**Lesson 3**

**21-22 June 2021**

**Genesis 1-3 + Revelation 20-22 + Ezekiel 28**

**Comments from Chapter 2: *The Case for Bible Literacy***

* Jen Wilkin said that Bible literacy occurs when a person “is *steadily* moving toward knowledge and understanding of the text.” Notice that she doesn’t say that such literacy occurs when a person has put in 1000 hours of study or spent half their life reading the Bible. The point is that, no matter where we are in the journey toward knowing God through His Word, we keep steadily moving forward toward that goal. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Not that I have already attained this or am already perfect, but I press on…Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, *I press on toward the goal*.” (Philippians 3:12-14)

Some of these runners are very close to the finish line. Others are way back in the pack. But each one is making forward progress, one step at a time, and that is what pleases God.And notice that it isn’t *speed* that matters in this event. Some of these ladies are jogging at a good clip; others are just walking, but walking with purpose. And this little lady doesn’t go anywhere very rapidly, but she is determined to get to that finish line, cane in one hand and Bible in the other!

* I wanted to comment about a couple of the unhelpful or at least limiting approaches to Bible study that Jen pointed out, i.e. the Magic 8 Ball approach and the topical Bible study approach. I agree with Jen that God is more concerned with *who we are becoming* than with telling us *what to do* in every little decision in life, and I very much agree that it is dangerous and foolish to treat the Bible like a Ouija board or some magic book, trying to force God to give us guidance through some special ritual we go through. I also concur with Jen’s point that “a well-rounded approach to Bible study addresses a topic as it arises in Scripture, rather than attaching Scripture to a topic.” Having said that, however, I want to point out that there are times when we need specific guidance in a situation and/or when an issue—a “topic” if you will—arises in our lives, forcing us to deal with it. So what should we do in times like that? I’d like to share a specific instance of such a time in my own life. The following excerpt is taken from a letter Tom and I produced to introduce ourselves to new pastors and supporters.

In May 1970, during the annual missionary conference at Cedarville College, I expected to be called to missions, but the Lord had something else in mind. What He made abundantly clear that week was that **His** plan for my life was for me to remain single. Surrendering all my dreams for marriage was devastating, but I understood that this was the "call" I had earnestly prayed for and that my marital status was a matter of obedience to God. That commitment to obedience was tested over the years as I painfully found that surrendering my longings for marriage did not make them magically go away. For a long time I felt guilty for continuing to want something that God had clearly shown was not meant for me, but gradually I realized that obedience is never easy, that God's grace is always sufficient, and that the harder the trial, the more God is glorified in it by our obedience.

During my third furlough, however, I began to experience a joyous intimacy in my relationship with my Heavenly Father, and it was with an eager heart that I returned to Bangladesh the summer of 1992 to a new area of service. Six months earlier I had received an invitation from my friend Laura Kuykendall to share an apartment with her in the port city of Chittagong and to teach in the school for missionary children there. At first I wasn't too interested (cities in Bangladesh look pretty dismal) but as I prayed about it, I began to be very excited about the move. So I arrived on the scene in July, all excited about starting a new phase in my career.

And then: enter one Tom Sartor! He arrived in Chittagong shortly after I did, and we ended up teaching in adjacent classrooms. At first I thought he was just a very pleasant person, but soon found myself being attracted more and more to him. By September I knew I was falling in love with him . . . and was miserable because I also knew that marriage was not God's will for me! The problem was compounded by the fact that he was not just a short-term teacher who would conveniently go away at the end of the year; instead he was another full time missionary who would be there year after year. If the situation were not resolved, it could cause both of us embarrassment and even disrupt our ministries, so I decided I must seek out counsel.

So I confided in my roommate Laura and found real help in her quiet, godly response. She listened to all I had to share and at the end, when I asked if she would pray for me to be content to remain single, she said, "Yes, I will. But, Edie, if God has marriage for you now, you need to open your mind to that option. Do you mind if I pray that you will be married if it is God's will?" Her words took me by surprise and were a real challenge to me to seek the mind of the Lord. I began to search the scriptures to read all the "love stories" I could think of to see what principles could be gleaned from them.

Note: To use Jen Wilkin’s terminology, *I began a* ***topical study*** *on marriage because* ***I wanted guidance from God****.* As I continue the narrative, see if you can spot differences between what I did and what Jen talks about in the Magic 8 Ball and the Personal Shopper approaches.

I began with the first man and woman and saw that God specifically created Eve to meet Adam's need for companionship and that He brought them together in His time. For me that was a very freeing concept: I did not have to cleverly manipulate a relationship with Tom. My only responsibility was to become the woman that God wanted me to be, and if that woman was what Tom needed, then God would work out the details. Then I read the story of Ruth and Boaz. What struck me there was the role of Naomi in Ruth's life. I, too, had an older woman who was my mentor and who had once challenged me to be as attractive as I could by losing weight. But once again I noted that it was then up to the man to do what he would do and for the woman to quietly wait.

And then I read Proverbs 31 and heard the voice of God. My intention had been just to take a fresh look at the qualities of a godly woman, but my eyes were riveted by the words at the end of the chapter, **". . . a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned."** The Lord used His Word to speak to my heart and say, "Edie, for 22 years you have been single because I asked you to. Now I am giving you the reward you have earned." And I knew that I now had the freedom to marry.

But then began the hard part: waiting! Waiting to see if having the freedom to marry in general meant that I could marry Tom in particular. Waiting to find out if Tom was as interested in me as I was in him. Waiting for him to pop the question after we started dating. Waiting . . . somehow it seemed easier when I read about Ruth doing it! But, as the old saying goes, "all things come to those who wait." Tom *was* interested, and he *did* ask me to marry him, and the rest is history.

**Comments about the Text: Genesis (beginning) + Revelation (ending) + Ezekiel 28:11-19**

**Chart 2a** – The “Symmetry of Scripture” chart is one of the very first things I prepared for this class this summer and is intended to illustrate something that I find very intriguing. I had noticed sometime in the past that the *first* two chapters of the Bible describe the creation of the original heavens and earth at the beginning of time, while the *last* two chapters describe the new heaven and earth that God will create at the end of time. That “two chapters” and “two chapters” seemed too similar an amount to be coincidence. (I realize that chapters and verses were added centuries after the Bible was written, but still the amount of material devoted to the original creation and the final creation is roughly the same.) As I read and re-read those chapters and then considered the rest of Genesis and Revelation, I kept finding more and more parallels between the two books . . . and they were structured in a way that seemed rather familiar. This chart is the result of that study. It contains the broad brush strokes of the similarities; the “Digging Deeper” assignment you did highlights some of the smaller details. So today’s lesson is going to focus on the second of the three goals for this class that I shared with you in the first session, “that we would grow in appreciation for the Bible as a book that is *skillfully and wonderfully* *written*.”

**Mirror Images** – If you look at the chart, you will see that Genesis and Revelation talk about four very similar events, but they occur in reverse order in the two books. We have already observed that the original creation account is at the very beginning of Genesis, while the re-creation account is at the very end of Revelation. Genesis chapter **three** introduces us to another significant person: our arch enemy Satan. He deceives Eve and leads both Adam and Eve into sin, with devastating results, not just for the two of them, but for all their descendants and indeed, the entire cosmos. *Everything* is cursed because of their sin. But if we turn to Revelation chapter 20—the **third** chapter from the end of the book—we learn in verse 10 that Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire, never to harm us or any of God’s creation again. The remaining verses of that chapter reveal that *all sin is eradicated*, and the last two chapters show how *all effects of the curse are reversed*: earth is once more a “very good” place to be.

**Two Worldwide Judgments** – Fairly early on in Genesis, in chapters 6-9, we come to the account of a worldwide judgment on sin in the form of a great Flood, that leads to the total destruction of the original earth. By “total destruction” I don’t mean that the earth ceased to exist, but that it came out of the Flood vastly different than it had been before. Much of the water that had been stored in the “expanse” God used to separate the waters on Day 2 of creation is now permanently on earth, which if you think about it, would have profound implications for earth’s weather systems. The vast continent of dry land may well have begun to break up during the cataclysmic conditions when the “fountains of the great deep burst open”. Mountains may have been pushed up, and huge valleys (such as the Grand Canyon and the Marianas Trench in the Pacific Ocean) may have formed at this time. Whether those things happened at that point or not, we can be sure that the world Noah faced when he came out of the ark was very, very different from the world he had last seen before the Flood occurred.

Similarly, the earth that we and all the rest of Noah’s descendants live on will be destroyed by fire at the time of God’s final judgment. There are numerous references to judgment by fire toward the end of Revelation, such as the Lake of Fire and “fire from heaven” (Revelation 19:20, Revelation 20:9-10, 14-15). Second Peter 3:10 describes this judgment in graphic detail as it relates to planet earth: “But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief…the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works…therein shall be burned up.” (KJV) Revelation sums it up in 21:1, “The first heaven and the first earth…passed away.” Once again, this doesn’t mean that they will no longer exist, but that they will be *vastly* *changed* from what they were like before. One big change that we would instantly notice if we viewed the New Earth from space is that there is no more sea or ocean. We can’t even begin to imagine how that could be, let alone how that could be a good thing. But the wording of Revelation makes it clear that the New Heaven and the New Earth will be unimaginably beautiful, beautiful in ways we won’t understand until we see it with our own eyes someday.

**A People Called To Be Holy** – The first three parallel events (creation/re-creation, dealing with sin, and worldwide judgment) I had noticed many times before. But this summer I realized that both Genesis and Revelation devote significant space to another topic, *calling a people to belong to God and to be holy*. And following the “mirror image” pattern, this topic is found at the end of Genesis and at the beginning of Revelation. The amount of space devoted to it in Genesis in much greater than in Revelation, probably because the whole concept that God desires a people for Himself and that He wants them to reflect His holiness is a new thing that needs to be developed and explained in great detail after the worldwide Flood. Perhaps it is better to say that the concept that God desires a people for Himself and that He wants them to reflect His holiness is a *newly revealed* thing after the Flood. As we saw in Ephesians 1:4 last week, God “chose us in (Christ), *before the foundation of the world*, to be holy and blameless in His sight.”

So the concept wasn’t new to God, but He began to make it known to man in the last 38 chapters of Genesis. Chapters twelve to fifty give the account of God calling one man, Abraham, who then becomes the patriarch of one nation, Israel, called to be God’s people, uniquely different from all other nations on earth. The book of Exodus then shows how He gives His people a set of laws (and hence a lifestyle) that is uniquely different from that of all other nations on earth. The rest of the Old Testament builds on this theme in various ways, and then Jesus Christ arrives on the scene in the New Testament to continue calling a people to Himself. He broadens the scope to include Gentiles, building a Kingdom of righteous people from every kindred, nation, people and tongue and establishing a church that is to be HOLY and reflect His glory. So in chapters 1-3 of Revelation we find Jesus addressing His universal church through letters written to seven representative local churches, once again calling them to repentance and renewed holiness, just before the final series of worldwide judgments begin on earth. In each letter, He shows that He understands their difficult circumstances. He praises the things they are doing that are worthy of a child of God. But He also challenges them to consider the areas where they have fallen short of the mark; He wants them to repent and serve Him with renewed zeal. He knows that the day is soon coming when He will bring His Kingdom to earth, and He wants them to be ready for that event. And He wants them to face the coming judgment without fear, knowing that He will triumph at last.

**Chiasmus: An Old Familiar Friend** – So I was very excited about seeing all these parallels in the two accounts. I looked online for some neat graphics to illustrate the various topics, made the chart, sat back and looked at it . . . and realized something else. The way the chart was set up had a very familiar look to it: it looked very much like a *chiasmus* (key-ass’-muss)! This is a new word and a new concept for some of you, and some others may have forgotten the specifics, so I am including Chart 1a as a help.

**Chiasmus is a Hebrew logic pattern in which related thoughts are presented in pairs.** When a writer uses chiasmus to make a point, he builds his case step by step to the most important thought and then repeats the steps *in reverse order*. Think of people approaching royalty for an audience: they come in facing the king, and when they leave, they back out so that they are always facing the king. In the same way, a chiasmus is structured to have us always focusing on the main point being made.

The example given on Chart 1a is a relatively short chiasmus, involving only four verses. But when we look at Chart 2a it seems that the entire Bible is one gigantic chiasmus, focusing on one big overarching concept: God is calling people to be His own and to reflect His holiness. Are you blown away yet? Just think of it: Moses wrote Genesis while he was in the wilderness; over 1500 years later the apostle John wrote Revelation while he was in exile, and everything they wrote was “skillfully and wonderfully” crafted by the Holy Spirit into one beautiful pattern that reveals the heart of God.

**Some Smaller Details** – We are now going to complete the “Digging Deeper” worksheet you were given last week. We will do three things with it today:

1. **Write the word “Revelation”** just under the little picture of the lady archaeologist.
2. I am going to start with the top red blank and call out a scripture reference. All of you will **write the reference** I call out **beside** the red blank, on the left.
3. Each of you was given a paper with some verse references from the book of Revelation on it. If the reference I call out was assigned to you, please **read the verse aloud** to the group. Then all of you will **write ON the red blank** an item in Revelation that corresponds to an item in Genesis you listed on the left side of the worksheet.

Notice that some things from Genesis have no corresponding item. For example, there is no more sun and moon in the heavens because there is no longer any need for them: God Himself will be the light, and since He will always be there, there will be no more night. Even more amazingly, there will be no more sea on earth. Why? We don’t know. We’ll just have to wait and see . . . and marvel.

**Gold and Precious Stones** – The last item on the Digging Deeper worksheet has always struck me as rather odd. Whenever I read about the river from Eden splitting into four rivers, one of which flowed through a land that had pure gold and some precious stones, I always shrugged it off as an obscure detail that wasn’t really relevant to us now. The things are just mentioned once, almost in passing, and I almost didn’t even include verses 10-14 from Genesis 2 on your blue text to mark. But as I was reading the description of New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, I was struck afresh by how much emphasis is given to gold and all manner of precious stones. The entire city will be glittering with these things! And if the New Heaven and New Earth are the culmination of all of God’s marvelous creation, then the gold and jewels are significant because they will be used to craft something that will make our jaws drop and call for our admiration and wonder and praise. Now I have come to think that they are mentioned in Genesis just to let us know that those raw materials are there, waiting for God to put them to their best use in the future. He is, after all, the One who knows the end from the beginning, and He already had the New Heavens and New Earth in mind when He created the originals. It is almost a tease, God saying, “You think *this* earth is beautiful? You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”

There is one other passage that makes me think that gold and precious stones are especially significant to God, found in Ezekiel 28:11-19. This passage has a double meaning. It is first of all a lament for the destruction of the man who was king of Tyre during the time of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was commissioned to let him know that God would cause his ruin because of his wicked life. But as you read the details of this lament, you realize that it also applies to Satan, contrasting his glorious beginning with his horrible end. Notice how Satan (then known as Lucifer, which means *brightness* or *morning star*) is described in verses 13 and 14. When he was created, he was literally covered in all kinds of jewels set in gold, and he walked on fiery precious stones “on the holy mountain of God”. This suggests to me that Heaven itself is filled with gold and jewels, and that we should not be surprised, therefore, when we find the New Jerusalem filled with these things, since the city will come down from Heaven.

**It’s a Matter of Faith** – As we looked at the Symmetry of Scripture chart, we saw that it began with the original planet Earth and ended with the New Earth . . . but we are living, as J.R.R. Tolkien would say, here on Middle Earth. We look back to the past and have no grasp of what the first earth was actually like, and we look forward to the future and have no grasp of what the New Earth will actually be like. We can read the words used to describe both creations, but as the Scots would say, the worlds described in both instances are beyond our ken. We haven’t seen either of them, and so we must take both of them by faith. The book of Hebrews says as much. In Hebrews 11:1, 3we read, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for (the New Earth), the conviction of things not seen (the original Earth)…By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen (our “Middle Earth”) was not made out of things that are visible.”

**TAKE AWAYS:**

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