

JANUARY 1



BEGINNINGS OF EARLY MANKIND

(Creation to ca. 2100 B.C.)

The Beginning



Is it possible to imagine a time when nothing existed? Take away the brilliance of the sun, for example, and the moon and stars at night. What would life be like without them? Take away the clouds and sky and rivers and oceans. Imagine the earth without any human beings, animals, fish, birds, grass, trees, or plants of any kind. What would it be like with the earth completely bare? Indeed, what would it be like if there were no earth at all, no universe—nothing? Has the universe existed forever? Was there never a time when it had a beginning? Surely it must have had a beginning. But when would that have been? How would it all have happened? What made it happen? For what purpose, if any, did it happen? Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here?

Since recorded history began, men and women of every generation, culture, and place have searched for the answers to those questions. Some say it all happened by chance, without any reason or purpose whatever. But given what appears to be intelligent design and order throughout the universe, an origin by chance seems hard to accept. And life without meaning seems clearly contrary to the very mind which searches for meaning. So what are the answers? Where did I come from, and why am I here? How did it all begin?

ACCOUNT OF CREATION. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Gen. 1:1,2

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. Gen. 1:3-5

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. Gen. 1:6-8

Gen. 1:9-13 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

Gen. 1:14-19 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

Gen. 1:20-23 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

Gen. 1:24,25 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Gen. 1:26-30 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^a and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything

^aProbable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth*

that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Gen.
1:31-2:1

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Gen.
2:2-4

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

Adam and Eve

The answer is God. God is the Creator of all things. God existed before the universe came into being, and it was God who made it all happen. What power and majesty must accompany this God! The Genesis account of the beginnings of all things is a revelation which ascribes creation to an all-powerful, all-knowing, and purposeful Supreme Being—a living Creator and spiritual God acting with meaningful deliberation. In documenting the creation of man, the account suggests that God speaks with more than one voice in bringing about his creation. The implication is that there is a fullness to this divine personality, a fullness which will be more completely revealed as the biblical text unfolds.

Of even more significance is the statement that, in some way distinctly different from all other creatures, mankind has been created in the very likeness of God. Surely this cannot mean that the likeness is a physical resemblance, since God existed before anything physical came into being. Therefore it probably suggests that, like God, human beings are essentially spiritual beings, having intelligence, moral consciousness, and freedom of choice. Though limited by human form, mankind is given creativity and permitted to exercise a degree of dominion over God’s creation and the lesser creatures within it. What an amazing thought, that mankind, both male and female, should be so honored by the Creator!

As if to underscore the significance of mankind’s creation, the Genesis revelation gives a special account of the first man and woman, known as Adam and Eve. Adam is formed first from elements of the earth, as if God, working like a potter, fashions him from a lump of clay. Then Eve is formed from part of Adam’s own body, suggesting a wholeness and unity between man and woman, particularly when the two are joined in the marriage relationship, which is instituted with this first couple. Both Adam and Eve share in the uniqueness of having received a divine inbreathing of God’s Spirit which sets them apart from all other living creatures. They are given dominion over the other creatures and are set in a garden of lush vegetation in a place called Eden, an area associated with the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, just east of the Arabian Desert in the Middle East.

Here in Eden, Adam and Eve live in a time of innocence until both are tempted by a serpent to eat of a particular fruit which God has forbidden them to touch or taste. Although a complete explanation is lacking, it appears that the serpent is being used on this occasion by Satan, or the Devil, who will subsequently be identified as God's adversary in the spirit realm and the great Tempter of mankind to do evil.

The effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God is a new acquaintance with sin and the reality of punishment. Their sin not only produces feelings of shame, fear, and blame but also results in more specific consequences to all mankind, who will be seen in each subsequent generation to participate in their own disobedience to God's will. The ultimate punishment, as far as Adam and Eve are personally concerned, is banishment from the garden, with all its ease and pleasure. They, like all generations thereafter, must face the hardships and struggles which life on the earth imposes.

Gen. 2:5-7 CREATION OF MAN. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth^a and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams^b came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed a man^c from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Gen. 2:8-17 Mesopotamia GARDEN OF EDEN. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin^d and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.^e The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Gen. 2:18-22 CREATION OF WOMAN. The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

^aOr *land*; also in verse 6 ^bOr *mist* ^cThe Hebrew for *man* (*adam*) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for *ground* (*adamah*); it is also the name *Adam* (see verse 20).

^dOr *good*; *pearls* ^ePossibly southeast Mesopotamia

Isaiah Tells of “Last Days”

Perhaps it is during this time of jubilant rededication that Isaiah shares with excitement the visions he has received about the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Using vivid and powerful imagery, Isaiah describes the time when the wicked will be punished and the righteous blessed forever.

Isa. 24:1-23 THE EARTH'S DEVASTATION.

See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth
and devastate it;
he will ruin its face
and scatter its inhabitants—
it will be the same
for priest as for people,
for the master as for his servant,
for the mistress as for her servant,
for seller as for buyer,
for borrower as for lender,
for debtor as for creditor.
The earth will be completely laid waste
and totally plundered.

The LORD has spoken this word.

The earth dries up and withers,
the world languishes and withers,
the heavens languish with the earth.
The earth is defiled by its people;
they have disobeyed the laws,
violated the statutes
and broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse consumes the earth;
its people must bear their guilt.
Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up,
and very few are left.
The new wine dries up and the vine withers;
all the merry-makers groan.
The joyful timbrels are stilled,
the noise of the revelers has stopped,
the joyful harp is silent.
No longer do they drink wine with a song;
the beer is bitter to its drinkers.
The ruined city lies desolate;
the entrance to every house is barred.
In the streets they cry out for wine;
all joy turns to gloom,
all joyful sounds are banished from the earth.
The city is left in ruins,
its gate is battered to pieces.
So will it be on the earth
and among the nations,

as when an olive tree is beaten,
or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.

They raise their voices, they shout for joy;
from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty.
Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD;
exalt the name of the LORD, the God of Israel,
in the islands of the sea.

From the ends of the earth we hear singing:
"Glory to the Righteous One."

But I said, "I waste away, I waste away!
Woe to me!
The treacherous betray!
With treachery the treacherous betray!"
Terror and pit and snare await you,
people of the earth.
Whoever flees at the sound of terror
will fall into a pit;
whoever climbs out of the pit
will be caught in a snare.

The floodgates of the heavens are opened,
the foundations of the earth shake.
The earth is broken up,
the earth is split asunder,
the earth is violently shaken.
The earth reels like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut in the wind;
so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion
that it falls—never to rise again.

In that day the LORD will punish
the powers in the heavens above
and the kings on the earth below.
They will be herded together
like prisoners bound in a dungeon;
they will be shut up in prison
and be punished^a after many days.
The moon will be dismayed,
the sun ashamed;
for the LORD Almighty will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before its elders—with great glory.

PRAISE FOR SALVATION.

Isa. 25:1-9

LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you and praise your name,
for in perfect faithfulness
you have done wonderful things,
things planned long ago.
You have made the city a heap of rubble,
the fortified town a ruin,

^aOr *released*

the foreigners' stronghold a city no more;
 it will never be rebuilt.
 Therefore strong peoples will honor you;
 cities of ruthless nations will revere you.
 You have been a refuge for the poor,
 a refuge for the needy in their distress,
 a shelter from the storm
 and a shade from the heat.
 For the breath of the ruthless
 is like a storm driving against a wall
 and like the heat of the desert.
 You silence the uproar of foreigners;
 as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud,
 so the song of the ruthless is stilled.

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare
 a feast of rich food for all peoples,
 a banquet of aged wine—
 the best of meats and the finest of wines.
 On this mountain he will destroy
 the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
 the sheet that covers all nations;
 he will swallow up death forever.
 The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears
 from all faces;
 he will remove his people's disgrace
 from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

In that day they will say,

"Surely this is our God;
 we trusted in him, and he saved us.
 This is the LORD, we trusted in him;
 let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isa.
25:10-12

GOD HUMBLER THE PROUD.

The hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain;
 but Moab will be trampled in their land
 as straw is trampled down in the manure.
 They will stretch out their hands in it,
 as swimmers stretch out their hands to swim.
 God will bring down their pride
 despite the cleverness^a of their hands.
 He will bring down your high fortified walls
 and lay them low;
 he will bring them down to the ground,
 to the very dust.

Isa. 26:1-7

PRAISE FOR DELIVERANCE. In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

^aThe meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain.

All this also comes from the LORD Almighty,
 whose plan is wonderful,
 whose wisdom is magnificent.

JERUSALEM WARNINGS IGNORED. A prophecy against the Valley of Vision: Isa. 22:1-14

What troubles you now,
 that you have all gone up on the roofs,
 you town so full of commotion,
 you city of tumult and revelry?
 Your slain were not killed by the sword,
 nor did they die in battle.
 All your leaders have fled together;
 they have been captured without using the bow.
 All you who were caught were taken prisoner together,
 having fled while the enemy was still far away.
 Therefore I said, "Turn away from me;
 let me weep bitterly.
 Do not try to console me
 over the destruction of my people."

The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has a day
 of tumult and trampling and terror
 in the Valley of Vision,
 a day of battering down walls
 and of crying out to the mountains.
 Elam takes up the quiver,
 with her charioteers and horses;
 Kir uncovers the shield.
 Your choicest valleys are full of chariots,
 and horsemen are posted at the city gates.

The Lord stripped away the defenses of Judah,
 and you looked in that day
 to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest.
 You saw that the walls of the City of David
 were broken through in many places;
 you stored up water
 in the Lower Pool.
 You counted the buildings in Jerusalem
 and tore down houses to strengthen the wall.
 You built a reservoir between the two walls
 for the water of the Old Pool,
 but you did not look to the One who made it,
 or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

The Lord, the LORD Almighty,
 called you on that day
 to weep and to wail,
 to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth.
 But see, there is joy and revelry,
 slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep,
 eating of meat and drinking of wine!

“Let us eat and drink,” you say,
“for tomorrow we die!”

The LORD Almighty has revealed this in my hearing: “Till your dying day this sin will not be atoned for,” says the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

Isa. 29:1-4 JERUSALEM WILL FALL.

Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel,
the city where David settled!
Add year to year
and let your cycle of festivals go on.
Yet I will besiege Ariel;
she will mourn and lament,
she will be to me like an altar hearth.^a
I will encamp against you on all sides;
I will encircle you with towers
and set up my siege works against you.
Brought low, you will speak from the ground;
your speech will mumble out of the dust.
Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth;
out of the dust your speech will whisper.

Isa. 29:5-8 JUDGMENT AGAINST OPPRESSORS.

But your many enemies will become like fine dust,
the ruthless hordes like blown chaff.
Suddenly, in an instant,
the LORD Almighty will come
with thunder and earthquake and great noise,
with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring
fire.
Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel,
that attack her and her fortress and besiege her,
will be as it is with a dream,
with a vision in the night—
as when a hungry person dreams of eating,
but awakens hungry still;
as when a thirsty person dreams of drinking,
but awakens faint and thirsty still.
So will it be with the hordes of all the nations
that fight against Mount Zion.

Isa. 33:1 OPPRESSORS TO BE DESTROYED.

Woe to you, destroyer,
you who have not been destroyed!
Woe to you, betrayer,
you who have not been betrayed!
When you stop destroying,
you will be destroyed;
when you stop betraying,
you will be betrayed.

^aThe Hebrew for *altar hearth* sounds like the Hebrew for *Ariel*.