

**An Examination of Genesis 1-4; No. 1**

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(You expressed interest in Greg's articles about Satan/satan. If you are open for such studies, you will be intrigued by his examination of the "creation chapters" of Genesis published in the February 2004 issue of his Eschatology Review. Because of its length, it is being given in two installments. –Cecil Hook.)

In this issue we are going to look closer at some of the ideas and implications mentioned in the December issue. Genesis is a most interesting book and covers a long period in redemptive history. I say redemptive history, because I do not believe the theme of the Bible is world history, but rather, redemptive history. It is concerned with the covenant people of God. We are going to look at some highly controversial things in this issue and the next. I ask that you not be too hasty to write me off, but that you will open your minds to some new approaches even if they go against your grain. By the time we have gone through the whole course of these ideas, it may not go against your grain.

Because there are different ways of looking at the accounts of the first 4 chapters of Genesis, it is hard for me, as well as unwise, to be dogmatic. However, I feel quite certain that there are many things in these four chapters that must be taken symbolically, or figuratively. The reason being that they do not make sense when applied literally. As with much figurative language, it is the enveloping concept that is to be understood. This means that not every detail can be symbolically correlated. Some is merely needed to fill in and complete the story and make sense of it. The following is from Biblical Hermeneutics, by Milton S. Terry in 1890, p. 284. He is commenting on the parable of the wheat and tares in Matt. 13:24-30, and its explanation in verses 36-43.

“In the interpretation of the second parable Jesus gives special significance to the sower, the field, the good seed, the tares, the enemy, the harvest, and the reapers; also the final burning of the tares and the garnering of the wheat. But we should observe that he does *not* attach a meaning to the men who slept, nor to the sleeping, nor to the springing up of the blades of wheat, and their yielding fruit, nor to the servants of the householder and the questions they asked. These are but incidental parts of the parable, and necessary to a happy filling up of its narrative. An attempt to show a special meaning in them all would tend to obscure and confuse the main lessons. So, if we would know how to interpret all parables, we should notice what our Lord omitted as well as what he emphasized in those expositions which are given us as models; and we should not be anxious to find a hidden meaning in every word and allusion.”

The main thought here is to allow the figurative language its own flow. We do not want to impose a meaning that was never intended. Yes, this is often easier said than done. But by continuing to study with an open mind, we can eventually learn much. An open mind is truly necessary, yet we must guard against letting our imagination carry us into error. It

is easy to get off track in this way, and so we must consider not just one area of scripture by itself, but the whole of the Bible as a harmonizing unit. Consider whatever you like. If you later find it to be incorrect, there is certainly no shame in admitting it and moving on. If our teachers, preachers and professors would do this we would not be girdled with so much false doctrine for such long periods of time.

So, by looking at Genesis 1-4, can we determine what is literal and what is symbolic? We have been taught to take this all literally, and with a casual reading and a little blind faith, we find no problem. However we should not allow blind faith to lead us. After all, look where blind faith has led the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moslems and all other religions that require a big helping of blind faith in order to adhere to their doctrines.

God gave us a mind to think with and a thing called logic to use in our search for his truth. One may be quick to point out that scientists are logical, and look where their logic has taken them. This is true. The greatest portion of them seem to have been led to atheism. We then need to consider that most scientists are logical only within their own paradigm. Beyond that they seem to throw all logic to the wind. Is it not reasonable that we should attempt to apply our logic in the widest spectrum possible? Would it hurt us to give a close and critical examination of Genesis 1-4? Perhaps we can push this a bit further than Genesis 1-4, and re-examine the account of the flood as well. Don't we owe it to ourselves to reaffirm what we assume to be rock solid truth in Genesis? What if we find our assumptions to be wrong? What kinds of repercussions will this have on the rest of our understanding of the Bible? If we find error, we had better rethink some things. If we find our long held understanding to be correct, we have lost nothing from the investigation, and gained the satisfaction of knowing we have a solid foundation. With an open mind, please join me as we consider some interesting points.

I will be making considerable use of the Greek OT, otherwise known as the Septuagint, and abbreviated as LXX. It is not within the scope of this issue to discuss the reasons why I value the Septuagint a great deal. We will do a study on the history of translations, including the Septuagint, in an upcoming issue.

I find two accounts of creation in Genesis. The point of division is 2:4. Some claim that there is only one account, and that the second is merely an expansion of the first. I disagree with this statement seeing how the actual order of the events is different. In the first account, God creates the animals before man. In the second account, the animals are made after man. Why are there two accounts? Is it possible that there were two narratives of antiquity that were written down? Most accept the teaching that Moses wrote Genesis. However, that is not the only possibility. I just wanted to mention that for now, as it is beyond the scope of this issue, and it will be reserved for discussion at another time. One thing I want you to notice is the abrupt change in the name of God. In the first account, the term "God" is used exclusively (35 times). In the Hebrew, the word is "**Elohim**". Beginning in 2:4, we see the term "Lord" enter into the text. In the Hebrew the word is "**YHWH**" or "**Yahweh**." In this same spot where the accounts seem to take on a different approach and narrative, the term "Lord God" is used exclusively, except when

the serpent is speaking. Why the abrupt change? This seems to support the idea of more than one narrative melded to create Genesis. Notice in chapter 4, the term “God” is dropped and only “Lord” is used, except verse 25, where Eve is speaking. It is interesting to note that in the LXX we find 2:4 as well to be the first use of the term “Lord God,” but thereafter it uses a mix of the terms. In Greek the word for God is “**Theos**,” and the word for Lord is “**Kurios**.”

### **Is a Literal Approach Correct?**

I ask you the following questions: Is Genesis dealing with the creation of the universe, the planets and stars, the sun and the moon, the plants and animals, as well as the first human beings? Was the Garden of Eden a real, literal garden, with a literal tree of knowledge of good and evil, and a literal tree of life? Did these trees produce real, edible fruit of some sort? Was there a literal serpent there that conversed with Eve, who was more convincing to her than God? Let us examine some of the difficulties if all of this is to be taken literally as tradition insists.

Did God really create the earth formless and void? His spirit moved over the surface of the water. If there was water, how could it be void and formless? On the first day God created light and separated it from the darkness, yet God did not create the sun until the fourth day. What was the source of the light if the sun had not yet been created? Also God created the plants on the third day before the sun was created. Plants require sunlight for survival. Wouldn't it seem logical to create the entire framework and setting before adding the life forms? If the sun and moon were created to serve as dividers and regulators of day and night, why was there day and night already in day one? Could there have been an evening and a morning with no sun?

During this creation period, we find the phrase, “and God said” used several times. Who was he speaking to? Many are quick to state that it must have been the other two persons of the Trinity. They also point to 1:26, “Let us make man in our image,” to show that this was a Trinitarian act of creation. First, God is spirit, and speech is surely not the means by which the persons of the Trinity communicate. Secondly, in 1:27 we read, “And God created man in his own image.” What happened here? Why the change from plural to singular? Shouldn't the passage have said, “And God created man in their image?” In the future, we will examine the doctrine of the Trinity and see if it is sound according to the Bible.

Are the days of creation to be taken as literal 24-hour days? If your answer is yes, why does 2:4 (the second account) speak of the day of creation as singular?

In 2:8 we see that God planted a garden **toward the east, in Eden**. East of what? Why is this bit of seemingly insignificant information included in an account that envelopes such a grand scheme? It seems to be irrelevant.

The river that flows from Eden to water the garden, then divides into four, is hard to take literally. Rivers do not divide except at a delta. Rivers converge, making many into one.

The text depicts them as surrounding the land of Havilah and the land of Cush, or Ethiopia. What kind of a river surrounds a land? Many claim Havilah to be Arabia. If this is true, and Ethiopia is in Africa, what kind of description is this?

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge, and their eyes were opened, why is being naked the first order of things. If they were the only human beings on the planet, why would it matter? Is physical nakedness really the subject here?

When God curses the serpent, he is told he will eat dust for the rest of his days. In the LXX it says he will eat earth for the rest of his days. No one takes this literally. When God curses Eve, she is told that he would greatly increase the pain of childbirth. Doesn't this imply that she had already experienced childbirth with little pain?

When Cain is driven away, he is concerned that anyone who finds him will kill him. Who is he worried about? If there were not other humans living at that time, such a fear would not enter into his mind. According to the scriptures, Seth was born as a replacement of Abel after this event. Yes, there were other sons and daughters, but the account implies that they came after Seth. Are we to believe that Cain was in fear of his future siblings? Cain being sent away, took a wife for himself. Are we to believe she was a younger sister? Cain went into the land of Nod. It would make more sense that he found his wife there. Lands were named after those who inhabited them. It would make sense that Nod was the patriarch of the land of Nod. It is no different than the land of Canaan, or the land of Egypt. They were named for their founders.

This is not so hard to see if we keep in mind that Adam was the first **covenant** man of God. I recall years ago, a preacher teaching that there was a covenant made between God and Adam. He reasoned that to ratify this, animals were slaughtered, and that is where the skins came from which God made into garments for Adam and Eve. At the time, it seemed like he was grabbing for something that wasn't there. He elaborated no further, yet at the same time, he believed that Adam and Eve were the first human beings. I don't know about the preacher's slant on the garments, but it seems to me that Adam was not the first man in an absolute sense, but rather, the first man with whom God made a covenant. Is that really so hard to consider?

Was Adam created out of nothingness, or was he plucked from the present population of the world? If viewed from a literal standpoint, it would seem that Adam was created out of nothingness. From a figurative perspective, the account can be seen as a literary invention carrying the idea that God took an earthly man and brought him to himself, in his image.

What if the first four chapters of Genesis are symbolic of God creating a covenant people for himself? Isn't that what God did with Noah? Isn't that what God did with Abraham? Isn't that what God did with the children of Israel in Egypt? Isn't that what our Lord Jesus did for us? After all, Paul in 1 Cor. 15:45-49, relates to Adam as the first man, and Jesus as the last man. He said the first man was from the earth and the second man was from heaven. Was Jesus literally the last man? Was he literally the second man? Of

course not. Jesus was no more the absolute last man than Adam was the absolute first man. The concept is that Adam represents the first covenant dealings with man, while Jesus represents the last covenant dealings with man. First the earthly, then the heavenly. First the physical, then the spiritual. I will also remind you of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 2:14, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised." []

Look for the second and final part of this essay next week. You may communicate with Greg at [gjr@viclink.com](mailto:gjr@viclink.com) or 32080 NE Corral Creek Rd, Newberg OR 97132.

(Cecil Hook: July 2004)