

Before The Beginning

Since most stories begin at the beginning, it would seem logical to begin with Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Genesis is a Greek word meaning origin, source, generation, or beginning and appears strategically placed at the opening of the Bible. Nevertheless, we are not starting at the beginning, but at a point before the beginning. If this sounds oxymoronic, bear with us for a moment.

We are going to begin with the book of Ephesians because part of it takes us back to a time before the creation, if while we speak of "before the creation" we can speak of time. Time and physical reality provide meaning for a "beginning" because they both did not always exist and both will one day cease. In eternity, there is no beginning, neither is there an end. Where we start today is in a realm which existed before the creation, as well as existing through the creation, and which will continue to exist after the creation no longer does.

Paul uses an expression five times in this letter, not used anywhere else in the Bible, to refer to this timeless place. In Ephesians 1:4; 1:20; 2:6; 3:9; and 6:12 he speaks of "the heavenly places." [translated sometimes as heavenly realms or heavenlies] He is referring to the spirit world where God resides. Interestingly, we find that not only God dwells in this spirit world, but also forces of evil that are opposed to Him. In Ephesians 6:12 these evil forces appear to be quite numerous and represent the elements against which we struggle. Paul writes:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We also see that powers of good reside in this realm. Paul asserts in Ephesians 1:20 that Jesus Christ dwells there now and, in Ephesians 2:6, that Christians, by proxy so to speak, dwell there also in Him. In 3:10 Paul explains that His church, the body of Christians, will be instruments of His choosing to make a demonstration of His wisdom to all the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places." We conclude that these "principalities and powers" are those both evil and good.

In this heavenly realm, or spirit world, many interesting things were determined by God before the first particle of matter was created. Ephesians 1:1-14 reveals many of these things. Among them we want you to note these things about the creation.

1. In verse 4 we are told that before we were created God determined how man would be chosen so that he would become "holy and without blame." Paul writes, "He [God] chose us in Him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world... (emp. add.)" The operative phrase is "in Him." This expression, or one similar to it, is used over thirty times in this letter and over sixty times in all of Paul's writings. Whatever "in Christ" means and whatever it takes to get "in Christ," this is the predetermined process for salvation. This is a point that we will come to in the future and is a

foundation principle of Christian faith and doctrine. Before the creation of man, salvation was determined to be "in Christ."

2. Verses 5, 9, and 11: The creation was a work performed by God for His own pleasure and motivated by His own counsel. This was not done to please any spiritual entities and certainly not to please man who was not yet created. He was not compelled by any external forces to create anything. God simply chose to do this because of the next point.

3. Verse 12 and 14: The whole of creation was done by God "to the praise of His glory". He would do a work that would demonstrate to the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places" the "manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). This would ultimately be accomplished "by the church" (Ephesians 3:10) which is comprised of all those who are "in Christ."

There are two points that we want you to remember from this message.

1. The coming of Jesus Christ for the salvation of man was determined by God before the universe came into being. All that has transpired was no accident. God's will has never been thwarted or deterred, but has driven steadily like a silent, invisible, invincible dynamo throughout the creation to its appointed purpose.

2. This whole creation, corruption, redemption event; all that is in heaven and on earth; all that is, was, or ever will be is not about you and me. It is all about God. God is the central player. He is the protagonist in the account of existence. However much he loves man; however significant a role we might play; however much blessings He has bestowed upon man, the story is about God.