



# THE GOD OF CREATION

*SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN*

Catalog No. 992

Genesis 1:1-28

First Message

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February 12, 1995

Genesis is the book of beginnings. That is what the word “genesis” means. The first book in the Old Testament tells the story of the beginning of God’s plan to bring salvation to the world. Salvation is what the Scriptures are all about. In our modern world, however, people wonder whether God has a plan to bring salvation. Things appear to be helter skelter and meaningless. People ask, Does God know what is going on? And if he does, how can he be said to be in control?

Even Christians become anxious about the direction of history. There is a limerick that expresses how we feel at times:

The world had a hopeful beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning.  
We trust that the story  
Will end to God’s glory,  
But at present the other side’s winning.

But Scripture tells us differently. Scripture records the activity of God in and through history, not only in the nation of Israel, but in the entire world. The book of Genesis in particular provides the foundation for the history and theology of the entire Bible. This book introduces the Creator God, and the beginnings of life, family, worship, salvation, sin and judgment.

Before we look at the text, I would like to make some introductory comments about the purpose of Scripture in general and the Book of Genesis in particular. The purpose of Scripture is not to teach about history or astronomy or geology or botany (although when the Bible touches upon these matters we can expect it to be accurate). The Scriptures leave a lot of questions unanswered, because the purpose of the Bible, as the apostle Paul puts it, is to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). Or, putting it another way, Paul says in 1 Timothy that the goal of his teaching is to make us into more loving people (1 Tim 1:5)—people who are easy to be around. That ought always to be our goal as we study Scripture.

While we can expect the Book of Genesis to be accurate when it touches on scientific matters, it is not a science textbook. We do not know how long are the days of Genesis 1. We do not know when creation occurred; Scripture does not record that. That is because the purpose of Scripture is not to explain creation, but to catch us up in its wonder. Moses, the author of Genesis, is not concerned with how God accomplished creation. Moses would not be much interested in our modern debates about the time scale of evolution or the physics of the

First Three Minutes. When we bring such questions to the text we are disappointed, because the Bible is silent on these matters.

Although the term agnosticism bothers some Christians, there is a healthy kind of agnosticism that we can have about certain things in Scripture. The word agnostic means “not knowing.” And there are many things we do not know. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that we “know in part” (1 Cor 13:9). Therefore we ought to be uneasy with people who say they know everything. But in the critical issues of life, those matters that have to do with salvation and how to live as God’s people, the Scriptures speak with clarity. These are the things we want to learn from Genesis.

Genesis 1 and 2 are parallel accounts of creation. They are not contradictory as some imagine; they complement one another. The purpose of both accounts is to reveal how important man is in God’s sight. God loves us. We are his most important creation. Genesis 1 teaches that chronologically, because man is the last of God’s creation. Chapter 2 teaches that same fact logically, because everything is created for man.

Chapter 1 can be divided into two units of thought. The first two verses are a prologue to the creation story. The creation account begins with verse 3 and continues through 2:4. (The chapter division is in the wrong place; the creation account actually runs into chapter 2.) Notice how verse 1 begins: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”; then 2:4 concludes, “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.”

We will begin by looking at the prologue:

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.** (Gen 1:1-2, NASB)

The first verse is a summary statement of creation; the second verse is a description of the conditions that made that creation necessary. The point of the first verse is that God created everything. The Hebrews did not have a word for “universe.” They expressed that idea in terms of opposites. Describing a diverse group of people, we might say that both rich and poor were present. We would not necessarily mean that only rich people and poor people were present, but that people from all different economic levels were there. That is

what Moses is doing here. The point he is making is that God created the universe. More than thirty-five times in this chapter the writer says that it was God who created everything.

The word that is translated “create” means “to make something new”— something that never existed before. We say this of someone who is creative, who does things that have not been done before. This describes the God of creation. He is always doing fresh, exciting, innovative things. There is nothing boring about God. If you are bored with the things of God, then you do not understand the character of God. Now we can be creative in areas where Scripture has not spoken, because we are related to a God who is always fresh and unpredictable in what he does. In fact, the only thing that is predictable about God is his unpredictability. We cannot creatively murder or lie, because these things are fixed. But where Scripture does not speak we can be wonderfully creative, because we are related to a creative God.

The point of this story is that God created something fresh and new for man. In this account we see a pattern: God speaks and something happens; then God evaluates it and pronounces it “good.” The word “good” in Hebrew does service for many words. “Good” actually means beautiful. When Moses was born he was described as “good.” That does not mean that he slept through the night; it means he was a beautiful child. This seems to be what Moses is saying about creation. God speaks, something comes into being, and God says, “That is beautiful. Man will like that.” Everything that God created was designed for man.

That is what we are told in the first verse: In the beginning God created. He made everything new. This is in stark contrast to what everyone else was saying at that time. The first five books of the Bible are set against the background of the land of Canaan, which the people of Israel were about to enter. In Genesis, Moses is preparing them for what they would find there. They would discover, for example, that the Canaanites had their own account of creation. The Canaanites explained creation in terms of a cosmic soup, a mass that existed before the gods, out of which the gods were born. Their gods were not sovereign over creation. They themselves were the product of chaos. But what is unique about the book of Genesis is that Moses holds that God is sovereign over his creation. He is not controlled by anything or anyone. God rules: That is the point of verse 1.

Verse 2 relates the conditions that made creation necessary.

**And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.**

The earth is described first, as “formless and void.” In Hebrew, this phrase sounds like our descriptions “helter-skelter” or “hodge-podge.” The Hebrew words are “tohu vabohu.” They mean that everything was a mess;

everything was chaotic, ruined, wasted. There needed to be order, structure and purpose put back into the world. It was *tohu*, without form (it had no shape), and it was *bohu*, empty (it was unpopulated).

Furthermore, it was dark. That would have frightened ancient man. That was when burglars and bad people came out. At darkness, the city gates were locked. One did not go out in the dark. (Revelation 21 says that in God’s new city, in the new heavens and earth, the gates of the city are never closed, because there is no night there.) Ancient man feared the darkness. The picture evoked here would arouse in him a feeling of terror. The world was dark and chaotic.

And it was watery. The entire globe was enveloped by what is described as “the deep.” And the Spirit of God was “moving over the surface of the waters.” Ancient man was afraid of the sea. He did not venture out onto the high seas. So the picture that is evoked in verse 2 is a frightening one.

In this setting God began to work, to create, setting right the conditions that created the chaos. And the point of Genesis 1 is to remind us that the God of creation is the God of history. He is a Savior. He is a God who brings order out of chaos, and light out of darkness. God is sovereign. He is in control. We may feel that our lives are a “tohu vabohu.” Our marriages, our family circumstances, our jobs, may need light. But God is in control. He is a Savior.

Throughout the process of creation we notice a distinct pattern in the way that God works. We delight in patterns. As children we make patterns in the sand. We look for patterns in the stars. We delight in snowflakes, in series of numbers, in wallpaper patterns. When I was a child I spent hours looking at beautiful patterns and colors through a kaleidoscope. Science exists because of patterns. Notice that there is an order, a pattern, to God’s creative acts. In the first three days God forms the earth; in the second three days he fills it. So days one through three parallel days four through six. On day one God creates light, and on day four he creates the light bearers. On the second day he creates the sky, and on the fifth day he creates the birds to fill the sky, and the fish to fill the sea. On the third day he creates the dry ground, on the sixth day the animals, and finally man, to fill the earth.

Verse 3:

**Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (1:3-5)**

So God speaks, and light comes into being; the darkness is dispelled. God has resolved the first problem. Moses does not try to explain what we know today about the division between light and darkness, that

they result from the rotation of the earth and the motion of the planets around the sun. This would mean nothing to ancient man. So Moses explains in simple terms that God did it. God made a separation between the night and the day. When the sun rose in the morning, ancient man would say, "God did that." The point is that when the sun went down in the evening and darkness fell, God was still in control.

The Canaanites had a story that is related to God's activity on the first day. They believed that El, who was their high god, cooked a lamb in its mother's milk. (That practice is prohibited in the law of Israel [Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21] because it was a custom of an ancient fertility cult to guarantee fertility in the land.) Afterwards, El proceeded along the seashore and found two young human women. He assaulted them, and they gave birth to two gods, Shakker and Shallom, dawn and dusk. That is how light and darkness came into being, according to the Canaanites. But Moses says that this was not how it happened. Light was created through the action of God. He is the one responsible for light.

Verse 6:

**Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. (1:6-8)**

It appears that the earth was enveloped in water. And over the water lay a mist. The first thing God did was make the sky. He chased the clouds away. Now there was a separation between the waters under the expanse or the sky and the waters up in the sky. God was beginning to solve the problem of the lack of form. On the first day he dispelled darkness, but the earth was still formless. So he made a division, and at last there was some form to the earth.

But notice that on the second day God did not say that it is good, because he was not finished.

**Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. (1:9-10)**

Next, God creates the continents, the land masses, by drawing them up out of the water, which covered two thirds of the world. So now there is a sky; there is some form to the waters; there is water in the clouds and water under the sky; and land masses are emerging out of the water. The Canaanites had their own version of how these land masses were formed. They believed that the god Baal engaged in mortal combat with Yam, the Canaanite word for sea, and with a club drove him away

so that dry ground appeared. But Moses says that God created the earth and formed it.

Verse 11:

**Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth"; and it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. (1:11-13)**

Here God is preparing the land to populate it. He caused the land to produce the grasses and the trees, with their seeds, so that the process of reproduction is fixed by God. The Canaanites worshipped Baal, the god of fertility. They believed that in the spring Baal died, that he went down under the earth, and that was why the rains ceased. Then in October Baal was raised up again. So everything depended on Baal. Their worship centered around the drama which depicted Baal's death and resurrection. The Canaanites felt that by doing these things they insured Baal's resurrection, and thus the land would be fertile. But Moses says that it is God who produces fertility. He gave the grass and the trees that would provide for the people and their animals.

Verse 14:

**Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. (1:14-19)**

So light precedes the sun, moon and stars. And light outlasts these bodies. The book of Revelation says that in the new heavens and the new earth there is no need for the sun and moon, because God himself is the light. The sun, moon and stars are merely light bearers; that is the meaning of the term. They are places where God gathered the light. Moses is making the point that these heavenly bodies are not objects of worship. They are under God's control. The Canaanites worshipped the sun, moon and stars. Even today, people govern their lives by the movements of the stars. But Moses says these are mere servants to help us mark days and years. In fact, he doesn't even give them names. They are merely lights.

So the darkness is dispelled and the earth has form. But it is still empty. On the fifth day God begins to solve

that problem on earth. Verse 20:

**Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." And God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.**

**Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. (1:20-25)**

So God creates the warm-blooded animals and the reptiles to inhabit the dry ground that he created on the third day. Now the earth is becoming populated.

This brings us to the apex of God's creation. Verse 26:

**Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (1:26-28)**

On the sixth day God created man. On this day also God created animal life. This explains why man resembles the other animals anatomically. Man has the same sort of muscle and bone structure as animals. Technically, man can be classified with animals. That is legitimate, up to a point. But man is more than animal. Without God's word to enlighten him, however, man fails to

understand this. That is why secular psychologists are wide of the mark. They simply cannot give good counsel because they try to explain man merely as an animal. But man is created in the image of God. Next week, we will talk more about the creation of man, but let us simply say here that on a scale of one to ten, if God is a ten and the animals are a one, man is much closer to an eight or nine. Man is created in the image of God.

When Moses wrote this text, people had no concept of one God in control of all of nature. They believed that all of nature was god, that there were gods everywhere. There is no neuter gender in any of the Ancient Near Eastern languages. Unlike English, there is no "it" in them. The reason for that is that there is nothing that could be called "it." Everything had personality and life. The rocks were god. The clouds were Baal. The sky was Enu. The sun was Sheppish. The stars had names. They were gods. Even death was a god. The people had no control over their environment. If a child fell in a river and was swept away, it was the god of the river who took the child. So people lived in constant fear, because they had no control over any part of their lives. Moses wrote to say that it was not so. God rules.

And God is a Savior. Our ability to rule derives from our relationship to him. We can rule only when we are being ruled. The extent to which we allow God to master our lives is the extent to which we can master our environment. The world tries to control us and manipulate us. The message is that if we buy whatever is being produced this year, whatever goes faster or looks better, then we will be able to attract the opposite sex. But the answer to life is not found in something we buy or wear or spray on or drive. The Creator God of history is also a Savior. He wants to enter your *tohu vabohu* and dispel the darkness by giving you his word. This is the Word that the apostle John says "became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The same God who spoke creation into existence desires to bring life into our existence. That is the promise he makes today to those who belong to him.

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# THE GLORY OF MAN

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Catalog No. 993

Genesis 2:4-17

Second Message

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February 19, 1995

My son was taught the evolutionary process as part of his sixth grade school studies this year. I remember a chart that I used to see in grade school depicting man, first as a simple primate (like a small monkey), then through various stages of evolution, involving different types of hominids, all the way to *Homo erectus* (man who stands up) and *Homo sapiens* (man who knows). According to the theory of evolution, man stuck his claws up out of the ooze and has been crawling ever since, making it on his own. From ooze to booze in only four and a half million years!

I'm not trying to ridicule evolutionists. Christians need to love scientists who hold the evolutionary viewpoint, just as we need to love everyone. But I want my son to understand that underlying the evolutionary point of view is a set of presuppositions about life. One is that man is self made. The fundamental belief of the world is that man has everything he needs to face life and its demands alone, without God. Reduced to its essence, worldliness is the notion that man can live apart from God. But Scripture says that man can be man only when he knows God and is rightly related to him. It takes God to be a man. This is the message of the opening chapters of the book of Genesis.

Before we look at our text this morning I want to make a point about the kind of literature we are studying in this series. Last week, someone asked me whether these opening chapters of Genesis are historical or mythical. I want to suggest that they are both. Let me explain. As I read the Bible, it appears that Scripture intends for us to take Adam and Eve as actual historical figures who lived in space and time. If that is not the case, how can we explain the genealogies of the Bible which often begin with Adam? Adam seems to be just as real as anyone else in the various genealogies. For instance, the Book of Chronicles begins with Adam. Luke in his gospel traces the lineage of Jesus all the way back to Adam. In fact, the details which Moses, the author of Genesis, gives in this story lead us to believe that he wants us to take the account as literal and factual. In the passage we will look at the writer goes to great lengths to give the location of the Garden of Eden. The New Testament takes this story historically. In Matthew 10, Jesus holds up Adam and Eve as the ideal for marriage. Theirs was a monogamous relationship, the kind that God intended in the first place. These and other facts lead us to the conclusion that the Bible takes Adam and Eve as literal, historical people.

But, having said that, the Adam and Eve account is more than a story that is rooted in space and time; it is a story that teaches us things about ourselves. Adam and Eve represent every man and woman. In this sense it is supra-historical, or mythical, in that it helps us understand ourselves. One point will suffice to validate this. Everyone who has read this account discerns this intuitively. When God told the woman that she would bring children into the world through painful labor, does anyone think that God was referring only to Eve? No. We intuitively know that Eve represents every woman. When God said to Adam, "Dust you are and to dust you will return," and, "you will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow," does anyone think that God was referring only to the historical Adam? No. These words relate the experience of every man. So on another level, Adam is every man and Eve is every woman. This story sets out their hopes, dreams, and aspirations—and ours too, even our failures. So everything in this story is representative of our experience. It is on that level that we want to read the account and interpret it.

In chapter 2 we come now to the second account of the creation of man. The chapter falls into obvious divisions. Verses 4-17, which we will look at this morning, describe the making of man; verses 18-25, which we will take next week, describe the making of woman. Chapter 2, verse 4:

**This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.** [This line belongs at the end of chapter 1. It's the tag line for the first creation account. Then we begin the second account, with this second line.]

**When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.** (Gen 2:4-7, NIV)

From the grandeur of chapter 1, which related the majesty of creation, the tone becomes more intimate now in chapter 2 as we are invited to explore the garden. Chapter 1 talked about "the heavens and the earth," but in chapter 2 it is "the earth and the heavens." There is a new name for God in this account.

Chapter 1 used the general name for God, the generic *Elohim*. This was the name, the Sovereign Creator God, used not only by the Israelites, but also by all the pagan nations. But chapter 2 refers to God as the LORD God, *Yahweh Elohim*, or *Jehovah Elohim*. This is God's name, in contrast to his general title in chapter 1. Our focus of interest here is no longer the cosmic perspective of the One who made the stars, but the intimacy of fellowship with the One who calls man by his name.

The point of this name change by Moses is to indicate that the Lord who created man is the Lord who cares for man. Moses knew from his experience at the burning bush what the name of God stood for. This is the Lord who is everything that man needs in order to become what God calls him to be. We are hand-crafted by a Lord who cares. We began life in his hands. Most of the religions of the ancient world were based on man's efforts to get God to care about him. But the Bible begins with the clear statement that God already cares for us. He loves us. We have been hand-crafted by him for a special purpose. This is what David discovered, and that is why he wrote, in Psalm 23, the words we are so familiar with, "Yahweh is my shepherd."

So the Lord who created us is a Lord we can know. He is the covenant-keeping loving God of Israel.

Though the perspective of chapter 2 is different from chapter 1, notice that it has a similar structure. Moses repeats what he said in chapter 1. He begins by describing the conditions that predated creation. Chapter 2, verse 4:

**When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground— (2:4b-6)**

Such were the conditions that existed prior to the creation of man. Moses is not saying that the creation of plant life occurred after the creation of man. He is not referring to plant life in general here, but to plants that are cultivated. The point here is that no cultivation was going on, because there was no rain in this part of the land at this point; there were only springs and rivers. There was no one there to cultivate the soil and no one to irrigate the crops.

The lesson of this is that God wants man to cooperate with him in what he is doing. God planted a garden in Eden and charged man to make the whole world into a garden. God was going to do it, but he would do it through man. This is the story that is told throughout Scripture. God planned it so that man can cooperate with his activity; we can be co-workers with him in his redemptive work. There is a humorous story told of a man who was working in his garden. A couple came by and noticed what a beautiful garden it was. The man said to his wife, "Look at what God has done." The gar-

dener interjected, "You should have seen it when God had it all by himself!" It is true that in some sense God has chosen to work out his plan through man.

The third thing we learn in these verses is something of man's unique creation: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Man became a person. Here in chapter 2, Moses uses verbs to communicate the same truth he communicated in chapter 1 through nouns. In chapter 1 Moses says that man is created in God's image, according to his likeness. He is not saying that God is precisely like man. He is saying that man is somewhat like God. The fact that we can see means that God can perceive and is aware, though he doesn't necessarily have eyes. The fact that we can hear means that God can hear us when we pray. He is aware of our needs and our cries. That is why the psalmist says, "He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?" (Psa 94:9, NASB). God sees us and hears us, and man can communicate and work with him.

And the passage says that we are like God in that we were created to exercise dominion. God is sovereign over his environment. He is not subject to anything or anyone. Moses wants the man of his time to know that he too is not subject to his environment; he too can rule. That is man's destiny. So God uses the nouns, "image" and "likeness," to communicate what he wants to say.

But here in chapter 2 Moses communicates this through verbs. God "forms" man out of dirt. The word that is translated "dust" here actually refers to dirt clods. (Just yesterday I watched my son watering dirt in the yard to make mud to shape things.) The word that is translated "forms" is used to describe the activity of a potter. A potter makes something exquisite out of raw dirt. That is what God did: He hand-crafted man. Then he breathed into man, and man became a person. You may know the story of the little boy who came to his mother and said excitedly, "Mom, is it true that we are made from dust and that after we die we go back to the dust?" She said, "Yes it is." "Well," he said, "I looked under my bed this morning, and there is someone there, but I don't know if he is coming or going!"

In the OT, the word for man, Adam, is based on the Hebrew word for earth, *adamah*. The counterpart in English is "earthling," a term derived from the word earth. We would say, "I will call his name earthling, because he is made out of the earth." This is a reminder to us of the stuff from which we are made. We are merely dirt, clods, dust. No one is made out of super-dust; we are all made out of the same stuff. God took us from the dust of the ground and formed us into something significant. And our significance comes from him. He is the One who made us what we are. Our worth and dignity come from our relationship with him. This is a good reminder to us of our frailty. We should not be so shocked and despairing when we act out of our humanity and are not what we should be. We can be what we



were intended to be only when we live out of the life of God, when we depend on him. When we do not do this, we revert to dust. The Lord knows that, as David illustrates in Psalm 103:

**The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness...  
For high as the heavens are above the earth,  
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who  
fear Him.**

**As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.  
Just as a father has compassion on his children,  
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him;  
For he knows how we are formed,  
[the psalmist uses the same word as the Genesis text]  
He remembers that we are dust.**

(Psa 103:8, 11-13, NASB; v14, NIV)

God is never disappointed in us when we act in the flesh and fail, because he knows us, and he knows we are but dust. Our strength, our ability to be God's men and women—to be what God has called us to be—flows from our relationship with him and our dependence on him.

So we have the Genesis description of man.

Verses 8-14 describe man's environment. It is an ideal setting.

**Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; [Notice that this is not the Garden of Eden. Eden is not the name of the garden. It is a garden "in Eden." The word Eden means "Plain." Somewhere in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley, just north of the Persian Gulf, there was a vast plain; and somewhere in that area, east of Palestine, God planted a garden.] and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

**A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (2:8-14)**

Moses describes this place as a garden. We think of gardens as open areas, but in the ancient world a garden was a closed place that was surrounded by walls. So this is a picture of a walled garden where there is security and safety. In chapter 3 we will learn that there was an enemy on the outside, but here, in the garden, man is secure.

The garden in Eden then is a place of harmony, happiness, and peace. There man was in harmony with God, with the animals (he treated them properly), with his companion (there were no wars or conflicts), and with creation (he was a steward). It was all harmony and peace. This is what we long for, isn't it? The memory of this is in everyone's heart. There is a place of harmony and bliss, and the reason for that is because God is there, walking in that land. When God is not present there is no harmony, no happiness.

God caused all kinds of trees to grow in the garden—trees for beauty and trees for food. In the middle of the garden stood the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This reference to a "tree of life" indicates that there is a form of life higher than the first form of created life. The rest of Scripture calls it eternal life. It is life in its fullest potency. It is both a quality of life and a quantity of life in which one never perishes. If Adam had continued to partake of this tree he would have lived forever. As this theme develops in the progress of revelation, what does this tree of life represent? What can we eat, what can we drink that will give us eternal life? Jesus said, "If you eat my flesh, and drink my blood, you will have eternal life." His blood was shed for us. His body made open the way into heaven. He is the tree of life.

And what about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? We need to say, first, that this was a good tree. Everything that God created is good, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree is symbolic of the knowledge that man needs to cope with life. In fact, when man ate of this tree, in one sense he became like God, knowing good and evil. This tree represents coming to moral maturity, becoming aware that there is a battle between good and evil in this universe—and that is good. But man took this knowledge independently from God, and he died. God had another plan, called revelation, to teach man how to live. Man was not intended to learn it on his own, relating everything to himself.

In this garden there was a vast, fourfold river system that watered the crops. And the garden contained gold and aromatic resin and precious stones. The composite picture is of a perfect environment. The garden had everything that man could possibly want.

Next, in verses 15-17, man is given a vocation:

**The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (2:15-17)**

The first thing we are told about man's vocation is that he was to work—and work hard. God gave man a plot of ground, and the resources to irrigate it, and told him to work. So work is not the result of the fall. It was after the fall that work became burdensome and the

land did not yield as it should. Work in itself is not a part of the curse. God always intended for men to work. Sloth is a sin. Laziness is a sin. Those among us who are out of work know that not working makes us uneasy after a while. We begin to doubt our self-worth. We feel restless and unnatural when we are out of work, because it is God's intention that we work.

And secondly, man is told to "take care" of the garden. The word actually means "guard" it, watch over and protect it. We can understand that command on two levels. First, on the physical level, man is to take care of his environment and make the world a beautiful place to live in. But the command is also to be understood on another level: man is to protect his environment spiritually. There was a snake outside, trying to get into the garden. The man needed to be watchful, to guard his environment from the attacks of the snake.

This is still man's responsibility today. The snake makes its way into our homes oftentimes through our attitudes. I find he often enters my home through my negative spirit or my critical heart, destroying our family environment. Or the snake can enter through the behavior of a child or through our mate. We have a responsibility to guard our garden and protect it.

So man is to work, to watch out for his environment, and to walk with God.

Then thirdly, the man was told in verse 17: "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." There was only one prohibition. God is often portrayed as a kind of cosmic wet blanket, always ready to snuff out fun, because he cares only about rules and regulations. But that is not true. On the contrary, God's command to the man is: "Enjoy! Freely partake of every tree I have created. Eat until you are content. But stay away from this one tree, because if you eat of it, it will kill you." That is why God is against sin. It is because he is *for* people. What he prohibits he denies to us, because it will kill us. There is only one rule: man is to live subject to God.

When man ate from that tree, he began to do what God does, and that is, to relate everything to himself. Man began to think of himself as the center of the universe, becoming like God. But it was all a lie. Man is not the center of the universe. He cannot be. But that is the seductive lie that the serpent has whispered into the ears of man ever since: "This is your world. Everything relates to you. What you like is right. What you don't like is wrong. Don't let anyone make you do what you don't want to do. You are the center of things."

So man is placed in a beautiful garden, and the way he gets to remain there is to be childlike, under the Creator God. That is what Jesus said, isn't it? He wants us to be children, in a way. We cannot seize life on our terms. We can have life only as we submit to the One who is life. He commands us: "Eat of all the trees of the garden." He sets before us a banquet table of life—all the foods, all the wonders of life. That is what the Creator really wants. But, we must take it on his terms, not ours. We must not take certain things until he says we can have them. We must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If we seize it on our own terms we will surely die. But, if we "live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," we will surely live.

This is the test of man: Will we insist on being human on our terms, reaching our fullest potential, becoming mature without God, or will we be childlike and trusting? Jesus said, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). Our ability to rule comes from our relationship to God. We can rule only when we are being ruled. The extent to which we allow God to master our lives is the extent to which we can master our environment.

Have we stopped trying to be little gods, trying to run things in our homes or workplace the way we want them to function? Have we crowned Jesus Christ Lord of his empire, where he belongs, and invited him with gladness to sit upon the throne of our hearts and rule there? These are the questions we must ask ourselves this morning as we come to the end of this account of the creation of man.

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# THE GLORY OF WOMAN

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Catalog No. 994

Genesis 2:18-25

Third Message

Gary Vanderet

February 26, 1995

In our studies in the book of Genesis we come now to the account of the creation of woman. I approach this text with a sense of timidity. I grew up in a male-dominated home. I have two brothers. My wife Kathy and I have three sons. Although we will celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary this year, it is only in the last few years that I have been begun to understand and appreciate the companion whom God created for me.

A Peanuts cartoon expresses my feelings as we turn to this marvelous passage this morning. Lucy is walking down the street, thinking to herself:

"That Chuck. He's something else...

I don't even know why I think about him...

Chuck doesn't seem to understand a girl's emotions...

In fact, Chuck doesn't seem to understand girls at all...

Chuck is hard to talk to because he doesn't understand life...

He doesn't understand laughing and crying...

He doesn't understand love, and silly talk, and touching hands, and things like that...

He plays a lot of baseball, but I doubt if he even understands baseball..."

Then Lucy knocks on Charlie Brown's door. She says,

"I don't think you understand **anything** Chuck!"

As she is walking away, Charlie Brown replies:

"I don't even understand what it is I don't understand."

This is how I feel about this deeply theological text. I have so much understanding to do that I sometimes feel "I don't even understand what it is I don't understand."

Someone has said that marriage is like a phone call in the middle of the night. First you get the ring, and then you wake up! How good of God to give us this text to ponder and reflect upon. The passage we will look at, from Genesis 2, is closely connected to the verses we studied last week. Actually, these passages are one unit of thought, but time constraints have forced us to study them on successive Sundays.

Last week, we made the comment that these stories in the book of Genesis are supra-historical. Though these incidents really did take place in time and space, they are more than a recounting of history. They represent every man's and every woman's dreams and aspirations. This passage then is archetypal in that it was designed to demonstrate what the Creator intended for the relationship between man and woman. As we will

see, marriage was meant to be God's good gift to mankind. But it hasn't always been that way.

The account begins in verse 18:

**The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone..."** (Gen 2:18a, NIV).

There is something jarring about this statement. In chapter 1, following each creative act, God said, "It is good." And on the sixth day of creation, God said that everything he had done was "very good." But here God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." The situation called for corrective action.

God himself does not exist in solitude. He has always existed as a tri-unity. A heavenly chorus surrounds him at all times. And he does not want us to be recluses. He wants us to enjoy the company of others. Fellowship with others is part of being human, part of being real, part of being made in the image of God.

In the book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the main character is a shiny new stuffed rabbit who is in the process of becoming "real." The rabbit wants to be considered more than just a toy on a shelf. As he struggles with initial feelings of uneasiness, he converses with an old, worn-out, well-used and much-loved stuffed horse:

The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?" "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." "Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once, said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most

of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

We become real through establishing loving relationships with others.

So God's statement, "It is not good for the man to be alone," indicates that at this stage of creation, man was not yet what God had planned. From the beginning it was always God's intention to make two sexes.

And that is what he proceeds to do, as we read in the second part of verse 18:

**"...I will make a helper suitable for him." (2:18b)**

The word "helper" has been greatly misunderstood. Webster renders it, "one who helps, usually one who is less skilled." Usually it is the latter part of that definition that is emphasized. Thus there is a great deal of misunderstanding about this word "helper." In Scripture, however, "helper" is not a demeaning word at all. In fact, on most occasions it is used of God, who comes alongside to provide what man lacks. The word simply means "companion, someone who comes alongside." The rabbis frequently used this word in their writings to describe someone who comes alongside another to help. The word refers to a sidekick, a friend, someone with whom man can share the job that God gave him. Man needs someone who can share his destiny. He has been given a difficult task—to make the world a garden and to guard it from the attacks of the serpent. Man would accomplish this task by walking with God. God says man needed a helper *suitable* for him. The word means, an exact opposite. One lexicon renders it as "someone equal and adequate to himself." These two would be a fitting complement to each other physically, socially, and spiritually.

But notice that God does not do this immediately. Despite his identification of man's need, there is a delay in God's provision to meet it. God knows that Adam's loneliness is not good; now man must come to the same understanding. God is not going to present the apex of his creation to an unappreciative male.

Verse 19:

**Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. [By the way, that is how this verse should be translated: the creation of the animals preceded the creation of man.] He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (2:19-20)**

So God puts Adam in a zoo. Then he parades the animals before him so that Adam can name them. In doing so Adam begins to order his world. Scientists attempt to gain control over their environment by giving names to

things and putting them in categories. We like to come up with titles and names and put tags on things. It is our way of analyzing our environment and understanding its relationship with us. If we can name something, we feel secure.

That is what Adam is doing in naming the animals: he is establishing the relationship of that part of creation to himself. If he had named the animals in English, he would have begun with the aardvark and worked his way down through the alphabet to the zebra. And he would name them in terms of their relationship to himself. One would be a beast of burden; one would help him carry his load; one would produce wool for clothing; one would mow his grass; one would be ornamental. But after naming the animals, Adam found that his deficiency was still there: there was no companion for him. While there was one which who could help him clean house, one which could provide clothing for him, and some which could provide meals, there was no sidekick, no companion, no one who could move in alongside him and share the responsibility that God had given him.

Last year, we got our first dog. We needed another female in the house, so we got a little female golden lab, which we named Amber. She now weighs almost 80 pounds. Our boys love her; we spend hours playing with her and sharing her affection. But the fellowship we have with her can only be on her level, because a dog can communicate only on that level.

Through this experience of naming the animals, Adam begins to realize that there is none like himself. Verse 21:

**So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs [the word means, "something from the side"] and closed up the place with flesh. (2:21)**

Once Adam recognized his need, God put him to sleep. He did not have to search for his wife. She was a gift, made for him while he slept.

Notice how the woman was created: she was created from Adam's side. The rabbis described the significance of this in these words:

She was not taken from Adam's head, that she should rule over him; not from his feet, that she should be trampled on by him; but she was taken from his side, that she might be his equal, from under his arm, that she might be protected by him, near his heart, that he might cherish and love her.

God now brings his creation to man. Verse 22:

**Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ["Wow! This is what I have been looking for all my life!"] This a loose paraphrase. But that is the point. Adam was saying, in effect, "This one fills my need. These animals can bear my burdens and some can be ornamental, but none of them**

can be a companion for me.”]

**“This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called ‘woman,’  
for she was taken out of man.” (2:22-23)**

Adam names the woman in relationship to himself. He classifies her in a special way, using what amounts to the feminine form for “man.” The masculine word for man is “ish.” Adam calls the woman “ishah.” These are much like our words, man and woman. Woman means, “wife of man.” Adam is playing on the word “man.” He is saying, in effect, “This is my counterpart, my companion. She is the female counterpart to man. This one will share my life and all that I am. This one will help me in making the world into a garden. She is not like any of the animals; she is not made to be a beast of burden or to be an ornament. She is something special. She is my companion.”

Verses 24 and 25 are a commentary on what has been revealed in the preceding verses. We know it is an editorial comment of Moses and not a continuation of Adam’s words, because Adam did not have a mother or father. Reflecting on this truth, therefore, Moses comments, in verse 24:

**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

**The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (2:24-25)**

Here Moses establishes the reason for marriage. The expression, “leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,” is his way of referring to marriage. That is what marriage entails—leaving one set of authorities, being joined to someone else, and establishing a separate home. Moses is saying, “It is for this reason that you get married.” That is, when you discover the partner that God has for you, that special person who will help you fulfill your destiny, then you marry. The woman was to meet man’s need—but not merely his sexual needs. She was not to be just a beautiful adornment at his side. She would be the one who would help him fulfill his tasks of working and ruling. This is the criterion that we ought to use in determining whom we will marry. The world has sold us down the river at this point. The world’s criteria demand beauty or wealth or some combination of other qualities. But Moses says that the woman God chooses for man will be his companion to share his life. He can communicate his deepest needs to her. She will move in alongside him and help him to obey God and work to turn the world into a fruitful place. That is why we get married.

We also learn in this passage not only the purpose of marriage, but the place of sex. Moses says, in verse 24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” That last phrase “become one flesh,” is a euphemism. It is a delicate way of describing the sexual rela-

tionship between a husband and wife. That is the way Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians 6, when he says that he who is joined with a prostitute becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor 6:16). Moses is saying that in this context, when a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to a wife, sex is proper and right. It is a part of God’s creation that precedes the fall. There is nothing bad or dirty about it. It was God who thought of sex, not Hugh Hefner.

Sex is an explosive dynamic in life. Sex energizes life. When it is controlled, it produces something powerful and good. But outside the context of marriage, sex is destructive. When the atom is split in the reaction chamber of a power plant, it produces energy, and that energy profits all who come in contact with it. But if that energy is put in a bomb and dropped on a city, in the wrong environment, it destroys and blights the landscape and ruins everything it comes in contact with. The world treats sex not like nuclear energy, but more like play-doh. It doesn’t really matter what you make with it, we are told. Be creative and do with it whatever you desire. But the Bible clearly establishes the place of sex in God’s scheme of things. Sex belongs in a loving relationship between a man and a woman who are united together for life. That is where sex achieves its maximum power and effect.

To single men and women I say, that is God’s word to us! Abstinence never hurt anyone. The world tells you that if you wait, you are going to miss out. But you won’t lose anything. God wants the very best for you. And he says, “Wait!” The proper context for sex is marriage. And so we read in verse 25, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” People become ashamed through guilt and sin. The man and his wife could be naked before each other and not feel shame because they had no feelings of guilt. But if you enter into a sexual relationship outside of marriage, shame and guilt invariably follow.

So here in this chapter we have God’s plan for mankind. Man is to work hard, protect his environment, both physically and spiritually, and walk with God. We must do everything in dependence upon the life of God, because we are merely dust. We cannot do these things on our own.

And finally, we need to realize that God intends for husbands and wives to fulfill their destiny together. We receive our partner as a companion for life, to enable us to fulfill the vocation that God has given to us.

There is a Babylonian account of creation called the Gilgamesh Epic. In this story, man is called Enkidu. He was a hairy beast that lived in the woods. According to the story, the gods sent a prostitute after him to seduce him, and through her seduction he became a man, and gained wisdom to deal with life. How different is God’s perspective. The Babylonians viewed the relationship between man and woman almost entirely on a sexual level. But God sees the union of a husband and wife not

only on the physical, but the spiritual level as well. The person whom God brings to you is to be your companion, to enable you to be God's man or woman. And you do this together, not in competition with one another. Husbands and wives are to be mutually supportive of each other. Men and women share together God's mandate to rule.

Man's helper is not a "gofer," one who runs and fetches. She is his partner who rescues him from working alone. There was a time when the world told us that man's responsibility is to work, while the woman is responsible for the home and children—"and never the twain shall meet." But it is clear from this Genesis account that husbands and wives are to work together to build their home and life.

Further, it is also clear from this passage and others that man is given the responsibility of leadership in the home. But men who treat their wives like children, monitoring their activities, curbing their creativity, restricting their freedoms and using them for their own ends, are not leading, they are dominating. In the Song of Solomon, the bride is called the "friend" of the bridegroom. My wife is my friend, given to me to help me fulfill the destiny that God has for me. I need to respect and honor her. The apostle Peter tells husbands to give their wives honor as joint heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7). If husbands do not do this, he warns, their prayers will be hindered and their spiritual life will collapse.

You may say, "That's all very fine, but my marriage is on the rocks. It can't be salvaged." I cannot comment on your particular situation, but I know that God can repair anything. That is his specialty. He is a Savior. He can create order of chaos. He can fill empty lives. In my marriage he is changing me from being a controlling

man who has abused people to one who is a little more fun to live with and a little safer to be around. If God can change me, I know he can change you.

The single people among us are probably asking, "Where does this leave us?" Isn't it interesting that when God set out to provide a mate for the man, he put him to sleep? There is something to be learned from this. It is this: Men, do not hustle. Be God's man. The apostle Paul has a helpful word for young men in this regard: "Treat the younger women like sisters." How do you treat your sisters? How do you relate to them? That is how you are to treat your Christian sisters. Do not exploit them. Do not defraud them. Do not arouse in them expectations that you cannot fulfill. Care for them, and wait for God to show you his choice. He knows what you need.

There may be some people here this morning who will never marry. Does this passage leave them out in the cold? The text says, "It is not good for man to be alone." Does that mean that singles will live lives of wasted endeavor? Not at all. God may choose some to go through life single. That is a calling, a gift. Paul says that if that is your calling, God will supply your needs out of his riches in glory, according to Christ Jesus. God will be your partner. You will not miss out on a thing. He will fulfill you in every way.

As we come to an understanding of God's design for marriage and sexuality we feel the searching quality of his word. It exposes our weaknesses and wrong attitudes. But it also sets before us the great possibilities and potential that await us when we submit ourselves to his wisdom. May God grant to us submissive hearts, and restored confidence that he wants the highest good for each of us, whether married or single.

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# THE ENTICEMENT OF EVIL

*SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN*

Catalog No. 995

Genesis 3:1-7

Fourth Message

Gary Vanderet

March 12, 1995

The third chapter of Genesis, to which we come today, is perhaps the most important information that has ever been conveyed to mankind. Here we find the ultimate explanation for the tensions and conflicts that constantly flare up around the world. Here we find the answer to the eternal "Why?" that arises in our hearts in times of tragedy and sorrow. Here we find the explanation for more than a hundred centuries of human heartache, misery and torture, blood, sweat and tears. Here we find the reasons behind the powerful fascination of substance abuse, the passion for power, the lure of wealth, and the enticement of illicit sex. If Genesis 3 were removed from the Bible, the story of humanity would be impossible to understand.

Why does man act the way he does? Why are we so self-centered, so mindless of the needs of others? Educators, psychologists, social workers and anthropologists offer different answers to these questions. Man's education is lacking, they say, or there is something wrong with his genetic structure or his environment. Adherents of a certain Eastern religion blame man's problems on "bad karma." But the Bible says that mankind is sinful because sin entered the world through one man. And if we believe that Jesus is Lord, then we must accept his view of Scripture, which is that there is something desperately wrong with man.

Genesis does not make Adam the origin of sin. When God called Adam and asked him what he had done, Adam replied, "Eve made me do it. She is the culprit." And the blame-passing did not stop there. Eve said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." It is obvious that God regarded the serpent as the culprit. Satan, then, is the source of all the evil in the world. Thus we discover early on that man has a spiritual enemy, and that enemy is Satan. He is an evil, malicious killer who is bent on destroying mankind. As Christians, we must accept the fact that there is a personal devil. The Lord himself believed as much. We only have to look to the gospels for evidence of this. The name Satan is mentioned twenty nine times in the gospels, in twenty-seven instances by the Lord himself.

As we open to this account this morning, we will see ourselves once again. We have already learned that this Genesis narrative is supra-historical. We all find ourselves here, because we have all been here; we know the enticement of evil.

Chapter 3, verse 1:

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of**

**the field which the LORD God had made. (3:1a, NASB)**

There is much that is mysterious in these words. The text does not address either the origins of evil in the serpent or the nature of the animal. The New Testament, however, identifies the serpent as the devil. John writes in the Book of Revelation, "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back" (Rev 12:7, NIV). But he was not strong enough. The great dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the being who leads the whole world astray, was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

In the Ancient Near East, the serpent was thought to be one of the most beautiful of all the animals. The serpent represented eternal life. It was the symbol of healing, perhaps because it shed its skin and renewed itself. Thus, Satan, the diabolical adversary, appeared before Adam and Eve in a beautiful guise.

But where did the serpent come from? Everything that God had created was good, but this creature, obviously, is not good. He is a murderer, and he is diabolically opposed to both God and man. We might assume, therefore, that he is some kind of spirit which stood apart from the creation of the earth—an alien, in other words. God gave man the gift of speech in order that man might bring everything under his dominion, but this creature, this fast-talking snake, is smarter than man. By his treachery he dupes the man away from his childlikeness and his duty to live under the word of God.

Let us focus on the strategy which the tempter employs with Eve. There is much for us to learn here, because he uses the same tactics with us. In the eighth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus described Satan in these words: "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44, NIV). Satan is a liar and a murderer. His goal is destruction (he destroys and ruins human life), and his method is deception (he lies).

We see Satan's strategy operate right from the start. He begins his deception by sowing seeds of distrust in the woman's heart:

**And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (3:1b)**

Satan's attack is designed to undermine the woman's

confidence that God really had her welfare in mind. Thus Satan asks her, in effect, "Is it really true that God does not want you to eat from every tree?" Satan's first step is to plant in the woman distrust of God's love for her. He is intimating, "Could God have said a thing like that? How well do you know him? Do you think that a God who loves you would ask you not to eat of a tree in the garden?" Concealed in his question is the idea, "I can't believe it. God really told you not to do that?" That would be akin to a mother putting a Super Nintendo in the middle of a room and telling her child not to play with it. Satan is asking, "Is it true that God does give you the freedom to expand your mind and to fulfill yourself in every possible way? Don't you know that God is trying to suppress you and make you irrelevant? He is keeping you from being what you know you want to be."

That was Satan's attack then, and that his approach now—to get us to distrust God, to believe that he really does not have our welfare in mind. In fact, Satan uses the generic name for God, *Elohim*, not *Yahweh*. He uses God's title, not his name, referring to him as the being who created, rather than a personal God who not only created us but who knows us and cares about us. This is a distortion of the truth. Satan accentuates the negative, not the positive. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Have you ever heard that question? Can a God who loves you forbid anything to you? Is it really love if he forbids something?"

The deception works. Apparently Eve begins to wonder if God is holding out on her. Verse 2:

**And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" (3:2-3)**

There is confusion in Eve's response. She has lost the precision and clarity of the commandment. The Lord had said, "You may *freely* eat." She simply says "we may eat." God was positive: Eat from any tree in the garden, only stay away from this one. But the serpent focused on the one thing she was forbidden to do. Now she is enticed to focus on what she could not do. She forgets about the tree of life and all the wonders of the garden that were hers to enjoy.

And second, she adds to the prohibition. God had not said anything about touching the tree, but Eve says that God (she uses his title now, not his name) said not to touch it. Lastly, she weakens the penalty for sin. The Lord had declared, "You shall surely die," but now Eve says that he said, "lest you die." Her concentration on the forbidden object is the thing that leads to these modifications. She says, "We must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden." She forgets that the tree of life was also in the middle of the garden. But that is the one thing that Satan does not want her to see.

Satan detracts from God's word. He acts like a per-

fectly serious theologian. He is not denying God, but he detracts from God's commandment, reducing the word of God to a question. He is saying, "Now we can have a good debate about what the word of God really means. I am not sure what God is talking about. Maybe he didn't mean that after all. When God gave the commandment, it was perfectly clear and simple. Let's think about that; let's debate that. You never can be sure what God is talking about."

Following this detraction, deception and distortion, there is an outright denial of God's word. The evil one moves quickly. He openly dares to deny the results that God said would occur if the woman ate the fruit. Verse 4:

**And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die!" (3:4)**

Satan openly substitutes a lie for the truth. But he does so in the realm of the future, where the results could not be checked. Things would not happen as God said they would, he suggests. Do not take God so seriously. These issues are not that important. It is not a life and death matter.

Then he supports his lie with a distortion of the truth:

**"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (3:5)**

There is truth to this statement. Verse 7 says that when the woman and man ate, their eyes were opened. "The Lord God said, 'Behold the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil'" (verse 22). That is what the devil said would happen. But with this difference: Their eyes were opened and they did become able to know good and evil as God knows it, but they learned to relate everything to themselves. Like God, they now used themselves as the instruments to measure good and evil. But the devil did not tell them that this would be the most disastrous thing that could happen to them. They thought he was offering them something glorious and expansive, but when their eyes were opened, they felt shamed, sordid and sad. "Oh," you say, "how diabolically clever!" Exactly! That is the way the devil works. The woman's eyes are opened, but not to what she expected. This is what the serpent was intimating: "God knows that when you eat you will be more than human. You will be like God himself. You will reach your full potential. You will be all you can be. These commandments from God are but an obstacle in your path to full realization. Throw them away!" That is the serpent's hiss. All of us have heard that voice. All of us have tasted that forbidden fruit.

The devil is now finished with the woman. He has succeeded in arousing desire in her, and that is all he wants. Eve is left standing before the fruit. It is hanging there in all its luscious fascination, tantalizing her, offering her an experience she never dreamed possible. The devil had planted the seed in her heart. He had caused her to slightly distrust God's love, to believe a lie, and



to expect an unwarranted result. Now he can safely leave her, even though she has not committed the act. He is fully certain that the desired result will follow.

Verse 6:

**When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [the lust of the flesh], and that it was a delight to the eyes [the lust of the eyes], and that the tree was desirable to make one wise [the boastful pride of life], she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (3:6)**

The fall itself is instructive. The act is reported in a rapid sequence of verbs: “she took,” “she ate,” “she gave,” “he ate also.” Eve ate the fruit. It does not look as though anything ethically suspect is occurring. She did not hurt Adam. She did not hurt anybody else. She did not hurt the creation. There is no question about ethics here. The issue is sin. She broke trust with God; that is the point. She is no longer totally depending on God’s word. She discounted the promises of God. She depreciated his character and broke relationship with him. She preferred sensual pleasures (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life) over God and his word.

The comment about Adam is noteworthy. I think Adam was with Eve throughout this episode. He did not know what to do, so he passively sat and watched the whole sordid drama unfold. Remember that he was supposed to guard the garden. He should have taken a rake and gone after the serpent. At the very least he should have warned his wife, “What the serpent is saying is not true,” or, “Let’s take a time out and talk this over.” He should have done something. But he did nothing.

Adam’s silence underscores some one of manhood’s essential failures. When the chips were down, he chose Eve over God. He was not deceived, but he chose the woman, whom he could touch and love, over God. One commentator makes an interesting observation on the coincidence of words used in the Bible. He notes that the words “take” and “eat” describe a simple act in the garden. The act, however, required a very costly remedy, for the Lord himself would have to taste death before these verbs became verbs of salvation.

And now the aftermath. Verse 7:

**Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (3:7)**

The result is somewhat anticlimactic. Their eyes were opened, but instead of divine enlightenment, what they experienced brought them only shame and embarrassment. They knew more, but the additional knowledge they had gained was evil. Mistrust and alienation had replaced the security and intimacy they had enjoyed. They make a futile attempt to cover themselves with leaves.

What went wrong here? you ask. How could they have avoided this? Where was the battle lost? It was lost right after the first sentence, when the devil raised the question, “Did God say...?” Eve was beaten from the moment she accepted the idea that God was not to be fully trusted.

That is why I am convinced that everything the devil does is designed for one purpose only: to draw us away from God’s love. It is not so much that the devil hates us, but that he hates God and will do anything to break his heart. And nothing breaks God’s heart more than being separated from those he loves.

Satan, Jesus said, is a liar and a murderer. His goal is destruction; his method is deception. He is the source of all our doubts about God’s goodness. He is the one behind the deceits that buffet us all day long—the messages that encourage us to find something or someone more trustworthy than God; the subtle seductions to meet our own needs rather than trust God’s provision. The devil fills us with guilt over the past, denying God’s forgiveness. He makes us anxious about the present by insinuating that God cannot provide. He exacerbates the final terror of death, ignoring the Lord’s conquest over the tomb.

Anxiety, guilt, and fear: these are the marks of Satan’s presence. They are based on the lie that God cannot or will not do anything about our condition; that our sin, our suffering, our inadequacy, our destiny all are beyond his control and care. Satan’s subtle craft is to make us suspicious of God. “He is holding out on you,” he whispers in our ears. That is Satan’s fundamental deception.

Satan is the one behind the bitterness of some of our questions. Why must infants become drug dependent *in utero*? Why are women battered, abused, and then discarded like waste? What about the homosexual’s lonely despair? Does it occur to God that it is hard for us to live with only his invisible presence to comfort us, that sometimes we long for human arms to give us a hug? Is he aware that his silence deafens us to his word, and that it’s hard to believe he still speaks to us today? Can he possibly comprehend the terrible pain of our loneliness? Satan plagues us with these questions and uses them to push us away from God.

Adam and Eve’s doubting of God has been passed on like a virus to every human being since that time, except one. Underlying our fallen nature is our doubt of God’s goodness. It creates a terror of being alone in an uncertain world. That fallen personality structure within each one of us is built on one central lie that says: *God cannot be trusted with the things that matter most*. We can thank him for finding a parking place for us this morning, but we can’t trust him with our souls.

The key to life is believing that God is good. If you do not believe this, you will be taking responsibility for your own life.

Can you believe that God is good in spite of that posi-

tive biopsy?

Can you believe that God is good although you have lost your job and you are fearful of tomorrow?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your spouse's unfaithfulness?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of rebellious children who provoke deep pain?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your demanding job that keeps you moving at a frantic pace?

Can you believe that God is good in spite your battle with self-hatred, and the notion of finding your identity in Christ seems like so much mockery?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of the memories of abuse that haunt your every waking moment?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of your personal failure?

Can you believe that God is good in spite of the consuming loneliness that fills your life like a fog?

You will know that you have found God when you believe that he is good, no matter what the circumstances may seem to be saying. Every temptation of the devil is designed to draw us away from the love of God, who is the only one who can give us life and love. We should not use God to solve our problems. We should use our problems to find God. That is what they are designed to do. May God grant to us the eyes of faith to see difficult circumstances as opportunities to draw closer to him.

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# PARADISE LOST

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Catalog No. 996  
 Genesis 3:8-24  
 Fifth Message  
 Gary Vanderet  
 March 19, 1995

In our last study in Genesis 3, we saw how Satan sowed seeds of distrust in Eve. Satan's approach was to undermine Eve's confidence that God had her best interests in mind. He intimated to her, "Is it really true that God said you could not eat from every tree in the garden? Doesn't God give you the freedom to expand your mind and fulfill yourself in every possible way? Isn't he trying to suppress you, to make you irrelevant and keep you from being what you want to be?"

That was Satan's mode of attack then, and it is his approach still today. The Deceiver wants to get us to distrust God, to think that he does not care about our welfare, so as to undermine our confidence in what God has said. If we fall for Satan's deceit, we end up believing his lie that our circumstances do not fit the pattern that God has revealed, and that we need to live as we think best. The inevitable result is death. Death may not be immediate, but a death-like state sets in, a condition that is manifested in boredom, frustration, emptiness, resentment, and coldness and indifference to human need.

During the first Muslim period in Spain, in about 900 AD, an Arab chieftain prince said this: "I have now reigned about fifty years in victory or peace. Riches, honor, power, and pleasure have wanted on my call. Nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot. They amount to fourteen." In fifty years of rule, this prince remembered but fourteen days when he was genuinely happy. Many can empathize with that. We try to do things our own way, only to reap a harvest of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. As one person put it, "First I tried health food, then transcendental meditation, then jogging; and now I am more serenely, tranquilly, robustly miserable than I've ever been before!" We need to believe God, not the Tempter.

I want to begin this morning by reading from verses 6-7 of chapter 3. Although we have looked at these verses already, this will help refresh our memories.

**When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (3:6-7, NASB)**

Our human attempts to set things right always have a pathetic quality about them.

Notice that it was the man who caused the fall, not the woman. The text says, "she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. *Then* the eyes of both of them were opened." Mankind did not fall until Adam ate. Eve has had a lot of bad press. She has been blamed for the fall, but she is not responsible. The apostle Paul says that she became a sinner, but she is not the one responsible for the fall of the human race. Adam must take the blame for that.

We have already pointed out that during this exchange between Eve and Satan, Adam should have called time-out, or taken a hoe to the snake. Even after his wife ate, he should have said to her, "Wife, you have disobeyed God. Satan deceived you. I don't how God is going to correct what you have done, but he has a way of making everything right. Try to put that fruit back on the tree. Wire it on if you have to." And Adam should have sought out the snake and said, "If you ever mess with my wife again, I'll take your head off."

But Adam didn't take either of those steps. Instead, he capitulated to his wife. Husbands today are no different. It is because we are so drawn to our spouses. But there are times when, in order to be pleasing to God, we must be displeasing toward our wives. Few men are willing to do this, however. We fear our wives' displeasure, so we settle for peace at any price. But James reminds us that our policy must not be peace at any cost, but purity at any cost. "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable," says James (3:17). We need to please God, not ourselves.

A husband's natural tendency is to respond in one of two ways in conflicts with his wife. He either capitulates, or he tries to dominate. Some husbands have rounded heels; they roll over backwards rather easily when faced with the possibility of displeasing their wives. The second tendency is more my style. I tend to overreact and dominate. Periodically, I launch into a tirade about how we are going to operate in our home in the future. I even sprinkle in a few spiritual-sounding phrases and add a little Scripture to sanctify what I'm saying. Everyone in my family responds by wondering what problem I was wrestling with that day. Even on the rare occasions when we husbands respond properly we still feel guilty, because it is hard to be gentle and strong and do what God has called us to do, in spite of the pressures we feel from our families.

Notice that it is Adam who is called on the carpet here. Adam is the one whom God seeks, because he is responsible for spiritual leadership in his home. It is his job to keep the snake out of his house, to be the spiritual pace-setter, and to correct things when they are out of alignment. Verse 8:

**And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (3:8-13)**

Adam and Eve pass the buck, refusing to face the facts. That is what mankind has done ever since the fall. We duck and hide, bob and weave. We hide both physically and emotionally in an effort to defend ourselves. But we have no defense against God's scrutiny. God knew where Adam was. He asked the question, "Where are you?" not for his own sake, but for Adam's sake. Adam needed to know that he was out of kilter with God. Something had gone wrong, and so God as a Father went seeking him.

At first, Adam was hiding physically, but then he began to hide verbally. One commentator writes, "They should have smitten their breasts, and cried out, 'Father, forgive me!' But they couldn't do that, and so they hid." That is why some people get upset when they hear the gospel explained—because they don't want God to find them out. Instead of confessing their sins, they start blaming others. Adam blames the woman, and indirectly blames God: "The woman you gave me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." Eve, in turn, blames the serpent.

The serpent doesn't have anyone to blame, so the curse falls on him. Verse 14:

**And the LORD God said to the serpent,  
"Because you have done this,  
Cursed are you more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field;  
On your belly shall you go,  
And dust shall you eat  
All the days of your life;  
And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise him on the heel." (3:14-15)**

I do not think the serpent had legs up to this point. He probably crawled on his belly from the beginning.

From this moment forward, his method of locomotion becomes symbolic. For the rest of time he would have to bite the dust. He would experience defeat and frustration. He would be like one of the villains in the old Western melodramas who captures the heroine and ties her to the railroad track, but in the nick of time the hero, in white hat, arrives and rescues her. The villain goes offstage muttering, "Curses! Foiled again!" That's Satan. He is not the formidable foe that he is often depicted. He is subject to God.

God said that he would put enmity between Satan and the woman. From that day forward there would be hostility between mankind and Satan and his demons. So we can expect life to be difficult; anything else is unrealistic. At times we are shocked when trials come our way, but the apostle Peter tells us not to be surprised, because we are in a battle. But the outcome of the battle is sure. We read in verse 15b, "He [her seed, the offspring of the woman] shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." In other words, the serpent would inflict a painful wound on the man, but the man would inflict a mortal blow on the serpent: He would crush his head. In the New Testament, we learn that the man in question is the Lord Jesus. He was struck on the heel: He was crucified. But he rose again, and inflicted a mortal blow on the serpent. So when trouble enters the world here in the garden, at the very outset we learn that there is hope: God is going to keep the serpent in his place, and ultimately deal him a death blow. No matter how dark things become, no matter how vigorous the conflict, there is hope. Things are under control.

Next, God speaks to the woman. Notice that he does not say, "Because you have done this." He says that of the serpent in verse 14, and of Adam in verse 17, because they are directly responsible, but he does not say to the woman "Because you have done this, such and such will happen." She was not ultimately responsible. Verse 16:

**To the woman He said,  
"I will greatly multiply  
Your pain in childbirth,  
In pain you shall bring forth children;  
Yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you." (3:16)**

The consequences for the woman would be twofold: she would experience pain in child rearing, and she would have an ambiguous relationship with her husband. In this remarkable chapter we are told the root causes of every disturbance in the home. It is stated very deftly and subtly, but the message is clear.

The first thing God says to the woman is that she would have pain in childbirth. The word "pain" encompasses things like toil and sorrow—not only the pain of conception, but the pain of child-rearing. Children are a pain to raise! (And parents can be a pain, too. I know, because many times I have been a pain to my family.) Children are hard to raise, because they enter the world

as fallen beings. They are part of the problem, like everyone else. They are fallen, sinful, rebellious and disobedient; they will go their own way.

It is a mother who feels this most keenly. A threat to her child pains a mother's heart. Mothers feel more sharply than fathers any sense of danger to or failure in their children. Their hearts are bound up with their children. Who is it that always attends parent/teacher conferences? Who is it that can't sleep at night because she is worried about what is going on with her son or daughter? Who ponders all of those things? Because of the fall, fathers tend to leave the burden of caring for their children, especially younger children, to their wives.

Grace, of course, overrules this failure. That is the wonderful thing about the gospel. Grace demonstrates to a mother that it is God who is ultimately responsible for raising her children. She can entrust them to him. The parents of the generation that entered the land of Canaan and conquered it did not themselves go into the land, because they feared for their children. Their unbelief caused them to perish in the wilderness. It is ironic that the children entered, but the parents did not. God took care of them. Ultimately, a mother has to trust God to raise her children. And grace does something to fathers as well. Husbands must seek to lift this responsibility from their wives and involve themselves with their children. Fathers are responsible to train and equip and love their children. And they must begin to do this in the children's early years.

The second result of the fall is the wife's ambiguous relationship with her husband. God said to Eve, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." We find this expression again in 4:6-7, and this is how we must interpret these words here in Genesis 3:

**Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."**

Cain became angry with his brother, and his face fell; he became depressed. God told him that sin was like a wild beast that was crouching at his door. Its desire was for Cain. It wanted to capture him and control him, but he must master it. The same two terms used here in chapter 4 are used in our passage in chapter 3: "Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you."

In these words God reveals the fundamental problem in many marriages. The problem with fallen woman is that she wants to possess her husband. Her whole life centers around him. Her self-esteem is wrapped up in her marriage relationship. Men, on the other hand, can live a much divided life. They can be involved in business, recreational and educational pursuits, all at the same time. They can pour their lives into a number of things and find satisfaction in each of them. But the fundamental relationship in a woman's life is her relation-

ship with her husband. And apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus, she will tend to smother and control him.

And husbands tend to respond to this by dominating and tyrannizing. "Rule" is a very strong Hebrew term that means, "to dominate." So husbands get mad when their wives become possessive. They storm around and pout and become angry, passive-aggressive individuals. They become passive when they should be active, and active when they should shut up and be passive. That is what sin has done to man.

But when Jesus enters a life, he becomes the center, the one who satisfies a wife and meets the needs that her husband cannot meet. And what grace does for a man is teach him to love his wife "as Christ loved the church." That is what a wife really wants—to be loved, to be cherished, to feel secure. The worst thing husbands can do to their wives is to undermine that feeling of security; to deride and ridicule them, to point out their weaknesses, spiritually, physically or emotionally.

It is interesting that the New Testament does not command wives to love their husbands. (Titus instructs the older women to teach the younger women *how* to love their husbands.) Wives will naturally respond to their husbands, but men have to be commanded to love their wives. Women are told to *give in* to their husbands, but men are told to *give up* for their wives. That means doing the little, practical things that indicate their wives are special to them.

Next, God speaks to the man. Verse 17:

**Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';**

**Cursed is the ground because of you;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life.  
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;  
And you shall eat the plants of the field;  
By the sweat of your face  
You shall eat bread,  
Till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return." (3:17-19)**

The man, likewise, has a two-fold curse: the ground (not the man, notice) is cursed, and he must suffer death. These are the two things that frustrate men most. As young men we venture out in life, filled with excitement about our vocation and the possibilities that lie before us. But as we grow older, we become more disillusioned about our jobs. Work gets frustrating and fails to satisfy. It doesn't matter how hard we toil or how many hours we put in, work never satisfies fully. That is why many men become workaholics and bring home a briefcase full of work at night. They pour their lives into their vocations, because they think that if they work hard enough, it will pay off. But it never does, no matter what your vocation. I feel this myself. At least once

every five years I think I should be doing something other than pastoring. The grass is always greener on the other side, but someone has pointed out that you still have to mow it when you get there! Nothing, no profession, satisfies all the time.

This helps explain why men go through a mid-life crisis. They reach a certain age, and they feel they should be at the top of the heap. But even those who reach the top find that they still are not satisfied. They have destination sickness. Having achieved everything they wanted, they don't want anything they have. They get frustrated. They think an affair will liven things up, and they go downhill from there. It is because the ground is cursed.

That is why Jesus says to "seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt 6:33). As we give ourselves to knowing God, then we will be satisfied, whether or not we achieve what we wanted in our vocations. That doesn't mean that we should not work hard, or that we should not want to be the best we can be in our field. But we must be realistic. Ultimately, work will not satisfy us. Only God can do that. Sooner or later we have to come to God and say, "Lord, here is my life. Do with me as you please. I want to be an instrument to accomplish your purposes in the world, not my own." That is when life becomes fulfilling.

The second result of the fall for man is death. There is nothing quite as frustrating as death. We spend an inordinate amount of time preoccupied with it. Think of the amount of money and time we invest, simply because of the fact of death—the defense budget, the cosmetic industry, medical research, etc. We are consumed with trying to stave off death. But it finally gets us. The death rate is an impressive 100%. We live as though we are immortal, but we are not. Watches and calendars remind us that our time is short. Here God says to Adam, "You are going to return to the dust." Every time Adam turned over a spade of dirt he would be reminded of his death. He came from dirt. That was his origin, and that was his destination.

Verse 20:

**Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.**

**Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the**

**way to the tree of life. (3:20-24)**

Adam had been eating from the tree of life all along. As far as we can discover, God did not even tell him it was the tree of life. To Adam it was just one of the trees of the garden, and he was eating from it. Had he continued he would have become immortal. But now he is banished. It would be a terrible thing for a fallen man to live forever. Death, therefore, is a gracious thing. Think what it would be like if despots like Hitler were immortal. How awful life would be. So in one way, death is a gracious thing. Fallen man can't live forever. Something has to change, so death is introduced into the picture.

There is a delicate touch here. The Lord slew an animal and made garments for Adam and Eve and clothed them. An animal had to give up its life for Adam and Eve. God made little leather shirts for them, and he sent them out clothed into the cold, hard world. The Jews say that the first five books of the Bible begin and end with the love of God. God cares for us! Most of the religions and cults try to get God to notice and care for man. They say that if we go to enough meetings, if we do the right things, then God will care for us. But we need to see that right from the very beginning, God cares about us. He cares about our homes. He cares about our relationship with our children. When we hurt, he is moved to compassion.

Notice also that Adam did a very simple thing. He named his wife Eve, because she would become "the mother of all the living." That statement indicates the change in Adam. God had said that Eve would have an offspring, and that offspring would trample on the head of the serpent, and Adam took God at his word. He trusted God that Eve would produce that offspring, and so he called her "the mother of all the living." He went from rebellion to trust at that moment.

And so can we. The thing that gets us off base in our homes is that we don't do things God's way. We think we know better. We eat of the tree, instead of letting God reveal truth to us. But when we repent, and trust him, things begin to change for the better. He will turn our pain, and even the scars that result from our sin, into good. That is the promise that is ours every day of our lives.

Perhaps you have never made that initial act of repentance. You have been doing things your own way all your life. If this describes you, invite God to take ownership of your life today, and trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ to cover all your sins. If you do this, you will find the way back to God that he has provided, and to the life we were intended to live.

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# THE WAY OF CAIN

*SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN*

Catalog No. 997

Genesis 4:1-26

Sixth Message

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March 26, 1995

In our study in Genesis 4 today, we come to the final story concerning man at the time of creation. These stories begin in Genesis 2, verse 4, with these words, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven." A new division begins in Genesis 5, with the account of Adam's line.

At the end of the third chapter we saw that there would be two seeds: the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. If we are to learn our roles, and understand the conflicts we face in life, we must see the tension between these two seeds. The seed of the woman is that spiritual seed that believes and trusts the word of God and the character of God, that he is good and kind and trustworthy. The seed of the serpent, on the other hand, is that spiritual descendant that does not believe the word of God, or that God is loving, kind and good. The seed of the serpent regards God as an ogre, a restrictive force.

The birth of a child is a happy occasion. At the birth of our first son, Joel, I was so excited by the event I kept charts detailing every one of Kathy's contractions. Our study today in Genesis 4 records the birth of the first child to be born in history. Doubtless, this was a very exciting occasion for the first parents, Adam and Eve. Verse 1:

**Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD."** (4:1, NASB)

They named the child Cain, meaning, "something produced," or "I have produced or acquired something" from the Lord. Although it isn't quite clear in the translation, it appears that Eve thought this child would be the God-man who would trample on the head of the serpent. In the NASB, there is a side note that says, "I have gotten a man, the Lord." Apparently, it had been revealed to Eve that the man who would be born, her seed, the man who would trample on the head of the serpent, would be a God-man. He would be the one to set things right.

But it quickly became apparent that he was not the one who would correct the problem that the serpent had introduced into the world, because she names her second son Abel, which means, "vanity." This word occurs many times in the Book of Ecclesiastes, including the introductory statement of the book, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." "Vanity" means "vapor," "breath," "nothing." Eve knew that Cain, whom she thought would be the deliverer, was not a deliverer at all. He was merely part of the problem. He wouldn't pick up his toys; he complained whenever he was asked to do something; he stamped his foot and shouted, "No!" Cain demonstrated from the beginning that he was an independent being. He was going to go his own way and live his own life. That is why she named her

second son Abel, "vanity," because she realized that Cain was not the man who would set things right.

Next, we learn that each of these sons chose a vocation. Verse 2:

**And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.** (4:2)

There is no hint of censure here that there was anything wrong with the vocations which these brothers chose. Abel was a keeper of flocks; he raised sheep and cattle. Cain was a tiller of the ground; he worked the soil.

And each of these men brought an offering to the Lord. Verse 3:

**So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.** (4:3-5)

Cain selected some of the fruit which he had produced from the ground and brought them to the Lord, while Abel brought an offering from his flocks—"from the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions," says the text. In the Ancient Near East, the firstborn was considered the very best animal; and the best part of the animal was the fat. Abel offers God the very best of what he had, the firstborn; and he brought the fat, the very best he could bring. And, we read, "the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard." Abel's offering was received, but Cain's was rejected.

I do not think that Abel's offering was received because it was a blood sacrifice and Cain's was refused because it was not. Both were legitimate offerings. The author is saying that the problem was not in the offering, but in the attitude that lay behind the offering. There was something wrong with Cain. John in his epistle says that Cain was "of the evil one" (1 John 3:12). There was something wrong with his heart attitude. Cain made a sacrifice, but the sacrifice was wrong because his heart was wrong. A sacrifice symbolizes an offering up of ourselves. But Cain's offering was minimal. He brought something "from" the fruit of the soil, but he did not give the best. Thus the symbol did not represent the reality. He offered up something that was symbolic of the offering up of his life, but he had no intention of giving himself wholly to God. He was holding something back, reserving the best for himself.

A number of years ago, Dave Roper told a story of a friend of his who was a missionary in the hills of Kentucky. After he had been there awhile this man noticed

that everyone on his street flew a flag on national holidays and other special days. It had never occurred to him to do that until one day a neighbor came by and chewed him out for not having a flag and flying it. The man told him he was unpatriotic, and that if he had any allegiance at all to his country he would buy a flag and fly it. So he did. Three days later, the missionary awoke in the middle of the night to the sound of screeching tires. He looked out the window and saw a number of police cars at the house of the neighbor who had rebuked him. There was some gunfire, and after a while the neighbor was taken away in handcuffs. Later, the missionary found out that the man had a still in his basement and that he was making and running moonshine liquor. It struck the missionary how contradictory it was that his neighbor had an allegiance to the symbol, but there was no reality there. He was not subject to his government. Some people are strongly committed to symbols, but their hearts are far from the reality of the symbols.

Cain offered a sacrifice, but there was no reality behind his action. God had no regard for his symbol.

Verse 5 gives Cain's response: "So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell." Cain was resentful because God did not accept what he had offered. He became depressed, which is often the case when people get angry.

Verse 6:

**Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (4:6-7)**

The Lord presents two options to Cain. If Cain does well, that is, if he does what he knows God has called him to do, then there will be a lifting up; there will be forgiveness. But if he does not do well, then sin is crouching at the door, like a wild animal, "and its desire is for you, but you must master it." If he did not do well, sin would ensnare and defeat him. That is the nature of sin. We think we can play around with sin and let the flesh have its fling, but we cannot. Sin will always get us. The Lord tells Cain, "If you do what is right—and you know what is right—then there will be a lifting up; there will be forgiveness. But if you do not do what is right, then sin will master you."

Here we have a picture of what Paul would later write about in Romans 6, that man was made to be mastered, either by God or by sin. We think there is a neutral position, that we can run our own lives and live independently. But that is not true. We are either going to let God master our hearts, and be ruled by him, or sin will control us and conquer us. We think we can sin a little, like cheating on our income tax returns. I am working on my income tax these days, and I have to fight the temptation to cheat a little. You know how that line of reasoning goes: The government gets enough of my money already, and they squander what I pay them. I have certain income that it would be easy for me not to report, so... But the problem with that kind of thinking is that once we set out on that road, there's no stopping. If we let sin control us a little bit it will master us in the end. That is what happened to Cain. Adam and Eve's firstborn had a divided heart; he wasn't fully committed to the Lord.

The result was that sin, like a wild animal, conquered

him. Verse 8:

**And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (4:8)**

The Hebrew literally says, "chopped him into pieces." What a graphic picture of Cain's anger and resentment. How far sin had taken him! He probably had not planned to go this far. Cain killed his brother! The chapter continually underscores the fact that this was a brother who was slain. The enormity of this act comes into focus when we realize that Cain killed one-fourth of humanity! No one has ever done that in the history of the race.

Verse 9:

**Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (4:9)**

What Cain actually said was, "I am not my brother's keeper, am I?" The question does not expect an answer. He was saying, in effect, "I'm not responsible for my brother! I have enough to take care of, thinking of myself and my own needs. Why should I care for my brother?"

Verse 10:

**And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." (4:10-12)**

So Cain is driven out from the portions of the land that could be cultivated, to the east of Eden, to what is now the Iranian Highlands, a wild and rugged country.

Verse 13:

**And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear!" (4:13)**

There is no indication that Cain ever repented. He simply felt that his circumstances were too difficult. Scripture says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." That is what Cain experienced. He felt his punishment was more than what was justified, more than what was demanded by the nature of his sin.

He continues (verse 14):

**"Behold, Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me." So the LORD said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should slay him. (4:14-15)**

Although there is no indication here that Cain's heart was ever softened, no indication that he was anything but a rebellious man to the end, concerned only for the consequences of his actions, God still takes steps to protect him. (God cares about unbelievers!) So he appoints a sign for Cain. We are not told what it was. It was something that would protect Cain so that wherever he went, if anyone tried to slay him, God would protect him. Everyone was related to Abel, and Cain knew they would avenge Abel's

death.

Verse 16:

**Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (4:16)**

“Nod” means wandering. Cain begins a life of rootless, empty searching, without God, estranged from his family.

Cain had chosen sides. Part of the consequences of the fall was that there would be two lines of spiritual descent—the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman—and there would always be enmity between them. These are the two choices in life. Man can either choose to subject himself to God and to do things God’s way, or he can choose to go his own way, live his own life, make his own decisions. And as we have already seen, that is what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes. It was not the fruit itself that poisoned the man. There was nothing inherently evil about the fruit. It represented the choice that man had to make. He could either let God tell him everything: what is good and what is evil, or he could go his own way and learn about the nature of good and evil and determine his own code of conduct.

Cain chose to side with the seed of the serpent, to go his own way. The result was restlessness, rootlessness, and emptiness. He is turned out into the land of Nod. But despite his rebellion, God loves him, and God would protect him. Cain is told that if anyone sought to avenge the death of Abel by killing him, than his death would be avenged seven-fold.

The rest of the chapter deals with Cain’s descendants. Verse 17:

**And Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. (4:17)**

All of the literature of the Ancient Near East says that this city, Unich, or Eric, was the first city ever built. Cain built it because he was afraid. He wasn’t willing to trust God and let God be his defense. He built a walled city to defend himself, because that was the purpose of cities in those days. The earliest cities that we know anything about, such as Jericho, which is the oldest city that has ever been discovered in that part of the world, had enormous walls for protection. Cain was afraid for himself and his family, so he built a city and named it Enoch.

Verse 18:

**Now to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad became the father of Mehujael; and Mehujael became the father of Methushael; (4:18a)**

Notice that the last two letters in each of these names, “el,” is the word for God. But though these men took the name of God, and they had a form of religion, they denied the power of religion, which is trust and confidence and belief in God. They were religious, but they had already decided that they were going to go their own way and live their own lives.

**and Methushael became the father of Lamech. And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. (4:18b-19)**

Thus we have the beginnings of polygamy. These men

have already rejected God’s word, given to Adam and Eve, that it was God’s intent that man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two become one flesh—not three or four, but one flesh. So this line of descent rejected the truth about the home. They went their own way and established a polygamous lifestyle.

Verse 20:

**And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. [Here we see the beginnings of the Nomadic life.] And his brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. [Culture, music and the arts develop.] As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. (4:20-22)**

Thus we see the beginnings of metallurgy and man’s ability to produce farming implements and weapons. The Iron Age in Israel did not begin until shortly before the time of Saul and David, and yet at this stage in history, before the flood, men were working in iron. These people weren’t cave men; they were very sophisticated and accomplished.

And we are further told (verse 23):

**And Lamech said to his wives,  
“Adah and Zillah,  
Listen to my voice,  
You wives of Lamech,  
Give heed to my speech,  
For I have killed a man for wounding me;  
And a boy for striking me;  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (4:23-24)**

The point of this all is that by now Lamech feels he doesn’t even need God to protect him; he thinks he can protect himself. Cain, despite his rebellion, cried out to God for protection and God responded. But Lamech says, “who needs God? I will use these instruments that my son has developed, and I will defend myself.”

I am reminded of the lines from the poem *Invictus*:

Out of the black that shadows me,  
Dark is the pit from pole to pole.  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

That is man’s attitude, “Who needs God?” I can protect myself with my technology, my weapons.” On our coins we have inscribed the words, “In God We Trust,” but what we are really trusting in is our defense budget, our gadgetry and our ability to set things right. When man gets in a mess he thinks he can get himself out simply by applying his knowledge and technology, but he just makes things worse. Every generation thinks that it is going to set things right. Politicians offer themselves as saviors who are going to make everything work out. But they are merely men. Like Cain and Abel, and they are weak; they just make things worse.

Scripture says that the whole world lies in the hand of the wicked one. The philosophy of the world is that mankind can make it without God. As Christians, this should be our greatest concern, not the blatant attempts in the media to lure us into sin with alcohol or sexual allurements. At

times we do not recognize this, and it often gets into our unconscious. We are told that we can run our businesses without reference to God; we can run our families without faith; we can live without God; our technology will make the world right. But we only succeed in making things worse.

At last, man recognized the truth of this. Verse 25:

**And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him."** ["Seth" merely means "appointed"; so this is a replacement for Abel.] **Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh** ["Enosh" means, "weak or "frail"]. **At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.** (4:25 [NASB], 26 [NIV])

They were beginning to get the message. Adam and Eve had a son, and they name him "acquired," or "created." Cain was going to be the one who would set things right, but he was not; he killed his brother. He was merely a part of the problem. And so they have another son. Eve is still hoping. She names him Seth ("appointed") in place of Abel. But he isn't the answer, either. Seth has another son, and they name him Enosh ("weak") because the picture is getting a lot clearer. Then "men began to call upon the name of the Lord." That is where man's strength comes from, not from technology or science, as good as those things may be.

Without God, we are unable to live life as he would have us live. He created us that way. We can't do it. As Jesus put it, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." We can do many things. We can go to the moon, we can make remarkable discoveries and achievements in medicine, but we can't be what God intends us to be apart from him. We can't be godlike in the world; we can't set the world right apart from God.

At last, as we see in these closing verses, man began to get the message. So a line came down, from Adam through Seth, of people who believed God, who trusted him and

counted on him. Notice that very little is said about their achievements. This line probably shared in many of the accomplishments of the line of Cain. And they probably intermingled with the Cainites. But they had an entirely different attitude. They depended not on science and technology, but on God. And this attitude can best be seen in the seventh generation, in the person of Enoch.

When we find ourselves in the way of Cain, and we all feel that way on occasion, so we can identify with him, that is when we must remember the words of the letter to the Hebrews:

**But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel** (Heb 12:22-24, NIV).

The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance, but the blood of Jesus cries out for forgiveness and cleansing. It is a better blood. The blood of Abel is a righteous blood. It cries out that innocent life will be avenged. But the blood of Jesus is a better blood. It cries out, "Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The blood of Jesus cries out, "Father, cleanse them from all of their sins." It is a better blood. All of us were in the ways of Cain, all of us deserve the judgment of God, but the blood of Jesus provides a lifting up, a cleansing, a washing, in the forgiveness of our sins.

Do you know this cleansing, this forgiveness? Do you believe that all of your sins were taken to the cross? God wants you to have a childlike trust and dependence upon him, and this process begins by repentance. Tell God that you have gone astray, that you have tried to live life without him, but you have learned that is not possible. Trust him for that, and let today be the day you begin your new life in him.

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