

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?” (*Psalm 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?

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.

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.

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?

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?

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?

The Letters That Changed a Village

by BIKILA MERGA

A letter from an isolated area of Ethiopia leads to a new group of believers.

Adventist World Radio's program producer in Ethiopia, Temesgen Bulti, received a listener letter that made him take note. The listener, who lives in an isolated area several hours from the capital city of Addis Ababa, asked for clarification regarding the Sabbath and the Holy Spirit's manifestation in Christian churches.

Bulti answered the listener's questions and sent literature in his language. The listener learned more Bible truths and confronted his pastor with questions. "Why do we worship on Sunday, contrary to the Bible?" he asked. Their pastor could not answer the question, and, realizing where his member had learned about the Sabbath, traveled to AWR's studios in Addis Ababa to get answers.

In response, AWR aired more programs designed to answer the questions and specific needs of the people in this community, including further information on the Sabbath. The congregation closed their church on Sunday and began worshiping on Saturday. They sent elders to Addis Ababa with a petition to be recognized as a Sabbath-keeping congregation. Bulti referred them to the Central Ethiopian field office.

Church leaders promised to come and hold meetings in the village. A team made the difficult journey to the village, including a five-hour hike from the nearest road.

"Church members were so excited when we arrived that they carried our luggage [and even] the generator all the way to their village," Bulti says.

More than five hundred people attended the evening meetings, many of them sleeping in tents so they would not miss a meeting. Following the meetings, 185 people were baptized and another 350 committed their lives to the Lord and will join the Seventh-day Adventist Church soon. Members of other churches want to become Seventh-day Adventists too. The church headquarters in Ethiopia plans to build a church for these new believers.

Until the evangelistic meetings, there had been no Seventh-day Adventist presence in this area, more than one hundred miles (one hundred fifty kilometers) north of Addis Ababa. This is an area that has proven difficult to enter because of the strong hold by the traditional church of Ethiopia. Recently listener interest has increased significantly, judging by the number of letters the station receives. AWR plans to follow up with materials produced for each language group.

Our mission offerings make possible the work of Adventist World Radio in Ethiopia and around the world.

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