

## “CAN WE TRUST GENESIS?”

Today we are going to do something a little different. Last week we began a study of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which we will move through verse by verse. This morning I want to take some time to talk about something I think is very important – and that is: can we trust what is recorded in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. If you are a long-time, committed Christian you say, “Of course we can trust Genesis – it’s God’s Word.” But as soon as you set foot outside the church doors, you encounter a worldview that says otherwise – that the Bible is a book of fairy tales and myths, and cannot be true because it contradicts science. And for the past 150 years there has been relentless assault on the Bible, and ground zero of these attacks is the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

An all-too-common scenario is that someone grows up in church, is taught the Bible – and never really questions the Bible – then goes off to college where they are taught a completely different worldview – one that debunks the Bible as an ancient, man-made book written by people who knew nothing about science, knew nothing about the evolutionary process – and have no relevance to our more enlightened age. They’re taught that man evolved naturally, not supernaturally – and there is no need for God to explain the origins of the universe. It’s not just one professor who says this, but all their professors - professors they look up to and admire. Doubts creep into their minds and they begin to question all they were taught to believe. Is the Bible right or is my professor right? Some use their doubts as a way to dig down deep as to what they believe and become more resilient in their faith, while some chuck everything out the window and become an atheist.

Another common scenario is that you sit down one evening with you bag of chips and being flipping through the channels and land on a documentary on the history channel about the origin of the earth. You see beautifully illustrated animation showing how life began by a chance collision of floating gases in space set in motion a random set of events that took place over millions of years, that continued to evolve until we have the complex form of life we have today. There’s no mention of God, no mention of creation, no mention of the Bible – just proven scientific facts of how we got here. Then you come to church the next Sunday and hear something completely different.

I debated whether or not to even do this sermon because the whole subject of the origin of life is so immense and complex, and it’s easy to get bogged down in the details. There are also wide-ranging views on the details among Bible-believing Christians. But I think it’s good for us to talk about these issues because somewhere along the line your faith will be challenged, and its important to know that the Bible you hold in your hands is trustworthy and that your faith is built on solid evidence.

I’ve always had a passion to help people who have doubts – in large part because I have had some of the very same doubts. I’m not naturally wired to take a blind leap of faith, or to set aside my rational thinking. The very essence of faith means that there will be times of doubt and uncertainty. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” God has so designed life that we walk by faith and not by sight, and He delights in those who do not linger in doubt, and wallow in it, but who ask the hard questions and diligently seek the answers. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

With this in mind, I want to address two primary attacks that are often launched on the book of Genesis. The first attack is that **Genesis is mythological, not literal history**. Critics will say that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are ancient, legendary tales – and are no different than other ancient stories told around the same time period. The second attack is that **Genesis conflicts with known, established science and therefore cannot be true**.

Let's start with the first attack – that Genesis does not record real history, but is a fanciful fairy tale of larger-than-life stories. If you were to pick up a Bible for the first time and begin reading the first eleven chapters of the Bible you indeed would read about a God who created the world out of nothing in just six days; you would read about a man named Adam who was instantly formed out of the dust of the ground, and his Eve was formed from his rib; you'd read about a serpent in the garden that speaks; you'd read about an ark being built to house two of every living creature; and you'd read about a worldwide flood destroyed the whole earth. To the analytical, western mind – these stories belong more in the science fiction section of a bookstore than the non-fiction aisle.

In recent years even some well-respected Christians have questioned whether the events of Genesis 1-11 really took place or if they were allegories meant to teach theological truths. These chapters certainly do teach theological truths, but there are two major reasons to believe that the early chapters of Genesis are real events with real people. The most important reason is that **Jesus believed they were real** and if they weren't real Jesus would be lying.

- When answering a question about divorce in Matthew 19 Jesus quoted from Genesis 2 about God creating male and female and the two coming together to form one flesh. He believed Adam and Eve to be real people.
- In Matthew 23 Jesus spoke of Abel as being a real person whose blood was shed by his brother.
- In Matthew 24 Jesus spoke of Noah as a real, historical figure – and the flood as being a real, historical event.
- The gospel of Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam – not a fictional character, but a real person. If everyone else in the genealogy is real, why is Adam not?

The Apostle Paul in his writings refers more than once to Adam and Eve as real people, and Peter talks about Noah as a real person and about the flood as being an actual event. All this to say that if Genesis 1-11 is not literal history, then Jesus was wrong, Paul was wrong, and Peter was wrong – and if they are, the rest of the Bible is called into question.

The stories in Genesis are certainly epic and incredible – but so is the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus, so is Daniel remaining unscathed in the lion's den, so is Jesus' walking on water and calming the storm. One of the unique features of Christianity – that's different from other religions – is that it stands or falls on the historicity of miracles, especially the resurrection. Paul even says that if the miracle of the resurrection is not true, our faith is in vain. While believing these miracles took place requires faith, God does not ask for blind faith, but offers plenty of evidence for those who will honestly seek it.

One writer – Greg Boyd – puts it this way: “There's plenty of solid evidence for anyone who wants to believe, but enough faith is required to still render it a personal choice and not a coerced decision... not forced behavior from robots. God won't overwhelm you with so much evidence that you have to believe.” If you are looking for absolute proof, you will never believe. If God overwhelmed us with miracles, faith would no longer be required.

Boyd also says, “God is obvious enough so that those who want to see Him can see Him, but hidden enough so that those who don’t want to see Him can avoid Him.” That’s really true. None of us can say that we have totally conclusive evidence, but we have enough of it to have faith. The question is, are you willing to see and believe the “just enough” evidence that God has already given you?

The second reason to believe that Genesis 1-11 is an historical account of real people and real events is that **the rest of the Bible would not make sense if it wasn’t real**. These chapters are foundational for the rest of the Bible. They tell us how man is specially created in God’s image, they tell us about gender and marriage, they tell us how sin came into the world and why people die, and they tell us how languages and different people groups originated. If these chapters are myth and legend, then how can we trust the rest of the Bible to be true?

One of the long-held views by Bible critics is that the creation account of Genesis sounds very similar to other ancient creation stories – such as the Egyptians, Sumerians, and Babylonians – and that the Bible simply borrowed from these stories. Therefore, the Bible is not unique and not divine. That view, however, has been pretty much abandoned in scholarship. Not only does Genesis not borrow from other creation stories – Genesis stands in stark contrast to other ancient creation stories. If someone honestly takes the time to evaluate these other stories, they will see that – while there are similarities – the biblical account stands distinct in its worldview.

The second main attack on the trustworthiness of Genesis is that it **conflicts with science**, and the findings of science prove that the events of Genesis cannot be true. Science is a word that is used a lot today by politicians and activists who use the word “science” to silence critics who don’t agree with them... “Science conclusively proves so-and-so, and we must believe science.” Science, science, science. Science has become something of a religion that we must bow our knee to.

According to the dictionary, science is observing the natural world and forming an idea or theory about how it works. Then you test your theory to see if your observation is correct. You watch, you measure, you experiment. One of the ways you know your theory is correct is when it can be repeated – you put some chemicals in a test tube three times and it does the same thing. What’s remarkable is how much of science remains theory and how highly-regarded scientists can disagree on what is scientific fact. It’s like at a trial where each side brings in their expert witnesses who all look at the same evidence, but reach different conclusions.

As Christians who believe that God made everything in the world, we welcome science – and each new scientific discovery helps us understand the majesty and wonder of our creator. Francis Schaeffer said, “When all the facts are finally in, we will discover that there is no final conflict between the Bible rightly interpreted and the facts of science rightly understood. Since all truth is God’s truth, there can be no ultimate conflict between God’s Creation and God’s Word. The two go hand in hand.”

When we seek to determine how and when life originated, we all look at the same evidence – it all comes down to how we interpret the evidence – and I’m reminded of what God told Job after he and his three friends philosophized and debated life for several chapters, and then God says in Job 38:2-4, “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.”

We must humbly admit that none of us were there when the world came to be, and no matter what bias you have in answering these questions, it comes down to faith. In other words, everyone is required to believe what they believe without absolute, iron-clad evidence. This, then, leads us to ask: how do we best interpret the evidence we do have, and which takes more faith to believe?

There are only two possibilities to explain the origin of life: by the natural means of evolution or by the supernatural creation by God. Let's start with evolution. It's easy to forget that the idea of natural evolution has only been around for 150 years, when Charles Darwin first put his theory of life's origins into print. Darwin has had an enormous influence on the way many people think today – not just about science, but about philosophy and morality and the meaning of life. I remember that in a poll taken in 2000, he was voted the fourth most influential person of the past millennium.

The theory of evolution can be summed up in three main ideas. First, it says that life came into being naturally – without divine intervention – through a chance collision of gases in space that set-in motion a random set of events that took place over billions of years and here we are today. To believe in evolution you have to believe that all life on earth came from nothing – from nonliving matter – and progressed from simplicity to complexity, and from disorder to order. You also have to believe that human beings – with our amazingly designed bodies, our conscience and ability to think and reason – all developed over a long period of time a simple cell that came from nothing. That, to me, takes an enormous leap of faith. It's like taking all the parts of a computer and laying them out separately on a table, and somehow believing that it became a computer by chance.

The second main tenet of evolution is that all life form on earth – whether its animals or plants or humans – all originated from one common ancestor. That means that humans are not supernaturally created in God's image, but evolved from the same DNA as plants and animals. Darwin called this the tree of life. Once again, it takes a tremendous amount of faith to believe that a cell evolved into a tadpole, and a tadpole into a fish, and a fish into a reptile, and so on, until you arrive at a fully-functional, unique human being.

The third main idea of evolution is that called “random selection,” which says that over billions of years the species that adapted to their environment survived, and weaker species that did not adapt became extinct. For example, if we had a bunch of deer – half of which were white and half that were brown – the brown deer would be much better adapted to survive because the white deer would stick out like a sore thumb and would be much more likely to be killed by predators. Over time, we would see fewer and fewer white deer, and a greater number of brown deer because more brown deer would live long enough to reproduce. This is one example of how natural selection works. A given population will adapt to its environment, and over time the traits of that population change based on what is most beneficial for survival. This all gets back to the main idea of change over time.

Now it's important to understand that there's a difference between macro-evolution and microevolution. Macroevolution – which means large-scale evolution – maintains that there was change from one species to another – such as a fish becoming a reptile, or an ape becoming a man. The problem with macroevolution is that it is not observable, which we will talk about more in a moment.

Microevolution – which refers to small-scale evolution – is the kind of change and adaptation that happens within species – and this is observable. You see changes in dogs and in horses – but these changes take place *within species*. You never see a dog evolving into a horse, or a fish becoming a snake. This is in keeping with the six days of creation where it repeatedly says that God made things after their own kind.

If someone asked me if I am an evolutionist, I would say, “I am a microevolutionist... yes... because changes within species is observable – and there is great evidence for small changes and adaptation among distinct species. But macroevolution is untenable both with what the Bible teaches and what observable science reveals.”

In the big picture, there are three major problems with evolution – the “macro” kind – and the first is what is commonly known as the “missing link.” **There is no observable evidence to show a transition for one species to another.** If we evolved over millions of years from a one-celled organism to a tadpole to a bird to a fish to a land animal to and ape to a man – you’d expect to find plenty of transitional fossils showing part frog, part bird – something showing evolution between different species. But there are none.

You many remember the big posters (**SLIDE**) on the wall showing the gradual evolution of man from a bent-over monkey to a fully upright man. At various times evolutionists have excitedly announced the finding of a “missing link” showing the transition between ape and man, but each finding has been proven false. **SLIDE.** The so-called artist’s rendition of Nebraska man was based on a tooth thought to be from a half-man, half ape creature, turned out in the end to be a pig’s tooth. **SLIDE.** The Piltdown man turned out to be a hoax in which someone took the jaw of an ape and put it with a human skull, filed the teeth and then carefully stained it all so that the bones looked both ancient and a matching set. The truth is that there is no evidence whatsoever to show a transition from one species to another, much less from an ape to a man. There are other so-called missing links that have all proven to be false.

The second big problem with evolution is that **it goes against the Second Law of Thermodynamics.** Do you remember this law from science class? It’s also called the law of entropy, a law that says that everything left to itself has a tendency to deteriorate, and moves from order to disorder. We see this law at work every day – as soon as you buy a car, its value depreciates because of wear and tear. Our bodies are slowly wearing down, and I don’t have to say much more about that. You paint your house, and over time it begins to chip and peel. The best example of entropy is your child’s bedroom. As soon as they clean up their room it begins to deteriorate back to its original state. Everything, when left on its own to drift, when not given attention and energy, everything has this tendency to deteriorate.

In order for macroevolution to work, it would move directly against the force of entropy. Yet evolution says that rather than deteriorating, things are gradual improving – moving from simplicity to complexity, and from disorder to order. Simple observation shows that this is not true.

A third major flaw in macroevolution is the law of probability. In other words, if man really did evolve over time from a single cell, just how long would that take? In order to work, evolution needs long, long periods of time – millions and billions of years for life to evolve – plus random chance. Honest biologists, however, admit that even 20 billion years is not enough time for complex life form to evolve. One scientist, Stephen Meyer, uses the illustration of a thief trying to steal a bike, but finds a lock on the bike with four dials, which means that there are 10,000 possibilities to unlock the lock. If the thief has enough time on his hands, he might stumble across the right combination, but say the lock had ten dials.

Meyer says if the thief does nothing the rest of his life but try different combinations, the thief will only sample about 3% of the total combinations. And the chance that he will randomly stumble on the right combination is extremely slim. Meyer says that to form the smallest human cell by chance would take over ten million years. One noted astronomer said that the chance that higher life forms might have emerged through evolutionary processes is comparable with the chance that “a tornado sweeping through a junk yard might assemble a Boeing 747.” The point is: there’s no length of time that could account for the complex form of life we see today.

The only other explanation is supernatural creation by the hand of God. Does it take faith to believe in creation? Absolutely. But no more faith than it does to believe in naturalistic evolution. Each person must decide which requires more faith.

As believers God has given us two lines of evidence in favor of supernatural creation. The first is the world we see around us, that we can observe – which theologians call general revelation – revelation that everyone from every time period of history can observe. The second line of evidence is God’s written word – the Bible – which is called special revelation. The world around us not only declares the handiwork of creation, but God has revealed how the world came into being by telling us. The Bible is not written as a science book, and it does not tell us everything we’d like to know about the origin of the world, but the Bible is consistent with science – as Francis Schaeffer says, “Science as it is rightly interpreted.”

As God told Job, “Where were you in the beginning?” Whether as person believes in evolution or creation, there are many things scientifically that we simply can’t observe because we weren’t there. But today we can see the fingerprints of God all over creation – from the oceans and rivers and mountains, to the creative diversity of animal life, to the vast solar system we see when we look up, and to the amazing complexity of the human body. All this amazing design argues for a great designer. Beyond that, how does naturalistic evolution account for the human conscience, the ability to think and reason and build and create, for our innate understanding that there is right and wrong?

But it gets back to the main question of this sermon: Can we trust Genesis? The answer is “yes,” but in order to trust it you must believe in the miraculous intervention of God. But to believe in evolution you must also believe in the miraculous – that all you see today sprang to life out of nothing and evolved randomly by chance. Either way, it takes faith.

It all leads us back to Hebrews 11:3 which says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” God delights in faith. He gives you plenty of solid evidence that He exists, but He will won’t overwhelm you with so much evidence that you have to believe. The question is, are you willing to see and believe the evidence God has given you, and bow before Him as your creator?