

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.

Last week, we explored Genesis chapters 1 -3 and witnessed the biblical account of the creation of the universe as well as the fall of man. The two great milestones, which when properly understood offer significant insight into the glory of God’s creation and the catastrophic result of sin, become the telescopic lens through which we now look at the rest of the book of Genesis. In three short chapters, Moses informs God’s people how we came to be, and what went wrong. From the boundaries of Eden we have the promise that a seed is coming, a seed of the woman that would crush the serpent’s head and suffer harm in the process (the serpent would bruise his heel). For the first generation descending from slaves, it must have been tremendous to hear the evidence of God’s familial tie with his chosen people. The value or worth of the Hebrews (and indeed of all humanity) was not their ability to make bricks for the trophy cities of Rameses II, but the fact that they were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Everything from the rising of the sun to the reflective ability of water was understood to be governed by the volition of the one who had called Abraham, and remained faithful to his covenant throughout more than 400 years of Egyptian slavery.

In this lesson, we will explore events immediately following the fall, and how these events were not without God’s providential guidance. We will also consider God’s redemptive work in history particularly as is it revealed in Genesis 4 -21.

Point One: Murder He Wrote – within a generation of the consumption of the forbidden fruit, the first murder had been committed. The story is a familiar one to anyone who has ever been to Sunday school: Cain brought an offering unto the Lord of the fruit of the ground, for he was a farmer/gardener. Abel also brought an offering unto the Lord of the firstborn of his flock, because he was a shepherd. God accepted Abel’s offering, but rejected Cain’s offering. Cain, filled with jealousy killed his brother in deceit and cold blood. God held Cain responsible for the blood of Abel. There are three things that stand out in this story:

- 1) The rejection of Cain’s offering;
- 2) The responsibility of Cain for Abel’s life
- 3) The curse of the ground.

Why are these three things significant? The first recorded sacrifice in human history established the shedding of blood as a pre-requisite for acceptance in the sight of God; 2) Cain was responsible for the *life* of his brother, not simply his death. Abel’s sacrifice had atoned for his sin, but the sin of Cain

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remained (Matthews 23:35; Hebrews 11:4; Hebrews 12:24). However, the main reason that these three things are significant is that we have here hard upon the heels of the fall, the first biblical account of justification by faith alone. We need not wait until Genesis 15:6 to learn of justification by faith, it is here made plain by the account of the murder of Abel and the commentary of the author of the book of Hebrews (11:4). The curse of the ground was a variation of the curse placed upon Adam in Genesis 3:17.

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Point Two: Noah's Flood – from the murder of Abel until the flood in the days of Noah, the monstrosity of sins perpetrated by descendants of Adam intensified. One of the most astounding comments regarding the total depravity of man is given in Genesis 6:5-6, *"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart"*. Thus, God determined to destroy the earth with a great flood. However, *"...Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of the Lord"* (6:8).

With the destruction of the earth by a great flood, and the preservation of humanity through the stock of Noah, the story of redemption once again like the contractions of an accordion, narrow in on one family, a family chosen by God's grace to be the means of preserving the seed from which would come the true savior of mankind. After the flood, God establishes his covenant between himself and every living thing, with Noah as the mediator of this covenant. The covenantal promise is as follows:

I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. (Genesis 6:21-22).

Here we see the gracious lessening of the effects of the fall on God's good creation, a lessening that will only be truly known in its fullness with complete redemption (the consummation of all things) – see Romans 8:20 -22. The Noahic covenant stabilizes creation until the Redeemer (Christ) has finished His full redemption.

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Point Three: Abraham's Call – Genesis 12 – 20 after Noah, God calls Abraham (Genesis 12:1). He makes him a promise that, *"...I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great (as opposed to the men of Babel who sought a name for themselves), so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* The means of this blessing were stated as coming from Abraham's descendants, but

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when he was an aged man, he was still childless. This led to an elaboration of the covenant in Genesis 15:4-6 in which God promises accordingly:

“...This man (Eliezer) shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir...look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your offspring be. And he (Abraham) believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:4-6).

God’s promise was most certainly confirmed to pertain to the natural descendant of Abraham. God appears to Abraham the third time in Genesis 17 and promises the following: *“...I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between men and you, and may multiply you greatly...behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourning’s, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:1-8).*

The three appearances together comprise the elements of the Abrahamic covenant of scripture. One may rightly ask, in the context of the mega-narrative of scripture, what is God doing? God is narrowing his covenantal promises once more to one man, and through him and his descendants, to the entire world. With the birth of Isaac (Yitzhak or laughter) we hear the joy of the ages: God is choosing a people, through grace and justifying them through faith so that they might be the vehicle of the promised redemption.

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Point Four: Isaac’s Birth – (Genesis 21) God’s covenantal promise is fulfilled microcosmically through the birth of Isaac. God tells Abraham, *“...through Isaac shall your offspring be named” (21:12).* God is choosing to redeem all things not through extraordinary means, but through covenantal promises conveyed from generation to generation. This message is pivotal in light of the audience of the book of Genesis. As we saw last week, the audience of the book were second generation slaves whose parents were redeemed from Egyptian bondage by a God who identified himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac. Through the giving of the Torah (Pentateuch), the exodus generation is given assurance of the remarkable plan of God, and their role within it.

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Conclusion: The lesson today spans more than five hundred years and seventeen chapters of the book of Genesis. Implicit in the story of each character is a descending vortex of human responsibility. Cain was instructed to bring an acceptable sacrifice, Noah was instructed to build a boat, and Abraham was instructed to leave the land of his nativity. The birth of Isaac is the demarcation line. With Isaac's birth, nothing but continued faith and obedience is required. Such faith and obedience on the part of Abraham reaches a new level as we will see in our lesson next week. For now, we should take a step back and endeavor to see from the vantage point of a Hebrew wanderer on the borders of the Promised Land the unfolding of God's story of scripture. Collectively, last week's lesson and this week's lesson established God's rightful ownership of the world; the value of all mankind, and the particular grace of God as witnessed in his preservation of creation (Noahic Covenant), the call of Abraham and birth of Isaac.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8)