

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

How to Interpret Scripture
Lesson 8: Creation: Genesis as Foundation—Part 1

The book of Genesis contains or anticipates all of the truths found in the Bible. In spite of accusations that the stories are myths, our culture borrows freely from it. The question, “am I my brother’s keeper,” is still a common phrase, though few know its origin. Many other examples come to mind. Some secular universities even teach creation concepts in science classes under the names “creationism” or “intelligent design.” Christians know that the word of God contains a power that attends no other written or spoken word. Perhaps students who study this biblical book, even if taught as myth, will come to hear the voice of God.

God begins His written record with simple words: “in the beginning.” We might ask, “the beginning of what?” All creation necessarily has a beginning, but God is eternal and has no beginning. Thus, even though the book begins with “in the beginning” it cannot be referring to God’s beginning. This book answers the perennial question, “how did we get here?” That alone justifies including the Genesis account as part of legitimate study.

Jesus Christ Himself is the Beginning (Col. 1:18). He is the beginning of the creation of God (Rev. 3:14). He is the power of God, and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). He is the one speaking in the eighth chapter of Proverbs saying, “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was” (Prov. 8:20-23). The words “set up” come from a single Hebrew word meaning “anointed.” This word is also used in the second chapter of Psalms, “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.’” (Psalm 2:4-7, *New American Standard Bible*).

How can Jesus be the beginning of creation? It is true that the fleshly body of Jesus had not yet been prepared “in the beginning.” However, God is eternal, and He speaks of things that happen in points of time as if they already exist since He cannot lie. In Genesis 3:15 God promised the world a Redeemer Who would accomplish the necessary things to restore fallen mankind to a direct communion with God.

“For Seventh-day Adventists, the book of Genesis is of special significance. Not only does it explain and justify their keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath as a people united in a covenant with the God of Israel, it also substantiates their ‘advent’ hope, when the world will be restored to its original ‘Genesis’ state. It is noteworthy that nearly all Seventh-day Adventists beliefs are both found in and founded on this book: the seventh-day Sabbath ... the unity of human nature ... conditional immortality ... the Law of God ... the great controversy ... salvation ... substitutionary atonement ... the practice

of tithe ... the ideal of a plant-based diet ... the distinction between clean and unclean meats ... the meaning of baptism (1:1-3; cf. 1 Peter 3:21), the cosmic significance of the sanctuary doctrine ... the creation ... the Trinity ... the responsibility of mission to the nations ... and the gift of prophecy (3:15; 20:6).” [1]

It is generally accepted that Moses wrote the first five books of the bible of which Genesis is the first. Before the flood people relied on their memories to pass down stories to the next generation. Adam lived for almost a thousand years, so he could verify stories as they were handed down. If anything was written before the flood, nothing has been found. Mankind's life expectancy quickly diminished after the flood. The Genesis account makes no attempt to provide a complete history of everyone in the world before or after the flood, but focuses on the people who believed in the one true God. After the flood, the focus is on Abram, one of apparently few humans who still believed in a single, all-powerful God. He is chosen to begin the nation that Jehovah would use to demonstrate to the world just Who He is and how He deals with humans.

God called Abram out of Ur, in the Chaldean area at the southwest portion of Babylonian territories. Ur is on the Euphrates river just west of where it joins with the Tigris river, which continues south emptying into the modern day Persian Gulf. These geographic locations still exist, mutely testifying to the accuracy of the Genesis record. The Tigris and Euphrates were originally identified in Genesis 2:10-14 as the third and fourth rivers that arose from the river that God placed in Eden. It seems significant that God did not allow the cataclysmic dynamics of the flood to obliterate two of the four rivers originally placed in the antediluvian world.

Our Quarterly asks the question “What difference does it make to know that you were created by God?” (p. 65). This question goes to the value of a human being. We are told that humans were created in “the image” of God. There is tremendous encouragement in knowing that. Much more value can be given to a human created by God, in His image, compared to the theory that a piece of slime slid off a ledge in some primeval forest and somehow triggered an evolutionary advantage to that particular piece of slime resulting in development of the human race.

Two institutions, marriage and the Sabbath, were created by God at the end of creation week. The concept of “rest” is inherent in both. Since we know that Adam was created on the sixth day, he did not need to rest from labor, but God wanted him to enter into God's rest. The Sabbath was created so mankind could have an entire 24-hour period where he did not need to “labor and do all your work.” That is a very practical reason to enter into God's rest, but there are always spiritual aspects in His design. He knew that in addition to physical rest we needed mental rest as well. Focusing our thoughts on our Creator is an essential part of rest, yet so often humans completely ignore this to their detriment.

“But God always was and is everywhere present; why then do not all people have rest?—For the simple reason that as a general thing men do not recognize His presence, nor even His existence. Instead of taking God into account in all the affairs of

life, most people live as though He did not exist. 'Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is.' Heb. 11:6. This shows that the general inability to please God, and so to find rest, arises from practical unbelief that He exists." [2]

The "rest" inherent in marriage also has practical and spiritual implications. "In Christ we have the rest and the inheritance; but in order to be made partakers of Christ we must 'hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' Heb. 3:14." [3] There is no rest out of Christ, either in marriage or on the Sabbath. It is significant that in order to adequately create "man in our image" two separate beings were required.

The relationship of marriage is also used to represent the relationship Jesus wants to have with His church. Yet Christ told the disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

A happy marriage is one in which the husband and wife are committed to making things work even though there will be "tribulation." The knowledge that both respect their marital commitment produces a restful relationship. Likewise, Christ has fulfilled His commitment to the church. He made promises to restore the broken relationship to Adam and Eve. He worked out a righteousness that the bride requires to "make herself ready" and paid the penalty for sin at the cross. All the bride needs to do is enter into that rest by faith.

—Arlene Hill

Endnotes:

[1] Jacques B. Doukhan, *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*, p. 22.

[2] Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Everlasting Covenant: God's Promises to Us*, pp. 283-284; Glad Tidings ed., 2002.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXLvWsFVivg>

Many of Pastor Penno's sermons are on YouTube in Spanish. Just type **pastor paul penno en español** in the search bar.

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org