

**Title: “In the Beginning God”****Text: Genesis 1:1*****Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on May 20, 2007*****[www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)**

I was watching the TV show Jeopardy a few years ago, and I think one of the categories had to do with famous first lines from books, where it would quote part of the line and the contestants would have to finish the line. And the clue was about the first line of the Bible “In the Beginning ...”

- not one of the 3 contestants knew what came after that, or could even guess right that the next word might be God
- even though they were well versed in other famous literature and subjects, apparently none of them had ever bothered to read or pay much attention to how the bestselling book of all time opens
- what also struck me is that not only are so many ignorant of how the Bible starts, but even within Christianity at large, the first verse and first chapter of Genesis is not considered very important or that we should pay much attention to it; many *know* what it says but don't believe it means what it says

**READ VERSE 1 “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*”**

This one verse is concise and precise and one of the most profound statements ever penned. It is utterly foundational.

If you have ever lived in or visited a large city, you probably have had the chance to watch a skyscraper under construction. For the first six months or so of the project, all the workmen do is make a great hole in the ground. To build a tall building by starting far below the surface level seems absurd, even crazy. But, as you would suspect, there is a good reason for the large hole. To build a mammoth building, it is first necessary to dig down until a strong foundation can be built, one that is capable of supporting the skyscraper.

A doghouse needs no foundation, and an ordinary house can be built on little more than a concrete slab. But a skyscraper, that's different. It requires a deep and solid foundation.

So it is in our Christian life. Our upward potential is totally dependent on the foundation underneath it.<sup>1</sup>

The only foundation massive enough to support the entire Bible and the entire life of all God's people of all time is Genesis. There's a lot of people who don't think the first chapter of the Bible is very important, but God put it here on purpose to be the first thing His people read, and we would be foolish to think a foundation of a building is unimportant and can be skipped.

The book of Genesis answers the most foundational questions of mankind:

- Who are we?
- Why are we here?
- How did we get here?
- Is there any meaning in life?
- Is there a God? What is He like?

- Can we know Him? If so, how can man be right with God?
- Why is the world the way it is, so much pain, suffering and death?

I heard this week of a secular science magazine that featured a story about “150 unanswerable questions” that they cannot answer and the first several are answered in the first several verses and pages of Genesis.

The first 3 chapters in Genesis alone not only answer those above questions, they also provoke more detailed and difficult questions, many of which have controversial and differing answers among good Christians:

- What was it like before God created the universe? What moved Him to create?
- Doesn't science contradict a plain reading of the Genesis account of creation?
- How could Moses have written those things down if he wasn't there?
- Could God have used a big bang and evolution and naturalistic processes and Genesis 1 still be true?
- Is Genesis 1 poetical in the Hebrew and therefore non-historical?
- Can we interpret “day” to refer to millions or billions of years without doing violence to the text?
- Does the old “gap theory” between verses 1 and 2 help reconcile Genesis and science?
- What about the framework hypothesis that says Genesis 1 is all a literary device that simply wants us to know the big idea that God created, and the actual history begins after the earliest chapter(s)?
- What about the alleged discrepancies in chapter 1 vs. 2?
- Does it really matter whether we believe what Genesis 1 says to be true, or can we just skip over it to chapter 2? How do we know chapter 2 is historically true, or 3?
- Isn't the beginning of the Bible kind of like the end of the Bible in Revelation where since so many people have different views, we should just throw up our hands and say the only thing that's important is that God started this whole thing and He's gonna end it? In other words, that God was the creator and that Jesus is coming back is really the only thing that matters
- How could God have created light in day 1 when the Sun wasn't created until day 4?
- Where do the dinosaurs fit in? Does the Bible give any clues as to how and when did they die out?
- Could God have created the heavens and the earth and creatures with the appearance of age, and if so, does this make Him somehow deceptive?
- What does it mean for man to be created in the image of God?
- Is male headship a result of the fall, or part of God's original design?
- Does the Old Testament and Bible present a demeaning view of women?
- Does the command “be fruitful and multiply” prohibit any form of family planning?
- How does the command “fill the earth and subdue it” relate to stewardship of the planet, environmentalism, global warming, etc.?
- How would you answer a vegetarian who is convinced that Genesis 1:29 is teaching that God's way is to only eat plants and no meat?
- Did Adam have a belly button?

- In chapter 2 it says God rested on the seventh day and blessed and sanctified it. Does this mean the Sabbath is a creation ordinance and therefore binding on all humanity in all times?
- If so, why do we as a church meet on the first day of the week, rather than the seventh? Is there any support in the NT or early church for changing the Sabbath to Sunday, instead of the Sabbath in Bible times which started late Friday afternoon and ended late Saturday afternoon? What NT verse supports this change?
- Was man called to keep the Sabbath before the time of Moses? If it is part of the Mosaic law, is it part of the ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ, or is it moral law required for Christians today? If the latter, what can we do and not do, and which day (Saturday or Sunday)? Are the Seventh Day Adventists more consistent than other Christians on this?
- Why did the Puritans and Christians in England have a different view of the Sabbath than the continental Reformers, who were essentially not Sabbatarians?
- Why does the N.T. repeat the other 9 commandments, excluding only the Sabbath command?
- In Genesis 2:4, what does the phrase mean “These are the generations” and does it refer to what comes before or what follows?
- Where was the garden of Eden?
- What does the OT teach about marriage and divorce?
- Where did evil come from? Did God create evil?
- Why did the serpent fall?
- Did humanity’s fall into sin only cause death to the human race, or did it affect the entire universe? Did animals die before sin entered Eden?
- Why does the N.T. hold Adam responsible for the fall if Eve sinned first?
- How is it fair that we inherit guilt and fallen sin nature from our first parents, when we weren’t even there?
- What does Genesis 3:16 mean, in the curse on the woman? How does it relate to marriage and childbearing?
- Is the gospel contained in Genesis? The Trinity? Is Jesus in the book of Genesis?
- Why was Cain’s offering rejected and Abel’s accepted?
- Where did Cain get his wife?
- Why did men in Genesis start having multiple wives, and why didn’t God speak out against it then?
- Who were these “sons of God” in Genesis 6 who cohabitated with the daughters of men and produced children?
- Did people really live hundreds of years back then?
- Was the flood local or global? What are the implications of how you answer that question?
- How did the animals get on the ark, and after the flood, how did they get to Australia?
- Is capital punishment ok biblically? Why is murder wrong?
- What was Ham’s sin? How would you respond to those who use this story as justification for slavery in early America?
- Where did all the races and languages come from?

Anyone want to say the Old Testament isn't practical, that it's not relevant or doesn't speak to issues of today? The first few pages alone in your Bible have enough questions to keep you busy for a long time. I had a big challenge this week in my study, because there's probably 45 hours worth of material and directions I could go with some of these things, and I need to figure out what to fit in 45 minutes. So I'm going to just introduce the book this morning, and if you want to learn the answers to some of those questions, don't ask me after the service or we'll be here all day, you need to keep coming back! We'll do our best to eventually touch on most of the more important questions in the weeks and months ahead as we work our way through the text.

Those are some issues from the first 11 chapters, as we go on in Genesis there's more:

- We see great doctrines like God's sovereign election in Abraham and Jacob and Esau, we see God often choosing His servants differently than man's conventions (ex: often not the firstborn)
- We see doctrines like justification by faith in Genesis 15, imputed righteousness
- We see with the Jewish people a promise and truth that really runs through the entire Bible, we learn about God's faithfulness to His people, and we see a unilateral covenant made by God that still awaits final fulfillment
- We learn in Genesis 22 about how the Lord provides the substitute sacrifice so that we do not have to die and we see a picture of a Father willing to give his only begotten son. Yes, Genesis is about salvation and about Christ in many ways
- We learn about some of the roots of conflicts that still exist in the middle east today between Israel and their neighbors
- We learn about family, parenting, relationships, dishonesty; and the sad results when man does these things his way (favoritism, jealousy, revenge, adultery)
- We meet moms who struggle with the fact that they cannot have children, we see dads who struggle with fear and lack of faith, and both husband and wife sin here instead of finding their sufficiency and trust in God alone
- We learn about sovereignty and providence in the life of Joseph
- We see the freedom and power of forgiveness

I hope by now nobody in this room doubts the relevance and importance of this foundational and unique book. All scripture is God-breathed and profitable, but I have been convinced that Genesis is particularly pertinent for us at this time.

Genesis is unique not just because it describes the origins of all things, but it also covers more timeframe of human history (thousands of years) than all the other books of the Bible combined. Without the early chapters of Genesis, the rest of the Bible wouldn't make a lot of sense, and our world wouldn't make a lot of sense without Genesis 3. These are just some of the reasons why I felt compelled to do an extended verse-by-verse expository series covering at least the early chapters of Genesis, and eventually Lord-willing we'll cover the whole book. What better way to start our first book study together than by starting the way God started His book – if God chose to begin here, it can't be a bad idea for us to start “in the beginning” and to seek to be grounded in the foundation God laid down.

READ V. 1 AGAIN “**In the beginning God**” (stop there)

I don't know if you realize how profound those simple four words are. This is not only the title of this message, I hope it becomes a motto or standard for our ministry -

- God, God is at the beginning of the Bible, setting the stage, calling the shots, in charge
- God is at the forefront, God is the opening subject
- God is the only actor in this chapter
- God not only existed at the beginning, He existed *before* the beginning, He precedes Genesis 1:1
- God never had a beginning, God caused the beginning of this universe.
- No one created Him, He is the uncaused cause, He is the uncreated Creator of all things
- God is God, and He is the unchanging eternal "I AM."
- This is about Him far more than it is about us and our questions

I had the privilege of meeting Joel Beeke at Shepherd's Conference, a faithful preacher and author of God-centered books, and he helped me see the big point and idea of the first four words of the Bible really epitomize all that follows. In one of his sermons he shares how numerous scholars have tried to summarize the message of the whole Old Testament.

- One said it's about "the covenant of God"
- another said "the holiness of God"
- someone said "Israel's election as the people of God"
- or "the rulership of God"
- another had "the kingdom of God"
- still another "communion of God"
- or "the promises of God"

He asked himself, what do all of these have in common? GOD! God is the grand and glorious theme of the whole Old Testament, and the first line of Genesis paves the way for that: "**In the beginning God**" - make no mistake, this is a God-centered introduction to the Bible which is a God-centered book written so that we would be God-centered people.

We can talk about science and evolution and some of those other questions, and we will, but I don't want you to focus first on those secondary matters and miss the primary point that this first verse introduces and exalts God as the mighty, magnificent and magnanimous and matchless Creator and source of all things and the only explanation of all things. The focus here is not primarily the science of geology, it is about theology, our view of God.

When the Bible speaks of history or science it speaks perfectly and infallibly, but the point I'm making here is that my greatest concern is not winning a debate about allowing intelligent design to be taught in public schools, the reason how we interpret Genesis 1 is important is because of the glory of God. The bigger issue is how we honor our Supreme God and His sufficient infallible, inerrant, and inspired Word that remains unchanged while secular scientific theories and opinions constantly change and crumble around it. To say that this is the big idea in no way diminishes our duty to be consistent and reverent in how we handle every word of God's perfect truth and to study exactly what it means in the details. But the first chapter of the Bible is fundamentally about God, not satisfying man's curiosities or needs. It is a revelation about God, God is the subject, so I want to start on this note.

Just look through the first few words of each verse in chapter 1:

The word “God” appears 35x in the first 35 verses (saying, seeing, calling, creating, acting, etc.)

There were a lot of things I could have talked about today, but I didn’t feel I could be true to the overall intent and thrust of this chapter without focusing the bulk of this message on God

In our past studies on the attributes of God we have learned that He is supreme, He does not need man in any way, God is not lonely or lacking. So let me go back to one of those questions I mentioned in the beginning:

What was it like before God created the universe? What moved Him to create?

Warren Wiersbe asks ‘What was happening before God spoke the universe into existence?’

... *God existed in sublime glory*. God is eternal; He has neither beginning nor ending. Therefore, He is totally self-sufficient and needs nothing more than Himself in order to exist or to act. “God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made,” wrote A.W. Tozer, “but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself.” God needs nothing, neither the material universe nor the human race, and yet He created both.

If you want something to boggle your mind, meditate on the concept of the eternal, that which has neither beginning nor ending. As creatures of time, you and I can easily focus on the transient things around us; but it’s difficult if not impossible to conceive of that which is eternal. Contemplating the nature and character of the Triune God who always was, always is, and always will be, and who never changes, is a task that overwhelms us. “In the beginning God.”<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Pink also dwells on these first four words of the Bible in his first chapter of his book on the Attributes of God: “In the beginning, God” (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if “time” it could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three Divine Persons), dwelt all alone. “In the beginning, God.” There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises; no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and that, not for a day, a year, or an age, but “from everlasting.” During a past eternity, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. If this universe, or angels, or men and women, or any created thing were necessary to God, if He needed these things, or if He even had a need for His creation to glorify Him, such would have existed with Him from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.

God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure; for He “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11). That He did create was simply for His *manifestative* glory.<sup>32</sup>

God is the subject of creation, and He is also the object of creation from Genesis to Revelation

Revelation 4:11 (KJV) “**Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou [subject] hast created all things, and for thy pleasure [or will – this is the object] they are and were created.**”

Isaiah 43:7 says God created us for His glory.

In verse 43:21 God says “**The people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise**”

Col. 1:16 says “**all things were created by him and for Him**” - - not for us

Heb. 2:10 says all things are for him, also talking about Jesus

Prov. 16:4 says “**The Lord hath made all things for Himself**” (KJV) [or “for its end”]

God for all eternity has always been self-sustaining, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, never changing or lacking in anything. It certainly is not that He needed us in any way, the reason God created was for Himself, to display Himself and His glory. One of the most profound thoughts ever is trying to think about what it was like before Genesis 1:1, and that God has been God from everlasting – He is always “I AM.”

Psalms 90:1-2 (NASB95)

1 A Prayer of **Moses**, the man of God. Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

The Bible begins telling the world not first of God’s love and plan for them, but more fundamentally *who God is*, and that He is the Creator and Owner and Supreme One that mankind is accountable to in chapter 1-2, and explaining why mankind is in the trouble it is in because of sin in chapter 3 and then God shows His grace and gives a promise of a coming Messiah. Early Genesis also shows God’s wrath against depraved humanity in destroying the entire world by water, but then it shows His grace in the promise of the rainbow.

If we skip over or downplay sin or the character of God and His attributes in our evangelism, we are departing from the biblical pattern. Romans begins in chapter 1 talking about creation and God and His attributes which all mankind should glorify and thank Him for, and Paul explains what happens when they don’t and suppress His truth. It is later in the book that Paul explains God’s great love after he has first shown how hopeless and helpless and dead and depraved and sick and sinful mankind is in the first 3 chapters.

D.A. Carson has written that we would do well in following God’s example in telling our world about the message of God’s Word, and if we just ‘tell them that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives – well, why not? They [feel they] are worth loving; they are entitled to it, in fact. And they have some wonderful plans for their lives too ... What Carson argues is that, in order to be effective witnesses to Christ in our age, we will have to go back to the Bible and learn to present our case as the Bible itself does.

We will need to begin with the doctrine of God as Creator, explaining who he is and what he has done; explain how human beings are created in God’s image and are therefore responsible to God for what they do; how we have fallen from that high calling and intent; and how we now need someone to rescue us from ruin ... In other words we must recognize that our

world is as spiritually ignorant and pagan as the world into which the gospel of God's grace, both in its Old Testament and New Testament forms, first came [ex: way evangelistic book of John also starts "in the beginning"]. And we must present our message as the Bible did and does. We have an excellent example of this in the New Testament in the way the apostle Paul argued Christianity's case before the pagan philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:2-31)' [as cited by Boice, *Genesis*, 1:11-12]

So much of thinking in the world and even the church seems to be "in the beginning ME" – from our beginning everything is about me, self-centered, man-centered world view, everything relates to me and is about me and how much God loves *me*. Beeke says that this is the difference between the Arminian man-centered view vs. classical or reformed worldview and evangelism that starts with God in the beginning and God is the end and goal and we seek to be God-centered all the way through rather than starting with man as the focus. He also says that John 3:16 is not where we should start in evangelism, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible because it is here and in the Old Testament that God is so clearly revealed, and since the Bible starts with God so should we.

The argument is passionately and powerfully made clear as he says, the Bible is very clear, and creation itself makes it clear that everything revolves around God. The purpose of this story is not to make you feel good, or to keep you healthy, or to let you get what you want, the purpose of creation, and the purpose that you are sent into this world for, the whole goal and object of everything about your existence is the honor and the glory of the creator! God gives you life and calls you to glorify Him.

Is God the subject, the supreme subject of your life? Do you meditate on Him, are you focused on Him? But also, is He your grand *object*? Do you desire to do all things for His glory? Is your life governed by God as the object, the goal, the subject, the all in all? Are you living unto Him, for Him, bowing beneath Him?

Can you say "Yes, by the grace of God, though I came into this world focused on myself ... 'In the beginning I' ... I wanted this and I wanted that. But now by the grace of God, God has turned me around and so my first thought, my first desire, my first yearning is God. (above 4 paragraphs adapted from "In the Beginning God" – a sermon by Beeke available at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com))

Our 2-year old Annalee isn't much of a theologian yet, but we thought it was important at least that she know the answer to these two questions:

1. Who made you? (GOD)
2. Why did God make you? (TO GLORIFY HIM AND ENJOY HIM FOREVER)

I wish more 22 year olds and 52 year olds spoke in such terms and I wish we all lived that way

Man-centered thinking can be manifested in even little things like the way we Christians speak about scripture "what does this verse mean to me or you?" The proper question is what did GOD mean when He wrote it, what does this reveal about GOD first and foremost? What did

GOD intend to be understood by the original audience through the original author in the original language and what is the original context?

Now the original author of Genesis is Moses and the original audience is the Israelites and the original setting is they are preparing to go into the promised land. This is an important fact often neglected in expositions of Genesis, that Moses is giving the Jews a worldview about God and creation and marriage and sin and all these things because they are going into the land of Canaan and would be living in a world utterly antithetical in their thinking to all of these things. Moses' concern is not to answer all of the modern questions we might have, but he does give God's people in Genesis and the rest of the law what they need to know and He gives them the principles necessary to live as godly people in an ungodly world, and I don't think anyone will deny that America needs these foundational truths and principles as well.

### ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth***

The first ten words of Genesis refute a lot of isms:

- humanism – man is not the focus and ultimate reality and measure of all things, only God
- atheism – God exists and Genesis doesn't need to prove it
- dualism – because God was *alone* when He created
- materialism, or any idea that matter is eternal; Genesis clearly says there was a beginning and that only God is eternal
- pantheism – because God is transcendent to that which He created
- polytheism (multiple gods) which was common in the Canaan, as well as Egypt where they had just come from.
- paganism - it clearly refutes all of the myths and legends from other ancient cultures about how the world began
- evolutionism – this was not a big accident, or a series of mutations, random chance and forces gradually spontaneously bringing life from non-life, and more complex from less-complex (of course we now know that a so-called simple cell is unfathomably complex, with extraordinary evidence of design)
- Naturalism / Darwinism – the text is clear that God was directly involved with the creation of all things and creatures, this is supernaturalism not naturalism

Of greater concern to Moses was later in the chapter where he reveals the heavenly bodies and nature are not to be worshipped as many ancient cultures did, but Genesis shows that they are subservient to their Creator and distinct from Him and all the universe declares God's glory and should cause us to worship Him.

Kent Hughes says that each day of creation refutes one or more of the false gods in the ancient world. 'On day one the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On day two, the gods of sky and sea. On day three, the earth gods and gods of vegetation. On day four, the sun, moon, and star gods. Days five and six dispense with the ideas of divinity within the animal kingdom. Finally, it is made clear that humans and humanity are not divine, while also teaching that all, from the greatest to the least, are made in the image of God.' (Hughes, *Genesis*, 26)

Evolutionary philosopher Herbert Spencer, one of Darwin's earliest and most enthusiastic advocates, outlined five "ultimate scientific ideas": time, force, action, space, and matter. These

are categories that (according to Spencer) comprise everything that is susceptible to scientific examination.

That simple taxonomy, Spencer believed, encompasses all that truly exists in the universe. *Everything* that can be known or observed by science fits into one of those categories, Spencer claimed, and nothing can be truly said to “exist” outside of them ... Genesis 1:1 accounts for all of Spencer’s categories. “In the beginning”—that’s *time*. “God”—that’s *force*. “Created”—that’s *action*. “The heavens”—that’s *space*. “And the earth”—that’s *matter*. In the first verse of the Bible God laid out plainly what no scientist or philosopher cataloged until the nineteenth century. Moreover, what evolution still cannot possibly explain—the actual origin of everything that science can observe—the Bible explains in a few succinct words in the very first verse of Genesis.<sup>4</sup>

After long years of ministry, the venerable Charles Simeon of Cambridge came to his deathbed. As his friends gathered about, he smiled, asking them, “Do you know the text that comforts me just now?”

“No,” they replied. “Tell us.”

“I find infinite consolation in the fact,” he said, “that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Intimate comfort in an infinite God.

Yet the creating power of God not only gives us *dying* comfort, but *daily* comfort.<sup>5</sup>

My prayer is that not only the first 10 words of the Bible would be believed more deeply but that everyone in this room would know the truth of the last 10 words of the Bible “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” The only way you can have the grace of the Lord who created you is by a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The same power that called light into existence when it did not exist is necessary for your dark heart (2 Corinthians 4:6). You need to repent and turn your life and trust over to the Lord of the universe, believing in Jesus Christ alone and not yourself, and God will be “in the beginning” of your life, the subject and object of your life, for His glory and pleasure. May this grace be with all, amen.

---

<sup>1</sup>Green, M. P. (1989). *Illustrations for Bilical Preaching* : Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1998). *Be basic. An Old Testament study.* (p. 10, 15). Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor Pub.

<sup>3</sup> Pink, A. W. (1996, c1992). *The attributes of God.* Index created by Christian Classics Foundation. (electronic ed.) (9). Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, J. (2001). *The battle for the beginning : The Bible on creation and the fall of Adam* (40). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, R. J. (2000, c1998). *From this verse : 365 scriptures that changed the world* (electronic ed.) (January 1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.