


GENESIS 1:1 THE GOD OF CREATION

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”¹

reat philosophers are distinguished by asking great questions, whereas the merely curious ask meaningless questions. For instance, some shallow individuals may ask what they imagine is a profound question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Superficially, this question appears to offer a choice between something and nothing. However, consider the point—What is nothing? As soon as we answer, “nothing is...” whatever our definition may be, nothing ceases to be nothing and becomes something. If nothing really is nothing, nothing defies description.

Instead, the question asked should properly be, “Why is there something?” When we ask the question in this manner, it is no longer meaningless. This question forms one of the great philosophical questions of the ages. The question can be stated in different forms, any of which stimulates great thoughts. Where did the universe come from? Who made the atom? How did everything get to be as it is? Any of these is the same, basic question, each exploring the ultimate source of all that is.

Something exists—an immense, intricate and orderly something. That something was there before we were, for we cannot imagine our existence without it. But how did it get there? And how did it get to be as we understand it? **GENESIS 1:1** answers these and every such question. That verse informs us, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Focusing on this one verse, we should be able to discover something about the origin of all that is, and something of the God who gives being to all that is. Obviously, understanding the nature of our Creator can only be beneficial for those who seek to worship Him.

A CONSIDERATION OF THE QUESTION OF ORIGINS—There are really only four possibilities when we consider answers to the question, “Why is there something?”² First, there is the view that the universe had no origin. This view argues that matter is eternal or at least that in some form the universe has always existed. This has been the predominant view of both ancient and modern science until recent times; it continues to be held by some.

A second view would hold that everything had a beginning and that this beginning was the work of a good personal being. Essentially, this is the Christian view.

Opposed to this view, one must concede the possibility of the view that all things came into being as result of the work of an evil personal being.

The fourth view is that there has always been and is now a dualism. This view takes several forms depending on whether one thinks of a personal or impersonal, moral or immoral dualism; but all the views are related. This was the view of ancient cosmologies such as presented in the Babylonian Epic. It is still characteristic of eastern religions and mysticism.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² This review is adapted from James Montgomery Boice, **Genesis: An Expository Commentary** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 35-37

We can quickly eliminate the third view. You will recall that that view proposes an origin for the universe from a personal evil entity. That particular view says, in effect, that Satan is the creator. This view may be readily dismissed since it fails to give an adequate explanation of the origin of good. Evil can be a corruption of good. Satan can rebel against the Lord God of the Christian Faith. However it is not possible to think of good emerging from evil. While evil may be the misuse of otherwise good traits or abilities, there is no place for good to develop if evil is the source of all things.

It is possible to restate the problem of an evil origin for the universe in a slightly different form. For a power to be considered as truly evil, that power must possess the attributes of intelligence and will. However, these attributes of intelligence and will are in and of themselves good, which implies that good must have existed previously and that evil cannot therefore be the origin of all things. With the dismissal of this view, we are left with three views to account for origins.

The fourth possibility, dualism, will be seen to fail to satisfy. The reason for the failure of this view is that, although dualism has been quite popular throughout long periods of history it fails the test of careful analysis. You see, having stated the dualism we either immediately attempt to pass behind it to some type of unity that includes the dualism or we choose one part of the dualism and make it prominent over the other. In this latter instance, we are easing into one of the other possibilities and essentially dismissing the dualism as a viable possibility.

C. S. Lewis addressed this problem, pointing out a fatal flaw in the system. Dualism envisions two powers (whether spirits or gods) who are supposed to be quite independent and eternal. Neither entity is responsible for the other; each has an equal right to call itself God. Each presumably thinks that it is good and the other bad. Lewis questions what is meant when we say, as required in stating dualism, that the one power is good and the other bad. Do we mean merely that we prefer one to the other? If that is all we mean, then we must give up any real talk about good or evil; and if we do that, the moral dimension of the universe vanishes entirely and we are left with nothing more than matter operating in certain ways. Thus, we cannot possibly mean that and still hold to the dualism. We have fallen back to possibility number one.

If, on the other hand, dualism means that one power really is good and the other really is bad, then we introduce some third entity into the universe—some law or standard or rule of good which one of the powers conforms to and the other fails to conform to. This standard, rather than the others, will turn out to be the true God. Lewis concludes, “Since the two powers are judged by this standard, then this standard, or the Being who made this standard, is farther back and higher up than either of them, and he will be the real God. In fact, what we meant by calling them good and bad turns out to be that one of them is in a right relation to the real, ultimate God and the other in a wrong relation to him.”³

Therefore, neither postulating an evil power behind the origin for the universe (from which good arose) nor proposing a dualism adequately accounts for reality as we know it. The only viable alternative lies between two views—either matter is eternal or all things have come into existence through the personal will of an eternal and moral God. Candidly, either we beg the question of origins and embrace a form of nihilism, or we recognise there is a God who gives life and Who called all things into being.

³ C. S. Lewis, **Mere Christianity** (New York: Macmillan, © 1943, 1945, 1952), p. 48-9

Before considering the Faith held by Christians, we must review the chief competitor of that Faith—materialism. The materialistic view has roots in antiquity, being found in the scientism of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. Epicurus taught that everything is composed of small building blocks of matter. These minuscule building blocks were conceived to be hard, indestructible particles. Epicurus called these building blocks “atoms,” which is incidentally the origin of our word atom. Epicurus’ ideas likely were drawn from Democritus of Abdera who in turn was indebted to a little-known philosopher named Leucippus. In turn, Leucippus may have derived his ideas from a Phoenician philosopher named Moschus, who lived before 1000 BC.⁴ In an altered form, Epicurus’ materialistic view has become the dominant philosophy of western civilisation. For instance, the atom can be divided, as we well know. We have been taught by Einstein that energy and mass are interchangeable—a mind-boggling piece of knowledge. Knowing this, the presuppositions of materialism should be shaken, but the western world generally continues to be philosophically materialistic.

The materialism of this day does not necessarily deny a personality in the universe, but it conceives any such being as having arisen out of impersonal substance. It does not deny the complexity of the universe—even including such aspects as the intricacy of the atom; but it assumes that complexity came from that which was less complex. Consequently, modern materialism assumes that all things arose from that which was ultimately simple. The concept demands the conclusion that matter always existed. This concept lies behind most evolutionary thinking.

This description of the origin of the universe introduces problems which the philosophy itself cannot solve. The view presupposes a form for matter and then imagines more complex forms arising from the initial form. Where does form come from? Some have speculated that organisation and purpose are inherent in matter. However this thinking not only makes nonsense of the conception as this is no longer mere matter, but the basic question still remains unanswered—the problem is accounting for how the organisation and purpose even got there. At some level we have to account for the form; and if this is the case, we soon find ourselves looking for the One who gave organisation and purpose.

At this point we have introduced the idea of the personal. If we began with an impersonal universe there is no explanation for the emergence of personality. Francis Schaeffer writes, “The assumption of an impersonal beginning can never adequately explain the personal beings we see around us, and when men try to explain man on the basis of an original impersonal, man soon disappears.”⁵

Genesis begins with the opposite answer. Moses’ first book maintains that the universe exists with form and personality because it has been brought into existence by a God of order and a God who possesses personality. God was there before the universe came into existence; He was and is personal. God the Creator created all we know, including ourselves. Thus, the universe naturally bears the marks of His personality.⁶

⁴ Frederick A. Filby, **Creation Revealed: A study of Genesis Chapter One in the Light of Modern Science** (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, © 1963), pp. 15, 16

⁵ Francis Schaeffer, **Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History** (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, © 1972), p. 15

⁶ The preceding arguments are attributed to Boice, op. cit. 31-33

THE GOD OF CREATION — It is possible to become so engrossed in detailed argument revolving around the issues of origins that one misses a point of crucial importance. In arguing for the Christian view of origins one may too easily miss the wonder of the God of Creation. Biblical writers never fall into this trap, though in our haste to appear acceptable to people conditioned by a scientific age we are susceptible to precisely this error.

Whenever biblical writers look at creation, they inevitably end up praising God. In the same manner, when they praise God, one of the truths for which they consistently praise Him is His creation. God is inseparable from His creation and even a casual review of His creation leads the conscientious individual to praise Him for His wisdom and power. Recall the praise which shall be offered by the redeemed of all ages.

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

[REVELATION 4:11]

Contemplating God’s creation—the heavens and the earth—are we not led to praise Him?

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” These are the words of our text. Contained within those few words are great revelations concerning attributes of the God of Creation. We see revealed God’s eternal nature, for He was in the beginning. We witness God’s power, for it was God who created. God’s wisdom is revealed through these words, for He created the heavens and the earth, preparing for the crowning glory of His creation—mankind. God’s moral character is demonstrated, for when He had completed creation He pronounced His work very good. Each of these attributes of the Lord our God is worthy of careful consideration in the remaining moments of this message.

Consider first **GOD’S ETERNAL NATURE**. The first words of the text are translated virtually universally into English by the phrase “in the beginning.” In other words, the universe had a beginning. Moreover, the Creator was there in the beginning and in fact, He existed prior to the universe. If no other Scripture existed to alert us to the fact that God existed before creation, this one verse would serve to alert us and to suggest strongly that God is before creation. Consequently, we would be convinced by this knowledge that God is superior to His creation and that He is wiser than that which is created.

Throughout His Word God reveals His eternal nature. Consider just a few of the instances in which God presents His eternal nature. Abraham in Beersheba called upon “the Name of the LORD, the Everlasting God” [GENESIS 21:33]. Moses in his final song of blessing for the people of Israel spoke these beautiful words describing the Lord God.

“There is none like God, O Jeshurun,
who rides through the heavens to your help,
through the skies in his majesty.
The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

[DEUTERONOMY 33:26, 27]

Paul acknowledged that the prophetic writings had been delivered by “command of the Eternal God” [ROMANS 16:26]. In his first pastoral letter to Timothy, Paul ascribes honour and glory forever and ever to “the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” [1 TIMOTHY 1:17]. Writing Titus, the Apostle confesses that the faith of God’s elect and knowledge of the truth rests in hope of eternal life, which “God, who never lies, promised before the ages began” [TITUS 1:2]. It is, according to John, Jesus who is the true God possessing eternal life as He Himself is eternal. “[Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:20].

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, rebuked Israel for its idolatry as he delivered to the nation the words of the true and living God.

“The LORD is the true God;
he is the living God and the everlasting King.
At his wrath the earth quakes,
and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

“Thus shall you say to them: ‘The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’

“It is He who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

[JEREMIAH 10:10-12]

In the Hebrews letter the author moves quickly to honouring God on the basis of God’s eternal nature. In fact, he ascribes this attribute to the Son of God.

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,
like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will have no end.”

[HEBREWS 1:10-12]

Think with me for a moment. What was God doing before He spoke the universe into existence? God is eternal. He is self-sufficient and needs nothing other than Himself to exist or to act. Tozer has cogently observed, “God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no necessary relation to anything outside of Himself. His interest in His creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply nor from any completeness they can bring to Him who is complete in Himself.”⁷

⁷ Tozer on the Almighty God: A 366-Day Devotional (WingSpread, Camp Hill, PA 2004) May 13

Thus, before ever the worlds began, we can say with confidence that *the Triune God existed in sublime glory*. The God of the Bible is infinite and knows no limitation either in time or in space. He is perfect; He cannot improve. He is immutable; He cannot change.

The divine Trinity was in loving communion. The God of Creation exists as three Persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Though the word “Trinity” does not occur in the Bible, the doctrine certainly does occur there. Before He spoke all things into being, the three Persons of the Godhead were involved in planning and executing the divine will for the universe—and that includes salvation for mankind.

The divine Trinity planned redemption. God wasn’t forced suddenly to come up with a “Plan B” when our first parents sinned. The Godhead determined to create a world that included humans made in the image of God. The same Godhead determined that the Son would come to earth to provide His life as a sacrifice for sinful people. **EPHESIANS 1:3-14** makes it clear that the plan of salvation is Trinitarian: we are chosen by the Father (verses 3-6), purchased by the Son (verses 7-12) and sealed by the Spirit (verses 13, 14). All this was planned before there was ever a world!

I invite you also to consider **GOD’S POWER**, for the Word of the Lord declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God preceded creation; the Lord our God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Why, save for a perverted desire to refuse glory and honour to the Living God, would one ascribe to time and chance that which He accomplished by His Word?

The Word of God declares that He not only determines the number of the stars, but that He calls them by name [**PSALM 147:4**; cf. **ISAIAH 40:25, 26**]. Consider how vast these heavens are? On a clear night, away from the lights of our towns and cities, we may see so many as ten thousand points of light in the sky. A few of these are planets within our solar system, shining by reflected light. Thousands of the stars we see belong to our Milky Way galaxy and thousands of others belong to other galaxies. These ten thousand stars are all we see with our unaided eyes, but they are the tiniest fraction of the stars.

A typical galaxy contains billions of stars. Our Milky Way galaxy alone contains two hundred billion (200,000,000,000) stars. The galaxy to which we belong is a great spiral rotating majestically in space. The glowing arms of this spiral trail behind like distended points of a pinwheel. Our sun is in one arm of this vast spiral. The galaxy to which we belong is capable of making a complete rotation in two hundred fifty million (250,000,000) years.

Figures such as these I have just cited beggar the imagination! These figures speak only of the galaxy to which we belong! There are thousands of other galaxies visible to the naked eye and billions more within range of massive telescopes such as the South African Large Telescope in South Africa, the Spanish Gran Telescopio Canarias on the island of LaPalma or the Keck Telescopes located in Hawaii. If this weren’t awesome enough, consider that many more galaxies are being visualised today through use of the Hubble telescope orbiting in space. And even larger telescopes on earth and in space are being developed for use in this decade!

The galaxies display a seemingly unending array of beauty. Some are spirals. Others are spherical clusters. Some are flattened like a pancake. Others are erose or irregular about the edges. All the stars of the heavens are clustered in these intricate and beautiful galaxies which are scattered about in a seemingly random pattern.

Between the galaxies is space—immense, boundless stretches of space. The distance from one edge of an average galaxy to the other edge is approximately six hundred thousand trillion (6×10^{20}) miles. The average distance from one galaxy to another is twenty million trillion (2×10^{25}) miles. Translated into astronomical figures, the size of an average galaxy is one hundred thousand light years, and the distance between them is approximately three million light years.

The Andromeda Galaxy is the galaxy closest to our own Milky Way. It is separated from us by two million light years. These galaxies are not fixed in space, but they are moving away from one another at tremendous speed. The most distant galaxies are retreating at a speed of one hundred million miles per hour. The universe is expanding—the galaxies are all retreating from the centre of the universe.

Not only galaxies exist, but stars themselves are being born constantly. At any given moment in time, millions of stars are being born in space. Clouds of interstellar gas contract under the force of gravity acting between the atoms which compose these clouds. As they contract the temperature rises. At the critical temperature of twenty million degrees Fahrenheit the hydrogen within the ball ignites in reactions similar to those which occur in the explosion of a hydrogen bomb. The release of this energy halts any further condensing of the gas and the star will burn for billions of years.

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
Their measuring line goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.”

[PSALM 19:1-4]

Should we not praise God for the might and majesty which are His alone?

In our text, we also see **GOD’S WISDOM** revealed. In creating the heavens and the earth, God had man in view. The account of creation reads as though God were directing a great orchestra toward a glorious crescendo. First, He created light, and separated light from darkness. Time, a diurnal rhythm, was the first result of His work. Atmosphere, on which man is dependent, was the second aspect of His creation. Before ever man was on the scene there was a diurnal circadian rhythm and atmosphere. Earth and sea were next presented, followed by plants. After this, God created the vast universe to mark out times and seasons. Then sea creatures and birds were brought into being when the world was prepared for their presence. On the fifth day the animals—mammals, reptiles and insects—were given existence. Then, and only then, did man make his appearance.

The earth was prepared for man’s occupation and when that earth was readied man was given life. Consider that if the earth moved out of its orbit by but one degree, life could not be sustained. A tilting of the axis of rotation by even a portion of a degree would prove catastrophic to all life forms. Even a slight increase in the rotational speed would result in spinning off the oxygen on which life is dependent. In all this, God displayed His wisdom in preparing this venue for man, the epitome of His creative work.

Man was created to know God and to enjoy Him forever. What is amazing about this particular statement is that God created all things for man's benefit though He knew that the apex of His creation would rebel and plunge the whole of His work into ruin and misery resulting from sin. In Peter's first letter is discovered an enigmatic statement that is meaningless except in light of the grace of God who gave existence to mankind despite knowledge of his rebellion.

"If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

'All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.'

"And this word is the good news that was preached to you" [1 PETER 1:17-25].

Note especially the TWENTIETH VERSE. Peter here affirms that Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world to be the Lamb of God. God made provision for redemption of man even before God had created the rebel. If we think about the issue we know that all our theology is worthless if there was no creation. If there was no creation, there could have been no fall by our first parents. If there was no fall, there is no sin. If there is no sin, there is no need of a Redeemer. If there is no need of a Redeemer, there is no salvation. If there is no salvation, we are fools and worse because we have believed a lie, beginning with our belief that God is Creator and that all things are the result of His creative work.

In a discussion of God's purpose in setting aside the people of Israel so that the Gentiles could be saved, Paul spoke of the wisdom of God. In particular Paul marvelled at God's wisdom in providing for the salvation of His fallen creature. The reason for Paul's wonder is that God reveals His grace toward fallen humanity despite mankind's propensity for evil. As he considered the grace and goodness of the Creator the Apostle spoke the words which express our own wonder and praise for our God.

"The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order by mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable his ways!

‘For who has known the mind of the Lord?
or who has been his counsellor?’
‘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.

[ROMANS 11:29-36]

Fifteen years ago I read a thought provoking commentary in the National Post. The commentary was entitled “Why Humans Rule the Galaxy.”⁸ The writer, through application of statistics and logic, concludes that man is alone in the universe. A portion of that article reads as follows. “The Milky Way, a galaxy 100,000 light-years across, contains roughly 100 billion stars, of which about only 125 million are nice G2-type stars (like the Sun). But of these, about three-quarters are binary/multiple stars (a bit like two-sunned Tatooine in Star Wars), and the overwhelming majority of binaries have dangerously eccentric orbits, which makes it difficult for a planet to exist for any length of time in the same system as two (or more) such massive gravitational bodies. Indeed, the only hope for long-term survival lies in maintaining a distance either very close to the stars, or very far from them. In that case, however, temperatures range from immensely hot to impossibly cold, making it difficult for life to form...

“It is difficult to find too many planets that are lukewarm (at extreme temperatures, molecules either break apart or do not bond), covered with liquid (a necessity for the bonding process) and blessed with a complex enough atmosphere (atmospheric pressure keeps gasses in liquid form) to nurture nature. In our solar system, only earth was fortunate enough to inherit these three characteristics...”

The author, obviously disposed to accept the evolutionary view, continues with these sobering words. “Put it this way, since about a billion species have ever existed, and mankind is the only intelligent one, we are the result of a miraculous, perhaps divine, accident—a one in a billion chance...” His conclusion is equally blunt. “The chances of extraterrestrial life existing at the same time as us is, statistically speaking, zero.” God displayed His wisdom in creation.

A final consideration of the God of Creation is **GOD’S MORAL CHARACTER**. On the basis of this first verse of God’s Word we can define God as *THE ONE WHO CREATES*. From time-to-time, newspaper article breathlessly announce the “creation of life.” When one reads the article, however, it is apparent that the announcement of the creation of life is exaggerated, at best. Man does not create, though mankind can form or fashion from pre-existent matter. Even when we form or fashion objects or should we eventually actually make creatures, we are compelled to confess that we obtain our imagination, to say nothing of all physical, mental and spiritual gifts from God. We are at best, therefore, craftsmen. God, however, does create. Moreover, His creation is on a scale so vast as to be incomprehensible. He has willed creation and as a result, all we know, see and are have come into being.

⁸ Rose, Alexander, “Why Humans Rule the Universe,” (The National Post, © July 10, 1999) Page URL <http://www.nationalpost.com/commentary.asp?f+990710/25818> (dead link)

If God were not Creator, He would be only part of the world process. Consequently, He would be of no help to us; for if He were only a little bigger than us He would be only part of the whole. We would all be in the mix together. God and man would then be part of a mix for which there were no standards, no absolutes. It would be every man (and every god) for himself and all modern philosophies and ideas would be perfectly permissible ... if God were only part of the world process. If we concede this to be true it does not matter whether He is dead or alive. We need but live for the moment. Since there would be no standards we would be incapable of judging right from wrong. What is right today may be wrong tomorrow and we are on our own to get through this life as best we can.

However, the God of the Bible is a God of righteousness and holiness; He is pure and good. He created all things and pronounced His creation very good. Consequently, there is meaning to life, but only as we embrace the standard of the God of Creation. There is purpose to life; and that purpose is to glorify the God of Creation. There is right and wrong in this world—right being that which honours the God of Creation and wrong being that which dishonours Him. Thus, we who believe in God are right in saying that our chief reason for existence is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

If you will worship God, that is, if you will glorify Him as God and enjoy Him forever, you must acknowledge Him, as He demands. This means that you must submit yourself—your will and your being—to His rule. This is an issue of Faith. In fact, the Bible is quite clear in saying, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” [**HEBREWS 11:6**].

The call of this message, the cry of this pastor’s heart and the plea of this congregation, is that you would receive the grace of God and be saved. Coming to God, accept that He has made provision for you both to know Him and to enjoy Him forever. This is the Word of God, which commands you to believe God’s Good News.

The promise of God is, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ [**ROMANS 10:9-13**]. Amen.