

06-14-15 – In the Beginning God...

Genesis

Two men were standing and looking over the Grand Canyon. Seeing the great depth of that world-famous canyon, one man said, "This is the hand of God. I'm amazed!" The man next to him looked over the edge and spit. He said, "That's the first time I ever spit a mile." I guess it's all how you look at things. (Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes, p. 124)

We're going to look at the book of Genesis, not in detail, but as a survey of the overall message of God to us. This is the first book in the Bible, so that's the first beginning – beginning of the Bible, the Word of God. Also, it's name, Genesis, means beginning in Greek. This is the only book of the Pentateuch or Greek translation of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures where the title is the same as the Hebrew name. Genesis in Greek means the beginning, and **Berashit** in Hebrew means beginnings. *Berashit bera Elohim... In the beginning God.*

The actual name of the first five books is found in the first line of each of the books. I'll let you figure that out. For example, Exodus in Greek means "coming out," but in Hebrew the name of the book is **Shemot** – names – the first line says, "These are the names..." So, homework assignment, you figure out what the actual Hebrew name is for each of the books in the Pentateuch or Torah or Law of Moses.

The book of Genesis contains a number of beginnings. We also need to understand that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible. He influenced men to write down what they did to tell a God story to humanity. The Bible is a God Story. That is foremost. Sometimes we look to it for answers to problems and how to correct wrongs, but it is really about God and how He can change lives not necessarily circumstances, although that sometimes happens too.

Here are just some of the beginnings we find in Genesis:

- Of the Universe – and all it's components – stars, sun, moon, sky, planets, water, land, etc.
- Of living creatures – animals, birds, fish, etc.
- Of humanity – man and woman – God's relationship with humanity – His intent
- Of an enemy – temptation – sin and its consequences – curse – death
- Of forgiveness and sacrifice to bring it about
- Of the work of the Holy Spirit in creation and going forward
- Of a seven day week – and of a Sabbath rest on the seventh day – of worship
- Of human need – in each of the patriarchs – and all of us
- Of deliverance and of a future deliverer – part of God's plan
- Of chaos without God – of order with God
- Of victory over the enemy through God
- Of redemption
- Of child birth – intended and then after judgment – with pain.
- Of the promise of victory through the seed of the woman (future).
- Of the first murder, first jealousy, first judgment against mankind and the land (Cain & Abel)

Obviously, we can't go into each of these in detail.

So, let's look at a few firsts in Genesis...

The first heaven and the first earth – yes, the first:

Gen. 1:1 – *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* NLT

There is no mention of any type of evolution in the Bible. God created everything – period. This concept doesn't go against Science. People argue about the length of time in which God created everything. That isn't important. There are many things about God that we may never understand. What we do know is that He created everything for a reason and purpose, and it was all done for us – the human race whom God loves and desires a relationship with. Everything was created for our benefit. Whether it took six 24 hour days to create everything or it was six one-thousand year long days is immaterial. There was no time with God until he created humans and put us on a clock. The Bible tells us that *a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as one day with God*. None of this changes the fact that God is the creator and has a master plan.

The first Sabbath rest:

Gen. 2:2-3 - *On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.* NLT

There is a repeating and rhythmic pattern to the account of the six days of creation. It is almost hypnotizing. God said... then the creation of that thing in detail – then God saw it was good – then there was evening and morning the Nth day. We almost don't pay attention to the details since every day is exactly the same pattern. It's almost like poetry. But – not so for the seventh day. The pattern is broken and this day is unique. It simply starts by saying, **“On the seventh day ...”** God gets our attention by breaking the repetition. The seventh day is special and very serious with God. It is a day of rest. This is the first establishment of the seven day week and a six day work week. This holds true to this day. We have seven day week and supposed to have a Sabbath day of rest on one of those days. Originally it was Saturday – the seventh day. Today and especially for Christians it is Sunday – the first day of the week due to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Sunday is our day or Sabbath rest and for worshipping God. It doesn't much matter what day we rest, as long as we rest on one day each week. This put us (humans) on a clock. This established the first basic calendar (another first).

The first humans:

Gen. 1:26-27 - *Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* NLT

They were commanded to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. These were the first and only people to ever live who didn't have parents. They had a child (another first), then another – Cain and Abel.

We see the first mention of the multiplicity of God in verse 26, and the singleness of God in verse 27. The triune God is one and three at the same time.

We see the first sign of **marriage** between the man and the woman a little later. After God created the man, he took one of his ribs and created a woman from it. From the one, He made two. The first human relationship, since the animals were not suitable. The two then become one, united in marriage.

Gen. 2:23-24 - *“At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” ²⁴ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.* NLT

Humans were the only creatures who could commune with God and with themselves. They can reason and interact. They had fellowship with God and with each other. This was exactly what God had in mind.

There are two very practical and human answers to the creation of man and woman. One is the man's view; the other is the woman's view. Are you ready? The woman's view of creation is this: God made the man and looked at him and said, "I can do better than that," and He made the woman. Now the man's view is: God made the beasts and man and then he rested. And then He created woman. And neither beast nor man nor God has rested since. (Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes).

The first Temptation, Blame, Sin, Judgment and Death:

Chapter three of Genesis talks about the serpent, but later we learn that it is none other than Satan himself influencing the situation and tempting Eve. You know the story. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden to care for things. They had all they needed provided by God and fellowship with God on a daily basis. They walked with Him and they talked with Him – as the hymn says. God put only one restriction on them, "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you eat of that tree, you will surely die.

The serpent manipulated Eve's words and said, "You will not surely die." He made her think God was holding something back from them. So, she ate and gave some to Adam and he ate too. The issue here is not what the actual act was, but that the temptation was to be more like God. We face the same temptation today. We like to control our own lives and destiny, but God wants us to trust Him to control our lives and destiny. They were tempted to be their own God, and they succumbed to the temptation.

Gen. 3:8-12 - *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man^[a] and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees.⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."¹¹ "Who told you that you were naked?" the LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."* NLT

God questioned them, and Adam blamed Eve, who then blamed the serpent. The fact was that they chose to disobey God's command. They only had one commandment and they broke that. We have ten; how much easier is it to break one of them. James tells us, "***For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws.***" James 2:10 NLT

They were guilty of breaking God's commandment, and they were subject to His judgment. Their punishment seems harsh, but it is God's judgment and must be right and just. They were exiled – out of the Garden – a repeating theme for the people of God when they disobey. The woman would experience pain in child birth, and the man would have to work hard to farm the land outside the Garden. They had everything they needed provided by God, but now they had to work for themselves to survive.

But, God did not leave them in condemnation and sin. After sentencing them to the punishment they would receive, He covered them with animal skins.

Gen. 3:21 – *And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.* NLT

God sacrificed animals to make their clothing (another first). This is the only means for forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:22 tells us, "***... For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.***" NLT

We have the rule set in motion that Jesus came to fulfill. He would shed His own blood to forgive the sin of humanity to all who will believe.

We also see that as a result of their sin, they will die – not God’s original plan for them.

Gen. 3:19 – “... For you were made from dust and to dust you will return.” NLT

Natural death is initiated because of the sin of Adam and Eve, and it is still in effect to this day.

God gave humans free will to choose right or wrong. He was not about to take that back, but there are consequences to our choices. Some of those consequences affect us eternally. Adam and Eve’s sin and punishment followed them into their new exiled existence. They had children, Cain and Abel. You know this story too. They brought their offering to the Lord, but God accepted only Abel’s offering. We don’t know why. They both offered what you would think was good. However, Cain’s offering was not acceptable to God.

We give offerings to God every week. What is your attitude in giving? We are to give joyously, not grudgingly. Our attitude must be pure. We can’t give out of compulsion or guilt. God wants a cheerful giver. Then you will be blessed. Otherwise, your offering is worthless and not acceptable to God. He doesn’t need your money. He needs and wants your faithfulness and trust. When you give to God from a grateful heart, He knows you are totally in His camp. He will receive your offering graciously and reward you now and in eternity.

Cain became jealous and plotted to kill Abel – and carried out his plan. The first pre-meditated murder. We see the sin of Adam and Eve has perpetuated to the next generation. In fact it will continue to do so for all generations to follow. A curse was set in motion that has never ended. All humanity is under this same curse. We are not in the Garden of Eden, but outside where sin continues and plagues all of us. There is only one remedy.

The Book of Genesis also provides a glimpse of God’s plan to redeem humankind. As we read through this great book, we see so many foundational stories that help us understand our relationship with God. We don’t have time to discuss all of them, and we could spend a month of Sundays preaching through this one book. However, we begin to see a pattern of humanity. We recognize God and begin to serve Him. Then we drift off and abandon Him. Something or some circumstances get our attention, and we turn again back to God. And He accepts us again, because His desire is to have a relationship with us just like He planned from the beginning.

Finally we come face to face with him again and discover that he is the one we rejected once before. We need help, but we’re fearful that he will punish us for our past. What should we do? We would do well to fall before him in fear and trembling, the way Joseph’s brothers fell before Joseph. And when we do that, the marvelous Word of God comes to us personally, extending a hand of grace and raising us to our feet in full forgiveness.

(The Message Study Bible, Eugene Peterson, p. 94)

The book of Genesis sets the stage for the entire biblical story and provides foundational lessons for us. As we read Genesis, we’re reminded that no matter what life brings or how evil intrudes, God has a plan; and His ultimate plan cannot be frustrated. Many of the events recorded in Genesis permanently affected life on earth. Yet in spite of those epic events, God’s plan remained on schedule. We can trust His ability to make sense of our lives even if our world appears to be upside down. When we read the book of Genesis, we’re reminded that our Creator-God is sovereign and He is always in control – from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation.

(Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible, Dr. David Jeremiah)

We read about the patriarchs of our faith and the beginning of the nation of Israel – the people of God. The book ends with a lengthy story about Joseph – Jacob’s favorite son. He went through so much, but God had a plan to make him a deliverer of his people. This was a type of Jesus’ deliverance story for all humanity.

Fifteen hundred years passed between the time Joseph's coffin was put to rest in Egypt and the time our Lord was born in Bethlehem – and another two thousand years since then. The only thing that has changed in that time is that God's way of salvation, which worked hidden and secret in Joseph and his brothers, has become open and exposed in Christ. God saved Joseph from opposition, temptation, and defeat so that he could save his brothers. God saved Jesus – who also spent time in Egypt, fleeing from the wrath of Herod – so that he could save us.” (The Message Study Bible, Eugene Peterson, p. 94)

The book of Genesis starts off with God creating the heavens and the earth, and the Bible ends with God creating a new heaven and a new earth. The contaminated universe is restored at the end of time by the same God who created all things to begin with. In the beginning God created...

Rev. 21:1-2 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. NLT

The same God is still in control of everything. We need not fear. He loves us and desires a relationship with us. All we have to do is ask Him to come into our lives and take over control. It is so simple, but yet, it's so hard, because we really want to control our own lives. God has a plan for you – a plan to use you for His kingdom. The same God who created the universe and all that exists is asking you today to yield to Him and ask for forgiveness and for Him to take the wheel. You will never be disappointed in Him. He is faithful to the end.

The new heaven and earth is the restored Garden. God will provide everything we need, and the Tree of Life is there. Death is destroyed, and we will live forever with God in fellowship. This is the promise to all who put their faith in Jesus. This promise is for everyone!