

## Genesis 1:1...The Majesty of God (continued)

### A God to Be Adored and Praised

*Already we have learned so much about God in just the Bible's first verse. He is transcendent, personal, and almighty.*

*Having met God in Genesis 1:1, how should his creatures respond? Bruce Milne writes that the Bible's teaching of God clearly calls "for a deep self-abasement of ourselves before his awesome majesty, and highlight[s] our obligation to offer him an adoring, submissive worship."*

Truly, 'Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise' (Ps. 96:4)." In one of our most beloved hymns, Christians sing praise to God for his creation:

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed.  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:  
How great thou art, how great thou art!

*When we get to the end of the Bible, we find that this impulse to worship God as Creator is further fulfilled by the heavenly beings in glory: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). This heavenly chorus shows that our calling to worship is grounded in the fact of God as our Creator.* For while Christians have abundant reasons to praise God for our redemption, everyone has every reason to glorify God as our Maker. Pink exclaims: "The wondrous and infinite perfections of such a Being call for fervent worship. If men of might and renown claim the admiration of the world, how much more should the power of the Almighty fill us with wonderment and homage."

### Self Existence

What's in a name? In our culture, the answer is often "not very much," because names are commonly given simply because of the way they sound. ***In the Bible, there is very much to a name.*** Moses knew this. Therefore, as he received his commission to deliver Israel out of Egypt, he asked God for his name: "Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I

say to them?’ ” (Ex. 3:13). The answer was of the greatest significance. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: “I AM has sent me to you” ’ ” (v. 14). This name is expressed in Hebrew by four letters: YHWH. The King James Version translated it as “Jehovah,” but it is probably more accurate to pronounce it as “Yahweh.” (***Moses introduces this special name for God in Genesis 2:4***)

***John Calvin comments, “God attributes to himself alone divine glory, because he is self-existent and therefore eternal; and thus gives being and existence to every creature.”***

We remember that when Moses began writing Genesis, he had already met God at the burning bush. Moses had been tending the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, when he saw a bush that “was burning, yet it was not consumed” (Ex. 3:2). ***There are no analogies for the being of God in nature, so God presented a supernatural analogy in the bush that burned but was not consumed. Just like the God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, the blazing fire did not have an evident source and was not dependent on created materials. God’s nature, likewise, is self-existing and self-sufficient.***

Just as God told Moses to approach with reverence, taking the sandals off his feet, ***we also should appreciate that the study of God’s divine attributes is holy ground, calling for humble praise from our hearts.***

***Understanding God’s self-sufficiency is important simply because our worship calls for a right and true understanding of God. There are at least three practical implications for us.***

***The first is that God does not need our help.*** We are never helping God meet his needs even as he helps us meet ours. Tozer writes, “We commonly represent Him as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world.”

Paul refuted this way of thinking in the great doxology of Romans 11:

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”  
“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. (Rom. 11:34–36)”

***The God who made all things out of his own eternal resources does not need our help but yet graciously invites us to participate in his glorious work in history.*** God does not need our witness to convert the lost, but he graciously welcomes us in playing a blessed role in the salvation of those who become our family members and close friends in the household of God. ***Rather than being paralyzed by God’s self-sufficiency, Christians will be emboldened by the certainty of his will and humbly motivated because he graciously stooped to work by and through his obedient people.***

***It was to this end that God revealed his self-sufficiency to Moses as he was sending him on a daunting mission to Egypt. “I AM WHO I AM,” God declared (Ex. 3:14), so that Moses would know that the resources of a self-existent and self-sufficient God were available to him as he acted boldly in obedience and faith. The same is true for us in serving the gospel today.***

***A second implication of divine self-sufficiency is that since God possesses in himself an infinite fullness of blessing, the greatest aim of every creature is to truly know God through saving faith (John 17:3), becoming his beloved children and heirs. God is himself our greatest end, treasure, resource, and hope.***

***Thornwell writes: “Poor in ourselves, without strength, without resources, feeble as a reed, and easily crushed before the moth, we are yet rich and valiant and mighty in God. We have treasures which can never be consumed, resources which can never be exhausted, and strength which can never fail.”***

***Third, the knowledge of God’s self-sufficiency should humble us so that we often pray with a true sense of our great need.*** How great is our need of the blessings that only God can provide out of his infinite fullness! ***Our endurance fails, so we should call on him who upholds all things with his own power.*** Isaiah rejoiced:

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength. . . .  
They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength. (Isa. 40:28–31)

***The same is true of our wisdom, which often falls so far short of the needs of life and difficulty. But God is all-sufficient in a store of perfect wisdom joined with infinite knowledge.*** James therefore writes, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5).

***How much greater is our need when it comes to righteousness as we stand before God’s perfect justice. What can we offer to God that will cause him to violate his own holy standards in forgiving our sin? The answer is that we can offer nothing to the all-sufficient God. But in his abounding grace, for the glory of his infinite mercy, God has provided a sacrifice to us in order that we might be cleansed of our sins, while honoring his own justice. Romans 3:24–25 speaks of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”***

### **The Immutability of God**

***We must consider one last attribute of God as we read Genesis and gaze on the God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth...the attribute known as God’s immutability. God, being self-existent and self-sufficient, does not and cannot in his own being experience change.*** For us, life involves constant change, often for the worse....Yet God is an eternal being, so that he does not and cannot change. He is immutable.

***One reason that God does not change is that change implies a succession of events, whereas God dwells in an eternal present in which there is no succession.*** He thus existed prior to creation and named himself to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). ***We are the beings who experience time as a succession of events. God is the absolute being who looks down on the entirety of history all at once. God sees the entire flow of history, knowing what for us is past and future all at the same time.***

***Divine immutability means that God never changes in his being. God always has been and always will be precisely as he is now. The attributes of God revealed in the Bible, including his holiness, truth, goodness, justice, and love, will never alter.***

***This means that while every human source of trust is eventually bound to fail, God himself will never fail.*** A. W. Pink writes:

God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be. “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:16) is His own unqualified affirmation. He cannot change for He is already perfect; and “being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He only can say, “I am that I am” (Ex. 3:14).<sup>9</sup>

***Further, God never changes in his will and purpose.*** Numbers 23:19 declares: “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” In God’s will, James notes, “there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17)....He always acts in a way that is consistent with himself.

***This is equally true of God’s will...amid all the turbulent changes in our world, God’s will is perfectly fulfilled as it has been from all eternity. He declares, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:9–10).***

***The immutability of God, like his self-existence and self-sufficiency, is full of comfort for the believer in Christ.*** Thornwell writes:

“The immutability of God is the foundation of all our hopes. It is here that the heirs of the promise have strong consolation. He can never deceive us in the expectations which He excites. He never falls short of, but often goes immeasurably beyond, what He had led us to expect. Here is the pledge of His faithfulness—He can never change; His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure.”

Adapted from Genesis by Richard Phillips (Edited)

## **Genesis 1 and Science**

***“There is a tendency in the study of Genesis 1 for scholars to insist that we should not expect it to teach science but only theology.*** St. Augustine is quoted in support, saying that in Genesis God “wanted to make Christians, not mathematicians.”

***A problem with this emphasis is noted by E. J. Young: “Inasmuch as the Bible is the Word of God, whenever it speaks on any subject, whatever that subject may be, it is accurate in what it says. The Bible may not have been given to teach science as such, but it does teach about the origin of all things.”***

***This being the case, Herman Bavinck urges that when the Bible “speaks about the origin of heaven and earth, . . . [it] deserves faith and trust. And for that reason, Christian theology, with but few exceptions, has held fast to the literal, historical view of the account of creation.”***

***The problems come when the findings of science and Scripture conflict. In approaching this challenge, we need to consider science rightly.*** Secularists often speak of objective science. Yet the data of science always needs an interpreter, and the human interpreter is never objective, but approaches data with bias and preconceptions. Christians further realize that human interpreters are influenced by sin, which promotes a bias against the truth of God. Young writes: ***“We must remember that much that is presented as scientific fact is written from a standpoint that is hostile to supernatural Christianity.”***

***Another expression to reject is the declaration of “settled science”. Opponents of Christianity will often argue that evolution and other theories concerning our origin are settled beyond argument. But by its very nature, science is never settled. At best, scientists work with a small amount of the overall potential data and must always be willing to consider new information. Mark Ross thus warns against the tendency to accommodate the Bible to science:***

***“Those who think that Biblical teaching must give way to scientific teaching whenever conflicts arise perhaps have not given adequate attention to the corrigibility of scientific findings. Today’s accepted scientific “truth” might well turn out to be tomorrow’s discarded theory.”***

***In contrast to science, the Bible is the revealed Word of God, the perfect interpreter and source of truth.*** God possesses none of the limitations of human beings. He possesses all the data, not merely a part, and was himself the sole actor in creation. Being holy in his perfect nature, God is always trustworthy. Therefore, ***while Christians should not casually discount the arguments of science, we should not place science in authority over God’s Word.***

***Poythress writes, “Since the Bible is infallible, we should give it the preference when conflicts between the Bible and science seem to arise.” If nature is a book for us to read, John Calvin points out that the inerrant Scriptures are the spectacles we wear in order to read it rightly.***

***Until about three hundred years ago, Christians were virtually unanimous in reading Genesis 1 as presenting creation in six literal days. Under the pressure of scientific opposition, this situation has shifted so that today large percentages of Bible believers are willing to adopt nonliteral views of the creation days. This change occurred not because of more careful Bible study, but as a result of accepting the truth claims of scientists over the propositional revelation of Scripture.***

Today, a variety of theories see Genesis 1 in nonliteral ways in order to lessen or remove the conflict with science.

### **Evidence for the Literal Chronology of Genesis 1**

***There are several solid reasons to embrace a literal chronology of creation. Consider five lines of evidence.***

***First, the genre of Genesis 1 is prose, not poetry or even a poetic narrative—however elaborate its construction may be—which everywhere else in Genesis signals historical narrative. Geerhardus Vos observes the danger to the entire Bible if Genesis 1 can be discarded as history: “If the creation history is an allegory, then the narrative concerning the Fall and everything further that follows can also be allegory.” Derek Kidner comments “Moses, the author, shows no consciousness of speaking otherwise than literally.”***

***Second, the grammar of Genesis 1...marks a sequence of events wherever this grammatical structure is found in the Old Testament.***

***Third, the numbering of the creation days identifies them as normal earth days. Joseph Pipa writes that “the use of ‘day’ with the ordinal number demands a sequential reading. . . . When an ordinal number is used with yom, not one example of non-sequence can be found.” Thus, the fact that Genesis 1 numbers the days as first, second, and so on gives the impression of ordinary days.***

***Fourth, we note that the context of the days is marked by the words “evening and morning.” This signifies the period of darkness and the breaking of dawn that ends the day that began with the creation of light.***

Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch observe ***“If the days of creation are regulated by the recurring interchange of light and darkness, they must be regarded not as periods of time of incalculable duration, or years or thousands of years, but as simple earthly days. God’s revelation of creation is presented in normal day periods.”***

***Fifth, when the Bible later looks back on Genesis’s creation story, its own view of the events is that they are historically literal.*** Paul pointed out that in the beginning, God said, “Let light shine out of darkness” (2 Cor. 4:6), validating the historical claim of Genesis 1:3. In Matthew 19:4, Jesus spoke of Adam and Eve as historical persons. Psalm 33 corroborates the claim of Genesis 1: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6).

***Most telling is the language of the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8–11). We are to imitate God’s creation pattern by working six days and resting on the seventh day:*** “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day” (Ex. 20:11). ***The logic is that we must do as God himself did. We are to work for six literal days each week, resting on the seventh, to imitate what God did on the original days of creation.***

Armed with this evidence—Genesis 1’s historical genre, its narrative grammar, the numbering of the days, the context of evening and morning, together with the agreement of the rest of Scripture—***Christians may be confident in reading the days of Genesis 1 as literal twenty-four-hour periods.*** Instructed by God’s Word, we stand humbly but confidently before the contrary teaching of science.

***How, then, do we answer science’s teaching that the universe is billions of years old rather than the thousands of years indicated by Scripture? ” Vern Poythress argues a “mature creation” approach, noting that Adam seems to have been created in a mature, adult form, rather than growing from infancy. By analogy, there is no reason why God could not have created the universe with a mature appearance, including light already in motion from distant stars.***



***“If so,” Poythress writes, “the age estimates from modern science, such as 4.5 billion years for the earth and 14 billion years for the universe, are simply coherent instances of apparent age.”***

***This kind of reasoning, together with alternative scientific theories, may help to bridge the gap between Bible believers and scientists, although the secular hostility to Christianity makes this difficult in practice. Nonetheless, Christians must stand steadfastly and confidently on God’s Word, knowing that, as Psalm 119:130 declares, “the unfolding of your words gives light.”***

Excerpt From: Richard Phillips. “Genesis.”

**Family Worship comments on Genesis 1 from Joel Beeke...**

***Consider the power of God in creation. If a computer were observing 10 million stars per second, it would still take 63 million years to count all the stars! Such is the power of the Almighty. Remarkably, the stars are the work of His fingers (Ps. 8:3) but salvation is the work of His right hand (Ps. 98:1). In a wonderful way God’s work in making believers new creations in Christ Jesus demonstrates a power greater than commanding the world into existence. Let us be amazed at the wonder of creation; let us be overwhelmed with the wonder of grace. How does saving grace display even greater glory than creation?***

***Stand in awe of the power of God’s word. God’s word is the agency of creation. God said, “Let there be . . .” Christ demonstrated this power in the miracles both with people such as raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) and with the inanimate creation such as calming the storm (Mark 4:35–40). God’s word still is powerful today through the Scriptures. It is by the word of His power as well that He bears His created world along according to His purpose of providence (Heb. 1:3).***

***The fact that God created gives Him the right to govern and to use His creation as He sees fit (Ps. 24:1–2; 95:5). Since creation, including man, belongs to God, all of creation, including man, is dependent on Him and accountable to Him. The theological implications of creation are far-reaching.***

## **Appendix...Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Faculty Statement on Creation**

*Annually, the faculty of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary subscribe to the following statement regarding the proper biblical understanding of the creation week.*

We the faculty of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary wish to acknowledge publicly our view on creation so that the churches and individuals supporting the Seminary may know what to expect from classroom instruction and faculty writing. In so doing, we note the following as preliminaries: (1) the issue of creation has long been considered a fundamental Christian belief, one that distinguishes Christianity from other religions; (2) this particular doctrine has been subject to prolonged attack since the mid-19th century, but continues to be critical for orthodoxy; (3) although the history of belief on this subject is clear, some fine and notable theologians from our communions have held differing views on this subject; and (4) that as a Seminary we are obligated not to teach contrary to the Westminster Standards. The Westminster Standards may be changed by the church courts, but, in our view, the seminaries ought not to be teaching contrary to those Standards, so that when there are changes they will occur as a result of the church's mature deliberation and not in a de facto manner.

Thus, we offer our view on the subject of creation as a school that serves a number of Reformed denominations, especially the PCA and the OPC.

- We believe that God's Word is not only inerrant, but that it is also clear to the learned and unlearned alike; thus, we affirm that when God reveals his mind—on creation or any other matter—he is quite capable of making his thoughts known in ordinary language that does not require extraordinary hermeneutical maneuvers for interpretation.
- Accordingly, we believe that when God revealed his creation as ex nihilo and by the power of his word, and when he surrounded the six days of creation with such phrases as “the first day . . . the nth day” and “evening” and “morning”—all phrases which would have been understood in their normal sense by Hebrews in the second millennium BC—that God himself intended to convey that the work of his creation spanned six ordinary days, followed by a seventh and non-continuous day which also spanned 24 hours like the other six days.

- We believe that an accurate study of OT texts does not support the gap theory, the framework hypothesis, the analogical theory, or the day-age view. Indeed, we find the OT creation texts to be interpreted as normal days, and no passage demands that Genesis 1-2 be re-engineered to yield other interpretations. The long history of rabbinical commentary, the very dating of time by the Hebrew calendar, and orthodox Jewish thought so understands these texts to embrace only days of ordinary length.
- The NT church and Scriptures offered no revisions of this view, and nowhere do those texts themselves advocate framework or day-age views. We certainly believe that if the wording of Genesis 1-2 required clarification or modification away from the normal meaning of the Hebrew terms, God would so indicate in the text itself, as well as in NT treatments of Genesis 1-2.
- The earliest post-canonical commentaries either advocated a 24-hour view of the days (e.g., Basil, Ambrose) or followed Augustine in a somewhat platonic scheme. Augustine's view, however, was that creation occurred instantaneously, and he nowhere enunciated a day-age view or a framework hypothesis.
- Until the Protestant Reformation, only two views were propagated: (1) the Augustinian view (followed by Anselm and John Colet) and (2) the literal 24-hour view (espoused by Aquinas, Lombard, and others).
- The magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Beza) adopted a uniform view, that of 24 hours, and overtly repudiated the Augustinian view.
- Prior to the Westminster Assembly, the leading Puritans (Ainsworth, Ames, Perkins) and others repudiated the Augustinian view and taught a sequential, normal day view.
- The Westminster Assembly divines either felt no need to comment on the length of days—so clearly was it established—or if they commented, they uniformly (either explicitly or implicitly) adopted the 24 hour view. With 60-80 divines normally attending sessions, at least 20 of the divines who did comment in other published writings indicate that they only understood the creation days to be 24-hour days (or ordinary days), and none have been found who espoused a contrary view. Specifically, there were no divines who wrote advocating a day-age view or a framework view. We continue to esteem them not only as confessional authors but also as faithful exegetes. We deny that certain scientific theories are so certain as to compel us to reinterpret Scripture on this matter.
- Following the Westminster Assembly, the testimony of the American Reformed tradition (e.g., J. Edwards) followed the tradition of Ussher/Perkins/Ames/The Westminster Divines on this question. No debate about this subject arises until after 1800, as the winds of various European views began to circulate.

- By the mid-nineteenth century, certain leading Presbyterians (C. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and later Shedd and Warfield) began to conform their exegesis to the ascendant science of the day. We believe that this was a strategic and hermeneutical mistake, as well as a departure from the meaning of terms in the Westminster Standards.
- Leading southern Presbyterians (such as Thornwell, Dabney and Girardeau) however, simultaneously resisted efforts to broaden the church on this point, as is documented in the Woodrow trial and decisions.
- Early in the twentieth century, numerous evangelicals — and some seminaries — became overly concessive to a secular cosmology, departing from the historic view expressed in the Westminster Standards on this subject.
- Some of us, at earlier times, were willing — due to love of the brethren and respect for esteemed teachers — to declare that the meaning of confessional language on this question was vague. We are no longer able in good conscience to do so. Both the normal meaning of the confessional phrases and the original intent as verified by other writings of the divines is now abundantly clear, with no evidence to the contrary.
- Even the secular confidence in earlier cosmologies is declining in some areas.
- Therefore, we declare our view shares the exegesis of the Westminster divines that led them to affirm that God created all things “in the space of six days” by the word of his power. We also believe that this clear meaning of confessional language should be taught in our churches and pulpits, and that departures from it should be properly safeguarded.
- Accordingly, we reject the following contemporary notions: (1) that John 5:17 teaches a continuing seventh day of creation; (2) that violent death entered the cosmos before the fall; (3) that ordinary providence was the only way that God governed and sustained the creation during the six days of creation; (4) that extraordinary literary sensitivities must be ascribed to pre-1800 audiences; and (5) that Scripture is unclear in its use of “evening and morning” attached to the days of creation.

We admit that some Christians have been too lax on this subject, and others have been too narrow. Hence, we hope to enunciate in this statement a moderate, historic, and biblical position. Even should other fine men differ with us on this subject, we hereby announce our intent to remain faithful to the teaching of the Westminster Standards and other Reformed confessions of faith on this subject.

*To God alone be glory.*