

THE STORY: UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE

Week 4 – The Story Unfolds

Experiencing the Presence of God by A.W. Tozer - “. . . for the hungry heart, there is but one discovery that satisfies it: the discovery of the manifest, conscious presence of God.” The most common Hebrew term for "presence" is *panim* which is also translated "face(s)," implying a close and personal encounter with the Lord. Psa. 16:11 - *In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

One truth in Scripture is not isolated from another truth in Scripture. “When people begin isolating Scripture to try to make it stand on its own, it is a warning signal that truth will be sacrificed. It is possible to make the Bible say anything you really want it to say.” Tozer tells us in his book that the Scriptural foundation is crucial. “Many people have taken a sharp left turn somewhere and gone into. . . Christless mysticism.” Our desire is to know God in an increasing level of intimacy from day-to-day! Tozer also writes that no matter how far we go in our spiritual walk, there will still be mysteries! “The secret things belong to God.”

And so, the story that we’re praying that we can understand, unfolds – the story that God has REVEALED to us. Are we listening? Are we learning?

Isaiah 55:8-9 - *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

The secret/hidden things belong to God, but the things He has revealed belong to us. Because of what we know about God from His word, from His creation, we can trust in the secret things – we can trust in His thoughts and in His ways!

REMEMBER/WORSHIP/ANTICIPATE: Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God told the children of Israel to remember what He had done on their behalf: how He had fought for them and redeemed them. He told them to worship Him now. And, He told them to anticipate what He would do based on His promises to them.

As the book of Revelation moves toward a conclusion, toward RESTORATION, John, the beloved, writes. . . *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.* ² *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* ³ *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”* (Rev. 21:1-3)

John’s attention is drawn to a holy city that possibly fills the new earth. As the voice from the throne announces, here God will live among human beings – because God’s desire is to dwell with man (Ex. 25:8). The Bible begins with a similar picture. Genesis opens with God creating an earth into which He places a human couple, Adam and Eve. God created man for relationship. God fellowships with Adam and Eve – because God’s desire is to dwell with man.

The human couple sin and they are driven from God's presence. Gen. 3:22-24 – *Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—*²³ *therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.*²⁴ *So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.* This is God's grace! If man, in his sinful, fallen condition, had been allowed to remain in the Garden and had eaten of the tree of life, they would've remained in their fallen condition for all eternity! The complex story that follows centers on how the earth can once more become a dwelling place shared by God and humanity. And so moving forward in the Bible, we see redemption and restoration. The opening chapters of Genesis and the final chapters of Revelation frame the big picture – the larger narrative.

The OT is divided into two distinct parts, each covering several thousand years of history.

OT	
Gen. 1-11	Gen. 12 - Malachi
2,000 yrs.	2,000 yrs.
Creation	Abram through history through writings
The fall	through the major and minor prophets
The flood	
Tower of Babel	

The first part is Genesis 1-11 and is a record of God's dealings with mankind in general. During this time there was no special group such as the Church or the nation of Israel. There were no Jews and/or Gentiles. God dealt with individuals – with mankind. For 2,000 years – the first 2,000 years - four important events occurred: the creation, the fall of man, the universal flood, and the division of mankind at the Tower of Babel. We learn from this – how the material universe came into being, the beginning of sin and evil, and why the world of mankind is so fragmented. Thank you, man's pride – at the Tower of Babel. The second part of the OT (from Genesis 12 through to Malachi!) covers about 2,000 years. It begins with Genesis 12 and includes the rest of the OT. In Genesis 12 we read of God selecting a man by the name of Abram – a Gentile – and entering into an eternal, unconditional covenant with him and his descendants – the Jewish people.

Genesis 1 through 11 gives us a foundation from which to better understand the unfolding of God's plan for all time. Focusing on the first 2,000 years of the earth's existence following the creation. . . .

In the fall, man had chosen to believe Satan rather than God. The serpent had boldly declared that no harmful effects would be experienced in eating of the forbidden fruit. *And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"*² *And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'*"⁴ *Then the serpent said to*

the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Genesis 4

God told man to be fruitful and multiply – so man had children. Was the promise of Genesis 3:15 in the minds of Adam & Eve? There was hope in that seed of the woman. Did they realize?

Gen. 4:1 – *‘Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”’*

Cain means “possession,” “I’ve got.” And Eve’s comment in Hebrew: “I have gotten a man, the Lord.”!! “from” is missing in the Hebrew. It is likely Eve thought that Cain was the seed that God promised, the deliverer, who would come from Eve (Genesis 3:15). God had promised! And, Eve connected this deliverer with GOD! Was she thinking that Cain would be her redeemer? Was Cain the Deliverer, the Messiah? NO! Remember, the Messiah had to come through a supernatural – virgin – birth. Gen. 3:15 anticipates a supernatural birth – through the seed of a woman. A woman has no seed; man has a seed. Cain did not come into the world through a supernatural birth; Cain did not come into the world through a virgin birth.

Gen. 4:2a – *Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel.*

Abel means “vanity,” “breath,” or “vapor”. By this time it appears that Eve realized that redemption hadn’t as yet arrived. The first child born – a baby – born in sin – became a murderer! In the rundown of mankind on the first several pages of Scripture, the first child born kills the second child born! (Jer. 17:9; Psa. 51:5; Rom. 3:10; Rom. 3:23)

Original sin: Adam’s sin was imputed/ascribed to/assigned to each person of the human race. Each person is born in sin (Rom. 5:12 – *just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—* Eph. 2:3 – *we’re by nature the children of wrath.* Psa. 51:5 – *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*)

Original sin does not mean that every person is as bad as he can be. But **every person is as “bad off” as he can be.** We are sinners by birth, by nature and by choice. And, as such, we are separated from God for all eternity. That puts us in the “BAD OFF” category! This does not mean that sinful people are incapable of good deeds. It does mean that sin has touched every area of our being. And, **it means that there is nothing in the human heart capable of earning God’s favor.**

Adam and Eve – who would better understand what it means to be lost? What did they teach Cain and Abel?

Gen. 4:2b-5 – *Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. ⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.*

Heb. 11:4 - *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

From the verse in Hebrews, we observe that Abel's offering was more excellent than Cain's. Genesis 4:4 states that God did not respect Cain AND his offering (Gen. 4:4). Cain's offering wasn't what God had instructed (Gen. 3:21 – blood wasn't shed). Plus, Cain didn't offer God what would be considered the “first fruit” – the BEST – of the ground (Gen. 4:3); Cain offered God an offering of the fruit of the ground. Abel offered his sacrifice by FAITH! The text does not state that Cain's offering was by faith. Cain became angry at God's non-acceptance of his offering. Regarding Cain's anger, the Hebrew implies that inward heat rose up to Cain's face. The text states that his countenance fell. We see an outward display of what was going on inwardly.

“The way of Cain” - in the book of Jude (v. 11) in the NT: rebelling against God. We see in the account of Cain and Abel that there are two ways to approach God.

- Approaching God through our achievements – our good works – what we think is right. Proverbs 14:12 - *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*
- Realizing that you deserve death because of sin (Rom. 6:23). Either you die or something has to die in your place. A life for a life principle.

How significant is a substitutionary sacrifice? JESUS! We begin to see an unfolding of the principle of a substitutionary sacrifice in Scripture – a life for a life. Substitutionary sacrifice is a huge subtheme in the big picture of the Bible.

- Gen. 3:21- animal skins for Adam and Eve in the garden.
- In Genesis 4 we see a lamb for a person – Abel. Abel brought an animal from his flock – on his behalf.
 - We also see a lamb for a person in Gen. 22 – a ram offered for Isaac.
- A lamb for a family – at the first Passover in Ex. 12. Those homes with the blood of the lamb painted on the doorposts/lintel – the firstborn was not killed.
- A lamb for a nation – at Yom Kippur in Lev. 16. The Lord's goat was killed and Israel's sins were confessed over the scapegoat which was led into the wilderness – bearing Israel's sins – once a year.
 - 1500 years of animal sacrifice – night and day!
- A Lamb for the world – “Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).
- A Lamb for eternity – the Lamb on the Throne (Rev. 22:3)

After murdering his brother, Cain refused God's offer to repent (Gen. 4:6-9). This is at the outset of human life on earth!!! God told Cain he would be a wanderer and a vagabond and the very land which he had been tilling would no longer yield fruit for him (Gen. 4:10-12).

Regarding the mark on Cain - it's not described in the text. It seems to be an identifiable sign conveying a message of "hands of Cain" – while serving as a mark of shame and warning to others.

Where did Cain get his wife? (Gen. 4:16-17) Gen. 5:4-5 tells us that during Adam's long life, he had many sons and daughters. Someone has conservatively estimated that in his 930 years, Adam could easily have had over a million descendants!!! Cain probably married one of his sisters. By Moses' time, this kind of close marriage was forbidden (Lev. 18:9-17).

While he was to have been a wanderer, Cain built a city seemingly in defiance of God. "City" was probably nothing more than a walled enclosure with a few houses. With Cain we see the rapid downward spiral of sin. . . man's deterioration. Cain's lineage didn't produce any God-fearing people. Lamech, in Cain's line, not only sinned, but sinned boastfully. Lamech took two wives. This is the introduction of polygamy in the Bible (Gen. 4:19). And take note of Lamech's boastful words re: his actions in Gen. 4:23-24.

In the midst of man's depravity, God's grace is in action once again. Through Adam and Eve, God raised up another seed in Seth, whose name means "appointed" – through whom the Promise would come – the Redeemer (Luke 3:38 – Seth is in the genealogy of Jesus). Enosh was born to Seth. . . Seth named his son, Enosh, which means "frail one," or "mortal." Instead of boasting about his strength as Lamech did, Seth readily acknowledged his weakness by naming his son, "frail one." Through Seth's descendants we read, "Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26). Even with the downward spiral of sin, the worship of God was known. Eve held on to God's promise in Gen. 3:15. Abel offered an excellent sacrifice to God. Eccl. 3:11 tells us that God has put eternity in our hearts.

What can we observe through Seth's lineage before the flood?

Gen. 5:21-24 - *Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah.* ²² *After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters.* ²³ *So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.* ²⁴ *And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.*

Scripture tells us that Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him (Gen. 5:24). It appears that God took Enoch up to heaven. Enoch was translated. Could this be a foreshadowing of the rapture? There were no Jews/no Gentiles at this time. But Scripture tells us that Enoch pleased God and that without faith it is impossible to please God. Notice that Enoch did not always walk with God. The first 65 years of his life were quite different than his last 300 years! Heb. 11:5-6 - *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; [a] for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.* ⁶ *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* By faith Enoch pleased God.

Gen. 5:22 tells us that after Enoch begot **Methuselah**, Enoch walked with God. What's the connection with Methuselah? Enoch was given a revelation of the judgment of God. The source of this information was the Holy Spirit Who inspired Jude:

Jude v. 14-15a - *Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints,"¹⁵ to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly.*

Jude records that Enoch prophesied God's judgment! Enoch walked with God AFTER Enoch begot Methuselah. What's with Methuselah? "Methuselah" means "His (Methuselah's) death shall bring it (or him)" or loosely translated, "When he (Methuselah) dies, it/he will come." Some believe that the "it/he" refers to the flood – because the flood occurred the very year Methuselah died. The flood was God's judgment! It appears from Jude that Enoch was impacted by God's judgment!

Gen. 5:27 - *So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.*

The grace of God is again revealed. Methuselah lived longer than any other man. God waited 969 years (Methuselah lived 969 years – Gen. 5:27) before executing judgment on mankind!

Methuselah died the year of the flood of judgment:

Gen. 5:25 - *Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech.*

Gen 5:28-29 - *Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son.²⁹ And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.*

Re: Methuselah – 187 years plus 182 years = 369 years (following Noah's birth). Methuselah had 600 years remaining.

Gen. 7:6 - *Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth.*

God let Methuselah live longer than anybody else to reveal the heart and compassion of God. God kept him alive longer than anyone to give people time to repent.

Man spiraled downward further in Genesis 5. . . . And, we read in

Gen. 6:1-2 - *Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them,² that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.*

The "sons of God" in the OT is a specific Hebrew expression, *benei Elohim*. "Sons of God" is almost exclusively identified in the Hebrew Scriptures as angels/angelic creatures (Job. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Every reference to angels in Scripture refers to them in the masculine gender. The only named angels in the Bible – Michael, Gabriel, Lucifer. The angels in Revelation are all spoken of as "he" and "his" (Rev. 7:1; 10:1, 5; 14:19; 16:2, 4, 17; 19:17; 20:1)

Job 1:6 - Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan^[a] also came among them. (See also Job 2:1)

Job 38:4,7 - Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

Sons of God – angels at the creation.

It appears that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6, in this context, were fallen angels (demons) who mated with human females and/or possessed human males and then mated with human females. These unnatural unions resulted in offspring, the Nephilim (“fallen ones,” “giants”), that were “heroes of old, men of renown” (Genesis 6:4). (II Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6 & 7).

WHY did Satan send his angels to intermarry with human women?

This is the crux of the matter; this is what we need to understand. This feeds into the CONFLICT that we’ve been discussing between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This is part of the BIG PICTURE! Satan tried to pollute the human blood line – to make the human race unfit for bringing forth the Seed of the woman – the Messiah – promised in Gen. 3:15. The race was so polluted. God started again with Noah and his sons. And, so we come to Genesis 6 – in God’s dealing with MANKIND and we see JUDGMENT!

Gen. 6:3 – “My Spirit will not always strive with man.” The Spirit is the Holy Spirit Who is God Who calls men to repentance and righteousness. God would not allow the human race to stay in this rebellious place forever. There is a “point of no return” in our rejection of God. God will not woo us forever. There comes a point when He will say, “No more!” This is why it’s crucial to say TODAY is the day we will respond to Jesus instead of waiting for another day. We have no promise that God will draw us some other day!

The Bible does not specifically say how long it took Noah to build the ark. When Noah is first mentioned in Genesis 5:32, he is 500 years old. When Noah enters the ark, he is 600 years old (Genesis 7:6). God caused it to rain 40 days/40 nights (Gen. 7:4, 17); and the floodwaters prevailed on the earth for 150 days (Gen. 7:24).

In the universal flood, Noah and his family were kept out of the water while those who went into the water were destroyed. In the ark there is safety from God’s judgment. (Looking forward to Jesus saving from eternal damnation.) Noah, from Seth’s line, found GRACE in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8) – in the midst of judgment.

QUESTIONS:

What was new to you? How did it impact you?

How are you understanding grace and judgment?

Who is God to you?

Are you understanding the big picture of the Bible? How would you explain it?

What application(s) are you taking away with you after this lesson?

HOMEWORK:

If you hold a different viewpoint to something that was shared in this lesson, write out your viewpoint and back it up with Scripture.

Continue to work on your BIG PICTURE chart.

Read week 5 in preparation for next week.