

In the Beginning . . . by Pastor Marty

*For this month's newsletter, I am posting the first few pages of the first chapter of the new book I am writing: **Reality of the Incarnation**. This book will examine and discuss how the incarnation actually permeates Christian theology from beginning to end; it is not just a singular event that took place over two thousand years ago and is limited to being a historical fact. God has been in the habit of "incarnating" matter from the very beginning, and He will continue to do so until the new heavens and earth have appeared to us. Incarnational reality—a term associated commonly with Leanne Payne but a principle infusing the works of Agnes Sanford, C. S. Lewis, and others—is the foundation of the gospel and God's interactions with His people. Its core relationship to biblical truth and reality is precisely why the Early Church reacted so fiercely against Gnostic concepts and why that heresy has continued to plague the Christian Church since its inception on the day of Pentecost. Gnosticism forever divorced spirit and matter, negating the nature of God and His creation, and traces of its dualistic ideals are still percolating in numerous theological streams present today . . . and not just at the fringes of orthodoxy! My hope is that this book will reveal this foundational truth in a way that makes it comprehensible to us all so the body of Christ can again reclaim the practical aspects of the incarnation for today's world. The beginning of the book looks at Genesis 1-3 to examine the Holy Spirit's involvement in the creation.*

* * * * *

In the prologue to the human story, we read about the origins of the universe. God, for His own reasons, manifested Himself as the Creator of everything that is. There was not very much of anything before that point. He had already made angels at least a bit before our earth came onto the scene, but we have very few details about that process because it is—to use a phrase from C. S. Lewis—someone else's story. Instead, we are given a glimpse into our own story. It is easy to glean the basics of the six days of creation, the fall of man and woman, and the start of civilization as we know it. However, we can learn a lot more from a careful reading of these verses than is commonly realized. God has hidden an eternity worth of treasures within His Word to us, and there is always more that we can find among those gilded pages.

Before we begin, it is important to recognize that not all hidden things are bad, nor are all revealed things good. Proverbs 25:2 tells us, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter." There is a great deal of truth in God's Word that must be searched out because it is not immediately apparent. This is the positive aspect of something being hidden: its being discovered. It is human nature to find joy in discovery. From the earliest days outside the womb, an infant takes great delight in the game of "peek-a-boo" with parents and others: hands cover the eyes for a moment before suddenly being removed to reveal that the person is still there. It is debatable whether the adult or the infant loves the game more. Indeed, those of us who have pets will recognize that even animals are inherently predisposed to the game of hide and seek . . . and not just from a predator/prey perspective.

This tells us something about God's nature: He has made all creation to love discovery, and this shows that He loves to reveal things. Eternity itself will be an unending cycle of God revealing more of Himself to us while we discover more about Him. Nevertheless, there is also a hidden knowledge not described positively in the Bible: it is occult, illegal, and destructive. It may seem confusing or difficult to identify one type of hidden knowledge from another until we recognize one very simple rule: good

knowledge is hidden *expressly for us to find* as we draw closer to God and grow in our personal relationship with Him; it always makes Him the center of our lives and travels with humility, faith, love, and obedience. Ultimate truth never requires us to force Scripture to say what we want to hear; it becomes clear as we just stop and listen.

Correctly interpreting the creation account of Genesis is an issue of profound debate within theological circles today just as it has been since imperfect human beings first tried to demythologize the Bible, deciding they had the inherent inerrant wisdom and knowledge to authoritatively identify what was real and what was not. Are the first few chapters of the first book of Moses intended to be a history or an allegory? They are certainly written in a style of Hebrew poetry. However, if we assume that this automatically means they are fantasy, we are being both presumptuous and ignorant of ancient culture. We may categorize Hebrew poetry in the same class with Greek, Roman, or Sumerian epics, but doing so repeats the same error as equating dumb idols with the Living God: there is a distinct difference between a block of wood and the I AM THAT I AM who created everything. When we acknowledge inspiration, which is a whole lot more than simply making something historically factual, we find that our obligation is no less toward poetry than prose. Jesus regularly spoke in the genre of parables, but instead of making His words non-factual, it added almost infinite levels of meaning and responsibility to the message. If Genesis 1-3 is historically factual, we can find more than enough to tell us what we are required to know; however, if those chapters are allegorical, then even more is required of us because it means that every single word was chosen with a very specific purpose in mind.

Jumping slightly ahead, it says that after God created (formed, fashioned, and breathed life into) our first father and mother, He would walk with them in the garden in the cool of the day. If this is historical, then it means God manifested Himself in physical form on a daily basis to commune with the pinnacle stewards of His creation. If it is allegorical, then it means there was a time when He was so tangible, real, and present to human beings that the only way to describe it was using the image of a continually-recurring theophany. This is important! We CANNOT read this the way we read pagan mythologies, fairy tales, or fantasy books; these are words inscribed by the hands of someone who knew God face-to-face and heard Him speaking with a thundering voice out of a flaming fire. Even if we doubt that Moses wrote these words as God revealed to him what took place, we still need to concede that the author who did write them believed that this God was THE GOD . . . and He was not to be trifled with by reporting false accounts to His Name! It is easy to make up stories and say whatever comes to mind about a god who does not exist, but when that being is not only omniscient and omnipotent but also omnipresent and watching what is being written in real time, it takes on a whole new and terrifying level of care. This was the worldview of the biblical writers—irrespective of our personal opinion on the reality (or lack thereof) of the supernatural. The only other option is to believe that the authors of Scripture were simply writing what they made up in their heads as a positive message intended to encourage people in their culture to live better lives, similar to what we find in the works of Mark Twain, Shakespeare, or Charles Dickens. If we view the biblical accounts the way we do children's fables, it would be better for us not to be Christians.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God's Word tells us this. This may seem somewhat simplistic or basic, but we do not want to miss anything being revealed to us. Making assumptions can lead us down a wrong path, so it is important to look at everything. The first question we have to address is, "what beginning does this reference?" It certainly is not the beginning of *God's*

existence, for we know that God always was, always is, and always will be. This is not the beginning of His story; it is the beginning of *our* story. Every single word from the “in” to the “amen” have been provided here for our instruction. However, we also should not immediately presume that the story is exclusively about us or for our benefit; we may be significant characters, but we are not the only characters. A great deal is going on in the first act of this divinely-narrated play, and every line counts. To paraphrase what Jesus told us, not the tiniest dot of an “i” or the tragically neglected Oxford comma will become irrelevant until this whole heavens and earth pass away and become new—and even then, His Word will still remain in Heaven. It behooves us, therefore, to study the script with great care.

In the beginning, *God created the heavens and the earth*. This is the thesis statement for the days of creation. There are two primary schools of thought associated with this verse. The first suggests that this is all of creation summarized in a single sentence. This view believes that the remainder of the chapter is simply expanding on this sentence. This perspective has support when we look at chapter two, for that chapter expands on everything that took place on the sixth day of creation mentioned in chapter one, and all of chapter three zooms into two brief interactions between the man, the woman, the serpent, and God. The second perspective does not deny the idea of expanded narrative, but it perceives a period of time taking place between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. This view suggests that God created the earth and the cosmos first, and the remainder of the chapter explains the subsequent steps. In other words, Genesis 1:1 is a description of God creating the universe and the earth, and Genesis 1:2 then details His terraforming our planet. The interval in between the two may be either a short or a long period of time, depending upon how one reads it. Those who believe in a pre-Adamic creation and destruction often hold this view as do those who believe in theistic evolution—though for very different reasons. We will see how this verse is best understood as we proceed.

Scripture tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. The word “heavens” here could have a few different meanings. When we use the word “heaven” in our vocabulary, we sometimes mean the place where God’s throne is located, surrounded by cherubim, seraphim, and all the hosts of heaven; it can also mean the sky around our planet where clouds float, rain falls, and birds fly; there is also the context indicating the realm of sun, moon, stars, and all the other celestial bodies. Some secular-minded scholars suppose that our first ancestors did not recognize any difference between these, viewing everything “up” as equal, but that argument presupposes a secular-anthropology-based primitive worldview not supported by readings in Genesis, Psalms, or the prophets. If we are trusting God’s Word to tell us what we need to know, then we have to actually trust the God who inspired it as well as the work that He inspired along with the people He inspired to write it.

And the earth was formless and void. The context of the two Hebrew words “formless and void” suggests that “the heavens” in the previous verse probably does not mean the realm of the cherubim, seraphim, and angelic hosts. Instead, it seems primarily to be dealing with our physical universe. The “formless” and “void” tell us a great deal about the state of the world at this time. The most basic definitions for this pairing suggest an empty area with no recognizable structure. In the context of landscapes, it can mean a deserted wasteland; if we consider this is describing the nature of the cosmos before God had done anything, it can mean empty space. This perhaps raises in our minds an image of the universe before the big bang when nothing as yet existed. Alternately, it means that our planet was present, but it was nothing more than a huge rock floating in space. Either way, we see that nothing of substance had yet been created.