

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study.

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1. Highlights from the "Pre-History" (Genesis 1-11)

Genesis is the first of the sixty-six books that make up the Bible. The first eleven chapters are referred to as the "pre-history" because there is disagreement among Christians over exactly when these events took place. Very important lessons are taught in these chapters. We learn that God purposefully created all that there is, that His creation was good, and that human beings were created "in His image" with the ability to make moral choices and with the charge to be the caretakers of the earth. All this took place in what Genesis 1, refers to as six "days." The nature of the "days" of creation is debated among Christians. Some believe it was six 24 hour periods of time. Others believe it refers to six actions of divine creation over an unspecified amount of time, because the term "day" is sometimes used to mean more than 24 hour periods in the Bible, as is clearly the case even in Genesis 2:4. In either case, God created everything out of nothing. And, on the seventh day, He ceased His work of creation and declared that day as "holy."

The first man, Adam, had a special relationship with God and with all the creatures in the beautiful paradise called the "Garden of Eden." However, of all that he had, Adam had no human companionship. To mercifully meet that need and to show the divine plan for holy matrimony, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and miraculously created, from Adam's own body, a woman named "Eve." Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God, with one another, and with all creation (Gen 2).

God allowed Adam and Eve to eat of all the plants and trees in the Garden, with one exception... the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were to never eat the fruit of that tree. God had warned them that eating from that tree would cause them to die. Obeying God kept them free from evil, disobeying God would enslave them to sin. Satan, a fallen angel who had rebelled against God, came to Eve in the form of a serpent and tricked her into tasting the forbidden fruit by telling her that it would make her just like God, knowing good from evil. Satan's deception was in the fact that disobeying God was the evil act that would open Eve and Adam's eyes to sin, and enslave them to it. Not only did Eve eat of the fruit, but Adam did also. Immediately, the harmony they had enjoyed was shattered. Their innocence gone, they were filled with shame and even tried to hide themselves from God.

Adam and Eve fell from their state of grace that day and were banished from Eden's harmony and perfections. Nothing would be as it was for them or their descendants after them. They were now spiritually dead and would know physical death also. But, in His mercy, God promised that someday an offspring of Eve would fix the damage done by the serpent's deception and their sin (Gen 3).

The devastating impact of the fall into sin would be seen in the generations to come. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve (Gen 4). Abel loved God and worshiped him in obedient faith and God accepted his worship. Cain was not obedient or faithful and his worship was not accepted by God. Cain was so jealous of Abel, that one day he killed him. God punished Cain, who became a fugitive. But, even in his punishment, God placed a mark of protection upon Cain against anyone taking vengeance on him for killing Abel. So Cain wandered among the many people who were descended from Adam and Eve (Gen 5:4) in the centuries that they and their offspring had lived, for people grew very old in those days, living for hundreds of years.

One of the other children born to Adam and Eve was a son named Seth. He, like his brother Abel, worshiped the Lord, as did many of his descendants, right down to a man named Noah (Gen 5). However, the faithful descendants of Seth began to intermarry and be influenced by those who did not follow God (Gen 6). Sadly, people had become so sinful in Noah's days that God sent a great flood of punishment, but He spared faithful Noah and his family by having Noah build an large boat, called the "Ark," into which Noah, his wife, their three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and their son's wives all were kept safe from the flood, along with a male and female of all the various types of land animals of that day. Some animals were so special that God had seven pairs of each of them saved in the Ark. The rain lasted for forty days and the waters rose over the mountains and lasted 150 days (Gen 7). When dry land finally appeared, Noah and his family came out of the Ark and worshiped God (Gen 8). God used the rainbow as a sign of his promise of mercy never to flood the whole earth again (Gen 9).

Even though God graciously gave a new beginning through Noah's family (Gen 10), the sinful nature of the human heart remained. Once again, men and women sought to make themselves great, instead of obedient to God (Gen 11). They began to build a large tower as a monument to themselves, to their own glory, as a type of self-worship. Once again, humans were pridefully challenging God's rightful place over all His creation. But God, in His merciful determination to one day undo the damage of the fall into sin and save a people for himself, prevented these disobedient and prideful tower builders from divine destruction. He confused their language so that they would scatter over the earth. Because of the confusion of languages that occurred, the tower became known as the "Tower of Babel."