

“It All Starts with a Big Bang”

Genesis 1-11

The Story – Chapter 1 Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

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Since we are starting The Story today it seems fitting to look at a few first lines of some famous stories. See if you can guess the book and author.

- “Call me Ishmael” *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville
- “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ...” *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens
- “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
- “All children, except one, grow up.” *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie

The most famous first line of all is the one which opens The Story:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” Genesis 1:1

The Bible, God’s story, starts with a big bang. In one verse God creates everything. Based on observations through the Hubble Telescope, astronomers estimate there are over 200 billion galaxies in the universe and possibly 70 billion trillion (7×10^{22}) stars. Some scientists say that number is low. The Big Bang theory states that everything in the universe exploded from a single point, and it has been expanding ever since. Science cannot go behind the Big Bang. It can’t tell you how or why all this started. Scripture can. Like Science, the Bible says everything came from a single source and then it goes a step further. It gives that source a name: God. It tells us the main character of the entire Story. The leading Actor in the Story is not Abraham, Moses or David but the Author of the Story – God. This is God’s story. We must always remember that God is not someone behind the scenes. He writes the Story, interacts with characters in His Story and, as we shall see later, actually enters the Story.

Like all good stories, the Bible begins by giving us the **Context** in Genesis 1-11. To understand any story we need to know what is going on. What’s the time and place of the story, who are the characters in the story, what happened before the story started? If you don’t get the context of the story at the start, you’ll be confused. This often happened to me when I watched the TV sitcom Seinfeld. If I tuned in after the first commercial break, midway through the show, I missed the start of the running jokes in the beginning. So I had no idea why everyone was laughing when they talked about the Bubble Boy or the Puffy Shirt or the Soup Nazi.

To understand the rest of God’s Story you have to understand the first chapters of Genesis. They give us the context. Chapter 1 gives us the ultimate context: the creation of

the entire universe. Chapter 1 is one of the most familiar and most highly debated chapters of all time. It is also, perhaps, one of the most misunderstood. There are two common misunderstandings about this chapter. One is to view it as **Mythology**. Many modern skeptics look at Genesis 1 in the same way they might look at myths from Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek or Roman mythology. Every culture has its own story about how all things came to be. The Babylonians believed there was a goddess named Tiamat, a chaos sea monster, who gave birth to all the gods. Later, she became angry and tried to kill her children. One of her sons, the god Marduk, killed his mother, cut her in two, used half of her body to make the heavens and the other half to make the earth. The remaining gods created human beings to be their slaves so they could relax and not have to work so hard. Myths are created by humans to explain what goes on in the spiritual world. Some people today say Genesis 1 is just another myth.

At the other extreme are those who view Genesis 1 as **Modern Science**. Since the rise of modern science in the 17th century and, especially since Darwin's theory of evolution in the 19th century, Christians have defended Genesis 1 as a scientific explanation. When I was in college, my professor of biological anthropology, an ardent evolutionist, had a public debate in a large lecture hall with a Creation Scientist. At the end of the debate I don't think either side was convinced by the other. Some Christians are afraid that if Genesis 1 is not provable according to current scientific theory then it is all false. If myth focuses on what happens up in the spiritual world, modern science only focuses on what happens in the physical world.

Unfortunately, many in our world believe that the only truth is scientific truth and if something cannot be explained using equations, equipment and experiments then it is not true. Yet we all know you can't explain or understand beauty, goodness, joy, purpose, or love with an equation. We need another source of information. The Bible gives us something more than myth and something more than modern science. It reveals to us the **Message from the Author**. When I am done with a DVD I watch the credits and the extras. The credits tell me *how* the film was made – how many gaffers, key grips and best boys they needed as well as all the special effects and computer graphics. That's what science tells us – *how* the earth and universe were made. Yet what the credits don't tell me and what science can't tell me is *why* – *the purpose of creation*. That's why I watch the extras or the director's commentary or, even better, the author's commentary. Now I get insight into why the story was written, what was the purpose behind it all. The Bible gives us the message from the Author – God. He reveals why He created and what it all means. Genesis 1 gives us the purpose of creation. Science cannot do that. In fact, scientists will tell you that is not their job and they are right. So Genesis 1 gives us a message that is not against modern science or an alternative to modern science but a message that is above and beyond what science can tell us.

Mythology is about the spiritual world. Modern science is about the physical world. God's Message gives us both – it connects the spiritual and physical worlds. As we read through the Story together this year and as you study it in your Growth Groups you will be hearing about two concepts which may be new to you: **the Upper Story** and **the Lower Story**. The Upper Story pulls back the curtain and invites us to see the Story

from God's perspective. It reveals the spiritual side of reality and shows us what God is doing. Some think God created the world and then abandoned us. Maybe right now you feel God has abandoned you. Through the Upper Story you'll discover that God never stops working for you, God never stops loving you and God never leaves you. The Lower Story gives us the physical side – what happens here on earth. We'll see characters like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Ruth, David, Mary, Peter, and Paul who, like us, live their lives here on earth. They will show us what happens when people who live here in the Lower Story, follow what God tells us in the Upper Story. And we'll meet one figure who unites both the Upper and Lower Stories: Jesus.

So what do we learn about our Context – the Creation – in Genesis 1? What does the Author tell us? Here are five quick lessons we learn from Genesis 1. The Creator is first **Personal**. The Bible tells us creation is not an accident. It is not random. We are not the product of blind forces that accidentally collide to make something that is infinitely complex. You intuitively know that accidents cause things to break down not build up. Neglect makes things messier not cleaner. Just check out your teenager's bedroom. There is a Person putting this complex creation together and we call Him God.

Second, the Creator is **Peaceful**. It's not the result of a battle between gods as in the Babylonian myths. There is no clash of the Titans. One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, doesn't fight anyone or consult a committee. Instead, God simply speaks and says, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let the dry ground appear" (Genesis 1:9). "Let the land produce vegetation..." (Genesis 1:11). "Let the water teem with living creatures..." (Genesis 1:20). "Let the land produce living creatures..." (Genesis 1:24). God is peaceful. He doesn't fight creation. He calls forth creation. He is the Author but He is not authoritarian. He does not force us to obey Him or love Him. Yet if you let Him into your life, He will give you peace. As the Beatles sang centuries later God peacefully says, "Let it be."

Third, Creator is **Protective**. God takes chaos and turns it into order. Genesis 1:2 says: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The ancient people didn't have a concept of zero. For them chaos – especially the chaos of the deep ocean – was a sign of nothingness and emptiness. So when God speaks and creates, He takes chaos and turns it into order. He pushes back the chaotic forces of nature to create a safe and protective place where we can live. God is constantly pushing back and protecting us from chaos. Right now, there may be chaos in your life. It may be caused by people, places, or things. Turn to God and ask Him to push back the chaos and create order in your life.

Fourth, the Creator is **Pleased**. Like a master artist, God occasionally stepped back, took in what He accomplished, "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1: 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). God is pleased with His creation. Other religions may view the world as an evil place to avoid. Yet Jews and Christians have always praised God's artwork. The creation is good and that's why the first modern scientists, who were Christians, wanted to study God's good creation. They wanted to understand how God made this good

universe. God wants you to take pleasure in your creations. Yet the creation is not complete, it is not the best, until His final creation: humans.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:26-28, 31)

We are the purpose of creation. God loves all His creatures but we are the only creatures made in His image. We are not his slaves, as in the Babylonian myth. We bear His likeness. We have His family resemblance. And we are His representatives here on earth. He blesses us and tells us “be fruitful and increase in number” (by the way – that was the answer to last week’s Jeopardy question. It’s the first commandment to humans and the only one we’ve obeyed perfectly). Gazing at the trillions of stars in the universe can make you feel quite small until you realize the Creator of all that wonder wants to have a close, personal and wonderful relationship with you. If that doesn’t boost your self-esteem nothing else on earth will. Every morning you need to remind yourself – ‘I am created by God, in the image of God, to be loved by God. He says I am very good.’ God loves you so much He even wants to give you rest.

That’s the fifth point: the Creator **Paused**.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2-3)

Now we know God doesn’t need to rest. So why did He pause on the seventh day? To give us a break. He created us with a natural need to rest. We all need a Sabbath. We are too busy. Many of you know that my cell phone number ends with 666. When people joke about a minister having the number of the beast, I tell them this proves cell phones are from the devil – they are a sinister plan to prevent us from ever taking a break and truly resting. Be counter cultural – cut back on the sports, the cell phone and the shopping and give yourself a real Sabbath.

Speak of the devil, Genesis chapters 2-3 gives us the second part of every great story. Context in chapter 1 is followed by **Conflict** in Chapters 2 and 3. As you know, the Lord places the first two humans, Adam and Eve, in Eden – a lush beautiful garden. Someone once said Adam and Eve had the perfect marriage. He didn’t have to hear about all the men she could have married and she didn’t have to hear about the way his mother cooked! God came and spent time with them. This is the close, personal, loving relationship God wants to have with us.

Yet this beautiful scene did not last. “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9). God told them “but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:17). The serpent, whom we later understand to be Satan, tempts Eve.

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Genesis 3:4-7)

Why did the man and woman eat the forbidden fruit? They wanted to be like God, they wanted to be gods, they rebelled against our loving God. And with forbidden fruit juice still on their chins, they suddenly realized they were fooled. They didn’t become gods. They actually became less than human. They lost what was best about them: their close relationship with God. Instantly, like children who know they’ve done something wrong, they try to cover up their sin and hide. Then God, like a parent coming home at the end of the day, walks into the Garden and discovers it’s very quiet. Too quiet.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8-9)

God knows where they are. His real question is, “Why have you separated from me?” For that is the essence of sin – a separation between us and God, a breakdown in every relationship. Their decision, to go my way instead of God’s way, to rebel against God’s will, has been played out in every age, every day, in every person. And a broken relationship with God always leads to broken relationships between people. When confronted, brave Adam blames his wife and Eve passes the buck to the serpent. No fig leaf will cover sin. No hiding will make it go away. The history of humanity is littered with broken relationships, war, crime, abuse and destruction. It is a tale of one conflict upon another. This is the second Big Bang in the Bible.

If you think God is cruel for sending them from garden you need to look again. The curses he describes – toil in working the soil, pain in childbirth – are the consequences when we tell God we don’t want to live under His protection, we want to do things our way. God could not let them stay and eat from the tree of life because then they would live forever in the chaos of sin. Instead, even here, in the third chapter of the Story, God hints at how He will solve this conflict. God loves you and me so much that He will do anything to get us back. He gives the serpent Satan fair warning.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

One day, a Child of Eve will take on the devil. The old serpent will sink his fangs into that Son. But in that great battle, the Son will crush the serpent and set us free. In the next episode the Story, God will begin His plan to save the world. Stay tuned.