

The Genesis Foundation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 40:7, 8; Gen. 22:1–13; John 3:16; Rev. 5:5–10; 1 Cor. 15:15–19; Rev. 12:1–9.*

Memory Text: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

One of the key problems with modern interpretations of Bible prophecy, such as in Revelation, is that they fail to recognize the ancient roots of Revelation. The author assumes a knowledge of the Old Testament and uses concepts that would have been well-known to his audience. While searching the entire Bible for passages that resemble the text you are studying in Revelation is useful, there are also core texts that set the stage for understanding the book better than other texts do. This is particularly true of Genesis, which lays out the path by which our world descended into sinful chaos. Nearly every key concept mentioned in Revelation appears—in some form—in the opening chapters of the Bible.

This week, we are going to study a handful of big concepts at the core of Revelation. There are many, and so we will choose a few to illustrate the all-important point that understanding the ancient foundations behind Revelation enables the student to see countless nuances in the text, each of which can yield important lessons about the nature of humanity, of God, and of the conflict being waged in our universe and, thus, in our lives, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.

The Principle of “First Mention”

Most academic programs begin with a general survey course (often given the number “101”), a course that covers broad and basic principles that will form the basis for further study as you dig deeper into the subject. Likewise, when you read through the entire Bible, you quickly discover that God also has a general survey course in the book of Genesis, where He introduces ideas that will be examined in more detail throughout the rest of the Bible.

Generally speaking, the first time a concept or symbol is mentioned in the Bible—particularly in the opening chapters of Genesis—you will discover that it establishes a general understanding of that concept, which will help you understand how it’s being used later on.

Some Bible students refer to this as the “law of first mention,” although it would more properly be labeled a principle (or a pattern) rather than a law, because it is certainly not ironclad, and there are many exceptions to the rule. The pattern that seems to emerge, both in general Bible study and in Bible prophecy, is that God slowly feeds His children information over time, beginning with a basic concept and then enlarging on it many times over the years, or even the centuries.

Read Isaiah 40:7, 8; Malachi 3:6; and Hebrews 13:8. What principle can you derive from these texts that would help you properly anchor your study of prophecy?

Much of the modern world speaks about “truthiness” instead of “truth,” because it is assumed that “truth” is a malleable thing that can change over time. Or, in some cases, the very concept of “truth” itself is deemed suspect.

When God establishes truth, however, He does not change His mind. Once He begins teaching His people truth, we can count on the fact that repetitions of the same biblical principle or theme do not change its meaning but, in contrast, shed further light on that meaning. It makes great sense in studying prophecy, therefore, to develop a good understanding of the book of Genesis, where you find many key concepts explained for the first time, and then take that foundational understanding with you as you explore the rest of the Bible.

Why is it so important that we not allow anyone or anything, no matter how smooth or logical, to weaken our faith in the Bible and the infallible truths it teaches? What are subtle ways that this weakening can happen?

Understanding God’s Love

Part of inheriting a sinful nature means that our perception of the universe has been tainted by our own propensities toward selfishness and pride. We see the world from our own limited perspective rather than from God’s omniscient one (obviously). Perhaps no concept has been more skewed by the sinful human race than that of “love.” Popular culture tends to promote an understanding of love that centers on self-fulfillment rather than on others. This self-centered approach to the subject makes it hard for us to understand how God views the subject.

Understanding the nature of love is an important key to understanding Bible prophecy. One of the key themes in the great controversy is the existence of a substantial misunderstanding about God’s character. Ellen G. White, after all, ends her summary of *The Great Controversy* by writing: “The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Page 678.

Read Genesis 22:1–13. The first mention of “love” in the Bible is found in Genesis 22:2. What does this story teach us about the nature of God’s love?

Occasionally, in addition to finding the first occurrence of a concept in the Bible, it can be useful to find the first mention of that same concept in individual books of the Bible—especially in the Gospels. In Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, and John 3:16, we find the first mention of “love” in each of the Gospels.

For example, the first mention of “love” in John (*John 3:16*) is particularly enlightening: it appears to allude to the story of Isaac on the altar. Abraham’s faith in God was such that he trusted Him, choosing to believe that God could raise his son if he went through with the sacrifice (*Heb. 11:19*). It foreshadowed God’s love for the human race. He loved us to the point where He “gave His only begotten Son” (*see Gen. 22:2, 12, 16*)—and, then, raised Him from the dead. Thus, we are given a revelation of the kind of love, the self-sacrificing love, that God has for us.

How do we even begin to manifest to others the kind of self-sacrificing love that God has for us? Why, for most of us, is this kind of love not necessarily basic to us?

Isaac's Question: Where Is the Lamb?

The Bible's first mention of a *seh* (Hebrew: a lamb) occurs in the same story as the first mention of love: Genesis 22. The lamb, of course, is one of the most persistent symbols found in the book of Revelation, in which Jesus is called "the Lamb" more than 20 times. In one of the most powerful scenes of Revelation—John's visit to the throne room of God in chapters four and five—the Lamb plays the central role.

Read Genesis 22:7, 8; Exodus 12:3–13; and Revelation 5:5–10. How does the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice help us understand how lambs are used symbolically? How does this story tie into what John sees in Revelation 5?

The first mention of a *seh* (lamb) in the Bible comes in the form of Isaac's question: "Where is the lamb?" (*Gen. 22:7*). Interestingly enough, the rest of the Bible answers that question in great detail. The other 38 books of the Old Testament lead the reader along a path where Isaac's question is progressively answered with more and more details, from the Passover rituals to David's early occupation and onward. The entire story is punctuated with countless Messianic prophecies that anticipate the answer to Isaac's question. Then in the New Testament, the question is answered when Jesus appears in flesh and blood, ministers among His people, and finally sacrifices His life at the cross.

Meanwhile, look at the first mention of a Lamb in John's Gospel, in John 1:29–34. It would almost seem as if John the Baptist is personally answering Isaac's question, and the setting couldn't be more apropos. Sinners are repenting and going under the water in baptism, symbolizing the death of the sinner and the beginning of a new life. In this context, Jesus, the Lamb of God, suddenly appears and, according to Matthew's account, the heavens open to announce Him: " 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' " (*Matt. 3:17, NKJV*). Notice how a voice, the Angel of the LORD, also announces from heaven the solution to Abraham and Isaac's problem (*Gen. 22:11–14*).

When you weave all the threads together, it is clear that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Substitute. That sheds much light on our understanding of the slain Lamb in John's vision.

Why is knowing that Jesus is our Substitute so foundational to our salvation? What hope would you have without Him, as that Substitute, especially in the judgment?

Dealing With Death

Perhaps the cruelest aspect of living in a world detached from its Creator is the way that death lurks in the background of every life, ready to strike at any moment. It is the “wages of sin,” the penalty that we pay for having been disconnected from the only Source of life in the universe: the Creator. As such, it plays a major role in Bible prophecy, both its reality and, even more important, its solution, which is found only in Jesus and His death and resurrection.

Both the first mention of death in the Bible and its first occurrence shed much light on this major theme in prophecy, helping us to understand the gravity of the sin problem and giving us important tools to understand God’s solution to the problem.

Read Genesis 2:15–17, Genesis 4:8–15, 1 Corinthians 15:15–19, and Revelation 1:18. What do these passages—which include the first mention and occurrence of death—tell us about why people die, how God views death, and what His solution is for our problem?

We often say that “death is just part of life.” That is a lie. Death is the opposite of life, the undoing of life; it is an alien intruder that was never meant to be part of our experience here. Even though we have become accustomed to death, our hearts still protest strongly when we encounter it, as if the human race still collectively realizes that there is something fundamentally wrong with it. As painful as death is, there are some instances of death that seem even more tragic than others, such as the death of a child. For the most part, we expect that parents will precede their children in death, and we have come to accept that as the normal order of things.

The first death recorded in Scripture, however, goes against the expected norm. Before Adam and Eve went through death themselves, they experienced the tragedy of death when their righteous son was murdered by his unrighteous brother. It was a particularly unjust death.

Think about Jesus, the righteous murdered by the unrighteous, as was Abel. What death could have been more unjust than Christ’s? What other parallels might one find between the death of Abel and of Christ on the cross? How might the nature of Abel’s death help us to understand why Jesus has “the keys of Hades [the grave] and death” and what God is offering us in Him?

Without the problem of death being solved, why are our lives ultimately useless, meaningless, and futile? What does this fact teach us about how thankful we should be for what Jesus has done for us?

The Serpent

The issue of worship is a key subject in the book of Revelation. The perpetrator and enabler of false systems of worship is identified as the “dragon” (*Rev. 13:2–4*), and the serpentine description of this fallen cherub is no accident. It clearly points us back to the Garden of Eden, where a serpent entered Paradise and persuaded Adam and Eve to follow him into rebellion against the Creator.

Compare Genesis 3:1–5 with Revelation 12:1–9. What are some of the common themes in each account? How do the details found in the introduction of the serpent in Genesis help us to understand some of the issues that had previously led to the war in heaven mentioned in Revelation?

There are two accounts in the Scriptures in which Satan leads the whole world astray. In Genesis, at a moment when there were only two people in existence; and then in the account given in Revelation 12 and 13, in which Satan is identified as the one who “deceives the whole world” (*Rev. 12:9*) and as the one who enables the sea beast power so that “all the world” marvels and follows it (*Rev. 13:2, 3*). One of the themes found in Bible prophecy is the unchanging nature of the great controversy. God’s character and Word do not change, and neither do the ambitions of the devil.

Fortunately, because the nature of the great controversy does not change, and because we have clear reference points in the prophetic Scriptures, Christians are able to sift through trends and begin to recognize where spiritual pitfalls might lie. God will always be who He is, and the same is true of the devil. Satan may wear a thousand disguises, but millennia of fallen human history, coupled with the prophetic scenario painted in Revelation, demonstrate that he never strays from the game plan he used in Eden. God has promised us wisdom and discernment (*James 1:5*), and armed with the certainty of the Scriptures, we need not fall for the devil’s lies. Unfortunately, many have fallen for them, and many more—the majority—will, as well.

Consider how culture changes over time. Societal norms shift; things that were once acceptable become unacceptable and vice versa. Given that the underlying issues and actors in the great controversy do not change, what things should a Christian consider in examining the shifting cultural landscape? For example, the original lies that the devil told, such as you shall not die and you shall be as gods: where can you find them being told in your culture today?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Revelation,” pp. 578–581, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Many world religions simply deal with ideas; in powerful contrast, the ideas found in the Christian religion are anchored firmly in historical events. The Bible is the story of God’s interacting with humanity throughout history, and by studying thousands of years of such interactions, we can learn much about the consistent character of God.

Sometimes, however, Christians complain that they are getting tired of hearing the same things. Sometimes, when our distinctive prophetic message is being preached publicly, we think that we already have heard it and have nothing new to learn.

The fact that our message is unchanging and consistent, however, does not mean that it is simplistic or unchallenging. Quite the opposite: when you are studying information relayed to us from the mind of an infinite God, you quickly discover that you will never reach the end of a subject.

Ellen G. White states that one of the reasons the book of Revelation was written was to anchor the Christian church in its historical message for all time. “Some of the younger workers [at that time] . . . had become weary of oft-repeated truths. In their desire for something novel and startling they attempted to introduce new phases of doctrine.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 580. To that extent, it is not merely a book about the future; it is also a book about the past, designed to keep us rooted in our historical faith so that we are not led astray by a desire to seek originality.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The Scriptures never fail to yield new information and new understanding. How does one balance the desire to learn something new with the importance of staying anchored in the truths that we already have been given?
- 2 How should the church respond to new interpretations of prophecy? Though we know that there is always more to learn, how do we discern whether the new light is essential or just a fad, or even error?
- 3 In World War II as a sailor in the Pacific lay dying, he cried out to the medic, “I am an orphan. When I die, who will remember me?” The medic responded, “I will always remember you.” However well-meaning the medic’s words, sooner or later he also would die, and so would the memory of the orphaned sailor. How does this account help us realize the futility and meaningless of all our lives if death, ultimately, has the final say?

The Milk Miracle

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

No cow stood in the yard when Mother returned home from the market.

Mother looked around the yard. No cow. She knew her two small children were waiting for her in the house. Tears filled her eyes. How could she tell them that the cow, their only source of income, had been stolen? Without the cow, they would die.

Mother decided not to tell the children. She didn't want them to see her tears. Walking over to some bushes, she poured out her heart to God. She reminded Him that her husband, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, had been arrested for keeping the Sabbath and sentenced to eight years of hard labor far from their home in the then-southern Soviet republic of Tajikistan. She thanked God for the now stolen cow, whose milk she had traded for flour, potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, tomatoes, and cucumbers at the village market.

"What next?" she wept. "How can my children and I survive?"

As she cried and prayed, she looked at the bushes and saw something caught in the branches. She looked closer and saw that it was a banknote for a large sum of money. "Thank You, God!" she prayed. "You have sent money to buy another cow."

Mother dried her tears and returned to the market to look for another cow. But every seller wanted more money than she had found in the bushes.

Finally, a man agreed to lower his price.

"I'll give you my cow for the amount of money that you have," he said.

It was the smallest, scrawniest cow in the market.

Mother handed over the money and took the cow home.

"God, this cow is in Your hands," she prayed.

At home, Mother fed the cow, and the two children played with it. With food and love, the cow grew and grew. Before long, it was producing twice as much milk as the cow that was stolen.

"God saved our lives during this difficult time," said Liubov Brunton, the granddaughter of the mother in the story.

She said the miracle with the milk serves as a powerful reminder that God protects and cares for His mission workers, no matter where and when they serve. But the story of the cow didn't end there. Liubov's grandmother was about to witness another miracle. Read about it next week.



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