

West Valley Church  
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## **Engage The Word** **Part One: Genesis 1-2**

The Bible was written by over 40 different authors from all walks of life: shepherds, farmers, tent-makers, physicians, fishermen, priests, philosophers and kings, over a period of some 1,500 years, from 1450 BC to around 100AD, in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Despite these differences in authors and languages and the span of years it took to write it, the Bible is an extremely cohesive and unified book.

The Bible has been translated into 2,018 languages, with countless more partial translations and audio translations (for unwritten languages). (This is an enormous amount of translations. Compare that number to Shakespeare, considered by many to be the master writer of the English language, who has been translated into only 50 languages.)

According to statistics from Wycliffe International, the Society of Gideons, and the International Bible Society, the number of new Bibles that are sold, given away, or otherwise distributed in the United States is about 168,000 per day.

The Bible is still the best-selling book of all time. Sales exceed a billion copies a year. (<http://bibleresources.bible.com/afacts.php>)

The Bible. If we are going to base our lives on it, we need to know if we can trust the source.

How credible is this book? We are beginning 40 days of reading the Bible together in a series called, “Engage the Word.” But can we trust it? When we point our friends and family members to faith on the basis of this book, can we do so with confidence in the integrity of this book?

You see, we believe that

### **1. The Bible is God’s Word to us.**

We believe it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That doesn’t mean it mystically appeared, or that God dictated while people wrote, or that he turned them into some kind of catatonic stenographers (there’s a word that’s no longer a part of our vocabulary!). For those of us who are younger, God didn’t turn them into some kind of spiritual Babel Fish or Google translator. But God spoke clearly to people who, in cooperation with His Spirit, recorded what they knew, saw, and heard. Then God protected that recorded Word, knowing it would

be compiled and preserved for us to this very day, intact, to reveal His heart, His plan, His Word to us. This is what the Bible says about itself: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, nlt)

That’s why we are going to read it together over the next 40 days, beginning tomorrow.

Now, sometimes people say the Bible isn’t credible because it is bad history. Well, what is bad history? Let me start with some easy examples of what bad history might be. I’ll give you some phrases and you tell me why it’s bad history.

First statement: World War I was a bitter four-year conflict fought from 1890 to 1894. Good history or bad history? Why is it bad history? What’s wrong? The dates are wrong. (Some of you are bad students!) World War I was fought between 1914 and 1918. *Good history pays attention to dates and gets them right.* Bad history doesn’t.

Second statement: World War II was a bloody conflict between Allied and Axis forces fought on the battlefields in Central China from 1939 to 1945. Are the dates right? Yes, the dates are right. What’s wrong? The place. The geography is wrong. World War II was not fought in Central China, but predominantly in Europe, South Pacific, and a few other places. *Good history gets geography right.*

The third statement: The Premier of the Soviet Union, Margaret Thatcher, will always be remembered as the leader who engineered the unraveling of the USSR. (You’re getting to be better students) Why is that bad history? It’s the wrong what? It’s the wrong person. It’s Gorbachev, not Thatcher. *Good history pays attention to the people facts and gets them right.*

Here is one more: Michael Jordan played basketball for over a decade for the Chicago Bulls in the 80s and 90s, but his play was only average. Now, are the dates right? Yes. Is the place right? Yes. You know the person is right. Just the whole storyline is wrong. The essence of what the statement is about is wrong. *Good history pays attention to the story and gets it right.*

Bad history plays loose with dates, places, people or storylines. I think we could all agree on that much. Every once in a while a new book will pop up and claim that there was no Holocaust in World War II, that the whole thing was made up for propaganda purposes. Every *day* the government of Iran makes that claim.

That’s just bad history because we have eyewitnesses who experienced it and who are still alive to tell about it. We know the dates. We know the people. We know

names of murderers and those who were murdered. We know the storyline; it can't be argued. So anybody who tries to alter the reality of the Holocaust or any other well-documented event in history is going to have a tough time because good history will stand up to the challenges.

All of that to say, when you study the Bible and you compare it to accepted history, the events of the Bible have been well established historically. There is wide documentation and corroboration and cross checking. The Bible is not bad history. In fact, the Bible is not just good history, it has proven to be *outstanding* history.

Sometimes the Bible is even more accurate than the historical accounts. Let me give you an example of this:

For many years, secular scholars laughed at the idea that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. The historians claimed that in the days of Moses, people were preliterate; they couldn't read or write. So they said, "This is an obvious situation where the Bible is bad history." Many years later, however, archeological digs uncovered tablets, scrolls, and writing instruments that clearly show that a good portion of Moses' entire culture was literate, in fact, quite intelligent and sophisticated. All the secular historians had to agree that the Bible is good history.

Let me give you another example:

The critics of the Bible used to point to people mentioned several times in the Old Testament in the Bible, a nation called the Hittites. The secular historians said, "Look, no such group of people ever existed. This is purely fictional. There's no record of them anywhere. The Bible is bad science." That is until 1906 when archaeologists unearthed not only evidence that the Hittite nation once existed, but they found the capital city and 40 other key cities that made up the Hittite Empire.

Friends, this kind of thing has happened scores of times in the last hundred years where what was thought to be bad history in the Bible suddenly became good history because of archaeological science. The Scripture is very accurate in even the little details surrounding the events of the Bible.

For example Luke, who penned the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts in the New Testament, demonstrated amazing geographic precision when he referenced certain cities, towns and villages that he and the Apostle Paul traveled through during the first missionary journey. Each city, town and village that Luke mentioned squares exactly with the record of secular history. The same is true when Luke cites the official names of the city and state leaders of his day. It would have been pretty easy to get at least one of those wrong, but Luke gets every single one of them exactly right. It's good history.

The Bible starts with history all the way back to the Creation because

## 2. The Creation is God's *First Word*.

For those of us who are parents, our kids' first words were a big deal. I'm pretty sure all three of our boys' first words were, "Hello Father!" (Well, maybe not) But I will tell you we celebrated. It was like affirmation of everything we hoped they would become. Creation is God's first word in this universe! It's the affirmation of all he tells us. And it continues to reverberate all around us. All you have to do is look outside and you are seeing to this very day God's first Word. He has revealed himself to us in creation itself. That's why the Bible says, "For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God." (Romans 1:20, nlt) (Bonus verse!)

Now, having said that, some people will also say that the Bible can't be relied on because it's a bad science book. Let me reply to that first by saying it's not supposed to be a science book; it's a book about God's dealings with human beings. But there is some science in it.

Let me give some examples. First, some scientists are finally admitting that an outside power of some kind was necessary to kick-start the forming of this universe. Some scientists are finally admitting that you'd have to wait a long, long time for nothing plus nothing plus nothing to produce anything. Even some committed atheistic scientists are seeing a possible parallel between the creation story of the Bible and the Big Bang Theory. Some are finally saying at some point that maybe, just maybe, something or someone ignited the activity that resulted in the world taking form; that there is intelligent design to the universe.

Another point of agreement between Bible scholars and scientists is that no new matter is being created. You science students know that the first law of thermodynamics is that the actual amount of energy in the universe stays constant, nothing is being added. Interestingly, the Bible held that position thousands of years ago. The Bible states in Genesis 2 that after God completed his creation, God stopped creating. He rested. He decided not to add anything additional to the equation of creation. No new matter. The Bible held that position thousands of years ago. Scientists hold it today.

How about another one? In the Book of Genesis, the Bible says that God formed man from the dust of the ground. And, of course, after death, the Bible says man's body -- not his soul, but his body -- is going to return to the dust of the ground.

After centuries of speculation about what makes up the human body, modern scientists have figured out that the basic elements of the human body are the same as those elements found in the earth.

Or how about one more? Back in the Book of Genesis, 1:24, the Bible says that living creatures -- listen carefully -- will reproduce after their own kind, and only after their own kind. Of course, for the last 200 years, many scientists have been desperately trying to show evidence for any kind of reproduction that would indicate a gradual evolution from one lower kind of living thing to a higher form of living thing -- change within the species.

Evolution depends on this. But listen to what agnostic paleontologist, Stephen J. Gould, recently wrote: "Species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they finally disappear." Now, do you understand what he is saying? Scientific research is slowly forcing scientists to consider adopting the position the Bible has held for thousands of years, and that is that living creatures only reproduce after their own kind.

The Bible may not be a science book, but it reveals God and his very first words, from the beginning of created science.

We're talking about this today because, you know, it's easier to take pot shots at the Bible than to read it, or to sit down and do some serious study and come to some thoughtful conclusions about the Bible.

How can you make sweeping statements about the Bible's credibility if you've never read it cover to cover, and you haven't read it closely? How responsible is that to hold a position but never having done your homework?

Maybe it's time for some of us to do a little more homework around here. Maybe it's time for some of us to start reading the Bible, or to attend the Community Groups at 8:45a, or to attend the Sunday afternoon content classes, because you might learn and grow in ways you never thought possible. If you want to know what the Bible says—better yet, if you want to know God—read his book! That's why we are in this series. If you start reading with us tomorrow, you will begin in Genesis, and there are a couple of different views you will get when it comes to the Creation; it provides

### **3. Two Perspectives.**

As you look at the creation account in the reading that you will do this week, you will see the - big picture of our God, the expanse of his power and majesty, and his great plan for people. In just a few short chapters, you will see a God who has a plan and who is determined to accomplish that plan, all because he loves people so very much. He created all that we can see and all that we can't see, for our blessing, for our use, and for our stewardship. You can't help but get a big picture perspective. But you also see something else. And that is God's - human interest

story. God has a great, driving interest in us humans. It drives all he does in creation and much of what he does outside of creation. And you will see humankind. You see so much of our nature and character. Unfortunately, we haven't changed all that much, but we can!

What about the human condition? Does the Bible help us with this? Some would say the Bible is terrible psychology. Is it? Does it turn people into head cases? Does it instruct people to live in unhealthy ways? Does it undermine marriages and families and friendships? Does it create mental or emotional havoc in people's lives?

For over 30 years I've encouraged people to read the Bible, to understand the Bible, to live the truth of the Bible, to apply it to their lives, to bet the farm on it, to plan their eternity on it. I've encouraged people to set their moral compass by the teachings of the Bible, to relate to family and friends according to the relational rules of the road set down in the Bible, to resolve conflict according to the biblical pattern for conflict resolution, to build their marriages and raise their children, and treat their bodies according to the biblical pattern.

I just have to get this off my chest: if I thought for a single minute that the teachings of this book were way off base, if they were terrible psychology, if they were hurtful and damaging to the human psyche, if they would wreck relationships, if they would be damaging in any way to human beings, you have got to believe I could not continue to teach this book.

Every week as I stand up in front of you to teach the Bible, I do so with a full awareness that many of the people I love most in life are right here listening. My wife and my boys are here. My closest inner circle of friends are here. My colleagues on the staff are here. Many of the neighbors in my neighborhood are here. Many of my business friends in this community are here listening to the Bible.

How could I teach this if deep down I knew that the Bible was going to be harmful to the human psyche and damaging to people's emotional health and their relational health? Could you do that? I can't. But I don't live with that kind of tension in my teaching, not at all, ever, because the Bible's stood the test of time again and again.

I am thoroughly convinced that the Bible teaches the best psychology available to human beings, the absolute best available. The wisdom of the Bible is the surest foundation a person can build their one and only life on.

When people I love the most are asking me for input at critical decision points of their life, I don't turn on the television and look at the writings of the latest guest

on Oprah or The View or Dr. Phil. I turn to the Scriptures where God has spoken and given his wisdom.

I find wisdom and truth from the Word of God, the kind of wisdom that has contributed to people's stability and growth and deepening faith for thousands of years. I turn to that, and then I offer counsel to people at decision points in their life. I am convinced the Bible is the best psychology out there, friends, the absolute best.

But if you want to talk for just a moment about some terrible psychology, I'll talk to you about that because I see it, read it, and hear it almost everywhere I turn these days. Terrible psychology is any psychology that puts a human being at the center of the universe instead of God.

You devise a psychology that puts a human being at the center of the universe, you watch that human being get self-obsessed, self-absorbed, self-centered. They'll alienate their marriage partner, they'll alienate their kids, their friends, their business partnerships, I mean, it's going to be a disaster.

Terrible psychology is any psychology that says the highest aim in life is for me to feel good and to fill all my desires. We go on that plan as a society; we will wreck this world in five years or less. But I read in books and magazines, I listen on the television, and I hear that kind of psychology being put out there every single day.

Terrible psychology is any psychology that says, "Anger should always be ventilated." That "guilt" doesn't matter at all." "Divorce has no consequences. Kids can just raise themselves." Let's call that stuff what it is, friends. That is terrible psychology.

I can't tell you how many times I talk with people who tell me horror stories of what happened when they followed the foolish counsel of someone who told them these things.

All the time I see people who come in for counseling because they've followed bad psychology and their lives are a mess. They talk about going through a couple of marriages, and their kids are a mess, they're in financial arrears. I mean, they're just a train wreck. Then they say, "Well, here I am. Could God help me?" Certainly he can. But look at the depth of the hole that person is going to have to be lifted out of. Why? Because they followed terrible psychology.

God's heart must break when his gift, the Bible, his instruction manual for human life is scoffed and ridiculed, because God knows that the Bible is the only book that can set people free.

It's the only book that can introduce people to faith in Jesus Christ. It's the only

book that equips us with a faith that works. It's the only book that empowers us to live a life of purpose. It's the only book that can help people plan a decent future and a wonderful eternity. It's the only book that enables us to love, and learn, and live.

You know, I'm 49 years old so I've done a little living, and hopefully there's some to do. But in my 49 years, I have never heard a single person one time say to me, "Ten years ago I decided to build my life on the Bible, decided to build my marriage, raise my kids, handle my money, treat my body, all of that according to the wisdom of Scripture, but I now realize it was a terrible decision. I regret it deeply." I have never had that. But almost every week I have multiple people who tell me that they built their life on something else and now their life is a wreck.

So, friends, we have a decision to make right now, and I'm not going to let you off the hook on this one. We have a choice to make, and it involves this book, the book that God breathed into being, the inspired book.

The book unlike any other book. The book that can be trusted. The book that has stood the test of time. The book with good history in it, good science in it, and the best psychology you're ever going to find anywhere. The Book that reveals God to us, records his first words from the very beginning, and that shows his big picture plan for us predictable people. What are you going to do with this book today? You can disregard it. You can blow it off.

But if you do, I just have one question to ask you: What are you going to replace it with? What's going to be true north for the compass of your life? What's going to give you an indication of what's really right and wrong and what's around in the afterlife? The instruction for daily life, what is it going to be? It better be good because you're betting the farm of your life and eternity on it.

My strongest recommendation is that you'd make the other choice, that you would choose this day to build your whole life and plan your eternity on the truth in this book. I'm going to challenge you to make a decision today, to read a small portion of the Bible with us every day for the next 40 days, starting tomorrow.

And you parents, I'm not beyond pleading. I plead with you to make sure your kids understand the truth in this book because if you spin them out into a world as corrupt and lost as ours, and they don't know where true north is, that's parental malpractice. You can't send them out if they don't know who God is, what the love of Christ is about, what's right, what's wrong, what heaven is, what hell is. Don't do that to your kids. Give them truth on a regular basis. Use this resource we're giving you. Do the once a week family discussion.

My strongest recommendation is that you embrace the central teachings of the

Scripture: that there is a God and He loves you, that His Son, Jesus Christ, went on the cross for your behalf so that your sins could be forgiven. And if you invite Him into your life, He'll transform you from the inside out and set you on a course for a life of purpose and abundance and one day for heaven. That's my recommendation, friend, that you would make a decision to trust the Bible fully today. But you know what? All I can do is recommend. You have to decide. Do you want to know God? Read his book!