

GENESIS - SOME BACKGROUND THOUGHTS

Historical Background

Genesis was most likely written about 1500 BC by Moses, probably near Mt. Sinai, while herding sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro. Moses also probably wrote Job about the same time. Nineteenth century higher critics didn't think Moses could have been the author for the following reasons: a. the use of three different names for God with different sections of the book seeming to prefer one or the other; b. many repetitions of stories suggests that the "author" drew from several different sources and couldn't fully put them together; c. conditions described in the book were not supposed to have been present until long after Moses' death; d. Location names from a much later period seem to be used instead of the earlier names; e. the traditional stories of the creation, flood, and some patriarchs are so similar to other stories from Babylon etc. that it is assumed that the "author" copied these stories. Fortunately for us, many of the claims of higher critics have been clearly refuted by modern archaeology. For more details see *SDA Bible Comm.* vol. 1, p. 201-204.

Discussion:

Looking back into eternity we see God seated on His throne and on His right hand we see Christ the Morning Star or Light Bearer (in Latin it is translated Lucifer) and on His left the creature named Lucifer bearing one of the names of God. Of all God's creatures none could better explain the things of God or better represent God than Lucifer. When God prepared to create this world they did not include Lucifer, the creature, in their deliberations because he had nothing to contribute. This was one of the factors that contributed to his growing jealousy of Christ who had humbled Himself so much that He was known as Michael the Archangel. Soon after Satan was cast down God went ahead with His plans to create this earth. (What do you think Satan was cast down to?)

The story of Genesis is the sad story of the rapid decline of the human family from sinless perfection in the garden of Eden to its conclusion with putting Joseph in a coffin in Egypt.

All of these books need to be studied in their setting, but how broad should we make the setting? To get the best possible understanding of what the issues were in the garden of Eden we must look at all the available evidence on what had taken place in the universe up to that point. Scripture can always be interpreted best when we take the broadest possible context. So where do we look in the Bible to learn what had happened before Eden and to discover who else out there might be looking on? For example, during creation week, who was watching?

A. Who was observing the creation of our world?

God is eternal, All three Members of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were there from the beginning: Isa 57:15 (NIV) - "For this is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy..."

Habakkuk 3:6 (NIV) - "...His ways are eternal."

John 1:1 - "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... v.14 "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." compare Micah 5:2; Colossians 1:16; 1 Timothy 6:16

Angels were there: Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 12:7-9

Sons of God: Conservative scholars imply that other worlds had been created and their inhabitants were also observing--compare Job 1,2 (see especially 1:6, 2:1 where some modern translations have angels, but in Hebrew the words are "sons of God") To support this see Job 38:4-7. First, please notice an important technical point. In Hebrew poetry when two lines seem to give a parallel thought, the second line is explaining or repeating or confirming what is in the first line, e.g. Morning Stars and Sons of God. When God began the creation of the world, we thus see who was watching. When God had finished creation, they "sang together, and shouted for joy." The entire universe were watching very closely on creation week. We only showed up on Friday as newcomers.

Lucifer was there: Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-17; Revelation 12:7-9

See Revelation 12:4 for the first mention of the war in heaven. When did Satan begin his work of deception and accusation? What is Satan actually trying to accomplish by his accusations? See Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Matthew 4:9. Notice how many times he tried to set himself up as a god.

After sin arose in the heart of Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:15), he spread his rebellious thoughts to one-third of the heavenly angels (Revelation 12:4) and then there was "war in heaven" Revelation 12:7-9. Lucifer (now Satan-the accuser v.10; compare Zechariah 3:1-5; Job 1:6; 2:1) wanted to occupy the place of God and exercise the authority of God, but without using God's methods. Thus he began to accuse God's government and malign His character. Satan, a mere creature, wanted to be worshiped, not only by his fellow creatures but by his Creator (Matthew 4:8)!! Incredible as it may seem, at the very end, here on this earth, he will almost succeed. (Revelation 13:3,4)

Satan's charges and accusations against God have not been made in private, but before the entire universe. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, Paul gives us a clear idea about how Satan actually does his work, and how he appears to us. It should teach us that although one lies in the most winsome ways, no matter how appealing he appears, if he is not telling us the truth we must reject him. Compare Deuteronomy 13:1-5, and 1 Kings 13 (esp. vss. 18,19)

God on the other hand has gone out of His way to be gracious to His fallen and unfallen children. Everything He does is open before the entire universe. (Compare Job 1 and 2--an example of one of the councils which God called to discuss plans with His unfallen children.) Even Christ's death was for them: Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 3:9,10; and especially Colossians 1:19,20. And it is not only Christ who was being observed, see 1 Corinthians 4:9.

No doubt the entire universe was watching as God created this earth. We have no evidence that any other world was created like our world. As the Creator proceeded, Day One to Day Seven, it was apparent that many of Satan's claims were false. Imagine the freedom God gave Adam and Eve. At great risk, He shared with us as far as possible the power to create. He was even fair with Satan in placing the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden.

Sin and God's Foreknowledge: If God had all the foreknowledge to know all this trouble was coming why did He create a being who would one day become Satan? Why didn't He just blot Lucifer out and then blot out the memory of him so we wouldn't know? Then God could just go ahead and repeat this anytime anyone would entertain the thought of sin. How do we know that God hasn't done this? The great controversy is proof. Only God would have known. Just imagine the lengths God has gone to to prove to us that He does not manipulate us. God would rather lose one-third of his angels and most human beings rather than limit our freedom.

B. Issues related to creation:

Creation Week: Acts 16:31 tells us that all God is asking for is trust, perfect trust. Romans 14:23 says that sin is a breach of this trust. Imagine the universe watching creation week day-by-day. What do we learn about God from creation week? Do you see any evidence that God can be trusted? Do you hear any answers to Satan's charges? Remember that Satan charged that God is arbitrary (not respectful of human freedom). Satan claims that God is vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, and severe. He cannot be depended upon to tell the truth. Are there any answers to his accusations given in creation week? Apparently God could have created our entire world just by the snap of His fingers. Why did He take so long? Do any of God's actions during creation week suggest that He is selfish in any way? Imagine the beautiful place He has created for His creatures. Why do you think He made us male and female? What better way for God to show His willingness to share as much as possible His creative power. Wouldn't it be just like God to have this work in an atmosphere of love and just like Satan to pervert this as much as he can? Consider how much Satan has done to pervert the power we have to procreate, and thus to destroy what it says to us about God.

What was this ultimately saying to the angels? Or do we have any evidence that there are creatures that reproduce anywhere else in the universe? Compare Christ's discussion of marriage in heaven (the woman with seven husbands Matthew 22:29,30). When our children are young, we are like God to them. Can you think of any better way for God to illustrate the problems He was facing in dealing with us? Are you really willing to respect the freedom of your children so that when they are ready to leave you are ready to let them go? God did. We must be very careful what we say about parents because we sometimes suggest that perhaps if their children have problems it was their fault. What about God? He lost a third. What about God's respect for our freedom? He gave us the freedom to love and obey Him or hate Him and spit in His face.

Tree of Knowledge: Would it have been necessary for God to put a tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden if Satan had not rebelled? The tree of knowledge of good and evil was put where it was primarily to try to answer some of the questions that had already been leveled against God. Perhaps if Satan had not already rebelled and raised the questions the tree would not have been there. Adam and Eve would have had an opportunity to exercise their freedom in some other way as the rest of the universe does. In the garden, disguised as a beautiful iridescent snake, Satan comes as Lucifer (“light bearer” in Latin) pretending to bring “new light”. He still claims that title, and we must not forget that one day he will come claiming to be Christ Himself. Matthew 24:23,24. What about the placement of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? To be fair to Satan, and yet limit his access to Adam and Eve, he was allowed to approach them only at one tree. This tree was placed, however, in the center of the garden near to the tree of life. When God told them not to go too near the tree, He was only trying to protect them. Had God said anything to Adam and Eve about death yet? When did He first talk about death? Remember that shortly Satan was to claim that this was a lie (Genesis 3:4). The ultimate, direct answer to this question doesn't come until crucifixion week.

The Sabbath: After the significant events of all creation week comes the Sabbath, the day of rest, and celebration to consider all that has taken place. At the end of crucifixion week the very next day was a day to consider and celebrate what Christ has done for us. The Sabbath was no mere test of our obedience. The Sabbath was made for us, Mark 2:27,28. The primary function of the Sabbath is to provide an opportunity for us to be reminded of the essential truths in the great controversy over the character of God which were revealed in creation and in crucifixion. No wonder most people who do not understand the issues in this controversy find it difficult to understand why we observe the Sabbath. Without this background understanding, the Sabbath is regarded merely as a legalistic hangover from Jewish times.

On the seventh day God said, “We would like to set aside this day to memorialize all that creation has said in answer to Satan's charges?” Shouldn't we make this a time of special togetherness to celebrate God's answers given at the beginning, at Sinai, and at the cross (remember that Christ rested in the tomb) to refute Satan's charges? Doesn't this say a lot about God and about the Sabbath and the risks He was willing to run in giving such freedom to us. That first Sabbath was a great day of victory for God, and helps to explain why there has been so much conflict over the Sabbath down through the ages. No wonder Satan has worked so hard to destroy the meaning of the Sabbath!

C. Issues Related to sin:

“Dying, thou shalt die” (Genesis 2:17) is a Hebrew idiom for “you will certainly die”.

Adam and Eve's sin: In the garden, wasn't the worst problem—the first human sin—the inclination to open themselves, both of them, to Satan's deceptions or accusations and not to trust God?

Notice that Satan's first recorded act was to make some specific accusations against God. When talking about the fruit, he said specifically that God had lied. (Gen. 3:4) Would you trust a liar? He also suggested that God was withholding something from them. He said, I don't know why God is holding this back from you. If God is so good, why would He be cheating you out of this? Right there from the very beginning God is pictured as being arbitrary and exacting. Then when it is all over, God expels them from the garden on their very first offense. What if our parents treated us this way? Doesn't it seem that our sinful parents are more forgiving than our loving heavenly Father-God? If God is really loving and gracious, why did He throw them out on the first offense? What did He mean when He said, on the day that you eat of the fruit, you will die? Did He mean that He would kill them? Was God clarifying the issues here or making things more confusing? Doesn't it seem like God is acting in just the way Satan had claimed He does.

Adam wasn't willing to trust God with his happiness. He didn't see how he could emotionally survive without Eve. It was a very difficult decision for Adam, but rather than trusting God and letting God make the decision about what he should do, Adam took things into his own hands. Compare Abraham, Hagar and Sarah (see below). Think of the millennia of conflict which have come out of that situation—the Arab-Israeli conflict, etc. Why didn't Adam wait until evening when God would come so they could consult together about the tree? Why didn't Eve consult with her husband on the issue? Think how different things would be if Eve had only said to the talking serpent, “Perhaps you are right about this tree, but it doesn't seem to agree with what God has told us. Let me talk to Adam and God about this, and if it is indeed a good idea to eat this fruit I will come back tomorrow!”

The results of sin: What do you think went through Adam's head as Eve told him what she had done? Did he think, “God is so gracious he will forgive us.” The question is, did God forgive them? Certainly, but forgiveness doesn't undo the results of the sin. God forgave them and continued to forgive them. Sin is not just a legal problem recorded in a book and stamped forgiven when we ask for it. It is a real problem and leads to real changes. Sin damages people. The consequences are in no way arbitrary. It is very real and it scars us. Even God cannot undo this without violating our freedom.

What if Adam and Eve had come honestly forward and asked for forgiveness? Would God have treated them differently? It raises the question, do we have to ask for forgiveness? By contrast with Adam and Eve can you think of anyone in the Bible besides Jesus who was tested to the ultimate, and was given all sorts of misrepresentations of God, etc., and yet stood firm? What about Job? Is there anything in the Bible that suggests that God is absolutely forgiveness personified? Even before we ask? See the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31) The father didn't even let his son finish his speech.

Do you think Adam and Eve who were living in a perfect environment fully comprehended death? When was the first time that anyone in the universe had an opportunity to see what was the death that was the wages of sin? It can't be the first death that is referred to here, because Christ (John 11:11-15), Paul (1 Corinthians 15:51), and others refer to that simply as a sleep. They must be talking about the second death. (See Revelation 20:6) No doubt the universe was asking when the first lamb was killed, is this the death that You are talking about? When Abel was killed, again they asked is this the death that You are talking about? Similar questions were raised at the flood, and at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah when fire was poured out? The second death is so awful that God decided that He must demonstrate it Himself. Certainly Adam and Eve didn't understand. The angels themselves didn't understand. This is why Colossians 1:19,20 and Ephesians 1:9,10 and 3:9,10 say that the death of Christ affects the whole universe—brings harmony and order to heavenly beings as well as us. These loyal angels didn't need forgiveness. The cross didn't make it possible for them to be forgiven. But it was to show them something. In order to answer all the questions that had been raised in the universe, even before the time of the flood, many things had to be done, especially as demonstrated at the cross.

Through all these crises God, in effect, says to the universe, “The most important thing that I have to say to you cannot be said yet. I am waiting for a time when the people who are most apparently my obedient children, will actually be ready to crucify my Son to demonstrate the hazards of worshipping Me out of fear. They appear to be absolutely dedicated to the `blueprint'. They believe in Me. They believe in the Bible. They study it. They spend much time memorizing it and reading it out loud. In fact, they believe in all the right things, but they will torture Me to death in the name of God and in the name of the truth and the Scriptures.”

So there is no reason to be afraid of God. He never says, “Love Me or I'll kill you”. But there is certainly plenty of reason to be afraid of sin and its consequences.

The answer to what God stated in Genesis 3:15 was not fully clarified even for the beings in the rest of the universe until Christ's death—compare Colossians 1:20; Romans 3:24-26 (How did Jesus die on Calvary, did God execute Him?); compare Romans 4:25 where the word “delivered” (KJV) in Greek is exactly the same as the word for the results of God's wrath in Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28 translated “gave them up”.

Adam's first sacrifice: How did Adam feel as he killed his first sacrificial lamb, perhaps with a stone? Don't you think that he turned in prayer to God and said, “I can't do this, it is making me sick?” God would no doubt have replied, “That is just the point, may it always make you sick! Sin is deadly and I want you to take it seriously.

God and the use of force: What God wants most—love and trust—can never be produced by force. This should be obvious from a little reflection, but there is more. God is clearly the most powerful Being in the universe. If He could win the great controversy and establish the trust and love of His children by exercising that force He should have done so long ago! In the Bible we find that

the use of overwhelming force gets peoples' attention for a while (consider the Flood - Genesis 6-11; Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19,20) but it **never** succeeds in really producing lasting love and trust. (See Genesis 11:1-9; Exodus 32) The Flood was a powerful demonstration, but as soon as people could gather in groups after the Flood, they were building a tower to escape this God that they didn't trust! The Devil admits that God has plenty of power but it only makes him tremble with fear. (James 2:19)

One of the main issues in the great controversy is the use of force. God ordinarily refuses to use force but Satan loves it. Can you imagine Satan touring the universe after the flood and saying, "I told you so!" Would God allow such a thing to take place unless there was a very important reason? This was probably God's greatest exercise of force in the entire Bible and what kind of people did He manage to save? They certainly were convinced about His power and His existence (they built a tower to protect themselves) but it didn't lead them to love and trust Him. It demonstrates that you don't win people by a show of power or force.

The Flood: We have no evidence that everyone who drowned in the flood will be lost. But then if you measure success in terms of numbers, God has never done very well. God would be a failure on Madison Avenue. The most common question that children ask regarding these books is, "Why would God destroy all the children—in the flood, in Sodom, etc?" (We must recognize that there were other good and righteous people who were laid to rest before the flood began.) Was it God's choice to save only eight or did He save anyone who would go into the ark? Is this a demonstration of what God's destruction is like?

Don't you think that Satan felt that he was about to win just before the flood? Don't you suspect that he accused God of playing foul?

The Tower of Babel: The story of the tower of Babel is the first of many stories in the Bible that suggest that God can get people's attention for a little while by a show of force or power, but the results **never** last very long. The first inhabitants of Babylon built the tower of Babel not because they didn't believe in God, but because they didn't trust Him and they were trying to escape His power! Often in more modern times we have suggested that if God would just step in and use His power to take charge of things people would respect and reverence Him more. The story of the tower of Babel should teach us that the use of force never accomplishes what God wants most—love and trust.

God calls Abraham: After the flood it was not long before people were just as bad as before! Soon God chose Abraham to separate himself from his kindred and travel a long distance and establish a separate nation that was supposed to honor and worship the true God. God didn't call them for special privileges (although there were some of these) but for special responsibilities (which they never really lived up to!).

Abraham offers Isaac: When Abraham was going to sacrifice his son, he said, God I'm on my way, but I'm asking lots of questions. Abraham struggled with God in prayer for three days and three nights, before he came up with the conclusion that God could either provide a substitute or

resurrect his son. (Hebrews 11:17-19) Real trust, real faith says I'm on my way, but let me ask questions as I go. Much larger issues were at stake than just whether Abraham would survive a test of his faith. To understand all that was involved it is essential to read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 154, 155.

It wasn't so strange in Abraham's day for someone to go out and sacrifice his son. Some pagan religions (Molech) did it regularly. Abraham probably did not regard sacrificing his son as being the same as murdering him. Sacrificing was a form of offering something to God, and the death was only secondary.

God's long patient wait for us today makes Him look good, but it makes us look bad. Are we personally concerned about how God looks or about how we look?

Anthropomorphism and God: Why does the Bible so often picture God as if He had ordinary human limitations? (Genesis 3:9; 11:5; 18:20) While the wording of these passages comes from Moses and not God, it is clear that He is using terminology that we humans are familiar with and picturing God as someone like us that we can understand. The Bible elsewhere clearly shows that God in fact knows everything. (See Psalms 139:1-18; Job 37:16; 1 John 3:20) God is present everywhere. (Psalms 139:7-12; Hebrews 4:13)

The God of the Old Testament was Christ: It is essential to understand this if we are to put all the stories together into one consistent picture of God. (1 Corinthians 10:4)

Prayer is conversation with God: In Scripture there are a number of examples of people talking with God. Some of them seemed to speak with incredible forthrightness. Look at Abraham's conversation with God in Genesis 18:22-33. Would this qualify as a "prayer"? Abraham spoke very straight with God and was called His friend. (See Genesis 18:25; 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) Moses had a similar experience (Exodus 32:7-14) and so did Peter (Acts 10:9-16). They seemed to know God very well and they were jealous for His reputation. But they felt amazingly free, reverently, to speak very candidly to God.

Isaac, the son of laughter: If you were as old as Sarah and Abraham were when God promised to give them a son, wouldn't you laugh? (Genesis 17:17; 18:11-15) Sarah was about 90 (and past menopause) and Abraham was nearly 100. When questioned, Sarah even lied about laughing! But both of them were put in Hebrews 11 as examples to people of all ages of the kind of faith God is looking for! However, Abraham's repeated failures to trust God at critical times (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-13; compare Genesis 26:1-11) necessitated the hardest test of all, the sacrifice of the promised son! (Genesis 22:1-14) Abraham struggled for 3 days and 3 nights with the dilemma of God's asking him to sacrifice the promised son as they journeyed to the place chosen by God. He finally concluded that God was able even to resurrect his son if necessary. (Hebrews 11:19)

The rite of circumcision: Genesis 17:11,12. Abraham and his descendants lived in the midst of a large group of tribes that generally worshiped fertility. It is quite possible that the giving

of the rite of circumcision had something to do with this. If a young Israelite man were tempted to sneak into one of these fertility cult services perhaps the fact that he was circumcised might have made his origins obvious and prevented him from getting fully involved with some temple "virgin". Some experts believe that circumcision also is more hygienic for the male and leads to less infection and less cancer in his female partner.

Lot and his daughters: Genesis 19:7. This passage is first of all clear evidence of how different culture was in Lot's day than it is in our own. We cannot imagine a father in his right mind offering his virgin daughters to such a crowd under any circumstances, let alone in an attempt to protect the honor and dignity of strangers! One wonders how Lot's daughters could have remained virgins in that environment! It is clear from events that happened later (Genesis 19:30-38) that their thinking had been corrupted even if their bodies were not. Why were Lot and these two daughters living in a cave when uncle Abraham was nearby?

Polygamy: While the Old Testament does not come out clearly and discuss polygamy and all its aspects, it is clear that God made a single wife for Adam. It is also abundantly clear that in every case where there is sufficient evidence available to us, these multiple marriages caused troubles! (Sarah vs. Hagar; Rachel vs. Leah etc)

Remember:

There will always be many things left unanswered from each book but we must keep reading for we will find that the same questions and problems recur. We will always have all the books of the Bible before us, but we will be concentrating primarily on one book each time.

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EGW Quotes:

"Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people. Satan and all who have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. Sin and sinners will perish, root and branch (Mal. 4:1),--Satan the root, and his followers the branches. The word will be fulfilled to the prince of evil, 'Because thou has set thine heart as the heart of God;...I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire....Thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.' Then 'the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be;' 'they shall be as though they had not been.' Ezekiel 28:6-19; Psalms 37:10; Obadiah 16

"This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is 'alienated from the life of God.' Christ says, 'All they that hate me love death.' Ephesians 4:18; Prov. 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place

themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them.”

“At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God’s goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to reproduce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

“But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God’s love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.”

“Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour’s cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, ‘It is finished.’” *The Desire of Ages* 763,764

Human beings—a new and distinct order:

All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made “in the image of God,” and it was the Creator’s design that they should populate the earth.” 4RH 380:1:1; 1BC 1081