

“In the Beginning, God...(Part 1)” – Genesis 1:1

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take your Bible and meet me on page 1...

Today we begin a new series. The title of that series is “Paradise Lost.” The plan for this series is to take us through the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. This section is so foundational to everything that takes place in the rest of God’s Word. In fact, Graeme Goldsworthy went so far as to suggest “that *all* of the theology of the Bible has its foundations in these chapters,” for “the doctrines of creation, the Fall, judgment, the progress of evil, the exhibition of God’s grace, election, covenant, [divine] sovereignty and salvation history all have their beginnings here.”¹

Therefore, it is difficult for us to grasp why the story of Scripture unfolds the way it does without understanding what God has revealed in these opening chapters. But this shouldn’t surprise us too much because we know how stories work. The beginning of any good story is not wasted plot. It is meant to set up the rest of the story. This is why I am one of those guys that can’t just jump into shows midstream. Well, you can, but you’re bound to experience a lot of unnecessary confusion along the way.

My wife has excellent taste in shows, but I hardly ever watch them. Let me explain. Every so often, I will pass by when she is watching something, get intrigued by what is happening on the screen, and start asking questions about the plot while she is watching the show. (She just loves that). If it seems interesting enough to me, I’ll ask her how many episodes deep she is into the show, thinking I’ll just catch up and we can watch it together. But almost invariably she’s a few seasons in, not because she watches a lot of TV but because she will often play a show in background when she is doing other things. She can do that because she’s the kind of person who is comfortable not knowing everything about a story. I’m not that kind of person. So usually that means the questions I ask her, she doesn’t know because she has not really been paying close attention or jumped into the series somewhere in the middle. It also means that I usually don’t get into her shows because, as interesting as they seem, I don’t have time to start the series from episode one and catch up. Because if I am going to watch a show or read a series of books, I want to start at the beginning. That’s my personality.

Now which kind of person you are—more like my wife or myself—doesn’t really matter when it comes to entertainment because that’s simply about your enjoyment of a story. But if the story matters for your life, then you should care how the story begins. If you don’t understand the beginning of a story, you are not going to understand the point of the story. As David Murray explains,

“Most stories begin with a happy, idyllic situation, before a villain appears and ruins everything. The middle of the story, and the majority of it, is about how the hero of the story fights the villain, reverses the ruin, and, at the end, returns to the original ideal—or even to a better one. That, in a nutshell, is the plot of *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and most other movies and books. If that’s the usual structure of a story what will happen if we start reading it halfway through or start watching the movie an hour after it started? Without knowing how it began, we won’t know what’s going on, who’s who, what’s happened, what’s wrong, or where the story is going. We’ll be confused and disoriented, and probably give up on trying to figure out the plot.

That’s where many of us are when it comes to the story of the world. We’re living in the middle of the world’s story, but we’re confused and disoriented because we have no idea how the story began. Perhaps we haven’t read chapter 1 and therefore don’t know what’s happened, who’s who, what’s gone

wrong, what's going on, or where the story is going. The world is a bewildering and perplexing place for anyone who doesn't know how it began....By figuring out the beginning, we'll get a better handle of the messy middle and uncover the route to a happy ending.”²

Because this is true, I'm excited for the sermons ahead. Yet I'd be lying if I didn't confess that there is some degree of trepidation when entering into a series of this sort because that fallen part of me—that part that still, at times, fears the opinions of men more than the opinion of God—knows that there is no way a preacher can exposit this section of God's Word, particularly the opening two chapters, without disappointing someone or many someones. Don't misunderstand. I'm not too concerned with preaching on the implications that this section of God's Word has on many of the social issues of the day—related to things like gender, marriage, the image of God, and so on. I know that my positions on these matters, which accord with the clear testimony of Scripture and have been the position of the Church since its inception, will put me at odds with the emerging cultural norms and social mores of the day. That's not what I fear. Nor should you.

But if I am being honest, there are certain sections of God's Word that do give a preacher some pause when they consider *not* the world's opposition, but the “friendly fire” that such texts can sometimes elicit. In my experience, people have very strong and unflinching opinions about how the beginning of the world unfolded and how the end of the world will unfold. The conviction and resolute detail that these opinions are couched in has the feel as though the speaker believes they possess and are expressing their own, personal, eyewitness testimony. Yet we know that cannot be the case. And at times these seemingly settled convictions, in my opinion, go far beyond what the text itself claims. They seem driven far more by the questions of modern scientific theory than they are by the questions that Moses, the author, was trying to answer for a generation of recently delivered Hebrew slaves. And that's a problem.

What we need to understand is what the author was intending to communicate. That author—understood as God Himself, communicating through His chosen human instrument—may be addressing the curiosities we have today, but isn't always. That's why we have to let the text drive the conversation. If we do, we will find that it never contradicts truth. But we may also find that the truth it does communicate may be more or less than we expected. But any pastor worth his salt should want to be the sort of man who goes as far as the text goes and no further, who unashamedly highlights what he believes the author of God's Word intended to communicate and contentedly embraces the mysteries that result from the silences of Scripture. That means that, when it comes to the *what* and the *how* of the beginning and end of the world as we know it, I will be compelled to say more than some of you would like and less than others of you will like. But, to coin a phrase, “Here I stand; I can do no other.”³ And you can send your emails to PastorEvanWebster@email.com. (I'm kidding...maybe...no I am...probably).

With that said, we have one verse to consider today. We are going to take our time in the first few chapters, so calibrate your expectations. Today, we are really going to focus on the significance of just one word. But it's definitely the most important word. Look with me at the opening verse. Though you probably know it by heart, ask God to give you fresh eyes as I read it now...

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

This is God's Word...

It's interesting, is it not, that people who know virtually nothing about the content of the Bible could, upon hearing that one sentence, tell you that it is the opening line from the Bible. You might say that this sentence is iconic when it comes to literary openings. Writers will tell you that they often spend more time on the opening line of a story than they do on any other. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” You may not know much about the plot, but many of you will know that this is how *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, begins. If you hear, “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” then you immediately start thinking about *Star Wars*. Some of the ladies will recognize this one: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a

single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” What is it? *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen.

Good stories tend to have memorable opening lines, so should it really surprise us that the best and truest story of all—that in many ways our favorite stories have ever since been echoing the themes of to greater or lesser degrees—should have the most memorable opening line: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” What an opening! Yet it must not be reduced to a mere, “One upon a time,” as if it bore no more significance than to signal the beginning of the story.⁴ No, no. This opening line is loaded with implication. In fact, there is more here than we will have time to explore today. But the central thing of note is that we are introduced to the central character to this story right out of the gate—none other than God Himself.

“In the beginning, God...” He is the Hero of the story.⁵ The subject of its most important sentences.⁶ The memorable “Soloist” for whom every accompanist exists only to accentuate.⁷ We cannot properly understand the plot or characters of the Creation account unless we “first bow before the Author of Creation.”⁸ As one commentator put it, “The passage, indeed the Book, is about Him first of all; to read it with any other primary interest (which is all too possible) is to misread it.”⁹

Therefore, as I tell you often, we must ask the most important question that we can ask of any text of Scripture: What are we being taught about God? A. W. Tozer was right when he asserted that “what comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹⁰ Our view of God will shape the way we understand the world and engage with every circumstance we encounter in this world.¹¹ So we must start with God. And what a delight that is! Charles Spurgeon expressed it well:

“The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father...It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity...Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.”¹²

That’s been my experience. How about yours? Regardless, it can be. To that end, we should ask: What can we know about God from the very beginning? A lot, as it turns out. Here’s my next couple sermons in a sentence: God is the One, eternal, transcendent, personal Creator. I think all of this is tethered to the Bible’s opening statement. As we begin to break this down, let’s start with this...

God Simply Is

In the beginning, God... “God comes on stage with a complete absence of preliminaries.”¹³ God simply is. This is a point that D. A. Carson begins with when discussing this verse in a book titled, *The God Who Is There*. He writes,

“The Bible does not begin with a long set of arguments to prove the existence of God. It does not begin with a bottom-up approach, nor does it begin with some kind of adjacent analogy or the like. It just begins, ‘In the beginning God’ (Gen. 1:1). Now, if human beings are the test of everything, this makes no sense at all because then we have the right to sit back and judge whether it is likely that God exists, to evaluate the evidence and come out with a certain probability that perhaps a god of some sort or another exists. Thus we become the judges of God. But the God of the Bible is not like that. The Bible begins simply but dramatically: ‘In the beginning God.’ He is. He is not the object whom we evaluate. He is the Creator who has made us, which changes all the dynamics.”¹⁴

Carson goes on to explain how this biblical way of thinking, then, is quite different from the way Western thought has trended in the past several centuries, which is worth rehearsing now. Up until the time of the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation (i.e., through the seventeenth century), most people in West assumed that God exists and that He alone possessed absolute knowledge. Whatever it is that we can know must only be a subset of what God knows “exhaustively and perfectly.” Indeed, it was presupposed, we are dependent on God for our knowledge. His Spirit must disclose truth to us through what we observe in the natural world around us or the special revelation of Scripture.¹⁵

But in the 1600s this way of thinking began to change because of the influence of René Descartes and his followers, who birthed what is usually referred to as “Cartesian thought.” So every freshman philosophy student is exposed to the famous axiom of Descartes: “I think, therefore, I am.” Descartes was searching for a starting point for human knowing, something that theists and atheists, the religious and the secularists, could all agree on. He reasoned that if there was one thing that no one could deny it was their very existence. If you’re thinking, in other words, you must exist. With this notion as the starting point, he then began to build a system of thought that, ironically, he hoped would convince people to become good Roman Catholics. But this, arguably, began a shift in Western thought patterns.¹⁶

Notice how the axiom begins: “I think, therefore, I am.” It begins with “I.” As Carson explains, that’s not something people would have said in previous centuries, where “our existence was seen as dependent on [God], and our knowledge a mere subset of his.” Therefore, to understand anything, not least of which the self, you must begin with God, not “I.” But that began to change in the West with the introduction of Cartesian thought. Now, Carson writes,

“I begin with me. And that puts me in a place where I start evaluating not only the world around me but also morals and history and God in such a way that God now becomes, at most, the inference of my study. That changes everything. But the Bible does not run along those lines. God simply is.”¹⁷

God is not subject to us and our ways of thinking. God is. And since God is, we are subject to Him. Like it or not. And He will prove that to us all in time, including to an untold hoard of people who have thought they could supplant Him as the arbiter of true knowledge. Denying His existence doesn’t change the fact that God is. And beginning with self to fashion an imaginary God that fits our fancy, doesn’t change the God who actually is. Doing so only changes us. And not for the better. Gerald Bray provides an example:

“Those who create ‘God’ in an image that suits them will almost certainly be disappointed, because God is not a creature of their imaginations and will not allow himself to be caricatured in that way. Very often when we meet or read about people who have ‘lost their faith,’ this is what has occurred—their picture of God was one of their own making, and when it failed them, they stopped believing. The true God has created us, not the other way around, and we must never lose sight of that.”¹⁸

But when you begin with “I,” losing sight of this is all but inevitable. And the God you’ll one day be rejecting is not the God who actually is. The Bible doesn’t make that mistake. It opens with God at the helm. God simply is.

But what if that were not so? What if in the beginning there was simply...nothing. What if all that is came from “a big, dark, endless expanse of empty space,” which, of course, is not “nothing,” but “a whole lot of black something”? What if Shakespeare’s *King Lear* was wrong to say, “Nothing will come of nothing,” because everything, as it turns out, came from nothing? Then how can we escape the conclusion that it is also heading to nothing. We cannot. At least Lawrence Krauss, the author of *A Universe from Nothing* and a self-described anti-theist, is consistent in teasing out the implications of his beliefs when he suggests: “The two lessons I want to give people is that you’re more insignificant than you ever thought, and the future is miserable.”¹⁹ At least, he’s honest that taking God out of the equation and beginning with nothing, means we end where we began.²⁰ This “nothing story,” as Glen Scrivener calls it, forces us to “make your own reason for being, construct your own image, be a self-creator.” But the problem with this is that “In the end, we go back to the basics. Less than

basics. We finish how we began—with nothing.” The point is that our origin story matters. Remove God from the opening verse then there is just nothing. And if there is just nothing, “then life is *ultimately* absurd,” without purpose or enduring meaning.²¹

But that’s not the story the Bible tells because that is not the story that *is*. In the beginning, God. Beginning with Him changes everything for us. But before we can understand more of that, we have to understand more of Him. So what does text suggest God would have us know about Him? More than we have time remaining to cover. But let’s make a start at it...

God Is Eternal

“*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” The first word of the Hebrew original is translated “*in the beginning*,” which is actually where we derive the term “Genesis” (from the Latin translation). Others have long observed that “[w]henver the beginning of time is mentioned [in the Bible], God is already there, for he is without beginning.”²² Moses will later refer to Him as “*the eternal God*” for this reason (e.g., Deut. 33:27). God is pre-existent, meaning He existed before all that is part of the created order.²³ He alone has no origin.²⁴ A fact that equally applies to the entire Godhead, including God the Son. Concerning the Son, John writes, “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:3). Everything that exists owes it’s being to the Creator God, who owes His being to no one, since He is self-existent.²⁵ He is uncreated. He is eternal.

On one hand we can understand this—God has always been and will always be, having no beginning or end—yet on another level we are truly at a loss when it comes to God’s eternality since He is not like anything in the created order, which all had a beginning, including us.²⁶ How are we to wrap our mind around the idea that God exists outside of time, even existing before time was created, for that is what we are contemplating when we think on God’s eternality? “Time has a beginning with succession of moments, but God has no beginning, succession of moments, or ending (Gen. 1:1; Job 36:26; Ps. 90:2).”²⁷ The heavenly bodies by which we account time did not even exist until God spoke them into existence. Time and the material world are not eternal. God is.

It’s interesting to see where the modern scientific consensus has landed in recent years as it relates to whether or not the earth and the stuff of the cosmos is eternal. If we back up to Aristotle, and most of the Greek philosophers who succeeded him, we find it being argued that the universe had no beginning and would have no end.²⁸ As Stephen Hawking explained,

“Aristotle, and most of the other Greek philosophers [in contrast to Jewish/Christian/Muslim traditions] did not like the idea of a creation because it smacked too much of divine intervention. They believed, therefore, that the human race and the world around it had existed, and would exist, forever.”²⁹

Then with the advent of the scientific revolution—driven especially by Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics—this belief in an eternal and infinite universe also became the scientific consensus over and against the teaching of the Bible. This consensus persisted through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Then came a guy named Edwin Hubble—of the Hubble telescope fame—and he observed that the stars and galaxies were moving apart from one another, which suggested that something had to launch them in that direction and implied that you could trace back the origin of that motion to some initial cause. By the latter half of the twentieth century, with the emergence of the big bang theory, the eternal and infinite nature of the cosmos began to be questioned, much to the consternation and resistance of the majority of scientists. But now scientists almost universally embrace the notion that the material world had a beginning.³⁰

You see the problem for many atheistic scientists, don’t you? If the universe was eternal (as they formerly believed in the “steady-state” theories of old), then there would be no need to assume that it was caused. But as

soon as you concede (as they typically do today) that the cosmos came into being in the finite past, then inquiring minds will want to know what caused it to come into existence. This is where the big bang theory rises to prominence. But what stands behind the big bang? A “singularity” mutters secularism. And behind that? Crickets. It’s not because scientists are dumb. They are not.³¹ Christians have long championed scientific inquiry and the great scientists of old have been, almost without exception, religious people. We love science. But we don’t love that notion so prevalent today among many scientists that begin with the presupposition of materialism—the doctrine that nothing exists except for matter and its movements and modifications. But that’s an assumption. Not something verifiable as fact. It’s a faith claim. It’s religious. You can’t rule out an immaterial cause by materialistic science.

Meanwhile, theists are sitting back saying, “Please, by all means, follow the science.” So you think there was a “singularity,” then, if we grant that for arguments sake, where does that conclusion take us? Neil Shenvi has noted, “If all time, space, matter, and energy came into being at the Big Bang, then wouldn’t the cause of the Big Bang have to be immaterial, outside of time, and outside of nature?” And, if so, then we are talking about something that sounds a great deal like what Jews and Christians have believed about God for ages, namely, that He is the “immaterial, eternal, extra-natural cause of the universe.”³² So even if one accepts the big bang theory as gospel (so to speak), it doesn’t remove the need to posit a cause that sounds, at least in part, a great deal like the God of the Bible. Indeed, Robert Jastrow, an astronomer, reflected on the discoveries of modern astronomy and concluded his book *God and the Astronomer* with these words:

“For the scientist who has lived by faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”³³

“In other words,” as Shenvi writes, “scientists are just now catching up to theologians, who have believed for millennia that the universe is not eternal and was created by God in the finite past.”³⁴ Theologians are now asking scientists, If you can believe that matter came into existence from nothing with a big bang (or “singularity” as it is often called), then why is it irrational to think that it came into being at the behest of God? Or why would something like, say, the resurrection of Jesus be so troubling? Does belief in a “singularity” take any less faith? If it is not irrational to say that everything came from nothing, then why would it be irrational to claim that everything came from Someone? Is there mystery? Yes. But that is not the same as irrationality.

Creation is not eternal; God alone is. Creation was caused; God is not.³⁵ Creation has a beginning; God does not.³⁶ At the “Beginning,” God already is. That’s one of the points of this opening verse in Genesis.

And by the way, the biblical view and the modern scientific theory I have described both are also unified in rejecting “the circular idea of history common to Eastern religions and so popular in our culture today” (cf. the various new age movements in vogue today). As Richard Phillips writes, “Time is not a circle, but a trajectory. We may therefore ask where the line is pointing....If there is a beginning, there is history, meaning, direction, and purpose. We are already on the way to the Christian worldview!”³⁷

This language of “beginning” implies that there is an end in view, that there is a trajectory to history. And that trajectory has much to do with redemption, as the first readers of Genesis would have known. Remember the original audience. This Creator God is the same God who revealed Himself to them as their Deliverer, their Savior. He rescued them by His grace from their bondage and shame, from misery and death. The creation story has developed into a redemption story. And this redemption story, all along the way, is pointing forward to a Redeemer, Jesus Christ. No wonder, John introduces Him to the church in creation language—“*In the beginning was the Word...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*” (John 1:1, 14). And why did He take on flesh and offer Himself on the cross? To redeem us. As John says, “*to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*” (1:12-13). The Creation story becomes the Redemption story. The story of history has a redemption arc to it. As Phillips writes,

“In this way 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. 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. History’s story has a beginning! But it also has an end in the Savior God has prepared to meet us in our greatest need, the Redeemer Jesus Christ, who forgives our sin.”³⁸

That’s the biblical story. It begins and ends with the God of (New) Creation. And at the heart of the story is the Savior Jesus Christ. We begin with the end in mind. So we should begin with Jesus in mind. For it is by God’s Son that creation has come into existence. And it is only by the work of the same Son—by His perfect life among us, His substitution on the cross for us, and His victorious resurrection before us—that we can have hope beyond the grave. And it is by the Son that a new creation will be ushered in on the last day.

In other words, this is His story. And that’s good news for us because He invites us to Himself. He died that we might live. So turn from your sin and self-reliance. Trust in Jesus to save you from what your sin deserves. Trust in Him to make you new. Trust in Him to bring to into right relationship with God. He died to make it so.

Let’s pray...

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 27.

² David Murray, *The StoryChanger: How God Rewrites Our Story by Inviting Us into His* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 26-28.

³ Legend has it that Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, boldly said this before the religious leaders who called for him to recant of his biblical positions (called heretical by the church of his day) at the Diet of Worms. I do not mean to suggest that my stance on the matters under consideration is in anyway analogous to the courage of Luther or the cost he endured for his resolve, only that, similarly, I do feel constrained (and hope I am in truth constrained) to not go beyond what the text of Scripture communicates, though others are quite dogmatic about asserting positions that, as far as I can tell, the Scriptures remain silent on.

⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Paternoster, 2017, 2022), 58.

⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2001), 56.

⁶ Derek Kidner writes, “It’s no accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some thirty-five times in as many verses of the story.” *Genesis* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 43.

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 119.

⁸ Daniel Darling, *The Characters of Creation: The Men, Women, Creatures, and Serpent Present at the Beginning of the World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022), 11.

⁹ Kidner, *Genesis*, 43.

¹⁰ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 1.

¹¹ Cf. Chris Bruno, *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 17.

¹² Charles H. Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, 6 vols (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 1:1-2.

¹³ M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 322.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁸ Gerald Bray, *The Attributes of God: An Introduction* (SSST; Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 49.

¹⁹ From an interview with Cara Santa Maria, the transcript of which can be found at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/lawrence-krauss-universe-from-nothing_n_1681113?utm_hp_ref=science.

²⁰ This reminds me of something J. I. Packer wrote: “The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it’s a disappointing and unpleasant business...Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 14-15.

²¹ The quotes and the thoughts of this paragraph were gleaned from Glen Scrivener, *Long Story Short: The Bible in 12 Phrases* (Christian Focus, 2018), 19-20.

²² Bray, *The Attributes of God*, 48. He continues, “If God had a beginning, he would exist in time, since without time, the word ‘beginning’ has no reference point. But when did he come into existence, and how can anyone know? What was there before? This is not a matter of indifference. If there was a time before God came into existence, he must have a cause, and that cause would almost certainly be greater than he is. We can see now where this is leading. If there is something greater than God, then he is not really God at all, and several of his other attributes, like omnipotence, would have to be discarded. For this reason, God’s lack of beginning is a necessary corollary of many, if not most, of his other attributes” (ibid.). Cf. Mark Jones, who writes, “God has no beginning....Nothing brought him into being....God has no ending (Ps. 9:7; Rev. 4:9-10). Just as no other being can give God life, so no other being can take his life away from him....God has no succession of moments. God’s eternity cannot be abstracted from his other attributes, such as immutability (i.e., he cannot change) or omniscience (i.e., he is all-knowing). God comprehends all things at once. He does not increase in knowledge and wisdom. He sees all things that have ever been or shall ever be at once, which we may call an ‘eternal present’” Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 52.

²³ “Augustine jokingly replied to the question as to what God was doing before he created the world: ‘He was preparing hell for those who pry into such mysteries.’ Augustine argued that the question had no meaning—if time is an element of creation then there was no ‘before’ the events of Genesis 1:1.” Kenneth D. Keathley and Mark F. Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 27; cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.12.14, Philip Burton, trans. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2001), 269.

²⁴ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis* (TOTC; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 50.

²⁵ “If something exists, it must either have the power of being in itself or it must come from something that has the power of being in itself. Otherwise, nothing at all could exist” (R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, rev. ed. [Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019], 100).

²⁶ “We possess *aeviternity*, which has a beginning but no ending. This word was used both by Reformed theologians and by medieval scholastics (e.g., Bonaventure). Angels and humans possess *aeviternity*” (Jones, *God Is*, 54).

²⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁸ E.g., Aristotle, *Physics* 8.1 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 418-421. Also cited in Keathley and Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution*, 27 n. 10.

²⁹ Stephen Hawking, *The Illustrated “A Brief History of Time”* (New York: Bantam, 1996), 13

³⁰ Keathley and Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution*, 27-28. “Whether the world is young or old, the fact that it had a beginning is an important point because whatever is eternal is divine. Even if the universe is nearly 14 billion years old, it is finite. Only God is self-sufficient and eternal; therefore only God is worthy of worship. All other worship is idolatry because everything else had a beginning and has existed for a finite period of time” (ibid., 28).

³¹ Richard D. Phillips, *The God of Creation: Truths and Gospel in Genesis 1* (Evangelical Press, 2018), 14.

³² Neil Shenvi, *Why Believe? A Reasoned Approach to Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 89.

³³ Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: Warner, 1980), 105-106. Also quoted in Shenvi, *Why Believe?*, 89.

³⁴ Shenvi, *Why Believe?*, 89.

³⁵ “By far the most common atheistic rejoinder to this line of reasoning is the question, ‘If God caused the universe then who caused God?’ One positive aspect of this objection is that it implicitly endorses the necessity of causation. Anyone who wants to know what caused God can’t simultaneously dismiss the notion of causation as meaningless. However, this objection makes a fundamental mistake about the kind of Being God is. The reason we demand a cause for the universes is that it began to exist in the finite past. In contrast, God never began to exist. God is eternal. Therefore, asking for the cause of God’s existence is illegitimate. It would be like asking for the cause of a set of all even numbers. The set of all even numbers never began to exist; therefore, it doesn’t require a cause. In the same way, God never began to exist; therefore, God doesn’t require a cause” (Ibid., 89-90).

³⁶ “All our experience leads us to believe that the existence of physical things or collections of physical things requires an explanation outside itself. To put it another way, physical entities are contingent; that is, they might not have existed at all. Just as it would be extremely odd to declare that a piece of paper in our mailbox is self-existent or is a ‘brute fact’ with no explanation, it seems extremely odd to declare that something in the universe (or everything in the universe) is self-existent. It would be equally strange to declare that either the paper or the universe is a ‘brute fact,’ with no explanation. On the other hand, nonphysical entities do not seem to demand an explanation. We don’t normally ask why prime numbers exist or why the law of noncontradiction exists. Given their nature, it’s difficult to conceive of reality in which they did not exist; they seem to exist necessarily. But God is also a nonphysical entity, so even apart from theology, it’s plausible to think that if he exists, he exists necessarily. In this way, God is a reasonable explanation for a contingent universe, while it’s less plausible to insist that the universe explains itself or has no explanation for its existence at all” (ibid., 94).

³⁷ Phillips, *The God of Creation*, 13.

³⁸ Ibid., 21.