

## In the Beginning (Week 2) - And It Was Good

This summary is longer than usual because there's a lot of detail to pass along - at the least, so you can save it for use or reference down the road.

Yesterday we looked at the three main takeaways that a Hebrew in 600 BCE would have when hearing/reading Genesis 1-2 (excluding what's said about humanity, which will be in focus during weeks 3-4 for this series):



### 1. God, who precedes disorder, tames it with ease

- Genesis 1.1 is best understood as a title or topic sentence to all of Genesis 1 (like Gen. 2.4 is for the rest of Gen. 2, Gen. 5.1 is for chp. 5, Gen. 10.1 is for chp. 10, etc.)
- This means the first action of creation is Gen. 1.2, which has both similarity and dissimilarity to the Babylonian creation myth, Enuma Elish.
- The "formless void" of 1.2 is hard to translate, and can mean emptiness, futility, or, most often, a harsh, barren wasteland in which life cannot survive ("deep" in 1.2 works the same way, but refers to a chaotic, dangerous ocean).
- God's spirit/breath/wind "hovers" over this void, which is to say that it lingers or remains. This longer-term action by God is paralleled in Genesis 2.7-8 where God "forms" Adam (a word associated with the hands-on work of a potter) and "planted" a garden (again, a nurturing term that involves work over a span of time).
- Thus, God's work of creation beginning Gen. 1.2 is ordering disorder, taming chaos, bringing purpose to futility, and making function and life out of a barren wasteland.
- This understanding of God's creative activity is mentioned elsewhere, a good example of which is Psalm 74.12-15.
- Walter Brueggemann, one of the great Old Testament of our day, says that we see here (and not just here) the "prescientific wisdom" of the ancient Hebrews: though they had nothing like the modern sciences, through observation, experience, and reflection they discerned creation as a process more than specific, periodic events, and that it was an ordering of disorder.
- Whereas the Babylonian Enuma Elish understands chaos & disarray as first and foremost in the cosmos (not unlike a modern atheist might), from which everything else comes including the gods, the Genesis account sees an organizing, deliberate, engaged God as that which is most fundamental and enduring.
- God is portrayed as authoritative in the biblical creation account: He "says" or "calls," and creation by its very nature is meant to listen for Him and respond.
- Why seven days of creation in Genesis 1? One reason is that seven in both the ancient world and Old Testament is a number of fulfillment or completion. So by the end of creation, day #7, we've arrived at the exact opposite of where things began in Gen. 1.2: we've traveled from "formless void" to a full creation.
- And why does Israel need to hear about a Creator God who can do this sort of thing? Because their entire world had become a "formless void," so to speak: they'd lost their homeland and countless thousands of their countrymen, they were hauled off to a foreign land for indentured servitude, and there they waited. If God hover over the futility and bring order and purpose out of it, then He can do it for them too.

## 2. Sabbath rest is woven into the very fabric of the cosmos

- Genesis 1.1-2.3 also ends in a way similar to the Babylonian creation story: God or gods are at rest in their abode(s).
- But in the Bible's account, God's temple is so much bigger: God is not a territorial or national god, He is not confined to one locale, but instead the whole of the universe is where He can be found.
- Note that the pinnacle of the Genesis narrative is NOT the creation of humanity on day six, but the sabbath of God on day seven.
- God "blesses" this day of rest and marks it as "holy," giving it as a gift to the rest of creation (Gen. 2.3).
- As Mennonite pastor Nathan Stuckey puts it, "(In Genesis 1-2), Humanity's starting point with God is rest - God at rest, and Him inviting us into that rest with Him. We are to stop with God before starting anything else; we are to rest with God before working. Sabbath is a time to admire His handiwork, not our own."
- So for the Hebrews in 600 BCE, Sabbath is not merely a cultural or religious observance, nor can it be limited to one (#4) of the great "10 Commandments," but is instead a fundamental law of the universe, like gravity or the speed of light. To break or forgo Sabbath would be like jumping off a building and expecting not to fall.
- This explains why the land should get a Sabbath every seven years (Lev. 25.23) and domesticated work animals should be given the gift of the Sabbath every week too (Deut. 15.14).

## 3. That creation, each and every facet, is good

- In the ancient eastern world, as seen in the Enuma Elish creation story, creation is just stuff, a plaything for the gods to use or abuse at their whim. It had no inherent, intrinsic, or independent qualitative value. (A modern scientific atheist might have a similar view of creation - minus the gods, of course.)
- Not so in the Hebrew telling of creation: over and over throughout Gen. 1, creation is called "good" by God, and at the end the whole of it is labeled "very good."
- "Good" is an evocative word in Old Testament Hebrew, of the heart and not just the head: you can get at it what it means and feels by reflecting on a "good" child, spouse, or friend.
- "God saw that it was good," we're told time and time again. Thus, awareness or seeing is a precursor to sensing creation's goodness. This can be our entry point into the goodness of the sun, moon, stars, plants, and animals too - we pause, we linger, we explore, we "see."

## For This Week

- Interested how the findings of the modern sciences sync up well with this understanding of Genesis 1-2? Check out the BioLogos resource archive - the first two links below are for specific articles you might appreciate, while the third is to their resource page about creation and the sciences:

[Evolutionary Creation is for Everyone](#)

[God's Good Chaos](#)

[Resources](#)

- We can't overestimate the importance of spiritual rest in our lives, not when you see the Sabbath in all its wonder and depth as portrayed in Genesis 2.1-3. How are you doing at purposeful rest? You may feel like it's impossible in your life, but remember - we break the law of rest woven into the cosmos at our own peril and ultimately at great cost to ourselves. Use the following to help you explore how you can prioritize Sabbath rest:

[The Key to the Keys to the Kingdom - Dallas Willard](#)

[The Spiritual Discipline of Rest - Richella Parham](#)

[Podcast: Solitude · Sabbath with Small Kids · When Grown Kids Leave the Church Sabbath](#)

- Spend this week "seeing" each day of creation in Genesis 1 as "good":

Tomorrow = Pause, see, and enjoy the sunrise or sunset, that is, the passing of light into darkness, or darkness into light. (Day 1 of creation)

Wednesday = Pause, see, and admire the different spheres of creation, the wide sky above us, and the ground and sea with us. (Day 2 of creation)

Thursday = Pause, see, and appreciate vegetation of all kinds and varieties. Walk in the grass or dirt barefoot. Smell the autumn trees and leaves. Admire the fall colors. (Day 3 of creation)

Friday = Pause, see, and feel the warmth of the sun, and find the moon in the night sky. (Day 4 of creation)

Saturday = Pause, see, and admire the great variety of fish and birds. Try to find a bird flying above. Or just ponder these videos for awhile - [2 Hours of Beautiful Coral Reef Fish, Relaxing Ocean Fish, & Stunning Aquarium Relax Music](#) or [8 Hours of Beautiful Birds \(No Music\) 4K Nature Relaxation™](#). (Day 5 of creation)

Next Sunday = Pause, see, and admire animal life. Play with your dog or cat, and be thankful. Or just spend some time being amazed by these videos: [ONE HOUR of Amazing Animal Moments](#) and [Planet Zoo Cinematic - LOTS of Animals! \[4K\]](#)