

Genesis

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

VOLUME 1

GENESIS 1–19



P U B L I S H I N G

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To

Bob Brady

With thanks to God for 25 years of friendship and shared ministry

and

To Him

Who is “the Alpha and the Omega, . . . who is and who was and
who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8)

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confes-

Series Introduction

sion of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can

provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

My original interest in preaching and writing on the book of Genesis focused on the first eleven chapters, where the Christian worldview finds its essential foundation. Every few years, I attend our church's summer youth trip and teach through these chapters to help prepare teenagers for the intellectual challenges that college may wage against their faith. There is a problem, however, with the idea of stopping at Genesis 11. That problem is Genesis 12 and the alluring start of Moses' narrative about the life and faith of Abraham. Once I crossed over this line, there was no stopping! I look back now on my years of preaching and writing on Genesis as some of the most satisfying experiences I have had in Christian ministry.

Genesis 1–11 *is* essential material for understanding the world in which we live and for meeting the God who created it all. The creation account, the fall of our first parents, Noah's flood, and the fascinating account of the Tower of Babel fill these chapters with interest and information. Here, the biblical grand narrative launches its trajectory, aimed directly at the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem the depravity so clearly depicted in the primeval world. Turning to the story of Abraham, we discover the reason why this father of our faith appears so frequently in the New Testament, providing so much of the back story to the gospel message of our salvation. Jacob appears as a figure who could inhabit many a modern-day novel; as he journeys toward saving faith, God's long-suffering grace comes into striking relief. By the time we have traveled through these "generations," one might think that Genesis would be wearing thin. Instead, the jewel of the Bible's first book is the story of Joseph, which, on its own merits, stands as one of the great literary masterpieces of the world. By the time Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph have been "gathered to [their] people," we find ourselves looking

Preface

forward to the age to come, when we will meet these very believers—together with so many other lively figures in Genesis—in the presence of Christ.

Genesis stands as a vital book not only for its beginning to the biblical metanarrative but also for the doctrines that find their own beginnings here. Genesis is a rich book for doctrinal instruction! Creation, fall, covenant, and redeeming grace all receive essential treatment in its opening section. In Genesis we learn of justification through faith and sanctification by grace, and we see the sovereignty and holiness of God in vivid perspective.

With these thoughts in mind, I commend these chapters for the Lord's blessing in the lives of readers and of those whom they will teach. Going back to the beginning, you will come to understand God, yourself, the world in which you live, and the history that continues in its redemptive purpose until Christ returns.

In publishing these volumes, I wish to express my loving gratitude to the congregation and elders of Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina, where these messages were preached from October 2015 to January 2019. The loving prayers of these dear saints and their faithful support of my broader ministry play an essential role in my service to the Lord. I am grateful as ever to my beloved wife, Sharon, who ardently supports my excessive labors and cheerfully serves as my most godly and delightful companion. I am further thankful for the editors of this commentary—Philip Ryken, Iain Duguid, and Karen Magnuson—together with John Hughes of P&R Publishing, who supports and understands the ups and downs of my authorial productivity. This commentary is dedicated to Bob Brady, who for twenty-five years has been executive director of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. I have had the privilege of laboring at Bob's side in this work all these years, becoming grateful for his extensive service to Christ's kingdom and for his friendship to me. May the God who was before the beginning receive praise, glory, and honor from these studies, and may his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, be exalted for his saving grace that is so vividly exhibited in the book of Genesis.

Richard D. Phillips
Greenville, South Carolina
January 2023



Genesis 1~19

CREATION, FALL, AND REDEMPTION



Part 1

THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION

1

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD . . .

Genesis 1:1

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

(Gen. 1:1)



When the apostle Paul began his long exposition of the gospel in the book of Romans, it was not by chance that he opened with the doctrine of creation. All people are accountable to God, Paul said, since “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19). If we ask when and how God has revealed himself to every person, Paul answers, “Ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (v. 20). Every person is obligated to glorify God because he has made himself known in creation. God’s glorious self-revelation was also the thesis of Jonathan Edwards’s famous 1765 treatise “The End for Which God Created the World.” Edwards wrote that “what God aimed at in the creation of the world, as the end which he had ultimately in view, was that communication of himself which he intended through all eternity.”¹ Or as Paul concluded in the final words of his gospel treatise in Romans, since “from him and through him and to him are all things,” therefore, “to him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

1. Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, 2 vols. (1834; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 1:101.

Paul pointed out in Romans that man's chief problem is forgetting the glory of God. One remedy for this problem is the creation itself, with which we are daily confronted. Seldom has the impact of the sheer glory of God in creation been more potently stated than on Christmas Eve 1968, as the *Apollo 8* spacecraft orbited the moon for the very first time. Never before had human eyes beheld the planet Earth rising above the surface of another sphere. As the world held its breath at the images beaming back from the lunar capsule window, the broadcasters were literally speechless. What do you say in response to the first view of our planet rising over an alien horizon? Astronaut William Anders knew, breaking the silence in the crackling hiss of the distant radio with these words: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth."² In this way, like it or not, the marveling human race joined in fulfilling the purpose of creation by giving glory to God.

THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS

In the Hebrew canon, the name of the Bible's first book is derived from its first word: *bereshit*, meaning "in the beginning." This was a fitting title, because as the Latin Vulgate heading *Genesis* indicates, it is the book of origins. Here we are told by God about the beginning of the universe and of history. If we want to understand the world, the meaning of life, the nature of our own selves, the salvation for which we hope, and the destiny awaiting us in the end, the origin of all these is recorded in Genesis.

These opening words form the initial basis for a Christian worldview. That there was a beginning means that things have not always been. Matter and life have a definite beginning, and by identifying that origin, we learn vital truths about them. Little children ask, "Mommy, where did we come from?" Even at a young age, we realize that our origin says much about who we are. In its opening sentence, Genesis answers this important question.

In the 1950s, scientists taught a "steady-state" theory of the universe, stating that it has always existed. This theory needed to be replaced when Edwin Hubble observed that the stars and galaxies are moving apart from one another, evidence suggesting that there was a beginning that launched this matter into all directions. The currently dominant scientific theory is

2. Taken from Alasdair Paine, *The First Chapters of Everything: How Genesis 1-4 Explains Our World* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014), 17.

therefore called the *big bang*, which supposedly took place some 13.7 billion years ago. This idea holds that first there was nothing, and then there was an explosion (or a *singularity*, as it is sometimes called) that caused everything. This theory leaves numerous questions unanswered, most important of which is the question of origins. If the universe started with the big bang, we inevitably ask, “What or who caused the big bang?” Moreover, we ask, how is it rational to believe that something came from nothing? It is thus remarkable that those who believe in the big bang find the Christian doctrine of the resurrection impossible to believe!

Genesis 1:1 agrees with the big bang theory in stating that there was a beginning to the universe, even if it radically disagrees on the source of the beginning. Already, however, we can agree against the idea that history involves a never-ending circle, as taught by the Eastern religions. If there was a beginning, things have not always been. Time is not a circle, but a trajectory. We may therefore ask where the line is pointing. Before we see what the answer is, the question itself is important. If there was a beginning, there is history, meaning, direction, and purpose. What, then, is the source of this beginning, and therefore of history and purpose?

GOD IN THE BEGINNING

“In the beginning,” says Genesis 1:1, prompting a question that it immediately answers: “God.” Here we confront one of the most titanic claims in the entire Bible. If there was a beginning, then what was already there at the beginning? The Scriptures answer, “God was there.” “The cause of everything that is . . . is the creative, powerful, and sovereign hand of almighty God.”³ Francis Schaeffer notes the significance of this first cause: “Christianity as a system does not begin with Christ as Savior, but with the infinite-personal God who created the world in the beginning.”⁴ God the Creator is a truth that precedes God the Redeemer.

Here, the Bible presents an answer at the very point that secular science does not. We ask, “What was the true and first cause of all that there is?” and science has no answer. There was a “singularity,” science muses vaguely.

3. Derek Thomas, “The Bible’s First Word,” in *God, Adam, and You: Biblical Creation Defended and Applied*, ed. Richard D. Phillips (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 2.

4. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, in *Collected Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 2:68.

But what caused the singularity? we ask, and only silence is heard. Science in itself has nothing to see and point to as the source behind all things. It has been argued that we live in “an ‘ontologically haunted’ universe,”⁵ meaning that observable reality cannot provide an answer for its being. Thus, if we find no material source to be observed, we must conclude that the beginning was caused by an immaterial source. It is not science’s fault that it cannot discern the origin of all things, since science relies on what can be observed. Reason therefore dictates that the origin must be other than something physical or material.⁶ On this rationale, Christians urge secularists to consider the possibility of a personal, nonmaterial source for all things, namely, Genesis 1:1’s claim: “In the beginning, God.”

The Bible’s first verse identifies a single being who did not have a beginning: God. In the beginning, God already was. God is the actor in the creation and the source of all things. This statement is staggering in its implications. We earlier noted that a beginning indicates a direction and future. Since the beginning indicates a trajectory, if God was in the beginning, then he not only created the beginning itself, but determined its direction. If the cause and source of history is a person, as the Bible reveals God to be, then the purpose of creation and the meaning of life are shaped by the One who made it all. Already in Genesis 1:1, therefore, we encounter the reality that Moses put so beautifully in Psalm 90:

Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Ps. 90:2)

Genesis 1:1 declares God not only as the source of all things but also as the subject of the Bible that will follow. G. Charles Aalders writes: “The first words of Scripture purposely lift our hearts on high to God. In this way it becomes apparent from the outset that Holy Scripture, in its very nature, is the revelation of God. And first of all, the revelation of God as Creator.”⁷

The claim that in the beginning God already was points out that God is not himself a part of the creation. In this way, Genesis 1:1 stands against pantheism, the popular view that God is all and all is God. Instead, the Bible

5. Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live without God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 192.

6. Zacharias, 192.

7. G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:52.

claims that there is God the Creator and there is the creation. They are not one and the same. God is apart from his creation. His being exists outside the rocks, rivers, and trees. Neither is he like the mythological gods of ancient Babylon and Greece, whose soap-opera existence is a reflection of human foibles. The world with all the things in it is not eternal but is created. God alone is eternal, absolutely free above all that is.

The name for God in Genesis 1:1 is the Hebrew *Elohim*. It is the name associated with God the Father as Creator. It is a name that the first readers of Genesis 1 had already heard—the name of the loving, faithful, personal God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the true and living God, who dwells in majesty and glory. Many Christian writers have noted that *Elohim* is a plural name for a singular God, and have taken this as proof for the doctrine of the Trinity. Genesis does reveal God’s triune being, but it is probably not sound to base the doctrine on this plural name. Rather, the word *God* is plural probably as an expression of majesty and power, as befitting the Creator. Moreover, as John Calvin points out, *Elohim* is used as a name for the Father, in distinction from the Spirit, who appears in verse 2. *Elohim* is thus used here not as encompassing the Trinity but to refer to the Creator Father.⁸

Reading that God was in the beginning provides the greatest comfort to the Christian, especially when praying to God in time of need. God is involved and invested in the creation; otherwise, we would not have Genesis 1:1. At the same time, God is exalted above the creation. He who was before is also after and above. His will, which formed the universe, is not constrained by any created power. This realization grounded the hope of Psalm 121:1–2: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” The Creator’s help cannot be thwarted by anything in this world. The apostle Paul likewise grounded his assurance in God’s supremacy over all creation: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

More broadly, in this opening verse the aim of the entire Bible is disclosed. “In the beginning, God” means that there is a personal source who has

8. John Calvin, *Genesis*, 2 vols. (1554; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 1:71–72.

determined the meaning and direction of all things. It raises these questions: “What is your relationship to God? Do you know him? Do you know his purpose for you and your life? Do you know how to be in his favor?” G. Campbell Morgan observes:

The consummation of every human life must therefore inevitably be related to the originating cause. No man can escape God here or hereafter. . . . God is the originating Cause; man is His stuff, His design, His workmanship. These are the things from which I cannot escape. I live and move and have my being in Him, whether I will or not; the beating of my heart, the throbbing of my nerves, all these things are of Him.⁹

CREATED IN THE BEGINNING

The final statement of Genesis 1:1 is that in the beginning God “created the heavens and the earth.” The particular word used for “create” (Hebrew, *bara*) is a seldom-used term that always refers to God’s activity in making things from nothing. Alec Motyer writes that when this verb *to create* “has a subject, it is always God; when it has a presumed subject, it is always God. . . . It is used throughout the Old Testament of acts or events which either by their specialty or novelty or both point to God as their originator.”¹⁰ In Genesis chapter 1, this word is used three times: in verse 1 for the creation of all things, in verse 21 when God created the living creatures, and in verse 27 when God created man in his own image.

Genesis thus describes what theologians refer to as creation *ex nihilo*, that is, creation out of nothing. Christians do not believe the absurd proposition that something came from nothing. We believe that God, who has always been, created all things, whereas there had previously been nothing but himself. Only God can create in this way, never man. The distinction is between making things out of existing material (as, for instance, a carpenter makes a chair) and creating the wood itself that will become the chair. The writer of Hebrews identifies creation by God out of nothing as a cardinal article of Christian faith: “By faith we understand that the universe was created

9. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit*, 10 vols. (1906–16; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 5:322.

10. J. A. Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 67.

by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb. 11:3).

It is awesome to consider the universe that God created by his own power. Physicist Stephen Hawking states in his best-selling book *A Brief History of Time* that our galaxy is of only average size at a diameter of 100,000 light-years. Moreover, he notes that “our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen using modern telescopes, each galaxy itself containing some hundred thousand million stars.”¹¹ At the micro level, “God created every speck of dust in the hundred thousand million galaxies of the universe. He created every atom—the sub-microscopic solar systems with the whimsically named quarks . . . and leptons . . . and electrons and neutrinos . . .—all of which have no measurable size.”¹² To consider the magnitude and the marvel of what God has created is to stand in awe of his glory, power, and wisdom. Isaiah is just one of many biblical writers to regard God’s creation as an impulse to praise:

To whom then will you compare me,
 that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
 who created these?
 He who brings out their host by number,
 calling them all by name;
 by the greatness of his might
 and because he is strong in power,
 not one is missing. (Isa. 40:25–26)

Genesis 1:1 states that God created “the heavens and the earth.” It is often asserted that this statement constitutes a *merism*. This literary device uses polar extremes as a way of gathering together everything in between. To say that God created “the heavens and the earth,” then, is simply a way of saying that he created everything—that is, the universe. Alasdair Paine writes: “*The heavens and the earth* is deliberately all-inclusive: there is not a postal address anywhere in the cosmos which does not have one or the other as its bottom line. God made all that! The galaxies, the black holes,

11. Quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 20.

12. Hughes, 20.

the earth, the rainforests, incy-wincy spider, you, me, everyone. He is not the result of our imagination; we are the result of his.”¹³

It is undoubtedly true that God created the whole universe, but it is unlikely that the expression “the heavens and the earth” is making this point alone. In addition to functioning as a merism, it identifies the two great realms of creation: the material and the immaterial. This is the first of many binary couplets that we will encounter in the creation account. In addition to the physical, there is the unseen, heavenly world that was also created by God. In this way, Genesis 1:1 rejects materialism, the view that matter is all that there is. David Atkinson writes that

“heaven” refers to a higher world, of angels, of God’s throne, of God’s glory. . . . There may be much within the created world which we cannot sense, cannot weigh and measure, cannot put in a test tube; there may be more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy; but the Lord God made them all. There is a created spiritual world, just as there is a created material world.¹⁴

This was evidently the view of the early church Council of Nicaea, which began the Nicene Creed by saying, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.”

Genesis 1 will detail the creation and forming of the material universe, which is why verse 2 focuses on “the earth” separately from the heavens. But from the beginning, God created all that is, including the spiritual realms. No doubt, from the perspective of the original hearers of Genesis, “the heavens and the earth” encompassed both the material and spiritual realms. Looking around them, they saw the rocks, hills, and streams. Looking up, not only did they see light from the distant stars, but they imagined the heavenly realms of glory that even today the strongest telescope cannot perceive.

To say that God created all things rules out the theory that matter came into being by chance. Instead, Genesis chapter 1 will make clear that verse 1 launches a highly developed creative process by which God shapes and forms all things. Therefore, not only broad categories such as matter and time were created by God, but actual planets, molecules, laws of nature, and

13. Paine, *First Chapters of Everything*, 18.

14. David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 22.

definitions of life. What God created, he also formed. This is true not only for physical laws but also for moral laws. The Ten Commandments are just as fixedly created as are the laws of nature. Realizing God's created design is increasingly essential in today's neopagan Western culture. We hear today that gender is a social construct, whereas Genesis teaches that God created man "male and female" (Gen. 1:27). Our courts may decree that marriage licenses must be issued to any kind of romantic relationship, but Genesis 2 will teach that God created marriage between a man and a woman. There is right and wrong, life and death, male and female, good and evil because of God's sovereign design in creation. We reject these created distinctions not only to our peril but also to the great offense of the living God, who designed them as a reflection of his own character as a God of truth.

It is in this sense that we remember Paul's warning that creation exposes the great folly of idolatry. The original readers of Genesis lived in a world where idolatry was common and widespread. Genesis 1 is intended as an assault against all false gods and all false worship. Henri Blocher writes: "Just as Abraham left his family and the land of his ancestors, so with its very first step the metaphysics of the Bible leaves behind the metaphysics of the pagan world."¹⁵ There is one God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. Genesis declares that the Maker of the galaxies is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who revealed himself not only in creation but also through his revealed word to the patriarchs and the prophets. Rebellious creatures who refuse to worship him and who exalt others in his place will find themselves at odds with the very Creator whose purposes are certain to stand.

THE STORY BEGINS

We have noted that the words "In the beginning" show that there is a history that began long ago and of which we are still a part. There is a trajectory and a story that Genesis 1:1 announces. The great question to ask is "What is that story?" If we wonder, we should ask the original audience to which the book of Genesis was written. The Bible tells us that Genesis was written by Moses during the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt (see

15. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 61.

In the Beginning, God . . .

Ex. 24:4; John 5:45–47, among many other examples). Therefore, when we read the words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” we should imagine the people of Israel as walking on the desert earth, gazing up at the million shining lights of the blazing heavens that God had made. God created all the glory shining down on them, as well as the good earth of the land to which they were sojourning. If we ask those Israelite readers, “What is your story?” we will gain a clue to what began in Genesis 1:1. We know their answer: the story that begins with God’s creation is the great story of redemption. The Israelites were living the story of deliverance from bondage to evil and salvation in a land of promise that God intended from the Bible’s first verse. Their story looked back to God’s creation and then to man’s sin and the misery and death that it produced. But their story looked forward as well to a Savior, who was also part of God’s original design, to the Lamb slain “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19–20).

It is no wonder, then, that the New Testament gospel message begins in language that deliberately echoes Genesis 1:1. Moses began the story of creation, from which the tale of sin and redemption would emerge, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The apostle John, centuries later, opened the gospel story of the new creation in deliberate echo, speaking of Jesus Christ: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). In these words, we are reminded that to begin the Bible is to relish the story it tells, the terrible problem it defines, and the marvelous solution it offers from God. Beginning in Genesis 1:1, we learn about God, creation, and history, and from there begin to learn about ourselves, sin, death, and salvation. Just as the Israelites who first heard the message of Genesis were a people moving forward to a saving encounter with God’s Messiah, so, too, should we read Genesis as a beginning of our meeting with God, for salvation through the Savior he has appointed to come to us in our need, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.