



### **IN THE BEGINNING ...**

Today we begin a new series, on the subject of ... origins! Which is a subject that is always going to be relevant, because origins matter, to all of us. It's why astronomers peer at distant galaxies and biologists map the human genome; why celebrities trace their family trees and kids ask the age-old question, "Where do babies come from" (Steve's answer: ask your mum). And why every culture has its own origin-story.

Our origins tell us who we are. And why we are.

So, we're going to look at what is arguably the greatest origin story of them all – and one that belongs to us all:

### **Genesis 1:1-2:3**

I got you reading the whole passage, but today we're just going to look at 1 verse – the first verse in the whole Bible:

*"In the beginning ... God created ... the heavens and the earth."*

Or in Hebrew:

*B'reshit bara elohim et ha-shamayim v-et ha-eretz.*

Now you might be thinking, "How are we going to get a whole message out of just one verse?" Easy. Because there are some verses – those world-stopping, ground-breaking, life-changing verses – that are worthy of a whole message. And this is one of `em!

Because this verse is an introduction, not just to the rest of the chapter or to the book of Genesis or to the Bible as a whole, but to God Himself. And as such, it's the Bible's first challenge, its opening gambit: do you believe this? Do you believe in a God who is powerful / intelligent / passionate enough to do this? Because you won't go much further with God if you don't! The adventure starts *here*.

So, what is Genesis 1:1 saying?

Something we all need to hear – in the form of 3 points:

**1) In the beginning.** In Hebrew this is just one word – *b'reshit*, the book's original name. Now some have taken this to be referring to a single moment – the Big Bang, point of singularity, etc. But *b'reshit* is actually referring to a *period* – an indefinite one (that's how it's used in other parts of the OT). I.e. this is probably an umbrella verse for what we read in the rest of the chapter. So, we could be talking the 6 days of Genesis 1, or 13.7 billion years (depending on which angle you're looking at this from).

Whatever the length of time, the message here is that the universe – time and space - had a beginning. I.e. it hasn't always been around, or gone through one cycle of existence after another, which means the natural world isn't responsible for being here. It also means it isn't worthy of worship (something people in the ancient world were pretty good at – just check out Romans 1:25 – and people in the modern world, too). The point being: something else put it here - something *outside* of time and space.

Which leads us on to the next section:

**2) God created.** Or *bara elohim* in Hebrew. The word for God here, *elohim*, comes from the Hebrew for power, *el*, except that *elohim* is plural, so 'powers.' At the same time the verb *bara* or 'created' is singular. So, we're talking one God, who possesses every kind of strength there is.

Now you could say this is the most important part of the verse, but also the most controversial – and misused. Because some will use it to try to deny faith, while others will use it to try to deny science. And neither side has got it right! Because to suggest that you've got to choose between faith and science, scripture and nature, is a false dichotomy. As Francis Collins, the geneticist who headed up the human genome project, explains, it is perfectly possible to believe in both, because we're talking 2 different disciplines, 2 different angles on the world, and 2 different questions. Science answers the 'how', the mechanical: how does this work? How does this happen? Faith answers the 'why', the metaphysical: why does this happen? And why are we even asking?

I.e. I personally don't care how you think everything came into being, so long as you believe in the God behind it! As it says in Isaiah 40:26: "Lift your eyes to the heavens: who created all these?" That's what Genesis 1 is really all about! That's the question it's asking –

And answering.

All of which leads to the final section:

**3) The heavens and the earth.** Or *et ha-shamayim v-et ha-eretz* – literally, ‘the skies and the land.’ Which is a Hebrew way of saying, ‘everything from up there to down here!’ From the biggest galaxies to the tiniest particles, from the mighty blue whale to the microscopic jellyfish parasite, from a beautiful calming sunrise to a terrifying earthquake. God has made it all – or at the very least, created a world where such things can – and will – exist.

And that includes you and me.

And it all exists for a reason, as a part of this colossal organism called ‘Life’ – and to serve the One who made it. To quote one of the songs of the book of Revelation (4:11): “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being.” And as Jesus said of a blind man, “This happened so that the work of God may be displayed in his life” (John 9:3).

Everything owes its existence to Him.

And its purpose.

### **Donuts**

Go back far enough, and all you have is a faith statement. Because eventually, you reach a point where the science reduces, then disappears. So, you either believe the universe came from nothing; or you believe the universe came from the universe before that, *ad infinitum*; or you believe that the universe came from God. Whatever way, you’re left with a faith statement. As God says to Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” The answer being, “A long way off!”

The real issue, to quote Pi Patel in the book / movie *Life of Pi*, is: “Which story is the better story?” Which meta-narrative is the one that is most likely to inspire love and hope and meaning and purpose and goodness and righteousness and justice? Which story is most likely to change your life, and your world, for the better? *That’s* the story to go with. *That’s* the story to choose. And to *tell*.

Now, a thought to leave you with, courtesy of ... a donut. If I were to ask you, “What is a donut?”, you might, if you were scientifically inclined, attempt to explain it on a material level. You might list the ingredients; you might explain the processes that have caused the dough to rise; you might even describe what happens on a biological level when a person consumes said donut. But then, while you’re doing all that explaining, someone comes along, snatches it out of your hand, and eats it!

And you will have missed the point of the donut.

The point being: donut miss the point (sorry guys, it had to be done!).