

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MESSAGE OF GENESIS

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

1. Theology

The Science of God.

2. Cosmogony

The Science of the Universe.

3. Anthropology

The Science of Man.

4. Sociology

The Science of Society.

5. Hamartiology

The Science of Sin.

6. Ethnology

The Science of Races.

7. Soteriology

The Science of Salvation.

NOTE: These subjects are dealt with in Genesis fundamentally, and not finally.

THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. God and Man are Intimately related.

- i. God created Man in His own Image
- ii. God governs Man for Man's own Good.
- iii. God loves Man.

II. Man realizes his own Life by Faith in God.

- i. Faith the simple Law of Life.
- ii. Failure in Faith is Failure in Life.
- iii. Faith may differ in expression.

Abraham, Obedient.

Isaac, Passive..

Jacob, Restless

NOTE: Faith is the basis upon which God can work out His will in man, and man can work out his salvation from God.

IT is perpetually being asked to-day whether there are any permanent values in the book of Genesis.

In the light of later revelation is there any reason for retaining this book, except, perhaps, that of interest in an ancient writing which has yet no vital relationship to our own times?

In answer to that enquiry it may at once be stated that the whole system of the Christian religion depends upon the accuracy of certain statements made in this book. Without them that system is an erection without a foundation, conclusions without premises. These declarations, at once the simplest and the profoundest in the book, constitute its permanent values, not merely because all subsequent Scripture depends upon them; but also because if there were no other writings, these statements supply us with answers to questions which must arise to the thinking mind.

The permanent values may be stated briefly and concisely, in order that the living message may be deduced therefrom. There can be little doubt that there are very many people who have no particular desire to destroy the book of Genesis, who are interested in it as a collection of stories, having been familiar with it from childhood, who have, nevertheless, never realized of what vital importance it is, and how much it contains of supreme value.

Its values may thus be technically tabulated. The book contains the foundation truths of:

- Theology,
- Cosmogony,
- Anthropology,
- Sociology,
- Hamartiology,
- Ethnology,
- Soteriology.

These words are used with the express purpose of indicating the profound conviction that Genesis is preeminently a scientific book. None of these subjects are dealt with finally, but all are presented fundamentally. Genesis supplies men with the rudiments of the science of God.

- It offers a theory of the origin of the universe.
- It says the first thing concerning the science of man.
- It lays the foundations of the science of society.
- It reveals the simplest matters of the science of sin.
- It introduces the study of the science of races.
- It presents the initial truths concerning the science of salvation.

The essential value of the book is the fundamental character of its teaching on all these matters. Its declarations meet us at the point where knowledge, proceeding along the line of investigation, fails; and present truths undiscovered by investigation. Investigation is a perfectly proper exercise of the human mind. All that men are doing in their attempt to discover the underlying secrets of nature and life is in harmony with the purpose of God in the creation of human intellect.

It is nevertheless conceded that man ever arrives at a point beyond which he is unable to go. It is at this point that Genesis speaks in the terms of revelations made to man, rather than a record of discoveries made by man. Processes and consummations will be dealt with in subsequent revelation, or discovered by further investigation.

To possess the book of Genesis alone is not to be acquainted with the final truth on any of the subjects named. It is to have the initial word which no subsequent discoveries contradict, and without which all later declarations are meaningless. In order to illustrate this let us pass over the ground in briefest statement by enquiring what the book supplies in each department, and what are the things lacking.

As to theology. Genesis presents God as Creator, King, and determined Redeemer; and upon these fundamental facts all Christian theology depends.

- The nature of God is not revealed.
- His methods are not declared.
- His ultimate purpose is not stated.

As to cosmogony. Genesis declares that the whole universe has come into being by the will and act of God. The hall-mark of the Divine handiwork is upon every blade of grass and upon every flaming constellation. Nothing is stated in detail concerning

- The process of creation, or
- The period occupied, or
- The ultimate purpose.

As to anthropology. Genesis teaches that man is a mingling of dust and Deity by the will and act of God; a being placed under authority, and having dominion over all things beneath him: a being responsible, therefore, to God.

- Nothing is said concerning the laws which regulate the interaction of the physical and the psychical.
- Nothing is declared concerning man's ultimate destiny.

As to sociology. Genesis reveals the truth that the first circle of society is the family, based upon the marriage relationship; and that the true nation is made up of families which recognize their inter-responsibility under the Divine government. The application of these principles to varied and complex conditions is not to be found in this book.

As to hamartiology. Genesis affirms that sin in the case of man is failure of faith in the goodness of God, and consequent rebellion against His government. The ultimate issues of sin in individual destiny are not declared.

As to ethnology. Genesis records the breakup of the unity of the race, following upon an attempted confederacy of godlessness. The ultimate issue in its scattering is not described.

As to soteriology. Genesis makes it perfectly plain that human salvation must come from God, and through man. In whispers and symbols and shadows, man is taught that having sinned, his only hope is that God will be his Redeemer. Nothing is distinctly said concerning the method or finality.

To deny the accuracy of these fundamental statements is to lose the meaning of all subsequent teaching. If God is not Creator, King, and Redeemer, there is no resting place for man other than the restlessness of agnosticism. On the way to agnosticism, human speculations may retain the name of religion; but the logical outcome of the denial of these fundamental assertions concerning God is denial of the existence of God.

To deny what this book teaches concerning the origin of the universe is to be compelled to attempt to account for the things seen by some undefined action and interaction within the universe, which has behind it no personality.

To deny that man is a mysterious mingling of dust and Deity by the will and act of God is necessarily to be compelled to think of him as the last product of animal evolution; and therefore as himself an animal, and nothing more. If the teaching be denied that human society is founded on the family, and based upon the marriage relationship, then sociology becomes chaotic, and spurious socialism denies the sanctity of or necessity for the marriage relationship.

If the teaching be incorrect that sin is rebellion against God, based upon unbelief, then necessarily the terms in which it has been described by the Christian faith must be modified, until eventually it is declared to be nonexistent, none other than the under side of good.

Failure to accept the teaching that national divisions are finally the outcome of a false attempt at unity, based upon self-sufficient rebellion against God, must ultimately result in affirming those divisions to be good which, nevertheless, have been productive of all wars and kindred evils. To deny the suggestions concerning human salvation as possible only through the intervention of God is ultimately to abandon the idea of salvation as either unnecessary or altogether impossible. There is a sense in which these things do not constitute the message of this book to our own age, although they do constitute its permanent values.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that this book is the only inspired word ever given to man. What is its ultimate message?

It teaches with unvarying definiteness

- First, the immediate relation between God and man; and
- Second, that the great principle for the realization of human life is such faith in God as expresses itself in obedience to His throne.

This book of first things declares the immediate relation between God and man.

It is perfectly true that subsequent books state this more fully, and deal with it more explicitly. When we pass from the sublime stateliness of these original statements, through the giving of the law, the establishing of worship; through the thunder of the prophets, and the wailing minor threnody of their pleadings with humanity; and still on to the matchless and final splendour of the brief words spoken by the Man of Galilee; through the unveiling of the meaning of these words by the Spirit, in the apostolic writings, we find this truth wrought out in greater detail and with mightier force.

Nevertheless, all that the law indicated, all that the prophets enforced, all that Jesus said, and all that the apostles expounded, depend absolutely for accuracy upon the teaching of this truth as contained in this book. If that first fact of man's relationship to God is not established, then everything that followed was false dreaming, mistaken enthusiasm, or mischievous vaporizing.

The three main divisions of the book, as indicated in the study of its content are:

- Generation,
- Degeneration,
- Regeneration.

It is at once evident that the supreme message every where is that God has to do with man; man has to do with God.

In the first division we see the story of creation, tracing everything from the material order to man, and then describing man as to his nature and office; and behind all the processes of creation suggested, God is declared; and immediately presiding over the final movement by which man appears, God is seen. That is the first great truth. Man is related to God, for He created him, and He alone perfectly understands him, and consequently He only can govern him.

The message of Genesis to our own age is, first of all, that of man's immediate relation to God. We need Genesis because it is difficult sometimes to believe that any such relation exists. We look into the faces of men and women, the flotsam and jetsam of our great cities, at both ends of the social scale, and there seems to be no trace of Deity. If in that statement there seems to be something of personal satisfaction, it is by no means intended.

Therefore let a personal word be spoken. To look into one's own heart is to find it most difficult to believe that man is "offspring of God." Nevertheless, when this book affirms that God said, "**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,**" and that He made him to have dominion; that He placed him in circumstances where he should be reminded of his relation to God, and called upon to respond thereto; I know that I am reading the deepest truth of my own life. This conception of the relation between man and God creates that consciousness of what sin is, which fills the soul with fear. The determined prostitution of powers which are akin to God, to purposes of evil, is terrible indeed; and this message concerning the true nature of man must create a profound conviction of the awfulness of sin. It is, nevertheless, a message of hope, for it suggests the possibility of renewal.

- To be without God is indeed to be without hope.
- To believe the truth that man is related to God is to know the renewal of hope.

In this first message then, there is thunder, but in it there are also tears. It is because man loses his sense of essential relation to God that sin and sorrow continue. If we could say to the men of this age, in His image, after His likeness, as we ought, there would necessarily follow the profoundest and deepest conviction of sin, and the most genuine return to Him; and therefore to holiness of character, and righteousness of life.

The second message is an inevitable sequence of the first. It is, indeed, a corollary, something which is inseparable therefrom.

As man is related to God by creation and government, it follows that the true secret for the realization of his life is that of faith, which expresses itself in obedience.

This is at once taught as we pass into the second division of the book, that dealing with Degeneration.

Man's confidence in God was first shaken when the enemy said, "**Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?**" and declared, "**Ye shall not surely die.**" He called in question the goodness and truth of God, and thereby attacked the confidence of a human being. When faith wavered, through listening to a slander upon God, the issue was an act of disobedience. Faith and obedience are always joined together.

"Trust and obey,
For there's no other way."

May be so simple a statement as to be considered doggerel rather than poetry. It is, nevertheless, the philosophy of Genesis, and of the Christian religion.

When trust failed, obedience ceased; and immediately there passed over all life a blasting and a mildew, and humanity failed to realize itself. Thus the fundamental truth is taught that man can only realize his own God-created life by trusting God, and walking in the way of His commandment.

In the final division of the book, that dealing with the beginnings of Regeneration, the principal subject is that of the life stories of individual and representative men, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

Throughout all these the supreme revelation is that of God seeking to restore men to obedience by restoring them to the main principle of human life, that of faith in Himself. Faith is seen having different methods of expression.

- In the case of Abraham, seven communications were made to him, and his faith was always obedient without questioning.
- Two communications were made to Isaac, whose faith was passive. To him God spoke merely by way of ratification.
- Five communications were made to Jacob, whose faith was restless; and these always came after a period of wandering, in order to restore him.

The one principle is found in all;

- In Abraham an obedient faith,
- In Isaac a passive faith,
- In Jacob a restless faith.

And because that principle was present, God was able to work for the remaking of these men, and they were able to find their way back into conscious relationship with Him.

Thus the book reveals the fact that faith is the basis upon which God can work His will in man, and upon which man can realize the will of God.

All this is carried out in greater detail in subsequent books of the Bible, but this is the simple and almost overwhelming message of Genesis to the men of this age.

- First, that man is not wholly of the dust, but that between him and God there is immediateness of relationship; and
- Second, that man only finds himself, and realizes the true meaning of his own life as he places his confidence in God, and obeys Him with unquestioning loyalty.

Hear, then, the final message of the book.

Oh, man, thou art of God. Thou canst only enter into thine own life and realize it as thy confidence is reposed in Him, and thy obedience is yielded to Him.

That is the truth which this book utters to all men as a philosophy of life. To those who have fallen, and are excluded from their own life because they are out of fellowship with God, it declares that as they return to the principle of faith in God, they will find their feet placed again upon the highway that leads them home. Not that they will be able to rebuild the ruined temple, or reconstruct the wasted years, but He will be able to do these things when they trust and obey.

The book of Genesis declares that the just shall live by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. These principles underlie every story, and constitute the living message of the whole book.

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