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Toward a Collision with Eternity? (The President's Page)

Larry L. Lichtenwalter
Adventist Theological Society

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Larry L. Lichtenwalter

One of the things I have learned while mountain biking is that it is not always a good thing to look back. When you are shooting along a single-track— weaving your way through trees just 15 or 20 inches apart, negotiating roots and rocks and fallen logs, or anticipating quick turns, sudden drop-offs and steep climbs—you need to be alert and forward-looking. You need to keep focused on what you are doing at the moment and on what's coming up next. If you turn your eyes backward for even an instant, you can get into big trouble. I learned the hard way.

We were shooting down a straightaway. No trees. No logs. No sudden drop-offs. Just a straight narrow single-track groove worn into the sandy soil of Michigan's Yankee Springs State Park. I heard someone coming up fast behind me. I called out, thinking they might want to pass. No one answered. I glanced back to see my friend pumping hard and closing in. That brief looking

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back was all it took. Next thing I knew, my front wheel was riding up and down the side of the groove. Suddenly it was pulled cockeyed and I skidded hard and fast on my side through the brush along the trail. My bike finally stopped, and I went head over heels. Ouch! Bruised and bleeding, I could hardly get up. All because I looked back for an instant.

But sometimes, looking back is an important part of looking ahead. In fact, if you don't look back, you just may miss what's up ahead altogether. I'm thinking now of the Book of Genesis and the reality that our world is fast biking down a narrow single-track groove toward a collision with eternity. If we don't take the time to look back and get our moral and spiritual bearings, we will be totally unprepared for what we may encounter as we approach the end.

That's what Moses had in mind as he wrote Genesis, the first of a five-part book we call the Pentateuch. His intended audience was the generation of Israelites that was about

to go into the Promised Land. Inspired by God, His thinking lay ahead. To the future. To the generation on the verge of entering the Promised Land. They were headed in an awesome direction.

But the children of Israel were in danger of unbelief and failure to trust God even as they were on the very border of the Promised Land. The only way they could look ahead with confidence was to look back and gain perspective. The only way they would be prepared to meet the spiritual and moral challenges that lay along the pathway ahead was to be reminded where the trail originated. They needed to remember who they were and Who was with them.

Looking back was an important ingredient of their looking ahead.

In his commentary on Genesis, Eugene F. Roop writes, “The beginning cannot be ignored as if it is past. Beginnings do not disappear; they form the ground from which all subsequent moments arise.”¹ In other words, beginnings set the tone and live on in whatever takes place afterward.

The nuances of the Hebrew text are profound. The word *beginning* (Gen. 1:1) marks a starting point of a specific duration. It’s the first in a series, or the initiation of a series of historical events. It has an end or purpose in view. It’s a word often paired with its antonym *end*. By using this word to open the account of Cre-

ation, Moses (under the inspiration of God) not only marked Creation as the starting point of the history of God with His people, but also prepared the way for the consummation of that history at “the end of time.”²

The “end” is already anticipated in the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1. The fundamental principle reflected in the opening word of Genesis and the prophetic vision of the end of times in the rest of Scripture is that the last things will be like the first things: “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17, NKJV); “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1, NKJV). The allusions to Genesis 1–2 in Revelation 22 illustrate the role that these early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of the scriptural vision of the future.³

Genesis also provides a paradigm of the moral and spiritual issues leading up to the end.⁴ The careful reader can trace parallels between the Book of Genesis and the broad issues and events of the last things on Earth. Jesus pointed out that “as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:37, NKJV).

There are two themes that a look back at Genesis provides: a particular view of God and the multi-generational saga of the first family of the Bible.

God! That’s where Genesis begins. All at once we see Him creating

the world in a majestic display of power and purpose: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NKJV). There is no biography of God. No elaborate background of how God came into being. We are introduced to Him through His actions, which begin with bold strokes of creativity. Genesis unfolds a clear, concise statement about the Creator and the Creation. Its simplicity belies the depth of its content. These seven words (in Hebrew) are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible.

Genesis also gives us stories of people. They are epic stories, vivid characters in dramatic circumstances, a virtual multi-generational saga of the Bible's first family and their all-too-human struggles of faith and faithfulness. The interesting thing about Genesis is that its stories turn from full-scale global events like the Creation or Flood, or world history like the tower of Babel or the famines of Egypt, to isolated, seemingly incidental experiences of private individuals, like Noah's lewd drunkenness or Hagar's soulful cry in the desert. But these vivid dramas, these family tales, convey truth for a people with the Promised Land on the horizon. They are family stories that convey truths about spiritual identity, personal accountability, and moral purpose—and the long-ing search for a blessing.

Moses has at least four things in

mind as he writes: (1) to identify the Creator, (2) to explain the origin of the world, (3) to tie the work of God in the past with the work of God in the future, and (4) to give hope and moral perspective that encourages both faith and faithfulness in light of the epochal events on the horizon.

The God who was about to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land was the Creator of the Universe. The same God who made the wasteland of this unformed Earth into a virtual Eden garden for the first family is the One Who seeks to lead His people from the Sinai desert wasteland to the Promised Land.

Moses had the Promised Land in view when he wrote Genesis. We, too, must have our eye on the sea of glass when we read it. Looking back is an important ingredient of looking ahead. Beginnings do not disappear; they form the ground from which all subsequent moments arise, especially as we stand as a final generation on the brink of eternity.

In this special issue of *PD* on Creation, we want you to look back with us to see the awesome Creator who is leading us forward to His new creation (Rev. 21:1). God will make all things new by the same creative power with which He began all things (vs. 5). Our understanding of this important topic determines both our faith and our life choices. As you read through these articles

on the biblical understanding of Creation, be encouraged. Find new hope in the God whose chief purpose in creating human beings was to bless them.⁵

REFERENCES

¹ Eugene F. Roop, *Genesis* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987), p. 20.

² John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 83. See also, “*reshit*” in *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, Laird Harris, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), vol. 2, p. 826.

³ Sailhamer, pp. 83, 84.

⁴ Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Carpenter Books, 1984).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.