

## WHAT THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT - WHERE AM I IN GOD'S BIG STORY?

### Beginnings

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

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Here's our problem when it comes to Bible knowledge. How do we get our minds around this library of 66 books? We tend to see the Bible in isolated bits, like pearls rolling around in a drawer rather than being strung on a necklace. A psalm, a story by Jesus, some words of St. Paul's. But we don't know how to string all those pearls into a collective whole. As we move through this series, "What The Bible Is All About," I'll try to share with you resources to use in getting the overall picture of the Bible. By the way, *Twible* (a cross between Twitter and Bible), summarizes all the Bible's chapters in 140 characters or less, giving a quick, witty overview of God's Word. There are other, more traditional resources out there as well, if you're serious about an overview of the Bible.

Here is a great quote from N.T. Wright: "[The Bible is] a big book, full of big stories with big characters. They have big ideas...and make big mistakes. It's about God and greed and grace; about life, lust, laughter, and loneliness. It's about birth, beginnings, and betrayal; about siblings, squabbles, and sex; about power and prayer and prison and passion. And that's only Genesis" [*Simply Christian*, p. 173].

*The New York Times* once asked contemporary writers to name the most memorable first lines of a book. Robert Ludlum chose *A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Gloria Vanderbilt named Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "In the middle of the journey of my life I came to myself in a dark forest..." Someone chose Melville's *Moby Dick*: "Call me Ishmael." But Herman Wouk asserted that by far the most regal first words to any book were, "In the beginning, God created..." The title of the first book of the Bible, "Genesis," comes from a word meaning beginnings. It's the origins of the earth, of life, of sin, family, faith. (By the way, baseball is mentioned in the Bible: "In the big inning, God created..."). Sorry!

Worthy of note is that God did not grunt or strain. God spoke the world into existence, the writer's way of saying that when God got ready to create, nothing stood in God's way. A sort of Captain Picard from Star Trek: "Make it so." A movie director barking, "Lights. Camera. Action."

Many of you will recognize the name of Francis Collins, the scientist who wrote *The Language of God*. He was not raised in a home of faith. He became an atheist and a brilliant scientist. Somewhere along the way, he came to faith. When he finished his medical training he was asked to head up the Human Genome Project and was able to unravel all the details of our DNA instruction book, and he said it was actually for him a worship experience, a feeling that he had glimpsed a tiny bit into the mind of God [*Sojourners*, Feb., 2010, p. 34].

In ancient days, there were other creation accounts circulating. One of them, the *Enuma Elish*, was a Babylonian creation story that depicts humans almost as an afterthought. And they are there only to run errands for the gods. But in Genesis, there is this dignity assigned to humans. Honor! And with it, Genesis reminds that what God creates, God will provide for and love and sustain. Many of us here today are experiencing beginnings--of school, job, relationship, following Jesus. We need to know in those beginnings that God is with us and will sustain us and provide for us.

I mention this because very soon the Bible story sin, brokenness and failure enter. By Genesis 3, Adam and Eve disobey and run from God. There enters fragmentation, fear, guilt. And then by Genesis 4, more tragedy. Murder. But not just murder. Brother murdering brother. But a third piece to it. Brother murdering brother over church issues! (one brother's sacrifice was not acceptable to God and the other's was). But through it all, God's grace. So here's the message from Genesis: God made us and we are so noble! We are such a mess! God loves us anyway and fixed things!

Is it just me, or does the world seem to be spinning out of control? International tensions in the Middle East, in Ukraine, Iraq, racial and class tensions in our own country, a seemingly boiling cauldron of anxiety. People plagued with a strange mixture of busyness and boredom. Is it all going anywhere? Does it matter? Parker Palmer has posited some serious questions along these lines: Does my life matter? Do I have gifts which the world needs? Whom and what may I trust? How can I rise above my fears? How can I deal with suffering? [*The Heart of Democracy*, p. 124]. Perhaps one of the missing pieces in our lives is a sense of God's grand design, God's big idea.

For those of us who follow Jesus, this is answered in Eph. 1:9-10: "He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth." Notice with me how the creation theme runs throughout the Bible. When John's Gospel wanted to tell about Jesus, it begins, "In the beginning..." (John 1:1). When Paul strained for language to talk about the transforming power of Christ, he said, "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation..." (2 Cor. 5:17). Reread Gen. 1:1-2 and apply it spiritually. Perhaps our hearts are formless, void, empty, a desert wasteland. And the Spirit of God generously hovers. And sweeps across the face of the deep. And then, Life that is life indeed! Make it so!