

Foundations



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 19:3-8, Luke 17:26-30, Acts 7:1-15, Rom. 1:17, 4:3, 5:14, Heb. 11:1-22.*

Memory Text: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (*Psalms 11:3*).

South African Laurens Van der Post had a rock sitting on his living room table. When asked about the “strange black stone,” he responded that it came from fifteen thousand feet below the surface of Africa. It was sent to him by a friend who, in the accompanying letter, wrote: “This is a symbol of what you and I have tried to build on all our lives.”

We all build upon foundations. In the most literal sense, we build our lives upon the rocks beneath our feet; but in another, we build our lives around the principles that govern us. Atheists, religious fanatics, skeptics, scientists—everyone governs their lives by fundamental principles, whether they acknowledge those principles or not.

As Christians, our principles are found in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*). And yet, we know about Jesus through the Bible. So the Bible, in essence, works as the foundation for our lives and our faith. And, in a sense, Genesis serves as the “foundation” of the Bible, kind of like the “strange black stone” far beneath the earth that held up the ground immediately beneath Laurens’s feet.

This week, we’ll take our first look at this book, the “bedrock” of the Bible itself.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 7.*

Genesis and the New Testament

The Pentateuch (the first five books found in our modern Bibles) comes from a Greek term for “five.” The five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, provide the foundation for our biblical faith. It would be hard to make much sense of our religion without them.

As the first of these five books—and, indeed, the first book in the Bible itself—Genesis begins with the origin of our world. After all, if we don’t have our origins right, how easy it is to get everything else wrong. If a builder working on the joints of a house gets the joint off by a few degrees right from the start, before long the walls will be crooked and unusable. Thus, Genesis begins with a clear and distinct message about our origins.

Of course, the enemy of souls works hard to turn the world away from the true God. One of his methods is to put doubt in our minds regarding the veracity of the Bible. Genesis itself comes under fierce attack. If he can undermine our faith in it, which is so foundational, how easy for him to undermine our faith in everything else.

What do the following texts tell us about how Jesus and the New Testament authors viewed the authenticity and veracity of Genesis? *Matt. 19:3-8; Luke 17:26-30; Acts 7:1-15; Rom. 4:3, 9-21; 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22; Gal. 3:6; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; Heb. 11:3-22; 1 Pet. 3:20.*

Are we going to listen to the critics who come up with all sorts of “evidence” to question the historical veracity of Genesis, or do we follow the lead of those like Jesus and Paul and Peter, who showed unquestioned faith in the book? Indeed, to question the veracity of Genesis means to question the veracity of the New Testament, which time and again refers to Genesis. How reliable could the New Testament be if it were all wrong about Genesis? As we can see, once we start questioning the historical veracity of the Genesis account, the whole edifice of faith crumbles. Which, of course, is exactly what Satan wants.

What other examples can you find of how doubt regarding what might seem like a “small” thing can, if taken to its logical conclusion, lead to doubt about major things, as well? Why, then, should we be so careful regarding our trust in the Bible as the Word of God? After all, once you start doubting the Bible, what’s left?

Key Text: *Genesis 1:1, 2*

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish the authenticity of the book of Genesis.
2. To reveal the presence of God throughout the book of Genesis.
3. To discuss the foundation of our faith as introduced in Genesis.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Foundation of the Bible (*2 Pet. 1:20, 21*)

- A. The beginning of our existence can be found in Genesis.
- B. All of the books of the Bible have their roots in Genesis.
- C. New Testament writers view the Old Testament—including Genesis—as the authentic Word of God.

II. A Revelation of God (*Gen. 1:1, 2*)

- A. Genesis reveals God as the Creator and Ruler of planet Earth.
- B. Genesis reveals the everlasting nature of God.
- C. The intimate relationship between God and humankind can be seen in the book of Genesis.

III. The Foundation of Our Faith in Jesus (*Heb. 11:1-22*)

- A. Genesis points to the coming Messiah.
- B. The patriarchs lived by faith, even from the beginning.
- C. The first Christians had a firm foundation for their faith in Jesus.

Summary: Genesis is the foundation of our existence and of our faith. God's presence and interaction with human beings are seen throughout the book of Genesis. New Testament writers often refer to Old Testament scriptures, giving evidence of their authenticity.

COMMENTARY

The first verses of Genesis introduce a theme that continues throughout the rest of the Bible: God's creatorship. His creatorship has three aspects. He creates

1. physical matter and life,
2. a special people, and
3. history.

Believing that God's creative power shapes life, nations, and history inspires trust in His power to save us from sin and moves us to say with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (*Ps. 51:10*).

Creator of History

Most people are aware of the first aspect of God's creatorship.

The Mighty and Merciful God

The book of Genesis is first and foremost a revelation of God. In Genesis, humanity is given its first written revelation about our Creator and Redeemer.

What do these following passages tell us about God?

Gen. 1:1

Gen. 7:11

Gen. 14:19, 22

Gen. 18:23-33

Gen. 48:15

The first book of the Bible rings with the might and power of God. He is seen as the Creator, Judge, Exemplar, Sustainer, Most High, Almighty, and Everlasting God. As the Sovereign, He not only exists before everything but also brings everything into existence.

And yet, there's so much more revealed about God here. Even in some of the Genesis accounts about judgment we can see His mercy; His sufferings over humanity's sin; His great patience. Before the Flood came, He had Noah preach many long years, giving everyone an opportunity to be saved. Even with Sodom and Gomorrah, despite their great wickedness, He was willing to spare them, if possible. All through Genesis we can see the might and power of a merciful, loving God who, despite His hatred of sin and evil, loves His fallen creatures and seeks to redeem them.

Write one short paragraph about your understanding of what God is like. What does your answer reveal about your view of God? Be prepared to share your answer in class.

The debate over our origins, waged between the theories of Creation and of evolution, confronts us almost everywhere—from the classroom to the legislative hall. The theory of evolution seeks to give a naturalistic explanation to the origins of the physical universe and its life forms, denying the event any supernatural significance. Scripture reminds us, however, that God brought everything into being.

The second aspect of God’s creatorship is less well known. God not only created the first human couple; He brought into being a special people for Himself and continues to create a people in the last days. (This will be explored further in lesson 3.)

The third aspect of God’s creatorship is the least familiar of the three, even to many Christians. The Bible declares that God is Maker not only of heaven and earth but also of the events that transpire in them, especially those things that fulfill the plan of salvation. Starting with His vow to the serpent that Someone “ ‘will strike your head’ ” (*Gen. 3:15, NRSV*), the Lord would shape historical events to fulfill that promise. The Bible is the story of His role as Creator of history.

We find in the book of Isaiah perhaps the clearest associations of God as Creator with His making of history. In Isaiah 41:21-24 the Lord challenges the false gods to prove themselves real by predicting the future. Isaiah 44:8-19 dismisses idols as nothing more than human-made objects, unlike God, who has existed from the beginning and who not only created the physical universe, including the earth, but also controls world events (*Isa. 40:22-24*). Things can happen only as He permits them. “To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One” (*vs. 25, NRSV*). The Lord answers His own question by pointing to His creative power. “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?” (*vs. 26, NRSV*). “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (*vs. 28, NRSV*). The true and one and only God is the Creator of all that is, including human history.

Notice how intimately Scripture links both physical creation and the creation of history. “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, . . . who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing” (*Isa. 40:22, 23, NRSV*). Here, God ties His creative powers to His ability to control political and world events. Thus, God creates not only the heavens but also the events that take place under them, present and future. Speaking of the future of the nation of Assyria, God declared, “As I have designed, so shall it be; and as I have planned, so shall it come to pass” (*Isa. 14:24, NRSV*). “For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?” (*vs. 27, NRSV*). History—here, particularly, prophetic history—is as much a divine creative act as the stretching out of the heavens. “I work and who can hinder it?” (*Isa. 43:13, NRSV*). Through His creative power He not only blocks false predictions (*Isa. 44:24, 25*) but “confirms the

Close Encounters

Genesis, we saw yesterday, depicts God as all-powerful, the One who spoke the world into existence, the One who could bring a flood upon the whole earth, and who could rain fire down on rebellious and violent cities. As humans, looking out at the expanse of the creation, how could we not be in awe at the incredible power of the God who created all things?

Yet, the Bible also depicts God as up close and personal; that is, unlike the god of deism, who creates the world and then goes off to leave it on its own, the God revealed in the Bible has been intimately associated with fallen beings. We see this most powerfully in the life and death of Jesus (*see Phil. 2:5-8*). And yet, even back in Genesis, we are given glimpses of the closeness with which God interacts with His fallen beings. Kind of a nice thought, isn't it, especially if you view God as loving and compassionate.

In the following examples, how do we see God closely interacting with humanity? What does each account tell us about the character of God?

Gen. 2:7

Gen. 3:8

Gen. 18:17

Gen. 39:21

In what ways have you personally experienced the reality of God's nearness? In class, share with others what the experience was like and what you learned from it. Do it in a way that will help encourage others who might not yet have experienced the reality of a God who can be so near to us.

word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers” (vs. 26, *NRSV*).

The book of Isaiah points to Cyrus as yet another example of God’s power to control history. God begins His introduction of the future Persian leader by asking, “Who has roused a victor from the east, summoned him to his service?” (*Isa. 41:2, NRSV*). The Persian leader accomplishes everything he does through God’s creative activity. The Lord grasps his right hand and gives him the power to conquer other nations (*Isa. 45:1*). The Creator goes ahead of Cyrus to overcome obstacles so that the human leader brings to

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 2:1, Matthew 5:18, 24:37-41, 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 14:7*

- 1 It has been said that we have to know where we have been in order to know where we are going. This seems especially true in regard to the Genesis story, as it relates to our Christian faith. Why is it so important to have a correct concept of our origins, as put forth in the book of Genesis?
- 2 Jesus often referred to events in the book of Genesis—many of which often are regarded today as mythical—as historical fact. What is the significance of this to us? How do you think that so many people, who claim to regard Jesus’ words as authoritative, manage to disbelieve the historical authenticity and literal truth of Genesis?
- 3 The main message of Genesis is the creatorship of God. Is it possible to accept what it says about God being Creator, while ignoring or denying the details of the Genesis narratives? Is it possible that the author of Genesis did not intend it to be taken as literal fact, as some claim? Why, or why not?
- 4 How do the events of Genesis anticipate or prepare the way for the coming of Jesus? Can Jesus be seen in the Genesis story? Where, and how?
- 5 What does the New Testament teach us about the Old Testament in general and the book of Genesis in particular? Were the means of salvation available to people in Old Testament times somehow different from the means offered to those living during or after the time of Christ, as some claim? For example, what was the role of faith as opposed to works?

Foundations

In Acts 6 a Jewish believer, Stephen, a man “full of faith and power” who did “great wonders and miracles” (*Acts 6:8*) was hauled before a council of leaders for preaching and promoting Jesus. Acts 7 then begins with him giving the speech that would, when done, lead to his death by stoning (*see Acts 7*).

Read the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:2-17 and then answer the following questions:

1. Does Stephen appear to have any questions about the authenticity of the stories he is recounting? What lesson is here for us?

2. Where is he getting these stories from?

3. What’s the purpose of his telling these stories as part of his defense of his belief in Jesus?

If you look at the context, Stephen is being challenged for his preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. And he starts his defense back in Genesis, with the call to Abraham; he then traces the family history from him up through Joseph in Egypt to the founding of the nation of Israel and the building of the temple itself. All of which culminated in the coming of “the Just One” (*Acts 7:52*), Jesus of Nazareth.

The point is that Stephen uses Genesis as the starting point for the great truths that climaxed in Jesus, “the truth” (*John 14:6*). These Jews, who formed the core of the church, had a firm foundation for their faith in Jesus—and that was the Holy Scriptures, of which Genesis was the starting point. Hence, we can see the important role this book should play in our own understanding of what we believe, as well.

What are some of the “foundations” in your own life, basic things upon which so much else rests? How firm are these foundations? Are you sure they are firm enough to hold you even during the weightiest of trials?

pass what the Divine One wants him to do for His people (*vss. 2-4*). God arms Cyrus (*vs. 5*) and sets in motion forces that will enable the Persian to fulfill the divine plan. And how can the Lord do this? Because He is the only God, the Creator who establishes light and darkness and everything else (*vss. 6, 7*). He will arouse Cyrus “in righteousness, and . . . will make all his paths straight” (*vs. 13, NRSV*), because He is the One “who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I am the Lord, and there is no other” (*vs. 18, NRSV*). The Lord predicted of Cyrus: “‘He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose’” (*Isa. 44:28, NRSV*).

Cyrus’s story shows how Scripture links God’s creative power

Witnessing

What family doesn’t have family albums—picture books that chronicle, through fuzzy, out-of-focus snapshots, the events, large and small—that make up the family’s history? Through the years, the books grow in length, covering birthdays, holidays, baptisms, school events, vacations, weddings, and more. The books are treasured and passed on from one generation to another. They are reminders of the blessings, joys, and heartaches that, when blended together, structure and mold the family unit.

This week’s lesson opens up to us our earliest understandings of our royal family heritage. By opening the book of Genesis, we open our heavenly family to images of our Heavenly Father’s character, His boundless love for all created things, His great care and attention to detail, and His love of beauty and order. We learn that from Him, and Him only, all things have their beginning.

It’s true that more than six thousand years have passed since our family began and that our once-perfect existence became distorted by sin as a result of the actions of our first parents. Sadly, sin has caused many family descendants to question our heavenly Father’s role in the Creation story. Much of our world now encourages an alternate view of God and His miracle of Creation. This view rejects the Genesis story and substitutes chance for Divine intervention.

We will counter these challenges to the Creation story by intensively studying our earliest family history found in the book of Genesis. Focusing on God’s words, His character, and His instructions help us to solidify our faith and positively affect those with whom we come in contact. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the people we meet feel that they have encountered Jesus through us? When this occurs, our family album can once again reflect the original and true character of our Creator.

The Just Shall Live by Faith

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (*Rom. 1:17*).

Write out your understanding of the above text.

It’s often heard that in Old Testament times believers in the Lord were saved by works of the law and that after the death of Jesus and the beginning of the Christian church they began to be saved by faith alone. Yet, that’s not Bible teaching, not in the Old or New Testament. According to the New Testament, God’s people lived by faith even from the beginning.

Read Hebrews 11:1-22, an inspired account of the lives of some of those found in Genesis. How does what you read there harmonize with Romans 1:17? As you read about each person, place yourself in their position and ask yourself what it was they were having to take on faith; that is, what they were needing to trust God on. What lessons can you learn from their experiences that can help you with whatever you are going through right now?

Go back to Hebrews 11:13-16. What are those verses talking about? In what ways can you relate to what’s being said there? Look at your own life and ask, What do my actions say regarding what country I am seeking? What changes might you need to be making in your journey?

with the promises of salvation. The power that God displayed in bringing all things into existence assures us that He also is capable of delivering us from sin. God chose to accomplish this deliverance through Jesus. The New Testament repeatedly declares that our Deliverer is also Creator (*John 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1, 2*). Through Him Heaven has wrought those events that will forever end sin and redeem those who love God.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Recall a time when you were lost. How did it happen? Did you write down the directions incorrectly or misread a map? How did you find your way to your destination? In Matthew 19:8, as part of His discussion on the equity of divorce, Jesus says, “From the beginning it was not so.” What was He trying to tell His listeners and us? How does personal time in the Scriptures help us find our way through the muddle of current ideologies and belief systems?

Thought Questions:

1 History repeats itself. What does this statement tell you about humanity’s ability to learn from its past? In what ways does the list of faithful individuals found in Hebrews 11:1-22 provide a foundation for trust in God? What information did these individuals have that interrupted and prevented their downward spiral toward eternal destruction? How would you share the importance of salvation with a co-worker who may be experiencing a difficult life challenge?

2 “ ‘And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also . . .’ ” (*Luke 17:26, NKJV*). Jesus is sharing an insider’s glimpse into the nature of society in times of crisis, especially before His return. As a class, read Luke 17:26-30. Note its broader context. What does Jesus say before and after these verses? Together, compare our current culture with Jesus’ description of the time of the end. How does knowing our origins, as recorded in Genesis, and our future keep us from the quagmire of doubt? Pray in groups of two, asking God to help you find hope, even in the clutter of uncertain times.

Application Question:

Paul recounts Israel’s origins and history in Acts 7:1-15. He highlights key junctures in their journey that should have laid the foundation for faith in Jesus Christ. Spend some personal, quiet time recalling your own faith journey. What people or situations undermined your belief in the Savior? What obstacles presented themselves along the way? In what ways does your past history impact your future walk with God? How might sharing your story bless someone who is struggling with life and who God is?

Further Study:

“The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives. By spiritualism, multitudes are taught to believe that desire is the highest law, that license is liberty, and that man is accountable only to himself. . . .

“The power of a higher, purer, nobler life is our great need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 474, 478.

“Night, dark and portentous, is enclosing the Christian world. Apostasy from God’s commandments is evidence of this night, deep, dark, and apparently impenetrable. Systems that make the truth of God of none effect are cherished. Men are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men; and their assertions are taken as truth. The people have received man-made theories. So the gospel is perverted, and the Scripture misapplied. As in the days of Christ, the light of truth is pushed into the background. Men’s theories and suppositions are honoured before the word of the Lord God of hosts. The truth is counteracted by error. The word of God is wrested, divided, and distorted by higher criticism. Jesus is acknowledged, only to be betrayed by a kiss. Apostasy exists, and will enclose the world till the last. Its hideous character and darkening influence will be seen in the maddening draughts dealt out from Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, Feb. 1, 1897.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Discuss the Ellen White quotes listed above. What kind of influences in your society are working against the authority of the Scriptures? How can we, as a people, protect ourselves and others from these sentiments?
- 2** In class, read your paragraphs regarding what each person believes God is like. Discuss your answers and what you can learn from each other.
- 3** Talk about your answer to the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson. What can you learn from others’ experiences regarding the closeness of God? How would you explain to a non-believer what it means when we say that “God is close” to us?