

Read Through the Bible

Reflections and Questions for Thought and Discussion from Fellow Readers

Week 1, January 1-10, 2010

Readings: Genesis 1-24; Matthew 1-8

Introductions (will be added to weekly commentaries as new books come up in the weekly reading schedule).
Introductions are taken from *The Message* translation by Eugene Peterson.

Genesis

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a **building** operation in which we are engaged all our life long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the Kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives, we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God's creative acts, God's intervening and gracious judgments, God's call to a life of faith, God's making covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless "truth" or "principle." We are given a succession of stories with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in "heaven and earth." God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out—there's no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story—at the beginning.

Matthew

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with Jesus. God had been at work for a long time. Salvation, which is the main business of Jesus, is an old business. Jesus is the coming together in final form of themes and energies and movements that had been set in motion before the foundation of the world.

Matthew opens the New Testament by setting the local story of Jesus in its world

historical context. He makes sure that as we read his account of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see the connections with everything that has gone before. “Fulfilled” is one of Matthew’s characteristic verbs: such and such happened “that it might be fulfilled.” Jesus is unique, but he is not odd.

Better yet, Matthew tells the story in such a way that not only is everything previous to us completed in Jesus; we are completed in Jesus. Every day we wake up in the middle of something that is already going on, that has been going on for a long time: genealogy and geology, history and culture, the cosmos—God. We are neither accidental nor incidental to the story. We get orientation, briefing, background, reassurance.

Matthew provides the comprehensive context by which we see all God’s creation and salvation completed in Jesus, and all the parts of our lives—work, family, friends, memories, dreams—also completed in Jesus. Lacking such a context, we are in danger of seeing Jesus as a mere diversion from the concerns announced in the newspapers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Reflections and Questions by Pastor Dan Storvick

The first thing that struck me as I reflected this week’s readings was the continuity of God’s promised actions. In Genesis 12:1-3, “the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Then in Matthew 1, we read this seemingly dusty genealogy of the ancestors of Jesus. But on closer inspection we see the name of Abraham in verse 1, and the name of Jesus in verse 16. And verse 17 tells us that the promise made forty-two generations before was fulfilled in the birth of the Messiah, Jesus: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.”

This tells me that God keeps his promises! And even when it seems like it takes forever, he is faithful.

In the ensuing chapters we see man failing repeatedly and God at work, redeeming repeatedly. In Genesis, God calls Abraham, tells him he will be a blessing, corrects him when he falters, and coaches him along to the fulfillment of his promise. In Matthew, Jesus does the same thing: calls his disciples (Mat. 4:16-17), tells them to be a blessing (Mat. 5:13-16), and corrects their faulty notions (Mat 5-7)

For Personal Reflection and Group Discussion:

1. What promises have I claimed from God’s word?
2. How have I seen his hand at work in my life? In the short term? When it seemed to take forever?
3. Were Abraham and Sarah, or Joseph and Mary all that much different from me? What would it look like in my life if I obeyed God as they did? (See Genesis 12:4; Matthew 1:24-25)?
4. What kinds of patterns, processes, or promises might God be playing out in my life?

5. There is a Pattern that plays out over and over in the Bible: Election (God chose Abraham), Covenant (God promised to make Abraham a great nation), and Mission (God asked Abraham to trust and obey him); Jesus did the same with his disciples—and with all who believe. How has God elected you? What has he promised you? What is God asking you to do today?

6. From this week's readings, what verse, concept, event or promise stood out most for me?