

Therefore he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant [diathēkē], so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant [diathēkē]. For where a will [diathēkē] is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will [diathēkē] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

The word *diathēkē* is translated as “covenant” in verse 15 but as “will” in verses 16–17. Many think the author switches to the classical meaning of *diathēkē* in these latter verses, where the discussion seems to revolve around executing a will at a person’s death. However, it may well be that the author of Hebrews means “covenant” in verses 16–17 as well. The covenant under discussion is the broken covenant at Sinai, which required the death of the Israelites according to the ritual self-curse of Exod 24:8 (see Exod 32:9–10). The Greek of these verses may be translated as follows: “For where a [broken] covenant is involved, it is necessary for the death of the covenant-maker to be borne. For a [broken] covenant is enforced upon dead bodies, since it certainly is not in force while the covenant-maker still lives.”

The author of Hebrews is emphasizing that the (broken) Sinai covenant required the death of the Israelites (Exod 32:9–10), because they invoked a curse of death upon themselves during the covenant-making ceremony (Exod 24:8). That curse of death was not paid when the people turned from the Lord and worshipped the golden calf (Exod 32:14) but is

ultimately paid by Christ himself on behalf of Israel (Heb 9:15).

A similar issue appears in Gal 3:15: “To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man’s will [diathēkē], or adds to it, once it has been ratified.”

Here there is even less reason to translate *diathēkē* as “will.” In the context (Gal 3:15–18), Paul is discussing the inviolability of covenants. Since even a human covenant cannot be changed after the fact (Gal 3:15; cf. Josh 9:18–20), a divine one certainly cannot be (Gal 3:17). God cannot change his covenant with Abraham (Gen 22:15–18) to bless all nations through his seed (Gen 22:18; cf. Gal 3:14) by adding the Mosaic Law as a condition four hundred years later (Gal 3:17–18). Changing covenants after the fact is not allowed by human justice, much less divine.

To summarize, all the occurrences of *diathēkē* in the NT may and should be translated “covenant,” following the example of the Septuagint.

CREATION The formation of the universe out of nothing by the action of God.

The creation account in Genesis may use figurative language (see “Truth of the Creation Account” below), but it is very different from the creation myths of Israel’s pagan neighbors. In those myths, creation was the result of the triumph of some deity or hero over the pantheon or some god or primordial being, such as Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat or Baal’s triumph over Yaam. In all these myths, the universe arose out of preexistent matter, the result of an undesired or unforeseen accident.

The Genesis account, on the other hand,

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stresses the uniqueness and omnipotence of God. God creates out of nothing by the power of his Word. His creation proceeds according to an orderly plan and has a very definite purpose. All that he creates is good (Gen 1:10).

I. *The Six Days of Creation*

A. *Creating the Form*

B. *Filling the Void*

II. *Important Messages of the Creation Account*

A. *Creation Is Good*

B. *We Are a Special Creation, Made Like God*

C. *God Is Our Father*

D. *The Cosmos Is a Temple*

III. *The Truth of the Creation Account*

IV. *"A New Creation"*

I. THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

At the beginning of creation, "the earth was without form and void" (Gen 1:2). This is the statement of the problem, so to speak, and the rest of the creation account is the story of how God formed the world and filled the void.

A close look at the first chapter of Genesis shows a careful literary structure. We can look at the six days of creation as two sets of three days. In the first three days, God created *forms*; in the second three days, God filled those forms with inhabitants. Thus there is a close correspondence between days one and four, two and five, three and six.

A. *Creating the Form*

1. *Time*. On the first day, God separated light from darkness, creating day and night, and thus time.
2. *Space*. On the second day, God created sea and sky, marking divisions of space.

3. *Life*. On the third day, God created dry land and filled it with vegetation, the beginning of life.

B. *Filling the Void*

4. *Rulers of time*. On the fourth day, God created the stars, the sun, and the moon to "rule" the day and night and to mark the seasons and days and years.
5. *Rulers of space*. On the fifth day, God created sea creatures and birds to fill the sea and sky.
6. *Rulers of life*. On the sixth day, God created animals and humans to fill the dry land.

At the end of creation, God rested and made the seventh day holy. This holy seventh day suggests a **covenant** with creation (see **Adam**; CCC 288); it crowns the work of creation the way a pediment crowns a temple.

II. IMPORTANT MESSAGES OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT

In contrast to the almost random creation recorded as part of Near Eastern mythology, the account in Genesis carefully uses the creation to convey important truths about God's relationship with the universe.

A. *Creation Is Good*

"And God saw that it was good": we read this statement four times in the first chapter of Genesis (Gen 1:12, 18, 21, 25). At the end of creation, "behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). The message is clear and simple: creation is good. It is not the work of some evil or incompetent demiurge; the material world was

created to be good. And, though it was subsequently wounded and disordered by the sin of Adam, creation is being restored and renewed in Jesus Christ.

***B. We Are a Special Creation,
Made Like God***

Man and woman were made “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), unlike any other creature. We are not, of course, equal to God, but we have the potential to relate to God and live as part of God’s family.

C. God Is Our Father

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” God says (Gen 1:26). The next time the words “image” and “likeness” appear together, they refer to Adam’s begetting his son Seth “in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3). The language points out that we are related to God the way Seth was related to Adam.

D. The Cosmos Is a Temple

Genesis describes the pristine creation in sacral terms. According to a Jewish tradition, the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, the most sacred core of the cosmic temple that is the world (Jubilees 8, 19). The seven days of the creation story parallel the narrative of the building of the Tabernacle, which proceeded according to seven commands (Exod 40:16–33), and the erection of the Temple, built in seven years (1 Kgs 6:38). The world is thus viewed as a cosmic sanctuary filled with God’s glory (Isa 6:3), and Adam is portrayed as the first priest. (For more on this sacral view of creation, see **Adam**.)

**III. THE TRUTH OF THE
CREATION ACCOUNT**

The Church does not require Christians to believe either that the universe came to be in six literal days or that it did not; Christians are free to interpret the scientific evidence for themselves. Even the Church Fathers were divided. Many insisted on the literal interpretation: “six days” meant six days as we count them today. But even in early centuries, others took a different view. Saint Clement of Alexandria warned against a literalistic interpretation: “how could creation take place in time, seeing time was born along with things which exist?” (*Miscellanies*, 6.16). Our days are twenty-four hours long, Saint Augustine wrote, but “we must bear in mind that these days indeed recall the days of creation, but without in any way being really similar to them” (*Gen. Litt.*, 4:27).

The truth of Genesis, however, is not at all in doubt. Genesis may use poetic and figurative language, but the important message that language expresses is clear. The universe is God’s creation, and that creation is good. It was creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Moreover, the creation of man—however it may literally have taken place in time—is a special act by God. Man was created good and given stewardship over creation; he brought evil and disorder into the world by his own disobedience. These truths are basic axioms, so to speak, for the rest of Scripture, and they are fundamental to the Christian faith.

The Church has given some guidelines for understanding the scientific data about cosmic and human origins in light of the biblical

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doctrine. It has ruled out atheistic evolution—the belief in blind progress unguided by God (see Pius XII, *Humani Generis* 35). And the Church has condemned “polygenism,” the belief that mankind descended from multiple ancestors (see *Humani Generis* 37).

The Genesis creation narrative establishes a theological worldview. Its purpose is not scientific, but apologetic, countering the many myths of the ancient Near East. The pagan stories speak of multiple gods, which are somehow embodied in nature; these gods have limitations and needs; the world emerged as a result of a struggle between them; and mankind was created to serve the gods in slavery. Genesis counters this worldview, teaching clearly that there is only one God; that he is not limited by space, time, or nature; that he created the entire cosmos by his mere utterance; and that he made the human race in his own image. The relationship between God and creation is the basis for all the rest of biblical revelation (CCC 337–44).

IV. “A NEW CREATION”

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a renewal of creation, a time when the land would produce abundantly and people would live in peace, faithful to God’s covenant (see, e.g., Isa 4:5, 65:17, 66:22; Jer 31:35–36; Ezek 36:8–11). The OT wisdom literature presents a more developed reflection on the created order (see, e.g., Ps 8, 19, 96; Wis 7–8; Sir 17–18). In the fullness of time, the New Testament presents Christ as a “new Adam” (see **Adam**), the focal point of the long-awaited new creation.

The Gospel of John begins with a restatement

of the creation account: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). So far there is nothing startling in John’s interpretation. But several lines later, John tells us something astounding: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Word of God, present at creation, became the man Jesus Christ. The power of God the Father created the universe through the love of God the Son.

Creation began with water and the Spirit: “and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2). Christ told us, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The striking parallel suggests that baptism initiates a new creation, and Paul makes the suggestion an explicit statement: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal 6:15).

Paul tells us that creation has been in “bondage” until the coming of Christ (Rom 8:21). Thus the coming of Christ makes all things new, a promise that will be fulfilled perfectly at the end of time, when “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1) will replace the old. But Christians already possess the new creation in baptism; though they live in this world, they are already citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CREMATION See **Burial**.