

The Story (1) - From Creation to Abraham

By Ashby Camp

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I. Introduction

A. This morning we begin a class that is scheduled to run through November. It is designed to provide an overview of the story of the Bible to help us not lose sight of the forest for the trees. I appreciate Terry waiting a few weeks to begin this so I could finish Romans.

B. The Bible is, of course, a collection of writings that were made by many different people in different places at different times over a period of more than a thousand years, but all those writings ultimately come from one mind, the mind of God. However complex the process, God guided and orchestrated things so that the biblical writers wrote precisely what he wanted written.

C. For all its subplots and twists and turns, the Bible tells one grand story, a story that is ongoing and of which we are a part. We need to see ourselves within this great unfolding of God's work in this world.

D. The classes are designed to be taught at a certain pace that keeps up with the subjects of Terry's sermons. As Terry said to me, it is a rather "aggressive" schedule. For example, this morning we are to cover from creation to Abraham. Obviously one can only scratch the surface of such a large amount of text in a 45-minute class, but I hope I can say enough that it will be of some value to you. Buckle up because we are going to move!

II. God's Good Creation

A. God is the uncaused cause

1. God is, of course, an eternal being. He has no beginning and no end; he has always been and will always be. And since God never *began to exist*, never went from not existing to existing, he requires no cause for existing, requires nothing to have brought him into existence. Unlike *everything* else, God is *self-existent*.

2. This is important to understand because, even apart from Scripture, there are excellent reasons for believing the universe began to exist at some point, went from not existing to existing. So the universe requires a cause for its existence, an explanation for how it came to be.

3. What I want you to recognize is that the popular attempt to dodge having to identify the cause of the universe by saying "Well you can't identify the cause of God's existence" is invalid because God never *came into existence*; it's apples and oranges. To ask "What caused God?" is to commit the category fallacy in that one is incorrectly assigning God to

the category of things requiring a cause. It is to ask what caused the uncaused, which is nonsensical. It is like asking what time tastes like or how tall Tuesday is – wrong categories.

B. God created everything that is not God

1. Scripture declares in numerous places that *all things* other than God have been created by God (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:11; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 146:5-6, 148:1-5; Isa. 66:1-2; Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2, 2:10, 3:4, 11:3; Rev. 4:11, 10:6). By his word, he called everything into existence. That includes all spirit beings and everything else.

2. And implicit in the fact *everything* other than God was created by God is that he created, at least in the first instance, *ex nihilo*, meaning "out of nothing."

a. In Gen. 1:1, which states "In the beginning God created *the heavens and the earth*," the phrase "the heavens and the earth" almost certainly is an expression, known as a merism, signifying the totality of creation. It is like our phrase he looked "high and low." That does not mean he looked in two places, the high places and the low places, it means he looked everywhere. The point is that during the six days of God's creative work, which is *the beginning* of the universe and all existence other than God, God created absolutely everything.

b. And since he created absolutely everything during those six days, he necessarily created from nothing because if something from which to create was already in existence then he would not have created absolutely everything at that time. The writer of Hebrews is probably making this inference explicit when he declares in Heb. 11:3: "By faith we understand the universe to have been created by [the] word of God, so that what is seen did not come into being from visible things."

3. God "rested" on the seventh day from his work of creation in the sense he *ceased his creation work* not in the sense he *rested* from being tired. Genesis 2:2a does not mean the work of creation continued into the seventh day. Genesis 2:1 specifies that the work was finished on the sixth day, so 2:2a is better translated "by the seventh day God finished (or had finished) the work he had been doing" (e.g., NAS, NET, NJB, CSB, TNIV, NIV).

a. The fact God ceased, rested from, this particular creative work means that all things that came into existence after that time came into existence in a different way; they were derived from or descended from what was created miraculously in the beginning. So all plants, animals, and people that came into existence after the six days were created by God but they were not created the same way as the first members of their kind. Scripture tells us that God ceased from that specific creative work.

b. That is just one of the reasons I reject the claim of some theistic evolutionists that the six-day creation of Genesis 1 is a symbolic reference to God creating by the process of evolution. Even if I were willing to grant that six days somehow can be turned into billions of years, which I'm not, evolution is allegedly still ongoing, still "creating," so it cannot be how God created in the beginning. He rested from that work.

C. God created to share his love

1. That God created all things is clear, but *why* he created the cosmos, or more specifically, why he created us, is less clear. I think John Mark Hicks, who is a professor at David Lipscomb University, offered some real insight into this in his book *Yet Will I Trust Him*.

2. He first points out that God did not create to fulfill some need or satisfy some inner desire. He did not create to supply something lacking in his own life, as though he were in some way incomplete. We do not exist because God *needs* us in any way.

3. Rather, creation is God's loving nature on display. Hicks writes (pp. 56-58):

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the divine reality is a community of loving fellowship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. It is a community of holy love which existed before the cosmos did. . . .

God did not create because he needed fellowship since he already enjoyed fellowship through the triune communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This fellowship was not created by an act of God as though at some point in time God became a fellowship. Rather, it is who God is. God is *agape* (1 John 4:8). Consequently, God did not need to turn to anything outside of himself in order to experience loving community. This was present through the mutual indwelling of God's triune fellowship.

I think the best analogy for understanding this divine act -- as limited as the analogy is -- is the decision of a couple to have children. Why do couples decide to have children? Certainly, in a fallen world, there are less than pure motives. But in the purest sense, couples decide to have children in order to share their love with another. The decision to have a child is, in the best of circumstances, a selfless decision. They share something that they could have kept to themselves. The love which exists between a husband and wife is a communion unsurpassed in human relations. When children are born into that loving communion, children share something they did not create. The parents give something they were not compelled to share. Children -- and we wish it were true in every instance -- are born out of the loving communion between parents. The couple shares their love with another.

Following this analogy, when the triune community decided to create, they decided to share with another something they already enjoyed. We humans did not create that fellowship, but it is offered to us in love. God did not create in order to receive (as if he needed anything outside of himself). He created to give of himself. Thus, the act of creation is an act of gracious, selfless love.

D. Scripture reports the goodness of God's original creation at several stages (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and says of the completed creation that "it was *very good*" (Gen. 1:31). It was an idyllic and blessed existence in which all things were functioning in the way God desired.

There was no death, and Adam and Eve, the first humans, were in harmony with God, each other, and the rest of creation.

E. Humans were created uniquely in the image of God and were given a place of special importance within the purposes of God, including the authority to rule the earth.

III. The Fall

A. But soon Adam and Eve, who were to be God's representatives on earth, rejected his rule by disobeying him. They ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thereby coming to know evil experientially, and in so doing, they corrupted or spoiled God's very good creation.

B. The serpent that tempted Eve to disobey God was being used for that purpose by the evil spirit-being Satan, who in Rev. 12:9 and 20:2 is referred to as "that ancient serpent."

1. That means that *prior to* Adam and Eve's sinning some spirit beings had already rebelled against God. We know that these spirit beings were created in the beginning, during the creation week, because everything that exists other than God was created in the beginning; and we know that they originally were created good because upon completion God pronounced his creation "very good."

2. So at some point after creation and prior to tempting Eve in the Garden, Satan (and some other spirit beings) turned against God. But the focus of the narrative is the introduction of sin into the *human* stream, the physical world. The story of fallen angels, Satan and other demons, is revealed only by inference; it receives no attention from the inspired writer.

C. As a result of their sin, Adam and Eve were immediately alienated from God, the source of all life, which is reflected in their attempt to hide from him. They were alienated from each other, as suggested by the sense of shame that drove them to seek bodily covering. They also were alienated from creation as a result of God's cursing the ground so that it would now be in rebellion to mankind as mankind was in rebellion to God. And as the Spirit makes clear much later in Rom. 8:19-23, the effect of this Fall was cosmic in scope; all creation was subjected to futility and subjected to the bondage of corruption.

D. And mankind at that point became unconditionally mortal in that God would no longer sustain their physical lives in perpetuity, as he would have done if they had not sinned. Physical death became the lot of all mankind; we, like Adam, all return to the dust (except those who will be alive when Christ returns).

E. In Gen. 3:15, a famous verse known as the protoevangelium (first gospel), God says to the serpent: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and her offspring [seed]; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

1. I think the first clause probably speaks of the origin of the hostility that generally exists between humans and snakes, certainly harmful snakes. Snakes can bring death to

you and your children, a capacity that in some way is traceable to this judgment, so most people in the world have little tolerance for them. (A 2008 study estimated between 20,000 and 94,000 people are killed each year by venomous snakes.) This struggle or conflict between humans and snakes, something with which ancient Israelites were well familiar (Eccles. 10:8; Amos 5:29; Acts 28:3-6), is a tangible reminder of the conflict between humans and creation that was introduced into the world by the first humans' rebellion against God.

2. The second clause, however, probably alludes to the deeper *spiritual* conflict that is symbolized by this enmity between humans and snakes. It speaks of one man (he, singular), a descendant of Eve, who shall bruise the head of the serpent (your, singular) not that of the serpent's offspring. The conflict between Satan and mankind that is symbolized in the decreed conflict between humans and snakes ends with Christ, the God-man, prevailing over Satan, the fallen spirit-being who animated the serpent in the garden.

3. I am aware that many understand the serpent's offspring in the first clause to be a reference to humans who take after Satan in character, those who are his "sons" in that figurative sense (see, e.g., Mat. 13:38; Jn. 8:44; Acts 13:10). The hostility in that case is between the people of God, called the offspring of the woman, and those who are not in a relationship with God. Either way, we are in agreement on the allusion to the Lord's victory over Satan in the second clause.

IV. Increasing Violence and Corruption

A. In Genesis 4-11 we see the alienation caused by sin becoming an incubator for greater sin. Sin intensifies and spreads like a plague. In chapter 4 Cain murders his brother Abel and Lamech, after bragging about having killed a young man for striking him, claims a right of unlimited retribution and violence.

B. Noah is introduced through the genealogy in chapter 5 as a descendant of Adam through Seth. And then in chapter 6 we see that the sin Adam let loose on the human world has thoroughly corrupted God's very good creation. Genesis 6:5-6 states (ESV): *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*⁶ *And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* And Gen. 6:11-12 states (ESV): *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.*¹² *And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.*

V. The Flood and the Covenant

A. Genesis 6-8 we have the flood account, which is not the cute children's story we have often made it out to be but the greatest judgment of God on creation prior to the final judgment. By means of a cataclysmic flood, God destroyed the earth and killed all the people, land animals, and birds, everything on dry land in whose *nostrils* was the breath of life (Gen. 7:22).

B. But before doing so, God had mercy on righteous Noah, calling him to build an ark through which he and seven others in his family (Gen. 7:13; 1 Pet. 3:20; his wife, his three sons –

Ham, Shem, and Japheth – and their wives) and representatives (breeding pairs) of the various kinds of land animals and birds, would be spared.

C. When the earth was dry, some 370 days after the flood event began, Noah, his family, and all the creatures disembarked the ark to a new world with instructions to be fruitful and multiply on the earth. And in 9:1 God tells Noah and his sons to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," which is what he had said to Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:28.

D. In 8:20 Noah builds an altar and offers a sacrifice to God, which pleased God. As a result, God said *in his heart* that, even though (taking *ki* as a concessive) man is inclined toward evil from his youth, he will never destroy the earth and kill all the living creatures as he did in the flood. He gives formal expression to this intention in chapter 9 where he enters into a covenant with all creation, with Noah and his sons but also with all the creatures that came out of the ark, that he will never again destroy the whole earth with a flood.

VI. Continuing Rebellion

A. The covenant text of Gen. 9:8-17 is followed immediately by a report of sin – Noah's drunkenness and Ham "seeing his father's nakedness." It is unclear what is meant by "seeing his father's nakedness," but it certainly was sinful as it resulted in Noah cursing Ham's son Canaan.

B. Chapter 10 reports nations that were descended from Noah, and then in chapter 11 we have an account of large-scale human rebellion in the story of the Tower of Babel. Rather than filling the earth, as commanded in Gen. 9:1, people are congregating in the land of Shinar determined to make a name for themselves, to seek greatness through their own accomplishment.

C. God confuses their language and disperses them over the face of all the earth.

VII. The Issue Remains

A. By the end of chapter 11, the fundamental question of sin and its corrupting effect on God's very good creation remains unresolved. The creation is not the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer a paradise where all things work together in peace and harmony under God's rule. Instead it is infected with things like anger, division, hatred, violence, destruction, disease, death, decay, lying, stealing, suffering, sorrow, and pain. In that sense, it is a creation that is sick and broken as a result of sin. It has fallen from its original state of glory, which is why Adam's sinning is known in theology as "the Fall."

B. God's judgment in the flood revealed not only God's holy wrath against sin but also showed in a powerful way the depth and extent of Sin's grip on mankind. Despite the opportunity for a new beginning that God provided in bringing righteous Noah and his family through the flood and in expressing his mercy by making his covenant with creation, mankind continued on its sinful course, living in rebellion to God.

C. Clearly some kind of extraordinary work was going to be necessary to recover from the "sin plague" that Satan induced humans to bring into their world. But what would it be? The

answer begins to surface in the last half of Genesis 11 where we have a genealogy that takes us from Noah's son Shem down to Terah, the father of Abram (later Abraham), Nahor, and Haran.

D. Abraham, of course, is a key person in God's plan of healing the sin-sick world, restoring the broken creation that it might be all that God intends it to be. He calls this man and promises to bless him with multiple descendants living securely in a bountiful homeland and promises to bless all the nations of the world through him. We, brothers and sister, are the heirs of that promise. And that is where our guest speaker Kevin Carson will pick up the story next week.