



REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

AUGUST 2009

What's Happening?

Hugh Ross Coming in October

Hugh Ross will visit the Seattle area Oct. 18-21. Here are the events that are currently scheduled:

- Sunday, Oct. 18, 6:00 PM, Harbor Covenant Church, Gig Harbor
- Monday, Oct. 19, 7:00 PM, His Place Community Church, Burlington
- Tuesday, Oct. 20, 7:00 PM, Christ's Church, Federal Way
- Wednesday, Oct. 21, 7:00 PM, Mars Hill Church, Downtown Seattle Campus

If you would like more information, or want to help support these events financially, please contact us at seattle@reasons.org.

We Do Presentations

The Seattle chapter does presentations on wide range of topics. If your church or group is looking for speakers, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. We are also happy to help you with resources to support your personal studies and/or ministry efforts.

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Examining the Perfect Creation

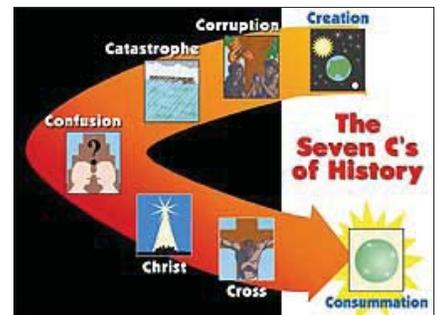
RICK BARTH

Answers-in-Genesis, the predominant young-earth creation organization in the West, has launched a Bible curriculum they call the "Seven C's of History." The *Seven C's* represent major events in history from the Bible. The second "C" refers to corruption and is described as follows:

We've seen that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and everything was very good (Genesis 1–2). The next 'C' in the Creation Museum will be 'Corruption,' and is found in Genesis 3...

From perfection ...

For a while, things were perfect in the Garden of Eden. As we will show in a wonderfully designed area of the museum, Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden (planted especially for them by God). They could eat of any tree in Eden, except one. This first couple had a perfect relationship with their Creator, a perfect marriage and a perfect place to live. The animals, which Adam ruled over, got along perfectly. But something obviously corrupted this 'very good' world, turning it into the world we see today, which is full of sickness and death.¹



PREFACE

Looking into this issue several years ago I came across several aspects of the common young earth paradigm of a perfect creation that troubled me. Apparent inconsistencies and assumptions were issues I could not clear up on my own, nor find a good defense for, from young earth apologists. Such issues I perceived established an inappropriate approach to scripture and, in turn, lay the foundation for an inappropriate view on the purpose of creation and our existence.

Such questions were:

What is the limit of Eden?

Is there a differentiation between Eden itself and the rest of creation?
What exactly does “perfect” mean in the eyes of God?
When did evil begin?
What are the real affects of the curse?
What is the true, original purpose of man?

The hope with this essay is to reveal answers to these questions.

The claim that Eden was perfect is often the biggest hurdle to discussion between young-earth and old-earth creationists. Too often someone’s ire gets raised if anyone suggests that human sin didn’t usher in all death, pain, suffering, etc. It is as though such a thought tramples on the humility of those who hold such a view. We do like to revel in our forgiveness and why not? What a glorious gift we have been given, to be reconciled to the Almighty by His grace. Yet from this I think some Christians read more into Scripture than is actually there, such as putting the responsibility on our shoulders for the decay of the universe and the degradation of a once perfect world—neither of which is scripturally defensible without some significant stretching of hermeneutics. In such a framework, we also can miss our true objective in serving God. It is difficult to take that one step further and admit we are utterly at His disposal and have been from the beginning.

In no way do I suggest the young earth position is heretical, nor do I in any way intend this piece to be divisive. Rather, I submit that improper exegesis, and the image of God from that exegesis, present a bad apologetic and give fuel to the fire of atheistic argumentation and an inaccurate picture of the character of God. This is true not just in terms of good or bad science (age of the earth, human origins), but in the character of God (if God is so good, then why...)?

The age of the earth is a secondary issue, not a scriptural truth claim. By this I mean that neither old nor young earth supporter can show the Bible even inferring an age of creation. Young-earth supporters utilize genealogies but have no consensus, therefore young earth ages range from 6,000 to 50,000 years. Old-earth supporters make no claim of a Biblical age of the earth. Yet both young and old earth Christians still frequently come to the same conclusion; that we are to live our lives to glorify our Maker. Therefore, the age of the earth should not be an issue of primary doctrinal importance for an individual or a church. But there are implications to the presuppositions of either view on how the rest of scripture and potential theological approaches are interpreted. That being said, while I may endorse an old-earth view that this essay is compatible with, the views I present in this paper could certainly be compatible with a belief of an earth of just a few thousand years. Age is not the issue.

The point here is that elements that are not explicit, such as the age of the earth should not be considered heretical points of debate. They certainly can affect apologetics, but should not fragment the family of believers.

As for why “bad” things exist (the now present and supposed “imperfections”) we need to look closely at the purpose of human kind. The answer to this question will be based on the presupposition of the purpose of humanity. It is a difficult response if the purpose of humanity is relationship. Debates about innocence of children, disease, natural disasters can become hard points to overcome. But if our true purpose is to work for the Creator and part of that Creator’s plan is that there are challenges ahead, then our answer becomes noticeably different and, I contend, not only scripturally sound, but more palatable to a non-believing world.

In the **NEWS...**

[Tetrapod Transitions](#)

This RTB article by Fuz Rana discusses how recent fossil finds of supposed fish-to-amphibian intermediates raise serious questions about the evolutionary model. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/tetrapod-transitions-evidence-design>.

[Friend or Foe?](#)

This Christianity Today article discusses how technological advances may hurt the pro-life movement by encouraging more abortions as parents use tests as a basis to determine whether or not the baby’s life is valuable or wanted. Go to <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/august/12.16.html>.

[Scientific Publications Supporting ID](#)

Critics of intelligent design (ID) claim design advocates don’t publish their work in scientific literature. This Discovery Institute article provides a bibliography of technical articles supporting ID that have been published in scientific peer-reviewed venues. Go to <http://discovery.org/a/2640>.

[Darwin’s Doubt](#)

This RTB article by Kenneth Samples discusses how the naturalistic worldview is self-defeating because it fails to provide a viable pathway to ensure humans develop true beliefs about reality, something science depends on. Go to <http://www.reasons.org/darwins-doubt>.

[Seeking Salvation in Science](#)

This Salvo article by Regis Nicoll critiques scientism, the conviction that everything is reducible to material processes. According to Nicoll, it is a conviction not based on fact or evidence, but on dogmatic faith in materialism. Go to <http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvog9nicoll.php>.

I hope this piece will be a bridge of reconciliation between old and young earth creationists and return this debate to an arena of respect instead of animosity. For a Christian open to old-earth interpretations, I would intend this to be an encouragement that such perceptions of scripture are theologically sound. For the young-earth Christian, I hope they would see this as an honest and respectful critique between believers. What often seems to be the case is that an old earth view is presented as a mere compromise to secular science and takes away from the Glory of God's miraculous works. This article shows several scriptural aspects of both views, hopefully with grace, so that any reader would understand the earnest desire for old earth creationists to honor God's word, His creation, and His mandate for humanity just as young-earth or perfect creation Christians desire.

THE APPROACH

Scripture is about God's glory first and foremost and that we should read every verse from this perspective. Dr. Walter Kaiser makes the point that missions truly started at Genesis 12:3 with the promise to Abram that God would bless all nations through blessing Abram.² I wish to extend this logic further. Missions are the mechanism of blessing with the end goal being the glorification of God. The glorification is the true, underlying purpose of all our activity as Christ's followers.³ We are saved from hell, but more importantly saved for worship and glorification of God.⁴ Therefore, I contend that the glorification of God goes back beyond Genesis 12:3, all the way back to Genesis 1:28, and that missions are merely God's mechanism, His marching orders, to get back to 1:28. We should not see our existence and our salvation as the primary purpose. Rather, instead of looking at individual purity as the sole objective (i.e., don't eat of the tree), we should see our role as partakers of a global God-glorifying strategy, actively and aggressively pursuing anything that is not glorifying to transform it into something that properly acknowledges the majesty of the Creator.

We are but bit players in this act, given the opportunity to take part in God's conquest of evil by being endowed with a spirit so we can consciously glorify him. What a blessing! The reward is eternal existence with our glorious Creator in a predetermined "new" creation (Matthew 25:34); but the wages of sin, or choosing not to take part, is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Without the reconciliation He provides, we have lost out not only on future eternal residence with the Maker, but also missed out on the opportunity to be His champion while here on earth (Rom 5:17-21, 6:12-13). As I will show, this was the guilt of the early followers of Yahweh, including Adam, Eve, and Cain—they were just as guilty of what they did not do as what they did do. Therefore, I contend that we need to rethink the "Perfect Eden" paradigm, taking care not to place ourselves too high on God's list of importance as though our salvation is the only purpose of God's redemptive work. As John Piper notes:

But notice that this ultimately loving act [Christ's sacrifice] has at the center of it the vindication of the righteousness of God. Good Friday love is God-glorifying love. God exalts God at the cross. If He didn't, He could not be just and rescue us from sin. But it is a mistake to say, "Well, if the aim was to rescue us, then we were the ultimate goal of the cross." No, we were rescued from sin in order that we might see and savor the glory of God. This is the ultimately loving aim of Christ's death. He did not die to make much of us, but to free us to enjoy making much of God forever.⁵

It should be noted that the Genesis account up to the point of Cain and Able is truly brief. While providing some detail, it should be treated as a summarized description of how we got to the point of recorded history outlining the beginning of God's conquest of evil. That being said, it does leave something to be desired for our over-analytical culture. With this in mind, it is worthwhile to begin with a brief description of the major differences in the two perspectives of Eden.

It should also be noted that many of the specific critiques or defenses mentioned here are elsewhere established in greater detail by other writers more astute than I. But for the purposes of having a comprehensive critique and counterpoint in one place, a summary of the major conceptual objections to the young earth perfect creation paradigm and an alternative view are reiterated in this article.

THE DIFFERENT PARADIGMS⁶

From the young-earth, "Perfect Eden" perspective, the order of events is as follows:

God creates Eden, a perfect place for a man-God relationship.
God allows evil to appear in Eden. Mankind chooses evil over obedience to God. God sets out a plan to destroy evil and sin.
God culminates His victory over sin and evil in the Cross (the 7 C's order of events).

From the old-earth, "Perfect Purpose" perspective, the order/type of events is as follows:

God has a spiritual realm. God allows evil to appear in that realm.
God creates a universe for the defeat of evil, the pinnacle of which is the creation of mankind, spirit filled (conscious) beings.
Mankind chooses evil over obedience to God. God culminates His victory over sin and evil in the Cross.⁶

Notice the differences between the two views. In the perfect Eden perspective, God set out to have a relationship with us and His plan was interrupted by sin, which God later overcomes with Christ. In the perfect Purpose perspective, God set out to destroy evil and through our sin He accomplishes that, again through Christ. The primary difference is our role. In the young earth perspective, we are the object of creation.⁷ In the alternative perspective, conquering evil is the object, with humanity being God's servants in accomplishing that task

(whether for good or ill, honor or dishonor). Now notice the similarity. God receives His victory and rightful place of glory through His work on the cross. Thus, regardless of the perspective, the end result is the same and young-earth and old-earth Christians are on the same team!

THE YOUNG-EARTH EDEN

According to the young-earth view (or perfect creation view, I will use those terms interchangeably), Eden, if not all of creation was heaven-like where Adam and Eve could have stayed forever, presumably in an eternal perfect spiritual and physical state of contact with Almighty God. God made the earth for us so that we might have a relationship with Him (seemingly the only reason).

The problem is this is a stretch of the text, reading into Scripture much that simply is not there and over-romanticizing the garden. It is a characterization of our orientation to God that had we just stayed in His good graces, nothing else was required. If we just had not bitten that fruit, Christ would not have had to come. If we had kept faithful, we would have had a pleasurable life with no pain, suffering, or discomfort. It is a man-centered reading, not a God-centered reading, a sort of hedonistic wish that unfortunately often seems to become the goal of our existence on earth.

But God's goal, His true goal, is more than to just "have a family." It is to conquer evil and, through that, receive maximum glory for Himself. This evil originated with the fall of Satan, manifested itself in the serpent and the world still has to deal with it today. Man's task is to be God's foot soldiers (Rom 6:15-23) against that very foe.

To reveal the shortcomings of the perfect-creation model, and hence establish the alternative view, I will critique some of its major principles as stated in the publications of Answers in Genesis. In fairness, it should be pointed out that many who hold to a young earth viewpoint do not necessarily endorse all aspects of this framework. What follows is a discussion of various points of Answers in Genesis' 7 C's piece.

PERFECT...BUT FOR WHOM?

Answers In Genesis:

We've seen that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and everything was very good (Genesis 1-2).... For a while, things were perfect in the Garden of Eden.

However, nowhere does the text state, or even imply, that Eden was "heavenly" or a perfect state of spiritual consciousness. The best the text offers is "very good." The Hebrew for "perfect" is "*towmeem*", and it is not used here, nor is any similar term. The "very good" term is the same one Joshua and Caleb used after spying on the Promised Land—a land that 10 of the 12 spies did not want to go to because it had wild beasts, rough terrain and seemingly terrible enemies (Numbers 13-14). This usage provides a contextually parallel glimpse of what can be meant by "very good." At least in Joshua and Caleb's case, very good

did not mean "perfect" for human existence.

Scripturally a defense for the "perfection" of creation comes from Deuteronomy 32 (His work is perfect) and Matthew 5 (be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect). But that still leaves open the description of that perfection with respect to creation. Is it perfect for human existence or perfect for God's plan? If God's purpose is relationship, then we should agree that God's creation had better be without blemish, hardship, or pain. But if God's purpose is self-Glorification by the elimination of evil, then blemish, hardship, pain could well be part of the picture. After all, we need something to compare His glory to.

But this perfect creation has logical and philosophical problems as well. If His works are "perfect", and I agree they are, then death, suffering and sickness are also perfect, for it is God who made those, not the devil. The devil may be given power to use those, but he did not create them. Therefore, if all of God's works are perfect, and His work created these difficulties, then those difficulties are perfect. This must be true regardless of timeframe because God is never-changing.

It seems odd that we should believe God made a place where only pleasure was felt. No struggles or pain or difficulties. As a parent, one of the most rewarding moments in life is when I place a challenge before my children and I see them work through it, figure it out, and overcome the challenge rightly. Even more so when they say "thanks, dad." That, I believe, is part of God's glory that we miss in the perfect creation paradigm. The challenges God laid before Adam were not part of a curse, they were the task which we were to overcome so that God would receive proper glory, honor and praise.

So, what about the "pre-fall" state? Human immortality in the garden appeared to hinge upon three things: obedience to God (Gen. 2:16-17), eating of the tree of life (Gen 3:22), and simply having to eat (Gen 2:9). Immortality did not appear to be guaranteed merely by being in the garden or to be an inherent trait of humanity. There is no indication that animals were to eat of that tree therefore animal immortality is not specified. From the beginning, God had a plan for humanity, a series of tasks implying work, as we will see later. The picture we see in Genesis 1 and 2 is one of God creating, then establishing His pre-determined purpose. Not one of creation, then, God's surprise over Adam and Eve's sin and having to alter His course as the ICR quote presents. The idea that Adam had a task and the reward for such a task being the Tree of Life is commonly called the Adamic Covenant, which is a covenant of works. Christ fulfilled that covenant with his life as an example of the God glorifying behavior one could have who was closely connected with God as Jesus is. Therefore it was not only his death on the cross that saved us, but also his life as Christ satisfied all previous covenants in the New Covenant of Grace.

Also, looking at the threat from God, He only states that Adam "will die" (v 2:17). There is no inference of any sort that the entire created

order would be thrown into disarray. When the curse is pronounced (v 3:17-19) it is merely a fulfillment of what God promised. The ground is “cursed” because of Adam, indicating Adam no longer has the access to the garden for good seed, His toil shall now bring pain instead of the joy of the Lord, and since He no longer has access to the tree of life, He will “return to the dust” (v 3:19). This physical first death could be in opposition to the non-death transport of Elijah and Enoch from this earth, whom did not “return to the dust.” It also seems plausible that part of what God is indicating in the curse is now that man is defiled and there will be further defilement of humanity as time progresses, requiring missionary activity (Gen. 3:14-15). Instead of Adam taking advantage of the opportunity to glorify God with His offspring, now His own offspring would be set against God (see the non-Ark occupants, Esau, Ishmael, Saul, and so on). In Jeremiah 12 we see this manifestation of the curse as God indicates Israel has “sown wheat, but reaped thorns” and in Hebrews 6 that the ground “yielded thorns and thistles,” referencing much more than just agricultural incompetence and indicating that it is the spiritual work of Christ-followers that is at issue. Likewise, we see Christ say to the Pharisees “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it (Matt 21:43)” again, not talking about agricultural effectiveness.

We should also consider God’s sovereignty. If God made something perfect, are we thwarting His perfect creation by contaminating it? If our sinful acts brought in global, if not universal corruption, then have we not made ourselves as powerful as the Almighty? We have wrecked something that He made perfect. Can we also take away someone’s salvation or do something that refuses God His glory? If God reigns over all creation, did we throw off His authority over how creation functions? Such thoughts seem implausible for the concept of a sovereign God.

Another item to consider is the Hebrew numerology of scripture. The number six (6) generally represents imperfection or incompleteness. Hence six (6) is the number of man, yet seven (7) the number of God and thereby representing His holiness, completion and perfection. Could it be that God’s stage He made at the end of day six is a stage of incompleteness? We are in His image, but not made perfect. We are perfect by what we would do with the glory and provision God made in view of the penetrating evil that was and is in the world. What would we choose with this challenge before us? Psalm 8 humbly and with awe notes that mankind has been “appointed over the works of His hands.” We were given a task and in our humanness given opportunity to work for God. Hopefully, for our sakes, we would have done so in a God-glorifying way.

Furthermore, you have to include many contortions and eisegesis to make the end of day six work. Many young-earth creationists believe “very good” applies to the angelic realm as well.⁸ They therefore place the fall of Satan at the end of the sixth day, sometime between the

declaration of “very good” and the actual end of that 24-hour day. All we can say from Scripture is the angels observed creation taking place (Job 38). There is no place in Scripture that defines when exactly Satan fell, nor is there any indication that “creation,” as depicted in Genesis 1-3 included the spiritual or angelic realm. It appears illogical that God would have a tree of knowledge of good and evil if evil did not yet exist. While it is entirely possible that the angelic realm fell into corruption during the creation account, nowhere in Scripture is it proclaimed to be at that time (or any other time for that matter).

Similarly, it is generally claimed that when God made Adam and Eve garments of skin, that it was from the first sacrifice, and hence, the first death of any kind. But the text merely says God made them garments of skin (Gen 3:19). While the scenario above is certainly possible and the imagery of sacrifice theologically meaningful, scripture does not mandate this to be the case.⁹ As far as we can tell, we should also be open to God “breathing” those skins into existence since it simply says He “made” them. It is interesting that, because of the term “made,” the young-earth position demands God “breaths” into existence the sun, moon and stars, but the skins had to be from something else already created. Associated with this argument, Psalm 19 indicates God used his “hands” to create, throwing that apparent argument of God breathing to create into some contortion. These should be read as the metaphorical representations they are. It is God’s power and His alone that created. Whether He uses hands, or breathes, or some other “mechanism” is truly immaterial to the discussion. All things come from Him and Him alone.

PERFECT MARRIAGE AND SPIRITUAL HARMONY

Answers in Genesis:

This first couple had a perfect relationship with their Creator, a perfect marriage ...

This is an interesting claim since we have so little description of interaction between God, Adam and Eve. God made Adam, put him in the garden and gave him training and instruction. The next scene is Adam’s failure. The first words we have recorded from Adam are his feeble defense of his sin. It is interesting to claim all of this perfection for the married couple. If all of creation was perfect, then why was Adam’s relationship alone not sufficient? For some reason humankind was created, but left wanting. I contend this was simply to show our own incompleteness (although we were still innocent for a moment) and God’s provision of partners to complete a task. And what a task lay ahead!

Perfect marital harmony is not evident as Adam did nothing to stop Eve from subscribing to the offer from the talking snake. It is noted that Adam “was with her” (v 3:6), giving at least the appearance that He not only knew the serpent was in the garden, but knew that His wife was succumbing to the serpent’s lie. This is part of why it is

rightfully called “Adam’s sin.” Was it pride? Laziness? We cannot be sure, but regardless, Adam was not doing his duty. In 1 Timothy 2, Paul notes that women need to “receive instruction.” We should notice that God only taught Adam. There is no indication of God having any direct teaching role with Eve. That was Adam’s responsibility and, apparently, he did not do a good enough job, if anything at all (Eph 5). (Please do not misconstrue this point. I am merely talking about gender responsibilities, not capabilities).

But this is often where the discussion stops. We see Adam and Eve eat of the tree, it is rightfully declared it sin, and then go on to the salvation story. But there is much more amiss in this scene. There are only two plausible positive scenarios for Genesis 3. By “positive” I mean in such a way that would have shown Adam and Eve to remain obedient to God’s directives of Genesis 2:16-17 and Genesis 1:28.

First, assuming perfect spiritual harmony was the case someone should have stepped forth, renounced the serpent, and stayed faithful to God’s requirements. We have to ask ourselves why is the garden or even creation considered perfect if God allowed evil to exist? Was God duped? No. Adam’s sin was not only believing the lie of the serpent, but His failure to protect the glory of the garden. Scripture teaches that God cannot stand evil (Habakkuk 1:13, but this needs context as we will see later). Resisting the devil would cause the devil to flee (James 4:7). The devil cannot withstand the full glory of God. But, while God was “away” Adam was not tending the garden like He should have, nor tending to His wife’s nature. It seems, even after the fall as evidenced by the referenced scriptures, once reconciled we do have power through God’s glory to confront evil to some extent (Gen 4). How much more had we kept full access to that garden (Rev 2:7)?

God would not have let the serpent into His paradise without a reason. He must have passed that responsibility onto someone else, perhaps indicating again that God has given us a task to bring to completeness creation and enter into that seventh day of rest (Heb 4). Upon seeing the serpent, Adam should, and could have, with the authority and preparation God gave Him to “subdue,” vanquished or run the serpent right out of the garden. He did not. This was a sin of omission, just as eating the fruit was a sin of commission. So, defending the glory of the garden would have at least satisfied Genesis 2:16-17.

But I argue it does not stop there. The second possible scenario extends beyond the garden and is one which I truly prefer. Adam and Eve should not have been in the garden anymore in the first place. God gave instructions to “multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” Their instructions seem to indicate not only a protective role, but an aggressive one. A role that would require them to be outside the boundaries of Eden and back into the world from which Adam came. They should have voluntarily left in obedience to take on the evil of the world on behalf of God’s glory and as per His direction in Genesis 1:28. The serpent came into the garden precisely because Adam was not out

looking for that deceiver. The curse was not only that Adam and Eve were evicted, but that they were no longer allowed to return.

When Jesus takes the disciples to Caesarea-Philippi and Peter makes his confession (Matthew 16), the Messiah then reveals the results of such wisdom. Those results are a realization of the work ahead. Christ gives an analogy that the church will be conquerors, as the “gates of hell will not prevail” against the body of Christ. This is basically a realization that we are and were to be subduing the ungodly elements of this world, attacking the very home of the devil. I argue that not only were we to defend against the attacks of the deceiver, but to be on the offensive, outside of the garden.

This is much like the church today, where we hunker down in our foxhole and wait for the enemy to attack, enjoying the blessings of peace and tranquility. The devil is, and has been since his rebellion, constantly at war with God. In that, he is content to let us relax and focus on preparing to defend against him. He can just sit there and watch and never actually attack. All he has to do is make us comfortable. We should not wait for his attack but likewise be on the offensive. But, unfortunately when the enemy does attack, we are often so lethargic we do not even fight back (five of the seven churches noted in Revelation were not standing strong). This is exactly what Adam and Eve did, they stayed, enjoyed the blessings of God’s creativity, and did nothing to honor it. But as noted, Adam’s orders were exactly the opposite.

OUR FIRST ETERNAL HOME?

Answers in Genesis:

Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden (planted especially for them by God)... a perfect place to live.

It is often presented that the initial conditions of creation were to be a beta-version of heaven. Yet, scripture tells us Adam and Eve were never intended to stay permanently in the garden. Rather, after their training in the garden, they were given instruction to “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Genesis 2 should be read as a “detail view” of Genesis 1:26-27, then returning to verse 28. Once training had occurred, the orders were given. Much like the missionary emphasis throughout the Bible, we are to be “goers,” not “stayers” (Romans 10:14-18) and to actively bless others, bringing them to a recognition of the one true Lord (Psalm 67). Yet, Adam and Eve stayed in the garden and ignored God’s orders to do something about what is outside of the Garden.

What was outside the garden? The outside world must have been distinctly different from the garden in some way. After all, why else did God need to plant the garden? Often times, young earth creationists project the garden over the whole of creation as though all of creation, including the universe, was “Edenic.” This is a misreading of the text. Genesis 2 indicates that man was created before the garden was

planted, then man was placed into the garden “in the east, in Eden” (vv. 8-9). It also indicates that Adam had the “breath of life” into him from God before the garden was planted (vv. 7-8). It appears likely that Adam would have been familiar with the non-Edenic conditions of the outside world. This would explain how he knew what death was and why God didn’t have to explain to him what dying meant, in either a literal or analogical sense. There are fine articles using scripture that describe the Hebrew terms “subdue” and “rule” meaning an authoritative, significant effort is required to overcome the challenges and bring those elements into control, which is counterintuitive to the concept that creation must have been entirely “paradisical.”¹⁰

But what exactly was actually outside of that garden can only be assumed. It seems safe to say that if the garden was such a wonderful place, then the rest of creation was not as wonderful, at least for humanity. After all, what would Adam have to “subdue” (Gen. 1:28) outside of the garden if the rest of earth was equally a paradise? It should be noted that the instruction to “subdue” was given before the declaration of “very good,” indicating that there was something substandard (in a human context) about the world before the fall. However, when we do read Genesis 1-3 in a chronological order, the next scene after the order of Genesis 1:28 the serpent is introduced. What is there to subdue? Question answered.

Yet, once Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden, God was still with them, pursuing the destruction of the Evil One. Cain had a conversation with the Lord, and a very revealing one at that. In verse 4:7 God says “If you do right, won’t you be accepted?...Sin is at your door, but you must master it.” This verse is in line with the scriptural mandate that we are to subdue the earth and fill it. Subdue the difficulties of earth just like we subdue the sinful desires of our flesh. Note again how similar this is to Adam’s guilt. The serpent crept into the garden and Adam did nothing. Sin was at the door of Cain, and Cain did nothing. More sin of omission so often commented on in various locations in scripture such as James 4:17. Take the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30). What brought the master joy were his servants working for him. The lazy servant who resided in the master’s domain but did no work was thrown out. Note too that the lazy servant knew exactly who his master was and how powerful he was, hoping to rely on the mercy of the master. It is not just about receiving undeserved mercy and grace, but it is about accepting the responsibility of working for our Master.

It should also be noted that it is not only that they were evicted from the garden, but that they were prevented from returning. It is not just that they lost “paradise”, but that they lost direct access to God’s provision. This, I believe is the greater penalty. We were instructed to get to work on the evil of this world, but now it was of our own power and to woefully unsuccessful results. In Hebrews 13 the author notes that we too now should go “outside the camp” as Christ did, bearing his reproach. Only now with Christ, he has granted us access to that

garden once more (Rev 2:7).

How about “thorns and thistles”? A close reading of Genesis 3 reveals what it is that causes the thorns and thistles to grow. It is Adam’s work, work without the glory of God as Adam chose to try and attain that knowledge and power for himself. Recall that Adam was created before the garden existed. He was familiar with the “outside world”. The “thorns and thistles” is being used as an analogy by God. It did not need further explanation because Adam already knew what thorns and thistles were.

Now, in Genesis 5 we have Lamech who comments that Noah will “give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed” (Gen 5:26). We must look at this in context as well. It should be noted that Enoch, Lamech’s ancestor, is noted to have “walked with God” (Gen 5:22) and he did not return to the dust. That statement should stand out as a statement of faithfulness. It should catch our eye when it is and is not used. It is not used for Lamech. As further evidence the name of Enoch means “initiated or disciplined”, giving the idea of he tried to do right and may have been the first truly faithful one, as the text seems to indicate. Lamech, however, is the first man noted to be a polygamist (4:19). In a context of faithfulness to one true God and the abundant imagery of marriage and fidelity in scripture, this should be considered a significant defect in Lamech’s character.

It is probable that Lamech is actually speaking out of ignorance because none of his statement comes true. Noah did not save us from future work or toil with stubborn fields. And you read that Lamech is blaming God for the troubles he has. But as noted above, it is precisely because of Adam’s work that the ground is so troublesome. Just like Adam tried to put off the blame of sin to Eve, Lamech is trying to point the finger elsewhere instead of his apparent unfaithfulness. That is the very point of this statement, to show how incorrect it is. It is wrong in scope (that it is just agriculture), wrong in blame (God vs. Adam’s work and that work itself is bad), and wrong in prediction (not rescued from work).

To further support for this idea that God’s purpose for us while on this earth is not to provide paradise, we see such an interesting scenario with the Hebrew people. After 40 years in the wilderness, they come upon and subsequently conquer through God’s miraculous power the city of Jericho. This area was, and still is today a virtual oasis in the desert. A near paradise compared to what much of the people of God had just been through. But God ordered them to pass it on by and, in fact, take nothing from it. So what would have been a beautiful place to begin a nation became the first-fruits of sacrifice to God. God is instructing His people to rely on Him, not on a place. Paradise is being with God, not in a place of comfort and relaxation.

A final note on the garden as an “eternal paradise.” Scripture indicates that the final reward, noted as “much greater than the trespass” in

Romans (8:18) is a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), not a return to the initial conditions as those have “passed away” (Matthew 5:18, 24:35 and 25:34). As followers of Yahweh through Jesus Christ, we can look forward to a much better reward than a return to the beginning. The opportunity to stay in Eden for eternity was never part of the plan as the Lord had something much better in mind for those who trust in Him (Matt 25:34). We should quit looking at Eden as our first home and instead see it for what it was...boot camp.

[End of Part 1, Part 2 will appear in September.]

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