

JANUARY 2

Genesis 3-4

The word "Genesis" means beginnings. Today there are all sorts of important beginnings. They are almost all tragic, but they are vital in understanding how mankind (you and I included) got so messed up. There is no end of observations in these two chapters and there are many connections between things that are said here and things that are "reversed" later in the Bible. For example, the temptation that led to the Fall and to Satan's dominance happened here in a garden. Jesus' temptation was in a wilderness. That's an interesting contrast. Also, the battle between the woman's offspring and Satan is mentioned here. If you read Revelation last year, that should sound like Revelation 12. Then, of course, there is the comparison/contrast of Adam and Jesus. There are many more connections, because all of the damage done here will someday be undone by God as He works to redeem mankind.

Genesis 3

V. 1 There is no explanation given for Satan. Here, he is assumed. Later, particularly in Job and Daniel we get more information. Then, in the Gospels and in Revelation, we get more information. To be noticed also is that Satan passes out of the story immediately after the curse, with only an allusion to his forces in Genesis 6:2. This is all to say that as major as Satan's opposition is in this life, for the disciple, apparent from the emphasis of the Bible itself, our focus, goal and what we are to do is to equip others to follow God. In following Christ in the harvest as disciples, Satan is defeated. *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* (Rev. 12:11)

Vs. 2-7 There are a lot of things to observe here, but don't worry about thinking deeply about everything. As you read this year after year, the Spirit will bring different things to mind.

So, how would you summarize or describe Satan's strategy? It's the same one he uses now, getting us to doubt God.

V. 3 Assuming the information was correctly given to Eve by Adam, what do you think about her "adding" to what God said? There is a lot going on there. The religious people who killed Jesus added man-made rules to what God said and therefore lost sight of God.

V. 6 There is a lot here, such as the description of temptation once a person has doubted God. Jesus said that temptations "must" come. This event was necessary, but doubting God is what opened the door.

Some people suggest that Adam was standing next to Eve when this happened; in which case Adam was a dweeb and a moron. *With her* probably means that they were partners.

V. 7 Eve's eyes were already opened. Now both people were initiated. Note also that sin didn't become a permanent part of mankind until Adam ate. It says in 1 Timothy 2:14 that Eve was deceived, but not Adam. This means that Adam walked into this, ironically, with his eyes open. To make a long story short, whatever happened in Adam was spiritual and physical. He died spiritually; and that "magic" within him, that God had put there, to pass on life to another human, became corrupted and rebellious to God. Conception is not simply physical. There is a soulish, spiritual kind of thing that is passed on in conception. From now on, that "thing" that would be passed on would be depraved and would be rebellious toward God.

Knowing they were naked meant that for the first time, they were embarrassed in their self awareness. There was a sense of negative judgment toward themselves and possibly toward each other. Oddly enough, they didn't have movie stars with which to compare themselves. It just happened within them. Isn't sin great?

Sin is a spiritual disease and is the most powerful, destructive force on the planet. Sin permeates everything. We don't grasp this and do not understand how truly lost we are without God. And it isn't just lost-ness, it is in the edge of our attitudes and in every disagreement and every gripe. A disciple needs to understand this illness, its incessant, ever-present power.

This is why we need the daily washing of the Word, or put another way, why we need to take our "meds" every day. I'm told that a person who is bi-polar doesn't fully acknowledge his condition until he submits to taking his meds daily. As believers, we think we are OK if we go a day or a week without being close to God in His Word, but we are kidding ourselves. Our condition is grave. We may throw up a few words to God as we multi-task and we know He is everywhere; but it is not until we are quiet in His presence, in His Word, that the Spirit can begin the cleansing, healing and guiding. He is present in that still, small voice; and we need to be still and quiet before Him, in His Word, to hear it.

Forgiveness allows God to come into our lives to break the power of sin by the regeneration (giving of spiritual life) by the Holy Spirit. The power of sin is broken, not removed. To the Christians in Rome, Paul wrote that the power is still there (ch. 7), but that the Holy Spirit helps us as we walk by the Spirit (ch. 8) and that the redemption of our bodies is the hope we live for, that is, the death of this body of death and being resurrected without a sinful nature. Amazingly, even with Christ, the sinful nature is incurable in this body. You know this theologically, but even more practically, every day. This world is under the power of sin, in each of us, incurable and pervasive; and only God has the cure...the resurrection in Christ. Dead as we were, we could not earn forgiveness. There had to be justice for our actions and payment for our sins. We couldn't pay for our sin. Yet even with forgiveness in place through Christ, we still need to agree with Him that we are incurable (by repentance) and welcome His cure (accept Christ). Then and only then, are we JUST before Him in Christ, and He can enter in and break the power of sin by the life of the Spirit.

As disciples we need a healthy respect for the sin that is in us. Jesus' words to His disciples, pointing to their ability to make disciples of others (Luke 6:39-42), explain that if we do not recognize and deal with the sin in us, we will pass it on to others, or at least lead them into a hole.

Vs. 8-13 This began our hiding from God and blaming others.

V. 13 Although Adam blamed Eve, taking no official responsibility, God didn't argue with Adam. He went right to Eve. This was the truth, but Adam would pay for what he had done.

Vs. 14-15 Notice that there is no question for Satan. God already understood the motivation. The curse on Satan apparently also affected the animal he possessed. This curse is literal and figurative. Some aspect of his service to mankind (dust) would be more hateful to him. Verse 15 is not only his defeat by Christ in the crucifixion and resurrection, but I think there is also a reference to Revelation 12.

V. 15 Notice that it was God who "put" enmity between Satan and mankind and between his followers and Christ's followers. This is spiritual. I'm scared of snakes too, but more is meant here. I'm also afraid of bees, wasps, and all sorts of stuff. But here, there is a fear and division being put in place to keep mankind safe, in some sense, from Satan. I would think that this is sort of like God putting the fear of man in the animals after the flood.

Inherent in what God is saying here is that the "woman" would bear a savior. This begins the promise of redemption. Adam and Eve must have clung to the hope that Eve would bear a deliverer who might reverse what they had done. Although Satan "bruised" Jesus, Jesus has crushed Satan. The book of Revelation shows how it will end.

And now, we don't hear anything more about Satan's influence until chapter 6.

V. 16 This is a short verse with long-reaching results. Apparently there would have been little pain in childbirth. Imagine that.

The major impact is in her relationship with her husband. At first glance, this looks cool. She will *desire* her husband. What husband wouldn't want that? Notice that the words to the woman in her curse (3:16) are the same words to Cain (4:7). Give this a lot of thought. The Fall brought a sickness into the relationship between man and wife. Even in Romans 1:18ff, the sickness after perverting the knowledge of God led to the sickness between husband and wife. This battle ruined marriage and turned the need for "completeness" to sexual perversion. Some say that since we are redeemed in Christ, the effect of this curse is gone. Obviously this is promoted by those who want gender equality and do not notice that since we've trusted Christ, we still sin. Sin's power is still amazingly strong, and the curse is still working.

In those minutes and hours between Eve's sin and Adam's sin, she was superior, realizing (as all wives do) that he was an idiot. Because of what she had done, she would now seek to control and withhold respect. He would live in a defensive, ruling posture. Properly understood, the curse on the woman was that because of this bent she had developed toward Adam, he would suppress that bent by force, lacking understanding and gentleness. The gender wars were spawned, and it all rolled downhill from that moment, until the Spirit via Paul commanded regenerate men to love their wives as Christ loved the church and commanded women to respect their husbands (Eph. 5:22-33).

Vs. 17-19 Since the curse on Adam was longer than either Satan's or Eve's curse, you can see that God held Adam responsible. If you look at Romans 5, you can see that it was Adam's sin that brought the curse on all of mankind and on nature.

Sometimes you wonder what Adam could have done. Eve had sinned and had to be punished. The answer is really pretty easy. All he would have had to do was what the second Adam did. If Adam had taken Eve's punishment and died for her, being sinless himself, he would have been raised and this substitution would have brought forgiveness to Eve.

V. 19 By the way, we still live from the field, even in industrialized countries, where the only time we see farms is on the nature channel. Adam's curse was not work. He was already creatively working in the garden (2:15). His curse was that now he would have to work to live. Up to this point food was totally provided for Adam and Eve. Now, if they didn't work and toil, they would starve. That was huge. Work would now be to make ends meet.

Vs. 20-21 Adam gave his wife a good name. Verse 21 records the first death in the Bible. It was probably a sheep, killed to make skins for Adam and Eve to wear. In that sense, it was the first sacrifice.

Vs. 22-24 Adam and Eve were sent from God's presence and provision in the garden. The tree of life was guarded because they were not worthy to eat of it. Also, many think that had they eaten of it at that point, their nature would have been everlastingly bound to a resurrection (undying) body. In essence they would have been permanently sinful and would have had to have been put in hell.

Genesis 4

Vs. 1-2 Adam and Eve believed the promise. If the hope of Adam and Eve was that one of their first two sons would be the promised one, it was crushed in what followed, both seeing, in full realization, what this spiritual sickness was that they had brought into the soul of man. You have to believe that the object of saving faith for them, and the godly line that followed, was that one of their sons, or some son of the future, would reverse the curse. Cain's lineage proved the spreading power of sin as they watched, I'll bet, with deep regret. I wonder if they thought it might be Seth. Eventually, it was through Seth, but many generations removed, to Jesus.

Vs. 3-7 At this point, we have no idea of what these sacrifices meant. It might have been offerings of gratefulness to God. Apparently there were some guidelines. It is interesting that Abel knew how to prepare an animal for offering. Maybe Abel learned this from Adam, who had been taught by God. Notice that the point with Cain is really his attitude, not his sacrifice of produce. Notice too, how freely God spoke with them. It wasn't that God was far off or hidden.

V. 7 The word *desire* is the same as Eve's desire for Adam. It was a desire to control and dominate. Cain was told to fight. Had he fought and asked for help, Cain might have won and done something that led to deliverance.

Vs. 8-16 This is the beginning of murder and hate. I was just reading where Jesus said that all the blood of all the prophets would be required of that generation in Jerusalem that killed Him, beginning with the blood of Abel.

V. 9 I'm always amazed at the unsurprised, openly arrogant way Cain talked to God. Back then, the relationship with God was so close and natural you could "dis" Him. We have grown further and further from God with each passing year.

Not only did God curse the ground even more, but He made Cain wander. I think that might have been to separate his influence from those people surrounding Adam and Eve. This must have been a heartache for Adam and Eve.

V. 14 Notice that this happened at a time when there were many people around.

V. 15 Note that God says that the vengeance would be seven times. That reminds me of Peter and Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22, *Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

Vs. 17-24 This shows the line of Cain, or the line of ungodly culture, growing in the world. There are a few things to note.

- First, obviously there was "incest." All you can say here is that it was watched over by God until the population grew large enough. But notice that Cain knew "his wife." It doesn't say he had sex with his sister. They were married. Nowhere does it say that fathers abused their daughters. We have no clue here how many years passed, how quickly the population grew and what "marriageable" age was. We just have to trust God. This would have been the case after the flood too. Interestingly enough, when God made rules for this in the Law of Moses, God forbid all incest and also outlawed the relationship that Abraham had to Sarah, half-brother and sister through one common parent.
- Second, in v. 21, this line made the first musical instruments. Therefore, some churches and groups do not use instruments in worship because they originated with the line of Cain.
- Third, the line of murder continued with the added idea of self-justification of sin and guilt. Notice that Lamech, in Cain's line, is the first to have multiple wives. They were still called wives, meaning there was a ceremony in the culture. Notice too, that Lamech mentioned seventy-seven. Apparently they could do math.

Vs. 25-26 Again we have no idea of the time involved in all of this, but this goes back to the time of Cain killing Abel. Adam and Eve may have had other children in between, but Seth is mentioned because Seth appears to be the new child of hope, who had faith in the promise of redemption. Now we begin to see the growth of the line of those who had hope in the promise.

It's funny to read this about the child of promise, and then to go to Matthew and read about the real child of promise. We who know the Lord become children of the promise, children of God,

by spiritual birth. Now it is our turn to work in the plan of redemption. That's why God left us here, to keep (internalize) Christ's Word, follow Him into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Matthew 2:13-3:6

Note how Matthew shows that Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy, even in the deeds of Herod.

Matthew 2:13-23

Vs. 13-15 Notice again that the Spirit is moving Matthew to talk only about how God spoke to Joseph, the son of David. And of course, notice how this flight to Egypt fulfilled Scripture (Hosea 11:1).

Vs. 16-18 If the people had had any hope because of the coming of the wise men, Herod put that to an end. I really believe that Herod was religiously evil; that is, he had an understanding of the spiritual and thought he could control it through his actions. In that sense, he had a satanic kind of irrationality.

Notice again, Scripture was fulfilled in the coming of the Savior. Actually, in Genesis Rachel, Jacob's wife, died in childbirth near Jerusalem. Here sorrow and grief in losing her child (actually Benjamin lived and she died but she lost him all the same) were used by Jeremiah to express the sorrow of the mothers and the nation in losing their children when Babylon came into that area to destroy Jerusalem.

Vs. 19-23 It is interesting that Joseph and Mary ended up back in Nazareth, from where they started. God made it their desire to return there. And oddly enough, this fulfilled Scripture in a funny way. Jesus was a Nazarene, meaning and showing that he was a prophet from Nazareth; but he was not a Nazirite, like John the Baptist, having taken an oath before God, neither cutting his hair, touching the dead and abstaining from wine. Actually, no OT prophet ever said that Jesus would be a "Nazarene" or that He would come from Nazareth.

There is a subtle wordplay taking place here. The Messiah was referred to as the Branch of Jesse, coming out of the house of David, that is, the Son of David. There are many words used to refer to this "branch" but one of the most important is in Isaiah 11:1. This word for branch is "netser" from which we get the word Nazareth. To hear the title "Jesus of Nazareth" was to hear "Jesus of branch" or "Jesus the branch." It is just like names we hear but don't actually think of, like, "George Bush" or in German, "Helmut Kohl (cabbage)." It was a very sly way for the Lord to open the ears and hearts of people who were spiritually perceptive. When Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, heard the commotion of a crowd going by, he asked who it was *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* (Mark 10:47) Bartimaeus understood that Jesus was the branch of the root of Jesse.

This is funny in a way because in John 7:41-52 both the people and the Pharisees said that the Bible said no prophet was to arise from Galilee. They knew that Nazareth was in Galilee and they knew, like we would, what the word Nazareth meant. They knew, but didn't want to see.

Matthew 3:1-6

If you read last year, you just read about John in the final chapters of Malachi. Here he is.

Vs. 1-3 Many years had passed. Luke actually nails the time down very specifically. It is thought that John and Jesus both began their ministries at about 30 years of age. John was six months older than Jesus, as you can see in Luke. Again, John fulfilled a lot of Scripture regarding the Messiah's birth.

Vs. 4-6 In John, you see people drawn toward spiritual reality. Jesus later asks the crowds what they were seeking when they went out into the wilderness. John didn't know much about marketing or blending in with his focus group ... camel hair and locusts. Yuck. But the people

needed a prophet to confront them with spiritual reality and they went to see him. This is what the world needs today, not simply believers, but disciples of Jesus who speak and live for Him.

Psalm 2

If you read Revelation and Zechariah last year (last month), this will remind you of how God will judge the nations when the Messiah comes.

Vs. 1-3 This is the expression of mankind and its nations refusing to accept God's rule. If it was David who wrote this, he probably understood that the promise of redemption was coming through the promise of Abraham and that all nations would eventually bow to God.

Vs. 4-6 Notice that the King is to reign in Zion and that God Himself is fighting for Zion. This is a major theme in the OT.

Vs. 7-9 Notice the references to the Messiah, the coming King. Verse 7 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5, regarding Jesus being the reigning King. Verse 9 is something we recently read in Revelation 19:15. This is a very redemptive and "end times" psalm. It shows that God was always pointing people to His plan of redemption and to the future.

Vs. 10-12 The options are pretty clear. In the harvest we are warning people of v. 10 and inviting them to vs. 11 and 12.

How interesting that Psalm 1 points to where a disciple grows and finds life, whereas Psalm 2 shows where our boldness and confidence for following comes from. Our God reigns. Disciples see God's power and control behind the scenes, and are humble on the outside, knowing that God is truly in charge, even as the ungodly sit on thrones. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2 show us what we are to do as disciples: pray for those who rule, to allow us to fly under the radar and make disciples of the lost, for *it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

We need to ask the Lord to keep our eyes on the harvest as we follow Him. We just read Revelation, so we know how things will end. Nations will be controlled by sin, but more importantly, men and women and children will be sent to hell. We need to be in the harvest today. That's what Jesus wants.

Proverbs 1:7-9

Vs. 7-9 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* We just read in Proverbs 31:30 that a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Proverbs begins and ends with the fear of the Lord.

This fear is not just "respect," but as we all know, fearing the police or punishment will make you go the speed limit. Again, if we have a real understanding of sin and its power, it is not difficult as disciples to love God for issuing His stern warnings to us. He is a loving Father, wiser than we can imagine, and He gave us His Son.