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IN THE BEGINNING: GOD

Genesis 1:1

By

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Genesis Lesson 1

In The Beginning: God Introduction, Genesis 1:1

Queen Victoria ruled England from 1839-1901. When she was a young girl, she was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England, lest this knowledge spoil her. When her teacher finally did let her discover that she would one day be Queen, Victoria's response was, "Then I will be good!" No matter where she was or what she did, Victoria was governed by the fact that she would one day sit upon the throne of England. The knowledge of her identity and destiny governed her life.

Go back with me to about 1500 B.C. You are the leader of over two million refugees who have come out of slavery in Egypt and are about to enter Canaan, a land God has promised to your forefathers. But there are giants in the land who must be conquered. The people in the land are idol worshipers, immoral beyond description. You know that you are about to die, so you won't be able personally to lead your people in the conquest of that land. Somehow you must instill in them the resolve to conquer the enemies and to remain morally and spiritually pure in the process. How would you do it?

The first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) were written by Moses for that purpose. Moses had led Israel out of bondage in Egypt. For 40 years they had wandered in the wilderness, often grumbling and threatening to mutiny and return to Egypt. Finally they were on the verge of entering the land. Because of Moses' disobedience in striking the rock, God told him that he could not enter the land. In fact, except for Joshua, Moses' successor, and Caleb, the whole adult generation which left Egypt died in the wilderness. Before he died, Moses had the overwhelming task of instilling in this new generation a vision for conquering the land and remaining true to God. He did it by writing the first five books of the Bible.

The first of those books, Genesis, is the book of origins. The title comes from a word in the Greek translation (the Septuagint)

that is repeated 11 times throughout the book, translated "these are the generations of," or "this is the account of" (cf. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). The theme of the book is God's sovereignty in human history, especially in the history of Israel, His chosen people. It is an account of how God began to call out a people for Himself with the purpose of blessing all nations through them. G. Campbell Morgan has cleverly outlined the book as Generation (chap. 1-2, creation); Degeneration (chap. 3-11, the fall); and Regeneration (chap. 12-50, through Abraham and his descendents).

Most Bible scholars agree that the book hinges at chapter 12, and thus divide it into two major sections, each with four subsections:

1. Human history from Adam to Abraham: The human race (chap. 1-11).
 - A. Creation (1-2)
 - B. Fall (3)
 - C. The judgment of the Flood (4-9).
 - D. The judgment of Babel (10-11).
2. Human history from Abraham to Joseph: The chosen race (12-50).
 - A. Abraham (12-24)
 - B. Isaac (25-26)
 - C. Jacob (27-36)
 - D. Joseph (37-50)

In the first section there are two opposite progressions: God's orderly creation, resulting in the blessing of man; man's fall into sin, with the devastating judgments of the flood and the scattering at Babel. These chapters demonstrate the desperate condition of the fallen human race and the need for a Savior. This prepares the scene for God's sovereign calling of Abraham. Though he had no land and no children, God promises to make him a mighty nation, to give him the land of Canaan, and through him to bless all nations.

Moses' purpose in writing Genesis was to show Israel their origins. He wanted them to know that God was behind all their history, that He was the prime mover who had brought them to where they were. Since the God who had created the universe and had promised the land of Canaan to their ancestor, Abraham, was with them, they could trust Him to fulfill His promise, if they only would obey Him.

Genesis is rich in theology. It has been said, "The roots of all subsequent revelation are planted deep in Genesis, and whoever would truly comprehend that revelation must begin here." (Cited by J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* [Zondervan], p. 23.) In Genesis, says A. W. Pink, "we have, in germ form, almost all of the great doctrines which are afterwards fully developed in the books of Scripture which follow" (*Gleanings in Genesis* [Moody Press], p. 5; the following summary is based on Pink, pp. 5-7). To list a few:

God is revealed as the Sovereign, all-powerful Creator. He is seen as the Covenant God. The first hint of the Trinity is in Genesis. The schemes of Satan, the fallen nature of man, God's sovereign election and saving grace, justification by faith, the security of the believer, the need for holiness, the power of prayer, and even the saints' rapture to heaven are in Genesis. God's judgment on sin, His promise of a Savior, and the death, resurrection, and superior priesthood of that Savior are foreshadowed. The basis of God's program for world missions is found in Genesis.

Genesis tells us the beginning of almost everything except God. There is the beginning of the universe, of life, man, the seven-day week, marriage, family life, sin, sacrifice, redemption, death, the nations, government, cities, music, literature, art, agriculture, and languages.

As you know, Genesis (especially the first eleven chapters) has come under severe attack from critics. Many have dismissed it as pure myth. Others, who hesitate to go that far, nonetheless view it as religious stories woven together from various sources by a later editor. They reject the historicity of Genesis, while accepting the religious or moral point of the narratives. Of course evolutionists laugh off the creation account as totally lacking in scientific validity.

Hundreds of volumes have been written on these problems. I could spend many messages going over a lot of tedious material on both scientific and biblical arguments on these issues, but I doubt that such an approach would resolve much. My approach is simple (but, I hope, not simplistic): There are scholars who are far more brilliant and educated than I am on both sides of the issue. That tells me that it is *not* primarily an intellectual matter. If competent scholars can hold to the scientific credibility, historicity, and Mosaic authorship of Genesis (and many do), then I can also hold those positions without sacrificing my intellectual integrity.

I believe that the real issue is moral and spiritual, not intellectual. You don't have to check your brains at the door to become a Christian, but you do have to submit your will to Christ as Lord. If you accept the first verse of the Bible, it has some fundamental effects on your life! But because of sin, people don't want to accept the truth of the sovereign Creator God who is presented here. Thus they are quick to grab at supposed intellectual problems so that they have an excuse not to submit their lives to Him.

Jesus and the apostles clearly believed in the historicity and authority of the early chapters of Genesis. Our Lord refers to Genesis 1 & 2 in His teaching on divorce, attributing the texts to Moses (Matt. 19:4-8; see also Mark 13:19 where Jesus refers to creation). Paul obviously believed in a literal Adam and Eve, created by God, fallen in sin (1 Tim. 2:13-14; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 5:12-14). Peter believed in the historicity of the flood (1 Pet. 3:20). You cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and His teaching through the apostles and at the same time reject the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis.

With that as an introduction to the book as a whole, let's spend the rest of our time on the first verse, one of the most profound in the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Immediately the reader of the Bible is brought face to face with the fact of God. There is no argument to prove His existence. There is no introduction to lead up to the point. There is no room for speculation, no philosophizing. By revelation, not speculation, we are brought face to face with the God who created the universe. There's not even time to duck. Genesis 1:1 draws a line in the dirt

and asks us to step over. As A. W. Pink points out (p. 10), false religions and human philosophies begin with man and, in some cases, seek to work up to God. But the Bible begins with God as the One who was in the beginning, the One who made all that is. We must, in all our thinking, begin with God. He is the Source of all else.

The late Professor Harlow Shapley of Harvard stated, "Some people piously proclaim, 'In the beginning, God.' I say, 'In the beginning, Hydrogen'" (cited in *Christianity Today* [10/8/82], p. 28). That's the clear choice! Either you must accept God as the Source of all or reject Him and accept matter and chance as the source. You cannot be neutral; it is an authoritative declaration that demands a response:

Because God is the eternal Creator of the universe,
we all must submit to Him.

1. God is the eternal Creator of the universe.

Before anything was, God was. If you reject that, your only option is that matter has always been in existence in one form or another. It is inconceivable that matter came into being apart from God. Science can take us back 15 billion years ago to the Big Bang, but it can't tell us where the material which exploded came from or what caused the explosion. It must have come from matter which existed before it. If there was ever a time when nothing existed, then nothing could exist now, because something cannot come from nothing. And so either matter always has been or God always has been. Those are the only choices. This verse is clear as to which is correct:

A. God is eternal.

That means that He alone is *self-existent*. Everything else in the universe has a beginning, a cause. God alone always has been, is, and will be. He is the first cause, Himself uncaused. As Moses put it so eloquently in Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were born, or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." That's mind-boggling! Everything we know and relate to has a cause or a beginning. But God has no cause, no beginning. We don't have a category to fit Him into. We

can't grasp the concept of a Being with no beginning or end, who exists in and of Himself.

In Romans 1:20, Paul states, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The fallen human race should be able to look at creation and deduce that there is a being with eternal power behind it all.

Consider just the enormity of the universe. If you could travel at the speed of light, it would take you 8 minutes to get from the earth to the sun. To go from the sun to the center of the Milky Way would take about 33,000 years. The Milky Way belongs to a group of some 20 galaxies known as the Local Group. To cross the Local Group you'd have to travel at the speed of light for 2 million years. The Local Group belongs to the Virgo Cluster, part of the even larger Local Supercluster, which would take you 500 million light years to cross. To cross the entire known universe would take you about 20 billion light years! But not only is God eternal. Our text also reveals that ...

B. God is the Creator of the universe.

"The heavens and the earth" refers to the whole universe. God created it all by speaking the word. Hebrews 11:3 states, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." A skeptic will chide, "See, it takes faith! You can't accept creation unless you put your brains aside and take a leap of faith." If you say such nonsense, God calls you a fool (Ps. 14:1). It takes faith to accept that God did it all simply by speaking His word. But even a little child can figure out that it takes an eternal, powerful God to do it.

When my son, Daniel, was four years old, he asked me, "Dad, if there were no trees, could we live?" I told him that if there were no trees or plants of any kind we could not live, because the plants provide the oxygen we need to breathe. We provide the carbon dioxide the plants need to live. Think about the amazing balance God has put in creation! Our planet is perfectly designed to sustain life. If it were closer to the sun, we would burn up. If it were far-

ther from the sun, we would freeze. If the earth were a few miles smaller in diameter, the density of its atmosphere would be so thin that the earth would not retain enough heat to sustain animal or human life. The earth's waters would freeze to such a depth that all other forms of life would perish. But if earth were a few miles larger in diameter, the air would become so dense that too much heat would be absorbed, resulting in the death of all living things.

God made water to freeze and boil at just the right temperatures. Between absolute zero (-460 F.) and boiling (212 F.) is 672 degrees. If water froze just 4 percent of that range lower, it would rain at 6 degrees above zero. Where there are now vast fields of snow and ice, storing up water against the heat of summer, there would be winter floods and erosion. If God had fixed the freezing point of water two percent of the range higher, there would be frost at 45 degrees, snow and ice would never melt in many areas, and many serious problems would result.

God knew that the oceans should not freeze at 32 degrees, or there would be too much ice. So He added salt, in just the right proportion to sustain marine life. And yet He designed the hydro-logic cycle to provide salt-free rain from the ocean for crops and human consumption. He has designed the seasons and the balance of food for all the animals. We could go on and on! Even evolutionists admit the delicate ecological balance on this planet. But they attribute it to "Mother Nature" (= Chance), not to God.

It is this matter of chance or purposeless natural processes versus intelligent design that is at the heart of Darwinism (see Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* [IVP, 2nd ed.], p. 17). Evolutionists have an *a priori* commitment to the fact that even though the world and the incredibly complex creatures that inhabit it sure *look* like they were made by an intelligent Creator, it isn't true, because random mutations and natural selection explain everything, even though these processes have never been scientifically observed as causing any kind of useful new organ in a species, let alone a whole brand new species.

Phillip Johnson explains that even the simplest living organism is "a masterpiece of miniaturized complexity which makes a spaceship seem rather low-tech" (p. 105). He goes on to say that the odds that even a DNA or RNA macromolecule could assemble

itself by chance are fantastically unlikely, even if billions of years were available. Then he writes, "I won't quote figures because exponential numbers are unreal to people who are not used to them, but a metaphor by Fred Hoyle has become famous because it vividly conveys the magnitude of the problem: that a living organism emerged by chance from a pre-biotic soup is about as likely as that 'a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein.' Chance assembly is just a naturalistic way of saying 'miracle'" (p. 106).

So the choice is, either the eternal, intelligent, all-powerful God created the universe and everything in it, or it came about from senseless chance acting on matter that has eternally existed. If God is the Creator, then ...

2. We all must submit to God.

If eternal matter plus impersonal chance caused all that is, we don't have to submit to it and repent of our sin. We can live as we please. But if a personal God created everything by His word, a God who is awesome in His holiness, then there are definite implications for us! Because God is the creator of everything in this universe, including human life (1:26), we cannot ignore Him. This is the inescapable import of this profound first verse of the Bible!

If you ask the modern atheist what he believes in, he will most likely reply, "I believe in humankind," or, with Carl Sagan, "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." Of course, Sagan is making a faith statement, not a scientific one. What a terrible thing, to believe that the material universe is all that is! This is precisely what Paul observes of those who throw off the knowledge of God through His creation, and become futile in their speculations, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:20-25). As G. K. Chesterton once said, "It is often supposed that when people stop believing in God, they believe in nothing. Alas, it is worse than that. When they stop believing in God, they believe in anything!"

This was pathetically illustrated some years ago when Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA, saw the difficulty of explaining how the complexity of life could have evolved by chance in the time available if the earth is about 5 billion years old. In all seriousness, he speculated that primitive life forms must have been sent here on

spaceships from some advanced extraterrestrial civilization. To what ludicrous extremes otherwise intelligent men will go to escape the reality of God and the moral implications of His power as revealed in creation!

Conclusion

Each of us must come to terms with the God who made the universe and who made us in His image. Either you submit to Him or you must believe what Darwinist George Gaylord Simpson said: "Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind." But believing that God doesn't exist does not make Him cease to exist. He is the living God who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth. Perhaps you're afraid to come to Him. There is sin in your life, and like Adam and Eve after they sinned, you'd rather hide from Him. Listen to the words of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be sent by God to die for our sins and that someday He will judge every person: "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

Discussion Questions

1. Is Darwinian evolution scientific fact or religious dogma? Why?
2. Can a belief in God as Creator co-exist with a belief in random mutations and natural selection? Why/why not?
3. How would you answer someone who said that the early chapters of Genesis are just a bunch of religious myths?
4. How would you respond to someone who said, "To accept Genesis 1:1 requires a leap of faith"?

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