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# SERMON NOTES

## The Book of Genesis: Introduction and 1:1

On the one hand, every book of the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, certain Biblical books take on more significance for us because of what they say, or because of how they say it. Genesis is one of those books that seems to be very significant to our understanding of life and the world as it is today. Not only does it provide us with insight into the origin of the universe and early human history, it also gives us a record of how God began to work in the lives of ordinary people.

Most of the book of Genesis was probably oral history to begin with. This is not necessarily a reason to doubt the truth of what it records. Within many primitive cultures, oral history was treated very seriously and “professional historians” were appointed to make sure it was remembered and passed on exactly as it was received. Stories were keyed with mnemonic devices (that is, cues to assist in memorization). In fact, we can see one of these aids to memory right away in Genesis chapter one. In verse 5, it says “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” This is repeated, in verses: 8, 13, 19, 23 and 31 (of course each time, the number of day is different – other than that, the phrase is exactly the same). This phrase helped the first oral historians to memorize the story in short blocks.

Probably in the time of Moses, the people of Israel actually wrote down the oral history contained in the book of Genesis. Since that time the evidence that nothing has been changed in the written text is very good. Another clue suggests that even the very early parts of Genesis were accurately remembered. If Genesis records actual events, you might expect that when it comes to the parts that deal with all humankind, other cultures have also preserved the same information. In fact, that is exactly what we find. Ancient Sumerian cuneiforms record a story that is very similar to the *Garden of Eden* account in Genesis 2 and 3. Virtually all world cultures with strong oral traditions have some sort of *flood story* like in Genesis 6-9. In fact, stories of a flood that wiped out all human civilization except one family abound: from Ethiopia to India; to Indonesia and even South America. Some Christian scholars believe, based on a fair amount of research, that almost every world culture has preserved some piece, however distorted, of the promise of the messiah in Genesis chapter 3.<sup>1</sup>

But wait, there's more! If the early chapters of Genesis are true, then the human race originated somewhere in the area encompassed by the Middle East and Eastern Africa. For years – in fact, well into the twentieth century – scientists and scholars used that as a “proof” that the book of Genesis could not be true, because they (the scientists) believed that human beings had evolved in several places at once. During the last thirty years, however, scientific consensus has changed, and most responsible anthropologists, archaeologists, and geneticists believe that the human race originated from one point, probably somewhere in East Africa or the Middle East.

But wait – there's *even more!* Another thing that scientists used to scoff at (and in fact, still do) is the idea that that entire human race originated with one couple. However, just 15 years ago, geneticists discovered that every living human male on the planet traces a gene back to just one male ancestor. Likewise, every human female on the planet can trace her genetic heritage to just one woman. An interesting side light to these facts is that the ultimate female ancestor appears to be older than the ultimate male ancestor. Strangely, this turns out once more to affirm that the book of Genesis is accurate. According to Genesis, there were three men on the Ark – Noah, and his three sons. Noah's sons, and their descendants, would each trace their common male gene to Noah himself. Thus the single ultimate male ancestor that scientists have discovered is Noah. But there were three women on the Ark who weren't directly related – Noah's wife, and the wives of her three sons. Their genes would

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete explanation of this theory, read *Eternity in their Hearts* by Don Richardson

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have to be traced all the way back to Eve before they met a match in a single common ancestor. So if both the flood story and the garden of Eden story are true, genetic research should show exactly what it does, in fact, show. The most recent science confirms the truth of the Bible.

Genesis can be divided into two major sections. The first section contains chapters 1-11, and deals with the very early history of the human race. There are many issues of history that are not answered by this section, but even so, it contains some very important information and perspective about the world and about human beings.

Chapters 12-50 are focused on the very early history of the Hebrew/Jewish people. They deal primarily with Abraham and his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren: Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons. These first four generations of the Hebrew people are sometimes called "the Patriarchs." The section on the patriarchs is very significant because it shows us how God dealt with people from the very beginning, and how people of faith lived, struggled, failed and were redeemed.

Let's begin our journey through Genesis. Verse 1 is enough for the rest of our time this week: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

On the face of it, this is a very simple and straightforward statement. But the implications of this statement and the things which logically follow it, are profound and far reaching. To think about what it really means, consider the alternative, which is being taught today as fact in all American public schools: No one made the universe and no one is responsible for it. If that is true – if secular science is correct – then all of us – even you – only exist by some random accident. There is no meaning to your life. **If God did not make the universe, your life does not matter.** There is no significance to your existence, and what you do is meaningless. It doesn't matter if you try to be good and live a moral life – that's all meaningless. It doesn't matter if you live your life to please yourself and get what you want – it's all pointless and random anyway. If God did not make the world, then it doesn't matter if you hurt someone else. It also doesn't matter if someone else hurts you. It doesn't matter even if you kill someone, or kill yourself. Doing drugs doesn't matter. Not doing drugs doesn't matter. If God did not make the world, then there is no such thing as right or wrong – these are just concepts which randomly evolved for no particular reason. If there is no God, there is no real hope and no point to anything. People who claim otherwise are just deceiving themselves.

We teach kids in our schools that God had nothing to do with the existence of our world. And then we act surprised when they do drugs, kill each other, kill themselves or act as if they don't care about their future. We shouldn't be surprised – they are simply smart enough to figure out that life is meaningless if there is no God. They are living with integrity to the belief that there is no God.

But if Genesis 1:1 is true – then *life does matter*. If it's true, then you are not an accident. What we do is important. What we *don't* do is also significant. **There is a pattern and a purpose to our existence.** To put it another way: you were *meant* to be alive right now. If there is a God, there is hope.

If God made the world, there is something else too: it means the world does not really belong to us. Our own lives don't really belong to us. The one who made everything – including us – has a claim on what he has made. We owe him something for our existence. We can be held accountable for how we've used this world, and for how we use our own lives. If that's the case, then the logical thing to do is to find out as much as we can about this God who made the world, and how he may want to relate to us. The book of Genesis is great place to start doing that.