

Genesis 1:1

The Most Important Verse In The Bible

I grew up in Emmaus, PA, which was a small town of about 10,000 people. Emmaus is right outside of Allentown, which is quite a bit larger so the kids from Allentown considered us hicks.

Of course we didn't think we were hicks. we thought the kids from Macungie were the hicks. But the people of Macungie weren't at the bottom of the food chain. They considered the inhabitants of Alburtus to be true hicks. But, if you lived in Alburtus you still had one town below your level of hickness. That was Minesite. Those kids were the true hicks.

The dictionary definition of 'hick' is "a term to refer to the stereotype of unsophisticated country people."

Somehow if your from the farm or out in the sticks you're not supposed to be as enlightened and cultured as someone from the big city.

There's an very interesting "hick" reference in the New Testament of a confrontation between an apostle of Jesus and a group of philosophers. It's recorded found in Acts 17. The apostle's name was Paul. He's in the Areopagus in Athens, Greece. This is like the epicenter of Greek philosophical thought.

Verse 18 says, *Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babblor want to say?"*

This was definitely a bunch that thought they were pretty smart. They thought of themselves as a cut above most people. In fact the word translated *babblor* is a Greek term that literality means "seed picker."

"What's this hayseed talking about anyway?"

Things haven't changed much in 2000 years. There are still a lot of people who would consider anyone who believed the Bible literally as a hick, a seed picker, a backwoods fundamentalist who's clueless when it comes to modern scholarship and scientific advances.

Nowhere does that attitude become more apparent than when we're discussing the Book of Genesis.

We're beginning a study of the book of Genesis this morning and before we get started I'd like to propose something to you. Here it is: the Book of Genesis is the most important book ever written.

The Bible as a whole has certainly exerted the greatest influence on history of any book ever produced. But the Bible is actually a compilation of many books and the book of Genesis is the foundation of them all.

If somehow Genesis could be removed from the Bible, the rest of the scriptures would be incomprehensible. It would be like a building without a ground floor, or a bridge with no support.

Henry Morris, in his commentary on Genesis says:

"The books of the Old Testament narrating God's dealings with the people of Israel would be provincial and bigoted, were they not set in the context of God's developing purposes for all mankind, as laid down in the early chapters of Genesis. The New Testament, describing the execution and implementation of God's plan for man's redemption is redundant and anachronistic, except in the light of man's desperate need for salvation, as established in the record of man's primeval history, recorded only in Genesis."

What Morris is saying is this; without the teachings of Genesis the rest of the Bible wouldn't make sense and life would be meaningless. In fact, much of the Bible would be meaningless because Genesis is the key.

For years now the book of Genesis, and especially the first 11 chapters, has borne the brunt of biblical criticism. Modern writers commenting on the book tend to treat the first 11 chapters as a myth.

For some, Genesis is ancient Jewish folklore having no more historical validity than the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, or the stories of Zeus. For others it forms a pre-scientific look at the past that no one who respects scholarships can accept.

Others tell us that the story is just symbolic. It's some sort of religious truth, but not in the sense of being literal fact.

All of these views that are based on disbelief present real problems. Here's why.

If there wasn't a literal creation, but instead people came as a chance product of impersonal evolution, then man isn't responsible to anyone but himself. He's a god.

If there wasn't a literal fall, if Adam and Eve didn't eat the fruit from the garden, then we don't need redemption. If we've just made a few mistakes along the way then we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps but we certainly don't need a Savior.

If there wasn't an act of God by which He chose the Jewish people for Himself then Israel has no right to their land and no place in God's program for the world.

The book of Genesis explains the origin of all things and then out of that we're told the meaning of all things. This is truth that couldn't be known any other way except by divine revelation. There weren't any historians or scientists there who could clue us in. But, God was there. He's the source of this essential truth.

The book of Genesis actually has two names, as do all the books of our Old Testament.

The English names come from the Septuagint. The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language done around 200 BC. It was done because many Jews were being influenced by the Greek culture and weren't able to read Hebrew anymore.

Genesis is Greek for "beginnings" or "origins." The Hebrew title is "in the beginning" or *bireshith*, first word in the Hebrew text.

I. The Book Of Genesis Is The Book Of Beginnings

In the book of Genesis we find the origins, or beginnings of all the basic components of the universe and life.

For instance it tells us:

1. The origin of the universe. Genesis 1:1 stands alone in contrast to all other explanations. Every other system, whether it happens to be ancient religious myth,

or modern science starts with eternal matter or energy in some form from which everything came into being.

Even “Big Bang” proponents aren’t able to explain how the infinitely dense point of energy got there to begin with.

2. The origin of order and design - order doesn’t come out of chaos by itself.
3. The origin of the solar system.
4. The origin of the atmosphere, which is unique to planet earth.
5. The origin of life.
6. The origin of human beings.
7. The origin of marriage.
8. The origin of evil, language, government, nations, religions, the Jewish people!

The book of Genesis is actually the foundation for all history as well as science and philosophy. And above all else, it’s the foundation for God’s revelation, the Bible. Genesis is the foundation for all the rest of the Bible.

God was very careful to give us a lot of internal proof for the accuracy and truth of the book of Genesis. No other book of the Bible is quoted so often or referred to so frequently in the other books of the Bible as Genesis.

Adam is mentioned by name 21 times in the Old Testament and 9 times in the New. Noah is mentioned in 51 times in the Bible.

Abraham is mentioned by name in 15 books of the Old Testament and 11 of the New.

Jacob is named in 21 books of the Old Testament and 17 of the new.

Moses is referred to 79 times in the New Testament in 12 books.

The New Testament is, in a real sense, more dependent on Genesis than the Old. There are at least 165 passages in Genesis that are either directly quoted or clearly referred to in the New Testament.

What I find fascinating is, the portion of Genesis which has been the object of the greatest attacks by skepticism and unbelief (the first 11 chapters) is the portion which has had the greatest influence on the New Testament.

There are over 100 quotations or direct references to Genesis chapters 1 - 11 in the New Testament and everyone of the New Testament writers refers somewhere in his writings to Gen. 1 - 11.

On at least 6 different occasions, Jesus Christ Himself quoted from, or referred to, something or someone in one of these chapters, including specific references to each of the first 7 chapters.

You can't take away the reality of the book of Genesis without the Christian faith tumbling like a house of cards.

Understand Genesis in its historical setting and the rest of the Bible will begin to dovetail into place.

Why is this? Because the book of Genesis, in common with all the other books of the Bible, was written under the inspiration of the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus repeatedly ascribed the authorship of Genesis to Moses. God used Moses to get His word across in a way that was both spiritually and historically accurate.

I. The Book Of Genesis Is The Book Of Beginnings

II. The First Verse In Genesis Is The Foundational Verse Of The Bible

If the book of Genesis is the Bible's foundational book then it is obvious that the first 11 chapters, which give the beginning of the world and the nations, constitutes the foundation for the rest of Genesis.

Chapter one of Genesis is the foundational chapter of the first 11 chapters since it summarizes the creation of the world.

Then, Genesis 1:1 is the foundational verse of this foundational chapter. It's the foundation of all foundations. Genesis 1:1 is the most important verse in the Bible.

Look at Genesis 1:1 Read verse 1

If you really believe Genesis 1:1, you'll find it is easy to believe the rest of the Bible too.

If you get stuck at 1:1 you'll have to trouble with the rest of Scripture. If God really created all things, then He controls all things and can do all things. If he didn't create all, then the rest of His power would be brought into question too.

This one verse, with which God introduces the Bible, refutes all of man's false philosophies concerning the origin and the meaning of the world.

It refutes:

1. Atheism - the universe was created by God
2. Materialism - matter isn't eternal, it was created.
3. Pantheism - God is distinct from His creation
4. Polytheism - One God created all
5. Humanism - God, not man is the ultimate reality
6. Evolution - God created all things
7. Astrology - the stars are simply God's creation
8. Idolatry - God is the almighty Creator, idols are nothing and not to be worshipped

Actually all of those false philosophies are merely different ways of expressing the same unbelief: That there is no personal, creator God who is above all.

I think its striking that with all those anti-God philosophies that the Bible makes no attempt to prove that there is a God. The Bible doesn't debate the fact of God's existence. The opening verse of Genesis simply takes this fact for granted, as though it were so obvious that only a fool could say with absolute certainty that there is no God.

And in fact that is exactly what the Bible tell us. Psalm 14:1 *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*

Clearly every word in this first verse is packed with significance. Each word is a key word and so I'd like to take them one by one and see their implications.

The first word, as we've already mentioned, is 3 words in English but only one the Hebrew text, *bireshith*, "in the beginning."

I can still remember the first time it dawned on me that a Sunday School teacher was telling me that God was eternal.

My thoughts as a child were. "That can't be. Everything has a beginning and an end. Who made God? Where did He start?"

Well, here I am 50 years later and my finite mind still can't grasp the externality of God. But I do understand that at the creation of the world time began.

Our problem is that we can't think of existence apart from time. We live in time. We are creatures of time. But time did have a beginning and one day it will have an end.

In the Septuagint this is translated *en arche* which is the same way John begins his gospel. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and was with God.*

John takes us from the beginning of time and has us look backward. Before time began, Jesus existed.

Moses takes us from the beginning of time and has us look forward. Everything in this world as we know it started with the creative act of an eternal God.

That brings us to our next word - in the beginning "God."

There are several words translated as "God" in our Old Testament. This first one is the word *elohim*. It's derived from a root found in Arabic meaning "to fear" or "to reverence." The image is a God who by His nature and His works commands our respect and reverence.

Whenever you hear an "im" ending in Hebrew you know that the word is plural. Hebrew doesn't have just singular and plural. It has singular, dual, and plural endings. Singular refers to one, dual refers to 2, and plural refers to 3 or more. *Elohim* is a plural word.

It can refer to more than one god and often does in the Bible, but here it is clearly being used in the singular. It has a 3rd person singular verb with it. *Elohim* is a plural noun with a singular verb, and even though Hebrew can use a plural to signify fullness, or greatness, or majesty, I believe implicit within this word is the idea that God is one and yet more than one.

There is a trinity. Not 3 gods, but one God manifested in 3 persons and we find this truth showing up in the very first verse of the Bible.

The next words we come to is the word “created.” This is the Hebrew word *bara*. *Bara* is never used of people in the Bible, only God. Of course, the reason is that only God can create. Only God can call into existence something that had no previous existence.

Turn to Hebrews 11:3 page 1069

Read verse 3

God spoke existence out of non-existence. He spoke time out of eternity. He spoke material out of immaterial. He spoke and his speech became earth, planets and all that is.

Right at the beginning the Bible confronts us with a choice.

To some people, the concept of an eternal, self-existing God is out of the question. “Where’s the scientific proof?” As if everything could be laid out in a lab. But then they turn around and in faith believe in an eternal, self-existent universe.

Either “in the beginning God created,” or in the beginning it was all just there. Eternal God or eternal matter, that’s the choice. And both choices take faith.

Don’t ever let anybody criticize you for having faith. Don’t ever let it get you down if you are laughed at for having faith. The culture likes to point a finger at Christians and say how weak and irrational they are for having faith. But every body has faith.

Through faith the Christian believes that God created this world. Through faith the atheist believes the world, in some form, always existed.

Through faith the atheist believes the mind boggling order and the complexity and the design of everything from the smallest atom to the largest solar system is by chance.

Through faith the atheist believes that personal beings; men and women, boys and girls, with personality and feelings and emotions, all arose out of impersonal matter by chance natural processes.

Atheists are people of faith. Unproven, chance, blind faith. It takes an infinitely greater amount of faith to be an atheist than it does to accept the teaching of Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning God created. **Back to Genesis 1:1**

The 4th word we need to consider tells us what God created in the beginning and that was the heavens. *Shamayim*, like *elohim* is a plural noun and can be translated either “heaven” or “heavens” depending on the context.

Actually there are 3 heavens mentioned in the Bible.

The first heaven is what we would call the atmosphere. In Genesis 7:11 this heaven is mentioned with reference to the flood. It says, *On that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.*

The second heaven is beyond the first and this is what we would call outer space. In Genesis 15:5 God brings Abraham out and says, *Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.*

The 3rd heaven is the actual home of God. Now, one of the attributes of God is omnipresence. God is present everywhere. There is no where we could go to get away from God.

And yet, at the same time, the Bible speaks of God having a special particular dwelling place called “heaven.”

I Kings 8 records Solomon’s dedication prayer for the temple. In verse 27 he says: *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!*

At the same time Psalm 2:4 declares *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.*

God lives in the heavens - but where? Turn back with me to the New Testament, **II Corinthians 12, page 1032**

If you were with us last week you’ll remember that this passage describes a

physical limitation placed on an apostle named Paul. God was using what Paul calls a thorn in the flesh to keep him from being too proud. Too proud about what?

Read verses 1-4

This is generally considered to be Paul's description of an event which happened to Him.

Notice he was caught up into Paradise; the same place that Jesus told the thief on the cross that they would both be that very day.

Paradise, or the home of God, is called "the third heaven" in verse 2.

Back to Genesis 1

The last word in Genesis 1:1 is "the earth," *erets*. *Haerets* means "the earth" or "the land." It's the name of the name of Israel's oldest, independent newspaper.

There's always been an ongoing debate about whether there is life on other planets. I think we can answer that through the Word of God.

If life could arise spontaneously given the right conditions, and if the universe was billions of years old then it would be foolish to discount the possibility of other life forms.

But if we take the biblical record as it is written, we find that the earth stands out as a unique aspect of God's creation. The earth is man's kingdom and heaven is known as God's throne.

God said, *Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool*. Isaiah 66:1. The earth is a testimony to God's glory because it is here that He placed humanity; people made in His own image.

Not only that, but it's here that the last Adam, the Son of Man, The Lord Jesus Christ will eventually rule.

In the book of the Revelation, the last thing we find is a description of the New Jerusalem. Paradise will then be located on the new earth.

Everything in the Bible points to the fact that we are it. There is no intelligent life in space.

The Bible tells us that:

God loves the world.

God created man in His own image.

God became a man in Christ and Jesus Christ will retain that glorified human body through all eternity.

And then God's future eternal dwelling place, paradise itself will be on earth in the midst of redeemed men and women.

And so, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Ten words in English, 7 in Hebrew, but 7 of the most profound words that have ever been written. All of the rest of the Word of God hinges on how we view this introductory verse.

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III. The God Of Creation Is A God Of Majesty And Power To Whom We Owe Total Commitment

What can we learn from Genesis 1:1? The most important thing of all concerning the true character of God.

David wrote in Psalm 19:1 *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.*

Paul told the Romans, *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.* Romans 1:20

God is a God of majesty, a God of glory, a God of unfathomable power. What we need to guard against is having a deficient view of the majesty of God.

But before any of us in this room are going to have spiritual power in our lives, we are going to have to begin to think of God as He truly is. God is our strength. But if in our minds we limit God, we're going to be weak Christians.

God begins right off the bat challenging us with who and who He really is so that we'll have the awe and reverence for Him that we should have.

I mean, what is it that comes to your mind when you think of God? Is He someone far away, the man upstairs? Is He like a magic genie who answers your requests but has no claim over your life?

What do you do when you worship God? Do you treat Him like some kind of cosmic buddy or do you stand in awe and admiration of the almighty God creator of heaven and earth?

Spiritual weakness and confusion can usually be traced to a deficient appreciation of God.

A right belief and understanding of God will give you the right thinking about life's problems. You'll see them in the light of a sovereign, loving God.

The fact that God has created the heavens and earth shows His ultimate control. God alone determines what He wills to do, and because He's omnipotent he is able to bring it to pass. It's impossible to describe God's power any other way than to say simply that He has all power.

He's got more power than all the armies of this world and He's able to establish kingdoms and cast them down. Even when we look at our world situation and become disturbed or distressed at the way things seem to be going we can be conscious of the fact that God is working behind the scenes all the time and that He is in ultimate control.

Think about this, although man denies the creatorship and government of God, he is still confined to God's program.

G. Campbell Morgan, who was a 19th century American pastor and scholar wrote:

"No man ever escapes for any 5 minutes of his earthly career from the government of God. A man may be in rebellion against that government but he lives in the grip of it. By the laws of God each man is made or marred; which, depends upon his attitude towards these laws. It is impossible for humanity to separate itself from God ... I breathe His air, I trample His earth, I derive the sustenance of the physical from the forces which have emanated from deity ...

I may degrade them, prostitute them, but they are all things which I am and have from God, and I cannot ultimately escape the touch of the government and law of God, the rule of God in my life.”

The ultimate paradox is for someone to claim to be an atheist all the while breath the air that God provides, eat the food He’s caused to grow, and live on the earth that God has made.

As believers we need to make sure we don’t fall into the same contradictory trap.

The creator God has created a new life in us. As believers we need to take God into consideration in all the decisions we make. We live in the realm of his government and we need to see that he has full control over our lives.

We’re God created. We live in a God created world. We need to submit ourselves to Him so we will be God governed as well.

The Bible tells us that we’re lost without God. We’re sinners who are on our way to a Christless eternity without God. But God...! There’s a total of 46 “but Gods” in the Bible. Here’s one of my favorites: *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).* Ephesians 2:4-5

How about this one: *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8

If you will come in faith believing that Jesus Christ gave His life to pay for your sins, the Bible promises God will make you part of His eternal family and give you a home in heaven.

I’d like to challenge you this morning to meditate on the majesty of Almighty God. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. II Peter 3:13