



FROM *the* BEGINNING

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This may be the part of the Scriptures that is the most familiar to the typical Catholic, the typical Christian, probably even those who aren't terribly interested in religion. For those who have embarked on their own tour of the Bible, it's quite normal to start at the beginning and maybe get a few chapters in before things start feeling overwhelming.

What then can we say here about the creation account to get us started as we explore the big picture of salvation history?

First, there's the fact of how God creates, and what it meant for the People of God in the Old Testament. In the life of ancient Israel, there was a whole host of competing and local gods, each of whom had limited power and scope, many of whom were understood to be parts of the creation itself, elements of the world endowed with some sort of human qualities. But as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger noted, the God of the Bible stands in a different category altogether. God is not within creation; He creates everything, and not from pre-existing raw matter. He is the source of everything, and He holds it in being. The author of Genesis wants us to see this by showing that God, the true God, creates the sun, the moon, the stars, all parts of creation that were often seen as being divine in and of themselves by the ancients.

Second, we should see the order of creation, not so much in the fact of what happens first, second, and so on, but rather that God's creative act brings about an ordered cosmos. It is because of the order of creation that God calls everything "good." The goodness of creation is another rebuke to the competing deities that were worshipped in the ancient Near East. Depending on the sect, some parts of creation were deified and thus good, while others were considered evil or in opposition to the good. The radical nature of calling all of creation "good" is easily overlooked by us today when we read these pages, but it should be kept in mind.

Third, man and woman, who are the only part of creation made in the image and likeness of God, are not just good, but "very good." The pinnacle of creation, the only part made for its own sake, man and woman are called to share in God's own dominion over creation. Furthermore, there is a radical union between the two: Eve is bone of Adam's bone and flesh of his flesh. This is covenantal language, and in keeping with the covenant established between the two of them, God gives the first law: be fruitful and multiply. This covenant union, with its blessings and laws, stands at the heart not just of the creation account, but of the Scriptures as a whole.

Finally, note the sabbath structure of creation. The six days of creation lead up to the dramatic conclusion in which God rests. Of course, God hardly needs rest, but He shows us by His example that the seventh day is to be set aside. The literal meaning of the term “holy” is “set apart.” By the creation accounts, God shows us that we should set aside one day for worship. †

DAY 2: FALL

GEN. 3

In today’s reading, we see one of the most dramatic parts of the human story. After the sweeping narration of the creation of the world, where God finds everything to be “good,” it doesn’t take long for human freedom to enter into the picture and throw things off track. Sometimes, we wrestle with the story of the Fall and wonder why a good God would let His children choose evil. But we must remember, as the Church teaches, it is because of God’s respect for our freedom, because of His desire for us to authentically choose and love Him, that sin is a possibility. Original sin is thus a radical possibility of human freedom.

We see in the account of the Fall three consequences:

1. Adam and Eve are suspicious of one another. Thus the relationship between men and women, who are created naked without shame, begins to be complicated due to sin. No more will they freely give of themselves. Now there is a concern over the fundamental relationship of men and women.
2. Adam and Eve no longer trust God. Instead of having an open and honest friendship with the Lord, they turn away in shame and guilt. Their conscience has awoken, and with it, they have brought fear and shame into their hearts and into the human experience.
3. Adam and Eve can no longer even trust their own instincts. They now have to wrestle, according to St. Augustine, with their own internal decisions. Prior to the Fall, Augustine teaches that Adam and Eve would be in complete control of all of their faculties and would never have desires that were beyond their control. But after sin, they lose this.

The story of salvation really takes a critical turn here, with Adam and Eve setting up, in a very real way, what will take the rest of the Scriptures to undo. How can God's most prized creation, the human family, turn away from the covenant He wants to offer? And how can we ever turn back? †

**DAY 3: NOAH AND THE ARK,
COVENANT WITH NOAH**

GEN. 6: 11 - 7, 9: 1-1

If you've ever felt like a major sinner or a big disappointment in your family, reading the Book of Genesis should help put you at ease. It's not that we should feel like our sins don't matter, or that we shouldn't worry about it at all. But think of how things went early in creation, early in the human story, in the first few chapters of Genesis. God created everything in Ch. 1 and 2 and found it all to be good. In chapter three, sin, suffering, and death, had entered the world. Then by chapter seven, things have gotten so bad, God wants to destroy everything.

But Noah "found favor with the Lord." (Gen. 6: 8) What should stand out about the reading for today is the way in which God's words to Noah are a very noticeable echo of the creation accounts in Genesis Ch. 1 and 2. Keep in mind, we're barely getting into the story of salvation history, and already there's a sense of God re-creating or re-forming creation. He has a pattern that establishes itself in the Old Testament and when we can see this pattern, it helps us see how things are all connected together.

The pattern is called a covenant. In the ancient Near East, the idea of a covenant was widespread, and it was an important part of the social order. Covenants were used to enter into sacred agreements. A covenant, though, was different from a contract because covenants often established family relationships between the parties. To enter a covenant, in some sense, made you members of the same family. Covenants also don't expire, because family ties don't expire.

In the story of Noah, we see God not only entering into a covenant with Noah, but we see God expanding on His original covenant with Adam and Eve. At creation, God's covenant is with man and woman. For Noah, it's a covenant with his family. Throughout the story of salvation, God enters into covenants with expanding groups, each time trying to find a bigger group of people to carry out His divine plan. As you read through the big picture of salvation, keep your eyes open for more covenants. †