

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

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The book of Genesis has often been called the book of beginnings. The name "Genesis" is derived from the opening words -*"In the beginning."* Genesis is at the beginning of the Bible, and through this book God has revealed to us the beginning of many things, such as:

The beginning of the universe – *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1 ASV). By the power of His Word, God spoke the entire universe into existence! *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth"* (Psalm 33:6). Several times throughout Genesis chapter one, we read the phrase, *"And God said."* As soon as God said, *"Let there be light,"* there was light. During each step of creation, it seems as if the entire material universe was eagerly awaiting God's next command. Then as soon as God uttered the words for the next part of His creation, *"it was so."* Not only was it *"so,"* but it was also *"very good!"* *"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day"* (Genesis 1:31). There can be no doubt that part of the reason why God's creation was *"very good"* is because it was very beautiful. The stars, moon, sunsets, and many other beauties of God's material universe are marvelous to behold: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork"* (Psalm 19:1).

The beginning of life on earth – Another reason why God's creation was *"very good"* was because of the life that God created. The first living organisms on the planet were plants, which God created on the third day (Genesis 1:11-13). Of course many of these plants would be sources of food for the creatures God would create on subsequent days, but plants and trees have also comprised some of the most beautiful sights human eyes have beheld – from the majestic Redwood trees to a vast array of flowers and other beautiful plants. On the fifth day, God created the sea creatures and birds (Genesis 1:20-23). At God's Word the seas were teeming with life, from the smallest plankton to the blue whale and the great leviathan mentioned in Job 41. The air must have been swarming with wings flapping after God had made all the birds of His creation. On the sixth day of creation God made animals and man. These animals included any that we might see today, as well as extinct creatures such as the tyrannosaurus rex and the behemoth of Job 40. As magnificent as all these creations were, the apex of God's creation was man, who was created in the image of God: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Genesis 1:27).

The beginning of the human family – After God had made all the creatures of the earth and God had made man, God allowed Adam to give names to animals and birds. Most of the creatures God had made had been made both male and female, and God knew that man needed a companion suitable for him: *"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of*

the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18-20). God then created man’s lifelong companion: “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:21-23). Adam called his wife Eve, which means “life-giver,” because she was going to be the mother of all people (Genesis 3:20). Adam and Eve were the first family, and the words of Genesis 2:24 reveal much about God’s plan for the family: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” The relationship between a husband and a wife surpasses all other earthly relationships, and God’s plan has always been for one man to be married to one woman for life. God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). Adam and Eve had children, and eventually there were a great number of families on the earth. Just as Adam was thankful for Eve, we should be thankful for our family members, knowing they are blessings from God.

The beginning of sin on earth – God had “*planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:8, 9). God had specifically commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but Satan tempted Eve to eat of the fruit that God had forbidden, and Eve chose to disobey God. She gave Adam the fruit, and he also ate (Genesis 3:1-6). When one disobeys God’s law, that is called sin: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). When they partook of the fruit that God had commanded them not to eat, they violated God’s law, and they sinned against God. God had warned Adam and Eve that there would be a penalty for disobedience: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16, 17). When Adam and Eve committed sin, God sentenced them to death. He cast them forth from the beautiful home He had given them – the Garden of Eden where the tree of life was located: “And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever- therefore Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:22-24 ASV). Without access to the tree of life, Adam and Eve were going to die. Their sins had also separated them from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2), and they needed a way to be reconciled to God.*

The beginning of the revelation of God's Plan of salvation – After sin had entered the world through the choices of Adam and Eve, God began revealing His Plan for saving man from his sins. God said to Satan, *“...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”* (Genesis 3:15). This “seed of woman” was Christ, who would be born of a virgin, and would destroy Satan and the power of death: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people”* (Hebrews 2:14-17).

The beginning of sacrifices for sin – *“And Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins, and clothed them”* (Genesis 3:21). The fact that God clothed Adam and Eve in animal skins after they had sinned seems to imply that animal sacrifices were made because of their sins. In the next chapter we read of Abel offering an animal sacrifice to God, and later chapters reveal others like Abraham offering animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices were also a critical part of the Law of Moses. The writer of Hebrews wrote that *“without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins, JPH]”* (Hebrews 9:22), but the blood of animals could never truly take away sins: *“But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Hebrews 10:3, 4). Those animal sacrifices which involved the shedding of blood were foreshadowing the fact that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would one day shed His blood for the remission of sins committed by people throughout all dispensations of time: *“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God”* (Hebrews 10:10-12; cf. Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 2:9; 9:22-28; 10:1ff; 1 John 2:1, 2).

The beginning of nations – After God sent the global flood because of the wickedness of men, Noah and his family were the only people who remained alive (Genesis 6-9). Every person alive today is a descendent of Noah through one of his sons: Shem, Ham, or Japheth. We are therefore all “of one blood”: *“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation”* (Acts 17:26). Noah's three sons bore children through their wives, and the number of people upon the earth grew exponentially once again. Genesis 10 contains the “table of nations” – a list of nations which existed not long after the flood. Genesis 11 explains how the people became divided into those nations. After the flood *“...the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech”* and the people were together as “one” (Genesis 11:1, 6). We cannot be sure what language they spoke, but it was most likely the same language

spoken by Noah, and possibly the same language spoken by Adam and Eve. God was not pleased with the people's prideful decision when they said, "...Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). God then confused their languages and scattered them throughout the earth (Genesis 11:5-9). These groups of people with their varied languages and territories became the nations of which we read in Genesis chapter 10.

The beginning of the Hebrew nation – Out of all the nations of the earth, there would be one nation which would stand out as being different from the rest. God chose Abram to be the father of this special nation: "*Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed*" (Genesis 12:1-3; cf. Exodus 19:5, 6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2). Genesis reveals that Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat his twelve sons, who eventually settled in Egypt and became the great nation of Israel that Moses led out of Egypt. Through this nation God was going to bring the Messiah, the seed of Abraham, through whom all families of the earth would be blessed. Today if we are in Christ, we are part of the greatest nation which has ever existed – spiritual Israel, which is the church of Christ (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 9:6-8; Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:16). It does not matter who our physical ancestors are – if we are in Christ we are the spiritual descendents of faithful Abraham, and we are blessed beyond compare through Christ: "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Galatians 3:27-29).

Without the book of Genesis, we would lack so much knowledge regarding how all these things began! This beginning section of God's Word is truly a blessing that should never be taken for granted.