

The Old Testament's 5 steps to maturity:

Tonight's question: How would you summarise the Gospels, the book of Acts and the Epistles in regards to Jesus?

We have learned that the purpose of the revelation God has given us, is to make us grow up in Christ, but why must we “grow up” if scripture tells us we must be like *little children* in faith? [Read Ephesians 4:14]

We must become instruments of the grace of God - growing in spiritual maturity so that we might be bodies wholly filled and flooded with God himself. [Read Ephesians 3:14-19]

We have learned in the past few months that the Old Testament's function is **preparation**, and the New Testament's function is **realization** and many Christians fail right here! They try to get everything out of the New Testament and never - or seldom - go to the Old Testament. You simply cannot grasp all that is in the New Testament without the *preparation* of the heart which comes from the Old Testament.

The first **five** books of the Old Testament - **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy** are called the *Pentateuch* in Latin, which simply means "five books" - the five books of Moses.

How many of us have begun to read these books? How many of us have finished them?

Usually we start off very well in Genesis and move on into Exodus, but about in Leviticus - where we get into all the strange requirements of the Law - we bog down, and we never quite get through into Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Why do we bog down? It is because we are reading without *vision*.

- We don't know why we are reading it.
- We don't know what to expect from it.
- We don't know what to look for.

This is the purpose of the studies that we are now doing - we are climbing up on a mountaintop, look out over the whole surface of the land and get a bird's-eye view, so that we might see what we are going to run into, and why.

We begin with **Genesis**.

The name means *beginnings*:

- The beginning of our universe
- The beginning of the human race
- The beginning of sin
- The beginning of civilization

Genesis is a record of the origins of the all things we find around about us. The book opens with an awareness of the greatest fact in all of human life: *We are living in a universe.*

We are aware that our planet is part of a solar system. We are aware that the Earth is orbiting in a prearranged path about the sun - orbiting once around the sun every 365.24 days. We are aware the whole solar system itself - the sun with all its planets - is part of a great whirling body of stars called a galaxy - that is 100 hundred thousand light-years across and contains about 300 billion stars (300 thousand million). Our galaxy - the Milky Way is also moving at incredible speed through the vastness of space along with billions of other galaxies like ours.

Look up into the night sky and see the glory of the stars, and we become very much aware we live in a universe.

The Bible opens with that majestic, amazing recognition - man is part of a universe **[Read Gen. 1:1]**

Isn't it strange how all the heavens are put in one lump and our tiny planet Earth in the other!

Then the book moves right on to tell us about man - insignificant man - this tiny speck of life living on a minor planet in the midst of this unthinkable vast universe. *What does this say to you?*

[Read Psalm 8:3- 4 and 6] (v4 & 5 in Afrikaanse Bybel) (Verse 6 is the answer to the question raised in verses 3-4)

Thus the Bible begins with explaining the greatest mystery we come up against - the mystery of man in relationship to his universe. This is the very theme of science today - What is the place of man in relationship to his universe?

Here is where the Bible begins: It tells us man is a strange and remarkable creature who was made to be the expression of God's love, the instrument of God, the dwelling place of the Almighty. Man is seen in the opening chapters of Genesis in a marvellous faith-love relationship with God - in communion with him. **[Read Genesis 3:8]**,

(Correctly translated, this should say God walked in the garden "in the spirit of the day," i.e., in a spirit of understanding with man - intimate communion between God and man - God's intention for man.)

Immediately this is shattered by the story of the fall.

In the third chapter of Genesis, we see recorded the *tragedy of unbelief* - the error of *faith in the wrong idea* - and what happens when man in his ignorance and his blindness begins to put faith in error, but it shows us that man is made to be a creature of faith. People say, "I can't believe." But that is the one thing they can do. It is the one thing human beings are made to do. We cannot help but believe. The question is, "What do we believe?"

So here is the story of man in his failure and fall. It is followed immediately by the story of the failure of the first creation and its eventual destruction in the flood.

The rest of Genesis is a picture drawn for us by God of man in his need. It is the story of the lives

of four men - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

These four men are four representative types of personality. One of them is like you.

Each of the stories of these men, are given to show us the desperate *need* in each one's life.

- **Abraham's** story is the story of the *need for a supplier*. He was a man who was always needing somebody to come and deliver something to him that he lacked. That is the story of Abraham's life. He was always in need. *It is the story of a man whose need was continually being supplied by God.*
- **Isaac** was a man who had another kind of need. He never ran short. There is no record of a famine in Isaac's life. But he was in *need of a stimulator*. He loved to just sit. He needed somebody to get him going. *So God had to prod him repeatedly to get him moving into the place God wanted him to be.* All of us consistently need this kind of stimulation.
- **Jacob** was a man who was in continual *need of a bodyguard, a protector*. He was always getting himself into trouble, into difficulty. So all life long *he needed somebody to come and get him out of the trouble he got himself into.*
- **Joseph** was different from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet the story of Joseph's life is the story of need - *the need of a deliverer*. He was always needing to be delivered from situations which were not his own fault, or into which he was placed without any failure on his own part. But he needed to be brought out of them. *And his is the story of how God continually delivered him.* Genesis ends with the words: *"a coffin in Egypt."* In the coffin were the bones of Joseph. His last need was to have his body delivered from Egypt and taken up to the Promised Land.

So the whole story of Genesis is a message of the need of man.

(Next time: We move onto Exodus. If Genesis is a book about the need of man, what is the message of Exodus?)