

Beginnings and Belongings

Foundations

Lesson #1 for October 7, 2006

Scriptures: Matthew 19:3-8; Luke 17:26-30; Acts 7:1-5; Romans 1:17; 4:3; 5:14; Hebrews 11:1-22.

1. Welcome to the study of the book of Genesis. “In 1997 a Nobel prize-winning physicist made a stir when he wrote, ‘The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.’ Responding to the statement, one astronomer wrote, “Why should it have a point? What point? It’s just a physical system; what point is there?” Another scientist, agreeing, said, “I am willing to believe that we are flotsam and jetsam.” (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 2)

2. “GENESIS: First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don’t have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our life long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the Kingdom of God. But we don’t build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives—we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God’s creative acts, God’s intervening and gracious judgments, God’s call to a life of faith, God’s making covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless “truth” or “principle.” We are given a succession of stories with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in “heaven and earth.” God doesn’t work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out—there’s no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story—at the beginning.” (*The Message*, Introduction Genesis)

3. **What questions do you have about Genesis 1-11? About creation? The flood? About prehistory in general? On what basis do you decide to believe/disbelieve these stories?**

4. Be honest with yourself! Do you believe Genesis is inspired and correctly represents prehistory because of 1) The influence of your parents? 2) The influence of peers? 3) Your personal study? 4) You're not sure why you believe it? 5) You don't believe it?
5. We have often spoken of the idea that faith should be based on evidence. What evidence do you have for believing the stories in Genesis 1-11?
6. There are hundreds of other creation stories—sometimes called “creation myths”—in various other cultures around the world. Are there similarities in these stories? How do we explain these similarities? What major differences do we see? What is a myth? In your own personal thinking—on a scale of 1 to 10 with evolution being at 1 and creation being at 10—what number would you say represents the cumulative evidence available for us?****
7. Genesis is the first of five books written by Moses. We believe that Moses also wrote the book of Job. **“The long years amid desert solitudes** were not lost. Not only was Moses gaining a preparation for the great work before him, but **during this time**, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **he wrote the book of Genesis and also the book of Job**, which would be read with the deepest interest by the people of God until the close of time” (ST Feb. 19, 1880). {3BC 1140.3}
8. What terms do we use for referring to these books? **“Torah”**—which means “law” or “instruction”; **“Pentateuch”**—a Greek term meaning five books; **“Bereshith”**—the Hebrew word for Genesis (the first word in the book); **“The Law”**—usually the term used in Scripture to refer to the books of Moses; **Tanakh**—the Hebrew word for the entire Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament. We will sometimes use these terms interchangeably.
9. Do you regard these books, written some 1400 or 1500 years before Christ, as essential to your faith? Why?
10. Is it essential to our faith to have a clear understanding of our origins? Why?
11. What scriptural evidence do we have for events which took place before the creation of our earth and our world? (John 1:1-3; Revelation 12:1-12) Ellen White suggests that Job may have been written before Genesis. Does the book of Job tell us anything about origins? (Job 38:1-7)
12. The prophet Isaiah has some interesting discussions about God in Isaiah 40-55. He basically states that the real God: 1) is able to create; 2) is able to predict the future; 3) is able to perform supernatural acts. In these chapters Isaiah hints at the foolishness of worshiping idols made of wood or stone or metal instead of our powerful and wonderful Creator-God. How do you feel about Isaiah's arguments? Would you use other arguments in our day? Do you think all of Isaiah's arguments are valid even today?
13. **Another evidence for belief in Genesis and the Old Testament is based on what the New Testament says. How important is this evidence in your mind? Biblical writers such as Peter and Paul and Luke speak of Genesis and the stories of Genesis as factual. They quote Jesus as speaking of the stories of Genesis as factual. Review the following passages: Matthew 19:3-8; Luke 17:26-30; Acts 7:1-15; Romans 4:3, 9-21; 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Galatians 3:6; 1 Timothy 2: 13, 14; Hebrews 11:3-22; 1 Peter 3:20. Could Genesis be a myth if these New Testament writers, including Jesus, himself, speak of them as fact?**

14. Why do you think there's so much doubt about the veracity and truthfulness—even scientific accuracy—of the book of Genesis? Was Genesis written as a scientific treatise? **Is it fair to pit science versus Scripture especially in the book of Genesis? Shouldn't we compare science with science and belief with belief? If we ask scientists who believe fully in the theory of evolution to explain how they interpret their science and how they explain origins, we could put together a contrasting system of belief.** While virtually nothing in the book of Genesis can be proven archaeologically as a Biblical minimalist would like it to be, everything that we can document about the book of Genesis is consistent with archaeology as we know it today. Is it fair to say that we should believe what the Bible says unless we can prove it wrong? Or should we say that we should only believe those portions of the Bible which we can prove from extra-Biblical sources? How much would be left?
15. When speaking of Genesis and origins, we are speaking about “who” and “why” and very little about “how”.
16. **What things about God do you feel are clearly revealed in the book of Genesis?**
17. **Our lesson speaks of God as the creator of 1) physical matter and life, 2) a special people, 3) history. In what way has God created a special people and history?**
18. After speaking of creation, the flood, and the events shortly after the flood, in Genesis 12 the book begins to speak about God's personal relationship with Abraham and his descendants. God seemed to have a very personal relationship with Abraham. Could you describe this relationship in your own words? Were they friends? Acquaintances? **Did Abraham always know immediately when God approached him? Did he recognize him by sight? Did he recognize his voice? Did he always know immediately?**
19. **As you look at the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons, you find God acting in very personal ways with these patriarchs. Do you wish that God were that active in our lives today? Why? Or why not?**
20. In what way has God created a special people? Can you name groups that considered themselves a special people of God down through the generations? What relationship did they have with God and why did they consider themselves his special people?
21. How does God create history?
22. Read Isaiah 40:22, 23; 44:24, 27; 43:13; 44:24, 25. In what ways did God interact with Cyrus? (Isaiah 41:2; 45:1-13, 18, 28) Do you think Cyrus was immediately aware of God's activity? The devil's activity?
23. Do you think you have had personal experiences where God has been involved in your life? Do you wish that God were more involved in your life every day? Or are you more comfortable with the God who stands back and lets you make your own choices even if they are wrong?
24. Genesis 3:8 speaks of God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening to speak with Adam and Eve. In your mind what kind of experience was that? Before sin entered the world, were these happy and joyous occasions? Do you think Adam and Eve had saved up many questions from the day's activities to ask God? What would they talk about?

25. Many of our Christian friends pick and choose what stories they believe in from the book of Genesis. Is that a valid thing to do? Could we call Genesis 1-11 myth and still believe the rest of Genesis is valid inspired material? What about the rest of the Bible?
26. Our lesson study guide speaks of some examples from Jesus (Matthew 19:3-8) and also from Steven (Acts 7) where they, when asked questions, went back to the beginning. Is that an important principle that we should follow, or just a waste of time?
27. How much do you think Adam and Eve, and later Noah and Abraham, understood about the great controversy? Did God reveal to them any details about the war in Heaven? Why do we have to wait until the book of Revelation to hear about the war in Heaven? Is there evidence in earlier parts of Scripture that there was a war in Heaven? What kind of war was it? Over power or ideas?
28. Much of the book of Genesis is about Abraham and his descendants. Abraham is spoken of as a great man of faith. (Hebrews 11:8-19; Romans 4; James 2:23,24) What experiences from the life of Abraham would you point to as proof of his faith?
29. Would you have been willing to leave Ur of the Chaldees with Abraham and his family? Was that more presumption or more faith? What was the basis for Abraham's faith at that time?
30. Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:17 speak about the righteousness of God. They suggest that the righteous will continue to live in their faith. There are two different possible interpretations of this expression in Romans: should it read "those who are righteous because of their faith shall live" or should it read "those who are righteous shall live by their faith?" Either interpretation is possible in the Greek. Do you think Paul intended for us to believe both?
31. Is it important in your thinking that our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is also our Creator? Why is that important?
32. Faith seems to have two basic characteristics. Rightly understood it seems to be based on evidence. But after carefully considering the evidence, people of faith move forward in areas of their lives where they may not be completely sure which direction to go. What does it mean to move forward in faith? Is collecting the evidence on which we should base our faith more important or the act of moving forward in trust?
33. In this series of lessons we will take a good look at the book of Genesis. There will be many things that we will have questions about. Very little detail is given for many of the stories. We have no extra-Biblical evidence for any of the stories in Genesis 1-11. Can we believe these stories? On what basis? Are you comfortable with the book of Genesis as a "foundation" for your faith?

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