

# THIS WOULD BE THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

GENESIS 1:1-2    JUNE 16, 2021

Tonight we set out together through the book of Genesis. If I'm not mistaken, the last time our church went through this book from start to finish was in 1993.<sup>1</sup> About 12 years ago, Pastor Jake taught through a big chunk of it. Tonight we start again.

The more we think about Genesis, the more we realize how significant it is doctrinally, historically, philosophically, and Biblically. Of course, all 66 books of the Bible are significant, but some are more consequential on the whole than others. For example: The Song of Solomon is never quoted in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, there are at least 165 passages from Genesis that are either directly quoted or clearly referred to in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Henry Morris writes:

*"No other book of the Bible is quoted as copiously or referred to so frequently, in other books of the Bible, as is Genesis."*<sup>4</sup>

That makes sense because Genesis is a book of beginnings. The word "genesis" means "origins."<sup>5</sup> It not only shows us the start of our cosmos, but also why things are the way they are. It is also the beginning of God's special revelation to mankind. When God, in His grace, decided to reveal Himself to His creatures, *this* is where He started the record.

I, for one, often usually it for granted that God has revealed Himself and His doings to us. He didn't have to. Often powerful people go to great lengths to *conceal* their personal lives or their activities from the world at large - whether it's their campaign contributions or their real estate purchases.

But God doesn't do that. He has gone to a lot of trouble to make sure we know not only what He's done, but what He still plans to do *and* on top of that, who He is, what He thinks, what His heart is like and how He feels.

In doing so He answers many questions that we have. Humans have an innate desire to know where we came from and who we are and how to make sense of the world around us. It's one of the many characteristics that separates us from the animals. That desire isn't only felt among religious people. Even atheists want to answer the question of where we came from. And they have come up with some truly preposterous theories in their attempt to ignore the reality of God and what He has gone to such great lengths to reveal. Genesis answers many questions. At the same time, it leaves a lot of questions *unanswered* and even raises new ones in our minds - some that are addressed in a later portion of Scripture, but some that we're left to ponder.

Like most of the books of the Bible, Genesis is controversial. Meaning that controversies spring up because of differing interpretations of certain passages. It happens a lot in the first eleven chapters, which cover the creation, the flood and the tower of Babel. Even within the Church, people form camps and draw battle lines in support of or opposition to certain doctrinal stances. It happens after the *very first verse*.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://media.calvaryhanford.com/genesis/Genesis%2001a.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.knowableword.com/2013/03/27/11-old-testament-books-never-quoted-in-the-new-testament/>

<sup>3</sup> Henry M. Morris *The Genesis Record*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

I'm sure in the room this evening there are those who have disparate and passionately held opinions on certain elements of the creation account. As we move through these passages you may find yourself on one side of a debate or another. That's ok! You should know what you believe and have good, Biblical reasons for your positions, not because *I* told you, but because you've searched the Scriptures and come to your own conclusions. At the same time, there are issues we'll come across that have been argued over for hundreds of years by faithful believers who have not come to a consensus. Of course, we're talking about non-essential issues, of which there are many.

But, setting out in Genesis should make us pause to consider *why* God gave us the Bible in the first place. If the goal is that He reveal Himself, why not specifically detail and answer every question? First of all, there simply wouldn't be enough space for all of that. Second, God's Word is not meant to be a *reference* book. Meaning, the Bible isn't to function like a dictionary, where we pull it down to grab an isolated piece of information when we need it. It is God showing us who He is, showing us who *we* are and showing us how we can commune with Him and be brought into His household.

God explains very clearly why He gave us the Bible. He gives us His word so that we can be complete people.<sup>6</sup> He gave it so that we might understand sin<sup>7</sup> and understand how we can receive eternal life.<sup>8</sup> We're to take God's word and live by it,<sup>9</sup> because we cannot live properly without it.

Since all of that is true we can be sure that what God has recorded is sufficient. We don't need a "Snyder cut," as it were. But now, since we read God's word for life, the question is: How should we read *this* book, Genesis? There are various types of literature in the Bible. There is history and prophecy and poetry. What about this book? Some say it's a mythology (at least the first eleven chapters). Some say it's an accurate, literal history. Some say much of it is figurative. Some say it is neither literal nor figurative, but "analogical."<sup>10</sup> How we read a book makes a big difference.

Here at Calvary we read the Bible literally. I'm guessing just about everybody here knows that and signs on with it. But it's important that we remind ourselves of our method of interpretation, especially in a book like this one which is the site of so many theological disagreements. There may be things we can't fully comprehend (like an eternal, self-existent God), but we come to Scripture *assuming* that what we're reading is meant to be taken in its plain, literal sense unless we have a compelling textual or contextual reason not to.

Here's one helpful explanation of what is referred to as the Literal Method of Biblical interpretation:

*"To interpret literally means nothing more or less than to interpret in terms of normal, usual, designation. When the [text] alters its designation [like when we see a vision or parable or analogy] the interpreter immediately shifts his method of interpreting."<sup>11</sup>*

After all, the whole point is that God is communicating with mankind so *that* we will learn and understand. Not *perfectly*, but *effectively*.

It helps to remember that this book isn't written only to us, but to an original audience and every generation between. The first group to hear this wonderful book was the children of Israel who had

<sup>6</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>7</sup> Romans 7:7

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 5:13

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 4:4

<sup>10</sup> James E. Allman *Genesis* <https://courses.dts.edu/genesis/>

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Ramm *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*

been rescued from slavery in Egypt and were headed through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Jesus Christ verifies that Moses was the author of this book multiple times.<sup>12</sup>

This was a group of people who were being made into a nation. It was a group who was having truth and morality and a worldview codified for them. This book, along with Moses' 4 others that follow it, was their founding document. This was the Divine revelation that not only answered the great cosmic questions of who we are, where do we come from, does God exist, and what is the meaning of life, but on top of that it was the foundation for their society and their families and their future.

So, we know that through this book God has every intention of *revealing* Himself and explaining life to us. In that perfect effort, how does He start?

**Genesis 1:1-2 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.**

One of the most remarkable things about the opening of this book is that it does not seek, in any way, to *prove* the existence of God. God is *assumed*. As far as Moses is concerned, God is so real and so present there's no need to even discuss His backstory. We're reminded of when Moses first talks with God. He says, "I'm going to have to answer questions my countrymen have about You." God says, "Here's your answer to all of those questions: I AM WHO I AM."<sup>13</sup> God is constant.

"In the beginning." The beginning of what? Not of God. He has no start or cause. He is eternal and self-existent. He is outside of time and space and matter. All of that was created by Him. He made the heavens and the earth, what we call the universe, including all the elements and atoms and energy and forces like gravity. He made it all from nothing. He spoke and it was done. So, we see that this is a record of the beginning of *our* universe and God's dealings in it.

In its simplicity, verse 1 reveals some dramatic things about this God. First, that He transcends everything. Second, that He is more powerful than we could ever fathom. Third, that He has the ability to choose and plan and make determinations. He isn't a blind force, but a thoughtful Person.

Additionally, if we read Hebrew, we would see that the word used for God is *Elohim*. Now, I am not a language scholar and I think, as Bible students, we should be careful not to go too often to different opinions about Hebrew and Greek definitions, because those opinions almost always come with a bias. But scholars agree that this term is a *plural* term, yet it is being used to describe an *individual* God.<sup>14</sup> We being told that this God is *more than One* and yet is still One. In verse two we read of His Spirit, a Personage of this multiple-in-one God. By verse 26 we discover He refers to Himself plurally, "Let *us* make man in *our* image." Don't let anyone tell you the Trinity isn't taught in Scripture.

Now, when we move from verse 1 to verse 2 a problem presents itself and must be dealt with. How can God create the heavens and the earth and yet we see right away it is described as formless and empty? And, if it is "formless," how is there a "deep?" Why does it seem so chaotic?

There are a variety of interpretations about what is going on here. One of them is called the Gap Theory. It's a camp some Christians are in. By the way, this is different than what is known as

<sup>12</sup> Luke 24:44, John 5:46-47, John 7:19, 23

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 3:14

<sup>14</sup> See *Ellicott's, Benson, NET Bible, etc.*

Theistic Evolution or the Day-Age Theory. We'll get into those in future studies. The Gap Theory suggests that there is a significant gap between verses 1 and 2. The thinking is that God made a perfect universe in verse 1, which included the angelic beings. After verse 1, Satan rebelled against God, taking a third of the angels with him, which then prompted God's judgment, which rendered the perfect universe formless and void - kind of smashed by God's wrath. Then, after an unknown length of time, verse 2 picks up with a *re*-forming of creation, which would ultimately include human beings.

If this describes your position on Genesis, that's fine. The Gap Theory doesn't track for me, not only because it relies so much on speculation, but also because it demands that there be death *before* sin. Paul tells us in Romans 5 that death came as a result of Adam's sin, not Satan's.

Another view is that verse 1 describes God's act of creating all the forces and elements of our universe and then we see them presented like paints on a palette in verse 2 before the Creator goes about fashioning His great work of art. He had everything there at His disposal, created by the word of His mouth, then He went about forming it from all the different elements.

A third view is that verse 1 is a title or summary, verse 2 gives the conditions at the beginning of God's work and then verse 3 starts explaining what God did.<sup>15</sup>

So when *did* Satan rebel against God? For that matter, when were the angelic hosts created? How long were Adam and Eve in the garden before they ate the fruit? We're not told, so we don't know. Sometimes the Bible is detailed and sometimes it isn't. The Lord knows what we need to be told and He has told us what He wants. Some of these things are going to remain a mystery to us.

Instead of getting into fights about the spaces *between* the words, I'd encourage us to focus on what *is* recorded for us. What do we see? We see a transcendent God who brings Himself into His creation. He involves Himself. The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. What does that mean? Well, Moses uses that term again in his fifth book, once again describing God. In Deuteronomy chapter 32, in this amazing song, Moses is talking about God's greatness and His incredible work and how, even though the people had not been faithful to Him, He was going to be faithful to them because of His tender love. And then he says in verse 11:

**Deuteronomy 32:11 - <sup>11</sup> He watches over his nest like an eagle and hovers over his young; he spreads his wings, catches him, and carries him on his feathers.**

That's the heart of our Creator. Why did He make this universe? He doesn't *need* us to give Him glory or to validate His power or because He lacks attention. He did so out of the awesome goodness of His will so that He might pour out His extravagant love on us. From the very first moment of cosmological history He was affectionately tending this universe like a mother eagle taking care of her young.

There are a lot of questions that we have about the mechanics of creation. That's fine. But remember that God's intention in recording this for us is to reveal *Himself* to us. And what will become clear as we go through this book is that this God, so full of power and might, *delights* in His creation. He has good intentions for it. He loves light and order and growth and beauty. He likes to build things and develop things and further things. And we'll find He likes to do so with *us*, His special creation.

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<sup>15</sup> Allman *Genesis*

This is where the Bible says *you* came from. The start matters. Back when M. Night Shyamalan was still making our hearts pound with trick endings he made *Unbreakable*. At the end we discover that Elijah Price had been the architect of many terrible disasters and crimes. As he monologues to the hero he says something profound:

*“You know what the scariest thing is? To not know your place in this world. To not know why you’re here...Now that we know who you are I know who I am. I’m not a mistake. It all makes sense.”*

Genesis reveals an all-powerful God who has turned His attention on you and I. You have been designed on purpose. This is not a fable. It’s not a propaganda piece meant to stick a thumb in the eye of Babylonian myths. This is the true account of our beginning. The Lord says this is where you come from. Genesis will show us where sin comes from. Where salvation comes from. If chapters 1 through 11 are figurative, we’ve got a problem. Because then we can’t be sure of why things are the way they are or what can be done about it. The children of Israel wouldn’t have known if God was really on the level about His directions and His promises to them. If the Garden of Eden isn’t literal, maybe the New Jerusalem isn’t literal either. There are many serious implications to consider.

On the other hand, if we listen to what God says about the purpose of His revelation and if we take Him at His word, things become much more clear. Not perfectly. Right now we see through a glass darkly. But in this book God pulls back the curtain so we can see what He’s done and what kind of Creator He is. One of unlimited power but also unlimited tenderness. He’s a God who is all about filling. Filling our universe with His goodness. Filling our lives with His goodness. Giving us a revelation of Himself, inviting us to come and see. So that we, like the original audience, would learn what He’s capable of and how great His care is for us. After all, the God who brought continents out of the ocean depths could certainly deal with the Jordan river on their walk to Canaan.

Now take what we’ve seen about the Lord and think about your own life. After all, God makes us His “new creation” in Christ. Some see verse 2 as describing an uninhabited world. The word “void” could also be rendered as “empty,” meaning “unfilled.”<sup>16</sup> In that case we can see God’s desire to take us and not leave us empty or unfulfilled. He wants to fill you up and fashion you into a stunning masterpiece of His craftsmanship. He wants to create in you a magnificent testimony of His grace. His Holy Spirit is here, moving in your midst, to accomplish that work as you follow after Him.

Others see verse 2 as describing a ruined world, crushed by the terrible result of rebellion against God. Maybe tonight you feel as though you’ve wrecked your life because of sin. And, maybe you have. But take heart! Look what God can do. He is the Redeemer. His Spirit has not abandoned you. His intentions for you are still wonderful and good. He can make right what you’ve ruined.

A major point of God’s revelation in this book is that He does these things *on purpose*. His creation was on purpose. *You* were made on purpose for *His* purpose. The question is: Are you allowing Him to form you and fill you? Can we honestly say that the Spirit of God is active in our lives? That we submit to Him like a baby eagle dependent on its mother?

God is not done with His work. Not by a long shot. Discover what it is by taking in His Word. Be a recipient and a participant in His work and allow Him to do what He’s wanted to do all along in your life, not resisting Him, but responding to His call and His movement in your life.

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<sup>16</sup> CSB Study Notes