



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Genesis: “Beginnings”

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~ Scripture: Genesis 1:1 ~

PRELIMINARY

We’re starting a series on the BOOK OF GENESIS. Genesis contains many of the stories and accounts that are so foundational to our faith as Christians (e.g.: Creation, Fall, Flood, Tower of Babel, the Covenants + the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph). It was written some-time around 1450 B.C. == 3400⁺ years ago!!!

We will cover 2/3 of the book between now and ASH Wednesday (beginning of Lent). . .then pick up the rest of the book after Easter.

Let me mention two resources to help you grasp all you can and apply to your life:

- 1) Study Guide in each week’s bulletin (based on reading 5 chapters a week);
- 2) Adult Studies class at 9:50 & 11:15 called “*Invitation to the O.T.*” (Room 203/204).

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

BEGIN...START...COMMENCE...LAUNCH...CRFEATE...INNOVATE...SET IN MOTION.

There’s something refreshing and optimistic about those words, whether they refer to:

- The dawn of a new day
- The birth of a child
- The prelude of a symphony
- The first few minutes of an athletic contest
- The first miles of a family vacation

Beginnings are full of promise. They stir hope, vision and imagination. They are free of baggage, and that’s what makes them so delightful.

Genesis means “beginnings” or “origins”. As such, it is the first book of the Bible (for both Christians & Jews). It is a book of beginnings. We read in **Genesis 1:1** — “*In the beginning, God..*”

GOD. That’s where Genesis begins. All at once we see Him creating the world in a majestic display of power and purpose, culminating with a man & woman made in His very likeness (thus giving them consummate worth and dignity). And He called all this “*good*” because He was so pleased with all that He created.

But before long, sin enters the world—another beginning—and Satan is unmasked for the devil he is. Bathed in innocence, creation is shattered by the willful disobedience of Adam & Eve (i.e.: the Fall). Fellowship with God is broken, and evil begins weaving its destructive web.

And we begin to see why there is so much trouble and heartache in the world. . .why we are so broken and out-of-sync with God...with one another...and the wonderful world God gave us.

In rapid succession, we read how Adam & Eve are expelled from the beautiful garden. . .their first-born son becomes a murderer. . .and evil breeds evil until God finally destroys everyone on earth except a small family led by Noah, the only godly person left.

Along the way, we are given intimate glimpses of individuals dominated by hatred, drunkenness, lust, unhealthy family relationships, cheating, dishonesty, jealousy, violence, etc. Oh, the tragic consequences of human sin—how it brings ruin to God’s “good & excellent creation”.

Then we come to Abraham on the plains of Canaan, and there’s another “beginning”—the beginning of a specially chosen people, from whom one Man (the Savior of the world) would come to complete the work of salvation. So, the Book of Genesis doesn’t leave us in despair.

Even after all this ugliness so early on in the history of civilization, God stays involved—ever seeking to make things right between His creation and Himself again. Helpful to know, because:

- There are a lot of people who believe God is out to judge and condemn them;
- There are a lot of people who feel they are too “bad” to be redeemed (i.e.: unredeemable).

But the truth is, God is out to get back what belonged to Him from the very beginning. **John 3:17** says, “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Christ).*”

This is what blesses me so much about the Book of Genesis. It’s not just a book about origins (of the universe, of civilization). It’s a book about God’s unstoppable love...about His relentless efforts to reach, redeem and restore us. And it all starts right from the very beginning—here in Genesis—NOT in Matthew (in the New Testament)...NOT even the prophets later in the Old Testament...BUT right here in this book of beginnings.

As early as the 3rd chapter, right after Adam & Eve have been found out, God promises hope and healing for us by telling the serpent that the offspring of the woman (Eve) would crush his head. Let’s go to that passage [**Genesis 3:15**]. God is speaking to the serpent (Satan): “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman (Eve), and between your offspring and hers. You will strike His (Christ’s) heel, but He (Christ) will crush your head.*”

The phrase “*you will strike his heel*” refers to Satan’s many attempts to defeat Christ during his life on earth (e.g.: wilderness temptations; resistance of the religious leaders; even doubt, un-belief, and betrayal among the Disciples). The phrase “*He will crush your head*” foreshadows the utter defeat of Satan when Christ rose from the dead. A strike on the heel is not deadly; but a crushing blow to the head is! Here at the very beginning of human history, God was revealing His plan to defeat Satan and offer salvation to the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

God has woven “beginnings” all throughout history. . .and all throughout your life and mine.

The practical application I would like to make this morning has to do with how we think about the New Year that is before us.

Each year at this time, we push the re-set button and anticipate things being new and different. New opportunities...a new semester...a fresh start...a new relationship...turning over a new leaf ...beginning again. We get (and give) greetings like this one: *“May you reach for the stars with hope and courage, not fearing what lies ahead, rather living each moment for the gift it offers.”*

Yet, there’s a nagging sense that things won’t really be any different. The world will push along as it has in the past. Our lives will not be significantly altered from what they were last year.

In 2012: There will be accidents...people will die...couples will get divorced...there will be wars and rumors of war...the “war on terror” will drag on...hopefully more dictators will fall...we may make some headway economically (at least we hope so!).

On the positive side of the ledger: In 2012, new relationships will form...people will get married...babies will be born...folks will retire or graduate, and start a new career...new businesses will start, some will prosper...a few will win the LOTTO.

Of course, people of faith hold out that Christ could come this year. And people “with” or “without” faith realize a calamity of unspeakable proportions (like 911) could change our way of life; although we are not expecting that to happen.

But aside from that, will 2012 be all that much different than 2011? Or will it be “more of the same”? Is there anything to look forward to? Is history going anywhere?

It depends on how you look at it:

- Some view history as “spiraling out of control” (i.e.: no God);
- Not many view it as “spiraling upward” as they did a generation ago;
- Many (Christians included, unfortunately) view it as “spiraling downward”, because no one is at the helm.

Just how in control is God (of our lives, of the world)? My reading of Genesis tells me He has never left us (in spite of our sinful behavior). He is very present and very involved. He has a plan, and in spite of how mankind tries to pull it off track, it is being accomplished little by little.

Imagine an ORCHESTRA. All of us in this world make up the orchestra. God is the orchestra conductor. We’re playing a complex piece of music that’s actually being written as we play it. Sometimes what I play throws the harmony or the rhythm off. Sometimes I don’t like the music I’m playing, so I go off on a tangent and play my own thing. You do that too. Whole groups of people (nations) do that. And it all sounds like clashing noise, a mish-mash of disharmony and dissonance. **BUT GOD IS THE CONDUCTOR.** He is able to make all the dissonant parts and all the wrong notes fit → so that someday when this symphony has reached its finale and we hear the playback, it will all make sense.

History==yours, mine, and the whole world's==is the working out of God's purpose and plan for His creation. You may think that it's going nowhere. . .that the symphony is a discordant mess. And you wonder, "Where is God? Where is the conductor?" HE'S THERE! He has never left nor forsaken us. Reading Genesis assures me that God has a plan and a purpose for the world, for your life and mine—although it doesn't seem like it at times.

When the Israelites were being taken into captivity—a truly dark moment in their history—God sent a prophet (Jeremiah) to them and said: "*When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I have plans for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*" [**Jeremiah 29:10-11**]

Each year, they got a little closer to the fulfillment of that promise, even though at the time it didn't seem like they would ever get there.

Next year, if the Lord tarries and we get to the first of January, we'll be a little closer to the fulfillment of all that God has in mind for us.

I hope as you read Genesis over the next few weeks, that you will gain a greater sense of who God is...His personality / His character / His plan for His creation. I hope you will catch on to His deepest desire: to be in fellowship with the people He created.

May you be grateful for the ultimate step He took toward re-establishing a relationship with us through His historic visit to this planet in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. . .and give Him your heart (if you haven't already).

Tips for Bible Study

Remember: by looking at whole chapters, we are looking at larger chunks of Scripture. Look for overarching meanings. It doesn't have to be some deep experience every single time. Enjoy the rhythm of it. Don't allow it to become tedious, but rather, pray to be hungry for what God does reveal to you as you read. If a certain passage grabs you, that's the God of creation speaking to you through His Word! Mark it, or write it down. Have a notebook or journal handy.

Set a time to meet with your spouse. Have your family study it. Find a friend or small group of friends to touch base with, even if it has to be via email. What is God speaking to you? What are you learning? What's making sense?

Find a friend as you go through this process to ask: How's your life? How's your walk with Christ? How's your ministry?

Study Guide for Genesis 1 – 5

Monday: Read Genesis 1. "In the beginning, God." The first words of scripture immediately confront the dominant worldview, which assumes life sprang from random motion in dead, impersonal matter. One God towering above nature, whose personal actions explain all beginnings. How aware are you of the creation in your everyday life? Notice v.31 that "*God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.*" How does it affect your opinion of God? Of how you treat the earth? According to Romans 1:20 – 25, what should be our response to god's self-revelation in the created order?

Tuesday: Read Genesis 2. Personal Origins of Humanity. After introducing the Sabbath, Genesis 2 returns to the creation of humankind, including the location of Eden (8-14), its design (4-20), the tree of knowing good & evil (15-17), creation of woman (19-23), & marriage (24). See in all this the stress on the

personal. It is God who lovingly designs us for fellowship with God-self. Have you gotten glimpses into your potential? What does God's "original design" of you look like? Do you have others with whom to share and care? If not, call someone right now & connect.

Wednesday: Read Genesis 3. The Fall of Humanity, the Power of Choice. The perfect universe becomes marred. In here is Satan, the temptation, the fall, the psychological impact of sin (7-13), and further curses of sin (14-20), & the first glimpse of redemption (21-24). The result of sin is being separated from God. Do you view this brokenness as punishment, or natural consequences? Did you ever think that God already showed mercy to Adam & Eve by not killing them instantly? When do you feel most "naked" before God? Where in your life is the serpent seemingly alive & well?

Thursday: Read Genesis 4. Cain & Abel, & Origins of Death. In 2:17, God warned Adam of death, but more than physical death was meant. Cain & Abel's (1-16) story demonstrate the impact of "death" on human experience: Cain's anger, coldly luring his brother to a field for premeditated murder. Cain is promised frustration at work & restlessness in life (11-12). How are you experiencing either of these? Where might God be looking on your life with favor? With disfavor? Cainite Civilization (17-24) grows: division of labor, taming of animals, developing culture including music and metallurgy. But the inner deadness lingers, as Lamech breaks God's pattern for marriage by taking 2 wives & excuses murder as repayment for an injury. Philosophically, can we master the principle of death that shrouds our own personality? Hope glimpsed (25-26) as Seth is born, as "*people call on the name of the Lord.*"

Friday: Read Genesis 5. Adam to Noah Genealogies. Hebrew genealogies included only the famous people. Interesting theories about people's ages in these primordial records include: deep cover of water vapor clouds (before the flood) or racial vigor being greater near humanity's origin. Archeology corroborates scripture repeatedly. The Bible's uniqueness within its culture is evident. Today, see how far you can trace your "spiritual genealogy." Who passed the faith to you? From whom did they receive it?