

Title: Creation: The Secret to Shalom

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Text: Genesis 1:1-2

Shalom!

What's in a word?

What's in a word?

When my family moved from New Jersey to Portland, ME, it wasn't long before I heard someone say that something was "wicked good." "Wicked good?" I had never in my life ever heard those two words used together. In my world they were complete opposites!

- Wicked = really, really *bad*
- Good = opposite of *bad*

But in New England "wicked good" meant "really, really *good*."

It turns out that you can think you know what a word means, only to find out that it means something very different to someone else.

Peace?

The same is true with a word that we find used over and over again in the Bible: Peace. Peace is a word that we use all the time. We pray for peace; nations sign peace treaties; we try to find time for "peace and quiet." We all know the word "peace."

In the Bible, the Hebrew word for "peace" is *shalom*. It's used hundreds of times in the OT. In fact, to this day people in Israel greet each other by saying, "Shalom!" But this little word carries a much richer meaning than our English word "peace." There simply isn't any single word in our language that can possibly convey the full meaning of *shalom*.

Shalom comes from a word that means to be whole, complete, full. Thus, *shalom* includes the ideas of:

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- Completeness
- Wholeness
- Harmony
- Fulfillment

Shalom carries the idea of good, happy relationships. It is used to describe success and fulfillment in something you do. Most of all, it describes “a state of fulfillment which is the result of God’s presence.” (Theological Wordbook of the OT, II, 931)

Shalom!

Shalom, then, is much more dynamic than what we think of as “peace.” For instance, when we say that our house is peaceful, we most likely are thinking of a day when nothing’s going on: no company, the dog asleep on his favorite chair, the house all picked up, nothing but “peace and quiet.”

But for people from OT times this little picture would be achingly dull! For them, *shalom* would be something like our Thanksgiving Dinner: the house full to the brim with family and friends; the table piled high with food; kids, pets, parents and grandparents all eating, laughing, sharing life together. Somebody else knocks on the door? No problem! Just more *shalom*.

David sums it up perfectly in Psalm 4:

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Psalm 4:6-8 NIV

Many, LORD, are asking, “Who will bring us prosperity?”

Let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Peace = *Shalom*

The Creation Story

Finding *shalom*:

So you can see that in the Bible, peace is not just the absence of strife or trouble. It is something *more powerful* than the confusion or hostility around us. It's something worth looking for:

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Psalm 37:37 NIV

*Consider the blameless, observe the upright; a future awaits those who **seek peace**.*

Psalm 34:14 NIV

*Turn from evil and do good; **seek peace** and pursue it.*

Peace – *shalom* is something that God commands us to go looking for. When we find this kind of peace, our world works the way it is supposed to, our relationships are healthy or on the mend, and most of all, God is present to make it all happen.

So how do we go about finding *shalom*? A good place to start our search is by looking at how God went about making our world work and how he created us to be people who live in *shalom*.

Where to start our search:

Open your Bible to Genesis One and you find the story of how God created a world as a place of *shalom*. And yet, five words into Genesis One we hit another one of those words that mean different things to different people and different cultures. That tricky little word? *Create*.

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Genesis 1:1 NIV

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

When we read the opening words of Genesis One, we most naturally think that this chapter is telling us about the material creation of the world. We think in terms of atoms and molecules, stars and galaxies, our little planet and every living thing on it. We search for a glimpse into how God made the stuff of His world.

But to the writer of Genesis, the word “create” had a different meaning. For him, to create meant to give something its proper purpose and function. It meant to make something useful, to make it work properly. In his book [The Lost World of Genesis One](#), John Walton explains that in the ancient world of the time of the Bible,

...what was most crucial and significant to their understanding of existence was the way that the parts of the cosmos functioned, not their material status.

Creation, then, from the Hebrew point of view, meant making the world function properly. Of course, the Bible affirms that God made everything in the universe. He is before all things and everything comes from Him. But the special message in this opening chapter of Genesis is that God made his world work so that we could live and thrive in it, and so that He could be present in it with us.

Starting point:

The story of Genesis One is the story of God creating a world defined by *shalom*. The story begins with the pronouncement that God “created the heavens and the earth.” What comes next is a description of the world *before* it became functional.

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Genesis 1:2 NIV

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

In other words, the Creation Story we find in Genesis begins with the world in a not-yet functional state of being. It was like a house that had not yet become a home. Or, you might think of it like a lump of clay about to be put on the potter’s wheel. The clay becomes the potter’s *creation* when she forms it into its proper shape and makes it functional.

The goal of the Creation Story is not to tell us how God created the stuff of the cosmos. Instead, its focus is on *how God made the world to work so that it could become our home and His dwelling place*. He was present through His Spirit – “hovering over the waters” – so that He could make our world work.

Creation: the Secret to Shalom

Chaos then and now:

How many times do we find ourselves in a world like that of Genesis 1:2? A world in which things aren't working the way they were meant to work. It might be in the world of our relationship with our spouse or children. It might be experienced in the loss of a friend or loved one. It might be the loss of our ability to work or pay our bills. It might be feelings of confusion and chaos inside us – fear, anxiety, depression. We've all been there. We may be there right now.

We have that deep sense of *how things are supposed to work*. And when they don't, we feel disoriented, angry, confused, bewildered. We want things to work again. We need *shalom*.

God Present:

The good news is that God is the God of *Shalom*. The prophet Isaiah promised:

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Isaiah 9:6 NIV

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Prince of *Shalom*! The same God Who made this world become a home for both us and Himself is present to restore what's broken and non-functioning. The same God who rules the world is the Prince of Peace in the here and now.

As we look more deeply into Genesis One, we will find that He does the same creating in our day and in our lives that He did when He brought His world online in the first place!

Creation: the Secret to Shalom

So in a sense, we can say that Creation is the secret to *shalom*. We can bring those broken and non-working things in our lives, our relationships,

and our world to the only One who can make them work the way they were meant to.

It all begins with putting our trust in Him to do His work of creation in us:

Then we can sing with God's people:

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Isaiah 26:1-4 NIV

We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts.

Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith.

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You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.