

God's Big Picture 2. The Perishing of God's Kingdom

Introduction

American journalist Britt Towery told the story of a well-respected critic who wrote reviews on the various shows performed on Broadway. His opinions were highly regarded and favourable reviews were prized by the participants. On one occasion this man was obliged to miss a performance, but nevertheless he wrote a review of what he had expected to have seen had he been in attendance at the show. No-one noticed what he had done. In fact it became a regular habit until in the end he simply researched the musicals and dramas in advance and wrote all the reviews without leaving his own home. His reputation ensured that no questions were asked of him for quite some time, but finally he came unstuck. The critic had always got his reviews in early. On some occasions they were even sent before the performance had been completed. However, on one sad night a theatre caught fire in the middle of the second act and pandemonium erupted out into the street. The next morning's paper printed his review in full. It recalled how much the critic had enjoyed the third act the previous evening! A proof-reader should have spotted the obvious problem, but no-one did until after the paper had been published. [Brit Towery, *Brownwood Bulletin* (a West Texas newspaper) Friday 11 September 2009] When we do wrong for a time we can get away with it. However, eventually, the consequences of sin have to be addressed. Genesis 3-6 reports the depressing decline into sin by humankind which resulted in God's judgement in the great flood of Noah's day. Sin that had begun with inappropriate thoughts on the part of Adam and Eve had spiralled downwards in later generations into murder and eventually a society that mistook depravity for normality. Genesis 6:5 stated: *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* Can there be a more bleak and depressing verse in the whole of the Bible than this one? Sin is like those persistent weeds in the garden that seem impossible to remove- you get rid of it in one place and it soon appears in another place only a few days later. However, doing nothing is not an option. This section of Genesis warns us in the starkest terms of the seriousness of sin, but will also encourage us with the wonder of God's grace.

1. The Fall of Humanity into sin Genesis 3-6:7

Did God really say...? (Genesis 3:1) We live in an age when all kinds of authorities have been questioned and challenged –sometimes rightly, but on other occasions probably not; in the 21st century as in the previous couple of generation agreed standards of morals and values have been contested as never before in the previous 150 years at least in the western world. *Did God really say...?* The devil's crafty question was skilfully raised to cause Adam and Eve to doubt the goodness of God. He did not say: 'God hasn't said....' as that would have allowed a simple negative response. Instead this open question was framed in a way that cast doubt on God's generosity to His creatures that had not been entertained in their minds before. Let us note first: (a) **The Historicity of the Fall** This account like the other events described in Genesis 1-11 is not a story, a myth or a fable, but a statement of facts. The rest of the Bible is built on the foundations of what happened here at the beginning of human

history. Paul will compare the fall of Adam into sin with the redemption of humanity in Christ in Romans 5:12-19: ¹²*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—* ¹³*for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.* ¹⁴*Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.* ¹⁵*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!* ¹⁶*Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.* ¹⁷*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸*Consequently, **just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*** ¹⁹*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.* In the same way Paul links death that came to humanity with Adam to resurrection that came to humanity through Christ in I Corinthians 15:20-22: ²⁰*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹*For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* ²²***For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*** Three years ago I had a conversation with a professing Christian who declared that he didn't believe in the historicity of the Fall; I had to point out to him that the reality and effectiveness of the sacrifice of Jesus and benefits of His resurrection for Christ's followers is bound up with our interpretation of Genesis 3. Satan, the evil one, presented himself to Adam and Eve disguised in the body of a snake (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). Satan, or Lucifer to give him his name, was a fallen angel who rebelled against God and who with other fallen angels was thrown out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6). This was the start of the long, but ultimately futile war he has waged against God, the godly angels and those of humanity who have pledged their allegiance to follow God. (b) **The Pleasure gained from the Fall** (Genesis 3:1-7a) Eve's first response was promising. She corrects Satan's inference that God is being less than generous to them, but does point out the one restriction God had placed upon them. Now that he has engaged her in conversation, the devil then directly but subtly contradicts God by asserting that death would not follow disobedience to His command (v5). He tantalises her by suggesting that she could become godlike, *knowing good and evil* –if only she will disobey God. The possibility of gaining from an act of sin caused her to reflect on the pleasure of the act of sin (v6) and was followed by encouraging her husband to join her in this act of rebellion against their Creator. No-one sins because we think it will be painful or unpleasant or because we expect to be punished for it – the human mind rationalises even the most extreme behaviour to avoid facing up to reality and the truth of their situation. We need to be honest with children and young people that many forms of sinful behaviour are initially enjoyable, but the long-term consequences can be serious. No-where is this more apparent in our contemporary world than in the attitude to sexual activity, but every generation has its temptations and 'favourite' sins, so we must not excuse our own temptations as somehow less objectionable to God. For the last forty to fifty years our government has in ever increasing

measures opposed abstinence outside of marriage and promoted ever more ‘sex education’ by which they usually mean encouraging young people to engage in a range of activities ‘safely’ –that is without causing children to be conceived. However, should that happen an innocent child’s life can be snuffed out as an unfortunate mistake. Thankfully more and more people are starting to question that approach, especially in the USA, but we have a long way to go to win that debate in the public domain. (c) **The Painful Consequences of the Fall** (i) For Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:7b-24) *The Times* editorial of 6 December 2009 has the headline ‘Your sins will find you out’ – all can learn from Tiger’. In case anyone is unaware of the story it concerns the world’s greatest golfer Tiger Woods. He has made hundreds of millions of dollars from carefully chosen advertising on brands consistent with a clean-cut wholesome family image. It was Woods the faithful husband and devoted father that was portrayed every bit as much as Woods the successful golfer. All of us fail to live up to God’s perfect standards so our response to Tiger’s fall will be one of sadness for him and for his family; but also once again an awareness of our own vulnerability to making our own wrong choices. Sin separates us from God. It was Adam and Eve, not God, that caused them to hide from Him (Genesis 3:8-10). Their sense of their own sinfulness produced discomfort in the presence of a holy God. They had never before had a barrier to fellowship with God. It was followed by conflict between Adam and Eve. He blamed her and she in turn blamed Satan, in the guise of the snake. The ‘it wasn’t me’ / ‘pass the buck’ blame game had well and truly begun. Sin, in one respect is like old age, it never comes alone! The snake was cursed (3:14) and either it or the one it represented (Satan) would be in conflict with humanity in future generations. Humanity was now alienated from fellowship with God. The blood of animals was shed to provide skins for their clothing (3:21); Sin brought division amongst people with a warning (3:16) that childbirth and relationships between men and women would now carry the potential for pain and abuse, disrespect and power struggles, in the place of the quality relationships God had envisaged for us. Their sin, as God had predicted (2:17) brought both spiritual and physical death; the former at once and the latter now guaranteed for each subsequent human on the planet. Humanity created for immortality was now born to die. From the astonishing ages of these early people attaining the best part of a millennia each to the time of Moses when a hundred years was close to the upper limit, when he wrote Psalm 90:10, hinting that seventy years was now a remarkably good age to attain. The key phrase in Genesis 5 is *then he died*. Lifestyle choices now would change and diet. From God’s original intention of a vegetarian diet for humanity in a harmonious world (1:29-30), it became a carnivorous one in a world of almost everything becoming a potential dinner for some other creature, in a world of the survival of the fittest (9:1-4). Relations between creatures would be characterised by conflict and nature itself would suffer from the curse induced by human sin (3:17-19). The pleasures of sin produce a bitter harvest of often unforeseen consequences then and now. God is not a kill-joy. Obeying His standards is by far the best course of action to take. (ii) For Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16) the apparently minor transgression of Adam and Eve was followed by the sin of murder in the next generation. Like a garment in need of mending or an illness untreated the consequences inevitably follow. When human sinfulness goes unchecked the threshold for greater depravity increases; Animal lives were taken following the first act of rebellion against God; now the act of defiance has increased to

destroying a creature created in the image of God. (iii) For the following generations prior to the Flood (Genesis 4:17-6:7) although there was significant economic and cultural advancement recorded in Genesis 4 the moral decline accelerated even further. An example is given of a man called Lamech openly boasting of murdering a man with no thought of God or the consequences of his actions (4:23-24). Genesis 6:5-7 summarised the event of human depravity prior to God's decisive act of judgement: *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* ⁶ *The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain.* ⁷ *So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.* If we can grasp something of the seriousness of sin and its consequences it will reduce the extent of the temptation to indulge in it in the first place. How many broken lives and broken families must there be in an increasingly fractured society, before as a nation we come to our senses and heed God's guidelines for living? It is, though, a personal question – what will it take for me and you to live for God as He intends us to?

2. The Punishment of Humanity for sin (Genesis 6:8-7:24; 9:18-11:9)

Abraham many centuries later memorably declared with respect to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah: *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* (Genesis 18:25). A God who is totally holy and righteous cannot overlook sin and must punish it when wrongdoers refuse to repent. The devastating flood described in Genesis 7 serves as a marker of God's seriousness at keeping His Word to stand by the principles He has laid down for us. However, all was not doom and gloom: (a) **Light in the midst of darkness** (Genesis 6:8-10, 22) ⁸ *But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.* ⁹ *This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.* ¹⁰ *Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.* In the surviving human population one family determined to retain biblical principles and honour God. What pressure they must have been under to conform to the world, but praise God they stood firm. God is looking for men and women today. Will you put on His spiritual resources as Paul declares in Ephesians 6:10-20: *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and **after you have done everything, to stand.*** There are times when we can make advances for God's kingdom. On other occasions when the battle is fierce –our call is to maintain our witness, to stand firm. Can He count on you and me to do that in our generation? This was not just for a few weeks, but for many years. In a beautiful sunny climate where they probably had a lot less rain than us Noah accepted God's invitation to build the biggest boat on record up to that point in human history. It was as late as the nineteenth century before our country built as big a boat as this one. Genesis 6:22 states: *Noah did everything just as God commanded him.* What a testimony. (b) **The outward devastation of the world** (Genesis 6:11-21; 7:1-24) God takes sin seriously and the extent of this flood makes this point more eloquently than any words. Genesis 7:22-23: *Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died.* ²³ *Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.* These events are referred to in a number of other biblical passages. Examples include: *To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again **cover the earth.*** So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again (Isaiah 54:9). Jesus warned that at His second coming there would be great similarities to the time of Noah in Matthew 24:38-39. *For in the days before the flood, people were eating and*

drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Peter mentions Noah and the flood in both of his books (I Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). In the second reference in 2 Peter it is in a context of warning people to trust the Lord rather than face condemnation at the Final Judgement and is included as one of several examples: *...if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others...;* (c) **The inward devastation of the human heart** (Genesis 9:18-11:9) Did such a judgement ensure that future generations of humanity were all godly upright people? Genesis 9:18-11:9 dispels any such notions: In Genesis 9:20-27 there is the profoundly sad picture of a drunken, naked, Noah so inebriated he is out for the count. This is the same Noah listed in the 'hall of faith' in Hebrews 11 –despite his alcohol problems. We all have our weaknesses that may not be known to other people, though He knows. However, God can use you and me despite our weaknesses – what an encouragement! In 9:22 Ham sees his father in this state and the careful choice of words in this verse indicate that he *gazed with satisfaction* or took delight in the situation and then *he told with delight* to his two brothers [H. Leupold, *Genesis*, p. 346] what Noah had done. The other sons who appear to have been believers were so upset they said nothing but deal appropriately with the situation. The situation got worse as Genesis 9:24 records that Noah *found out what his younger son had done to him*. Even within that small group of people the problem of sin had reared its ugly head. God had told them to spread out through the known world as their clans increased in size over the generations. This command was followed until the generation alive whose deeds were recorded in the first verses of chapter eleven. In Iraq they took a stand to defy God and build a tower to reach the heavens as it were to literally shake their fists in God's face. Genesis 11:5 contains a beautiful word picture implying God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are having a look for this little tower – oh there it is down there! Implying its insignificance and confusing their speech so that the people spoke different languages and consequently began to spread out again into different parts of the known world. Had God's plans for humanity been defeated? Would the creatures continually defy the Creator? Will you and I heed His call on our lives or will we resist His voice? This is very personal between each one of us and God? Praise God this was not the last word.

3. The Promise of Redemption for Humanity despite sin (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 8:1-9:17)

Praise God this was not the end. The first hint of redemption for humanity was given in Genesis 3:15. God being God will finish all that He has started. In the words of Paul recorded in Philippians 1:6: *being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. What is God's mission statement for His people? Romans 8:29: *For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers*. What does this mean? When we become Christians God treats us like His Son because the righteousness of Jesus is credited to our account and our sins to His (II Corinthians 5:21) –although we still sin and fall short of His perfection. However, in heaven you and I will be perfect. God has determined this fact and will ensure that every child of God will be brought home and be as spiritually beautiful to our heavenly Father as His beloved Son is to Him, although we will always be creatures distinct from our wonderful triune Creator. (a)**The Cost of redemption** (Genesis 3:15) *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*" These words spoken to Satan, in the guise of a snake, were a declaration of war against Satan and his followers declaring that although God's people

would suffer persecution, oppression and martyrdom, they would triumph, especially through the One who would overcome Satan, triumphing over him on the cross and shouting *finished* (John 19:30) because Satan's doom was sealed. In every generation some will choose to follow God and His purposes for humankind and others will by indifference or active opposition oppose them; from Abel who chose the correct sacrifice rather than Cain (Genesis 4) down to our own generation the responsibility and accountability rest upon each one of us. Are you committed to living for Jesus? Have you consciously determined to follow Him? In one of his advertisements for Accenture, [a global management, consulting and technology services company], the image of Tiger Woods appears along with the words: "It's what you do next that counts." Much now depends on what Tiger Woods does next. If the American people are truly scandalized by his adultery, they must now hope and pray that this marriage and family can be rebuilt and sustained. Something of far greater consequence than an illustrious career in sports is at stake here. Tiger Woods the human being is of infinitely greater value than Tiger Woods the brand. [Al Mohler blog 14 Dec 09] "It's what you do next that counts – that applies equally to each one of us –like relay runners on a team the baton of salvation and Christ-like living has been held out to each of us –can God count on you to determine to be an effective member of His team? (b) **The Covenant of Promise** (Genesis 8:1-9:17) After what must have seemed like an age in the ark carried about on the waters Genesis 8:1 begins: *God remembered Noah...* This is not implying that God had overlooked the people and animals in the ark. This word (used in Genesis 8:1; 9:15,16 (Noah); 30:22 (Rachel); Exodus 2:24; 6:5 (Israelites in Egypt); I Samuel 1:11 (Hannah);) implies nurture, protection and deliverance with a pre-planned strategy to carry out what needed to be done. [see Leupold, Genesis, p.308]. God is never taken by surprise. His judgement on sin is restrained by His love for and redemption of guilty sinners. He promised never to send another universal flood (Genesis 8:21-22) and confirmed that the seasons and order of nature would continue in the pattern He had planned for them. The rainbow in the sky would from that point onwards be a constant reminder to humanity of the grace of God and His everlasting covenant with them (Genesis 9:12-17). Our creation mandate was reaffirmed yet as a flawed humanity we receive His blessings for obedience and judgement for our rebellions against Him. How would the promised redemption prophesied in Genesis 3:15 become a reality? In the next study God reveals the next part of His kingdom vision in the call of a man Abraham.