

CREATION

A study of where we came from and why it matters in the 21st Century

LESSON 2: In the Beginning

Here's what we're going to do. First you will find a list of readings. I'll try and keep them brief. They may include Scripture (which you will look up on your own) or external readings which I will attach on following pages. This first page will always include the list of readings.

Second, there will be questions. Pray them out, study them out, think them out, and write them out. Then give your response. Such preparation will hone your soul and your mind for our discussions come Sunday.

Ready? Here we go...

READING

- Scripture: **Genesis 1:1**, John 1:1-4, Psalm 90:2, Acts 17:22-31, John 8:58, Job 38:1-7, Ephesians 1:3-6
- Paul Davies, "What happened before the Big Bang?" (<http://www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/big-bang.html>)
- Francis Schaeffer "Genesis in Space and Time," (1972, Francis Schaeffer) pp. 8-12. On the surface, this may appear a daunting read. Please give it your time. If it doesn't lead you to a point of worship, you might want to check for a pulse. ☺

QUESTIONS

1. What was before "In the beginning?"
 - a. According to science –
 - b. According to Scripture –
2. What was "the beginning"?
3. Carl Sagan audaciously claimed that the universe is all that ever is, was, or ever will be. Why, looking backward in time, is this a statement of utter nonsense? Is Davies' response (article) as satisfying as he asserts?
4. How has the Schaeffer excerpt changed your perspective of Genesis 1:1?
5. Meditate upon Genesis 1:1 all by itself and then map out the key events in the sequence in which they occurred.

Spend some time worshipping the God who was, and is, and is to come!

“What happened before the Big Bang” by Paul Davies

...This simple, schoolchild query has exercised the intellects of generations of philosophers, scientists, and theologians. Many have avoided it as an impenetrable mystery. Others have tried to define it away. Most have got themselves into an awful tangle just thinking about it. The problem, at rock bottom, is this: If nothing happens without a cause, then something must have caused the universe to appear. But then we are faced with the inevitable question of what caused that something. And so on in an infinite regress. Some people simply proclaim that God created the universe, but children always want to know who created God, and that line of questioning gets uncomfortably difficult.

...One evasive tactic is to claim that the universe didn't have a beginning, that it has existed for all eternity. Unfortunately, there are many scientific reasons why this obvious idea is unsound. For starters...you don't explain the existence of the universe by asserting that it has always existed. That is rather like saying that nobody wrote the Bible: it was just copied from earlier versions. Quite apart from all this, there is very good evidence that the universe did come into existence in a big bang, about fifteen billion years ago. The effects of that primeval explosion are clearly detectable today-in the fact that the universe is still expanding, and is filled with an afterglow of radiant heat.

...If the big bang was the beginning of time itself, then any discussion about what happened before the big bang, or what caused it-in the usual sense of physical causation-is simply meaningless. Unfortunately, many children, and adults, too, regard this answer as disingenuous. There must be more to it than that, they object.

Indeed there is. After all, why should time suddenly "switch on"? What explanation can be given for such a singular event? Until recently, it seemed that any explanation of the initial "singularity" that marked the origin of time would have to lie beyond the scope of science. However, it all depends on what is meant by "explanation." As I remarked, all children have a good idea of the notion of cause and effect, and usually an explanation of an event entails finding something that caused it. It turns out, however, that there are physical events which do not have well-defined causes in the manner of the everyday world. These events belong to a weird branch of scientific inquiry called quantum physics.

...The essence of the Hartle-Hawking idea is that the big bang was not the abrupt switching on of time at some singular first moment, but the emergence of time from space in an ultrarapid but nevertheless continuous manner. On a human time scale, the big bang was very much a sudden, explosive origin of space, time, and matter. But look very, very closely at that first tiny fraction of a second and you find that there was no precise and sudden beginning at all. So here we have a theory of the origin of the universe that seems to say two contradictory things: First, time did not always exist; and second, there was no first moment of time. Such are the oddities of quantum physics.

Even with these further details thrown in, many people feel cheated. They want to ask why these weird things happened, why there is a universe, and why this universe. Perhaps science cannot answer such questions. Science is good at telling us how, but not so good on the why. Maybe there isn't a why. To wonder why is very human, but perhaps there is no answer in human terms to such deep questions of existence. Or perhaps there is, but we are looking at the problem in the wrong way.

Well, I didn't promise to provide the answers to life, the universe, and everything, but I have at least given a plausible answer to the question I started out with: What happened before the big bang?

The answer is: Nothing.

and is deeper than the Greek concept because it is rooted in that which is historical. For example, we find Moses insisting, “You saw! You heard!” In Deuteronomy 4 and 5, just before he died, Moses reminded the Jews who stood before him that when they were young, they themselves had seen and heard what had occurred at Sinai—that is, in space-time history. Their parents had died in the wilderness, but they, the children, had seen and heard in history. Joshua spoke the same way a bit later in Joshua 23:3ff.

As a matter of fact, we have an exact parallel in these and other Old Testament passages to John’s explanation of why he wrote the Gospel of John. “And many other space-time proofs [that is what the idea is here] truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30, 31).

As we deal with the Jewish writings in the Bible and with the book of Genesis in particular, we must not understand it solely in Greek terms nor, certainly, in terms of an existential leap. Instead, we have an insistence upon history, truth that is rooted in space and time.

START HERE

Before the Beginning

Although Genesis begins, “In the beginning,” that does not mean that there was not anything before that. In John 17:24, Jesus prays to God the Father, saying, “Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Jesus says that God the Father loved Him prior to the creation of all else. And in John 17:5 Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him, Jesus Himself, “with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

There is, therefore, something that reaches back into eternity—back before the phrase “in the beginning.” Christ existed, and He had glory with the Father, and He was loved by the Father before “in the beginning.” In Ephesians 1:4 we read, “. . . he [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world. . . .” Thus, before “in the beginning” something other than a static situation existed. A choice was made, and that choice shows forth thought and will. We were chosen in Him before the creation of the world. The same thing is emphasized in 1 Peter 1:20, where the sacrificial death of Jesus is said to have been “fore-ordained before the foundation of the world.” Likewise Titus 1:2 says that God promised eternal life “before the world began.”

This is very striking. How can a promise be made before the world began? To whom could it be made? The Scripture here speaks of a promise made by the Father to the Son or to the Holy Spirit because, after all, at this particular point of sequence there was no one else to make the promise to.

Finally, the same point is made in 2 Timothy 1:9, where we read about God, “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

We are faced, therefore, with a very interesting question: **When did history begin?** If one is thinking with the modern concept of the space-time continuum, then it is quite obvious that time and history did not exist before “in the beginning.” But if we are thinking of history in contrast to an eternal, philosophic other or in contrast to a static eternal, then history began before Genesis 1:1.

We must choose our words carefully here, of course. How shall we talk about the situation before “in the beginning”? To avoid confusion, I have chosen the word *sequence*, in contrast to the word *time* as used in the concept of the space-time continuum. It will remind us that **something was there before “in the beginning” and that it was more than a static eternal.**

After creation, God worked into time and communicated knowledge to man who was in time. And since he did this, it is quite obvious that it is not the same to God before creation and after creation. The Scripture pictures this before “in the beginning” as something that can be stated. While we cannot exhaust the meaning of what is involved, we can know it truly. It is a reasonable concept, one that we can discuss.

This subject is not merely theoretical. What is involved is the reality of the personal God in all eternity in contrast to the philosophic other or impersonal everything which is frequently the twentieth-century theologian’s concept of God. What is involved is the reality of the personal God in contrast to a theoretical unmoved mover, or man’s purely subjective thought protection. There is more here than contentless, religious truth achieved through some sort of existential leap. Consequently, when we read, “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” we are not left with something hung in a vacuum: something existed before creation and that something was personal and not

static; the Father loved the Son; there was a plan; there was communication; and promises were made prior to the creation of the heavens and the earth.

This whole conception is rooted in the reality of the Trinity. Without the Trinity, Christianity would not have the answers that modern man needs. As I have said elsewhere, Jean-Paul Sartre well pointed out the basic philosophic problem that faces us: the fact that something, rather than nothing, is there. This is the incontestable and irreducible minimum for beginning to move as a man. I cannot say nothing is there; it is quite plain that something is there. Furthermore, it is also clear that this something that is there has two parts. I am there, and something in contrast to myself is there.

This leads us, of course, to the modern notion of Being. Being is there. But the question immediately arises: “Has it always been there?”¹ This is modern man’s basic mystery.

Man is shut up to relatively few answers. I think we often fail to understand that the deeper we go into study at this point, the simpler the alternatives become. In almost any profound question, the number of final possibilities is very few indeed. Here there are four: (1) Once there was absolutely nothing, and now there is something; (2) everything began with an impersonal something; (3) everything began with a personal something; and (4) there is and always has been a dualism.

The first of these—that once there was absolutely nothing and now there is something—has, as far as I know, never been seriously propounded by anyone, and the reason for this is clear. For this explanation to be true, *nothing* must really be *nothing*—totally nothing—neither mass, nor motion, nor energy, nor personality. Think, for example, of a circle that contains everything there is, and there is nothing in the circle; then remove the circle. This is the concept of absolute nothing. As I say, I know no one who has propounded the concept that all that now is has come out of such absolute nothing.

The fourth notion, that of an eternal dualism, can be dealt with rather quickly because it has never stood under close analysis, for men naturally press on behind the dualism and its particulars toward a unity by which to comprehend the duality. This is true whether it is the dualism of electromagnetism and gravity, or some shadowy Tao behind Yin and Yang. Parallel dualisms (for example, ideas—or ideals—and matter, or brain and mind) either

tend to stress one at the expense of the other, or leave the unsatisfied question of how they march on together with no reason for doing so.

In contrast to this, the impersonal beginning, the notion that everything began with an impersonal something, is the consensus of the Western world in the twentieth century. It is also the consensus of almost all Eastern thinking. Eventually, if we go back far enough, we come to an impersonal source. It is the view of scientism, or what I have called elsewhere modern modern science, and is embodied in the notion of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. And it is also the concept of much modern theology if one presses it back far enough.

An impersonal beginning, however, raises two overwhelming problems which neither the East nor modern man has come anywhere near solving. First, there is no real explanation for the fact that the external world not only exists, but has a specific form. Despite its frequent attempt to reduce the concept of the personal to the area of chemical or psychological conditioning, scientific study demonstrates that the universe has an express form. One can go from particulars to a greater unity, from the lesser laws to more and more general laws or super-laws. In other words, as I look at the Being which is the external universe, it is obviously not just a handful of pebbles thrown out there. What is there has form. If we assert the existence of the impersonal as the beginning of the universe, we simply have no explanation for this kind of situation.

Second, and more important, if we begin with an impersonal universe, there is no explanation of personality. In a very real sense the question of questions for all generations—but overwhelmingly so for modern man—is, “Who am I?” For when I look at the “I” that is me and then look around to those who face me and are also men, one thing is immediately obvious: Man has a “mannishness.” You find it wherever you find man—not only in the men who live today, but in the artifacts of history. The assumption of an impersonal beginning cannot 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.²

In short, an impersonal beginning explains neither the form of the universe nor the personality of man. Hence it gives no basis for understanding human relationships, building just societies, or engaging in any kind of cultural effort. It’s not just the man in the university who needs to understand these questions. The farmer,

the peasant, anyone at all who moves and thinks needs to know. That is, as I look and see that something is there, I need to know what to do with it. The impersonal answer at any level and at any place at any time of history does not explain these two basic factors—the universe and its form, and the “mannishness” of man. And this is so whether it is expressed in the religious terms of pantheism or modern scientific terms.

But the Judeo-Christian tradition begins with the opposite answer. And it is upon this that our whole Western culture has been built. The universe had a personal beginning—a personal beginning on the high order of the Trinity. That is, before “in the beginning” the personal was already there. Love and thought and communication existed prior to the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Modern man is deeply plagued by the question, “Where do love and communication come from?” Many artists who pour themselves out in their paintings, who paint bleak messages on canvas, many singers, many poets and dramatists are expressing the blackness of the fact that while everything hangs upon love and communication, they don’t know where these come from and they don’t know what they mean.

The biblical answer is quite otherwise: something was there before creation. God was there; love and communication were there; and therefore, prior even to Genesis 1:1, love and communication are intrinsic to what always has been.

END HERE

The Trinity

If we press on in a slightly different way, we can see even more of the nature of the God who existed prior to creation. In Genesis 1:26 we read: “And God said, Let us make man in our image. . . .” As we have seen in the New Testament, God the Father not only loved the Son, but made a promise to Him. And so we should not be taken by surprise when we read the phrase “Let us” or the phrase in Genesis 3:22, “the man is become as one of us.” This same phrase also occurs in Isaiah 6:8: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”³

The teaching that the Trinity was already there in the beginning is especially emphasized in John 1:1-3. As a matter of fact, the concept has particular force because it picks up the first phrase of Genesis and makes it, it seems to me, into a technical term: “In the