



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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Creation

Notes on Genesis by Grant Thorpe—A Reading Guide.¹

This book must be the most ancient of records in history. It is a gathering of family records (perhaps oral) from earliest times from those with good reason to keep their family history. God had spoken to them about their origins and their future in him, and each generation wanted to trace their link to that word.

If Moses is the person who gathered and shaped this material, then the whole story of our origins is brought to us through the lens of being saved by God from Egypt. The first section is a Prologue to these family stories.

1:1—2:3

In a carefully worded statement, we are told how the heavens and the earth came to be, that is, everything that isn't God. The Spirit hovered over the dark formlessness and emptiness. ('Hovers' is used again of God hovering over Israel in Deuteronomy 32:11.) The tone is majestic: God just speaks, and everything happens. But then, the story becomes very personal: we are told that a home has been made for ourselves and that we have a close relationship with this God and a responsibility to care for what he has made. God is utterly free to do as he wills, but look at the wonder of what he has made and where he has placed us!

God's relationship with us is by this speaking. We owe everything to this and continue to live by his speaking to us (Deut. 8:3). He does this as the expression of his freedom. He can do as he wills with no other constraint than his own nature, and this is what he makes, ourselves in his image and a place where we can live under his care. We can never be free as God is free. Our freedom is to live in things as he has shaped them. The sun rules the day and the moon the night and the sea cannot escape its allotted place (Jer. 5:22).

Simply, God created everything, so everything belongs to him and everyone is answerable to him. We can't get behind or around this. We are accustomed to finding a cause for things, but when we come to this, there is no further penetration.

God asks Job, 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?' (Job. 38:4). As the conscious part of this creation, we find we have eternity in our hearts but not so that we can find out the end from the beginning (Eccles. 3:11). God made us so that we would feel after him and find him (Acts 17). He is the beginning.

Knowing the Creator should be the most natural thing for creatures to do, but it comes to us as the prologue of a book in which God must deal with those who reject him and who make idols

¹ Permission granted by Grant Thorpe to hand out these notes.

and who abuse their place in the world (i.e. the rest of this book of Genesis, and then, the next four books which record God redeeming of his people). So, the story of creation is written in a way that confronts the idolatries of Ancient Near Eastern peoples, as, of course, it confronts all other attempts to worship the creation rather than the Creator.

Within our worship of the Creator, of course, science has a legitimate task to enquire about the nature of creation. In fact, knowing the Creator encourages all enquiry because we know there is a carefulness and order and personal purpose behind all that exists. If it appears that it has taken millenia to bring our cosmos to its present form, then, so it may be. And if it appears that there is a spontaniety to development of life forms, and a randomness in their selection, then that may well be the appearance. What is clear from this creation story is that everything is attributed to God.

God spoke, ten times, first, to give everything form (the first three days), and then to fill up what he had formed (the second three days). He separated light from darkness, waters above from waters below, and then, land from the sea. Then, he made a sun and moon and stars to be the light, fish and birds for the sea and sky, animals and man for the dry land. Anxious humanity needs reminding that God did not create the world to be chaotic, or empty (Isaiah 45:18; Jer. 5:22). He has given it form and fullness.

In later times, Israel had reason to wonder about the stability of the creation. Their enemy Edom would be threatened with desolation (formlessness) and emptiness (Isa. 34:11). So would Israel when they abandoned their Lord (Jer. 4:22-23). But God could still say, 'For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other"' (Isa. 45:18). In spite of its unworthy inhabitants, God purposes to keep his creation as he planned it to be, a home for his people and a place where they can discover his glory.

Creation stories among Israel's early neighbours suggested very different origins for everything. They involved arguments among the gods and their making humanity to be their servants to provide them with food. Suggestions of the difference between this story and other stories is present in the fact that the sun and moon are not called by their usual names but simply named the greater and the lesser lights. Other nations could not get behind the creation itself and worshipped these entities. In this story, God makes light, and only later makes a sun and moon to be this light. Our minds wish to find some explanation for this but we should be warned not to do so. At the end of history, there again will be no sun or moon because God himself will be the light of his creation (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). It will end as it began. We should not worship the creation but the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

'Man' or mankind, as male and female, is the high point of this story. We are made in God's image, to be like him, to represent him as lord in the creation and to be his sons and daughters (cf. 5:3). The image is 'male and female, so being the image involves a relationship, not only with God, but with one another as males and females, a matter that will be clarified in the next chapter.

It would be impossible to be this image without being alive to God, and God being alive to us. It is in this relationship that he shows us who he is and what he is about in the creation. He has made us in his image, not to compete with him but to be filled up with his giving. In this way, others will be able to look at us and give glory to God—because that is the glory they will be seeing.

All that God makes he calls good, and when all is finished and placed under the dominion of man, it is 'very good'. The next chapters will have the Serpent questioning this goodness of God in the ordering of creation. It is the constant temptation of Satan to have us believe that the creation is not good, with the inference that its Maker is either evil or weak. James warns us not to be deceived on this point (Jam. 1:17).

God's blessing of creatures and the human couple, is the way the creation will proceed. The creation does develop from its own resources. Rather, God causes it to prosper so that it can fulfill the purpose intended for it.

We need to know that it is in Jesus Christ, the second and final Adam, that we can be sure of this blessing in all our life (Ephesians 1:3).

God 'finished' the creation on a day when he did nothing. This is clearly the meaning of chapter 2, verse 2 (as in the NRSV or ESV translations). The matter is important because God rested on this day, and blessed it and sanctified it.

The 'rest' cannot mean inactivity because he who keeps Israel never sleeps (Psa. 121:4), but it does mean that God is entirely at rest about what he has made and about its progress and outcome. This is how he wants the creation to proceed, by humanity being completely at rest in himself as Creator and Lord. Israel was later commanded not to live as self-creators, or as slaves, but to rest in God as their Creator and Redeemer (Ex. 20:10-11; Deut. 5:13-15). They were to have a day of rest as God did. Humanity may now share in the purpose and goal of creation by resting in God being Creator and Finisher of all things (an activity that requires all our energies – as in Heb. 4:11).

Later, God called the Temple his resting place (Psa. 132:7f, 13f), the place where Israel could meet with him and share his rest. Perhaps this is clearer if we understand that Jesus also finished his works, on the cross (John 19:30), and we cannot have rest until we receive, thankfully, all that he has done there.

Because this is the only day that doesn't end with an 'evening and morning' formula, we must still be in this seventh 'day'. The rest of history is the day of God's rest, a day in which we are called to live, knowing him as our Creator. God blessed this day, so it must be a time for fruitfulness, that is, for God's plan to be fully worked out. He also sanctified it, so it must be the time to live for God and to take the creation with us into his purpose.

2:4-25

For the first of ten times, we read 'These are the generations of ...'. Moses may well be the one who collates these family histories – family records made by those who had reason to keep them. God came to these people to give them hope by the promise of a future made by him. This future would be worked out in their families and so they remembered their connection to God's promises. Chapters two (from v. 4) to four are really one story, telling us what happens to 'the heavens and the earth' whose beginnings form the prologue to Genesis. Later stories will mention particular names but this story is the story of all humanity.

Chapter two provides detail within the creation story showing the starting point for Adam. At this stage, there is no rain for the fields, but a gushing spring waters the arable ground. For this ground, and from it, God forms the man. This creature, though crafted from dust, comes to life by nothing less than God's own breath, giving him understanding (Prov. 20:27) and

consciousness of God (Job. 32:8). It is a life that only God can sustain and restore (Psa. 23:3) and only Christ can raise from its death (John 22:22; 1 Cor. 15:45).

Man is formed but he needs a habitat and starting point for his task, not creation in general but a specific setting - God's garden. Before this garden is planted, there is an unemptiness to the ground, no bush, no rain, no man, and only a mist (or spring) to water the ground. Man is central to all that creation will become, beginning here with his work in this garden.

The 'God' of chapter 1 is now called 'the LORD God' (Yahweh Elohim) or 'the LORD', a name more fully revealed in Exodus (3:15), a name that expresses God's covenant bond with his people. What happens in these chapters reveals the LORD in a covenant relationship with his creation, and man as the breaker of this covenant. On the other hand, and wonderfully, the section finishes with men and women learning to 'call on the name of the LORD' (4:26).

The rivers going out to water the earth (recorded between two verses that tell us about God putting Adam in the Garden) suggest that as Adam and his seed follow these water courses, the whole earth will be inhabited, subdued, sanctified and become wholly God's garden. We may call it the 'Edenising' of all creation.

God's Garden is abundant in fruits, and Adam is commanded to enjoy them. Two trees need special mention. The first one tells us of God's intention to give immortality to his creatures. How appropriate for the man whose life is given by God (a *living* soul) to have a tree of *life* to secure the eternity of that life. Only God has immortality (1 Tim. 6:15-16) but we are made to receive this gift from him so that we may fully reflect him.

The other tree will give Adam opportunity to rely on God for the knowledge of good and evil. Only God is good and we are dependent on him to lead us into all that is good. If Adam remained a lover of this law of God, he would remain in the blessing of God. As in Psalm 1, he would be like a tree planted by streams of water, and all he did would prosper.

For the first time, God calls something 'not good', that is, until he has made the woman. We are now shown the significance of our being created 'male and female' (1:27). The creation of the beasts and birds is for the man, but they cannot complement him as a being made in God's image. Woman is created from him to be like him, yet not him, so that he has someone to love, and a true helper in the task of tending and extending Eden. The delight of the man is evident in the poetry that springs to his lips. God has made this couple, male and female, to represent and express him - in faithful union and in unashamed purity.