

Did God Create Time?

Description

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A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 3rd Quarter

Rest In Christ

Week 10

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This week's lesson is entitled, "Sabbath Rest." Sunday's lesson reads,

"Of all the Ten Commandments, only the fourth begins with the verb 'remember.' It's not 'Remember, you shall not steal,' or 'Remember, you shall not covet.' There is only 'Remember the Sabbath day . . .'

The idea of 'remembering' presupposes history, presupposes that something happened in the past that we need to, well, remember. When we remember, we make connections with the past, and 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy' marks a straight line back to the Creation week itself."

Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Sunday, August 29, 2021

It's certainly true that "remembering" presupposes history. But in this video, we'd like to take things a step further. Not only does "remembering" presuppose history, but both "remembering" and "history" presuppose time. While the lesson doesn't deal directly with the nature of time, it's a subject worthy of our attention – especially since people frequently make unscriptural assumptions about time and how God must relate to time. So today, we thought we'd talk about the idea that God created time, the idea that God exists outside of time, and the nature of time as presented in the bible – and also as presented in the writings of Ellen White and the other SDA pioneers.

As we'll see in a minute, scripture presents God as being within time just like all of us are. But many have the idea that God created time, and exists outside of time, in non-time, even though there is nothing in scripture even implying any of these ideas.

Time is simply the network of sequential relationships between events. This is not something we typically consider, but the sequence of events is inherent in any action we do, or any thought we have – really any aspect of life is experienced as a sequence of events.

So, if God created time itself, that would mean that He created moment-to-moment change – that He created sequence... But what would that even mean?

So, let's think about this for a minute. If it was the case that God created time, what was it like for God before He did that? We can't think of this scenario in the context of time, obviously, so we must call it "non-time." And since time is the sequence of events, non-time would be the total reverse of this, which would be complete simultaneity – where the sequence of events is not possible. But if that were the case, then God could never have an original thought, like, "Hey, I think I'll create a new thing today – time," because even to have that thought would require the sequence of events.

If God existed in non-time, then could He even have thoughts at all? It would seem like He would either have to be thinking nothing or thinking everything simultaneously since there is no allowance for succession.

Most people wouldn't want to say that God wasn't thinking at all, and would instead prefer the idea that God was thinking one simultaneous thought. But if we take this route, other weird things happen. If you think that God had any thoughts about time at all while existing in non-time, then His thoughts about time could never change because nothing could change in non-time. So if God thought "I am about to create the world" – this thought could never change. He would, for all of His timeless existence, be thinking this. So, it seems like He would be ignorant of when He actually created the world because He would always be thinking of it as a future event. But if you say that God ever thought something like "I just created the world" then you either have to say He only thought this "in time" while His timeless existence still only thinks of creation as a future event, or you have to say that God's simultaneous timeless thought included "I just created the world." Many have a view of God that seems to require that His timeless thought would contain all His thoughts since He knew everything from timeless eternity. But if this is the case, His timeless thought would have to simultaneously include "I am about to create the world," "I am currently creating the world," and "I just created the world," ...all at the same instant. And at this point, you would either have to say that He was wrong in at least some of His thoughts, or you have to say that He was right in all of His thoughts, but this would mean that it was simultaneously true that the world was about to be created, was in the process of being created, and had already been created.... All at the same...non-time. It's a contradiction, and contradictions are impossible to comprehend. We will get to more on the comprehension angle of this in a minute.

Let's take another example – the existence of Satan – and see how his existence would work out if we assume God exists outside of time, which, again, would mean that everything He experiences in non-time, would have to be experienced simultaneously. If we say God in this non-time has any thoughts at all, we either have to say that God isn't thinking all thoughts and that He, in His timeless existence, is ignorant of what Satan is actually doing, or, if we say He is thinking all thoughts, then He is either deluded into thinking everything is happening at once when it actually isn't, or His thoughts are correct and everything actually is happening at once. If that is the case, then Satan has not yet existed, is currently existing, and has ceased to exist, all simultaneously. Furthermore, for God, it will always be true that Satan exists. And it will always be true that Satan doesn't exist. So Satan doesn't yet exist, does currently exist, and already ceased to exist all simultaneously in this non-time. Of course, we aren't saying this is reality. We are just pointing out that when you take the idea of God's timelessness to its logical conclusion, it results in contradiction.

Now we are not saying that things could not happen simultaneously *within* time. For example, two people could both go to the grocery store simultaneously, but in any given moment they could not both be at the grocery store and not be at the grocery store. The reality of time precludes this.

Some might say that we can't comprehend God, and therefore it is reasonable to hold the incomprehensible belief that God exists outside of time – that God exists in the simultaneity of non-time. But as we said, the simultaneity of all thoughts implies either that God is delusional or it implies a self-contradictory reality, and it is not possible for two contradictory things to be true at once. It is impossible for someone to be at the store and not be at the store at the same time.

Some have the idea that God created absolutely everything and therefore oppose the idea that God did not create time. But the bible does not promote the idea that God did create time. There are some things that He did not create, and we can logically understand this with a couple of examples. How about truth? Did God create truth? If so, that would mean that there was no truth before God created it. But truth is just reality – so, so long as there was reality, there was truth. So truth never had to be created – it just always existed. Same thing with love. If God created love, then He must not have been loving before He created it. But since the creation of love would be a loving thing to do, then love had to exist before God created it. We could go on and on, but hopefully, this is enough to make the point that God did not create absolutely everything in the universe. Time is one of those things, because to create time would require succession, and if there is no succession (non-time) then it is impossible to create time. Time is something God did not need to create, in the same way that truth and love did not need to be created by God.

Now let's look at an example in scripture to demonstrate the biblical presentation of God's relation to time.

Consider Jeremiah 3:6-7. It reads,

⁶ The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? ⁷ And I thought, "After she has done all this she will return to me"; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it.

We all know what it's like to be disappointed. And according to this passage, God knows what it's like too. God is portrayed as someone who in the past had thought things would work out differently than they eventually did.

So, here in Jeremiah 3:6-7, we see a sequence of events. First, God sincerely thought that Israel would return to Him after she had done all her "whoring." Second, they didn't return to Him. Third, God is disappointed that what He had hoped would happen didn't happen. This shows that God does not exist in the past, present, and future simultaneously, because if He did, He would have known that Israel would not return after her "whoring," and He would have known this already at the time He said He thought she would return. If God exists outside of time, you would have to concede that God was insincere when He told Jeremiah that He had thought Israel would return.

So, to take on the idea that God exists outside of time is to concede that in a case like this, God would be nothing short of insincere. Sound familiar?

Yes, it sounds sort of like Satan's insinuations about the character of God when he said to Eve, "You shall not surely die." Eve thought that God truly loved her, but Satan is very subtle...he got her to question God's sincerity. Satan is not going to directly say that God is insincere, but to promote the idea that God exists outside of time locks us into that conclusion when it comes to passages like Jeremiah 3.

But, if we take Jeremiah 3:6-7 as it reads, we can see that God truly expected Israel to return to Him. And we can also imagine how hurt He was when this didn't happen. We see – that we can actually relate to God.

Ellen White spoke of God struggling with the decision to let humanity perish in their sins, or to give His Son Jesus to die for them. She said,

“Said the angel, Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no. It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His beloved Son to die for them.” Ellen White, 1SG 26.2

The context of this statement is very illuminating. We encourage you to read this whole chapter in *Spiritual Gifts*, Volume 1. It is called “The Plan of Salvation” and can be found from pages 22-28. In these pages, Ellen White describes very clearly that when humanity fell into sin, Jesus devised a plan of salvation for them and He went into the presence of His Father three times. In these three meetings, He presented the plan of salvation, pleading with His Father to allow Him to sacrifice His own life for the sake of humanity. Only after the third time did the Father accept the plan. This is what the angel was referring to by telling Ellen that it was a struggle for God to decide between giving up His Son and saving humanity. Why this is so relevant for our discussion today is that this clearly presents God as responding in real time. When Jesus presented the plan of salvation to God, it was a new idea – it wasn't something that God had in mind from all timeless eternity. God had a hard time accepting this plan – it was a real, moment-to-moment struggle. The angel was clearly telling Ellen that this was a genuine struggle. God wasn't putting on an act, and the angel wasn't being insincere – just like God wasn't being insincere to Jeremiah. For God to be genuine in any of these circumstances requires God to be within time, not a timeless being – but a real being experiencing time like we do, in a moment by sequential moment way.

Lastly, let's look at something from an early SDA pioneer – A.C. Bourdeau. Bourdeau directly came against the idea that God exists outside of time in his article, “The Hope That Is In You,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 8, 1869.

“[The scriptures clearly show] That the righteous shall inherit substance. Prov. 8:20, 21. It is not a Heaven ‘beyond the bounds of time and space’ that they will inherit; for this would be *no* Heaven.” A.C. Bourdeau, “[The Hope That Is In You](#),” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 8, 1869.

Bourdeau also said earlier in his article,

“Is this [saying that heaven is beyond the bounds of space and time] not spiritualizing away God, Christ, angels, saints, and Heaven? burning them down to nothing, as it were, by the fire of Spiritualism? Yet this constitutes the Christian's hope as taught by popular orthodoxy. Heaven save us, and open our eyes, that we may see the truth.” Ibid.

Note here that Bourdeau was arguing that scripture presents heaven as a real material place within the bounds of time and space. To assert otherwise would be to annihilate heaven. That is because space and time are intimately related. You cannot get rid of time without getting rid of space, and if you get rid of space, you get rid of existence. This is tied to a much broader idea that was central to the thinking of the early SDA pioneers; that is, the idea that existence is material. For more on that subject, see “[Materialism: Our Forgotten Foundation](#).” Bourdeau opposed the idea of a timeless and spaceless heaven and a timeless and spaceless God, saying that it is a form of spiritualism. The reason why is because it assumes that God is beyond the material world, and thus immaterial. An “ism” is a belief, and Spiritualism, literally speaking, is belief in the existence of a so-called “spiritual” realm, which is understood to be a non-physical or non-material realm. Thus, spiritualism is just belief in anything non-physical. And the idea that God is beyond space and time certainly fits that description.