

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Mar. 8, 2020

Today's lesson includes Days 4-12 on your reading guide.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Gen 4: Notice that even though this story is about the beginning of the relationship between God and humans, it is not a history that can help us to figure simple historical things like how did Cain find a wife? The story does tell us that greed was there from the beginning and it did not please God. It tells us that God wants our best efforts and will punish anything else. You may also have noticed that there is no specific description that tells us that Cain's offering was less than his best. A rabbi explained to me that clarification of this is in other Jewish writings but that it is certainly implied in Genesis. Notice in vs. 24 we hear about Lamech. He does not sound like a nice man. He does not forgive like Jesus said. He or his wives are condemned seventy-sevenfold. I'm not sure which is the case, but this is surely to let us know just how bad the sinfulness had become.

Gen. 5: In this chapter, vs. 28-31, we find out that Lamech was the father of Noah. So again, we know that the world is in a terrible state. One of the typical questions that are asked is whether these guys lived as long as this says. Two answers: the first is that the story is not about historical accuracy, so it doesn't matter from that perspective. The second is that they might have been doing something similar to what some of the surrounding nations did as far as listing their kings. They rated them in effectiveness by saying that a good one ruled 600 years even though they might have only been around for 20. Another might be rated as having ruled for 10 years when they were really around for 40. They were trying to show that these guys were great. With Lamech, it might have been that he was powerful, even though he was not good. Notice that Cain is not even listed but that he built a city and a tribe, the Canaanites, that became strong. Notice from that perspective that one of the main purposes of this genealogy has to do with the many tribes of people that lived in the Middle East in the time of the writing. It might be their way of saying where some of these tribes came from, and it also gave them an idea of how to treat them, depending on just who their family line included. Last but not least, notice that this genealogy goes from tight to broad. The genealogy in Matthew sharply focuses on one line to Jesus. This is much like the situation created by Babylon that is fixed by Pentecost.

Gen. 6: The first verses talk of "sons of heaven" breeding with the "daughters of man." One of the main things to focus concerning this strange little story is that it foreshadows the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary so she can be the mother of a God-man. As you read the story of the flood and the ark, it is important to realize that this is a story to foreshadow baptism and the Church. The water washes away sin and the ark is the image of the church that protects the people of God from the destruction in the world. Also note that this is not a historic document. The end of Chapter 6 says that Noah must bring in two of every animal. The beginning of Chapter 7 says he must have seven pairs of the clean animals. This is a contradiction in a history story that any one of the listeners would have caught. They didn't correct it because their intention was not to do history. Scholars see it as one two versions of the story bringing two viewpoints, one from the priestly class and the other from the Lord's perspective.

Gen. 7: Notice in verse 11, that it talks about the “floodgates of the sky were opened.” This is a part of these people’s image of the universe. It fits with their idea from chapter 1 that said the sky is a dome. That dome explains why the sky is blue—because it holds all the water back. When the floodgates open (hidden by clouds) you get rain, snow, sleet, or hail. If the dome were torn, it would mean the end of the world.

Gen. 8: Notice the dove is a great foreshadowing of the Holy Spirit that came at Jesus’ baptism. Also note the olive leaf. Olive oil is what was used for an anointing, so the leaf is a foreshadowing of the Anointed One that is to come to bring a new heaven and a new earth.

Gen. 9: Notice, in verses 4-6, the focus on blood. It is the essence of life for these people. This is an important thing to remember when Jesus starts talking to his disciples about drinking his blood. It makes it hard for them to except but it also makes it an essential part of His plan. This is right after verse 3 in which God allows the animals and man to eat meat. Before that every creature was to be a vegetarian. This vegetarian idea helps to make sense of what was being eaten on the ark. Notice the idea of nakedness between men being seen as evil in verses 20-26. Ham, the father of Canaan sees the nakedness and does nothing about it, but tells his brothers, which would have been seen as trying to shame his father by spreading the news. The other brothers cover the dad. So, the Canaanites are cursed.

Gen. 10: More explanations concerning the tribes living in the surrounding nations that can be seen as mankind spreading farther away from God which flows right into what happens with the next chapter.

Gen. 11: One of the main things to realize about this story of the Tower of Babel is that the destruction of human connections that came from one language being made into many is reversed at Pentecost when people of different languages could all understand Peter. The gift of the Holy Spirit reversed the curse at Babel.

Gen. 12: Notice in verse 7 that God gives Abram a homeland. They don’t get to stay there very long but eventually God leads them back to it. This is a foreshadowing of the people of God being promised a home in heaven. Notice the strange way Abram treats Sarai. The lack of the sacredness of marriage always causes problems, but there are no commandments or laws concerning this from God yet.

Gen. 13: Lot is the grandson of Abram and because of how well they are doing, they have to separate, because there is just not enough pasture land for both sets of herds. Notice that the use of altars, as a way of making sacrifices to God, is already a common practice.

Gen. 14: Notice verse 18. This seems so insignificant but it is not. Melchizedek is the only person in the Old Testament who is both priest and king. He blesses Abram by sacrificing bread and wine. He is also the king of Salem. This is also significant. Salem means peace. Jerusalem means new peace. The New Jerusalem in the New Testament refers to heaven. This all points to the Eucharist. Notice also that the second half of verse 20 gives us the idea of tithing, giving a tenth of everything. Melchizedek comes out of nowhere. The question is who appointed him priest and the only answer is in that his sacrifice is accepted, which means he has his priestly

authority from God. The priesthood of the Jews would later come from family of origin. Jesus is a priest in the “order of Melchizedek” because he comes from God and not from a priestly clan. The Catholic priesthood comes from God, through His Church, not by family of origin.

Gen. 15: In the first verses of this chapter we have another image to help us understand God. Abram is an image of God. Abram wonders what good life is without a son. A son is everything for Abram. This lets us know God’s feelings. Not only does this foreshadow our knowledge of Jesus, but it also foreshadows the Mystical Body of Christ, which we become a part of by baptism. Notice this covenant, vs. 7-18, that God makes with Abram. Passing through the animals that have been split in two is saying that if I break this covenant, may what happened to these animals happen to me. The smoking brazier and flaming torch represent God.

Gen. 16: The story of Ishmael is the foreshadowing of those who are not born in a situation to be part of the chosen people. Abram loves Ishmael even though he isn’t part of those to be the chosen ones. God’s loves those who aren’t able to be Christian, through no choice of their own.

Gen. 17: Abram means the father of many but Abraham means the father of nations. In verse 11 circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant. A question that is sometimes asked is why this particular sign? At this time, this was considered the organ of life. Circumcision did not destroy it, but was a sure sign of making yourself vulnerable to God’s wishes in terms of life. Circumcision is the foreshadowing of baptism, which replaced it as a sign of the covenant. In both old and new covenants, God wants an actual physical sign from us, to prove that we are going to try and live out our part of the bargain.

Gen. 18: Abraham is setting a tone for generations of Jews in that hospitality to strangers is important. Any one of them might be a visitor from the Lord. These three strangers are welcomed and surprisingly one of them knows the name of Abraham’s wife. Two other things I love about this chapter is that it lets us know that Isaac means laugh, which Abraham and Sarah both do when they hear they would have a child in their old age, and also that Abraham gets somewhere by bargaining with God. Abraham doing this is kind of like a kid trying to deal with their parent.

The Book of Psalms

In summary of last week’s lesson, it is critical in understanding the psalms to know that first and foremost we must read them as the prayers of Jesus to the Father. They are the words of Jesus speaking to the Father. When you read the word “Lord”, realize that this can usually and easily be replaced with the word, Father, or Abba.

Psalm 4: This is about Jesus but also all the saved. We were anointed when we were baptized and many of us suffer things that can feel like parts of the Passion of Christ, so this psalm can be

very powerful as our prayer also. This one is easy to feel like we are praying right with Jesus. Vs. 4, Know that the Father works wonders for the faithful; the Father hears when I call out. Jesus could have prayed this when He was dying but notice that it can only be seen as being correct if you believe in a resurrection.

Psalm 5: Murderers and deceivers the Father abhors. “Then all who take refuge in you will be glad and forever shout for joy.” Again, this can only be the case if there is resurrection and heaven, for if there are murders then some have to be dead, and that would rule out anything good if there were no heaven.

Psalm 5: Jesus could have prayed this whole psalm during His agony in the garden. This is one that I would have had a lot of trouble with before I recognized it was a prayer of Jesus. It is violent and emotional. I can believe those thoughts of Jesus as He hung on the cross.

Psalm 6: With this psalm think of Jesus praying this as He was held in prison awaiting His trial before Pilate, knowing that He was facing death, but He is already trusting that God will answer His prayer. Vs. 11; “My foes will be terrified and disgraced; all will fall back in sudden shame.” This would only happen at the resurrection.

Psalm 7: Imagine Jesus praying this psalm. This psalm talks of lions but only that the person praying not be torn to pieces so there would be none to save. When Jesus takes our guilt on Himself at the Garden of Gethsemane, “then let my enemy pursue and overtake me, trample my life to the ground, and leave me dishonored in the dust.” This ends with the three days in the tomb, but who ends up in hell? Sinners “open a hole and dig it deep, but fall into the pit they have dug.” The devil and his legions will end up in the pit and not Jesus, for the Father will save Him.

Psalm 8: This is one of my favorites. The theme could be summarized as: God is great, we are pathetic, but He loves us. “What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor....” Being fully human Jesus stands with us in this feeling. Being God Jesus lives it.

Psalm 9-10: This psalm looks at things from the perspective of God being outside of time. For it is only in the fullness of eternity that all this will be done. Jesus does come to fulfill this, but only in the fullness of time. The footnote explains why these psalms are connected. “Each verse of the two psalms begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Obviously, it loses that in the translation.

Psalm 11: This could be a prayer of Jesus as He carried His cross. The slings and arrows of the people’s words are killing Him but his confidence is in God.

Psalm 12: I hope you are getting the point that these are the Word of God and so are the thoughts of Jesus. Vs. 1: “Help, Lord (*Father*), for no one loyal remains; the faithful have vanished from the human race.” This seems to discount that Mary is sinless, but you have to remember that she also had to be saved. It just happened before her conception.

The Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 3: John the Baptist is introduced but Matthew does not give his background. He is the focus of preparation for the Messiah. After you have read the rest of the historical books of the OT you will realize why they felt they needed repentance. The people definitely needed a Savior. Realize that this particular century in Jewish history was when they felt the Messiah would come. In that century there were actually others who said they were the one. The High Priests referred to them in the passion accounts. Nothing came from them, but Matthew is telling us that Jesus is different.

Just like the story of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, when Jesus was a baby, was a proud moment for Mary His mother, the Baptism of Jesus is a proud moment for the Father. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Chapter 4: The temptations remind us of the battle. The Jewish people were not wishy-washy about the idea of evil. But the particular books or sets of scrolls that made up a book that God chose to be a part of the Bible show a very strong message the evil here. You just read the 3rd chapter of Genesis, which gives the first clue. The devil tempts. Our salvation comes from God. Jesus relies on the OT to respond to the devil. But note that the devil can use scripture against Jesus and will do the same to us. That is why we must also have the Church, or the Bible gets torn apart. The other question is whether you have had angels minister to you like happened for Jesus in Mt.4:11. This is included as a way for Matthew to show that Jesus really was a righteous son because he did not fall to temptation.

In the rest of the chapter Jesus is going out after His baptism to start the work. He also quotes the OT. I hope you have found the little keys to quickly find the OT references. At the end of the first line of vs. 15 there is a very small “m” in my bible. That refers to the matching references in the footnotes. Those come right before the verse related footnotes are shown. So you have a footnote labeled 4, 17, which then refers you back to Mt.3, 2. At first your head might start spinning with all of these references. You don’t have to do them all. I will point out some key ones. But it is important to realize the way this shows how scripture is all tied together.

Then Jesus starts to pick his team before going on with his town to town ministry in which He preaches, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He gives Himself credibility by the miracles that He performs. Only God should be able to do these kinds of things.

Chapter 5: Chapters 5-7 are the Sermon on the Mount. His being on a mount should make you think of Moses getting the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai. In these three chapters Jesus is upping the ante on the 10 Commandments. Those 10 were to help the people get to the Promised Land. At this point they are already there. Now Jesus is raising the bar and giving them a chance to get to heaven. It is a better place so the stakes are higher as are the expectations that must be fulfilled. The Beatitudes show that right away. We are being told that bland and dull is not good enough. We must be salt and light.

The Teaching about the Law in verses 17-20 let us know that He is not throwing out the old law but bringing us to a higher standard, if we plan on being in heaven. He will have exceptions to this later on but He is not worried about those now.

Teaching about Anger in verses 21-26 give a few points on these new expectations. It is no longer good enough to not kill someone. You must be reconciled with him before you can come to God. Again, He will clarify this later because we can't be expected to pay the last penny of another person's debt, only our own.

The Teaching about Adultery in verses 27-30 is very scary in our current sexually soaked culture. Pornography is terrifying to priests as we watch so many souls fighting this battle. Before you lose an eye, you might want to lose an i-pad.

The Teaching about Divorce in verses 31-32 is why the church has the annulment process. Why the Protestants have denied that comes from guys like Henry VIII.

The Teaching about Oaths in verses 33-37 fits right into the idea of adultery by thought. This stringency does not make much sense unless you realize that our five senses will die with our body. The soul or sixth sense will live on. With it we will be able to read each other's thoughts. So clean up those thoughts or you might not be allowed in heaven.

The Teaching about Retaliation and the Love of Enemies in verses 38-48 are again based on the idea that it is not good enough to live by the minimum standards of the OT. We have to learn to love or our being in heaven would not be pleasant even if we got there because we would be spending eternity with people we do not like.

Chapter 6: This chapter continues the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that teaching from on top of a mount means that He is really speaking as the Son of God in a very specific way. This is like Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments. The first part of this chapter, vs. 1-18, should sound familiar. We hear it on Ash Wednesday. Jesus is again making the Ten Commandments sound easy, for it is not good enough to keep our actions in check. We must keep our minds focused the correct way. So in 1-4 we hear that unless you have the right attitude you get no reward for almsgiving. You can't think, "I will give this person something but they are not worth it." This "attitude" would not read well in heaven when we can read minds. Then in vs. 5-8 we hear that our prayer must be sincere, and not just babbling on to nag God into submission. In 9-15 Jesus gives us a way of praying that is actually a way of thinking. The Our Father is far too loaded with meaning to unwrap in these notes, but do take notice that Jesus emphasizes the forgiveness part, which is hard enough without the emphasis. His thoughts on fasting is also a matter of correct attitude and not just for show.

The second part of the chapter continues with Jesus helping us have the correct focus. We must focus on heaven and what will get us there and not just think that we already live in the Holy Land, even if we are in Nebraska. The church clarifies that the biggest category of treasure in heaven, vs. 19-21, are the people we help to get there. One of my takes on the idea that the eye is the light of the body has to do with what we focus on. Our current sin of rampant pornography, pray for the souls of Hugh Hefner who just died, is what fills our soul with darkness because it has us look at people in a way that will not go over well in heaven. Are you noticing a theme? Vs. 25 clarifies our need to avoid greed, because it won't help us focus on God. And that is what vs. 18-34 are all about.

Chapter 7: We are still on the Sermon on the Mount. Vs. 1-5 have nothing to do with what the world wants us to think at this point. Many people don't want anyone to judge the actions of

others. This is very clear in that it is only about not judging the person. This still fits the theme because we can't see into their minds and hearts like God can so they might be working on having the right motivation but just having a hard time getting there. We are all in that boat. Verse 6 has a comic named after it and it reminds me of an old saying, "Is nothing sacred?" The sacred is what would lift our minds to heaven, which is the right direction. We must keep that from being blasphemed. We have too many artists who do that at this point. Vs. 7-11 lets us know that this is not just good ideas from Jesus, but that he speaks for the Father who wants to help us. The Golden Rule in vs. 12 is the shortest summary of the teachings of the Law and the Prophets that I can think of. I think Jesus didn't give a particular percentage or number of those saved so we don't get stuck on the idea that "I just made it because I am better than SOO many, which would knock us right out of contention for judging others.

There are a lot of ways we have to worry about the False Prophets that Jesus talks about in vs. 15-20. If they make it sound too easy it is probably false for none of this is being presented as easy. It is a total make-over. All you have to do is think about some of our recent Saints like St. John Paul II or St. Teresa of Calcutta and you will realize how much many of us have to grow and change. None of this is something we can accomplish totally in this life, but you will not know that you have gotten there until you actually arrive in heaven. Vs. 21-23 let us know it is not good enough to just talk about it or claim we have it because we know Jesus. The devil knows Jesus very well. Building on sand versus rock is powerful in several ways. One is just to look at the eventual safety of building on rock. Another is how hard it is to build that foundation because you have to be imbedded in the rock for it to help and that is not easy. Another is that to build on rock you have to be ready for the work and the time it takes. That last two verses of this chapter remind us again that Jesus is not just another teacher. He is speaking like He is God, which He is.

Chapter 8:1-17: The miracles that Jesus performs in Chapters 8 & 9 are to prove that He has the right to speak like He is God. No one else could do what He now does unless He has the power of God. He cures the leper with a touch and then tells him not to tell anyone. This is so He is not labeled as unclean for touching someone who is clean. Otherwise He would not be able to go into a city like Capernaum. In vs. 5-13 he extends His reach in the eyes of those following Him. He cures long-distance. Curing Peter's mother-in-law would not make Him unclean for there is no bodily fluids that can be transferred. The people did not know about germs back then. But they figured body fluids in the wrong place were a part of the problems. So a fever wouldn't be a problem. Matthew then quotes Isaiah in vs. 17. At this point I can clarify the footnote on this verse as written in the NAB St. Joseph Edition. LXX is the Septuagint or the writings of the 70. The MT refers to the Byzantine Majority Text, which some say is an older version of the OT. It doesn't matter because the Catholic Church uses the LXX almost exclusively for its reference. There is very little difference. In this case the word diseases vs. sufferings. Either way Jesus is trying to lighten our load.