

June 1-5, 2020 Edition

The "Big Story" Of The Bible

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Part I: Creation

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: Today we begin a wonderful journey together. Today we begin looking through the greatest story ever told. It's a story that is told in a book called the Bible. This book is the most influential book that has ever been written. It is the number one best seller not just of this year, not just of last year- but the number one best selling book of ALL TIME. In fact, its name just means "book". It's such an amazing book it doesn't even really need a title. People just call it The Book.

It was written down over a period of 1500 years by at least 39 different authors living in different times and sometimes different places. How did they know what to write? Well, God breathed His wisdom and truth into the hearts of men and women who would then write down words that would change the entire course of human history- words that show human beings the way back to Him. And when people who believe this story read it and live it out in their own lives then this book breathes the Spirit of God into them and changes not just their own lives but it changes the entire world.

For the next few months we will focus entirely on the stories of the Old Testament. I don't know if you've ever read it or not but it can be a bit intimidating. So much there that is hard for us to understand. Why is it so cryptic? Why so hard to figure out what's really going on? If you've ever asked those questions you're in good company-

This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NLT)

The prophets themselves who wrote so much of the Old Testament didn't understand what they were telling us. And who could blame them? The story is too wild to be believed. That there could be a God Who loved us so much that even though we constantly rejected Him and chose to go our own way He still cared about us. That our choices had led us to a place where nothing short of the blood of God's own Son could save us- that's how messed up we are. And yet both the Father and the Son were willing to pay that price for us- that's how loved we are. And so the prophets made marks on a page (many pages as it would turn out) that together revealed the secrets of eternity. This book is unlike any other book that you've ever picked up in your life. This book is alive. Living. Active. Sharper than any sword ever made:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)

It may not seem like it at first- but keep reading it and start trying to live out the message it trumpets- to become like the One Who inspired every word contained in it- and you will find a power flowing into your life you never dreamed was possible. In fact, if you find yourself confused as you read this book don't let that stop you. Write down your question but keep going and soon you will find something you understand all too well. Something that is quite understandable but difficult to translate into our lives. But do your best and you will find

yourself becoming more and more like the One Who created everything you see and then looked around and thought that the world could use one of you.

One thing that helps me in understanding the Old Testament is understanding Who Jesus is. Because this book (as amazing as it is) still could never truly convey to us Who God is. And so Jesus came to this earth to show us. To live the life we were created to live and to give His life so that we could find our way back to God. So if you feel like reading spend some time today looking at the story of creation from Genesis chapter one. It's easy to spot... it's at the very beginning.

Tuesday Reflection: Over the next few months we are going to spend each week looking at a story from the Old Testament. We are going to begin with... well the beginning. And we will finish up this first segment of the series on Christmas Eve with the birth of the Baby that everything in the Old Testament was leading up to. We will be using The Jesus Storybook Bible as a rough guide and what you will see (I hope) is that every story in the Old Testament whispers the Name of Jesus. Sometimes it's hard to see- but He's in there. Do you know how I know? Because He said so Himself. In fact the inspiration for this lesson series comes straight from Jesus Himself.

On the day He was resurrected a few of His friends had the privilege to see Him. The problem was they were all women and in the first century the testimony of women was questioned. In fact, women were not allowed to testify in court because their testimony was considered worthless. Interesting then that Jesus chooses to make the first witnesses to His resurrection a group of women. But that's what He did. The women (most of them named Mary) ran back to tell the male disciples who were too afraid to leave the house they were hiding in. Two of the disciples decided they had had enough and were going home. They left the city and were walking to the city of Emmaus. Jesus joins them but He's disguised so they don't recognize Him. This is the second time that day that He disguises Himself. Why did He do it? Nobody knows for sure but I'm thinking that He just went through the toughest few days of His life. He showed the stress a little bit before He was killed but now He's alive, He's back, He defeated the forces of Hell and Death and now He's having the time of His life.

So He asks them what they're talking about and they look at Him like He's crazy. Doesn't He know what's been happening in Jerusalem the last few days? "Tell Me," Jesus says and so they launch into the story of their time with Jesus. They finish their story with this sad conclusion (at least it would be sad if it were true):

Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about?" They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet who said and did many powerful things before God and all the people. Our leaders and the leading priests handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we were hoping that he would free Israel. Besides this, it is now the third day since this happened. And today some women among us amazed us. Early this morning they went to the tomb, but they did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive! So some of our group went to the tomb, too. They found it just as the women said, but they did not see Jesus." Luke 24:19-24 (NCV)

At that point Jesus stops them. He still doesn't let them recognize Him but He says this:

Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to believe everything the prophets said. They said that the Christ must suffer these things before he enters his glory." Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. Luke 24:25-27 (NCV)

Did you catch that last part? Jesus preaches them a sermon pointing out every place in the Old Testament that was about Him. Remember earlier in this devotional when I said that "every story in the Old Testament whispers the Name of Jesus"? That's what I was talking about. Man... what I wouldn't give to read a transcript of that sermon. If only Jesus had a YouTube channel where He streamed all of His sermons. But He doesn't. And we don't have a transcript of that sermon. So we're going to have to do a sort of "Where's Waldo" type of exercise with Jesus in the Old Testament. This part of the series we are calling, Finding Jesus In The Old Testament. When we get to the New Testament we will be calling it something different. Why? Because in the New Testament it's not hard to find Jesus- He's everywhere. On every page. In every story. If the Old Testament whispers Jesus' Name we'll see that New Testament SHOUTS it from the rooftops.

And so we will begin this week with the story of creation. As you read I hope you'll think about where Jesus is in this story of how everything that is came to be. Because He's there... He's in it and through it and if you miss Him you'll miss the point of this whole thing. So today read Genesis chapter 2 if you'd like to spend a few more minutes reading about Jesus and His story.

Wednesday Reflection: Genesis- A Family Tree: Warning: This paragraph includes content that may not be appropriate for all audiences - it is academic enough that some may find it boring. If you couldn't care less about history and just want to get to the "so what?" portion of today's devo, feel free to skip to the last 2 paragraphs... What is the history of Genesis? Genesis means beginning or origin. Many of the events that occur in Genesis happened in prehistoric times. It wasn't until several thousand years later that human beings invented writing.

The book of Genesis was written in Moses' day, along with Exodus (the story of the Israelites exiting Egypt), Leviticus (instructions for the priests and the temple), Numbers (the events during the Israelite's 40 years in the desert) and Deuteronomy (a review of the law and the story of the Moses' last years with the Israelites). Like most ancient people, the Israelites had a rich oral tradition. This means that stories about history and genealogy were valuable identifiers to preliterate cultures, so information important to the community was memorized by its elders or history keepers and passed down from generation to generation. We still find this practice used today. In "The Good Lie," a movie about African refugees, two of the characters use a brief recitation of genealogy to identify each other as long lost family.

So who told these stories to the Israelites? I myself like the scene in the mini-series "The Story of the Bible," where Noah is reciting Genesis to his children as they shiver in the ark while it's being tossed in the waves of the flood. Noah would have heard it from his father who heard it from his father and so on back to Adam. But it wasn't written down until much later- by Moses. Who told Moses the story? We're not sure. Maybe it was one of the Israelites in Egypt. Maybe it was Jethro- Moses' father in law that the Bible says was a priest of God. Maybe God told Moses Himself. We will probably never know but what's important is that Moses was given the story

and he wrote it down probably never imagining how wildly popular and how wildly hated this book would become. Creation is only one of the stories Moses tells in his book.

What I find most fascinating is how completely different Genesis is from the other creation stories of the ancient world. One of my favorites is the story of Marduk and Tiamat, two ancient gods. The earth was created when Marduk rips Tiamat apart into chunks. People were believed to be the offspring of Tiamat's drops of blood. Ewwwww. Even when you get to the Greek gods (much more sophisticated, though still PG-13 for violence and sex) you find a group of competitive, quarreling, war-lords.

There was no expectation of morality among the gods. They were just like humans only more powerful, and took whatever they wanted by sheer force. Humans worshiped them to stay out of trouble. Sacrifices (often human) were used to appease angry gods or warrant favor. So what? Well, here's my take away: The Old Testament has a rich history and was written for multiple audiences spanning thousands of years. It is an amazing piece of literature. The Bible tells us that God inspired the Scriptures. He breathed His very life into it, much as His life was breathed into humans to make us spiritually alive. Genesis is a collaboration between a holy, perfect, and benevolent God and His flawed children. Each of the 66 books of the Bible has a different flavor based on the style and perspective of its human co-author, but God shares a picture of His character and heart in all of them.

The bottom line is that we all have a choice. How we see God and whether we trust Him to be able to speak collaboratively thru primitive men is a matter of faith. Each of us must decide where to place our bets. As for me, a loving God who designed music and beauty is worth believing in wholeheartedly. I can't prove anything, but I've decided to put my faith in my faith and doubt my doubts. Maybe it's because my life works so much better this way. I'm just saying... maybe you should try it ;o) Why not spend some time pondering these scriptures today:

Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding. Proverbs 9:10 (LB)

For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him. Colossians 1:16 (MES)

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for... part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone. Ephesians 1:11 (MES)

Thursday Reflection: Creation- it all begins with these words:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1 (NLT)

And what follows is one of the most beautiful poems or songs ever written. It may not necessarily look like poetry to us because it doesn't rhyme but that's Hebrew poetry for you. It has all the markings of a poem. But we can't really talk about creation without talking about the elephant in the room, right? As soon as I read those words. As soon as I use the word, "creation", everybody immediately has the same question come to mind- what about the big bang and evolution. Hasn't science proven the creation account is a myth? Or has it? Does the creation account in the Bible exclude the possibility of evolution? It's sad to me that I have to

spend the first precious few minutes of this series talking about that debate but that's where we are, right?

So what about it? Do I have to believe Genesis chapter 1 is a literal explanation of how God did it to be a child of His? And if so does that mean I have to check my intellect at the door when I come to worship Him? I don't think so... Historically in the Christian faith there have been 4 basic ways that Christians have looked at Genesis chapter one.

1. It is a literal, historical account of how God created the universe. He did it in 6- 24 hours periods of time and anything that science says that contradicts or challenges that idea is just wrong. The dating methods scientists use are flawed or God hid things like dinosaur bones that seemed to be millions of years old and ancient seeming rocks in the ground to mess with the scientists that He knew would one day come along.
2. The second way some more modern Christians have looked at this is that it's just a myth. That the Bible is not the inspired word of God. It's a great book but it was put together by regular people who didn't always know what they were doing and they showed their hand by slapping Genesis chapter one together with Genesis chapter 2. If you've ever read them side by side and tried to unify the stories you'll know that it'll drive you crazy. There are just some seeming inconsistencies there that seem to make it obvious that the Bible is contradicting itself. I don't believe it is myself but there are those who think that.
3. The third way some people will deal with the seeming inconsistencies between the idea of creation and evolution is by pointing out that until the fourth day there is no sun and moon. The day and night are already around but the sun and moon don't come til day four. Maybe that means that the first three days weren't literal 24 hour days. Maybe that means God used the process of evolution to create? It's an interesting theory, isn't it? Something to think about anyways.
4. The fourth way some Christians have handled Genesis chapter one and how it seems to differ from Genesis chapter two is by saying that one of these accounts is a historical account and one is a song or a poem. They don't exactly measure up because one explains how God created the universe and one explains why God created the universe. And there are other examples of this in the Bible. In Judges chapter 4 we read the historical account of how Deborah and Barak defeated the armies of the Canaanites. Then in Judges chapter 5 Deborah sings a song about the victory. The two accounts differ quite a bit. Maybe most glaringly is when Deborah says the stars came down out of their orbits and fought against the enemy. Did the stars really come down? No. But in her song Deborah takes poetic license and says something that isn't literally true. In one account we're told how God gave Israel the victory and in the other we're told why.

Same thing in Exodus chapter 14 and 15. In Exodus chapter 14 we read about the historical account of the Israelites crossing over and through the Red Sea. In chapter 15 Miriam sings a song about it. They are different accounts. Why? Because chapter 15 is a song or a poem. In one account we're told about how God did it and in the other we're told why God did it. Over the last 2,000 years of Christian history there have been many who believe the same thing about the creation accounts. One account tells us how God created and the other tells us why. And it isn't just rogues on the edges of the church that have believed this- Augustine (one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church), Thomas Aquinas, and Anselm of Canterbury are just a

few big names of people who believed that Genesis chapter one was a poem instead of a literal historical telling of how God achieved the miracle of creation.

They all agreed on one thing, however. They all agreed God did it.

So there are different ways of looking at the concept of creation if you're a follower of Jesus. Maybe at this point you're confused. Maybe at this point you're wondering, "so what do you think, pastor Ed?" I've spent a great deal of time thinking about this and for me I guess you could say I feel strongly many different ways (how's that for taking a stand?). I guess for me it comes down to a fifth way of looking at the question of how God achieved the miracle of creation- I don't really care.

I know there are some for whom this question is the most important question in our culture and devote their entire lives to proving that creation happened in the way they believe it happened. If that's where you are then God bless you. I firmly believe we all need to be pursuing the ministry that God gives us and if creation science is yours then work at it with everything you have. But for me, this question just gets in the way of what I would consider my primary mission on this earth to be- get rid of every objection people may have to investigating the claims of Jesus so they can fall in love with Him and devote their lives to Him. What I've noticed is in our society people want to argue about creation -vs- evolution and they never get to the question of Jesus. When I came to Jesus at 20 years of age I was skeptical of the idea that God created everything. But I was desperate to save my life and I hoped Jesus might be able to save me so I started doing my best to follow Him. And over time as I saw His power unleashed in my own life it became much more believable to me that He created the universe. Today I have no doubt about it.

I had a friend who always wanted to debate me on creation. He'd tell me that he was a man of science and facts and that he could shoot down any argument I used about creation. He was extremely frustrated with me when he asked how I thought it all happened and I just said, "I don't know how He did it. I don't really care. All I know is that I believe He did it." I'll never forget his response- "how am I supposed to argue with that?" You're not. That's the point. Although he did try. He said, "you believe God was always just here? That He had no beginning and no end?" I told him I did believe that. His response? "Well that's totally non scientific... doesn't make any sense at all." I asked him how he thought it happened then. He told me all about the big bang and the cosmic accident that resulted in our existence. So I asked him this question: "so where did all the stuff that blew up come from?" He was confused by the question so I clarified it. "If there was a big bang that knocked this stuff from one end of the universe to the other and resulted in the "creation" of earth, animals, humans and everything else... where did the stuff that went "bang" come from?" He said it was just always there. I told him that didn't sound scientific at all to me. He just walked away shaking his head saying I was hopeless.

But that's the thing. I grew up believing that if I believed in God then I was living by faith (translated as "fantasy" by my friend) whereas people like my friend were living lives of science and rationality and facts and data. But now I realize that it's all faith. Even with my friend the evidence ends far before proof can be arrived at. That's why they still call the Big Bang "Theory" and the "Theory" of Evolution. They're theories because the scientists can't prove they

happened. And really, isn't "theory" just another word for faith? In Romans chapter one the apostle Paul says:

The righteous will live by faith. Romans 1:17 (NIV)

And that's true. The righteous will live by faith but what nobody ever says out loud is, so will everybody else. We are, all of us, living by faith whether we believe in a Creator or whether we believe it's all just a cosmic accident. You can't prove either position. So where does that leave us? Exactly where God wants us. Does it matter what we think about how He created the universe and us? Sure. So then how does He want me to treat people who disagree with me? With mercy:

Be merciful to those who doubt. Jude 1:22 NIV)

So treat people who disagree with you with mercy. Some of you may be confused right now. Some of you may be angry because I'm not championing your particular view of Genesis chapter one. All I know is that if I get to Heaven and find out God created everything in 6 literal days I won't be mad at God. I'll be blown away. And I'm not saying He didn't do it in 6 literal days, ok. If God created everything and I believe He did then would it have been a huge trick for Him to do it in 144 hours? I don't think so. But if when I get to Heaven I find out God did it all over billions of years I'm not going to go and find Him and tell Him He's wrong. Not my place. Not my department. God did it however He did it.

Now comes the part of the question that is truly important to me- what does it all mean? We didn't have space to put that in this set of devotionals. If you're curious to learn more about the reason God created us head over to the Riverside website and click on the "Video Lessons" box and you watch the lesson for yourself. But here's a spoiler- He did it all for you. Why? Because He loves you. Everything else you read in the Bible will require that knowledge to properly understand God's plan.

Friday Reflection: A Woman's Walk through Creation- (in the interest of full disclosure this is a very feminine interpretation and paraphrase of the story of creation as taken from Genesis 1 & 2, John 1 & 1 John... most of you will like it but you've been warned ;o)

The following is a synthesis based on Genesis, John and 1st John by Judy:

Before the beginning of time and space there was a Sacred Being of Love. And although this Love was united in a single Identity, He lived in community with Himself. The Being of Love, the Word of Love, and the Spirit of Love existed together in harmony and collaboration. There was no hierarchy or competition or separation between them. There was only Love. Love spoke to Love. Love honored Love. Love was with Love. And Love was Love.

Love spoke and His Language created all matter. The Word of Love formed the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren and empty except for the Spirit of Love, Love's Consciousness. She brooded over the earth and witnessed its dark waters.

Love spoke again and said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The Word of Love became light for the world. Love witnessed this and called it good. So Love continued His poem of creation - line by line, stanza by stanza. The Word of Love designed lands and seas, plants and

animals, seasons and life-cycles. It was all beautiful and Love found delight in each of His creations.

Then Love said, "Let us make human beings in our image." So men and women were created to be the children of Love. Male and female He made them to reflect the nature and character of Love. And Love breathed His own Breath into the first human. It was Spirit of Love who gave us consciousness. She brought us to life.

My favorite thing about Genesis 1 is that we get a glimpse of God talking to Himself. See, it's not just me. God collaborates and communicates when He creates. I used a feminine article (she) for the Holy Spirit because the Old Testament name for the Spirit of God is a feminine word (Ruach). Besides, it's always chicks that brood over their nests and wait for life to hatch.

God had the power to make it all in one big bang, but He gives us poetry instead. After each step He admires His creation. He doesn't critique or find flaws or say, "maybe I could do better." He takes it one step at a time, with each step building synergistically on the one before. He created plants to breathe knowing that mammals would find life in their oxygen rich exhale. He designed harmony and interdependence. He demonstrates rhythm and a gentle pace. He makes appreciation a daily priority. And when it's all done, He rests.

In the ancient world (where the powerful were always grabbing land and goods from anyone less powerful) a ruler was truly great if he could rest over his land. That meant that he was powerful enough that he could hold his kingdom without genuine threat. God taught His children that rest naturally follows work, and that it provides the opportunity for appreciation and celebration. I find the Bible's origin story to be a profoundly peaceful and beautiful reminder of who God is and how spiritual beings dance through the creative process. I never argue about creation. I just read it and find myself more at home.