

## God and the Beginning

I think we all know that lots of people have lots of disagreements about what is written in the Bible. Lots of people who are born again Christians have differing opinions, ideas, and beliefs about what various things in the Bible mean and how they should be understood.

This shouldn't surprise anyone. God gave us all individual personalities, and we all have had different experiences. As a result we have different views, thoughts, tastes on all sorts of things. We like different foods, different kinds of music, different sports, different cars, and on and on. As a result, we are open to interpreting the reality of things in different ways. We can accept the Bible as God's inspired word, believe that it is true, and yet understand some of those truths differently.

But there are truths in the Bible that must be accepted without interpretation. There are truths that are clearly presented and absolutely essential to the purpose of God having revealed them to us. The core message of the Bible is the revelation of God and the revelation of His purpose and provision of salvation, to reconcile mankind to Himself.

I think that it is interesting that, already at the very beginning of the Bible, there is a severe conflict between secular scientists and those who hold the Bible as God's revelation. Secular scientists, of course, do not view the Bible as having come from God. Many scientists consider the biblical record as containing interesting early history, imaginative fables to explain the world and its origin, and the history of an ancient culture that produced a remarkable person whose influence over morals and ethics continues to be accepted by many, but who has been glorified as a god by some who used that claim for their own political and economic purposes, as well as by well-meaning but misguided other people.

This conflict underlies essentially all of the disagreement between secular scientists and those who hold that the Bible reveals truth, and can be relied upon and applied to all areas of life. I am not saying that science and the Bible are in conflict. I am saying that it is scientists that dismiss the Bible as unreliable or irrelevant. True science should have no disagreement with the Bible when the Bible is properly understood.

Science has been defined as a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the universe. It is knowledge about, and the study of, the natural world, based on facts learned through observation and through experiments. It is supposed to be “knowledge” not ignorance or misunderstanding. “Knowledge” is defined as “what is known”. We hold knowledge in our intelligence, but we have to be competent to have knowledge, otherwise we could be holding onto errors or foolishness.

Science organizes what is known. But, often what is known is incorrect. Over the ages, people have “known” lots of things that were foolish, things that were based on ignorance and misunderstanding. I can testify to this from first-hand experience. When I was in medical school many years ago, I was taught by brilliant teachers, authors of widely accepted textbooks. But, I later learned that some of what I had been taught was false. No one accepts it as knowledge any more. It is recognized as error based on ignorance of truth that was not known at that time. We all know that the earth is not flat, and that the earth is not the center of the universe, but people who suggested those facts many years ago were imprisoned or thought to be fools.

As I said, many scientists vehemently disagree with the Bible, starting with the very beginning. When I say the very beginning, I mean just that. The first three words of the English translation of the Bible are totally unacceptable to many scientists. What are those words? They are “In the beginning”. “In the beginning”, notice, I didn't even get to the fourth word, “God”. They get into a great debate before God is even mentioned. They can't accept the idea of a beginning. The belief in a beginning threatens too much of the rest of what their “science” is built on.

Why is a beginning such a problem to these scientists? How could a beginning upset their science, their knowledge? How could accepting a beginning possibly ruin so much of what they know, so much of what they hold as truth? Well, lets look at that.

I recently was watching The John Ankerberg Show, a Christian television program. His guest was a Christian philosopher and theologian, with doctors degrees in both of those fields, Dr. William Lane Craig. This man discussed the reason so many scientists and others cannot accept those first three words of our Bible.

God has revealed Himself in two major ways, and God continues to reveal Himself to us. We have God's revelation through His creation. God has revealed much about Himself through what He has created and through how He upholds and sustains it. God also has revealed Himself through His revealed word, the Bible. The Bible is the source from which we learn of God's will for our lives, of how our relationship with God was broken, and how God has made it possible for us to be restored to the relationship with God for which we were created.

God continues to reveal Himself through His creation, and science is giving us more and more reason to be amazed at what God has created. God also reveals Himself through His inspired word, and through His Holy Spirit whom He has sent to us to open our minds to His revealed truth. Jesus said this to His disciples in John 14: 25-26:

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

And in John 15: 26 Jesus told them:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—He will testify about me.

I love the words of the first 3 ½ verses of Psalm 19. David wrote them. David was a shepherd during his early years. He spent a lot of time out-of-doors at night. Other than torches or camp fires, his view of the night sky was not interfered with, as it is today for us. We have so much artificial light at night, that we can see only the brightest objects in the sky. David's view was clear. He wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

And, in Romans 1: 20, Paul testifies:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1: 20)

With that in mind, let me present the reasoning and the argument Dr. Craig presented in his discussion with Dr. Ankerberg. Dr. Craig gives philosophical evidence, a philosophical argument, that there was a beginning, and why that fact is important.

Dr. Craig presented what is called The Cosmological Argument. That sounds pretty complicated, but it makes sense, and I think it will be easy to understand. It reminds me of high school geometry. It has two premises and a conclusion.

Here it is:

Premise # 1: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Premise # 2: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: Therefore the universe has a cause.

OK, that sounds simple enough, but people will argue with it. For a very long time, scientists claimed that the universe had always existed, that it was eternal and had existed for an infinitely long time. I think that it is interesting that an atheist, a person who denies the existence of an eternal God, and who probably denies that there is eternal life after physical death, would insist that the universe, the physical world, is eternal. But, atheists have held the belief that the universe has always existed, that it just is there.

Over 100 years ago, Albert Einstein developed his Theory of Relativity, which introduced a new understanding of the relationship between space and time.

None of us may understand it, but probably we all have heard of his equation,  $E = m c^2$ , which means that energy and mass are equivalent and can interchange with each other. Mass (physical material) can become energy, and energy can become mass. When Einstein recognized the implications of what he had discovered, he intentionally falsified some of his figures, because they suggested that the universe had had a beginning, and he wasn't ready to accept that. Other scientists later used his original data, and discovered that the universe has been and is expanding.

We may not pay much attention to the fact that the universe is expanding, but it tells us that the universe had a beginning. Scientists can look at how fast and how long it has been expanding. They can calculate back. As you go backwards, the universe gets smaller and smaller, until it is only a tiny speck. Everything would be contained in that tiny speck, and before that it would not have existed at all. It would not have begun yet. The beginning that this science has revealed is called "The Big Bang". They believe that it occurred about 14 billion years ago. That is a point that many of us will see as in conflict with the creation account in Genesis chapter 1. Scientists also know that the universe is using up energy, and if it had existed since eternity, it would have run out of energy already, but it hasn't.

So science demonstrates that the universe had a beginning. That beginning was the beginning of all matter, of all energy, of all physical space and of time. Actually we have known that for a lot more than 100 years. The Bible's first verse told us that, and it was written thousands of years ago.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

But now, let's go back to Dr. Craig's Cosmological Argument. We have shown that the second premise is true, "The universe began to exist". But, what about the first premise, "Whatever begins to exist has a cause"? I think we can all agree that something cannot come out of nothing. "Nothing" means "No thing". If you have no thing, you cannot make something from that. If something could come from nothing, without a cause, why don't we see that happening all around us? Why do we never see it? When we see something, we know that it had a cause. Animals produce meat. McDonald's employees make hamburgers. Ford employees make new cars. These things don't just happen. They are caused, by a cause. We don't expect them to just suddenly appear from nothing, spontaneously. Things that begin to exist have a cause.

So, let's go back again to the Cosmological Argument.

Premise # 1: Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

Premise # 2: The universe began to exist.

Conclusion: Therefore the universe has a cause.

We have seen that it is true that the universe had a beginning, and that a cause was

necessary. We now have proven that the universe had a cause. But, what kind of cause? Well, the cause had to be outside of time and space, since space was started with the universe and before that there was only eternity, no time. The expanding universe doesn't expand into space. The space that exists is in the expanding universe, which expands into a nothingness that is not space. The space increasingly replaces the nothingness around it. Before the beginning there was no time, just eternity. So the cause existed outside of time and space.

The creative cause had to have had unimaginable power to bring time and space into existence.

The cause also has been personal, having the ability to modify the things that were created through the physical laws that govern the creation. So we see changing seasons, we see birth, we see growth and we see death. We also know that creation fell, with the fall of man, the sin of Adam and Eve.

This creative cause was first, nothing preceded it. It did not have a beginning or a cause. It exists outside of time, and is not contained in the space it created. It is not a material substance, since it created all matter. It is powerful beyond our wildest imagination. And, it is personal. I have just listed some characteristics of the creative cause, and the description seems only to fit what we understand to be God. Not a group of competing or cooperating gods. One God.

The Bible records that His name is “Jehovah”, and “I Am That I Am”. An unchanging being that exists of its own, “I Am That I Am”. Why am I? I am because I am. That does not permit an explanation. It merely states a reality.

That cosmological argument relies on an examination of the universe, which is what David wrote thousands of years ago in Psalm 19: 1-4:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

And, God's revelation to the writer of Genesis summarizes it:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters He called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

...

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. (Genesis 1: 1-10 & 14-19)

This Being, God, the Cause of all that exists, He Himself exists outside of time and space. He has unimaginable power. God is not a material being, having created all material, He is a spirit. We have Jesus' word on this in John 4:24:

“God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

And, God is personal. We can see this in what David wrote in Psalm 23:

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

God takes personal care of us. He is our shepherd. Those who are His sheep will dwell in His house Forever.

But following the sin of Adam and Eve, our relationship with God had been broken. God's infinite perfection and the sinfulness of man prevented the fellowship with God that God had created man to have. As a result, God put into place a means for man to be restored, and in doing so, God revealed His infinite capacity for love.

Jesus testifies to this in John 3: 16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

And Paul referred to this in Romans 5:8, where he wrote:

God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God has taken such a loving, personal interest in each of us, that He went to the extreme to rescue us from ourselves, from the consequences of our sin. God made Himself a human being, a man, in the person of His Son, so that He could take on Himself the terrible punishment that His righteous judgment required. As Jesus said, “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

While in Macedonia for a few days, Paul and Silas were falsely accused and thrown into prison. While in prison that night, they were praying and singing hymns, even though they had been severely beaten. Suddenly an earth quake loosened all the chains and opened the doors of the prison. The terrified jailer asked Paul and Silas,

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household. (Acts 16: 30 – 34)

The man was a sinner. He recognized his sinful condition. He asked to be saved. He believed, was saved and was baptized that very night.

Now, if you are troubled by the God-fearing scientist having said that the “Big Bang”, that is God's creation of the universe, took place 14 billion years ago, notice that neither Jesus nor Paul asked that one believe in a seven day creation week. It didn't come up. Nicodemus probably believed in a seven day creation week, but Jesus never brought it up. The jailer probably had believed in a pagan fable about the origin of things, but Paul didn't bring it up. Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to them.” They came to believe in God, were saved and were baptized.

Speaking about Himself to Nicodemus, Jesus said:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Speaking to the Macedonian jailer, who may have heard of the teaching given by Paul and Silas before they were arrested, Paul said to him:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

When an angel of the Lord sent Philip to meet an Ethiopian eunuch, who was in charge of the entire treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians, and was in his chariot headed toward Gaza, this took place. The man was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, and was puzzled by chapter 53, verses 7 & 8:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Sometimes we may give people the idea that you almost need a seminary degree to be saved.

It seems to get so complicated. It's not.

But, you need to know so much. You don't.

In a very simple statement, Jesus told Nicodemus, an educated religious leader, what was necessary to be saved. Jesus said:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Paul, Silas and Philip all understood this: **Believe and be Saved.** It is still true for you.

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