

# *“The Starting Block”*

February 10, 2008

Genesis 1

Isaiah 44:2

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Isaiah 44:2 “I am the Lord who created you ... you are my chosen people whom I love.”

If I asked how long it has been since you read the Bible in your home (and I wouldn't do that for the purpose of embarrassing anyone, or making anyone feel guilty) some of you might say a week – some of you might say a month – and some of you might even say a year.

My immediate concern in this message is not whether or not people ARE reading, but why they aren't. If comments I have heard over the years are any indication, probably the most common reasons people don't read the Bible is because they don't understand it. And it my contention that the Bible is not read and understood because it seems according to everything they hear, to be so foreign and separated from everyday life. It seems ALMOST totally irrelevant.

Let me give 3 illustrations:

One, you are reading the Bible and stumble across a list of genealogy such as found in Genesis or Matthew, and the honest feeling is – “so what?” or “Who cares?”

Two, you pick up the paper and see a headline that reads “Iran, Afghanistan and Revelations.” You don't remember ever seeing anything about Iran and Afghanistan in the Bible. Assuming that such writers and preachers surely know more than you, the Bible becomes a book of only the few rather than the book of the common man.

Three, in a similar vein, the so-called experts say that in the Bible you find one account of how the world was created – which is radically contradictory to what clues science has been able to pull together regarding the origin and development of our world.

Again, leaving the Bible irrelevant, because it is the book only a few experts can understand. It is left unbelievable because it is out of touch with scientific fact.

Further, from what you learned in school, from you see on the history channel about scientific discovery even here on our own planet, you get the idea that the things SOME teach about the Bible is so ignorant that it becomes a superstitious, out-dated, and therefore useless book.

An example of that from a few hundred years ago is Galileo's conflict between faith and scientific fact (or should I say the church's conflict – it was no conflict for Galileo.) Galileo had developed the telescope and discovered all kinds of marvelous sights as he gazed into space. Perhaps the biggest, most surprising thing he saw what that the sun was the center of the universe rather than the earth – as was commonly understood at that time. Primarily because of the teachings of the church.

The church, arguing from theology and the Old Testament – and from mistake – declared that the earth was the center of the universe – no matter what Galileo said. Man was God's highest creation. Thus the earth on which man dwells had to be the center of the universe. His

proposition was condemned as “foolish, absurd, false in theology, and heretical, because expressly contrary to Holy Scripture.”

Late in life, after years of harassment and persecution and imprisonment, Galileo was called to Rome to publicly announce that his earlier conclusions were false. Legend has it that after he finished taking a solemn oath avowing that the earth is fixed in position as the center of the universe, he whispered, “It still moves.”

(Webb Garrison, “Strange Facts about the Bible”)

In recent years, we’ve been seeing more of the old battle over what has unfortunately come to be known as “creation vs. evolution.” Or, in a worse yet ridiculous expression: “The Bible vs. science”

It’s an unfortunate misnomer suggesting that there is a blow-by-blow description in the Bible describing how everything came into being. And further that it is basically different than most things taught in science books. And further that anyone who reads the Bible will find this point of view. And further that anyone who believes anything science has to say is a God-hating atheist.

I always get a little hot when I read in the papers about “the creation theory” or “the Biblical account of creation” or “the Christian belief” - in reference to a certain narrow-minded point of view about the order of things.

In other words, anyone who REALLY believes the Bible – also believes that the world was created in 7 short days as we know them, or knows that the cro-magnon man is a lie made up by atheistic scientists. Those who discover all kinds of things as they dig through the dirt of our planet and try to get us to believe that some of these things took hundreds of millions of years to happen, are god haters.

Our battles in school districts about this issue are unbelievable. We’re doing to our 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century children the same thing the 17<sup>th</sup> century church did to Galileo. In communities all across our land, children are told to ignore what they are taught in school in their science books and to “believe the Bible.” Children (and adults) are left between the proverbial rock and a hard place to believe that the Bible is a rational, believable, dependable book containing the Word of God for our times and our lives. We find ourselves caught in an incomprehensible battle to rationalize the faith/science conflict. A conflict that doesn’t need to exist. A conflict spawned by ignorance, by close-mindedness, by lazy minds.

With such thinking propagated in my poor mind – how on earth can I expect my faith to keep up with the modern scientific world in which I live? I feel pressured to take on one of two positions: One, I can believe science and have a faith kept in a tidy little Sunday-morning compartment - a gulf that can never truly be bridged, or

Two, I can stick my head in the sand, ignoring the findings of intelligent investigation - choosing to believe one interpretation of the Bible and live in a 4,000 year old world of ignorance and superstition.

Ah, but there's a third alternative. To use my own intelligence, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as my teacher, to find ways of bridging the gap, drawing together the best contributions of ancient and modern man so as to bring some integration of my world into a new and vibrant wholeness. In short, a faith adequate for the needs of the day.

How then, do we accomplish this integration of both worlds?

First, foremost, essentially, foundationally, we understand that the Bible is a book of faith. Rather than a book of science. Anyone possessing some basic biblical knowledge and just a smidgeon of common sense should know that the Bible isn't an astronomy book telling which planets or stars move. Nor is it a science book busy with the idea of explaining how the universe came to be.

Genesis is an account of WHO created the world and WHY He created it. And only almost incidentally gives some remarkably accurate "hows" about creation. The Bible was not put together as a scientific manual to give us a running account of how it all began. That is neither the purpose nor the effect of the Bible. The Bible is put together to teach us about the God who did it all and why He did it. Anything else is beyond the scope and interest of the writers.

Horace Weaver in his book titled "*Getting Straight About the Bible*" writes:

"We must not be bound to the ancient view that ours is a 3-storied universe, with heavens above, hell below, and earth suspended in between, floating on water. In 1962 when John Glenn moved around our earth in his space craft it never occurred to him to look for God on his throne in heaven. This young Presbyterian scientist knew that God is not a physical God. So, the heavens must be interpreted in our day in the light of modern cosmology and the sciences which deal with space travel. We will still affirm "in the beginning God ..." but we will disagree with some biblical interpretation about the size and shape and age of our universe.

The scientists tell us how the world was made and approximately how long it took to make the earth and to form living things. The Bible tells us who designed the processes by which all came into being and for what purpose He made them. The Bible tells us God made the heavens and the earth, but it does not tell us how it was made. (The Bible tells us God made people – frankly the thought that my grandfather a couple of hundred generations before me might have swung from trees does not disturb me in the least nor have anything whatsoever to do with my faith in God.) Scientists are beginning to learn of God's methods and techniques.

God brought into being the atoms of infinitesimally small structures. He designed the amazingly unique ways for atoms to bind themselves to other atoms to form molecules and compounds and eventually the universe. As modern man thinks of the heavens and the earth he thinks of much more than the Biblical writers dreamed.

Modern man cannot hold to the cosmology of the Biblical writer and his 3-story world. We know that we live in a solar system and a galaxy. This in turn is part of billions of other galaxies. This also includes the microscopic world of molecules and the atom with its electrons, protons, and neutrons." Things Biblical writers knew nothing of.

Second, to integrate our faith and science worlds, we will need to remember why creation is so often mentioned in the Bible. Not just in Genesis, but in other places like Psalms, Jeremiah, Isaiah, the Gospel of John.

Have you ever noticed that often-times when asked to tell about something, we back up and give a little history of the situation? When one of your kids gets in trouble and you ask the profound question, "What happened?" it usually means there is about to be a history lesson. Given to you. To answer the question accurately (and of course truthfully) the offending child must take you on a journey back in time to some prior event and pull in another person or two. "Well, see, the other day Billy ...."

The lyrics of an old love song don't just say "I love you." They say, "Longer than there've been fishes in the ocean, I've been in love with you." (so if you find yourself in an unhappy marriage, it's your own fault. You bit on that line.)

So when trying to talk about who God is, to explain His activity in the world, to describe His relation with mankind – the ancient writers go back to the beginning. To the foundations of the world. The story of creation does not stand by itself as though it were a pre-scientific attempt to explain the origin or evolution of nature. But it is the starting of history. Covenant history. The history of God's dealing with mankind. It is part of the story of our relationship to God and His with us. It is a portrait of this great God and all of His majesty.

The creation story is part of a grand celebration of this great God who loves us and whom we love. It's like saying, "I got these flowers just for you." This great God who created everything that is, everything as far as the eye could see (oops, not far enough), everything as far as the latest telescope can see, everything as far as the space probe that has been up there the longest has been able to photograph and EVEN BEYOND THAT - it was all made for you. And in the middle of all this awesome, mind-boggling, incredibly beautiful universe, God made a place and a plan for you.

You know what it is like to make a gift of some kind for someone you love. It could be a Valentine Card all the way up to building a home. You say, "Close your eyes – now you can open them. I made it just for you!" This is suggested by the text: "I am the Lord who created you ... you are my chosen people whom I love." Creation is part of the story of our faith. And that is why the story of creation is told.

The old prophet Isaiah says: (40:21, 28)

"Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth!"

Perhaps if we can begin to think intelligently and make the effort to open our minds and educate ourselves in the proper handling of Biblical material, the Bible can once again become important reading material – a foundation piece for our living, and perhaps we can develop a faith that is vital and up to date.

