

FORWORD

The Bible Exposition Commentary had a modest beginning in 1972 when Victor Books published my commentary on 1 John and called it *Be Real*. Nobody remembers who named the book, but for me it was the beginning of three decades of intensive Bible study as I wrote additional commentaries, all of them with *Be* in the title. It took twenty-three books to cover the New Testament, and they were published in two bound volumes in 1989. Then I started the Old Testament BE series, and *Be Obedient*, on the life of Abraham, was published in 1991. Over twenty books are now available in the Old Testament series and, the Lord willing, I hope to complete the Old Testament within a few years.

This volume on the Pentateuch comprises seven separate books covering the writings of Moses, and we plan to issue three more volumes on the rest of the Old Testament: one on the Prophets, one on the historical books, and one on the wisdom and poetical books. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* will then be complete in six volumes, the joyful work of over thirty years. During this time I have written books for several publishers, but "doing the next BE book" was always at the top of the agenda.

Victor Books was purchased by Cook Communications Ministries in 1996 and the BE series began to carry the Chariot Victor and now the Cook imprint. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the editorial staff for their encouragement and cooperation these many years, including Mark Sweeney, Jim Adair, Lloyd Cory, and Greg Clouse. Greg has been faithful to "shepherd" me through book after book, and I appreciate his friendship and ministry more and more. Every author should be as fortunate as I've been to work with such dedicated, skillful people who always take a personal interest in their authors. To the best of my knowledge, during these years we've ministered together, we've never had a cross word or a serious misunderstanding.

I especially want to thank the Lord for His kindness and mercy in allowing me to minister in this way through the printed page. I can think of many of my friends who could have done a far better job than I in this series, but the Lord graciously gave the privilege to me. He also gave me the wisdom and strength to get each book written on time—and sometimes ahead of time—in the midst of a

very busy life as a husband and father, a pastor, a radio Bible teacher, a seminary instructor, and a conference speaker.

This leads me to say that I couldn't have done it without the loving care of my wife, Betty. She manages our household affairs so well and takes such good care of me that I've always had the time needed, for studying and writing. When I started this series, our four children were all at home. Now they're all married and my wife and I have eight wonderful grandchildren! Time flies when you're checking proofs!

The numerous readers of the BE series have been a great source of encouragement to me, even when they have written to disagree with me! I have received letters from many parts of the world, written by people in various walks of life, and they have gladdened my heart. Unless a writer hears from his readers, his writing becomes a one-way street; and he never knows if what he wrote did anybody any good. I want to thank the pastors, missionaries, Sunday School teachers, and other students of the Word, who have been kind enough to write. We could compile a book of letters telling what God has done in the lives of people who have studied the BE series. To God be the glory!

As I close, there are some other people who ought to be thanked. Dr. Donald Burdick taught me New Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary and showed me how to study the Word of God. Dr. Lloyd Perry and the late Dr. Charles W. Roller both taught me how to "unlock" a Scripture passage and organize an exposition that was understandable and practical. I recommend their books on preaching to any preacher or teacher who wants to organize his or her material better.

For ten happy years, I was privileged to pastor the Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, Kentucky, just across the river from Cincinnati. One of my happy duties was writing Bible study notes for "The Whole Bible Study Course" which was developed by the late Dr. D.B. Eastep, who pastored the church for thirty-five fruitful years. No church I have ever visited or ministered to has a greater love for the Bible or a deeper hunger for spiritual truth than the dear people at Calvary Baptist. The BE series is, in many respects, a by-product of Dr. Eastep's kindness in sharing his ministry with me, and the church's love and encouragement while I was their pastor. I honor his memory and thank God for their continued friendship and prayer support.

To you who study God's Word with me, "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Warren W. Wiersbe

GENESIS

OUTLINE

Key theme: Beginnings

Key verse: "In the beginning God . . ." (1:1)

- I. GOD CREATES THE UNIVERSE
- 1
- II. ADAM AND EVE - 2-5
 - 1. The garden - 2
 - 2. The fall - 3
 - 3. The consequences of the fall - 4-5
- III. NOAH AND HIS FAMILY - 6:1-11:9
 - 1. The flood - 6-7
 - 2. The new earth - 8
 - 3. The covenant - 9
 - 4. The nations - 10
 - 5. The tower of Babel - 11:1-9
- IV. ABRAHAM AND SARAH - 11:10-25:11
The beginning of the Hebrew nation
- V. ISAAC AND REBEKAH - 25:12-28:22
- VI. JACOB AND HIS FAMILY - 29:1-38:30
The building of the Hebrew nation
- VII. JOSEPH AND HIS MINISTRY - 39:1-50:26
The protecting of the Hebrew nation

Note the ten "generations" in Genesis: the heavens and earth (1:1-2:46); Adam (5:1-6:8); Noah (6:9-9:29); Shem, Ham

and Japheth (10:1-11:9); Shem (11:10-26); Terah (11:27-25:11); Ishmael (25:12-18) Isaac (25:19-35:29); Esau (36:1-37:1); Jacob (37:2-50:26).

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CHAPTER ONE B.C.: BEFORE CREATION

Genesis 1:1

In spite of its name "Genesis," which means "beginning," and in spite of its position as the first book in the Bible, the Book of Genesis isn't the beginning of everything. Genesis 1:1 reminds us, "In the beginning God." So, before we study the basics that are laid down in Genesis 1—11, let's acquaint ourselves with what God did before what's recorded in Genesis. After that, we'll examine what He did that's recorded in Genesis, and finally, what occurred after Genesis. This will give us the kind of broad overview we need to study the rest of God's revelation in the Bible.

Before Genesis: redemption planned

What was happening before God spoke the universe into existence? That may seem like an impractical hypothetical question, like "How many angels can stand on the point of a pin?" but it isn't.¹ After all, God doesn't act

arbitrarily; and the fact that He created something suggests that He must have had some magnificent purposes in mind. What, then, was the situation before Genesis 1:1, and what does it teach us about God and ourselves?

God existed in sublime glory. God is eternal; He has neither beginning nor ending. Therefore, He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing more than Himself in order to exist or to act. "God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made," wrote A.W. Tozer, "but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself."² God needs nothing, neither the material universe nor the human race, and yet He created both.

If you want something to boggle your mind, meditate on the concept of the eternal, that which has neither beginning nor ending. As creatures of time, you and I can easily focus on the transient things around us; but it's difficult if not impossible to conceive of that which is eternal.³ Contemplating the nature and character of the Triune God who always was, always is, and always will be, and who never changes, is a task that overwhelms us. "In the beginning God."

Moses wrote, "Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the

world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God" (Ps. 90:2, NIV). Frederick Faber expressed it like this:

Timeless, spaceless, single, lonely,⁴
 Yet sublimely Three,
 Thou art grandly, always, only
 God in unity!⁵

"Process theology," an old heresy in modern dress, affirms a "limited god" who is in the process of becoming a "greater" god. But if God is God, as we understand the word, then He is eternal and needs nothing; and He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. In order to have a "limited god," you must first redefine the very word "God," because by definition God cannot be limited.

Furthermore, if God is limited and "getting greater," then what power is making Him greater? That power would be greater than "God" and therefore be God! And wouldn't that give us two gods instead of one?⁶ But the God of the Bible is eternal and had no beginning. He is infinite and knows no limitations in either time or space. He is perfect and cannot "improve," and is immutable and cannot change.

The God that Abraham worshiped is the eternal God (Gen. 21:33), and Moses told the Israelites, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27, NIV). Habakkuk said that God was "from everlasting" (Hab. 1:12, and see 3:6), and Paul called Him "the everlasting [eternal] God" (Rom. 16:26; see 1 Tim. 1:17).

The divine Trinity was in loving communion. "In the beginning God" would be a startling statement to a citizen of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham came from, because the Chaldeans and all their neighbors worshiped a galaxy of greater and lesser gods and goddesses. But the God of Genesis is the only true God and has no "rival gods" to contend with, such as you read about in the myths and fables from the ancient world. (See Ex. 15:1; 20:3; Deut. 6:4; 1 Kings 8:60; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 18:31.)

This one true God exists as three Persons: God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. (See Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-20;⁷ John 3:34-35; 14:15-17; Acts 2:32-33, 38-39; 10:36-38; 1 Cor. 12:1-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3-14; 4:1-6; 2 Thes. 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1-2.) This doesn't mean that one God manifests Himself in three different forms, or that there are three gods; it means that one God

exists in three Persons who are equal in their attributes and yet individual and distinct in their offices and ministries. As the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) states it, "We believe in one God—And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father—And in the Holy Ghost."

I once heard a minister open a worship service by praying, "Father, thank You for dying for us on the cross." But it was God the Son, not God the Father, who died for sinners on the cross; and it is God the Holy Spirit who convicts lost sinners and brings them to repentance and salvation. To scramble and confuse the Persons of the divine Godhead is to change what is taught in Scripture, and this is a dangerous thing to do.

The doctrine of the Trinity wasn't clearly revealed in the Old Testament, because the emphasis in the Old Testament is that the God of Israel is one God, uncreated and unique, the only true God. Worshiping the false gods of their neighbors was the great temptation and repeated sin of Israel, so Moses and the prophets hammered away on the unity and uniqueness of Israel's God. Even today, the faithful Jewish worshiper recites "The Shema" each day: "Hear [*shema*], O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5, NKJV). The God revealed in Scripture has no peers and no rivals.

But the Old Testament does give glimpses and hints of the wonderful truth of the Trinity, a truth that would later be clearly revealed in the New Testament by Christ and the apostles. The "let us" statements in Genesis (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; see also Isa. 6:8) suggest that the Persons of the Godhead worked together in conference; and the many instances when "the angel of the Lord" appeared on the scene indicate the presence of the Son of God. (See Gen. 16:7-11; 21:17; 22:11, 15; 24:7; 40; 31:11; 32:24-20; Ex. 3:1-4 with Acts 7:30-34; 14:19; 23:20-26; 32:33-33:17; Josh. 5:13ff; Jud. 2:1-5 and 6:11ff.)

Messiah (God the Son) speaks about Himself, the Spirit, and the Lord (Father) in Isaiah 48:16-17 and 61:1-3; and Psalm 2:7 states that Jehovah has a son. Jesus applied verse 7 to Himself when He challenged His enemies who did not accept Him as the Son of God (Matt. 22:41-46). In Genesis 1:2 and 6:3,

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the Spirit of God is distinguished from the Lord (Father), and this same distinction is found in Numbers 27:18; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 40:13; 48:16; and Haggai 2:4-5.

Though the word "trinity" is nowhere used in the Bible, the doctrine is certainly there, hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. Does this profound and mysterious doctrine have any practical meaning for the believer today? Yes, because the three Persons of the Godhead are all involved in planning and executing the divine will for the universe, including the plan of salvation.

The divine Trinity planned redemption.

The wonderful plan of redemption wasn't a divine afterthought, for God's people were chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 17:8) and given by the Father to the Son both to belong to His kingdom (Matt. 25:34) and to share His glory (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11-12, 24). The sacrificial death of the Son wasn't an accident, it was an appointment (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28); for He was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

In the counsels of eternity, the Godhead determined to create a world that would include humans made in the image of God. The Father was involved in Creation (Gen. 1:1; 2 Kings 19:15; Acts 4:24), but so were the Son (John 1:1-3, 10; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). God didn't create a world because He needed anything but that He might share His love with creatures who, unlike the angels, are made in the image of God and can respond willingly to His love.

The Godhead determined that the Son would come to earth and die for the sins of the world, and Jesus came to do the Father's will (John 10:17-18; Heb. 10:7). The words Jesus spoke were from the Father (John 14:24), and the works He did were commissioned by the Father (5:17-21, 36; Acts 2:22) and empowered by the Spirit (10:38). The Son glorifies the Father (John 14:13; 17:1, 4) and the Spirit glorifies the Son (16:14). The Persons of the Holy Trinity work together to accomplish the divine will.

According to Ephesians 1:3-14, the plan of salvation is Trinitarian: we are chosen by the Father (vv. 3-6), purchased by the Son (vv. 7-12), and sealed by the Spirit (vv. 13-14), and all of this is to the praise of God's glory (vv. 6, 12, 14).⁸ The Father has given authority to the Son to give eternal life to those He has given to the Son (John 17:1-3). All of this was

planned before there was ever a world!

It's important to see that all three Persons in the Godhead share in the salvation of lost sinners. As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He graciously chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world; but I knew nothing about divine election until after I was converted.⁹ As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross, and I knew that great truth from the earliest days of my life. But as far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned, I was saved in May 1945 when the Spirit of God convicted me and I trusted Jesus Christ. Then what God had planned from eternity all fell into place in my life.

Spiritual birth is something like human birth: you experience it but it takes time to understand it! After all, I wouldn't know my own birthdate if somebody hadn't told me. It's after we've been born into God's family that the wonder of it all is revealed to us from the Word, and then we want to share it with others.

When you seek to fathom the depths of the divine eternal counsels, you will be overwhelmed. But don't be discouraged, for over the centuries, good and godly scholars have disagreed in their speculations and conclusions. One of my seminary professors used to remind us, "Try to explain these things and you may lose your mind; but try to explain them away, and you will lose your soul."

Moses said it best: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29, NKJV). The important thing is not knowing all that God knows but doing all God tells us to do. "For we know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9).

Genesis: redemption promised

When He wrote the Bible, God didn't give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled *God*, *Creation*, *Man*, *Sin*, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future. It's a story about God and His dealings with all kinds of people and how they responded to His Word. As we read these narratives, we learn a great deal about God, ourselves, and our world; and we discover that our own personal story is found somewhere in the pages of Scripture. If you read long enough and honestly enough, you will meet yourself in the Bible.

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In our versions of the Bible, there are fifty chapters in Genesis; but the original Hebrew text isn't divided. After describing the Creation (1:1—2:3), Moses listed eleven "generations" that comprise the Genesis narrative: the heavens and the earth (2:4-4:26); Adam (5:1-6:8); Noah (6:9-9:29); Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9), with an emphasis on Shem, father of the Semites (11:10-26); Terah, father of Abraham (11:27-25:11); Ishmael (25:12-18); Isaac (25:19-35:29); Esau (36:1-8), who is also Edom (36:9-37:1); and Jacob (37:2-50:26). These are the individuals presented in Genesis.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis deal with *humanity in general* and focus on four great events: Creation (1—2), the fall of man and its consequences (3-5), the Flood (6-9), and the rebellion at Babel (10-11). The rest of Genesis focuses on *Israel in particular* (12-50) and recounts the lives of four great men: Abraham (12:1-25:18), Isaac (25:19-27:46), Jacob (28-36) and Joseph (37-50).¹⁰ We call these men the "patriarchs" because they were the founding fathers of the Hebrew nation.

As you study Genesis, keep in mind that Moses didn't write a detailed history of each person or event. He recorded only those things that helped him achieve his purpose, which was to explain the origin of things, especially the origin of the Jewish nation. Genesis 1-11 is a record of failure, but with the call of Abraham, God made a new beginning. Man's sin had brought God's curse (3:14, 17; 4:11), but God's gracious covenant with Abraham brought blessing to the whole world (12:1-3).

You will also notice in the Genesis record that when man does his worst and reaches his lowest, God gives him a new beginning. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said that the cycle in Genesis is "generation, degeneration and regeneration."¹¹ Cain killed Abel, but God gave Seth to continue the godly line. The earth became violent and wicked, so God wiped out humanity but chose Noah and his family to carry on His work. Out of pagan Ur of the Chaldees, God called Abraham and Sarah and gave them a son, Isaac; and the future of God's plan of salvation rested with that son. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob, but God rejected Esau and chose Jacob to build the twelve tribes of Israel and inherit the covenant blessings.

In other words, from beginning to end, Genesis is the story of God's sovereign will

and electing grace. This doesn't suggest that the persons in the story were mere robots, because they made mistakes and even tried to thwart God's plans. But whenever people resisted God's rule, He overruled and accomplished His divine purposes anyway. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11, NKJV).

What begins in Genesis is developed throughout the Bible and then finds its fulfillment in the Book of Revelation, as you can see from this summary:

Genesis	Revelation
The first heaven earth	The new heaven and and earth
The first garden; the Tree of Life guarded	The "garden city" and the Tree of Life available
The first marriage	The last marriage, the marriage of the Lamb
Satan tempts Eve to sin	Satan thrown into the lake of fire
Death enters the scene	"No more death"
Babylon built	Babylon destroyed
The Redeemer promised	The Redeemer reigns

There are many more comparisons and contrasts between these two books, but this gives you some idea of how important Genesis is to an understanding of God's program and the rest of Scripture.

After Genesis: redemption accomplished

God revealed His great plan of salvation gradually. First, He gave a promise (Gen. 3:15), the first salvation promise found in the Bible. It's the promise of a Redeemer who would be born of a woman, defeat Satan, and bring salvation to mankind. The promised Savior would be a man and not an angel and would save humans and not fallen angels (Heb. 2:5-18).

Where would this promised Redeemer come from? Genesis 12:1-3 answers that question: the Redeemer will be a Jew, from the people of Abraham. Through a miracle of God, Abraham and Sarah had Isaac; and Isaac was the father of Jacob. But Jacob had twelve sons who founded the twelve tribes of Israel.

Which of them would give the world the Savior? Genesis 49:10 tells us: the Redeemer will come from the tribe of Judah.

The Book of Exodus tells how God built the great Hebrew nation as they suffered in the land of Egypt, and then delivered them by His great power. They should have claimed their inheritance in Canaan, but in unbelief they disobeyed God and ended up wandering forty years in the wilderness (Num. 13—14). Joshua led the new generation into the land and there established the nation.

After the tragic era of the rule of the Judges and the reign of Saul, recorded in Judges and 1 Samuel, God anointed David as king and revealed that the promised Redeemer would come from David's family (2 Sam. 7). He would not only be "the son of David," but he would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2). Through Isaiah the prophet, God announced that the Redeemer would be born of a virgin in a miraculous way (Isa. 7:14; see Luke 1:26-38).

Of course, throughout the Old Testament ages, Satan did all he could to thwart the plans of God. Cain belonged to the devil (1 John 3:12) and killed his brother Abel, but God gave Seth to continue the godly line (Gen. 4:25-26). During the Flood, God preserved Noah and his family, and from the family of Shem, Abraham was born, the father of the Hebrew nation.

On at least four occasions, the godly line was threatened with extinction. Twice Abraham lied about Sarah his wife and she was taken by pagan rulers (12:10-20; 20:1ff), and his son Isaac committed the same sin and jeopardized his wife Rebekah (26:6-16). During the dark days of the later Hebrew monarchy, the wicked Queen Mother Athaliah had all the royal sons slain, but one little prince, Joash, was rescued to continue the Davidic line (2 Kings 11).

How did it all end? "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 5:4-5, NKJV). The angel announced to the shepherds, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

The promise had been fulfilled! And it all started in Genesis!

Now let's join Moses and read his magnificent inspired record of the creation of the heaven, the earth, and human life.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ It's doubtful that the ancient theologians ever asked this particular question, but the topic isn't totally irrelevant. Angels are spirits and have no physical bodies, except temporarily when sent on special missions; so how do they occupy space? Thomas Aquinas discussed the matter in his *Summa Theologica*, so the question is important.
- ² A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 39.
- ³ Of course, every human being will exist forever, either in heaven or hell; but as far as this world is concerned, we're all strangers and pilgrims "only passing through."
- ⁴ "Lonely" doesn't suggest that God needed friends. The word means "solitary."
- ⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Christian Book of Mystical Verse* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1963), 7.
- ⁶ In our day, "process theology" grew out of the teachings of the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), and his disciple Charles Hartshorne gave it wide exposure. Process theology was popularized by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner claimed that God was too weak now to do anything about cancer, war, and the tragedies of life; but as we trust Him and do good, we strengthen Him to do better. For the evangelical point of view, see *On Process Theology* edited by Ronald H. Nash (Baker Book House, 1987), and my book *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People* (Fleming H. Revell, 1984).
- ⁷ The conjunction "and" in the Christian baptismal formula is important, for it shows the equality of the Persons of the Godhead.
- ⁸ The doctrine of divine election is not an excuse to not share the Gospel with others. The same God who ordained the end—the salvation of the lost—has also ordained the means to the end, which is the witness of His people and their prayers for success for His Word. God chooses people to salvation and then calls them by His Gospel (2 Thes. 2:13-14). The two go together. We don't know who the elect are, and we have been ordered to take the Gospel to the whole world (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).
- ⁹ Dr. H.A. Ironside, for eighteen years pastor of Chicago's Moody Church, used to illustrate this truth by describing a door, over which hung a sign that read, "Whosoever will may come." Believing that, you walked through the door and were saved. Then you looked back and read another sign hanging over the inside of the door: "Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world."
- ¹⁰ These chapter divisions are arbitrary since there is an overlapping of generations in the narratives as there always is in human history. Technically, the "generations of Jacob" begins at 37:2, but Jacob's story starts much earlier and moves Isaac into the background. There is no section labeled "the generations of Joseph" since Joseph is a part of the Jacob narrative which closes the Book of Genesis.
- ¹¹ See Morgan's *The Analyzed Bible and Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, both published by Fleming H. Revell.