

THE PATTERNIST

hold fast the pattern of sound words

A New Church of Christ Newsletter

We are glad to announce the first issue of The Patternist! Our writing and editorial staff includes evangelist David Griffin, evangelist Austin Maddox, and elder Bart Shaw. Our theme verse is from 2 Tim 1:13:

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

The Bible in all of its teaching presents the disciple with a pattern for faith and good works. The plan is to publish every month on topics that speak to this pattern.

This month David writes concerning the “Foundations of the Family” and how the first few chapters of Genesis establish God’s pattern for the home. Our second article by Bart Shaw concerns the word ‘armageddon’ in Revelation 16. Some scholars make the case that ‘armageddon’ should be translated as ‘mount of assembly.’

If you enjoy David’s article watch patterntheology.com where David’s video presentation will soon be posted. Other topics from the Mid MO March Bible Study include “Communicating to the Modern Audience (Roger Gardner) and “Surviving Religion 101” (Smith Bibens). We also have some lively presentations on Revelation with a new perspective for consideration for eschatology minded readers. Look for these soon!

We hope you enjoy the newsletter. Tell your friends and invite them to subscribe! Click or scan the blue QR code to link to patterntheology.com





Foundations of the Family

By David Griffin

There are many voices out there today who actually celebrate the demise of the traditional family because they think it represents an emancipation from Judeo-Christian morality and an outdated veneration of the Bible. The destruction of the family is one of the planks in the social platform of Marxists who need the whole society to collapse in order to foist their utopian dreams upon the rest of us. However, there are still at least a few people out there lamenting the loss of the Biblical family because we realize the devastating effects it is having and will continue to have on social stability—not to mention the resulting loss of souls! And make no mistake about it—*the family is lost* (at least in the world)! This loss of the family is not something that has happened only in the last decade or so. It has been under attack, not just in America, but all over Western Society, not just in the last decade, but for at least a century. As a result, many deviant practices have been foisted upon a Bible-rejecting culture for several decades that are now bearing disastrous fruit!

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As Christians, we cannot permit ourselves to be swallowed up in this societal collapse. In order to avert spiritual disaster in our own lives and those of our children, we must be proactive and make deliberate decisions about how to save our families from the abyss that modern society has become. The only way we can hope to save our families is by a deliberate and radical return to the Bible on this subject and all other subjects. This article is the first in a series that is designed to point the interested Christian to Biblical principles on the family. We begin this study by taking our cue from Jesus.

Some Pointers From Genesis

In all spiritual matters, Jesus is the *Prime Example* and *Master Teacher*. When confronted by the Pharisees in Matthew 19 on a question about marriage, our Lord directs their attention to the creation account as the ideal model for learning and imitation in this matter. He asks, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?” (vs 4-5, NKJV). Jesus is of course quoting Genesis; the importance of Genesis therefore must not be overlooked. If the Son of God calls our attention to Genesis when answering a question about marriage, then we do well to examine Genesis in all foundational questions about marriage, and by extension, the foundations of the family. I am concerned that we have been weak through the years in our teaching from Genesis. It is foundational to everything in the Bible. Since Jesus points us to Genesis on this matter, let us follow his lead.



A Position

Genesis 1 narrates the six days of creation where verses 26 and 27 describe the “crowning event” on the sixth day.

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

These verses compose a summary statement of the creation of humanity without providing any sequence of particular events. All the details are “telescoped” into these verses. It is the *next* chapter of Genesis—chapter 2—that breaks down this summary account into a more or less sequential itemization of details. We will notice chapter 2 below; for now, let’s look at chapter 1 verse 26.

Verse 26 begins with the words “Let Us make...” This expression represents a change in the Hebrew of the passage. All the other creative acts in the six days of creation begin with a fiat decree—a kind of *command*:¹ “Let there be light,” “let there be a firmament,” “let the waters be gathered,” and “let the earth bring forth,” etc. Following these fiat decrees, all these things “were so” (vs 6, 9, 11, 15, 24, & 30). With the creation of man however the language changes from fiat decrees to a form expressing “personal intent.”² Instead of God saying, “Let there be man,” pronouncing him into existence as in his other creative acts, he says, “Let *Us make* man.” The first person plural “Us,” with the Hebrew verb “make,” implies deliberative thought within the Godhead just prior to bringing man into being. Merriam-Webster defines the word deliberation as “the act of thinking about or discussing something and deciding carefully.” This simple variation of language in the creation account implies the primacy of the human race over all other parts of the creation. We might also understand this change in language to suggest that the earlier creative acts of God were all merely preparatory to this sixth day “apex of creation”—the human race.

This primacy is also made clear by the second part of the expression, “...*in Our image*.” This phrase or its equivalent is stated once and repeated three times in various ways in these two short verses. This repetition implies significance. Moreover, the statement occurs in no other part of the creation account. Volumes have been written on the meaning of the “Image of God” or the *Imago Dei*,³ but it is not the purpose of this writing to dive into this matter. For now, it is sufficient to say that since the record emphasizes that men and women are created in the image of God and that this fact is linked to the male/female relation, then this relation is paramount in God’s plan and must be honored and not treated lightly, corrupted, or “canceled.”

The second prominent feature of these verses is that God gave “them dominion...over all the earth.” This concept is anathema to much of the modern world, which considers the human race a “blight” on the earth. Those who believe that humans are merely a product of evolution consider it the height of arrogance for people to write such things as the Genesis author records here. Again, volumes have been written on such matters, and the present writing will proceed unapologetically on the assumption that

¹ In Hebrew, the 3rd person jussive construction (a command to encourage behavior in a person or thing outside of direct conversation).

² In Hebrew, a 1st person plural cohortative construction

³ *Imago Dei*, Latin for “Image of God” is a famous, centuries-old technical term for “The Image of God.”

the “Dominion over all the earth” is a broad statement about man’s position on the earth relative to the other creatures which is further developed in verse 28.

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

The words “be fruitful and multiply,” “fill the earth and subdue it,” and “have dominion...over every living thing” compose a divine pronouncement. There is nothing in later revelation to suggest that it has been retracted. Accordingly, those modern voices who call for a reduction in the human population, and who seek to implement schemes to effect such reduction, either by curtailing future births or shortening present lives, are in direct defiance of this pronouncement. They put themselves in the place of God. Again, volumes have been written, so we move on.



A Provision and A Project

The application of this dominion principle first comes sharply into view in chapter 2 where we are told that “God planted a garden and there he put *the man* whom he had formed” (verse 8). This is a divine provision. Thus, “the man” (Hebrew, *adam*) was the first human occupant of the

garden. The author then repeats this fact in verse fifteen but specifies the man’s purpose for occupying the garden: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to tend and keep it*.” This is his divinely appointed project. The words “tend and keep” inform us that it was not the Lord’s intention to make the man an idle sightseer of the beauty of the garden and a careless consumer of its produce. Even though this garden was the ideal pristine paradise, God nevertheless fashioned it in a way that it could benefit from the activity of a human “caretaker.” This is the job of the man.

Moreover, the account informs us that tending and keeping the garden involves another more specific task. Verse 19 says that the Lord God “brought [every beast of the field and every bird of the air] to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.” This divine project involves a linguistic skill, a skill which was apparently innate to the man at his creation; he now has the opportunity to “practice” this skill. Maybe he needs such linguistic practice in view of the fact that at a future point, there will be another human being in the garden with whom he will communicate, even though he does not know it yet.

We know the man had such linguistic skill, for elsewhere the account tells us that God “commanded the man, *saying...*” He thus has the ability to *understand* spoken words, and this new divine project teaches us that he also has the ability to *articulate* words by his own powers of speech. This “naming of the animals” is a most singular task, one that surely not only brought a sense of accomplishment to the man but indeed amounted to a learning experience as well.

On this point, the verse just prior to the “naming project” gives us a hint of what the man may have learned in performing this project (beyond mere linguistic practice). In this prior verse (v 18), once again we find the Creator himself engaged in a Divine soliloquy. The LORD God said [apparently speaking to himself], “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (v 18). The location of this statement in the narrative *just before* the naming assignment suggests a possible connection between these two. Note that “God brings every living creature to the man to see what he would call them.” As these creatures pass before his notice, he carefully observes them in order to name them. As he carefully observes them, he of course notices many obvious differences between them and himself. However, he also surely becomes aware of an acute *similarity among them* that is also markedly different from himself—*they* are male and female—*he* is not—at least not yet!

Now, perhaps all this is mere speculation, but if so, why is the naming assignment placed in the narrative so directly on the heels of God’s observation that it is not good for man to be alone and his promise to remedy this problem? And then, why is the fulfillment of this promise—that is, the creation of the man’s partner—placed in the narrative so directly on the heels of the naming project? To put it another way, why is the naming project “sandwiched between” God’s promise to “make him a helper” and God’s actually making that helper—unless there is somehow a connection between the two? We’ll discuss the partner a little later below. But first...

A Permission, A Prohibition, and A Penalty

Before studying the creation of the partner, we must examine the first legislation given directly to the man—Genesis 2:16 and 17.

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

In these verses we find a permission, a prohibition, and a penalty. The man has permission to eat “of every tree of the garden,” and he may do so “freely.” Thus, he has wide latitude in his dietary choices from the garden. The sole exception of course involves the prohibition—“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *you shall not eat.*” Although the text does not explicitly say so, we may presume of course that the Lord identifies this tree for the man in order that he not eat of it inadvertently. Third, the penalty for violation is death.

A Partner

While Adam names the living creatures, God then “makes good” what he previously said “was not good”; that is, he makes a partner for the man. Genesis 2:21-22.

²¹“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. ²² Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”

These verses comprise a more detailed account of the earlier summary from chapter 1:27. There the record simply says, “male and female He created them.” Now in chapter 2 we get more detail. To understand the nature of this newly made relationship, we need to look at what God said about his intention to create this partner. Genesis 2:18 says, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” God is aware of course that the man is not *absolutely* alone because he is surrounded by the animals and birds. However, there is no creature among them that is “comparable to him.” Thus, God acknowledges that Adam needs a “helper” who is “like him.”

The King James Version uses the expression, “a help meet for him.” This expression has been misconstrued for at least a couple of centuries. It is common for people to read “help meet” as a single noun, “helpmeet.” However, the King James text has two words, “help meet”—where the word “help” is a noun and “meet” is an adjective describing that noun. The word “meet” carries its outdated sense of “suitable,” “fitting,” or “proper” (see other passages where the KJV has “meet” with this meaning; for example, Jeremiah 26:14; Luke 15:32, etc.). The more recent term “helpmate” gets closer to the true idea, but the New King James version clarifies it, “a helper comparable to him.”

The Hebrew of this expression is notoriously difficult to translate. It is *ezer khnegdo*, literally, “a help as in front of him.” This is usually construed to mean that this partner was first a “helper” and as such she is positionally and relationally “in front of him” in the sense that she is a counterpart to him, is “like him,” suitable to him, and proper for him in a way that none of the other creatures could be. The Lexham English Bible perhaps says it best, “I will make for him a helper *as his counterpart*.” And like him, she is also made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

This description of the partner as one who is “like him” suggests their equal worth in the eyes of the Creator. However, “equal worth” does not entail identical roles and equal strengths and weaknesses. To be sure, each has both, but they are not identical. The man has already been given the “position,” the “provision” and “project,” the “permission,” the “prohibition,” and the stated “penalty” for violating the prohibition. She is now created as a “helper comparable to him” amid these provisions and conditions.

Adam can thus say, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). The author of Genesis adds the following editorial statement: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they

shall become one flesh” (v 24). In this way, the inspired Genesis author places the divine stamp of approval on this event as the basis for the marriage relationship.

Presumptions

Based on the Genesis account as discussed above, we may conclude that the following concepts serve as underlying presumptions for the Biblically ideal family unit.

1. Human beings occupy a unique place in the world as the only products of creation made in the image of God. This fact is “foundational” for the family, because if people are only glorified animals, then there is no solid basis for marriage and family. It is merely a “social construct” to be changed or discarded at will.
2. Human beings are created as male and female. All efforts to modify or eliminate this distinction are futile and serve only to wreak havoc in a society that attempts to do so.
3. The nature of marriage as a “Headship / Helpership Relationship” is built-in to the plan. This shows that the teaching of “egalitarianism” which maintains that headship / helpership is a result of the fall into sin, is false. From the beginning, God made “headship / helpership” an integral component of marriage.
4. The partner (Eve) was created as a “helper” in the man’s work. This fact serves as a clue for marriage partners to seek ways to integrate their means of support for the household with the household itself, with the goal of making “the home” an economic unit. Such an effort can only strengthen and undergird the marriage and resulting family.
5. “Be fruitful and multiply” is a general principle that God issued in the beginning. We do not take this statement to mean that couples sin if they have no children. However, “be fruitful and multiply” gives couples the freedom to have as many children as they want without feeling guilt from society or from fellow Christians who frown on them for doing so.
6. The fact that God created the heavens and the earth, made the garden, put the man in it, and issued to the man all its attending provisions and assigned responsibilities before creating the partner indicates that he is the foremost custodian of God’s provisions and commands. He is therefore God’s designated spiritual leader in the marriage/family. This of course does not give him permission to be a petty tyrant, always insisting that things be done his way. Instead, it makes him the responsible member of the family before God. It also does not mean that a wife/mother whose husband fails in this regard is totally helpless in serving the Lord. It only means that the ideal family, the one that functions best, as God designed it, is the one where the man humbly assumes his responsibility in these matter.

May we cease taking our clues from the world and turn to the pattern of God’s word in all the affairs of life!

Armageddon: The Mount of Assembly?

By Bart Shaw

“Armageddon” is only mentioned in Revelation 16:16.

And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (NKJV).

Most translations render the word “Armageddon” (NIV, ESV, NET, ISV, KJV) and a few render it “Har-magedon” (NRSV, ASV, NASB, LSV).

But what does it mean? Arndt and Gingrich note that “No satisfactory explanation has yet been found as to what it specifically refers.”¹ In an article from 1989, Hans K. Larondelle stated that:

From a linguistic standpoint, biblical scholars are divided in their assumptions as to the original Hebrew word lying behind Har-Magedon. In fact, they generally regard the etymological problem as being unsolvable.²

A plausible explanation (and the one which we will endorse in this article) comes from a number of sources. In his commentary on Revelation, Adam Clarke (1762-1832) supplies one possible translation:

Armageddon - The original of this word has been variously formed, and variously translated. It is הר־מגדון har-megiddon, “the mount of the assembly;”³

This is certainly an interesting suggestion. The mount of assembly brings to mind the Lord’s Church spread across the centuries of time since it was established on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Adam Clarke’s first translation challenges the dubious proposal that the battle is a literal physical conflict and instead replaces it with the thesis that it is *metaphorical, figurative, and allegorical*.

Is Adam Clarke alone in his gloss of the word? A trio of scholars including Torrey, Kline, and Jordan all support Clarke and make the same argument. Specifically, C.C. Torrey (who was a professor of Semitic languages at Yale University from 1900-1932 and thus certainly has imperious credentials) argued that the word was derived from the Hebrew *moed* (מועד), meaning “assembly.”

¹ Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of Revelation 12–22*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 108.

² <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1915&context=auss>

³ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/revelation/16.htm>

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“Torrey’s own solution, developing an earlier conjecture by F. Hommel, was to trace har magedon to the Hebrew har môed (cf. Isa 14:13), “Mount of Assembly.” He noted the appropriate association of har môed with Jerusalem and dealt with the question of transcriptional equivalence. The apparent differences between the Hebrew har môed and the har-magedon rendering can be readily accounted for.⁴

All of the above is very technical, and to the non-scholar who does not read Hebrew or Greek can be very confusing. But take heart, even experts in Hebrew argue about John’s intent in Revelation 16:16. As noted above, some scholars posit that John was writing about a battle around the ‘mount of assembly’ i.e. *the Church established by Jesus Christ*.

It is up to us, as generalists, as readers of the Scripture to ‘rightly divide’ the word of truth. We must compare and contrast Scripture with Scripture and reach the best and most contextual conclusion. Is there a literal battle found in Scripture at the end times? Certainly not. Is there a “mount of assembly” to which all Christians gather and congregate? Most assuredly. Listen to the words of Paul as he writes in the book of Hebrews:

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Hebrews 12:18–24, NKJV).

We conclude with this idea- the battle of Revelation is a battle for the mount of the congregation, the general assembly and Church of Christ. Are you part of this battle for the doctrine, pattern, and faith that was once delivered to the saints? Or have you joined forces with the enemies of Zion?

Thank you for reading this first issue of The Patternist.



⁴ https://meredithkline.com/files/articles/39-2-pp207-222_JETS.pdf