



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Old Testament Survey Lesson 2 – In the Beginning

Eternity

The first sentence of the Old Testament is this: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** (Genesis 1:1). In these words we are told of the origin of the world in which we live. It was created by God. But no attempt is made to tell us anything about the origin of God. The reason for that is that there is no origin for God. God simply is. There is no time before God was. God gives Himself the name **“I AM”** (Exodus 3:14). Moses, the great prophet of God, wrote: **“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”** (Psalm 90:2).

God is above and beyond the limits of time or space. God began time in the beginning, but there is no beginning to Him. God is eternal, timeless, always existing in time and beyond time.

The same is true of Jesus, for it is written: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”** (John 1:1-3). We know who the Word is, because in John 1:14 tells us that **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,”** and John 1:17 identifies this One who lived among us as **“Jesus Christ.”** As a human being Jesus had a beginning in time when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of His mother Mary, but as the Son of God Jesus had no beginning. For that reason, He once told His enemies: **“Before Abraham was, I AM”** (John 8:58).

Whereas time can be presented as a straight line moving forward, eternity can be presented as a circle that includes all straight lines within itself. God sees all and knows all, and He sees all the past, present and future as existing before Him. One could call this “the eternal now.” The Bible uses such expressions as **“before the foundation of the world”** (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20) and **“before time began”** (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2) to describe eternity. Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father: **“O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”** (John 17:5). Therefore we can join the apostle Paul in saying: **“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen”** (1 Timothy 1:17).

Paradise

As we read the first two chapters of Genesis, we notice that the world described in these two chapters is considerably different from the world we know today. Some things are the same – we still have darkness and light, day and night, land and sea, the sky, sun, moon, and stars, plant life and animal life, air creatures, water creatures, and land creatures, and finally human creatures. The almighty and eternal God created all these things in an orderly way, in six regular days, simply by speaking the word.

The difference between that world and our world is indicated by the word **“good”** that appears in the account over and over again (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and **“very good”** (Genesis 1:31) when God completed His creation. In our world there are many things that are not good, such as storms, sickness, killing in the animal world, and death even for those creatures that God made last of all: the human beings. Notice that on the sixth day of world history God **“created man in His own image”, “male and female”** (Genesis 1:27). To be made in the image of God means to be like God in holiness, righteousness and purity. There was no sin in that original world, which we call Paradise. Since there was no sin, there was no death, for death is the result of sin.

The second chapter of Genesis tells us that God made the male human first from the dust of the ground and then made the female human from the male. God did not want the man, Adam, to be alone, for that would have been **“not good”** (Genesis 2:18). God wanted everything in His creation to be good, yes, very good. And so God created a partner for Adam, the woman named Eve. Their holiness and purity are indicated by the fact that **“they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed”** (Genesis 2:25).

In that perfect Paradise God made a home for Adam and Eve, a perfect home. **“The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed”** (Genesis 2:8). God watered the garden of Eden with a river that **“became four riverheads”** (Genesis 2:10). God gave man the pleasant task of taking care of Eden. This was no problem, for everything at that time was **“very good”**. God even provided minerals such as gold and bdellium and the onyx stone, and the gold was **“good”** (Genesis 2:12).

The best thing of all that God did was to plant **“the tree of life”** (Genesis 2:9) in Eden to provide a simple way for Adam and Eve to avoid the opposite of life, which is death. Besides the tree of life, there was also in the garden **“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”** (Genesis 2:9). In order to avoid death, God gave them one simple command: **“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:17).

It is hard for us to imagine what Paradise was like, since our world is filled with things that are not good, but perhaps we can get some kind of an idea of what it was like by listening to what God has promised us concerning **“new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13). The prophet Isaiah already in the Old Testament promised **“new heavens and a new earth”** and said that in this new world **“the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying”** (Isaiah 65:17-19). This sounds like Paradise. Moreover, Isaiah declared: **“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain”** (Isaiah 65:25). No doubt this is what it was like in the original Paradise.

Jesus' apostle John was given a glimpse into the **“very good”** land that has been promised to us in the visions of the book of Revelation. It is Paradise indeed! God **“will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain”** (Revelation 21:3-4). **“There shall be no more curse”** (Revelation 22:3). Those who dwell in that Paradise will once more **“have the right to the tree of life”** (Revelation 22:14). **“There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie... Outside are...sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie”** (Revelation 21:27; 22:15).

The apostle Paul was once given a small glimpse of Paradise. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter”** (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). From the context it is clear that Paul was talking about himself and a vision that he himself had.

God is a good God, and He created a good world. He created a Paradise for our first parents. And He promises there will once again be a new Paradise for all those who learn to love Him and trust in Him. From the cross Jesus promised the repentant robber who was crucified next to Him: **“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

The Fall into Sin

We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in their perfect Paradise. It probably was not long, for even though their Creator had told them to reproduce, Eve did not conceive until she and Adam were removed from their original home in Eden.

The account in Genesis 3 speaks of a serpent who spoke to Eve and contradicted the clear Word of God. God had said: **“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”** (Genesis 2:17). But the serpent said: **“You will not surely die”** (Genesis 3:4). Eve had experienced nothing but blessing from the Lord God, her Creator. Surely it was to be expected that she would put more confidence in the Word of the God she knew than in the word of a created animal who contradicted God.

But the serpent cunningly suggested that God had ulterior motives for issuing the command not to eat the fruit from that one tree. The serpent insinuated that God was not as good as Eve believed and had experienced God to be. The serpent suggested that by commanding them not to eat from that tree, God was purposely keeping good from them. The serpent said: **“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 3:5). Even though everything was **“very good”** in her world, Eve wanted even more. She believed the serpent’s lie because it seemed plausible to her. **“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate”** (Genesis 3:6). Where was her husband during this time? He was with her, and he joined her in her disobedience: **“She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate”** (Genesis 3:6).

From that moment God’s created world was no longer **“very good”** or even just **“good”**. The world was *not* good, because Adam and Eve were not good. Whereas they had been in perfect harmony with God, with each other, and with all of creation, they now were **“dead”** as God had said they would be. They still had *physical* life, as they would continue to live on earth for hundreds of years, but their perfect life with God had come to an end. They were now *spiritually* dead.

Their deadness resulted in a sense of shame at their nakedness that they had not known before, and they tried to cover themselves (Genesis 3:7). When the Lord came to them, they did not rejoice in His company, as they had before, but they foolishly tried to hide themselves from Him in the trees of Eden. When God called to him, Adam claimed that he was afraid of God because of his nakedness. Adam had never been afraid of Him before even though he had been naked. God told him that his problem was not nakedness but unbelief and disobedience. But Adam did not confess his sin. He blamed Eve, and, in fact, he blamed God, for he said: **“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate”** (Genesis 3:12). Eve did not confess her sin either. She said: **“The serpent deceived me, and I ate”** (Genesis 3:13).

As we read this account, certain questions come to our minds. For example, if God made everything very good, how did this serpent learn how to lie and to contradict God? Where did the opposite of good come from? What is the origin of evil?

Another mystery is the mere existence of a talking serpent. In our experience serpents don’t talk. For this very reason many Bible readers in our generation simply dismiss this entire account as fiction, as mythology, as made-up legend, as fictitious as Santa Claus and the Easter bunny. How are we to accept and explain this account?

We have to let the Bible explain itself. As we read further in Scripture, we learn who it was that was speaking through the serpent. We learn more about the origin of evil from Jesus and His apostles. As far as the serpent is concerned, we read in the book of Revelation that the **“serpent of old...is the Devil and Satan”** (Revelation 20:2). So, the one who spoke to Eve in Eden was the Devil, known as Satan, and the animal (the serpent) was merely the cunning creature that Satan used to utter his lies and insinuations. The event took place exactly as written in Genesis. The apostle Paul wrote: **“The**

serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Corinthians 11:3). He also wrote: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14).

In order to fully understand the account in Genesis, we must search the Scriptures to find out what God has to say about His chief enemy, known as Satan. In His ministry, the Jewish authorities, especially by the Pharisees, opposed Jesus again and again. Very pointedly Jesus said to them: **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).** If Satan is the father of lies, then there was no one who lied before Satan lied. If Satan was a murderer from the beginning, then he must be the one who destroyed life and brought death into the world. The apostle John wrote: **“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8).**

We should not think of the devil as being equal with God. There are some who speak of two equal gods: one good God, and one evil God, namely, the devil. The devil is called an **“adversary” (1 Peter 5:8)**, but he is not an adversary on the same level as God. On the contrary, the devil was created as a good angel, but he fell away from God together with a number of other spirit beings who are called the devil’s angels. The apostle Peter wrote: **“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).** Likewise, Jude, the Lord’s brother, wrote: **“The angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).** In other words, the devil and the evil spirits under his command were created by God as **“good” angels.** It is written: **“By Him (Jesus, God the Son) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers” (Colossians 1:16).** But the devil introduced sin of his own accord, persuaded other angels to disobey God, and ever since that time, he has endeavored to lead God’s human creatures away from God, walking **“about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).** Eve and Adam were his first victims.

Because of his success in Eden, the devil is rightly called **“the ruler of this world” (John 16:11).** He is called **“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2)** and even **“the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4),** who blinds the minds of unbelievers. In fact, it is written that the devil **“had the power of death”** and therefore was the master of **“those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).**

As soon as the fall into sin occurred (as recorded in Genesis 3), the world became a different place. The fall into sin affected all of creation. To the woman God said: **“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).** To the man God said: **“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-20).**

As Adam and Eve reproduced and multiplied, their children were no longer in the image of God. No, we read: **“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).** Even after the great flood destroyed the original world, **“the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21).** God’s verdict on the human race is this: **“They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:3).**

There was no death in the world before there was sin, not even in the animal world. The apostle Paul explained: **“The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the**

glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21). The created world did not willingly become subject to futility and death. God changed the created world because of human sin. A curse fell on all creation as a result of human disobedience. This curse will not be removed until the children of God are delivered on the Last Day. Then creation itself will be delivered from its bondage and will share in the **“glorious liberty of the children of God”** (Romans 8:21).

The relationship between sin and death is clearly outlined by the apostle Paul in his grand comparison between the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus Christ. He says: **“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned... Death reigned from Adam to Moses... By the one man’s offense many died... For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation... By the one man’s offense death reigned through the one... Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation... By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”** (Romans 5:12-19).

The Promise of a Savior from Sin

Eternity, Paradise, the Fall into Sin. If the Old Testament had stopped at this point, there would be no hope for mankind or for all of creation. Because of Satan’s murderous lies and the disobedience of Eve and Adam, sin was now in the world, and because of sin, death was now in the world – spiritual death for the human race, decay and deterioration and destruction for all of creation because of human sin. There was no possibility of any change, for sin and death cannot produce life.

But God was not willing to abandon the creatures He had made in His own image. Already from eternity God knew what was going to happen – even as He knows all things – and He already had a plan in mind to rescue the human race and salvage His creation. The Lord God was quick to reveal His plan of salvation to Adam and Eve at once. After confronting Adam and Eve with their disobedience, God confronted the serpent who had led them astray. To the serpent God said: **“Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life”** (Genesis 3:14).

These words seem to be directed to the animal that Satan chose to use for his evil purpose. But then the Lord God went on to say: **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”** (Genesis 3:15). These words are directed no longer to the animal, but to the spirit being who used the animal, namely, the devil himself. With these words God was pronouncing a curse on Satan and indicating how God would one day take away Satan’s power by bruising or crushing his head. The picture is of a man stomping on the head of a snake with his heel and killing the snake while, at the same time, enduring pain himself through a bruised heel. We can be sure that God is talking about Satan and not the animal serpent from the Apostle Paul’s words in Romans 16:20: **“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”**. Satan is the one who will have his head bruised and crushed, and that will mean his total defeat.

After Satan succeeded in deceiving Eve and after Adam followed Eve in disobeying God, Satan thought he had gained total control over Eve and all her descendants. Because she had listened to him instead of God, he expected that all her descendants would follow in her path and listen to him. But God said that would not happen. God said: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed”** (Genesis 3:15). God’s message to Satan was this: “Eve is not going to listen to you and obey you. I am going to establish a state of hostility between you and her, and between her children and your children – a state of hostility that will go on and on and on. They are not all going to listen to you, but they will fight against you. Yes, you will have some children, that is, some of the sons and daughters born to Eve and her descendants will follow you and your evil ways. You will have seed, and your seed will be enemies of her seed. This warfare will continue throughout the generations. You are not always going to get your way. Not all human beings are going to listen to you, although many of them will.”

Then God said: **“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”** (Genesis 3:15). God’s message in this promise was: “But finally at some future time the woman will have a Seed, a son, a very special son, who will take you on in battle head-to-head. This Seed is the Seed of the woman. He will have a woman as His mother; He will be a true human being like Adam. And what is He going to do? He is going to bruise your head, Satan. He is going to crush you and demolish you and rob you of all your power. All you will be able to do in your struggle against Him is to bruise His heel, but you, Satan, will have a crushed head. You will be utterly defeated.”

These words of the Lord God were directed at Satan, but Adam and Eve were present and listened to them and believed them. This is evident from the fact that **“Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living”** (Genesis 3:20). If Adam had remained in his unrepentant state after his disobedience, he would have given Eve a name meaning the mother of death, for he had accused her of bringing sin into the world. But Adam called her the mother of the living – the mother of life – rather than the mother of death. This indicates Adam believed God’s words that the woman’s Seed would create life instead of death. Eve was the mother of all biological human life, but she was also the mother (that is, the woman ancestor) of her Seed, the One who would bring life into the world.

Genesis 3:15 is certainly one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. It is a summary of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament portrays the hostility between Eve and her believing children, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Satan and the men and women who follow him rather than trust in God and His promise. The woman’s Seed is present in the specific ancestors of the Savior, men and women like Abraham and Sarah, Judah, Ruth, David and the kings who followed him, and Zerubbabel. Finally, the woman’s Seed is conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and He begins His epic battle against Satan.

Jesus, the woman’s Seed, portrayed Satan as a strong man who is overcome by a stronger Man, namely, Jesus Himself (Luke 11:18-22). Jesus overcame Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. Jesus drove out every evil spirit that He encountered. And finally, the woman’s Seed won the war by defeating Satan on Calvary. Jesus suffered a bruised heel on Calvary, but Satan had his head crushed. It is written: **“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”** (Hebrews 2:14-15). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on the third day proved that He indeed was the Victor over sin, Satan, and death.

The bruised heel refers to Jesus’ death, which was the only way Jesus could take away the devil’s power over death. The entire New Testament speaks of the crucial battle on Calvary and its meaning for the human race. The book of Revelation foretells the end of the war, when **“the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever”** (Revelation 20:10). On the other hand, those trusting in the woman’s Seed will be permanently rescued from the devil and every temptation; they will once again **“have the right to the tree of life”** (Revelation 22:14). **“And there shall be no more curse”** (Revelation 22:3).

We cannot understand the world we live in if we do not grasp the truth of what God teaches us in the first three chapters of Genesis. That is why we have spent so much time on these first three chapters. These chapters are the foundation to everything else in the Scriptures. No doubt that is why Satan and those who follow him in this world have done everything they can to discredit these chapters and call them fiction or a fairy tale or mythology or poetry or anything other than the clear historical account of what actually happened in the beginning. The prevailing worldview among most scholars, and even many so-called Christian leaders, is that the origin of the world is best explained by the theory of evolution rather than by the Biblical account of creation. But there is no real proof for the theory of evolution, and, in fact, evolution can never be proved because no one was there to record it.

Should we not rather believe the account of the One who was there, that is, God Himself, who breathed into His prophet Moses the words of Genesis 1-3? If these chapters are removed from the Bible, we may as well throw the rest of the Bible away also. The whole Bible is based on the truths taught in these first three chapters of Genesis, and what is presented in these three chapters is repeated and explained more fully in the rest of the Bible, even to the final chapters of Revelation.

Questions

1. What is the difference between time and eternity?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said to His enemies, "I am"?
3. List some differences between the world as it was at first and as it is now.
4. Why was it good that God gave Adam and Eve the command to not eat of that one tree?
5. What do we know about the origin of Satan?
6. How do we know that Satan was speaking through the serpent?
7. How does the Bible explain the difference between Eve's sin and Adam's sin?
8. In what way did Adam and Eve die on the day of their transgression?
9. How did the sin of Adam and Eve affect the rest of creation?
10. What was the plan of salvation that God devised in eternity?
11. How did God reveal this plan to Adam and Eve?
12. What perpetual battle would take place throughout history?
13. How can we be sure that Jesus is the woman's Seed?
14. When will death be finally defeated totally and forever?
15. Why are the first three chapters of Genesis so important?