

Who is God? “In the beginning God ...” (Gen 1:1) Stephen Semple

Focus

All of the Bible is important, but if you were to choose which book of the Bible is the foundational book out of all of them – which would you choose? I would choose the book of Genesis. No other book is quoted as often in other books of the Bible as Genesis. Genesis means – “beginnings”. The book of Genesis is important because it outlines the beginnings of so many things, all in the first 11 chapters.

EG: The beginning of – the universe, order, earth, sun, solar system, atmosphere, plant and animal life, humanity, marriage, worship, work, evil, conflicts, sin, language, governments, and even the gospel.

The book of Genesis is the foundational book of the Bible. The first 11 chapters are the foundational chapters, and beyond that the first chapter is the foundational chapter of those. Finally Genesis 1:1 is the foundational verse of this foundational chapter. It is probably the most quoted and read verse in the entire Bible, and the key verse. Henry Morris calls Genesis 1:1 – the “*most important verse in the Bible*” in fact. (The Genesis Record – 37)

I think most of you here could quote Genesis 1:1. Try it with me – “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

This morning I want to focus on the first few words only of Genesis 1:1 – “*In the beginning God*”. Even more – I want to focus on one word this morning. This word is key to the entire Bible and key to our lives and key to our faith. That word is the word – “God” or Elohim” in the Hebrew.

WHAT DOES GENESIS 1:1 TELL US ABOUT GOD?

Genesis 1:1 states very simply and yet with great authority – “In the beginning God ...” The Bible begins with God because the Bible is a book all about God. So what does Genesis 1:1 tell us about God? There are a number of things:

1/ God is self-existent.

The Bible nowhere tries to prove God. It assumes His existence. The reader right at the beginning is brought face to face with the fact of God. “*In the beginning God*”.

Genesis 1:1 takes God’s existence from eternity past for granted. It makes no attempt to prove or disprove the existence of God. There is no speculation. Only affirmation. It simply states, “*In the beginning God*”, as though it should be obvious to all that He exists.

Theologians speak of the aseity of God. Meaning a being who exists in and of itself and from itself. One who needs nothing else to have being. God exists from Himself and for Himself. And He is the only being in the entire universe who is self-existent. God is the ultimate cause and He Himself is uncaused.

You and I are not self-existent. Our existence as people is derived. It is derived from other beings and ultimately God Himself. God on the other hand derives His being from nothing outside Himself. And exists for no one outside of Himself. As much as you might like to think – God does not exist for you or me or anyone else. He does not need us for anything. Its not all about us – its all about God.

When God introduced Himself to Moses in Exodus 3 He used the verb “to be” to describe Himself. He said – call me – *“I Be” or “I AM WHO I AM” or “I exist”*.

An atheist and a Christian were engaged in an intense public debate. On the blackboard behind the podium the atheist printed in large capital letters, “GOD IS NO WHERE”. When the Christian rose to offer his rebuttal, the first thing he did was go to the blackboard and erased the W at the beginning of WHERE and added it instead to the end of the word NO. The statement now read – “GOD IS NOW HERE.”

This is the affirmation made in Genesis 1:1. God is here. God is, God was, and God will always be.

Ancient theologian Thomas Aquinas spoke of God as a *“necessary being”*. That is – one who cannot possibly not be. In the beginning God. Genesis 1:1 brings us face to face with a God who exists and whose existence relies on no one or no thing.

Doesn't that blow your mind? Doesn't that make you want to cry out, like the Psalmist did – *“O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth”*. ?

2/ God is self-sufficient.

That is – He has no needs whatsoever. He depends on no one or no thing. He does not need you or me. He is sufficient in and of Himself. He has nothing to learn. He is not evolving or changing in any way. He is perfect being.

When the apostle Paul was on Mars Hill or the Areopagus he declared to the Athenians in Acts 17: *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, **as if he needed anything**.”*

Theologians use the term – immutable. That is – unchanging over time or even unable to change. A. W. Tozer put it this way:

“He is immutable, which means that He has never changed and can never change in any smallest measure. To change he would need to go from better to worse or from worse to better. He cannot do either, for being perfect He cannot become more perfect, and if He were to become less perfect, He would be less than God.”

You and I change every day – generally from better to worse. As we age things don't work like they used to. The things we possess also change. I got bad news for you - that new big screen TV you got for Christmas is gradually wearing out. Everything is in a state of flux – except for God. He is unchanging and unable to change.

The psalmist declares in Psalm 102:25-27:

*In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
and they will be discarded.
But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.*

James asserts in 1:7 – *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*

And in Hebrews 13:8 – Speaking of the Son of God says – He *“is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.”*

The Westminster catechism captures the majesty of God with these incredible words – *“God is ... unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”*

3/ God is self-revealed.

We don't know God by reflecting on the nature of things or postulating Him or philosophizing about Him. We know God because He made Himself known. He never proves Himself or asks us to prove Him. He reveals Himself.

And what does He reveal about Himself in Genesis 1?

a. He is Infinite and Eternal

When we speak of God as infinite we mean He has absolutely no limits in time, space, knowledge, presence or power. Theologians use the “omni” words for this – omnipresent, omnipotent omniscient. And let's make up another one – He is omnixistent – He is eternal – He has no beginning and no end Before we were, He was. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)

Psalms 90:2 declares –

*“Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”*

Isaiah 40:28 - *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God”.*

Other Biblical writers picked up the same theme and we find it repeated throughout the pages of Scripture. Isaiah called God – *“the high and exalted One who lives forever.”* (Isa 57:15). Paul referred to Him as *“the King eternal.”* (1 Tim 1:17).

A story is told of 2 boys 8 and 10 years old. They were always getting into trouble. The parents were certain that whenever mischief occurred in their community that their 2 young sons were probably involved. They were at a loss as to what to do. Then the mother heard about a pastor who had been successful in disciplining children. She brought them to him. He asked to see the boys individually. He sat the younger one down first and asked him – “Where is God?” The boy made no attempt to answer. The question was repeated in a sterner tone. Still no answer. The pastor asked one more time. At that the boy ran from the room. His older brother followed him and asked him what happened. The younger brother replied – “We're in big trouble this time. God is missing, and they think we did it!”

Well God is far from missing. Genesis 1:1 makes it very clear that God has always been. *“In the beginning God”.*

The apostle Paul acclaims - *“Now to the eternal king, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever! Amen”* (1 Timothy 1:17)

b. He is One and More than One

You don't have to go to the New Testament to find the doctrine of the Trinity. The first hint that God is one and more than one is found right here in Genesis 1:1.

The Hebrew name for God used is – Elohim. The word – Elohim – is plural. Instead of using the singular word for god – El – the author chose to use the plural form. So why don't we translate it as "gods"? Because the noun has to match the verb in the Hebrew language and here it doesn't.. The writer used the singular form of the verb "create". The author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was pointing right here in Genesis to one God who is in some way plural.

It is interesting to note that each usage of the word – Elohim - throughout the Bible is grammatically incorrect. It is a plural noun used with singular verbs. According to Genesis 1:1, the Creator of the Universe, Elohim, exists as a plural being.

Some say it is just a plural of majesty – like the royal "we" of how the Queen may refer to herself. But as we read on in Genesis we see other plural pronouns associated with the one God.

In 1:26 we read: "And then God said, "Let us (plural) make mankind in our (plural) image." In 11:7 in the story of Babel - God also says – "Let us (plural) go down and confuse their language."

And then also note 1:2 – we read of the "Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters". Elohim and the Spirit of God were both involved in creation.

When we do flip over to the New Testament we read that it was in also God the Son – Jesus – who was involved in creation.

John 1:1-3 asserts:

*In the beginning the Word (Jesus) already existed.
The Word was with God, and the Word was God.
² He existed in the beginning with God.
³ God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.*

Someone would have to be crazy to come up with the doctrine of the Trinity – that there is one God who is self-existent in 3. It makes no sense and we can't really even understand it. But no one made it up. God revealed Himself as plural right from the beginning in Genesis 1:1 and affirmed it over and over again throughout the whole of the Old and New Testaments.

c. He is Sovereign and All-Powerful

We are introduced in Genesis 1:1 to the God of everything, who can and will do what He desires. First creating the universe out of absolutely nothing and creating the world for His own purposes.

The name for God in Genesis 1:1 - Elohim – means - Almighty God, the God of all might and strength. It means the Strong, Omnipotent, the one with Supreme power and intelligence, the one to be revered and feared.

In Genesis 1 the word Elohim occurs 31 times in 31 verses.

- 4 times it is stated that God/Elohim created
- 10 times "God said"
- 7 times "God saw"
- 3 times "God called" & 3 times "God made"
- 2 times "God divided" & 2 times "God blessed"
- 1 time "God set" & 1 time "God moved"

The God revealed to us in Genesis 1:1 and following is the Sovereign, All-Powerful, Almighty God. In the first book of the Bible He is presented as the Almighty God. In the last book of the Bible He is also affirmed and worshipped as the "Almighty God"

I didn't use those big theological words earlier by the way, just to impress you. It's because theologians have been racking their brains and pulling their hair out for centuries trying to describe God. And they found some pretty good words that say a lot about how impressive God is – but still not enough. Because he is indescribable, incredible, inexpressible, incomparable, indefinable, incalculable, inexhaustible, independent, infinite, invisible, immeasurable, immense, impressive, immortal, immutable!

C.H. Spurgeon put it this way - *“The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature the person the work, the doings and the existence of the great God who he calls his Father.”*

A.W. Tozer said - *“Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God.”*

So – if this is who God is – what should our response be?

APPLICATION

So - What do we need to do in response to such a God? 2 things:

1/ I need to believe in Him!

The Bible unequivocally declares in Genesis 1:1 – *“In the beginning God ...”* God does exist and we can know about Him and even know Him.

If you have never come to a place of faith in a personal God you need to do that today. There is no other God. There is no other philosophy that has what the one true God has to offer. He created us to be in fellowship with Him and He opens up the way for that relationship through faith in Jesus Christ.

Gen 1:1 really doesn't present us with any other option than to put our faith in Him. We come face to face with the God of the universe with no explanation – because he doesn't need one and even if we tried we could never really come up with one. No – just believe – because in the beginning God. Gen 1:1 blows away any notion of atheism or agnosticism or skepticism.

An atheist once said to a Quaker, *“Have you ever seen God? Have you ever felt God? Have you ever smelled God? And you say there is a God!”*

After a long pause, the Quaker replied, *“Have you ever seen your brain? Have you ever felt your brains? Have you ever smelled your brains? And you say you have a brain!”*

The Bible declares in Psalm 14:1 – *“only the fool could say there is no God.”*

Isaiah the prophet entreats us in 45:22

*“Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.*

2/ I need to bow to Him!

The apostle Paul again on the Areopagus proclaimed to the Athenians – *“For in him we live and move and have our being.”* And by implication – apart from him we don't live, or move, or have being. We owe Him everything. We owe him our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Because God is God – self-existent, self-sufficient and revealed as the infinite, eternal, sovereign and all powerful triune God we need to bow down to Him in acknowledgment, acceptance, assent, awe, and adoration.

Pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards preached these words on July 8, 1731:

“God is the inheritance of the saints; he is the portion of their souls. God is their wealth and treasure, their food, their life, their dwelling-place, their ornament and diadem, and their everlasting honour and glory. ... The glorious excellencies and beauty of God will be what will forever entertain the minds of the saints, and the love of God will be their everlasting feast.”

Think back to that video we began the message with. Didn't that just blow your mind to think about the statistics on that? We don't get to see a lot of stars here in Brampton – but do you ever get the chance to go up north or to a cottage or somewhere where it gets dark and just look up into the night sky in wonder and amazement at the billions of stars and galaxies that make up our universe. It's amazing to think about how big and wonderful the universe is.

Nasa launched the Voyager 1 in 1977. Thirteen years later in 1990 it was 3.7 billion years away and it hadn't even left our solar system yet. It would not be till 2012 that the Voyager leaves our solar system – 35 years after the launch. The next encounter flyby with a star will take another 40,000 years. Even just to travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) across our galaxy – the milky way – would take 100,000 years. And this is just a fraction of our universe. There are over 100 billion galaxies out there.

As impressive and incredible and indescribable as our universe is – God is even more. God is even bigger. He is majestic, magnificent, mighty, marvellous, momentous, monumental, and totally mind-boggling.

Isaiah 40:12 asks the question – (NLT)

*“Who else has held the oceans in his hand?
Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers?”*

When the psalmist David began to contemplate the greatness of God who created all things around him, he mentally falls down on his face before Almighty God and cries out in amazement with words that should echo today in our mouths and hearts:

*LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory in the heavens. ...
When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*