

RECORDS OF GOD'S UNFOLDING PLAN

- A. Introduction: We have begun a new series on the Bible. We've going to discuss what the Bible is, why and how we need to read it, as well as why we can trust what it says. Let's begin with a brief review of key points we made last week.
1. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books and letters, written by more than forty authors over a 1500 year period—from the time of Moses (1440 BC) to the death of John the apostle (AD 100).
 - a. Together, these documents tell the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths He has gone to to obtain that family through Jesus. Each book somehow adds to or advances this central theme.
 - b. The Bible is a unique book because Almighty God inspired the many authors who wrote the various documents. The Lord revealed to the mind of the authors what He wanted them to write, and they wrote down His words and thoughts. II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:21
 1. The authors were aware that they were speaking, not for God, but from God. The phrase "thus says the Lord" is found six hundred times in the Old Testament.
 2. Paul the apostle (author of fourteen New Testament documents) wrote: When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths (I Cor 2:13, NLT).
 - c. The Bible is a record of God's revelation of Himself and His plans and purposes to mankind. The Bible doesn't prove the existence of God. It presumes that He exists and then tells us about Him.
 1. The Bible reveals that God is eternal (having no beginning or end) and infinite (without limits of any kind). He is the Creator. Everything derives its existence from Him. He spoke and all things came into being. I Kings 8:27; Gen 1:1; Col 1:16
 2. The Bible reveals that God is omnipresent (present everywhere at once), omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), and transcendent (above all and beyond everything we can imagine). Nothing is impossible for Him. Jer 23:23-24; Ps 147:5; Gen 18:14
 3. The Bible also reveals that this transcendent, infinite, eternal Being is knowable (at least in part) and wants to be known by the men and women He created. Through the revelation He gives us in His written Word (the Bible), we can know Him enough to respond to Him with awe, reverence, gratefulness, and love. Jer 9:23-24
 2. Last week I gave you a simple and effective way to read the Bible. Begin with the New Testament. Set aside a reasonable amount of time on a regular basis (15-20 minutes 4-5 times a week). Read each book and letter, one at a time, from start to finish. They were written to be read this way.
 - a. Each book was written by a real person to other real people to communicate information. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just keep reading. You are reading to become familiar with the text. Understanding comes with familiarity. Regular reading helps you see context.
 - b. We begin with the New Testament because, not only is it much shorter, the Old Testament is easier to understand once you are competent in the New Testament (more on this in upcoming lessons).
 3. People lack confidence in the Bible because they mistakenly think that it is a book of myths and legends. But the Bible is primarily a historical narrative of real people, places, and events.
 - a. The Bible is roughly 50% history, 25% prophecy, and 25% instructions for living. The history is verifiable through secular (non-Bible) sources as well as through archeology (more on this later).
 - b. The men who wrote the books that make up the Bible did not set out to write a religious book. They wrote to record what God revealed to them about Himself and His plans for mankind, and to record what they saw and heard as they witnessed God's power and presence in their lives.
 - c. Men began to keep and preserve records from the earliest days of humanity. Tonight we're going to look at how the Bible developed, and begin to show why you can trust its contents.

- B. The Bible opens with God’s creation of the heavens and the earth (the home for His family) and then the creation of the first man and woman (his family). Gen 1-2
1. Genesis 3 records the fall of humanity, when the first man (Adam) chose independence from God through sin. His act of rebellion brought a curse of corruption and death to the entire race and to the earth itself (Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19). Adam and Eve began to have children (Gen 4). The impact of Adam’s sin on the world was immediately apparent when his first son murdered his own brother.
 - a. Gen 3:8-9—Following the sin, God came walking in the garden and called to Adam. The casual phrasing in the text indicates this was a normal event, a time when God came to commune with Adam and Eve. Remember, God wants relationship with men and women.
 1. This was a theophany—God appearing, in a visible, bodily form, to communicate with people. Theophany comes from two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *phaino* (to appear).
 2. Although God is invisible and omnipresent, He is not necessarily present in the same way everywhere. There are places where He is specially present. And, although God is Spirit and is invisible (John 4:24; I Tim 1:17), when He chooses, He can give an appearance of Himself.
 - b. As the Lord talked with Adam and Eve, among other things, He promised that one day the Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary) would come to undo that damage done. Gen 3:15
 1. God’s promise is known as the protoevangel (or the first gospel), the first promise of the coming Redeemer or Savior. This is the first prophetic reference to Jesus Christ in the Bible.
 2. The rest of the Bible is a gradual unfolding (progressive revelation) of God’s plan of redemption—His plan to restore the family and the family home through Jesus.
 2. Gen 5:1 is a very significant statement. It reads: This is the book of the generations of Adam (KJV). This is the first place in the Bible where the word book (*sepher*) is found. The Hebrew word translated generation (*toledoth*) means origins or records of origins (history).
 - a. The passage indicates that men were keeping written records of their origin or history. It is possible that Adam himself wrote the preceding section (chapters 2-4), ending it with his signature.
 - b. In Gen 5:1-32 ten generations are listed, from Adam to Noah. When we examine Jesus’ genealogy (Luke 3:23-38; Matt 1:1-16) we find that this is the line through which the promised Seed came.
 1. There are eleven of these divisions (these are the generations of) marked off in the Book of Genesis. Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2
 2. It is probable that these sections were written by eyewitnesses of the events reported there and handed down from generation to generation (more on this in a moment).
 3. The Bible is redemptive history. It doesn’t list everyone who lived or everything that happened. It is a record of people and events that directly relate to God’s unfolding plan of redemption.
 - a. Early in the Bible record, the Lord identified the people group through whom the Redeemer (the promised Seed) would come into this world, the descendants of a man named Abraham. Gen 12:1-3
 1. Around 2000 BC God directed a man named Abraham to leave his homeland in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and settle in Canaan (modern Israel). His offspring became the nation of Israel.
 2. During the third generation, Abraham’s descendants (75 in all) traveled from Canaan to Egypt for food during a severe famine in that part of the world. They remained in Egypt for four centuries, increased greatly in numbers, and were eventually enslaved by the Egyptians.
 - b. Almighty God delivered the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and, under the leadership of a man named Moses, led them back to Canaan—the place where the promised Seed will be born.
- C. Moses is the author of the first five books of the Bible. At the Lord’s direction and under His inspiration, Moses recorded what God revealed to Israel about Himself and His plans, as well as what the Lord did for Abraham’s descendants. Let’s briefly examine how this unfolded.
1. When Moses was eighty years old, God appeared to him in a flame of fire, in a bush that did not burn.

The Lord told Moses that He was going to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Ex 3:7-9

- a. The Lord gave Him this name for Himself: I AM THAT I AM (Ex 3:14). The root word means the Self-Existent One or the Eternal. It has the idea of underived existence. He is because He is.
 1. The Lord instructed Moses to tell the Israelites: I will redeem you with mighty power and great acts of judgment. I will make you my own special people and I will be your God. And you will know that I am the Lord your God who has rescued you (Ex 6:6-7, NLT).
 2. Note the relational aspect of God's words: You will be my own people, my special possession. And, I will be your God. This promise is repeated over and over again in Scripture, Jer 31:33; 32:38-40; Ezek 34:23-25; 36:25-28; 37:26-27; II Cor 6:16-18; Heb 8:10; Rev 21:3
- b. Once Israel was physically out of Egypt, the first thing Almighty God did was reveal Himself more fully to His people—and make sure that that revelation was written down for future generations.
 1. God descended visibly, in the form of fire, at Mount Sinai, a mountain in modern Saudi Arabia. One to two million people (Ex 12:37-38) witnessed the biggest and most powerful theophany in history. They saw the fire, heard God's voice thunder, and felt the earth shake when He spoke.
 2. God appeared as fire—not because He is fire, but to help them understand some things about His person and work: I am the only God, I am All Power, and I am here to help you.
 - A. The Israelites had lived for 400 years among polytheistic people who believed that multiple gods ruled the world. This demonstration was meant to show them there are no other gods
 - B. Ex 19:4-5—God's message to them was: I've brought you to myself on eagles' wings (this bird was known for the care of its young and carrying them on its back). If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant you will be my special treasure.
 - C. A covenant is a binding agreement. Israel's part of the covenant was to worship only the Lord (Ex 20:1-17). Israel agreed and the covenant was enacted (Ex 24:1-8).
- c. Moses spent much time with the Lord up on the mountain and received numerous instructions which wrote down. God also wrote His words on two tablets and instructed Moses to teach the people His laws. Ex 24:4; 7; 12; Ex 31:18
 1. God gave Israel numerous social, civil, and ceremonial laws to help them establish a functional society once they reached Canaan—one that would reflect their relationship with Him.
 2. He also gave detailed instructions for building a Tabernacle where He could meet with them and dwell among them.
 2. Israel remained camped at Sinai for a little over a year, and completed the Tabernacle, before they set out for Canaan. Once the Israelites reached the border, out of fear of the obstacles in the land, they refused to cross the border. They spent the next 40 years living as nomads in the wilderness they'd just crossed.
 - a. During these forty years Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). He had the words of the Lord written at Sinai. And, he was an eyewitness of the events in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
 1. Exodus is a record of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, God's appearance at Sinai and the giving of the Law, and the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishing. Leviticus is a handbook of directions for priests who will carry out sacrifices and ceremonies, as God instituted at Sinai.
 2. Numbers records the wilderness journey, from the last 20 days at Sinai to their arrival at the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Canaan 40 years later. Deuteronomy is a restating of the Law, and a farewell address from Moses to a new generation of Israelites.
 3. Moses was not an eyewitness to the events in Genesis. That information came from earlier materials (including the books of the generations mentioned earlier) and oral traditions passed down from the time of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - b. The rest of the Old Testament was written by men God spoke to through theophanies, dreams, and visions—eyewitnesses of the history they reported as God unfolded His plan of redemption.

- D. Can we trust the Bible? People have a bias against the Bible because of the supernatural element. But when it is assessed with the same standards used to assess other books from antiquity, the Bible stands up to the scrutiny. Can we trust Moses' account of the events connected to Sinai? Consider these points.
1. We must always consider what the information in the Bible meant to the people to whom it was first written—in this case, the nation of Israel. Remember, Jesus was born into 1st century Israel.
 - a. The Bible of that day was the same Old Testament used today. It was known as the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (same information, slightly different arrangement of the books).
 1. First century Jews treaded the Old Testament, not a folklore or fables, but as history—their history. They accepted the events at Sinai were part of their national identity.
 2. Passover (instituted at the Exodus) was a major feast celebrated as a yearly reminder of what happened. They taught their children what God did for them in Egypt. Ex 12:1-28; Ex 13:8-9
 - b. Moses' narrative reads like a historical account, listing specific people (Moses, Aaron), places (Egypt, Goshen, the land Midian, the Nile River), and events (slavery, plagues). The rest of the Old Testament books treat what happened in Egypt and at Sinai as history. Ex 78:12-16; Isa 48:21; etc.
 1. The first Christians and New Testament writers regarded the events as literal history: Stephen, the first martyr (Acts 7:30-38); Paul (Acts 13:17; Heb 12:20-21); Jude (5).
 2. Jesus authenticated the events in Egypt and at Sinai by authenticating the Law and the prophets as the Word of God, testifying that they wrote about Him. John 5:39; 45-47; Luke 24:27
 2. Archeologists have discovered more than 25,000 finds that relate directly or indirectly to the Scriptures, including the existence of 30 individuals from the New Testament and almost 60 from the Old.
 - a. For example, archeology has confirmed the existence of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (II Kings 24:1) and the cities of Sodom and Gommorah (Gen 14). And, geological evidence supports the biblical description of their destruction by a catastrophic, fiery event (Gen 19).
 - b. For years, critics dismissed Moses' writings, claiming that the period he described was prior to the existence of writing. The Ebla Tablets (16,000 clay tablets from in Aleppo, Syria in 1976), dating from 2400 BC changed that. They showed that writing existed a thousand years before Moses in the area where Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived.
 - c. The geography around Sinai matches information Moses gave in his account, including a split rock, with evidence of gushing water (Ex 17:5-6), a stone altar and twelve stone pillars (Ex 24:4-8), a massive cemetery where thousands of Israelites may be buried (Ex 32:25-28).
 3. The point is, there's enough evidence in the historical, archeological, and geological record to prevent us from dismissing Moses' account of the events at Sinai simply because of the supernatural aspects.
- E. Conclusion: We have not said all there is to say about why we can trust the Bible to be what it claims to be—the Word of God. But consider these points as we close.
1. The events Moses recorded in were real events. But many of them also picture or foreshadow what the coming Seed (the Redeemer) will do. Israel's deliverance from Egypt pictures redemption through Jesus. The night before they left Egypt, at God's direction, they placed the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and were preserved from destruction. Ex 12:1-28; I Cor 5:7
 2. The Lord delivered them from bondage to slavery (a picture of human bondage to sin, corruption, and death) for relationship. As a result of the redemption provided by the Lord through the death and resurrection of Jesus we can call this wonderful being My God. Almighty God is my God.
 - a. This wonderful Being (our Creator) who showed Himself to possibly two million at one time at Sinai wants to be known by and have relationship with the people He created.
 - b. The main way we get to know Him is through this marvelous book we have been given—His written Word which reveals His power, His character, His plans, and His purposes. More next week!