

Part 1: The God Before the Beginning

Tyler Velin | Genesis 1:1-2

July 27th, 2025

In the 1980's George Shultz, then the Secretary of State, set about to meet his ambassadors stationed around the world. The first thing he would do is hand the ambassador a map and say, "Show me your country." Generally, the ambassador would point to the country in which he was stationed. If that was the case, Shultz would quickly chastise them saying, "No. Your country is the United States of America, and don't you forget it."

Shultz realized that if his ambassadors were to effectively fulfill their jobs and attain their callings—they had to always be aware of where they come from. They had to know their beginning.

It wasn't long ago that your family, your hometown, and your heritage were the most influential elements in what would either be your success story—or your demise.

But now, we live in a society where it seems we have been freed from those influences. Supply chains and HVAC free us from having to live near food sources or in specific climates. Modern transportation and the internet mean most of our jobs aren't tied to one specific location. The advent of nursing homes and video calls mean we don't have to live near our aging families in order to communicate or care for them. And the decline of the family unit and marriage in general has diminished relational connections even amongst our closest relatives.

It's never been easier to live without an awareness of our beginnings. But whether you know it or not, we all live in light of our beginnings. Our thoughts on who we are, and where we come from are the silent bedrock to every decision we make.

It's why we seem to be sitting on the precipice of a doomsday device with artificial intelligence. We are convinced that AI can change the human experience—and yet AI's programmers are limited because they cannot define human existence. What makes a human, human? Who are we? Who should we be? Where have we come from? It's hard to ask AI to think like a human and make moral decisions when we don't even know what it means to be human.

This modern crisis is an old problem. One pastor lived during Germany's Third Reich, and he witnessed firsthand the dangers of undefined humanity. Because they had lost their own origin story—the whole nation was susceptible to Hitler's rewriting of the human ideal. The pastor commented then: "Humankind no longer lives in the beginning; instead, it has lost the beginning. Now it finds itself in the middle, knowing neither the end nor the beginning...It knows therefore that it comes from the beginning and must move toward the end. It sees life as determined by these two factors (the beginning and the end), concerning which it knows only that it does not know them."

We aren't in 1940's Germany. But I feel those words capture our current cultural moment as well. We know we started somewhere, we know we are going somewhere—and we are making decisions in light of those questions for which we do not have answers.

Some three thousand years ago, a group of people stood on the banks of a river overlooking the land of opportunity and promise. In that land, a new start—even a new world—was promised. But their leader, seeing the challenges that would await them, knew the danger of forgetting where you're from. So he opened up his manifesto for this new world saying this: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

Today, we begin our study through the first eleven chapters of the first book of the Bible: Genesis.

Moses wrote this book as the opening to his comprehensive history of God's relationship with his people. God had heard Israel's cry in captivity—he had delivered them by his mighty hand. And as the Israelites stood at the threshold of the Promised Land, Moses looked out and saw the new challenges of occupying a land ripe with promise—but filled with false gods, seductive cultures, and different ideas on life itself. Knowing firsthand the dangers of forgetfulness he begins with this warning: "Don't forget where you're from."

Though, we could more accurately say, "Don't forget who you're from." Though Genesis is the origin story of humanity—it opens up describing first and foremost the God of humanity. If we are made, as we will see, in the image of this God, then we must understand first of all the God in whose image we are made.

In other words, to understand who we are—we need to understand first and foremost the God who is not like us. The story of our own beginning begins with the story of a God who had no beginning. "The God before the beginning." Our main idea today is this: **Our common life is the result of an uncommon God.** And we will see this in three ways this morning. First, we will see the hope of a God without beginning, the power of a God without rival, and the comfort of a God with a plan.

Genesis 1:1-2 might be one of the best well known passages in the whole Bible, maybe second only to John 3:16. Because of that, it's often easy to import an immediate sense of what is being said, and what we can expect.

Maybe you think it's a science book on the origin of humanity. Or maybe it's a philosophical guide to life's deepest questions. Perhaps is a history and geography book that will help you crack the age of the earth, the resting place of the arc or the location of Eden.

But if we let the Bible dictate our understanding of the Bible, then we will realize that the primary goal of this book is to introduce us to God. This is our first point this morning the hope **A God Without Beginning.**

Notice how the grammar of Genesis emphasizes the priority of this as well. It doesn't say, "God, in the beginning..." it says, **Genesis 1:1**, "In the beginning God." The Bible doesn't present God as the background information to our story—he's the center of it. The story of our own creation is the context in which we understand God himself. He is the subject.

God created so that through his creative acts we might know him. Creation itself is the penmanship of God so that we might know him as the center point of everything because he is the center point of everything.

And what does God want us to know? He wants us to know that he is a God beyond, before and without a beginning.

This is what theologians call, "the eternity of God." It's what Isaiah references in **Isaiah 57:15a** "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy." It's what God humbles Job within **Job 38:4**, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding."

You might have two questions here. The first might be, "What was God doing before creation?" The Bible doesn't tell a lot of details. But when Jesus speaks of eternity past, he speaks of it as the most wonderful, the most intimate, and the most glorious fellowship the world has ever known between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. One pastor named Martin Luther had a student ask him this same question and do you know what his answer was? He said, "He was preparing sticks to smack people who ask such silly questions." If he wanted us to know—he would have told us. But he wants us to know him as the always-there, creator God.

And here's why this is good news. History often bemoans the loss of the libraries of Alexandria. These ancient libraries in North Africa were once the repository of most of humanity's history—our art—our lineage. But through time and fires—all of it was lost. We literally lost our beginning. Many cultures lost access to their roots, their cultural identity, and the positive shaping influence that could have had was lost forever.

And while Genesis is history—God is not. Genesis doesn't connect us to a history that can be lost, it's not a heritage which you might accidentally misplace. Genesis connects us to a God who exists outside of creation. A God who was already present *before* the beginning.

When explorers would get lost in the wilderness, unable to retrace their steps or discern their trail, they were most helped when they looked up and navigated by the stars. Genesis raises our eyes to the God who stand behind the stars and reminds us that wherever we are, however lost we feel, we can look up and remember from whom we are from—this eternal preexistent God.

Your second question might be, "Well, if God was there before the beginning, then how do we know what happened in the beginning?" This is a question every world view has. No one was around when the world came into being. Whether you believe in a big bang, whether you think we came out of EZ-bake oven, or whether you think there was another cause—none of us were there to see it.

So, how can we as Christians, reading the words of a man named Moses be so certain that this is what happened? The answer is astounding. This God, this powerful, lifted up, eternity filling God is a God who draws near to his people.

Moses didn't have to guess. Moses didn't have to read this in a book. Moses' mom didn't explain it to him. God himself did. Look at **Exodus 33:7-11**, "Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of

cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

I don't have any friends who are celebrities. I don't have any regular communication with athlete superstars. But this God, who created the stars, is a God who desires to draw near to his creation and talk with them as friends. That's unique. He wants you to know him not only as a creator—but as a friend.

This is what leads us to our second point this morning: the power of **A God without rival**.

The best stories in our world often feature battles between two seeming equals. Environmentally we have hot and cold, light and dark, wet and dry. In sports we have Yankees and Red Sox, Griz and Cats. In entertainment we have Superman and Lex Luthor, Harry Potter and Voldemort.

But God has no rival. The Bible creates two categories: The eternally existent God who is apart from and infinitely distinct from creation, and creation itself.

Look at the contrasts again in **Genesis 1:1-2**, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

God created it—but God is totally and entirely distinct from it. Here's why this is good news for us: God is seen here as affecting creation, but God himself is not affected by creation. Or to put it another way, God causes things to happen in creation, but creation doesn't cause things to happen to God.

Created things get tired. Created things need water. Created things are ruled by outside factors like seasons, and siblings and seconds. But God is not like that. He neither slumbers, nor sleeps, he doesn't grow weary, he is eternally undiminished in all that he is and does.

This doesn't mean God doesn't have feelings—he is an emotionally rich God. But it means God doesn't flinch. No one wants a surgeon who flinches. No one wants a clock that slows down. No one wants an alarm that fails. Fire fighters can burn with those they save. This God doesn't burn. Which means for those who are in a real bind--this original God is the objective hope we need. When everything seems to fall apart--this God stands above it all.

When life is hard—the Bible presents a God for whom nothing is hard. That's why the Psalmist can sing: **Psalms 18:2**, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

There is no one like this unrivaled God. He's unrivaled by the realities of the world—and he's unrivaled by the other pagan myths or gods you may encounter.

In our world today—most people don't attribute the origin of humanity to a divine being. But for the majority of human history they tied our origins to a bunch of different gods or goddesses.

What's more is that if you study those stories, they include many of the same elements Genesis includes. Those who believed these stories themselves saw those origin stories as myths. A myth means

it explains things but isn't real history. But what's unique about Moses writing style, and the way the Jewish people viewed Genesis is that it was presented as real history. It had meaning—because it is true.

Moses did use some mythical elements here—but he did so intentionally to mock these other stories. In most of these stories the gods were presented as better than humans, but they had all the same issues humanity had. There was no real distinction. They were jealous, needy, prideful, petty and pretty messed up.

For instance, the Babylonian creation account involves the belligerent goddess of the sea named Tiamat who waged war against the supreme god Anu. Coming to Anu's defense, the god of creation Marduk defeats and kills Tiamat the sea goddess and splits her body in two using her corpse to create the heavens and the earth.

The God Moses presents in Genesis 1 is not under threat by anything else. He creates freely and without need. But here's where Moses gets spicy. He uses two words Moses uses for "deep" and "waters" that sound like the titles of two popular pagan gods. But over those "gods"—this God is peacefully hovering. He's not threatened, he's not worried. Moses is saying, "there's no God like this God."

Even the name Moses uses to introduce God captures this. While the word, "el" is the common word for any god or spirit—Moses uses the plural absolute "Elohim" to introduce God. He's saying this is a singular God—but he's diverse in his power. While Moses didn't yet understand the Trinitarian shape of this God, already the language expresses, what one commentator said, "the majestic potentiality" of this God.

We find ourselves rivaled by a lot of things: competition for jobs or spouses, time, health. In the face of these, Moses wants to hold up as a hope a God who is bigger and stronger than anything else we might want to seek help from. That's why the Israelites sang when they were saved, **Exodus 15:11**, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

When we feel like our own life is form and void, with darkness everywhere—we might feel tempted to try and rewrite our own stories. We self-identify who we should be, what went wrong, and how we can carve out a new future.

But Genesis reminds us that this preexistent is the only hope for brining order of out what seems disorderly—he's the only God who can bring light out of darkness. The God who is not created is the exclusive hope for those who are.

Here is our final point this morning: the comfort of **A God with a Plan**.

If you look back at **Genesis 1:1-2**, we see that God created the world in full. But we also see that God didn't create and walk away—God continued to walk with his creation seeking to bring light out of the darkness, form out of the formlessness, and life out of the void.

Genesis 1:2 is a little weird isn't it? Did God not have enough power to create everything all at once? Why does it start with him hovering over a world that he made but that doesn't seem done yet? Well, I think we can see another example of this in Mark 8.

In Mark 8, Jesus is trying to help his disciples answer the question of who he is. But that narrative is interrupted when he encounters a blind man. Jesus set out to heal this man, and he made some mud, put it on the blind man's eyes and asked, "Do you see anything?" The blind man said that he saw people, but they looked only like trees. So, Jesus touched him again and then the man saw clearly.

Now, this is odd isn't it. Jesus calls a dead man out of the grave with a word. And here—it seems he's not strong enough to heal a blind man the first time? But it's after Jesus heals this blind man, that the disciples finally have clarity on who Jesus is. Jesus slowed down his work, so that we and our slow eyes might see with clarity the God who restores creation.

God likes to hit the slow motion button and show off his work for our own sake so that we might better understand the character and power of our God.

That's what he's doing here in Genesis 1:1-2. Genesis 1 gives us the big picture of what he did. Genesis 2 picks up in that creative process and begins to give us a play by play.

And here's why this is hopeful for us. Whenever we read Genesis 1, we do so from a Genesis 3 world. Our world seems dark, void, chaotic, and empty. But it's not because God's creation is incomplete—it's because sin ruined it.

But what we see in Genesis 1 is a God who doesn't draw back from his creation. What we see in Genesis 1 is a God who hovers over it, creating it and forming it into the good and perfect creation he wanted. Void, empty, darkness is a threat to everyone—except the God who created all of it and has a plan to bring it to fulfillment.

And for those of us this side of Genesis 3, God has begun a new recreation. Not to complete what was incomplete—but to restore what was ruined by sin.

And how does God bring about his plan to restore his creation which through sin has become dark and chaotic? **John 1:1-5** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Genesis 1 showed us that in an incomplete world—God was going to guide it to order form and life. But the rest of the Bible shows us that in our sinful world—that same God has now called out to lost and darkened sinners for the promise of re-creation through Jesus Christ. In him we become a new creation.

We must not forget our own origin. And the only way we find out who we are, what went wrong, and where we are going is to let our creator God define and redefine it for us. He says this in **Isaiah 46:9-11**, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it."

The author, the creator, the God of the Bible stands and calls out to all who feel lost, all who feel like chaos and emptiness is the shape of their life, and he calls you to Jesus. He calls you to come to him, and to submit the whole of your life to his loving care.

His hope, is bigger than whatever circumstance you're in because he's not threatened by your circumstance. His hope is unrivaled because no one does what our God does. And his hope is organizing helping us find a way out of the chaos we made, through the way of salvation he has made.