

“Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.”<sup>1</sup> Superb advice from one of the most famous movie songs of all time. Fitting...Genesis means “beginning.” Some more advice, this time from the person who wrote half of the books in the New Testament. As a Christian, I would advise to start reading the Bible at the beginning of the book of *John*, because that starts with Jesus, who existed in the beginning of time, and through whom all things were created. From there you will be introduced to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. From that viewpoint, the Old Testament is a revealing of God the Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit through the history of the ancient Jewish people.

As you read the New Testament, you might notice we writers seldom reference the first ten chapters of Genesis unless we use them to support the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, and all that follows from that fact. When we do reference the first ten chapters of Genesis, we accept them at face value to be true.

You may remember I was also a Jewish scholar. As a Jew, I would advise to start reading the Bible at the beginning of *Genesis*, because that book starts with the beginning of the creation of all material things. From there you will immediately be introduced to God and his Spirit. From this viewpoint, the Old Testament is primarily a revealing of God and his nature, and the history of the ancient Jewish people.

What *Genesis* said about physical creation and history made sense to the Jews of my time, so we had no reason to question any of it. Scholars, priests, common folks. We all accepted the Scriptures to be sacred and true. Things existed, so they must have been created. We were where we were, so history must have progressed in a reasonable manner from creation to get us to that point. God is all-powerful, so he must have been the creator and directed history to get us to where we were. Our oral and written records confirmed not only our beliefs, but what made sense to us.

All of our Jewish worldview begins with the first sentence of Genesis, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God exists, God is all powerful, God created everything so he owns everything, God exists outside of time and physical constraints, God is in control. For his own reasons, God chose to create the heavens and the earth...and mankind.

God exists, God is all powerful, God created everything, God is in control. It’s about God, how could I ever forget that? You don’t, do you?

<sup>1</sup> The first two lines of “Do-Re-Mi”, sung by Julie Andrews in the *Sound of Music*

Imagine the earth in complete darkness. Giant oceans in disorder, the Spirit of God hovering above. Darkness. Seemingly never to end.

Darkness. Let ...there...be...light. With one thought, one breath, a few words, God creates light! Light! No big fanfare, there is...light. Because God wants it to exist.

Night and day. Sky and water. Seas and dry land. Vegetation, plants and trees. Time. Sun and moon. Birds, sea creatures, fish, wild animals and livestock. All these things, God creates.

God creates something out of nothing. Order out of chaos. Beyond comprehension. And, you know what? It is good. God says all of those things are good. How is that for a modest God? Good? That's it...good?

Yes, good. Because what comes next is better. God says his next creation is not just good, but it is very good! It is so good that God entrusts the rest of his creation to it.

After God creates almost everything on earth, he creates the first man, Adam, from the dust of the earth. God breathes his life force into Adam, and he becomes living being. God places Adam in a very special garden, the garden in Eden. You might not be so impressed with a garden that is watered by four rivers and has all kinds of trees with everlasting amounts of fruit. We people who grow up in deserts with scarcity of food are truly envious of Adam and appreciate why he would never want to mess up his good deal by disobeying the one command God gives him...not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Things were so good for Adam that he never knew he was alone, but God knew it. God knew that it was not good for Adam to be alone. God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and made a woman from the rib. God brought the woman to Adam, and he named her "woman" since she was taken out of him. He did not name her Eve until much later. Both the man and woman were made in the likeness of God.

From that time on, Adam knew he would not be complete unless he was with Eve. He was incomplete without his rib. They were so close that they are described as being one flesh, completely inseparable. Well, almost inseparable. Their downfall started when they were separated.

The serpent came to Eve and tricked her into taking the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She ate the fruit and gave some to Adam for him to eat. Their eyes were opened to their nakedness, and they made clothes to cover themselves.

Of course, it wasn't long before God found that they had broken his command. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. After making them clothes, God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden...forever. Before doing so, God placed curses on them and the serpent.

The serpent was cursed to crawl on his belly, and to be enemies with the descendants of Eve from that point forward. Eve was cursed to have painful childbirths, and to be ruled over by her husband. Adam was cursed to have painful toil while trying to make a living. Prior to that time, working in the garden was a pleasure. Adam was also cursed to have a lifespan...and then, die and return to the dust of the earth.

God made them clothes. He knew they must not be allowed to eat from the tree of life, so God drove Adam and Eve from the garden... forever.

New Testament writers did not refer very much to the first ten chapters of Genesis. I did refer to this incident of Adam and Eve's disobedience a few times. I mentioned that Eve was the one who was deceived and became a sinner, but women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness.<sup>2</sup> I wrote that sin entered the world through Adam, death entered through sin, and Adam is a pattern for Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, I wrote that in Adam all die, through Christ all will be made alive.<sup>4</sup>

Can't you imagine Eve's surprise when her belly started getting bigger and bigger and bigger. First time in the history of mankind that had happened. Then, with a whole lot of pain, she had a baby...a little man she named Cain. Later, she had a second little man, and named him Abel. Cain, the oldest son, worked as a farmer. Abel was a shepherd. Both Cain and Abel brought some of the fruits of their labor as offerings to God. We are not told why, but God was pleased with Abel's animal offering, but not Cain's grain offering. Might have been the type of offering, might have been their attitudes, might have been something else.

In a classic case of blame transferal, Cain attacked his brother and killed him. When God confronted Cain by asking where his brother was, Cain responded with the infamous line, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God placed a curse on Cain that kept him from being a farmer, and forced him be a wanderer. Cain was worried about other people hurting him, so God placed a mark on Cain that acted as a sign of protection from other people.

It's remarkable that Cain was more worried about other people harming him than he was having to leave the presence of God. Well, I guess it's not that remarkable. People throughout the ages have been more concerned about their present circumstances than enjoying the presence of God.

Where did these other people come from? I don't know, and nobody else does either. It is one of the mysteries of *Genesis*. Where did Cain get his wife? I don't know, but he did get one.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 2:14

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:12-14

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45

Five generations after Cain, a son named Lamech was born. Lamech had two wives and three famous sons. Lamech bragged to his wives that he had killed a man for wounding him, a young man had injured him so he murdered him. He said he had avenged himself seventy-seven times. I wonder if that was where Jesus got the idea that we should forgive people seventy-seven times?<sup>5</sup>

Adam and his close descendants lived very long lives. Adam lived 930 years and had many sons and daughters. Adam's son, Seth, lived 912 years. Methuselah lived 969 years, the oldest of all of them.

I skipped over one passage that I should go back to. Genesis 4:25-26 says that Adam and Eve had a son named, Seth. Seth had a son named Enosh. During that time, "people began to call on the name of the Lord." Through the ages, scholars have argued over the exact meaning of that phrase. I don't have a final answer, but it is clear that the people of that time knew about the Lord, and his presence was near enough to them that they called on his name. They were not ignorant of the Lord.

The people had no excuse to become completely wicked. Wicked enough that God regretted having made human beings. From creation to regret. What would God do about that? Plenty, but that is a story for someone else to tell.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 18:22