

Formed and Filled

In Genesis 1, we have the account of a six-day creation. There is a lot of debate about the nature of a day. Some would hold that the day is a literal 24-hour period while others would say that a day is more like an era. In all that debate, something fundamental is overlooked, something that should help us better understand why the creation narrative was written in the way that it was.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This is often understood to be a summary statement for what follows. The next statement tells us that the earth was formless and empty and that the Spirit hovered over the face of the deep. God was there, but there was nothing to sustain life. It is then that God begins his work of creation. Again, we need to return to the statement that the earth was formless and empty to fully understand the significance of what happened on the six days of creation. In the first three days of creation, God gives that which is formless form and that which was empty fullness. The following chart helps clarify what the text is telling us.

| Forming | Filling |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Day 1 – Separation of light and dark | Day 4 – Sun, moon and stars |
| Day 2 – Separation of water and sky | Day 5 – Fish and birds |
| Day 3 – Separation of water from dry Land | Day 6 – Animals and humans |
| Day 7 – God rests and we rest with him | |

As we look at this chart, we cannot help but see the pattern that has developed. Day 4 fills Day 1, Day 5 fills Day 2, and Day 6 fills Day 3. Again, the first three days are about forming, and the last three days are about filling as God forms and fills that which was formless and empty. What we have at the end of the sixth day is a world which provides a place for life and which is designed to sustain that life. When the earth begins to revert back to formlessness (floods, desertification, etc.), life can no longer be sustained. The life that is most affected by any reversions of creation is that which was created on the sixth day, animals, but most specifically human beings. We also learn from Scripture that human beings have the remarkable ability to cause formlessness and emptiness. Sin leads both to flooding (Noah and the ark) and the disappearance of sustainable farmland (the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were at one time fertile but are now a wasteland). We also notice that when God restores his people, he also does so in conjunction with the restoration of creation.

The forming and filling of creation is an often overlooked aspect of the creation narrative, but it is an important one. What is even more important is the seventh day of creation, the rest that God provides. By making one day holy (an important attribute of God), God transmitted to creation the opportunity to experience his presence and blessing. It is rest that is the goal and purpose of creation, for resting is the end for which creation was designed.

The sin of Adam and Eve (and all of humanity with them) results in the final form and fullness of creation to be destroyed. God, because of his holiness, is no longer able to be present in creation, and that empties

creation of its fullness and robs it of its form. All of creation is meant to experience God, and sin reverses that experience.

It is God who makes the first move to restore what was lost, but his move must be careful and measured. Thus, when the holy God makes himself present first in the tabernacle and later in the temple, he must carefully guard himself against all that is sinful. Thus, these two buildings have curtains and walls which are designed to keep him from being tainted with sin. These two buildings restored to creation something which was lost when sin entered the world, but not fully. In Jesus Christ, God comes to us again, and he comes in power, for although he was God among us (and we are sinful), he is not tainted by sin; rather, he pushes back against sin and its impact, bringing healing and restoration. In the church, which consists of people who have been made holy, the Holy Spirit dwells, and God continues to be present in this world.

But none of these manifestations of God in the Bible are the final reversal of sin. It is only in Revelation when sin is cast into the lake of fire and all things are made new that God comes to dwell among his people, being present once again in creation and establishing the rest that was lost because of sin.

All of this is to say that the real purpose of the creation narrative is not to give a scientific explanation of the beginnings of this world but, rather, to give us an understanding of what was meant to be, no longer is, but will one day be restored. Often we talk about a 6-day creation, but that is inappropriate. Humanists believe that the goal of all things is the wellbeing of humanity, and a Christian humanist believes that humans are the epitome of creation and that creation was made to serve us. The Genesis account says something different, for while the world was ultimately created to sustain life for humanity, the goal of creation is not to serve humanity but, rather, to give humanity the opportunity to serve God (and to cause the rest of creation to serve him as well). God's intention is that we live in a creation that is properly formed (he is with us) and is properly filled (he is present among us). Thus, our efforts are not so much to maintain the place where we live so that we can survive but to seek God who makes himself known to us. Having God among us is the first step in restoring the emptiness and formlessness caused by sin. The Genesis narrative was not given to us, first and foremost, to describe how the world was made but, rather, to reveal to us what God intended for creation: that we all experience his presence, something that is lost in sin but is made possible again through Jesus Christ.

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