

Principle Faith: Genesis One/Two

Part 3

The audio and print files for this class can be found online at <http://www.etspm.org/audio/principlefaith>

Our Purpose: Following the directives of the great commandments, our purpose is to honor and glorify God through heart, soul, strength and mind, and to do so in a way that demonstrates love for others and self at the same time. Our study will focus on salient principles that help us understand the biblical text, our relationship to God and others, and, more importantly, help us love, honor and glorify God more diligently in our lives.

Our Goal: To examine at least the first eleven chapters of Genesis during the quarter, looking for, explaining, and applying the principles we find.

What is a principle?

A principle is a foundational truth or premise upon which we build beliefs, practices and explanations. “Principle Faith: Genesis” will be a study of key biblical principles in light of how they generate and strengthen faith, reflect God’s nature and glory and build a case for all things spiritual.

Biblical principles: reflect the existence/nature of God; indicate God’s connection with the overall biblical theme; demonstrate divine providence; illustrate how tightly organized the “scheme” of redemption really is

Genesis In Context: The initial audience, the children of Israel during the early days of the Mosaic law, needed to see their connection/purpose to God’s eternal plan. The creation account provided an account of creation, and Israel’s connection to historical figures like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It also links Israel with Adam and, even further, God.

The principle faith (or principles of faith) that we derive from this first chapter must always keep that key element at the forefront. The philosophical/metaphysical premises we encounter there but always have a theological association. As we will note later in the first chapter, God does nothing except that mankind lies at the heart of his actions.

1:5ff: light/day; darkness/night; evening/morning

1. Significance of order/sequence
2. Significance of time and chronology (point of reference/measure, history/chronicle)

1:6ff: land, sea, firmaments/expanse/heaven, plant, animal, human life

1. Significance of order/arrangement
2. Significance of function/purpose
 - a. heavens
 - b. land, seas
 - c. plant life
 - d. animal life
 - e. mankind

1:6ff: let it..., let/them be for ...

1. purpose/function
2. providence
 - a. it was so
 - b. it was good/very good
 - c. God blessed ...

1:11ff: seed (plant, animal => spiritual)

1. life
2. reproduction
3. pattern (after its kind)

1:26ff: Man created in the image of God (1 Th 5:23)

1. body
2. spirit
3. soul (rational, emotional, volitional, moral, behavior, temporal/eternal)

2:1ff: God finished

1. God had a “job” to do (purpose, plan, providence; cf. Jn 9:1ff)
2. God finished the “job” (cf. Is 45:18)
3. God rested
 - a. introduction of Sabbath principle (cf. Neh 9:14)
 - b. significance of rest (physically)
 - c. significance of rest (spiritually)
4. God actions => man’s actions
 - a. God gave man a “job” (tend my garden)
 - b. value/principle of labor (cf. Proverbs)
 - c. value/principle of rest
 - d. work => rest (suffering => glory)

2:4ff: God’s history/genealogy

1. God’s record of creation
2. Israel’s connection to Adam, God, God’s purpose
3. Beginnings
 - a. of creation
 - b. of mankind
 - c. of God’s purpose (revealed)
 - d. of God’s generations (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/man and Jacob/nation)

2:7ff: Man’s place

1. created physically (from the earth), to fulfill physical purpose/s
2. created metaphysically (from God), to fulfill spiritual purpose/s

2:8ff-17 “A Vale of Soul Making” - God’s Nature/Providence & Revelation

The Bible begins and ends with providence and in between; it’s more providence. In brief, the Bible simply can not be understood apart from grasping how God’s providence permeates it.

To understand that more fully, we will note two senses of the meaning of the term, and two methods of its fulfillment.

Wise mothers and fathers, even before their children have needs, have **already** planned to meet those needs. They know that their children will need food, clothing, shelter, compassion and

companionship. On a much larger scale our heavenly father does the same thing. He “sees before” the needs that we will have and then makes arrangements to see that those needs are met.

The first meaning of providence reflects this sense. Providence, literally "pro," meaning before, and "video" meaning sight or vision, conveys the forethought and/or foresight of both our heavenly father and our parents. Long before the need exists, it is recognized and planned for.

Second, providence includes the carrying out, the meeting or actual “provision,” for those needs. Knowing that needs will exist might fulfill the etymological and literal intent of the term, but fulfilling those needs makes the planning active.

Returning to our initial statements: The Bible begins and ends with providence. In between the Bible that theme is maintained: the Bible is all about providence.

Take for example, the creation account in Genesis 1. God made everything in the beginning. Why? For me, for you, for all. God created the world knowing in advance (“pro vision”) what our needs would be. Creation reflects that purpose. God made us to be like him. And God planned, from the beginning, for everything to be just right so that God’s purpose—our hopeful and eventual transition to godlikeness—could be fully accomplished in our lives.

God’s provisions for us, in the planning *and* in the carrying out of that plan, involved all of the needs we noted that wise parents know their children will need. God planned and fulfilled our needs for food, clothing, shelter, compassion and companionship. He created the *world* that provides for every *physical* need and he created (a) *relationship/s* that provides for every *spiritual* need. Right from the start, the Bible is all about providence.

But just how is that providence “provided?” How does it actually happen? What mechanisms are in place to see to it that what God “pro visioned” in the first place is actually “provided,” in the second place? The answer to these questions takes us to the second part of our quest.

To understand it more fully, we need to understand that our opening statements, including the part that said “the Bible is all about providence,” were not just glibly made. The Bible, God’s revelation, and providence, in both senses (planning and fulfillment), are so intertwined as to be impossible to separate. And the means by which God reveals is perfectly parallel to the means by which he provides. How so?

Like the philosophical concept of epistemic distance, God’s provisions (providence) for this world are neither so far away that they cannot be accessible, nor so immediate that everything is provided without any of our own doing. Just how and what does God do for us?

The concept of providence parallels God’s revelation. That revelation manifests itself in two broad categories: natural revelation, which includes all of the created world, and special revelation, which includes all of the revealed word. Taken together there is no aspect of God’s revelation that fails to provide all that we need in order to find God, know who he is and what

he is like, and know what he expects of us in order to be pleasing to him. To this extent natural and special revelation are all sufficient.

Providence must be understood the same way. It also manifests itself in two broad ways: *general* providence, which includes all of those things that God provides for us in and by means of his created world, and *special* providence, the “mechanisms” through which God provides for all of our spiritual needs through his revealed word. Taken together there is no aspect of God’s providence that fails to provide all that we need in order to know who he is, what he is like, and what he expects of us in order to be pleasing to him. To this extent natural and special providence are all sufficient.

It appears obvious that God’s revelation and providence go hand-in-hand. There is, in fact, no way to separate them as they function together to accomplish all of God’s will, word, and work. To understand one is to understand the other.

Let’s first examine the area of God’s revelation, both natural and specific. Paul plainly declared that God was able to be found. He was not far from any one of us. His existence could be known, even from abundantly available information within the nature of man himself (cf. Romans 1:18ff). All men made from one blood reflects one creator. The poets that Paul cited in Acts 17 taught a premise that was biblical. They said that men were the offspring of the gods, indicating that their gods were in some sense greater than they were. If that’s the case, then they indicted themselves by worshiping things that were less than they were. By this reasoning process, Paul indicated that the natural world of revelation had something to say about God’s existence and his essence.

Paul did the same thing in Acts chapter 14 when he indicated that the benevolent nature of God could be grasped, at least to some degree, from the physical world around us (cf. Ps 104:27-28; 145:15-16; Ps. 65:9-13; Jer 14:22). God not only fills our stomachs with food, he fills our hearts with gladness. God can be known by what he has done for us; that is by what he provides for us.

Note clearly that God’s physical provisions (what he provides, his providence) reveal that he is, reveal who he is and reveal what he is like. In this instance, God’s ability to provide physically parallels and is closely identified with his ability to reveal. Revelation and providence go together hand in hand. In fact, they are inseparable.

A study of the specific elements of both revelation and providence simply continues the principles noted here. God specifically reveals (within the word) and specifically acts (within the realm of providence) in such a way to allow himself to be found, known and followed.

Specific Study: Amos 3:7

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”

Assignment: Read through and study Genesis 2-4 for additional principles.