

The Book of Beginnings

Genesis 1:1

Introduction

Today we were going to begin a study that will take us through the Bible, book by book. I can almost hear a sigh of, “Uh oh. Boy, this sounds kind of long.”

I will warn you, I do not know how long this will take. However, I did read that a pastor I admire, who has been preaching for twenty-five years, did the same thing and took seventeen years. Now I hear a real sigh!

We will not spend seventeen years in the same book, if it does take that long. I imagine this is a commitment that may take from five to seven years. It is something that I have personally struggled with and believe God wants me to do.

Why should we attempt to study the entire Bible?

This morning we are going to begin by laying a foundation as to the reason we are about to embark on this kind of journey. Let me give a couple of reasons why we are going to study the Bible in this way.

The Bible is entirely true

1. The first reason that we are going to study the entire Bible is because the Bible is entirely true.

There is no doubt that in our American society in the last ten to twenty years, there has been a battle raging as to whether or not the Bible is entirely true. If you have assumed that I believe the Bible is entirely true, you have assumed correctly. And because we do believe that all of the Bible is the word of God; all of it is true; all of it is without error, we will begin a study of its entirety.

Reasons the Bible is entirely true

Now, there are several reasons why I believe that the Bible is entirely true. Let me give them to you.

Fulfilled prophecy

- The first one is fulfilled prophecy.

What does the Bible say about itself? If I were asked today, the primary reason I consider the Bible to be true, I would suggest immediately – the fulfilled prophecies of scripture.

We already know from previous studies that there are at least three hundred prophecies alone that prophesy the coming of Jesus Christ – His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. Three hundred prophecies have already come true. They were written, of course, before the time of the events, so we consider them prophetic. More than one quarter of the Bible, when it was written, was prophetic.

Now, we all pick on weathermen. Sometimes they predict that it is going to rain and instead, it is sunny. We are happy then. Sometimes they say it will be sunny and instead, it rains. We are not happy then.

The Old Testament criteria for a prophet, however, was that he had to always be correct – one hundred percent of the time. In fact, the Old Testament records in the book of Deuteronomy that if a prophet was ever wrong, he was assumed to be a false prophet and was taken out of the city and stoned. Now I am not suggesting we do that to the local weatherman, but you need to understand that the people would not place any credibility upon the prophet unless he was always correct.

There was also a certain thing that the prophets had to do. If they declared themselves to be a prophet of God, they first had to prophesy something that was to happen in the near future in their city and among their people. If that prophecy came true, then the people would trust them for a prophetic event to take place in the years to come.

For instance, Micaiah, a prophet we are told of in I Kings, chapter 22, told King Ahab that if he went to battle as he planned, he would not only lose the battle, but he would lose his life. Ahab’s false prophets told him another story – that if he went to battle, he would win. And of course, Ahab being the humble man that he was, decided to believe the false prophets. He had Micaiah thrown in jail, telling the guardians to give him only bread and water until he returned from battle

safely and victoriously. Micaiah's words, in verse 28, were,

. . . If you indeed return safely the Lord has not spoken by me. . . .

We know from the Old Testament recordings, that Ahab indeed lost the battle. The scripture says not only did he lose the battle, but as the battle was nearing an end, an enemy soldier took an arrow from his quiver and shot it at random into the air. It had Ahab's name on it. So, as the battle was coming to a close, this soldier at random; that is, "I have one arrow left, so why not?" just plunged that arrow into his bow and shot it. It finds Ahab and kills him.

We know then that the prophet Micaiah was a prophet of God.

Today, there is the question, and in fact, I have been asked this more than any other, "Are there prophets living today? Are there people receiving revelation today?"

Turn in your Bible for a brief answer to this question, before going on to another passage. Look at Hebrews, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. It is as clear as on the nose on your face that there is no such thing as a prophet living today and receiving revelations from God, whether it is one who claims to know Christ or one from another religious belief system, because Hebrews writes,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days . . .

(Did you notice the phrase, "in these last days"? The prophets are past tense, but the "in these last days" is in the present tense. So, how has He spoken to us?),

. . . has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

So, if someone suggests that there are prophets today, they are in opposition to the clear writing of scripture – that the prophets are past tense and that in the present tense, we have the living word and the written word of Jesus Christ. That is the revelation from God to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I suggest to you that if God would break the sound barrier and speak today, He would repeat something that He has already said. One of the reasons I think the Bible is entirely true is because of fulfilled prophecies.

Its Preservation

- Secondly, I think the Bible is entirely true because of its preservation.

This is an objective proof, but it is marvelous. Jeremiah tells us of one occasion when the king was handed a copy of the Old Testament writings and he took a knife, cut it into pieces, and threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36). That attitude has come down through the centuries and even today, men outlaw Bibles from our schools, they attack and would outlaw the Bible from our courts, they attack and would outlaw the name of God from every institution in our land. They are still attacking this Book and yet, God miraculously continues to preserve His word.

I have in my library, a copy of two ancient manuscripts that go back to the time of John the apostle. There is no one who would question the writings of Homer and yet, you have to go more than a thousand years past the time of Homer before you find a manuscript of his writings. God's word goes all the way back to the time of the apostles. And from that time to this, God has miraculously preserved it. Although men have burned thousands of copies; although men have outlawed it; although men have tried to stamp it out, God has preserved His word.

Before we leave this point, may I suggest to you that Satan has another strategy for America. It is not stamping it out, it is flooding the market with something that is legal. In that way, you and I will take it for granted and read it as little as someone who does not own a copy. However, the word of God has been preserved.

I love the story of Voltaire, who was an atheist. He once bragged, "You have seen what a little fellow by the name of Paul has done for Christianity, now I will show you what a Frenchmen will do to destroy Christianity." Yet, to this very day, the Geneva Bible Printing Society has as its headquarters, Voltaire's own home! They print Bibles in his former living room. God preserves His word.

Transformed lives

- The third thing that proves to me that the Bible is entirely true is the evidence of transformed lives. The Bible is the only book that can turn a sinner into a saint.

This past week, someone brought a book into the office of stories about men and poems they had written. I began paging through the book and found a story I remembered reading before. It was a story about John Newton.

John Newton was born in London in 1725. His father was a sea captain and his mother was a devout believer. His mother had an illness that she knew would take her life soon, so she invested every spare moment teaching her young son John God's word. When John was seven, she in fact, died, and he became a cabin boy aboard a sailing vessel.

John Newton began a life of terrible sin that would one day see him captain of a slave ship. He was a drunken sinner, and in fact, his crew considered him nothing more than an animal. That was exemplify on one occasion when John Newton fell overboard. His crew did not even let down a boat to rescue him, but instead, took a whaling harpoon and threw it at him. It caught him in the hip and they pulled him back on board as they would a large fish.

John Newton limped the rest of the days of his life, but the grace of God gripped his heart. He one day, came to Christ, remembering the words of his mother from Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8a,

For by grace you have been saved through faith . . .

As an act of appreciation and gratitude to his Lord, he would write the words that we sing so often,

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me;

I once was lost, but now I'm found,

Was blind, but now I see.

One verse is no longer in our hymn books, but was in the original poem written by John Newton. I like it because it has a direct relation to the transforming power of God's word. It says,

The Lord has promised good to me,

His word my hope secures;

He willed my shield and portion be,

As long as life endures.

The Bible can turn a sinner into a saint. The greatest illustration of that is not John Newton, but you. Is God's word part of your life?

Archeological proof

- Let me suggest a fourth and final proof that the Bible is in fact, entirely true. One of the most beautiful proofs is archeology.

Now, this is not a proof to a nonbeliever, but it is an assurance to those who already believe. The reason for that is because there is only one way that you will ever come to the point where you believe that the Bible is God's book, and that is by faith. But once you have that faith, then logic can impose and you can see all the reasons that men without faith are blind to.

I could preach on this archeological proof for a long time, but I will give just a couple of illustrations.

The first illustration is the city of Pithom that was recently uncovered. It was built by Rameses II, or actually by the Hebrew slaves during the reign of Rameses II. This was a period in their captivity known as hard labor. When this city was uncovered, it was discovered that the homes were made of sun baked bricks – some of which had straw in them, while some did not. In other words, this find displayed exactly what we find described in the book of Exodus, chapter 5, when the Hebrew slaves were commanded to make bricks without straw.

The Old Testament scriptures also speak of another city that we call Petra. This city was one that many liberals and infidels had longed mocked. The critics scoffed and asked, "Where is your city Petra that the Bible mentions?" Then one day, archeologists discovered a city built into a mountain of stone, and it was as if gigantic mountains watched over it, as stone guards. It was a city built into solid rock, just as the Bible declared. When it was finally discovered, the archeologists found within that stone tomb, a city with homes, theaters, temples, places of business, and a main street six miles long.

There is no need to be afraid of the archaeologist's spade. They have done nothing but substantiate the words of scripture and declared that the Bible is entirely true.

The Bible is entirely profitable

2. Let me give a second reason that we study God's word in its entirety – not only because it is entirely true, but because it is entirely profitable.

The Bible is the primary source for equipping the believer

Turn to II Timothy, chapter 3. Let us look at several passages that declare this to every believer. In verses 14 through 17, we will notice four things that the word does that make it profitable to the believer.

Look at verses 14 and 15. Paul writes to Timothy, his son in the faith,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Then, Paul declares to him a truth about the word, in verse 16a.

All scripture is inspired by God . . .

The word “inspiration” means, “the breath of God”. So this literally means that God breathed through the author or the human instrument. It was the wind or breath of God. In fact, we find this same original word used in the book of Acts, when it talks about the wind blowing into the sails of a vessel. It is that same thought of the wind or the breath of God blowing through the author; the human instrument. It is God directing him to write exactly what we find here. All scripture then, is breathed by God.

Four things scripture is profitable for

Continue to verse 16b,

. . . and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

All scripture is also profitable for four things. Let us briefly look at them.

Teaching or doctrine

- First it is profitable for teaching or doctrine, as your translation may read.

Doctrine is what you believe. Doctrine tells you how to think.

I have frequently heard, and believed until recent years, that we know enough about the Bible, we just do not apply enough of the Bible. I now reject that statement because I believe there is a famine in the land as to what the Bible teaches. We do not know enough about the Bible. And the Bible is profitable for doctrinal function; for truth.

Reproof or rebuke

- Secondly, the Bible is not only profitable for teaching or doctrine, but also for reproof or rebuke.

This tells you where you are wrong. Doctrine tells you what to think or how to believe; reproof tells you where you are wrong.

Correction

- Thirdly, Paul goes on to tell us that the Bible is also profitable for correction.

This tells you what is right.

Training in righteousness

- Finally, the Bible is profitable for training and righteousness.

This tells you how to do what is right.

Continue to verse 17.

so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I think the main part of this scripture is that the Bible is the primary source for equipping the believer. Without it you stand naked against the attack of the evil one in the world. It is this Bible that will equip you. It is profitable.

The Bible is the primary assurance for a credible testimony

Now turn to II Timothy, chapter 2. This gives us another thought about the profitability of the word of God. Let us read verse 15.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [or rightly dividing] the word of truth.

I heard one man say that this verse is the “bottom line” of Christianity. The bottom line is found in two questions, which are:

- Am I pleasing to Jesus Christ? We are to be a workman who is pleasing to God.
- Is my life measuring up to the standard of scripture? We are to be studying God’s word in such a way that we are not ashamed. In fact, the literal translation of verse 15 could

be, “a workman whose work is never a disgrace”. That is the idea.

I think the main idea in this passage is that with the word as the primary assurance, there will be a creditability in your testimony. Without the study of scripture, your walk will never match up, as they say, to your talk.

I read a poem that says the gospel is written a chapter a day by the deeds that you do and the words that you say. Men read what you say whether faithless or true. What is the gospel according to you?

The only way the gospel will have creditability is if we are studying this book, the Bible.

The Bible is the primary guarantee for spiritual maturity

Turn to Hebrews, chapter 5. Here we are told that the Bible is the primary guarantee to spiritual maturity.

Look at verse 11.

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

There was a problem with this church – a hearing problem. It was a spiritual hearing problem. They had to have things repeated over and over again. And as a result, he compares them to a child.

Continue to verses 12 and 13.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, . . .

(Who are the mature?),

. . . who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

This is saying that spiritual maturity is not simply learning about this book, but it is practicing this book. The spiritually mature individual is one who begins to live what he has learned. I think the only way we can have the guarantee that we will in fact, live what is learned, which is spiritual maturity, comes from this book, the Bible.

The Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth

Let me add one other passage that continues this same thought and gives the main idea that the Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth. Turn to I Peter, chapter 2.

Look at verses 1 and 2.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

Why does God want you and I to study the Bible? For us to become smarter? Absolutely not. He wants us to study the Bible so that we can become transformed; so that we may grow up.

The implication in these verses is that it is possible to grow old in the Lord, without growing up in the Lord. I fear that there are many believers who are five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years old in the Lord, but are still in the nursery.

My friends, without this book, we stay in the crib; without understanding the words of scripture, we become or remain an infant. Someone always has to come along and burp us or change our diapers. Why? Because we have long refused to allow this book to be part of our lives and to transform and renew our minds.

So, the Bible is the primary method for spiritual growth.

I would suggest to you not to pray anymore that God will help you grow, but to pray that God will give you diligence to study the word. When you do, you will grow.

Why do we study the Bible? Because the Bible is entirely true and because the Bible is entirely profitable. That gives us the foundation for the reason that I think we should begin at the beginning.

Exposition

Turn to Genesis, chapter 1. Today, we are going to take a few moments to introduce the first verse and then, in our next discussion, we will take a more detailed survey of the six days of creation.

Verse 1 of Genesis 1 stands by itself. It should – it is a foundational verse. Look at that verse.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Let us dissect these words for the sake of study. We will look at the words individually and then, put them together into one unit.

In the beginning

- The first words are, “In the beginning . . .”. This could be translated literally as, “In the beginning of things”. In other words, before there was anything other than God – this is when He began.

Now I have got to admit to you, ladies and gentlemen, in my study, I so often scratch my head. It would have seemed so much better if God had written one hundred words instead of the ten that we have in our English translation. There are seven words in the original Hebrew language. We might think, “Lord, it would have been so much easier if You had just written a book on verse 1 and told us all of the details.” But He did not do that. Perhaps that is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said in chapter 11, verse 3a,

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God . . .

Whether there are ten words or a thousand, believing it is still a matter of faith. Questions will never be completely answered and understood until we get to heaven and then, it will take all of eternity before we truly comprehend.

God

- The next word is, “In the beginning God . . .”. The original Hebrew word is the word “Elohim,” which is a beautiful, powerful name of God.

The word “Elohim” means, “God of Power”. This name will appear many times in the Old Testament. It is rightly used in this verse because this act of miraculously creating the worlds is an act of great power. So, when the writer seeks to express who this individual is; when God would express Himself through the writer, He chooses the name “Elohim,” or “the God of Power”. This name always pulls a response from us of trust and awe.

As I read, “In the beginning God . . .”, and read it and read it, it became clear to me again that things are left out. There is no proof for the existence of God in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. There is no argument,

and in fact, the Bible is silent when it comes to arguing the proof of existence.

Why? I think we are given a clue as to why in the only verse that even remotely mentions this. Look at Psalm, chapter 14, verse 1,

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”

In other words, it is not going to be discussed because it is the fool who does not believe that there is a God.

In Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, it is a simple statement, not a deduction; it is a declaration, not an explanation; it is revelation. He is simply saying, “In the beginning God . . .”. We can take it or leave it; believe it or not believe it. This is a fundamental statement that needs no proof.

When we study the book of Romans, we will discover in chapter 1 that every man and every woman that has ever lived is without an excuse. Why? Because written on the heart of every human being is the fact that there is a God. In fact, if you go to some remote part of Africa and find some tribe in a jungle that has never before been discovered, guess what you would find them doing? Worshiping something. A missionary does not go to the field to tell people there is a God, he goes to the field to tell them how to get to the true God.

So, He merely states, “In the beginning God . . .”.

Created

- Notice the next word, “In the beginning God created . . .”. The word in Hebrew is “bara,” which means, “created out of nothing”.

This is not a Hebrew word that means to form or to fashion, but one that means, “to create out of nothing”. God did not form something that already existed; He did not pattern after something already in existence, God created out of nothing, planet earth and the heavens.

The heavens and the earth

- The verse then says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” “The heavens” could be translated as “space,” and “the earth” as a little reference to “this planet” or to “matter”.

So, in the first verse of Genesis, chapter 1, we find that God created space, matter, and time. “In the beginning” – time; “God created the heavens” – space; “and the earth” – matter.

No scientist could ever improve on Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. If they by faith believe it, then they have the logical answer of the creation of everything that ever has been.

Oh, I know that scientists scrap for theories, and that even today, there is the theory of evolution. In fact, I read of one scientist who said that in the space of twenty or thirty years, that particular theory will be replaced by another.

Theories have always existed. The theory of evolution just happens to be one for our generation; one for our time. Theories of the origins of the earth and of space have changed through time because after thorough investigation, they have been shown to be untrue.

An unbeliever might suggest that this view of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, is narrow and there is no room for anything other than that God created the heavens and earth. I would say, “Yes, it is narrow. All truth is narrow. What would you think of a mathematician who said, ‘I am no good at mathematics for I am liberal and open minded and $2 + 2$ could equal 3.999.’?”

You would think they were foolish, for $2 + 2$ will always equal 4. Never did a math teacher, including mine, give any credit for any answer that was only close to the correct one. It had to be dead on.

The truth of the scripture is very narrow, my friends. In the days of Noah, there was salvation and there was only one way. You were either in the ark or you were out of the ark. In the days of Moses, deliverance came only one way. You either had the blood on the door post or you did not have the blood on the door post. Today, the scripture tells us that if you believe in the Son of God, you will have eternal life; if you do not, you will have the wrath of God upon you. It is that narrow; it is that simple; it is that plain.

May I suggest to you that this verse, Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, provides a foundation upon which every other verse in the Bible rests. If you can believe, ladies and gentlemen, the first ten words of scripture,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

. . . then you will have no problem believing eleven other words in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17a,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature . . .

If you can believe,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

. . . then you can believe John, chapter 3, verse 16, that,

. . . God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

If you by faith can believe these first ten words, then you can believe all of scripture.

Application

Let me apply this foundation of study in three ways.

Preaching/teaching the Bible is not voluntary, it is imperative

1. First, I think and I hope it is obvious that preaching or teaching the Bible is not voluntary, it is imperative.

Let me suggest to you, ladies and gentlemen, that we are not to preach *about* the Bible. We live in a generation that has literally sapped the vitality out of the Christian world because pulpits are filled with men who preach about the Bible.

One of the things that I fear, is preaching something other than the very words of scripture. I had a professor in college who told us on one occasion, that his greatest fear was preaching error.

One of the questions I believe you should ask yourself as a Sunday school teacher, or as a preacher, or as a teacher is, “Did I preach/teach the word?”

Paul told Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, to preach the word – and there is an exclamation point after that in the original. It is imperative.

Studying the Bible is not optional, it is essential

2. Secondly, studying the Bible is not optional, it is essential.

If it is the only method for spiritual growth, it is the only guarantee for spiritual credibility. If it is the only promise or hope of spiritual maturity, this is all we have. The question is not “Should I study it?” but “How can I afford not to?”

Obeying the Bible is not suggested, it is demanded

3. Obeying the Bible is not suggested, it is demanded.

A recent archeological find in the biblical city of Heshbon (Joshua 21:39), presents an ironic twist – sixty-two pounds of cut up silver jewelry was discovered stored in five earthen jars. Even more significant is that this discovery was not found in some mount in the middle of nowhere, but eighteen inches under the earthen floor of a home that had been lived in by individuals over the past three centuries. There were people who had these valuable things within their grasp. You can almost imagine the reaction of someone who discovered that after they had moved out. They would probably say something like, “Oh, if I had only known! I would have dug down and gotten it for myself.”

My friends, I submit to you that we have in front of us, a treasure house filled with precious gems. I would encourage you to bring your Bible with you when you come to church on Sunday. And I would suggest that we are far more willing to do that than we are to walk across the living room floor and pick it up during the week. My friend did you dust your Bible off when you came to church this morning? Is the word at work in your life? Is this Book having a transforming power and a part in your daily existence?

The challenging thing is that when I get out of sorts; when my life gets out of balance, it is directly traceable to the fact that I either do not know what the word says, or I am not obeying what I know what the word says.

So, we begin a journey. I would suggest that you bring your Bible every Sunday as we begin studies of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. What a joy it will be to study the words of God.