

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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**The Declaration of Independence**

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers on earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

We present here the opening paragraph of the unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen States of America, on the 189th birthday of our country. As a holiday, we too often forget the real reason for the celebration and look forward to the day as a time to enjoy the outdoors with picnics, fireworks, fishing, sprints, etc. Maybe a few veterans will recall, or the survivors of those who died to preserve our way of life will think of the cause of the celebration, but to be truthful we have a designated Memorial Day to honor our war dead and July 4th is our Independence Day.

The educational processes of our country are under constant pressure in regards to what and how they shape our young people. Especially is this true in regards to the recent show of a lack of patriotism in some instances among our armed services. What we are wondering is, is it possible to teach patriotism? It is possible to teach history, to demand respect, to inculcate ideals, but to actually teach love and patriotism seems an impossible task to impose on instructors. Better is it to teach history, to impress ideals and to create a love for our way of life and thereby to create a higher degree of patriotism. It is interesting to note that the Supreme Court decision concerning prayer in the schools came just about a week before the celebration of Independence Day and to note mention of God in the Declaration of Independence and in all documents of the government and the use of the Bible in most public functions. Many things have been said concerning the decision both in agreement and in disagreement. It is unnecessary to repeat them here except to say that while patriotism may not be a "taught" subject, religion is considered such. The United States established as a Christian nation offers freedom of, not from religion. And while the nation is established as Christian, it welcomes other religious and creeds and the Supreme Court has attempted to prevent the imposition of a religion on anyone not desiring it. It must be carefully stated that to pray, or not to pray or what to pray for, is left to the local authorities.

Actual religious instruction has been eliminated from the curricula of public schools for some time and at the same time the opportunity for the teaching of moral maxims and principles which would be advantageous in the training of the young is eliminated. Recognizing the fact, many denominations have maintained private and parochial schools so that instruction in the particular faith of the group can be maintained and religion taught on a proper prospective with other subjects.

This year, the 4th of July comes on Saturday. May we wish you a safe and happy Fourth of July and remember safety begins with you—on the highway, in the home or wherever and however you celebrate the holiday.

This Week's Sunday School Lesson**GENESIS IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE BEGINNING WHERE YOU ARE**

Some of our social scientists and psychologists tell us that the loneliness or emptiness many persons feel nowadays is caused by the absence of meaning in their lives—a lack of personal identification with and sense of belonging to a family, a nation, or a social group. To compensate for aimless living, many such persons turn to the use of alcohol, drugs, violence, or promiscuous sex.

In our society, life patterns and values are changing fast. Many families live far from relatives and move often. To maintain emotional balance and personal health in such a situation, we need to remember, preserve, and understand both family heritage and national history. For a nation to determine its purpose, it must understand its past. The nation's history must be recited and studied so that goals and aspirations for the future may be confidently set. Patriotic celebrations and rituals make a nation's present and future meaningful.

The Book of Genesis is the foundation for the self-understanding of the community of Israel—of family, clan, tribal, and national origins and heritage. Israel's worship is basically a theological recital of her origins and heritage, just as the church's worship is a recital of her Founder's history and meaning.

Genesis provides a faith account of the origin of the world and history as the handiwork of one Creator-God. The first eleven chapters of Genesis present genealogical origins interwoven with stories about the early world. Genesis 12 through 50 records Israel's traditions about her fathers in the faith. The stories of Abraham and his descendants, a mixture of historical fact and theological affirmation, have provided the cultural foundations of the Western world for nearly two thousand years.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Scripture for this lesson is Genesis 1:1-4; John 1:1-3; Romans 1:16-21; Colossians 1:15-27; Hebrews 11:3. Selected verses are printed below.

Genesis 1:1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. John 1:1-3

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; 3 all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Romans 1:18-21

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; 21 for al-

though they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Colossians 1:15-17

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; 16 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Memory Selection: By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. —Hebrews 11:3

EXPLORING THE QUESTIONS

Many persons living in the nineteen-seventies may feel that reading Genesis is an irrelevant and time-wasting endeavor. Can a study of ancient cultures and history be meaningful to modern man? Why is the study of Genesis important to Christians?

To persons who live, as we do, in a culture dominated by science, the question of historical validity is important. Are the Genesis accounts historically accurate? Tied to the question of historical accuracy is the matter of the origin of the material in Genesis. Who wrote it and why?

Perhaps the most important aspect of this study is the question of enduring meaning. What is the purpose of Genesis? A related question is this: What should be the results of this study for any man anywhere, any time?

FINDING HELP WITH YOUR QUESTIONS

As we begin this series of thirteen lessons in Genesis, we need to consider both our reasons for making such a study and the perspective from which we will approach it. What does this ancient book have to do with twentieth-century Christians?

Genesis for Christians

We Christians do not possess a brand-new religion. We worship the God of our fathers, known of old. Genesis is a part of our heritage and history. In this heritage we discover our personal identity, our sense of belonging, our awareness of destiny, our guide to meaning and real community.

Americans must understand themselves through the history of the Pilgrims, through the work of George Washington and others of many ethnic and cultural backgrounds who have contributed to our history. Similarly, Christians must discover themselves through the history of their fathers in the faith.

From its beginning, the Christian community recognized its indebtedness to the Old Testament Scriptures. But for Christians this Old Testament inheritance must inevitably be understood from the perspective of the New Testament's testimony to the event and meaning of Jesus Christ.

The Genesis passage printed with the lesson asserts that God created the heavens and the earth. Obviously we cannot make such a claim on the basis

of eyewitness testimony. We accept the statement by faith. We understand the story of creation as an expression of the faith of our spiritual forefathers. Thus we join with the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who wrote, "By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God." (11:3)

John's Gospel states that creation came through the Word of God and that this Word became flesh in Christ. (1:1-3, 14) The apostle Paul who wrote that "all things were created through him (Christ) and for him." (Colossians 1:16)

As creation came from God through his Word, so the new creation (technically, "the renewed creation") has come through the redemptive activity of Christ. This new man, God's Son, has ushered in the new age of the Spirit, the age of the spiritual man. The redemption Christians claim in and through the birth, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is expressed as a new Genesis.

The final chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, echo the creation stories of the first three chapters of Genesis. The original intention of God is pictured as having been fulfilled through the redemption of the Lamb. There is now a new heaven and a new earth, and regenerated men freely eat of the tree of (eternal) life.

The Beginning of Salvation

The Book of Genesis begins the story of God's salvation of the world. It records the origin of the world, of evil, and of the process of redemption as Christians traditionally have understood it. God's salvation began with Abraham and continues to the Christian community of today.

Because men have believed the witness of the biblical record, many in every generation have come to know the God who revealed himself to Abraham and who is perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christians' knowledge of God rests on the faith Abraham knew. "The word of the Lord came to Abram . . . And he believed the Lord; and he (the Lord) reckoned it to him as righteousness (or merit)." (Genesis 15:1a, 6)

Paul claimed that as Abraham was justified (accepted) by God through faith, so the sons of Abraham are those who, like him, are justified through faith. (See Galatians 3:6-9) This justification or acceptance of man by God is what we mean by Salvation.

Christians preach that man's salvation was fully realized in Jesus the Christ. This descendant of Abraham is also proclaimed as a light to the gentiles and Savior of the world. In the New Testament Jesus is called the true seed or offspring of Abraham, and by faith in him the gentiles become adopted sons who share the patriarch's blessing. Genesis thus provides the theological framework for the gospel of redemption and renewal which the church claims is fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ.

A Book of Faith

Questions often arise as to the historical accuracy of the (Continued on Page 3)