

Humble. Beginnings.

Approaching The Creator with Humility

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (ESV)

¹ When God began to create heaven and earth -- (TNK)

Genesis 1:1

Humble Beginnings

I WANT TO BEGIN BY TELLING YOU A STORY. My story takes place on seven special days. It is a complete, sad, yet also funny story.

The beginning day was Dec 10, 1828 in Scotland Co., Missouri. A mother was pregnant in the morning, but in the evening she had given birth to a girl-- Elizabeth Ann Gorman. She was beautiful and wonderful, and the girl grew into a fine woman.

The second day, Elizabeth met a wonderful man named William. They fell in love and all was good in the world. Elizabeth Gorman became Elizabeth Goodwin. In the morning she was single, but by evening, she had married the man of her dreams.

On the morning of the third day, they heard about the better life they could have out west. By evening, they packed their bags and moved to Westcliffe, CO, a small mountain town at the foot of the rugged and majestic Sangre De Cristo (Blood of Christ) mountains.

The fourth day saw a parting of the ways. He went off to Canyon City where he died from influenza. She started a boarding house with her daughter Lucy, who was pregnant with my great grandmother--Nellie Myrtle Bryan (Van Dorn).

The fifth day saw great change. Running a boarding house was a difficult life, and her daughter and son in law had heard about a good and free land to the north

and west in Moffat County, where some of their relatives had already become established. So they covered the wagon in the morning, and by evening they were headed to what would become, in twenty some-odd years, Craig, Co. If you've ever been to Craig you will understand that the land was free, but it most definitely is not "good," at least not in a farming kind of way. It is full of sage brush and cactus and wild animals. Farming was a rare and difficult burden.

On the sixth day, my great, great, great grandmother took in her granddaughter, Nellie, a child of three years of age, after her daughter Lucy died of typhoid fever. She took her into her dugout, a "soddie"--an inconceivably tiny (approx.) 12 x 6 hole in the side of a river bank covered with tree branches, wood, and mud. This is where the two of them lived, alone, miles and miles from the nearest outpost of civilization, along the freight wagon route between Rawlins, WY and Grand Junction, CO—two hundred miles of torturous, uninhabited landscape, while Bob, Nellie's father, was away for three weeks at a time.

Those were difficult days. Then, on the seventh day, Elizabeth Ann Goodwin rested with her fathers. She died in that lonely hole, accompanied by her granddaughter and another relative. She became the second person buried in the Craig cemetery. One day, many years later, my own two year old daughter overheard this story of Grandma Goodwin dying in that hole. We were talking about it while on the way to see the old soddie, which still exists to this day, though in ruins. When we arrived at the hole, there was a dead, poached skin of a deer inside, which someone had left there illegally, hoping it would not be found. It was found, by my daughter, who, when she saw it asked, "Is that her?" And we all rested in the laughter of the innocence of a child.

People who came out west to scrounge a living off this desolate landscape were, by nature, *humble* people. You had to be to live a life like that. People who came out west were also starting life anew. It was, quite literally for them, a *new beginning*. Humble beginnings. When I thought of title for this sermon, a sermon which will kick off a new study in the book of Genesis, the first thing that came to my mind was this story of my ancestors—perhaps because I had just been there a week earlier to bury my own grandmother in that same Craig cemetery.

Humble. Beginnings.

But I have not titled my sermon “Humble Beginnings,” from the phrase that reminds us all of stories like these. Rather, I have titled it “Humble. Beginnings.” It is not a phrase, but two distinct words separated by periods. Grammar matters. If you don’t believe me compare the following ideas:

Let’s eat, grandma.
Let’s eat grandma.

The first is a call to grandma to come to dinner. The second is, well, a call to someone else to do something unthinkable to grandma; namely, eat her. In the passage today, grammar (not gramma) is very important and can change the whole meaning of the text.

What we are going to see from the very first verse of Genesis is something that should keep us all humble. It is also something that will teach us about beginnings. These are two separate ideas: Humble. Beginnings.

Beginnings

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The word for “beginning” is *reshith*. It is found in the first verse of the book, and is in fact the first word of the Bible. Before we get into what it all means, let’s consider a few facts about Genesis. We get **the title** for the book from the LXX which reads, (*Genesis Kosmou*): Origin of the World. Genesis is the book of origins. That is very similar to the idea of a beginning.

These origins are mostly **concerned with people**. So, the book is divided into **ten sections** which each begin, “**These are the generations of ...**” There are generations of “**the heavens and the earth**” which tell us about **Adam and Eve** specifically (2:4); the generations of **Adam’s descendants** (5:1); the generations of **Noah** (6:9); of **Noah’s sons** (10:1); of **Shem** specifically (11:10); **Terah** (11:27); **Ishmael** (25:12); **Isaac** (25:19); **Esau** (36:1); and **Jacob** (37:2).¹

In giving us the origins of these people, **the book as a whole acts as a preface to understanding the Exodus** and all that God does with Israel after it, from giving it

¹ For an outline of the book according to this formula, see the end of the chapter.

the law to bringing them into the Promised Land. In other words, the stories of Genesis serve a greater purpose; namely, to ground the reader in the story of redemption that God is working about through his chosen people, a nation that he created out of a man named Abram, but which did not exist when all the other nations came into being.

There are eleven chapters that come before Abraham is introduced. To understand God's working in Israel, we need to understand in a more general way his working in the world before that. If we want to understand the meaning of the redemption that comes to Israel, we need to understand why we need redemption in the first place. We need to understand creation. You can't be redeemed if you aren't first created. In creation, we need to learn about God, what kind of being is he, what kind of power does he have, and so forth. We also need to learn about humanity. Why do we need redeeming? What kind of people have we become—morally speaking? Thus, we need to look at the fall. The first eleven chapters deal with these more basic questions.

While we can (and will) have interesting digressions on any number of secondary topics, the focus of even these discussions needs to be how and why God is working redemption. Not just "God" generically speaking, but God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of whom appear in the book. Let this always be the focus of our study together, for this is our common ground and our most important theology.

We'll make one other comment, on [authorship](#). The authorship of the book has traditionally been ascribed to [Moses](#) (see [Luke 24:27](#); [John 5:46](#)). This does not mean that Moses is the only person involved in the final form we have today. It means that Moses is the original compiler of the stories before us. He probably got these stories from traditions preserved by Jews before him, by the descendants of Noah, perhaps through stories from Enoch and/or even Adam which were preserved through the Flood.

Over the years, of course, new copies of Moses' material needed to be made, not only because of deterioration, but because of the exile, which changed the language of the people. It appears that Ezra was deeply involved in this editorial process, as he created a whole school of scribes simply for the purpose of making clear to Israel the history that Moses (and others) had passed down to them ([Ezra 7:6](#); [Neh 8:8, 13](#)). You can see this in Genesis, for instance, in the phrase "to this

day” which occurs many times in the book (Gen 19:37-38; 22:14; 26:33; 32:32; 35:20; 47:26; 48:15). Or, you can notice it in place names which were changed in order to make them recognizable to the listeners (cf. Gen 14:14 where Dan, who was not yet born, is the place Abram flees to). Thus, there were perhaps several redactors (editors) involved in the final form(s) we have today and this can make the study of this ancient book a bit more difficult.

Still, I view this entire editorial process from start to finish as belonging to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who gave us these most ancient words through ordinary men, languages, and cultures, yet in such a way that it gives us the truth *it seeks to give* infallibly. At some point between the Testaments, the Jews recognized that the book as it is today became basically fixed and that no more editing was necessary. The inspiration of the process itself stopped, and the book took on a quality which has been viewed as divinely inspired ever since.

God

Let’s move then to the text. We will focus on **just one verse today**, though later we will expand our view to the first three verses to make sense of this one verse. My purpose in doing this will, I hope, be made clear before we are finished. Genesis opens by saying something like this, “**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth**” (Gen 1:1 KJV). Immediately, a question of context surfaces. This comes prior to any of the “generations” formulas in the book, and thus most people see this and what follows (1:1-2:3) as kind of preface material to the book.

This verse is both vitally important and also notoriously difficult both to translate and to understand. It isn’t the whole verse that is like this, but parts of it. That is, it says some things clearly and other things, not so clearly. **That which is clear is vital**. That which is not clear is secondary. *Both* demand our humility. Hence, the idea of humility in the sermon today. We’ll look at what is clear and vital first.

If you had to guess what **the most important word** in this verse is, what would be it? My choice would be the word “God.” There are many words for God in Hebrew. The word chosen here is *elohim*. It occurs some 2,750 times in the OT. It is plural in form (like “sheep” or “deer”; “*im*” is the plural ending in Hebrew like “s” is in English), but may be plural or singular in meaning, depending on context.

This means there is a potential problem in translating the verse, for, there are several beings referred to as *elohim* in the OT. There are angels (**Gen 35:7**, cf. **32:1-2**; also **Deut 32:43** DSS). There are demons (**Deut 32:17**; **Ps 96:5** LXX). The dead Samuel is called an *elohim* (**1 Sam 28:13-14**), as are a special kind of angel called the “sons of God” (**Gen 6:4**; **Job 1:6**; **Ps 82:1**). According to Job and relevant to Genesis 1, it says that this last group were already there watching God work at his creation (**Job 38:7**). Finally, God is called *elohim*. **So which being(s) is in mind?**

The way you often tell if the word should be translated as God or gods is through the grammar, especially the verb attached to the noun. In this case, **Genesis 1:1** is perfectly clear. The verb is “created.” It is the *3rd person masculine singular* form of verb. Since verbs and nouns must agree in person and number, this means that Elohim must be singular: God. God created. All translations rightly say “God.”

One of the things we will discover as we go along in Genesis is that this specifically contradicts and attacks other Ancient Near Eastern creation stories. It is not merely for Israel’s edification or knowledge of history that this is written, but it is also a **warning** to them that their religion is very different from others and that they are without excuse if they abandon it. From the very beginning, it does this. In all of these pagan stories (indeed, even in the creation stories across the Ocean such as the Mayan *Popol Vuh*),² it is **the gods who create—together**. Thus, to say that God created is radically different than any other religion, especially when it gets into more details about what all it is that God created.³

If we want to understand what the text meant in Bible days, it is important to learn to lay aside 21st century concerns and get into the mindset of an ancient Israelite. They were surrounded by pagans who each had their own version of creation. A **Mesopotamian creation story** called the *Atrahasis Epic* says first that Belet-ili/Nintu would create, then Enki, then the Igigi gods. All of this was done in the “**assembly of the gods**.” Similarly, the famous *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian

² Involved in the Mayan creation are Quetzal and Heart of Sky (who include Thunderbolt Huracan, Youngest Thunderbolt, and Sudden Thunderbolt). The story is a fascinating read in terms of how so many similar ideas found in Genesis 1 are also used. See the *Popol Vuh*, Translation and Commentary by Allen J. Christenson, <http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/christenson/popolvuh.pdf>, last accessed 6-9-2015.

³ What I mean is, in some creation stories, there is a first cause of a few things, like a few primordial gods. But then, those gods create more gods, and those gods create the physical universe, and so on.

creation story has **Apsu** and **Tiamat**, then **Anu** and **Marduk** and so on creating, again in the midst of the divine assembly.⁴

Against this background, well known to any Israelite, Moses says that **God created**. One God. As Job says, the sons of God were *present*, but they were not creating. They were observing, singing, and shouting for joy (**Job 38:7**). Thus, we worship the God who created all things. Holy, Holy, Holy is he.

Who is this God exactly? We will not be introduced to him by a different name until **Gen 2:4** when his name, Yahweh, is first given to us. Yahweh Elohim. Yahweh God. **Psalm 18:31** asks, “**For who is God (Eloah), but Yahweh? And who is a rock, except our Elohim.**” (*Elohim* is the plural form of *Eloah*). **This is the first vital point of Genesis 1**, and to compromise on it is to fatally wound Christianity.

Creation: Heaven and Earth

A second vital point, and one that is clear as well, is that God created “**heaven and earth.**” Heaven and earth is a way of speaking about everything. It is that which is above and that which is below. It includes that which is visible and that which is invisible. God created it all.

Throughout the ancient world, **Heaven** (Greece: **Ouranos**, Egypt: **Nut** [f], Babylon: **Anu**) and **Earth** (Greece: **Gaia**, Egypt: **Geb** [m]; Babylon: **Ki**)⁵ are gods—persons, not things. The Egyptians saw it this way, as did the Babylonians, the Greeks, and virtually everyone else. It is heaven and earth together which spawn mankind (for instance, see chart below). And, curiously, you often find the gods and goddesses of water and mud and night and sky and others involved too.

Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i> , lines 45-46.	Gen 1:1 (LXX)
ἐξ ἀρχῆς, οὗς Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανός εὐρὺς ἔτικτεν	ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν .
from the beginning , those whom Earth and wide Heaven begot .	

⁴ This idea of a divine assembly of gods is most familiar to westerners through the mythology of the Greeks where **Zeus** reigns over the earth from the top of **Mt. Olympus** with other gods of the pantheon; but the idea is found throughout the world in almost every religion on the planet.

⁵ The earth is usually seen as fertile, and thus a woman (Mother Earth in **Wicca** for example). Heaven is usually seen as the source of the seed, and thus is usually masculine (**Zeus**, for example). Egypt sometimes switches this, seeing heaven as a star-covered naked woman hovering over the terrible, violent male earth.

οἱ τ' ἐκ τῶν ἐγένοντο ¹ θεοί, δοτῆρες ἐάων.	and the gods sprung of these, givers of good things.	In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.
¹ In Genesis, it is not the gods who are begotten/born/sprung up, but mankind. This word is used throughout Gen 5.		

We will see later on that in the Bible it is God who creates mankind. But **Genesis 1:1** uses the verb *bara'* which is usually translated as “create.” **Genesis 2:4** uses this word and a synonym. The new word is *asah*. It is usually translated “made.” To create and to make is the same thing. This is the foundation of the Christian doctrine of creation. The heavens and the earth have not always existed. They were created. God made them. They did not come into existence by some random freak accident. They have purpose, they have meaning, they have function. Nor are they given any personified role in creation at all. God rules over them and does not need them to create anything.

Heaven and earth appear together in the same verse in eight verses in Genesis 1. They appear together in 129 total in the OT. One of the most important for our purposes is found in Isaiah, in a verse that teaches you about the purpose for which God made heaven and earth. “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” (Isa 66:1). A throne and a footstool is a way of talking about a temple or a palace. This is part of the world’s function, and a primary part of Genesis 1. We will see more of this throughout our study of this chapter.

Application

What should you take away from these two points: first that God created and second that God created heaven and earth? First, you must see that **this God is unique**. He existed prior to the heavens and the earth. Indeed, elsewhere we learn that no one created God. He has always existed. He is eternal. He is the Uncaused Cause of everything else. He was not created. No one made God.

Isaiah 40 is a commentary on creation. It says things like, “**To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him**” (Isa 40:25)? “**He who brings out [the starry] host by number, calling them all by name.**” The stars, the sons of God, the angels, anything which may have been here prior to the creation of the material

universe—he made them too. Finally, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isa 40:28).

Children have a difficult time understanding this. Let’s be honest, we all do. But the other choice is absurd. If God was created, who created God? Who created that person? Who created that person? You get what is called an infinite regress, meaning that you can never stop going back to find a cause, and therefore, you can never move forward to get a result. It is even worse if we just assume that heaven and earth are eternal, because even scientists admits that matter is finite stuff. Thus, they propose something like a big-bang. But how did the singularity that produced this bang get there? All of this amounts to logical nothingness. In a kind of strange irony, the highest god of the Greek pantheon, the one who existed before all others is named “Chaos.” It means “gaping void.” This void is found in Genesis 1:2, but God is hovering over it.

Second, this God is powerful—VERY powerful. He created by himself; he needed no help. Isaiah says, “The Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him” (Isa 40:10). This is the statement used to introduce God’s creative activities in that chapter. Of course, God is triune, and so there are three persons in creation, but they are all equally God (God’s “arm” actually hints at this). Strikingly absent is any hint of a female consort helping God create. Pagans who personify the goddess have done a horrible thing; they have worshipped the creation rather than the Creator.

Two other things should be mentioned. God must also be infinitely wise and knowledgeable to have created all this. Indeed, as it says again in the same passage, “his understanding is unsearchable” (Isa 40:28). Finally, he is immense. Indeed, heaven and earth cannot contain him (1 Kgs 8:27).

In light of these attributes of God, the Apostle, also commenting on creation gives this application. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). The application here is that this knowledge of God is universal and he holds all men accountable for what they have done with that knowledge. There is a day of judgment coming. Therefore, the greatest application must be to do what the Holy angels in heaven do: worship him, submit to him, be subjected to him, obey him,

and humble ourselves. That is the application of **Genesis 1:1** and what we know for certain, and this is what we must believe and strive to let impact our hearts.

Humble

Who, How, When

However, we sometimes make other things in this verse more important than God and what he has done in creating. There are two things I want to talk about in regard to this. Both of the ideas we will now discuss have become controversial in our day, mostly because modern science and its associated theory of Darwinism has become so entrenched in the public sector.

What is Darwinism? As best I understand it, it has three necessary components: natural selection, time, and chance. The first is the *how of creation*, specifically the origin of species. Creation of most things is not immediate, but mediate, taking place through small, inherited mutations that increase a species ability to survive, eventually leading to the creation of brand new life forms. The second is the *when of creation*. Darwinism necessarily needs long amounts of time for the system to (supposedly) work. Thus, creation could not be a relatively recent event, as many Christians and Jews have believed throughout history. The third is the *who of creation*. Specifically, there was no intelligent design involved in how species “evolved.”⁶ It all just happened by chance. Chance is attributed with powers that intelligent beings possess, and so it ironically becomes much like the Greek’s Chaos who is the First Cause “god” of all things.

We have seen that one of these premises are utterly non-Christian. It is the idea that what is here got here by chance. No, Christianity from the very first verse of the Bible necessarily affirms that what is created is created by a Creator—by God. The other two premises, because they are often attached to a *Godless* theory, are often said to be impossible on other biblical grounds. To put it another way, they

⁶ “Chance,” of course, hits directly at the idea of God. Darwin’s religious beliefs have been the subject of much writing. What is safe to say is that whether he was a theist or an agnostic on the matter of God, whether he personally believed that an intelligent First Cause programmed the mechanisms that lead to evolution, his theories on science developed in such a way that the theory of evolution itself became void of God. Except for theistic or Christian evolutionists who believe that God used the mechanism of evolution to create, the three points of the theory discussed here are all valid for most who talk about the theory today.

are guilty by association. This is where things begin to get more difficult, maybe not for you personally, but certainly for other Christians out there.

There are Christians who really and truly believe that God created everything, that Jesus is God, that Jesus died for their sin, and so on, who nevertheless disagree with other Christians on the “when” and the “how” of God’s creation. They agree that God did it. They disagree with how and when he did it.

There are reasons Christians give from the Bible that support a position that God created everything [a short time ago](#) out of nothing. But there are also reasons other Christians give, from the Bible, that they use to support their position that God [didn’t create a short time ago](#), and how he created may not be the way some others think he created. My purpose is not to defend one view or the other.

They can’t both be correct. What I want to look at is the clarity with which Genesis 1:1 speaks to these issues. It could be that the verse is clear and that one or the other is just badly misinterpreting Scripture. Or, it could be that the Bible isn’t concerned with this modern question at all, and that one or both sides are actually reading into the text things that were never in mind when it was written. If that were the case, I suppose that one could argue that God foresaw this debate and he supernaturally intended another meaning that Moses didn’t think about, but this is not something we can really prove one way or the other. All we can deal with are how words are used, how they were used, how they were understood when they were written, and so on. Trying to figure out what may be secretly hidden in God’s mind is another matter entirely.

[I’m a pastor](#). And as I’ve thought about whether or not to preach through this book, this whole issue (along with other controversial ones like it) has kept me from doing so until now. Someone will be offended no matter what I say. I’m not afraid of offending, but I don’t want to offend *unnecessarily*. Perhaps I’m a fool for thinking we can steer clear of turbulent waters here. But my role is to shepherd and train the flock in what Scripture teaches and does not teach as best as I understand it. When I see what Genesis 1:1 says about both the “how” and the “when” of creation, unfortunately for this issue, I soon discover that what it says is not definitive for either position. This has nothing to do with science, but with grammar.

When

Let's deal with the "when" question first. **When did God create in Genesis 1:1.** What is in its mind? You might answer, "Pastor Doug, how can you be so blind. It says right here, 'In the beginning,' which means day 1." My answer is that maybe it says that; maybe it does not. We must look at the grammar. To get at this, let me give you a different but very literal translation of this verse. "When God began to create heaven and earth--" This comes from the Jewish Publications Society and there are others that follow the same thinking. **Let's compare the difference side by side:**

"When God began to create heaven and earth--"

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

The difference here is between what we call an **independent clause** and a **dependent clause**. What are those? The traditional translation is a complete thought. It stands alone. The other is an incomplete thought. It leaves you asking for more. "When God began to create heaven and earth ... *what?*"

Let's use a different example. Here is an independent thought. "The speaker taught Genesis 1." Here is a dependent thought. "When the speaker taught Genesis 1." That leads us to ask, "When he taught Genesis 1 what?" We expect something else. "When the preacher taught Genesis 1, *some people were very happy.*" The complete thought at the end finishes the sentence. The focus is not on the teaching, but on the happiness. Or, one could say, "*Some people were upset, when the speaker taught Genesis 1.*" Now the complete thought at the beginning finishes the sentence, and the focus is on some being upset. The point is, the incomplete thought modifies the complete thought, but by itself it's meaning is open ended.

With this in mind, let's think about **the traditional interpretation**. On this reading, **vs. 1.** stands alone. How about **vs. 2?** "Now/and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Would you say this is dependent or independent; does it stand alone or does it need help? The word "now" seems to make it dependent. How about the next line, "... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water." This feels the same way. It seems like something else is needed. What about **vs. 3?** "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and

there was light.” Is this dependent or independent? It is independent. Vs. 3 clearly stands alone.

So, on this interpretation it appears that you have two distinct stand alone ideas: “In the beginning God created...” and then “And God said, ‘let there be light.’” Both are the focus, although even here, commentators are not agreed on the function of vs. 1. Some think it is a kind of preface to the rest of the chapter, a summary if you will, of what is to follow. That is, it describes in one verse what will take place in more detail below. Vs. 2 then begins that longer explanation. Others think that it describes the creation of the very beginning of all things. But then the rest of the chapter describes events that follow after that initial creation (the Gap theory is an example of this).

This is important because it is on this reading that some argue that what is being described in this chapter is God’s creation of all matter from the very beginning of all time. The idea is then that the three verses focus on a sequence. First, God creates the heaven and earth. Then the Spirit hovers. Then God creates light. But it is all describing the totality of creation. And this, in turn with things like the meaning of “days,” is used to prove a young earth. In other words, they are saying that vs. 1 proves that the “when” of creation was a short time ago.

What if we take the other reading? Very simply, what you have in this case is three dependent clauses (vv. 1-2) followed by the first independent clause in verse 3. So the ideas in the first two verses are incomplete thoughts which are completed by vs. 3. In other words, verse three is the focus, not one or two. Thus, “When God began to create heaven and earth – and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters – Then God said, “Let there be light.” Do you hear the difference?

On this reading, there is only one creative act taking place at the present time—the creation of light. The rest of the creation before it takes place at some indefinite time in the past. Light is created after certain things were already in place (the heavens and earth were created, without form, in darkness, and the Spirit of God is hovering). To put it another way, the verse may not be concerned with the “when” of original creation at all. It might be, but it might not be. It tells us that God created it, but it isn’t clear about *when* it was created. We can’t answer the “when” question definitely from the grammar. The entire set of verses may in fact

describe an ordering or even refashioning of matter that was already existing when God got to work. He is giving it purpose and showing who rules over it.

My story *at the beginning* should be read this way, as should this very sentence. The beginning of what? Of all time or of this sermon? In my story I said that the beginning day was in 1828. But obviously there are other days prior to it. This is just when my story begins. When we raise this issue of origins, as important as it may be to us, it simply wasn't an issue with them as it is with us. That's why the grammar is not helpful in this question, in fact, it only creates confusion.

How

There are two other grammatical points which, unfortunately, do not really help us either. The traditional reading has "In **THE** beginning." The problem is, "the" (the definite article) is simply not present in the text. It has to be assumed. It is possible that one could justify putting it there in English, but this is doubtful.

One could justify it this way. Originally, written Hebrew had no vowels. Vowels were added around a thousand years ago by ingenious Hebrew scribes, because the verbal traditions were beginning to be lost and people were forgetting how to read the text. The definite article, in this case, would have to be written as one of those vowels.⁷ The problem is, in every single manuscript we have that puts the vowels in, not a single one has the definite article. Not even the Greek LXX puts it in. This means the most literal translation would be "in beginning." The question then becomes, which beginning? The beginning of what? It is, of course, possible that the traditions all blew it and got it wrong. But this is an argument from silence and it goes against the manuscript evidence that we have.

The other problem concerns the word *bara*: create. Some will argue that this word means creation "out of nothing." Therefore, the whole chapter refers to the original creation of matter. The problem, again, is that this is not feasible. As we have seen, *bara* has a synonym *asah*. To create and to make are the same basic idea.

In **Gen 1:26** God wants to make (*asah*) man.⁸ He wants to create him. But how does God create man in Gen 2? Out of nothing? No. He makes him out of the

⁷ There is a definite article consonant in Hebrew. It is the letter ׀. But because *reshith* already has a consonant ׀ in front of it (this is the word "in"), one has to add the definite article as a symbol under the letter like this: ׀. This little "T" like symbol is the definite article in this case.

⁸ In **1:26-28** where both *bara* and *asah* are also used as synonymns.

dust of the ground. And how does God make the woman? Out of nothing? No, he makes her out of Adam's rib. This same word *asah* is used in [Ex 20:11](#) for the heavens and the earth. “[In six days the LORD made \(*asah*\) heaven and earth.](#)” Thus, depending again on the grammar and the interpretation one goes with, God might have made the heavens and earth out of nothing in Genesis 1 (he certainly did, but the question is whether or not Genesis 1 has this ultimate beginning in mind), or, he might be concerned with what was already there; he is working with material he already made, and has some other purpose in it.

On this reading, this doesn't mean God didn't make everything, even the pre-existing stuff sometime earlier. The Bible affirms, “[God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are](#)” ([1 Cor 1:28](#)). But it also says, “[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](#)” ([Heb 11:3](#)). The question is, what is Genesis interested in telling us about regarding this *how* and the previous *when* questions?

Humble. Beginnings.

How can we ever hope to wrap this up, especially given that there are more books written on this topic than the whole world has room for? I want to do it this way. Before I ever began writing this sermon or thinking about preaching through Genesis, one thing stuck in my mind. Because there are so many things in this book that are not only wonderful and interesting, but potentially divisive in our culture so far removed from theirs, because of our predispositions and personally held very strong beliefs, I thought it would be vital to set the stage, not only for this sermon but for the whole book by helping us gain a little perspective.

To do that, I thought of [how the Scripture itself reflects upon the Genesis creation story](#). I've spent uncounted hours of personal study in the first three chapters of Genesis. It fascinates me, but also frustrates me. This is because I've learned that it doesn't always say what I wish or think that it must say. Reading broadly to expand my understanding rather than narrowly, with those who already agree with me in order to merely to confirm what I already believe on these chapters has convinced me of that.

But the Bible does reflect on this story and it is fascinating to me to think about both what it focuses on and what it does not focus on in these other places. To

the point, as I've already said about Genesis, so I will now say about the other creation stories found in Scripture (Some of these include [Job 38-41](#); [Ps 104](#); [Prov 8:22-31](#); [Ecc 1:2-11, 12:1-7](#); and excerpts from [Isa 40-55](#), though these do not exhaust by any means all Scripture says about this subject). [You will look in vain to find the Scripture fixating on how long the creation took or how exactly God did it](#), except in the context of this: When it tells us how God did it, it is given so that we might marvel rather than boast.

There is sometimes an arrogance in people when it comes to the topics of where or how of creation. I've seen it in Christian evolutionists. I've seen it in day-age guys. I've seen it in creationists. I've seen it in Gap theory proponents. I've seen humility too from representatives of each position. But not always. For some reason, this particular sin seems to sometimes dominate our discussions. But listen to how God puts it to Job, a man that was defending God:⁹

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements-- surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

([Job 38:2-7](#))

This is similar to Isaiah:

“Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness” ... Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them

⁹ Job himself said, “By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! *But the thunder of his power who can understand?*” ([Job 26:13-14](#)).

all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God'? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."

(Isa 40:21-23, 26-28)

And how about the Psalms:

"Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent ... O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures ... May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke! I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; *I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*"

(Ps 104:1-2, 24, 31-33)

David must have taught his son Solomon something, for he too writes:

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. *And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways.*"

(Prov 8:22-32)

What excites me about this book is how it drives us closer to an understanding of God. Part of that understanding is growing in humility that we just don't know

everything. Part of that humility is the necessary conclusion that he is a God to be worshipped. This is what creation does. It is what the first book of the Bible does. It causes us to worship God. It drives us to worship the Father. It teaches us to worship the Son, who is speaking as Wisdom. It brings us to worship the Spirit who hovered over creation, overseeing and superintending all of the glorious work that caused even the heavenly beings to sing and shout for joy.

May it be so with us. May these be teach us of many kinds of beginnings. And may they keep us humble. Humble. Beginnings.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

(Rom 11:33-36)

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

(Rev 4:11)

OUTLINE OF GENESIS - *Toledoth* Formula
“These are the generations of...” “This is the account of...”

- I. Prologue: Creation of Heaven and Earth**
- II. Toledoth of Heavens and Earth (2:4-4:26)**
 - A. Adam and Eve on Probation in Paradise (2:4-25)
 - B. The Fall and Its Consequences (ch. 3)
 - C. Escalation of Sin in the Line of Cain (4:1-24)
 - D. A Godly Remnant (4:25, 26)
- III. Toledoth of Adam (5:1-6:8)**
 - A. The Covenant Line of Seth (ch. 5)
 - B. Escalation of Sin Before the Flood (6:1-8)
- IV. Toledoth of Noah (6:9-9:29)**
 - A. Preparation for the Flood (6:9-7:10)
 - B. The Flood and Salvation (7:11-8:19)
 - C. God’s Covenant Not to Destroy the Earth (8:20-9:17)
 - D. Prophecies About Noah’s Sons (9:18-29)
- V. Toledoth of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9)**
 - A. Table of Nations (ch. 10)
 - B. Escalation of Evil in Babylon (11:1-9)
- VI. Toledoth of Shem (11:10-26)**
- VII. Toledoth of Terah (11:27-25:11)**
 - A. Genealogy (11:27-32)
 - B. The Abrahamic Covenant: His Land and People (12:1-22:19)
 - C. Transition to Isaac (22:20-25:11)
- VIII. Toledoth of Ishmael (25:12-18)**
- IX. Toledoth of Isaac (25:19-35:29)**
 - A. Rivalry in the Family
 - B. Covenant Blessings on Isaac (ch. 26)
 - C. Jacob’s Theft of Esau’s Blessing (27:1-40)
 - D. Covenant Blessings on Jacob and His Exile (27:41-32:32)
 - E. Esau’s Reconciliation with Jacob (33:1-17)
 - F. Transition to Jacob: Itinerary and Deaths from Shechem to Mamre (33:18-35:29)
- X. Toledoth of Esau (36:1-37:1)**
- XI. Toledoth of Jacob (37:2-50:26)**
 - A. Joseph’s Dream of Rulership (37:2-11)
 - B. The Sins of Jacob’s Family (37:12-38:30)
 - C. Joseph’s Rise to Rulership over Egypt (chs. 39-41)
 - D. Joseph’s Ruse and the Reconciliation of the Covenant Family (chs. 42-45)
 - E. Transition to Exodus (chs. 46-50)