

CREATION'S PARABLES

GENESIS AND SCIENCE TELL THE SAME STORY

JO HELEN COX

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THE COVER

The original painting by Jo Helen Cox symbolizes God's love of creation. God holds His hand in the traditional Christian blessing above the Earth. His fingers also gently caress the baby's hand, His favorite creation. The baby holds tightly onto God, our Father.

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO: THE SPIRIT OF THE ONE AND ONLY GOD,

the one who gave me understanding.
Only He could calm the anger in my spirit
by answering my questions.
Only the Creator could show
so much love exists
in the history of theology.

I THANK THESE FRIENDS

My loving husband, who encouraged this journey.

Ginny Greene, Barbara Rollins, and Iris Williams for listening to me rattle on and on about my ideas. They put up with the process of learning throughout years of friendship.

Lary Davidson, whose encouragement gave me the energy to finish.
Shalom.

EDITED BY

My sister in Christ, Dr. Suanna Davis

DISCLAIMER

The words "Bible" and "biblical" refer to canonized Protestant English

Bible translations and the Jewish *Tanakh*. I am not discrediting any of the other canons, just keeping things simple. I do not reference commentary versions, which tend to emphasize personal religious philosophies not expressed in the oldest Hebrew or Greek texts.

Many of the ideas presented in this book are original, inspired by God's Spirit. Some came as insights of others collected throughout my life. Unfortunately, I no longer recall their origin. I apologize for any missed citation.

God's blessing over you for sharing His vision.



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PROCLAMATION OF FAITH

The theology within this book builds upon the following characteristics of God.

The One God of Abraham created everything. No other being (like Satan, angels, spirits, or humans) or force (like sin) contains the ability to create anything genuinely new. “Everything” includes the imperfect, the dangerous, and the deadly.

The One God is in control. Nothing reduces God’s sovereignty over any part of creation. His rule includes guidance, inheritance, joy, and protection as well as authority over sin, death, misery, and devastation. Suffering stimulates life to grow and motivates us to mature spiritually.

The One God is omniscient (all-knowing). He knows every possibility of every scenario. Nothing restricts God’s knowledge, except Himself, as when He forgets repented sins.

The One God is omnipresent (everywhere and every-when). No distance separates any part of creation from

God. He never leaves. Instead, humans stop feeling or accepting His presence.

The One God is omnipotent (all-powerful). Nothing restricts God's actions or commands Him to perform. He chooses when and how to act.

The One God is just and merciful. His justice extends to the birth, life, and death of individuals and civilizations. Instead of instantly killing us for each sin, He extends warning with mercy. He lets murderers live free and forgives at the instant of repentance. His style of government includes people of all races, creeds, and social standings. He wants us to learn His ways to benefit all.

The One God is love. His love of creation is absolute, emotionally stable, and tolerant. He loves throughout suffering and despite sin committed.



Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

-- Revelation 4:8b NIV

NOTE TO READER

Creation's Parables chronicles my journey to understand the biblical creation stories. Such a long twisting road kept me questioning doctrine for decades. I hope my efforts provide a shorter route for you.

Searching for God and truth produced awe. I now respect these ancient texts, which I could not have said in my youth. They are truly unique. No other ancient writings depict events that match modern scientific discoveries so beautifully. This connection gives us evidence for God's inspiration.

To get to that place, I required a paradigm shift in my understanding of theology. What I had been taught and what the Bible teaches are not the same. Instead of myths filled with condemnation for humanity, I discovered the eternal love of God for His thick-skulled children. His Good News starts in Genesis. The Abba that Jesus adored has always been our Creator and guide.

Give yourself time. A paradigm shift is painful. It requires acceptance that God corrects even our most cherished beliefs, doctrines, and dogmas. Remember to breathe.

It takes effort to remember and keep remembering the new information. Let your Father change your life. The journey's end is beautiful.

Enjoy,

Jo Helen Cox

P.S.

If you are one of those readers who read the end before finding out the “why,” then these chapters retell the main creation stories.

The Creation Story

The Garden Story

Noah's Flood

Messages from Babel

PART ONE
THE MODIFICATIONS

CHAPTER I

BIBLICAL DINOSAURS

Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.

-- Psalm 102:18 NIV

BAM!

The preacher slammed his hand onto the lectern and shouted, “If anyone can prove to me that dinosaurs existed, then I will stop believing in God!”

I was seven, and that was the dumbest thing I had ever heard. Why would dinosaurs keep him from believing in God? If God created everything, then He created dinosaurs. Simple.

Not so simple. The doctrine of many Christian denominations insisted that scientists had got it wrong. Why? Because according to their theology, the Bible told them so. Those Christians counted the ages of the patriarchs and concluded Earth began roughly 6000 years ago. Scientists maintained that this sum was too short for all the dinosaurs to live and then become extinct. That was fine

with the preachers. They believed that if the Bible did not mention dinosaurs, then they did not exist.

My older brother agreed with the preacher. In his teenage years, he became an atheist.

A high school science teacher informed one of my cousins that all the fossils were just strange rock formations, never living animals.

That cousin, the fossil collector, knew the teacher was wrong. Such a blatant error in theology caused her to distrust Christianity. However, instead of rejecting the spiritual realm, she studied the world's religions and accepted an assortment of nature gods.

Several other cousins decided it was too much trouble to sort it all out. No one could possibly know the truth anyway, so they determined to live a decent life and hope for the best.

By the turn of the 21st century, most of Christianity had accepted dinosaurs; some even put them on Noah's ark. However, too many preachers continued to say science was wrong. They just changed the proclamation. I heard a preacher say, "If evolution exists, then God does not."

My inner seven-year-old screamed, "Why are you still doing that!"

Those preachers insisted we had to choose between the physical world and a spiritual entity. That viewpoint caused too many of my family and friends to leave the church.

I needed answers.

When I first heard that pronouncement against evolution, I had begun writing on Genesis 1, though it was not actually a book yet. I was trying to determine what I believed about biblical creation and how that differed from what other people believed the Bible said.

What I found was frustrating. There were many interpretations. Christianity insisted it held the truth, but Christians did not tell the same creation stories. It no longer surprised me that the non-believers scoffed.

I searched Genesis to see where the beliefs originated. What I discovered irritated me further. For the most dogmatic points, I could not find even a hint of biblical support. One dominant theme stunned me. It still does, perfectionism.

Perfectionism controlled nearly every creation interpretation. It even influenced most doctrines of Christianity. That belief said, God created a perfect and immortal world, which human sin corrupted. As a result, God cursed humanity with death and separated Himself from all that was imperfect.

The problem with that series of beliefs was the Bible. It never said that God created a perfect world. It never said sin or humans messed up His initial creation. Never.

In Genesis 1, God created things and then called them good, not perfect. The only word that could have been translated as “perfect” occurred on day 7. Scholars never interpreted it that way because the context clearly meant “completed” or “finished.”

I scoured the rest of the Bible for references to the creation details. What I found disagreed with what I learned as a child. Not one prophet mourned the loss of a perfect world or immortality. Not one prophet said God separated Himself from us with a rift. Nobody even called death a curse.

What I did find throughout the Bible encouraged me to continue. All the prophets proclaimed God created this world, the one in which they lived. This world is His good creation. Also, God was always “near.” People could not

hide any sin from His sight or His presence. He even spoke to sinners: Adam, Cain, Abraham, Moses, and, well, to anyone who would listen.

Despite the biblical evidence, people believed God stopped listening and moved away. They taught that because people stopped following His ways, then God could not be close. However, sin did not form a rift that kept God away. Our self-imposed theologies created blinders that restricted our view of God's eternal presence.

My quest found something amazing. Genesis 1 through 11 and modern science told the same story, in the same order. But to tell that story, I had to scrape off the crust of perfectionism, like revealing a fossil encased in limestone. Once clean, Scripture beautifully outlined the Big Bang, evolution, and human emergence as the dominant life form that created civilization. Science filled in the wondrous details.

The Bible showed that science got it right. Science revealed that the Bible got it right.

Most of all, and from the beginning, removing perfectionism unveiled God's unchanging love story woven into the lives of His favorite creation, humanity. Those ancient stories carry on their parables of love, even today.

That thought made me want to dance with the dinosaurs.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOSSILS

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.

-- Romans 14:1 NIV

Images of dancing dinosaurs did not last long. Once I started searching, the rabbit holes started multiplying. I slid into, lumbered through, and climbed out of them repeatedly.

I began with the question, “What did Christians believe about creation?”

Those beliefs did not come from the Bible. Instead, people interpreted the stories using their cultural assumptions. In time, those beliefs became doctrines that overshadowed the Bible.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

Let us start at the time of early Christianity. The non-Jewish people who the apostles discipled lived within the

Greco-Roman culture. That meant they had to learn new ways of thinking about God to overcome many false beliefs. For instance, believing in only one God was heretical for most Romans because their culture accepted polytheism.

While their beliefs about God changed, their ideas about nature remained fundamentally the same. A set of books called *Natural History*, a type of encyclopedia compiled by Pliny the Elder (24-79 AD), illustrated the “science” of the time. Despite basing many of the entries on hearsay or fictitious stories, these writings served as textbooks for over a thousand years.

The biblical creation story generated mockery because it differed drastically from the Greek philosophers’ views. To help his fellow Christians, Augustine of Hippo (c. 400 AD) wrote the first known interpretation of the biblical creation.¹ It is an allegory, even though he called it literal. Allegories are like parables, only longer. Their inconspicuous form hides a profound underlying message that requires contemplation to grasp.

At his time, non-believers ridiculed God because creation took a week of hard work. They said a perfect god would have formed the entire world instantly. Augustine found a brilliant solution. He interpreted Genesis 1 as a list of directions. Evening completed one command, and morning started the next. Angels finished all the “days” simultaneously at the actual creation of everything in Genesis 2:4. Augustine made a created beginning understandable in the Greco-Roman culture, which reduced the amount of scorn from the non-believers.

Augustine also understood that his culture had an incomplete knowledge of nature. He believed that as we learned more about creation, the inspiration of God would let our flawed interpretation of Scripture change. He chas-

tised Christians for basing faith on a religious stance while they rejected the physical information God provided.

I saw this same progression in the history of science. Mistakes are inevitable. For example, during most of the 20th century, paleontologists envisioned dinosaurs as slow-moving reptiles with sprawling legs and tails that dragged on the ground. The people assembling the scientific displays literally broke bones to force the specimens into those positions. Once it became apparent that their ideas about anatomy were wrong, the displays appeared silly. The standard beliefs quickly changed. Remounting all the expensive displays followed more slowly.

I was glad to see dinosaurs finally stand upright. I also suspected God would be pleased when we stopped force-fitting our religious beliefs onto His creation.

QUESTIONING OPINIONS

Augustine's doctrine and Greco-Roman "science" adequately served the church throughout the Middle Ages. However, as Christians began studying the world, those ideas proved flawed.

The Christian clergy were the educated people of Europe. As they found contradictions between beliefs and nature, they devised explanations to connect what they studied with the biblical account. Then, they shared their ideas. Other educated Christians accepted or rejected those insights based on their beliefs and the evidence they saw in nature. Little by little, people discarded the fault-ridden ancient ideas and established new views about the world.

That was a slow process. Humans never let go of beliefs quickly, even faulty ones. For six hundred years, Christians

proposed and argued about the new solutions to the problems.

I laughed when I saw the connection. Science is not the enemy of the church, as I had been taught. Instead, science grew out of the Christian quest for agreement between the biblical story and the physical world. Ideas had to match the evidence, all the evidence, to connect the Bible and nature.

Augustine predicted this process!

QUESTIONING DOCTRINE

If the Creator genuinely inspired the biblical story of creation, then nature should validate that story. Without confirmation, we could not know if the story was true or false. Like a prophecy that never manifested, people would eventually condemn it as a lie. For an ancient creation story to rise above the level of a myth, the connection between it and nature must be so apparent that even a non-believer would agree they told the same story.

That happened in Augustine's day. His interpretation unified the biblical tale and the Greek view of nature. More importantly, it did not reject future scientific discoveries.

Over time, Christians lost Augustine's clarity. People held onto religious beliefs about the creation while the evidence from nature expanded our world view. Because of this, questions arose that undermined the authority of the church.

The Reformation started when Martin Luther objected to how the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church abused their authority (c. 1517 AD). He also criticized how they depicted God and His creation. Luther insisted Augustine was wrong. God alone was the Creator. He did not need

angels to help. Most Protestant groups who followed him returned to a more direct reading of the biblical story and reinstated a literal seven-day creation week. However, instead of giving God full creative responsibility, they kept the working angels used by Augustine.

Just as in Augustine's time, the literal 24-hour 7-day interpretation had problems. As knowledge of nature advanced, the story grew more difficult to support. The desire for truth about nature became a holy quest throughout Europe. Each denomination and each generation added clarifications to make the narrative reasonable to their congregations.

Dogmatic explanations, coupled with a limited understanding, started the "creation wars" inside the church. This conflict transpired before any modern atheist voiced an objection. Each group wanted to prove their interpretation best. Church doctrine splintered. Beliefs calcified into stones, which Christians hurled at one another.

With such a wide array of interpretations, I was surprised that modern science grew out of Christianity's quest. Still, that is what happened. Christians' obsessive search for truth gave us the basics of geology, paleontology, biology, and chemistry. All the other sciences found their roots growing in those fertile soils.

Sadly, many denominations within modern Christianity sold their birthright for a bowl of man-made beliefs. We held onto the ancient traditions and gave away the inheritance of knowledge. By the middle of the 20th century, the creation interpretations solidified.

More significantly, the way many Christians reacted to new scientific ideas changed. People insisted on their preferred doctrine and rejected any scientific explanation that disagreed. They identified science that did not support

their beliefs as a lie, sometimes a satanic lie. This unwillingness to admit to theological misunderstanding was why dinosaurs could not exist and how evolution became evil.

In a counter against science, biblical interpreters resurrected and revamped ideas that originated during the 1500-1800s. They insisted these old ideas proved their beliefs correct. However, those explanations held the same glitches that made Christians reject them long ago. They failed to describe the evidence adequately.

Science was not the only enemy.

People used dogmatic beliefs as weapons of war. Preachers threatened their listeners with Hell if they questioned the dogma as presented or if they agreed with any other group's interpretation. Most Christians stopped voicing their opinions for fear of retribution.

The battle raged for believers who worked in certain scientific fields. Their coworkers ridiculed religious beliefs as mythical nonsense. Their brethren condemned them for promoting Satan.

Every time I heard such condemnation, my spirit said, "God does not threaten us like that. Why do you?" We had returned to the problem Augustine faced and then intensified it. We showed the world how much hatred we held for each other. God sounded like a myth again. The non-believers just laughed.

APPLYING MYTH

The creation interpretation that shook me the most was a recent proposal. Since no one had aligned the Bible story with nature, many Christians concluded no one could. They did not wish to stop believing, so they decided our creation story must be a myth.

To them, the biblical writers needed to explain who created the universe. Those storytellers told the story in their culture's standard form. The details showed us their understanding of nature, but nature was not the point of the story. Based on this interpretation, the only truth Genesis 1 conveyed was who did the creating. Just like Augustine, those devout Christians found a way to believe by disconnecting the ancient account from modern science.

That did not work for me. Not in the least. Any myth could hold some truths, while most of the details remained fictitious. That interpretation said this was true for the biblical creation stories. What I saw was a redefinition of the word "myth." It insisted our myths held truths about God, where no others did.

My brain blinked at that incongruity.

If the creation details were fictitious, how could we determine divine inspiration? Without evidence of inspiration, the Creator became fictitious within His mythological world.

REJECTING DOCTRINE

I was not satisfied with the stories told about creation. Genesis 1 remained at odds with the knowledge humans gained in the 20th century. The love I felt for God and dinosaurs seemed hopelessly irreconcilable. Preachers regularly rationalized God into a myth or condemned what they did not understand. A biblical scholar even told me that agreement was impossible.

Foolishly, I continued my quest. I believed all things are possible with God. Only then did the Creator start answering my questions. And, wow, so did agreement.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL INFUSION

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

-- Deuteronomy 4:2 NIV

Christian history did not provide answers to my questions. It only showed evidence of confused humans making a concerted effort to understand.

My question changed to, “Why did Christianity’s beliefs keep people from agreeing? Where did they originate?”

To sort it out, I became obsessed with locating the origin of the paradigm that overshadowed the creation story. I had to go further back in time, though not all the way back to the dinosaurs.

Once I saw the source, I found that many of my problems with religion originated within one long-held cultural mindset. This worldview is perfectionism—the idea that anything involving God must be perfect. Perfectionism may be logical, but it neither matches nature nor the biblical accounts.

So, where did perfection theologies come from? Let us follow the history.

PLATO'S GOD

Augustine considered the 24-7 creation week a faulty interpretation because it did not fit his understanding of nature. His views came from ancient Greek philosophers, like Aristotle, the teacher of Alexander the Great.

Aristotle's teacher was Plato (c. 424-348 BC). He rejected the gods of Mount Olympus, saying they were irrational. He proposed a single perfect god of reason.

Plato probably did not borrow the concept of a singular god from the Jews as they were insignificant during that time. Persia was the dominant nation. Many Persians believed in Zoroastrianism, which described a monotheistic dualism. This single god was good and created all the good things. All the bad things came from an evil force that was not a god.

However, Plato's imaginary god was not the Persian god. He only started there. His philosophy insisted a perfect god did not create anything imperfect.

Both Zoroaster's and Plato's gods needed helpers. The Persian world had forces and spirits, which worked in the world or messed it up. Plato called his helpers the *logos*. That word meant much more than just "word." It embraced all reason and logic. For him, *logos* was a form of persuasion that relied on facts instead of emotions or ethics.

I was amazed to learn that *logos* was not a uniquely Christian idea to define Jesus. Nor did it originate from God's prophets. For Plato, however, *logos* separated his perfect god from the imperfect world.

PLATO'S INFLUENCE

After Alexander the Great swept across the Middle East, everyone started to follow Greek ways. So, naturally, the schools taught Greek philosophy. Perfectionistic ideals quickly influenced the dominant religions and probably all the minor ones too.

The Greeks ruled Egypt. They came up with a brilliant solution to explain why they worshipped two sets of similar gods, called Hermeticism (c 250 BC). Plato's perfect god became the origin of everything. From him, the *logos* anthropomorphized as the polytheistic gods. Those deities grew more imperfect with distance from the source of perfection. Each nation needed similar gods because no one god could cover so much territory.

Imperfection separated people from Plato's perfect god and the divine lower gods. However, those who followed the right rules and knew the right magic would live with the perfect god after death. Everyone else simply followed them.

The Greeks ruled Persia, so Plato's perfect God influenced Zoroastrianism. The good god became perfect and aloof. Instead of a hierarchy of gods, people added more spirits and forces. Those that produced bad things in the world began to dominate all the others. Humans had to choose to be good so that the evil forces would not win.

The Greeks ruled the Jews too. Judaism accepted parts of the Plato/Egyptian beliefs to redefine their perfect God. As seen in the *Book of Enoch* (c 250 BC), Hellenized Jews accepted a God who sat immobile on His fiery throne, just like any carved statue of a god. Instead of lots of gods, the author inserted a hierarchy of angels to run the world and

mediate between Heaven and Earth. Angelic scribes wrote notes while the highest angel presented all the gathered information to God. The Jews also started adding stipulations on who would live with God. Jewish people who followed all the rules did; everyone else went to Hell.

The Greek's control over the Jewish religion exploded in the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC). The conservatives could no longer tolerate God's laws being usurped or ignored. Miraculously, they won against the overwhelming forces of the empire, but they did not remove the entrenched influences. Instead, the Jews made their religion the religion of Heaven (*Book of Jubilees* c 160-150 BC). Spiritual salvation required every tradition to be followed perfectly. Having decided this, the Jews ramped up the requirements significantly so that only the elite Jews went to Heaven.

GNOSTIC DOCTRINE

Christianity sprang from a Greco-Roman world. The cultural view of both Messianic Jews and Gentile converts included Plato's perfectionistic ideals. However, they did not recognize the fundamental difference between the Hebrew Creator of everything and a god limited to only creating perfection.

These Christians wanted to understand how their God interacted with an imperfect world.

A religious fad invaded. It was not actually a religion but more of a thought process that influenced the doctrines of many religions. We call it Gnosticism, the pursuit of all knowledge.

Gnosticism included ideas drawn from the ancient

Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, the Greek philosophers, the beliefs of Egypt, and many others. Christian leaders fought the influence of ideas and won many debates. However, they failed to identify the entrenched Greek philosophies about Plato's perfect god in their own beliefs. That meant the biblical understanding of Father/God altered. He became too perfect for tolerating the presence of sin, so they inserted a rift to protect God. Theologians concluded that was why God abandoned Jesus on the cross. In this belief system, Satan grew very powerful. Without our help, God could lose the war. Like the Jews, Christians also added rules that excluded everyone but Christians from Heaven.

Much later, returning Crusaders brought pillaged scrolls home, which introduced European Christians to many of the ancient philosophers. Centuries of profound knowledge suddenly became available to the church. Christians cheered those philosophies that matched their beliefs. However, they failed to recognize some of their ideas did not come from God.

GOD'S STORY

I found my answer. Christian beliefs of a perfect creation originated in the Greek philosophies of perfectionism, not with the Hebrew prophets. They interpreted the biblical story using imported ideas not provided by God. I realized every previous attempt to reconcile the Bible with nature failed because they started in the wrong place.

All those religious philosophies came together to create an epic story that disturbed my spirit. In them, the Bible transformed into just one more myth. Greek perfectionism imprisoned the Creator in Heaven on His lonely throne. The

hierarchy of angels did all the work while evil forces waged war.

I wanted reality, not Plato's unapproachable God.

To make sense of the biblical creation story, I had to get the Greek out!

CHAPTER 4

THE HEBREW STYLE

Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

-- Deuteronomy 11:19 NIV

What if I looked at creation without Plato's perfect God or Augustine's interpretation?

If God inspired the biblical story, then one of the authors was God. He knew His creation. A correct understanding of Genesis 1 should describe nature in unparalleled truthfulness.

I kept looking for an interpretation that instilled awe in me. My search concluded with a creation story that did just that. It was more amazing than the epics told in church or the scholars' watered-down myth-like versions. The magnitude of information contained in so few words staggered me. I began to respect the biblical story as a parable inspired by my loving Creator.

Getting to that point spanned decades.

GOD'S SIMPLICITY

The underlying problem stemmed from Christianity's understanding of the world, which came from the ancient Greeks, not the Hebrews. Philosophy distorted and complicated the words of God. Theology bound His ways with the heavy burden of perfectionism.

That contradicted what God told the Israelites. His ways never required any strenuous searching. He provided what was necessary, and it was simple enough to teach children.

“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14 NIV).

Jesus told His followers the same. Their approach to God should be like that of a little child (Matthew 18:2-5). They should be open to learning from God himself. Without arrogance, pride, or status, the kingdom would then be theirs. This kingdom was not a future manifestation of Heaven. Instead, it already existed in their mouths and hearts.

Simple.

UNCOMPROMISED COSMOLOGY

Not so simple.

We do not understand the ancient Hebrews' way of thinking or how their creation story was significantly distinctive from their neighbors. It was even unlike Christianity's way of viewing the universe.

Their ideas were extremely simple yet remarkably complete.

- * One God made everything. His work contains order.

- * One God controls everything. He rules the whole, not just one nation.

- * God's creation continues until He chooses to end it. "Last days" include individuals, cities, nations, and the world.

The Hebrews' God was the center and orchestrator of their cosmology, not just their theology. The biblical writers presented their God as a fact without a preamble. They did not speculate on His origin or how He created their world. The ancient Hebrews' belief in creation did not change in the thousands of years attested to in the Old Testament writings.

Those details made the Hebrew cosmology very different from their neighbors. They did not modify their stories into grand epics of monsters and heroes. They kept things simple.

UNPRETENTIOUS ANCESTORS

The early Hebrews presented their heritage differently than their neighbors.

Genesis held an ungarnished family history that included every human as descendants of the first man and

woman. Those ancestors were ordinary people with problems that taught lessons applicable to future generations. The text chronicled Adam, Eve, and the patriarchs to show a lineage that began with their Creator. The Hebrews simply came through one of those lines.

Most ancient cultures remembered their founders. However, they transformed ancestors into fictional superheroes who fought gods and monsters. Later, rulers appropriated the prestige, which bequeathed god-like status. Their epics claimed authority through power.

After the Hebrews crowned their first king, they also gave those men special status and expected their neighbors to cower. However, even when their historians glorified the Hebrew kings, they included the embarrassing occurrences of those ordinary humans. More importantly, they did not change the family history that named all of humanity as their brothers.

God anticipated the Israelites' desire to be like other nations. So, he told Moses that by studying His ways, any ruler would be different (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Superiority and arrogance should diminish. His message was not power through lineage but authority through living God's way.

Sadly, the rulers of Christian nations acted like the ancient kings and proclaimed themselves superior. They demanded respect and admiration because of their prestigious bloodline and religion. Sadly, too many followed the despicable actions of the wrong predecessors.

UNCOMPLICATED STORYTELLING

The early Hebrews presented their beliefs differently than their neighbors. Other cultures' complicated creation

stories grew into epics over time. They also exchanged characters and rearranged events to reflect changing ideas.

Genesis 1 described the Hebrew's simple cosmology in a short text that uses a complex structure.¹ The other early biblical stories (Genesis 2 through 11) come to us in diverse styles without segues to connect those narratives.

The later Hebrews wrote psalms that repeated elements from the first chapter to remind people of the One who formed their world. However, they did not use the other early Genesis chapters the same way. The biblical writers rarely referenced those stories again.

Later, during Greek rule, Jews changed how they viewed the world. Doing so complicated their simple cosmology to better match their neighbors. They romanticized the short Genesis stories into epic tales. They added worker angels and specified their functions. Ancestors became superheroes. These renditions also modified the basic nature of God. He remained the boss but was no longer actively involved on Earth.

Early Christians accepted the alterations. Much later, Christian storytellers combined Genesis 1 through 11 to make one grand story. This merging required segues to connect the stories and explanations to make it all understandable. Then the epic became the doctrine and cosmology of the church.

The earliest Hebrew form of explaining creation did not look like their neighbors, but our renditions do.

Sigh.

NONRELIGIOUS STORYTELLING

The Hebrews also used their earliest stories differently than their neighbors. Those stories never became religious

dictates that drove faith or ritual. Instead, the primary lessons were to listen, trust, and obey their Creator.

Historically, Christianity did not follow the early Hebrew pattern. Instead, it used Genesis to condemn humanity, adding stipulations that forced the biblical stories into a religious controlling role. Instead of seeing a world of warring brothers, it segregated people with theological rules that dictated who God loved or hated. Religion condemned when God did not.

Later, the Jews followed their neighbors, and Christians followed those Jews. They both complicated what God made simple.

PART TWO
THE CREATION
STORY

GENESIS 1:1 - 2:6

CHAPTER 5

FROM THE BEGINNING

It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.

-- Isaiah 45:12 NIV

Many of the teachings about biblical creation do not match standard science. I did not like that, so I kept looking at the story and asking God for resolution.

However, I did not realize that I would have to wait for scientific comprehension about the universe to catch up with the biblical text's details. Then, I had to wait some more for the scientists to mostly agree on what the evidence said and then pass that knowledge on to the general population.

That took decades. After the 21st century started, I noticed that the details of creation's first day and the Big Bang theory began to match. The two connected more with each discovery until they both told the same story.

That revelation of timely inspiration still gives me goosebumps. It is that amazing.

OPENING CREED

The writer of Genesis 1 began with his cosmology. He declared his belief in a one-line creed, boldly declaring who did the creating. Instead of describing when two places suddenly came into existence, the writer neatly and poetically included everything above (heaven) and everything below (earth). He left nothing out. His God created everything.

This creed removed the need for any myth-like explanation required by a “literal” interpretation of the word “earth.” The Hebrew cosmology let light come into existence before the creation of the planet described in day 2.

EVERYTHING EARTH

Verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1 each contain the word often translated as “earth.” However, the writer did not know he lived upon a spinning sphere. His concept of the earth was not our word “planet.” The Hebrew word included a broader usage than ours, but it was also much more limited in scope. That word most often described a region, an area dominated by a person or nation. Their word “earth” depended on the context for proper interpretation.

The writer of Genesis 1 used that same word in naming the dry-land (verse 10). This verse described all the land above the oceans. That usage did not include the land under the oceans. Likewise, in the first two days of creation, the word “earth” could not mean dry-land before the creation of dry-land.

The inspired writer did not mean a planet in day 1. He started with a synopsis that described everything above and everything below. I believe this because in his

following statement, the “earth” was formless (confused, unreal) and void (empty). If the writer described a vision, then what he saw did not look like rocks, dirt, or even dust. He did not see an unkempt or lifeless planet. He saw nothingness. The writer used the most encompassing word he had to portray something he did not fully comprehend.

Here, the word “earth” meant “everything,” even the nothingness.

FORMLESS BIRTH

Instead of our planet’s creation, day 1 depicts the beginning of everything. We call that event the Big Bang, our most encompassing words to describe an event we do not fully comprehend.

The early beginning looked very different from the world humans see. Nothing existed, not even chaos. It did not start with a dispute amongst gods or the breeding of gods. That time contained unreality filled with emptiness, where darkness covered the depth and surface of that nothingness. The biblical writer did not see anything that looked like heaven or Earth, not even a primeval ocean.

Science contains the same unworldly imagery. Everything started with a singularity, the only genuinely formless thing in this universe, as it had no width, depth, or height. That size-less point contained nothing, yet it had the potential to produce everything that has ever existed.

Only the earliest moment in history was irrefutably void because even energy arrived later. In what was an almost instantaneous event, the singularity inflated at a rate greater than lightspeed. That could only happen because no physical thing, including light, existed to slow it down. The birth of the universe contained nothing.

WATERY WAVES

Then, the brakes engaged. Inflation suddenly slowed. The next biblical detail poetically described that event. God moved above the water.

The Hebrew verb was an interesting choice. It translated as hovered, fluttered, or brooded, which described the tenderness a mother bird showed her eggs and chicks. That one word told the Hebrew reader that his Creator cared for him too.

I wondered how the first moments of the universe incorporated such a word. The answer came with the description of the first physical thing created out of nothingness. Surprisingly to me, this was not light.

In a fraction of a second, inflation cooled the universe enough to produce plasma, and plasma slowed down inflation because physical things cannot move that fast.

Plasma is an incredibly hot form of energy, consisting of a thick soup of quarks, electrons, and antimatter. These tiny bits were the building blocks of every form of energy and matter. I laughed when I heard the description of plasma. It flows like a fluid, which to the ancient Hebrew writer might appear as water. The universe quickly filled with this water-like stuff. It was so thick that photons had nowhere to go. Darkness ruled.

God fluttered over the ocean of plasma. His movement caused tiny ripples to form unequal speeds and temperatures. Particles began to crash into each other, which fused into atomic nuclei.

FIRST LIGHT

With time, space began to open, and time cooled the universe. Electrons merged with atomic nuclei. Photons had room to travel farther than the next atom. Suddenly, the pent-up energy from the Big Bang sprang forth. The universe lit up. Light dominated everything. The Cosmic Microwave Background formed, preserved like a fossil on the backdrop of the universe. It is the oldest energy we can study.

Biblically, God emphasized this moment in history. Not with a harsh command. He spoke with the gentle coo of a mother bird, and the entire universe joyfully responded. Light glowed everywhere. No darkness. No night. Our Creator called this time good and painted the event in the heavens. This beginning of light without shadow lovingly illustrated our future home in Heaven.

SECOND LIGHT

After the initial universal flash, newly formed atoms began to trap the photons. The light faded, and the universe quickly grew dark again.

Variations in density assisted gravity. Atoms pulled together, which drew more atoms into dense clouds. These continued to condense until, at their core, fusion began. A smaller flash of light birthed the first star. All over the growing universe, brilliant balls of fire burst through the cloudy darkness.

God named this different kind of light “day” and the darkness “night.”

The biblical creation and the Big Bang theory tell the

same story of two kinds of lights. The first embraced everything. The second sparkled from the darkness.

SHINING BRIGHT

Take a deep breath and contemplate that miracle.

Roughly 3600 years before the atomic age, a Hebrew writer penned a short version of the Big Bang. Even the oddest of the story's details align with scientific discoveries. For most of my life, non-believers proclaimed day 1 a myth. That is no longer accurate, as current cosmology and the ancient text tell the same story.

Amazing. The inspiration of our Creator shines!

CHAPTER 6

A TIMELY LOOK

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

-- Ecclesiastes 3:1 NIV

The details of day 1 match modern discoveries beautifully. Science does not contradict. That impressed me. Still, questions remained.

The hottest topic in the “creation war” concerns the length of one “day.” Christian groups quarrel over beliefs. Multiple accounts give atheists plenty of reasons to laugh and attribute every unrealistic detail to the realm of fiction, including God.

However, I eventually found that the biblical creation story’s day differed from most denominational versions. Its details embody a scientific universe, which incorporates a natural timeline.

Of course, I first had to “get the Greek out.”

BELIEVER'S DAY

Christian doctrines vary greatly.

Many believers agree with Augustine: measuring the first three creation days in hours is impossible. Since the sun determines the length of one day, then an inspired biblical writer could not have meant actual days if no sun existed.

Christians counter that logic by adding to the text. Some say God created angels as the light of day 1, but the text does not say so. Others say the radiance of God's presence lit the Earth, even though no biblical prophet ever discussed or hinted at such a scenario.

As a child, I giggled at the implications of that second image. I envisioned God turning Himself off for the night. I later grimaced when I realized how that theology limited God. A perfect God could not be everywhere. He had to move away to keep from outshining the sun.

CREATION'S TIMING

The active verbs of Genesis 1 inform us of an alternate interpretation to an instantaneous creation or a 24-7 week. They involve time: create, hover, separate, made, gather, produce, increase, fill. Each one paints a picture of the work taking place.

Work takes time. God utilized time. That revelation vetoed Augustine's interpretation, which was based on Aristotle's view of world order. Nothing in the passage described anything as instantaneous or mentioned angels doing anything.

Some early Jewish commentators incorporated "*A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or*

like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4 NIV) to define each day of creation as a thousand years. A few Christian groups agreed, but for only one reason. That passage was important enough for Peter to quote (2 Peter 3:8).

For me, it only works as a metaphor. To make my case, I will restate the biblical statement into our vernacular to emphasize time. "A billion years is like an hour zipped through or like a millisecond for an insomniac."

Both writers clearly define time as our concern, not God's. The verse maintains that a day is just as pointless to God as a thousand years, or even a billion.

This explanation gives us another way to interpret time measurement. Humanity exists within the framework of time. Historically, God took time to reveal the creation to us. The accumulation process spanned the entire existence of humanity. In God's timing, and with the Creator's process, creative thinkers developed. I believe God gave or withheld knowledge throughout the eons for humanity's benefit. He did not present all the information at one time, to one person, or to one group. His ways did not change. The Creator waited for the right time.

Long ago, God decided to give a group of ex-slaves some guidelines for living His way. Most of them did not understand the message. It took generations to even accept that only one God existed. Later, their descendants took that message to the nations. We still require time as each person or each culture slowly incorporates God's guidelines and removes old ways.

Much closer to our time, God decided that humanity was ready for an upgrade in our notions about nature. In a few hundred years, He supplied Christians and Jews with wisdom that developed scientific disciplines. The Creator

then placed into their hearts the desire to share that knowledge with people of all nations and religions.

The same accumulation exists throughout Genesis 1. Each day unwraps new creations that relate to the creations on other days. The singular creation took time to flourish.

DAY'S TIMING

The first chapter of Genesis contains stanzas that end with the line translated, “*And there was evening, and there was morning—the day.*” The Hebrew word translated as “day” is *yôwm*. Writers throughout the Old Testament used that word to describe a 24-hour day. However, they also used it to stand for periods that were obviously not 24-hours long.

* Genesis 2:4 says the entire creation was one *yôwm*.

* In Genesis 30:14 and Proverbs 25:13, *yôwm* referred to harvest time.

* In Joshua 24:7, *yôwm* was a long season.

* Isaiah 4:2 and Zechariah 14:8 used *yôwm* as a future era.

Many passages refer to “the day of the Lord,” or “in that day.” They simply meant a specific but undetermined time, not always one day or even the end of time.

The Hebrew words for “evening and morning” supplement *yôwm*. If a writer used *yôwm* as 24-hours, those words literally meant evening and morning. If *yôwm* was longer than 24 hours, then a reader could interpret them as a poetic end and beginning of that figurative period.

The Hebrew usage was no different from many other languages. When the Jews translated Genesis into Greek, they chose *hemera* for their word *yôwm*. Christians translated Greek into Latin using the word *dies*. Just like the

Hebrew, those words expressed both a 24-hour day and a figuratively longer period.

Even in English, context determines the length of the word “day.” No one considers the phrase “in Abraham’s day” as one 24-hour period. Abraham’s life set the extent of his “day.” More than that, that phrase in English lets time extend beyond Abraham’s birth and death to express a generalized era.

None of those languages enforce a literal 24-hour period onto the biblical creation text. Not one rejects an eon-based period. The chapter’s context emphasizes nature. Only by studying nature can we decipher the length of creation’s days. Whatever amount of time God used in each phase of creation set the beginning and end of each *yôwm*.

It has taken eons for humans to decipher the age of the universe. However, time never constrained the Creator.

POETRY’S KEY

A hidden message forces the reader to think, so poets have always liked playing hide-and-seek. This even works in prose. A key clue gives a mystery novel a surprise ending because the reader dismisses it as insignificant or feels pride that they figured it out.

This tendency is common. Even the ancient Hebrews use the technique. Finding a hidden key unlocked deeper meaning and understanding in what the writer said.

The Genesis creation story repeats days and main words. Everything repeats except for a line in verse 14. There, God positioned the astral bodies as signs. They helped people determine seasons (sacred times), days, and years. The writer only used this concept once, which makes

it a key. However, the astral bodies are not the key, since they repeated. The only words not repeated are “seasons” and “years,” which surround the repeated word “day.”

Many scholars insist that the chapter is not a poem, yet they agree that seasons is a key. Only a few tried to describe what that key unlocked, but because they believed the text was not poetry, I felt their explanations fell short.

I studied that verse. The Hebrew word translated “signs” also meant a distinguishing mark, banner, or token. Genesis used this same word for what God put onto Cain’s forehead (verse 4:15) and for Noah’s rainbow covenant (verse 9:12-17). The book of Exodus continued its use to describe what we call the ten plagues.

The key said people were to look for signs. The rest of the Bible said we needed discernment too. God’s signs were not magical. He wanted us to know His presence, not be impressed by a magician or cowed by a priest.

This key described God putting seasons, days, and years in the heavens. Those marked time. Humanity’s attempt to comprehend the movements of astral bodies created calendars and math.

I studied the concept more deeply. The definition of the Hebrew word “seasons” is less restricted than the English word. Instead of just referencing yearly cycles, daily cycles, and cycles within a lifetime, they also used it for the regular meetings of a congregation of worshipers because the people came and went. Seasons showed repetitive similarities that changed within time. Seasons started; seasons ended. They depended upon the seasons preceding them and influenced all that came afterward.

Time is a requirement to interpret Genesis 1. Seasons and years bracket the word “days” in verse 14. Days make up seasons and years. Seasons incorporate days or years.

Instead of using the unprovable “24-hour day,” the key interprets the poem’s “days” as a metaphor. It describes a “season of years” or a vast span of time. The sign says, “Whatever time it took to complete the season of that day was how many years the day lasted.” Only the evidence provided by God in nature exposes the length of each season.

GOD’S TIMING

Time is not relevant to God, yet He created time for a reason and utilized time to fill our universe with things of matter. Time was part of His plan from the beginning. He even used time to teach us about His creation.

God inspired a writer to produce a creation story that described the world through thousands of years of constantly fluctuating myth-based beliefs. Was the ancient Hebrew seven-day creation belief false? Not for them. Oddly, it does not matter what they believed. Even today, those words do not contradict the evidence described by 21st century science. Instead, the natural evidence combined with the Bible story challenge faulty religious beliefs about creation.

Our Creator provides evidence that dismisses the traditions we cling to. We should stop relying on interpretations that place constraints upon the inspired text or limit God’s abilities. We must stop dictating what the living God can and cannot do.

Time inside creation provides an additional deep concept.

The Jewish day begins in the evening. They start the day by resting. They sleep before work returns in the morning.

This belief works with science. The Earth rotates as it

revolves around the sun. Each evening faces where the planet has been and each morning faces where it is going. I interpret this as a metaphor. We should contemplate where we have been before considering where we are going. In between, it is best to sleep on it.

Resting in God and with God is a lovely image of time. Cutting that blessed time short garbles the message.

CHAPTER 7

A CLOSER LOOK

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

-- Matthew 7:3 NIV

Removing the traditional constraint of a week of 24-hour days gave me hope of finding God's inspiration.

I evaluated the variables. Theologies within Christianity altered details until they did not tell the same creation story. Then, I compared those to the opposing arguments that believers and non-believers presented. My big question was, "What made one interpretation better?"

Something unsettling surfaced as I grilled the details. The more dogmatically people held a belief, the less it matched the biblical account.

In that painful process of reflection, I started to find inspired answers. More of the strange creation wording told the same story as 21st century science. I simply had to stop reading the Hebrew text like a Greek myth.

HEAVEN'S SHAPE

One of the quarrelsome creation details from my childhood involved the dome of heaven. Until the invention of telescopes, this belief modeled the world above our heads. Every culture agreed that something substantial supported the sun, moon, and stars; otherwise, they should fall from the sky. A dome was one of the popular suggestions.

Christians had a difficult time giving up their traditions when modern scientists found no such barrier nor the need for any such structure. Holding onto a false belief simply to support religion gave other people strong reasons to disbelieve the text and dismiss God as a myth.

The first thing I noticed was that even the oldest English versions did not translate anything as a “dome.” Instead, they used “firmament,” “expanse,” or “vault.” I suspected that if the Hebrew word meant an upside-down metal bowl, then they would have described one.

I never met anyone who could explain what was firm in the “firmament” since everything moved. A “vault” forced the dome concept upon the reader by using a similar term. I grew to accept “expanse,” as it did not openly disagree with science. Instead of a thing, it was like saying “all that wide up-there stuff.”

I needed to understand the original definition of the Hebrew word *raqiya*, so I found everything I could on the subject. Also, I did not want to restrict it with a translator's preference or even my knowledge of nature.

Other than in Genesis 1:6-8 and 1:14-20, the Bible uses *raqiya* only a few times. It is always connected to the spaces high above our heads, but it was not the common Hebrew word for the atmosphere or for Heaven.

* In Ezekiel 1:22-26 and 10:1, the prophet Ezekiel saw

the *raqiya* sparkle like ice crystals above the heads of the living creatures. This vision resembled what Moses saw. Under God's feet were blue tiles clear as the sky, but he did not use the word *raqiya* (Exodus 24:10). These images were not the same.

* In Daniel 12:3, the angel told the prophet that people who taught God's ways shone brightly like the *raqiya*, and their converts to righteousness multiplied like stars forever. This metaphoric usage did not describe a dome.

* In Psalm 19:1, the psalmist has heaven declare God's glory, and the *raqiya* proclaim His works. But, again, the poet did not express a dome.

* In Psalm 150:1, the psalmist praised God in His sanctuary (Temple) and in His mighty *raqiya*. Alternate translations include the word "heaven," but again, no dome.

Those were the best definitions the Bible provided, and they were all written in metaphor. They did not say what they believed it was. Surprisingly, most passages in the Old Testament that referenced the creation, atmosphere, or heaven did not call those things *raqiya*.

Hebrew words have relations to other words. I wondered if the base word of *raqiya* would shed some light on the issue. *Raqa* did mean to beat, stamp, spread, or stretch, which gives the possibility of a metal dome. The Bible used that base word for when a smithy formed metal using a hammer. However, no Bible passage depicted God swinging a hammer to build the sky.

The best biblical verse to support a metal dome was Job 37:18, where God stretched (*raqa*) out the heavens then called the sky a bronze mirror. That verse uses the literal meaning, but the words "heavens" and "bronze" are not related to *raqiya* or *raqa*. More importantly, we must not take this verse as a binding image. Neither God nor Job

spoke. It was one of Job's friends whose theology eventually God rejected.

Job answered the friend. He agreed about the stretching but did not mention metal (Job 9:8). However, he used the word "*natah*" for action. That word contained a deeper meaning. In other verses, it described setting up a tent or when God extended His hand. Instead of only referring to the resulting product, both *raqa* and *natah* required someone actively bending or stretching.

The biblical description never required a metal bowl, but it did necessitate action. That action dictated someone in charge, which agreed with the Hebrew cosmology. God stretched the heavens into existence.¹ Because God did not tell them how He did it, the Hebrew prophets did not add conjectures to their religious beliefs.

Remarkably, that ancient Hebrew description agrees with Big Bang theories. The universe in all its vastness did spread out: first by inflation, then by expansion. That action continues still.

OCEAN'S ORIGIN

From my childhood, I heard of the primordial ocean of creation. Many ancient cosmologies included a version of that idea. Since the sons of Israel came out of Egypt, a few people likely held those beliefs. Genesis mentioned water in days 1 and 2. Therefore many theologians taught this was a short version of the same concept.

Except the writer of Genesis 1 never described the beginning like the Egyptians did. Water existed at the beginning, but nothing was created out of the water. It was just everything.

I asked, "If they were not the same myth, then why did

water show up in so many creation stories?" The answer was simple. People recognized that water was essential for life on Earth. The Egyptians made water the center of their religion because they needed the Nile River to grow food. In contrast, the Hebrews needed God. He provided their water.

The Genesis 1 writer did not present the world like the later Greeks or Christians who split the heavens into realms. He saw the sky with clouds and the astral bodies beyond. However, instead of separate layers, God made all the things above.

Day 2 did not comment on the structure of clouds or the heavens. Again, that knowledge the poet left in the Creator's hands. He used observational facts about water only. Whatever held up everything, he called *raqiya*. It held up the stars and clouds. It also lets water rain down on Earth. His cosmology was just that simple. God divided water above from water below. Water did not remain in-between.

Their simplicity lets the wording match today's science, which explains how God's creation works. What the ancient Hebrews called *raqiya*, we call physics.

Simple is beautiful.

One of the more recent scientific quests posed the question of why Earth has so much water. The models of the early solar system all agreed. As it formed, our world would not have retained so much surface water or even much atmosphere. Then, someone envisioned a meteor bombardment. The space rocks evaporated on contact, which freed the gasses they held. The stones they hit also evaporated and released their water. Together with volcanism, the gases built an atmosphere, which regulated the planet's temperature. Only then did the oceans form.

The ancient Hebrew cosmology maintained that God divided the undivided; then it stayed divided because God told it to do so. Simple. Miraculously, instead of a primordial ocean lurking above our heads, day 2 was the construction of the early Earth into a water world that scientists have only recently described. The water below literally came from the water far above.

That is inspired writing!

STELLAR MISTAKE

Day 4 gave God credit for creating the sun and moon. Then it added stars as almost an afterthought (Genesis 1:16). This listing seems to contradict the scientific order. Astrophysics says stars came first, with the sun being one of them. Planets and moons came later.

That dilemma stumped theologians. It puzzled me too until I realized the written form of day 4 was unlike the previous days. The writer connected these objects back to humans.

I started with the most relevant detail. The passage says, “*God set them...*” (Genesis 1:17a NIV). Instead of a comment on how or when they formed, it is a who-dune-it statement. God did it. The Hebrew word for “set” also means “given” and “provided.” In the story’s context, God made the stars, which benefited humans. That phrase rejects the need for a metal bowl with pinholes where Heavenly light showed through. It is not even the image of a jeweler setting stones.

Once I put the brass bowl aside, I saw why the writer prioritized the astral objects as listed. Day 4 contains a human viewpoint, which moved outward. The writer

understood that days and seasons guided life on Earth. Therefore, the most influential came first.

- * He lived on the vast Earth.

- * He defined days with the sun.

- * He noticed the cycles of the moon and called them months.

- * He studied the stellar movement and named it years.

What I found more interesting was that the astral bodies only gave light and governed our perception of time. That was all. Nothing in the passage advocated or identified an ancient Hebrew cosmology that tied personalities, spirits, or gods to the sun, moon, or stars. The writer held this belief so firmly that he did not even name the sun and moon. He intentionally made this point: the lights in the sky were just big and little lights.

That lack of spirituality made Genesis 1 radically different from their neighbors.

From the beginning, God did not want the Hebrews to depend on magic, but He did not force anyone to stop relying on those illusions. He knew humanity was not ready. God simply asked for their trust and gave the leaders orders on how to handle practitioners of the magical arts. They were to cast out or kill those who lured His people away by using magic.²

Separating spirits from the stars and convincing the masses of what God repeatedly said throughout the Old Testament required devotion to reality. No religion ever mastered that reverence. It took generations of scientists who described creation's wonders. People finally told the story of creation without adding entities to that story.

Through the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, humanity learned about time, developed calendars, and

invented mathematics. All the other scientific disciplines followed because of our curiosity and desire to understand.

ARISING LAND

Genesis 1:9 says God moved the water to let dry-land be seen.

That statement always sounded like a myth to me, but not anymore. I learned geology. Dinosaur bones were fascinating, but the ground that held them was just as impressive.

God did not perform a magic trick or even call it miraculous. In most biblical versions, the land “appeared,” but that is not quite right. The Hebrew word simply means “seen.”

I started smiling. Geologists figured out how that happened.

Earth was always an active planet. Plate tectonics scraped and slammed large sections of crust together, which formed strings of mountains. Once Earth contained an ocean, volcanic stones eroded into sands deposited around the mount. Pressure and chemistry solidified the sediments back into rock. Islands formed.

When the crust shifted again, the sedimentary rock became part of the movement. Compression formed new kinds of rocks that differed from the seafloor and the volcanic. The chemical makeup and structure of those newer stones made them lighter. That meant, as oceanic plates collided, the lighter ones stayed on top and eventually formed continents. As the continents grew broader and taller, they pushed aside the ocean.

That was not all! According to the Bible, plants were the

first life forms to thrive on the dry-land. Paleontologists have found that to be true.

A scientist might be more specific and say plants were the first multicellular organisms to colonize and dominate dry-land. But what about bacteria? An easy answer removes that problem. The biblical story of creation contains a human viewpoint. Microscopic creatures would have appeared as part of the soil, thus dirt. Likewise, fungi may not technically be plants but would have looked like plants in a vision.

The testimony of science declares the Bible got it right. God's inspiration totally rocks!

UNCOVERED AWE

Respect for God's inspiration filled me with joy as I shoveled off the myths.

Augustine was right about one crucial concept. Letting science describe creation does not negate the biblical story. In fact, the harmony between the two highlights the inspiration of the Creator while it exposes our faulty beliefs.

We should pursue that endeavor—less of me, Lord, more of you.

This creation story is different from all others. It alone presents cosmic concepts understandable to a Bronze-Age reader, a Greek philosopher, a Medieval European, and a 21st century scientist.

That is miraculous!

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S EVOLVING CREATION

With God, all things are possible.

-- Matthew 19:26 NIV

The creation war began long before the concept of evolution. As Christians learned about nature, they debated, argued, and ridiculed each other's theologies. However, each group's understanding also changed as they processed the new information.

Why was the evolution of life such a difficult transition? Many Christians still believe the theory impossible. Its mere mention inflames my ultra-conservative brethren. Yet, all the empirical evidence points toward a universe that changes over time. All life, including human-kind, evolved.

I find the contempt for the theory of evolution bewildering. For me, evolution made the world understandable instead of magical. Stars had their time to form and die, and dinosaurs had their time too. Even as a child, I wondered why so many preachers rejected the theory.

My search uncovered perfectionism again. Christianity built its creation theologies upon non-biblical foundations. By removing those, I found our Creator's inspiration in the interaction of words. To my great surprise and delight, Genesis 1 supports 21st century theories of evolution.

DARWIN AND MILTON

Much of the disdain fixated on Charles Darwin (1808-1882 AD), but what Christians told me about him was often false. He was not the first to describe evolution. He did not say a fish crawled out of the water and promptly grew legs. He did not invent the term "survival of the fittest." He did not advocate the racist ideals of "Social Darwinism."

More importantly, Darwin's writings showed that he was never an atheist. Evolution and atheism are not the same. The theory of how life evolved never demanded disbelief in God.

Darwin was a devout Christian when God opened his eyes to how life changed. It took twenty years for him to trust the reliability of that vision. Only later in life, when the church could not answer his questions on the nature of God, did his faith in the Creator fade. He wanted to understand how to relate his experiences with what the church taught. He discussed his problem with many religious leaders. No one provided a satisfactory solution.

I had the same questions, so I asked God. He gave me a disturbing answer. Darwin's problem was apparent once I saw the list of his favorite books. The ship he traveled on had a sizable library. If he took an excursion inland, Darwin most often took one of the ten volumes of *Paradise Lost* (1667 AD).

I realized something horrible. By the time of Darwin (1800s), Christians envisioned the creation and the Creator through Milton's words. That epic poem overshadowed people's reading of the simple biblical story. Yet the church still teaches those ideas as doctrine.

It should not have. John Milton was not a prophet of God.

Milton wrote this epic poem as a veiled political commentary and while in a state of depression. The poem combined Greek perfectionism, Persian dualism, Egyptian hermeticism, and the Jewish hierarchy of angels. Those he intertwined with medieval monsters and European romanticism. The biblical details were there, but the vivid fantasy distorted the inspiration given to the ancient Hebrew writer.

Christianity embraced Milton's writings so much that no one could find a solution to Darwin's questions, including Darwin. That deadlock remains a problem in the church.

We must get the Milton out!

EVOLUTION AND EVIDENCE

Darwin's revelation contradicted the science of his day. The older scientists fought back. Yet, in one generation, the standard paradigm of how people thought about nature shifted. That theory also helped squash magic as a scientific discipline.

The current understanding of evolution defends Darwin's premise. Scientists only modify the details as they study the evidence. None of those discoveries minimize the original bombshell.

I can summarize evolution simply.



From the beginning, all things change. Given enough time, things change to other things. Nothing in creation stays the same, not stars, not planets, not individual life forms, not even the lineage of those life forms. Everything will continue to change until there is nothing left in the universe to change.



THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM starts in the interpretation of the creation text. The Bible declared God created everything but never specified any process. Christians wanted answers, so they inserted stories like Milton's.

Before Darwin's time, scientists tried to envision how the process of change worked in life forms. Only recently has the revelation of genetic modification given them the mechanism that drives evolution. Thus, genetics proves the evolutionary theory to be true. What those people have accomplished in such a short time is simply amazing. Our Creator not only supplied us with fossils, but He also provided evidence of previous forms in every creature's DNA.

Instead of confusing a Bronze Age prophet, God left enough evidence in nature to show us how He made things. To see those wonders, God required us to remove the concepts tied to myths we had gathered and called sacred. Science complied. Religion resisted.

Below is my short version of how creatures evolve.

* Each birth produces offspring not quite like their parents. Life forms adapt to new or changing environments as they multiply. Slight differences can aid individuals so that they pass on their genes. For instance, coloration provides attraction or camouflage.

* Each generation differs slightly from its predecessors. If a population becomes separated, then differences accumulate between the groups. The less alike any two lineages become, the less likely individuals will see someone in the other group as a suitable mate. That process continues until differing groups no longer reproduce. The groups look similar, but they are no longer the same.

* Given enough time, small changes became significant changes. Time produces enough generations that diverge into radically differing groups. Eventually, new forms look nothing like their distant forbearers.

Fossils and living animals show the same story of lineage. Not one plant or animal so far studied has contradicted that revelation. All life came from the first life that started in the water.

Biblically, life started in the water because of God's order. He then commanded it to multiply. That order accepts the ongoing process of evolution. Through it, life reproduces in a myriad of ways, one minuscule change at a time.

MIX-AND-MATCH

Biblically, God commanded plants, animals, and people to reproduce according to their kind. To me, that seemed like a no-brainer, so I wondered why God included that detail. The answer eventually came. It was significant, scientific, and a bit strange.

The biblical wording told the reader that mythical hybrid animals were fiction. For example, lions never produced offspring with a bird. Sadly, God's people opposed letting go of that myth. No religious edict from any religion rejected the mix-and-match mythical animals until the scientific method assigned them a fantasy status.

Genesis 1 agreed with science.

That is not the end of the story. Once most people discarded the possibility of such mythical animals, Christians condemned evolution for producing them. They distorted the concept of evolution to say animals had to change so quickly that they were half one thing and half another.

That explanation of evolutionary theory holds even less truth than the ridicule placed on Darwin. Yet, too many believers still repeat the distortion without question.

CLAY OR CAUSALITY

I asked, "Could the entire creation story agree with the theories of evolving life?"

The odd wording again held the answer.

Did you know the creation text does not say God created land plants? God told the dry-land to grow them (Genesis 1:11-12). The same was true for land animals. God told them to come out of the dry-land before the writer said God made them (Genesis 1:24-25).

Many interpretations combined those statements with the dirt from Genesis 2:7 and 19 to conclude God made clay sculptures. That teaching irritated me from childhood. It sounded too much like so many other myths. I pondered how to read the passage until realization hit like a brick. No biblical writer expressed the concept of

statues brought to life or that life on land started fully formed.

I will delve deeper into that topic in another chapter, but at this point, my understanding simply needed a different way to interpret the passages, so I studied the wording.

The full meaning of the Hebrew word translated “created” surprised me. Throughout the Old Testament, many biblical writers used that word. They never implied “out of nothing.” Instead, the act of God changed something that already existed into something new.

I found that description very enlightening.

The biblical usage matched the scientific concept of causality. Everything, even new things, come from something that preceded it.

Everything started from a singularity. It was empty, yet out of that nothingness, everything formed. Our universe came from something, something we cannot adequately describe. The singularity came from something too. The Bible’s ultimate “something” is “someone:” God.

CREATED OR MADE

My understanding expanded when I realized God did not create things the same way every time, though it did not say He formed them differently either. Unexpectedly, those opposites did not contradict each other. It just sounds like they do on the surface.

I eventually noticed that science explained the quirki-ness. God was making a point.

The writer used the word “created,”

* in his creed for everything (Genesis 1:1),

* for the aquatic and flying animals (Genesis 1:21),

- * for human-kind (Genesis 1:27),
- * and in the closing statement (Genesis 2:3-4).
He used the word “made,”
- * for the expanse (raqiya) (Genesis 1:7),
- * for the lights in the sky (Genesis 1:16),
- * and for the land animals (Genesis 1:25).

DRY-LAND AND CHANGE

I focused on how the writer involved dry-land first because it stood between the direct word of God and the creation of life. I hoped that if God inspired those variations, then this strange detail might expose the difference between “created” and “made.”

The answer surprised me. In words that a Bronze Age person could comprehend, God told dry-land to evolve aquatic plants and animals into land lovers!

Paleontology shows that marine plants slowly adapted to colonize freshwater rivers and then dry-land. We can deduce they did so to access more sunlight. Aquatic herbivores followed the plants, and the carnivores tagged along behind. They all desired something.

Reaching out of the water required characteristics not possessed by all the life forms living at the edge. Minor variations allowed individuals to accomplish tasks more effectively. They passed those abilities on to their offspring. After many generations, differences became significant, which let them go further away from the water. All they needed was desire and time.

Dry-land gave new opportunities for adaptation. Genetics did its thing to form new kinds from old kinds, which filled all the Earth. The Bible simply said God told

the land and life to do so, and everything followed His command.

The dry-land's involvement becomes environmental—small changes accumulate into extreme changes over long periods of time. The fossil record shows this process as slow and steady.

MADE AND PROCESS

Slow was not the only way creatures evolved. Sometimes things changed more quickly. The inspired writer expressed that distinction with the word “made.”

Genesis 1:24 says God told the dry-land to produce the animals. Then in the next verse, the writer says God made them. Instead of a restatement, I see a connection to science. First, the animals slowly evolved; then, something sped up the process. Historically, that happened quite often. For example, every time a natural disaster struck a region or a planet-wide extinction occurred, creatures died in droves. Once the environment normalized again, creatures refilled the empty spaces quickly. However, the lineages that endured no longer looked like their ancestors. Disaster accelerated the standard process.

If the explanation was correct, then it also had to work for the astral bodies. It did.

Day 4 concerned the expansion and filling of the universe, not the initial inflation. Gravity compressed atoms into stars, planets, and moons. These were not radical changes to the norm, but when stars died, heavier elements formed. They changed the environment and the anatomy of the next generation. Many stars exploded to produce our rocky planet covered in water.

Also, our solar system did not form in this location.

Gravitational interaction slung it away from its nursery into this safer region of space. Without that change, life probably would not exist here.

The Bible used the word “made” for those events where God paid special attention to expedite specific changes within the standard process.

CREATED AND NEW

Our understanding of nature and evolution has designated a few beginnings where radical changes occurred abruptly or very quickly. Those times align with the use of “created” in Genesis 1.

- * The entire universe formed from a singularity. I cannot think of any event more unique than that one.

- * Life on Earth began in the water. Those early forms came from the surrounding chemicals, but divergence radically changed what those chemicals could do. The development of life then radically altered the surface of the planet.

- * The ability to fly began an exceptional change from an animal's lineage. Winged creatures still include some of the most extreme forms of animals on Earth.

- * The ancestors of *Homo sapiens* were mammals, but our ancestors became extraordinary. We alone consider our world, other worlds, and the One who made it all.

Our Creator took His already existing creation and “created” something new.

FORMED AND INSPIRED

We need to center our questions on God. What does He tell us about His creation? Do we defend beliefs that contradict God's evidence, the story within nature?

I find the biblical creation much more inspired than ancient beliefs about it. The peculiar wording of Genesis 1 and science agree again and again. God did not form everything the same way, but He did use the same process of evolution.

Amazing.

CHAPTER 9

KINDS OF KIND

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind.

-- Genesis 1:24a NIV

To understand Genesis 1 better, I needed to understand the word “kind.” That took a bit of time since I first had to unearth it from our current religious interpretations. How did the ancient Hebrews determine the differences or similarities between animals? Was it based on observation, mythical tales, or a combination?

Spoiler alert! I again found astonishing agreement with science.

DEFINING KIND

Generally, our perception of the Hebrew word “kind” comes through the Latin translation of “species.” Both note similarities between like things, but there is a big difference.

The ancient Latin beliefs said that if two things shared one characteristic, then they shared other characteristics and must be the same kind. For example, since blood is red, then a red stone must have life-giving properties too. Christianity used that viewpoint for most of our existence because we thought like the Greco-Romans.

Such descriptions suited magic but did not hold up to examination.

However, the ancient Hebrews looked at things differently.

The Bible used the Hebrew word for “kind” in six chapters,¹ and they each applied it the same way. “Kind” described plants and animals only. I found it humorous that its root word meant to “portion out” or “separate from a common source.” Since God inspired the biblical creation text, is it any wonder that He chose a word that could describe evolution?

The best biblical illustration for this meaning was Leviticus 11. It listed clean and unclean animals grouped by visually distinctive characteristics. The ancient Hebrews called each grouping a kind.

The most extreme example of what that word meant was the water creatures (Leviticus 11:9-12). The Hebrew people were only to eat animals from the water that had fins and scales. Scientifically, those two features included many orders of fish but did not define all the fish. Creatures without fins and scales embraced the rest of the fishes plus all the other kingdoms that lived in the water.

Those were really huge groups!

Some of the other groupings were big too. Yet the passage only said what animals the people were to eat or not eat by using visual indicators. Therefore, the biblical

concept of the word “kind” encompassed all the animals with similar features. Nothing more.

SPECIFYING KIND

When Christians started observing nature closely, they found that some ancient groupings (like blood and stone) were coincidental. People had based false deductions on unsupported assumptions.

Latin was the common written language of Europe, so Christians used a Latin-based system to name things. Many people studied nature, but one stands out, Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778 AD). This man did what Adam did; he named plants, animals, and even rocks. He was obsessed with providing each thing with only one name.

Linnaeus realized that similar traits showed animals to be more likely the same kind but not necessarily the same kind. He saw relationships, and his studies developed into the science of taxonomy. Linnaeus determined that to be the same many characteristics within a group had to be alike. Those most alike were called species. He then grouped cousin species into genera. Larger groupings became families, orders, phylum, classes, and kingdoms. All shared common characteristics.

Linnaeus’s work stimulated a paradigm shift in how people viewed nature. Controlled analysis changed the definition of “species,” which led people to realize that every individual was unique.

That surprised me. The scientific definition of “species” changed to be like the Hebrew concept of a kind. All the animals with the same characteristics were the same kind. Creatures with similar but not exact features were close kin, so still the same kind but not exactly the same. The fewer

similarities animals had in common, the farther apart the relationship. At some point, they could no longer be called the same kind.

The Hebrew word translated kind, and the scientific views had another essential concept in common: lineage. Every plant and animal had ancestry going back to whatever came first.

“Kind” means animals with similar characteristics in their lineage. The process of evolution modified individuals to produce different species that retained similar characteristics. Therefore, lineage unites kind with evolution. Lineage plus time will eventually change any kind into different kinds.

Paleontology showed a progression of forms leading to the current ones. Almost all those forms no longer exist. Many lineages even ended in extinction, with only fossils to reveal their existence. I believe God provided those as evidence for people to find. He wants us to know that He controls things that were and will be. No magic needed.

God started the process, and creation followed His command. Through the fossil and genetic records, we trace each lineage into many shapes. Each lineage branched to produce cousin forms. Each form links back to the first creature, which shares its characteristic of carbon-based life with all its descendants.

Life is one, as its Creator is One.

GENERALIZED SCULPTING

The biblical creation emphatically stated that God created everything. Then, the Hebrew text did something strange. **It generalized all the life forms.** Unlike some English versions, it never differentiated fish from whale, insect from

reptile, or mouse from elephant. Genesis 2 contained the same overwhelming ambiguity, except for two humans, two trees, and one serpent.

Let me put that a different way. Genesis 1 never stipulated a scientific species, genus, or family. Instead, it grouped plants and animals in what we would call kingdoms, phylum, and classes. God even created the all-inclusive group “human-kind” on day 6, not the individuals Adam and Eve.

There was so much generalization in the creation stories that God had to be making a deliberate point.

He was, but it took a while for me to understand how amazing that revelation was. Genesis 1 contained something that no other ancient creation story accomplished. Instead of mentioning a few animals and hinting at others, generalization encapsulated the entire lineage of all the plants and animals that ever existed. The writer included all those that lived in his day and all those in our day. He did not leave out any of the fossils or those creatures that never left a trace.

God created everything, not just the things we know about.

The generalized wording accepted evolution as God’s sculpting tool. He formed the generations into the plants and animals we see today through the lineage of plants and animals we see in fossils. That included the entire ancestry of every living thing back to first life.

Life is one, as its Creator is One.

STRUCTURING PLANTS

Another old argument against Genesis 1 states that God created the flowering plants, grass, and herbs before land

animals. However, paleontology shows they developed during the age of the dinosaurs. Since they did not exist at the beginning, then the Bible is wrong.

That statement is only somewhat accurate. The King James Bible translated the Hebrew words with grass and herb. However, the Hebrew was not so specific. One word embraced all the young vegetation, not specifically what we call grass. The other word relates plants with seeds. In other words, the passage meant "all of those soft young plants and all those mature plants that produce their seed."

This same explanation fixed the problem with the fruiting trees. Our culture insisted this meant flowering trees, like a peach. However, the Hebrew writer did not say that. His concept described a fruit as the entire structure that reproduced the plant by seed.

For instance, let us look at pine trees. They do not have showy flowers, but they form cones (fruit) filled with seeds from which pine trees grow. Before dinosaurs existed, conifers flourished. God made plants and trees with seeds long before any animal walked on dry-land.

The biblical writer used all-encompassing terms that summarized all plants into a few groups based roughly on size and usage, not genetics. It included every species, even the extinct ones. Generalization restated the chapter's theme, "One God created all of them."

Amazing.

SCULPTING LIKENESS

Many theologies maintain that God created humans differently from the process seen in other parts of creation. We were that special.

I did not find that belief stated in scripture.

God made plants and animals from dirt and humans from dust. Truthfully, dust is just finely ground dirt, and it is not as useful as dirt. We sweep this irritation out of our houses and wish it did not carry pollen. So how does dust make us extraordinary?

When John the Baptist countered the haughty arrogance of his fellow Jews, he said that God could make people from stone (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8). He disagreed that their physical or national heritage made them superior.

The ancient Hebrews believed God formed humanity as part of His good creation. Just like plants and animals, we lived and multiplied to fill the Earth. At death, our bodies returned to the dust just like theirs. Biblically and scientifically, the fluids, gasses, and minerals of the Earth comprised our bodies. Our physical form looked like our earthly lineage, the image of the universe.

Sadly, our egos rejected that biblical and scientific truth.

SCULPTING HERITAGE

Scripture states that God made “human-kind” in His image. Most Christians take that statement quite literally as our bodies.

However, the Creator did not look like a human.

We share a heritage with Jesus. He said that God is Spirit (John 4:24). God also gave us a spirit, and we have access to His Spirit. It is our spirit that returns to God. When a person acts in love, their spirit reflects God as their father (John 13:34-35). Those who do not act in love show their heritage (John 8:44), which no longer looks like God.

God gave us the opportunity to choose which image we reflect.

SCULPTING HUMANITY

Heritage is lineage, and that brings us back to evolution.

I have heard many people become offended and yell, "I am not a descendant of a monkey." Some might have said "ape" or "gorilla." It does not matter. That statement shows egotism again. How is a monkey less impressive than dust?

That reproach also exposes a distorted view of evolution. The theory does not insist monkeys or apes evolved into humans. Instead, it says the monkeys and apes separated from our lineage. We simply share a common ancestry.

We could not have sprung from those animals because monkeys, apes, and humans are all the most recent in each lineage. Our lineage diverged from the lineage that produced the chimpanzee several million years ago. The split with the gorilla lineage was closer to ten million years ago. The separation that deviated pre-apes from pre-old-world monkeys occurred over thirty million years ago, and forty million for the pre-new-world monkeys.

All those splits transpired long before humans were remotely hominid and before human-like attributes developed. We share common traits, but our lineage is exclusively ours.

I believe God let apes and monkeys remain so that we could visualize our ancestors. More than that, looking at those lineages revealed an important variance in evolution. The lineages of those animals barely changed. Our physiology modified rapidly.

Something besides standard evolution changed one

lineage of animals into humans. Something besides routine genetic modifications gave them ideas about adornment, farming, and architecture.

The Bible says that something was someone: our Creator.

FORMING GENETICS

Many people, including Christians, say the Eden story was mythical. However, scientists determined by reading our genetic code that every human living today descended from one male and one female. They nicked-named their findings Y-chromosomal Adam and Mitochondrial Eve, who lived between 150,000 to 300,000 years ago.

The researchers emphasize that those dates are very rough. Those two individuals did not have to live at the same time or in the same region. They were not the only living hominids on the planet. Scientifically, it meant that the other females of that time did not produce a direct surviving line of females, and the male did not produce a direct surviving line of males.

Only the lineage of one male and one female ties all humanity together.

The evidence does show something quite clearly. All the other not-quite-human species living at that time started to die off. The dominion of Earth became ours alone. Only one hominid species exists today, and we all share a common lineage through one man and one woman.

I understood that the scientists were working on understanding the genetic information and did not want to make wild speculation. Nevertheless, how much closer could an ancient creation story come and people not recognize it as

something besides a myth? The Bible and science agree. We are one family.

Humanity is one, as our Creator is One.

FORMING HUMANS

It suddenly struck me that “two lone humans on the planet” was a traditional assumption. Biblically, God placed one man in the garden and then brought the woman to man. He did not say where they were before moving or how long they had lived. Not mentioning a community of almost-humans living outside the garden does not imply only the two people existed.

Theologies spliced the Eden stories into day 6, but not Genesis 1. It called the people God created “human-kind.” Without the addition, the creation story’s wording lets God create a lineage of evolving mammals that produced almost-human kinds and finally humans.

In Genesis 2:7-8 and 19, God formed (squeezed) a man from dust and animals from the dirt. This word probably influenced the “clay sculpture” interpretations. However, neither dust nor dirt was the damp form of clay suitable for sculpting. Those substances would not hold a form.

Something amazing struck me about the biblical connection between dirt and dust. They support evolution theory. I know, crazy right, yet what is dust but the smallest partials of dirt. Dust comes from dirt. They are the same thing. If animals come from dirt and humans from dust then the analogy concludes that God made dusty humans from dirty animals. The Bible accepts the evolution of humans from animals without conflict.

I then linked God squeezing life from dust and dirt back to the meaning of “made” in Genesis 1. God formed “first

life” from minerals readily found in nature. He then transformed dirt into animals, then animals into humans using His sculpting tool of evolution.

Genesis 1:27 gripped my attention. Three times it repeats that God created human-kind, both male and female. This oddity may well be an emphatic repetition common in the Hebrew language. However, it may also show a progression that reflects anthropology, a series of changes that turned animals into almost-humans and almost-humans into humans. With that interpretation, the Eden story accepts the radical transformations in the creation process that made animals into almost-humans then into the image of God.

Change did not end. Humanity had to learn what good and evil meant. Slowly and deliberately, God changed cultures and our attitudes. Each generation differed from its parents. Each nation built upon its predecessors.

I found that concept of cultural evolution flowing throughout the Old and New Testaments. God begs us to modify our ways of thinking until our society transforms. Everyone had the choice to be like Him (serve with love) or be like the world (selfish with contempt) (Jeremiah 7:3-8; 2 Corinthians 3:18). At some point, humanity will be very different. Peace will reign in our hearts.

That process continues today.

INSPIRING HUMANITY

One more essential insight came from studying the biblical creation chapter and science together. God knew many people who studied nature would eventually reject its Creator.

Yes, that one took me by surprise, yet that step was

crucial and not an oversight on God's part. It showed how God handles unbelief.

Studying nature exposes the structure of nature, nothing outside itself. Our Creator made the universe run its course without any apparent influence.

I asked, "Why not make the universe so that we automatically recognized His authority?"

That was a tricky one, and the answer came slowly, almost in a whisper. God did this for those who chose not to believe.

He deliberately gave us the freedom to choose. To see and hear the truth about nature or God, we must be willing to accept correction. He does not force anyone to believe. He was, is, and always will be a gentleman.

He gave us reasons to believe. In the Bible's short but amazing creation passage, God furnished substantial circumstantial evidence for His existence. No human lived to witness the creation. Yet, in a time long before our recent scientific discoveries, the Bible recorded the same cosmologic, atmospheric, and geologic order uncovered by modern researchers. This ancient story deemed a myth also matched the patterns of life found by paleontology and biology. From the small to the enormous, in organization and form, standard science and Genesis agree. However, to hear the harmony, we must "get the Greek out."

Only one biblical creation detail remains without scientific analysis: God. His nature is beyond nature. We cannot test Him in a lab unless He chooses that means of exposure. So far, He has not. Combining science with Genesis gives us an answer to even that quest. Science declares the first cause of every created thing was a singularity. The Bible boldly exclaims all things physical originated from a relationship with the spiritual singularity of God.

I found this revelation quite refreshing.
All of creation is one, as its Creator is One.

TAKING STEPS

The revelation about “kind” profoundly changed my view of Genesis 1. However, it still did not answer all my questions.

I kept asking, “How should I read the creation text?”

CHAPTER 10

THE STRUCTURE OF CREATION

“Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord.

-- Isaiah 66:2a NIV

Genesis 1 is far superior to any fictitious creation story ever written. It really is. The more I studied the passage, the more excited I got. Nothing else compared.

The structure of the text interconnects everything with God. And, those relationships match 21st century science beautifully.

The Bible’s creation story is much more than a list. Let me show you its rhythmic order.

UNIQUE APPROACH

The Bible starts with a holy smirk, not a solemn frown. Genesis 1 has an in-your-face attitude. This short text brilliantly mocks the worship of nature gods. It artfully hides

its scorn until the reader sees the joke and laughs along with the writer.

The ridicule was probably apparent to the early Hebrews surrounded by idol worshipers, yet Christianity never embraced the absolute audacity of the text. The writer blew a giant derogatory raspberry, but we were too busy arguing traditions and did not hear.

I found that rather sad.

The biblical writers repeatedly proclaimed nothing within creation compared to its Creator. Only He was worthy of worship (Deuteronomy 4:15-19). The creation chapter boldly states,¹ “One God already created everything. No others need apply.”

* Opening – One God is Creator. He alone is worthy.

* Day 1 – No other gods needed for light and darkness.

* Day 2 – No other gods needed for sky and water.

* Day 3 – No other gods needed for dry-land and plants.

* Day 4 – No other gods needed for astral bodies.

* Day 5 – No other gods needed for aquatic animals or birds.

* Day 6 – No other gods needed for land animals or man.

* Day 7 – One God is the Creator of everything. He watches over it all. As His creation, all generations need to take time to contemplate Him and His works.

* Closing – One God is Creator. He alone is worthy.

The “generations” of the created universe (day 7) do not only refer to our physical reality. It brazenly mocks the imaginary families of gods and demigods from the other nations. “No need” includes angels, spirits, demons, and Satan. They cannot create anything genuinely new because God created everything, including the non-corporeal

beings. One God created and controls everything. No others are required.

Hmm, I think we should all blow a joyful raspberry!

STRUCTURAL REPETITION

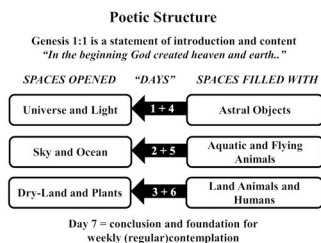
The next feature of Genesis 1 surprised me too. It was glaringly obvious, but I had never heard anyone mention it. Even though Western scholars noticed this aspect in the late 1700s,² that information did not spread to the masses who continued to read the chapter like a list.

The chapter has a structure. The seven stanzas (days) formed complex sets. Stanzas 1 through 3 opened spaces that days 4 through 6 filled.

* Day 1 opened the universe with light; then day 4 filled the universe with objects.

* Day 2 opened the sky and ocean; then day 5 filled the ocean and sky with creatures.

* Day 3 opened the land and readied it with plants; then day 6 filled the land with creatures.



I immediately realized that a structure removed one of Augustine's objections to the 24-7 interpretation of the text. How did plants grow if God had not yet created the sun? The order makes sense with the concept of sets. Since

the astral objects of day 4 filled the universe of day 1, then they completed a poetic set. Therefore, the sun formed as part of the universe before the plants arrived on day 3.

My next issue was not so easy. Dry-land and plants (day 3, third set) needed to come before birds (day 5, second set). The structure seemed to put the birds in the wrong set. I scratched my head for a long time before realizing the structure's purpose was to deal with complex relationships, which correctly ordered those details.

The sky and ocean opened in day 2 and then filled with animals on day 5. In just a few words, the writer described the extremes of Earth and the life that lived there. The topic in this set was the relationship between the two environments. The writer did not mention land or land animals because they were not the topic. He did not say God created birds before reptiles because that was not the topic. What he did was restate the entire chapter's theme. Instead of saying "heaven and Earth" again, the writer described everything above (sky, birds) and everything below (ocean, aquatic animals).

The third set continued that sentiment with everything in-between (dry-land, plants, animals, people). Day 3 claimed the land grew out of the ocean, and plants grew out of the land. That physically placed land and plants between sky and ocean. Day 6 filled the land with animals. Instead of separate creations, the writer artfully used a structure to connect everything we know into one creation.

The structure of relationally linked sets puts all the details in the order scientists have found in nature.

Very cool.

CHIASTIC POETRY

One of the arguments about the structure of Genesis 1 bugged me for years. Most biblical scholars insisted the chapter did not conform to any known form of Hebrew poetry. The rhymes were not consistent. It had no meter or parallelism. Therefore, it had to be prose.

However, it flowed like poetry, even in translation. That meant other scholars disagreed. They argued that the structure did not adhere to the rules of prose because, just like poetry, the chapter had non-standard grammar.

People have suggested many poetic forms, but the most popular idea today is a Chiasm. The Old Testament uses this symmetric pattern regularly, which makes memorizing passages easier. The main rule is the reversal of concepts. The lines of the second half mirror the lines in the first half. Poems can be two lines or fill an epic.

Scholars disagreed on how the structured pattern forms. Some established the pattern in the topics of the days, while others found it within each day. Some saw chiasitic phrases while others identified single words.

If this passage were easy, then the scholars would have agreed years ago. I lost count trying to find one that answered my questions about God's inspiration. My problem with this poetic device is that the rhythm helps memorize the words, but it does not provide an interpretation. Chiasm simply showed a functional pattern.

That bothered me, so I kept searching.

EXPOSED ORDER

The writer of Genesis 1 composed the passage with structure and depth of meaning. As I focused on those two

things, I saw my answer coming together, bit by bit. Sometimes the scholars helped, sometimes not. However, I still looked for something that filled me with awe. That something made me shout, hallelujah.

I wanted strong evidence for a God-inspired biblical creation.

Shout His praises with me! God gave me that prize.

CHAPTER II

THE POETRY OF GENESIS ONE

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

-- Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

I wondered, “Could Genesis 1 be poetry and prose at the same time?”

The answer rang a resounding, “YES!”

POETIC STRUCTURE

I returned to the structure. To get it in my head, I listed the main details in the stanza sets. To my surprise, there before me sat a pattern and progression. The last concept in each poetic set matched the first concept in its set. They formed a circle of ideas with a structure that made three circles. The center circle linked the first and third circles.

I wondered what that meant. None of the theologians I read mentioned such a structure.

Circles reminded me of something I had heard long before. Most Christians are of Western descent and typically had a linear way of thinking, a Greek way of thinking. On the other hand, the ancient Hebrew people had an Eastern concept. They structured their thoughts in circular, spiral, or layered fashions to illustrate relationships and connectivity. That meant chronological order was not the primary focus. In fact, a linear reading lost meaning.

I naively went online to key-in “poetry circle.” Up popped Circular Poetry. I am not a poet and had no idea what that meant, so I sent my list to a friend who is a poet. She exclaimed, “Wow! I finally understand Circular Poetry!”

I figured that I was onto something.

This style of poetry differs from most. The rules do not specify single words, sentence fragments, or paragraphs. It does not enforce grammar or a lack of grammar. It does not require or reject meter and rhyme. The wording can look like prose, poetry, or a mixture.

There is only one rule to Circular Poetry. The poem must start and end with the same concept, which connects by a progression of related thoughts to form a concept circle.

CIRCULAR POETRY

Here is an expanded version of my original circle list. I have incorporated some scientific details to help explain the main concepts. The underlined main words show the progression, and the lettered words emphasize how the poetry circles back to the beginning of each set.



* **CREED** – At the beginning, the one (a) Creator created (b) everything.

* **Linking day 1 to day 4** – After the initial formless and void beginning, the (a) Creator moved and spoke to make (c) first light from the plasma. He then separated the light from darkness. This progression produced stars like our sun, around which unlit bodies formed. They reflected and guided us to understand the (c) light. The (a) Creator said the light of the universe was good.

* **LINKING DAY 2 TO DAY 5** – From the heavens, the (a) Creator sent water-ice asteroids to Earth. Water accumulated as (d) atmosphere that precipitated into oceans. In time, the ocean provided a suitable environment for prolific sea life, which transformed into flying animals capable of dominating the (d) atmosphere. The (a) Creator said the life in the sky and ocean was good.

* **LINKING DAY 3 TO DAY 6** – The (a) Creator grew (e) dry-land out of the oceans. It provided nutritious minerals to support life. The first large multi-cellular life forms to dominate land were plants. They provided an environment for prolific dry-land animals, which transformed into humans and carried God's image. Humans then dominated the (e) dry-land. The (a) Creator said all life on dry-land was good.

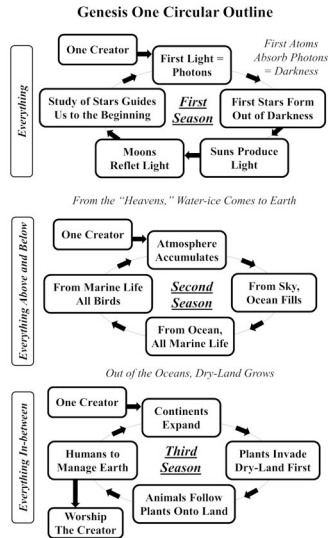
* **ENDING** – The one (a) Creator said (b) everything was very good.



GENESIS 1 IS CIRCULAR POETRY. It fits the rule and makes a distinct pattern.

What a totally mind-blowing miracle! The first chapter of the Bible is not a myth. It is based on reality. God's inspi-

ration included words the Bronze Age writer could understand and 21st century scientific details we can recognize.



BOTHERSOME CONCERNS

For a time, I worried that my poetic interpretation of the biblical creation simply added one more to the already long list of arguments. I repeatedly prayed that my attempts at harmonizing did not distort the scriptures to fit my perception of nature, making me a victim to my understanding.

Softly, an answer came.

* The previous attempts at harmonizing Genesis with science began with a perfect creation, which was not biblical. They started in the wrong place.

* The previous attempts told the story as a linear list, both in prose and poetry. Instead, the writer of Genesis 1

composed Circular Poetry, which tied together all the strange elements in the text that did not make sense.

* As Circular Poetry, the biblical creation no longer contradicted nature as described by scientific discovery. Instead, it tells the same story of relationships through time.

* The most important thing is this. A poetic interpretation that agrees with science gives us strong circumstantial evidence that God inspired the writer.

That stilled my worries, but I had another concern. Science will change, and this interpretation might be found wrong.

Change happens, but my interpretation might still hold true. Therefore, fear of the future was not a valid reason to quit trying. Nor was it a reason to reject this interpretation.

What about the future? I agreed with Augustine. When the time becomes right again, God will reveal to that generation how inspired the Genesis creation really is by harmonizing the stories with that era's knowledge of nature. My God changes the impossible into reality.

I asked myself, "Why did God hide the truth for so long?"

That answer was simple. The text was in plain sight, and nature was in plain sight. God did not hide anything. Instead, the cultures of Judaism and Christianity forgot the poetic structure and its meaning because they adopted Greek logic.

We were not ready to see what sat in front of our eyes.

SECURING BONDS

The intricate structure and circular form of Genesis 1 connect everything within creation without contradicting

21st century science. That miracle is only possible coming from someone who lived at the beginning. That person was our Creator, the living God of Abraham.

We are not quite done. Circular Poetry beautifully tied the six days together. But what about the seventh day?

CHAPTER 12

CREATION'S COMPLETION

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

-- Genesis 2:3 NIV

I rejoiced in the creation poetry, but the seventh day perplexed me. Those verses did not flow like the other days. I found no structural pattern or poetic circles. The end remained a stumbling block to understanding, and I often wondered if someone tacked it on later.

Big surprise, God resolved that impasse too. Day 7 sounded different because it followed the pattern used in many Hebrew psalms. Creation ends in a different voice, a song of praise to the writer's Creator. Also, believers placed restrictions upon that day, which spoiled the circle and its meaning. Once I scaled the rock wall of misinterpretation, the poetry slid into place.

God's creation story kept getting better and better!

CREATOR'S NAME

I will start at the end to find the finale.

In most English Bibles, the creation story concludes with Genesis 2:3. A heading often sits between that verse and the next paragraph. However, I noticed that a few versions separated the text differently. Those Jewish Bibles end day 7 with the first half of verse 4.

I wondered, "Why? Did they know something the Christians did not?" The answer irritated me, "Yes and no."

This division highlighted a long-standing problem for translators. The ancient Hebrew writers did not use headings, verses, paragraphs, or punctuation. So, for scholars to write the story in their language, they had to choose how to segment the text. Jews split the verse. Christians did not. Obviously, the scholars used different reasoning for their choices. For me, that meant opposing traditions probably biased their decisions.

To my surprise, the primary logic for paragraph placement grew around the name of the Creator. Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 used the word "*Elohim*." However, in the second half of verse 4, the description changed to "*Yahweh Elohim*," which continued through chapters 2 and 3. Scholars presumed the change showed two writers who lived at different times with dissimilar customs. Therefore, European scholars separated the two styles.

Elohim was never exclusively Abraham's God or His name. The Hebrews could give anyone with power that title. Instead, this plural noun coupled with a singular verb always distinguished the One God from any of the other gods.

The Hebrews knew their God as *Yahweh*, which English Bibles inadequately interpret as "LORD." They did this

because the Jews feared insulting God's name. Unfortunately, Christians adopted the fear and forgot the name.

I saw the logic in the paragraph split, but the revelation hit hard. Both Jews and Christians deliberately separated *Yahweh* from the creation of the universe and forced the generic title of *Elohim* into the role of the Creator's name.

Now, every time I see that choice in any of the biblical versions, my spirit twitches.

YAHWEH'S POETRY

After discussing the names of God with a rabbi, my view of day 7 suddenly changed. He said the first line of the Bible contained a two-letter Hebrew word used to point directly to a verb's object; in this case, what God created. English does not need that word, so it does not appear in our Bibles. However, its placement next to *Elohim* is critical for understanding creation's poetry.

My eyes popped open at this!

This word's letters, *aleph* and *tov*, are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Bible repeats that concept as a description of God. Isaiah quoted God as saying, "*I am the first and I am the last*" (verses 4:6 and 48:12 NIV). At the end of the Bible, John defined Jesus the same way (Revelation 1:8, 1:17-18, 21:6-7, 22:13). Once at the beginning, twice in the middle, and four times at the end. They all had the same meaning, One God forever.

The first line of our creation poem identified the Creator as *aleph* and *tov*, not *Elohim*. If we return Genesis 2:4 to the creation poem, then the entire poem starts and ends with the same concept, thus Circular Poetry. The complete circle of God encircles the three circles of creation. The poetry intertwines *Yahweh Elohim* with everything from the first to

the last, creating an enduring relationship between Himself and His creation.

My revelation did not end. Because of John's references, we can also view the entire Bible as Circular Poetry. It starts and ends with the same concept of "first and last." Seasons of human development filled the time between with a progression of beginnings and endings. Each circle connects because of the encompassing God of creation.

Yes, this fat old lady squealed in delight and danced around the room.

The Bible is one, as its Creator is One.

SEVENTH'S POETRY

Many scholars looked at the wording of Genesis 2:4 and found a chiastic pattern. A chiasm shapes a unit. To me, that gives an excellent reason against dividing the paragraph in the middle of the verse as some Jewish Bibles did. The form may not confirm inspiration from God, but it does indicate content continuance.

Finding the pattern here must not be difficult because I am not a poet, and I did it. Also, like Genesis 1:1, which condensed the entire poem into one line, this verse summarized "everything" into the one word "generations." Here is my attempt at a chiasm using the primary words of Genesis 2:4.

These generations
A – of the heavens
B – and the Earth
C – when created
C' – when God made
B' – the Earth and
A' – the heavens

TO MY DELIGHT, by including verse 4, the entire seventh day forms a chiastic pattern. The poem's last line, the one with *Yahweh*, restates the poet's creed (Genesis 1:1) in reverse order. It also does the same with the first line of day 7. And, if anyone reading the poem misses it, day 7 ends the creation poem with three restatements of that creed.

Below is my version of a chiasm of Genesis 2:1-4 using the content.

A – Finished the heavens and Earth
B – God ended the work on the seventh day
C – He rested on the seventh day
C' – God blessed and sanctified the seventh day
B' – He rested from all the work, which God
 created
A' – in the generations of heaven and Earth, in
 their creation
Yahweh Elohim made the Earth and heavens

GENESIS 2:1-4 also continued the poetic form of circles. It boldly emphasized the close relationship between everything created and the Creator.

* **DAY 7** – (b) Everything completed by one (a) Creator, and He rested from His work. The (a) Creator blessed and sanctified (b) everything, these generations of (b) everything by the one (a) Creator who made (b) everything.

IT TOOK a master poet to make all those connections work. To make them continue working throughout the millennia required the inspiration of *Yahweh*.

The Creator's proper name absolutely belongs in the seventh day of creation.

SEVENTH'S KEYS

Genesis 1 contains the poetic key word of “season” to interpret the poet's use of “days” as long periods of time. It is the only unrepeatd word within the first chapter. Three more unrepeatd words show up in day 7: sanctify, generations, and *Yahweh*. These unlock an untapped depth of understanding.

SANCTIFICATION'S KEY

God set the seventh day of creation apart as holy (sanctified) and rested. For many believers, the resemblance makes them think God instituted the first Sabbath on this day. Here I only want to discuss the holiness. I will discuss the Sabbath in a later chapter.

To sanctify (declare holy) anything, someone must set that thing apart from similar items and change its regular use. For example, a cup is just a cup until given a religious purpose. Once this happens, its use as just another cup belittles its sanctification. God also sanctifies people. He can call someone to a ministry or purify their soul from repetitive sins. At the same time, He gives people the right to disregard sanctification with thoughts and actions.

The writer invited the reader to join God in rest. By naming both seventh days holy, God linked all of creation with the formation of the Israelite nation. At Mount Sinai, He established the Sabbath for humans to contemplate God's love and His creation. In the spirit, both days give us joy, hope, tranquility, serenity, and peace. Together, the two days form a poetic circle of changed lives, beginning and ending with *Yahweh Elohim*.

CREATION'S FINISH

The seventh day did not include an evening. That detail always made me wonder, why not? Genesis 2:2 surpassed that oddity by saying God finished on day 7, not before day 7.

When I learned that, my head spun. No one I ever met described anything but rest for God on that day. I had to discover ancient knowledge by reading a little book by a Jewish rabbi.¹

In verse 2, many English versions replace the word "on" with "by" to reinforce the tradition that no work occurred on day 7.

This is a literal translation:

“Thus were finished the heavens and the earth and all the host of them. And ended God on the day seventh His work, which He had done. And He rested on the day seventh His work, which He had done” (Genesis 2:1-2 NIV).

Instead of just restatements, a progression transpired. God finished heaven and Earth before, but something else happened prior to God resting. Many Jewish scholars have speculated that God created the Sabbath or just rest, but the passage does not contain that word.

So, what did God do?

The answer came once I realized why day 7 did not have a poetic evening. It continued. That revelation flowed into the next key.

GENERATIONS' KEY

How did the day continue? The original language contained the mind-blowing answer in the second key, generations (Genesis 2:4).

English versions express that keyword in several ways. The most common are “account,” “history,” or “births.” However, each one translates the same word literally as “generations” at the beginning of the Genesis genealogies.

I wondered why they altered the first use of “generations.”

The word “generations” did not fit the interpreters' theology. No generations could exist in a literal seven-day creation or Augustine's instantaneous creation. The theologians did not allow the word to shape their understanding, so they concluded the entire statement of verse 4 could not have been a part of day 7. They accepted tradition and

restricted the word's meaning by segregating both *Yahweh* and the generations from the creation poem using a paragraph break and a heading.

On the other hand, a literal translation requires a different interpretation. *Yahweh Elohim* concludes the creation poem and shapes the poetry of day 7. It also confirms the keyword of "seasons" as the metaphoric meaning of each "day" because many lifetimes are inherent in the word "generations." Eons filled with generations let the Bible and science tell the same story.

Poetic generalization also came into play here. The writer generalized the creation of the universe and the creation of life to include everything that ever existed. Instead of an immediate and complete seven-day creation, the word "generations" generalized the time it took creation to unfurl.

One word lets everything evolve through generations of star-kinds, generations of plant-kinds, generations of animal-kinds, and generations of human-kinds. The Creator controls all the generations that ever existed and all the generations to come.

Generations are an essential component of God's good creation.

YAHWEH'S GIFT

God blessed the seventh day for rest. Rest did not mean a nap or that God could not create anything else. He did not stop that blessing any more than He stopped blessing the multiplication of kinds. His involvement with the generations did not end. More importantly, His sanctification did not end.

That concept gave me goosebumps.

Day 7 continued. It did not stop where tradition said it stopped.

Time never limits the Creator. God rested (waited) through thousands of generations. That time included Adam and Eve, where humanity began, and Abraham, who received a special message. God continued the day through the generations of biblical Jews, who lived in the sanctification of the seventh day. No matter how sinful, those generations remained under God's initial blessing.

The generations are intrinsic to the day's sanctification. Within day 7, God made a holy people. He set the Israelites apart as priests to the nations. They did not comprehend that purpose because they needed to understand holiness first. God gave them a weekly reminder called Sabbath. Celebrating that day filled the participants with holiness as they communed with their Creator.

Yahweh made the Sabbath to benefit people, for rest and for growing in holiness. Jesus described rest as still available (Matthew 11:28-30). Yet, we still fail to understand the importance of rest. Every one of us needs to rest with God.

All generations live under God's blessing and sanctification. Humanity simply needs to know that God offers holiness to all. Learning God's ways provides the needed rest for our souls. The Creator's rest continues blessing the generations with sanctification.

Now, that is Good News!

YAHWEH'S KEY

God inserted His Name as the third key at the end of day 7. *Yahweh* had not finished creating. It may have taken generations, but He formed a new creation (Isaiah 43:18-19, 48:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17), with a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-

34; Luke 22:20), at the beginning of the age of the Gentiles (Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 12:32b; Luke 21:24).

“God Incarnate” lived during that transition. The Son followed the Father’s example. He repeatedly blessed the generations and sanctified preachers of the Good News. We are to rest in that blessing.

The passion and death of Jesus echoed the pattern of Jewish cleansing ceremonies. Those rites took seven days plus one. On the eighth day, the person brought a sacrifice to the priest, who then declared the ritual complete. Similarly, Jesus presented himself to the priests as a living sacrifice. His last words were, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30 NIV). Day 7 ends with Jesus dying on the cross.

Day 8 begins the new creation with a new covenant to become the age of the Gentiles. Jesus arose on the eighth day, cleansed of death and renewed with life.

When will this day end? I do not know. What will come next? Probably something wonderful with seasons of terrible growing pains. I expect the eighth day to be like all other days of creation. It will seem to us like too much time, yet each day takes as long as it takes.

Within day 8, humans have drastically changed how we view ourselves and creation. Yet, the Creator still transforms individuals and societies. That process is in its early stages. God desires to soften our hearts and open our minds. He replaces hate with love, fear with trust.

Do not worry. God loves His creation, especially His thick-skulled children. Our Creator has plenty of patience for the evolution of the generations.

CREATION'S REWIND

In my experience, preachers generally skip the “second creation” (Genesis 2:5-6) as it messes up the flow of their epic story. The only part they include is the mist (streams). They insert it into the garden story. Some people also use it as “proof” that it rained the first time at Noah’s Flood.

As you might guess, I do not believe that either inclusion proves anything. Those doctrines expose the rationalizations of perfectionistic traditions. I will discuss my reasons in later chapters. However, removing those usages made me wonder, “What was the point of these verses? What was God trying to say?” It sounded like God started creating again, but awkwardly, so my inclination ignored the verses, too. Still, I had a nagging feeling I was missing something important.

I was.

This part of the creation continues the reversed order begun at the end of verse 4. Its highly simplified state includes the same relationships of seasons and time from Genesis 1. The writer was saying, “Even backward, the story works!” It restates the writer’s creed, “You cannot find anything *Yahweh Elohim* did not create, even in the ordinary things of life.” These two verses tell the same creation story, not a separate and sloppy second version. Like many of the Psalms, the creation poem ends in a different voice as a summation.

Below is my paraphrased interpretation.



* BEFORE PEOPLE TILLED THE GROUND, there was a time before plants (days 6 and 3).

* Before plants covered the land, there was a time before rain (day 3 and 2).

* Before God sent rain, there was a time when only mist watered the Earth (day 2).



Wow! My eyes popped open. Do you see the progression? This Bronze Age passage presents an understanding of the scientific concept of causality (cause and effect). Not until Aristotle (384-322 BC) do we find the first writings on this principle. Europeans did not start integrating the idea into their cultural understanding of nature until about the 14th century.

These two overlooked verses foreshadow the study of physics. Everything existing today required something that came before it. That one concept built the foundation theories for life's evolution and Big Bang cosmology. So, once again, the Bible tells the same story as science.

Are you as shocked as I was?

CREATION'S SONG

I found the evidence for divine inspiration. The structure of day 7 completed the form of Genesis 1, including its in-your-face attitude. It intertwined circular sets to connect everything in creation with the Creator. It tied the entire passage together in a neat poetic package and bound creation to the rest of the Bible.

This Bronze Age poem of creation allows for a modern scientific reading. Not one word rejects the 21st century understanding of nature. So, dance and clap your hands!

The Big Bang and evolution theories harmonize with the beats of God's beautiful love song.

Our God controls the beginning, the end, and everything in between.

How can you not be impressed?

CHAPTER 13

RETELLING THE CREATION

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'

-- Isaiah 46:9-10 NIV

The knowledge of how the details work is one thing. Recognizing their beauty is something else. Telling the story revitalizes both the writer's vision and the reader's soul.

This chapter is my paraphrased interpretation of Genesis 1 through 2:6.

I focus on the poetic structure of the biblical text that connects a created space to the objects that fill that space. The poetic circles emphasize the relationship between the details within a set and the interrelationship of everything created in the other sets. That means day 4 follows immediately after day 1. The word "day" is a metaphor for each

unfolding era within a set. It stands for an appointed season of years.

I weave scientific findings in with the wording of the poem to reveal how one describes the other. Poetic order aligns the text details with scientific order. Nature becomes the interpreter of the biblical story.

I give you harmony. Sing along.

CREED OF EVERYTHING

Sing the love song of creation.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1 NIV).

The writer penned his statement of faith as a creed, which encapsulated his entire cosmology. One God created everything without the need for any other entity’s involvement.

OPENING THE UNIVERSE

-- Genesis 1:1-5

Our universe actualized in the instant of God’s desire, but what He first created grew into today’s reality. Creator confined the totality of what could be into a singularity, a point tinier than a dot, smaller than the smallest particle. That singularity was so minute it occupied no space at all. It took no time. It involved no light. It had no mass. The singularity was formless, just as Scripture claimed.

Then... Creator inhaled. Space inflated at a speed faster than anything in the universe today. The nothingness

instantly became something, but that something was void of things.

Inflation cooled the emptiness, and an ocean of super-hot plasma formed. However, even the tiniest particles, the parts of atoms, cannot exceed the speed of light, so the universe slowed.

Creator caressed the young universe like a mother bird settling on her nest. The fluidic plasma responded. Currents flowed, regions separated, and concentration fused the protons and electrons into existence.

He spoke a gentle command. "Be light."

The newborn universe became light as photons found room to travel. A glorious, radiant uniformity tolerated no darkness, no shadow.

Creator smiled. He knew the goodness of this light mirrored the pure light of Heaven.

However, as matter increased, photons decreased, and the light quickly faded into darkness.

God waited.

Time is not relevant to God. He treated creation with unending patience, where the perception of time dominates and limits understanding. The Creator let events unfold naturally. God, forever a gentleman, waited patiently for this lady.

When the time was right, and out of the darkness, the densest accumulation of hydrogen burst into flame. Fusion recommenced. One by one, the new stars released photons from their trapped state. The universal darkness gave way to a myriad of lights.

God smiled. He enjoyed the lights.

The Big Bang required two first-light events. The initial light saturated everything equally; the second light sepa-

rated out of the darkness as stars. Just as Genesis says. Just as science describes.

The appointed season of opening the universe ended, and its filling began.

FILLING THE UNIVERSE

-- Genesis 1:14-19

Time was and is irrelevant to Creator. His words spanned nearly fourteen billion years. God filled the void with galaxy groups, a swirling dance of light on an unimaginable scale. Gravity joined them to form ribbons and tendrils of glittering radiance, defining immense bubbles of darkness. The oldest and most distant galaxies teach us of light's origin, the rhythm of chaotic flow.

Within the galaxies, the stars waltz around a central singularity, a massive black hole. The dance gives homage to the beginning and evidence of its possibility. The early stars did not last long, but they had a purpose. Heavier atoms fused within their cores and flung outward in their death throes. These brilliant endings propelled colorful bubbles of irradiated gas and dust far out into surrounding space, mimicking the universe's initial expansion. Gravity collected the gas and dust into nurseries, which birthed new stars. Extra dust formed rotating disks around the stars, imitating galaxies. Gravity again gathered the gas and dust. This time it built objects to reflect the light.

As Creator danced along with the twirling cosmos, He watched a baby yellow star form in a dusty nursery. The dynamics of gravity nudged it clear of its siblings and freed it from their destructive influence. The star drifted into unobstructed space. As it traveled, its cloud condensed into lumps. God smiled. One planet with a strong magnetic field

waltzed with a large moon. This planet orbited in a fantastic location, where life would soon flourish.

God foresaw a future generation. People would reflect on the heavenly lights in ways more elaborate than for waking and sleeping. They would notice how the sun marked days, the moon described months, and the stars denoted years. They would study seasons, analyze movement, and guess at the relational functions.

He also knew they would contrive magical explanations that blinded them to their Creator.

Much further in the future, their children would invent tools to concentrate light. Advancements would bring new marvels into focus. They would unravel the structure of enormous galaxies and the smallest particles. Then, His creation would act as an interpreter to take them beyond religious agendas and remove all aspects of magic.

We live in that marvelous time. Yet, most of the universe's secrets remain hidden in the endless vastness for future generations to discover and appreciate. God looked forward to that era of comprehension too. Each revelation brings us closer to understanding His ways. That pursuit gives Him joy, so He waits patiently.

The appointed season of filling the universe ended, and the next season began.

OPENING THE SKY AND SEA

-- Genesis 1:6-8

The planet with the large moon spent its youth lifeless. God spoke lovingly to initialize transformation. From the solar disk, meteors of stone and water-ice rained down. Gases steamed out of the impacts as mists. The growing atmosphere equalized the temperature of the planet,

allowing liquid water to accumulate on the surface. The liquids coalesced in basins and overflowed across the flats. Levels increased until life-sustainable seas covered the primal rock. The planet became a water world capable of supporting life.

Oceans separated from the atmosphere, which came from above, just as Scripture says. God enjoyed this incredible time of creating spaces for future creatures.

The appointed season of opening sky and sea ended, and its filling began.

FILLING THE SEA AND SKY

-- Genesis 1:20-23

God spoke. The lifeless orb responded, and life sprang into being. From the heights, the oceans filled with water; from the finned depths, the sky fluttered—a poetic balance of opposites. Within these two extremes, man has never dominated, not yet.

Current discoveries revealed God's first creatures were not the large animals we see with our eyes. Instead, life began as tiny snippets of RNA fabricated from minerals and molecule strands prolific throughout the universe. On Earth, these ancient fragments changed into something new. Organisms originated from the dirt, just as our Scripture said.

God's direction formed the first DNA. The descendants of first-life ate, grew, and reproduced. Creator blessed them with abundance. Streams of diverging continuity flowed from the firstborn to fill the ocean.

Creator's creatures changed over time. First, free-floating cells gathered into colonies, and then portions of the group diversified to benefit society. Eventually, the cells

lost independence. The collective became multi-cellular, dependent upon the whole for survival. The larger organisms coexisted symbiotically with some of the single-celled organisms, benefiting both.

God preserved the evidence of that evolution beautifully in stone. The earliest were mere streaks, lumps, color variations, or marks where they moved. Then, animals developed harder skins and shells that eventually fossilized. They, too, became prolific. In a short amount of geological time, life modified drastically, and all the animal phyla known today appeared. Generation after generation, a progression of variation filled the oceans.

A myriad of forms developed that no longer resembled each other or their distant forebears. Even so, some ancient lineages remained with very little change. Through His infinite wisdom, God sustained fossils in living forms. Many creatures have changed little since they developed, like archaeobacteria, dragonflies, and crocodiles. Without them, we could not imagine such alien organisms.

The biblical poet deliberately related two extreme environments and united those with the extremes of life within them. The structure repeated the poet's creed: one God created everything above and everything below.

The natural evidence showed a progression of sea animals acclimating to freshwater then venturing onto land. From them, creatures took to the sky, first the insects, then the vertebrates. One of the first tetrapod lines eventually became the dinosaurs. Of all the forms dinosaurs evolved into, only the birds remain. The writer linked all the aquatic animals with flying animals. He paid homage to an extinct lineage not understood until recently. Dinosaurs ruled the world while our ancestors hid in the dirt. We still knock the dust off our feet while they fly above us.

Only an inspired passage could connect such divergent details without contradiction. God gave us the evidence to appreciate past relationships to understand the present ones. He wants us to see His creation as He does.

Generalization allowed paleontology and the Bible to match perfectly. Before anything lived on land, the oceans thrived. Once life inhabited dry-land, the sky soon fluttered.

The appointed season of filling sea and sky ended, and the next season began.

OPENING THE LAND

-- Genesis 1:9-13

The poet of creation then described everything God created between the above and below spaces. Genesis matched geology and paleontology with details impossible for the writer to have known.

Before the sky blanketed the world or the oceans flowed beneath, a mass of accumulated space debris built the rocky sphere we now call Earth. It looked like all the other protoplanets, but this one had potential. Its surface moved. It cracked apart, and pieces scraped together. Large areas rose and fell as collisions buckled, compressed, and stretched. God added atmosphere and water to the rock. His recipe mixed various compounds underground and then shoved the batter upward through volcanism.

Something wonderful emerged from those ovens. The union formed dry-land, which soon dominated the oceanic plates. Continental rocks are lighter than the original oceanic stones. In the movement of tectonic plates, ocean floors sink beneath them, building more volcanoes and pushing mountains higher. Volcanic eruptions deposited

new rock upon the surface until the surface grew above the water.

The biblical text says dry-land could be seen above the collected water. That statement agrees with science. Continents grew taller and broader. They became dry-land as they pushed the oceans aside, just as Scripture describes.

However, Earth contains more than volcanic stones. Our dynamic atmosphere and ocean eroded mountains into pebbles and sand, then transported the rubble far away, eventually returning the debris to the sea. The continents grew broader with sedimentation. In the water, chemical reactions formed new kinds of stone from the silt. Plate tectonics heated, compressed, and crushed those rocks as well. Metamorphosis created treasures of incredible beauty ornamented with metallic ribbons. Creator hid these resources just below the surface, within reach of man to find, use, desire, and study.

God then gave the lifeless dry-land purpose. He spoke, and the ocean responded. One of the firstborn single-celled lineages used sunlight to convert carbon dioxide into food, manufacturing the byproduct of oxygen. Botanists believe cyanobacteria and chloroplasts originated the plant lineage. Those beautifully complex yet simple creatures oxygenated our atmosphere. They prepared the world for future habitation.

The descendants of those early life forms diversified. The single-celled became multi-celled colonies. They filled every body of water with plants. Five hundred million years ago, only algae mounds (stromatolites) dotted the edge of air, ocean, and land. Sea plants soon adapted to freshwater, then from aquatic to swamp. Cells that initially held colonies onto the seafloor by holdfasts modified to absorb water and nutrients as roots. Plants reached for the light

and moved inland. God's evolution strengthened stalks into trunks, and the plants grew upward. He invented numerous leaf forms, efficient to absorb light and produce shade.

Creator blessed the plants. The world radically changed in under 100 million years. Where sand once ruled, lush forests of fern and conifer reached high into the sky.

Dry-land grew out of the oceans. Rivers of eroded rock provided minerals to support the diversity of life in the ocean and extended an invitation for plants to come ashore. Plants colonized dry-land before any animal.

Like sea animals and birds, the poet linked dry-land and plants to proclaim the same pattern seen by science: the relationship of all things created.

The appointed season of opening land ended, and its filling began.

FILLING THE LAND

-- Genesis 1:24-31

Plants enticed herbivores. A whisper from God lured the gastropods and arthropods out of the water. In a short eon, they filled the world.

Snails and bugs attracted insectivores. Amphibians and fish heard the call. God blessed the lineages as the eons passed, and creatures adapted to drier conditions. Just as the Scripture said, just as the evidence God left us showed, a rush of diversification produced all kinds of land animals within the Carboniferous period. God played with genetics using evolution: His idea, His invention, His tool.

Out of the first land creatures, a distinct lineage of animals evolved. Their skull plates aligned distinctively, and their teeth differentiated inside those skulls. Their descendants grew hair, and babies developed inside their

frames. They lived alongside the dinosaurs until the dinosaurs grew big and our distant ancestors became small. After the dinosaur reign ended, those small mammals conquered and populated the planet in a multitude of forms and sizes. They encroached on every ecosystem, even into the sea and sky.

Then, God directed the scene. He did not idly talk to Himself, to an angel, or an unnamed council. His plans included the only other character presented in the text, the one who helped Him create everything, the entire universe. Creator spoke in this manner.

“We, Creator with creation, will make something new. From you, he receives lineage. Like me, he will create and rule. Therefore, I declare our image precious.”

Out of the dominant animals, the evidence shows a trifling lineage emerging. Those creatures were not large, or fast, or incredibly prolific. They hid in trees and ran from carnivores as prey. From them, one lineage changed quickly, even more so as they discovered tools. The last to emerge from a long list of almost-humans was the species we named *Homo Sapiens*. We alone remain. The evidence agreed with Genesis 1: humans appeared at the end.

God blessed and commanded humanity to master their environment. He gave an intellect above instinct to understand things beyond edible or safe. Creator desired them to explore all aspects of His universe, to learn their relationship with it. He invited them to discover how He lovingly created everything. Our Creator mandated that we govern His creation, investigate it, and mold it, to be like Him.

God smiled. His creatures were good, just as He desired.

The appointed season of filling land ended, and the next season began.

RESTING DAY

-- Genesis 2:1-4

God waited again. This time He waited for the activation of a bloodline that would look like Him. The lineage had to become something new. He rested in the knowledge that evolution would produce the goodness He desired. The Creator blessed and sanctified this time of waiting. He anticipated friends coming from these creatures, so He enjoyed watching them mature.

God waited for the right moment to end this day. He established a chosen people to carry His message and took responsibility for all their sins (Genesis 15). For them, God instituted a rest day, each seventh day, to establish a relationship and celebrate His sovereignty over their existence (Exodus 16). *Yahweh* connected with creation through this chosen people's bloodline until the two became one in Jesus (John 10:30).

Just like with evolution, God opened a bloodline that connected to the old. He filled it with people who became a new creation with a new covenant—just like in the creation poem, a new day opened. We live within the eighth day, the age of the Gentiles.¹

This poem contained the generations of heaven and Earth. It concludes as it began, God created everything.

CREATION'S RETELLING

-- Genesis 2:5-6

Long ago, a time existed before plants spouted on land. God controlled the world during that time before rain, long before human-kind existed to till the soil. That young

Earth, long past, contained only mists to dampen the rocky ground.

EVERYTHING'S SEASON

Genesis and science tell the same story.

Poetry says more in fewer words than any narrative could. Through the word-craft of a master poet, the creation story outlines the natural order. It describes both the ancient cosmology and the current one beautifully, ending in a summary and a song of praise like so many psalms. It matches the events and relationships science recognizes without contradiction. Scientific discoveries simply fill in the specifics of how God created the universe.

* The universe is one, as its Creator is One.

* Nature is one, as its Creator is One.

* Life is one, as our Creator is One.

* Humanity is one, as our Creator is One.

* The Bible is one, as its Creator is One.

I find all that oneness exhilarating!

CHAPTER 14

LOST AND FOUND

I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.

-- Matthew 13:35 NIV, quoting Psalm 78:2

The seven days of creation transformed from a source of irritation into a cup of giddy joy. I now see the loving Creator working in this world, the one in which we live. The all-powerful hand of God controls everything in the universe using the natural laws He established. The Father caresses each atom as He encourages the goodness of His presence.

I innocently asked, "Where did such a miraculous treasure come from?"

FINDING THE ORIGIN

Scholarly answers do not help much. Tradition says the prophet Moses wrote or dictated the first five books of the Bible. However, theologians disagree. Some people believe

the prophet took dictation from God; no errors were accepted. Other people say Moses collected the Israelites' traditional stories to add to his. And then, some insist all five books came much later than the time of Moses.

The biblical writings do not give us clues as to which of those views are correct. Nothing in the Bible specifies whether God dictated, inspired, or even originated with God. All we have is traditions, the hope of forgotten knowledge. That ambiguity causes division when theologians take sides to belittle their opponent's opinions.

My cynicism resurfaced. How could I trust what any of them said? Nothing in the bickering explained the origin of Genesis 1.

Then I reread the creation and become impressed anew. I took solace in the fact that fabricated theologies did not depict reality. A glimmer of revelation lit my brain. Possibly, just possibly, it was the interpretation that blinded us from knowing. I decided God must have left a clue, so I praised my Creator for the first chapter and asked again to identify its origin.

God gave me an answer. Oddly, He sent me to the end of the next book.

Let me tell you that story.

NEEDING TO KNOW

-- Exodus 33:12-22

Moses stood on Mount Sinai, and he boldly asked God to show His face. This was not an idle request; pardon the pun. The calf-shaped idol just cost the Israelites three thousand men. It took some persuading to keep God from snuffing them all out, so being able to tell the people about what they worshipped was very important. Moses pleaded

with God to give him something. He needed to provide an alternative description.

God hesitated for a moment. He insisted the sight of His face was fatal. Then God relented; His back was not.

So, Moses stood on a rock inside a cleft. God obscured the mortal's vision while His glory passed by the thin slice of earth and sky. Finally, the hand lifted, and Moses saw the back of God.

The text omitted the description of God and the scene changed.

Moses received carved replicas of the stone tablets he had smashed. He returned to the camp glowing, which prompted the people to ask him to veil His face.

SEEING GOD

I found that strange, so I asked God, "What has that story got to do with Genesis 1?"

He answered, "A lot."

I started examining the passage and saw three points of interest.

First, seeing just the back of God imprinted on Moses so thoroughly that he glowed. His friends and family would have asked about this phenomenon. He would have attempted to explain it to them.

Second, it was inappropriate to think of the front, back, and the hand of God as human-shaped because faithful Israelites never worshipped a human-shaped God (Deuteronomy 4:9-20; Isaiah 40, 44:6-23). God's people worshipped someone different from everything around them. God did not look like any animal, plant, rock, astral body, or human. He was invisible, intimate, and every-

where. The Israelites saw their God clothed in a fiery cloud, but neither fire nor cloud captured His essence.

The Tabernacle featured an empty space for God above the Mercy Seat, where an idol's throne would have stood. Moses taught that no image could capture the likeness of God, and the Israelites should not try. God was superior to... well, everything.

Third, what did Moses see? The text skipped the description. What happened to such a significant portrayal?

It was not in the book of Exodus or the other three books that told of the life of Moses. I started trying to visualize the scene.

I believe attempts to write down the vision would have failed to capture the glory. Notes taken as Moses spoke turned into laborious and futile attempts to capture the expanse of the God of everything. The prophet would have insisted the writing be accurate. However, a comprehensive description seemed impossible.

I imagined Moses burning pages in frustration.

MISPLACING TEXT

Nevertheless, one would think someone kept a scrap of that attempt if the Bible was truly inspired. The underlying tendency of humans to protect valuable information opened my eyes to an amazing possibility. That path began with how humans understand the spiritual.

I believe a spiritual vision requires a physical framework set within a cultural perspective. That means humans only see images they can relate to their experiences and understand within their culture. So God shows and describes spiritual things to people in a form that makes

sense at a mental and physical level. Without that kind of comprehension, a vision is meaningless.

God is Spirit. If the God of Abraham did not have recognizable form, then what could Moses have seen through the cleft rock that would make any sense to him? What was so big, so detailed, but also compatible with human sight?

In the story, God described what Moses saw as His goodness (Genesis 33:19). That helps us at an emotional level, but it does not help visualize anything. Goodness is not physical.

Considering that word unblocked my vision. The Hebrew root word of “goodness” repeatedly described nature in Genesis 1. The creation text unfolded in my mind as the description of God. God’s back looked like the history of the entire universe! Instead of a physical back, Moses saw everything that ever existed.

DESCRIBING GOD

From the depths of my mind, the theology of pantheism arose in rejection of that idea. In it, people taught that the universe was a manifestation of a god or is a god.

I shook off that reproach. I never implied any such thing.

The universe was not God. It is physical.

God is bigger than everything. However, we can catch a glimmer of who He is by what He made (Romans 1:20). I believe God created the universe in a way that describe His characteristics. Those qualities support the teachings of the prophets.

If God is always with everything, then He was in the past and will be in the future. Therefore, the history of the universe became the closest description of God in our phys-

ical world. Past events showed us what God had done and how He did them. The biblical prophets repeatedly told the people to remember their history. With knowledge, we could determine why God acted as He did.

I giggled when I remembered that a common human convention described past events as being behind or at one's back. What God showed Moses fit with how most people thought.

In the same way, God's face became the future. This concept provides a reason why the vision of this part of God was lethal. History might be vast, but it is fixed in time. Our minds can condense events into comprehensible collections.

On the other hand, the future is in flux. God predetermined very few events: like the reality of death and the end of time. The future may be finite, but each second contains nearly infinite possibilities of outcomes to every possible circumstance. Each variable is possible, some being highly unlikely but still possible. As the present aligns with the flowing future, the possibilities become fewer until only one of the variables solidifies in time.

God can handle that chaos, but a human mind would literally burn out.

Studying the universe shows us the size of God. He is bigger than everything we will ever measure. We also see God's processes. For example, he commands nature, but instead of dictating the placement of each atom, God installed evolution to create variability within all the possibilities.

The creation story told us God was interested in every detail of His creation, including us. God enjoyed the experience. He has not changed.

FINDING TIME

I looked at the problem in a different way, “Who wrote the creation text, when and why?”

The Bible begins with the five “books of Moses.” Traditions say the prophet wrote them. However, many theologians disagree, with the extreme cases insisting Ezra wrote them all.

I believe that Moses commissioned scribes to collect information, including the Israelites’ old stories. Storytellers told the history in differing styles. Moses kept the ones God designated. Time sifted and revised those to produce what Ezra included in his cannon.

This scenario works for most of the five books, but the first chapter of Genesis is different. It is not a simple history story. Instead, the writer produced a complex poem requiring the reader to connect the relationships between all things created and the Creator.

I believe this unique poem grew out of Moses’ attempts to describe what he saw – the back of God. That endeavor meshed the skill of a master poet with God’s inspiration. Together, they condensed the meticulous description Moses gave into a coherent and eloquent text. Multiple attempts to describe the vision even explain why the “second” creation story (Genesis 2:5-6) exists, and why it tells the same story in a different style.

LOCATING TEXT

I raised another question, “If the creation text was the description of God, why is it at the beginning of the book and not in Exodus?”

The answer became apparent when I thought about

how the people of that time handled written documents. Moses lived before the invention of the printing press and paper. They generally wrote on a thin sheet of animal skin, woven papyrus sheet, or clay tablet. Papyrus grew in the Nile valley; the wandering Israelites would have had a limited supply. Clay was available but bulky to transport. They had animals. Even if they first used something other than animal skin, then they would have copied it onto the animal skin for safekeeping.

People stacked loose sheets. In time, they eventually sewed them into scrolls. Before they did so, actively changing or very important documents might stay on top of the pile.

A later generation might no longer remember this poem as the description Moses gave of God. Instead, they would think it logical to place the beginning at the beginning, and so, the text became misplaced in plain sight.

INSPIRING SONG

This location interpretation made the revelation of God's back more valuable than Moses or the Law. Genesis 1 was a song parents sang to their children before studying the Laws. It integrated into how their nation came into being. Throughout their history, the prophets reminded people of this poem. They did so because their Creator loved them.

The Creator has not changed. He still loves His good creation.

CHAPTER 15

A DAY OF REST

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

-- Exodus 20:8 NIV

God rested and declared the seventh day holy (Genesis 2:2-3).

I have heard many preachers call the last day of creation “the first Sabbath.” Moses made a big deal out of the Sabbath. The later prophets criticized their fellow Jews because they would not keep God’s commands about the Sabbath. Jesus rested with God every seventh day and still desires to give us rest (Matthew 11:28-29).

To me, those seem like compelling reasons to keep the Sabbath. So, as a child, I started to wonder, “If God instituted this day at the dawn of humanity, then why did early Christians discontinue its celebration?”

Should we observe this Jewish ritual?

RESTING DAY

I will start with Genesis 2:1-4. Was that day a Sabbath? The answer is no, but partly yes.

The passage uses the Hebrew word for “rest” or “cease.” It is the root word for the Sabbath, but it does not specify the religious event. Resting is what someone does. Therefore, God rested at the end of creation, and a person rests on the “day of rest.” God made the act of resting holy: first for Himself, then for people.

The patriarchs never mentioned keeping the Sabbath because God had not established the ritual in their time. Instead, God introduced the Sabbath just before the Israelites reached Mount Sinai. It came with manna (Exodus 16:23). For forty years, the people gathered a daily ration of this God-given food except for every seventh day. Why? Normally manna spoiled overnight, but not preceding that day.

Food! What a great way of getting people’s attention.

However, this rest day was never about eating. For one day a week, God commanded everyone to stop doing routine chores. Instead of work, He instructed people to rest and contemplate their Creator and His salvation.

God officially wrote the Sabbath in stone at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:8-11). From then on, the Bible emphasizes this holy day as essential. The dictate does not apply just to priests or those with time to spare. It includes men, women, children, and all their animals. It even embraces servants, slaves, and all the foreigners living nearby. Everyone rests.

The blessing did not stop with just resting. The Sabbath involved communication between generations. The

creation poem provided a song that the Israelite parents sang with their children. They sang to remember their Creator, who gave provision, rest, and community.

When we read the first chapter of the Bible, believers can join that lineage of joyful rest. God wants His children to relax from daily drudgery and sing a happy Sabbath song.

COMMANDING SABBATH

Restful days and happy songs did not answer my overall question, and the connection between the Sabbath and creation still intrigued me. What did that relationship mean?

If an eon-based creation is accurate, then did God lie to the Israelites? He commanded the people to observe the Sabbath as holy because of the days of creation. He united the two in the Ten Commandments. Both the Sabbath and the creation describe seven days. How can they mean different measures of time?

The use of an analogy solves the puzzle. The two parts must relate, but an exact match is not necessary. Instead, the link infused significance into the newly introduced holy day. The covenant and commandments merged with everything God created, including the creation of the Israelites as a chosen people.

God wanted a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6). If they faithfully followed the commandments, then the Israelites would become unique. The Sabbath was an integral part of that transformation. It focused on building a relationship with God, becoming more like Him. If God rested, then so should His people.

WRITING REST

Interestingly, the word “rest” in day 7 unlocks the probable time when the poet of Genesis 1 wrote this masterpiece.

* A patriarch probably did not write the creation poem. They were nomads who became slaves. Scrolls are bulky. Therefore, people transferred knowledge by oral history.

* If the poet wrote of the creation long after Moses died, then he probably would have used the word “Sabbath” instead of “rest” to support the established religious belief.

* If the poet wrote the creation story during the life of Moses, and if Moses believed it was a Sabbath, then the correct word would likely be in the text.

* If the poet wrote during the early Mosaic era, why would he use the religious word? The Sabbath entered their lives recently. It belonged to them, not at the beginning

This logical progression gives us a time and a reason for the word “rest.” Creation’s seventh day links resting with the weekday, but not the ritual. It demonstrates how strongly the early Israelites held the Sabbath in relationship to their Creator without forcing the Sabbath into a previous time. The seventh day acts as a parallel to the Sabbath, not the founding.

HOLDING SABBATH

Jesus did not obey all the rules set by men,¹ but he followed the whole Law and kept the Sabbath holy. That also made me think we should keep the Sabbath.

Conversely, Peter and John supported Paul in not burdening Gentiles with all the Jewish Laws. Instead, they gave a very short list of rules, which did not include the

Sabbath (Acts 15:1-21). That made me think God commanded the Sabbath for the Jews only.

Once Christianity spread, Gentiles quickly separated from the Jews and began celebrating God on Sunday, not Saturday. Many Christian groups still call Sunday a Sabbath. However, despite similarities, it is not the seventh day, therefore not what God called the Sabbath.

Such radical departures from established traditions worried me. Should we or should we not call our Sunday services a Sabbath? Should Gentiles even try to hold the Sabbath? If we do, how strict should we be? To keep the Sabbath biblically, we should not go shopping, not eat at a restaurant, and not walk a dog on Saturday. Even a home-cooked meal would be a sin.

Christians have worried about and asked those same questions for nearly 2000 years. Their answers swing back and forth, just like mine used to do. Should we follow Moses' word, or is Peter's binding? I got dizzy trying to figure it out.

WEAVING LAW

I focused my Sabbath quest on one of the New Testament's more confusing statements (Matthew 5:17-20). Here, Jesus wove His story into the story of Moses and the creation story. Only when I realized how all the pieces fit together did it finally make sense.

In the passage's second half, Jesus said anyone who teaches an incomplete version of the Mosaic Law becomes less than those who practice and teach the whole Law. However, getting to Heaven requires we be better than those who meticulously follow the Law.

To me, that statement always sounded like an impossible goal. It probably seemed that way to His listeners too. How can we excel when we continuously fall short? How can an ordinary person be better than those who devote themselves to excellence?

As usual, Jesus used a parable form. He gave a verbal head-smack to the Pharisees. They wanted to follow a list, with God's "most important" on top. Sects argued over order and padded the Laws with added rules to "play it safe." Such ever-growing lists let a few people appear pious, but only on the surface.

Jesus calls such religious practices burdensome (Luke 11:46) because they only produce worries. Those who practice perfectly fear they must do more. Those who cannot follow enough rules feel condemned and unloved by God.

These human-dictated rules delete an important command from the Law. Legalistic lists almost always drop "love your neighbor" when it should be second to "love God." Without love, teachings about "neighbors" become so muddled that we must ask what the command means. Jesus answers with the Good Samaritan story, which clearly illustrates the distortion of the standard teachings (Luke 10:25-37).

This understanding applies to the Sabbath. If keeping the day becomes a status symbol, then the religious ritual condemns when it should nourish and restore. Most people lose its purpose as busy schedules win. Like the Old Testament Jews, the Sabbath and its benefits drop off when our legalistic lists dominate.

Jesus condenses all the Laws down to love (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). Hatred and lust held in the heart are sins against the command to love (Leviticus 19:18, 34). He even asks us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:21-48).

Jesus also does not condemn the Pharisees for wanting to follow their beloved traditions. He simply says doing so makes their beliefs less accurate. God does not see the ability to follow laws as superior or even righteous, just good.

So, how can an ordinary person be better than those who devote themselves to excellence? Learn to live like Jesus, who walked in God's love. People do not need to attain perfection through rituals. God sees those who practice love as better than the "pious best."

WEAVING CREATION

Following Law was not the only troublesome part of the Matthew 5:17-20 passage. Jesus claimed He came to fulfill (complete) the Law and the prophets, not trash them. Before losing the tiniest part of Law, heaven and Earth would pass away (disappear, die, perish).

For decades my brain tripped over His words. I was sure Jesus meant God still required we keep the Mosaic Laws. I feared that Christians were merely obstinate, particularly about the Sabbath. The statement of Jesus begged the question. "If creation still exists, then why not follow the Law? Why is the Sabbath no longer mandatory?"

I then recalled how insistence of Paul and Peter that Law no longer binds us. God's way is different from our way. I had to think differently, so I looked at how Jesus connected to creation.

* The human part of Jesus inherited a Jewish lineage and covenant. He loved both. He also knew that without repentance, His people would lose it all (Deuteronomy 28).

* Peter insisted his fellow Jews killed the author of life

(Acts 3:15). As a Jew, Peter believed in only one God, the Creator. There could be no other.

* Moses saw the back of God as the history of creation (Genesis 1). If Jesus is God, then the immortal back of the Son is the same history.

When Jesus died, the best part of creation died. If God died, then “everything” died that day. However, neither creation nor the Laws vanished. To my surprise, the precedence of God’s enduring love explains why. The Creator’s promise intervened.

God did not give this promise to Moses or through a later prophet. Instead, He spoke this one directly to Abraham. He assured a childless man that the Levant² would fill with his children (Genesis 15). Moses freed the Israelite slaves to keep God’s promise to Abraham (Exodus 33:1). Joshua carried that promise into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:2-6). King David made a nation out of the twelve tribes.

The covenant with Abraham required death when one side failed in their commitment. God himself took the place of humanity because He knew hard-headed humans needed salvation. The Israelites broke their commitment as sons of Abraham and followers of Mosaic Law. Jesus/God died to satisfy the law of covenant with Abraham.

The Creator’s promise to David intervened, too. Even if David’s bloodline required punishment, the kingdom would endure (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jesus became the King of kings and began a new covenant of love built upon the earlier covenants that taught love. God’s promise includes all humanity, not one nation. His kingdom will fill the entire world, not just the Levant.

Through God’s promises and covenants, the love taught

by the Law will endure. Creation continued because God loves.

TEACHING SABBATH

Jesus proclaimed, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27b-28 NIV; Luke 6:5).

God emphasized the importance of keeping the Sabbath because relationship changes our lives. The ongoing practice of rest actively builds intimacy with our Creator. He teaches us to be good as we consider our lives and rest from worries. He imparts peace instead of fear.

Paul got it. Peter and John figured it out. Instead of requiring a ritual, those Messianic Jews learned the lessons from God’s Law. They then taught the lessons to the Gentile converts. Only a loving relationship fulfilled the commands of God.

As believers, we partake in the death of Jesus. Our choice begins a new creation, which dresses us in the spiritual characteristics of our King. By following the command to love, God promises to instruct us in the fullness of His ways. We no longer need the Mosaic Law to bind us. Instead, we use it to learn to walk the correct path.

ENDURING PLAN

God’s command did not change. He created us to evolve into what He wants. We change as we give lordship to Jesus. God’s love of His creation lives within us. As we learn to love our Creator with our entire being, one day a week will never be enough. Worship penetrates our routine. Like

breathing, Sabbath flows through each day, and our day-to-day life sings the song of our Creator. We rest in Him.

God cleanses believers with His own blood. God Himself teaches us to be good. God gives us the right to become living temples and glow like Moses (2 Corinthians 6:16 and 3:18). We join our Creator in a living Sabbath.

PART THREE
THE GARDEN STORY

GENESIS 2:7-9 - 3:1-24

CHAPTER 16

EDEN REVISITED

The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers.

-- Isaiah 10:17 NIV

My quest to understand the biblical creation stories did not focus on Genesis 1 alone. I spent years feeling appalled at how varied the beliefs of Christians had become.

Still, I pressed forward and held onto hope. Almost all the variations began with a perfect creation. Maybe discarding those unbiblical ideas would align Eden with science. I begged for God for something substantial while peeling off the obscuring details covering Eden.

He answered again. This story is so much better without Greek perfectionism.

FORM AND FICTION

One of the last things I learned about Genesis 1 through 11 is the first thing that I will share with you. The stories were written in entirely different styles.

That sounds so obvious. I always knew they were different, but it took me a long time to see that notion as highly significant for proper interpretation.

The ancient Hebrews did not write a holy book called Genesis. God had Moses and his scribes record their oral history handed down from before Abraham. Many centuries later, and after the Israelites returned from the devastation of Babylonian exile, the redactors (editors) compiled fragments of texts into a single canon. They deliberately did not blend them into one epic or modify the forms to match.

What I found most interesting was the individual stories contained information that the epic interpretations lost or distorted. For example, the creation poem (Genesis 1) was the story of everything, too big to focus on only two humans in a garden. It was the making of the entire universe, including human-kind. Contrast that with the multiple Eden stories that were each a tiny slice-of-life, too small to dictate planet-wide norms.

Nevertheless, Christians forced the creation and Eden stories into a combined epic. They either insisted the whole planet looked like Eden or a barren wilderness. Not only did those beliefs oppose each other, but the biblical accounts did not support either of those descriptions. Both theologies built their worldview upon perfectionistic assumptions.

FORM AND FUNCTION

I looked closer at the forms and structures of the Eden stories' segments. Again, they were different from Genesis 1 and each other.

The creation of people in Genesis 2:8-25 was more like a prologue that set the scene and introduced characters with minimal dialogue. This passage even contained a section on rivers outside Eden, which seemed out of place.

The serpent story (Genesis 3:1-19) had a classic story form. Narration and dialogue moved a plot through a beginning, a middle, and an end. It contained protagonists and an antagonist. The protagonists had to make decisions and face the consequences of those choices.

The conclusion of the Eden stories (Genesis 3:20-24) combined several snippet scenes before the start of Cain's story in chapter 4.

I realized something about this collection. Storytellers do not tell us everything, just the things we need to know. Compressing history requires simplification and deletion.

The forms of the Eden stories did not dictate an entirely literal or fictional interpretation. The details might be drawn from history to express a metaphor. Or they might be expressed in metaphoric language to represent history. I kept in mind that a story form could contain a bit of each. How did the ancient Hebrew writer apply the details?

I also worried that those stories might not be inspired. From the time of Moses, the people wrote stories. The biblical redactors chose what they believed was history from the remnants the fires of war did not destroy. The redactors may have preserved cultural tales alongside inspired ones. They were human, which meant they could

have been wrong. I begged for some assurance that each story contained God's reality of truth.

Then I remembered, God could use our failures to speak to us. His inspiration included the redactors finding and judging stories worthy of canonization. God might have allowed fictional parables to match how He created humanity.

I needed to discover what details in the stories aligned with the evidence.

Yes, I was surprised and relieved at what I found. You will be too.

PARADISE AND HEAVEN

Paradise is a concept that Jews and Christians attached to the Eden stories.

The Greeks coined the word "paradise" about 400 BC after seeing the royal gardens of Babylon. To them, paradise encapsulated the best-kept gardens and best-hunting grounds. When the Jews translated the Hebrew text into Greek (c. 300 BC), they used this word in the same context. The garden in Eden was "paradise" because it comprised nature at its best (Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:33-36).

Later, "paradise" became associated with the afterlife. Since most cultures believe in a physical world after death, Hellenized Jews incorporated the word as a synonym for Heaven. While on the cross, Jesus told the man next to Him they would meet in paradise (Luke 23:43). He probably used that word because it gave the suffering man comfort. However, it is a giant leap to assume that Jesus meant Eden's garden. He described the afterlife only once, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). In that story, *Sheol* (not quite Hell) either embraced souls with

honor or held them in torment. Jesus never mentioned a garden.

Hellenized Jews and Christians accepted Greek philosophies that segregated creation into a hierarchy of spiritual domains that matched Aristotle's hierarchy of physical realms. The Greek-based beliefs located the highest Heaven beyond the stars and set Hell beneath our feet. Paradise was one of those in between, which became a spiritual garden for souls not ready for the highest Heaven. Misapplied logic linked that garden to the first one. Instead of just a great place to live, Eden became so perfect it was no longer earthly.

That interpretation let Gnostic beliefs elevate Genesis 1 into a place of perfection. But, at the same time, it degraded the concept of God's good Earth, the imperfect one, into a corrupt place only slightly better than Hell.

Christians build upon that "perfect world" theology. Our modern imagery about the creation and Eden traces back to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). His words described an elaborate world of perfection and corruption that the Bible never expressed. Instead, he wrote the epic poem as political commentary after his side of national reformation. Impoverished, depressed, and blind, Milton's emotional state permeates the poetry. He most likely felt slightly better than Hell. Our western culture embraced his beautiful words and negativity as his imagery overpowered and displaced the biblical account of creation and the Eden stories.

That needs to change.

WEEDS AND THORNS

Our view of the garden does not match the biblical depiction. The details show a good but not perfect place.

God commissioned the man to subdue the Earth and rule over animals. He then filled a garden with lots of pretty, yummy plants and made the man a gardener before the first sin occurred. The requirement of work presented the initial creation as imperfect. How does one garden in a perfect world? Doing so would disorder perfection. Instead, the story's details matched anthropological theories. Early humans ate the fruit of trees and gathered other edible foods. In doing so, they learned to tend and protect plants from other foragers to keep a stable food source.

Also, not mentioning undesirable plants does not prohibit their existence.

The text never hints that God waited until He kicked the people out of the garden to invent prickly, yucky weeds. Weeds were not a problem **inside** the garden in an orchard. However, **outside** the garden, people became farmers. Tilled soil grows plants other than those planted. Naturally invasive plants infest fields and reduced harvest, making the labor harder.

Inside the garden, the man named the animals. **Outside**, people became herdsman. Animals that stray still hide in the thorniest brush. Some plants kill livestock when eaten. Plants became a problem as humans advanced in their abilities to subdue the Earth.

The concept of a weed is a human perception, not a botanical prerequisite. One man's weed often beautifies another man's flowerbed. Think rose, a thorn bush with showy flowers. Human intolerance of unwanted plants

depicts them as wicked, even those without thorns. However, God did not.

God did not curse Adam with work because Adam already worked. God cursed the ground. Unwanted plants grew plentifully, unlike Cain's curse (Genesis 4:11-12) that kept desired plants from growing. God's words forewarned of a natural progression that resulted from learning to farm and ranch. He would not protect humanity from such hardships. That was the curse.

If God created everything good, then God liked all His plants, even the prickly, poisonous, and invasive ones. Adam's "curse" did not change the planet to something imperfect. Instead, it changed man's relationship with the planet. From then on, he worked harder for food.

ACCEPT OR REJECT

Our traditional interpretation distorts the garden story by inserting perfectionistic details and views not provided by the writer. If God inspired the text, then we must discard those additions. Only then can we hear and see what God wants us to know.

Yes, it will be difficult to change a cultural paradigm. It was for me. Yet, that shift is worth the effort. I find God's truth much more interesting than fiction. It satisfies my soul.

CHAPTER 17

IMMORTAL WORLD

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

-- 1 Timothy 4:4 NIV

PROBLEMATIC FEAST

One of my early memories tackled the logic of immortality. The Creator made everything. He is all-knowing and just. So why did the punishment for the first sin not only hurt humans but also corrupt the entire universe?

As I considered the mythical perfect world of Eden, its details did not line up with the Bible story. Christians mourned its loss, but not one biblical writer ever did. Instead, the Old Testament prophets and psalmists insisted this world was God's creation, even the deadly stuff.

I wondered, "What was the garden like? Could Eden and the natural evidence match?"

PROBLEMATIC FEAST

From childhood, I did not understand how a perfect garden could exist. Genesis 1:29-30 says all the animals and humans ate. Eating keeps animals alive. I scratched my head and wondered, “Why did immortal creatures need to eat?”

Eating creates imperfection. To eat plants, we must pull off leaves, break stems, or pull up roots. These acts can kill the plant—something not possible in a perfect and immortal world.

Both land and aquatic animals eat. Eating produces waste byproducts. One fart contaminates the perfect air. One cow pie ruins a perfect stroll.

How could any creature eat without disrupting perfection?

If the perfection of immortals destroys the idea of a perfect garden, then one or both of those concepts is wrong. Since the Bible does not describe either one, then why should we hold them as a fact given by God?

FLAWED FOOD

I have heard people justify their belief in immortals eating. Angels ate at Abraham’s tent and in Lot’s house (Genesis 18:8, 19:2). Psalm 78:23-25 calls manna the bread of angels, and Jesus referenced that passage in John 6:31. Jesus ate after rising from the dead (Luke 24:42-43). If God serves a feast in Heaven (Isaiah 25:6), then we too would eat as immortals.

I questioned those examples. They all contained alternate explanations.

* Abraham and Lot begged the angels to stay and eat.

Those beings did not say they needed rest or food after their journey. They let the men bless them with hospitality. In turn, they blessed Abraham and Lot with information.

* This psalm's translation of "angel" is traditionally biased, not literal. Out of seventeen biblical uses, only this one verse translates the word that way, and almost all the English versions follow along. Jesus says the manna came from Heaven. He did not call it angels' food. Both the psalmist and Jesus define the manna's origin, God.

* By eating, Jesus demonstrated that He was not a ghost and that He retained a human body. The act did not prove a need or desire for food. It showed His compassion for frightened people.

* The Bible describes the Heavenly feast in metaphor and parable forms, not as a fact. The writers meant that God's promises exceed all our expectations. Food represents the fullness of eternity; a seat at the table is God's acceptance. The prophets visualized Heaven as a joyous family gathering.

Can an immortal eat? Yes. Do they need to eat? The Bible does not give us that answer.

Jews and then Christians replaced the vivid symbolism of an eternal feast with a time bound physical activity. They transformed angels into superhumans to replace their mythical gods.

Heaven is not a product of our imaginations.

IMPERFECT ANIMALS

Neither Genesis 1 or 2 stipulated the creation of carnivores. Because of perfectionism, some theologies insisted God created only docile herbivores, even those with big sharp

teeth. Lions snuggled lambs as the first man petted their heads.

My first Bible contained a painting of that beautiful scene. The problem? No biblical writer mentioned any such event. Due to their perfectionistic view of Eden, Christians misquoted Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:25, and then intensified the picture using Revelation 5:5-6. However, Isaiah illustrates an ideal future, not a perfect past. In Revelation, John describes in metaphor the spiritual reality of Jesus, not creatures in a garden. Those passages do not place happy lambs and lounging lions together in Eden.

Biblically, God brought animals to the man for naming, not petting. Adam could do that from a distance. The experience emphasized that none of those creatures came close to being his equal. The man in Genesis 2:19-20 became mindful of his difference from all the animals. Self-awareness is an attribute that few animals possess. Only humans have developed it extensively.

To paint their beautiful picture, perfection theologies inserted perfect animals into the garden, which glazed over the reason for the animals' inclusion within the story. Instead of a second creation account, we, along with the man, learn a morality lesson: animals are not appropriate mates.

The reader also learns that God did not stop awakening this human. The Breath was only one stage. The man's mind needed growth too. God initiated a process that formed awareness and produced loneliness. The emotion of longing rejects the theology of a perfect creation.

Even with God at his side, the man needed more. Even today, our Creator's lessons lead us to want more. Even, sin does not change God's involvement.

FAULTY REDESIGN

Over the last several hundred years, the Christian view of creation has modified repeatedly as people accumulated knowledge about heaven and Earth. Explanations reinterpreted the Bible or redefined the evidence to support long-held beliefs. One of the more recent attempts to justify perfectionism did both. I do not have a problem with reevaluating past or new knowledge. However, this religious theory also dictates when God created and recreated creatures and why.

Genesis 1:29-30 says all the animals and humans ate herbs and tree fruits. In the second chapter, Adam did not worry about carnivores or thorns. Therefore, theologians decided God did not make meat eating animals or prickly plants until after the perfect creation ended.

Genesis did not mention problematic animals for the generations after Adam. In the mid-to-late-20th century, theologians focused on a later biblical passage. It resembles the Genesis 1 statement and indicates a change. This is called the redesign theory. For them, the transformation from docile herbivores to vicious carnivores occurred at the end of the Great Flood. They saw this happening when God tells Noah, *"Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything"* (Genesis 9:3 NIV).

Their interpretation still makes my skin twitch.

If the redesign theory is correct, then human sin forced God to corrupt creation, and He continued corrupting creation. Because of the fruit, God punished all life with death. The sin of Adam's descendants required a flood that kill almost everything. Only then did God disfigure peaceful

creatures into deadly creatures. That punishment again punished everything.

I shake my head in sorrow. This Christian theory describes sin controlling God's response. The Creator escalates violence throughout the world, even in places where humans cannot live. This "fix" did not work, so the theology describes God as intolerant and incompetent.

Nope, this is not the Creator that Jesus called Abba.

Redesign theory also makes God ignorant of His creation and His re-creation. Why? Because neither of those passages mention any inedible or poisonous life form. How then can everything be food?

Genesis 1 says God created all the kinds. Neither Genesis 3 nor 9 declares God suddenly creating more kinds or radically transforming some of the kinds. None of those passages mention meat or meat-eating animals. No biblical writer describes Adam or Noah as repulsed that God told them to eat their pets, nor are they surprised at seeing creatures eat each other.

Omission does not demand the nonexistence of weeds, carnivores, or omnivores.

Omission does not confirm their sudden appearance either.

Instead, an imperfect creation that agrees with science interprets the Bible better.

Genesis 1:29-30 acknowledges a point very early in human history, an era unknown to the writer. The Creator began creating human-kind long before He created almost-humans or humans. Anthropology suggests that our lineage may have started as semi-herbivorous creatures like the apes, eating things found in trees. As those not-remotely-humans evolved, they began to eat scavenged meat, again like a few of the apes. Long before *Homo sapiens*

developed, our lineage became omnivorous. God controlled the evolution of human-kind to develop His image.

Genesis 3:17-19 reveals the future. The occupation of farming exposed humans to abundant but unwanted plants, which were not a problem in the garden so not mentioned.

Genesis 9:3 made much more sense with a literal reading. Saving lives was the point of the ark. This included animals. Noah did not eat the animals while onboard. After disembarking, God told Noah to eat fresh food again. He did not need to mention inedible things. They were not the point.

Redesign theory supports a Greek-based perfect creation. It does not match the Hebrew scriptures or the physical evidence. The biblical creation does not need a redesign.

DEFECTIVE POWER

As a child, I often asked, "How could the sins of two humans have so much power?" The entire universe transformed. Not one atom remained perfect.

I finally realized that perfection theologies described creation as too fragile. It had to break. Not just at one point, for one species, or on one planet. Perfection ceased universally.

That is a problem. What does not last is not perfect. How can it be? It contains a design flaw from the beginning.

Worse, this belief places a requirement on the nature of God. He could not tolerate the imperfection of sin. Many of today's theologies insist He had to leave, and He had to stay away. If this were true, then sin not only had power over God's abilities; it controlled God.

Perfectionism also “calls” God a liar. Throughout the Bible, He condemned unrepentant sinners, one at a time. His punishment did not extend to anyone else. However, if sin changed the universe from perfect to imperfect, then He punished all those things that never sinned. He punished people for the sins of their ancestors. That would be unjust by His own word. Just like the Israelites, Christians demand that God comply to their beliefs (Ezekiel 18).

I concluded that any theology that required a perfect creation transformed by sin described an incompetent, inconsistent, and feeble god. That god was not the all-powerful biblical Creator.

WONDERFUL WORLD

Perfection theologies dictating creation reminded me of Galileo looking at the moon through a telescope. The mountains there fascinated him, but the religious establishment wanted the moon to remain smooth. Their view of scripture required perfection in this astral object. They did not see the wonder of reality; they felt embarrassment.

Getting rid of Greek-based perfectionistic beliefs realigns the garden’s details with science. I put my faith in the Creator to show us how He made His creation and how the biblical stories match that reality. Our perfect God deliberately created a good but imperfect place for us to learn. Our comprehension of His perfection is imperfect. We need to accept correction.

The prophets said God created this world, the world in which they lived. God’s good creation is much more wondrous than any fanciful myth describes.

This Earth is His. He made it.

CHAPTER 18

HUMANITY REVISITED

He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

-- Psalm 78:39 NIV

This journey was not easy for me. I struggled with Adam and Eve for decades and was unsure if such a story could be removed from the section marked fantasy.

Believers who insisted the two people were literal as written did not produce evidence to support their belief, yet they condemned disbelief. Those who taught the stories as a myth expected me to accept spiritual inspiration without any reason except tradition. A dismissal of Eden held better arguments, but I was not yet prepared to go there.

Guess what? God rewarded my search again, a little at a time.

TRIPLETS AND WORK

The Bible chronicles man's creation three times in three different ways. I found this very strange and was not alone in thinking it disturbing. Theologians had pondered the meaning of these multiple entries for a long time. Many supported the conclusion of story splicing. That meant more than one version (verbal or written) existed before their collection. At some point, they intertwined the scraps.

Before anyone blows a gasket at that thought, splicing does not invalidate inspiration. God has always used our imperfections for His purposes. Only His inspiration would provide a way to understand the reality behind the entries.

I concluded that the three creations of man did not constitute actual story splicing, which would have mixed the entries at least a little. Instead of splicing bits to form one story, the biblical redactors deliberately kept three distinct versions separated by unrelated information. These stand alone and convey similar ideas with subtle differences.

Here are the different stories and the reasons I found that matched nature.

* Genesis 1:26-27, God made human-kind in His image, not two individuals. It did not say God created us in a different way from other life forms. The distinction came when God singled out our species to be His image that would manage the world.

* Genesis 2:7-8, God formed a man from dust, breathed the Breath of life into him, and placed man in the garden with the two trees.

* Genesis 2:15-17, God placed a man in the garden, this time to work as a gardener. God also gave the command not to eat from one of the two trees.

Only after the third entry did the Eden story mention animals and the woman that already existed in Genesis 1.

Interesting... when man began working, his life changed. The man became aware of his environment by naming animals and then introspective because he did not find companionship. As a result, he felt lonely and needed another human.

I wondered about that progression, until I realized its significance. People take this same road, even today. Again, nothing magical. A curious boy simply grew up. The story tells us that God orchestrated the inner awakening as part of His plan.

SCULPTURES AND CLAY

In Genesis 2:7 and 2:19, God made man and animals from the earth. Many Christian theologies interpret this to mean that God formed clay sculptures and brought them to life.

I find that belief highly unlikely. The Hebrew specifies dust and dirt, neither of which are clay. Most dust and dirt are useless for sculpting as they do not hold a form well. If the writer of this story meant God formed a statue before breathing life into it, the writer could have used the correct words. He did not.

The lack of a biblical reference did not stop people from inserting the poetic metaphor of Job 10:8-12 into the creation story. There, God shaped and molded Job. God also poured Job like milk and curdled him like cheese. God clothed Job in skin and flesh, and He knitted bones and sinew together. God gave life. The poet credited God for forming each fetus, not the creation of life from sculptures.

Another ancient source is the Sumerian story, *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In it, the goddess of creation formed a man from

clay and saliva. Several other elements of the tale align with the biblical Eden story, but the Sumerians did not name him the first man. Scholars debate whether the Hebrews adopted parts of this text during the Babylonian captivity or if the two stories share a more ancient common source. Instead, I believe Christians permitted the Sumerian story to influence their interpretation of Genesis by inserting the clay sculpture idea.

I asked, “How could the biblical myth-like description possibly relate to evolution?”

“Easily,” came the answer.

John the Baptist insisted God could produce children of Abraham from stones (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8). He did not say how. The prophet just said it was possible.

Surprisingly, the scientific theory proclaims the same origin. Life started with the chemistry of Earth. The elements and molecules produced minerals (rock, dirt, dust). If someone saw a fast-forward vision of how life began, then the building blocks would resemble dirt. Therefore, if God produced animals from dirt, then God refined dirt into dust to make humans.

The very simplified biblical creation story never says how God made life. It does not mention all the steps He took to create life. Without those, the biblical beginning remains an interesting myth. Contrary to the popular interpretation, the Bible tells the same beginning as proposed by the theories of evolution. All those amazing details transforms the myth into reality.

Christians should view our dusty beginning, as Paul did. He wrote, “God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:28-29 NIV).

Genesis 2 and standard science tell the same story. All life on Earth started as minerals. So let us give God credit for life, no matter what process He used in its creation.

BREATH IN MAN

Many theologies I studied declared God's Breath filled man's lungs, so man became the first in his lineage with no predecessor—and possibly no bellybutton. I know many people who hold that belief as biblical.

However, the biblical story challenges that theology. All the living creatures breathed. Eve breathed. The text did not say God breathed into their nostrils too.

I needed a different solution than respiration.

The Hebrew word translated “breath” also meant “spirit” or “wind.” Jesus gave the Spirit to the Apostles (John 20:22) in the same way God gave man life by His Breath. Those people were already breathing, so it is likely Adam was too.

Throughout the Bible, God chose ordinary people. Why would this passage be different? The Breath did not mean a physical awakening. Instead, a natural-born almost-human man suddenly received a spiritual life beyond the physical (1 Corinthians 15:45-49). That inner spirit made him different from all other animals. God refined the dust to make someone more like Himself.

All life breathes. Humanity is not an exception. However, and more importantly, the Creator breathed His Breath (spirit) into a one body to give humanity a spirit. Together, those two kinds of breathing made a new kind of creature.

BREATH IN WOMAN

God created the woman in a peculiar manner. He put the man to sleep and removed something from his side. When the man woke up, he found the woman.

The passage did not specify what God took or how He used it. Also, the Hebrew did not call this thing a rib, so I wondered what else it could have been.

I thought about science. Humans carry DNA and stem cells that God could have used to “clone” a female. That had a more systematic starting place, but it was just a variation of the rib story. It required a miracle the passage did not mention to make a fully-grown woman without a belly-button. I had rejected the assumption of man’s instantaneous creation. Without any evidence except tradition, I rejected the instantaneous creation of the woman as well.

I tried again, this time with the initial creation of human-kind. God did not have to start from scratch or force cells to become a person quickly. Like the man, she already existed. God selected a female from the almost-humans and changed her to be like the man. God just needed to tweak her like He tweaked the man.

There was a difference. Instead of a separate Breath, God placed part of the spirit from the man into the woman.¹ The two people then contained the same spirit, not different ones.

That solution surprised me. If we all have one spirit attached to individual souls, then all our souls reunite as one spirit in Heaven.

Humanity’s spirit is one, as its Creator is One.

BREATH OF LIFE

My excitement grew as my perception of the biblical origins changed. I looked forward to what God would tell me next.

The Creator controlled the process of life. From the minerals, He formed first-life. From dirty life, God created animals, which included the lineage of almost-humans. He manipulated that lineage of dust until the proper generation. Then the Creator lovingly touched one man and one woman with the gift of a living spirit.

That interpretation agrees with the Bible's view of life. It elevates God's gift and deflates the human ego. We are special only because God chose us. Before that choice, we were just animals made from dust.

CHAPTER 19

CERTAINLY DIE

But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.

-- Genesis 2:17 NIV

Most Christian doctrines entangle the creation with an event that turned immortals into mortals. Believers use God's command to Adam (Genesis 2:17) as a proof text for the alteration. A few English Bible versions accentuate the command by using a phrase like "the man will die that day."

However, Adam and Eve did not immediately die. To keep God from telling a lie, believers say His command did not mean instant death. Instead, the first sin activated mortality, a future death within the no longer immortal man. Instead of a poison "apple," the toxin worked slowly.

That sounds logical, except no other passage in the Bible links Adam with immortality. That made me suspect it as an addition to theology.

If the loss of immortality was so essential to our under-

standing of creation and our role in life, then why did the prophets not preach the message boldly? Why did the apostles neglect to tell the Gentiles? Where did Jesus stand on this issue?

My quest for clarity had already rejected the perfectionistic requirement where God could only create perfection. Those beliefs came from the Greeks, not the Hebrew prophets. I sensed something similarly off for the interpretation of Genesis 2:17.

Yes, it is very off. The verse did not contain the harsh punishment that turns man mortal. Instead, it demonstrates God's love.

DEATH THREAT

God spoke of death when He warned against eating from that one tree. From childhood, I asked, "In a perfect world without death, how did Adam and Eve comprehend God's words?" Today, sheltered young people do not think about death. They may learn the word, but without seeing something lifeless, it is just a strange concept outside their experience. Before knowledge of death, would Adam even have a word for death? I do not believe that is possible.

I have heard preachers say that God gave Adam knowledge concerning death. My bogus-buzzer rejected that scenario. Those beliefs said God forced Adam to ponder the inconceivable. Such ideas would have tormented the man's thoughts, and the affliction would have entered the woman once she heard. This theology forces imperfection into the garden by God's "gift of knowledge." With this opinion, before the first sin occurred, perfection would no longer be perfect.

The Bible did not describe a perfect or immortal

creation, so I needed a new interpretation. God surprised me. This story's antagonist removes the myth-like description of death.

The serpent knew the woman already understood and feared death. He told her, and maybe even showed her, that touching the tree did not kill. His actions gave her a reason to believe the other things he said. Then, with her concern of imminent death relieved, she stopped worrying and started dreaming.

We live in God's good creation. Eve did too. She feared death because death occurred naturally, even in the safety of the garden.

DOUBLE DIE

I wondered if meaning became lost in translation, so I asked, "What words did God use in Genesis 2:17?"

In *Young's Literal Translation* (YLT), I found "die" used twice but no word for "certainly." To me, those repeated words did not look alike in Hebrew, but *Strong's Concordance* gave them the same number. That meant they were the same word but different verb tenses. A modernized literal translation of the Hebrew reads,

"... in the day you eat of it, dying you will die."

I looked up Strong's number for all the biblical verses that used it. I found eleven occurrences of the exact "double die" phrase, plus another thirty-four that contained the same repetition with verb-tense variants.

Something stood out as I pondered those forty-five verses. YLT translated both words as "die" in only five cases.¹ In the others, it replaced the first "die" with the

imperative “certainly,” “surely,” or a similar phrase. All other Bible versions removed the double every time.

The fact that our most literal English version routinely did not translate those passages literally stunned me. Yet, they did have a reason. The commentaries insisted the Hebrew language commonly used doubles for emphasis. They thought the literal “double die” lost the writer’s original intent. Thus, English translators simply followed the earlier German and Latin versions to interpret the phrase for emphasis.

Suddenly, I saw the problem. Most people today do not read Genesis 2:17 as a simple emphasis concerning death. Instead, perfection theologies insert their belief in an immortal Adam and the impending corruption of God’s initially perfect world.

Reading the passage this way is inconsistent. It requires only one verse out of forty-five to relay such information. No one ever reads any of those other passages as proof of immortals changing to mortals. And, since no other passage in the entire Bible discusses such an event, then this verse cannot support the belief in immortality or a radically changed creation.

That realization brought me a giant step closer to understanding God’s command.

I kept looking for a better answer.

DIFFERENT DIE

I did not doubt that the “double die” was a Hebrew emphatic expression. I also believed that the popular interpretation contradicted the biblical and natural evidence concerning death. So, I asked, “How can we read Genesis 2:17 to realign it with what the prophets did say?”

I looked closer at how the biblical writers used the phrase and found another strange discrepancy. Its use changed over time. Even the Bible makes this clear.

The five books of Moses utilized the emphatic phrase twenty-nine times.² God made all the statements, except one.³ We read all but one⁴ as an immediate death sentence for noncompliance of covenant, defiance of a direct command, or for a specific sin. These verses constitute the foundation of Jewish Law and place the burden of execution onto the offender's community. We view God's commands as black and white legalism, swift justice without mercy.

However, God says that is wrong. That interpretation contradicts the last three times the Bible used the emphatic phrase. In Ezekiel 18:13 and 33:8, 14, God instructed the prophet to tell the people their understanding of divine punishment was very wrong.

I took that as a hint that our legalistic beliefs might be wrong too. I wondered, "What else could God's death decree mean?"

I scrutinized the two Ezekiel chapters. They contained the same subject. God forcefully rejected "sour grape theology," which condemned generations because of an ancestor's sin. Just like today, those people wanted to assign a family's continued hardship as God's punishment. Therefore, they believed helping those people would be acting against God's will. Contempt and arrogance replaced the command to "love your neighbor."

Instead, Ezekiel preached that each person was only responsible for their own sins. The righteous man could become a sinner, so "dying you will die." Also, each sinner could repent, receive forgiveness, and live. That meant good

people needed to humble themselves just like any other sinner. This edict even applied to the prophet.

Ezekiel's words let me realize where the contradiction in interpretation lies. Somehow, between Moses and Ezekiel, people only viewed the "double die" phrase as an immediate death sentence. They forgot about forgiveness and mercy. Without those essential attributes of God, people found reasons to condemn their neighbors. In doing so, their theology judged God unjust (Ezekiel 33:17).

God does not change His ways. We do.

DOUBLE DEATH

That radical insight opened my eyes and ears enough to see and hear Genesis 2:17 in a new way. The emphatic phrase contained two times to die.

Part of me insisted I had already seen that fact. So, what was the big deal? The other side of my brain connected the dots. The New Testament writers did not invent the idea of a second death.

The "double die" interpretation shows the loss of God's meaning and its replacement with harsh legalism. Jesus and the apostles simply reestablished the idea that sin caused spiritual death before a person physically died. In both the Old and New Testaments, repentance revitalized life through God's Spirit.

Using Jesus' teaching to interpret the "double die," God told Adam that his action would cause spiritual death to start. When the man's physical body died, his spirit could die also. The same goes for every human ever born.

Just like today, the Israelites preferred the simplicity of religious legalism. Contrary to their inclinations, God did not change His ways or give Christianity a novel idea. From

the beginning, this phrase involved much more than a death sentence or the condemnation of sinners.

The serpent neglected to mention the value of a “double death” to Eve. Spiritual life is very important. The desire to keep it active should motivate us even when our physical death is imminent. The deeper meaning of this phrase reveals the love, mercy, and forgiveness of the Creator. He desires our continuance beyond the grave.

Those concepts are worthy of repeated and emphatic revival.

Within all the Mosaic “double die” passages, the phrase emphatically explains what happens when people deliberately refuse to follow God’s instructions: spiritual death initiates before physical death occurs. Our sinful actions kill the spirit within us. Later prophets explained that our thoughts are just as deadly prior to the acts. Hate kills your brother just like murder.⁵

A community of believers is bound to uphold God’s instructions. Sinners become the walking dead, who influence others by promoting sin. Mosaic Law tells us to cleanse our society of evil before the whole becomes infected.⁶

However, God also asks the sinner to repent. That means we need to restrain merciless legalism with love because contrite repentance turns the sinner into a righteous child of God (Ezekiel 33:18-19). God’s way has always included justice, mercy, and forgiveness.

The deeper meaning of that “double die” phrase emphatically demands justice with mercy. It rejects harsh legalism. If there is a remote chance that repentance is genuine, we must accept and encourage that behavior with a stay of execution. Why? Because a renewed life inspires others to obey. If the sinner lies to avoid punishment or the

community fails to act, then God's judgment still comes. That death indeed ends in eternal death.

Jesus used a similar "double die" in a statement that did not make sense until I saw the connection (Luke 9:59-60 NIV). When He asked a man to follow, the man asked permission to bury his father. Jesus replied, "*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*" His words did not mean dishonoring a parent. Instead, the spiritually dead should deal with the physically dead. Jesus emphasized the value of a person's spiritual life over a finished life or even good traditions. The man needed to choose. Would the man be a preacher for God or join in mourning the dead?

SECOND CHANCE

I like this interpretation of Genesis 2:17. God did not condemn humanity for an offense that He should have avoided. Instead, the Creator offered mercy and forgiveness to every sinner from the beginning.

Now, every time I read that emphatic phrase in the Mosaic Laws, I feel the tender Breath that the Creator gave Adam. Our Father loves His easily swayed children.

Rejoice! Our God gives second, third, and seventy-seventh chances.⁷

CHAPTER 20

THE TREE OF LIFE

She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

-- Psalm 3:18 NIV

Before I realized that biblically Adam's physiology did not alter, my brain churned out more questions. One of those involved the Tree of Life. I did not get a definitive answer, backed by biblical verses. However, what I envisioned made my head spin.

I asked, "What was its purpose? How could it affect Adam if he began as an immortal?" Eating that tree's fruit could not change the immortality of an immortal. However, if the Bible did not describe humanity as initially immortal, then that was the wrong place to start.

SECOND TREE

If God placed almost-humans into the garden, then the Tree of Life could change them. Then, I wondered what that

meant. My brain went into logic mode. That formed a stimulating yet curious progression.

1) What happened after eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

* The people remained mortal, but they were no longer innocent.

* Upon physical death, their spirit could die a second death.

2) What would have happened if a mortal ate of the Tree of Life but not the other?

* They would have become immortal while they remained innocent.

* They would not physically die, and their spirit would be safe from a second death.

3) What would have happened if the humans did not eat of either tree?

* The mortals would have grown old and died as innocent beings.

* Upon physical death, their spirit would be safe from a second death.

4) What if a mortal ate from both trees?

* They would be immortal but no longer innocent.

* They would not physically die, but their spirit could die a second death.

THREE ADAMS

At this point, the multiple introductions of the man caught my eye again. Genesis 1:26-27 describes human-kind, not an individual. In Genesis 2:7-8, a man received the Breath in a garden with two trees. In Genesis 2:15-17, a man gardened and was told not to eat from one of the trees.

I asked, "Did God deliberately include three creations of

man to tell us something? Or was it just a strange repetition?"

That question led to speculation. There is no choice in the day 6 creation, but the next two do. Could those two describe the choices of different individuals?

My mind raced. The last one ate of the Tree of Knowledge, received a name, and established the lineage of humans. What about the first individual? God did not give him a command. The logic trail recommenced.

5) What if a mortal human ate of the Tree of Life only?

* That person would become an immortal innocent.

6) What if a mortal human ate of both trees, but without a death threat?

* That person would become an immortal with the choice to be good or evil.

* If the immortal chose to follow God, the entity would remain innocent.

* If the immortal chose not to follow God, the entity would no longer be innocent.

Yep, my head spun. An innocent immortal sounded like an angel. A guilty immortal sounded like a demon. Could that be how God created the spiritual entities? Biblically, people did see angels in human-like forms.

If that logic stream is correct, then God created spiritual beings out of the same dusty lineage that formed humans. We all started as animals in God's good creation, but we took different paths. By eating from the Tree of Life, the angelic-kinds evolved from solid matter to become entities of energy. God offers us that same transformation. The Tree of Life awaits us on the other side of death. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Revelation 2:7)

WORSHIP CHOICES

I wondered what that meant to us and found a biblical lesson.

Angels repeatedly insisted, "Do not worship me."

Satan, on the other hand, desired people's worship.

Because humans are not innocent and make bad choices, we are more like Satan. People who rule often expect their fellow humans to treat them like gods, even when they do not call themselves gods.

We should take a hint from the angels. Never set yourself above others. Be the servant that follows God. And most importantly, never worship anyone other than the Creator. Only He is worthy.

ETERNAL QUESTIONS?

I present these speculative ideas because I saw a pattern that kept me awake for quite a few nights. The possibility might help remove some of the unbiblical myths that our culture believes about spiritual beings. On the other hand, I see no way of determining if these ideas are correct, as nothing biblical directly addresses the creation of spiritual entities.

Regardless of how God created the spiritual beings, in Heaven, the Tree of Life gives us everlasting life, so we become like them (1 Corinthians 15).

Evidently, we do not need to know everything, but we do need to keep asking questions to "get the Greek Out!"

CHAPTER 21

SIN AND MORTALITY

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.

-- Ezekiel 33:11b NIV

Why did God create the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Why place it into the garden?

The best reason I found concerns freedom. God wants us to choose to obey. However, if this was a test, what did that mean? Why does sin produce death?

Christian theologies answer those questions in various ways. I find perfection theologies controlling all the explanations. Some say God was too perfect, so did not anticipate disobedience. I ask, "Where is God's all-knowing nature?" Some say God is so perfect that sin becomes a treasonous act. It requires strict judgment. A big punishment for a little sin shows all sins as big. I ask, "Where is the mercy of the Father?"

For me, such beliefs do not proclaim the deity the prophets trusted. They do not describe the beloved Abba of

Jesus. If God knowingly exposed the universe to corruption and most of humanity to an eternity of suffering in Hell, that act made God evil.

I needed a better way to understand why the Creator deliberately placed Adam in the garden alongside the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

SPIRIT MORTALITY

My fellow Christians offered me Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 as proof texts for the change in an immortal Adam; death comes to us all because of the first sin.

However, all I saw were more assumptions imposed into Scripture to justify beliefs. Neither of those passages even hinted at Adam's immortality or a redesign of God's creation. I believe that if Paul believed anything like immortality, then he would have used bold wording like preachers do today.

Instead, I found something more remarkable in those passages. Paul's themes throughout both Romans and 1 Corinthians were spiritual life and spiritual death. He mentioned Adam because sin kills our spirit, but repentance and Jesus fill our spirit with life. If that were not true, then the life Jesus gave would have been physical, and Paul would still be alive.

The Apostle used words in much the same way as the prophet in Ezekiel 18 and 33:12-16. All those passages sounded like immediate commands of life and death, but nobody expected God to zap anyone. Instead, our daily thoughts and actions modify the status of our spirit.

The Bible declares this message: God considers spiritual life and spiritual death as a fundamental doctrine. We live

in the physical to prepare for the spiritual (Matthew 10:28), and following God's ways feeds our spirit. Contrite repentance is the key. Through this one act, the spirit remains alive while we live, and it stays alive beyond our death.

God is just and merciful. Our Creator tells believers not to fear the last hurdle in life. He is in control. He gave the first two humans the right to choose, as He gives us the right to choose.

Always remember, sincere repentance cleans the slate—His rules start with mercy.

SIN NATURE

I examined the doctrines that depended on mortality as a curse. The concept of sin is a running theme throughout the Bible. However, the idea of sin-nature is not.

Our beliefs about sin-nature come out of only one chapter in the Bible (Romans 7:18, 25). Paul was not setting doctrine. Instead, he used a common concept in the Greco-Roman world, and his readers understood what he meant. Paul wanted to do only good things but did not always succeed. He found he could not shake his base nature. Paul saw his life as dedicated to God but with irritating human weaknesses. That is all he said.

Later, Christians exaggerated the idea of sin-nature. They saw the selfishness in children and the lies toddlers told, so they condemned humanity because of our ability to sin. Believers soon taught that our mortal lives were despicable. Imperfection became a death sentence. Such ideals "doomed" us all with the curse of Original Sin.

However, no biblical writer taught such beliefs, even Paul. It took centuries to develop his simple concept of sin-nature into the complexity of Original Sin theology.

Nevertheless, this belief is so deeply ingrained into our culture that most people today accept it without question. Even atheists view humanity as a curse upon the Earth.

If that belief were true, then the sight of a newborn baby should fill us with deep remorse. It does not. Something is deeply wrong with a theology that condemns babies to Hell.

As I studied, my brain squirmed at the ideas that defined Original Sin. Eventually, I figured out its biggest flaw. It replaced God's forgiveness and mercy with rejection. This tradition demanded contempt for humanity, so it filled our hearts with self-loathing.

If we cannot love ourselves, then how can we love our neighbor? More importantly, how can we trust God to love us if our imperfection makes Him hate us?

SIN DEFINED

I knew Original Sin teaching contradicted what the Bible taught, but it took research to locate where the problem originated. Unexpectedly, I realized that the church does not use God's definition of sin.

The Greeks said sin meant "missing the mark." If an attempt was not perfect, then it was a sin. Every mistake was a sin. Gnosticism introduced extreme interpretations, which quickly split the church with opposing doctrines.

Some people focused on the tolerant side of "missing the mark." They said imperfection was okay because everyone messes up. Just keep trying. They gave Christians an advantage; the blood of Jesus covered sins. The downside of this teaching led some groups to do whatever they wanted to do, even the things God repeatedly said not to

do. It gave leaders an excuse to act in evil ways because doctrine said they would still go to Heaven.

Other people fixated on the oppressive side of “missing the mark.” Each imperfection discredited a person’s salvation. Without the blood of Jesus and membership in Christianity, every human was Hell-bound from the time of Adam. This teaching led people to accept self-flagellation as holy because it kept their physical bodies and thoughts in submission. It gave the church “Fire and Brimstone” sermons, the Spanish Inquisition, and too many wars. That mindset provided a reason to hate and kill neighbors who follow a different brand of Christianity.

Under Original Sin theology, the running theme of mercy within the Bible was impossible. Christianity held contempt above love. It condemned where God did not. The motivation behind evangelizing narrowed. The fear of going to Hell became greater than the desire to be with God.

Contrast the Greek culture’s view of sin to the Bible’s definition. The prophets’ descriptions did not dwell on every mistake. Instead of being vague, they were precise. Sin was and is “a transgression against law,” primarily God’s Law, but man’s laws too. Biblically, God did not send people to Hell for just being born human. Not every sin led to death (1 John 5:16-17). God only sent the unrepentant evil people to the everlasting pit, along with their master.

That shocked me. Christian’s use of the Greek definition of sin made humans despicable and God unmerciful. It reserved the blood of Jesus for only those who followed the right rules. Thus, in their theology, God could not love the whole world.

Instead, the Hebrew definition portrayed God as just while caring for His foolish children.

The Bible repeatedly tells us not to sin; do not choose to transgress the Law. Failure simply requires a willingness to repent. God's love then forgives each time.

Jesus commanded us to love. His version of love meant everyone. When we love our enemies, God views us as His perfect image (Matthew 5:48).

I prefer the biblical definition. From the moment Adam and Eve ate the fruit, humanity gained the choice to be good or evil (Matthew 25:31-46). When we acknowledge our need for God's forgiveness, He walks with us as He walked with Adam. Our Creator's love gives us a reason to love ourselves, our neighbors, and our enemies. We forgive their transgressions because God forgives us first.

Now, that is Good News from the beginning!

SIN PUNISHED

I wondered, "How did God define punishment for sins?"

The answer: quite clear, but again, we have a distorted understanding.

God told the early Israelites, "Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16 NIV). God did not implicate Adam as Christians do.

The Israelites did not listen. Instead, they preferred a different verse that provided a reason to hate their neighbors. Since they labeled calamities as punishment, helping those in need would be against God's will.

"You shall not bow down to them or worship them; I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children

for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Exodus 20:5 NIV).

The Israelites loved that verse so much God called their distortion "sour-grape" theology (Ezekiel 18). The prophet restated Deuteronomy 24:16 and made the case against their false beliefs. The people's theology rejected the command to love their neighbor, so they did not accept God's way as just. They wanted God to reject whole families.

Christian theologies did the same. I have heard "third and fourth generation" coupled with Original Sin's condemnation too many times to count. This version of "sour-grape" theology always contains a generational curse that punishes families for the sins of those long dead.

Like Ezekiel, I rejected such religious dictates that held no mercy, so I asked God how to understand His two apparently contradictory statements. Did He punish generations of good people because of one man's sin?

The answer was, "No, of course not."

He explained that the verses did not contradict each other. Not all devastating events are punishments from God. However, sin can reap consequences, and consequences can linger within a family without being a curse.

Read the beginning and end of Exodus 20:5. God's statement is specific. Those people were worshipping idols. People knew what they did was a transgression of God's Law, so they "hated" God. Their children followed in the rebellion against God. That way of life can become multi-generational. Attitudes and emotions filter into every part of the family's lives and the community around that family.

God's statement to the Israelites did not end in condemnation. Continue reading, "*but showing love to a*

thousand generation to those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6 NIV and Deuteronomy 5:10). God remains with those people, whatever their situation. That means that good people live within the influence of those who hate. Their lives will not be easy. That is where human love comes into play. We need to help where we can help.

God says every person belongs to Him: those who trust God, people in rebellion, and unbelievers (Ezekiel 18:4; Jonah 4:11). Our Creator does not reject anyone for being born into Adam's lineage or to any evil person. God's condemnation comes only to the person who sins, and that person's status can change in a heartbeat. Repentance is the key. The lack of action dooms the once-righteous man. Remorse brings salvation to the sinner.

Punishment will be just from our loving Creator, and only when necessary.

HUMAN NATURE

Such thoughts raised the question, "If Original Sin was never biblical, then where did desire and free-will originate?"

Biblically, Adam and Eve utilized both before eating the fruit. He desired her. She desired wisdom. They reached for what they wanted. Neither God nor Satan forced those acts. That means one of two things. Desire and free-will either came with God's Breath, or God installed them before the Breath.

Since the Bible never said the Breath gave desire or free-will, and most animals express those attributes, then they came as part of our biological inheritance through the almost-humans.

God created human-kind. His process of evolution formed desire and free-will in our ancestors before He gave the man a spirit. They were part of the good creation, thus not evil.

However, human pride rejected our animal roots along with our dusty origins. People estranged themselves from creation by naming human reactions superior and labeling animal instincts as inferior. Any resemblance between human and animal became part of this sinful, imperfect, and corrupt world, thus contemptible.

Those beliefs came directly from Gnostic philosophies. They rejected God's good creation, our place in it, and condemned when God did not. They endorsed disdain, while God lavished love.

I believe that what Paul called sin-nature we now call selfishness. We are born selfish, which is a form of self-preservation. To continue living, a mammalian baby demands attention from its mother. Human children quickly learn that the natural act of crying manipulates parents. Techniques become more sophisticated with age, including tantrums, blaming, and lying. This progression shows that selfishness, even though created by God for survival, can be misused. It can turn bad.

Humans learn to relate to the world through community, starting with family. We learn to control selfish desires for the good of the group because the group benefits us. Our society tells us which actions are acceptable and which are punishable. Life lessons evolve as we interact, make mistakes, and push limits. Selfishness diminishes when we accept correction.

Selfishness was what Paul fought. He called it a law of the flesh and a law of sin (Romans 7:21-25). We live with the knowledge of good and evil. Every day we must choose

between them. Paul wanted to express God's love, forgiveness, and mercy. He said it was not easy because we were not yet fully spirit. Paul had to work around his dusty mammalian origin.

The law of love guides us past selfishness. God wants to teach us a better way to use desire and free-will. God's process transforms our mental reactions before we enter the spirit realm.

Jesus taught this same Good News!

GOOD LIVING

God made the creation and called it good. That goodness was intentional, a choice. God premeditated "goodness" into His creation. It is good even though most of the creation cannot consider its state of being. The fusion reaction within stars is good, even when they explode. Storms are good, even destructive ones. Rocks are good, even in avalanches. All of Earth's life forms are good for something, even those that kill. God's creation is good.

Most life forms know when their environment is right or wrong. For example, amoebas move away from danger or go toward food. Higher level animals can even choose between doing right and wrong. Only humans are unique since we also choose between good and evil.

Being right is the same as being good. God instilled function within each thing, and they exist as God made them. Rocks are rocks. Cows are cows. Throughout time, they do not go beyond their existence. However, in humans, goodness exceeds doing the right thing. The right thing protects oneself and family. We must bypass self-preservation and choose sacrifice to defend strangers for the better good.

Choice distinguishes wrong from evil. Wrong is the awareness of things not being right. In contrast, evil requires thinking about doing something wrong, often to the detriment of another person or thing. It takes advantage of a situation to satisfy desires. It dismisses the welfare of others as inconvenient or unnecessary. Oddly enough, evil people sometimes sacrifice themselves to destroy enemies. Even then, that loss does not turn evil into good.

The Eden story illustrates those ideas. We find the tempter twisting the meaning of right and wrong as he manipulates desires to justify the dismissal of boundaries. He knowingly committed an evil act against God and the people.

In the garden, the man and woman had personal desires met by selfishness. They needed companionship, and they ate whenever they were hungry. God gave them a single boundary that curbed a selfish urge—do not eat from that one tree. They did not premeditate disobedience to harm anyone, so what they did was not evil. Instead, they chose to do something wrong.

When they understood, fear changed them. The people were no longer innocent. Guilt manifested as self-rejection. However, they still did not comprehend the concept of sin or evil. Like children, they hid the evidence and played pass-the-blame.

GOOD CHOICE

How should we interpret God's command to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Our teachings on that one statement tell the world what we think of God.

I believe God is just, merciful, and loving. Our Father

repeatedly reprimands, hoping for repentance. He reserves punishment for those who knowingly do evil.

If our religious theologies have not taught those qualities of God, then we keep asking, "Why did the Creator deliberately placed Adam in the garden alongside the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?"

In the next few chapters, I will give you the eye-opening answers God gave me.

CHAPTER 22

CURSED IMAGE

How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?

-- Numbers 23:8 NIV

Christians insist God cursed humanity because of the first sin.

“How can an image of God be cursed?” I moaned.

The only reply came with a shrug and a sigh, “Because we are.”

I shook my head and thought, “If God cursed humanity, then why not end the world and start over?” That seemed like a more rational option than sending billions of people to Hell just for being born human.

Since I believe God is rational, then something was wrong with our understanding of that curse.

What I found surprised me. It may surprise you too.

WHAT DEATH CURSE?

I have heard the phrase “the curse of sin and death” all my life. Many church doctrines insist we are born cursed. However, when I looked for that concept in the Bible, I did not find it. Even the commentaries I read were vague on the topic.

No biblical writer used the word “curse” to describe sin. Specific prolonged sins brought on curses, but the sin itself was not part of a curse. Those writers never even insisted the condemned were all destined to end up in the bottomless pit or the lake of fire, which are the Hebrew versions of Hell.

The closest biblical statement came from Paul. The apostle spoke of a law of sin and death and said the wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23, 8:2). Neither of those passages mentioned a curse. Paul was a Messianic Jew. When he wrote about law, he always meant Mosaic Law unless otherwise stated. He wanted people to know God’s freedom when released from the burden of the Law. Paul’s emphasis focused on spiritual death since Christians died spiritually with Jesus.

As far as I can tell, Christianity developed the phrase “the curse of sin and death” recently. It is just another example of perfection theology where every imperfection became a symptom of the curse. The phrase expressed a teaching that goes something like this, “Adam’s sin inflicted humanity with the curse of death. Therefore, we all must die because we are cursed.” People compressed the main points into a short statement.

However, this theology conveyed much more condemnation than the Bible. Harsh punishment replaced God’s forgiveness and mercy. Perfectionism added a rift of separa-

tion between the Creator and His beloved creation. Those who believed in that curse could only hear God's reproach in His statements to Adam and Eve. Their teachings degraded humanity into something God could not love.

None of those beliefs were biblical. Thank God!

WHAT FALLEN GRACE?

Believers repeat the phrase, "fell from grace," as if God's finger carved it into stone. With it, Christian theologies degrade humanity by claiming sin makes us too foul for God's presence. The doctrine insists eating from the tree severed Adam and Eve from God.

Once again, the teaching of my youth was not biblical.

The Creator kept loving His humans. He never pulled away. God graciously went to Adam and Eve, spoke with them, and clothed them. Cain and Abel communicated with their Creator the same way as their parents.

Throughout the Old Testament, writers celebrated the extent of God's mercy and forgiveness. Likewise, the Good News teachings of Jesus and the apostles overflow with love. He always comes to us and knocks on our mental door.

Only one biblical verse used the words "fallen" and "grace" together, Galatians 5:4, but Paul's views contradict perfectionistic beliefs. The apostle argued the case between the bondage of religious law versus the freedom of God's grace (mercy). Disobeying law increased condemnation. Everyone falls into sin, yet God's grace remains free to all.

God does not retreat from us. When we follow our own devices, God allows us to distance ourselves from His protection and gifts. He respects our choice to do things the hard way.

It is all about choice.

Repent and be glad! God loves you and will forgive your sins. That is the Good News of the entire Bible.

WHAT IS THE CURSE?

The apostle James said we should not curse the image of God (James 3:9-12). His statement set off alarms in my head.

If God already cursed us, what difference would an additional curse make? How much worse could it get? I decided James did not hold the same theology as the ones taught to me, so I looked at how the Bible used the word "curse."

In the Eden stories, that word was prominent in the section titles. However, section titles were not part of the original story, so I opted to ignore them.

God spoke to curse the serpent. I listened to the words and heard sharp sounds. God did not give the beast a chance to defend himself. In an instant, its life and the lives of its children changed dramatically forever.

From my youth, I heard God's anger and repulsion continue as He spoke to the people. Preachers snarled God's voice and called eating the fruit the highest treason.

How can that be true? The things that would change in the people's lives did not rip their arms and legs off. Instead, God's words softened, demonstrating a modified tone.

God never proclaimed a curse upon the woman. He never even called anything a punishment.

My brain flickered. God told the woman she would have pain while conceiving and giving birth (Genesis 3:16a). I was taught that pain was part of the curse. How could it

not be a curse? Easy answer, because the Hebrew text says her pain would increase. Experience already taught her about the pain of childbirth. Therefore, pain was not a new concept.

The teachings of my youth about Eve were false. Conception and childbirth were part of the Creator's good creation from the beginning. It was how all the animals reproduced. God did not alter the base neurological construction of any creature to feel pain.

My guess, as human genes evolved quicker than other animals, morning sickness joined conception. Perhaps, because humans developed larger brains, a baby's head got bigger; thus, pain in delivery increased.

The Creator loved His children, so He revealed the changes to come. Instead of a condemning finger, God hugged them.

WHAT IS IMPENDING?

Then I realized what God really said. He revealed the future, hers, and all the women to come. Her desire for a husband gave him the right to rule over her. Not all men, just her husband (Genesis 3:16b). That did not make them "owner and slave" but "supportive partners." We find that kind of relationship in healthier marriages throughout the Bible.

However, both men and women play games of desire and deception. God said her daughters' desires would lead to choosing mates poorly. That was not a curse, just the reality of choice. Biblically, women occasionally achieved equality, but most often, they did not because of generations of bad decisions. We should not base the relationships between spouses on the distortions inflicted by desire and power. Instead, we need to look at how God cherished His

people and the sacrifices He made for that love. Our marital relationships should look like God.

I kept reading.

The words of God did not snarl at Adam any more than at Eve. God did not curse the man, He aimed a curse at the ground, so it would grow more than just planted crops. The ground and plants did not change. Instead, humanity's relationship with the ground changed because of farming. The curse foreshadowed labor-intensive gardening, more work than Adam had been doing.

God mentioned death (Genesis 3:19), but only as the inevitable end to a life of labor. Death was not a result of a curse.

Again, the teachings of my childhood were biblically untrue.

I found one more insight within those passages. Man's desire for horticultural dominance made the interaction with weeds parallel to woman's relationship choices based on desire. Both of those interactions produced frustration and additional work. Such problems continue today.

The perfectionistic interpretation, filled with a corrupt Earth, did not describe the garden story accurately. Instead, it distorted and blinded me to God's actual meaning.

I felt a sigh of relief. God did not curse Adam, Eve, or their descendants just for being human. Our Creator loves His children.

WHERE IS THE ANGER?

The next two biblical scenes confused me greatly (Genesis 3:20-21). My childhood questions poured out. "Why would Adam name his wife just after God yelled at him? The man should have been wishing he was dust again. Why did God

kill an animal? It did not sin. And, at what point did sin make God go away?"

The perfectionistic epic of my youth never answered those questions. I spent decades questioning the inspiration behind those two verses because they sounded mythical. Then I suddenly saw how important they were to the story.

Adam was not trembling in front of a growling God. The fear that had sent him into the bush no longer overpowered his reason. Joy filled the man's mind and heart because he wanted babies. He became so excited that he lovingly named their mother-to-be. Then, God spent time teaching the two humans how to tan an animal's hide and make durable clothing.

Revelation transformed Genesis 3. Sin never repulsed God. None of His actions expressed a rift of any sort. God knew what would happen, what did happen, and the effects those choices made for the future. Our Creator continued and continues His love of humanity.

The Father extended mercy to the two frightened people and gently coaxed them out of the bushes. He spoke to them like children, kindly explaining that their tomorrows would not be easy. He remained with them, giving them hope in the form of future children. God even prepared them for their journey.

God treats us the same way, with love. He asks us to stop hiding our sins behind "bushes" that hide nothing. Our Father desires His children to run into His arms and hear His voice. Only then can He relieve our burden and rejoice in the next stage of our life.

This is the Good News of the Creator's tender care. This is the Abba that Jesus adored.

WHAT BANISHMENT?

The end of the story also improves without perfection theologies.

The Hebrew word, "*shalach*," sometimes translated as "banished" or "expelled," simply meant "sent out" (Genesis 3:23). It is not a harsh word. It does not mean "punishment by exile." It is the same word used when Noah released the birds from the ark (Genesis 8:7-12).

Instead of rejection, the God who hovered like a mother bird over the newborn universe (Genesis 1:2) sent the people out of the safe-garden nest. Adam and Eve had to leave so humanity could fly.

The word "*shalach*" also helps align the story with natural science. God sent the people back to where they came from. Communities of almost-humans existed out there. Adam and Eve needed to learn to make proper clothing because those people already wore skins that protected their bodies. Then, nature did its thing. They multiplied. Through them, all humanity inherited the God-given Breath and the Knowledge of good and evil.

Repulsion did not force God to remove the humans from the garden. He did not kick them out for eating the forbidden fruit. Nor did they get the boot for lying, hiding, sinning, or even bringing evil into the world. God's only reason was to keep the people away from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:23). They had to leave the garden so that they could not eat from both trees.

WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE?

Another sizzling revelation came quickly on the tail of those eye-openers.

The Creator set the people up to sin.

The heresy buzzer blared in my head. What I heard in church rejected the possibility that God might in any way be responsible for our sin.

It was what they taught me, but it was not biblical. God designed the universe, the garden, and the humans. So how was God suddenly blind to the future? How could sin form a rift between God and His creation? Why did God not hold himself accountable for the way He created us?

The answer was the same as before. Our theologies reinforced the Greek version of a perfect god, which misrepresents the perfection of the biblical Creator.

I focused on the description of God's basic nature.

The Creator is not blind. He is omniscient. The Bible says God knows everything, even our most secret thoughts.¹ If God slept and was not aware of the serpent's thoughts or actions, then He was not all-knowing. If God did not know what would happen with the Tree of Knowledge, then He was blind to the future. If giving humans the freedom of choice was not the point of the two trees, then God did not understand His creation. Such overwhelming ignorance does not accurately portray God.

The Creator did not separate Himself from humanity. He is omnipresent. The Bible says there is no place to hide from God, not even the bottom of the ocean.² His name, *Yahweh*, proclaims He exists throughout time and space. He is everywhere and every-when. If God left Adam and Eve alone for even one second, then He was not everywhere, every-when, and could not control everything. Such incompetent absence does not portray God.

The Creator was not powerless to prevent sin. He is omnipotent. The Bible says there is nothing more powerful than God. What He says, He will do. Nothing can stop Him.³

If sin was not part of His plan for humans, then God was not all-powerful. He did not keep sin from being possible or prevent events from happening. God did not fix the problem afterward. If anything kept God from acting, then He did not have control over those things. They controlled Him. Such impotence does not portray God.

Perfection theologies reduced God's authority by stipulating what He could and could not do. Christians blinded themselves to the biblical passages that contradicted those beliefs. They reinterpreted the words of God's prophets through their changing cultural traditions.

Our God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. He is different from all the man-made gods.

God constructed the scenario that provided the opportunity for sin. The Creator of everything was not surprised at the outcome of the garden. He made sure the humans had access to the special trees and made sure they noticed those trees. God did not create sin-proof humans. God did not put up a barrier to restrict the serpent from entering the garden, tempting the people, or distorting the truth.

Instead, God gives us the gift of choice. Choice requires at least two options. One of those is to follow God and do His will. We cannot choose God if we don't have a second option.

The Creator blessed Adam and Eve with the same opportunity. That means our capability to sin was part of God's good plan from before the beginning. By not interfering sooner, He gave the people and the serpent the choice to obey or not. God provided them with alternatives, just like He does today.⁴

WHO NEEDS CHOICES?

Those revelations kept my brain spinning and required a paradigm shift in my theology. They demanded that I process and accept them as valid or reject much of the Bible. I had to remove the fables taught to me in Bible class and replace them with the meaning of God's words.

Such a radical transition in beliefs did not come easily, but slowly, I began viewing humanity through God's eyes. Our ability to sin was by God's design, and He still calls us blessed. However, I still needed to comprehend what the Creator meant by the "image of God" to see the blessing.

CHAPTER 23

IMAGE OF GOD

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

-- 1 John 2:13a NIV

I wondered, “What made a human the image of God?”

The Old Testament writers did not develop this topic as theology and rarely mentioned the image concept outside the first few chapters. In this, the Hebrew theology matched their cosmology. God said it, so it was. Therefore, they did not need to debate the issue.

We do. Why? Because conflicting unbiblical beliefs have infiltrated Christian doctrine.

IMAGE OF JESUS

A few statements in the New Testament help but also muddy the issue about the image. Jesus said He looked like God (John 14:9-10). Paul wrote that Jesus was the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15), but he also said

that God sent Jesus “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3c NIV). The apostles called men the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9), and we are “*to be conformed to the image*” of Jesus (Romans 8:29b NIV).

Did those apostles mean we should all look like a typical Jewish man? No. Like many mammals, humans vary in appearance. God made us that way.

Does Father/God have a human form? No. However, idolatry influenced the belief that He does. All the nations made statues and referred to them as their gods’ images. Most of them had human-like features. Logical deductions follow. Jesus was human, so His Father must look human. Therefore, humans must look like God, and God looks like humans.

That progression sounds logical, except God demanded that the Israelites not carve or worship statues. His essence is beyond our ability to comprehend. God is entirely spirit, but we are not. Our bodies change with time, degrade, and die. His essence does not.

God took human form, but scripture never says Jesus held a human appearance before His conception. The body of Jesus grew, bled, and died like a human. The resurrection changed that body into something new. It will live forever. However, just because Jesus was a human does not mean the Father ever looked like a human.

Again, I found my childhood doctrines inaccurate. Theologians transformed the Creator into our image. I had to consider other options.

IMAGE OF SPIRIT

I asked, “If Jesus looked like God, but His physical form was the image of dust, then what was the image of God?”

After the creation of human-kind, the next event was God giving a man the Breath. I wondered if that gift made people into the image. Since God is Spirit, the logic sounded right. Our spirit originated with God and would return to Him.

I looked for a biblical confirmation of that idea. I found none. God's Spirit and our spirit were similar but distinct. Nothing said the Breath or our spirit endowed the image of God.

IMAGE OF GOD

What I did find struck me as odd. The second reference to the momentous declaration of the image came in the post-garden genealogy (Genesis 5:1-2).

I looked closer at the Genesis passages.

* In chapter 1, God made human-kind in His image, not the individuals Adam and Eve.

* In chapter 2, God created man and woman and placed them into the garden. God gave the living Breath but never said the man or woman was His image.

* In Genesis 5:1-2, the writer retold the creation story from day 6 when God created human-kind in His image. Verse 3 starts the genealogy passage with Seth's birth, born in Adam's image, not God's.

I stared at those passages for a long time before God provided insight. Finally, I began to see what was missing. The Eden stories did not mention the people as God's image, and the genealogy skipped over the Eden stories.

Let me restate that revelation. God never called Adam the image. He said it about human-kind.

That bugged me. My brain twitched as old paradigms started to shift.

The image came at the dawn of humanity, so I started thinking about time. For God, time was not relevant. When He said He did something, it could seem like a very long time to us. For instance, the prophets proclaimed the suffering servant's arrival, but many centuries passed before His birth.

I scratched my head and wondered, "If Adam's lineage came through the animals and almost-humans, then at what point did humans first look like God?"

Time. It took a staggering amount of time for me to ferret out the significance between the three biblical accounts of the image. In fact, I do not believe my hunting provided the answer.

I begged for revelation.

Then, suddenly, I saw the difference between chapter 1, the garden story, and chapter 5. The answer stared at me from the pages the dozens of times I reread them. Now, it smacked me in the forehead.

Instead of skipping the garden story, Genesis 5:1-3 silently screams for the reader to go back and look at what happened between day 6 and Seth's birth. The lapse of time includes the entire garden experience, the story of Cain murdering Abel, plus a few tidbits from Cain's side of the family.

IMAGE IN CHOICE

What could I have possibly missed in that simple garden story? Even as a child, I was able to tell it. Still, I felt that nagging push to look harder.

Genesis 2 neglected to say Adam and Eve were the images of God. I kept reading. My eyes opened. The only place within the garden story that resembled a statement of

God's image came at the end. God proclaimed, "*The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:22b NIV).

At the start of that statement, the Hebrew contains a strong interjection. Most translations use "now," "behold," or "look." God wanted us to pay close attention to what He said next. He identified those humans as being like Himself.

Oh, my goodness. The "image" was not at the beginning of the story. It came just before the people left the garden. Only then did the humans look like *Yahweh Elohim*. They were finally God's image, able to pass on the Breath and the Knowledge to their children.

Their ability to choose good from evil made them the image of God!

As the revelation started to sink in, my old theology fought back. I was in shock. I had never thought of such a thing. It felt like pure heresy, and I had to work through my repulsion.

* Since God is all-knowing, He had a reason for the two trees.

* Since God is all-knowing, He allowed the serpent to enter the garden.

* Since God is all-knowing, He allowed the temptation of the people.

* Since God is all-knowing, He allowed them to eat the fruit.

* Knowledge of good and evil did not cause physical death. Yet, it produced shame and guilt.

* The Bible never called the Knowledge a curse.

* Knowledge transformed Adam and Eve. They could comprehend good and evil like God.

Wow, that was a shocker. God made human-kind into

His image using the process described in the entire garden story.

IMAGE IN CONFLICT

From the start of the garden story, God gave humanity the opportunity of choice.

Only with choice did the people look like God.

Only by choosing God do I look like God.

CHAPTER 24

BLESSED IMAGE

And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

-- 1 Corinthians 15:49 NIV

I went back and worked through the garden story details as I wondered about what else I missed. Was there something more profound in those simple scenes?

God speaks to us in parables. When God speaks, His stories will contain layers of meaning. And, the answer to our questions usually comes with a profound “DUH.”

CHAOS IN CREATION

Preachers usually condemn Eve because she listened to the snake. However, her problem started when the man shared God’s command with her. Their natural fear expanded the simple dictate from “Do not eat” to “Do not touch.”

Even without the serpent’s nudging, the potential for eating from the Tree of Knowledge existed. The people

probably saw animals in the branches, which could have eaten the fruit but did not die. They also did not gain the Knowledge of good and evil. Such a sight might have been enough to form ideas contradicting the directive.

I thought about that. If the fruit was not poison, then what did the tree do to the people?

* This was not a magic tree. God is not the “great magician.”

* Nothing physically changed. Life continued as usual.

Oh, my goodness! If God set the stage for our benefit, then God’s plan included eating from the Tree of Knowledge all along. The serpent sped up the process, but nothing changed the plan.

My childhood theologies emphatically disagreed. Defying God was very wrong. How could this act be good for humanity?

Disobedience affects the God-given spirit within. Spiritual life comes from following God’s ways, whereas sin kills the spirit, one sin at a time. The one thing that changed was how the people thought about themselves—they suddenly knew shame and guilt.

This process has not changed. Every child learns the lesson. Sadly, not all of them discover a better way to live when they go through traumatic events.

The man and woman did not like the shame and guilt. Their first response was to hide. Then they stopped hiding and returned to God.

God has not changed. He asks us to stop pretending that we can hide our shame and guilt. Our loving Creator calls each of us to return.

CHAOS IN CHOICE

Spiritual change made me ponder the role of the serpent in this story. If God is truly All-knowing, then God gave the beast freedom to access the humans. He knew the creature's intent and let it choose its own path.

Suddenly, revelation surprised me again. That one tree was a greater temptation for the serpent than it was for the people. The serpent knew it did not follow God's directive. It knew it could not hide. However, instead of waiting for instruction, it pushed the possibility of sin into certainty by using a distortion of the truth (you will not die) and implied that God's selfishness withheld knowledge. In doing so, the serpent steered the humans into distrusting God.

I then wondered how long the serpent-spirit resisted.

Obviously, not long enough.

I believe the Creator controlled the events inside the garden. That means sin was not outside the parameters of His good plan. God may not have tempted anyone, but He set the stage, cast the players, and launched the events in motion. I concluded that He controlled the scene but did not force the actors to read a script. Like the creativity within evolution, character improvisation is part of God's good plan.

Think about that.

Our Father did not fall asleep on the job, He allowed sin to exist. All the sins produced by all the humans and all the spiritual entities will never obstruct God's good plan. Our Father is in control even when He lets bad things happen.

BLESSING OF US

God said Knowledge made the man “*like one of us*” (Genesis 3:22 NIV).

I asked, “Who was us?”

The most common Christian answer is the Trinity. However, Moses and the Jewish redactors would have balked at this understanding. To them, God was always singular.

I needed another answer.

The passage contains an alternative to a Trinity interpretation. The next characters presented were the Cherubim, spiritual entities in the company of God. I believe God spoke to the living creatures who surrounded His throne. He then dispatched some to guard the Tree of Life.

Interpreting the pronoun this way tells us that God and those beings know evil. However, knowing is not the same as enacting. The living creatures followed God in choosing goodness, but the serpent chose the other path.

This interpretation has biblical support. We see something similar in Isaiah 6. God said, “*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*” (Isaiah 6:8b NIV). He first used a singular pronoun; only God sends. Then, He used a plural. The Jewish reader would not have envisioned the Trinity or even a “royal we.” As in Genesis, the passage provided the answer. “Us” included the Seraphim who flew around God’s throne.

Those statements show us more about God than all the perfection theologies ever could. His perfection does not reject the Knowledge of good and evil. God chooses to be good and asks us to make the same choice. Also, our Creator is not an aloof dictator. He acknowledges His

followers. Both spiritual beings and humans have the option to follow or not.

That God outshines any human-made god. He alone is worthy of my worship.

BLESSINGS OF FREEDOM

The paradigm shift in my understanding continued.

Most Christian theologies interpret the garden events as contrary to God's plan. They declare creation as fallen, corrupt, and cursed. Therefore, God must reject us, which creates a rift. As a result, He resides far away in Heaven while Satan dominates our lives on Earth.

However, the Bible does not describe the beginning that way. No Old or New Testament prophet even hinted at living with such a scenario. God did not kill the two people to rid creation of the danger. He instead granted kindness and mercy to the sinful humans. He cursed the serpent and its descendants yet did not deny them access to humanity. Most importantly, God interacted and continued to interact with people.

Those actions made me ask, "How does God view human sin?"

The answer came as, "Blessed freedom, not a broken plan."

No one taught that in my Bible classes. God did not download the message as stated. I had to critique my beliefs and discover the lessons Scripture contained. I give you the glad synopsis after years of irritation.

From the beginning, God blessed His good creation with the freedom to choose. Most life forms have that ability; even amoebas move towards food or away from danger. Birds and mammals exhibit this freedom the best. They

study their environment to determine a course of action. They learn from the mistakes of others. As a result, the fear of death grows stronger within those creatures. Fear keeps them alive.

The human-kind lineage developed within that creation. Those people had the God-given freedom of choice, which we call free will. They had desires, learned lessons, and grew fears. However, at some point, human-kind became noticeably distinct from other animals. Our abilities to communicate symbolically developed alongside tool-making skills. However, selfish desires made us choose poorly, giving us reasons to rationalize evil acts as good or good acts as evil. We also started to condemn ourselves and consider life beyond the grave.

The study of human evolution and the details within Genesis 3 tell the same story. They both describe the activation of changes that made humanity distinct. However, the Bible adds a critical point. God initiated those transformations to make us His image.

BLESSINGS OF LIFE

From the beginning, God wanted to form mortal beings into His image. So, he combined their natural inheritance of desire and free will with His Breath. He then added the Knowledge of good and evil. As a result, two humans became the image of God.

He calls that image a blessing, not a curse.

My old doctrines rejected that realization. Adam and Eve did not have permission to eat. I again asked, "How could disobedience possibly be blessed?"

God provided an answer. What the people did was wrong, but it was not evil because prior to this they did not

know how to be evil. Despite their disobedience, they attained and retained the ability to live as the image of God. Even though they obtained the Knowledge prematurely, the Creator intended it as a blessing, so it was a blessing (1 Peter 4:19). The people passed on that ability to choose. When we act like God by choosing good over evil, then we reflect His goodness (John 8:31-47).

God did not change His ways or His plans. He created an imperfect world and worked within its natural limitations. Our Father has always taken human transgression and turned it into something good. He forgave Adam and Eve just like He forgives our sins when we return to living like Him. Their spirits did not have to die, they just opened that possibility. We do not need to die either. Our Father still offers a better way.

This progression explains why God kept humanity away from the Tree of Life. The Creator blessed Adam and Eve by removing the possibility of premature immortality. A mortal lifespan provided humans with time to follow the path of goodness. On that path, people can learn God's ways and freely choose to be good. God says we do not need to fear death. The Tree of Life waits on the other side (Revelation 22:2).

How could that not be a blessing?

BLESSINGS OF FUTURE

The perfectionistic interpretation only sees condemnation and punishment, the guilt and shame of sin. It misses the love, mercy, and forgiveness God offers. He provides freedom of choice as a blessing, not a curse. With it, we determine our path to develop into His image.

The choices God wants us to make have nothing to do

with power or wealth, which worldly people crave. They are not about appeasing an angry deity by conducting elaborate rituals, which religions require. Instead, we need to grow beyond such base instincts, beyond learning that the consequences of sin are bad for us. He wants us to want to choose goodness because goodness is the reflection of our Abba-Father.

What we think and do today determines our state of being, now and in the future. Together, our good choices and God's love transform us into something new. God calls His new creation a blessing to the world. Thus, even though we sin, God blesses humanity.

Yep, Good News from the beginning!

CHAPTER 25

SERPENT-SPIRIT

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

-- 2 Corinthians 11:3 NIV

What kind of creature was Eden's serpent? Was it Satan or a demon?

The Bible never identifies that antagonist in any way except for "the serpent." I came to realize that Scripture says very little about Satan, demons, and evil spirits. Israelites believed in those entities, but the biblical writers did not dwell on them or discuss their differences. However, believers from then on did not follow that example. Instead, they embellished cultural stories to construct monsters, which altered their religion with fears based on the unknown.

Such exaggerations failed to identify Eden's serpent adequately and skewed our understanding of the beast's role in the biblical story.

I wondered, “Can removing the additions align this creature with other biblical writers?”

Spoiler alert! The answer is yes.

SNAKE’S CHANGE

What characteristics of the serpent appear fictional?

I will start with its physical form. Popular traditions say snakes originated at this event. Those animals had limbs but God took them away.

Oddly enough, that part happened, sort of. All of today’s snakes retain deactivated genes that once produced limbs, and a few species still grow useless remnants. That shows they did change. Since God controls evolution, then He removed those limbs.

However, nothing corroborates the belief that humans coincided with that change or that the change happened suddenly. The fossil record shows that limbed reptiles slowly became limbless during the time of the dinosaurs. People arrived much later.

Stone layers in the West Bank of Israel preserved an early snake species with a pelvis and tiny hind legs. For me, it was easier to believe ancient quarrymen unearthed such a fossil, and stories grew around it. Still, a mythical serpent bugged me. This main character’s characteristics discredited the entire story and discouraged belief in God.

I needed God to explain the biblical serpent and change my attitude.

He did.

TALKING SNAKE

That revelation came after I understood how the serpent spoke to Eve.

Yes, I think that is a strange statement too, but it is true. Let me explain.

No reptile can utter words. Some cannot even hiss. Moreover, no evidence indicates any animal remotely like snakes has ever had the physical structures necessary to make sounds that we might call speech.

I looked at the passage again.

It says that serpent was craftier than any wild animal. Snakes may be stealthy, but they are not crafty. That means this one creature was not an ordinary reptile, not just a snake.

Instead, it was a serpent-spirit, something craftier than any wild animal.

Hiding inside an ordinary snake was a spiritual being. The spirit was invisible. So, to interact with the woman, it required a host. It possessed a snake using its “arms and legs” to grab the animal and force compliance. It moved the serpent’s mouth to give the illusion of speech.

Spiritual beings communicate directly into the human mind. The woman saw a snake but heard the words of the oppressor in her head. She did not fear the creature because she lived in a secluded garden free of poisonous snakes. She did not know about evil or trickery, so she did not question its voice. Instead, curiosity motivated her response of surprise.

SERPENT'S SPIRIT

God spoke to the serpent, but Adam and Eve did not hear its response.

I always questioned why, because in fables, the characters always converse. The best explanation depicted the silent fear of a quaking serpent because God was mad. That sounded reasonable, but it always put a bad taste in my mouth. It resembled the perfectionistic god, not the God of Abraham. Why leave the creature alive? Why harm its descendants? Why let it have descendants? Why tell us about this event at all?

Too many questions made me return to the story and think about the revelation of a serpent-spirit. Eventually contemplation paid off with a surprising answer. This was not a fictional animal in a fable. This story contained reality.

God did not curse and remove limbs from an already-limbless reptile. Instead, He re-formed the spirit within and all its descendants to resemble the animal it hijacked. When God directed His attention toward the spirit within the snake, it could no longer speak directly to either human.

TESTING JESUS

How do you depict an encounter with Satan? How about when Jesus was in the wilderness?¹ Does the accuser have a man-like body? Is he big and powerful?

I do not believe that possible. God ripped the spiritual limbs off the serpent-spirit and likewise disabled all its descendants. Now, they can only interact by using their voices.

The encounter of Jesus and Legion dramatically shows this inability (Mark 5:1-13). When the Messiah removed a hoard of spirits from the crazy man, those entities asked to enter pigs. However, the limbless spirits could not control them. The pigs heard the voices and promptly drowned themselves. So, I asked myself, how did those entities control the man? Simple. Humans listen to the voices and believe the lies.

The Eden story tells us the children of Eve learned fear. To this day, people still watch for beings they cannot see. They dread demons more than sneaky snakes. Have faith, God tells us we do not need to fear. If you do not trust their words, then they cannot possess you. Destruction awaits such spirits and those who follow their slithery sway.

SERPENT'S WHISPERS

The power of the serpent-spirit relies exclusively on humans believing non-verbal whispers. God ripped off the serpent-spirit's arms and legs, but He did not remove its ability to speak. Nor did He forbid its descendants from twisting truth into lies.

I pondered that detail and again found the answer hidden by perfectionism.

The Creator is not Plato's perfect god who does not know the future. Our God's control is supreme. He knows the beginning, middle, and end. That means He allowed the garden's temptation to happen, as He continues to allow trials to happen. From the beginning, God's good plan included spiritual entities with the ability to entice people.

Yes, I know that goes against most Christian theologies. The teachings from my youth rejected that conclusion also. The Bible, however, supported it.

* God is in control, always, but He also lets His creation choose their own path.

* The serpent-spirit's actions did not surprise God. God knows all.

* The serpent-spirit's actions did not corrupt God's plan. God is all powerful.

* The serpent-spirit's actions did not force God to flee from sin. God is with us always.

That understanding provided another viewpoint. God allowed that creature to make this bad decision because choices are integral in His plan.

Maybe the serpent-spirit's sin lay not in the temptation but in how he tempted. He hijacked an animal. Through it, the whispers became stronger. He twisted the truth until the woman could no longer resist. Trusting God became a less desirable option. God got angry because, instead of awaiting divine direction, the serpent-spirit chose to do the tempting its own way.

The serpent-spirit knew better, so it had no defense. Its existence changed, but its life did not abruptly end. God's purpose for that spirit and its descendants continued.

That view of the serpent-spirit matches how the Bible describes humans. We choose our way too and live with the consequences. God's anger comes when we knowingly choose evil over good. This pattern shows God's consistency in how He rules creation.

BAD FORCES

Stories about Satan radically distort how we visualize Eden's serpent. Most begin with him as the leader of a vast army attacking Heaven. God's good angels win and send the evil hordes to Hell. There, Satan reigns as its monstrous

leader. Those bad angels and demons do not stay put though. Earth is too close, so they freely afflict humans.

The problem with that epic rendition of the beginning is that it is not biblical. Those horror stories are recycled myths from other cultures, coupled with a few Bible verses taken out of context. Very little within those Hollywood-like whoppers relate to Genesis or any other book in the Bible.

Jewish writers started the exaggerations. Early gnostic Christians and European Christians embellished those and added more. They inserted the philosophies of Plato's perfect god, which placed Abraham's God far away, so angels did all the work. They combined the dualism of Zoroastrianism and the monster Baal to transform Satan into the ultimate evil force. Expanded stories provided motivations for the conflict with God. People gave him a physical form and dominion over the corrupt creation. Satan became the creator of all the things humans consider bad. Ultimately, believers promoted Satan and demoted our Creator turning them into warring Greek-like gods.

However, the Bible never gave Satan that much power. For the ancient Hebrews, God is in control, even when we do not see it. Good and evil are never spiritual entities or forces in nature. The Bible never depicts Satan as a creator of anything, not even chaos. The God of Abraham is Creator of everything, so even deadly things are good for something.

Likewise, the New Testament's use of the word "powers" does not dictate spiritual entities. Most often, those writers listed different kinds of human bureaucratic or governmental offices as powers controlling their lives. Even the verses that describe "miraculous powers" do not

require a source other than God. Theologies introduced the satanic interpretation to describe their cultural fears. Fantasy corrupted the religion, which “limited” God’s control to Heaven.

Christians often quote John 10:7-10 to support their view of Satan—he kills, steals, and destroys. However, in that passage, Jesus was not talking about a spiritual entity. Instead, He described the religious leaders of His day. He blamed them for justifying their evil deeds and robbing the people of the truth about God. Jesus’ words matched how the Old Testament prophets described their leaders.² Just like their ancestors, most of them hardened their hearts to the insult and rejected correction.

Can we presume Satan corrupted the minds of those bad leaders? Yes. On the other hand, did those people need help from Satan to continue committing evil acts? Jesus did not think so. Each person has the freedom to harm instead of serve, hate instead of love. Biblically, each person must choose.

SATAN’S DOMINION

My preachers taught that Hell was Satan’s kingdom, because he stole dominion of Earth at the first sin. However, that doctrine always felt wrong. I kept asking, “How could the ruler of everything lose two-thirds of His kingdom? How did Satan get so powerful?”

Biblically, he did not. Such beliefs come straight from Gnostic teachings and writers like John Milton. The Christians crowned Satan as the fearful “god” of their medieval torture chamber called Hell, and the master of corrupted creation.

The Bible tells a different story.

* God reduced the serpent-spirit's abilities with a curse.

* God granted human-kind dominion. No passage says Satan snatched it away.

* God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator. His directive for humanity stands.

On the other hand, Satan does distort our knowledge, and people do allow him to dictate their lives. He also blinds us to our authority as the image of God.

The wilderness temptation of Jesus illustrates the method used (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). In the story, Satan tempts Jesus with desire. "Do what makes you feel good. Show people your power. Make everyone follow you."

I always doubted that bread-making was one of Satan's talents. So, I pondered, "Why these questions?" The answer? Because Jesus was human. Those thoughts rolled through Jesus' head. Just like he tempts us, Satan made his whispers sound like Jesus' inner voice.

* The human was hungry. Why not just quick-fix the problem?

* The human worried that no one would notice. So, duh, do something spectacular.

* The human stressed about how He would get people to listen. Simple, just force the desired outcome. The world would follow all His commands.

Satan said he would give Jesus the world, but only if the Son of Man switched allegiance. How was that possible? According to the biblical prophets, God controlled the nations, not the cursed trickster. That serpent-spirit gained control of people ignorant of his manipulations. However, that serpent-spirit did not have the physical ability to take or hold them by force—no arms or legs, remember. All he

had was his voice, whispers which persuaded humans to follow.

Good thing Jesus knew that noise. He named the accuser and it had to flee.

The Bible paints a different picture of authority. God commands all. He gave human-kind the rule of Earth (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17). Jesus was both God and man, so He inherited the authority of both (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:5-9). If Satan held real dominion, permitted by God, then the human Jesus would have been subject to it. Jesus never recognized Satan as an authority. He treated demonic possession as a malady that needed healing, not a Heaven-threatening force.

That realization gives us a different prospective. All the power to fulfill the temptations of Jesus lay within Jesus. God resided in Him, the human. God lives within us too.

Think about that.

However, with the encouragement of Satan, selfishness and pride drive humans to distort their authority. People take credit for their worldly status. Jesus disagreed. He called the leaders of the Jews sons of Satan (John 8:44). They followed the Creator religiously and outwardly, but their hatred and contempt showed they listened to the evil whispers. Their authority became corrupted by their corruption. It blinded them to the true God who stood before them.

HISTORY'S WHISPERS

Once I removed the overlaying perfectionistic theologies, the answer to why God permitted deception to enter and remain in the world presented itself. Throughout the Bible,

it frequently appears as God encounters sinners. He gave us the ability and the authority to choose.

When the Israelites made their covenant with God, He set up blessings and curses. If the people followed the commandments, they received blessings. If the people listened to the deceiver, then they received a series of curses that grew worse as time passed (Deuteronomy 28:1-68). With each punishment, God begged them to reconsider their choices.

Along with the blessings and curses, God gave them a promise. If they did not follow the covenant and lost the land, He still provided hope. All they had to do was return to His ways, and God would respond with blessings (Deuteronomy 30:1-11).

There is a difference between acting good and being good. Humanity needed to learn about evil to fight evil impulses. God desires that we evolve physically, intellectually, and spiritually. The Creator never stopped developing a people that trusts His words and follows His ways. God longs to soften our hearts so that our minds can love like He loves.

His promise still stands. Repent, and He forgives all. Go and sin no more. Repeat as necessary.

ACTIVE WHISPERS

God gave people choices, which leaves us vulnerable to deception.

He did not destroy or remove the serpent-spirit from this world or stop him from having children. God did not silence that twisted voice or order him to leave humans alone.

God's lack of action was not based on naivete or the

inability to remove the problem of sin. It was deliberate. Since our loving God let this problem remain, then He had a good reason, and that reason is good for humanity. We worship the all-knowing and all-powerful Creator.

Humanity is still learning the difficult lesson of choosing wisely.

CHAPTER 26

THOSE RIVERS

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

-- Genesis 2:10 NIV

Have you ever wondered about the rivers described between the second and third creation of man (Genesis 2:10-14)? I did. For me, none of the epic interpretations adequately explained the four rivers that watered beautiful lands outside Eden.

The passage portrayed a delightful world that contained freshwater, luxury goods, and things to desire. Those details should have foiled the development of the most popular Christian creation myth. The rivers contradicted a world where life only existed in one perfect garden surrounded by a wasteland. Instead, people ignored these verses to tell their version of the creation story.

I finally asked God, “What was the point of mentioning the rivers?”

RIVER BENDS

For centuries, scholars have tried to locate Eden by using the river passage. Most proposals combined today's rivers and places with those of antiquity. Each hunter/theologian insisted they found evidence of this primeval account, which gave them an approximate location of the garden.

Sadly, none of the conclusions truly fit the criteria of the text. The explanations did a poor job of tying current landscapes to prehistoric ones. Instead of proving the passage reliable, the arguments over the proposals helped segregate the church and make the biblical account sound less trustworthy.

Adding to my doubt, it seemed that the names used in the passage paid homage to descendants of Noah and to nations existing only after the time of Moses. Yes, those later people might have been recalling the good-old-days to name their kin and places, but I wondered what reason people remembered those names nearly two thousand years after the Great Flood? The land changed. The people changed. Why would names stay the same?

I sighed, "Is it even possible to explain the rivers?"

RIVER PATTERNS

The river section always felt out of place to me. Why segregate the creation of man?

Scholars bickered over that split too. The rivers described the world Adam and Eve would have discovered only after leaving the garden, not before. That incongruity made me question the redactor who compiled the stories. I asked, "Was he really guided to place the verses in this loca-

tion? Did he add cultural fiction? Where was God's inspiration?"

I grumbled at God about these irrelevant details. They simply messed up the story. However, God held a big surprise for me. Like the creation story, all the strange details were necessary. The rivers and their placement finally became significant once I cleansed it of perfectionistic theologies.

Those four verses contained information that supported anthropology and a pre-human lineage. Our human-kind ancestors lived somewhere. The river section described three lush areas near Eden that almost-humans would have enjoyed inhabiting.

Anthropological evidence shows several almost-human species collected material things. They did not need all those possessions for survival, like shell necklaces. God gave them the natural desire to collect interesting objects, shiny pretties, and aromatic plants. Once possessed, our distant relatives discovered other uses for the items.

The river section exists in the proper timeline if Adam and Eve originated among those people. God isolated two almost-humans for transformation inside the safety of the garden. Creator then returned them to establish a human lineage that contained His image.

POETIC PATTERNS

Aligning those details with human history did satisfy part of my itch about this story. However, it did not explain the names used, how they tied to Adam, or why the later Israelites cared to remember them.

A reason eluded me for a long time, yet that inner nagging continued telling me that I was missing something

important. The answer only came when I remembered that Hebrew names held meaning. I found something unexpected. The names gave those verses a structural pattern very similar to Genesis 1.

Let me explain.

Water came first. Day 1 contained water before God made the astral objects on day 4. Water came from above the Earth to cover it with an ocean on day 2 before dry-land appeared on day 3.

Water came first. The rivers encircled dry-lands and brought life to the land.

Genesis 1 and the river passage use circling as a technique. Both coupled open spaces with the things that fill them. This interpretation agrees with Hebrew beliefs, God is the source of water, land, and life.



* Opening

The river that flows through Eden to water the garden has no name. It splits into four rivers that feed multiple regions. Finding this river may be impossible. Eden is guarded.

Genesis 1 starts before the universe existed. In a singular event, “nothing” flows to become everything. Finding evidence for that event may be impossible since math and physics become useless close to singularities. The beginning is guarded.

* First Set

The passage names the first river Pishon, which means “increase.” It winds through or encircles the land called Havilah, which means “circular.” This region contains

luxury items. Like Eden's river, the location of this river remains speculative.

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the universe (days 1 and 4). The increase (expansion) of space produced everything we know and everything we desire. Everything in our universe contains cycles of seasons with beginnings and ends, including the universe itself. Human interaction with nature brings us an understanding of the universe, but speculation is all we have for why things function as they do.

* Second Set

The passage names the second river Gihon, which means "bursting forth." It winds through or encircles the land called Cush. The traditional meaning of the word "Cush" is "black." However, Cush is not a derivative of the Hebrew word for black. That tradition was based on a much later usage. If we derive the name Cush from an actual Hebrew word, then based on phonetics, the etymology of Cush might be "as if he were weak" or "as if he were getting smarter."¹

Genesis 1 describes the creation of Earth's extremes (days 2 and 5). Life bursts forth in the ocean before birds fill the sky. We see a progression of life, meandering from a singular place, which could be a weakness. As it moved to new environments, diversity let life become smarter.

* Third Set

The passage names the third river Hiddekel (Tigris), which means "rapid." That river did not meander as it ran east of the land called Ashur (Assyria). The etymology of the Hebrew root word for Ashur means "successful" or "blessed."

Genesis 1 describes the creation of dry-land, plants, and land animals (days 3 and 6). The text reads as if life

suddenly appears but took time to multiply. Paleontology says that once life adapted to dry-land, it colonized and diversified rapidly (geologically speaking). Most life forms were very successful, with human-kind arriving more recently. The Bible says God blessed them all.

* Conclusion

The passage names the fourth river, the Euphrates, which means “fruitfulness.” Oddly, the verse does not give the land a name. That nation came later, as Babylon.

Genesis 2 describes the seventh day as one of rest (day 7). God blesses His creation to be fruitful. Oddly, the poetry does not give that day an end. That revelation comes later.



THE RIVER PASSAGE may not be Circular Poetry, but it contains circles as the first two rivers encircled land. Eastern philosophies expressed ideas as the interrelationship of differing things, not as linear lists. By placing the passage between man’s creations, the river section conveyed the same basic message as the creation poem, the relationship between all things created and their Creator.

RIVER LESSONS

This interpretation agrees with biblical doctrines about spirituality. The river section tells us God provided tangible things that people could appreciate. Through later prophets, God revealed that worldly wealth dims in comparison to the superiority of spiritual riches.

It took time for humans to start comprehending those lessons. As a species, we are still learning. God is still teaching, and He believes we will finally get the message.

FLOWING PARABLE

The river section depicts a reality unknown to the Bronze Age writer, and those Jews who canonized the text, and most of the people who have ever read its words. That is a lot of people. However, that ancient vision holds a truth far more profound than a lovely landscape. This text comes from God, and He speaks to His hard-headed followers in packed parables.

Because of its placement, the river verses tie the creation of man back to the Genesis 1 creation of human-kind and of everything else. Like the circling rivers, God connected all things in relationships. Those things change, yet ever stay the same. The Creator controls it all.

The items found within those water-circled lands ties the passage to the future. Despite all the sins that humans commit, God still provides good things from His good creation. This promise stands from the beginning. What we need is close at hand. Only our selfishness hinders us from sharing His blessings.

The future ties the passage to all the people who trusted in God. Abraham roamed many lands, each with their own rivers and their own riches. God promised him a son whose sons would fill those lands. One of those sons was Moses. He wandered through the deserts between the fertile lands to reach a promised land. Through him, God promised riches greater than anything they could find in any land. The people simply needed to follow the God who led.

Generations of those who trusted God opposed those who did not. One of those sons was Jesus. He dipped in the river, walked the land, and ate of its bounty. His parables speak to us still. All the land's beauty could not compare to what is promised. God's kingdom encircles us like the

Genesis rivers to bring us abundant life. The treasures within us outshine all the gold and scent the air better than any perfume. God still leads us. Good things still await discovery. Go with God. Be His image in every land you walk.

Let us rejoice! Genesis 2:10-14 flows with Good News.

INSPIRED RIVERS

I was no longer frustrated by the river section. I understood the names. If later people remembered and reused them, then that was okay. If they added the names later, then that was okay too. The names held meaning that only an inspired parable could provide.

That grand circle continues in the form of scientific revelation of creation and scientific revelations about our inner longings and desires.

For four strange verses, which sounded so out of place, that interpretation packs a lot of information. God's inspiration is impressive.

CHAPTER 27

RETELLING THE GARDEN

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

-- Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

In this chapter, I paraphrase Adam and Eve's story without the additions dictated by perfection theologies. By doing so, I learned God's plans always start, remain, and end in love. God's control is complete, but His style is not authoritarian. Instead, he lets us choose our way with all the interweaving consequences.

Instead of an angry deity, God's love and kindness glimmer from the pages. The garden events changed and shaped two almost-humans into the image of God instead of condemning them. Instead of a tormented exile, God sang a love song to His image and sent them out.

The entire garden scenario was good for humanity.

God still sings to the creation He loves. The Creator

gives each person a lifetime of opportunities to be good like He is good, to be His image.

Within the Eden stories, I found the Father that the prophets and Jesus adored. Now, that is Good News from the beginning of humanity.

FOUNDATIONS

-- Genesis 1

From the dirt and dust of this world, our Creator lovingly shaped life. He connected us to Earth as He bound Earth to the sun and everything to the original singularity.

The creation is one, as its Creator is One.

God blessed all the generations to fill every corner of our world. Then, He picked one small group as special. They multiplied and evolved in their seasons. He transformed a long lineage of creatures to become almost-humans.

At that new birth, the Eden story begins.

BREATHS

-- Genesis 2:8-9

God's love focused on a small area within a tiny region. Creator prepared a safe place with fertile soil. He chose the most beautiful trees to fill this garden. God then added two more: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.

God chose one young male from the lineage of almost-humans. This youth separated from his tribe, and Creator placed him in the garden. This man would be the first, something new, made from the old, which God formed from the dust.

In an intimate moment, the Breath from Creator

began a unique transformation within this tiny part of creation. The man became alive in a way different from all other living things. This animal now had a life beyond life.

God placed this unique creation into the safety of the garden for his spiritual growth.

GROWTHS

-- Genesis 2:15-25

That man worked. He tended the garden by himself. Through the blessing of God and Man's labors, all things edible and good grew within reach. However, the Creator's guidance instructed the man not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. He said, "In the day you eat, dying you will die."¹ The man agreed to refrain and went on with his work.

One day, Creator prepared Man for the next step of his transformation. God collected animals from each of the lineages and brought them to Man for naming. Creator watched Man's choices as this morality lesson unfolded. The man slowly realized something important; animals were neither his equals nor appropriate mates.

Loneliness filled Man's heart. Not even God's intimacy satisfied that void.

This pleased Creator. The man was now ready.

God chose one young female from the lineage of almost-humans. She separated from family and tribe. The Creator placed her in the garden. This woman would also be the first, something new, made from the old, which God formed from the dust.

He sedated Man and performed surgery. From Man's side, God removed some of the Breath. He transferred this

into a young female almost-human. She now carried the same Breath that bequeathed more than physical life.

They became the same new creation.

When God brought her to the man, Man saw a beautiful image of himself. On the spot, he called her Woman.

The garden nourished Man and Woman, where they lived and learned in safety. They did not need protection from thorns, burs, or sharp rocks. Clothing remained unnecessary, for this season transpired before the concept of shame that scorns self.

TRANSGRESSIONS

-- Genesis 3:1-7

Man and Woman tended the garden together. One day, they worked near the tree that God warned Man not to eat. Woman knew the command and stayed at a respectful distance.

Then she heard a whisper, "Did God *REALLY* tell you not to eat of the garden trees?"

Surprised, Woman found the sound came from a serpent. "No," she replied, "We may eat from any tree except this one. We must not eat or touch it. If we do, we die."

The serpent flicked its forked tongue. Inside, a malicious spirit laughed because Woman added to God's warning. It knew she feared to make a mistake so complicated the command with "or touch it." serpent-spirit worked this opening. It slithered up the trunk and comfortably draped its long body on a forbidden limb.²

Woman watched. She was amazed that it touched the tree and still lived.

Serpent-spirit spoke to Woman with authority, "See,

this tree will not kill you! God knows the fruit gives knowledge like His. He kept you blind. Eat, and know good from evil.”

Confusion swirled through her brain. She lived her life without such a contradiction. Through her brain fog, Woman stared at the tree. Like all the other trees, its beauty graced the garden. The fruit shimmered and smelled of ripeness.

A foreign thought entered her mind, “If it looks good and smells good and it gives wisdom, why not eat?”

Desire ripened in her heart before Woman reached up, plucked the nearest fruit, and took a bite. The serpent-spirit words held truth; she did not die. Woman plucked a second fruit and gave it to her watching husband. He ate. He did not die.

Then, something unexplainable awoke in them. The two looked at each other and knew shame. Eating that fruit was wrong—beyond wrong. Guilt undressed innocence and opened Man and Woman’s eyes to the burden of nakedness.

They considered their options and remembered back before the garden. People constructed garments to protect themselves from injury. So, Man and Woman found large leaves and stitched them together. These they put on, hoping to hide self-shame.

Instead, it increased.

CONSEQUENCES

-- Genesis 3:8-21

The breeze rustled through the trees, and the two recognized the approach of their Creator. Guilt over-

whelmed them. They quickly hid behind a bush, hoping the sound would pass by.

God knew their actions and their hiding place. The Creator never leaves us, even when we cannot feel His caress. However, sometimes, God chooses to make His presence known. Creator wanted the humans to confess and repent, even though He knew the fear in their childlike minds prevented such a response.

Creator gently called to them, just as He would guide all future generations.

The man could not resist the tender summons. An excuse sobbed out as he pushed his way through the branches. "I am naked. I feared that you might see me naked, so I hid."

God asked softly, "Who told you of nakedness, Man? Did you eat the forbidden fruit?"

The man quickly defended his action with a finger pointed toward the bush, "Woman gave it to me! It was her fault!"

God asked the shape hiding behind the leaves why she had done such a thing.

Woman stomped out with a glare towards Man. "We both ate," she growled, then pointed at the distant animal. "The serpent. He told me to. It was the serpent's fault."

God addressed the serpent-spirit without asking one question; the reptile could not answer. But inside the serpent, an intelligent being hid. Creator spoke to that spirit, "You are cursed to become like the animal you hijacked: legless, armless, a twisting beast. Your preference for evil toward humanity stipulates your food, the dust of human mortality. Those who listen to your words turn into your children, spirit or human.³ Woman's offspring will

despise you and yours. When you try to hurt Him, He will crush your head.”

The tone of God’s voice shifted to soft and sad. “Woman, you thought childbearing difficult? Choosing to eat that fruit makes it worse. You will be ill at conception and scream in delivery. Furthermore, wisdom was not what the fruit gave you; wisdom comes only from Me. Your desire becomes a bane to your daughters. Desire chooses unworthy men for husbands. Instead of choosing partners, they allow men to rule over them.”

God turned to Man. The act of eating changed this unique creature, so the Creator addressed him accordingly, “Adam, you followed your wife and ate. Your inaction and action brought consequences upon both of you. You were first; you need to lead in obedience. Your newfound knowledge accentuates difficulties and disappointments. You will learn a new profession, farming. However, the tilled ground provides nutrition for plants besides grain. The more ground you till, the more unwanted plants will grow. Prejudice restricts your discernment towards them. Appreciation for their beauty dies until all you see are pests. From the beginning, I made the soil for plants. Its resistance to your methods will act as a curse to you and your descendants. From now on, you will grow seasonal grain to make bread. To eat, you will labor throughout your life until death comes. In death, your body returns to the dust of its origin.”

Instead of weeping, Adam’s heart sang. He did not care about future grain harvests or thorns. Instead, he heard God tell the Woman they would have children. The man with a name turned to his wife and gave her a name, “Eve, you become the mother of the generations we conceive.”

In respect and preparation, God killed and skinned an animal. Then, he taught His humans how to tan the hide

and sew clothing. They needed this skill for the next season of their lives.

GUARDIANS

-- Genesis 3:22-24

God knows everything from before the beginning of time to beyond the end. What happened in the garden did not surprise Him. The Creator designed the scenario, which included good and bad options. God knew the serpent-spirit believed human rebellion was a good plan, so God let the creature try. However, God knows every movement of every particle, each thought that flows through our minds, all the choices we might possibly make. The outcome of the garden in Eden produced His plan to make human-kind into His image.

Creator spoke to His cherubim, "These animals are now my image. They now think like you and me. We know good from evil. They must learn what that means."

The heavenly beings nodded as their Sovereign continued, "However, I wish to keep them from eating the Tree of Life and living forever. That blessing awaits their future. From the beginning, all things in creation die. My Breath and the Knowledge make these two people unique. Humans need to consider death. Like the animals they once were, humans only fear physical death. I warned the man of true death. Humans need to learn that spiritual life outshines physical life, and physical death is nothing compared to spiritual death.⁴ They need time to trust my word." The cherubim nodded again.

"Now that they can disobey, they are ready to leave this secure place and return to the others. My image will begin a

new lineage. My Breath and the Knowledge must enter them all.”

God gave orders. The cherubim ushered Adam and Eve out of the garden, then took their station with a flame that never stopped turning, flashing like a sword in the sun. God’s servants guarded the Tree of Life until a new season of the world began.

BLOODLINES

The Creator sent His image back into the world for a reason. The Breath and Knowledge needed to infuse their lineage. Out of the old, a new bloodline formed. The enhanced humans spread and increased, while all the other lineages of almost-humans slowly ended.

Humanity is one, as our Creator is One.

However, that was not the end of the story! God again made something new out of the human bloodline. First by covenant, then by choice, these new creatures conform to the Creator’s image of love.

Yes! The Eden stories profess the Good News taught by God’s prophets and by Jesus.

Rejoice! Our Abba loves us from the beginning.

CHAPTER 28

BLIND SIN

Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.

-- Luke 11:52 NIV

Some of you may still recoil from my interpretations because of Original Sin theology. Let me illustrate the differences through the words of Jesus (John 9). He did not condemn everyone to Hell because of Adam's sin. He did not blame some ancestor's sin for misfortune. Instead, Jesus rebuked the pious religious leaders who condemned when God did not.

Let me tell you that story.

QUESTIONING THE ARCHITECT

A blind man sat begging at the gate as the crowd passed without seeing. There, the Spirit prompted the eyes of two disciples to ponder the man's fate. They asked their Rabbi

what condemned him from birth: his own sin or his parents' sin.

Jesus answered, "neither... but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3 NIV).

Without hesitation, Jesus did the work of God. The good Rabbi knelt beside the blind man and spat into the dirt. Then, the healer rubbed the mud on unseeing eyes and sent the man away to wash.

PATRONIZING THE MIRACLE

Jesus did not add human sin to this man's misfortune. No inherited curse or sin, particularly one passed down from Adam, caused the blindness. If Jesus believed in one of those reasons, then His answer would have been different.

Since sin did not cause the problem, some theologians have said the blindness existed to exhibit the miracle. God made the man blind to prove the superior status of Jesus.

This answer seems reasonable, yet I found it flawed. Why send the man away? No one at the gate witnessed the transformation. The man's friends and neighbors were so confused they argued whether he was the same man. Eventually, people sent him to the religious leaders who deemed the miracle impossible without witnesses.

The interpretation that focuses on the miracle of one man's sight does not work biblically. Jesus healed many blind people, but people across the world suffered the same fate without a cure. This theology limits God's abilities and His love for humanity. We must ask, "Does God's mercy decrease because He would not, or could not, heal them all?"

The prophets would say, “No.”

This popular interpretation’s conclusion describes a human pawn in a power game between good and evil (Persian dualism). It condemns a man to lifelong suffering so that another person (Jesus) appeared powerful to his followers.

To me, the good Rabbi did not display a power-hungry ego. Such a scenario insisted Jesus finally accepted Satan’s wilderness offer of fame and leadership. Instead, the healer sent the man away.

GLIMPSING A LIFE

Some people list Job as the poster child of the power-play theology. Bad choice.

Satan wished to use Job as a pawn since he assumed suffering would force the man to lose faith. However, God blessed humans with the right to choose and re-choose in every circumstance of their lives. That ability shows empowerment. God let Job suffer but knew faith would endure. He even gave Job’s friends the opportunity to repent of their bad theological advice.

In the New Testament, God let a fetus be born blind. He allowed those who listened to Satan to treat the man like a pawn. Yet, God also trusted this man to choose correctly.

Miracles were and are tools to get people’s attention. That means God’s work embodies much more than a magic trick or even one man’s sight.

The man was blind because of natural events before or at his birth. Blindness had nothing to do with Adam’s sin, the sins of the man, or his parents’ sins. God made nature. Evolution was God’s sculpting tool. His rules dictated that genetics and disease caused some babies to be born blind

(Exodus 4:10-13). This kind of blindness was merely a natural ailment, no sin required. Humans, not God, called such afflictions a curse. They condemned when God did not.

Jesus said, "*the works of God might be displayed....*" Might. That word is ambiguous. It implies the work of God might NOT be displayed.

I wondered, "Was Jesus doubting His ability to heal, or did He mean something else?" Jesus was a prophetic Rabbi, so I looked for something profound within His words.

The passage provided a clue, "*...might be displayed in him.*" Jesus was not talking about healing the man. Instead, he spoke of the man's entire life, like how God worked in Job's life.

God saw how the blind man dealt with his atypical existence, his responses to people's reactions to his problems. The Father watched as the man displayed a deepening resolve as the religious establishment insulted his healer. The Creator smiled as the man blossomed through his life-changing event.

The outcome might have been different, and the lessons are more insightful than the sight. God chose this man for healing because of the high probability of what might happen through him.

CREATING LIGHT

As Jesus showed compassion to a beggar, and before applying the mud, Jesus declared, "*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*" (John 9: 5 NIV). This state of being was neither a single event nor a performance statement to shock people into belief. Jesus told his disciples that time was short. He whispered a profound truth into the man: "*I*

AM.” As God, Jesus reached out to change one life. That man continued the work by holding onto the truth. By doing so, their story continues to change lives.

God’s work from the beginning was and is love. He wants us to see with more than eyes. Once enlightened, we then act in the likeness of God. We continue His work of loving the unloved. We carry the light of the world while we are in the world.

SEEING ANALOGY

Oddly enough, the pattern of this story roughly parallels Genesis 2 and 3. Both describe evolutionary events in the lives of individuals. Adam and the blind man started their day in the dirt, but that changed by something coming from the mouth of God/Jesus.

In the garden, the serpent-spirit spoke. A deceiving voice offered an opportunity for Eve to distrust God’s word. At a different time, it also hissed through the Pharisees’ denial. It tried to coerce the beggar and his parents to reject reality and accept an oppressive doctrine. This time, instead of knowledge, Satan dangled admittance to the Temple as the prize. The parents’ fear prompted them to shift blame, just like the first humans. Both Adam and the healed man experienced the fear of rejection. Both were banned from their sanctuary.

Unlike Adam, this man followed instructions and held onto the truth.

God came to man. Adam hid. His guilt disqualified him from eating from the Tree of Life. In contrast, the man once blind saw the Messiah, the only One worthy of worship.¹ He fell to his knees to bask in Heavenly light.

CONSIDERING THE PARABLE

At the end of this story, Jesus implicated the religious leaders as the ones genuinely blind.² Their traditions restricted them from rejoicing or praising God for the man's healing. Self-righteousness cast out the good and kept the lie.

We know that the descendants of Adam continue to disobey and reject God. We also know that some church leaders acted like the Pharisees. They taught traditions and laws but did not live as children of God. Their beliefs were the same as Job's friends, who insisted every affliction must be a punishment and thus a curse.

However, that tradition of belief has always been wrong.

The Bible and evolution teach similar lessons on affliction as a part of life. Trials are often necessary to produce strength or build faith. Our response is a choice. Will we blame God and lose faith or keep the faith and grow strong?

Will we condemn where God did not, or will we live as if God is really in control, even in our adversity? When we go through such events, we can let God's work manifest in our life. It opens eyes to see Him clearly and gives access to the Tree of Life.

CORRECTING THEOLOGY

Jesus offended the Pharisees when He called them blind. Was this deliberate? Probably. They believed their tradition was God's truth. It was not. They wanted Jesus dead because they held onto insult and refused correction. They made their choice.

We should learn the lesson. Original Sin theologies

agree with Job's friends, the Pharisees, and the sour grape theology in Ezekiel (chapters 18 and 33). God resolutely rejects such beliefs. He also begs His stiff-necked children to listen and change their ways. He does not want anyone to go to Hell.

Our Creator holds a person's sins against that person only, not his family or his descendants. That includes Adam. Original Sin theologies condemn humanity without mercy. God never did. He loves His good but foolish children.

Carry His light. Display the works of God. Live like God is your loving Father, no matter what events happen. Trust in Him, like He knows what is best. Rejoice when you see Him work, especially when blessing comes to someone else.

God's love for the unloved is the shining Good News taught by Jesus.

PART FOUR
THE GENERATIONS

GENESIS 4:1 - 6:4, 9:28, 10:1-32, 11:10-32

CHAPTER 29

THE BEGATS

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

-- Titus 3:9 NIV

I will admit emotional turmoil restricted my evaluation of the genealogies. Too many arguments that vacillated between a strictly literal and purely mythical interpretation left me bitter and calloused. Learning to consider them anew took time and a lot of patience from God.

I wondered, “Could a natural interpretation rebrand the genealogies into a reality defined by nature?” I had no clue. Once more, I asked God for help.

He came through again. God turned dull and irritating passages into something beautiful.

The repetitive verses give us much more than a man’s longevity. The genealogies tell us how the ancient Hebrew people viewed history.

UNRELIABLE LISTS

Early on, I accepted reasons to reject the Bible's dating. The clearest of those was the Earth. The evidence showed the geologic sculpting of stone took lots of time. Six thousand years simply did not provide enough years for the formations to develop.

What would be the point of God making the rocks look old when they were not? We might be impressed, but we could not comprehend what we saw. If we viewed the structures as artificial, then science became an illusion. Everything in nature returned to a magical state. Ultimately, that belief said God distorted the evidence just to show off.

I shook my head. The Bible does not describe God as deceptive.

The second-best reason I found for rejecting the standard interpretation of the biblical genealogies was the genealogies themselves. For me, they contained uncertainty, not evidence.

The Israelites suffered centuries of sloppy religion, which probably produced careless transcriptions and additions. The Jews compiled their canon only after the Babylonian exile, long after Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Those redactors included several mismatched copies of their family history.¹ Christianity then developed several biblical canons in which the people's ages differed by hundreds of years. The total sum changed by thousands of years.

That history told me two things. First, the Israelites, Jewish redactors, and Christians had more than one list. And two, inserting multiple lists had to be deliberate.

COMPILED LISTS

In 1658, Archbishop Ussher “resolved” the age of creation, stating the year, month, and time of day that everything started. People still quote him as an authority. However, he did not base his calculations on biblical information alone. Ussher depended on non-biblical sources too.

Many other scholars have tried to date creation. No two calculations came out the same. Why no consensus? Because the biblical genealogies do not match. The scholars’ attempts only highlighted the uncertainty of biblical accounting. This impasse has caused many conservative Christians to accommodate all the variables by stating the Earth’s age as “roughly 6,000 to 10,000 years old.” Non-conservative Christians dismiss the lists entirely as mythical additions.

Studying our biological history added to the confusion. Creationists proposed theories to attain the number and distribution of people alive today. One popular idea asserted that early humans did not have diseases, so they lived longer and had more children. However, the oldest human fossils show signs of illness, and the Bible never claimed everyone lived long lives. The theory is an assumption to support a belief, nothing more.

I came to a conclusion. God did not provide empirical evidence to support the genealogies’ precision as significant in their interpretation. Therefore, calculations based on those lists will not deliver the desired solution. Consequently, if people today choose to argue over genealogies, they do so without compelling evidence to back their beliefs (1 Timothy 1:3-4).

ABRAHAM'S TIME

God then showed me a passage that solidified my arguments against the literal uses of the genealogies to calculate accurate lifespans of individuals and/or the planet.

Abraham was a Hebrew from the lineage of Eber. According to the genealogies, all of Abraham's ancestors lived until he reached about 50 years old. Several ancestors outlived Abraham, including Noah and Eber.

Nevertheless, Abraham² laughed at the thought that he, an old man at one-hundred years, could produce a son (Genesis 17:17). If Abraham's forefathers had children after they reached one hundred years, then God's words should have sounded reasonable, not ridiculous.

If Abraham did not know his aged family members produced children, then why should I believe the ages in the lists? If he did not know, then who wrote the genealogies?

ADAM'S TIME

I started with the first name in each of the lists: Adam.

The Bible described Adam and Eve as the father and mother of every living human. That meant they had to live before the migration out of Africa. The almost-humans knew gardening, language, spirituality, and sewing, but Adam's children had to learn shame and evil.

Genetic studies trace every living human back to one man and woman, nicknamed Y-chromosomal Adam and mitochondrial Eve (Yadam and Meve). Science probably will never pinpoint those two as man and wife or even living at the same time. However, the data does say that those individuals were not the first *Homo sapiens*.

The Eden story never required Adam and Eve to be the first *Homo sapiens*, either. Accepting the lineage of almost-humans lets anthropological theories agree with the Bible. It places Adam and Eve somewhere between 65,000 and 200,000 years ago.

As revealing as that insight was, a part of it stumped me for a while. Was the similarity just a lucky circumstance? It seemed unreasonable to expect an unwritten story to remain intact for such a long time and still contain this strong a resemblance.

Then I added God, the One who remembered. Only He could have inspired prophetic storytellers to include details that matched modern genetics so well.

TRANSITIONAL GLITCHES

The timeline between Adam and his sons presents a challenge that archeological evidence rejects. Humans started planting grains roughly 20,000 years ago, and all current livestock became domesticated within the last 12,000 years. Along with those advancements came the first settlements we might call towns. By the time those innovations began in the Middle East, people had colonized the world. The technologies trailed behind.

If Adam and Eve were the genetic Yadam and Meve, then their children did not plant grain, raise animals, or build cities. That gave some theologians reason to propose that Adam was the father of only the Hebrew lineage since Cain built the first city.

However, the assertion did not agree with Adam's statement that Eve was "*the mother of all the living*" (Genesis 3:20c NIV). Moreover, it distanced them from being Yadam and Meve, which provided the Eden story with a foothold

in scientific reality. Worst of all, a nationalized Adam rejected human-kind as God's image and removed God's Breath from human-kind. Instead, it limited the Image, Breath, and Knowledge to the Hebrew people only.

The genetic evidence shows all humans as one species, which agrees with Adam's statement. I also trusted God, who claimed all people as His children.

I suddenly saw a consistent biblical concept that cleared my confusion about the inconsistent events. The genealogies presented all people as one family, which shows lineage. The details were real history but told in an allegorical form. God's inspiration kept the factual details until someone wrote the stories.

I liked that interpretation for Adam and Eve. However, I felt something was still missing. So I kept hunting for a way to harmonize the patriarch's genealogies with science and find inspired history.

HISTORY'S OFFERING

Except for a list of names, I did not see the point of the genealogies. My thoughts returned to my frequently asked question, "Why are they in the Bible?" I finally came up with a simple reason. Just like today, people made lists of ancestors because history dictated status.

God told the Israelites to remember. They needed to know their lineage to elect leaders, claim portions of land, or become priests. The Bible contained quite a few genealogies during and after Moses. So it seemed reasonable to presume genealogists broadened their work to include the patriarchs.

Precedent existed. Nations with monarchs required a pedigree, so genealogies defended family and celebrated

culture. To authenticate heritage, ancient historians reached back in time to search for any reference available. For example, the Babylonians gathered information from their stories and scoured archives of neighboring countries. They wrote list after meticulous list, trying to be precise.

The documents that survived tell us of that style. Ancient civilizations did not record history as we do. Instead, they used them as propaganda to emphasize a bloodline's superiority. People covered walls with myths glorifying their royal families. They ignored embarrassing events. Exaggeration came with the territory and gave prominent ancestors god-like status and much longer lives.

Modern archaeologists do not reject everything. They sift those texts to glean insights into a nation's history. They search for the truth, even in the wildest narratives.

I decided to give the biblical genealogies the same respect and understanding.

JEWISH DISTINCTION

The canon redactors compiled an anthology from what remained after generations of neglect and the devastations of war. They preserved their history so that their people could remember. The redactors considered these national stories worthy.

However, those stories were not just history. Like the neighboring nations, they often roused the reader's pride with the hope of God's continued presence while calling for dedication and humility towards their Creator. Unlike their neighbors, the biblical redactors rejected epic tales that would have spiced up their history. The genealogies preceding Abraham demonstrates this the best. They contain only a few lines with more than a name and age.

Any other nation's historians would have made sure each influential ancestor had a tall tale of remembrance.

Beyond this unusual minimalism, the Hebrew redactors did something even more extraordinary. Stories throughout the Bible included embarrassing events that dishonored beloved heroes and the nation. Every other culture would have cleaned up the history to empower themselves through their ancestors. The Hebrew concept of history was different.

With that understanding came insight. I realized the biblical redactors searched for histories they verified as holding resemblance to the truth. They deliberately did not embellish or scrub clean their stories. They did not exclude differing accounts. The redactors included more than one copy in hopes that they included the best one.

We no longer have their sources or reasons for choosing. Missing data restricts our ability to fact-check the information or even determine why the lists differ.

In this light, the biblical lists were not necessarily pure mythology, despite the prolonged lives and inconsistencies. The genealogies show research and methodical dedication. They assembled information from numerous sources, by multiple people, but for one reason. They wanted to preserve their history.

FAMILY HISTORY

Inside those preserved documents lay one piece of family history that contradicted their neighbors' beliefs. It may have differed from the views of the redactors. Some of God's people still reject this ancient idea about "the nations."

The genealogies included the forefathers of many

nations. The Israelites considered some of those people enemies, yet they still named the nation's forefathers as their forefather's brothers.

While they claimed Hebrew superiority as God's chosen people, they also supported the blessing of all humanity. While they flaunted national pride, they also integrated everyone, even enemies. We can conclude that the ancient Hebrews believed the nations were simply warring brothers. They included every human as one family.

Anthropology, genetics, and linguistics agree with the Bible on that concept. We may look and sound different, but humanity is one species, one family.

More than that, the Hebrew God was not a national god. He called people of every nation his children.³ If the ancient Jews had comprehended that concept, the world would be different. If Christianity embraced unity, the world would have changed radically.

The genealogies' insistence on kinship gave me hope. We can still achieve this blessed peace. Jesus did pray for our unity.

Profound inspiration is found in some the least read parts of the Bible. Those lists do not discriminate between nations. Humanity is one, as God is One. It is about time we figured out the significance of family.

SKIPPED GENERATIONS

I found another detail that helped interpret the genealogies and gave me a reason to pursue these "dull" passages. The biblical writers often used an individual's name to represent their community, family, tribe, or nation. Thus, the next name in a list could be the next prominent person in a clan's lineage, not the next generation.⁴

Even today, Jews call themselves “sons of Abraham.” This usage is not a mistake or an exaggeration. It expresses the relationship of a lineage that skips generations for emphasis, focusing on the most important ancestor.

With the interpretation of a “clan lineage,” I found a new understanding of the patriarchs’ ages. The number given was the longevity of his clan. The named son was the next person in the bloodline who began a new clan. Old ages showed stability within that community. For example, the people who claimed heritage through Noah ended during Abraham’s life. However, the clan of “Eber” continued. By the time of Abraham, the clan had modified his name to “Hebrew.”

The point of the patriarchal genealogies was to describe a single lineage, that from Adam to Abraham. Skipping people’s names or not mentioning other lineages did not infer insignificance. Nothing even claimed Abraham’s parentage was exceptional.

The genealogies simply record the family history of the Jews as they saw it. The literal interpretation of the patriarchs’ ages tells a much different story.

CONSTRAINED TIME

One more revelation finalized my understanding of the genealogies. These passages show how the ancient Hebrew scholars described time.

Using the variations in the multiple canons, the ages of the people listed provided a range for the creation’s beginning between 4000 BC and 8000 BC.

I was surprised to find those dates roughly corresponded to Abraham’s ancestral background. The Mesopotamian valley became colonized then fortified with

agricultural settlements by 6500 BC. They diversified labor then developed writing to keep track of trade by 3500 BC.

Abraham's immediate ancestors knew the Sumerians as leaders. Before his birth, that culture rallied their last national revival near the city of Ur. They lost to the Akkadians, who adopted their technologies and culture while suppressing them. Egyptian cultural developments trailed the Sumerians but had caught up and blossomed by Abraham's time.

Abraham came from a city named Ur, and he visited Egypt. The destruction of Sumer was his family history. The later Hebrew redactors knew the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Egyptian cultures as "the ancients" when they collected their canon's writings.

A light bulb clicked on. I suddenly found harmony. Instead of just individual lives or clans, the collective ages also showed the length of recorded history. With the information they had, they determined that the beginning of time started when the first civilization began.⁵

In a way, they were right.

FAITH'S LINEAGE

Oh, my goodness! My disdain for the genealogies changed to appreciation. Those passages may still be dull reading, but the insights into their development were not.

I suspect God gave us mismatched versions because He foresaw the misunderstanding of later generations. He inspired the redactors to make it impossible for a strictly literal interpretation (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

The passages deliver more than just names and numbers in a list. The genealogies show the historical significance of their ancestors. Most of the patriarchs were

not noteworthy. None of them needed epic fiction to enhance their greatness. Why? Because peacemakers gently reduce drama in their communities. Everyone could live quiet lives (Psalm 3:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12).

That lesson demands emphasizing today. Our Creator knows each person. Being a friend of God is always superior to all the accolades invented to impress other humans.

The biblical genealogies included all other nations and peoples. They traced family lineages through important people, yet instead of inventing mythical epics, they embraced embarrassing details. The Hebrew concept of history was very different from their neighbors.

CHAPTER 30

CAIN'S STORY

*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.
Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will
explain to you.*

-- Deuteronomy 32:7 NIV

The Bible follows Adam and Eve with a series of short narratives and one-line snippets from their descendants' lives. The usual retelling of the saga starts with jealousy and murder. Sin breeds horrific sins. God gets angry, so He sends worldwide destruction with the Great Flood. The survivors bring on God's rage again at Babel.

These stories irritated me as I struggled to understand the creation. If God hated sin so much, why keep any human alive to produce more evil offspring? Why would anyone remember the stories about extended family members, and why were they worthy of the canon?

I frequently asked, "What was the point?"

Frustration continued until I realized Genesis did not contain the epic version told at church. People added

segues to stitch the narratives and snippets into one story. They highlighted God's anger but not His love. My quest required I find God's love from the beginning, so I needed a paradigm shift in how I read those passages.

God stunned me again by answering my questions and quieting my disgust. He dislodged the brain-blocking epic and showed me why He preserved this history as tidbits.

To my great surprise, the God-inspired storytelling style takes us through the human journey to develop civilization.¹ And those stories tell the same story as anthropology and archeology.

Instead of mythology, the Bible relays history in allegorical form.

COMPACT TIME

Let me start with my most challenging obstacle with Cain's story (Genesis 4:1-17). It concerns how the ancient Hebrew's storytelling style dealt with time.

If Adam and Eve parented humanity, then they correspond to Yadam and Meve (65,000 to 200,000 years ago). Yet scientific accuracy may never determine Yadam and Meve as living at the same time. It is even less likely to identify their location as one garden. The occupations compound the problem. The timeline does not work for their sons to farm, shepherd, and build cities. Those advancements started within the last 20,000 years.

The solution was simple once I discovered that the texts do not record history as we do today. These stories compressed time to show relationships.

For example, Genesis 1 squeezed billions of years into an easily remembered chapter. The genealogies did something similar when they skipped generations to focus on

the next influential family member that started the next clan.

Likewise, the Eden stories compressed tens of thousands of years into the life of one representative family. People with those experiences existed, yet Adam and Eve were not required to live together to be the father and mother of humans. Also, the segue from father to son was not necessarily direct offspring.

The stories are historical allegories containing compressed time. Each of the Genesis narratives and snippets contain concise parables that convey more historical information than any fictional epic.

How does that work? People existed who experienced the described events, but a lifetime does not constrain this story style. It does not matter if that family lived at the same time or in the same region. The progression of events displaces the time it took to get to the next point.

That means a small family or one person acts as representatives of the lineage and events described. Each transition could embody generations or thousands of generations. Cain and Abel personify both the next generation and the “son” of the next significant event.

You can do stuff like that with allegories. And yes, the incompatibility between my childhood's simple literal understanding and how these seemingly simple stories work still makes my brain twitch. I suspect yours will too. Give it time.

This style explains the transition between Adam and Eve and their children. Time does not define the details. The interrelationship between details expresses progression.

Still, only an inspired parable could contain the scientific details unknown until now. Only an inspired arrange-

ment of snippet stories could have placed them in the order of progression found by modern anthropologists. That miracle, inspired by God, transforms pages of strange one-liners into notable nuggets of knowledge.

Revelation is worth the paradigm shift. It gives reason to praise our Creator.

SONS' WIVES

One of my oldest questions concerned Genesis 4:17. If Adam and Eve were the only humans on the planet, where did their children find mates? Unfortunately, the answers I heard in church tended to turn people away in disgust.

According to Moses, incest was a sin. Jews and Christians generally condemned the practice of such relations. Yet biblical believers justified incest for the first humans. Theologians even worked around the problem of recessive genes accumulating. They theorized that no genetic problems existed because mutations had not yet entered human DNA. However, no natural or historical evidence supports that belief. Their solution only inserts another unprovable doctrine into the unbiblical perfectionistic epic.

This explanation always made me wonder why God changed His mind. Then I saw the assumption. Biblically, the text did not say Cain's wife was his sister. It never said Cain had a wife before he left Eden or that she descended from Adam and Eve.

God did not change His mind. Instead, he used the existing almost-humans as genetically acceptable mates. Genetics has found that humans continued to mate successfully with other species of almost-humans (Neanderthal and Denisovan). Eve did not produce hundreds of

children to populate the world, and Adam did not father his grandchildren.

The image of God spread naturally, one child at a time. By merging the Breath and Knowledge into the almost-human lineage, all people became one kind. One kind agrees with science. Humanity is one, as God is one.

FIRST FIRSTFRUIT

I have heard that Cain and Able were twins. The reasoning asserts that since the text did not mention Eve getting pregnant again, then this was only one birthing. However, Genesis 4:1-2 never states that as a fact. She simply bore two sons, one later than the other.

My guess? That detail was not necessary for God's message.

The story's focus starts with the sacrifices (Genesis 4:3-7). Unfortunately, the writer again "neglected" to provide all the details desired by later storytellers. The passage does not say how or why God accepted or rejected the sacrifices. Sadly, that did not stop people from speculating.

One of today's popular reasons forces Mosaic law into this ancient story. They say Abel brought a "firstfruit" offering, but Cain offered "leftovers." The theology then merges the firstfruit with the tithe. This gives preachers an early biblical source to improve donations. The motivation for the givers becomes the fear of God's rejection, not the joy of His love.

What is my problem with this theology? Preachers inserting fear where God did not.

Also, firstfruit and tithe are similar but not the same. Under the Mosaic Law, the tithe offering was 10% of every financial gain, which kept the temple operational and

sustained the Levite priests. People gave the seasonal first-fruit offerings in addition to the tithe. At the beginning of each harvest, people give thanks to God for both their past survival and for sufficient bounty to survive the coming year.

In our non-agrarian society, we can consider gifts, bonuses, raises, and inheritances as potential reasons for a firstfruits offering. Each person decides how much to give.

Was Abel's sacrifice a firstfruit? The text indicates that is possible, but it predates Mosaic Law. Also, his gift tells us the time of year, February or March, when lambs and kids are born.

Was Cain's sacrifice leftovers? Unknown. The text does not say. At that time of year, harvests include roots, onion bulbs, and greens from the cabbage family. A few grains ripen in the late spring. Did Cain perform the ritual wrong, or not give the first of the harvest? Again, unknown. We know almost nothing of that time's practices.

The man did receive an explanation, which scholars say is difficult to interpret. I suspect some of that confusion stems from the beliefs of the scholars. That means they put into God's mouth what they believe He said, and that problem started long before Christianity. Even the Septuagint is not a literal translation into Greek. These later Jews decided Cain messed up the ritual.

God did not say why He found the vegetables unacceptable or anything about the application of a ritual. Instead, God asked the man why he felt bad. The Creator discussed right versus wrong. He added that both contained consequences. Cain could have brought everything gathered that day, and God still might have rejected it. Why? Because God saw something bad growing inside the man.

The Creator does not change His ways; He asks us to

change ours. God desires mercy and a contrite heart, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51:17). Hatred turns murderous even without bloodshed (Genesis 37:41; 1 John 3:15). Giving the best does not require only the highest quality or quantity (Mark 12:41-44). Why would this instance be any different?

Cain had a choice. He placed something on the altar, but his heart was wrong (Matthew 5:23-24). The man needed to release the anger, contempt, hatred, or unforgiveness along with the vegetables. When God spoke, He asked Cain to consider future actions and consequences. He wanted this image to act like His image.

CAIN'S CHOICE

Did you know that Genesis 4:8 starts with Cain speaking to Abel about hearing from God? I never heard that preached, and I found many English translations that interpreted the text to skip that detail. Their reasoning supported the epic myth. Perfectionism preferred Cain steering his brother into the field, which inserts the idea of premeditated murder.

Instead, the two brothers talked. They discussed the sacrifice and what God meant. Did they argue, debate theology, or discuss the future? Was worry or sympathy involved? Did they finish as friends? The text does not say, so it leaves us to speculate.

Only later did the brothers go into the field. It may not have been the same day or month, just later. Abel helped Cain with the plants. Then something happened to make Cain explode violently.

I believe Cain did not premeditate this murder. His emotions built over time, one irritation at a time. He never

mastered them, so they mastered him. In the heat of the moment, he freely chose evil.

Then he lied about what happened.

God still asks that we control our emotions or accept the consequences of their mastery.

FIRST MURDER

In Sunday school, I learned that Cain committed the first murder. However, when I studied the passage (Genesis 4:8-15), I found that the Bible never alleged that Cain was the first to kill or even the first to kill his brother. In fact, it said other people already killed strangers.

I have heard preachers justify the traditional interpretation by insisting Adam and Eve had so many children before Cain that they forgot each other. Even as a child, I thought that improbable. How did they forget their parents and siblings? What made them grow so fearful that they started killing each other? If they were killing each other, then how was Cain the first?

Fear, distrust, and violence already existed. To those strangers, he would be the stranger. For me, the concept of a vagabond confirmed that Adam and Eve were never alone on Earth. Abel's death occurred because Cain followed the violent ways of his ancestors, the almost-humans.

GOD'S MARK

Believers have regularly speculated on the type of mark given to Cain (Genesis 4:15). I heard that it darkened the man's skin.

I questioned that doctrine when I was very young. I realized that the Bible did not specify such a thing. Also, a

radically different skin tone would not have kept those people from killing him. Often, people are afraid of such differences.

Science offers an ironic departure from the traditions. The physical evidence indicates the first humans had dark skin. Those who wandered off the continent of Africa eventually (much later) developed lighter skin tones. That means Cain had dark skin like his parents. If the mark changed his skin color, then he became lighter, not darker.

I doubted that change too, and for the same reason. The Bible did not indicate a full-body transformation. So, I asked, "What did the Bible say about the mark?"

The text did not say whether it produced fear or respect, but God was quite confident that the mark would keep Cain alive. His threat to kill potential murderers was a bonus, not a necessity.

An alternate translation of the Hebrew word can be a "sign or banner." What about a symbol? That skill developed before *Homo sapiens* existed. Ancient almost-humans decorated artifacts and caves with humans, animals, and geometric marks. They communicated this way to convey complex ideas. The oldest evidence of tattoos date from over 3000 BC. Even today, people recognize and respect symbols.

Did God's mark remove the melatonin, which made white marks? Did God give the man the first tattoo? Whatever the process, it was permanent.

This brings us to the first evidence for the running theme of civilization's development in the snippet stories. Symbolism is a precursor to writing and the sharing of information.

CITY'S DEFENSE

I often hear that Cain built the first city (Genesis 4:17b). Preachers described that city as an enormous metropolis with massive walls.

The Bible merely says Cain built a city. It never calls it the first or even mentions its size.

I wondered, "At that time, what made a city?"

The anthropological answer was, "Not much." Cain did not need to build radically different fortifications unheard of by his contemporaries. It did not need to be huge.

Early farmers lived near each other, surrounded by their crops. A city was a community residing inside minimal fortifications to protect the group from marauding animals and humans. The inhabitants would go out to work or hunt and then return to the communal area to live. The defenses could have been as simple as a fence of pointed sticks.

If we view Cain as a representative of compressed history, then this part of his story reflects the earliest stages that created stable cities. The growth of humanity toward more populous communities produced problems. Vagabonds steal what settled people store. Combined defenses let groups expand.

God gave Cain, the murderer, the wisdom to protect his new family and community. Talk about a second chance!

SIBLINGS' RIVALRY

I paraphrased the first post-garden story and the glimpse of the compressed history it portrays (Genesis 4:1-16).

. . .

THE BIBLE DID NOT NUMBER the children Eve birthed. Yet, at some point, her lineage produced two sons. The parents named the first Cain, who followed his father into the fields. The second, Abel, tended animals domesticated by the almost-humans of the outside world.

Those two young men worshipped the God of their parents. We do not know why or how the brothers presented offerings; it only said they did. Cain brought vegetables and grain. Abel sacrificed a fat young animal. We do not know why God preferred one over the other, but the effect showed God's partiality, which changed the two men's futures.

Cain became sad, upset, and finally offended. He did not focus on his offering or on what might please God. Instead, he blamed "that kid," his brother who slept with stinky sheep instead of pulling weeds like a real son.

God knew Cain's heart, but He never threatened or stopped the anger. Instead, the Creator gently offered a logical warning. He told Cain that both good and bad actions produced consequences. The man had to choose. Good sense dictated the man master his emotions.

Cain heard the Voice of God, but he did not change. Cain spoke to his brother but kept his bad attitude. Twisted logic hardened Cain's heart as hatred, violence, and vengeance filled his waking dreams.

Two brothers walked into the field. The sun moved lazily across the sky. One returned home.

God spoke again. "Cain, where is your brother?" Creator already knew Abel's location because He never leaves us. God permitted that death. He does not stop us from sinning, nor does he immediately kill those who do. That is His way. Like the question in the garden, God wanted this man to confess and repent.

Instead of passing the blame like his parents, Cain redirected truth with a witty insult, an almost lie. "Why ask me? Am I a shepherd's shepherd?" Murder did not take away the anger. It only toughened it to obscure the guilt.

A growl from God rattled Cain's resolve. "Do you not know Abel's blood screams to me from the ground? Your punishment affects you more than physical death. You filled the furrows with your brother's blood. From now on, no amount of labor will force a response from dirt. Seeds die as you plant them. So today, leave your father's fields and wander far away."

Panic struck Cain. No food. No family. No safety. His voice shook as he spoke, "I will not survive. Those other people kill vagabonds. I will die!"

The wind brushed the forehead of Cain. God said, "I mark you with my mark. Those who find you will respect it. But for your peace of mind, I vow vengeance upon anyone who might kill you. Be assured; I will kill them and seven of their family."

Cain packed a bag and walked away from family and friends. His wanderings took him far away from Eden. In the land of Nod, God allowed the man to settle, marry, and produce children.

This emotional farmer, who could no longer farm, changed. The man became motivational. The man with the mark upon his brow persuaded people to band together and build a city. Cain, whom the ground rejected, gained enough support to claim naming rights. His blood, spirit, and the image of God infiltrated the descendants of that region.

BROTHERS' PARABLE

The allegorical morals conveyed by Cain's story are essential for understanding the rest of the Bible. Sadly, perfection theology distorts them.

God spoke clearly of choices and consequences. Cain chose poorly, but God did not rain down judgment. Instead, the Creator secured the sinner's life and let him prosper.

Human weakness never stopped God's compassion.

We need to discuss our problems. We also must find solutions that let go of pent-up emotions before they take control of our lives.

Murder was and is very bad because an image of God kills an image of God. Likewise, rationalizing an evil act was and is just as bad. Yet, amazingly, God wants to forgive both.

Why did God send Cain away? Simple: murder makes people angry. The family wants revenge and often kills the assailant of their loved one. Cain was no longer safe at home, and God wanted him to live. So, on the same day that the man became a murderer, God saved Cain twice. The first was the mark that kept him safe in the future; the second was by removing him from those who would not respect the mark.

God did not condemn Cain to Hell as Christians routinely do. Even at our worst, God freely gives mercy and love. Murderers and liars are no exception. God postponed the judgment of physical death. In doing so, Cain, the sinner, developed into a leader of men as the Breath and Knowledge spread outside Eden. We can only hope that he repented while mastering his emotions.

CIVILIZATION'S BIRTH

The end of Cain's story describes the natural tendencies of humans to migrate and then settle down. Dangers required cooperation. The desire for security drove the progression of humanity toward civilization.

For a civilization to exist, people must also live and work together peaceably. That requires us to curb our emotions before they drive us to violence. Do we rule them, or do they rule us? Choosing righteousness creates a better outcome.

God initiated change in humanity through a progression of events. Genesis describes all those generations by using one family. Our Creator is in control, always.

CHAPTER 31

CAIN'S FAMILY

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

-- Jude 1:11 NIV

Cain's children had children, and they had children (Genesis 4:17-18). Sermons condemned generations because of Cain's sin. Preachers said they had invented extreme evil, which required a flood of global proportions to eradicate.

The way believers talked about those people distressed my soul. Christianity told me God was love, God would protect His children, and God never changed. But here, God's mercy should have ended Cain's life to rid the world of the threat his children posed. He deliberately did not. Because God did not act early enough, he became so angry that he destroyed the world with a flood. Was God blind? Did He care? How did this story show the Abba that Jesus loved and trusted?

One day God opened my eyes. The Bible never villainized the descendants of Cain.

Only a few of those people became a name in a list. Only a few anecdotes mentioned more. All the criticisms were additions.

Again, believers condemned humanity when God did not.

Oddly enough, the Bible also did not say the lineage of Cain suddenly ended. People base that assumption on beliefs about the Great Flood. I will get to the flood story in another chapter, but for now, I will say our traditions terminated the lineage of Cain in five generations. The Bible did not.

That realization was significant, and the reason surprised me. The Bible listed Cain's descendants because of their beneficial contributions to civilization.

LAMECH'S SONS

The sixth person listed in the generations of Cain was Lamech (Genesis 4:19-22). He married two wives and produced four children. The text states his three sons' professions as the shepherds who dwelt in tents, musicians of lyre and pipe, and smiths of copper and iron.

Some traditions condemned their skills because of Cain. Shepherding morphed into gluttony. Music became depravity. Blacksmiths only constructed items of war.

As a child, I realized the preachers exceeded what the text said. These skills were never inherently evil. King David was a shepherd who played music. Not all the items that smiths fashioned became weapons.

Tradition also insists Lamech's sons invented those arts. However, archeology opposes the interpretation. The

evidence God left us indicates those occupations did not originate in one place, at one time, or by one family. Moreover, early Bronze Age peoples could not make a fire hot enough to smelt or forge iron. That technology arrived just before Israel crowned its first king, not before Noah.

I thought about those problems for years. It did not matter if a later storyteller substituted “iron” for an old word for “metal.” That one glitch gave a reason to reject the inspiration behind the entire story.

Then, God showed me how He utilizes our mistakes. The wrong word tells us to reevaluate our interpretation of the story, not reject it.

Like previous passages, this text never said those men invented anything. Also, the occupations of shepherd, musician, and metal worker signify more than jobs or professions. The first one provided food. The second one entertained those at leisure. The third one made useful items for home and defense, function, and beauty. When a population has plenty to eat, people have time to relax and enjoy life, including craftsmen’s beautiful adornments.

An alternate interpretation emerged from that perspective. It even matches science. The passage describes the beginning of three occupations and proclaims a change in how people interact. We call this “diversification of labor,” which heralded the formation of civilization.

This interpretation even accepts “iron.” This story compressed time like the earlier stories. The smiths that worked metals eventually learned to smelt and forge that metal too. The business remained the same, but the world changed with the advancement of technology.

CONTINUED RIVALRY

The text went straight into a personal incident (Genesis 4:23-24).

One day, men¹ attacked and wounded Lamech. He fought back and killed them. His terror continued with thoughts of the assailant's family wanting revenge. As Lamech voiced his concerns to his wives, he found solace in logic. His ancestor, Cain, murdered an innocent person, yet his life was worth seven others. Lamech killed in self-defense. Surely, God would claim seventy-seven if they killed him.

Preachers took advantage of the situation, regularly ridiculing the man to fit a preferred stereotype. Some condemned Lamech for having more than one wife or denounced him for being wealthy. Most of them continued the ridicule of Cain's family and judged Lamech as just another murderer. They even intertwined the arts of his sons to augment their judgmental opinions.

However, that was not how I read the passage. The text contained words that evoked empathy. But for what reason? Did Lamech sound overconfident, reassuring, or desperate? His emotion could change based on the reader's tone of voice.

Then it hit me. "Why did the lineage of Seth remember this event from the family of Cain?"

God showed me the reason, something I would never have guessed. This event was the next step towards civilization. Through the lineage of the one who received God's pardon came the concept of law.

People who endure trauma and anticipate repercussions act the same as Lamech. Emotions alternate between rationalizations and panic attacks. They need help. Lamech

needed help. The man turned to the only one he trusted in the only way he knew. Lamech asked God for justice.

This story describes the beginning of law, which binds people together. Every community must deal with violence and vengeance, corruption and deceit. Law provides a standard of ethics and punishments that a corporate group decrees, practices, and refines.

Lamech's story did not specify God's condemnation of Cain's family. Instead, the development of law codified guidelines that allowed a diverse population to coexist as a civilization.

Impressive for a strange little story.

CIVILIZATION'S FORM

The biblical account of Cain's descendants ends here. Theologians assumed that the lineage died out. The popular interpretation brings condemnation and extermination. I found a better explanation. We inherit from the family of the pardoned murderer the building blocks of civilization. God's action made our way of life possible.

Each person must learn these lessons to live peaceably together in a community. Like Cain, contemplating the consequences of violent emotions builds a society that protects the strong and weak alike. Through Lamech's sons, diversification of labor can better the lives of workers and consumers. Like Lamech's trauma, we must turn to God and deal with our problems using fair laws filled with justice.

Most of all, we should follow God's example. He asks that we practice mercy and forgiveness for offenders. In this way, we unify our community and transform civilization.

CHAPTER 32

THE OTHER BROTHER

*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.
Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will
explain to you.*

-- Deuteronomy 32:7 NIV

The descendants of Cain were not the only lineage that shaped civilization.

Adam had more children who carried the image of God, but Genesis named only one other. It remembered Seth for two reasons. He replaced the first two named sons: the one who died and the one who left. More importantly, the Bible declared him as the father of what would become the Hebrew lineage.

Through these patriarchs, the Bible gives us a way to curb violence.

SETH'S LINEAGE

Seth, had to be very important to the genealogists creating the lists. However, instead of making up fabulous stories, they recorded only one personal tidbit about him. He named one of his sons Enosh (Genesis 4:25-26).

In Enosh's day, society changed. People began calling upon the name of God.

I found that odd. If only two generations separated Enosh from Adam, then why did people need to proclaim or preach? Even the sixth generation of Cain knew of God.

My interpretation of Genesis 1 and the genealogies provided a solution. If the time between Adam and any of his descendants represented more than single generations, then thousands of years may have passed, even tens of thousands. The names listed indicates a point of change.

As people migrated, they shared ideas, fears, and technologies. Just like today, most people were not efficient thinkers.

Eating the fruit gave knowledge of both good and evil, but not all thoughts were good. It was easy for me to imagine that people chose the beliefs passed down from the ancestral almost-humans. They would have incorporated imagination into their stories until knowledge was no more than a myth. History became a fantasy.

It took devotion to ponder a God encounter and skill to compress ideas for others to understand. The world needed good teachers then, as it needs them now, and for the same reason. Humans are thick-skulled and insist on remaining that way.

BUDDING TIMELINE

According to the progression of the genealogies, Enosh would have been born before Lamech. So that gives us a timeline.

- * Cain's time saw the dawn of civilization when humans formed communities for safety.

- * Standardized religions began to take shape in Enosh's time.

- * In Lamech's time, civilization developed diversified labor and the concept of law.

Archaeological evidence described that same progression. Humanity needed to possess belief systems to form stable social groups that produced civilizations.

SINLESS LIFE

God gives hope to those who follow His ways.

Through the lineage of Adam's son Seth, a man named Enoch was born. Enoch's life ended early compared to the other pre-flood patriarchs, though it was still longer than our standard (Genesis 5:21-24).

Tradition said he followed God without sin, so God took him to Heaven without death. Enoch was the main character in the *Book of Enoch* (c. 250 BC). It said Noah carried a copy of that Heavenly manuscript on the ark. Jews and Christians often quoted the book, and some people still insist it contains prophetic wisdom. However, even early scholars rejected it as fictional.

In contrast, Genesis gave this patriarch only one line beyond the standard listing.

“Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away” (Genesis 5:24 NIV).

This statement is different from the other genealogy entries. It does not end in “then he died.” Vagueness helped start the fiction. However, the Bible does not say God took him to Heaven before he died. No one testified to seeing a transfiguration. It did not declare Enoch as so perfect that he became God’s lead angel, as the *Book of Enoch* proclaimed.

What else could the line mean?

Of all the possibilities, I prefer this one. Like Abraham, he heard God’s command to leave, possibly to be an itinerate preacher. Enoch walked away and kept walking. His life and death remained unknown to his family. The next person on the list was Methuselah, who lived 969 years. Maybe the reason that clan lasted so long was that they followed Enoch’s teachings and lived holy lives.

Despite what anyone believes about Enoch’s end, this passage declared a critical theological eye-opener that dismisses the core of many Christian theologies. From the beginning, purity was possible; a human lived a holy life. God called people to live that way throughout the Bible. Inherited sin from Adam did not disfigure this patriarch’s soul from birth.

God tied this verse of holiness into the civilization theme. Our societies become corrupt because too many individuals choose the almost-human’s fiction. Our communities remain corrupt because too many of God’s people believe a holy life is impossible except for saints.

We need to preach the Good News. God loves us so much that He will make us holy.

EASING TOIL

Knowing the Eden story and Cain's story, I never found it surprising that most farmers called the ground cursed. Labor was painful and weeds ever-present.

Seth's grandson, the father of Noah, was no different. He hoped his son would ease the burden and comfort in his old age (Genesis 5:28-31).

I must admit that this tidbit is a bit of a stretch for the civilization theme, but I found a philosophical link. The desire for leisure comes with a warning. Children can have strange, obsessive hobbies that might disrupt our plans.

We should not put our trust in the next generation or the next day. God is in control. We need to place our trust in Him to guide the direction of our lives and our civilizations. In other words, rest can end in the heartbeat of catastrophe.

GOOD LIFE

The Bible follows the advancement of civilization in snippets. In them, we find parables containing deeper meaning.

Cain and his descendants developed civilization's early attributes through generations of living together. Seth's lineage infused civilization with the concepts associated with holiness. For God, both are important for the development of humanity into His image.

To live peaceably, our dusty animal origin needs to learn how to control emotions. We require laws that recognize evil before problems occur and lessons to teach us to choose the better way. The Breath within us desires the spiritual food of goodness. This quality comes from choosing to be good like God.

Humans live in a secular culture and a spiritual culture

at the same time. God asks that His followers not treat them as separate. We should infuse His Spirit into every moment until our secular culture is the image of God. Those outside our culture should see the peace that this kind of society possesses and desire that life for themselves.

We still have a long way to go.

CHAPTER 33

THE ANCIENTS

They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

-- Genesis 6:4b NIV

The Great Flood story starts in an odd place. It inserts famous people before Noah but not necessarily those from his family (Genesis 6:1-4).

To me, the sons of God and the Nephilim always sounded like the beginning of a fairytale.

The Bible said very little about those people, but later non-biblical writers filled in the blanks with detailed exploits. Humans tend to exaggerate. A retelling of a normal day's events is not as interesting as a spooky campfire story. We crave the biggest fish and the darkness full of monsters. Myths inflated the sons of God and the Nephilim into giants, evil angels, or immoral warriors, depending on the tale told.

I still hear those non-biblical accounts from the pulpit. Like the fictitious image of a caressed lion in the garden, these repeated legends paint false pictures in our heads.

Unfortunately, people repeat them so often they believe the myths as facts.

And the world laughs at a God of fiction.

Sigh.

Finding reality within this biblical passage required that I recognize and let go of the myths. This effort was not fun because the Bible stopped being fantastical. Yet, it was worth the effort. Instead of fiction, the passage matches history.

LEGEND'S MONSTERS

I looked up Nephilim and rolled my eyes. All the scholars agreed; no one understood what the writer meant by the word "Nephilim." They could only guess by looking at later writings, and none of those sources were reliable. I needed a different viewpoint.

I found my answer in the only other place the Bible mentions the Nephilim (Numbers 13:21-33). That passage demonstrates how bad things get when we reject reality and believe myths. Yet, despite the lack of evidence, some Christians today insist that the Bible proves the beliefs were correct and enormous giants actually existed.

I usually roll my eyes and retell the story.



The sons of Abraham settled and multiplied in the land of Egypt. Generations passed. Moses freed them from slavery. Now and they stood at the border of the Promised Land for the first time.

God simply asked them to follow. They did not... again.

The Israelites picked twelve spies to scout the land. After returning, ten of them described the Canaanites as too strong and the cities too well fortified. Then they added the sons of Anak. The Israelites knew that meant giants.

Caleb opposed the others. He and Joshua insisted that nothing stood in their way. The land was theirs for the taking.

Moses accepted his testimony over the others.

The ten spies did not agree. They spread rumors of lands that would eat any who ventured there. They exaggerated all the inhabitants into enormous giants who would crush the Israelites like grasshoppers. Only then did they use the word “Nephilim.”

Fear spread in the Israelite camp. Panic surged as they accepted the ten spies’ lies. The people considered returning to Egypt and stoning anyone who disagreed, including Moses. God had to threaten them to end the rebellion (Numbers 14).

After wandering around the desert for forty years, they learned to obey. Joshua’s army quickly swept through the land (Joshua 15:13-14 and Judges 1:9-11). They never mentioned anyone who could crush them like grasshoppers. His army took the city where the ten spies said the “sons of Anak” lived. Those scriptures did not mention giants at all.



THE SPIES MIGHT HAVE SEEN tall people. However, to spread fear, they chose to identify those people as descendants of Anak and the Nephilim. They decided to embellish size and

say everyone was large. The old myth horrified the Israelites and filled their heads with dread.

Their plan worked. The people feared imaginary monsters more than they trusted their powerful God.

That generation lost the chance to take the land.

At the time of Moses, people believed in mythical monsters. Times and understanding have changed. If the Nephilim once existed, then we should quit describing them with the monster stories the Israelites concocted. We need a different way to describe what we do not understand.

GOD'S SONS

People created the same problem with the “sons of God,” where myths turned them into supermen or angels. Occasionally, they transformed into the super-violent sons of Cain. Again, none of the exaggerations match the biblical text.

Interpretation is problematic for the “sons of God.” We should not view the title like a half-human child of a deity. The phrase was also not like the title of the Messiah. In fact, Jesus said that all the Jews were sons of God (John 10:34). The Bible does not suggest those people were half-god or had superhuman abilities.

An outside source also introduced the “sons of God” as angelic entities. This belief must have been a long-lived and popular interpretation because Jesus corrected it. He insisted angels do not marry and implied that it was ridiculous to presume they did (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25). Biblically, no angel ever produced children with human women.

We must look at the phrase differently for it to match reality. Cultural mythologies only hide God's inspiration.

One day, God opened my eyes after I realized standard science agreed with the Hebrew usage of "kind." For viable reproduction, two animals must be the same species or very similar. That meant the daughters of man and the sons of God were the same kind as Adam. They were just people, viewed by their contemporaries as exceptional, then exaggerated by legend.¹

The Hebrew in this passage uses the word "*Elohim*" (God), which was never an exclusive name or title for the God of Abraham. It is the generic word for anyone with power: God, angels, and idols. It even includes human rulers and judges. The word literally means "mighty one."

The translators should not have used the word "God" in Genesis 6:2 and definitely should not have capitalized it. The "sons of *Elohim*" were people. No deities, spiritual beings, or superheroes needed.

For this passage in Genesis, I visualize a group of nomads encountering city dwellers. People from the city would seem huge to them. Why? Because those people had plentiful food. Their warriors also dressed in fighting equipment and carried the most advanced technology in weaponry. Moreover, these mighty men had a mighty leader, and they took what they wanted from the scrawny travelers.

Like the later Israelites, legends grew out of fear.

ADAM'S DAUGHTERS

The "sons of God" took the "daughters of man" as wives. Another problem with translation occurs here.

In Hebrew, the word for "man" is "*adam*"—God literally

named the first man, Man. So, the question arose in theologians, “Did the writer of Genesis 6:2-4 mean the daughters of any man or the specific man, Adam?” Some chose one way; others chose the other. Their decision helped them define the “sons of God,” but also caused division in the church.

Epic storytelling prefers superhumans fighting supernatural entities. The Bible does not. A natural interpretation removes the myth. The men with beautiful daughters were the commoners. They could not defend their families from the sons of the mighty. Their daughters became prizes.

Like the other early biblical stories, I believe these verses compressed a considerable amount of history into a few lines. Placing the human sons of God and human Nephilim before the invention of writing gives storytellers ample time to form the tales that later people recorded as history. The non-credible did not pass the biblical redactors’ scrutiny, but God’s inspiration retained the tidbit of information that matches anthropology.

I will rename those people using the wording and images already used in *Creation’s Parables*, starting outside the garden.

* The descendants of Adam and Eve mated with the almost-humans. Their bloodline dominated while the others decreased. Homo sapiens became the only ones on Earth.

* Persuasive communication skills or strength of arm elevated some people to leadership. Their cunning minds made them mighty. They surrounded themselves with others who supported their goals. Those warriors became known as the “sons of the mighty.”

* The warriors took the beautiful daughters of

commoners for the next generation of mighty men. Those men did not ask permission.

* The most exceptional group of people became the heroes of myth. Legend remembered them as the Nephilim.

People retold the stories until their ancestors turned into legendary superheroes, monsters, or erotic angels. The Bible's redactors did not accept those additions. They rejected any myths that did not align with God. That did not stop people from writing more myths and calling them history.

EPIC END

Out of the blue, God interrupted the story about the ancients. Right in the middle, He set the maximum length of human life to 120 years (Genesis 6:3).

My childhood preachers taught the epic version like this:



The sons of God and the Nephilim were Cain's children, the evildoers of Noah's time. God became so frustrated at the wickedness that He shortened people's lives. When that did not solve the problem, He sent the Great Flood.



I NEVER GOT my head around the preachers' logic. The popular interpretation described the passage backwards. I had always heard wickedness (verse 5) came before the stipulation about years (verse 3). It sounded like, once again, human sin forced God to change human physiology.

God never had control of the situation and fumbled to repair the problem.

That conclusion did not describe the character of the God that the prophets and Jesus worshipped. I needed a more suitable answer.

MORTAL END

This interpretation made God's words untrue. People outlived 120 years after this proclamation. In all the biblical genealogies, only one patriarch died before he reached 120. Abraham's grandfather missed the mark by only one year. Abraham managed 175 years, Sarah died at 127, Isaac lived until he was 180, and Jacob was 147. Also, the problem persists. The oldest verified person of the 20th century died at 122 years old.

Theologians bypass that monumental glitch by interpreting the edict of 120 years like they did Adam. Since the first man did not suddenly die. Then immediacy must not have described this second mortality adjustment either. This command took generations to fully manifest.

I did not buy that. The first faulty interpretation did not make this defect accurate.

Genesis 6:3 stated the edict came from *Yahweh*, the proper name of the God of Abraham. If God's statement was true, then no one after Noah's generation should have lived so long. Even Noah should have died sooner.

The popular rationale never solved my dilemma with this verse. My mind went back and forth for years. Was this passage just part of the ancient myth? Did God even say those words?

BACKWARD FALL

I looked closer at the passage. The context around Genesis 6:3 described the sons of God before the verse and the Nephilim after it. I wondered why a storyteller separated those stories with this verse. It did not fit.

Then I thought about the evidence backward. If God is trustworthy, but the verse is not, then some person could have written a fictional account that the redactors believed.

I shook my head. The redactors' efforts to compile the canon would have placed the statement at the end of Genesis when people no longer lived as long. They did not do that, so this solution was not acceptable either.

ILLUMINATED PASSAGE

Past revelations about creation gave me insight.

From the beginning, God formed creatures with a limited lifespan. The Creator did not change His mind or His plan. Sin did not force God to get so angry that He degraded humanity's initial design from immortal to mortal. Since humans were always mortal, then their lives were already limited.

Also, Abraham knew his family's history. If the genealogies were about the ages of the named men, then why would Abraham be astonished at an old man having a child (Genesis 17:17)? Interpreting the genealogies as clans redefined the patriarchs' excessive lifetimes.

What happened when I applied those insights to Genesis 6:3?

The patriarchs, sons of God, and the Nephilim were ordinary humans. They lived average lifespans because God did not change His plan.

AGE BIAS

God is trustworthy. So, to be a word spoken by *Yahweh*, we should read the number in Genesis 6:3 as an approximate. This interpretation joins the all-encompassing generalities in Genesis 1. It agrees with the “live” and “die” statements in Ezekiel 18.

I found theological bias in the translation of Genesis 6:3.

* The Hebrew translated “shall be” or “will be” is not necessarily an event that changes the future. Instead, it often imparts stability, something that continues to exist.

* The English word “contend” or “strive” is not the typical translation. In fact, out of the twenty-four biblical uses of the Hebrew word, this is the only place translated this way. Instead, the standard translation is “judge” or “plead.”

Those biased interpretations inserted the idea of God’s anger, which changed the meaning of verse 3. This verse did not hold the punishment curse inserted by the epic versions.

Here is my understanding. The Spirit of *Yahweh* does not plead with humanity for eternity. Instead, the Creator specified 120 years. His word continues. Most people will not reach 120 years, and few will exceed it. Trust Him, not the myths.

God did not change his mind or the physiology of His creation.

ANCESTORS’ PARABLE

Genesis 6:3 sits in the middle of a passage describing legendary people. God had the redactors segregate the

story of the sons of God and the Nephilim to make a point. It acts like a poetic key that makes a counter-cultural statement.

The ancient Hebrew beliefs were not like their neighbors, who gave their ancestors extra-long lives as demigods. This verse says their lifespans were not dissimilar to ours. The ancestors were just people. This shows the ancient Hebrews laughing at the absurdity of their neighbor's beliefs. It also exposes misunderstandings inserted across the generations and believed today.

Genesis 6:1-4 becomes a parable that tells us to distrust outrageous legends. God is the Creator and sustainer of reality.

CHAPTER 34

CITIES BLESSED

Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.

-- Psalm 120:6 NIV

There are only two tidbit stories after the Great Flood. So, I will mention them here because both concern the progression of civilization and the legends that distort history.

NIMROD'S FICTION

Nimrod was famous as a hunter and warrior long before building cities (Genesis 10:8-12). The Bible says people knew his valor and might. They also knew Nimrod as a believer. He hunted, fought, and grew his kingdom while worshipping God. Successive generations did the same.

Later, much later, mythology distorted his story. For some, he was the great Babylonian king Hammurabi, the lawgiver. Other people said he became an evil tyrant who hunted people for sport. Epic stories even gave him a whip

and forced slaves to construct Babel's tower: his goal, to wage war on Heaven.

Nothing supports those claims, neither the Bible nor the historical timeline. They are fantasies that stole Nimrod's name. People stretched the meaning of the biblical writer's words to build the myths.

NIMROD'S CITIES

Renowned leaders arose to spread their culture through war and commerce. They created a great legacy of distinguished deeds (Genesis 10:8-12). Nimrod, son of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah, expanded his influence with thriving outposts built along Mesopotamia's great rivers.

During this early development period, "city" meant a community of more than a few families living inside fortifications made of dirt or wood. Some of Nimrod's outposts no longer have a known location. Others thrived and eventually grew into massive empires.

Nimrod did not build the capital cities of Nineveh or Babylon, even though some English versions translate it that way. Those empires came much later. Instead, those places came into existence because he colonized his world with outposts, which spread the concepts that built civilizations.

The verses only say civilization spread by a mighty leader who worshipped God.

PELEG'S BOUNDARY

Eber was fifth in the line of Noah (Genesis 10:21-25). His descendants called themselves Hebrew, a title that carries

his name. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus came from that clan heritage.

Eber had to be quite influential; someone people admired greatly. However, the only personal detail the text contributes is his son's name, Peleg, "*because in his time the earth was divided*" (verse 25c NIV).

Today's most popular interpretation of that verse is of a great earthquake where fault lines shifted dramatically. Young Earth creation theories claim this quake was part of the plate tectonics that caused the Great Flood. As a result, the distance between the continents widened noticeably, so Eber named his child after the event.

That belief appeared in the second half of the 20th century only after science proved the continents did move. It was not the traditional interpretation. Instead, most commentators had a much less dramatic reason for the name. They said a division of properties occurred between clans, city-states, or civilizations. Peaceful negotiation affected all the people in the vicinity.

PELEG'S LEGACY

I asked, "Would such a treaty involve Eber?" Yes, even if he only lived nearby. "Would the truce only have occurred at the birth of the boy?" No. He could have changed the child's name when he heard the glad tidings.

He rejoiced in the finalized division and the newborn son, but why was this event important enough for following generations to remember?

The interpretation that details the building of civilization answers that question. Dividing lands and properties shows the growth of civilization. Competing groups claimed

lands near each other. Treaties initiated laws that respected and protected the rights of others. Commerce could flow freely. Enemies could become neighbors. Peace gave time for leisure, thinking, and the invention of new technologies. Even, Moses sang of an ancient time when God divided the nations and set boundaries (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).

We still need the peace that comes from Godly divisions.

CREATOR'S CONTROL

God blessed the people as they multiplied and developed civilization. Some were ordinary, and some were mighty. Some were good, and some were not. And, just like today, our Creator controls it all while He lets us choose our own way.

The hope remains that His guidance will lead us to live peaceably.

PART FIVE
THE GREAT FLOOD

GENESIS 6:5 - 9:27

CHAPTER 35

A PERFECT BIBLE

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

-- Psalm 119:105 NIV

My studies showed me that Greek perfectionistic beliefs modified all the early biblical stories, and then denominational variations split the teachings of the church. Those theologies added condemnation when God did not. Rationalizations placed God's anger above His love, which determined how He interacted with people. Perfectionism doomed humanity and remade God's good Earth into a place only slightly better than Hell.

The theologies based on Plato's perfect god did not only affect the beginning. They also built the foundation for many beloved Christian doctrines. One of these concerns a very touchy topic, how we describe the Bible and the information it holds.

DISTORTED DESCRIPTION

Many Christians call the Bible “perfect,” the flawless word of God. The big-churchy words “inerrancy” and “infallibility” demand that no problems exist within the biblical texts or in the declarations spoken by a human leader (usually the Pope, but also radical cult leaders). Supporters fear that one error would make a prophet, a book, or the entire Bible false, thus uninspired. They reject imperfection.

My upbringing did not include that tradition, so I did not understand why anyone accepted the concept of a perfect Bible. Finding biblical flaws and contradictions was easy. I just read the book. Research on the internet obtained long lists that existed simply to ridicule the belief.

None of that stopped the belief spreading.

What I heard from those who accepted an inerrant Bible did not quench my questions. Preachers declared the Bible flawless, then immediately backtracked. They insisted that the supposed problems people found came from our lack of understanding, or a bad translation, or something else, anything but a biblical error.

Reading commentaries muddled the issue further. They did not use the dictionary’s specific and easily understood definition of “without error.” They wrote detailed explanations for what they meant, which ended with the Bible not totally free from errors but still somehow flawless.

Those long-winded doctrines did not filter down to the rest of the population. Instead, Christianity became burdened by the literal meaning of the big-churchy words and the mandatory condemnation for those who disagreed.

LIMITED HUMANS

I looked for the origin of this belief.

Biblically, no writer expressed the idea of perfection in their predecessors' writings or their own works. However, I did notice that many generations of ancient Jews did not care if the texts changed or even existed.

The scribes who did care were still human, and the best humans still make mistakes. God did not transform all those people into superhumans. The few ancient Jewish documents surviving today contain variations in wording and spelling. If a perfect manuscript ever existed, then how would anyone know?

I suspected that if someone asked Moses, Isaiah, Matthew, or Paul if God inspired their writings, they would have said yes. But flawless? They would have found the concept crazy, laughable even. Humans are not perfect.

MUDDLED HISTORY

If the Bible was not the source of the doctrine, then where did it originate? I went into research mode and found several worrisome details.

The first Jewish canon (c. 500-400 BC) consisted of the five books of Moses, who lived about 1391-1271 BC. Genesis does not state authorship. Think about that. Did God give Moses the old stories, or were they passed down through the Israelites?

Back then, nobody cared who composed the stories. That slowly changed once Jews started using the term "Law of Moses" while meaning a set of books (scrolls). Shortly after the canonization, Greek domination introduced "the need to know" and the desire to debate minute details.

The Jews then wrote more stories to fill in the blanks. For example, even though the rabbis dismissed the *Book of Enoch* (c 250 BC) as contemporary literature, people believed angels wrote it in Heaven and Noah carried on the ark. The *Book of Jubilees* (c 160-150 BC) insisted Heaven's religion was Judaism. People treated such fiction as divine.

Over fifteen hundred years after Moses, and after the Romans exiled Jews from the Promised Land (136 AD), rabbis compiled the *Talmud* (c 200-500 AD), an encyclopedia of Jewish commentaries. Some of those writings declared Moses the sole writer or the one who dictated the stories to a scribe. They even said he wrote his own death scene, which he then played out.

I found the source. Those rabbis claimed flawless manuscripts were perfectly copied throughout Jewish history.

I asked, "How did any of them know these as facts? Why accept their beliefs as divine when the ancient prophets did not note that miracle?"

The answer? Because this is human nature. Everyone wants to believe their faith is superior. Those rabbis wanted generations of scribes who could not make or tolerate mistakes. People fabricate gallant superhumans from the ordinary heroes of history, then insist their myth is real.

The early Christians adopted the Jewish opinions. They substituted Christianity as the religion of Heaven, but oddly enough, the doctrine of inerrancy and infallibility did not become dogmatic. Even after Christians canonized their versions of Scripture, they did not adopt that belief.

I kept looking.

Then, my jaw dropped.

The Roman Catholics proclaimed the Pope infallible in

1870. The Evangelical Protestants insisted that the Bible was inerrant in 1978.

Those dogmatic beliefs are very recent additions.

ALTERED MEMORY

Religious leaders demanded perfection when God did not. Their theologies “forced” the Creator to manipulate centuries of people to write perfect texts, every scribe to produce perfect copies, and every Pope to speak perfect words. Could such scenarios be biblical or historical? No. The Bible never described the God of Abraham as a puppet master.

God asked His prophets to speak the words He gave. They agreed and complied. He did not force them to do anything. They still could mess up (Numbers 20:9-12), and they retained the choice of refusal (Ezekiel 4:12-15). Even Jesus had to decide to carry the cross.

Only a few early Christian theologians wanted perfection in the writings, beginning with Augustine (354-430 AD). He insisted that a single flaw disqualified God’s inspiration. I am not surprised Augustine had his opinion. Christians were arguing over which books they should canonize. He wanted perfection.

Everyone else disagreed. They wanted God’s truth relayed through imperfect disciples, which was also the goal of the biblical prophets and writers.

Paul said scripture was useful for training and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). He believed them essential, but he never implied flawlessness. The earliest non-Jewish theologians found discrepancies in texts but dismissed them as inconsequential. Martin Luther and the early Protestant theologians agreed. What mattered was that the doctrines

about God and our faith remained consistent throughout the Bible.

FLAWED REASONS

The influence of perfectionism seeped in slowly, but fear forced it into dogma.

For the Jews, the Greek requirement of authorship led to mythical explanations for the first five books of the Bible. Competition from early Christian writers made it necessary for the Jewish canon and their rabbis to be divinely inspired. Perfectionism defined that as flawless. They insisted copies of the original manuscripts never changed, even one letter. Many Jews and Christians accepted, and still believe, those fabrications as truth.

For the Roman Catholics, ridicule by the Protestants demanded change from the clergy. The Cardinals wanted their traditions trusted as divine dogma. They solved the problem by mandating an infallible Pope. Their parishioners accepted the shift in doctrine because they already believed the Pope was divinely appointed.

For many Protestants, science contradicted beliefs. A requirement of evidence found none for the 24-7 creation and a worldwide flood. Preachers (mainly in the USA) pronounced science wrong and the Bible right. By fighting for the Bible's supremacy, many preachers began to call scripture flawless. Their congregations accepted the change in doctrine because they already believed their traditions explained the world.

Non-believers have always found errors. They laugh at the foolish beliefs.

ADDED DIVINITY

What about the proclamation that the Bible is the “Word of God”? The psalms say the Law of God is perfect, and His word is flawless.¹ How could that not mean the Bible?

Again, I did not have this belief drilled into me from childhood. My search found nothing in the Bible that said ink on paper was flawless or anyone calling those writings the Word of God. Not even Jesus quoted scripture verbatim. Getting close was good enough to express an idea or make a point. People added perfection.

God told Moses and a few prophets to write, but he never asked anyone to canonize those texts. The writings were no more perfect than the human who heard the words or used the pen. Canonization preserved God’s spoken words for the generations, nothing more divine than that.

Do not panic! None of the prophets, including Jesus, expressed problems with the written words. However, all of them disagreed with arrogant people who distort God’s words to promote dogmatic traditions.

Biblically, the words of the living God are living (Acts 7:38). He speaks to His dusty, thick-skulled creation. He asks us to remember. That includes recording the words as memory keepers. Without them, we forget to follow what He has already said. As we meditate on the ancient writings, God’s living Spirit activates the spirit within us. He penetrates deeper than any sword to alter the attitude of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). Even if we never hear the Voice of God, our imperfect life changes to include Him and what He said.

True prophets come and go as needed. The twisted doctrines of false prophets are ever-present. Good teachings tell us about our relationship with our good God. We

must know what God said in the past to decide if a new word comes from the Creator.²

Mistakes will happen, but we must ask, "Does the message reflect the same loving God described by the old prophets?" Too often, Christianity has accepted Plato's aloof perfect god or the Gnostic angry one. They start in the wrong place.

TRUSTED CORRECTION

Human fear of change demands a flawless Bible made by superhuman writers. Sadly, our doctrines contain ideas that distort the words God gave the prophets. Holding onto the perfection myth of inerrancy and infallibility keeps Christianity blind, deaf, and dumb to correction. If God did not initiate a belief, then we need to realign our theology.

I found that biblical theme unwavering. The prophets, histories, psalms, and proverbs wanted everyone to hear and act on their message. Those in authority feared losing their position's privilege and power, so they refused to accept correction themselves. Arrogant people built religious regimes to hide their sins. They killed uncooperative prophets and intimidated the "lower class," all in the name of God.

The Pharisees stood on strict religious values as they falsely accused Jesus and His followers. They defined perfection as acting like themselves. Every cult dictator has used the same tactic, "Do what I say. I have divine authority. If you consider any other option, then God hates you."

A "perfect" Bible that is not perfect gives non-believers a reason to reject God. That problem is worse than accepting an imperfect Bible.

Let me give you a personal example of how perfec-

tionism distorts our thinking. My grandmother refused to look at the moon through a telescope. “It will ruin the romance,” she insisted. I saw panic in her eyes. The woman who taught me to cherish broken fossils feared losing a romantic connection—the moon had to remain perfect. She had a passion for nature, except for this one thing. A myth kept her from seeing the beautiful truth.

God wants our lives and beliefs to transform into His ways. That requires a willingness to recognize when change is good for us.

INSPIRED FREEDOM

For me, perfection theologies construct a prison of doubt. They maintain that I am not perfect enough and never will be worthy. Perfectionism insists God condemns me for just being born human. He despises every feeble attempt at holiness.

Once I understood that perfectionism was unbiblical, I found a simple solution in God’s love. His inspiration is not about perfection in writing. Instead, the ancient documents point our spirits toward His Spirit. In that journey, we find a living bond with our Creator (John 4:21-24).

This revelation opened a deeper understanding of God. He does not require perfect human endeavors. My life does not have to be perfect for my God to love me. My beliefs, knowledge, and abilities do not need to be perfect for God to use me. The Creator’s freedom flows through my flaws. His inspiration exists in my imperfections. God wants me to follow His goodness and love, be obedient, and desire to change my ways when I mess up.

He will handle the rest. He is my perfection.

God’s eternal love also accepts other people’s imperfec-

tions (Mathew 22:37-40). That revelation enables me to start loving my imperfect neighbors and my imperfect enemies because God loves them. He always will. God's perfect way is freedom through love (Matthew 5:43-48).

Why demand more from the ancients than what God asks of us?

PERFECTED IMAGE

Jesus said following God's ways summarized the Law and the prophets. He asked us to be kind to the humans we encounter, even those we fear. Loving one's enemy is the only human endeavor God calls perfect (Matthew 5:43-48). In acting like God, the creation becomes the image of the Creator, perfect in love.

Ink on paper can never accomplish that wondrous feat.

CHAPTER 36

FLOOD SPLICING

I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

-- MALACHI 3:6 NIV

Most Christians tell the Great Flood as an epic journey of goodness triumphing over great evil. Apocalyptic destruction ends in a rainbow of new beginnings. The grand story even supports theologies about God's wrath at the end of time.

I realized early in my life that the popular interpretation did not relay a reliable historical account. No proof for it ever surfaced. Unexpectedly, biblical scholars provoked me to discard the entire story as uninspired. The conflicts and disunity amongst them illuminated all the problems existing inside the biblical account of the flood. They scrutinized each other's opinions to emphasize the fanciful beliefs, but gave me nothing to hold as true.

To understand why they said what they said, I dissect the Great Flood story instead of rejecting it. I am glad God

gave me the time. In that process, He provided the evidence I needed.

NOAH'S MENTIONS

The Bible referenced Noah or the flood only a few times. Most of what the writers said seemed unhelpful to my search to confirm inspiration. People knew of the event, but I still wondered what they believed. Two lines heightened my concerns. They sounded like Noah's Flood, but instead, they romanticized the making of dry-land from Genesis 1.

"The waters stood above the mountains" Psalm
104:6b NIV.

"Never again will they cover the earth" Psalm
104:9b NIV.

If the poet believed God never covered the world with water after its creation, then he did not know Noah's story. If the psalmist did not know, then how could I view the event as history?

To defend the Great Flood, Christians often reference the "end-time" speech of Jesus (Luke 17:22-35 NIV). It says the flood "*destroyed them all.*" That statement sounded like He believed everyone died. However, Jesus used the same phrase to describe the destruction of Sodom. Then, He said that half the people will be taken at the end.

How did those events relate as an analogy?

Yes, I have heard preachers say Jesus only spoke about the suddenness of the end. However, He emphasized the people taken. How did that image relate to the Great Flood or Sodom? Instead of an answer, doubt arose. Are we to

assume the earlier eradications worse than the “end-time” where half survived?

Then it hit me. Lot’s story did not mean every human on the entire planet. The psalmist insisted God did not cover the world in water twice. Jesus did not mention a world-engulfing flood. That meant their understanding of the Great Flood differed from mine.

I needed to find God’s story.

OTHER FLOODS

History complicated my search. Cultures around the world tell similar flood stories. Some teachers have thought those showed shared memories. Others insisted seafarers shared Great Flood stories that cultures integrated.

I asked, “If those accounts were natural floods told in legend form where exaggeration and gods simply made them more interesting, then why should I read the biblical one differently. Where was God’s inspiration?”

The scholars did not help. Modern theologians insist the Bible holds a condensed version of the much older Sumerian epic. The Akkadians and Babylonians also adopted and transformed that old story. So for many scholars, the similarities between all those versions suggest the captive Jews in Babylon adopted the story instead of it coming from Abraham or Moses.

Here are a few of the matching details from the Sumerian epic.¹

* The gods were angry with humanity, but one warned a man of the impending flood and gave instructions on how to build a boat for his family and a few animals.

* Rain lasted many days.

* The man released birds to find land.

* The water subsided, and the boat grounded on a mountain.

* The god created a rainbow as a reminder and pledge to send no more floods.

My head spun. Can you see why the easiest solution would be to reject the Great Flood as ancient fiction? However, I still hoped for a resolution, so I continued the quest.

ABRAHAM'S FLOODS

Archeologists have found evidence of massive floods that occurred in the Mesopotamian River valley. All of them destroyed cities, but not the whole world.

Abraham moved with his father from the city of Ur, which once was part of the Sumerian civilization (Genesis 11:28). Long before his birth, a flood destroyed that city (around 3500 BC). Closer to his time, flooding occurred in a neighboring city (c. 2950-2850 BC), which the Sumerian flood story referenced. The cultural history of Abraham's family probably included those events in some form.

However, if Abraham's family retained the Sumerian epic, then why not included more details and other stories? The same goes for the exiled Jews in Babylonia. If they adopted the flood story, then they would have added more Babylonian epics to their cannon.

I shook my head and looked at the history differently. Instead of accepting a dominating culture's epic version, I saw the exiled Jews recognizing similarities as evidence of history. To me, Abraham's story and the Sumerian stories showed variations of the same event. Both held embellished details but not the same ones.

I accepted that logic for a long time. It was easy to

believe the Great Flood was a myth based on history. But the story still bugged me. Where did the myth stop and the history begin?

SLOSHY STORYTELLING

I studied the art of storytelling as I pondered Genesis. The more I learned, the more I flinched at the writing style of the Great Flood. Despite being like an epic, it was not told in a grand epic form. Instead, it reads like an unfinished script from an argumentative committee. Multiple beginnings, middles, and endings disrupt the tale. Bizarre details bog down the plot. It even contradicts itself on the number of animals. The story simply does not flow.

* Genesis 6:1-4; 6:5-8; 6:11-13—Three openings.

* Genesis 6:19-20; 7:2-3—Two versions of the number of clean animals.

* Genesis 7:12 and 17; 7:24—Two versions before the Great Flood receded.

* Genesis 8:20-22, 9:8-17—Two covenant endings.

The other early Genesis stories were so much neater than this one. What happened here? If generations told this story, then the storytellers would have removed conflicting details. That is how storytelling works.

Many theologians believed the Great Flood's multiple beginnings and ends showed two or more stories spliced together. I will restate, splicing does not reject God's inspiration. He uses our imperfections to perfect His plans.

The scholars suggested that a simple older version included the dove, and later versions incorporated the raven, dimensions, and dates. They formulated this conclusion from the different writing styles used in those segments.

I present here the scholar's timeline of this story's construction.

* The earliest version was a family history with no religious decree to maintain purity. As generations passed, branches of the family told slightly different stories.

* The human tendency to embellish occurred as written versions became available. Some remained minimal, but others inserted religious beliefs, including Levitical doctrines, the boat size, and the number of animals.

* Language changed through time. During the Assyrian and Babylonian eras, storytellers replaced ancient wording with updated phrases, but not all the versions changed.

* After the return from Babylon, the canon redactors assembled Genesis from scraps of old documents. The multiple versions of the Great Flood became one account. However, the redactors did not smooth out the rough edges. Each snippet kept its wording and style instead of becoming a cohesive epic tale.

I will contribute a few more ideas to their assumptions.

* Long before Abraham's birth, the Sumerian sister-cities competed for dominance. Their storytellers played, "My flood was bigger than your flood," and "My hero was greater than your hero." Similar stories diverged and quickly transformed into fictional epics. They wrote their stories onto enduring clay tablets that our archeologists found.

* One family wandered northward and then through Canaan and Egypt. That version stayed short but acquired its own brand of divergences and additions.

This very human timeline satisfied many of my questions but not the most important one. Did God inspire the biblical Great Flood story? My quest continued.

PARTIAL POETRY

I wondered if the Great Flood story could be poetry. If it was like Genesis 1, then critical meaning was hidden beneath the surface. I found a few sources and had high hopes. Scholars described a chiastic pattern, where the key phrases from the first half mirrored to construct the second half of the text. However, mixed into the chiasm were lines that used other poetic devices, and large sections did not fit any poetic pattern at all.

The theologian² who first wrote about the structures admitted that someone forced phrases to fit the chiastic pattern. He concluded the poetry in the Great Flood story indicated an artificial timeline.

That answered one of my nagging questions. “Why would the descendants of Noah remember months and days that perfectly matched the Jewish religious holidays set at the time of Moses?” Because a poet inserted those dates into a much later version of Noah’s story to reinforced Jewish theology. Writers still do that with biblical stories.

A poetic interpretation did not give the Great Flood unity or historical reliability. On the contrary, the poetry exposed the text as altered and spliced.

However, in this, I saw God at work. I believe He did not intend for us to read the Great Flood as poetry because the poetic version did not contain God’s inspired message.

Finding His message became my goal.

MIXED STANDARD

I wondered why the canon redactors left this story in such a messy condition. The mishmash style seemed counter to the logical progression of the other stories.

Theologians did not give a satisfying answer. They merely highlighted the messed-up parts and told me to have faith.

I did not accept believing dogmatically in something so jumbled. I fought my conviction that required the rejection of fictional additions, even if they were biblical. Should I reject the whole Great Flood story or just parts of it? How was that different from those who cut out parts of the Bible for their theological reasons?

It was not different, so I reluctantly trudged on.

Slowly, something important trickled into my brain. By the time of canonization, the other creation stories had standardized. Everyone told the same version. The Noah story, on the other hand, was still in flux. It kept changing. Even today, people add to the epic to make it more Hollywood-like or child-friendly. Why? Because it is impossible to tell this story as written.

That is when it hit me. Splicing aided interpretation. The Great Flood's pattern was not the same as a complete story. If God inspired this narrative, then it included the human element.

INSPIRED TRUST

For me, decades of frustration ended when an unexpected solution presented itself. God's inspiration was the key to unlock God's message.

Yes, I still wince at that statement. It seems like circular logic, which is not logical. God's inspiration reveals the information inspired by God.

Instead of a wince, I probably should say, "Duh."

I believe God inspired the biblical redactors to preserve information necessary for future generations, which

includes us. He used this imperfect story to say something important. Surprisingly, the first inspired thing I found was not about an ancient flood. Nor was it about the people living at the time of Noah.

God's message involved the commitment of the redactors.

The style of splicing contained a high level of dedication. The redactors deliberately did not clean it up. Out of their civilization's wreckage, those Jews found and presented all the pieces that best represented their God. They arranged the scraps in what they believed was the correct order while they limited manipulation. The redactors may have used the ancient Sumerian stories to verify that the Hebrew story was historical. However, they also dutifully eliminated documents recently acquired or modified in Babylon.

They identified the scraps as religiously important. They did not discard conflicting accounts. They did not add segues to turn their history into a grand epic. They did not edit or distort the texts to fit their theology. Instead, they preserved the remnants that God saved from the fires.

Splicing may also show us that the redactors worried about some of the content. For example, a few might have wondered if someone added dates to help teach children religious holidays. Even if the redactors recognized that possibility, they could not have determined the source any more than we can. They kept the texts but deliberately left them disjointed.

Understanding the process taken by the biblical redactors gives us essential guidelines. Do not add segues and miracles to force the stories to flow together. Do not turn the Bible stories into one epic to fit our preferred cultural theology.

I realized I could trust the redactors. That revelation comforted my heart.

UPLIFTED QUEST

Instead of negating divine inspiration, all those style-details that repelled me actually emphasized God's presence in a way that the grand epic never could.

We need to let Him free us from our fear of being wrong. Freedom embraces the imperfect story and shows the redactors' dedication. Most importantly, God's freedom provides us with ears that hear what God wants to tell us.

I found the Creator's style quite refreshing and decided to give the Great Flood a deep cleaning.

CHAPTER 37

WATER'S PURPOSE

How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

-- Psalm 4:2 NIV

One might think my biggest problem with the Great Flood story focused on the mismatch with science. Not true. What did I hate the most? I heard believers describe my loving Creator as a homicidal maniac and remain clueless that they insulted Him.

EPIC'S DISTORTION

The best way to explain this problem is to use an extreme example. What follows is the creation, the garden, and Great Flood stories as told by a cynical non-believer.



Once upon an impossibly short time ago, God created a perfect world filled with perfect plants and perfect animals. He then made a perfect garden with two magical trees and placed two perfect people near them. He foolishly thought a command would keep them away.

God took a nap, and the obvious happened. Evil showed up in the form of a talking snake. Immortal perfection suddenly became mortal imperfection. Human sin corrupted the entire universe, and the all-powerful God could do nothing about it.

Despite God's responsibility in making everything, He was too perfect to be held accountable for the consequences of His neglect. So instead, God cursed the snake, the two people, and all their children to everlasting Hell.

This perfect God could not tolerate being around sin. Sin formed a rift between Creator and creation. So, God hid in Heaven while angels controlled earthly affairs.

Abandonment made everything worse. Soon, the angels and humans sinned together. Everyone got so depraved that God went crazy-mad. He decided to destroy all life on dry land. However, instead of starting over, He saved some animals and a few humans in an impossibly huge boat, which was not big enough for all the species on Earth. This flood created all the stratified stones, mountains, and fossils, but God left no definitive evidence to prove the event ever happened.

His irrational compassion botched the cleanup. This perfect God, who loved the world so much, murdered most of its life to accomplish... *nothing*. Sin continued just as before. Nothing changed.

Only idiots would follow such an incompetent deity.



YEP, that sounds like an insult.

Believers phrase their version with more reverence, but it is no better. Too many sermons start with perfection and end in contempt. They promote hatred of self and hatred of humanity. Christian culture embraced the condemnation and called it sacred.

If our all-powerful God decided to destroy sin by drowning it, then His plan failed miserably. If repulsion, retribution, and anger drove God to global violence, then His response was no different from Cain's reaction to Abel. If God reacted poorly to events outside His control, then He was never really in control. Such theology gives sin mastery over God and makes Him no different from any other man-made god.

I needed someone bigger and better. I wanted the Abba that Jesus adored.

GOD'S GOODNESS

Our Creator may have a whimsical sense of humor, but whim never described His biblical actions. So I asked, "Where in this story is the all-knowing God we worship?"

If the Creator understood human behavior before the beginning, then no amount of sin manipulated God into an evil act, not even to scrub clean the planet. Therefore, we cannot justify brutality by insisting those saved deserved it more than those who drowned.

If He inspired any part of the Great Flood, then I had to find God's goodness in the text.

GOD'S REPENTANCE

At the beginning of Noah's story, the passage said God grieved and repented that He ever made human-kind (Genesis 6:7). I questioned that verse and asked, "How did those emotions describe the all-knowing deity? Why would God repent? If repentance is for sins, did God sin in creating the world?"

I found many theologians who described this verse as a case of anthropomorphism, where the writer used a human concept to interpret God's actions. Their ideas sounded logical. We really do not know much about God.

Yet, that explanation still felt very wrong. For me, removing God's emotions never revealed the Creator. Instead, it required the reader to judge each biblical attribute of God. We cannot trust the prophets relaying correct information from God to humanity. We must second-guess every statement to remake God into someone emotionless. Such a theology lets people view Him as a thing of philosophy, not a being of reality.

I decided Christianity has not been very careful in our description of the basic nature of God. We accepted Greek perfectionism that "cleaned Him up." We removed who He was and made Him into what we decided He ought to be. We need to get the Greek out!

God's repentance made that distinction very clear to me. If God repented as humans repent, then we would no longer exist. Simple as that. Since we still survive, then God did not realize His colossal mistake or admit moral guilt (Numbers 23:19).

Let me define the word repent for a human response. It starts with regret. It fills the mind with guilt and includes a

sincere desire for a change within. If we do not change our ways then the regret remains.

However, God does not hate His actions. The Creator does not need to second guess His decisions. God has no need to change.

That bothered me for a long time. Then, I looked at the world through God's eyes of love. He took full responsibility for His creation that made it possible for sin to exist at the beginning and let that ability continue. The depth of God's grief concerned humanity's sins, not His own sin.

God did not make a mistake. His repentance only expressed regret, not guilt. Our loving Creator mourned all those people who would never know His blessings.

GOD'S GRIEF

The biblical evidence shows that we cause God to grieve. He lets us do so every day without raining down destruction. The Bible also testifies that God knows all the possibilities that might happen, but He prefers not to force His will upon us. Our Creator is a gentleman who waits in the hope that we will choose a better path.

He gave us free will. God does not repent of that gift or call it a bad decision. Like Adam and Eve, we blame others for our choices. Like Cain, we lie and make jokes to cover up our actions. We deny responsibility for our evil thoughts until we justify acting upon them. However, even when our choices become evil, free will remains a good gift.

God sees each sin and wishes we would listen to His Voice. When a community becomes evil, people no longer consider repentance necessary. Instead, they call evil good and good evil. God then begs people to reconsider their ways. If they do not, He removes His protection and eventu-

ally sends destruction. Examples fill the Bible. Without the additions of epic myths and perfection theologies, the Great Flood is only one of many describing those times.

At Mt. Sinai, the Israelites grieved God as they bowed to an idol. God did not force them to believe or comply. Their covenant gave Him the legal right to kill them all. Instead, God gave Moses the right to handle the situation and let the Levites cleanse the camp (Exodus 32).

Our modern sensibilities find that repulsive. We think God should have done something before things got out of hand. But if He did, then He took away their choice to sin.

Those Israelites knew God had told Abraham that they would take the Promised Land, but only after the current inhabitants became "more evil" (Genesis 15:16). When the Canaanites reached that stage, He had the Israelites do the cleansing. For many cities, God required the slaughter of every human and every animal. God even had cities burned to the ground to destroy what was in them.

Our modern sensibilities find that abominable. If God is in control, then we think He should have done something to turn those people around. He should not have forced His people to kill other people. On the other hand, if He had done that, then He would have taken away their choice to obey.

The Israelites held the land until their sins became greater than their neighbors (Ezekiel 16:52). This time, their enemies did the cleansing. God then sent people to cleanse those nations.

Our modern sensibilities reject that logic. Mass killings grieve us. Why are they not evil? If God controls the evil nations, then why is He not evil too?

A glimmer of understanding seeped into my head. Maybe, just maybe, modern humanity is only now starting

to learn how God felt all along. He looks for communities that recognize sin and abhor evil. He wants us to handle the problem before it gets out of hand. The identification of sin should trigger our grief and repulsion. We should not wait for the consequence of death.

At a base level, we know the lesson. When a bacterial infection overpowers our natural defenses, we beg for medicine. Many innocent bacteria die in our medicinal assault. We do not grieve those lives. Yet, how does our killing of bacteria differ from God's cleansings of evil? Except for the Breath and Knowledge, we are no different from bacteria. Are we blind to the fact that we are dust?

The Great Flood story follows the same pattern as the Israelite's examples. God warned the people of what was coming. Anyone could have joined Noah. Instead, the Creator chose to let a flood cleanse the land. He saved those who listened. Like the later remnant of Israel, a few lived to remember. They told their story to help the next generation learn.

JOB'S TEARS

God's ways have always upset our cultural sensibilities.

In Job 38 through 42, God did not tell the man why He let Satan ruin his life or why He did not protect Job. Instead, God dramatically replied that He made everything on Earth, even the big scary critters that kill people.

The Creator took responsibility for His good universe filled with lots of things that terrify humans. The most fearful of those being death. When many deaths occur at the same time, horror multiplies. People then blame someone, often a spiritual deity.

Like Job's friends, many Christian theologies contradict

God's statements. They justify God's actions and describe pain and deaths as punishments. Or they say God is not responsible for such evil actions and give Satan all the credit.

Either way, our fear of death insists God's ways are wrong (Ezekiel 18).

FLOOD'S PURPOSE

I thought about the apparent evil of watery mass murder for a long time. Then a light bulb glowed dimly, highlighting something I should have realized long before. God did not need water to kill sinful people. The plague on the Egyptian's firstborn demonstrated His precision.

I asked, "What was God's purpose? What was His reason for so many deaths?"

I studied the various interpretations and justifications and came up with two striking truths.

* Destroying sin was not the purpose of the Great Flood since sin did not end.

* Destroying sinners was not the purpose of the Great Flood. Those on the ark were sinners.

My conclusion surprised me. There was no purpose.

A bellow reverberated inside my head, "Everything has a purpose, especially Bible stories. God gave the reason right there in Genesis 6:7! Can't you read? He regretted the creation of humans!"

I often find the concept of "purpose" misused by people to force God to explain things or make our ordinary lives exceptional. We want epic reasons, but God's purpose for creating and destroying may be beyond our comprehension or so simple we reject it as foolishness.

If the Great Flood had a grand purpose, then God did

not tell us. Saving a remnant was part of the plan, but it may or may not have been a purpose except for retaining a generation with information God already gave.

GOD'S ACTIONS

Again, my head rebelled. "Genesis 6:5-7 said God would destroy the humans, beasts, and birds from the land. How could that not mean a miraculous act of destruction?"

Simple. God created everything and set natural forces in place. He claims responsibility.

- * God created the flood because He created how water works on Earth.

- * God took responsibility for all the deaths because He created life and death.

- * God could have created a perfect universe without death. He did not.

- * God could have made us unable to sin. He did not.

- * God could have stopped the flood. He did not.

- * God could have forced people to get on the boat. He did not.

Why not? Because all those events were within the parameters of His good plan.

The Creator controls all. His control is miraculous, even when He chooses to use nature.

Compare that with perfectionism, which rejected the possibility of a perfect God accountable for sin or death. Yet, at the same time, it excused and promoted irrational anger and excessive violence. How are those traits different from any of the mythical gods?

They are not. We must cleanse our doctrines to find Abraham's all-powerful and merciful God. The Father is with us because He loves His dusty creation.

That is Good News.

FLOOD'S LESSON

Devastation is a natural function of how God made Earth. He gave Noah many years to build the ark. Neither of them kept this project a secret. The water was coming, and the people refused to listen to the warnings. Like today, few people obeyed.

Instead of a purpose, I found a spiritual lesson, but only one: have faith in God. Everything else in the Great Flood story teaches rules, not morals: do not sin; follow God's commands; drink responsibly; respect your daddy. Unfortunately, all the epic versions exaggerate, ignore, or distort each of those points to force a purpose of condemnation into the story.

NATURAL FLOOD

It took me a long time to comprehend those revelations, as they were so foreign to the teachings of my childhood, yet they matched the rest of the Bible. Trials mold us. Tribulation can grow our trust in God. They make us into who we are to be.

It is our limited understanding that describes the Creator as a homicidal maniac. We need to recognize the insult and identify His choices as always loving. Our religion needs a deep cleansing to remove the grime of our hypocritical offense.

God's ways are not our ways. Earthly perfection and earthly safety were never part of the goodness of creation. No matter what happens to us on Earth, humans need to learn that God is our perfection and safety. God controls

everything, even in the world's worst disasters. He chooses who to save and who will die. Even with our failures or impending death, we must be satisfied that God's ways are best.

I must remember to repent of my fear of pain and death. I will try to repent each time my ignorant self-righteousness accuses God of evil acts. Receiving every answer, in my timing, may not be a good thing. A lack of revealed purpose must not sway my trust in Him.

Even while going through chaotic times, I will believe God's ways are best.

CHAPTER 38

FLOOD EFFECTS

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

-- Ephesians 3:14-15 NIV

Some rather disturbing details surfaced as I studied the Great Flood. Theologies built on perfectionistic beliefs contradicted biological evidence and normal human behavior. These often disagreed with how the rest of the Bible described humanity.

MUTATED FATHERS

If nearly everyone died in the Great Flood, then humanity should call Noah and his family our parents, not just Adam and Eve.

Genetically, that is terrible news.

The “re-creation” of humanity began with very old stock that came from even older parents. Old sperm and old eggs produce mutated genes. If the ages in the genealogies

describe personal years, then harmful mutations would have accumulated before Noah's time and too much after the flood. Eight people do not contain enough genetic diversity. The potential is terrifying. How did they continue to have healthy children? Why do we even exist?

The proposals given by promoters of popular Great Flood theologies fail to explain mutations adequately. They either say this is where genetic problems originated or add another unmentioned miracle to keep mutations from occurring. Neither explains the biodiversity seen today. Humanity exhibits variations in shape and color that blend where groups interact. These distinctive characteristics existed long before civilization started. If Noah's family comprised the entire human race, then why do we look the way we do?

The evidence tells a different story. Scientists have found genetic bottlenecks occurring in small groups throughout human existence, but none affected the entire species after becoming an established species. From the overwhelming lack of evidence, I concluded that God did not provide genetic markers to support Great Flood explanations. Our biodiversity remained intact, so no worldwide flood reduced the population.

Today, every human's genetics trace back to Y-chromosome Adam and Mitochondria Eve, not Noah and his wife. God created variety to care for His dusty children. Evolution provides enough time to work out problems associated with minor mutations and develop alternate solutions.

God controls our mutations and our evolution. Trust in Him.

DROWNED GRIEF

Old age leads to a related problem in the Noah story. Noah and his family would have known people who died. However, the text never mentioned loss or mourning. Those emotions do not exist in this story.

I grasped at understanding the reason for the Great Flood story's incompleteness and drew conclusions from the omission.

* Storytellers capitalize on characters' angst, not on the dimensions of a boat or the day of the year. The redactors were religious historians, not storytellers.

* The redactors found the Great Flood story as scraps of many versions. If God inspired the text's insertion, then He deliberately discarded emotional details from them all.

Why would God eliminate any reference to emotions from the account? My guess is that they told the wrong story, which would lead to faulty conclusions.

Those thoughts bring me to what this story reveals today. The retelling of the Great Flood by recent storytellers is not so selective. They spin an epic tale of drama and emotional tension. Angst builds segues that combine the Genesis stories into one grand epic. However, the fictional account increases God's anger and inserts strict condemnation.

Fixating on the wrong message will blind us to God's message.

MANIPULATED SONS

-- Genesis 5:32, 6:10, 7:13, 9:18-28, 10:1-32, 11:10-32

Age also highlights favoritism.

The Bible says Noah produced three sons after he

turned 500. The Great Flood occurred in his 600th year, and Shem reached 100 two years later. This son is listed first, but he was not the oldest of the three. Ham is listed second, but he is the youngest son (Genesis 9:24). In Genesis 10:21, the wording is a bit ambiguous, but Shem's older brother was Japheth.

I found it curious that the genealogies always identified the eldest last. As was the custom of those days, Noah only blessed the eldest son. Yet, the Israelites' lists blessed Shem with top billing and gave the second place to Ham. Why?

The answer arrived in the form of typical human prejudice.

* Shem's descendants wrote the lists, which revealed a national bias acquired much later.

* Ham came second because his descendants included the future world leaders, regular enemies of the Israelites.

* Japheth's children developed into the mariner nations. Those people were generally not in conflict with the later Israelites.

The genealogists demoted Japheth because they deemed his children less relevant. Favoritism did not stop. European Christians claimed Japheth's inheritance when they applied the concept of "the last will be first" (Matthew 19:30), assuming themselves more blessed than all others.

Such blatant partiality made my head twitch, but it also gave insight. If God inspired the redactors to insert multiple mismatched genealogies, then He included this identical clue in them all. If God has a message in the lists, then He wanted us to see how easily humans incorporated distortions and then exaggerated them into religious doctrines.

God chose the Israelites to teach the nations, but they chose to twist His message to support religious and

national superiority. Unfortunately, Christianity followed the same path.

Our Father did not choose one lineage over all the others. The first and the last will receive the same reward (Matthew 20:1-16). He loves us all.

PREJUDICED RACES

Christians have not always followed God's ways of love. Like the Israelites, we picked up prejudices from the nations. We adopted a belief that assigned the patronage of the "three races" to Noah's sons and then invented more reasons to condemn.

Theologians started with the genealogies then extrapolated deductions. They believed Europeans descended from Japheth. Shem's descendants were the mid-eastern and eastern peoples. Ham's children lived in Africa.¹ This logical path continued downhill until anyone with light skin inherited the promise of the eldest son. Those with dark skin became sons of the curse. Eventually, people with pinkish skin considered those without pink skin as soulless animals, even the sons of Shem.

The arrogance of the Greco-Roman culture intensified within European Christian culture. They embraced segregation as a requirement of God. Every community segmented into religious and secular hierarchies. They continued to differentiate between the rich and the poor. They let prejudice supersede God's command for unity. However, God did not. The biblical prophets rejected the idea that wealth or station made a person righteous while the poor deserved their curse.

To describe this phenomenon as natural, people labeled it Social Darwinism soon after Charles Darwin published

Origin of the Species (1859). Because of this, many Christians today accuse Darwin of all the 20th century atrocities associated with racism. However, Darwin disdained this application of evolution because he saw no difference between human races or social standing.

Those with social and religious status rejected Darwin's logic. They remained blind to the biblical assertion that all people are family. Bigotry is hatred, a reason to overlook cruelty and murder when profit or status is involved. Like the ancient Jews, Christianity accepted animosity as a doctrine.

God calls us to love. We need to listen and get on His boat.

CHILDREN'S STORY

The last disturbing human tendency found in this story will shock you.

Parents want to teach their young children Bible stories with morals, so they choose the Great Flood as a fun place to start. It imparts the lesson of lifelong obedience with a boat filled with smiling animals. For the age group, retail stores sell more Noah products than those of Jesus and Moses combined.

I understand the attraction to animal figurines. Even in my old age, I want to hold and pet each one. However, my spirit finds hypocritical capitalism morbid.

Happy Noah played with happy animals while every human child and every baby animal drowned.

Once I realized the horror, the cute toys and fantasy-filled storybooks made my stomach hurt.

Oddly enough, that knowledge never stopped me from sitting on the floor and playing with the kids. I do not think

of the toys as evil or even wrong. However, we adults need to be mindful of how we present Bible stories to growing children. Fiction trickles in and drowns the lessons. People eventually realize the difference. Too often, they discard the Bible story along with the tattered toys and their trust in the all-mighty God.

PONDERED PARABLES

No one has ever seen anything wrong in adding to the old tale of the Great Flood. Before and after its canonization, the Jews rewrote the Great Flood story in many ways. That was fine, except that those elaborations overwrote the history and the message. Perfectionism continues to distort the story. We must get the Greek out!

Remember. Always remember that God is in control, and His way is love. The Creator is the Abba of humanity. We distort reality; God makes clear. We condemn unjustly; God loves fully. His good ways are in our best interest, even when the floods come.

CHAPTER 39

WET REVISIONS

Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?

-- Job 38:34 NIV

God gives freedom through our imperfections, but that does not mean we should hold onto imperfect beliefs. If we fight to justify their existence, they become idols of our own making. God wants us to know the truth.

For me, the biblical stories that describe the Earth should depict the Earth, not a fantasy world. I am not the only one. Believers have searched for six hundred years to find proof for the Great Flood. Despite lots of claims, nothing supports a water-covered planet within the timespan of humanity. Instead, those endeavors formed the earth sciences.

If God wants us to know something, then He will tell us. I believe he already did. The Creator provided all the evidence we need in the world around us. Therefore, we should trust in what He gave, not in what we want.

I needed God to uncover the truth in His flooded story.

FLOODED REGION

As I studied, I wondered if the Great Flood could have been a local event. It turned out many believers have the same opinion, and with good reason, a regional flood matches the text better than a global flood.

I heard a shriek. "Does not!"

I childishly replied, "Does so!"

The main obstacle to interpreting the Great Flood story is the concept of the world. We see a globe. The writer of the text did not. Even when they added a word like "all" to their "world," the writer did not envision a planet.

The second obstacle is our vision of the story. Translators choose one word over another. If a preexisting belief influences that choice, then the interpretation might be wrong. In English, we can translate the Hebrew word for "world" as land, country, or ground. It refers to local geography and the people living there.

The third obstacle is our understanding of how the early storytellers viewed the story. They may or may not have assumed the flood covered more than it did. Traumatized people today repeat words like those of Noah, "Water covered everything!" Those survivors knew the water had a limit, and dry places still existed elsewhere. Yet, no one calls them liars. People hearing those words understand the horror of the situation and accept the statements as exaggerated declarations. I find it likely that Noah and his storytellers would have done the same, but we inflate the overstatement to engulf the planet.

Then I thought about events that might make people believe the whole world flooded. Natural occurrences that

produce too much water happen regularly. Hurricanes, a burst dam, a tsunami, or a meteor striking offshore destroy everything for hundreds of miles. If one or more of those happened, then the water levels would be higher and last longer in an extensive area.

COVERED MOUNTAINS

I shook cobwebs out of my head and asked, “Then what about the statements that described flooded mountains?” (Genesis 7:19-20).

That question took a bit of searching. I had to work through my doubts. I found many reasons why the flood could not have covered mountains. Almost all were based on the evidence God left within the Earth. However, one stood out in the text to support a regional flood.

Like the Hebrew word for “world,” the Hebrew word translated “mountain” also had alternate interpretations; hill, hill country, mount, and foothills. Choosing differently changed the setting. For a regional flood, water only needed to cover the highest places near a floodplain.

I felt an incredible amount of relief that a translator’s bias could remove the myth, but I knew there was more to come.

DESTROYED VIOLENCE

I heard internal scolding from the back of my head, “The world was full of evil. Genesis 6:11-13 said the entire Earth was corrupt, so God had to cleanse all of it!”

I found a similar translation problem. The Hebrew word rendered as “corrupt” also has more than one meaning, the most common being “destroy.” Oddly enough, this chapter

translates the word both ways within three verses. Most English versions change the Hebrew meaning from “corrupt,” in Genesis 6:11 and 12, to “destroy” at the end of verse 13.

The interpretation made a big difference. God did not condemn the ground as unclean or call it corrupt. Humans were violent, which violated (destroyed and corrupted) the land. Those humans no longer distinguish good from evil. No safety or righteousness remained within the land or for the land. Like the death of Abel, the dirt cried out to God. He answered.

That reasoning aligned with other biblical destructions credited to God. Extreme violence condemned the people. In this case, God chose to change the course of civilization by removing the evil with a massive flood.

MISTED RAIN

One popular belief concerns rain. Theologians combined the no-rain statement of Genesis 2:5-6 with the second mention of rain in the Noah story, Genesis 7:4. They conclude that no rain fell on Earth until the Great Flood.

The Bible never hints at that assumption.

Genesis 2:5-6 declares there was a time before plants when no rain fell. “Before plants” means before the garden, not in the garden. Scientific theories agree with that understanding. Mist existed on Earth before it had an atmosphere, which was needed to form rain.

Eden’s river (Genesis 2:10-14) rejects the theology that rain started with the Great Flood. Large rivers require copious amounts of water to feed them. That amount of water comes from heavy rainfall upriver or a melting glacier, not from mists along the river.

Genesis 7:4 described a deluge but did not dictate a lack of previous rainfall. Rain was not an issue for Noah. He did not ask God what the word meant or to explain the danger it held. Noah knew of water falling from the sky that caused floods.

The Creator did not change the physics of Earth's atmosphere. Christians added the false notion of "no rain before the flood" to support their theology.

SOAKED RAINBOW

Because the Bible does not mention rainbows before God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), some people claim this as the first occurrence.

However, the passage does not call it a first. Even gaseous clouds create rainbows. The belief is a presumption based on the assumption that no rain fell until the Great Flood.

The Creator established physics at the beginning of creation. Rainbows form from refracted light. God then used the beautiful bow as a recurring reminder of His covenant. No myth needed.

FLOODED VIEWPOINT

I still find it odd that very few biblical commentators noted the possibility of distorted translations. Too many accepted the traditional interpretation without question, while they also concluded the story was a myth fabricated from neighboring culture's flood stories.

That made me angry. I set my feet and remembered the miracle of harmony found in the earlier Bible stories. God gave me the courage to press on.

One day, I was listening to a person speak on the art of storytelling. Most of the information was basic. Stories require conflict and resolution between a protagonist and an antagonist. Plots and dialogue need to be believable. Most stories use only one character's viewpoint.

That was when it hit me. Even as a spliced mess, the Great Flood had a classic story form. It had a conflict, good and bad people, a plot, and dialogue. The problem was the viewpoint. New writers often failed to use this storytelling technique properly. Unless written with skill, multiple viewpoints confuse the reader.

My brain blinked for a while, denying the simplicity, but the text did not reject the answer. A viewpoint defines who tells the story. Was it a limited human, a narrator with hindsight, or did the narrator know everything?

The narrator tells the Great Flood story with dialogue defining God and Noah. Most renditions also give the narrator's voice to God, combining the two. However, I think that is wrong. God predicted the flood and told Noah what to do, but the narrator's knowledge was limited.

* Noah measured the depth of the water with a weighted cord. He echoed the narrator's words that the water covered the mountains. The Voice of God did not. How did Noah know the boat floated above the highest peak instead of drifting out to sea?

* The Earth's curvature swallows mountains. Drifting closer grows mountains out of the water. Why do we suppose Noah or the narrator knew this? God never commented.

* Noah realized the land was drying out because a dove returned with an olive branch. Olive trees do not live on top of Mount Ararat. They grow on the lower foothills. The olive branch shows us that the Great Flood did not cover all

the planet, all the mountains, or even all the hills. Noah and the narrator did not know. But, again, God did not comment.

* People have always understood the world through their experiences. Noah and the narrator expressed typical human exaggeration in describing devastation. God did not.

Despite splicing, the Great Flood story contained only one viewpoint, and that narrator had hindsight but not all-knowledge. He and Noah viewed the devastation in the same way. The narrator was never God.

SOGGY COVENANT

At the end of the Great Flood story, the two covenant speeches credit God with statements about a flooded world (Genesis 9:11 and 15). They say He would never again use a flood to destroy all life. How could we read these without involving worldwide destruction?

We face the same evidence impasse. God did not leave anything physical to prove such an occurrence occurred. However, he did provide plenty to challenge the belief. Did that make the wording of the covenants an untrustworthy later addition?

I went into research mode and wondered about the translation. The Hebrew word for “world” could be regional, but what about “all life”? Was this a translation problem too? The answer was decidedly no. Whatever the water covered, “all life” meant “all life.”

Then the research paid off. Most English versions used the phrase “never again,” but the literal Hebrew translates “not still.” Instead of a future statement, the verb form expresses a fulfillment of God’s prior commitment. Thus,

the Creator proclaimed that floods never had and never would kill all humans and animals.

Our acceptance of Greek perfectionism distorted God's words. Instead of an angry deity that had to promise to act better, God reaffirmed the blessing given to all life in Genesis 1 while He reassured the frightened people.

The Creator's word continued and will always continue.

REGAINED REALITY

Slight changes in the translation and interpretation allow the Great Flood's wording to match standard 21st century science as a regional flood. The conflict between text details and nature's evidence ends. Harmony removes the myth.

* Brine did not cover the entire Earth, so the soil remained unsalted. Plants survived.

* The ocean did not obliterate lakes and rivers. Their plants and animals continued.

* Species continued. A lion eating a gazelle did not end the lineage.

* The Creator did not re-create plants to feed the animals after the Great Flood.

* God did not re-evolve plants and animals to establish the biodiversity that exists today.

INSPIRED VIEW

My growing interpretation utilizes the story's own words and alternate definitions to show a regional Great Flood. Viewpoint lets normal humans use exaggeration during and after a traumatic event. Even God's view of the world aligned beautifully with nature. No myth needed.

The fundamental details within the Great Flood story

harmonized with science. Regional floods might feel like the whole world, but Earth is safe from drowning. This is because God made the planet with the right amount of water, not too much.

I was pleasantly surprised. God's inspiration allowed this messed-up story to inspire me.

CHAPTER 40

FLOODED FABLES

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

-- 1 John 4:1 NIV

The Noah story presents several problematic assertions. Some the Jews added before canonization or in their later epic myths. Others formed recently within Christianity to bridge the gap between traditional interpretations and science. Most of my concerns dissolved as I removed perfection theologies and read the passage from a natural stance.

A few of the story's features remained problematic.

Even with such challenges, I think the story contains God's inspiration. I believe He wants us to realize that religious dictates are not always true. We must look deeper. He works with imperfections to teach us a better way.

BUILDING A BOX

I can accept that God saved people from a flood. Stories around the world make such claims. Many are very old and include animals. However, the stated size of the ark is not credible for many reasons.

Noah used stone or bronze tools to fell and fashion one specific kind of tree to build a three-story boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet tall. According to the story, this pitch-covered vessel remained seaworthy for almost a year.

I considered the technical problems with the ark's structure.

A flat- or semi-flat-bottomed boat would not stay upright. Such a vessel would promptly roll killing everyone on board. To float upright, it needed a deep keel and a rudder, which required a massive scaffold to start building. The story never describes such structures. Without a keel and rudder, we must add an unmentioned miracle to the Great Flood.

Another problem involves the insufficient mechanical properties of wood. Not until the Roman era did anyone build massive ships. The ark dwarfed them and the world-traveling wooden sailing vessels of the 1800s. Even today, no one has made a functioning wooden boat of the ark's size. The text does not say God changed the properties of wood, so another unbiblical miracle is required.

That brings me to my primary concern about this big box. Not one of Noah's descendants utilized this technological breakthrough for any massive structure. Immediately abandoning such knowledge is not a human characteristic. Why would anyone memorize dates or sizes but not apply this knowhow to building a big barn?

My initial gut reaction remained steadfast; the dimensions were an exaggeration. They arrived later, but before canonization, in a fictional version of the old story.

FLOATING A ZOO

Calculations made by Christian Creationists manage to fit vast numbers of animals into the ark. But, of course, most of those require packing beasts to the ceiling for a year in a heaving, poorly ventilated boat.

The Bible did not describe that scenario.

Noah's boat was a big box, but not big enough.

The ark's floor space comprised 2-1/3 acres, or less than two football fields. But God did not reserve all that space for animals. The ark needed closely spaced pillars to hold up several floors. As in barns, stalls divided the space left, giving enough room for animals to move. Walkways provided passageways for humans to feed animals and clean pens daily.

The animals were not in cryo-sleep. Even if God made the beasts docile, feeding a large variety of creatures on a boat for a year seems outrageous. Noah needed to reserve a large area for the storage of supplies. A few cows, sheep, and goats go through quite a bit of hay and water each day. A boat full of animals would have consumed more than the ark could carry.

There was no mention of a miracle that multiplied provisions or one that made the carnivores into herbivores. Many animals require fresh meat. What died to provide their food?

Not all herbivores eat grass. Some survive on a very particular plant for food. Without those plants, those animals die. For instance, koala bears eat eucalyptus leaves

exclusively. Where did Noah get their food? The popular interpretation of the ark must include many more unbiblical miracles just to allow all those life forms to survive.

However, a regional flood fixes all those problems. Every animal on the planet did not need to make a long journey or squash to fit inside. No exotic foods were necessary. The ark only carried the kinds of creatures in the region where Noah lived.

DECONSTRUCTING RE-CREATION

The Great Flood story claimed that all land animals that walked, crawled, or flew died except the few on Noah's ark.

Once Christians started counting animals worldwide,¹ the popular interpretation required some form of re-creation to achieve the current biodiversity. Repopulation required more than simple reproduction. For example, the ark carried one set of dogs. As they migrated to the ends of the earth, God would have had to force them to evolve very fast to produce the different breeds. Humanity would have taken the same accelerated path for our variations in form.

The biggest problem I see with this theology is that the scripture does not hint at re-creation. The Bible insists God did the creating in the beginning. It never says God voided days 3, 5, and 6 to restart life after the Flood.

A regional Great Flood alleviates the problem. Animals and people already existed across the planet. A near-instant evolution is not required to re-populate the entire planet, not even to provide different ethnicities.

Noah did not father humanity; the Bible says we descended from Adam and Eve. We need living people to make that true.

BURSTING A PLANET

Christian Creationism changed in the 1980s when they integrated continental drift into their theological explanations. It became the driving force behind the Great Flood. That theory goes something like this.



The early Earth had only one continent and no mountains. Then, God's anger violently ripped the landmass apart. Oceans trapped below ground rushed upward and covered the land. The explosion tilted the Earth's axis and destroyed the protective celestial sphere. Debris blasted away from Earth provided the solar system with enough asteroids to pockmark the moon.

Landmasses slid to their present locations forming high mountain ranges and volcanoes. Churned-up soils deposited all the sedimentary layers across the Earth. High pressures quickly fossilized the dead and the sediments into stone.

All that action quickly slowed to the continent's present speed.



IT IS A GRAND THEORY. However, the evidence God provided has not confirmed those beliefs.

After a planet-wide flood, a continuous layer of silt should have covered the continents and the ocean floors. However, nothing in the world indicates such an event happened. Thick continental sediment layers end at the continental shelves. Deep ocean floors contain very

different sedimentation. Not one of those layers provides evidence of the Great Flood's popular interpretation.

Mountain ranges and volcanos did not form in one event. Some are new. Some are so old that erosion has nearly obliterated their once massive size.

Earth's layers tell the construction story at each location. Rock layers show distinctive regional characteristics. They did not form in one event or all in water. Likewise, areas of fossilization do not indicate a single burial event. Each site has a unique reason for existence. Most had nothing to do with floods.

Plate tectonics tells a story of a living planet, not a single traumatic event that occurred a few thousand years ago. It provides knowledge of how the mountains formed and why Earth contains volcanos, earthquakes, and rifts. That constant movement shaped the dry land of day 3. It made the shallow seas where marine life flourished long before God made human-kind.

Even the places ancient people lived reject the religious theory. Their caves formed within layered rock long before the invention of boats or even woodworking.

A ruptured planet is a recent addition to the Great Flood story. It fails as a scientific theory because it does not explain the evidence. It fails as theology because it requires theologians to tell God how He created and how He destroyed.

Our Creator gives wisdom and knowledge, not false evidence.

God wrote the story of His creation in stone for us to discover and understand. Listen, and it will speak. Only then can we hear His inspired words.

SALTING THE SOIL

Ocean water covering the world presents a critical problem for the Great Flood story.

In the ruptured planet scenario, a hot underground ocean suddenly joined the surface ocean. Mixing would have drastically altered temperatures and pH levels. What about aquatic life? Why do we still have freshwater plants and animals? Coral reefs require sunlight. They would have died deep below the waves, covered in hot silt. Small aquatic animals feed larger animals. Such a drastic environmental change sentenced the oceans to death.

A world covered in brine for a year also would have doomed life on land. Salt would have saturated the soil. How did the creatures living in the dirt survive? Worms and bugs should be extinct. After months underwater, all the land plants would have drowned and boiled, including the olive tree. Few seeds could have sprouted later in the salty soil. How did grapevines thrive?

In this scenario, starvation awaited those on the ark. That is unless we add many unmentioned miracles.

On the other hand, a sizeable regional flood eliminates all the problems associated with the blending of waters. The soil remained brine-free, and coral reefs continued as before. Rivers and lakes still existed. Those leaving the ark would survive.

AWAITING A REVELATION

What do I do with the portions of the Great Flood story that I do not trust? Should I ignore them as late additions that distort God's message? How does my disregard differ from those who reject other biblical statements?

It does not. That bugs me.

Does my desire for evidence prejudice my understanding? Possibly.

Should I wait for revelation? I have, but still nothing.

Those thoughts still bother me. I do not particularly appreciate waiting for something that may or may not come. However, if I have not understood, then God will bypass me and give insight to someone else. I believe He does not provide all the answers to any one person, time, or culture. God's timing is best.

Since revelation has not come, I downplay these details in my interpretation.

Creation's Parables presents my journey to discover how well the creation matches the evidence God left in nature. Recognizing additions transforms the story from an impossible myth to researchable history. Removing Greek perfectionism exposes reality and God's parables.

The basic story of the Great Flood fits that objective.

I place my trust in the Creator's love, not a messed-up story.

CHAPTER 41

THE LAW OF NOAH

*But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me
and keep my commandments.*

-- Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10 NIV

Between the Great Flood story's two covenant endings and bracketed by "be fruitful and multiply" statements, there sits a section that preachers call the Law of Noah (Genesis 9:1-7). They claim it foreshadows the Law of Moses. Christians associate it with Romans 2:14-15, where Paul realized that the Gentiles naturally did what the Jewish law outlined.

It also resembles the creation statements about human-kind. However, a notable difference exists between Genesis 1 and Genesis 9. The first chapter concerns all life. It describes grand cosmology and our interrelationship within creation. Noah's Laws concentrate on humans. It contains similarities to the Mt. Sinai commands, but not laws mentioned by the patriarchs.

Such contrasts challenged my interpretation of Noah's

laws. They made me look at them intently and ask if perfectionism distorted their meaning.

No surprise here. It did. Instead of legalistic condemnation, Noah's laws convey God's tenderness toward people and His desire that we take accountability for the creation around us. He asks us to act the same way.

ANIMALS' FEAR

"The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands" (Genesis 9:2 NIV).

Theologians interpreted this verse as a progression of Genesis 1:26. They say God created animals as docile. Then, because of sin, fear entered the animals when God transformed their original trusting temperaments. However, that explanation makes the statement false, as a few wild animals do not fear humans.

A regional flood solved the problem. On the ark, God calmed the animals and then returned them to their natural fearful state afterward. Outside the flooded area, the exceptions remained unchanged.

God did not change His mind. He did not alter the entire animal kingdom to instill fear. This statement warned people not to pet wild animals. God cares.

HUMANS' FOOD

“Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Genesis 9:3 NIV).

Theologians associate this verse with Genesis 1:29-30. They say God gave plants as food for people and animals at the creation. Then, after the Flood, God transformed creatures to eat meat.

However, if we do not read God's two statements as generalizations, then both are false. Why? Not everything is edible. Many plants and animals are indigestible or poisonous.

If God created only vegetarian creatures, then He would have had to alter their physiology to digest meat. No biblical passage described the shock of seeing animals kill each other or the horror of eating a pet. Instead, the transformation was a recent addition to support theology.

Removing perfectionism provided a simple solution. A regional flood eliminated the need to re-create anything. After leaving the ark, God permitted people to eat animals again. He made sure the people and the animals ate what they needed.

ANIMALS' BLOOD

“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Genesis 9:4 NIV).

Many theologians read this verse as a “Do not drink blood” command. However, the next mention of that law occurs in Leviticus and is almost always associated with

offerings, not everyday meals. Furthermore, no other nation of the contemporaneous Middle East practiced the prohibition.

Often, people drink blood to acquire the life force of the animal. Mosaic Law outlined the reason for not drinking (Leviticus 17:10-14). Instead of power, atonement came through the sacrifice, not the blood, so God wants people to respect the animal. Law also prohibited witchcraft, which included spiritual transfers of power.

Was this a late addition to the story?

I do not think so. God did not institute a strange custom just to make the Israelites stranger. Strangeness started long before Moses. People noticed Abraham as different. The Israelites practiced his customs, so they remained strange in Egypt.

The Hebrew emphatically linked to verse 3 and 4, and eating everything never meant everything. God excludes some things. Some things need thorough cooking to save the eater from several kinds of infections.

Those ancestors may have also recognized spiritual problems associated with drinking blood. By not drinking blood, God's dictate protects His people from human charlatans and spiritual exploitation. It prohibited the practices of their neighbors.

This law may be very old, but its strangeness is very practical.

GOD'S ACCOUNTS

“And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an

accounting for the life of another human being” (Genesis 9:5 NIV).

The popular interpretations couple verses 5 and 6 into a prohibition against murder. The King James Version inserts the word “brother” near the end to clarify the meaning. People connected it with Cain to reinforce laws that execute murderers. The beliefs also judge violent animals as evil creatures.

However, this interpretation contradicts God’s merciful judgment of Cain and condemns sinless animals. The theology holds men and animals to a higher standard than God, who just killed an unrecorded number of life forms.

Technically, many translations indent verse 6 as poetry. That credit makes the two verses independent statements. If the two verses are not a set, then the interpretation is faulty.

Removing perfection theologies of condemnation from verse 5 lets it continue the lessons of verses 3 and 4. God holds Himself responsible for His creation. The Creator remembers every life and every death. We are His image, so we must accept our responsibilities too. These three statements illustrate the theme of accountability that runs throughout the Bible. We need to value life, particularly those we eat. Accountability is a good thing.

While life exists, each person is responsible for helping to guide their friends’ lives and being accountable for their animals’ safety (Ezekiel 33:1-19). God did not change His ways. Judgment comes when we neglect to care for the lives around us.

EYE'S REVENGE

“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind” (Genesis 9:6 NIV).

Most theologians interpret Genesis 9:6 as eye-for-an-eye theology. This belief is the avenger's right to retribution, but people disagree on the avenger's identity. Was he family, state, or God?

I struggled with this verse. Jesus told us to turn the other cheek and forgive our enemies. Did God change His ways? No.

What I found opened my eyes. Many Bible versions indent the verse as poetry, which indicates an older source, not something new to Noah. Eye-for-an-eye theology was not distinctively Hebrew since many cultures utilized it as judicial law. In contrast, Mosaic Law employed eye-for-an-eye theology in only three cases.¹ The Israelites preferred their neighbor's ways. They distorted their religion to condone violence for every grievance. Christians did too.

Only then did I realize the verse was not just a capital punishment statement. It contained an empathy lesson. The poet wanted people to consider consequences beyond penalty and understand why they should not murder in the first place. Murder killed an image of God. The reaction of the community eventually killed the murderer, another image of God.

Verse 6 emphatically concluded the previous verses' accountability statements. When we hurt people, we hurt God. Therefore, communities needed to follow God's ways of love before someone required punishment.

GOD'S MESSAGE

Finding accountability as an interpretation lightened the weight of doubt and satisfied many of my worries about Genesis 9:1-7. However, one remained. Must we consider this section as an actual command given by God to Noah? Parts may be quite ancient, while other ideas seemed to be later additions to the old story.

The simple answer is: it does not matter.

God's inspiration speaks to all generations. The redactors respected the fragments. They refused to enforce a seamless story, so they left the stitching visible. That dedication allows us to look for and consider what is beneath the surface.

Can we hear the message, the parable from God?

Our good Creator prefers mind-broadening revelation to punitive legalism. He asks that we embrace responsibility and act with accountability. We should give respect to all things and take care of those in need. In doing so, we control our selfish emotions while we learn to love and forgive our enemies.

Jesus preached this Good News message. God is loving. Live as His image.

CHAPTER 42

UNEXPECTED ENDING

Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

-- Proverbs 20:1 NIV

Preachers regularly separate the last Noah story from the Great Flood (Genesis 9:20-27). They use it to chastise alcohol and show the early condemnation of the Canaanites. However, I felt that good fails to triumph if evil promptly returns.

I paraphrase and condense the tale as I heard it told.



Drunk, Noah ended up naked in his tent. Ham made fun of his father. The two other brothers dutifully covered dad without peeking.

On waking, Noah heard Canaan, Ham's youngest son, laugh at the nakedness. Instead of being angry at Ham,

Noah's anger turned on Canaan. He threw a hangover tantrum, cursed the boy, and made him Shem's slave.

In an afterthought, he blessed Japheth.



THAT STORY BOTHERED me from the first time I heard it. What was its point except condemnation aimed at the wrong person? It merely proved that no human should have survived the flood. So why did God not nuke us all and start over?

To my delight—and God's credit—my view changed again. It took a lot of grumpy foot-stomping to find the beautiful story, but it was there. God turned perfectionism's contempt into His perfect love.

SOURD GRAPES

I started with what I learned as a child. Sermons said that Noah planted the first vineyard and was the first to get drunk. Yet, the text never said he was first at anything. The Bible merely mentioned him doing those things (Genesis 9:20-27). Tradition inserted fictitious facts.

A regional interpretation of Noah's flood lets the evidence tell the history of vineyards and wine. Fermentation happens naturally, and animals enjoyed "aged" fruit long before Noah. Humans began cultivating grapes during the Neolithic when Stone Age peoples started to farm. They commercialized the process for its benefit.

Grapevines show us that the land where the ark landed was not devoid of life. The survivors harvested what God provided and processed the grapes as their culture always

did. Instead of a restart, the knowledge acquired through the generations continued throughout the world.

MISGUIDED ANGER

The aggression against Canaan always irritated me. My thoughts ran like this, “Canaan only followed his dad’s example, so why did the silly kid deserve such a harsh punishment? Why did his mom not cry out in distress?”

I considered the concept of slavery. If cursing the boy displayed the culture God flooded, then Noah followed their evil ways, not God’s ways. Where was the goodness that God saw in Noah? Not only did he pass his guilt on to another person, but he also condemned his grandchild to slavery. How is that not evil? Therefore, Noah could not be as righteous as God thought.

I did not like my conclusion. The analytical side of the puzzle made more sense. Maybe God did not inspire this story. Perhaps in a late addition, a writer justified hatred for the Canaanites, their neighbors. The redactors did not know that it was a recent story, so they kept it.

The trusting side of my brain finally rebooted. I doubted that God misread the character of Noah. I suspected that the wine did not turn Noah evil. I hoped for inspiration.

Faith in God kept me hunting for a better answer. As I studied this strange story, I tried to keep in mind that God does not change His mind. Instead, He teaches us to change our ways. Something in how we told the story was wrong. What was the message here? Where was the parable?

CURSED SLAVE

I noticed that English Bibles did not translate Noah's statement to Canaan the same way. Most used the word "slave," while others interpreted it as "lowest servant," which hints at slavery.

What Noah literally said was "servant of servants."

Then I considered something new. What if we misunderstood Noah's statement by overemphasizing the curse like the Eden stories' epic versions? We inserted slavery when Noah spoke of servants.

UNCURSED SERVANT

I asked, "In this growing family group, who would be the servants?"

Insight flashed across my brain. Shem and Japheth served Noah in his time of need.

The light brightened. Canaan would serve the two brothers who acted as servants.

Understanding illuminated the room. Noah did not place a curse on the child's future because his verb pointed to the past, not the future.

In shock, Noah suddenly realized the boy lived under the curse of a disrespectful father. The good grandfather placed his grandson into the care of those who could teach respect. Canaan served the servants.

Instead of drudgery, the boy's life changed for the better.

I got goosebumps at that interpretation since the Bible contained a running theme of service. God called the hard-headed Israelites His servants. He sent the prophets to teach those wayward servants. The covenant's curse came

because too many of those people chose disrespect instead of service. Jesus lived and died as the ultimate servant of servants.

The Good News flowed from Genesis, not condemnation.

Yep, delightful goosebumps.

RECOLLECTED BLESSINGS

The next part of the popular interpretation says Noah then blessed Shem and Japheth. Shem got a “slave.” Japheth would share the “slave” while living in Shem’s tent.

I suspected that we also had misread this part of the passage because theology used it to rationalize beliefs in racial superiority and the condemnation of neighbors. Those hate-filled concepts have never expressed God’s ways. Not at all.

Perfectionism twisted the message.

I first noticed that Noah never blessed Shem. He blessed the God of Shem, meaning Shem followed God’s ways. That explained a lot. By placing Canaan into this uncle’s care, the good grandfather hoped Shem would teach more than respect. The boy needed to follow God’s ways, too.

I then saw that Noah did bless Japheth. Giving the blessing to only the eldest son followed the other early patriarch’s cultural pattern. However, it seemed this verse also contained a translation problem (Genesis 6:27). The Hebrew word literally means “to make spacious” or “open.” So, Noah blessed his firstborn son with open. Very strange.

Most English versions added words to make sense of the blessing. They fiddled with possibilities to provide meaning for the blessing. Most said, “enlarge Japheth” or

“expand Japheth’s territory.” Others gave the man beauty instead of land.

Yes, very strange.

As a child, I always wondered why Japheth needed more territory than the other brothers in a big empty world. Finding the other versions asked the question, “Was Japheth really that ugly?” What Noah said never worked in the context of the popular interpretation.

However, once I realized Noah spoke kindly to Canaan, I understood this blessing instantly. The good man wanted his eldest son to believe in God as Shem believed in God. Noah asked for a spiritual awakening within Japheth, a mind or heart-opening experience. When the brothers shared the same love for God, Japheth would live peaceably in Shem’s tents, and Canaan would serve him too.

Not strange at all.

UNIFIED RESPECT

I found a provocative insight in Noah’s blessing. Noah asked for the peace of unity. Biblically this blessing did not end in that one generation.

Based on the genealogies, the sons of Shem, Japheth, and Ham fought as enemies, or at the very least as rivals. However, not everyone did so. God told the Israelites to respect each other, even the foreigners who lived in their midst. Likewise, Jesus asked his followers to live in love. Throughout the centuries, small groups of Christians have preached the same.

We now see that diverse people can act as allies, even friends. Even atheists condemn hatred of others. Some of us discuss the understanding of God outside the context of our preferred religion or denomination. After all this time,

humanity finally glimpses the benefits of living peaceably together as a family, sharing a metaphorical tent.

Service to enemies can turn them into brothers. Hope of hopes, maybe we really do have the potential to live in unity and love.

UNIFIED FAMILY

Perfection theologies insist on an angry God, where humanity is seen as corrupt, condemned, and hated. Unfortunately, Christianity inserted the wrong message into this story, and we lost the love it expressed.

God did not condemn Noah for getting drunk or sleeping naked. Noah did not thrash Ham or Canaan for laughing. The grandfather did not overreact by dividing his family or forcing a child into hard labor. Instead, the uncomfortable situation drove the good man to pray. He asked God to promote respect so the family could have unity.

We need more lessons like that.

CHAPTER 43

RETELLING THE FLOOD

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

-- Isaiah 54:10 NIV

In this chapter, I paraphrase the Great Flood story (Genesis 6 through 9) as a regional experience. Natural phenomena highlight the details. I deliberately left out the numbers and dates because we cannot verify these details historically. Instead of the original narrator’s knowledge, I insert my voice to explain what was unknown at that time and emphasize God’s biblical control.

Creation’s Parables is not about forcing biblical texts to fit nature or making nature fit interpretation. I want to show the history within Genesis 1 through 11 as supported by standard 21st century science. Remarkably, the unmatched parts are superficial to the basic story.

Most of all, I found the Creator’s eternal goodness in the journey.

GOD'S HEARTBURN

-- Genesis 6:5-8

The people made in God's image multiplied across the land, but they did not act like God. They listened to the serpent-spirit and became increasingly wicked and violent. The Earth cried out as it did with Abel's blood, "I am violated!"

However, God remained with them, always with them. Their sins filled Creator with sorrow and regret. By not listening, those people chose their way and rejected His blessing of safety.

God saw into the future. A flood devoured this vast region filled with people and animals. It was preventable, but He chose to let nature take its course. In time, life there would die.

ARK'S OUTING

-- Genesis 6:9-22, 7:1-24, 8:1-19

Amid the pain, one man's righteousness stood out. God spoke. "Noah."

The man dropped to his knees as Creator continued. "Devastation comes. Soon, I will destroy these corrupt people using the Earth. But for you, I will provide a way to survive."

The frightened man nodded and scribbled the specifications for a huge boat to save a selection of people and animals. Then, he set to work on the building project that took decades to accomplish.

Any time Noah had the opportunity, he spoke about the origin of the design. While people were impressed, they found it all too strange. Most laughed. Few listened.

Noah finished the boat and stocked it with food. Then, God announced that the rains would begin in seven days, so it was time to load the ark. With Noah went his three sons, their wives, every animal Noah had ever seen, and many he had never seen.

God sealed the door. He provided safety as the rain started falling. For more than a month, it continued to pour. This monsoon saturated the soil. Rivers filled, then overflowed upon the plains. Water from drenched mountains rushed down, raising the levels and stripping away everything in its path. Trees toppled. Animals screamed. People drowned. The torrent wiped every town Noah knew off the surface of the Earth.

The massive structure lifted and floated away with the debris. The people on board could not imagine any living thing surviving such a terrible flood.

When the rain stopped, Noah peeked out the one small window. What he saw frightened him. There was only water: water and the horrible floating carcasses of past life. No land, no mountains, and no sign any ever existed.

He dropped in a weighted line. In amazement, Noah counted twenty feet of wet cord. "There must be twenty feet of water above the mountains," he thought aloud. His family bobbed their heads in traumatized agreement.

None of them knew that mountains disappeared below the horizon as they floated out to sea.

The family discussed the absence of land. They wondered if the window faced the wrong way. Maybe the mountains were on the other side of the ark.

The family decided to release a raven to see which way it headed. These big birds are strong flyers with good vision. If land existed, then a raven would find it. However,

the raven flew around and around. It never reentered the boat but never left the vicinity.

In a few days, Noah tried a dove. The gentle bird quickly returned. The people knew in their hearts that they alone survived.

A few days passed before Noah tried again.

The dove flew off. The people waited all day, hoping for a sign. In the evening, the dove returned with an olive leaf.

The people knew that those trees grew on hills surrounding Mount Ararat. "The water must be going down," they thought.

After more days of only water outside the window, Noah set the bird free again. This time it did not return. The people rejoiced. But despite the encouragement, they spent what seemed like months floating in the ark.

Suddenly the ark lurched. They heard land scrape the ship's bottom timbers.

"That must be the highest place, the mountain of Ararat!" They believed this true, even though they did not know what land lay beneath.

Time went by. Far on the horizon, a mountain started appearing. Cliffs became visible and soon towered above them. The people stared out the window in wonderment.

"The water is retreating!" they rejoiced. Again, seeing was believing, even though none of the family knew that currents bring boats back to shore.

Eventually, the ark ran aground, and God gave the command to disembark. Noah followed God's order to leave the structure behind and continue life as before.

GOD'S COVENANT

-- Genesis 8:20-22, 9:1-17

As you might suspect, getting off the lurching boat pleased the people very much. They scrambled up to the highest point of the rocky beach. To one side, they saw only water; on the other, rocky hills meagerly covered in grass.

"This has to be the top of Mount Ararat," they agreed, even though they had no idea where they stood.

In honor of their arrival and God's fulfilled promises, Noah set up stones and sacrificed several clean animals.

God chose to accept the sacrifice of life and spoke to creation, "The Earth is not responsible for the wickedness of man's heart. I AM Creator. I set the course of the rain and guided its path. But for the duration of Earth, through every seasonal change, day and night will continue."

God spoke a blessing to Noah and his family. "Eat meat and vegetables. Produce children and populate this land." He also gave the people duties. "Despite the fear of man that I instilled in animals, I put them into your charge. Treat them with respect; do not eat meat that still contains blood. I know each life and notice when they die. Likewise, as the image of God, you must accept responsibility. Teach my goodness. Take retribution for the wrongful death of another image of God."

Creator saw the potential for future generations to fear. They would associate sin with the waters and say sin produced all floods. Therefore, God made a covenant with Noah and with all who survived aboard the ark. He proclaimed, "Never will the entire Earth be covered with water to kill all life. The rainbow is my witness and a reminder of this promise."

CANAAN'S LAUGHTER

-- Genesis 9:18-27

Noah and his sons began to work. They planted crops for food and cultivated vineyards for wine. These people lived their lives just like they had before the flood.

Some years later, Noah loved the drink and drank too much. He slept off the bender in his tent without a stitch of clothing to cover his old hide. His youngest son found him and told his brothers. The other two discussed what to do next. They walked into the tent backward with a blanket held between to cover the old man's nakedness.

When Noah awoke, he heard laughter. It came from a grandson, Canaan, who dishonorably repeated what his dad saw.

Noah's head pounded with the hangover, but he recognized a future problem.

"You are living under a curse!" he exclaimed. Ham had taught Canaan disrespect for his elders. Such lessons could not continue, so he placed the child into his uncle Shem's care to be the servant of the one who served God and Noah.

Noah then turned to Japheth and gave him a blessing. The good father prayed that his eldest son become like his second son Shem, open to God. The blessing came with a prediction. In the future, Japheth's relationship with Shem would grow so that all three lived peacefully together.

FLOOD'S END

The sun rises and sets as it has since the Earth formed. To this day, the entire world has not drowned, killing all the people and animals. God's promise, symbolized by the rain-

bow, is constant and forever, even when we feel like our world is under deep water.

I find it reassuring that I can trust God. This reality has always been true, but humanity has been slow to learn. As a species, we still fear stories invented to scare, myths held as fact. Fear exaggerates the weather and envisions monsters under beds. Respecting others remains a struggle. Living peacefully together confounds us.

Humans do not like change. We resist correction. However, everything does change, even our basic understanding. There is only one constant, that is the Creator. He is with us always. He can even change the inevitable future by taking the bad and making something good.

Step into His boat.

PART SIX
THE TOWER

GENESIS 11:1-9

CHAPTER 44

BABBLE ON BABEL

A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.

-- Ecclesiastes 3:3 NIV

One more story remains in the biblical account of creation, the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). When people retell it, the nine short verses transform into an epic tale of evil and destruction. The wrath of God plays a crucial role as He destroys the pride of humanity. In addition, He changes the course of human history by forcing people to speak multiple languages.

However, those are just the basic details, and some are not even in the story. I just do not have enough fingers and toes to count how many versions of this tiny tale I have read. Perfectionist theology defined humanity as broken and corrupt, unworthy of being loved by Creator God. Through this lens, the story forced another recreation of people because they threatened the perfect plan. Most adaptations contradict each other in characters and moti-

vations, yet they all concentrate on God's condemnation of humanity.

Without perfectionism's additions, this story teaches us about ourselves and God's control of the past, present, and future. Our Creator does not condemn humanity for trifling reasons. God cares too much. No one can threaten God's plans, so no re-creation is needed.

However, before I learned anew about God's amazing form of inspiration, I had to excavate Babel out from under the mythical rubble. I put this story through the same analysis as the others by removing added theologies. Babel reformed into history by matching the natural evidence.

I was quite amazed. I still am.

TESTING POETRY

Most scholars accept the chiasmic pattern in the early biblical stories. Babel is no different. And, like the other stories, the interpretations express the mirrored verses in different ways. Some people liked repeating words; others presented concepts as repetitions. Nevertheless, most of them held the same conclusion: the form helped in memorization.

The reason for poetry may be valid but poetic ordering changed nothing. It did not set the story as historical and all the conflicts between interpretations continued.

I also realized poetry did not establish God's inspiration either.

That irritation stayed with me for a long time. Then, I grasped that the style of storytelling was unlike the other stories before Abraham. Instead of just poetry, the tight wording expressed a concise parable, like one told by Jesus.

If that is true, then staying on the surface kept readers from identifying the profound meaning.

I wondered if the poetry contained a key. I did not find one nor a scholar who hinted at one. However, I did recognize a theme: fear. Fear of separation. Fear of neighbors. Fear of differences. Fear of confusion. Even God expressed a kind of fear, that of undesired future events. Fear is a very human emotion and often leads to isolation and more fear.

DISTORTING EPIC

Babel is unlike the other biblical creation stories. No one has found a similar myth in the adjacent nations that combines a tower with the divergence of languages. Predictably, theologians disagree on how to read the story. Some call it a reliable history to support the origin of languages. Others declare the story mystical, a dramatic lesson on how God punishes human sin. A few claim an exiled Jew in Babylon wrote a commentary on that city.

Like the other Genesis stories, epic versions of the Babel story quickly grew beyond the biblical text. Jewish storytellers added evil characters to kindle God's wrath, miracles to accomplish the impossible, and morality lessons that condemn rebellion. For example, they decided God became angry because the city leaders considered a single brick more precious than a human worker.

The tower's purpose changed. The structure grew taller with each recital. It spiraled into the clouds or beyond to the stars. Sometimes, it held up the sky to ward off floods. Occasionally, the tower turned into a flying fortress of the Nephilim. Quite often, it became an attempt to overthrow God.

The epic versions needed a tyrant to construct such a

thing. Sometimes that person was Nimrod, who enslaved people to build the city and tower to take over Heaven. In other versions he played the hero, pleading for the obstinate crowd to listen. More often, Abraham (or one of his ancestors) begged the people to repent.

These epics always ended in God's cataclysmic destruction of the tower. Such an evil place had to retain an evil presence. A few versions came up with horror story endings. They transformed passing travelers into demons or gave them amnesia.

The biblical writer must have forgotten to tell us about those thrilling details. Babel was not depicted as a Hollywood-like event in human history.

The additions made great fiction, but they hid or distorted the biblical account of Babel.

BUILDING TRADITION

According to the genealogies, Abraham lived over 50 years before his ancestors, including Noah, started to die. Yet, the Babel story never references Noah or anyone in the lists. The knowledge gap gave reasons to invent epic myths. Some theologians even forced Babel into the genealogies, where one verse mentions travel and language.

"From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language," Genesis 10:5 NIV.

I shook my head. "That verse talks about the sons of Japheth, but not everyone." The Babel story does not indicate that God changed languages by family groups. Therefore, the genealogy's family groupings would no longer

exist if a radical change in speech occurred. The chaos would have produced people too confused to remember such connections.

Also, the interpretation reverses the timeline, which starts with languages and ends with migration. The genealogy statement says people migrated together in clans and gained territories. Each of those nations produced distinct languages. That is backward, thus not the same.

As written, this verse tells the same story as anthropology. Ancient people migrated by family clans, and mariners spread quickly. Territories gained cohesive governing bodies. Distinct dialects emerged through separation. With enough time, languages diverged.

If Babel did not match anything in the Bible, then did that mean it was just a myth?

The earlier stories gave me hope, but where was God's inspiration?

DEFINING WORLD

The first verse of the story says the world had a single language, and then God said the same in verse 6. The popular interpretation maintains that all languages began at Babel. However, there is a difference between that belief and God's statement.

The narrator, not God, used the word "world." That word is the same one used in the Noah story. The writer also used it in Genesis 11:2 to describe just the land of Shinar. The Hebrew usage embodied land, country, or ground, with local geography as its most common meaning. The concept of an entire planet was not part of the narrator's vocabulary or understanding. His region was the

only world he knew. This indicates that a biased opinion influenced translation and interpretation.

Instead, God focused on the people building the tower, who spoke one language. He did not include the whole planet or say these people were the entire human race.

All the people who lived in that region spoke only one language. The region's physical characteristics isolated the tower builders from neighbors who spoke different languages. Many cultures could claim that distinction, at least for a while.

Removing myth-like beliefs helped me see that this strange little story could match history.

DEFINING LAND

The biblical story says a traveling group of people shared a common language and wished to stay together. This growing population found land, plants, and plentiful game more. Settling was much more comfortable than nomadic life. Instead of the fear-filled wild, they found security in home-sweet-home. So, they stayed.

The story names the area Shinar, which describes a plain with two rivers. Rivers on plains regularly change course, merge, or divide. From that meager description, many potential places exist where a river takes two routes within a broad valley.

Later, people gave Babylonia and Chaldea the same name. However, the Tigris-Euphrates River "valley" stretches nearly 340,000 square miles. That is a vast area. Chaldea was near the headwaters in the mountains. The biblical description of Shinar did not require so much land, and no mountains are in the biblical story. I find it possible

that Babel existed somewhere along those rivers or near the ocean where the two rivers run closer together.

However, this story gives us something more intriguing than location. In just a few words, it represents the method of how humanity traversed the entire planet. Our ancestors migrated, settled, then migrated again because some people do not sit still. As a result, languages changed.

BUILDING TIME

The popular interpretation maintains that multiple languages formed in an instant.

The text does not.

The teachings of my youth shouted back, “Yes, it does! God confused the people with multiple languages just before they scattered.”

The problem here is time. The Babel story neglected to mention any.

Building a community, city, and tower from scratch requires a considerable amount of time, even generations. How long that took was not important to the story’s writer. Time was not relevant to any of the activities. That included the diversification of language and the scattering. Events transpired in their own time with no restraints that required an instant, immediate, or even soon timeline.

That revelation was an eye-opener. Just like in Genesis 1 and 2, God inspired the writer to use generalities. Interpreters superimposed the instantaneous change onto the text. The biblical storyteller compressed an era of cultural expansion to glimpse history.

CONTROLLING PROGRESSION

Dislodging the myths that disguised the parable became a goal. The pursuit gave hope for alignment with the studies of early civilization. I wanted to find the Creator who controls humanity with patience, not the destructive deity of perfectionism.

Fear not, children of God, His inspiration is amazing!

CHAPTER 45

BABEL'S PEOPLE

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.

-- Psalm 127:1a NIV

“Who were the tower builders?” I asked.

Most interpretations maintain that the people who lived in Babel were recent descendants of Noah and the only humans on Earth. Noah and his sons may have lived there too.

I noticed something odd. Instead of a segue, the canon redactors inserted a genealogical list of nations between the flood and the tower, and nothing identified which patriarch lived in Babel. Stranger yet, no other biblical writer referenced the story. With all the problems the Israelites had, it would have been a perfect theme.

A lack of connection highlighted a huge assumption. The Bible never stated that those people were the only ones on Earth or built the city soon after the Great Flood.

Those facts surprised me, so I went into research mode.

I again asked, "Who were those city dwellers? What motivated them to want a tower?"

TOWER BUILDERS

The Bible says the people of Babel wanted a name (reputation, fame). They desired prestige, grander than that of... whom? Most epic versions stipulate God as their rival.

I always had a problem with that conclusion. Nothing in the biblical story describes a plan to conquer Heaven. Religious groups build structures to curry favor from their deities, but when did they ever think those structures made them superior to a deity?

Humanity built cities for protection against nature and each other. People built towers for security against their neighbors. Contrary to those, humans still construct grandiose structures to elevate their status.

I found a more down-to-earth interpretation for the motive to build. Because the biblical story does not stipulate "time," then we can read it as a compressed timeline. The earliest settlers' population grew and, over time, developed into sister cities. The location kept the community isolated so that they spoke the same language. As always, the people found reasons to compete. Fear grew as the power struggle ensued, and one of those cities produced a tower to demonstrate superiority. They impressed their rivals with fancy brickwork.

A desire for domination provided motivation. However, when such buildings fail, the builder loses prestige. The story of Babel agrees with anthropology.

EMOTION BUILDING

Many epic interpretations say God was angry over the people's fear of migrating to fill the Earth. Others insist God feared the humans' abilities and that they might overthrow His throne.

Assumptions dictated those assertions. God's dialogue holds no expression of anger or fear. The reader must add those emotions. Also, neither the narrator nor the people's dialogue indicates a fear of migration. The nomads simply settled to build a home.

The only emotion-driven statement in the story came from the speaker who wanted the tower. His words relayed the essence of a standard motivational speech, nothing more.

The reason God acted might contain a veiled emotion but not fear or anger. Genesis 11:6 NIV showed concern for a possible future: "*Nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.*" His knowledge prompted a preemptive act. God took care of the people to come.

The story does not tell us what that potential event was. God may never reveal that secret. If we knew, we would probably put our collective minds together and try to attempt it. Maybe, in God's timing, we already have.

SITE BRANDING

Babel was not the city's name. The biblical story says that people gave it that nickname only after the city became a ruin. The Hebrew word meant "to confuse."

That form of naming is not new. Many of the biblical writers used the name Babel to insult Babylon. Some theologians say that shows the Babel story was about

Babylon. However, I think that is wrong. The writers nicknamed many non-Israelite cities in the Hebrew Bible. These modifications are often rude and express the writers' opinions.

Misapplying Babel's name could also indicate the fear the post-exile redactors held for their overlords. In this case, they borrowed the name from the old story to safeguard their heritage. At the same time, they injected derision.

The English word "babble" originated from this source. We say babies babble before they learn words. However, people also use the term to insult other languages, improper grammar usage, or even an accent. This rudeness exposes prejudice. Humanity's animalistic fear of strangers started long before the building of a tower.

UNLOFTY BUILDERS

People like dramatic stories, but Babel does not include a super-villain or a dastardly plan. Instead, the people engaged themselves in a normal human activity, building.

Scorning neighbor's is another favorite pastime. The Babel story gives us an excuse. However, instead of superiority, we should be humbled. The original language no longer exists. We are just dust with absurd egos.

God created everything, including humans who build and the languages they speak. So, I needed a better foundation than what the epic versions presented.

CHAPTER 46

BUILDING BABEL

The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

-- Proverbs 18:10 NIV

The epic versions exaggerated and embellished the people of Babel, so it was easy to see why modern readers deemed the city and tower unreal.

For most of my life, I agreed. Such outrageous proportions made it a mythical place. Disbelief seemed the best option until I started excavating the story from the perfectionistic epic.

No surprise here. God grounded Babel in history, which we hid beneath thousands of years of additions.

SOARING TOWER

The biblical story said the tower reached the heavens. The epic versions grew that statement into a building so tall that none to date has matched it.

How tall was this structure?

For our ancestors, heaven started at an arbitrary point higher than any building, tree, or hill. Only where mountains filled the sky did that point reach too high for birds to fly. We now add space stations and planets to that arbitrary point. The human imagination designates where Heaven starts; knowledge moves it farther away.

Stripping off the epic addition of extreme height eliminates a skyscraper and brings the tower and heaven back to Earth. The structure only needed to be taller than the surrounding buildings. It only required the technology within reach of Bronze Age people.

The tower returned to reality. It was just a tower.

ERRONEOUS EDIFICE

What kind of structure was Babel's tower?

Theologians disagree.

* A few scholars assert that ziggurats were unfamiliar to early Israelites. They did not have a word to describe them adequately, so they called it a tower.

Ignorance seems highly unlikely to me. Abraham grew up in the culture that built ziggurats. His son and grandson acquired wives from back home. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, where pyramids loomed. All those generations lived along caravan routes with people who brought stories. The storyteller and his audience had a description for such massive buildings other than the wrong word.

* Other scholars think a Jewish slave in Babylon wrote the story about the unfinished ziggurat and his captors. He used the wrong word so that the Babylonians would not realize the story was about them. The redactors included it in the canon without realizing its recent origin.

Even though possible, the deliberate misuse of a standard description also feels wrong. People built ziggurats for idolatrous purposes. Despite many epic versions depicting the structure as religious, the Bible story's tower contained no relationship with religion.

More importantly, this interpretation makes the Babel story political commentary only. That would negate historical validity and possibly any inspiration from God.

* Most scholars say the structure was a watchtower, which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word.

The promoters of the epic versions reject the literal image. If Babel was the only city on Earth, then why would they build a watchtower? No enemies existed for them to watch.

With the interpretation of a regional Great Flood, more than one group of people existed. Furthermore, with the story's compressed timeline, the people of Babel needed the tower because they had enemies whose language was their own. Therefore, the Babel story's writer understood the structure as stated, a watchtower.

BABEL'S TIME

Many scholars require Babel and Babylon to be the same city. However, that connection is impossible.

Scholars see patterns in the writing styles of the Bible that relate to specific eras in history. They call this the Documentary Hypothesis. If it has merit, then the written form of the Babel story falls into the oldest Hebrew style. The story predates not only Nebuchadnezzar but also the kings of Israel.

An old writing style sets a time of the written version, but it does not specify the story's age, which may have

started long before the written form. That old city needed to be wealthy enough to build a massive structure, yet abandon it before the story became part of the Mosaic collection of creation.

In my opinion, people needed to abandon the city of Babel long before Abraham. Scholars still debate when he lived, but about 2700 BC is a reasonable estimate. That places Abraham at the end of the Sumerian civilization. His nomadic predecessors may have lived in or alongside it. Abraham's descendants retained this story, which described that culture's collapse.

BRICKING HISTORY

Does cultural evidence exist within the story details?

The Sumerian's colonized the lower end of the Tigris-Euphrates River systems. Plants and animals thrived in the delta floodplain. The location isolated the early settlements (c. 5500-4000 BC) from other cultures. They spoke a language very different from any of the other cultures along those rivers.

Those people's original construction style consisted of reeds, wood, and unfired mud blocks. Stone was not available, so the Sumerians invented a new technology from what was available. They made brick (fire-hardened clay) and used bitumen (mortar made from tar and powdered limestone) to keep structures from eroding. Those innovations revolutionized construction across the world.

Like most of humanity, the Sumerian's fought aggressively amongst themselves. The wars between sister-cities caused many projects to remain unfinished. The Sumerians lost control of the area to the Akkadian Empire. From then on, people spoke a mixture of languages in that land.

The Babel story does not express how long events took. Therefore, like other early tales, the history of Babel compressed the time it took to found, build, and end a great civilization. This interpretation lets the biblical details tell the same story as science. The archeological evidence of brick and bitumen supports a natural timeline sometime before Abraham.

BABYLON'S INSCRIPTION

One of the world's oldest capitals was Eridu (c. 5400-2050 BC), the Sumerian city of power and religion before their great flood occurred.¹ A succession of invasions eventually decimated the Sumerians, but their influence continued. The culture of each victor quickly incorporated Sumerian technological innovations (irrigation, writing, building). Like Latin in Christianity, each new religion retained the old language and deliberately tied their god to Eridu.

I am not asserting that Eridu was the city called Babel, as many ancient cities of the region fit the criteria, but how it connects to Babylon is interesting.

Farther up the Euphrates River, a village under the influence of the Sumerians grew. It later became the city of Babylon. It gained enough influence around 1900 BC to claim to be Eridu's successor.

King Hammurabi (c. 1792-1750 BC) made Babylon the center of the first Babylonian Empire. It is possible he also built the first extra-large ziggurat in that city. That structure was called *Etemenanki*, which was a Sumerian name even though the Sumerians were no longer a civilization. It meant "house of the foundation of heaven on earth." The structure stood until the Assyrian king Sennacherib

destroyed the temple (689 BC) about the time of Isaiah the prophet's death.

People claim this temple most often as Babel's tower even though its history happened long after Abraham. Why? Because of confusion.

In 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon defeated the kingdom of Judah. He destroyed Solomon's temple, decimated Jerusalem, and exiled the Israelites to Babylonia. Then, a period of peace followed, which allowed him time to rebuild his city. I am sure many of those new slaves helped.

During the rebuilding, Nebuchadnezzar wrote about the reconstruction of the older ziggurat of Babylon.

"A former king built the Temple of the Seven Lights of the Earth, but he did not complete its head. Since a remote time, people had abandoned it, without order expressing their words. Since that time earthquakes and lightning had dispersed its sun-dried clay; the bricks of the casing had split, and the earth of the interior had been scattered in heaps."²

Nebuchadnezzar wrote of an earlier era, but his statement, "*without order expressing their words*," did not mean before language diversified. Time changes speech patterns and writing styles. Just like we find Shakespearian English challenging to read, the written words of early Babylon would have seemed strangely out of order to Nebuchadnezzar.

However, since the biblical story excluded any reference to earthquakes and lightning, it is very likely Nebuchadnezzar's inscription influenced the violent non-biblical Babel epics that originated after the Jews returned from Babylon.

They imagined that was how God destroyed evil places. Christians accepted the assumption.

After Alexander the Great conquered the region (331 BC), the Greeks stepped in to add to the confusion. Babylon still retained its importance as a religious hub as well as its connection to the Sumerian city of Eridu. Therefore, the Greeks thought the two cities were one. Their error gave Babylon a much older beginning.³

Christian commentaries cited the Greek's list as factual. That "knowledge" became a religious stance used to support biblical history. In the 19th century, archaeologists found Nebuchadnezzar's tablet. Scholars promptly claimed he spoke about Babel's tower. Then came the assertions that Babel was a political commentary written by one of the Jewish slaves in Babylon. Because of this, people no longer viewed the biblical story as historical or even theologically relevant.

I believe both sides of this argument built their cases upon a weak foundation.

The Greek historian was wrong about Babel's age. Christians should stop citing an error as reliable. Doing so instills doubt about our faith.

If the biblical city of Babel existed as a real place, then it could not have been Babylon. Similar names promoted confusion. Babylon was too young. Even its older unfinished temple was not ancient enough. People populated the ruins and remembered its name well into the Christian era.

CRUMBLER MYTH

If the story of Babel originated from an actual city, then the people were just people, and the tower was only a tower. Human additions to the ancient event of Babel overlaid it

with emotional drama and theatrical effects. Those transformed this short story into a Hollywood-like myth.

Removing those beliefs was crucial for interpretation. Harmonizing Babel with anthropology helped give it a foundation, but I needed to find God's inspiration.

"What was His message?" I asked.

CHAPTER 47

BABBLING TOWER

May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue.

-- Psalm 12:3 NIV

Good people extract teachings that condemn humanity from the various versions of the Babel story. These presume the anger and violence of God. Such beliefs come from the additions grounded in Greek perfectionism, not the Hebrew text.

I asked, “What lessons do believers teach? Do these align with the Babel story or the rest of the Bible?”

UNITY VS. DISUNITY

LESSON: Many Jews teach that before the Great Flood people sinned against humanity, which God punished harshly. People sinned against God at the tower and got off lightly. Rabbis give two possible reasons for this.

* The people of Babel worked in unity, so God only punished the unity.

* God liked the unity, so He reduced the punishment for their rebellion.

Christian doctrines also focus on sin and condemnation. Their theologies say Adam's sin separated humanity from God. Further sin nearly ended life at the Great Flood. The punishment for arrogance at Babel separated men from each other. Unity is only possible with God. Anything outside of His will results in chaos.

EXCEPT: God did not call the diversification of language a punishment or a curse. We do.

God's preemptive action did not isolate people by languages because humans segregate themselves even within languages. Many animals segregate by species, packs, or some hierarchy. Therefore, this tendency started as part of God's good creation, not a curse upon humanity at Babel.

PUNISHMENT AND CURSE

LESSON: The actions at Babel required punishment, so God cursed humanity by diversifying language.

EXCEPT: The Bible never describes languages as a punishment or a curse.

Our Creator calls us children, and His followers are blind and deaf. God tells us not to curse such people (Leviticus 19:14). He even cares for those who do not know Him (Jonah 4:11). Conversely, we condemn when God does not.

PROGRESS OR CHANGE

LESSON: God instantaneously diversified language to stop humans from realizing a goal.

EXCEPT: Scattering may have slowed down progress for a while, but it did not stop anything other than one building project. Those people quickly returned to setting goals.

This lesson does not answer the question of why God used language or its purpose.

Believers assume an instantaneous change, but the biblical story does not contain a timescale. Perfectionism dictates rapid change. That theology requires God to recreate His creation. However, if the belief does not match the Bible, biology, or linguistics, then why believe it.

ARROGANCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

LESSON: People built the tower as a monument to self-importance. God hated the conceit.

EXCEPT: If diversification of language was a cure for arrogance, then God's plan failed.

Of course, that was not the reason God gave in the text. He displayed no anger toward the tower builders. Human achievement is not a sin. Instead, God looked at the future, to something that He did not want to occur if things continued. Either it was something God did not want to happen at all or something that would happen too soon.

God is in control.

HEAVEN AND CONTROL

LESSON: God worried that the people might get too powerful and take over Heaven. This scenario shows up in the myths of the nations that surrounded Israel. Therefore, it must be a concern of God.

EXCEPT: The Israelites knew the stories of their neighbors' gods, but nowhere in the Bible does God worry about losing dominance over Heaven or Earth. Biblically, the builders of Babel wanted fame, not the domination of Heaven.

We should stop trying to define the Creator of the universe using other people's myths. They do not tell us who He is. He does.

GOD CAME DOWN

LESSON: The people wanted to secure the presence of God in their city, a focused contact.

The idea is that humans must do something to get God's attention. Large structures gave the gods easier access or a dwelling on Earth. Buildings provided a place for humans to appease gods. People regularly used the Jewish Temple and Christian cathedrals the same way.

EXCEPT: The Babel story does not say the tower was a temple or that it had any religious significance. Also, God does not punish people who strive to find Him. He knocks at our door.

"Down" is a human rationalization of spiritual action. If in death we go down, then unreachable Heaven must be up. However, unlike the pantheon gods, the Hebrew Creator did not need a building. People did. He exists everywhere.

ORDERS DISOBEYED

LESSON: God told people to fill the Earth, but the people feared separation from family. Settling down was a rebellion that required punishment.

EXCEPT: Building a city never stopped reproduction or migration. The command to fill the Earth includes building along the way.

These people built for the same reason Cain built. Ancient people invented walls and towers to defend themselves from danger. Such enemies often shared the same language.

EVANGELISM MANDATED

LESSON: Take the word of God to the nations. The Jewish prophets hint at this. Christian doctrines make the message very clear. However, the people of Babel stopped.

EXCEPT: The story never mentions evangelism, religion, or a message from God. If these were the only people on Earth, then to whom were they to preach? Of course, I do not believe Earth was devoid of humans at that time. Also, going includes stopping. While God told Paul to travel, he lived in cities for years (Acts 28:30). In addition, most of the people he taught remained in their communities.

CITIES AND EVIL

LESSON: Cities degrade human ethics and morals. Commerce promotes greed. Therefore, cities and commerce are evil. Living in high-rise buildings and purchasing mass-produced items are sins.

EXCEPT: Condemning city life is not biblical. Even the

description of Heaven contains a city. There are so many people today we need tall apartment buildings. Without mass-produced items, people would have very little.

God stopped one tower's construction, but those people's descendants kept building, and the structures grew more massive. Therefore, if God punished people for establishing a city and building a tower, then God's plan failed.

God made the universe and gave us dominion to subdue the world. To perform our role, we must understand creation's construction. Only through knowledge can life benefit from our labor.

His dictate takes human cooperation.

We are not there yet. God will guide our efforts. He patiently waits for humanity to mature.

BUILDERS IN CREATION

Segregation is not God's way, but it is "fear's" way. Fear lets our individual and cultural variations drive us apart. Instead, God wants love to bind us together. Working through differences is good for humanity.

Our theologies condemn when God does not. Such unbiblical conclusions are steeped in perfectionism. They deny the deep love God has for humanity.

We need to step back and view Babel's people and tower without all the dramatic additions.

"Can this story match someplace in human history?" I asked.

"Of course," whispered the wind of time.

CHAPTER 48

RETELLING BABEL

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance - for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

-- Proverbs 1:5-6 NIV

The Babel story is not conventional storytelling. God did not give us a tall tale filled with dramatic plot twists, villainous characters, and an unnatural timeline. Instead, it is a parable, which is how God speaks when His thick-skulled children stop listening.

A parable format relays much more information than the written words. It probes the complexity of humanity and wraps insight inside a simple puzzle. We must go below the surface to find the valuable lesson.

As in the other creation stories, we must start in the right place. Our Creator's inspiration gives us the reality of a natural creation filled with His Good News. Without those, this story becomes just another myth.

But first, I had to find authenticity and meaning. In this

chapter, I present two of four possible interpretations of Babel. These two set the story firmly within history. Was Babel an actual city? If so, then it was a real place with ordinary people doing everyday things.

The city's abandonment also needed to occur long enough before the birth of Abraham to forget its name. Only then could its memory condense into a concise short story. The Sumerian cultural decline aligns easily with that historical period. Archeology shows many sister-cities grew to prominence, then began battling for supremacy. Still, they spoke one language.

Outside their domain, the Akkadians and Elamites did the same. Eventually, the cultures met. They, too, battled for supremacy. Then each land of one language changed.

HISTORICAL ANECDOTE

The first interpretation uses a natural timeline, relying heavily upon archeological and anthropological evidence. I start with the one-liners in Genesis that describe the dawn of civilization. The story of Babel simply continues the progression.



EARLY PEOPLE TRAVELED IN CLANS. They settled where they found security and abundant game. Fishing, farming, and ranching communities formed. In time, labor diversified. Food growers traded surplus for the wares of weavers, smiths, and artisans. Family groups grew into villages, developed into towns, and then matured into small cities. Bureaucracies expanded their influence by using laws to keep transactions fair and peaceful. In the mix, simple spir-

itual beliefs accumulated into elaborate religious theologies based on myths.

The story of Babel opens here.

A people of one language settled in an isolated region between rivers. They grew in population until pride broke their unity, and the sister-cities competed for dominance. Each group wanted to be the mightiest and have their name esteemed. Battles scattered losers, yet they remained one people with one language.

One of those cities decided to impress its neighbors with a building project. The committee chose a watchtower. They envisioned a grand structure, taller than the trees, with the top brushing the heavens. They thought its height would confound any foe.

Everyone helped. Engineers planned the design. The city's people supplied those who spent their time building. Their inventions of fired brick and bitumen kept the mud block structure from washing away. The edifice grew higher, impressively clad in the latest technology.

"Let the other cities fear us," they said. "Our tower makes us the best."

God of Heaven watched as the people's arrogance grew and contempt filled their hearts. He viewed the future to consider the options. What He saw displeased Him. Without intervention, nothing would stop the people's desires. So, he chose to make a change.

Creator spoke to His world. "Let us confuse their ways."

This command was not instantaneous. God knew their intentions before they did. It took time for the people to plan and partially construct a tower.

The world around the city began to change. Waterways slowly diverted their path to the far side of the floodplain. Irrigated land retained salt, which reduced crop yield. Over-

ranching pastures produced less grass and livestock.¹ The status of the tower people faded as they built.

Far away, outside their known world, other people lived. They established communities, traded amongst themselves, and developed civilization. Each of them had a language, but not the same language as the tower builders.

Fringe settlements met, and trade started. At first, foreigners learned the local language and customs. Others came, but they did not integrate as well. The local people eventually stopped thinking of them as a curiosity with exotic trade items. Instead, the locals saw them as intruders with strange ways.

Segregation built boundaries. The people in power snubbed those who spoke differently and insisted that their land remain a land of one language. Rivalry increased as insults and greed led to localized conflict. Tension grew within the land until battles ensued between distant nations.

The cost of war imposed an enormous toll on the tower builder's civilization. As the losers, they abandoned projects and homes. Refugees of many languages mingled to escape death, then dispersed into groups going their own way. The vanguard lost supremacy when they mixed with the many. Their world, their language, their lives abruptly changed.

Like their ancestors and their descendants, they chose to blame others for their misfortune. Their condemnation continued for generations. Over the years, people forgot the name of the city. Instead, they renamed the ruins Babel, Hebrew for "to confuse." They told the story of confusion each time they passed a crumbling tower or dealt with someone speaking another language. Because, any of those places could be where God confounded the ancestors.

THE PARABLE: Arrogance comes before the fall.

The people of Babel traveled far away. They intermixed with others and spread the concept of civilization outward. In turn, those cities fell, and their people dispersed. Today, we continue to spread our views of civilization, build our monuments, and deem our language the best.

Will we repeat the parable or learn from it?

HISTORICAL COMMENTARY

The second interpretation describes an ironic political satire of Babylon. Irony is a witty use of opposites. Satire is a crafty insult.

Using this rendition, we can read the Babel account in two ways. One presumes a storyteller invented the tale to make a political statement. The other ties a political message to an ancient story.

I prefer the second version since the canon redactors would not have presented a recently invented tale as historical. Either way, instead of an epic myth, we read Babel as a parable.



IN THE LAST days of the kings of Israel, God punished His chosen people. They had let their hearts stray and saw no need to repent. As a result, the Babylonians came and took everything valuable and left only the ravaged. The people of God who spoke one language became slaves in a foreign land of many languages.

The people helped build structures high into the sky, clad in fired brick. They saw the pride of their captors and remembered what the prophets said. That sin caused their

downfall. It happened before at Babel, and God would do the same to Babylon.

To speak of this insight, the enslaved teachers retold an old story, something easily overlooked by their oppressors as a children's tale. They used irony and satire to disguise the insult. The ancient watchtower stood in for a ziggurat. Their word *balal* (to confuse) sounded like the name of Babylon. The nickname hid the reproach.

Later generations forgot the satirical aspect of the story. Instead, they saw the historical content and felt a personal connection between the ancient tale and their forefathers' exile. In that way, it transformed into prophetic history since dispersal came to every one of Israel's enemies.

THE PARABLE: "Do you consider yourselves powerful? Our God will confuse your empire, just like ours. People will abandon your grand cities as the world laughs."

HISTORICAL REPEATS

People think, plan, and create, so we attempt and accomplish the impossible. All the while, we squabble over everything from trinkets to territories, from toleration to theology. Humans set blame, lie, and laugh off our responsibilities. Like frustrated children, we destroy our creations and those of others in the name of some deity. Unfortunately, Christianity has echoed the same mistakes as our ancestors.

Will humanity ever learn God's lesson?

Our Creator gives us hope for the future.

CHAPTER 49

MESSAGES FROM BABEL

This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

-- Matthew 13:13 NIV

I suspect people have always misunderstood and misrepresented God's responses of "not now." Selfishness wants its way. Waiting becomes a punishment, curse, or proof that He does not care. Such events probably provided the reasoning used to build doctrine upon perfectionistic myths.

However, Genesis does not present those epics or the anger and condemnation that accompanied them. Instead, I found the loving hand of the Creator guiding the history of humanity. The living God inspired the Babel story with profound meaning. Its parable delivers much more than a myth about language or why tasks sometimes remain unfinished.

This chapter presents my third and fourth possible

interpretations of the Babel story, where diversity acts as a blessing, not a curse. These thoughts dig deeper than the story's historical setting to reveal the Good News in ways that speak to our spirit.

BABEL'S WARNING

The third interpretation explains how humans view correction. Too often, we call it a punishment and promptly desire the return of our substandard ways. Instead, God's intentions are good for us, even when the corrections feel bad. Because God is good, the division of language is a blessing. Only our pride says otherwise.



THE BABEL parable emphasizes God's control of everything. He governs the rise and fall of nations and the etymology of words. Since our Creator controls all aspects of life, He controls situations that we assume block progress.

According to this parable, God alleviated a future problem. He did this, even though it meant scattering a community. Trauma occurred, which left a city in ruins. However, in the grand scheme of things, the event benefited humanity. God takes the bad and returns it as good.

Let me explain.

Babel illustrates a significant change in human dynamics within a community. The people unified in their desire for power, so they began constructing a tower. As their group gained prestige, they distanced themselves from their neighbors. That disunity forced drastic consequences, where even their language transformed.

The single society became segregated before it separated.

Such events have happened again and again throughout history. Our faith, knowledge, and nations ebb and flow. Human pride and greed always strive to seize power. Propaganda and self-promotion twist the truth. We let ritual take precedence over understanding and call retribution more sensible than love.

To realize the significance of diversity, look at the Church. (For that matter, examine any old organization). Most denominations hold onto truth even while they cloak it in superstitious and conflicting traditions. Unscrupulous leaders and ignorant followers are ever-present. People prefer magic and reject reality. We accept the erroneous additions until our common beliefs fracture.

Like in the Babel story, Christians build towers out of soiled pride, then coat them with hardened dogma held together with sticky traditions. Too often, petty arguments sever ties. Each group thinks their dogmatic edifice makes them the best. As a result, our community segregates, and we fail to recognize each other as one family.

It has always been that way. However, God knows who we are, and He works His good out of our disunification to improve the future.

God thinks differently than humans and wants something better for us. His lessons teach us the difference between “unity in love” and “unity to gain power.” The first is His way. The second is our way. Oddly enough, the Babel parable tells us that we need diversity to grasp that difference. Even odder, and because humans are human, God’s truth is too important to leave in the hands of only one institution. Diversification protects His reality by giving

each group partial yet intersecting truth held by the same source of love. We must learn from each other.

God loves the whole world, not just our tiny corner of it. His love exists within every group of people. Because of that, every human alliance can also contain spiritual truth. Even atheists know right from wrong and good from evil. They continually expose Christianity's shortcomings and failures. They demand truth and justice when God's people turn a blind eye. God provides correction by any means, and biblically, unbelievers play their part.

Diversity is a safeguard that offers correction. Opportunity comes by intermingling. Only then do we recognize strangers as neighbors and neighbors as family. In humble communication, we can share the love and truth we know. We change from within as we acknowledge our misguided ways. No matter how distorted one group becomes, humanity does not lose God's eternal truth of "unity in love."

THE PARABLE: A tower built in arrogance does not last, but God's stronghold will remain.

God bestowed the gift of diversity. It exposes and slows the false advancements of pride. We can humbly accept humanity's differences as a blessing or choose to reject people because of superficial preferences. It is our choice.

How do I unify with others? Is it through the love of God or selfish desires?

DIVERSE BLESSING

The fourth interpretation highlights how embracing our differences constructs opportunities. It continues where the Babel story and the other three interpretations end. Our

diversity may cause distancing and turmoil, but it can also bring us back together with hope for the future.



HUMANITY'S SUPERIORITY complex started long before Babel and continues to this day. We see our achievements eclipsing everything, sometimes even God. We stand upon gilded pedestals and proclaim our greatness while degrading opponents. We crush those we find substandard like bugs and fling insults of "ape" or "Neanderthal." Then... we brush off the dirt of conquest without a thought to our own dusty origin.

The Creator designed everything, so everything became lessons for humanity. Some teachings entered our collective consciousness quickly, others quite slowly. God chose to lift our species by transferring to us the governance of this planet and its animals. Yet, for most of our existence, we simply coexisted with nature or acted as corrupt dictators. We disregarded everything except for what pertained to personal gain.

The Bible and evolution disclose our humble beginning. The Bible and archeology show our triumphs and innovations but also our failures and impairments. Humanity's learning process continues.

Nature follows the commands set from the beginning of time. Everything in creation sings the melody of the Creator. It hums along willingly.

Humanity's mortal existence maintains God's command. However, we are a bit different from everything around us. We want to sing our own song, build a tune that does not harmonize, and insist it makes us superior. Self-

ishness deafens us to what we could sing within creation's song.

The Bible illustrates that history through one small lineage, the Hebrews. Dissonant chords abound, but God's love song still surrounds them. Babel shows the same pattern in its blues croon. Arrogance led to confusion. Confusion invited the condemning additions. Condemnation encouraged arrogance. Yet, God's presence was always there. He used the upheaval to alleviate something worse.

Humanity's relationship with nature changed throughout the passing generations. The lessons from the universe grew. In the modern era, one of God's predictions started to come true. Science toppled gods from the stars and boiled them from the depths. Without the burden of supernatural myths, more and more people see the actual substance of animals, plants, minerals, and astral bodies. Studying them gives an appreciation of their construction and role in nature. Believers still find God, but they no longer need the myriad of mythical deities and spiritual forces. God's word is trustworthy.

All life communicates: calls mates and children, signals fear or friendship, displays ripeness or poison. Some creatures even deceive opponents or fool predators. Human linguistic complexity follows the same patterns. The diversity equips us with some amazing skills. We can comprehend the messages of other species and communicate back as we learn to hear their song.

However, to do that, the human mind must release the preconceptions of smug superiority. God made those creatures. Only through the humility of wonder can we appreciate their intricacies and diversities. God's love song gets more prominent when we stop playing a solo.

The investigation of nature presents a future possibility.

Life might exist on other worlds. Their languages will not be like ours, but our linguistic diversity can imagine and hopefully assist in that potential encounter. Through our humble babblings, we hope to interpret a new song.

The biblical story of Babel ended in confused segregation, but the people's stories did not end there. They continued. Their knowledge flowed outward and kept going. Their experiences endured teaching the generations. Through history, God's long lesson gives us reasons to look past our superficial differences, break down our lofty walls, and embrace underlying similarities. Each language, nation, and life-form express the same concepts differently, sometimes in better ways. We can learn from them.

THE PARABLE: Anticipate correction from God. Ignoring His participation brings confusion and ruin.

Our Creator provides us with the opportunity to realize our ways are not the best. Our attitudes soften as we see ourselves as part of a vast and diverse universe. Knowledge brings insight and expands appreciation of the depth of His love for all creation.

Only with that humble attitude do we reach out to govern our tiny world wisely.

CHANGING TIMES

Tolerance does not arrive in an instant. Like everything within creation, it is a process. The Creator knows the difficulties we have in learning His lessons. So, Jesus prayed for our unity, all the while knowing that family ties would unwind¹ and scatter to different lands.

Humanity is taking God's long journey toward "unity in love." That trip does not demand uniformity. We do not need to compete until our anger kills our brother. We can

live peaceably as individuals within the same family tent, as we warmly welcome strangers with strange customs.

God promises that future hope. The negative attributes of humankind will diminish. Confusion will eventually end. He opens our eyes to the possibility of an improved collective. Through God's unifying love, we can become greater than the greatest in our community. In God's time, our species will transform to look like Him. Living as God's image will be enough.

Hallelujah!

A SONG OF PRAISE

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.

-- Psalm 47:1 NIV

Dance joyfully! Harmonize loudly! Sing as one! Rejoice in God's Good News!

The music I heard centered on our One Creator. It encompassed one evolving universe, one planet filled with life, and one humanity. His creation diversified from the beginning: something from nothing, light from darkness, water from sky, land from water, life from mineral. Life changed as it spread: single-cell to multi-cellular, lineage to class, families to species. We are one creation with One Creator. Only a divinely inspired text could harmonize so beautifully.

Let us rejoice in the marvel before us.

God designed the universe to display its formation. He inspired the Bible that tells the same story of the cosmos and humanity. Scientific investigation illuminated all the

delicious details. We found dinosaurs dancing at the gala of galaxies.

Celebrate the miracle of harmony! I joyfully joined the old song of creation with my new song of discovery.

I sing the song of His goodness!

The Eden story described God's complete control over events that shaped our existence. Our Creator chose to put a spirit into people. He desired to make that image stronger through love: God to man, man to woman, parents to children, family to community.

God controlled the process. He selected unique over perfect. The Creator chose to provide people with temptation and let a tempter speak. Our ancestors chose the option that gave knowledge like God's. That option continues.

God infuses His control with love.

The Creator made human-kind good, as He is good. Sin never repulsed God, nor did it condemn humanity with mortality. Instead, humanity's Creator approached in tenderness. He taught before sending out. Leaving the garden removed only the possibility of humans eating from the second tree too soon. God orchestrated all those events, for our good, for His name.

Rejoice in the Good News! Scripture tells us not to fear. Our Creator controls everything, even death—even life after death. Sing His song!

I giggled with delight as the progression of the biblical stories matched the evidence found through science. Like everything else God made, humanity evolved. From families to clans, from communities to civilization, we invented new ways to express ourselves. We did this, yet God remained in control. He has always turned our bad choices into good.

Heavenly harmony exists between ancient texts and standard science. Yet that is not all. The revelations about God amaze me more. His true nature shimmers from the pages. The stories of creation abound in the love, mercy, and forgiveness that God has always given His hard-headed children. So, I sing the song of hope.

Good News! From the beginning, our Creator is intimately personal. God loves us despite our sins and through our sins. No amount of sin separates humanity from His love. God freely accepts the responsibility for allowing us to sin and truly understands everything we go through. Remember, He became one of us.

I sing because Abba beckons us into eternity.

Our Creator still offers fruit from the Tree of Life. That choice evolves humans into a new creation that does not need to fear physical or spiritual death.¹ Nothing in the universe hinders God's plan. Nothing, not even our sins, censors God's passionate love.

God frees us to sing!

Within the spiritual side of reality, the perpetual cycle of crisis will end. Though our languages vary, we find a common hope in God. Though our customs disagree, we unite in the faith of love. All nations will eventually come together for one purpose and in one praise. Our One God wants us to be one in Him. That unity transcends life, and Heaven unfolds on Earth.²

Sing God's Good News! Fall on your knees to join the living creatures in worship.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

NOTES

2. THEOLOGICAL FOSSILS

1. Augustine of Hippo in *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Translation by J.H. Taylor in *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

4. THE HEBREW STYLE

1. I describe the complex structure of Genesis 1 in a later chapter.

7. A CLOSER LOOK

1. Psalm 104:2; Isaiah 44:24, 51:13; Zechariah 12:1
2. Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Isaiah 8:19-20, 47:12-15

9. KINDS OF KIND

1. Genesis 1, verses 11, 12, 21, 24, 25; Genesis 6:20; Genesis 7:14; Leviticus 11:14-29, Deuteronomy 14:13-18, and Ezekiel 47:10

10. THE STRUCTURE OF CREATION

1. Conrad M. Myers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (John Knox Press, 1984), p. 44.
2. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, J. Marsh (trans.), Edward Smith, Burlington, Vermont, 1833.

12. CREATION'S COMPLETION

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (first published in 1951 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005) p. 22.

13. RETELLING THE CREATION

1. New Creation: Isaiah 43:18-19, 48:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17. New covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20. The age of the Gentiles: Matthew 12:32b; Luke 21:24.

15. A DAY OF REST

1. Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23, 3:1-5; Luke 6:1-10, 13:10-17, 14:1-6; John 5:2-18, 9:1-41
2. The Levant is a large geographical region of the Middle East. It includes Upper Mesopotamia, the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and the Arabian Desert.

18. HUMANITY REVISITED

1. Malachi 2:15

19. CERTAINLY DIE

1. Genesis 2:17, 20:7, 26:11; Numbers 6:9; Deuteronomy 17:6
2. Genesis 2:17, 20:7, 26:11; Exodus 19:12, 21:12, 15-17, 22:19, 31:14-15; Leviticus 20:2, 9, 11-12, 15-16, 27, 24:16-17, 27:29; Numbers 15:35, 35:16-18, 21, 31, 6:9; Deuteronomy 17:6
3. In Genesis 26:11, King Abimelech reprimanded Isaac.
4. Numbers 6:9 requires a Nazirite to restart the ritual if someone dies suddenly next to him.
5. 1 John 3:15
6. Exodus 32:27-28; Numbers 2:1-9; Matthew 5:30, 18:8; Mark 9:43
7. Matthew 18:21-22

22. CURSED IMAGE

1. Job 31:4; Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 29:15-16, 40:27-28; Jeremiah 16:17, 17:10; Hosea 7:2; Matthew 6:8; Hebrews 4:13
2. Psalm 68:22, 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Jonah 2:2; Amos 9:3; Hebrews 4:13
3. Exodus 15:6; Job 9:4, 42:2; Psalm 145:3; Jeremiah 32:27; Zephaniah 3:17; Matthew 19:26.

4. James 1:13-15

25. SERPENT-SPIRIT

1. Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13
2. Isaiah 1:21-23, 10:1-2; Jeremiah 5:26-29; Ezekiel 22:23-29, 34:1-34; Zechariah 7:8-12

26. THOSE RIVERS

1. I found these interpretations on www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Cush.html#.WZppZyiGOuk. I thank Abarim Publications for permission to reference their information.

27. RETELLING THE GARDEN

1. This is a literal translation of the Hebrew emphatic double in Genesis 2:17.
2. This action by the serpent is not in the story but it is a reasonable speculation.
3. John 8:42-47; Romans 8:14-17; 1 John 3:10
4. Matthew 10:28-31; Luke 12:4-7

28. BLIND SIN

1. John 3:16-17; Colossians 1:15-17
2. John 9:39-41; Isaiah 42:18-20

29. THE BEGATS

1. Genesis 5:1-32, 10:1-32, 11:10-32; 1 Chronicles 1:1-27
2. The Bible calls him Abram at this point in his life.
3. Genesis 9:6; Psalm 8:3-6; Proverbs 22:2; Job 34:19; Isaiah 45:12; Jeremiah 1:15, 32:27; Malachi 2:10; Acts 10:34-35, 17:26; Romans 2:11, 5:8, 10:12; Galatians 3:26; Colossians 3:9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:18
4. A few Bible versions cite this explanation where the lists do not match.
5. The word "civilization" means a complex community with diversified labor. Morality and ethics define a culture but not the level of

civilization.

30. CAIN'S STORY

1. The word "civilization" means a complex community with diversified labor. Morality and ethics define a culture but not the level of civilization.

31. CAIN'S FAMILY

1. This passage might describe two assailants or only one where Lamech restated the incident for emphasis.

33. THE ANCIENTS

1. It is an easy bet that the Nephilim were human too.

35. A PERFECT BIBLE

1. Psalm 19:7, 18:30
2. Numbers 12:6; Deuteronomy 13:1-5

36. FLOOD SPLICING

1. The longest version is on Tablet XI of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2700 BC).
2. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Coherence of the Flood Narrative* (*Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. XXVIII, Fasc. 3, 1978) pp 336-348.

38. FLOOD EFFECTS

1. These ideas come from Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (c. 839-923).

40. FLOODED FABLES

1. Science has classified over 5000 mammals, almost 7000 reptiles, nearly 10,000 birds, and over 1,000,000 insects.

41. THE LAW OF NOAH

1. Exodus 21:24 was for harming a pregnant woman. Leviticus 24:20 was for injuring a neighbor. Deuteronomy 19:21 was for lying in court.

46. BUILDING BABEL

1. Research: *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*.
2. Translated by William Loftus, *Travels and Researches in Chaldea and Susiana* (London: James Nisbet, 1857).
3. Research: *The King List* by Berossus (c. 290-278 BC).

48. RETELLING BABEL

1. This paragraph lists common problems along rivers in semiarid lands. These archaeological attributes preceded the decline of several dominant Sumerian cities before foreign wars began.

49. MESSAGES FROM BABEL

1. Jesus quotes Micah 7:1-7 in Matthew 10:34-36 and Luke 12:49-53.

A SONG OF PRAISE

1. Isaiah 25:6-8; Hosea 13:14; Luke 12:4-7; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57
2. Isaiah 4:2-6

