

## The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy Fall, 2015

*The Beginning of All Things – Genesis through Deuteronomy* Have you ever wondered what the scriptures teach about the origin of the universe? What about the patriarchs, who were they, and why are they important? What relevance does the account of the exodus of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt have for Christian growth? What can the seemingly tedious ceremonial laws of Leviticus as well as the long list of names in Numbers teach us about godly living? How should a believer read and reflect on the five books of Moses collectively called the Pentateuch (or Torah)? How do these five books “fit in” to the over-arching story of scripture? These questions and more will be explored as we seek to understand this section of God’s Word.

The objective of this class is: to gain an overview of the first five books of the Bible (otherwise known as the Pentateuch), and understand the relation between these foundational books to Christ and Christian living.

This week we begin a new series in our exploration of God’s Word. We will look at the beginning books of the Bible, the Torah, the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. These books are known as the five books of Moses because he is believed to be the primary author. His authorship is confirmed by the infallibility of the text itself and is attested to by Christ in the gospels (John 5:47). Collectively, they form the foundation for Old Testament religion and from them the key components of the Hebraic faith arise. It is in these books that we have the very framework of God’s covenantal dealings with man witnessed, foretold and explained. No wonder Christ said, “...for he (Moses) wrote about me (Christ)”. Some scholars would like to relegate the Christological reference to Christ in the Pentateuch to the prophecy of a coming prophet (Deuteronomy 18), but this is not the only instance in which Moses wrote of Christ. The Torah law is a tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24) so every page, every chapter, every event is dripping with a Christ-centered focus. The task before us to mine for these riches and thereby obtain a fuller understanding of who Christ is, and who we are in Him.

*Let’s begin at the beginning, a very good place to begin...* This week we will explore the beginning of the Pentateuch, and look at Genesis chapters 1-3. These three chapters could well be a class unto themselves since they contain so much theology and mystery. The Hebrew title for the book of Genesis is *Bereshet* and comes from the first word or phrase of Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning...*” Our word for the book comes from the Greek word for generation, *genesis*. In either case, the name assigned to the book is appropriate for it is an account of the beginning of all things and the generation of all that is. However, there is one subject of the book of Genesis. This subject is identified as the second Hebrew word, fourth English word in the text: God. Regardless of the historical time period we will be discussing as we progress throughout the book and the various figures within it (Noah, the Patriarchs, and Joseph), the subject is always the same. God is the subject. If we keep this in mind, then we will not stray far from understanding the authorial intent. For the sake of exploring the first three chapters in a timely manner, we will divide them up into two main sections: Creation and Fall.

Point One: Creation (Genesis 1-2) – There are few presuppositions regarding Genesis 1-2 of which we need to be aware before we discuss the actual scriptural narrative. There has been for the past century an on-going discussion as to whether or not the Genesis creation account is historically true. If so, many have wondered how one reconciles the scientific, geological account with the creation account in scripture. Such a question has polarized the Christian world into two main camps: those who believe the Bible to be inaccurate because of the variance between scripture and science, (and consequently attempt to allegorize or dismiss the biblical account) and those who interpret Genesis 1 & 2 in

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opposition to evolutionary science. In other words, they seek to define the meaning of Genesis 1-2 by negation. Both extremes are incorrect ways of reading Genesis 1 -2.

Another statement heard quite often in the debate over Genesis 1-2 is that the text should be interpreted using its literal meaning. For many, this means not *literal* in relation to the original authorial intent, but interpreting the words in their simplest sense, i.e. literal to my own subjective understanding. The question, “What was the authorial intention?” is replaced by, “What does the text mean to me?” In order to understand Genesis 1- 2 we must answer the question, “Who was the original audience, and what was going on?” In order to accurately understand chapters 1-2, we will look at two different layers: textual, and contextual.

The textual layer adds significant insight into the meaning of the first two chapters. In chapter 1, there is a prosaic narrative throughout the entire chapter that is unique in comparison to the rest of the Bible. This narrative begins with a section of scripture, somewhat set apart from the rest of the chapter: Genesis 1:1-2. These two verses offer the overview of the entire chapter – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...Then, we see the focus of the creation week as outlined in the subsequent verses (3-31) being the shaping of the earth. From verse 3 through 31 there is the refrain, “and God said...” as well as “...and the evening and the morning...” Each day of creation is painting with broad strokes, meaning we do not have details of the creation of plants that reproduce asexually (for example) only those bearing seeds. This does not mean that plants that reproduce asexually are rogue mutants of God’s creation, but God did not intend to offer every detail of the creation account in the text of scripture. Of the seven days of creation the only day that is not framed with the statement, “...and the evening and the morning...” is the seventh day or the Sabbath. We have biblical reason to believe that we are still in the Sabbath, it did not end as did the other days of creation (Hebrews 4:1-11). This begs the question whether or not the other six days of creation are not analogous in a similar manner as is the seventh day.

The contextual layer of the book of Genesis in general and these three chapters in particular deals with the audience to whom the book was written as well as the purpose for writing. The audience for whom the book was written were descendants of former Hebrew slaves who had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and were on the precipice of entering the land of Canaan. As a nomadic people, they were agrarian and shepherds (as opposed to tradesmen and warriors). They were seeking understanding of their place among the nations, and how God, the covenant God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was capable of fulfilling his promise to make them a great nation and bless all nations through them. Their place among the nations was dubious; their role as a light to the world remained to be clearly defined. For the ancient Hebrews, the creation account served two primary roles: It established the distinctness of a monotheistic God, and assigned value to all of humanity. From this point forward the plan of God in history moves from universal to particular only to return with universal ramifications with the coming of Christ.

Point Two: The Fall (Genesis 3) – Everything that God made was and remains “very good” – but the fall is a historical reality. We do not progress far into the story of scripture until we know (far too well) what went wrong with God’s good creation. Genesis chapter 3 begins by informing us of the presence of an imposter – Satan. How and why he was in the garden we do not know. However, we can be certain that God does not allow anything that will not eventually bring him glory. Man’s desire for good things (Gen. 3:6) without God’s permission resulted in a cosmic revolt against the Creator, and a subjugation of the

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creation to the pains of death and decay. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. in his book, *Not the Way its Supposed to be* says the following about sin, “God hates sin, not just because it violates his law, but more substantively, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be. God is for shalom and therefore against sin. In fact, we may safely define evil as any spoiling of shalom, whether physically (by disease) morally, spiritually or otherwise.” When man sinned, the *shalom* of God’s good creation was broken.

So, what does scripture teach about the Fall? There are few things immediately ascertainable from the text at hand regarding the nature of the Fall. When man was tempted, he was in a pre-fallen state, meaning it was possible for him not to sin. After the Fall, man is in a post-fallen state meaning it is impossible for man not to sin. After glorification man will be in a fully redeemed state, which means that it will be impossible to sin. Man was originally tempted by three things:

- 1) A desire for sustenance
- 2) A desire for beauty
- 3) A desire for insight/wisdom

All three things are good (and part of the created world). However, when man desired these good things over obedience to God (1:17), idolatry was born in the heart of man, something other than God assumed the throne of sovereignty over the heart of Adam and Eve, and mankind fell.

In this lesson we have covered the two great way markers expressed in the first of the five books of Moses. In a sense, the rest of the Bible is a response to what we have just covered. These two mile markers will assume a critical position as we learn more fully the unique call placed upon the redeemed people of God in their transition from wilderness wanderer to world witness.

*Questions to consider?*

- 1) In what way does your view of Creation shape your understanding of the rest of scripture?
- 2) How do you think much of the evangelical world understands and interprets Genesis 1 -2?
- 3) Why does this matter (answer to question 2)?
- 4) How does an accurate understanding of the Fall shape your appreciation for Christ and salvation?
- 5) Why is belief in a historical Adam important?
- 6) What did you learn today that will impact the way you view the world and your place in it?