

Genesis 1-1-13

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[0 : 00] The first chapter of Genesis, particularly Genesis 1.1, certainly makes the top ten list for familiar Bible verses.

! My top five, or at least the first five that came to mind, John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

John 14.6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Romans 3.23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Psalms 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And Genesis 1.1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

It's very familiar. It's a very familiar verse. And I think it's passages like these that still have meaning, particularly for Christians, but that they can become overly familiar.

[1 : 13] They can lose their force. They can lose their significance. The kind of original power that they had to capture us and to amaze us about God and his ways in the world.

It's kind of like eating a meal over and over again, right? You were taken out for a birthday meal and it was one of the most wonderful meals you had and then you go back and have it again and again. It's never quite good as the first time. I listen to songs kind of obsessively. I'll find a song or an album I like and listen to it over and over again for weeks on end.

And then some of you might know how that is. And then eventually you do stop and you don't really enjoy the song that much and then you come back to it a few years later and listen to it. But it never has quite the kind of wonder that it first had.

And of course all of us know how this is with either traveling on a commute or being in the same house and walking the same paths day after day, week after week. The same route to school, the same route to work. That sort of thing, right?

[2 : 13] It's wonderful at first and you have these new sights, sounds, people and things you see. And then eventually you just sort of don't notice anything and you just go on your commute.

In some ways Genesis 1 is the same. It's similar to that, right? It begins our creed. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. The creed identifies the Father primarily as a creator.

A powerful, almighty creator. And if I ask you as a Christian, what do you believe about the origin of the universe? You would certainly say, well, God created it, of course.

God created the heavens and the earth. But is this fact enchanting? Is it enchanting? Is it amazing or wonderful in any sort of way?

When Chris read the passage this morning, did it strike us with a kind of amazing wonder that it's supposed to? And that I think it would have for an original group of hearers.

[3 : 19] I think at best we do sometimes find it as a kind of amazing reminder of what God did and how the universe came about. I think at worst we think, well, the Bible has to start somewhere.

Why not there? And we really want to get on the things like the image of God or God's mercy or the problem of human existence and so on, which we get in the following chapters.

But God created the heavens and the earth. Well, that's just my commute to work. This is not just the beginning of our creed.

And it's not an inevitable introductory line to the Bible. Genesis 1 is enchanting. It's amazing.

It's incredible. It's unsettling. It was and it still is revolutionary. Ancient Israel was staking its ground and answering fundamental questions about human life.

[4 : 24] They were saying this is where we stand on these issues. And a lot of people in the ancient world were doing this actually. Okay, the opening phrase, once upon a time, sort of sets you right

about what's to come.

Right? Once upon a time, you know what's coming and some sort of story. The first line of the Bible isn't actually exactly like that. In the beginning. It's not a given in terms of what will follow.

It's dramatic from the beginning. We don't know exactly what to expect. It's distinctive from the start. The story is distinctive and the beginning is distinctive.

So the ancient world did have its own alternatives. I want to spend a little time looking today at those alternatives.

Right? Israel's neighbors were coming up with their own stories of the origin of the universe. Their own stories about creation. About what was there at the beginning or what wasn't there at the beginning. About how humans fit into that.

[5 : 30] About where they came from and where they're going. These big questions about life. And the more I look into this. The more I see where Genesis stood among its neighbors. And among the alternative stories about the world.

The more I'm struck about the majesty of God. I'm struck with the majesty of God. It makes me want to worship him more. And I hope you get a little bit of that this morning.

Now for the people of Israel there were two primary rivals to the story of Genesis. The first was the Egyptian story.

And the second was broadly the Mesopotamian creation stories. Okay? So Egypt of course is in the south. The northeast of Africa. And Mesopotamia was to the northeast of the people of Israel.

They would have written these stories down. They may have put them on a wall. On a special building. On a tomb. Something like that. This is why archaeologists get really excited. They dig these things up. And they realize wow we have this text on the side of this building.

[6 : 34] And that's really meaningful. Or something sort of like that. They would have been written down in some ways. But they were often oral stories. They were often things that were told. From generation to generation.

And passed down. In a way they function as sort of campfire stories. Right? When you're at the fireside. With three generations. Think of grandchildren.

Parents and grandparents. And they're sitting around. Right? And one of the little boys or girls says. Grandpa tell us about how the world was made. The story in Egypt would go something like this. Well granddaughter. There existed the primordial waters. And from those primordial waters. Our supreme God. The all Lord. The sun God.

He created himself. He emerged from the primordial waters. And then he spit out more gods. Two more gods. He spit out from his mouth.

[7 : 36] And then the rest of the nine main gods. That we know were created from them. You know Horus. The god of kings. And the god of the sky. You know Nut.

The goddess of the heavens. You know Geb. The god of earth. You know Tefnut. The goddess of moisture and rain. Just look around.

And behold your gods. God of kings. In Egypt there were many gods. And these gods. Either created themselves. Or they created war gods. And the gods were identified.

With things in the earth. We look out and see the grass. We look and see the sky. And that is really a manifestation. Or an embodiment. Of the divine beings.

Now go up to Mesopotamia. To Babylon. The story would go something like this.

[8 : 34] You see granddaughter. Before anything came to be. Before there were heavens. Before there was earth. Before these things were named. There were two primordial waters.

And these waters mixed together. And they created gods. And those gods created more gods. And then there were two groups of gods.

And they came into a conflict. And one group appointed our great god. You know our great god. Marduk. And he went to challenge the other gods. And he slay.

The primary goddess. He cut her in half. And he created the heavens. So look up. And behold your gods.

In Mesopotamia the story is. In some ways much the same. You have these primordial waters. You have gods being created. And in this case you have a conflict. And humans actually sort of result from this.

[9 : 36] This conflict. Now. Say there was some sort of international. School of the ancient Near East. And there was a. You know a small. Boy from.

From Israel. And he's heard all these stories from his friends. And he comes back and tells his parents. Tommy said the sun created itself. Didn't you know that God came out of the primordial waters. Mom and dad. This is the origin of homeschooling.

Right. It wasn't. It wasn't like that. We didn't have those sorts of. Gatherings I don't think. But. Nevertheless. A Jewish parent. Would sit down.

Their child. And say here's our story. So let's look at the text now. Genesis chapter one. In the beginning.

God created the heavens. And the earth. Do you see an origin story about God? Where did God come from? Who created him?

[10:43] What created him? Nothing. Right. God just is. He didn't emerge out of some water. He wasn't procreated by something else. He didn't create himself.

God just is. He's there. He's eternal. No. This is just the origin of the universe. Of creation. In the beginning God created the heavens.

And the earth. There was nothing there. Until God created. It. Second.

God is majestic. And God said. Let there be light. And there was light. God saw that the light was good. And he separated the light. From the darkness.

He creates by word only. This isn't completely unique. In the ancient world. But it is. To this degree. It certainly is. No other God was creating. By word alone. God speaks.

[11:38] And things come. To be. He's methodical. God said. Let there be light. And there was light. God created the expanse.

And there was the expanse. And so on. This account is relatively terse. It doesn't give all kinds of extra information. It's not really dramatic actually. It's almost straightforward.

It's planned. It's not so much dramatic. As it is stunning. It's stunning. God speaks.

And the sun. Comes to be. I can't even look at the sun. For more than a few seconds. Without damaging my eyes. And God says. Let there be light. And there was light. There's no conflict.

In this story. It just says. God. Here you are. And here you are. Creating things. He doesn't struggle. Against these waters. In verse two. The earth was without form.

[12:36] And void. Darkness was over the face. Of the deep. There's some level. Of kind of chaos. And disorganization. And the spirit of God. Was hovering over the face. Of the waters. He's poised. Over these waters. And then he begins.

God of course. Doesn't procreate. There's only one God. God speaks. He creates by word.

He creates physically. But he isn't procreating. And he's not creating other gods. There's only one God. And furthermore. That one God. Is distinct.

From everything else. This view. That the gods. Would have sort of. Connected. Are manifest. In the things of nature. Isn't happening. At all. In the bible. There's God.

And there's creation. There's the Lord. And everything else. And these two things. Don't mix. There's a really interesting one.

[13:33] In verse 16. Have a look at verse 16. This is when God. Is creating the kind of. Astral bodies. Right. The lights. The sun.

And the stars. And the moon. In verse 16. God made the two. Greater lights. The greater light. To rule the day. And the lesser light. To rule the night. And the stars. This of course.

Is the sun. And the moon. And the author. Has very good words. For those. Right. Sun. Is a very common word. Moon. Less common. But very much. Accessible. So why. Doesn't he choose.

Those words. In verse 16. Well that's because. The sun. And the moon. And these other stories. Were gods. And they were sometimes.

Just called sun. Or moon. And this author is saying. Don't get confused. At all. This sun. And this moon. They're not gods.

[14:26] At all. This is a greater light. And a lesser light. That's all they are. And God has created them. He wants no confusion. At all. There's one God.

And this God. Of course. Doesn't spit out. Other gods either. He is there. God is one. God just is.

Our God is eternal. Our God is in charge. Here Israel. The Lord your God. The Lord is one. God. Or as the psalmist will say.

He who created the universe. By the word of his mouth. Stand in awe of him. Our God is contentious.

Genesis 1 was not a given. It was distinct. And all religions are not the same. I'll give you three texts. In five minutes. And you should read those.

[15:27] And if you still think. The religions are the same. I'm not sure what you're thinking. They are really not the same. There are some commonalities. Sometimes. But. They're very different. Genesis 1.

Was foundational. Genesis 1. Was ground breaking. It was subversive. But there's more application. We can draw on.

There's more than just Genesis 1. There's more than just those campfire stories. And the alternative to them. And when we look at applying texts. From the Bible.

This might seem. Somehow automatic. For a preacher. Or just. It kind of comes naturally. In a Bible study. Or something like that. But it's really not. We've got to be really careful. Applying text.

And it can be very challenging. Sometimes. But one of the things. All of us can do. Is when we come across. A passage in the Bible. We can look at how it's used. Throughout the Bible.

[16:23] And this isn't always the case. Not all. Bible. Ideas or verses. Are used elsewhere. But this one certainly. Is used elsewhere. And this is a really good way.

To get the sense. For. What. What should we make of this passage. What should we do with this passage. And particularly. As Christians. What should we do. As we look from the Old Testament. Into. The New Testament. The rest of the Bible. Puts this story. To very good use. Puts it to very good use. And I think it becomes. Even more significant.

When we look around. At the rest of scripture. And find out. How. God created the heavens. And the earth. How it was used. In other passages. I've.

I've picked just about four. Okay. Four main ones. I'm. I know there are more. But here are a few ways. That the Bible. Says. Look at Genesis. One. So what's the Bible.

[17:19] Say about it. In the first place. The story. Is factual. The story is factual. Hebrews 11. Three. By faith. We understand.

That the universe. Was created. By the word. Of God. So that. What is seen. Was not made. Out of things. That are visible. By faith. We understand.

That the universe. Was created. By the word. Of God. It's factual. It actually. Happened. Okay. And when I talk about story. I don't mean made up. Or I don't mean.

Well this is the kind of best we can do. Around the campfire. No. It really. Happened. Just as by faith. We understand. That there are historical people. Who live. By faith.

We understand. That Christ died. For our sins. And rose again. These are real things. By faith. We understand. That the universe. Was created. By the word. Of God. It's factual. But second.

[18:13] That faith. And that knowledge. Though it leads us to confidence. It also. Ought to humble us. It ought to humble us. Backwards.

Let's go backwards. To the book of Job. Right. Job is a man. Who. Who has. Catastrophic loss. Catastrophic loss. Uh. And his loss.

It. It really does. Push the bounds. Of reality. What we think. Could really happen. But sure enough. Job. Goes through. These disasters. And he.

He is convinced. That. He hasn't done. Anything wrong. To deserve. That disaster. Now. Job doesn't think. He's a perfect person. But he does think.

Well. You can't just say. Put. Put my deeds. On this side. Of the equation. And then say. This is what comes out. On the other side. Of the equation. Right. All the disaster. I'm facing. Isn't just a result. Of the bad things.

[19:10] I've done. And all his friends. Around him. Are saying. Listen Job. You know. According to our theology. You've really got to own up. To what you did wrong. Because all this stuff. Going wrong for you.

We know. That that's because. You must have done something. To deserve it. You must have done something. To deserve it. And Job's saying. No. That's just.

That's just not the case. And it's this. This real. Battle between. Between. His. His group of companions. And Job himself. But Job. Insists upon his innocence. And that's what he's doing. Chapter after chapter. I am innocent. I am innocent. Right. The result of these things. Isn't just about what I. Did. And he wants a hearing. With God. He wants God.

To sort of. Come before him. And come down. And hold a bit of a trial. And say. God. I need you to vindicate me. I want face to face. Time. With God. Because he knows.

[20 : 03] What's true. God appears. At the end of the book. God doesn't appear to him. For some time. And then he does. In chapter 38.

There are 42 chapters in Job. In chapter 38. God appears. And we're told. He speaks. Out of the whirlwind. And this is what he says.

Where were you. When I laid the foundation. Of the earth. Tell me. If you have understanding. Who determined.

Its measurements. Surely you know. Who stretched the line. Upon it. Have you commanded. The morning. Since the days began.

And caused the dawn. To know its place. That it might take hold. Of the skirts. Of the earth. Have you entered. Into the springs. Of the sea. Or walked.

[20 : 58] In the recesses. Of the deep. Have the gates of death. Been revealed to you. Or have. Have you seen. The gates of deep darkness. Have you comprehended.

The expanse. Of the earth. The earth. Declare it to me. If you know all this. Declare it to me. What we don't know.

About creation. Not to humble us. Where were you. When I laid the foundation. Of the earth. Have you seen. The gates of death. Have you been commanding. The sun.

Every morning. Since the days began. Have you comprehended. The expanse. Of the universe. No. No you haven't. Nor have I. I have no. Idea.

What that looked like. I have no idea. About the expanse. Of the earth. Or the universe. Or what the skirts. Of the cosmos.

[22 : 01] Looks like. I have no idea. I have no idea. If you have a moment. This afternoon. You should look up.

Peter Hitchens. Peter Hitchens. Is the brother. Of Christopher Hitchens. He. He has a debate. A few years ago. At the Oxford Union. This is a great. Kind of debating. Event.

In society. And he's. He's talking about. The claim. Does God exist. And he gets up. And the first thing. He says. Is I hate. This argument.

More than any other. Debate. That I take part in. I loathe. This one. Does God exist. He says. I have to stand here. And defend. The religion.

Of love. Of mercy. Of turning the other cheek. Of brotherly love. And affection. Against people. Who don't want it. To be true. And he proceeds.

[22 : 55] By reading this passage. From Job. Where were you. When I laid the foundations. Of the earth. And he says. We have no idea. We can't of course. Prove the existence. Of God. To one another. Or to other people. We can bring very credible.

Evidence to. The fact. But in some sort of. Locked and sealed. Proof. We can't do that. That's why Hebrews says.

By faith. We understand that the universe. Was created by the word. Of God. It's a choice. Of rejection. Or a choice. Of faith. Do we believe.

What we've heard. Or do we reject. What we've heard. Do we believe in. And love. The person that we hear about. Or do we reject him. That's really the question.

And it results in a confession. I believe. I believe. In God. The father almighty. Who created the heavens. And the earth. We should have. Significant confidence.

[23 : 50] In the fact that God did this. That he created. The universe. And we should have. Significant humility. In the fact that we were not there. Significant humility.

In the fact that we. Were not there. The story is factual. The story ought to humble us. And the story is put to good use.

We've heard that here. In the last few weeks. Acts 17. Paul's been spending time there. Weeks on end. And I think that's a really. Really good thing. We're looking at this. In different ways. From different angles.

Sort of over and over. And the apostle Paul. Is speaking. To these folks. And he's really putting. Genesis 1. To good use.

What we would call apologetics. I found an altar. With this inscription. To the unknown God. What you worship is unknown.

[24 : 46] I'm proclaiming to you. Let me tell you basically. What you've been looking for. The God who made the world. And everything in it. That's where he starts. The God who made the world.

And everything in it. Being the Lord of heaven and earth. Does not live in temples made by man. Nor is he served by human hands. As though he needed anything. Since he himself. Gives to all mankind. Life. And breath. And everything. Paul says. Here's what you've been doing. You've been worshipping.

Trying to worship. Filling in the blanks. Covering all your bases. To the unknown God. Right. Here's what I know. There's one God. He created the heavens and the earth. And so what ought you to do?

Here's what you ought to do. And he does spend time. You know. Debating with him. Arguing. He comes back. He presents. Logical argumentation. And so on. But in verse 30. He really.

[25 : 46] Really. Gets to. The kind of final stop. Here's what he says. The times of ignorance. God overlooked. But now he commands.

All people. Everywhere. To repent. All people. Everywhere. To repent. Because judgment is coming. And we're certain that judgment is coming. Because Christ.

Was raised. From the dead. People don't reject God. Because of a lack of evidence. Or because. God is implausible. Right. This is what people tell me every week. Right. Well. I just can't. I just can't believe it. I can't believe it. I don't have enough evidence. Well.

What do you want to happen? You know. If God just like did something amazing. And like. You know. Appeared. Or. Or if he. You know. Just did something kind of supernatural.

[26 : 40] In front of me. All right. Let me. Look at this Bible passage. And Jesus says. Time and time again. I did miracles in front of you. And you're still not believing. What do you make of that? Well. You know.

I think. I'd probably. React differently. Right. This is what I hear a lot. People don't reject God though. Because of a lack of evidence. Or because it's implausible.

People don't believe in God. For two reasons. One. They don't know about him. I think that's valid. People don't know really. What Christianity is. Or really about God. Okay. And of course.

They can't realistically believe. Believe in that. Or. They don't want to believe. And I think that's the most common thing. That. That.

That people. In. In our society find. They do have a sense. Perhaps for who God is. And. And some of the claims of Christianity. But ultimately. It turns. Down.

[27 : 38] Into. An issue of the will. I don't want to believe. I don't want to believe. And so. We put. Genesis 1.

To good use. And we put it to good use. In that discussion. fourthly. Fourthly. The story. The story gets even more.

Majestic. Genesis 1. Is majestic. But it gets even more so. In John's gospel. Opens this way. In the beginning.

Was the word. And the word. Was with God. And the word. Was God. He was in the beginning. With God. All things were made through him. And without him.

Was not anything. Made. That was made. John. Completely. Upgrades. Genesis 1. And he says.

[28 : 32] Christ. Is also the Lord. Of heaven and earth. He was there. Every step. Of the way. And that. Is incredible. That is majestic. Psalm 33.

Let all the earth. Fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants. Of the world. Stand in awe. Of him. For he spoke. And it came to be.

He commanded. And it stood. Firm. That's one of the ways. We ought to respond. To stand in awe. Of God. To fear. Before him. St. Augustine.

Writes on the Psalms. As follows. He says. Go round. The heavens. Again. And come back to earth. Leave. Out.

Nothing. On all sides. Everything cries out. To you. Of its author. Nay. The very forms. Of created things. Are the voices.

[29 : 32] With which they praise. Their creator. But who can fathom. The whole creation. Who shall set forth. Its praises. Who shall worthily praise.

Heaven. And earth. The sea. And all things. That are in them. And these indeed. Are visible things. Who shall worthily praise.

The angels. The thrones. The dominations. The principalities. Or the powers. Now. If in considering. These creatures. Of God.

Human language. Is so at a loss. What is it to do. In regards. To its creator. When words fail. Can not only.

Triumphant music. Remain. Augustine says that. Look. Even if you consider.

[30 : 27] Creation. It seems. It seems incredibly wonderful. It is an amazing thing. Human language. Can't even do justice. Even to these things.

That are. That are made. He says. How much more so. Of the creator. We are at a loss. Of words. At a loss. Of words. The story.

The story is factual. The story. Ought to humble us. It ought to be put. To good use. It's even more majestic. Than we at first thought. And I want to close.

With a few additional applications. Things that the bible. Doesn't necessarily pick up on. I think because. They just weren't. As kind of. They weren't. They weren't as much. Of an issue. In the ancient world. But we're encountering.

New issues. Day. Today. Day. And there's a few other ways. That Genesis 1. Can be put to use. The first is the environment. Or ecology. Creation is called.

[31 : 24] Good. It's called good. Because it does. What it's supposed to do. That's what that word means. In that case. Creation is good. Because it's functioning. In the right way. It's going. According to design.

And so humans. By being a part of that. Us being good. Us being good. In sort of. In charge of creation. As stewards. Over God's earth. We operate well.

When we're doing. What we're supposed to do. So when we're taking care. Of creation. We're doing. What God designed us. To do. Okay. This isn't our home.

To trample on. It's our home. To take care of. And it belongs. Ultimately. To God. He puts us in charge. So I do think. There's something. To be said. For the environment. And a lot of the things. That are going on. Now. I won't parse the details. I'll leave that to you. How do you care? But I'm saying. You should care. You really should care. So how can you exercise.

[32 : 19] Stewardship. Second. We've got some modern. Apologetics. Going on. Which I kind of alluded to. Before. Right. Paul's encountering people.

Who are setting up. Extra monuments. Or altars. So that they can. Worship. Sort of more gods. To make sure they have. All the gods. Taken care of. That's basically.

The opposite. Of what people do. In our society. Right. We don't need. An extra altar. We need. All these old altars. To go down. All right. We're not dealing. With a religious group.

Of people. But Genesis 1. Must be presented. And accounted for. By people. Who are saying. There's nothing.

Spiritual. And if you're saying. There's nothing. Spiritual. That life is only. Physical existence. That it's the material world. Beginning of story. End of story. Case closed. You've really got to account for.

[33 : 13] Genesis. As an alternative account. Of what the world. Is like. And Genesis is saying. We are spiritual. People. That the earthy.

Earthy. Place that we live. Is also a spiritual place. It has spiritual. Significance. And I think. If you're denying this. I think.

If you're denying this. That you're really living. As kind of. Half a human. If we are spiritual beings. As much as we are physical beings. We're living as half.

Humans. If we deny. The spiritual aspect. If we deny. The religious. Bent. The sense of the divine. That we have. And I think. It really makes us.

Ultimately. The center of the world. That makes us. The center. Of. The world. So we turn to psychology. We turn to mindfulness. These are really good things. Right. But.

[34 : 08] But. We don't turn to prayer. Actually talking to a God. Right. Sure. Get at peace with yourself. Go talk to someone. And I am saying. Those are good things. But they're not the whole thing.

Right. We can pray. We are designed to. Pray. And we are designed to worship. God. The God of the universe. And lastly.

It's no coincidence. That God creates. By the word. Of his mouth. It's no coincidence. That God creates. By the word. Of his mouth. And. God said.

Let there be light. And there was light. Just a chapter. Later. God said. You can eat. From any of the trees. Of the garden. But of this one. You shall not eat.

And then a book later. God spoke. All these commandments. To Moses. The prophets.
[35 : 06] Tell us. Thus. Sayeth. The Lord. One of the primary ways. God relates to us. Is by talking to us. One of the primary ways.

That God. Relates to us. Is by talking. To us. So I'll conclude. With the very words. Of Christ.
Whoever believes in me.

He says. In John 12. Whoever believes in me. Believes not in me. But in him. Who sent me. And whoever sees me. Sees him. Who sent me. I have come into the world.

As light. So that whoever believes in me. May not remain in darkness. If anyone hears. My words. And does not keep them. I do not judge him.

For I did not come. To judge the world. But to save the world. The one who rejects me. And does not receive my words. Has a judge. The word that I have spoken.

[36 : 03] Will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken. On my own authority. But the father who sent me. Has himself. Given me. A commandment. What to say.

And what to speak. And I know that his commandment. Is eternal life. What I say therefore. I say. As the father has told me.

Francis Schaeffer said. God is there. And he is not silent. And that really sums it up. God is there. And he is not silent. We ought to listen.