**Lesson 5**

**5, 6 July 2021**

**Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

**Comments from Chapter 4: *Study with Perspective***

* Jen Wilkin made several statements in this chapter that I think are worth reiterating now. In the previous chapter she made the point that the Big Story of the Bible is that of creation-fall-redemption-restoration. In this chapter she points out that “not only do all sixty-six books of the Bible tell one sweeping story, but each of those sixty-six books tells its *own* story, reflecting the character of God through a particular historical and cultural lens.” For example, the book of Ruth tells its own story of how Ruth came to faith, met Boaz, and became part of the lineage of the Messiah. But it also illustrates *redemption* and *restoration* in the lives of two widows, as part of the Big (overall) Story of God’s love and faithfulness and care for His people. Boaz is a beautiful picture—or type—of Christ, who is *our* kinsman-redeemer.
* Jen also used the illustration of people living in modern day Rome who have to be mindful of *Roma subterranea* (underground Rome) whenever they want to do any remodeling or new building construction. She drew the parallel that “modern day Christians inherit a faith that is built on the foundations of that which has come before. We, too, occupy a modern space while maintaining an ancient perspective.” In other words we will never truly understand or be able to properly apply a passage of Scripture until we understand what it meant to its original hearers.
* Then she introduced the five “archaeological questions” that we must answer for any book of the Bible if we want to understand it properly. These questions are:

1. **Who** **wrote it?** What do we know about this person?
2. **When** **was it written?** Was it written before or after some significant event, such as the destruction of Herod’s temple or the exile to Babylon?
3. **To whom** **was it written?** What do we know about their culture?
4. **In what style** **was it written?** As you saw in your homework, different genres use language in different ways. If we try to put a literal meaning to each word in a book that is written as poetry, we will likely be led astray. Or, conversely, if we try to make every word of some historical narrative account symbolic when it was meant to be taken as literal fact, then we will go astray again.
5. **Why** **was it written?** As Jen pointed out, “Every author writes with a specific purpose in mind.” We will understand *what* they wrote infinitely better if we also understand *why* they wrote it.

* I appreciated the fact that Jen didn’t end the chapter there, leaving us overwhelmed and wondering how on earth we would ever find out all that stuff. She encouraged us to look for a reliable study Bible that has this information. Another resource is the *Know Your Bible* booklet.

**Comments about the Text:**

**Developing Study Skills** – This coming week you are to read Chapter 5 *(Study with Patience)* in Jen Wilkin’s book. In that chapter she mentions that it takes time to develop any new skill and that we need to be patient—with ourselves and with the process—as we do so. One skill that got quite a workout in your homework this week was looking for *patterns* in Genesis 1, both to discern what a specific pattern is and to note any *exceptions* to it. Another related skill that we will touch on today is evaluating the *significance* of a given pattern and the exceptions to it, if any. This may seem very academic, but learning to look for patterns is a good skill to develop. God is a God of order, He communicates His truth in an orderly way, and we should take pleasure in discovering His thought processes. It is a way of getting to know Him better and thus to love Him more. (Remember “the heart cannot love what the mind does not know”!)

**Pattern #1: “Let there be…and it was so”** – Time after time in Genesis 1 we observe that God spoke something into existence. He merely—if we can use the word “merely” to describe anything that God does!—said for something to exist and immediately that thing appeared, just as He wanted it to be. But when we got to verse 26, we saw that God did NOT say, “Let there *be* man”; instead He said, “Let us *make* man in our image.” In other words, God did something different when it came to man. The creation of man was a very hands-on matter, which involved God forming man’s physical body from the earth and then breathing life into him. We don’t actually get those specific details until chapter two, but the change in wording in chapter one is a heads up for us to expect something new. And as we observed a couple of weeks ago, the use of the word “created” in verse 27 indicates that the “something” is strikingly new. So observing that exception to that specific pattern should tell us to be on the alert for a change.

**Pattern #2: “God saw that it was good”** – Most of us are familiar with this particular pattern and know that God evaluated His work every day as being good. But what does “good” mean? It includes the idea that things looked very attractive and that all the fruits and vegetables He created for people to eat tasted very nice. But more than that, the Hebrew expression implies that everything was perfect and complete.

We are also familiar with the fact that when God completed the work of creation on Day 6, the pattern changed a bit. Genesis 1:31 says that when God “saw everything that He had made,” He pronounced it *very* good. But verse 2:18 shows that a pattern can change more than once or in more than one way, each one significant. As we saw from the Jen Wilkin video last week, the statement that something is NOT good is rather shocking, when you consider that God made this evaluation *before* sin entered the world. In other words, it isn’t a sin issue at stake in Genesis 2:18, it is the “incomplete” or “not yet perfect” condition of mankind. Mankind won’t be complete until woman is created, so God gives the second change in this particular pattern to alert us to the fact that He is about to do another new thing: create a helper who, as Jen put it, will be an indispensable ally for Adam.

**Pattern #3: “And there was evening and there was morning, the \_\_th day”** – This pattern gives a certain poetic rhythm to the creation account. Have you read children’s books in which a certain refrain is repeated over and over? Children listen for it and probably start chiming in as soon as the refrain begins again. That’s part of the fun of the story. We know that Genesis 1 was not written just for fun, but it *was* written in a way that would engage the ears of the listeners and pique their interest about what was going to happen next. That is why it is significant that the pattern is not used on Day Seven: the work is finished, so the wording (or in this case, *lack* of wording) is an indicator that no more “work” is forthcoming. In fact, we are told pointblank that God did something completely different on that day than He had done before: He rested. He *stopped* working.

We also see that this pattern is an unusual one for modern day western hearers. We would expect the refrain to be, “And there was *morning* and there was *evening*, the \_\_th day”. After all, our day begins in the morning and ends in the evening, and we use expressions like “Jack works hard all day, from morning to night” to express time passing. But the original hearers were Jewish, and the Jewish day begins at sunset, even to this day, so the pattern was a natural one for Moses to use, and it made perfect sense to the people he was writing for.

**Pattern #4: Separation** – As you filled in the chart on your homework assignment, you saw that separation occurred on Days 1-4 as God separated light from darkness (on Days 1 and 4), the waters above the expanse from the waters below the expanse on Day 2, and dry land from the water on earth on Day 3. He also “separated” Day 7 from all the other days in that He blessed it and made it holy or “set apart”. This pattern is an example of Genesis being an archetypal book, i.e. it contains many patterns or prototypes that will appear throughout Scripture. For instance, we learn in Exodus 20:8 that God didn’t just set apart that first “seventh day” as holy, He wants His people to *continue* to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” And the physical separating done during the creation week illustrates the spiritual principle of separation that God intends for His people everywhere, at all times. Consider these two Scriptures:

*You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you…I am the Lord your God, who has* ***separated*** *you from the peoples. You shall therefore* ***separate*** *the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have* ***set apart*** *for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have* ***separated*** *you from the peoples, that you should be mine.*

Leviticus 20:22-26, ESV

*Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness?...For we are the sanctuary of the living God, as God said, “I will dwell among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be* ***separate****,” says the Lord.* 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, HCSB

**Pattern #5: God Himself** – At the end of the homework assignment for today, you were to circle the word “God” every time it occurred in Genesis 1 and then count them all, plus the pronoun “He”. Probably around verse five you were thinking, “Okay, okay, I get the point!” But there were plenty more to circle! I counted 36 times that *God* or *He* was used as the subject of a sentence and once in the phrase “in the image of God”. It is obvious that God is the hero of this account, and Moses left absolutely no room for anyone else to get the credit for any part of creation. From beginning to end, creation is God’s handiwork, and His alone. The universe declares His work, His power, His divine nature, and His glory, and we will be singing His praises for all eternity for all that He has created.

**Pattern #6: “according to its kind”** – There is another pattern that occurs regularly in Genesis 1:11-12 and 21-25 and that is “according to their kinds” or “according to its kind”. I didn’t have you mark it for a couple of reasons: 1) we had run out of colors in the pencil box, and 2) after a while, if too many things get marked, instead of standing out, they get lost in the clutter! But I do think it is important to note this pattern. What it means is that both plants (verses 11-12) and animals (verses 21-25) reproduce after their kinds. Their DNA does not radically change nor do they gradually evolve from one kind to another over time. God makes a point of saying that He created all animal and plant “kinds”, and they reproduce only within those limits.

**Pattern #7: Finished Work and Rest** – In Genesis 2:1-3 we see two other words, each used twice in these verses, that are significant. One is “finished” and the other is “rested”. Verse two uses both words in reference to the seventh day: ***On the seventh day******God finished*** *His work that He had done, and* ***He rested******on the seventh day*** *from all His work that He had done.* Moses brings home the point that God always finishes what He sets out to do. Can you think of another time when God said, “It is finished!”? That was what Jesus shouted from the cross as He died . . . just before the Sabbath began. At that moment, the work of redemption was completed. But there is another context in which we are assured that God is working and will surely complete His work and that is in our personal sanctification. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you* ***will bring it to completion*** *at the day of Jesus Christ.”* (Philippians 1:6)

The concept of resting on the Sabbath is first introduced in Genesis 2:2, 3. But God gives great emphasis to it elsewhere. When God gave the Law, He devoted a great deal of space to the Sabbath. As we saw earlier, Exodus 20:8-11 explains that *no one* (“you, your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant or the sojourner within your gates”) is to do *any* work on the Sabbath. Instead, they were to devote that time to worshiping God. As Jen Wilkin explained, **“The Hebrew concept of Sabbath is the ceasing of labor for the purpose of actively devoting ourselves to the joyful task of worship.”** And when Jesus was on earth, He told His followers, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**.” We can find that rest now, and when He returns to establish His kingdom, that Sabbath rest for our souls will go on and on forever.

**Why All the Repetition?** – As Jen Wilkin pointed out in the third video session in her *God of Creation* series, Moses’ original audience had no written Bible . . . until he started writing the Pentateuch! Just think: Adam and Eve had NO written Bible. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had no written Bible. The children of Israel had no written Bible all the years they lived in Egypt (over 400 years). They continued to have no written Bible until Moses started writing, at God’s command. And when Moses was finished, how many books were in their Bible? Just five.

But even after Moses finished writing the Pentateuch, the Israelites *still* didn’t have a written Bible in the sense that there were very few copies of the Pentateuch available. It wasn’t like every Israelite family had a copy of it in their tent. So it was very important that Moses write in ways that would be easy to memorize and keep in mind. Remember that Moses was coming to the end of his life, and he wanted to be sure that the people remembered the details of creation, of their history, and of the Law. So he used repetition as an aid to memory.

**TAKE AWAYS:**

* Today’s lesson has been rather academic in nature, but I hope it has left you with a deeper appreciation for the written Word of God. Let us thank God that we today *do* have access to a complete written Bible, perhaps several versions of it! Let us thank Him for gifting the men and women who produce study Bibles for our enrichment. Let us thank the Holy Spirit for specifically calling the biblical authors—Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets, the Gospel writers, Paul, etc.—to put ink to parchment and communicate His message and for skillfully directing them as they wrote. We are holding a treasure in our hands, an imperishable one. As Peter wrote, quoting the prophet Isaiah, **“The grass withers, and the flower falls, but** **the word of the Lord endures forever.”** (Isaiah 40:8, 1 Peter 1:24, 25)