

God, dante, and geology: relationship between geology and religion



There have been people living in a great underground cave since before 517 BCE. Many of the people in the cave are characterized to be prisoners who can neither move nor turn their heads. They live in comfort knowing only the echoes and shadows within that underground chamber, and in fear of the light that leads to the outside world. Plato signifies difficulties of sustaining intellectual knowledge with this allegory in his book, *The Republic*. Caves have been used to appeal to our imaginations and suggest human evolution.

There has been this recognizable relationship between geological and biblical ideas. Geology defines a cave to be a natural void in the ground, large enough for a human body to enter, and often formed by the weathering of rocks. Historically, people have worshipped and lived in or near caves, but never questioned their purpose or how they formed. That's when science comes in. Caves are formed by various geological processes, such as glacial and volcanic events. Science is the reasoning for the unknown events of the past.

Since approximately 3500 years ago, *The Holy Bible* has been worshipped and its stories have been followed. *Noah's Ark* suggests one man saved all of what god has created. Children of Adam began to populate the earth under God's creation. With population growth disobedience rose. God decided to clear out mankind with his power in hopes to grant the human race another opportunity. In efforts to remove mankind, a great flood demolished all of life on earth except those saved by one noble man. Noah hoped to preserve all of the species of life, and built a boat to save two of each species, along with him and his family. When the story was created, those who worshipped God followed the words he dictated in the Bible and did not question it. This story

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has those believe that God was the cause of this flood. Noah is an example of how followers should act since he even thanks God for deliverance after the catastrophic flood. Ending the story, God established an agreement with Noah that states, “ Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” This agreement is the job of science. Geology is the study of these God driven events.

Noah's Ark does suggest the preservation of the ecosystem, but with time has been proved that it can be done using science instead of divine intervention. Today we know that floods are mostly unpredictable events, yet we have the tools to monitor catastrophic events like these. Floods along with volcanic eruptions are both events studied by geologists to estimate the time of the event to prevent another demolition like in *Noah's Ark*. Compared to the flood of *Noah's Ark* , Santorini is a modern day volcanic setting of possible catastrophic events. Geologists keep watch on Santorini as it is a complex of volcanic islands in the Aegean Sea. The islands hold a population of ~13, 600 people so understanding when a volcano will erupt is crucial to the lives of the region. Studies of petrological deposits and relation to magma plumbing systems of Santorini, Greece are presented worldwide to ensure safety to the area. Studies synthesize together information of pressure and temperature conditions, volatile involvement and melt chemistry observations to reason for the differences in the calc-alkaline environment of Santorini. Melt chemistries and inclusions are studied and have allowed for evidence of the eruptive cycles between time periods of the Minoan and post-Minoan within the island arc of Santorini, Greece.

Understanding the petrology and eruptive cycles allows for geological

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science to fulfill the agreement with God that there will not be a catastrophic event to kill the population on the volcanic island.

Dante's *Inferno* was a more recent piece of literature that was based off of classical and biblical sources. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is an extension of *The Holy Bible* as it fills in gaps of biblical stories. It has become evident that The Bible does not have all the answers and people started to gravitate towards following the stories of Dante. The main addition Dante's writing offered was the introduction of the popular idea of hell that was never mentioned in The Bible. Though creative, Dante's *Inferno* suggested seven levels of hell and different punishments that all related back to human salvation.

Pozzuoli became a popular volcanic area that allowed for biblical insight. The name Pozzuoli came from ' puteus', meaning to predict the future, and ' osco fistulus', translating to cave (Pozzuoli, 2019). After the publishing of Dante's *Inferno* this volcano became even more of a popular attraction. In Dante's time, people believed that this volcano was the entrance to hell.

Geologically, there is reasoning for the name of the region since a cave is a void large enough to fit a human body through. This belief potentially comes from the structure of hell. The time Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*, people strongly followed the ideas portrayed in the story. As described in Dante's writing, hell is an enormous pit that leads down to the center of the earth. Within are nine circles of decreasing size. With Dante's ability to flip a reader's sphere inside-out and change perspective, the shape hell as told resembles a volcano, which is one reasoning for the belief of hell's entrance.

Located in the Bay of Naples, Pozzuoli not only an attractive site to Dante's followers but is the most geologically active region. An alternative root for the name Pozzuoli comes from the Latin word ' *puteo* ', meaning to stink (Pozzuoli, 2019). This refers to the sulfuric smell released from the volcanic activity within a volcanic caldera. Within the region of Pozzuoli there's collapsed calderas, the focal volcano, known as Solfatara, and fumarole (Pozzuoli, 2001). The geological phenomenon presents an environment that reasons for why Dante's followers believe this was an entrance to hell, past to volcanic shape. Bradyseism is a geological process that is a geo-seismic condition from gradual uplift and descent of the Earth's crust (Pozzuoli, 2001). The continuous level changes of hydrothermal activity cause these conditions and emissions allowing the area of Pozzuoli to truly look like hell. Within Pozzuoli there is even Burning Fields known as the Phlegrean Fields which is " a geologic wonderland of strange phenomena" (Pozzuoli, 2001). This area relates to *Dante's Inferno* as the area genuinely looked like a burning hell due to the geologic conditions. With high interest in Dante's proposal of hell, Pozzuoli draws attention from scientists to fill in the gaps of his story .

Science and the understanding of geology allows for continuous geological-biblical connections. In our life time, ideas of *Dante's Inferno* and the phenomenon of Pozzuoli still stand, literally. The local petrology and volcanic sand caused by weathering becomes the basis for many religious sites throughout Italy. The weathered rock from Pozzuoli has become the first effective concrete(Pozzuoli, 2019). Geologists study and conclude that the material reacts chemically with water and becomes a supportive substance.

The weathering of Pozzuoli made the construction of the world's largest unreinforced dome possible (Pozzuoli, 2019). The cupola of the Pantheon still stands as the largest unreinforced building today thanks to the processes of geology.

Human evolution correlates with the introduction of new stories and ideas. Our knowledge has expanded past the darkness of the cave overtime. Past *The Holy Bible*, *Dante's Inferno* was published and then science began to question the reality of these stories. As our understanding of these stories continues to evolve, the human population as a whole wants to know the reasoning and explanation to matters such as unpredictable events and geographical landmarks. Our understanding of geological sciences has allowed the human population to sustain intellectual knowledge. Today, we live in comfort in the light of the outside world, and in fear of the darkness that leaves us enclosed in the cave.

Works Cited

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