

In the time between the two temples, the annual Torah Reading Cycle was set up and standardized. The prophetic portions came next and they are also standardized. The New Testament portions have not been standardized, but as believers in the Messiah, we should be studying the whole Bible from cover to cover. We keep the Torah at the centre of our annual studies, because it is the foundation upon which the rest of the Scriptures is based.

In a traditional synagogue, Simchat Torah is celebrated the day after Shemini Atzeret (the eighth day) because we have come to the end of one annual Torah reading cycle and are about to embark on another year of study. Because Simchat Torah is not a biblical festival, we observe it on the first Sabbath after Shemini Atzeret. This year I want to combine Simchat Torah with a study of the first portion in Genesis (Bereshit). We will not be following the service outline in the Makzor, but our rejoicing will be just as intense and real, because this coming year, it is once again time to dig deep into the Word.

We have had a good time in the worship portion of our service, and we have done the first set of Torah blessings. Now, we will do four things. First, I will give you a meditation on Genesis 1:1-6:8. Next we will read several passages of the Bible, both from the beginning and the end and a few in the middle. After these readings, we will roll the scroll back to the beginning and we will promenade it around the sanctuary seven times. We will each take turns holding the scroll and then we will put the scroll back in the ark and do the final Torah blessings. After the Aaronic Benediction, we will hand out bags of chocolates to the children and go downstairs for a nosh.

The first eleven chapters of the Torah are both the oldest portion of the Bible and are a series of songs and poems. Just because they contain lots of symbols and literary language, does not mean that their message is not just as true and important as the rest of the Bible. But let me give you a word of caution that I have frequently used as we study both what the Bible says and what it means.

Symbolic language paints word pictures and the meaning of these passages is not always found in the literal meaning of the words it uses. Our Messiah is both a lion and a lamb and these animals are used symbolically to highlight different features of His ministry. The trees do not literally clap their hands and the mountains do not really leap like rams. Israel is a country which flows with milk and honey because it was a land of plenty and not one whose rivers flowed with literal milk and actual honey.

The message of the Torah and the Gospel will be taken to the ends of the earth, but the Bible does not teach that our planet is really flat and it does not teach that the ocean actually roars. When believers take symbols literally, they destroy their credibility and people will not listen to anything else they have to say.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are songs and poems, which tell the truth with powerful images and today I want to take you through the first set of these word pictures in the first six chapters of Genesis.

The book begins by giving us two different creation accounts, but neither account contradicts the other. They just give different aspects of the wonder of all that G-d has created and of our place in the order which YHVH has created.

Creation did not take six literal days and it was not finished in a series of stages or days. There are two main purposes for using the symbol of six days. First, G-d built time into the fabric of creation and YHVH brought forth an orderly creation where no chaos or confusion exists. YHVH is L-rd of the universe, from one end to the other and His power sustains every particle, from the tiniest atom, to the great clouds of cosmic dust that extend for million of light years.

G-d precedes creation and is the only uncreated eternal being in the universe. His mighty word holds the universe together and if the truth be told, the first creation account has seven days, not just six. Chapters and verses were added to the Bible after it was written and the scholar who set up the first chapter of Genesis did not want to give the Sabbath the position of prominence it deserves.

Genesis 2:1-3 actually belongs to chapter one and the Sabbath was given from the very beginning of Creation and cannot be changed and should not be violated. It remains the seventh day of rest in honour of the amazing Creation which YHVH created before He rested (finished). It may not be possible to correct the error in future translations of the Bible, but the first three verses of Genesis chapter two should always be seen as the conclusion of the first Creation account in chapter one. The ones who first put chapter divisions in the Bible may have messed with how the Creation account is supposed to end, but they did not altar any of the actual content.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 paints a beautiful picture of all the wonder and all the order which our universe contains and each day of the account highlights different aspects of Creation. The first account does not tell us when Creation occurred or how YHVH brought everything into being. Modern evolution presents a strange, long progression of how the universe supposedly came into being and does not really tell us how old the universe is or how it was put together. Nothing in the universe contradicts anything which the first creation account teaches, but everything in the universe contradicts what evolution is trying to teach.

The Big Bang Theory is one of the strangest myths which people have made up. We know that all the natural wonder of living creatures did not evolve when life somehow crawled of the cosmic slime several billion of years ago. True science should be based on tangible evidence and true spirituality should be based on what the Bible actually teaches.

Let's move on to Genesis chapter two. In chapter one, man was created male and female and in chapter two the mystery of gender is explored. In this second creation account, man was the first living creature into whose nostrils G-d breathed the breath of life (2:7). G-d then planted a garden, which the Bible calls Eden (delights in Hebrew) and put man in the garden to tend it. It is interesting to note that the boundaries of this garden make it roughly the same size as Solomon's empire.

The Bible describes a garden of delights and the kingdom of Israel was set up where this garden used to stand. The flood reshaped our planet, but YHVH wants mankind to return to the Paradise that we were excluded from so long ago.

After giving the boundaries of the Garden of Delights, G-d brings all the animals before man to be named, but among them, he found no helper similar to himself. G-d put Adam to sleep and formed our mother Eve from one of his ribs and the two genders became a team.

A lot has been said about the role of gender with many commentators wrongly putting man in a position of dominance over the woman. The Bible describes the two genders as equals. The two form an echad (composite unity or plural singularity) and the race begins to multiply as a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife. Both genders are made in the image of G-d and from the beginning there was no question of one being superior to or dominating over the other. Gender is a gift and not a disability.

The rich symbolism of the Bible can teach us as much as when this document is speaking literally. Neither creation account is meant to be taken literally, but that does not diminish the truth that each one is teaching. In the first account, G-d created everything out of nothing and the whole universe functions under the changeless laws which He established. It took no time at all for G-d to bring the entire universe into being and the use of seven days really indicates that He wants to be in charge of how we use the time which He has given to us.

The second creation account introduces the mystery of gender and teaches that men and women are similar to each other and are equal partners in the team to which they belong. Taking the man's rib is a symbol of the equality and of the full humanity of both men and woman. Having the man name all the animals, is a symbol which declares that mankind alone possesses the full image of the Creator.

The Bible talks of a literal creation which both creation accounts sing about, without really telling us when and how the universe came into being. The Hebrew calendar supposedly takes us back to the moment of creation and many evangelicals believe that the world will only last for seven thousand years. Neither group adequately distinguishes between literal and literary truth in the Bible. We are told not to add to or take away from what the Bible teaches (Deut. 4:2 and 5:22). Taking symbols literally is both adding to what the Bible actually teaches and is taking away the meaning of some of the mighty word pictures (symbols) it uses.

Chapter Three is a sad song about the fall of our ancestors. They became sinners by choice and not by nature. G-d allowed the serpent to enter the garden in order to test our first ancestors. The two of them were tempted once and fell. In the wilderness, our Messiah was tempted three times and did not sin. The devil tempted the woman first because she was the stronger member of the team. His method of attack was to get our first ancestors to doubt what G-d had said to them. He is still in the same business today.

When the woman fell and ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, her husband was standing right beside her and also took a bite. In their fallen condition, if our ancestors had taken fruit from the tree of life, they would have become permanent sinners forever, with no chance of redemption. Instead they were excluded from the garden and the tree of life was guarded by angels wielding fiery swords. They did not suddenly become sinners by nature, because each of us are sinners by choice. We were born to choose good and to reject evil. Over the years, our race has not done a very good job, but YHVH only lets it go so far before He intervenes.

Our first father and mother become mortal and had to grow their food by the sweat of their brow. The woman was told that she would have pain in child birth and that she would want her husband, more than he wants her. It was a tough penalty but the war between the seed of the woman and the serpent it would crush, is the first mention in the Bible of our Messiah's victory over the enemy. Have you let the Messiah crush the serpent in your life?

Chapter four begins with an unspecified amount of time and Adam and Eve have two sons. Nothing about their childhood is mentioned, but when they become adults, Cain becomes a gardener, while Abel becomes a shepherd. Some kind of sacrificial system was in place where animals were to be offered as a means of worshipping G-d. In defiance of the rules, Cain offered the fruit of the soil to YHVH, while Abel correctly offered up an animal from his flock. Though Cain had broken the rules, he had not yet sinned. Mistakes are not sin, nor are bad decisions, unless we do something to cover them up and pretend that we have not made a mistake (see Isaiah 5:20).

When Cain blew it, he was upset and G-d appeared to him to help him work it out. He says when you make a mistake, sin is crouching at the door of your heart and life and you must dominate it and not let it dominate you (4:6,7). How good are you at keeping sin at the door and not inviting sin to come in to your heart and life and sit on the couch?

Rather than deal with his mistake, Cain kills his brother and goes off into the land of wandering (Nod in Hebrew- 4:16). We are not told how long he wandered for, or when it was that he came back. But, with the birth of Seth, Adam and Eve and the other patriarchs had many children, so the wife that Cain took was either one of his sisters, nieces or cousins.

Marrying close relatives was not a problem yet, but all of the children of Adam and Eve, would have married each other until there were enough other options for them to marry out of their kinship group. At the beginning, this may be one of the reasons it took them so long to get married and start having children. A brief partial genealogy of the descendants of Cain is given and some of them became people of renown (giants) and others were quite talented. This genealogy represents the sinful core of humanity that grew up among the children of Cain. Not much is said about them, but there are indications that they were not upright people who sought YHVH.

Chapter five gives us the genealogy of ten patriarchs who were the ancestors of Noah and they represented the righteous core of humanity which wanted to seek YHVH. It was during this time that the earth was populated and we learn in the beginning of chapter six that the human population of our planet was increasingly given over to sin and violence. The righteous core was shrinking and the sinful core was filling the earth with sin and darkness.

Chapter 6:1 introduces two groups of people: the righteous core who are called the sons of G-d and the sinful core which is called the daughters of men. Some pretty silly things are said about the identity of both the sons of G-d and the daughters of men. Some feel that the sons of G-d were angels who began to intermarry with mankind. There are at least two major problems with this position.

There is no indication in the Scriptures that angels possess gender or that they are all male. Matt.22:30 says that at the resurrection we shall no longer seek husbands or wives because we will be like the angels of G-d who do not procreate or even possess gender. Paul goes on to say that in the Messiah, there are no more distinctions like gender, because we are all one in Him (Gal. 3:28). Both genders equally and fully contain the image of our Creator and the later dominance of the male gender over the female gender is a product of the fall and was never the intention of YHVH. There are many differences between how men and women think, but each gender is supposed to complement the other and should not be made to feel superior or inferior. Men and women are definitely different, but we are equals in the eyes of G-d. Feminists and chauvinists are both wrong.

Some do not agree that the daughters of men represent the descendants of Cain, while the sons of G-d are the descendants of Seth, who called upon YHVH. When the two separate groups began to intermarry, many of the righteous sons of G-d were pulled into the darkness which reigned among the daughters of men. At some point, G-d put a temporal limit on how far He would let things go as He continued to exercise patience. He says that His Spirit would not contend endlessly with the growing darkness of the human race. He said He would give mankind another 120 years to get their act together before He would destroy all of those who had succumbed to the darkness which the sinful core was promoting all through every part of human society.

We learn from I Peter 3:20 that this divine patience lasted for the 120 years it took Noah to finish building the ark. While I am always suspicious of most of the wild and improbable things which evolutionary scientists teach, there is objective scientific evidence that our continents continue to drift. Before the drift started the earth only had one continent, which science has called "Pangea". We are not told when and why this drifting of the continents started, but it makes sense that it started during the great flood. While it was happening, Noah and his family floated above the drowning world in the safety of the ark.

The ark which Noah was building was a long term prophetic warning of the judgment which was going to come upon all of mankind, unless men abandoned the darkness of sin and began to seek G-d. Mankind continued to slide into total darkness, despite Noah's warnings.

This passage does mention a special group of people who are initially called giants. There are no people alive today who descend from these giants because they were all drowned in the great flood. Were they actually monstrous men of great height or does the term used here refer to another kind of stature? Gen. 6:4 refers to these people as heroes who were famous in antiquity. Some of their names are given in chapter four (Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain). They were not necessarily men of great physical stature, they were heroes who became famous for what they did.

Now nowhere in the Bible does it say that it is wrong to mix gene pools and we are not required to only marry within our own ethnic or racial grouping. Good things can happen when racially mixed marriages occur. Children born in a mixed marriage are usually stronger and smarter because they combine the best genetic strengths of both groups. Hitler and other white supremacists are wrong. Racial diversity creates stronger, better people.

Unfortunately, these special heroes of antiquity did nothing to slow down the progress of the sin and darkness which was beginning to cover the globe. Especially gifted people should use their gifts to help make the world a better place. History is full of stories about how especially gifted people made all kinds of positive contributions to the generation they lived in. Unfortunately, there is no indication in the Scriptures that the gifted descendants of the daughters of men and the sons of G-d had this objective in mind. They may have been called giants and heroes, but their gifting did nothing to slow down that which would eventually destroy the human race.

The beginning of chapter six goes on to say that, except for the family of Noah, the rest of mankind was given over completely to wickedness and evil. The chapter does not go into any detail about the nature of this evil and this wickedness, except to say that it had become universal. The righteous core of mankind was reduced to eight people.

It is likely that the population of Noah's world numbered into the millions, but they all came under the power of the sinful core. Mankind had likely turned into a global version of Sodom and Gomorrah. The same is happening to our world as we speak. Are you aware that no politician stands a chance of getting elected unless he or she openly expresses support for the LGBT agenda? People could even be arrested and charged with racism for speaking out against homosexuality. Also, at least in Canada and the US, society is deeply divided between those who support the right to abort babies in their mother's womb and those who want to defend the rights of babies growing in their mother's womb? I support Babies' rights!

The sinful core has not yet grown to the place where the children of the righteous core are taken from us, as they put us into prison camps. The Nazis nearly won WWII and the horrors which were committed were merely the enemy flexing his muscles, as he prepares to sink our world into a second global darkness. Dig deep into the Word and don't be taken in.

Our passage does indicate that the violence and wickedness had somehow infected most of the creatures on the planet and our race had passed the point of no return. G-d was deeply grieved by this horrible turn of events and the Bible does say that G-d repented for having made man on the earth.

When He created man, G-d did not make a mistake and committed no sin for which He had to repent. He was full of regret because the human race had become completely filled with evil and violence. He had given them every advantage as they had spread across the globe. In Proverbs, Solomon writes that wisdom stands at the entrance of noisy places and makes its voice heard (Prov. 1:20-23). The ten patriarchs who lived before the flood were generations of prophets who tried to rescue mankind from totally succumbing to darkness and sin.

G-d made man to choose and He worked on them until they all chose sin. Time does not permit a discussion of whether the great monsters we call dinosaurs were genetically engineered by the perverted minds who eventually succeeded in establishing the global dominance of sin. Dinosaurs were incredibly large reptiles and amphibians and may have dwelt in the lowlands of Pangea, while mankind dwelt in the highlands. They are not mentioned directly in the Bible, but may have been part of the evil which the human race was filling up with.

Are there any dinosaurs alive today or did they all perish in the flood? Were they too big to fit on the ark (though if Noah had wanted to, he could have saved fertilized eggs)? All that we know for sure about them is that they all suddenly disappeared in a great worldwide catastrophe, which we call the great flood. There is no evidence of some celestial event that gave the earth the equivalent of a nuclear winter. Many cold blooded animals were taken on board the ark, including the ancestors of the Komodo lizard. People have found the fossils of what appear to be aquatic dinosaurs, but extinction can be caused by many factors.

The Bible never claims to be a complete or exhaustive history of the world. It is more of a spiritual diary of the Jewish people. And in a series of songs and poems, the first eleven chapters of Genesis take us from creation to the flood, then from the flood to Babel and finally from Babel to our father Abraham. No details are given just to satisfy our curiosity and when we fill in details like I have just been doing, we must first be sure that nothing we say contradicts the biblical account and also that nothing we say gives details not intended by the account. We may learn a lot about our world from studying natural history and biology, but only the Bible teaches us what to believe and how to walk with our Creator. Shabbat Shalom.