

## The Promise Begins

Genesis 1:1-3:24

### Introduction

**Advent:** Our series title is “The Story of Christmas,” but it’s really our Advent series. **Christmas is the destination; Advent is the journey** (Christmas is actually the first day of Christmastide; 12 days of Christmas 🎵 Christmas to Epiphany, Jan 5; still don’t know how a partridge and a pear tree got in there; if you follow the Eastern church calendar Christmas isn’t until Jan 7; Jesus wasn’t actually born on Dec 25?).

- **Advent** is the season leading up to Christmas. It is a time of waiting, hoping, expecting, anticipating, and longing for the Savior to come. It teaches us to feel the anticipation and joy of Jesus’ birth so we can live in the same expectant hope of his future, second coming.

We will journey *through* the Bible to highlight the anticipation of the coming of Jesus.

**Waiting:** I don’t like to wait. I grew up in a fast-food culture and live in an Amazon next-day prime delivery culture. Waiting for door-dash is certainly not as dire as other situations.

- Waiting for the plumber to arrive to fix the broken pipe. Water meant for the sewer is entering my basement. I’m peering out the window. I’m anticipating his arrival. Things are bad (and stinky).
- What are you waiting for? Why are you waiting?

The beauty of Christ is magnified in our hearts when we feel the pain of his absence and anticipate the joy of his coming.

### 1. The Plan of God (Gen 1:1-2:24)

**The Beginning:** Where does every story start? *At the beginning...* Where does the story of Christmas start? *In the beginning.*

- Not with an Elf looking for his dad in New York.
- Not with Tim Allen accidentally offing Santa and scrambling to fill his boots.
- Not with Arnold Schwarzenegger fighting Sinbad for a Turbo Man doll.
- Not even with Bruce Willis crashing a terrorist-filled Christmas Party at Nakatomi Plaza.
- The story of Christmas is not a quaint, feel-good morality tale about being nice, finding a last-minute gift, or saving the North Pole. It’s deeply connected to the grand story of redemption, rooted in reality, and essential to our salvation.
- The story of Christmas doesn’t start with presents, parties, or even shepherds in a field. It starts where all the greatest stories start: *In the beginning*. **Genesis 1:1** takes us to the very start of the story, and **Genesis 3:15** points us to the first **whisper of Christmas**—the promise of redemption and the coming of the Savior.

- The Bible is a book (book of books). It is divinely inspired *literature*. Through its diverse authors, genres, and contexts it tells the **cohesive story of God**.
- It is really important to a story to understand not only the *end* but the *beginning*. The end might give you the resolution but the beginning helps you understand the what and (more importantly) the why.
- Imagine if you only saw the ending of a movie without the beginning.
  - The Lord of the Rings: Frodo stands on Mount Doom, about to destroy the ring. Cool, right? But without the beginning, you'd have no idea why a hobbit in his pajamas is on a volcano holding jewelry.
  - Even a simple story like Cinderella: she ends up marrying the prince. Great for her! But without the beginning, you'd have no idea about her evil stepmother or why glass slippers were the footwear of choice.
  - When you're teaching a kid Algebra you don't open up to Chapter 6 and expect them to understand. You start from the beginning because **it all builds on itself**. Many Christians are like this with the OT (e.g., Matt 1:1, cf. "son of David, son of Abraham; or Jn 1:1, "in the beginning was the Word").

**Significant Words:** The Bible opens with seven Hebrew words in one of the most beautifully poetic, succinct, and powerful sentences in history.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.<sup>1</sup>

- They help make sense of his design, his plan, and the current state of affairs in which we find ourselves.

**Who is God?:** The better we understand God, the better we understand ourselves because *he created us* (along with all things).

- **The Bible is for you but about God.** If we want to know ourselves, then we need to focus on knowing him. I promise, if you open your Bible to see God you will see the world, humanity, and yourself more clearly. However, if you open the Bible to first and foremost see yourself, you will be tempted to turn and twist the Bible to confirm what you want to believe and support what you already feel. You will become your own idol and will try to twist the Bible to do your bidding.
- And what a terrible story it would be if I was in the center of it. I surely can't be the hero that our world needs. I surely cannot find hope and salvation in my own pettiness.
- "Creation is about the spreading, the diffusion, the outward explosion of [God's] love. [He] is the very opposite of greedy, hungry, selfish emptiness; in his self-giving he naturally pours forth life and goodness. He is, then, the source of all that is good, and that means he is not the sort of God who would call people to himself away from happiness in good things. Goodness and ultimate happiness are to be found with him, not apart from him... Indeed, in the triune God is the love behind all love, the life behind all life,...the beauty behind all beauty and the joy behind all joy..." (Reeves).

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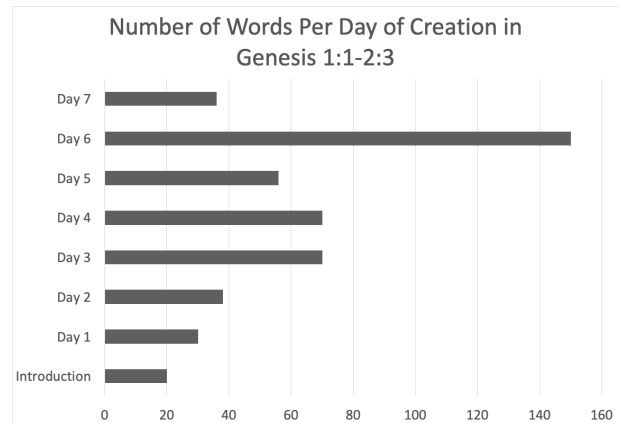
<sup>1</sup> בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: | beh-reh-SHEET ba-Ra eh-lo-HIM et ha-sha-MA-yim veh-ET ha-Ah-retz | Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

- “Love is not (actually) something creatures generate, but rather is a divine reality we participate in” (Kapic).

**Good Creation:** He designs, fills, and shapes it. **You can’t understand the problem of sin and the hope of salvation if you don’t understand the purpose of God’s original design.**

- \*btw\* If the world isn’t designed by a loving creator, then there is no explanation for brokenness and injustice and no hope for salvation. If all of this is “chance” then things just ‘are.’ There is also no such thing as beauty, simply evolutionarily useful.
- God said his creation “was good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25); “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (1:31).
- The flow of the creation account is one of beautiful design. Like a potter takes a formless lump of clay and makes a beautiful sculpture, God takes the chaos of creation and forms it into a masterpiece of order, beauty, and purpose. **God didn’t just make all that is, he fashioned it into a beautiful place for his people to flourish.**
- He took the **chaos** and crafted it into a masterpiece of **order** and purpose. He took the emptiness and filled it. The uninhabited heavens with the sun, moon, and stars. The empty waters and skies with fish and birds. The barren land with a variety of animals.

**Human Pyramid:** At the peak of creation God placed human beings. If God is the primary character of creation, human beings are his primary creatures. They are the crown of God’s handiwork, project “save the best for last” (e.g., bride comes down the aisle last). We see priority hinted even by the **number of words** used to describe each day of creation. The day humans are created (day 6) is more than twice as long as any other day. In each of the previous five God says “let there be,” yet about human being she says “let us make.”<sup>2</sup>



- <sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”  
<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

**Imago Dei:** Human beings are uniquely valuable because they bear God's image and are blessed to reflect HIS glory to all of creation. **Imago Dei.** Everything is made “according to its kind.” But humanity is made in the “image and likeness of God.”

- This isn’t the **physical** likeness of God (God is invisible and humanity is male and female). Most frequently *imago dei* is seen as a **spiritual** dimension, the capacity for relationship with God, for moral reasoning, that “thing” that separates humanity from

<sup>2</sup> Even the word “create” is used 3 times here in v. 27.

animals. No other creature is described in these terms. Humanity is set apart in position, value, and role in God's creation.

- We should “take all human beings infinitely seriously” because they are made in God's image.

**Purpose:** God made us and put us in his garden paradise for a **purpose:** <sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but 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” (Gen 2:15-17)

- Interestingly, the words “work” and “keep” are the same words later used in the Bible of priests as they “worship” and “serve” in God's temple.
- Just like the priests entered the dwelling place of God to worship and serve him, the first people were in God's garden temple worshipping and serving. **We were made to commune with God in worship and glorify God through service.**
- God has created a good world and filled it with creation for a purpose. All creation exists by him and for him, and he has generously filled his creation with beauty and love. When you are not living for the purpose you were created, your life will be empty, not full.
- We were not created intrinsically evil by design, but intrinsically good. We were made by a good God for good purposes. Sadly, sin has turned royal daughters and sons into thieves and prisoners (Kapic). **Something has gone wrong.** We know there's a problem...

## 2. The Problem of Sin (Gen 3:1-24)

**Problem:** Every good story has a problem—without it, the story is boring. That's why reality TV isn't reality; it has to manufacture **conflict** because no one wants to watch reality (e.g., reheating a bowl of chili or ordering a pair of socks). A good story always has a storm to weather, a monster to outwit, and a villain to defeat. There's no ‘happily ever after’ without a ‘once upon a time.’

- There's a reason God had to put on flesh. There's a Jesus *needed* to come and it's such great news and such a miracle, etc.

**The Bad Guy:** In this story, the bad guy shows up as a serpent. <sup>1</sup> He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. <sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the

day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

- As Scripture unfolds, we see the identity of the serpent revealed. By the end, we learn he **called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world** (Rev. 12:9).
- **(1) Dialogue with the Devil:** Eve's first mistake is her **willingness to entertain the conversation** with the serpent. She is lured into dialogue on his terms. There is a time and place to have a conversation, this is not it (e.g., telemarketers, pornography, etc.).
- **(2) Doubting God's Words:** Did God actually say?. He doesn't outright contradict (at first) but places seeds of doubt in Eve. He uses suggestion rather than rebellion.
- **(3) Redefining God's Commands:** Eve over-corrects and ends up misrepresenting God's command but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' Once they've quibbled over terms and refined God's commands, Satan outright rejects God's command. The counterclaim: you will not die. But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. He went from simple doubt to defiance. Ultimately a lack of trust.
- **(4) Blaming God:** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." He says that God lied! That God doesn't want you to have what he has (Satan promises only what they'll gain and *fails to mention* what they'll lose). They'll gain "wisdom" in exchange for death (e.g., weight loss drug Fen-phen will lose weight and cause heart valve failure).
- Satan will tempt us in sneaky, seductive, and subtle ways. He wants to lure you into sin by taking something good and twisting it (e.g., sex to pornography, leadership to abuse, food to gluttony, building to hoarding, worship to legalism, etc).

**Backfire:** <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. Sin didn't get them to where they wanted. They reached the goal of knowledge ("like God") but it was the wrong goal (#truth). "Man, who had been created 'like God' in the beginning (1:26), found himself after the Fall curiously 'like God'—but no longer 'with God' in the garden (v. 22)... [Man's] happiness (i.e., 'good') does not consist of his being 'like God' so much as it does his being 'with God' [and] enjoying the blessings of his presence (Ps 16:11)" (Sailhamer, 59).

- They are cast out of the garden. Their sin has separated them from life. Sin cannot exist in God's presence. They now "really know" how disobedience leads to death. They could have lived in trust with God forever.
- "Satan's temptations are all shortcuts" (Dyck). They knew *only* good, now they will know evil, not just intellectually but experientially.
- They are driven from the presence of the Lord by their guilt and shame.

**Sin Messed Everything Up:**

- The sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, has spread like a disease to all people. And the path of sin that they pioneered is like a river carving a path through a canyon, we walk that same path every day.
- We are sinners by nature and sinners by choice. We have inherited sin and we participate in it every day.
- It drives all of us from the presence of God.
- Adam, Eve, and the Serpent were all cursed directly (vv. 14-19), but their punishments had global implications, having broken the relationship between humanity and God.
  - Good things like marriage and multiplying become painful burdens. Work goes from joyful purpose to toilsome labor.
- Sin threatens our ability to fulfill our purpose. Rather than reflect God, we reflect ourselves. Rather than steward creation, we abuse it for ourselves. Rather than finding fulfillment in God's good design, we set ourselves up as god do "what is right in our own eyes."
- Everything is beautiful and broken.
- We now live in between the perfection of the garden and the redemption of heaven.
- **We have eternity in our hearts but sin in our bones.** We need regeneration. We need new life. We need God to fix it.

**Question of Hope:** What is God going to do? I would call it a failed experiment and trash the whole there. But that is not what God does. In the midst of it all falling apart, there is a *whisper* of hope. What will lift the curse and redeem the fallen?

### 3. The Promise of a Savior (Gen 3:15)

**Promise:** In the midst of the curses there is a promise. <sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

- Since the beginning, Christians have seen in this verse the first hints of the gospel (e.g., *protoeuangelion*).<sup>3</sup>
- "The Bible's first announcement of grace is found in Genesis 3:15. It whispers the name of Jesus and declares the good news that God will not leave us in our sin, but will crush evil at its source" (Keller).
- "In Genesis 3:15, we see the first glimpse of the gospel, where God's promise to crush Satan under Christ's feet begins to unfold" (Packer).

**Searching for a Seed:** Like any good foreshadowing, the attentive reader is looking for the great seed of the woman who will crush the enemy.

- Every son becomes a nominee. **Is it Seth, Isaac, David?** All of them carry the story forward, but none of them prove to be the promised one. They anticipate the fulfillment but aren't the fulfillment. By the time we reach 1st-century Bethlehem, the people of God

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem, all saw in Christ the fulfillment of this promise. As well in modern times (Calvin, Bavinck, Vos, Packer, Waltke, Keller, etc.).

are still waiting—still longing—for the **true Seed of the woman** to arrive and crush the serpent's head.

- Sometimes, we read the Bible clumsily and superficially, and we miss how themes are coherently traced throughout. A promise can appear in Genesis, but wait until Isaiah develops. A doctrine can be hinted at in Exodus but not stated fully until Daniel. Rather than playing one part against another, we should recognize how each is knit together by the same God.
- <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:4-5).
- The promised seed of the woman will receive a blow from Satan but, in return, will crush him for good (e.g., heel vs. head). “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20). “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev 12:9).
- “[So] in this one verse (Gen 3:15), the whole of Christ’s victory over Satan is summed up. The serpent would strike at His heel, but He would crush the serpent’s head—a victory both painful and complete” (Calvin)
- Jesus is the special person, the seed of the woman, who fights on our behalf to defeat sin and Satan. **In our sin, there is hope because we have a Savior.**

## Conclusion

### What does this mean for me?

- **(1) God is telling a story of redemption.** The story of Christmas is not an isolated event—it’s a high point in God’s great story of redemption. Sin has an expiration date. Brokenness, injustice, and pain are not ultimate; God is. The Bible isn’t just a book of rules or inspiration—it’s the true story of the world, a story into which we are invited.
  - What’s broken can be mended. What’s lost can be restored. What’s dead can be raised to life. Sin has an end date. Sin is not ultimate, God is. Injustice is not permanent, God is.
  - The mission of God is bigger than our lives. We don’t need to ask, “where does God fit into my story?” but “where does my life fit into God’s story.” “I may wonder what kind of mission God has for me, when I should be asking what kind of me God wants for his mission.”<sup>4</sup>
- **(2) God is a promise maker and keeper.** From the garden, God has been weaving a story of hope, and every promise He has made has been fulfilled or will be.
  - In Jesus, the seed of the woman, we have victory over sin and death. The serpent’s head has been crushed, even though the battle wounds were real.
  - Advent reminds us to live in the same posture of hope as those who waited for Jesus’ first coming—longing for His second coming with joy, trust, and expectation.

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<sup>4</sup> Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*.

- (3) **What are we waiting for?** Advent teaches us to wait well—not with frustration or impatience, but with faith and hope. “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” In waiting, our longing for Jesus deepens, and the joy of His arrival is magnified.
  - The promise of Christmas is that God has entered into our story to redeem it. We may still be waiting, but the outcome is certain: Jesus has come, and He will come again.
  - This calls us away from simply celebrating a sentimental season and to sincere worship and wonder of the God who keeps His promises and fulfills His purposes through Christ.
- What would it look like in your life to embrace this season with intentional worship of the Savior?