

Osaka International Church

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Series: Beginnings

Title: In the Beginning

Scripture: Genesis 1:1



I. Introduction

Good morning! Around the world there are many different cultures and peoples. There is a wide variety in styles of dress, types of foods, and social customs. But there are also some things that are the same everywhere. For example, in every place and in every time there are always people who ask, “Why are we here?” “Where did we come from?” and “What is the meaning and purpose of our lives?”



Today we are starting a new message series in Genesis and we will examine some of the answers the Bible, gives to these questions. First though, I want us to encourage us to begin with humility. Some of the topics we will discuss are controversial. There are various opinions, and some people feel quite strongly that their own opinions are correct. That’s okay, but we should still be sure to have an attitude of humility before the Scriptures and also before our brothers and sisters in the church. Everyone is free to decide what to believe. But among Christians, we should submit our opinions to the light of Scripture, and we should leave room for others to do the same. Many brilliant theologians have commented on Genesis, but on a number of issues there is no clear consensus. So we need to have humility, and leave room for some variety of interpretations. I pray that we will do so with humility, respecting one another.



Let’s go ahead and get started, beginning with Genesis 1:1.

II. Scripture and Teaching

Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It is easy to read these words without really thinking about the meaning. But, let’s take it step-by-step. **“In the beginning ,”** these simple words tell us something very important. Namely, that there was a beginning. Across the centuries philosophers, religious people, and scientists have debated the question of whether the universe was essentially eternal and unchanging, or whether perhaps time was circular and history repetitive. But for thousands of years, the Scriptures have clearly taught that the universe had a beginning.



The verse continues, saying, **“God created the heavens and the earth.”** Not only does the world have a beginning, but also there is a definite person, **“God,”** who did the work. The world is not the result of randomness, or accident, instead it is the result of an intentional creative act. This creative act produced the earth and the heavens, all of the universe. And if God created the entire universe, then surely God has unlimited power and endless wisdom. Furthermore, the act of creation strongly implies that God has a purpose for the universe, a reason for creating the world. One more idea that is inherent in Genesis 1:1 is the idea that God communicates with His creation, since Genesis 1:1 is a statement of revelation from God.

From this one verse, we are already able to develop a rich theology. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, personally active, and God reveals Himself to us, the people He has created. The world had a beginning, and therefore it will have an end. God had a purpose in creating the world, and therefore our lives have meaning and value. **Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”** Think about it carefully and meditate on it in your heart. Do you understand what this verse is saying? Do you believe it?

From the first verse, the Bible challenges us to make some decisions about our basic world view and philosophy of life. **Atheism** is incompatible with the assertion that there is a Creator God. **Agnosticism** is just a temporary condition in a world where God reveals Himself. **Polytheism** is incompatible with the assertion that there is one Creator God. **Materialism** is illogical if matter had a beginning and will have an end. The **Humanist** idea that everything centers on man cannot be correct if there is an all-powerful God. The independent existence of God before He began to create is incompatible with **Pantheism** and **Monism**. **Deism** agrees with the belief in one Creator God, but is ultimately incompatible with the idea that God reveals Himself to His creation. Furthermore, various philosophies that deny the objective reality of the material universe are incompatible with a real creation event.

Genesis 1:1 is purely **monotheistic** and it presents us with a clear choice. If we choose to believe Genesis 1:1, then we will have to reject all religions and philosophies that do not believe in a single all-powerful Creator God who reveals Himself. Examine the religions and belief systems in the world in the light of Genesis 1:1. When you are done, I think you will find that, logically, if you believe Genesis 1:1 and are not defeated by fear, then you will have to become a Jew, a Muslim, or a Christian. As far as I know, those are the only choices that are logically compatible with Genesis 1:1. And before we finish looking at Genesis chapter one, I think that we will see that Christianity is the only choice which is fully compatible with the first chapter of the Bible. There are many things in the Bible that take years to understand. But the most important things are very simple. The Bible says, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”** Are you willing to believe this? If the answer is, “yes,” then the rest of the Bible should be easy to believe.

Here is a photo from the Ten Commandments movie. It shows the scene where Moses raises his arms and God parts the Red Sea. The Bible is full of amazing miracle stories like this one. If you assume a naturalistic or humanistic worldview, then these miracle stories are very difficult to believe. But if you accept that the universe was created by an all-powerful and all-knowing God, then you know that all of the laws of nature and physics were also determined by God. And, if the laws of time and space came from the mind of God and are enforced by God’s power, then God Himself is free to ignore or change the rules any time that He chooses. With God, all things are possible. Not only does God have the power to make exceptions to the laws of physics and the rules of nature, God also has the sovereign right to do so, because the entire universe belongs to Him by right of creation. God is able to do any kind of miracle anytime that He chooses. But, relatively speaking, God does not usually choose to do very many big, dramatic miracles. If you think about it, this is a good thing, because if God was continually doing all kinds of big miracles, the laws of nature would become meaningless and the world we live in would be chaotic and completely unpredictable. I think we need a lot of small miracles just to help us get through the day. But we also need a certain amount of predictability in our lives, and God knows that also.



If we accept the huge miracle of creation in Genesis 1:1, then all the other miracles are easy to accept. And there are compelling reasons to believe Genesis 1:1. These reasons fit into two categories. The first category is evidence that comes from within the Bible. We call this special revelation. For example, if you examined a dozen prophecies in the Bible and then found their fulfillments in history, then that would be compelling evidence that the Bible prophecies came from a source outside time – a source which could only be God Himself. And if God revealed the truth about the future on many occasions, then it seems certain that God would also reveal the truth about the past, including Genesis 1:1. Many people have gone through this exercise and have come to trust the Bible through the evidence of fulfilled prophecy.

The second category of evidence is the general revelation about God that is found in nature. The Scriptures urge us to consider the evidence from nature as well. For example, **Job 12:7-9** challenges us to see the hand of God in all living things. **“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”** And **Psalm 19:1b** declares that, **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”**

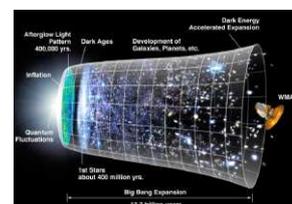
God is the author of both the Bible and of all of nature, because He is the Creator. Therefore, there can never be any real contradictions between the special revelation of the Bible and the general revelation of God found in nature. God does not contradict Himself.



Sometimes there are apparent contradictions though. For example, there are times when our interpretation of the Bible and the interpretation which scientists give to what they observe in nature are in disagreement. When this happens, we should not give up on the Bible or on science. Instead we should simply increase our efforts to understand both correctly.

When the Bible and science appear to contradict each other, we may find that the problem is some kind of error in the work of the scientists. In the 18th century many scientists believed that the universe was infinite and that it had no beginning or end. Science and the Bible were at odds, because the Bible said the universe had a beginning and science disagreed. But after Albert Einstein published his General Theory of Relativity in 1916, scientists realized that they had been misinterpreting the meaning of their observations of nature. Today, the majority of scientists accept the Big Bang theory; a theory which agrees with the Bible about the key fact that the universe had a beginning. Of course, we need to talk about the age of the earth issue and some other things, but we will get back to that later, so please be patient. Today, my point is that in this case science has come to agree with the Bible about the universe having a beginning.

Modern scientists portray the beginnings of the universe with diagrams like this one: diagrams which clearly shows a beginning of time and space - just as the Bible has always taught. If you had lived 200 years ago, you would have had to reject the prevailing scientific opinion in order to believe in Genesis 1:1. But today, science has come around. Modern science offers compelling evidence in favor of Genesis 1:1, not against it.



On the other side of the coin, in the middle ages, many theologians interpreted statements in the Bible referring to the, “**four corners of the earth**” (e.g. **Revelation 7:1**) as proving that the earth was square. When scientists proved that the earth was round, theologians had to reconsider their interpretation of the Bible. Today, theologians agree that the earth is round and that the expression, “**four corners of the earth,**” is figurative and not literal. Science caused the theologians to reexamine their ideas. But the theologians did not change their minds just because of what science said; they changed their minds because when they searched they saw that the Scriptures also speak of a round earth in verses like **Isaiah 40:22**. In fact, there are a number of verses that show that the earth is round once you start looking. In this case, an apparent contradiction with science was the result of theologians misinterpreting the Bible. So the theologians had to change their interpretation.



When we see an apparent contradiction between science and the Bible, we should not give up on the Bible or on science. Instead we should simply increase our efforts to understand both correctly. Sooner or later we will find and correct a problem either in our science or in our theology. Both nature and the Bible come from God, so there cannot be any real contradictions.

III. Good News/Christ Connection

Where is Jesus in all of this? The Bible teaches us that Jesus, God the Son, was right there, creating the universe alongside God the Father. The parallel between the opening words of John’s gospel and Genesis 1:1 is no accident. **John 1:1-3** says, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**”

“**The Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” This verse calls Jesus, “**the Word,**” a very excellent title for Jesus because in the rest of Genesis 1, we will see that God’s method of creating was to speak things into existence using His Word. Next week we will see the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:2, and we will understand that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in creating the universe. One God in three persons, eternally working together in perfect harmony.

I mentioned earlier that Genesis 1:1 implies that God had a purpose in creating the universe. **Ephesians 1:3-5** teaches us more about God's purposes and plans in creating the universe. **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. [4] For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love [5] he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."** Here we see that God's purpose in creating the universe involves God's love for us and His desire to have a loving relationship with us. We were created to be His children, members of His household, bound together with Him by love.

IV. Call to Decision

God's heart is to have a close and loving relationship with each and every person. And that includes you and me; it includes every one of us. God loves us. That is why He created us and placed us in this world. When Israel was in exile in Babylon, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying, **(Jeremiah 29:11-13), "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. [12] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. [13] You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."** These words were originally given to Israel as a nation, but I think they also apply individually to every one of us. Are you ready to seek the Lord with all of your heart? Are you ready to believe Genesis 1:1 and all of the Scriptures? Do not delay; seek the Lord in your heart. Turn to Him and you will find in Him waiting to welcome you into a loving relationship, a relationship for which you were created. Let's pray.