

CHAPTER 1: Genesis 1 thru 11

“In the beginning...” Every story has a beginning and the story of the Bible begins with God. **“In the beginning GOD”** – this story is about God. It is HIS story. He’s the main character. He’s the divine Hero. From the beginning of the Bible all the way through to the end, God reveals to us who He is by what He says and by what He does. The Bible shows us God’s character, His desires, His passions and His plans. One of the first lessons we learn about God is that He brings about whatever He desires. As we begin the story, we see that God’s desire is to create a magnificent physical universe.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water. (Genesis 1:1-2)

Out of initial disorder and darkness God the Creator brings forth order and beauty and goodness. The six-day creation account happens this way: On Day 1 God creates light, establishing day and night. On Day 2 God separates the waters below from the waters above. On Day 3 God separates land from water and creates vegetation. On Day 4 God creates the Sun, the Moon, the stars and devises time and seasons. How many stars are there? One source I read claimed there are 1 septillion stars (this is a one with 24 zeroes). And God made them all in one day! On Day 5 God creates birds and fish. On Day 6 God creates land animals, reptiles, and last of all, humans. The Creator is so powerful that He merely speaks His creation into existence. Seven times in the first chapter we read that **“God said...”** and **“it was so.”**

That which is created generally reflects upon its creator. And such is the case with the newly created physical universe. It reflects the character of its Creator. God evaluates His creation and is pleased with what He sees. **And God saw all that He had made – and it was very good.** (Genesis 1:31) God’s newly created order with all of its variety, color, sounds, smells, detail, intricacies, harmonious balance, majesty, splendor, diversity --- reflects an amazing and very good Creator. The result of God’s spoken word is a flurry of activity that is in total concert with His desires. God makes a world where life can flourish.

The last of God’s created living beings are humans, referred to as either “humankind” or “mankind” or simply “man.”

Then God said, “Let Us make humankind in Our image, after Our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26)

For the first time in the story God addresses Himself. When He does so, He speaks in the plural, using “Us” and “Our.” This indicates that God is multiple Persons.

God declares that man, unlike the animals, will have certain God-like attributes. Man will be made in God’s “image” or “likeness.” Man will possess the ability to think and to reason. He will know and be able to communicate with his Creator.

God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them. God blessed humankind and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:27-28)

These first humans are made to be reflections of God’s character in the world. They are appointed as God’s representatives to rule His world on His behalf. They are to care for God’s world and make it a place where even more life can flourish.

By the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day all the work that He had been doing. (Genesis 2:2) So God’s creation is complete.

We are provided with some details about God’s new world. It includes a pleasant environment, a garden paradise called Eden, into which God places the first man. **The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow from the soil, every tree that was pleasing to look at and good for food. Now the tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the orchard.** (Genesis 2:9)

God tells man that he is free to eat of any tree in the garden, with ONE exception. There is one rule that God lays out for man to follow – **“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die.”** (Genesis 2:17)

We can see that God is a good God by all that He has created. He has provided an abundance of good things for man to eat. Now God clearly defines what is good and what is not good and He gives man the freedom of choice to do what is good. Man now knows that the consequence of disobeying God will not be a good thing. Based on what God has told man, he knows that rebelling against God will result in something called

“death.” He doesn’t really know what that means because it has never happened. So, what will man do? Will he do what pleases God or not?

At first the man is alone and God realizes that this is not good. **The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him.”** (Genesis 2:18)

So, God provides a partner for the man, a helper, a woman. The woman is to assist the man in fulfilling the purpose God has for him, that of ruling over God’s creation. Part of ruling involves tending the garden and naming the animals. God forms the woman out of man, so, like the man, she is made in God’s image.

God establishes a special relationship between the man and the woman, that of a husband and a wife. **That is why a man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife and they become one family.** (Genesis 2:24) Here we see the family unit established with a husband and a wife as its core.

God has exercised His creative desires. Everything has been created exactly as God ordered and He is pleased. The man and the woman are ruling together in harmony representing their Creator in a good and perfect creation. God refers to the man as Adam which literally means “the man.” The woman is later named Eve meaning “life.” The rest of mankind will be the direct descendants of the first humans, Adam and Eve. All is well with God’s creation.

Every story has its hero, the good guy, as well as its antagonist, the bad guy. We’ve already been introduced to the main character, the hero, God. Now we get our first glimpse of the protagonist, the bad guy -- enter the serpent.

The serpent is introduced as an animal, which means that it is under man’s authority. But the serpent is more clever and cunning than any of the other animals. It is no ordinary animal! This serpent can speak and reason about God, unlike any other animal. The serpent approaches Eve and begins to carry on a conversation with her. Eve is so innocent (like a child) that she does not give this talking snake a second thought. There is no evidence that she thinks there is anything unusual about this at all.

The serpent does something that had never been done before – it questions God. It questions what God had told Adam and Eve, that one rule God had given to Adam earlier. We know that Eve is fully aware of this because she quotes it to the serpent. In response the serpent tells the woman, **“Surely you will not die, for God knows that**

when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)

The serpent accuses God of not being good. It contradicts what God said. It calls God a liar. The serpent casts doubt upon God’s good character. It accuses God of withholding from Adam and Eve their rightful destiny. “You deserve this!” And what is it that the serpent claims God is holding back? To become like God should they eat of the forbidden fruit. This serpent, whatever and whoever it is, is antagonistic toward God.

Beginning right here and continuing throughout the rest of the story we will see this continuing conflict between good and evil. Good is God. Good is following God and doing things God’s way. That is what we referred to earlier as the top line. Evil, then, is anything that goes against God. It is the wrong way every single time! There are always consequences for doing this. We’ll call it the bottom line. Here we see that the serpent opposes God, which makes this serpent evil, bottom line.

The truth is that Adam and Eve are already like God in that they were created in God’s image. They were made to represent God on earth. But instead of believing and trusting God, they believe the evil serpent’s lies. Eve, rather than defending God and His goodness, considers the serpent’s evil words.

When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable to make one wise... (Genesis 3:6)

She evaluates the situation based on her own desire and reasoning. She begins to crave the fruit despite God’s clear warning against eating it. She believes the serpent’s words, that by eating the fruit she will become like God. This is bottom line action, NOT believing God. She does not really believe that by eating the fruit she will die. She reasons to herself, “Surely God wouldn’t do that!” There is no hesitation now.

She took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:6) Eve does not take time to discuss what she should do with Adam or with God. Instead she reaches out to fulfill her own lustful desire for the forbidden fruit. In doing so she ignores God’s warning. Eve picks the fruit off the tree and eats it. Then she gives some of the fruit to Adam. Because Adam is with Eve he should be aware of what is going on! He should realize that the fruit he has just been handed by his wife is from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He should! But Adam does not question Eve’s actions. Instead he takes the fruit from her and he eats it. They are both complicit.

Then the eyes of both of them opened... (Genesis 3:7) The age of innocence is over. Adam’s and Eve’s eyes are opened. They are aware of good and evil. They know what they have just done is wrong. Having violated the expressed will of God, they are

filled with deep senses of guilt and fear. Prior to eating the fruit, Adam and Eve had been naked and not ashamed. Like little children they had lived in a complete state of innocence. Now their guilt makes them feel ashamed and they attempt to cover their nakedness.

Suddenly, Adam and Eve hear God moving around in the garden. Driven by fear, they hide from Him among the trees. But you cannot hide from God. When God finds them, they begin pointing fingers at each other saying, “It’s his fault” or “it’s her fault” or “the serpent made me do it.” But an all-knowing wise God determines that all three parties are guilty – Adam, Eve, and the serpent. God swiftly renders His divine judgment against them.

God curses the serpent to crawl on its belly and makes it the enemy of mankind. God tells the serpent...**“And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring’s heel.”** Genesis 3:15

Here in the middle of His divine judgment God makes a mysterious promise that one day a human, a descendant of Eve’s, will deliver a lethal blow to the serpent’s head. This sounds like good news. But that victory will come at a great cost – the serpent will deliver a lethal strike to that person’s heel as it is being crushed. One of Eve’s descendants will eventually come along who will destroy the evil serpent and set things right.

So, while there is some glimmer of hope, the present reality is that Adam and Eve have willfully disobeyed God. They have violated His clear instruction. And there are dire consequences. God says that mankind will NOT continue to live forever as before. They will return to the dust of the ground, which is a reference to physical death. God renders the judgment of physical death not only on the man and the woman, but on all living things because of what Adam and Eve did.

But this is not the end of the story. God does not strike Adam and Eve dead right then and there. Remember that God had earlier warned them, **“When you eat from it you will surely die.”** (Genesis 2:17) Instead God shows them mercy and the story continues. God allows Adam and Eve to keep on living, at least for a while longer. He is not finished with them just yet.

God banishes Adam and Eve from their garden paradise of Eden. They are never allowed to return to the place they once called their home. Their lives continue, but it is paradise lost. Their relationship with God has been severely strained, but not completely severed. God provides Adam and Eve the ability to get food from the ground so that they can eat. But unlike the ease of life before in the paradise of Eden, life now will be a constant struggle. They will have to work hard in order to get their food.

God again shows His goodness by taking an animal, killing it, removing its skin and clothing Adam and Eve. Here we see the death of an innocent animal to cover the shame produced by Adam's and Eve's sinful actions. Why does God do this? Because despite what they have done, God still cares about them and loves them. So it is that we see Adam and Eve leaving Eden, not naked and ashamed, but clothed and hopeful.

From here the story spirals rapidly downward... We have the story of two of Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. The brothers each bring an offering to God. Abel's offering is regarded highly. He is a top line guy. But Cain's offering is not regarded well by God. As we will soon see he is a bottom line guy. Cain is jealous of his brother that he becomes angry. God warns Cain not to give into the temptation of lashing out in anger against Abel. "Don't do it." But Cain doesn't listen to God. He murders his brother out in a field.

God confronts Cain about Abel's whereabouts. **Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he replied, "I don't know! Am I my brother's guardian?"** (Genesis 4:9) God knows exactly what Cain had done. He could have struck Cain dead but instead He is merciful. God spares Cain's life but condemns him to wander as a vagrant separated from His presence. It is not a good life for Cain.

One of Cain's descendants is Lamech. He takes for himself multiple wives. This is a violation of God's direction for a man to have only one woman as a wife. But obviously Lamech doesn't care what God wants. He takes many wives. Not only that but he openly brags about killing two men. He prides himself on being even more vengeful than Cain. Things just get worse!

As the earth increases in population, mankind becomes more and more sinful. There is a story in Genesis 6 about the **"sons of God"** having sexual relations with the **"daughters of humankind"** who then give birth to their children. Whoever these sons of God are, they, just like Lamech, take for themselves multiple wives and produce a generation of giants – ruthless and mighty warriors. They build kingdoms that fill God's world with violence and even more corruption. Mankind is systematically ruining God's good creation and hurting and killing each other.

But the Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind had become so great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the

time. The Lord regretted that He had made humankind on the earth, and He was highly offended. (Genesis 6:5-6)

In response to the rampant evil, God would have been justified to wipe every person off the face of the earth and start over again. But remember, God had made a promise to Adam and Eve – a promise that one of Eve’s descendants would destroy the evil serpent. And so, God chooses to spare a remnant of mankind and the animals through one righteous man, Noah.

God comes to Noah and lays out His plan. **So God said to Noah, “I have decided that all living creatures must die, because the earth is filled with violence because of them. Now I am about to destroy them and the earth.”** (Genesis 6:13) God instructs Noah to build a large boat, called an ark. He gives him all the dimensions and details.

“...Everything that is on the earth will die, but I will confirm My covenant with you. You will enter the ark – you, your sons, your wife, and your son’s wives with you. You must bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature from all flesh, male and female, to keep them alive with you.” (Genesis 6:17-19)

Noah obeys and builds the ark. This is a huge undertaking. Best estimates are that it takes Noah between 55 and 75 years to build it. Noah loads up his family and the animals onto the ark (God sends the animals) along with all the food provisions that God had directed. After everyone and everything is safely aboard, God closes the door and seals the ark. Immediately the raindrops begin to fall. And what a torrential downpour it is! **All the fountains of the great deep burst open and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And the rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.** (Genesis 7:11-12)

All living creatures on the earth are destroyed just as God had said. **So the Lord destroyed every living thing that was on the surface of the ground, including people, animals, creatures that creep along the ground, and birds of the sky. They were wiped off the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark survived.** (Genesis 7:23)

A full year passes with Noah and his family sealed in the ark. The ark finally comes to rest on dry land. Noah and his family exit. Noah builds an altar and worships God. He is top line guy. God makes a covenant with Noah. He gives mankind dominion over all other living creatures and underscores the sanctity of human life. God promises that He will never again destroy the earth with a flood and gives the sign of the rainbow.

Just as He had originally instructed Adam and Eve, God now tells Noah's family... **Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."** (Genesis 9:1)

At this point we are so hopeful. Perhaps Noah is the one God had promised would come as Eve's descendant and defeat the serpent and make things right. Could Noah be that promised one? Sadly, it doesn't take us very long to realize this he is not. Noah plants a vineyard and he gets drunk off wine produced from it. While in a drunken state Noah shamefully uncovers himself. One of his sons, Ham, sees his father laying naked in a drunken stupor and disrespects him. Rather than cover him up, Ham tells his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, to come take a look. The two brothers react appropriately by averting their eyes and covering Noah. When Noah sobers up and is made aware of what happened, he curses Ham while blessing Shem and Japheth. The downward spiral begins again!

Over many years Noah's descendants repopulate and they migrate to a fertile plain in Mesopotamia. There they construct a great city called Babel. The people adopt new building methods using bricks. This is top line because the people are using their God-given intelligence to develop better technology for construction. With bricks their buildings and towers are bigger and taller and they are able to build faster than ever before.

The people boldly proclaim their unified goal... **Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth."** (Genesis 11:4) But their best laid plan to obtain power and prestige in one centralized location is NOT what God wants. We know this by what happens next.

God again speaks to Himself in the plural... **"Come, let Us go down and confuse their language so they won't be able to understand each other."** (Genesis 11:7) And God does exactly that. He confuses the language of the various people groups and the result is that they stop their building project and scatter. Their great tower to the sky is abandoned and the people go their separate ways. God's desire is not for one large powerful nation of sinful humanity living in one place making a name for their selves. Rather, God wants there to be various distinct and separate nations spread throughout the earth. So it is that God's accomplishes His desire and overrides man's sinful desire.

These early biblical stories show us the same basic pattern being repeated. God over and over again gives mankind good things, the chance to do what is right in His

good world. But man keeps making a mess of it all. Slowly God's good world is getting worse and worse. Over time mankind chooses to do things his way rather than God's way. There is a downward spiral toward that bottom line! Man is pushing back against God. Man is basically defining what is good and evil for himself. And the result is disastrous – conflict, broken relationships, violence, death and destruction – not good!

It seems like the bad is overtaking the good and seems to be winning out. So what is the answer? What is God going to do in response to sinful mankind and his bent toward this bottom line behavior?