

## “From the Garden to the Grave” (Genesis 1-50)

What do Americans like to do in their spare time? *USA Today* recently reported that 96% of Americans like to watch TV. Now, I want you to think back to the last time you watched your favorite television program. Were you drawn in? Did you pay careful attention to the episode? Did your spouse or children attempt to talk to you, but you did not respond? If we are honest, most of us would have to say “yes” to these questions. When we are watching a program that we like, many of us can be oblivious to our surroundings.

This reality can also apply to the Scriptures. We have devoted 53 Sundays to studying the book of Gen. I have enjoyed our journey through the first 2400 years of human history.<sup>1</sup> Yet, a potential drawback to a lengthy and detailed study of Gen is that we may miss the forest for the trees. Don’t get me wrong, examining the forest’s remarkable trees has been beneficial, but we need to step back so we can see the magnificence of the forest itself. This we will attempt to do as we conclude our study through Gen.<sup>2</sup>

We must begin with a summary statement for Gen. I would suggest the following: **God has graciously redeemed us from the curse of sin so that we may be His channel for blessing all people.** This defines the forest (or the big picture) of Gen. Since it is difficult to succinctly summarize 50 chapters, I will recap Gen in this way: Genesis tells us who God is, who we are, and what we must do.

**1. Genesis tells us who God is.** Genesis begins with these simple, yet profound words: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). In the opening verse of the Bible, we are brought face to face with the eternal God who spoke the universe into existence (Ps 33:6). There is no introduction to lead up to that point, no argument to prove His existence, no room for speculation or curiosity. You must either accept God as the source of all or reject Him. Of course, the revelation of God’s awesome power in creation might tend to put us off, to make us feel like we can’t approach such a powerful God. Yet, the early chapters of Gen show that this creative, all-powerful God is also a personal God who communicates with the people He has created. He talks with Adam and gives him meaningful work to do in the garden. He knows Adam’s need for a helper and creates Eve for his wife. The first couple communes with God each day in the garden. But just when we’re starting to relax and feel like we might be able to approach this awesome but personal God, sin enters the picture and we see God pronouncing curses on the serpent, the woman, the man, and the ground. We learn that God does not take sin lightly as He expels the fallen couple from the garden. Then, as sin spreads through the fallen human race, we recoil at God’s terrible judgments in the flood and again at the tower of Babel. We see that God is a holy God who must judge all sin. But in all of this, there is hope. Rather than striking the fallen couple in the garden dead on the spot, God graciously offered them hope in the promise of the seed of the woman. He would bruise the serpent’s head, although the serpent would bruise him on the heel (3:15). This is the earliest promise in the Bible of the coming of Christ the Savior, born of a woman (not a man, through the virgin birth). In His death, He was bruised on the heel, and it seemed as if Satan had triumphed. But Christ’s resurrection turned what seemed like Satan’s victory into his defeat, as the seed of the woman bruised the serpent’s head.

Then God graciously provided animal skins to clothe the fallen couple (3:21). This provided for their physical nakedness, but obviously it went far beyond that. Just as man’s nakedness goes beyond the physical and points to the exposure of the soul resulting from sin (3:7), so God’s provision of clothing went beyond the physical need for garments. It is a beautiful illustration of what God would do through the Lord Jesus Christ to provide salvation for all who stand shamefully exposed before Him in their sin. God’s provision of the animal skins shows us four things:

- 1) *We need a covering for our sin.* The thought of standing with my sin exposed in the light of God's holy presence is more intolerable than the thought of showing up for a job interview at the White House stark naked. I need some sort of covering.
- 2) *Our attempts at covering ourselves are inadequate.* Adam and Eve made fig leaves, but that wouldn't do. Modern man tries the fig leaves of good works to cover his sin and to make himself presentable to God, but God cannot accept that.
- 3) *Only God can provide the covering we need for our sin.* He takes the initiative in properly covering our sin and guilt. Adam and Eve were passive; God did it all. We cannot receive God's salvation as long as we offer Him our fig leaves. We must let Him provide everything, as He has in fact done in Christ.
- 4) *The covering God provided required the death of an innocent substitute.* An animal had to be slaughtered to provide this covering for Adam and Eve. If, as we can probably assume, Adam and Eve witnessed this slaughter, it must have shocked them. This was the first time they had witnessed death. As they saw the animals having their throats slit and writhing in the throes of death, they must have gained a new awareness both of the seriousness of their sin and of the greatness of God's grace in not requiring their own immediate death for their sin. They learned that without the shedding of blood, there is no adequate covering for sin, but that God would accept the death of an acceptable substitute. In light of subsequent revelation, we know that the substitute is Jesus Christ, to whom these animals pointed as a type. So Gen shows God as the almighty Creator who yet can be known personally. Genesis shows God as the holy Judge of all sin, yet the Savior who Himself provided the payment of the penalty for our sin.

The book of Gen also shows us several other attributes of God.<sup>3</sup>

- **God is all-powerful** (Genesis 1-2). In the book of Gen He speaks creation into existence. He brings a universal flood. He destroys Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day. He brings a famine in Joseph's day. He opens the womb. He performs miracles. The God of Gen is an amazing God, capable of any display of power. This God has not changed; He is still powerful. You can call on Him today.
- **God is all-present** (Genesis 26; 28; 32; and 39). God told Isaac, "I will be with you" (26:3, 24). God's presence with Isaac was so obvious to the Philistines, they declared to Isaac, "the Lord has been with you" (26:28). Four times in the Joseph narrative we are told that the Lord was "with" Joseph (39:2, 3, 21, 23). Even when it seemed that God was a million miles away, He was present in power with His people. He is present with you today through the power of His Holy Spirit. Even when you go through dark and challenging times, He is right there with you.
- **God is all-knowing** (Genesis 16 and 18). One of the clearest expressions of God's omniscience is found in 6:5: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Only God could make such a statement. In Genesis 16 and 18, God speaks with Hagar and Sarah and demonstrates that He knows all about their lives. God understands what you're going through. He sees all the injustices that have been done to you. He knows your motives. He will care for you.
- **God is sovereign** (Genesis 15 and 25). God is sovereign in history, life, and grace. Whatever He predicts comes to pass. He chooses to open wombs when He pleases. He picks and chooses the younger over the older. He answers to no one. He is in complete control.
- **God is providential** (Genesis 45 and 50). God is so sovereign that He can use even human sin to accomplish His purposes (45:7-8; 50:20). God can take the lemons of your life and make lemonade. Thus, when difficult circumstances enter your life, recognize that God can take your trials and tragedies and use them to accomplish His glory and your good (Rom 8:28-29). We serve such a great God that there is never any need to fret. He will protect us; He will provide for us. He is more than able to work His will in our lives. We can trust Him completely, knowing that He is a good God and only wants the best for us.

**2. Genesis tells us who we are.** The British skeptic, George Bernard Shaw, in response to the German concentration camps, reluctantly concluded, “There is only one empirically verifiable doctrine of theology—original sin.” While that doctrine looms large in Gen, it is not the first picture of man. The first statement about man is God saying, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (1:26). While the image of God in man was marred by the fall, it was not obliterated. We know this because after the flood, God establishes the death penalty for murder, basing it on the fact that man was created in God’s image, a truth that still applies (9:6). That great truth lies behind the proper Christian view that every human being should be treated with respect. It lies behind Christian opposition to abortion and euthanasia. It is the motivation behind Christian hospitals and health care. It lies behind Christian charity toward the poor and underprivileged. It lies behind a proper Christian respect of men for women and of women for men, since 1:27 distinctly states that God created man in His image as male and female. It hints at what the second chapter confirms—the basis for Christian marriage and family relationships. It forms the basis for the proper understanding of one’s self, showing that we each have a unique role in God’s purpose.

But Gen also shows us as fallen in sin, alienated from God. The devastating effects of sin are displayed in full view throughout the book. The beauty of the first couple, innocent in the garden, is destroyed as they are expelled because of their sin. Their oldest son, the first man born into the first family on the earth, jealously murders his younger brother. In Noah’s time, the sinful condition of the human race is summed up: “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5). So our view of self has to be molded not only by the encouraging truth that we have been created in God’s image, but also by the sober reality that our hearts are inclined against God and toward sin. While it may not be a pleasant thing to look into the mirror that Gen holds before us, it bears witness with reality. You read the book of Gen and come away saying, “Yes, that is what human nature is like. Even more, that is what *I’m* like!” Apart from the work of Jesus Christ in my life, I am completely sinful. Due to my relationship with Christ, I am no longer a sinner by nature...I am a saint. However, I continue to sin because I have a wicked flesh that remains inside of me.

How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No. Scientists have discovered that the worm comes from inside. But how does he get in there? Simple! An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out. Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works out through a person’s thoughts, words, and actions.<sup>4</sup> It is ugly and we must recognize just how severe our sickness is. Fortunately, Gen doesn’t leave us there. That would be hopeless. Instead, Moses weaves a message of faith and promise throughout Gen.

**3. Genesis tells us what we must do.** Genesis shows us, as we’ve already seen, that God offers us redemption and how we must respond. I’d like to illustrate it from the first instance of faith, when Adam believed God’s promise of redemption. After God pronounced the curse for man’s sin (3:14-19), there is a verse that at first seems to be out of context. Genesis 3:20 reads, “Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.” Then the text goes on to tell of God’s provision of animal skins and of His expelling the couple from the garden. But after the grim words of 3:19, which inflict toil and death upon the human race, you would not expect 3:20. At best, you would think that it would read, “Now Adam called his wife ‘the Grim Reaper,’ because she was the mother of all the dying.” It was ultimately because of her sin that death came to the human race. Yet Adam calls her “Eve,” which means life-giver or mother. And, remember, this was before she had any children. What does 3:20 mean? It is Adam’s response of faith to God’s promise to send a Savior through the seed of the woman (3:15). Adam heard and submitted to God’s penalty of death (3:19), but he also grabbed on to God’s promise that there would come forth from the woman a descendant who would bruise the serpent’s head. And so by faith, before his wife had conceived, Adam named her Eve, the mother of all living. Salvation is now and always has been by faith in God’s promise. Before Jesus Christ came into the world, a person’s faith had

to look forward to the promised Savior (Rom 3:25). Since Christ, faith looks back to the Savior who has come. Salvation has never been based on keeping the commandments or on a person's good works balancing out his sins. We are made right with God by trusting what He has said concerning His Son, Jesus Christ, the only Savior, who took our penalty on Himself on the cross.

A healthy faith always results in obedience. Noah didn't just say, "I believe you, God, that you're going to send a flood to destroy the earth." His faith resulted in 100 years of hard work and ridicule as he built the ark and got on board when God told him to. Healthy faith always affects our behavior in this evil world. That means that we will commit ourselves and all the resources God has graciously entrusted to us to His great purpose of blessing all the families on earth through the seed of Abraham, who is Jesus Christ. If we really believe what Gen teaches about God's judgment on sin and about His provision in Christ, we cannot be complacent as billions go into eternity without Christ. Rather, we will do all we can to be channels of God's blessing to those who are lost and perishing.

An old man, walking along the beach at dawn, noticed a young man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the youth, he asked what he was doing. The young man answered that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun. "But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the old man. "How can your effort make any difference?" The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it to safety in the waves. "It makes a difference to this one," he said.

In Rom 10:12-15, Paul tells us that the Lord is "abounding in riches for all who will call upon Him; for 'whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'" God wants those beautiful feet to be your feet!

What are your summer plans? Will you commit today to invest in being a blessing to others? Genesis tells us who God is, who we are, and what we must do. God has graciously redeemed us from the curse of sin so that we may be His channel for blessing all people. Will you respond to the message of Gen? Will you be blessed and be a blessing?

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis spans more time than any other book in the Bible. It covers more than all 65 books of the Bible put together. The total duration is from the time of creation (?) to the time when the Israelites arrived in Egypt and grew into a nation (about 1800 B.C.). The date of Gen is sometime after the Exodus during the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

<sup>2</sup> In this summary sermon, I have greatly appreciated the insights of Steven J. Cole, "From the Garden to a Coffin: Genesis Recap": <http://www.fcfoonline.org/site/content/1/sermons/112397m.pdf>; R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 579-624.

<sup>3</sup> The names of God in Gen are worthy of careful study. E.g., Elohim; Yahweh; the angel of the Lord; El Roi (the God who sees); El Shaddai (God Almighty); El Elyon (God Most High); the fear of Isaac; the God of Jacob; etc.

<sup>4</sup> David Jeremiah, *Grace for the Day*, Turning Point Daily Devotional, 4/5/06.