

Genesis

Immediately in Genesis the question Curious never dared ask (because he knew he could never stretch his head around an eon) was answered: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* That was pretty close to “everything,” and it was a perfectly good answer, at a basic level, as to where everything came from without getting into numbers that were too big to imagine. He didn’t pause to see if he could get his head around it because he needed first to find out what the Bible meant by “God.”

Curious knew that the more enlightened of ancient peoples conceived of gods as having characteristics similar to humans, only exaggerated, and that they were empowered to manipulate nature for good and evil and that it was necessary to curry their favor or risk being a victim of their anger. These gods were many, and they all had names and stories about their origins. At least that was the impression which had stuck with him from his formal education. Now he was curious to see how accurate his preconception was. For that reason too he kept reading.

*The earth was formless [unreal, nothing] and void;
and the face of the deep was dark.
And the Spirit of God brooded
over the face of waters.*

Curious tried to imagine this emptiness, this nothingness that yet was something important enough for the Spirit of God to brood over. As an analogy he compared it to a blank slate, a blackboard before the professor writes on it.

“Who could argue with that?” he said. “It’s a perfect beginning! A beginning for a beginning.” Curious had wanted to know where everything came from, and here was a picture he could grasp. It was a curiosity killer! There was only this potential for something that would depend entirely on what God would write on the blackboard. Curious was amazed. He didn’t have the feeling of having gotten his head around it, yet somehow it satisfied his curiosity.

In fact, as he tried to be a little critical of it he realized it was the only possible answer to the question of where everything came from. And here it was hiding in plain sight on the very first page of the Bible! How could scientists talk about a “big bang” without connecting it to this? God broods awhile—in his own time frame, obviously—and when he finally writes an equation on the blackboard ... boom! That becomes the trigger for everything—the big bang or whatever. Yes, the blackboard is only a metaphor, but it had to be something like a Word from God which the void awaited, for whatever God says must be true (if he is a true God), and if it is true it is real, and if it doesn’t exist before he says it, then it *must* exist after he says it.

*And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good.*

Curious liked this very much. It was as though God had written on the blackboard the equations Maxwell discovered. “Who can disagree with that?” he said. “The equations that describe light are successful and therefore good.”

Curious’ curiosity failed him somewhat at that point because he failed to ask what the Bible meant when it said God, in his own view, saw that the light was good.

*God divided the light from the darkness.
And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
And there was evening and morning, one day.*

Now here was something Curious could not avoid being curious about. As much as he delighted in the satisfying simplicity and necessity of the beginning of beginnings, here, in the first thing God did, was a vast stroke of creation which had to include the solar system and the earth, for how else could there be day and night?

But it seemed to be entirely out of order! The next most important thing after fundamental equations was the terrestrial 24-hour day as if that were the whole reason for creating light! And why did the day start with evening? That seemed out of order too.

"Well, maybe it was that important," said Curious. But he wasn't really convinced. It would mean that God let a rather arbitrary measure of time be the distance between milestones in the creative process. Evidently, in his brooding, God had formulated a complete plan, but it seemed that "evening and morning" appeared out of nowhere.

Here's the thing, Curious: if God determines that something *is*, then it *is*, whether nature seems to support it or not. Think about it. If God determines an end in the beginning, then the end is a good thing, which is no contradiction from God's point of view because he exists outside the time-frame of his creation.

"That's a principle worth remembering," admitted Curious. "It's like when God says something it must come into existence whether it makes sense to anyone else or not." Curious already knew this because it's rather obvious, but isn't it hard to imagine the raw creative power in a word from God? In human experience we think of the difficulty we would have making something that doesn't conflict with or undo something else.

"Hopefully God isn't painting himself into a corner with this," said Curious as he considered that making the solar day a reality so soon brought along with it many other things that even God had to respect and work with.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."

When "waters" was mentioned in the beginning of beginnings, before anything existed, Curious had assumed it was a figure of speech that meant shapelessness. Now here he was encountering waters being used to introduce the principle of space, the principle which permits division into regions. Curious pictured God writing equations for both this and whatever infrastructure was needed to support the terrestrial day he had already determined. It was astonishing that this ancient document fit right in with the modern theory about information and mathematics under-girding all of creation. Not only that, it literally freed God from working within the time-frame of his creation while simultaneously presenting to the unscientific reader a meaningful account of the creation of time and space.

Thus God created the expanse separating the waters below from the waters above, and it was so.

And God called the expanse heaven [sky].

This was evening and morning, the second day.

"Okay, so this is the arrangement known as heaven and earth," said Curious. "But what are these 'waters?'"

For agrarian people, the reservoirs of moisture in the atmosphere are as important as the bodies of water below. Curious initially wondered if these might be the two waters, but considering the tone of what he had read so far he thought there must be additional meaning in this second day. Since "waters" had apparently been used in a non-literal way at the beginning, he wondered if the waters above represented objects in space: stars and planets above earth's atmospheric sky with the other being the earth below, which might have been covered by literal water at that stage. He imagined how a reader who knew nothing of astronomical distances might be distracted from essential things by learning that stars were worlds away from clouds.

But if that were true, it was a curiosity so much was put down as a day's work.

"All of this is human-oriented," Curious observed, and he was disappointed because not only was it cast in the time-frame of the terrestrial day, it seemed to be literally about the arrangement of literal waters near the surface of the earth.

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Still, the word “expanse” made him think of the expanding universe. If this day represented billions of terrestrial years of unfolding energy and matter, it would be a significant step worthy of its being called a full work-day of creation.

“I get it now,” said Curious. “The ‘evening and morning’ is a human-size marker used to impart to humans a sense of reality in creation, which would be indescribable in the time frame of the Creator.” But still he wondered about evening being first.

(As you can see, Curious’ Bible-reading got off to a good start as he happily worked his way out of his doubts. Wait till he gets to a place where something is truly inscrutable. It will be interesting to see how he reacts to that.)

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.

And God called the dry land Earth;

and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas.

And God saw that it was good.

“So it became a process once the supporting equations were written,” Curious theorized. “But I would expect there to be a lot more in this third day if God puts it on par with everything accomplished in the second day.”

And God said, “Let the earth sprout grass and plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit containing seed to make more of its kind.”

“This is all well and good,” said Curious. “But nothing has been said about powering the chemistry of this wonderful foliage. It seems like a showcase of the design that will now require sunlight when the time comes to actually have these plants grow.”

And it was so: earth sprouted plants and trees, and God saw that it was good. This was evening and morning, the third day.

“Nope, it wasn’t a preview,” said Curious. “By the end of the third day, behold, there it was! God said he saw it. Apparently the sun was included in the ‘waters’ that got created back in the second day.”

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to divide the day from the night. Let them be for signs, for seasons, and for days and years and to give light upon the earth.

“I was wrong again,” said Curious sadly. “The sun gets made after the trees are planted! What’s going on? Is it like he’s talking about elements of the design in his own timeless realm?”

No, Curious, this is actual creation, not a review of the architecture.

And it was so, for God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars as well.

And God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night and to divide the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good.

This was evening and morning, the fourth day.

“This is really perplexing,” complained Curious. “I can’t believe this was written in such an illogical fashion apparently for no reason.” For he had noted that the sun, moon and stars were made before setting them in place. That seemed odd to him too.

Curious wracked his brain trying to think of a solution. I give him a lot of credit for not relegating it all to mythology, which is what he expected it to be in the first place. He tried to imagine a two-tiered process, like making a model first.

“Sure, that’s it,” he said. “Spread out all the green things then hang a lamp over it.”

But on second thought that didn’t satisfy him either. Why would the lamp not be of benefit while building the model? Regrettably it didn’t make sense. Unless

“Ah! I get it!” Curious exclaimed. “Algorithms—like in software! The physical laws that make the sun are relatively simple compared to the myriad of processes that must work together in living things. So the requirements of all the various plants had to be formulated and taken into account *before* the precise solar and lunar parameters could be set!”

This insight went back to Curious’ earlier idea that the first day was about formulating the equations for light and that once having done so the light inevitably came into being.

“What is the universe, after all, if physical things depend on laws that are described by mathematics?” he asked himself. “Aren’t the laws themselves the reality?”

In computer software, as everyone knows, the words and instructions are what embody the logic and math that cause particular things to happen. This sounds exactly like God giving instructions for things to happen. Then is God a computer? Or is he the Programmer? What do you think, Curious? Do programmers write instructions in the same order in which they’re acted upon?

“No! Programs are not written as they are executed. Quite the contrary!”

This satisfied Curious, which was critical because for him it was more than a matter of curiosity: it was necessary that all this make sense to him before he could accept any of the Bible, which he had to do in order to keep reading it.

Having come to this conclusion, it followed that the human author of Genesis had to be inspired by God: he must have put it down as God told it to him, for he would not have known how the words spoken in creation could be creating the information infrastructure of the universe, which *was* the creation, just as a computer program is the only creation in software: we see what it *does* in real time, but only the programmer sees what it *is* in the creator’s time. If the programmer tries to describe his creation to a user of the software, he must do it in a very abstract fashion if it is to make any sense to the one seeing its effects.

*And God said, “Let the waters swarm with living creatures;
and let birds fly in the open spaces of the sky.”*

*And God created great sea monsters and every kind of living creature
wherewith the waters swarm, and every kind of winged bird.*

And God saw that it was good.

*God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply;
fill the seas, and let birds proliferate on earth.”*

This was evening and morning, the fifth day.

“He must have had a lot of fun doing that!” exclaimed Curious as he remembered some strange variations of aquatic and avian creatures. “Having finished programming the infrastructure for life, he got really creative with the details!”

*And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind:
cattle, all sorts of creeping things—beasts of the earth after their kind.*

And it was so.

“I’m getting a feeling that God had help with this,” said Curious. “It sounds like he gives orders to a helper who then carries them out—like his Son gets involved.”

*God made the beasts of the earth after their kind: the cattle after their kind,
and everything that moves upon the ground after its kind.*

And God saw that it was good.

“Well, no, it says God made them, so it wasn’t his Son unless”

Yes, Curious had heard the phrase “Son of God” in Christmas songs and knew that the Son was also God in some way. But it was only a hunch that both these persons could be referred to here, so he didn’t attach any importance to it.

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Curious also briefly entertained the thought that, with the aquatic creatures being first, it looked like this supported the idea of natural evolution. But clearly in the Bible's terms it was not evolution at all unless

"If these creation activities were creating the information structures that constituted life, then who can put a limit on the time in which they unfold?"

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness—"

"Aha!" said Curious. "My hunch was right: God speaks of himself in the plural."

But Curious decided to set aside this matter of God seeming to be like two persons—or maybe more than two, for he had heard of the Trinity. No doubt there would be more about this later. What he was really curious about was man being made in the image of God. The implications of that started to rain down on him like a heavy hailstorm, and the questions piled up. Pagan mythology had gods in the image of man to reflect the conflicts and aspirations man found in himself. The Bible was saying the opposite: that man was made in the image of God. Obviously a huge gap existed between the Creator of the universe and a man such as Curious.

"To start with," he quipped, "If God made everything, he wouldn't be curious about much, so if I were his perfect image, I wouldn't be Curious."

The Bible repeatedly said that when God made something it was good. On some days it appeared that his declaration of the day's work being good was after inspecting the product. So evidently God's purpose went beyond creating things that worked; there was a moral component in everything, which would include man. Such would be necessary, Curious realized, if God planned to stamp his image on man who would likewise demand that things be good. Curious knew that in his own heart the demand was there. So at least to that extent he could say he was made in God's image. But not everything was good. Obviously something went wrong after Creation was finished.

Though Curious considered what was meant, exactly, by the image of God being in mankind, the more pressing question was *why*. Why was creation arranged in such a way that this became possible?

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over cattle: dominion over everything that moves upon the earth.

"This couldn't be the reason," Curious surmised. "Those creatures do as well or better without mankind's intervention."

And God created man in his own image;

in the image of God he created him:

male and female he created them.

And God blessed them and said to them,

"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

"So God's purpose includes having mankind fill the earth," Curious observed. "He doesn't seem to be concerned about overpopulation at all. He just wants a lot of people, for some reason."

And God said, "I have given you every herb yielding seed in all the earth and every tree of which its fruit yields seed: these are yours for food.

And for the animals and birds and everything that crawls upon the earth wherein there is life—every green herb is theirs for food."

And it was so. God saw everything he had made, and it was very good.

This was evening and morning, the sixth day.

"I see they're all vegetarians, even the lions and tigers, evidently. That's curious. Indeed something has changed since then."

And the heavens and the earth were finished, the whole host of them.

*On the seventh day, having completed his work for that which he made,
God rested from all his work for what he had made.*

*And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it because in it he ceased from
all his work which God prepared for making. [This line is a literal translation.]*

“Now there it is again. The creation was the setup ‘*prepared for making*’ what we see.” When God said it was good, he referred to the preparation—the programming, Curious thought, and if that is true, then what came out of it could be a *different story*.

*The Beginning of the Heavens and the Earth,
in the Day Yahweh God Made Earth and Heaven....*

“Just as I thought,” said Curious. “Now the six-day program has been dropped. It was a bridge from the timeless realm of creation’s infrastructure to a human-oriented account. But who is this Yahweh? One of God’s names, I suppose.”

In the beginning Curious wanted to know more about this God, so he was pleased to find a new story of origins that promised to be told in real time.

*When no plant of the field grew upon earth,
and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—
for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain
as there was no man to till the ground—
a mist went up from the earth,
which watered the whole face of the ground.*

“Good. Now we get the sequence of how things unfolded in time.” In saying that, Curious sounded like he had emerged from a stretch of winding road and was seeing a straight highway ahead.

*Yahweh God formed man out of dust
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
thus man became a living soul.*

*Yahweh God planted a garden eastward in Eden,
and there he put the man whom he had formed.*

“Well, the sequence seems a little rough here too,” Curious muttered, “—unless the man *did* get made before the garden was planted. I wonder.... Maybe it’s more of a summary statement.”

Actually, Curious was more concerned about the description of the process. Using dust to form the man was reasonable enough, for in order to realize the plan of a living organism a number of minerals and microbes and other elements found in soil are required; but the “breath of life” was unexpected. It reminded Curious of the expression “spark of life,” but what a difference! “Spark” explained nothing. God’s own “breath” explained the miracle of life better than anything. To Curious, life did seem like a miracle, so he couldn’t object to the Bible saying it was.

*Out of the ground Yahweh God had made grow
every tree pleasing to the eye and good for food.
The tree of life was in the middle of the garden,
and also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

Curious saw here a setup for something; it wasn’t merely describing a lovely garden. This was the first time the word *evil* appeared in the Bible. God had declared that Creation was good, which Curious had not been curious enough about. Now it was clear that evil must have existed elsewhere: it couldn’t be anywhere in good Creation, so apparently something had gone bad somewhere in other places. Curious was tempted to stop and ponder the meaning of the two trees in the garden, but he continued reading with the expectation that more would soon be said about them.

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*The river that watered the garden flowed out
and became the head of four rivers:*

*Pishon, which provides water to Havilah, where there is gold
(the gold there is good, as is its bdellium and onyx).*

The second river is Gihon, which waters the land of Cush.

*The third is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria;
and the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

Curious scratched his head. Was this interruption necessary?—these geographical details. It jarred him out of his mindset that was allowing him to appreciate the story without connecting it to history and geography. If the Bible wasn't going to allow itself to be read that way, he had to admit there was wisdom in this diversion appearing where it did. It had worked for him!

*And Yahweh God took the man and put him in Eden
to dress the garden and keep it.*

"Oh, so the man must have lived outside the garden originally," mused Curious. "But where? I suppose near the future site of the garden—by one of the rivers maybe."

He had a point: it did not say there were no plants yet, just no crops.

"Maybe he ate fish. No, probably God had provided an easier source of food. Something just showed up like morning dew."

*And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying,
"Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat
except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:
you must not eat of that one, for if you do,
in that day you will surely die."*

"It appears to be a test," said Curious—though it was obvious. "I wonder how God explained to him what it meant to die. He had no knowledge of good and evil: everything was good with nothing to compare it to. Well, I suppose he might have been lonely sometimes, and that isn't as good as it could be."

*And Yahweh God said,
"It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make a helper for him."*

*So out of the ground Yahweh God formed every beast of the field and
every bird of the heavens
and brought them to the man for him to name.*

*And he named each bird and each beast;
but none of them became a helper that suited him.*

"Apparently a dog wasn't one of them," said Curious, being fond of his pet.

But seriously, he was thinking about the length of time during which this took place. Since he saw this not as being within the confines of that sixth day of Creation but as the outworking of it, the "every beast and bird" brought to his mind what he knew of the vast number and variety of birds and animals.

So he pictured the earth's original man being delighted on seeing these unique creatures as their Maker brought them to him and demonstrated their features. Thus the man had an important assignment to fulfill! Every one of those interesting creatures needed a name that would reflect its peculiarities and its amazing abilities to embrace the many opportunities God had designed for his creatures to enjoy while living in this good world.

"It must have kept him occupied for a long while," said Curious. "I guess he was kept too busy on this project to have time to mess with those trees in the middle of the garden." Apparently God was making sure that the man did not modify the divine plan,

for he had been given much freedom. But regardless of that, it was obvious that God was using this as a means of developing a friendly relationship with this man whom he had created in his own image.

As Curious thought about this, he wondered how the man could have any complaint. Yet he did: he yearned for a mate. That he would have a mate was definitely in the plan of the sixth day, but for some reason God had not made him one yet and seemed to be hoping that the man would be satisfied for some time being an animal husbandman—perhaps for a long, long while of perfect obedience before giving him one. But the man knew he was only half a man without a mate and could not help feeling incomplete.

Reading between the lines, Curious saw that this was all part of the Test. Having given the man freedom to disobey him, God was building a strong relationship with the man, building a foundation for obedience out of fondness even if respect failed.

This was an important revelation to our curious reader who had wanted to know more about God. He saw the difference between the God of the Bible and the deities of other religions: it was the difference between day and night.

But at the same time, the significance of the Test had captured his curiosity. What was it designed to prove? Was God proving to someone else that his free-willed creature would withstand temptation to disobey and leave the forbidden tree alone? Curious had to admit that if he were the one in the garden, he would be so curious about good and evil that he would probably sneak a quick bite and then hide the evidence.

After the man had named the last specimen of the novel creatures, no doubt he had developed favorites, and many of them stayed near him. However, it would be likely that not all of those that hung around were ones he liked as well as many that had gone away to establish dens and nests and begun their mandate to multiply. Thus Curious saw how it was inevitable that man would demand a mate if not given one.

*Then Yahweh God put the man into a deep sleep,
and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh,
and from that rib he made a woman
and brought her to the man.*

“There it is again,” said Curious. “He ‘brought her to him.’ It’s like God had a laboratory where he made living things after taking a scoop of dust from the earth or in this case a hunk of bone out of a man. It’s a bit mysterious to say the least.”

What’s more significant, Curious, is that this woman was not made of dust, not directly anyway. Of all the creatures God made, she was unique in her origin.

“Well then, if the man doesn’t like her, he doesn’t like himself,” said Curious.

*And the man said,
“Now this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!
I name her woman because she was taken out of man.”
Henceforth when a man leaves father and mother
and joins to his wife, they become as one flesh.
They were both naked, the man and his wife,
and they were not ashamed.*

Curious turned the page to chapter three, expecting to find out how the woman liked her husband and to see if she was eager to get to know the man who thought she was his perfect mate.

*Now the serpent, who was more subtle than any beast of the field,
came to the woman and said,*

“Did God really say you may not eat of every tree in the garden?”

*“I may eat the fruit of any tree except that one in the middle of the garden,
for God did say we must not eat of it, neither dare we touch it, lest we die.”*

“So she had listened to the man, apparently, and learned the rule from him,” Curious decided. “But I don’t remember that they were forbidden to touch the fruit. She must have added that detail herself, as if she knew her limits.”

“Surely you will not die,” said the serpent. “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The fruit was a delight to the eye and appeared to be good for food; and furthermore she thought no one should reject knowledge. So she picked and ate some and gave some to her husband, which he ate.

“I knew the serpent would get to her,” said Curious. “That snake never tried to tempt the man, but it appears that as soon as the woman was made she got put to the evil test. There was a shrewd will opposed to what God had done!”

Yes, and then she put the man to the test. What do you think of that, Curious?

No reply from Curious. ... Did he suspect that the man sacrificed himself to keep from losing her?

Curious continued reading.

And their eyes were opened, and they knew the impropriety of nakedness, so they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

When they heard the voice of Yahweh God as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees.

Yahweh God called to the man: “Where are you?”

“I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

“Who told you you were naked? Have you eaten what I told you not to eat?”

“The woman you made for me—she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate it.”

“Woman, what is this you have done?”

“The serpent beguiled me, and I ate some fruit,” she said.

“I can’t answer that question,” Curious said at last. “But suppose he let the woman go and stayed true to God. That simply wouldn’t work because he would still need a mate, and the same scene would likely be repeated.”

Don’t you think the right woman would withstand the temptation?

“Perhaps he would get a replacement. But the man only had so many ribs, and he needed a few himself. In fact, now that I think about it, the man had no choice in the matter if he was of one flesh with his wife.”

(Curious was recalling “Henceforth when a man leaves father and mother and joins to his wife, they become as one flesh,” which he had thought was irrelevant to the story back in the context where it appeared.)

“Because you have done this,” Yahweh God said to the serpent, “you are cursed more than any beast.

On your belly you go, and dust you get to eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed, such that

he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.”

“How did they know that?” exclaimed Curious, being aware that paleontologists had dubbed the fossil remains of a snake that had legs the “biblical snake.”

But he had not known that the Bible predicted that the legs would disappear, and furthermore he would never have guessed that the disappearance of the legs was by the direct command of God, not by natural selection.

As Curious pondered this curiosity, he decided he needed to give this story more respect; there was no virtue in the way he was withholding judgment. He had refrained from unleashing his curiosity because it seemed that parts of the story could not stand up to logic, let alone science. For example, snakes don't speak, so why should he try to make sense of that? But now Curious was inclined to let his curiosity have a little free reign. Just possibly he might get his head around something here.

"God doesn't speak audibly, does he? Maybe these first humans had the ability to communicate—even with animals—by some extra-sensory means," he theorized.

After all, there was no mention of language being taught or learned. When the man heard the voice of God in the garden, possibly his perception was not by means of sound waves. (If he literally heard the sound of God's voice, then who was he speaking to? Was he singing? There was no record of the man saying, "I heard you calling for me." Rather the Scripture said, "*they heard the voice of Yahweh God as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day.*")

Enmity between women and snakes is common, and it might have been another prediction, but, "*he will bruise your head*"—that the woman's offspring would not kill snakes but merely bruise their heads—made no sense at all. The second part of the statement, "*and you will bruise his heel,*" was even more curious: it seemed an inapt metaphor if it referred to a snake bite. These words painted an odd prophetic picture that looked a bit like a continuing battle between men (not women) and snakes, but more likely it referred to a battle of spirits because here was a supposedly dumb beast speaking and being spoken to. Perhaps that communication was not vocal, but rather the spirit possessing the serpent communicated in a subtler way. Perhaps the injured heel was symbolic of a vulnerability she would pass on to her "seed," and the bruised head indicated that her child would be victorious over the evil one. "Why hers only, not the man's?" Curious wondered.

That led Curious to consider the origin of the deceiving spirit in the snake. All creatures were good when created, so how did this evil presence arrive there? Could it have been dumb playfulness on the part of the serpent? No, Curious decided, for God would not speak to the snake as he did if it had no moral spirit.

These thoughts led Curious to inquire about the knowledge of good and evil that came about from eating the forbidden fruit. The woman listened to the serpent prior to having that knowledge, but how was she able to regard the advice of a snake over the advice of her husband and even her Maker? Should it not have been a hard-wired choice to respect her worthy councilors above a sneaky creature with a forked tongue? Even if she debated the snake for days before being beguiled to the point of disobedience, there is no getting around the fact that she was susceptible to errors of discernment *before* she transgressed and took the bite out of that famous apple—or whatever kind of fruit it was. Was she the snake's choice for this reason? Curious had to clamp down on his curiosity again; it was leading him into territory that he had learned was off limits in his generation.

God said to the woman, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; and your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

Curious felt sorry for the woman but otherwise had no desire to get his head around this, or maybe he didn't need to. At any rate he went on without comment.

And to Adam he said ...

"I was wondering why Adam wasn't being called by his name," remarked Curious. "Is this accidental, or does it mean something? Oh, I see by the footnote that Adam actually means 'man.'"

"Because you listened to your wife and ate of the forbidden fruit, cursed is the

ground on your account. By toil amid thorns and thistles, and by the sweat of your brow, you will eat herbs and bread until you return to the ground, for out of the ground you were taken: dust you are, and to dust you will return.

"Now you tell him!" said Curious. "But poor Adam had no choice! He had to listen to her—whatever her name was." Eve he presumed it to be, and he read on.

Adam named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living.

Curious saw in a footnote that "Eve" sounds like the Hebrew for "living."

"It seems Hebrew was the language they spoke, but if so then when did they learn it? I guess some details were lost over the years. Anyway, that ruins my theory about nonverbal communication. Eve began talking immediately, no doubt."

And Yahweh God made Adam and his wife coats of skins and clothed them.

"How did he do that?" wondered the curious one.

The only thing he could think of was that God killed a couple of sheep or some other kind of animal. Then did he prepare the hides and cut and sew them in the usual manner? Presumably the freshly-made humans were incapable of it, so he did it for them. Perhaps he did it in their presence, not in his "laboratory," so they would know how to make clothes for themselves.

"What did those animals do to deserve death?" Curious wondered.

From the sound of the command that forbade them to eat of the tree, death should have been Adam and Eve's penalty. Instead, the animals had to die.

"It's like the sacrifice of the animals was a substitute. It was necessary if they were to live long enough to have children and populate the earth. If God hadn't done that for them, I wouldn't be here! So in a way the animals died for me!"

That brief scene dismissed the idea Curious harbored in the back of his mind that God was present only as an invisible spirit. "Apparently the Creator, by making man in his image, could appear as one—like the author of a drama having a cameo part on the stage," he said.

And Yahweh God said, "The man has become as one of us, knowing good and evil. Now lest he eat of the tree of life and live forever—"

"The serpent wasn't fooling!" Curious exclaimed. "Apparently there's another dimension in this God-likeness, and man has crossed into it."

But it was not apparent to him how "knowing good and evil" furthered the God-likeness. Eve experienced the evil of disobedience, but there could be nothing like that in God, for who was there for him to disobey? Adam tasted the consequence of disobedience in the displeasure of his Maker, but there could be nothing like that in God.

"Eve acted independently of the advice of her husband," Curious noted. "Independent action sounds rather God-like. But is independence necessarily evil?"

Well, in this case it certainly was. But what gave her the ability to act independently? Maybe that's the God-likeness that wasn't realized until she disobeyed.

Curious thought about the animals that seemed to be programmed to behave according to their kind while humans carried within them the ability to write their own programs and follow their own scripts. "Maybe Eve was the first human to exercise this ability," he theorized.

That's unlikely, Curious. The ability to think is what makes humans stand above animals. But Adam did not know the danger inherent in it until he reasoned that sharing the fruit with his wife would keep him from experiencing loneliness again.

"It means independent thinking's power to create both good evil," Curious guessed.

But they must have had that power from the beginning, don't you see?

"What I really think is that Eve didn't realize she actually had the ability to oppose her Maker," said Curious. "She didn't know there was something she could do that would be

irreversible.”

Yes, and suddenly she knew, and with that enlightenment she stepped into divine territory. She discovered the good and evil responsibility that comes with free will.

“It strikes me as curious that God couldn’t do anything to prevent this,” Curious said.

Do you mean it’s a flaw in the Creation which Yahweh said was good?

“It seems like a flaw in Creation because it happened so soon.”

In other words, God shouldn’t have made beings quite in his own image.

“If he wanted beings he could communicate with, though—because they would respond intelligently ... was that a bad idea?”

Don’t forget the other intelligent being in this drama, Curious. You have to consider all the facts if you want to get at the truth.

“No, I think the bad idea was the serpent—or the devil that was in the snake.”

I remember you concluding that the devil existed before this universe was created.

“It was just too easy for the devil to do his mischief. I think God had to be more clever than a snake was, yet Adam and Eve were going to die. They suddenly knew that evil.”

Could that be the knowledge of evil they shared with God?

“If they choose to believe the devil from here on, how will God handle that?”

That’s what the Bible is about, Curious. You’ll learn that God must die before they can live forever. That was the knowledge which only God had that will make them God-like.

“Then there’s that tree of life. That must be a significant fact too.”

God expelled him from the garden of Eden, to a place where he must till the ground from whence he was taken. Then having driven the man out, he placed Cherubim at the east side of the garden of Eden, equipped with a sword of flame which went every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

“So that’s how I came out,” said Curious. “I wonder where and what that tree of life is today. It must be an important part of Creation.”

As he pondered this his mind wandered. He got to thinking that the six-day creation account appealed to the intellect while the garden story was meant to appeal to the heart. The abstract days of Creation challenged his thinking and formed an underlying layer that offered him an insight, but the tangible account of the garden explored intangibles and left the nagging question: why the serpent? If God saw to everything on earth being good, then what gave an evil spirit the right to be there? Yes, Curious had forgotten the tree of life.

The Eden story made it clear that God had his hand in the outworking of Creation as well as the Word of Creation. In fact, he was a participant in his own story! The egg came first, not the chicken: the complete design of every creature was encoded in its seed; the hand of God was the seed’s first womb and mother. He also partnered with living man, Adam originating zoological words as names. Adam named Eve too.

The garden story also suggested a reason why God made man in his image: it allowed meaningful face-to-face communication. But to Curious’ hyper-curious mind, that raised another question: was direct communication God’s plan and desire for all of Adam’s and Eve’s offspring after they had become fruitful and multiplied? If not, then what other reason did he have for making man in his image?

Though he didn’t express it at this point, Curious had come to appreciate that God is a wonderfully kind person. He gave his creatures seemingly unlimited amounts of time and cared for their welfare even after they had disobeyed him. The only thing Curious had against God was that he let that evil presence get into the serpent and corrupt the special beings he had made in his image.

Curious thought of that poor choice Eve had made before she took the bite out of the apple. What other poor choices might be possible without evil intent? Perhaps Eve felt a bit inferior to Adam and thought it was within her right to pursue higher education. If a seemingly reasonable choice leads to disobeying a law, then perhaps the serpent thought

he was doing a reasonable thing in advising Eve. And why didn't Adam eat fruit from the tree of life when it was available to him—and give some to Eve too? They would enjoy eternal life. Wouldn't that have made them immune to an attack of a poor choice? Or maybe it would have nullified the consequences of bad choices, and that would mean instability.

Our curious reader could have asked more questions, but he was into the story now, and he told himself to lighten up because better answers than he could come up with might well be found straight ahead. He knew a little of what to expect, for he was a beneficiary of this story in many ways. While Eve's offspring were often bitten by the snake, and evil had never been entirely stamped out by injured feet, she and her offspring were fruitful and had multiplied abundantly. Being made in God's image, the incredible creativity of man mirrored the creativity of his Creator. Curious thought of the vast number of hands and minds that had produced the food and housing and transportation he enjoyed—a literal explosion of creativity both in development and production—and he saw how the beginning described in the Bible was a truly significant “big bang” answering his heart's need to know the origin of everything. Though he had not gotten his head around it, it spoke to his curiosity better than did the atheist scientist's stubborn fascination with the first moment when God called his Word to action.

*Adam knew Eve and she conceived and gave birth to Cain,
and she said, “I have created a man like Yahweh did!”*

“She needed better learning than that bite of apple gave her if higher education was to amount to anything for her,” muttered Curious.

And then she had his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept sheep while Cain tilled of the ground.

*After some time, Cain made an offering to Yahweh out of his produce
while Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and the fat thereof.*

*Yahweh had respect for Abel and his offering,
but for Cain and his offering he had no respect.*

Consequently Cain became angry;

his countenance fell, and Yahweh spoke to him:

“Why are you angry? And why that long face?”

If you do well, will not your spirit be lifted up?

*But if you do not well, sin couches at the door and desires to get you.
So overrule it!”*

“What's the deal here?” said Curious. “Why was one offering better than the other? It seems they understood what Yahweh preferred, yet Cain was unfaithful and did his own thing. I'm glad to see God had not abandoned them, anyway.”

One day when Cain and Abel were in the field together,

Cain told his brother about this then proceeded to rise up and kill him.

Yahweh called Cain out for it.

“Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?”

*“What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.
The ground opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand,
and now it curses you. Henceforth when you cultivate the ground it will not
yield its strength to you, so you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on earth.”*

“I like the way God talks,” Curious remarked. “He's an artist in every respect.”

*“My punishment is more than I can bear,” said Cain. “You are driving me
from the face of the ground, and from your face I will be hid.
Moreover, whoever finds me will slay me.”*

Yahweh had an answer for that:

“If anyone slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him seven fold.”

“Well, I guess Cain should have known better. He was warned not to lose his temper. On the other hand, nothing was mentioned about a penalty for murder.”

*Yahweh put that on a sign for Cain to wear
lest anyone find out what he had done and kill him.*

“So they were able to read and no doubt write. Yahweh must have taught them language arts. Or maybe they had superior intelligence and invented things quickly. They must have had fire too if Abel burned his offering. Yahweh foresees a long life for Cain and a multitude of offspring, so Cain gets this protection, but it also marks him as a killer—what perfect irony. He will need a wife, of course. There’s only one possibility: if they were to be fruitful and multiply, siblings had to marry. Cain must have taken a sister with him. Brave girl she was!”

*Then Cain left the presence of Yahweh
and went to live in the land of Nod, on the east side of Eden.*

“I’m sure Cain wouldn’t touch that tree of life, but God wanted to keep his offspring from living forever, and that’s why he stationed the Cherubim over there—whatever they are. I thought they were chubby little angels, but apparently these were serious soldiers.”

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch who built a city he named after his son.

“I think there’s a lot between the lines that got left out here.” said Curious. “It’s impressive, though, that this much detail has been preserved.”

*To Enoch was born Irad. Irad begat Mehujael, Mehujael begat Methushael,
and Methushael begat Lamech.*

Lamech took two wives: Adah and Zillah.

Adah had Jabal, whose tribe became nomads, and his brother Jubal whose family became musicians skilled on harp and pipe.

Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain who forged cutting instruments of brass and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

Lamech boasted to his wives,

*“I have slain a man for wounding me—
a young man who bruised me.*

*If Cain will be avenged seven fold,
truly Lamech will be avenged seventy-seven fold.*

“What a mean character Lamech was,” said Curious. “Probably with having sired successful sons he thought he was worth eleven Cains. Was Cain still around, I wonder. No mention has been made of anyone dying since Abel.”

Adam knew his wife again, and she had a son she named Seth.

*“I name him Seth because God has appointed me another seed to replace Abel,
the one Cain slew,” Eve said.*

“Sounds like ‘Seth’ is another pun,” said Curious. “She seems to share Adam’s talent for making meaningful names. Being his rib, that’s not surprising.”

And to Seth there was born a son he called Enosh.

At that time men began men to call on the name of Yahweh.

“Apparently that’s when Yahweh told them his name,” Curious surmised. “Probably the spirit that possessed that snake was fastening onto others and prompting them to invent a pantheon of gods with names. That’s my guess, anyway. That Lamech fellow sounds like he had gotten grandiose ideas from Cain’s demon. If one devil was in the Garden, how many would there be outside the garden checking out this new creature called man and wanting to have their presence felt?”

Since everything Yahweh had made was good, his opposition began as an invasion from another realm—is that the way you see it, Curious?

“That’s what I think,” Curious confirmed. “There’s an untold story behind this—a rebellion in heaven or something. But why would Yahweh let that go on?”

If you find the answer, you will have the key to everything, Curious.

(It’s doubtful that he heard that. He was reading.)

This is an account of births starting from Adam:

Adam was 130 years of age when Seth was born, and he lived another 800 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 930 years.

Seth was 105 years of age when Enosh was born, and he lived another 807 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 912 years.

Enosh was 90 years of age when Cainan was born, and he lived another 815 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 905 years.

Cainan was 70 years old when Mahalalel was born, and he lived another 840 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 910 years.

Mahalalel was 65 years of age when Jared was born and lived another 830 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 895 years.

Jared was 162 years of age when Enoch was born, and he lived another 800 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 962 years.

Enoch was 65 years of age when Methuselah was born and lived only 300 years more during which he fathered other sons and daughters.

Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah for a total of 365 years. (God took him: Enoch walked with God, and he was not.)

Methuselah was 187 years old when Lamech was born and lived another 782 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 969 years.

Lamech was 182 years old when Noah was born, and he lived another 595 years and fathered other sons and daughters for a total lifespan of 777 years.

When Lamach named Noah he said, “This son will comfort us in our toil working the ground Yahweh has cursed.”

Noah was 500 years old when his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth were born.

“If Adam had lived a few more years he would have met Noah,” Curious observed. “So he must have known all these others, and it would have been easy for them to compile this record with all these numbers.”

When men began to multiply and daughters were born to them, the sons of God looked upon the daughters of men, and seeing that they were fair, they took to themselves all the women they wanted.

And Yahweh said, “I will not have my Spirit strive with man forever, for his flesh is corrupted. In the future his days will be limited to 120 years.”

The Nephilim were on earth in those days, and also after that: when the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children, those became the mighty men of old, the men of renown.

When Yahweh saw the extreme wickedness of man, that his imagination and the thoughts of his heart were evil continually, he was sorry that he made man on the earth. It grieved him deeply.

He said, “I will destroy the man I created from the face of the earth—every beast, creeping thing, and bird will perish too—for I am sorry I made them.”

Curious stopped and put the book down. This was very disturbing, and he was tempted to give it up. To read about the good Creation being ruined like this was gut-wrenching and disappointing.

“It was a war with evil, and Yahweh lost it,” Curious said sadly.

He liked Yahweh very much for his solicitous treatment of Adam in the garden—until Eve came along and handed the serpent victory. The consequential curses Yahweh levied against them were harsh, but not so final as the death his warning had promised. Curious understood that pain had to be an inevitable reminder to them now that the evil spirit had gained access to their minds.

But then when Evil attacked Cain and Cain attacked his brother, it appeared that Yahweh's stern discipline had not been effective: his adversary won that time too, and Cain's behavior became common among his offspring.

And now evil had come in the form of these "sons of God." Curious was astute enough to take that term in its context: "sons of God" vs. "daughters of men" meant "beings from outside the created realm" vs. "human women." In this there was a clue as to the origin of Evil: the evil spirits were many and apparently they were objecting to what Yahweh had done in Creation. This third blow had gone beyond remedy: they had hijacked the human genome to create monstrosities.

While all this trouble was perpetrated by Yahweh's opponents, Curious saw something that would assign some of the blame to the Creator himself: he had made human women too beautiful. Apparently he was trying to please Adam, but the seemingly unintended consequence was that he gave those "sons of God" the desire to make their mark in the human family.

"How were they able to do that?" Curious wondered. "Did they materialize as human males?"

The question connected back to the wonder of God appearing in the garden. It dawned on Curious that God must have put a "back door" in the language and words of Creation for his own use by which a spirit could materialize as a physical body. Had he anticipated a rebellion, he would have protected it with a password.

"Those 'sons of God' must have hacked the password," Curious concluded.

Yahweh had provided something special to enable the fallen sinful beings he had made in his image a way to survive. For Adam and Eve he made clothing. For Cain he provided statutory protection. Enoch he took to a better place. But now....

"Now he purposes to wipe out the whole show!" moaned Curious.

Of course there was no suspense for our inquisitive reader at this point because he knew that Creation has multiplied abundantly. Evil has not won yet. But how much longer will the human race be tolerated? Once again the genome is being manipulated to violate God's design, this time by man himself. Will this lead to the final wipe-out of life on earth? Curious knew a little of the Ark story already: God provided a way in that day for a chosen few to escape universal destruction.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh.

Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. He walked with God though the rest of the earth was corrupt before God and filled with violence.

God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh must come, for through them the earth is filled with violence. I plan to destroy them all, so make for yourself an ark of gopher wood. Subdivide it with rooms, and seal it with pitch inside and out. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet deep. To let in light, leave an 18-inch opening above and all around. Make a door in the side and three decks within. I will flood the earth with water, which will destroy everything that breathes, but I will establish my covenant with you. You will go into the ark, you and your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. Also bring in two of every sort of animal to preserve each kind, male and female. Gather some of all kinds of food, and take it aboard for you and for them."

And Noah did all that God commanded him to do.

"At least by saving Noah and his family, the Creator's creative efforts (in which he had

dared to make humans in his own image) had not been a total bust,” said Curious.

Then Yahweh said to Noah, “Now it is time. Bring your family (and no others) into the ark, for you alone have done right by me in this generation. Of every clean beast take seven pair, the male and his female. But of the unclean beasts take one male and one female. Of the kinds of birds take 14 clean ones but only two of the unclean fowls. Seven days from today I will bring down rain. Forty days and forty nights it will pour down. Every living thing I have made I will destroy from off the face of the earth.”

And Noah did everything just as Yahweh had commanded him to do.

Noah was 600 years old when the waters flooded the earth. He went into the ark along with his family, and, two by two, every kind of bird and animal went in with him. Then Yahweh shut them in.

Seven days later the flood began. In the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep erupted, and the windows of heaven opened, and rain poured down forty days and forty nights.

The ark lifted off the ground and floated, and the waters continued to rise to twenty feet above the mountaintops. All flesh perished: birds, cattle, beasts—every creature that moved upon the earth including every man: every breathing creature living on dry land died. Only Noah and those with him in the ark survived.

And the waters prevailed upon the earth 150 days.

“What were the clean and unclean animals about?” Curious wondered.

Yes, over the centuries many things must have taken place that are not included in the Bible. Rest assured, Curious, if this distinction between clean and unclean animals is an important matter, it will come up again.

“Perfect in his generations. ... That must mean that the genome Noah inherited was not one that had been unnaturally corrupted by Yahweh’s enemies. If he was the only human untainted by the tampering of the “sons of God,” how close I was to extinction! Maybe Noah’s wife was not so pure; nothing is said about that, which could explain why the Nephilim were still around after that.”

What, then, was special about Noah’s wife, Curious? How did she merit being saved?

“Mrs. Noah was fortunate to marry the one man who could save her.”

Yes, but do you think she picked him because of that?

“I doubt that she picked Noah. He was an old man, and I’ll bet she was a lot younger.”

Was that all? There were a lot of young women to choose from.

“She was very fortunate; that’s all I can say. Well, she had to like animals.”

And manage animals too, wouldn’t you say?

“Oh, yes. And stand the smell. Maybe Noah chose her for that reason.”

Can you imagine what the smell must have been inside that ship?

“No, I can’t. Maybe Yahweh caused the animals to hibernate.”

Then why did he mention the food supply?

“Right. And why did he bother to save the animals when he could have made a fresh start?”

You tell me.

“I guess Creation was a one-shot deal.”

Then everything that made that ark possible was in the original Creation?

“Of course. But Noah did need supernatural help rounding up just the right birds and beasts.”

Why? Couldn’t the original Creation have made provision for that too?

"Now if Noah were Adam, I think he could have just called them by name and they would have come."

Adam had a life-long relationship with all the animals, is that what you think?

"Now don't lead me on. I'm supposed to figure this out from what the Bible says. But yes, that's likely. I see what you're getting at. Adam must have passed on his animal lore to his great-great-great-great-great grandsons after civilization had gotten to the point where people had time to pursue the study of nature."

Cain's descendant Jubal would have been about that generation, and if he had time to invent musical instruments and become proficient on them, some of Adam's descendants might have gone in for zoology.

"Yes, I was getting to that. And Noah was probably a zoo keeper and already had just about every bird and beast he needed to fulfill the ark's passenger list."

I hate to bring this up, but it said Yahweh shut them in. So besides prompting Noah with instructions, he did give him a physical hand with the operation.

"Well, I'll keep that in mind. I'll watch for that sort of thing, and it won't be too surprising if he forces nature again."

You do that. Now do you think the stated size of the ark would have contained two of every kind of air-breathing terrestrial creature that God had made?

"That's a stupid question," said Curious. "Actually I wondered that myself until I realized that God wasn't stupid. He could figure the size the ark had to be."

Does that revise—

"Yes, I know. It does. Adam didn't have to name as many creatures as I had imagined, which means the effort it took to name them (and remember all those names) was more realistic. God might have given him a whole day to observe and study each pair before naming them. So the project might have been completed in a hundred years."

So you think Adam was a hundred years old before he lost his rib?

"Why not? He was 130 when Abel was born."

Then he didn't get much time with Eve before she got beguiled by the serpent.

"From what I read, it sounded like the serpent got to her before she had a chance to even consider the Tree of Life."

Apparently Noah spent a lot of years with—

"With his animals before he got a wife, just like Adam did. That's right. So he knew how to take care of them all when the time came to move the zoo into the ship. Now leave me alone so I can finish the story."

God remembered Noah and all that were with him in the ark, and God made a wind pass over the earth, and the waters subsided (the underwater fountains having ceased and the pouring rain having stopped). The waters kept getting lower until after 150 days the level had come down enough that the bottom of the ark contacted solid ground. This was the seventeenth day of the seventh month that it came to rest on a mountain of Ararat. Then by the first day of the tenth month the mountains became visible.

"Speaking of forcing nature, that whole flood scene was pretty wild," Curious remarked. "The only thing I can figure is the land masses got higher and oceans got deeper as flood water drained out to sea. Unless it took place slowly, there would be a quaking mountain under the keel of the ark. If it happened slowly, Noah must have been terribly anxious, wondering if the lowlands would ever dry off—not that I would expect a detail like that to show up here."

After 40 days had passed, Noah opened a window and sent out a raven, which flew around but never returned. He also sent forth a dove. When the dove found no dry ground on which to light, she returned to him. He waited a week and sent the dove out again. This time she returned at the end of the day with

an olive leaf in her mouth. Thus Noah was reassured that the waters were abating. He waited another week and sent the dove out again. That time she did not return.

"The raven found his own vessel, I suppose," said Curious, "—landed on some isle of debris. He took a liking to dead floating flesh for food. If I know ravens, they eat almost anything. You know, I like the realism of the details in this story."

On the first day of the next year (he was then 601 years old) Noah removed a hatch cover and looked around. Behold, there was dry ground. Then by the 27th day of the second month the land was substantially dry.

God then spoke to Noah: "Disembark the ark, you and your family, and bring all the birds and animals out with you. They will breed and multiply abundantly now that they are on land."

And they did: the birds and beasts of every family departed the ark.

"Ah! There it is!" said Curious. "'Families' of creatures were represented. So what God meant by multiplying abundantly obviously included diversification. It's making more and more sense all the time."

But what were the chances of survival? Wouldn't the lions eat the zebras? Wouldn't the wolves eat the deer?

"I see why they were herbivorous eaters when they were created," said Curious.

And Noah built an altar to Yahweh and took some of every clean beast and of every clean bird and made burnt offerings on the altar.

When Yahweh smelled the sweet savor, he said in his heart,

"I will not curse the ground again on account of the evil in man, for the imagination of his heart is evil from his youth, and neither will I smite every living thing in this way. As long as the earth remains, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."

God blessed Noah and his sons, saying,

"Be fruitful and multiply; replenish the earth. Every bird and beast will fear you now, for you have dominion over them (and the fish of the sea too). Every moving thing that lives will be food for you—just as I had given you green things to eat. But flesh with life in it—that is its blood—you are not to eat.

"Your blood—that is your life—I will require of any beast that takes it; and of man, even if it be his brother, I will require the life of man. In other words, whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God man was made.

*"Now be fruitful, and multiply;
bring forth abundantly and multiply on earth."*

Additionally, God said this to Noah and his sons:

"Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants and every living creature that is with you—the birds, the cattle, and all the beasts that have come out of the ark—yes, every beast of the earth. This is my promise to all of you:

*"Never again will all flesh die by the water of a flood;
neither will a flood destroy the earth.*

"This is the token of the promise I am making, the perpetual covenant between me and you and every living creature with you, including all your future generations:

"I set my bow in the cloud as a token of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every sort of living creature; the waters will never again become a flood to destroy

all flesh.

“The bow will be in the cloud, and I will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every kind of living creature upon the earth.”

God explained to Noah: “This is the token of the covenant I have established between me and all flesh on earth.”

“Did God repeat himself like that, or did the historian who put this together do it for emphasis?” Curious wondered.

That led him to speculate about the sources of these stories. Evidently Noah kept a diary. Adam might have written a history of the world and then passed it on to someone like Lamach, Noah’s father, so it would have been in Noah’s possession. It seemed unlikely that the abundance of numerical details would have been retained in an oral tradition, though not impossible. But putting that question down alongside the wonder of Noah’s accomplishment in designing and building the world’s first and only proven seagoing zoo, it seemed insignificant. Noah needed drawings and drawings need mathematics. Was that done by counting scratches on the wall of a cave? If mankind had developed metalworking and musical instruments, was not a written language inevitable?

Their sudden appearance and their long lifespans spoke to the soundness of the original race of humans. Curious thought it likely that the creativity and reasoning power of their minds as well as the strength and dexterity of their bodies—being freshly made in the image of God—would surpass that of any human flesh so weak that it is doomed to expire within 120 years.

Yes, Curious liked the story and sought to get his head around its origin. If it holds together, he might accept it as fact, for he saw that it might well be more difficult to explain as a myth than as history. It certainly felt like fragments of history, but there was one problem: some of the things written about occurred before the appearance of mankind; the author must have invented those.

Well, no, Curious. Put yourself in Adam’s place when it was just you and an incarnation of God (who happened to be your best friend before Eve appeared on the scene). He was the only person you had to converse with. Wouldn’t you be full of questions about your future? And if so, wouldn’t you wonder about the past too?

“You made everything, didn’t you?”

“Yes, my man.”

“Did it take you a long time?”

“A long time? Well, yes and no. The design was worked out first. On the first day”

“What about before that? I mean how did you express the design if there was nothing to start with?”

“That’s a very good question, my man. Let me just say there is this expanse of void. It isn’t nothing, but it isn’t what you perceive as anything. You might say it is emptiness, but to me it is where my Word lives. If you want a place for it in your imagination, you can say that in the beginning before the beginning, I brooded over this void and finally decided to go ahead with the plan.”

After that little flight of imagination, Curious no longer thought much about the redundancy, and I don’t know if he ever settled on an explanation for why the Scripture repeated some things other than the obvious possibility that those things were exceptionally import and worthy of being emphasized by every means.

This historical sketch seemed to comprehend everything of significance at that time, yet the way it was presented was not too hard to get his head around. That he liked. But when right away he found himself reading about human creatures being extravagantly capricious and making a ruin of their society, so much so that the God who had

created heaven and earth, and all of them as well, had to drown them all—that he didn't like. The fate of the world now hung on Noah, the one decent man worth saving. It was a new dispensation under a new covenant.

The sons of Noah that went forth from the ark, were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham is the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them the whole earth was populated.

"Now why is only Canaan mentioned?" said Curious. "His tribe must turn out to be something special."

Noah began tilling the ground, and he planted a vineyard. He drank wine from the harvest, and he got drunk on it.

At that point Curious slammed the volume shut and tossed it to the floor. He was through. He was disgusted.

"Couldn't you do better than that?" he yelled at the Bible's Creator. He stooped down, picked up the Book, and started to take it to the trash bin—but no, he could not do that: it belonged to someone else. Then he remembered his friend's smile when she handed it to him, and he dowsed his anger, sat back down, and doggedly kept reading while determined not to forget the fact that this God of the Bible had a poor track record when it came to managing his creatures. Even the most obedient of them, the one God declared "perfect in all his ways," was a drunkard.

While Noah was naked in his tent, Ham, the father of Canaan, went in and saw him and told his two brothers. Then Shem and Japheth laid a garment on their shoulders, and, walking backward, they covered the nakedness of their father—facing the other way so as to not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him, and he said,

"Cursed be Canaan: a servant of servants he will become to his brethren." And he added,

*"Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem;
let Canaan be his servant.*

*God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant."*

*Noah lived after the flood 350 years; all the days of Noah were 950 years.
And he died.*

"There's more here than meets the eye," said Curious, "and it's worse than I thought—much worse."

We might sympathize with Curious. He truly did not know what to make of this. The arbitrary unfairness smote his sense of justice far more than a mere moral failure on the part of the chosen one.

Was this episode fabricated to justify an oppression of Canaan that came later? That's exactly what it looked like. What had Canaan done? It was his father who had walked into Noah's tent at the wrong time.

"This whole episode is ridiculous," fumed Curious. "Noah had no reasonable basis for predicting one clan would serve another, so this makes no sense. Now I'm wondering if any of this Book really makes sense. I've been giving it the benefit of the doubt, but I can't do that any longer!"

What took you so long, Curious? Was it reasonable that God preferred Noah over everyone else?

"Well, you're right, I did swallow that too easily. I thought perhaps Noah was God's best shot at cleaning up the corruption in the human race—I mean physical corruption

introduced by an enemy tampering with the original design. But now am I supposed believe that corruption propagated to different degrees in different races?—making one race superior to the others? We know that can't be!"

Then you had better back off from your interpretation of the Nephilim and relegate them entirely to Adam's line. You must adopt the interpretation that no supernatural activity was meant by "sons of God" impregnating "daughters of men" such that they bore children who became "mighty men of old" and "the men of renown."

"I wish that were not mentioned at all," Curious muttered.

All right, go ahead and strike it out. Then what are you going to do about the serpent in the Garden?

"The evil, you mean? That troubled me, of course. All I could figure is that God has an adversary."

What can be worse—

"Yes, I know. Nothing can be worse than that. Yet it doesn't seem to bother God too much."

You mean that God has an adversary capable of ruining Creation?

"Right. That's the root of all the trouble. The Flood and everything."

You say it doesn't bother God too much. Why is that?

"Look, I don't know. This is all new to me."

Could it be that God is smarter than his adversary?

"No doubt. But if we're talking about the devil, and God created him too, then how smart was that?"

You won't find the answer anywhere else. And you're Curious.

"I never did like war stories. I don't know if I can stand to read about conflict all day long, if that's what it's going to be. Why hasn't God disposed of him yet?"

What if God shares a secret with you along the way that gives you hope?

"Is that why people read the Bible?"

Yes.

"Ha. Don't let me miss it."

You can't. It's on almost every page.

"I don't even know how to deal with the racial problem."

Try harder to get your head around it, curious one.

Curious allowed that the record regarding Ham and Canaan had to be incomplete. There were too many oddities for it to stand on its own: no mention was made of anyone else in that generation when Canaan's name suddenly popped up along with that of his father and uncles; the curse of servitude passed down to Canaan from his father had nothing to do with his own actions; no curse was pronounced on Ham, who committed the crime; and in fact Canaan may not have been born yet when his name was first mentioned.

The only explanation Curious could think of was that Noah had gotten a sense, somehow, that Ham's line, and Canaan's in particular, was predisposed to trouble. Noah believed this would come about because he knew his son Ham and Ham's wife and recognized certain characteristics. The whole thing could be explained by Ham having made a poor choice in choosing a mate, no doubt going against his father's judgment. There is nothing to say that diabolical genetic engineering always results in mighty men of renown; the opposite may be more common, and Ham's wife may have carried hacked genes onto the ark.

The only thing Curious failed to come up with was an explanation of why Noah seemed eager to voice this discouraging prophecy about his grandson—not that such behavior is unusual today. Curious couldn't just let the issue go without trying to get his head around it, of course.

“Perhaps Noah foresaw an unruly tendency that had best be suppressed,” he mused. “I wonder what Yahweh thought about that. This seems to be Noah’s independent response to the situation. Maybe God saw it differently.”

The reason Curious was not comfortable with Noah apparently trying to promote one son’s progeny and deprecate another was that the evident diversity among his three sons could have been arranged for with a purpose in mind that Noah did not understand. Certainly he would not understand it if God had not told him. Was that diversity not remarkable? Should Adam’s family not all be very similar after ten generations?—especially since Eve came from Adam’s rib!

If God had merely desired to plant human life on earth and watch it develop, he would not have made that “back door” in his design which made it possible to appear in the flesh himself, and he would not have made women so beautiful as to tempt other spirits! He would have let diversity unfold naturally without artificial tampering by the “sons of God.”

“It really looks more like a project than an experiment,” said Curious. “God has some great purpose in mind for this Creation. Well, I think he would have to!”

Yes, it does look very much like God had a purpose in the initial millennium of increasingly imperfect generations from which he selected one man and let that man select a wife and let his sons select wives—and then started over with them as a secondary beginning. Apparently the historian who compiled the first nine chapters of Genesis was unaware of this design, but it would explain why God took everything in stride and expressed no surprise when he seemed to be responding to his enemies using words of resignation. He was not really angry and not actually frustrated and did not start over from scratch when he “repented” of the good Creation in which he exalted mankind in his image.

“Really, that’s the unspoken drama here,” said Curious. God has an adversary, yet he is not anxious or fearful about opposition. The enemy is obviously inferior to him, not an original creator, and thus could be terminated. But he is tolerated for some reason.”

Then Curious frowned, as a dark thought crossed his mind. “God wouldn’t have created evil in order to fulfill a purpose, would he?”

That would ruin everything for Curious. He knew a little about the religious philosophy of dualism where the two sides balance one another and ultimately are a unity. Even that would be vastly superior to a God who purposely devised evil. The thought made Curious shudder, and he was thankful that there had been no evidence so far of either that or dualism. Yet the question was left wide open: Why? Why did God tolerate his enemy? The adversary was implicitly condemned, so why was this evil foe not disposed of and evil nullified?

That question was troubling to Curious, who hated to have his curiosity left hanging. What was his alternative? He could try to take this whole thing lightly and not let any discrepancies bother him (scant chance of that succeeding!) but then where would he turn next to answer his question about origins that got him started on this quest? As he reflected on this, he had to give the Bible credit for its realistic view of good and evil: the universe bore evidence of a designer who favored man, but corruption of mankind had set in and was being tolerated. He decided on that basis that the Bible was worthy of his continued attention. (Strangely, Curious never asked himself why he instinctively understood the difference between good and evil and why he loved good and hated evil.)

However, Curious was not convinced that he should adopt this as his own belief. When he thought about the naturalistic alternative, with its vacant morality, the only thing it had going for it was that it was not this, and that was its supreme advantage to most people. That he could not respect. But they were not curious, and Curious could

not help being who he was!

“Someday, when I finish reading this Book and return it to her, I’d like to read what theologians say about things like the Tree of Life,” he said. “Well, presumably it was eliminated in the flood, so I won’t have to be concerned now about interpreting that, at least. ... No, come to think of it, those lifespans that seemed almost unlimited went with it.”

Now came the post-flood genealogy:

Following are the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and all who were born after the Flood.

Sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

Sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

Sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim.

From these came nations according to the tongues of their families.

Sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

Sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca

Sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

Cush begat Nimrod, a mighty one in the earth, a mighty hunter before Yahweh, hence the saying, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before Yahweh.”

(The beginnings of his kingdom were Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From there he went into Assyria and built Nineveh with its wide places, and Calah; also Resen between Nineveh and the “great city” Calah.)

Mizraim begat Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines), and Caphtorim.

Canaan begat Sidon, his first-born, and Heth; also the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite, the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite, the Arvadite, the Zemarite the Hamathite. Later the Canaanite families spread out: their border was from Sidon, as you go toward Gerar, to Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, to Lasha.

These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their tongues, their lands, and their nations.

Shem, the elder brother of Japheth, became the father of all the children of Eber. The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram.

Sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

Arpachshad begat Shelah; Shelah begat Eber, and to Eber were born two sons: one was named Peleg, for in his days was the earth divided, and his brother's name was Joktan.

Joktan begat Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. The dwelling of the sons of Joktan was from Mesha, as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east.

These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their tongues, their lands, and their nations.

And these are the families of the sons of Noah by their generations and their nations. Such were the nations dividing the earth after the flood.

“Wow! That’s a lot of information,” said Curious.”

Indeed, someone was motivated to compile and preserve this record, and being that it appears in the Bible, it is esteemed above all others and will be preserved forever.

“They were truly pioneers,” remarked Curious, “but I suppose little is known about them—except where they fit into Noah’s family tree. But they don’t come together very well in the trunk. It’s like three trees growing out of the same root.”

Are you surprised at that, Curious?

“I’m surprised, yes, but maybe I shouldn’t be. If the Bible purports to document beginnings, it would be incomplete if it didn’t address the root of diversity in the human race. But what about language? Nothing is said to explain why there are so many languages in the world. And that genealogy skipped over a lot of history between the landing of the ark and forming all those nations!”

Now they all spoke one language. And journeying east, they came to the plain of Shinar, where they built dwellings, using thoroughly fired brick in place of stone and bitumen for mortar.

“Let us build a city,” they said, “with a tower reaching to heaven by which we will have established our name here, lest we become scattered over the earth.”

When Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower the sons of Adam were building, he said,

“This is only the beginning. As one people held together by one language, nothing will be too difficult for them.”

This was puzzling. The implication was that Yahweh was distant from this effort and did not see their building a city and exploring their ability to raise tall structures as a good thing. “One would think he would be delighted with their creativity,” Curious remarked.

However, Curious did notice that the text made it sound like they had moved out on their own, without Yahweh’s permission, away from the mountainous area where the ark had landed and where Noah had established an altar of worship. But Yahweh was not urging them to go back. He was more concerned about what would happen if they became dependent on a shared and centralized economy.

Curious saw four possible reasons why Yahweh did not see it as a good thing:

1) Since they were ignoring him and doing it without consulting his direction, there was a danger that one person or a small elite aligned with the adversary would develop the means of taking control of the area, confining everyone to it, and becoming their god.

2) Their survival depended on not being in constant close proximity because they had not developed immunity to certain diseases that could kill them all. (Curious thought it not unlikely that the opponent who had sponsored the snake in the garden and sent the “sons of God” to corrupt the human genome had the ability to engineer dangerous organisms.)

3) The diversity inherent in Adam’s genome would require the stimulation of environmental diversity in order to develop fully. By remaining close together in one region, that potential would eventually be lost.

4) Yahweh had created many wonderful lands on the earth which he wanted them to explore and enjoy. (The plain of Shinar was not one of them. It was simply the first level ground they came to.)

“Whatever the reason is, how is he going to do that without picking them up and transporting them?” Curious wondered.

“Let us go down and confound their language so they will not understand one another’s speech.”

“Ah, that was clever,” said Curious. “But how would he do that? ‘Let us go down’ sounds like an invasion of language professors. A private language would be more than a novelty; it would be a means of protecting one’s clan and gaining advantage by making secret plans. But that would foster distrust and splinter community.”

(We must credit Curious for having an active imagination, at least.)

Who were those “language teachers,” Curious?

“They came from God. ‘Let us go down.’ he said. Or at least that’s how the historian perceived it.”

Like those “sons of God”?

“It doesn’t say. For all I know God has a whole army of servants.”

Thus Yahweh scattered them. They left off building the city and migrated all over the earth.

“You know what I think?” said Curious. “I think those angels, or whatever they were, led them to places where they would find better pastures and be free from tyrants forcing them to make bricks for the building projects. Not only would they gain freedom and green pastures, they would find people there who spoke their new language.”

But there were no other people on earth at that time.

“No, not until they got there.”

But isn’t that deceptive? Does God trick people?

“He created them, and if the joke was for their benefit, why not?”

Therefore it was called Babel: the place where Yahweh mixed the language for all the earth. From there Yahweh scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

“Babel? Where have I seen that word before?” Curious muttered.

He looked back and found this in the genealogy of Ham:

Cush begat Nimrod, a mighty one in the earth, a mighty hunter before Yahweh. ... The beginnings of his kingdom were Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From there he went into Assyria and built Nineveh with its wide places, and Calah; also Resen between Nineveh and the “great city” Calah.

“There’s the one!” exclaimed Curious. “Just the type that makes slaves of everyone. That’s why Yahweh scattered them—to save them from Nimrod. ‘Mighty hunter before Yahweh’ must mean he had a habit of going out hunting for (not before) Yahweh to kill him.”

That’s outrageous, Curious.

“Yes, to fit an outrageous monster of a man. No doubt Nimrod knew Adam’s story and figured if Adam and Enoch had walked with God, Yahweh must be lurking somewhere in the area. So Nimrod made a mighty effort to hunt him down, organizing cities as he went, and as ruler over at least nine cities, he made up a tale that he had hunted down and killed Yahweh, and therefore he was the sovereign lord to be obeyed and worshiped.”

That good, Curious. Now what do you really think? You don’t mean that you’ve satisfied your curiosity by inventing a fable.

“Look, I gave it my best shot, and I’ve got a long way to go. I really don’t think Nimrod is worth spending more time on. Do you? What do you think ‘mighty hunter before Yahweh’ means?”

Well ...

“That’s what I thought. Now let’s see what comes next.”

These are the generations of Shem:

Shem was 100 years of age when Arpachshad was born (two years after the flood), and he lived another 500 hundred years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Arpachshad was 35 years of age when Shelah was born, and he lived another 403 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Shelah was 30 years of age when Eber was born, and he lived another 403 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Eber was 34 years of age when Peleg was born, and he lived another 430 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Peleg was 30 years of age when he begat Reu, and he lived another 209 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Reu was 32 years of age when Serug was born, and he lived another 207 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Serug was 30 years of age when Nahor was born, and he lived another 200 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Nahor was 29 years of age when Terah was born, and he lived another 119 years and fathered other sons and daughters.

Terah lived 70 years before his sons Abram, Nahor, and Haran were born.

Curious was fascinated by this genealogical chain that stretched some twenty generations back to Adam, specifically linked by numerations of years to ensure that no generation was forgotten. He thought it significant that the lifespans decreased from nearly a thousand years down to about two hundred years. Adam's vitality might have been diluted; but no, they did not suffer loss of longevity until after the flood. Apparently 900 years or so was God's initial design. Could the numbers be overblown be a factor of ten? No, that would imply a three-year-old father.

Yahweh had said he was going to reduce lifespans even further, down to 120 years as a way to curb evil. But there was no mention of how he would manage to bring it about. The fact that a large part of the reduction happened suddenly—Noah lived 950 years and his son Shem lived only 600 years—Curious thought was significant. Pre-flood they lived over 900 years with the exceptions of Mahalalel who did not quite reach 900, Enoch who was translated to heaven, and Noah's father, Lamach, who died in the flood.

Curious guessed at the reason: "Noah's wife must have had a genetic predisposition to a short life and passed it on to her sons."

It was a reasonable guess. The new environment could not explain why the next 400-years decrease, from 600 down to 200, happened not immediately but over ten generations. So it could be that she was God's instrument for that.

Is it not curious that Noah's sons were born when he was 500 years old?

"Yes, it is curious," said Curious. "I think Lamach hoped his son would invent a better plow, so Noah worked on that in addition to maintaining the zoo, and that double occupation left no time for social life. When he finally decided he needed to raise a family, all the women his age were taken, so he married a girl much younger than himself. Mrs. Noah might have died as young as 200!"

Curious was greatly enjoying the exercise of his curiosity and found the answers that came were satisfying within their context. He thought of his latte cup and pictured it running over. But now what was he going to do with it?

"A taste is fine, but I'm not sure I really want to drink this stuff in," he said.

While Genesis had addressed many big questions, the answers always involved miracles. Even though the miracles made sense in their context, they were one-time events that had no modern counterparts. He started to list them but got no further than the very first one: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Curious had never been one to deny the fact of existence, but after reading the biblical story of creation, "existence" for him had become ephemeral, a word without substance, the paper shell of his latte cup, a mere token people passed back and forth in place of real value. No longer could he speak of the universe existing: it was *Created*. That was as clear to him as anything could be.

And he had to acknowledge that Yahweh himself was an interesting personality. Now ... was God the source of the Creation story, or was he the hero of the story? Did Yahweh create the story or did the story create Yahweh?

"I can't believe anyone could fabricate such a God," was Curious' answer. "He con-

tinually surprises me in ways that demand respect. His condescension is like that, for example. I can't conceive of him being the product of a primitive story."

Thinking back over the account of beginnings, Curious remembered certain other details that marked it as being unlikely mythology: information like the precise dates of the flood—details that were not characteristic of legend.

The disappearance of Enoch was an unexplained event (the second Enoch, that is). If it was a fabrication, how did it fit the story? What did his "walk with God" refer to? And how did it become a certainty that God took him? Did God appear to him in bodily form as he had to Adam and Eve and apparently Cain? Answers to such questions would be expected if the event had been part of a story.

"Maybe Enoch was taken for a reason only known to God," Curious speculated.

But that feeble attempt to deny his curiosity its due process did not keep him from wondering about what provision had been included in the good Creation for translating human flesh and blood to heaven—presumably heaven, for it did not specify Enoch's destination.

"No, it could not be heaven, at least not the place distinct from this universe where the Maker of the universe dwells," said Curious. "Earthly material outside the created universe makes no sense. Enoch might have been taken to another place on earth, though what purpose that would serve is hard to imagine."

Why not to another place in time, Curious?

"Conceivably he was translated in time to a later era," said Curious. "That would be a shock to everyone concerned, and for what purpose I can't imagine."

(Curious was into it now and reluctant to let the issue drop.)

"Suppose God un-made Enoch's body and took his spirit—reversing how he made Adam's body and put his spirit into it," Curious theorized. "If all the information that organizes a body were somehow suddenly extracted, there would be nothing but disorganized molecules left—dust and gas; that's all. But that information *would* be compatible with heaven because information is timeless. Then I suppose it could become the pattern for a 'body' in heaven. I can see Enoch as a representative of pre-flood humanity in some living museum in heaven!"

Well, curiosity sometimes causes one to look where there is no reason to look, so we have to expect this sort of thing from Curious. Maybe I shouldn't be leading him on, but it is great fun to see what he does with any suggestion.

Overall it seems that Curious is finding the Bible palatable in spite of his expressed hesitation about "drinking this stuff in." Certainly he likes being challenged and would much rather seek solutions to the questions it raises than to dismiss them as marks of nonsense without first probing for answers.

But something was seriously wrong. He was not going on. Could it be the genealogy staring up at him from the page? No, lists of names had not deterred him so far. What is your problem, Curious? Why do you look so troubled?

"Genesis doesn't leave room for science; that's my problem. Within its own little universe it has things worked out pretty well, but it leaves no space for fossils that are millions of years old."

Who told you that fossils are millions of years old?

"The record is there in the strata of rocks and the dust of time."

Has the dust of time spoken to you, O curious one?

"Indirect though it may be, the evidence cannot be denied."

What language do fossils speak?

"It's a historical record put down by nature, and nature doesn't invent stories."

For whom was that fossil record written?

"The fact that scientists are able to read dates in the byproducts of the passing of

time makes them worthy of honorary degrees in the language of the ages.”

For whom was that book in your hands written, Curious?

“On the other hand, this Bible is a translation into modern English of material written in ancient languages—a translation of a translation, no doubt. Yes, someone wanted it to be read ... in fact I know someone wanted it to be read by me.”

So the Bible speaks your language?

“I’ll have to admit that it seems like Genesis was written for me. It’s pretty easy for me to understand.”

Do you get the sense that translation into your language has been a big leap?”

“The translators had to study ancient languages like scientists study fossils, but the scientists have had a much more difficult task.”

Why is that?

“Fossils don’t speak a human language. I suppose their language could be misinterpreted by humans.”

So translation of language by scholars is a science while scientists reading fossil language are making up stories?

“Yes, it does come down to translation being scientifically testable. But what of the authenticity of the original material?”

Are you comparing the words of the Creator to the decayed residue of his creation?

“I’m afraid I was being put off by something from a different realm altogether. It now seems to me that since fossil daters aren’t dealing with intelligence directly, they may be misunderstanding what they’re looking at.”

Curious looked down at the verses immediately ahead and sighed. “More genealogy,” he muttered. “But not too much.”

Now these are the generations of Terah:

Terah’s sons were Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Haran’s son was Lot, and Milcah and Iscah were his daughters.

Haran died before his father did—in Ur of the Chaldeans where they lived.

Nahor married his niece Milcah.

Abram’s wife’s name was Sarai—it turned out she was barren.

Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai, his nephew Lot and Lot’s son, and they left Ur of the Chaldeans, intending to go to the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled down there instead.

Terah lived 205 years and died in Haran.

“If I’d been Abram, I’d be disappointed that we stopped short of the wonderful land our father had promised us,” said Curious. “Maybe Terah named his son after the city of Haran because he had some liking for the place. And I wonder what happened to Nahor. Obviously there was more to the story at one time.”

Now Yahweh spoke to Abram:

“Leave your country, your father’s house, and your kindred; and go to the land I will show you. I will make a great nation of you. I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

“That’s quite a statement,” said Curious. “What great nation did Abram begin? What great nation has blessed all the families of the earth? That doesn’t fit anywhere in history as far as I know. Yet these are the direct words of Yahweh, and he should know!”

Curious did not ignore the clue in “I will bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you.” But he was unable to find a place for it. Certainly it could have been a factor in ancient conflicts, but as spoken the context was worldwide.

Abram went and did according to Yahweh's instructions to him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed Haran. He took Sarai his wife, his nephew Lot, and all their substance. He took all they had accumulated including the souls they had gotten in Haran. And they went forth to go to the land of Canaan.

And into the land of Canaan they came, to a place called Shechem and to the oak of Moreh—where Canaanites dwelt.

"It sounds like Shechem was a prominent city in later times, at least," said Curious. "Apparently the Canaanite presence wasn't strong enough to deter Abram at that time."

Curious also wondered who Moreh was, that an oak tree had his name attached to it. "Probably a Canaanite guru who sat under the tree and used it for a classroom," was his first guess.

And Yahweh appeared to Abram, saying, "I will give this land to your offspring."

"That revelation would have been a shock to Moreh, I'm sure," said Curious as he remembered the early mention of the Canaanite.

Abram built an altar to Yahweh, to mark the spot where he had appeared to him.

"If the Canaanites knew nothing of Yahweh, this would have been interesting to them," said Curious. "Here comes a wealthy man serving a God who obviously had greatly blessed him already and promises to give their land to him. And he puts up the symbol of his God. Maybe that oak tree represented their gods—that would make sense."

If you were a Canaanite in Shechem, what would you have done, Curious?

"Even if I didn't know who Abram was, I think he would have impressed me as a man to be respectful of. I would find out all I could about him, of course. I'm not Curious for no reason!"

Abram went on from there and pitched his tent on a mountain between Bethel on the east and Ai on the west. He built an altar to Yahweh there and called upon the name of Yahweh.

"I certainly would call on Yahweh," said Curious. "I would be thankful for the success of the journey so far, but I would also want to know if this is where Yahweh wanted me to settle, especially if the pasture was good."

Abram journeyed on, going south into the Negev region.

"Apparently Yahweh told him to keep going."

It doesn't say that.

"No, it doesn't say that. So maybe it was Adram's own idea."

And it came about that there was a famine in the land.

"I thought Abram was God's man and everything would go well for him," said Curious. "Apparently he kept going south without Yahweh's permission."

The dry spell likely affected the whole land, don't you think?

"But it could be that the famine affected the whole land. Probably it wasn't just for Abram's benefit."

Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land.

"It doesn't say that Abram built an altar and called on the name of Yahweh before he left for Egypt," Curious observed. "I can understand that. I would be feeling like I was on my own and the blessing I was promised had fizzled somehow, and now I had to make the best of it."

*When they neared Egypt he said to Sarai his wife,
“Now look: Because you are a beautiful woman, when the Egyptians see you
they’ll say, ‘This is his wife.’ And they will kill me, but they’ll take you alive. So
I ask you to tell them you’re my sister so it will be well with me—for your sake,
of course—and my life will be spared because of you.”*

Curious could not believe what he just read. He felt like he had felt when Noah went ashore and got drunk. Here was this favored man whom Yahweh had blessed with wealth, and he starts acting like the worst kind of coward!

“Is this the best that can be gotten out of humanity?” Curious grumbled as he thought back over the history. God had blessed his creation and pronounced it good. Adam did not treat Eve this way; he sacrificed his life to stay with her. Now Abram is sacrificing his wife and saying in effect he will not miss her! Curious wanted to shout back through the ages, “Where is your faith, Abram?”

Cool it, Curious. How much do you know about Abram’s situation. Your assumptions allow you to believe his faith was lacking.

At least Curious was prepared for the worst. He kept reading to find out what would become of poor Sarai and what the Egyptians would do to Abram if he dared to object to someone taking Sarai and they found out he was lying to them.

And so it happened that when the Egyptians noticed the woman and saw that she was very fair ...

“Okay, Abram. Now I’m suspicious,” said Curious. “Why did you have to show off your wife’s beauty? Why didn’t you keep her face covered? Wasn’t that customary? You’re up to something here.”

Pharaoh’s princes saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house; and he treated Abram well for her sake, giving him sheep and oxen and donkeys and servants and camels.

Can you imagine the consternation Curious experienced at this point? The shrewdness of Abram came oozing out of the text, which only made him look worse. In effect he had sold his wife. Did he want to get rid of her because she was barren? If so, he had compensated her with a life of luxury in the court of Pharaoh and greatly enriched himself.

“So Abram knew how to get ahead in the world,” surmised Curious. “But I can’t see Yahweh approving of what he did. I thought it was rash and unwise of Yahweh to make that promise to Abram—an unconditional blessing. But who am I to criticize Yahweh?”

Yahweh struck Pharaoh and his house with terrible plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife, so Pharaoh summoned Abram.

“What is this you’ve done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife? Why did you say she’s your sister, allowing me to take her to be my wife? Now, behold your wife! Take her! And go your way!”

Pharaoh assigned men to take charge of him, and they sent him on his way: he, his wife, and all that he had.

Curious’ head was swimming. He was aghast that Yahweh apparently had intended this as a means to bless Abram. Or was it Abram’s folly, and Yahweh condescended to step in and turn it around to become a blessing for the sake of the promise? Or was it a means of preparing Abram with resources to withstand opposition in Canaan? About those Egyptian slaves that were given him: was it for their sake, so they would learn about the true God? Or was the divine design that Egyptian blood would diversify the DNA of Abram’s descendants? Or maybe the whole thing was a swipe at the gods of Egypt in order to give the Egyptians reason to respect Abram’s descendants in future encounters.

Then it occurred to Curious that these possibilities were not mutually exclusive.

Could it be that Yahweh's intention was to accomplish them all simultaneously? "Could God be that smart?" he said. Curious laughed at his own question. "Of course the Creator was that smart!"

That led him to look at it from Yahweh's point of view as a response to inevitable folly in mankind, going back to Eve's foolish decision in the garden. It should have been obvious to Curious before, but now he understood that Yahweh had to compensate for Abram's mistakes if his plans for the future were to take shape. But was it Abram's idea in the first place? Perhaps Yahweh told Abram to protect himself by that means and no evil would come of it. "No, I don't believe that," said Curious. "I would rather believe that he picked a stupid man to bless, than that he would counsel him to do a stupid thing. But what do I know?"

If Abram's gains in Egypt were within the will and foresight of Yahweh, how far back did it go? Did Abram marry a beautiful woman for this reason? Was she barren to protect her from an inconvenient pregnancy? Was the drought in Canaan designed to get him down there?

Suddenly Curious realized that Sarai held the answer. If she had objected to joining Pharaoh's harem, there was no indication of it in the text. And apparently she had voiced no objection to Abram's plan that she represent herself as a single woman and dress to reveal her beauty. This could be explained in two ways: 1) she was extremely submissive and more afraid of her husband than of Pharaoh; 2) she was privy to the plan and either believed Yahweh would protect her or else she thought the riches to be gained justified the lie and the risk becoming an adulteress and a slave.

"If I knew more about Sarai, I could figure this out," said Curious. He thought if Sarai was the submissive type or if the culture and her husband allowed her no freedom, then it was a sordid deal all around. But if she was a strong and outspoken woman with any element of respectability in her character, then it would have to be that she and her husband and God had the plan worked out in advance.

Curious fervently hoped it was the later case. But even then, what of the lie about her being Abram's sister?

The puzzle looked insoluble with the information Curious had acquired so far. But if he had to make a guess, he would have to say it was the former case because there had been no indication that Abram had called on Yahweh since Shechem.

"But ... I'm not sure about that," said Curious. "When he built the altars, I think it was either for a witness to others or else he was assuring Yahweh of his devotion. When Yahweh had something to say to him, he just said it." And apparently Abram had no difficulty in determining that it was Yahweh speaking and not his own imagination.

That led Curious to wonder in what mode God spoke to those people. It was a question whose answer was long overdue, he thought, and he thought the reason was because he had been busy with relative trivia.

The Garden had its own answer where their Maker appeared to Adam and Eve in a bodily form not unlike their own. After that Cain's conversation with God had a material result on his body. Then there was Enoch's walk with God which certainly involved communication and had a material result. God spoke to Noah on several occasions, and out of it came a great wooden ship that bridged the ages. There could have been no question about what any any of them heard and who it was who spoke to them.

But with Abram it was different: he had no material evidence, yet apparently he had no doubt that God had spoken to him. Did he hear a voice in his head? Was the means of the message a vision or a dream? The text did not say: only that Abram did not seem to wonder about it.

All the evidence so far was that when God spoke—by whatever means—there was no doubt who had spoken and what had been said. If there were counterfeit seers about,

they had not made it into the pages of Scripture.

"Into the pages of Scripture. ... That's something that deserves consideration," said Curious. "Who decided what went into this book?"

Curious had no knowledge of the history of the book he held in his hands. He had only his own reasoning by which to probe this question. The mere fact that it was a famous book told him that many people had judged it worthy of respect. It's antiquity counted for something too. Since Yahweh was its focal point, no doubt Yahweh influenced the selection of writings that went into it.

Curious grasped the import of this deduction: the loop is a closed: the Bible gives voice to God, and God gives voice to the Bible. Therefore it may not be accepted in part: doing so would be to judge God—unless it is fiction. But if the Bible is fiction, it claims undue respect for itself, making it a work of deception; and as a work of deception it would properly be a work of the devil. To say that the Bible's reliability is in doubt is to make it a burden that we would be better off without. "It would be like a dream that one had, but wishes one didn't have," said Curious.

Since Curious has not quite answered that question for himself, you may wonder why he keeps reading. If you know why, you're ahead of me.

Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had—taking Lot with him—into the Negev. (Abram was very rich now with much cattle as well as silver and gold.)

From there he journeyed on up to Bethel, to the place where he had camped earlier between Bethel and Ai and where he had built the altar. And there Abram called on the name of Yahweh.

Lot, who tagged along with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents of his own. The land there was not able to bear them all, for conflict broke out between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. Canaanites and Perizzites dwelt there too.

So Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between us nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? I suggest you separate yourself from me. If you want to go to the left, then I will go to the right; if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.

Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (this was before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah), like the garden of Yahweh or like the land of Egypt as you come into Zoar.

So Lot chose for himself all the Plain of the Jordan; he journeyed east, and they separated themselves one from the other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the Plain, moving his tent as far as Sodom.

"Yahweh had told Abram to go live in Canaan; so why did he jeopardize his obedience on the whim of his nephew?" Curious asked his curiosity.

The first answer he came up with was that Abram was tempted by the pastures on the Jordan Plain, and if Lot had chosen the right hand and wanted to stay in Canaan, then he would be justified in going there.

"No, I think he knew which way Lot would choose," said Curious on second thought. "And if greater blessings were to be had on the east side of Canaan, then he Yahweh would have told him to go there."

So Abram was not going to be responsible for Lot's deciding to go that way, is that what it amounts to, Curious?

"No, I think Abram knew Lot wouldn't make good decisions on his own, so he must have felt he still had some responsibility for Lot's welfare."

Oh, really? After the way he deliberately put his wife's welfare in jeopardy?

"I still have to figure out what was in Abram's mind that led to that profitable sojourn in Egypt," mused Curious. "Was Yahweh involved? That's the question."

Why is that a question?

"Well, of course Yahweh was involved. Obviously he was busy blessing Abram. But did Abram get some assurance about how it would turn out in Egypt? I'll know the answer to that as soon as I find out more about Sarai. But right now it looks like Yahweh *did* speak to Abram about what he was going to do to Pharaoh and what the outcome would be, otherwise I would have to say Abram cared only about getting rich, and therefore he would take the best pastureland for himself."

Curious might have doubted Lot's sensibility as soon as he saw where Lot pitched his tent. The next verse told him that trouble was inevitable, and if Abram truly cared for his nephew, he would have to step in and try to get him out of it.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked and exceedingly sinful against Yahweh.

Why Lot would want to live there was truly a curiosity. Do you think Lot had a plan to reform Sodom, Curious? Would that be a possibility?

"Nothing I've seen so far would make me think Lot had leadership qualities, but he might possibly have wanted to clean up the Jordan Plain to make it safe for his children."

After Lot had gone his way, Yahweh spoke to Abram:

"Lift up your eyes and look to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west. All the land that you see, I will give to you and to your seed forever. And I will make your offspring to be like the dust of the earth: if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your seed may also be numbered. Arise and walk through the land, the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it to you.

Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and he built there an altar to Yahweh.

Next came a brief account of military uprisings in the area Lot had chosen for himself. The long names of kings and aspiring emperors (names like Chedorlaomer) and their petty kingdoms occupied nearly a half page in Curious' Bible. This impressed him as being important to someone but not to himself.

However, to Lot it was like being immersed in a world war as four kings battled against the armies of five kings.

They all came together in the valley of Siddim (the Dead Sea valley).

The king of Sodom was in on the action, and as it turned out he got defeated:

Now the valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the [armies of the] kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, the remainder fleeing to the mountains.

They [the victors] took all the goods out of Sodom and Gomorrah, including their entire food supply, and went their way.

The impact on Lot was that he lost everything, including his freedom.

One who had escaped brought the news to Abram the Hebrew that they had carried off Lot, his brother's son (who dwelt in Sodom) and his goods. At that time Abram dwelt near the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, who along with his brothers Eshcol and Aner were Abram's allies.

"Now there's a new word," said Curious facetiously. "I was wondering when the Bible would call someone a Hebrew. Apparently Abram was the first of the Hebrews." Then he saw in a footnote where the name literally meant "son of Heber (or Eber)" who was one of the sons of Shem. "Apparently Abram's line preserved the original language God taught Adam and Eve," said Curious as he recalled the Hebrew-like names in Adam's family.

When Abram heard that [the family of] his brother was taken captive, he led forth his personal army (318 trained men), and pursued them as far as Dan. He divided his forces by night and struck and pursued them to Hobah, which is north of Damascus. He brought back all their booty, including Lot and his goods, as well as the women and other people.

After his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the vale of Shaveh (called the King's Vale).

"This episode is more significant than I thought it was," said Curious when he noticed the improbability of Abram's little private army overtaking and defeating Lot's captors after a long chase. Here was a remarkable example of Yahweh's promise in action. But what made it so significant was that Abram had to be counting on Yahweh blessing him and cursing those who opposed him. It also enlarged the concept Curious had of Abram's character and abilities. If Abram knew that Lot would get himself into an immoral environment and certain personal harm which would ultimately require a miracle to get him out, it cast a different light on his apparent unconcern about his wife's captivity in the house of Pharaoh in Egypt—which required a miracle to get her out. Curious had been accusing Abram of scheming to enrich himself in Egypt. Now he was curious to see what the material reward would be in this case.

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine (he was priest of God Most High). And he said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, and blessed be God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

And he [Abram] gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of all.

"Who is this king Melchizedek that's also a priest of Yahweh?" said Curious. "And Abram knows him and knows that he owes him a tenth of the booty!"

And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons and take the goods yourself."

Abram replied, "I have raised my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and promised I will not take a thread nor a shoestring nor anything that is yours, except that which my young men have eaten, lest you say, 'I have made Abram rich.' However, the portion due the men that went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre—let them have their portion."

Apparently this evidence that Abram was not engineering his own blessings was eclipsed by the appearance of Melchizedek. And he might have noticed that Abram's snub of the king of Sodom fell in line with the godless reputation of his city.

"Very curious," said Curious. "He didn't mention the tenth he gave to Melchizedek. It's like they all respected the king of Salem and agreed that a tenth was due him. It doesn't say that Melchizedek came with an army of soldiers or priests to demand their due. He came with a ceremonial present and a blessing for Abram."

As Curious pondered this strange episode he decided that one thing was sure: Melchizedek was perfectly in tune with Yahweh regarding Abram. That made him a witness to Abram's special standing with God. But how did Melchizedek know this?

"He just shows up. He never was mentioned in the genealogies. Well, a book of this size can't contain a record everything. So if what's in it is true, there's bound to be severed connections." That observation satisfied Curious well enough to let him read on.

After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram; I am your shield and your exceedingly great reward."

To that Abram replied, "O Lord Yahweh, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and my heir is Eliezer of Damascus? To me you have given no seed; therefore this one born in my house is my heir."

“That [foreign] man will not be your heir. Your heir will come out of your own inner parts, Abram.” Come outside. “Now look toward heaven and count the stars if you can. So will your seed be.”

Abram believed Yahweh; and Yahweh counted it to him as righteousness.

“I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

“O Lord Yahweh, by what means will I know that I will inherit it?”

“Bring a three-year-old heifer, a female goat three years old, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.”

Abram brought all these, cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other (only the birds he did not divide). Whenever the birds of prey swooped down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram in which he had a terror of great darkness falling upon him. And he said to Abram, “Know this: your offspring will live for a time in a land that is not theirs, and they will serve masters who will afflict them four hundred years. Then I will judge the nation they serve, and they will come out with great substance. You yourself will go to your fathers in peace and be buried here in a good old age; and in the fourth generation your offspring will come here again. Because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full.”

And it came to pass when the sun had gone down and it was dark, he beheld a smoking fire pot, and a flaming torch passing between the pieces.

In that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram: “To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the lands of the Kenite, the Kenizzite, the Kadmonite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Girgashite, and the Jebusite.

Curious read all this with fascination. Abram had attained an enviable standing with Yahweh simply by believing a promise and then securing it by cooperating in the ritual.

Curious had heard the phrase “cut a covenant” but never knew the significance of “cut.” This case was very curious because for Abram’s part it depended on him simply believing the promise of Yahweh and watching as Yahweh visibly performed his part in the ceremony to make good the promise. Though the divided carcasses represented an equally shared sacrifice, the only sacrifice on Abram’s part was the loss of those few animals, which were nothing to him. On the other hand, what Abraham was expected to believe was a formidable exception to the laws of nature.

“But who is Yahweh, if not a formidable exception to the laws of nature?” said Curious. “For that matter, nature is an exception to nature if nature must explain itself!”

Curious wondered if Abram reasoned it that way—that Yahweh by his being an exception to nature was able to work a miracle for him personally—or if he was moved by the Spirit of Yahweh to believe. He saw that the latter would be more reliable and decided it was that—that Yahweh’s Spirit in Abraham ultimately held sway.

Hold on, Curious. Are you then saying that Abram did nothing?—that even his believing was by the grace of Yahweh?

“Okay, suppose it all depended on Abram adhering to his own intellectual argument. Then if he gets some other idea like that he misunderstood Yahweh or if he slips and forgets to maintain his belief, then the whole plan falls apart?”

That’s a good point, Curious.

Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, who had born him no children, had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Seeing as Yahweh has kept me from bearing, I’m asking you to go in to my maid; it may be that I’ll obtain children by her.” And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

“There, you see what happens when belief gets challenged?” said Curious. “If it depended on Abram, the covenant would be toast.”

That’s true, Curious, but Yahweh didn’t specify that Sarai would be the mother of nations. Her solution was not considered immoral in those days, so by what authority could Abram contradict her?

“I feel for the guy,” was all Curious said.

This was after Abram had lived ten years in Canaan that Sarai gave Hagar the Egyptian to be his wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she knew that she had conceived, her mistress lost respect in her eyes.

“Uh oh, now there’s big trouble,” said Curious. “And I think I’m about to have my question about Sarai answered.”

Sarai complained to Abram, “I’m being wronged because of you: I gave you my maid for you to embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despicable in her eyes. Yahweh judge between me and you.”

“Your maid is in your hands,” Abram replied. “Deal with her as you see fit.”

Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her face. The angel of Yahweh found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness—the fountain on the way to Shur—and spoke to her:

“Hagar, Sarai’s maid, from where have you come and where are you going?”

“I’m fleeing from the face of my mistress, Sarai.”

“Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands,” said the angel. In addition he told her: “I will greatly multiply your seed such that your offspring will be too many to count. Listen, you will bare a son, and you will name him Ishmael because Yahweh has heard your affliction. He will be a wild ass among men, his hand being against every man and every man’s hand being against him even as he dwells in the face of his brethren.”

She made up a name for Yahweh who spake to her: “You are a God who sees.” For she said, “Have I actually seen him who sees me?” And thereafter the well was called Beer-lahai-roi. It is between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar did bare Abram a son, and Abram called him Ishmael. He was 86 years old when Ishmael was born.

“I rather doubt that Sarai was complacent during that side trip to Egypt,” said Curious. “I think she had her eyes on clothing and jewelry and wanted the experience of being a queen. Rather curious it is that she got out of there without becoming pregnant but brought out with her one who would on her behalf. Really they brought out of Egypt more than a few slaves: they acquired Egyptian blood for their family.”

When Abram was 99 years old, Yahweh appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty. Walk before me and you will fulfill your part; I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly.”

Abram fell on his face as God continued. “Remember what I told you: my covenant is with you, and you will be the father of many nations. Therefore I’m naming you Abraham, the father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; kings will come out of you. I will establish my covenant between myself and you and your seed after you throughout your generations as an everlasting promise to be your God and also to your seed after you. I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojourning (that is all the land of Canaan) for an everlasting possession. And I will be their God.

“Now, your part in keeping my covenant, which you and your seed after you will keep, is this: every male among you shall be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin as a token of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male when he is eight days old shall be circumcised—he who is born in your house, or bought with money from a foreigner and not of

your seed—all must be circumcised. This permanent mark on your flesh is for an everlasting covenant. Any male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people because he has broken my covenant.

“As for Sarai your wife, no longer call her Sarai, but Sarah her name shall be. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. Yes, she will be nations: kings of peoples will be of her.”

Abraham, being still on down his face, laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to him who is a hundred years old? And is Sarah, who is ninety years old, able to bear a child?” Then he said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!”

God replied, “No, but Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him, an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. But as for Ishmael, I have heard you: behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. Twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear to you at this very time in the next year.”

Saying that he was finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on the very same day as God had instructed him.

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised, and Ishmael was thirteen years old. The same day Abraham got circumcised, so did Ishmael. And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money of a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

“That’s about the most incredible thing I’ve read so far,” said Curious. “That Abraham accomplished that in one day without resistance boggles my mind. What a guy! Did they fear him that much? Even if they respected him, how did he talk them into it?”

As Curious pondered this, he knew he would never get his head around it. In fact he reluctantly was putting it down as fiction when the answer dawned on him: it was not a new thing to them; it was not an unusual practice that none of them had heard of. But if it was not unique, then why did God choose it as a badge of his unique covenant?

“Maybe it was practiced from the beginning for health reasons and Abraham had been neglecting his duty in seeing that he and his men complied,” Curious theorized. “It might have made a difference in the overall fertility picture. The covenant as stated at this point was about fertility, after all, and even if circumcision was nothing more than a badge, it would be fitting that way—and one that the poorest man could acquire. I think the only way Yahweh could make sure they would keep up this painful procedure was to make it a religious ritual with dire consequences for neglecting it.”

Nice going, Curious, but I won’t say that you got your head around it.

Curious shrugged and kept reading. Every page revealed more about Yahweh and about Abraham and Sarah as Yahweh dealt with them.

One day Yahweh appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat in the doorway of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood some distance in front of him. As soon as he saw them, he ran to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, saying:

“My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, do not, I pray you, pass by your servant. Let me fetch a little water and wash your feet while you rest yourselves under the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread for you to strengthen your heart with, and after that you may pass on. For you have come to your servant.”

And they replied, "Do as you have said."

Curious saw things in that passage that he thought were odd. (Indeed we all did.)

"He acts like he's more certain of his guests' identity than they are of him," he grumbled. "How does he know these aren't just three Canaanites out for a walk? I guess he was expecting another visit from Yahweh regarding Sarah. But why three? Is this something like the Trinity of God?" Curious asked the Bible, for obviously it was very significant that Abraham saw three men but addressed them as one. He remembered God saying in chapter one, *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."*

"I thought he made man in the likeness of one of them, so when God appears as man he need only appear as the one. But here he appears as three, which apparently Abraham recognizes as one. I guess that's how he knows who he is. This is very curious."

Did you consider that two of them might have been angel companions, Curious? Or perhaps they were all messengers of Yahweh and not God himself.

"It says Yahweh appeared, does it not? And Abraham spoke to them that way. If they were messengers then they came as three witnesses to establish that they spoke for God. Now I'm curious to find out if they ate food."

Abraham hastened into the tent and said to Sarah, "Quick, make ready three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes."

Then he ran to the herd, selected a nice tender calf, and gave it to a servant who hastened to prepare it. Then he took butter, milk, and the prepared calf, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

"I'll say one thing," said Curious. "If they're divine, they show up the idols that never touch the food set before them. And another thing: though Abraham is remarkably nimble for a 99-plus-year-old, he's not an antediluvian, so he's thinking if he's going to have another son it will be by a special dispensation from Yahweh."

They asked him, "Where is Sarah your wife?"

"She's in the tent."

"That's odd," said Curious. "Wouldn't God know she was in there?"

Isn't there an implied question in their question, Curious?

"Okay, so they meant, 'Why haven't you introduced us to Sarah?'—like she was the one they had come to see, and Abraham knew it. Let me find out."

And he said, "I will certainly return to you when the season for life comes round; and, lo, your wife Sarah will have a son."

"Now just one of them speaks," Curious observed. "—like one was going to be returning without witnesses because no witness would be necessary. This is spooky."

Sarah heard this through the door of the tent, which was behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well stricken in age, and it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

And Yahweh said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I who am old surely bear a child?'"

"There it is again!" said Curious. "It says 'Yahweh,' the name of God, not an angel. And he knows what Sarah was thinking! Therefore one of them is a appearance of God, and the other two are angel witnesses."

"Is anything too hard for Yahweh? At the set time that I return to you, when the season comes round, Sarah will have a son."

"Just like Yahweh," said Curious. "So gracious when he doesn't need to be. But no doubt that cured Sarah's doubt."

Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid.

"Incredible!" exclaimed Curious. "She's calling Yahweh a liar."

Remember, Curious, the narrator of the story has told us this was Yahweh, and

apparently Abraham knew, but how was Sarah to know?

"Maybe Sarah didn't know who was speaking," said Curious. "That makes sense because if she had, she would have been afraid to say anything. ... Well, knowing what Sarah has done so far, that's probably not true."

Let's look at this in the proper light, Curious. Yahweh is bound by his promise; he can't do anything but bless her.

"I think Yahweh is laughing within himself at this point," said Curious. "But he had to let Sarah know he knew she was lying."

And he said, "No, you did laugh."

After that the men stood up and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to show them the way.

Yahweh reasoned, I should not hide from Abraham what I intend to do, seeing that he will become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him? I have known him so that he may command his children and his house after him to keep the way of Yahweh and do what is right and just, to the end that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what he has promised him.

So Yahweh said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

"Just like a good father," said Curious. "—modeling for Abraham what a just human overseer would do. What a project Yahweh has gotten himself into! I didn't realize he would have to work within the natural order of things to bring about what he promised Abraham. But why not? He created mankind and must know how things work."

The men turned and went toward Sodom, but Abraham drew near to Yahweh, and said, "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you not spare the place? That would be far from you, to slay the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous as if they were wicked; that would be far from you. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Curious laughed. It was a perfect setup. "I think Abraham is about to get his lesson about righteous judgment," he predicted.

Yahweh replied, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous, I will spare the whole city for their sake."

Then Abraham ventured, "Behold, I who am but dust and ashes am daring to speak to the Lord! What if there lack five of the fifty righteous? Will you destroy the entire city for lack of five?"

"I will not destroy it if I find forty-five."

"What if there be forty found there?"

"For the sake of forty I will not do it."

"Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: suppose thirty be found there."

"I will not do it if I find thirty there."

"Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord: suppose there shall be twenty found there."

"I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake."

"Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: suppose ten shall be found there."

"I will not destroy it for the ten's sake."

And Yahweh left off communing with Abraham and went his way, and Abraham returned to his place.