

**Genesis 1: 26-31** Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup> Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

**Exodus 16:1-12** Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. <sup>3</sup> “If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt,” they moaned. “There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.”

<sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “By evening you will realize it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup> In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaints, which are against him, not against us. What have we done that you should complain about us?” <sup>8</sup> Then Moses added, “The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfy you in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. What have we done? Yes, your complaints are against the LORD, not against us.”

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE PT2: IN THE BEGINNING

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “Announce this to the entire community of Israel: ‘Present yourselves before the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’” <sup>10</sup> And as Aaron spoke to the whole community of Israel, they looked out toward the wilderness. There they could see the awesome glory of the LORD in the cloud.

<sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the Israelites’ complaints. Now tell them, ‘In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

**THE STORY OF THE BIBLE PT2: IN THE BEGINNING**

Today we’re in part two of this series titled, The Story of The Bible. The reason I wanted to do the series, and the reason I’m so glad that you’re here and that you’re watching is because while most people (Christians, non-Christians, people even from other religions) while most people know parts of some Bible stories, most people do not know the story of the Bible. In fact, one of the reasons it has been so easy for some to dismiss the Bible, the reason it’s so easy to dismiss Christianity or to walk away from your childhood faith is because while people told you Bible stories as you were growing up, nobody ever sat down and explained the story of the Bible. Part of the reason they didn’t tell you the story of the Bible as a child is because you wouldn’t be interested. The other reason people didn’t tell you the story of the Bible is because, in many instances, the people that handed you your first Bible did not know the story of the Bible themselves. But this is a really big deal. It’s a really big deal in our culture. It’s a really big deal in your life. It’s a really big deal for Christians. And it’s maybe even a bigger deal if you grew up in the faith and walked away from the faith, because understanding how we got the Bible is almost as important as what is in it.

So, just to get us started, Jesus did not write it. In fact, Jesus didn’t write any of it. But here is the new information for most people, especially if you’ve walked away from faith or grew up in faith but didn’t know the story of the Bible. While Jesus didn’t write it, but Jesus is the reason that we have it.

The story of the Bible begins, not in Genesis. The story of the Bible begins when Jesus was discovered alive after he’d been crucified. It’s important to know (as we talked about last time) if Jesus had been crucified and didn’t rise from the dead, the Bible would not exist. There would be nothing to write about.

The reason men decided to document the life of Jesus isn't just because of what he taught, and it wasn't that he was crucified. But that tomb was discovered empty, and when His disciples saw Him alive, they went into the streets of Jerusalem. They proclaimed not what they had read about, not what they'd heard about, but what they had seen with their own eyes: a resurrected Savior. And the church began.

And so, the events surrounding the life of Jesus, this resurrected Rabbi, were extremely important to first-century followers, many people attempted to write down an orderly account of the life of Jesus.

Not just a few... many. So, consequently, we have this document we call "Matthew" that's an account of the life of Jesus: also "Mark," "Luke," and "John." And as soon as these were written (and they were written in different times) but as soon as they were written, they were immediately considered **valuable**. And very quickly, these four documents were considered by the early church to be **Scripture**. But it's important to understand, after the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written, there still was no Bible.

There were just four accounts of the life of Jesus that the early church held in high regard and would eventually risk their lives to protect.

That's where the story picks up this week. The apostle Paul and others left Judea and began telling Gentiles (non-Jewish people) about the claims of Jesus. And the biggest transition and struggle for Gentiles who were enamored by the life of Jesus, the message of Jesus, was this: The whole idea of giving up everything they had been brought up to believe. The struggle was giving up everything that everyone around them had been brought up to believe and embracing the idea that there was only one God.

Now, this is such a no-brainer for us because we're not polytheist. For example, it would be like many of you who grew up believing in God to suddenly just stop believing in God. It would be like those of you who don't believe in God to suddenly start believing in God. So, the entire ancient, non-Jewish world was expected in (order to be a Christian) to embrace this notion that there was only one God. This was unimaginable. It's important to know this: in ancient times, people didn't convert from one religion to another. They didn't leave Islam to

become Christian or leave Christianity to become Buddhist or leave Buddhism to become Hindu. That's not how it worked.

Every region, every nation (the barbarians, the Romans, the earlier Greeks) every region, every nation had their own gods, and most families had family gods. They worship their ancestors. And so when you move from place to place, you just took your gods with you. You just put them in a sack and brought 'em and set up your family altar. Nobody really cared what gods that you worship or serve. As I said last week, the Roman Empire didn't care who you worship. As long as you paid homage to Caesar and as long as you did not dishonor the Roman gods, you could keep your household god, and you could keep your family's gods; it just didn't matter. And then Christianity comes along and says, "No. You have to give up all your gods."

So, this was an obstacle for Gentiles who embraced Christianity, but more and more, in different parts of the world, Gentiles came to faith in Jesus. But the idea of there being one God seemed to them to be very novel and very new.

But for the most part, Gentile people had virtually no interest in Jewish religion and virtually no interest in the Jews until they were introduced to the Gospel, the teachings of Jesus, and the claims of Jesus, and until they were confronted with the Apostle Paul and Peter and others who were eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

But to their amazement, they discovered that the Jews (whose religion was older than the religion of the Romans and older than the religion of the Greeks) they discovered that the Jewish people had always, from the very beginning, only believed in one God: Yahweh.

Now, here's a little bit of history for you before we get back into the plot line, because this is important. During the first-century, second-century, and third-century, Christians were persecuted by the Romans because the Christians (as we said last time) would not worship the gods and would not declare that Caesar is Lord. But the Jews had never worshiped or honored the Roman gods, and the Jews had never declared that Caesar was Lord. So, a question you may have never

asked before (but you should ask) is this: Why is it that the empire, the Roman Empire, gave the Jews a pass, but they persecuted the Christians? The Jews were just as guilty as the Christians of not declaring Caesar as Lord and not honoring any of the Roman gods, but the Romans left the Jews alone. And do you know why Rome allowed the Jews to have a pass as it related to Caesar and the Roman gods? Because Rome honored ancient things, and the Romans knew that the Jewish religion was older than the story of Romulus and Remus and that the Jewish religion was older than the pantheon of Greek gods. They recognized that the Jewish scripture and the Jewish religion was older than any of their religions.

So, even though they didn't honor Yahweh as God, they honored the fact that the Jewish religion was older than their religion, so the Jews got a pass.

So, when these Gentile Christians began, for the first time, exploring Jewish Scripture, they were shocked to discover that the oldest religion anyone ever knew about had recognized that there was only one God from the very beginning. The implications of this were staggering. The implications were that since ancient times, every single other nation that worshipped multiple gods, every family that worshiped their ancestors, and every single culture since ancient times had it wrong.

And the Jews had known this from the beginning. They opened up, they unscrolled that first segment in the Jewish text that we call Genesis, and here's what they found. **"In the beginning, God..."** We've heard this so many times. We've read this so many times. You've argued against this so many times. You've disputed whether or not this is true or who wrote it. But don't, don't, miss the original context, and don't miss the implications of the original context. This was shocking to the ancient world, because they expected to find what they found in all the other non-Jewish cults and creation stories: "In the beginning, the gods..." But God? The word "Genesis" is a Greek word; it actually means "origin." It's the first Book of our English Bibles. We know, that Moses wrote the first five books of our English Bible and of the Jewish text. But something very interesting happened that has affected every single one of you here and every single one of you watching. Here's what happened. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archeological finds made the claims of what we find in Genesis a little suspect.

In nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archeological finds created doubt regarding the origins of the Jewish or the Genesis creation account. And here's

where those doubts came from. They found Egyptian, Sumerian, Canaanite, and Babylonian creation text. They discovered these texts, and they were very similar (or so they thought) to the Hebrew text.

They were so similar that the initial assumption was that these ancient Hebrew texts actually borrowed from other ancient creation stories. And the assumption is, “Look. This didn’t come from God. The ancient Hebrews just borrowed from all these other stories. So, it’s just one of many stories. Why take it seriously?” The point being, it’s not unique. What you need to know, (because who keeps up with this stuff other than Bible nerds, like me), what you need to know is that view has been pretty much abandoned in scholarship. Not only does Genesis not borrow from other creation myths. **Genesis stands in startling contrast to other ancient creation stories.**

**Genesis is a worldview unto itself.** An extraordinary, ahead-of-its-time worldview. In fact, the scientific community, the “modern scientific community,” wouldn’t even begin to catch up with the first statement in Genesis until 1927 when a Belgian priest first suggested the theory we call **the Big Bang theory**, that the universe had a beginning. Maybe you didn’t know this; now you will. Since the time of Aristotle, in the fourth century BC, everyone pretty much assumed that the universe just existed, that it had always existed, that matter just was. Albert Einstein embraced this idea that the universe has always been. But in 1964 with the discovery of the cosmic, microwave, background radiation that some of you studied in school—the view that the universe has always existed was abandoned. Scientists pretty much agree that in a trillion trillionth of a second, the universe expanded at an extraordinary speed from the size of something smaller than a pebble to its current astronomical scope.

Or in the words of Genesis, **“In the beginning...”** In the beginning God spoke and BANG it happened!

The significance of what comes next is lost on us, and the reason is because the point that Moses is trying to make is actually assumed by us.

To say it a different way, Moses is building a case that’s no longer needed, because his argument ultimately succeeded. Moses is writing to an ancient group of people who all they know is slavery, all they know is the power of the Egyptian gods, this ennead of gods.

And so, Moses is trying to help them to narrow their focus and re-believe, to become atheist as it relates to the Egyptian gods and become believers in the one God, Yahweh. So, in Genesis, Moses is making the point that God created the heavens and the earth. Not the gods, just Yahweh. And so, he says, **“In the beginning, God created...”** Not Egypt’s Ra or Babylon’s Marduk who rode into this epic battle of the gods.

In Genesis, we find something extraordinarily different, not even close, no similarity, no borrowing. **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** (Genesis 1:1) Genesis is nothing like the Egyptian creation myths. It is nothing like the Canaanite creation myths. It is nothing like the Babylonian creation myths. In these myths, the gods are at odds with themselves, the gods war with each other, and then the gods actually create other gods out of body parts and out of body fluids. And this brings us to the next epic, ahead-of-its-time statement. This is so extraordinary.

In all of the ancient creation myths, mankind is an afterthought to take the load off, to lighten the load of the gods. Genesis is completely different. Because of the way ancient people embrace these ancient mythologies about their gods, individuals had absolutely no rights. Women had absolutely no status, no hope. There was no intrinsic value in anyone. The violence and the injustice of the gods justified the violence and the injustices of their leaders. The kings of these foreign nations and these pagan cults were essentially acting like their fathers in the heavens.

And then you come to Genesis (which is in stark contrast with no parallel, nothing even close) a concept that the human race continues to struggle with even to this day. Genesis tells us (the religion that was older than any of the current religions in the first century) Genesis says what no other pagan myth said. It said, **“Then God said, let us make mankind in our image.”** (Genesis 1:26) In the Jewish text, the creation of mankind is the pinnacle, not the afterthought, of creation. Which means, (don’t miss this), dignity. The dignity of every man, the dignity of every woman, the dignity of every child is established at the very beginning. This was unheard of.

There was no parallel anywhere. And the pagan mythologies and the pantheon of gods that would develop after this through the ages, none of them established this kind of thought or this kind of idea but there’s more. What comes next is even

more unthinkable and more unimaginable. This is why later archeologists and later scholars decided, “You know what. The Jews didn’t borrow from any of these ancient myths. This myth... (as they would consider it) is far and away different.” Again, it is a worldview unto itself, because what came next was completely unimaginable. It would have been unimaginable five hundred years later, a thousand years later, fifteen hundred years later, almost two thousand years later. And this would still be unimaginable to some today. Here’s what the text says, **“And then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over...’ (not worship, not make idols out of, not deify) ‘so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, and over the livestock, and all the wild animals.’”** (Gen. 1:26) That in the very beginning, God told the Jewish people, “You will make no idols. You’ll make no image of me, Yahweh. You’ll make no idol or images out of animals or other people or anything that crawls on the ground or flies in the air. You will have no other gods before me, because there aren’t any other gods.”

And I’m telling you, this is in stark contrast to the Egyptian ennead of gods that they had just escaped from. God says, “You will not worship nature.” Think about this, **“You will not worship nature. You will rule over nature.” The implication being, “You will be the stewards of this world.” An idea we are still wrestling to the ground this very day.** Every single pagan culture following the establishment of the Jewish people worshipped nature, and the elements of nature, and the animals of nature, and all kinds of mixtures of animals of nature. So, from the very beginning, God established a unique worldview. God created mankind in His own image. Unthinkable. **“So God created man in his own image, In the image of God,”** is repeated for emphasis. **“In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.”** (Gen. 1:27)

Ladies, Look up here. Maybe you’ve heard me say this before if you’ve been around. I think every woman should be a Christian. Jesus was the first to elevate the status of women; this is why so many women followed Jesus. But ladies, in the very beginning, the God of the Jews, who became the God of the Christians, gave you dignity that the world is still trying to catch up with today. Only recently-historically speaking-has civilization begun to wrestle the way it needs to wrestle with the dignity of men, women and children, (born & pre-born). And it was there in the very beginning.



Now, our problem with this is that we get distracted. Because when we read Genesis, we fight over the question of how, when and why. Or is a day really a day. Friends, Moses (this is no exaggeration) **Moses dropped a bomb in the very beginning. Moses introduced a radically different, unparalleled, untested worldview.**

This would be the foundation of what would later be called the golden rule, and the golden rule is not reflected in nature.

And let's be honest, the golden rule isn't even reflected in human nature. But the idea was introduced at the very beginning when God said, "You are not a means to an end. You are not to worship nature. I'm going to make you as close as possible to me. I'm going to make you in my image." Which means every man, every woman, every child, and you..... bears the image of their creator. Be careful how you treat them.

According to the Enûma Elišh, you were born a slave to the gods. According to the Enûma Elišh, you have no individual dignity, no individual rights. There is no redeemer, and there is no afterlife. According to the new atheists, you were born a slave to your DNA. You have no free will. There is no redeemer, and there is no afterlife. But in the very beginning, we are introduced to a God who saves, who redeems, who delivers, and who never ever, ever gives up on you. All of this "in the very beginning." A God who gives us freedom to choose and then honors our choices. And then Yahweh does the most **ungods-ly** thing imaginable: he goes to work to reverse the consequences of mankind's decision to choose against him. Genesis 1 creates, gives us, and provides us with the meta-narrative of our lives: the big picture, the ultimate context for the human experience, **a monotheistic worldview.** A worldview (and please don't miss this) a worldview that answers life's most important questions: the why questions. **"Why is there something rather than nothing" question.**

More personally, **why are you here, and why do you matter? That answer is; you're here on purpose, with a purpose.** You are not the result of some cosmic conflict between the gods, and you were not created by the universe. God wanted image-bearers who could know and relate to one another, and image-bearers that can know and relate to Him. And this is my favorite part: when the time was right, when everything was just as it needed to be, Yahweh, the God of Genesis, joined us.

In the opening line of the Hebrew Bible, they realized something that was very difficult for first-century Jews to acknowledge.

In the opening line of the Scripture that they (Gentiles) began to adopt as their own Scripture, they realized that the Jews had it right all along, which, of course, only fueled their interest in the Law and the Prophets, the Hebrew Scriptures. And they moved very quickly to adopt the Hebrew Scripture (or the Hebrew Bible, or the Law and the Prophets) as their own Christian Scripture. And thus, the stage was set for the inclusion of Jewish Scripture in the Christian Bible. But that inclusion would not be without its struggles. So, please, please, please don't miss part three of The Story of The Bible.