Ask Away – January 1

1) **What is the significance of the Word being "in the beginning with God"? (John 1:1–2)**

John identified the Word (*logos*) as Jesus Christ (John 1:14–17), and his intent in these verses was to state that Christ existed *before* the creation of the world ("in the beginning with God"). Jesus *was* God, and Jesus was *with* God. This means that Jesus is fully God while at the same time He is a unique person within the Godhead. Jesus was *not* God's first creation–"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

2) **What relationship existed within the Trinity before the creation of the world? (John 17:24)**

The loving relationship between God the Father and God the Son. John 17:24 reveals that the Father and the Son both co-existed before the creation of the world. There has always been a Father-Son relationship within the Trinity.

3) **When did the Holy Spirit begin to exist? (Heb 9:14)**

The Holy Spirit is "eternal." He has always existed uncreated as the third person of the Godhead.

4) **When did God determine to save the world through the sacrificial death of His Son? (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet 1:19–20)**

Before He created the universe, the Father planned to save mankind from sin by the "once for all" sacrifice of His Son on the cross (Heb 10:1–18). This demonstrates the omniscience of God concerning the future (His foreknowledge). God knows all the potential events that might take place as well as the actual events that will take place. He knows what men will freely chose to do, and He acts in such a way that His purposes and plans are carried out without negating men's ability to chose (their free will).

5) **What is the significance of Paul's statement that the Father chose the saints "in Him" (in Christ)? (Eph 1:4; cf. 2 Tim 1:9)**

Before He created the world, the Father sovereignly and graciously chose (elected) His Son to be the one through whom the world would be saved. This means that election is Christocentric, that is, election is realized and centered "in Christ." The Father also determined (predestined) that all who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus would be united spiritually with Christ and adopted as His sons. This means that election is both corporate and conditional. It is corporate in the sense that our status as elect comes only from being united by faith with Christ. We are elect because we are "in Him," the elect One. It is conditional in the sense that our election is based on our response to God's gracious call and our obedience to His requirements of faith and repentance. This means that no one is predestined to be saved or lost. Rather, all men are called to believe in Christ (Matt 22:14) and those who "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel" shall be saved (Col 1:22–23).

6) What do the words "Pentateuch" and "Torah" mean?

The word 'Pentateuch' is composed of two Greek words: *penta* meaning 'five,' and *teuchos* meaning 'a case for carrying papyrus scrolls' or, in later usage, the 'scrolls' themselves. Pentateuch thus means 'five scrolls,' and it refers to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The Hebrew word Torah, which also refers to the first five books of the Bible, is often translated as 'law,' yet the term is much broader than its English rendering conveys. Torah derives from the verb *yarah* meaning to 'teach' or 'instruct,' so a better translation would be 'instruction' rather than 'law.' Wenham comments, "This instruction is more than merely imparting information. It is not purveying historical facts for facts' sake or laws for laws' sake; rather it is seeking to persuade: 'that it may go well with you, and with your children after you' (Deut 4:40)."[1]

7) What is the purpose of the Pentateuch?

The Torah was written to show God's people how to live in a loving relationship with Him and with each other. It revealed the sovereignty and supremacy of YHWH, the origin of the universe, the deadly consequences of sin, and the wonder of God's mercy and grace. It showed the people how to be right with God by faith (Gen 15:6), how to love and worship God (e.g., Exod 20), and how to love and care for each other (e.g., Lev 19). To those who followed its instruction and lived by its precepts, it would impart wisdom (Deut 4:5–8), grant physical life (Lev 18:5), and ensure success (Deut 28:1–14; Josh 1:8).

The NT confirms that the Pentateuch was written to reveal God and His will (Heb 1:1–2), and to point us to Jesus Christ, who is the "true form" of the good things to come (Heb 10:1; Gal 3:23–24). Paul said that it was "written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4), and that it was "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).[2]

8) Who is the inspired author of the Pentateuch?

The evidence that Moses wrote the Pentateuch is clear and consistent throughout Scripture. The Pentateuch itself makes the claim that Moses was the author (Exod 17:14; 24:4–7; 34:27; Num 33:2; Deut 31:9, 22, 24) and the rest of the OT does the same (e.g., Josh 8:32–34; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Chr 35:6; Neh 8:1). Jesus believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (Mark 7:10; Luke 20:37), as did Paul (Rom 10:5, 19; 2 Cor 3:15) and the other inspired writers of Scripture (Heb 7:14). While it is true that the text of the Pentateuch was later updated in places (Gen 14:14) and editorial comments added (Deut 34:5–8), this does not argue against Mosaic authorship. As Peter Vogt comments, "Subsequent editorial additions and linguistic updating do not detract from the idea of Moses as

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[1] See Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) 4.

[2] I recommend the book by Gordon Wenham mentioned above and the book by Peter Vogt mentioned below. They provide an excellent overview and introduction to the Pentateuch.

author but in some respects enhance his role, as the changes ensured that his intentions would be understandable to later audiences."[3]

9) Where did Genesis get its English title?

The English title "Genesis" is derived from Jerome's Vulgate, *Liber Genesis*. The Latin name followed the title of the book in the Greek (Septuagint), which was probably taken from Genesis 2:4 where the Greek *geneseos* ("origin, birth, generation") is used to translate the Hebrew *toledot* in the phrase, "These are the generations [*geneseos, toledot*] of…".[4]

10) When was Genesis written?

Genesis was most likely written during the last third of Moses' life, probably during the wilderness wanderings (cf. Num 33:18–35). This would put the writing of Genesis at c. 1444–1408 BC.

11) Are the first chapters of Genesis a record of actual historical events or simply a collection of myths concerning the origins of life?

Scripture confirms that Genesis is a record of actual historical events. The characters mentioned in Genesis are referred to as real people in the rest of Scripture (e.g., Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel and Noah are referred to in fifteen other books of the Bible). Jesus cited both the creation of the world and the first human beings as historical fact (Mark 10:6–8), and he referred to Noah as a real person who was saved from a real world-wide flood (Luke 17:26–27). Paul explained the message of the gospel in terms of a real Adam who sinned and brought death to all people (Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:21–22). Paul also drew theological conclusions from the nature (1 Cor 11:8–12) and order of creation (1 Tim 2:11–15). Any attempt to mythologize the Genesis account ultimately undermines the truth of the gospel, for if the fall of man is not true history, then the death of Jesus on the cross has no spiritual significance.

12) What is the significance of the phrase "In the beginning…"? (Gen 1:1a).

This phrase affirms that the universe began to exist. This is very important, for everything that begins to exist must have a cause. This premise is part of what is known as the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God. The argument goes like this: (A) Whatever begins to exist has a cause, (B) The universe began to exist, (C) Therefore, the

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[3] See Peter T. Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009) 129–136. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, it was widely agreed by both Jewish and Christian scholars that the Pentateuch was largely, if not entirely, written by Moses. However, beginning in the late eighteenth century, scholars began to consider alternatives to this view. In the late 1800s, Julius Wellhausen argued for four hypothetical sources in the Pentateuch: J, E, D and P (aka the "documentary hypothesis"). The J source is so named because of its preference for the name Jehovah (Yahweh). The E source is named for its preference for the divine name Elohim. D refers to the Deuteronomistic source, and P refers to the Priestly source. The documentary hypothesis was widely embraced and became the dominant approach to the interpretation of the Pentateuch until the late twentieth century. Then in 1987, Norman Whybray wrote a book, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, which concluded that the documentary hypothesis failed to adequately account for the features of the text in light of its ancient Near Eastern context. Other scholars joined Whybray in challenging the validity of the documentary hypothesis on different grounds. As a result of these challenges, there is no longer a consensus among scholars as to the authorship of the Pentateuch. That being said, conservative scholars have steadfastly held to Mosaic authorship throughout the reign of the documentary hypothesis, and it is hoped that their faithfulness to the Scriptures will contribute to this once again becoming the dominant view.

[4] Kenneth A. Mathews, "Genesis 1–11:26," *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 42.

universe has a cause. Both experience and scientific evidence confirm premise A, that things do not pop into existence out of nothing. Scientific discoveries in the last century have also confirmed premise B, that the universe is not eternal, but did indeed have a beginning. It follows then that C must be true. Since the universe cannot cause itself, its cause must be beyond the space-time universe. It must be spaceless, timeless, immaterial, uncaused, and unimaginably powerful. Much like–God.[5]

13) The word "God" in Genesis 1:1 is the plural noun *Elohim*. Does this imply the doctrine of the Trinity? (Gen 1:1a).

Murphy comments: "The plural form of *Elohim* is not, in itself, a clear indication of plurality within the Godhead. The best and most consistent way to understand the plural form in these cases is to take it as a majestic plural. The plural form is used in Genesis 1 and throughout the OT to refer to the God of Israel (the Creator of Heaven and Earth) because it is an intensive way to acknowledge the absolute supremacy of the One True God. This does not mean that the plural form speaks against a plurality of persons within the Godhead. It simply means that one cannot reason for the Trinity on the grammatical basis of this plural form alone."[6]

14) What is the significance of the fact that Genesis refers to God in masculine terms? (Gen 1:1).

The Bible consistently refers to God in personal, masculine terms, and while God possesses all the qualities which are characteristic of both the male and female genders, He has chosen to reveal Himself with an emphasis on His masculine qualities (e.g., Lord, Father, King, Judge, Husband, Ruler, and Shepherd). This terminology cannot be dismissed as a product of the patriarchal culture of ancient Israel, for other ancient Near Eastern cultures, though no less patriarchal than Israel, worshipped masculine *and* feminine deities (cf. Jdg 3:7; Acts 19:34), and even referred to one and the same God as both "Father" *and* "Mother." On rare occasions, Scripture does describe God's *actions* using feminine figures of speech (see, e.g., Deut 32:18; Job 38:29; Ps 123:2; Isa 42:13–14; 46:3; 66:13; Hos 13:8). However, the Bible never makes use of feminine names or titles for God (such as "God the Mother"). It should be noted that the masculine language used of God does not imply that God is male, for God is a spirit and has no gender in the physical sense (cf. Deut 4:15–20; John 4:24).[7]

Elass comments: "With regard to the Holy Spirit and the fact that the Hebrew *ruach* ("Spirit" in Gen 1:2) is feminine in gender, it should be noted that the gender of a word in Hebrew (as also in Greek) has no necessary connection to the gender of the thing itself. The most likely explanation for *ruach*'s feminine gender is that Hebrew categorizes most of the elements of nature in the feminine gender (sun, earth, rain, etc.). Since one of the principle meanings of *ruach* is wind, the word most naturally follows this pattern. It must also be noted that the Greek word used in the NT for "spirit" (*pneuma*) is neuter in gender, and further, that often the biblical writers, against language conventions, use

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[5] For more detail, see Dr. William Lane Craig's popular article on the Kalam Cosmological Argument and the short video available on Dr. Craig's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0.

[6] Bryan Murphy, "The Trinity in Creation," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 24.2 (Fall 2013): 167–77. See page 172 for citation.

[7] Randy L. Stinson & Christopher W. Cowan, "How Shall We Speak of God? Seven Reasons Why We Cannot Call God "Mother,"" *Journal for Biblical Man and Womanhood* 13.2 (Fall 2008): 20–23. See also Simon Chan, "Father Knows Best," *Christianity Today* 57.6 (July/August 2013): 49–51.

masculine referential pronouns when pointing to the Spirit rather than feminine or neuter pronouns, as grammatical rules would mandate (cf. 1 Cor 12:11; 1 Pet 1:11)."[8]

15) Is Genesis 1:1 a summary of the creation account which follows, or does it describe part of what God did on the first day of creation? (Gen 1:1).

The traditional view is that Genesis 1:1 is a main clause describing God's initial actions on the first day of creation, and that Genesis 1:2–5 describe subsequent phases in God's creative activity during that day.[9]

16) What were the "waters" the Spirit was hovering over? (Gen 1:2).

The earth in its initial state was covered by a global ocean. It wasn't until the third day that dry land appeared: "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:9–10).

17) How could light from the stars, which are many light years away, arrive in time to be useful to Adam "for signs and for seasons, and for days and years"? (Gen 1:14–16).

This problem is known as the "light travel time problem,"[10] and there are two main approaches to answering this challenging question. The first approach is to *appeal to the miraculous nature of the creation week*.[11] During this week, God used processes that are very different from the processes that exist today. For example, God made matter and energy of out nothing (Gen 1:1–3); God made Adam, the first man, from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7); God made plants grow rapidly out of the ground on the third day so they could be used as food by Adam and the animals (Gen 1:11–13). From this we see that God rapidly and miraculously matured many things during the creation week. It seems reasonable to conclude that, in a similar manner, God rapidly "matured" the universe on the fourth day, bringing the light from distant stars to earth just as He made the plants instantly sprout and come to full height.

The second approach attempts to solve the light travel time problem with a *scientific theory that fits the current laws of physics*. The idea is not to replace God with science, but to show how God might have created the stars in such a way that fits both the biblical account and current physics. Examples of such theories are Lisle's anisotropic synchrony convention and Humphreys' time dilation model.[12]

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[8] Mateen Elass, *The Holy Spirit* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2005) ix.

[9] For a defense of the traditional view, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis 1–15," *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1* (Dallas: Word, 1987) 11–13.

[10] For an overview of this issue, see Jason P. Lisle, "Does Distant Starlight Prove the Universe Is Old?" //answersingenesis.org/astronomy/starlight/does-distant-starlight-prove-the-universe-is-old. For an overview of the current state of creation astronomy, see Danny R. Faulkner, "The current state of Creation Astronomy II," *The Proceedings of the International Conference on Creationism* 8.22 (2018): 36–45.

[11] Danny R. Faulkner, "A Proposal for a New Solution to the Light Travel Time Problem," *Answers Research Journal* 6 (2013): 279–284.

[12] Jason P. Lisle, "Anisotropic Synchrony Convention–A Solution to the Distant Starlight Problem," *Answers Research Journal* 3 (2010): 191–207; Russell D. Humphreys, "New time dilation helps creation cosmology," *Journal of Creation* 22.3 (2008): 84–92.

18) What does it mean when it says "These are the generations of..."? (Gen 2:4).

This phrase occurs ten times in Genesis (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2; also Gen 36:9), and the author used it to provide structure for the book. The word "generations" is *toledot* which means "offspring, descendants." Thus the phrase serves to introduce either the descendants of some person or a narrative about some person (e.g., Noah, Isaac, Jacob). Although it may seem strange to refer to the "offspring" or "children" of the heavens and the earth (Gen 2:4), it must be remembered that Adam (man) was formed from the dust of the ground (cf. 1 Cor 15:47–49).

- Preface (Gen 1:1–2:3)
- The *toledot* of the heavens and the earth (Gen 2:4–4:26)
- The *toledot* of Adam (Gen 5:1–6:8)
- The *toledot* of Noah (Gen 6:9–9:29)
- The *toledot* of Noah's sons (Gen 10:1–11:9)
- The *toledot* of Shem (Gen 11:10–26)
- The *toledot* of Terah (Gen 11:27–25:11)
- The *toledot* of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18)
- The *toledot* of Isaac (Gen 25:19–35:29)
- The *toledot* of Esau (Gen 36:1–37:1)
- The *toledot* of Jacob (Gen 37:2–50:26)