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Genesis: Behold Our God / Genesis

Passage: Genesis 1-50

Title: Overview of Genesis

Series: Behold Our God

"In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate yet equally important groups: the police who investigate crime and the district attorneys who prosecute the offenders. These are their stories."

Most of you will recognize these lines as the opening monologue for the TV show "Law and Order." For years, authors and television producers have recognized the importance of how they begin their novels or TV shows.

Beginnings of television programs serve a number of purposes. Sometimes, they set the mood for a program. For instance the pompous "Dum, Dee, Dum, Dum" heralded each episode of the police drama DRAGNET. Sometimes they tell a story, such as when we are bid "Come and listen to story about a man named Jed..." at the beginning of the sitcom THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES. Sometimes they are meant to educate us, as in "There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man..." which was dramatically delivered by host Rod Serling on the beginning of each episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE. No matter what form the beginning takes, be it music, lyric or narration or a combination of all three formats, it is meant to give us a sense of what is to come and prepare us for the fun and excitement that most surely will follow.

For those of you who can remember back far enough to when you had to write term papers in high school and college, you may remember how your teachers stressed the importance of having a good introduction and a good ending. It seemed almost as if you could fill the middle with fluff, so long as you grabbed their attention at the beginning and gave them a flashy ending. Some of you are beginning to suspect that may just be the tactic I

use in preparing my sermons.

Simply put, our society suggests that the beginning of anything is one of the most important parts. There are countless instructions in books and on websites on how to begin writing a paper, how to begin studying music, how to begin painting a picture, how to begin teaching a kindergartener to read, how to begin building a building, and how to begin designing a computer program. What all of these have in common is that they recognize that how you begin something will invariably effect how you end it.

So, what do you think? How important is the beginning of something? Does how something began really have that much impact on what happens in the middle and even on the end?

I dare say that most of us understand the importance of beginnings. The greatest philosophers and literature of history have stressed beginnings. Plato said, "The beginning is the most important part of the work." The Proverbs tell us that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." So we recognize that if we want to have a prosperous life, we must begin with the fear of God.

Over the next few months, we are going to have a series on the beginning of the Bible. We are going to be covering the book of Genesis, which takes its name from the first phrase, "In the beginning." Now to begin this series, I am going to try to give you an overview, in 50 minutes or less, of the entire book so we can get our bearings and see the overall message. Kind of like a birds-eye view, if you will. So, if you will turn in your Bibles to page 1, we'll get started.

Actually, if you will look for just a minute in the table of contents, which should be a few pages into your Bible, you will see the Bible divided into two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Genesis is listed

as the first book, followed by Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five books together make up what is called the Pentateuch by which I do not mean five Canadian hats, but rather, in the Greek, five tools or scrolls. They are also referred to in the Hebrew as the Torah, or the Law.

These were the five books written by Moses as he led the Hebrews out of their Egyptian bondage on their way to the Promised Land. The overall purpose of the book of Genesis particularly seems to be to give this group of people a detailed introduction to the God that they served and to their historical origins. As such, it also serves to tell us important information about our God and the origins of our faith.

Now, the book of Genesis is fairly simple in its structure. There are a number of important things in the book of Genesis, but they all fall within a basic storyline. Chapters 1-3 introduce God, the creation, Adam and Eve, and the Fall. Chapters 4-11 cover the time from Adam to Abraham, including the accounts of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Chapters 12-50 deal with the family of Abraham, particularly Abraham himself in chapters 12-25, Abraham's grandson Jacob in chapters 26-36, and Jacob's son Joseph in chapters 37-50.

These divisions, and a few others, are very perceptibly marked off in the text by the phrase "Now these are the generations..." or "This is the genealogy..." So, you see in Genesis chapter 5 verse 1, "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam." If you look in chapter 6, verse 9, you will see another division introduced by the phrase, "This is the genealogy of Noah." And so on, down the line.

There are many beautiful scenes in Genesis, from the majestic opening lines, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," to the scene where Abraham seemingly barter with God in chapter 18 over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the culmination of the book where Joseph's brothers appear before him and they don't recognize him in his

Egyptian royal garb. And he weeps as Judah, his older brother, offers himself as a slave in place of the youngest Benjamin with the lines, "Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"

As I said earlier, the purpose of this message is to give you an overview of the entire book in one sermon, so, while we will talk about some of the individual stories in the book, we will not get into all the particulars of those stories as we would in a message that was more focused. Incidentally, if you are visiting with us this morning, this is not a normal type of sermon. Usually, I will spend more time on smaller portions of the text, but, as we begin our study of a particular book, I like to give the overall picture of what the author is trying to say. As well, as we go through this book this morning, I am going to be moving fairly quickly, which might cause some of you some anxiety because you can't keep up. Have no fear. A copy of the manuscript of the sermon will be posted on our website at arundelbaptistchurch.org under the section labeled "Resource" and you will be able to see the broadcast on Facebook as well.

Genesis is 50 chapters long, one of the longer books of the Bible and would take you about 3-4 hours to read in one sitting. As a matter of fact, I do recommend that you try that to familiarize yourself with this book. As you will hopefully see this morning, there are many wonderful stories and lessons to be learned in this book. And while it is good to sort of drill down on a verse or a paragraph, it is also very beneficial to catch the overall theme of the book by taking the time out of your busy schedule to read it all at once. Consider that for a moment. Don't you think that you will get more out of reading the book of Genesis than you did, say, out of what you watched on TV last night? So, I want everyone who is going to commit to reading the book of Genesis in one sitting this week to come down to the front as we sing... No, I'm just kidding. But, in all honesty, you ought to consider diving into this wonderful part of God's revelation of Himself.

I. Title – Genesis (Book of Beginnings)

There are many different things that begin in the book of Genesis. It only makes sense when we consider that before the events depicted in Genesis, there was nothing but God. So, when we think particularly of everything having to do with human history, time, the creation, and all the events of the Old Testament, they find their beginnings on the pages before us.

A. Beginning of Creation

We find, first of all, that Genesis shows us the beginning of creation. In fact, the whole book begins in verse 1 with the phrase, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Chapter 2 begins with the statement, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished."

We also find in chapter 1 the beginning of the human race.

B. Beginning of Human Race

In verse 26, God says,

Genesis 1:26–28 ESV

²⁶ 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." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and

multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Further down in chapter 2, verse 15 we read,

Genesis 2:15–25 ESV

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

And in chapter 3, verse 20, we are told that Adam named his wife Eve because, "she was the mother of all living."

So, in the first 3 chapters we have the account of the creation of our first parents from whom the whole human race is descended.

C. Beginning of Sin

We also see clearly in Genesis 3 the beginning of sin. Up until this point, there was no sin in the world. Man was in a state of innocence, something I dare say most of us long for. But we read in chapter 3, verse 6...

Genesis 3:6–7 ESV

⁶ 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. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And the result of that sin is found ultimately in chapter 3, verse 24...

Genesis 3:24 ESV

²⁴ 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

D. Beginning of the Nation of Israel

Towards the end of Genesis chapter 11, we see the beginning of the nation of Israel, although just in its stage of infancy

Genesis 11:27–12:3 ESV

²⁷ Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. ²⁸ Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹ Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³² The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran. ¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your

kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So, Genesis is all about beginnings. Now, from what you know about the book of Genesis, who would you say is the main character? There are many important people in Genesis, whether it be Adam, Abraham, Joseph, Noah, or others. But the most important character by far, as he is in any other book of the Bible, is God. The book is meant to show us all about our God and His character, as well as to tell us what our response should be. So, as we look at Genesis this morning, I want us to see three things about God. First of all God is Sovereign. Secondly, God judges sin. And thirdly, God is merciful. And then, from how these characters interacted with God, we will pull out what our response should be.

II. Themes of Genesis

A. God is Sovereign

So, firstly, God is Sovereign. Now, of course, when we mention God's sovereignty, immediately some people become defensive, and others perk up their ears ready to cheer. But bear with me for just a moment. Because it is important for us to understand that the sovereignty of God is not something that should be used for academic argumentation. Sometimes we wield God's control of His creation or man's control over his decisions like a metal chair at a WWE event that we want to use to bash our opponents' heads. But it should not be so. The sovereignty of God is beautifully portrayed in Genesis as Him not only being the Creator of all, but also the Lord of all.