

In the Beginning God...

Genesis 1:1

#r<a")h' taeîw> ~yIm:BV'h; taeî ~yhi_řa/ ar"âB' tyviParEB.

Bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim vayet hayaretz.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Today's sermon is simply a meditation on this one verse. Welcome to the book of beginnings! We are endeavoring on a new study in the book of Genesis.

Genesis is the title given to this book in the LXX, that is the Greek translation of the 2nd C. BC. Genesis means "creation" or "generation". In fact, the phrase "these are the generations of..." occurs ten times in the book as a whole. Genesis is a history of the generation of new things.

But if you picked up a Hebrew bible, you would find the title to be bereshit. Bereshit is the first word of the first verse of the book. It means "in the beginning". There are many beginnings in the book of Genesis. We see on these pages the beginning of the Universe, all that exists in this world. We also see the beginning mankind. But most importantly, we see the beginning of God's covenant people – Israel.

God wants his own people to know who they are and from where they have come. He wants them to know Him, as the true and only God, and as the One who has brought them to be as his people.

2 Samuel 7:23 ²³ And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods?

In Genesis God's reveals Himself to his people. And God reveals to his people their own beginnings. As believers in Jesus Christ, we too have Genesis as an explanation of our beginnings. The Apostle Peter speaks of Christians using the same sort of description that God gave to Israel of old.

1 Peter 2:9-10 ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him

who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. So, while Genesis has much to say to the unbelieving world, it is intended as God's gracious revealing of Himself to his own redeemed people, explaining their own beginnings.

How did we get the book of Genesis? Who is the author? Genesis, along with Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were given to God's people by Moses. They were first received by God's people sometime after the Exodus and before entering the Promised Land under Joshua. We call these first five books of the Bible the Pentateuch. Moses was a prophet among prophets. He received direct revelation from God.

Numbers 12:6-8 ⁶ And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.

Jesus affirms that Moses was the author of the first five books. When quoting these books Jesus would often state that "Moses said" or "Moses commanded." But this is not to say that Moses did not make use of other human sources and traditions. It is likely that he made use of some oral traditions. And it is also likely that he made use of written family genealogies as well. There is nothing contrary to divine inspiration to acknowledge that Moses used these sources. And it is also evident that after Moses died others occasionally made edits. For instance, the ending of Deuteronomy records Moses' death. That was probably added by Joshua. And sometimes we see the editing of place names so that the current generation would better understand the text.

Acknowledging these minor exceptions, we can affirm that God spoke to his people through Moses in the book of Genesis. Why do I tell you this? Why is it important? Because Genesis was written for you. It is a personal letter written to you by God. He wants you to understand who you are in relation to Him as your Creator and Redeemer. Genesis is historical and factual. But they are not random facts, nor are they a comprehensive account of all that occurred.

For instance, we are not told of the creation of angels nor of the rebellion of Lucifer the highest angel. We may be curious about these historical facts, but God in his wisdom has not given them to us. What he has given us is for the purpose of helping us to know our God and all that He has done throughout history to save us for himself.

In Genesis, we learn whether our God is powerful enough to establish his kingdom of righteousness on the earth. And we learn whether our God is powerful enough and gracious enough to deal with the problem of our sin. The Book of Genesis, along with all of Scripture, is given to us to promote and encourage our faith that our God is able, and he is willing.

As we study Genesis, we will learn many interesting things. But our primary purpose is that we would know God. And as we know him better, we may be encouraged to trust him more fully. Even though we are only going to look at verse 1 today, we are going to squeeze a lot out of this one verse.

First off, God is the One being with no beginning.

In the beginning,

God created

the heavens and the earth.

This means that when there was nothing else, there was God.

Everything that you see today had a beginning. Your life had a beginning. Your parent's lives had a beginning. The home in which you live had a beginning. Our country had a beginning. The mountains had a beginning. The oceans had a beginning. The Sun and Moon and Stars had a beginning. Light had a beginning. Even time itself had a beginning. Before all of these things, there was God.

Psalm 90:1-2 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

God is the one with no beginning! What exactly does that mean for you? What are the implications of God not having a beginning? Psalm 90 gives us a hint. The One with no beginning is able to be the home, the dwelling place, of his people.

Our hearts continually search for true rest. We want a place that is solid and reliable in which we can dwell in security and peace. We are searching for a home, a

dwelling place. God is our true dwelling place. He alone is unchanging. He alone is constant. To have a beginning implies change. It implies a movement from one place to another. And so, everything in this world is changing. Sometimes change is for the good. Sometimes change can be terrible. Only the One who has no beginning can be our eternal dwelling place. He is the only One who does not change like shifting shadows.

When you are struggling with the transience of life, look to the One who has no beginning, the One who is unchanging and who is our dwelling place from everlasting to everlasting. Another implication of God existing before the beginning is that our God is not a part of this creation. He existed before the creation and rules above the creation. The One who has no beginning is the source of all that does now exist.

ESV Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

The lie of evolution is not so much that God has designed the universe with flexibility built into it. Of course, the capacity for change is built into our universe. The lie of evolution is that what we now see came from what we now see. It is the lie that what we see is all there is.

I remember thinking about these things when I was still in college. And I remember reading a very good argument from J.P. Moreland. It went something like this. It is easier to believe in an eternal being who is outside of the creation than it is to believe in the eternity of the creation itself. I have found that to be true.

When I look at what I can now see, I cannot find a being larger than the world. All I find is the world. But if there is hope for this world it must begin with the One who is above this world and before the world. The God who has no beginning is the God of “eternal power”. The God who has no beginning is not limited by the world. There is no time limit on his power. There is no strength limit to his power. That means that whatever your problems are in this world, God is able to deal with them. He may not deal with them in the way you want or as quickly as you want, but He can be trusted to deal with them.

There are some problems in life that have human solutions. God has given to us the task of taking dominion over this creation. But many of our problems do not have human solutions. We must cast our hopes upon the One who is above this creation.

It is this God who is outside of creation who has brought you into a relationship with himself. Him who has no beginning, dwells with those who have beginnings. This is why Moses believed and taught what he did in Exodus 8:10.

Exodus 8:10 ¹⁰ ... Moses said, "Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.

God wants his people to know that he is like no other. God was not to be one god among many. He was to be the only true God in their worship and life. Do you know that your God is utterly unique? Do you know that there is nothing in all creation that compares to your God! That is what God wants you to know about himself. This is why the first commandment is: You shall have no other gods before me. Not because we cannot make gods out of created beings and form images of them to suit our purposes. But because there is nothing IN Creation that compares to our true God.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

In knowing God, we are not knowing One who is a part of this Creation. We are knowing the One who existed in the beginning. "In the beginning GOD..."

The word for God in Genesis 1:1 is Elohim. Elohim = Plural of El El simply means "god". The plural of god is "gods". So, why do we translate it here as God, singular God?

There are many instances throughout the OT in which Elohim is translated gods. There are several reasons. The first is that the Hebrew plural subject is coupled with a singular verb. Usually verbs and subjects are in agreement. But here, and throughout the Old Testament, whenever Elohim is used to refer to Israel's God it is combined with the singular verb. So, why not just use the singular subject (El). One reason is that (El) is often used when referring to the false gods of the other nations. And Israel's God is not just one of the false gods of the pagans. The use of the plural form of God to describe the ONE God of the Israelites – distinguishes Him as the God who is above all.

But we also can see here a hint of the Trinity in the name Elohim. I can only explain this by recognizing that God himself is the true author of Scripture. The overriding message of the OT is that there is only one true God. Basic to the Hebrew confession of faith is that God is one.

Deuteronomy 6:4 ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

But from the NT and the Incarnation, we see that this One God exists in more than one person.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

Given the fullness of revelation that we now have, it is not a stretch to see the wonderful wisdom of God in the use of the plural form of El. How much of this Moses would have understood is difficult to know. But understanding that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit all existed together eternally becomes incredibly important as the character of God unfolds throughout history.

One is a lonely number. One can also be a selfish number: me, myself and I. But God has never been lonely. And neither has he been selfish. The Father gives love to the Son. The Son gives love to the Father. The Spirit is loved by both the Father and the Son and also perfectly loves them in return.

God is neither starving for love nor desperate to give love. God is the source of all true love. It is true to think of creation as God's gracious desire to bring his people into the joy of his own internal relationships with himself. It is not enough to think of God as the sovereign Creator of all, we must also see him as our personal source of true life and intimacy.

So, when you hear: In the beginning, God... think two complementary aspects of God.

1. God is the all powerful, eternal, and transcendent God in whom alone we can find our dwelling place.
2. God is the personal, loving, joyful God in whom alone we can find our personal joy and become a wellspring of true love ourselves.

In the beginning God "created". The Hebrew word in Genesis 1:1 for create is "bara". This word is specifically used to describe the "bringing of something into existence." Its derivative, beriah, means "a new thing."

Of course, it is used here in Genesis 1 because it describes God's activity of bringing into existence new things. God creates what was not there before.

And although it is not explicit in the text, it is implied that he does so without any materials with which to work. Theologians have called this creation "ex nihilo". Creation from nothing. This is surely what God wants to communicate to his people. I am your God. I am the God who can make new things out of nothing.

But if you think that God only wants his people to look backward to his past greatness, you miss the point. God is forever calling his people to look forward to what he will do in the future. He wants them to trust him.

To the Israelites in Moses' day, God was the One who would create for them a new beginning in the promised land. But the physical land of Moses' day was only a foreshadow of the eternal home God would make for his people.

Isaiah 65:16-19 ¹⁶ So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes. ¹⁷ "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

Only the God who has created out of nothing can be trusted to create again.

I know that I am jumping ahead of myself. We have not even come to Fall of Mankind into sin. We have not discussed how the original creation was corrupted by sin and placed under God's curse. But that is OK because we do not need to be taught that this world is in need of fixing. In fact, when we really stop to think about it, this world is beyond fixing. What is needed is something completely new. And God promises to his people that He is up for the task.

He promises to his people that he will create a new heavens and a new earth for their enjoyment, one that has not, nor ever will be, tainted by sin.

There is another context in which this Hebrew word “bara” is used. It is found on the lips of the King David. The context is his having been confronted by the prophet Nathan in regards to his sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent sin of having her husband murdered.

David understands the depths of the evil of his actions. But he also understands as he had not ever realized before, the depth of the corruption of his heart. David pleads to God for mercy. He seeks forgiveness. He wants God to cleanse his record.

But David wants something more. He wants something that he knows only God can give him. David wants a new heart. And what word does he choose to express his desire: Bara.

Psalm 51:10 ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Through David God reveals the cry of every heart wanting redemption. We do not ask God to give us the strength to fix ourselves. We do not evaluate our condition and conclude, “Broken, but fixable”. We come to the place where we know we need change, but are utterly helpless in ourselves to bring about the change that we so desperately need. Who can help you when there is nothing within yourself to help yourself? Only the One who was there at the beginning... the One who created something from nothing... the One who is in the business of creating new things.

It is wonderful to think about the wonders of this present world. But God does not reveal himself as Creator so that you can simply marvel at what he has done. He wants you to trust in Him for what he will do!

David’s prayer is the prayer of conversion.
It is the first prayer of the new born believer.

But as someone who remembers the first time I prayed that prayer many years ago, I can also testify that God’s work of making me a new creation is not yet finished. I believe that I have been given a new heart and that I am united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. But I also continue to struggle with my old sinful nature. There is a war that continues within my soul.

And so, I continue to pray David's prayer. When I want to do good, I continue to find evil right there beside me. And sometimes I wonder if I will ever only and always desire that which is good. It is in these times that my hope is not found in myself, but in the God who creates, and in the God who finishes what he has begun.

Philippians 1:6 ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Are you beginning to see how very good it is that this God is your God?

- Your Savior must be your Creator!

In the beginning

In the beginning God

In the beginning God created

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

Why is it important that our God created "the heavens and the earth"?

Our God sustains and rules over the entirety of our lives.

The Hebrew word for heavens is "shamayim". It is in the plural.

It is a word that can refer to the sky in which the birds fly around. It can also refer to the space in which the Sun and the Moon and the Stars exist. And it also can refer to the spiritual abode of God.

The Hebrew word for Earth is "eretz". This word can refer to the planet on which we all live. It can also refer to land generally as what we call ground.

Taken together, they indicate the entirety of all that exists.

1 Chronicles 29:11-12 ¹¹ Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your

hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” Abraham Kuyper

As Creator over all, all the Creation relies upon God for its very existence. Speaking of Jesus, the 2nd Person of the Trinity, the Book of Colossians makes this clear.

Colossians 1:15-17 ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

One of the mysteries of our created order is that of gravitational force. Scientists observe gravity, but we still understand so little about gravity. I am no physicist, but I believe the Bible tells me that the entirety of Creation is held together by the hand of God. Of course, we should continue to study the laws of gravitational forces and to seek to take dominion over them. But we should engage in this work with humility, recognizing that even we are held together by the hand of God. What is true of the creation in general is more specifically true of us as humans.

Acts 17:24-25 ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Every person that draws breath does so by the hand of God. Remind yourself of this throughout the day. Stop, take a deep breath, and think to yourself, “It is only by the hand of God that I took that breath.”

Once we begin to see the implications of our God being the Creator and Sustainer of all things, we begin to see how vital it is to offer Him praise. As Creator over all, our God is worthy of praise from all of his creation. To not use our hearts and voices to praise God is to rob him of what belongs to him.

1 Chronicles 16:23-31 ²³ Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. ²⁸ Ascribe to the LORD, O clans of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; ³⁰ tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"

God takes pleasure in the praise of even one of his children. There is no need for large crowds to praise our God. But don't we sometimes feel that when we praise it is not enough? I don't mean that we are not praising enough, although that is undoubtedly true. I mean that God is greater than the praise that we alone can give.

Our God is worthy of the praise of all the earth.

And Our God is the rightful Judge of all the earth.

1 Samuel 2:10 ¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed."

God has jurisdiction over the ends of the earth. All flesh will stand before him.

Psalms 82:8 ⁸ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!

Psalms 96:11-13 ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy ¹³ before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Understanding that our God is Judge over all the earth, ought to bring us to fear him, not as a cruel monster, but as One who is holy and righteous. But strangely and wonderfully, the inability of ever finding a place to hide from God can also bring incredible comfort.

Psalm 139:7-10 ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Our God is with us at all times and in all places and he knows us completely. Therefore, we can place our full trust in Him. There is one last point I want to make today from Genesis 1:1.

Just as God gave a land to Adam and Eve at the beginning, our God promises to us a Land. But the Land that he promises to us is not a portion of this earth, but an entire new earth. We touched on this already, but it is worth mentioning again. Earth and Land are interchangeable in the Hebrew. In the context of Moses, God was leading his people into the Promised Land. The home that God would provide for his people. The home in which they would dwell, and in which he would dwell with them.

In comparison with the whole earth, the Promised Land was a very tiny portion of land. That Promised Land was only a foreshadow of the true Promised Land that God would provide for his people.

Hebrews 11:9-10 ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

There is no place in this world that will give you everything for which your heart yearns. This present “heavens and earth” are not our home. This original universe has been affected in every part by the curse. God will not simply take his people into a nice place in this present creation.

There is no paradise left in this creation.

We are called to be stewards of this creation. We are called to take dominion over this creation. But we will never create a paradise on earth.

Our hope can only be found in the One who is able to create a New Heavens and a New Earth. And that is precisely what God says of himself!

I am your "man".

I am your God.

Revelation 21:1-6 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

God may bring about the new creation today.

Or he may linger before he returns for some time.

The longer he lingers, the more mercy he is having on those who are dead in sin.

We keep one eye on our eternal hopes. But we keep the other eye on God's work of creating new hearts in our present creation. Every new believer is a firstfruits of the new creation. As Christians we belong to the new creation.

In every conceivable way possible God lays out the pattern by which we find life.

We are the creation. God alone is the creator.

He is not dependent upon us.

We are utterly dependent upon him in every way.

God is laying a foundation for your faith in his excellent word.

The world is subtly telling you every day that your God is not who he says he is.

Your own flesh is telling you that your God is not who he says he is.

But God is telling you “In the beginning, I existed, and I continue to exist, and will forever exist. And I am your God.”