



# Back to the Beginning

## Week 2: Stories of Creation

Lori Lampert - 04/26/2026

My husband Ben has a deeply researched and recorded history of both the Lampert and the Alexander lines. People on both his mom and dad's sides of the family. Dating way back. And there is so much fascinating material there.

There are women who were in the DAR, Daughters of the American Revolution. There is a German Bible chronicling births, marriages, and deaths of family that came from Switzerland. Daniel Boone—yes that Daniel Boone—is part of the trail of Alexanders. And right now in her apartment in Florida, my 93-year-old mother-in-law has a framed photo of the courthouse in Mecklenburg County where North Carolinians, including her ancestors, declared they seceded from Britain way before the rest of the colonies. So much history passed down from generation to generation that now includes our grandchildren—our grandson Calvin is Calvin Jett Lampert. Jett is a name, plucked off the family tree, that now lives on in him.

When we read those pages at our house, when we look at the diagram of the family tree, we see our history. Me because I married into it (so I am way out on some branch somewhere). My children and grandchildren because of the direct lineage they can trace through Ben Lampert. But it is history that has been told through the lenses of the writers. Many writers over multiple generations, each seeking to hold on to their stories, each for their own reasons.

We understand that these words were written down before computers were able to pull from millions of pieces of information and do the research for us. Before we could mail somebody a cotton swab and learn who we are related to and exactly the percentage of our ancestry is from where in the world. At our house we understand that this is a written account of people who did not want to lose their story. Each with their own perspectives. And sometimes prejudices and conflicts. Handed from each generation to the next in a centuries-long game of telephone.

Do the words on these pages fully explain what it felt to live through the American Revolution? The fear and bravery it was to immigrate as a family, leaving behind deep roots in another culture and language? Can we take the limited information we have today and extrapolate everything there is to know about who our ancestors were in the past? Can we maybe forgive them if they left something, or someone, out?

The Book of Genesis is that same idea, but on a much, much larger scale. From a much, much greater distance in time. It is the collected story of a people, the ancient Israelites. It is stories drawn from generations of oral history, gathered together and written down. Stories that the writers did not want to be forgotten. Most scholars believe these words were compiled by multiple people, sometime in the 6th to 4th century BC, as they looked back in time. They sought to both make sense of who they were as a people and who they believed they were ordained by God to become. Entering into the words of Genesis is a beautiful, wonderful, complicated experience that asks something of us. And you have to decide if it is worth it. I believe it is.

Here is what it asks. It asks that you be willing to step out of your comfort zone that wants Genesis to answer all of our questions regarding well, everything. It asks that you suspend your understanding of geology that began being studied in the 18th century and of archeology that began in the 19th century. Both sciences have uncovered layers of knowledge that we now possess, but that did not exist when Genesis was written. I appreciate what theologian Pete Enns says that “a close reading of Genesis requires

breaking down our modern western assumptions and a willingness to become critical of yourself to explore the people of the past.”

Who wants to do that? Criticize myself? It feels threatening. But I would submit that it is *freeing*. Approaching Genesis as the story of a people seeking to understand God, and who they were in relationship to God, thousands of years ago is a gift. It opens us up to learn and be changed by what we can know about them, about ourselves, about God. We find in the words our shared humanity and the faithfulness of God.

Last week Brian introduced us to the first story of creation culminating in Sabbath, the day God rested. If you missed last week I would invite you to visit our Youtube channel or Facebook page where you can always find past worship services.

The book of Genesis immediately gives us a *second* creation story. It does not fit with the first, and we would have to do a lot of mental gymnastics to try and make it fit. It is a uniquely different take on creation. The first is a poem with rhythm and beauty. It is a story of God as Creator and creation as a whole. It is the story of God making order out of chaos, calling all of life into existence. Humans are the last created. Whereas God speaks and blesses creation God does so from a distance. Elohim. The Sovereign one.

The second story is one of God intimately involved with humanity—forming, molding, breathing life into us. Why did the writers give us both of these stories? Why did they complicate it by putting them both side by side? The writers don’t tell us, yet I wonder. Could it be that the fullness of God is best told by laying these stories side by side? God is both above all and in all. God is both a creator from afar and yet intimately involved in creation.

From Genesis 2:

**In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,  
5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the  
field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain**

**upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;<sup>6</sup> but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.<sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.<sup>9</sup> Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

The Lord God formed man. Breathed life into him. Into God's magnificent creation, full of goodness and possibilities, humanity is created to care for it. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden with two trees with important distinctions. The Tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord God put man there and gave man this one restriction, one rule to obey.

**<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'**

God gives man animals and birds and all of creation, and yet that is not enough. Man is still alone. From the beginning, we are meant to be in community with one another. God creates woman from man.

And let me pause here and remind us that Genesis was written in a patriarchal world, during a time of kings and kingdoms. It was written to tell the story of the ancient Israelites and how they became who they became. And so don't discount that in the *first* creation story are written these words:

**So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27**

Created *them*. Excuse the segue, but I want to be careful to point out the importance of reading *all* of the story. The *imago dei*, the image of God, was placed in all, all of created humanity. Regardless of color, culture, gender, who you love. It is there.

And. Now comes the heart of the matter with humanity. The problem, the theme, the story that will happen over and over again throughout the Old Testament. With all humanity has been given, with the abundance of creation all around, we humans can't seem to choose obedience to God. Temptation calls us. We listen to the wrong voices. We wrangle and finagle our way with rationalization and denial. And ultimately we hurt our relationship with the God who loves us still.

I invite you to read all of Genesis 2 and 3 sometime this week. And let the story speak to you. For now hear these words:

**<sup>3</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?''**

Continue down to verse 6:

**<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.**

We can read this and blame the serpent, which for me would be easy, as I have a huge fear of snakes. We can put the blame on Eve, woman, which has been done by far too many for far too long. We can see Adam, man, as a weak spineless person who should have stood up to the woman. Or we can

read the truth that is there and has always been there. God wants what is best for us, and yet we turn away.

A close reading of Genesis 3 does not teach that this is original sin. Original sin is the concept that, because of Adam and Eve, you and I are born with sin written into our very being. This is actually a tradition developed by theologian Augustine who lived in the 4th century AD. Augustine was exploring the words of the Apostle Paul written in the New Testament, who refers to Jesus as the second Adam. Original sin is a doctrine many in mainline Christianity, including United Methodists, have held as they look back in light of Jesus Christ. I believe we disobey *like* Adam and Eve, not because of them. There are volumes written to discuss and debate original sin that I am not going to enter into today.

Instead, let's look at what the ancient story tells us is God's response to the choice of Adam and Eve, who represent humanity. Listen to what happens first.

**<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' <sup>10</sup>He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' <sup>11</sup>He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' <sup>12</sup>The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.'**

First notice God comes looking for them. Of course God already knows what has happened, but God still comes, still walks the same paths they walk, still calls for them. And then the consequences are pronounced.

The serpent becomes a despised creature. The woman will have pain in childbirth and she will let her husband rule over her. The man will have to toil in difficult soil. Yet, the most significant consequence is they are cast out from paradise, a place where they could be completely vulnerable with one another, naked to each other. A place where their needs were met from God and the intimacy of God's presence was so real to them. A place where the tree of life kept them from experiencing the pain of dying and the grief of death. The outcome is not original sin. The outcome is that humanity has to live in the real world, that we are human, finite, fragile. That our choices all too often try to pull us away from God's love.

**<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever'— <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.**

This is the story that will be repeated over and over again throughout the books of the Old Testament.

This first story of disobedience explains it so simply. Enjoy and celebrate all the Lord God has created. Use it to grow, to move forward, to increase and multiply humanity. And, obey the Lord God. Don't do what God has said clearly that we are not to do. Walk away from the desire to *be* god. There is only one God, and it is not you or me.

But over and over again humanity makes the choice to disobey. Over and over we see what is forbidden, and we grab it. We listen to voices that promise what is not of God, and too often choose it. We ignore the abundance and beauty of creation and use it for our own purposes. And if it all goes wrong, as it inevitably will, we blame one another for our choices

This is not just the story of the Old Testament, of Adam and Eve, of ancient Israelites. The power of these words is that they are our story. We understand what it means to disobey. We know it individually, and when we look at the world around it we see it collectively.

And yet. Don't ever forget that where sin runs deep, God's grace runs deeper. This is a wonderful depiction of what we United Methodists believe to be absolutely true. God's grace is present. God will always be walking with us in this world, just as God did in the garden. God stayed.

The Lord God Almighty is always and forever calling for us in the midst of our mess, our poor choices, just as clearly as God calls for Adam and Eve. And God's love covers us in our vulnerability just as surely as he covered Adam and Eve in their nakedness. God does not leave. We choose, we turn away. God stays. Deep, deep grace.

The book of Genesis goes on with more of the story of a people who are determined that generations learn both the truth of who they are and what they have learned about God. Get ready. Humans will try to build a tower to the sky to be like God. They will be so evil that an ark and flood will enter the story. They will try to control their own legacy, they will deceive one another, they will steal an inheritance, they will run away from home.

Yet through it all, God stays. God continually offers a better way of life. In the story of the ancient Israelites is the constant thread of God weaving a people together. We have so much to learn from this complicated, beautiful book. Read it. Sit with it. Let the ancient story speak to you. God is both transcendent and imminent. God is both above all and in all. God is both the creator and the One walking in the garden. Look intentionally, and you will find the story of Grace.

There is nothing in all of creation that can separate you from the love of God. Let's pray.