

The Doctrine of Time

By Dave DeWitt

Introductory Comment

My purpose for this study was not to defend any perspective of “time.” I was simply intrigued by some papers I read on the subject and decided to do some research, on my own, focused on what I found in the Bible. But what I found was quite amazing, and it forced me to abandon some of my old views about time and God’s involvement in time. I discovered that this is a crucial study because:

- (1) The Bible has a lot to say about time. If we think time is unimportant, we are determining what parts of God’s revelation are important and unimportant.
- (2) The biblical concept of time is diametrically opposed to the highly influential view promoted by the progressive secular world today.
- (3) Crucial biblical doctrines, such as prayer, the gospel, the sufficiency of the death of Christ, and the character of God, are linked to our view of time.
- (4) There are three commonly held Christian views about time, which are **wrong**: that there is no time in heaven, that God created time in Genesis 1, and that God is separated from time.

The purpose of this study is to determine a doctrine of time by making observations from the Bible and the ontology of the cosmos we live in. I will discuss three aspects of time:

First, I will discuss the **nature** of time, “How to define and describe time.”

Second, I will look at the **duration** of time, “Did time have a beginning, and will it end?”

Third, I will consider time and the **nature of God**. “Is God in time or apart from time, or both?”

The Nature of Time

Questions to Consider:

What is time? How do we know about time since we cannot detect it with any of our five senses? Is time a fourth dimension of the universe? Does time exist in the past and future, or just in the present? Does all time exist at the same time? Can we escape from time?

Definitions of Time

The best definition I found was in Wikipedia, “Time is the continued sequence of existence and events that occurs in an apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present, into the future.”

My definition: Time is the progression of existence.

Corollary: time exists, and it is always:

Sequential, things that happen in time always impact other things that happen in time

Continual, time goes on inevitably, it cannot be stopped

Measurable, the movement of time can be measured (as in minutes, hours, days, and years)

Irreversible, what happens in time cannot be altered or undone

Unavoidable, no one can escape the progression of time

Two things must happen, for time to exist: (1) some entity (object or being) must exist and (2) the entity must be in motion. By all observation, when these two conditions (existence and motion) are present, time always exists. And by observation they are always present everywhere. [See the Appendix for a further explanation of time and motion.]

The A-Theory and the B-Theory of Time

The two theories, labeled A-theory and B-theory, are not my designations. The terms A-theory and B-theory, were first coined by Richard Gale in 1966, who derived them from Cambridge philosopher J. M.

E. McTaggart's analysis of time and change in "The Unreality of Time" (1908). [From a Wikipedia quote and McTaggart, John, "The Unreality of Time," *Mind* (1908), pp. 457-474]

The A-theory, or **dynamic** view of time, says time is moving from past to present to future. The past existed, but it no longer exists, only the present exists, and the future does not yet exist. In A-theory, time is, "... the series of positions which runs from the far past through the present, and then from the present through the near future to the far future.

[tedsider.org/teaching/215/HO_McTaggart.pdf]

In the A-theory, if something happened yesterday and then something else happens today, yesterday's events are in the past and today's immediate events are in the present. Whatever happens tomorrow is in the future, which has not yet happened. Yesterday's events did not just happen before today's events but in past time from today's events. When an event happens in sequence with some other event (I wrecked my car, so I bought a new car), it means the first event is in the past with respect to the second event. The second event may also be in the past, but it is future from the perspective of the first event. The consequences of past events exist, but the past events themselves no longer exist.

The B-theory is the **static** view of time. It says that time is a fourth dimension of the cosmos where there is no past, present, or future distinctions, but all the time of the entire cosmos exists simultaneously. Events are like the letters in the alphabet. Some events happen before other events, but a prior event is not in the past, it is merely before some events and after other events. This is the view preferred in much of modern physics (often embraced by atheists and pantheists) and the basis for Hollywood movies about time travel (especially if you have a DeLorean with a "flux capacitor"). [Ward Crocker, Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics 2022, "Dispensational Theology and the Necessity of Divine Temporality" p. 4]

The capacity to move back and forth in time assumes the B-theory. Some time-travel movies picture the B-theory like a piece of paper or a ribbon which contains all time. All parts of the ribbon exist simultaneously and if the part you are in (what you currently experience) touches some other part of the ribbon, or there is a "wormhole" transporting you to some other part of the ribbon, you can move to that time, which actually exists at the same time as your time.

Ted Sider [referenced above] offers this example. If you are living in the year 2016,

A-theory: "The year 1967 is 49 years in the past"

B-theory: "The year 1967 is 49 years before the year 2016"

Jeff Speaks summarized McTaggart as follows:

The A series

Includes the properties of being past, present, and future.

Includes properties which are temporary rather than permanent.

If an event is present, it will not always be present.

The B series

Includes the properties of being earlier than or later than another event

Includes properties which are permanent rather than temporary.

[www3.nd.edu/~jspeaks/courses/mcgill/370/mctaggart-time.html, September 3, 2004, emphasis mine]

The Biblical Perspective

No serious understanding of the Bible, or observation of the natural ontology of the cosmos, could accept the B-theory of time. There are simply no observations of it, anywhere. We can put biblical events on a timeline, but it is a dynamic developing line, not a static preexisting line. There is a historical past and a predicted future which can be applied to the present. This is possible because time in the Bible is linear. The Bible does not see time as beginning or ending, but it does see our cosmos as

beginning and ending. Biblically, time is not presented as circular or cyclical, as in the pantheistic religions. Biblically understood, time moves in a direction from a real past, through a real present, toward a real future.

In the Bible, many things happen simultaneously, but past things are not simultaneous with present things or future things. There was a real past, there is a real present, and there will be a real future. But only the present exists. So, the B-theory, the most popular theory in progressive secular society today, must be rejected.

Observations about the Nature of Time

1. Time always moves in a progression from past to present to future. When referring to time, it is inappropriate to say some things are merely before, during, or after other things, because those terms do not necessitate a progression. Notice, since time (by definition) always has a past, present, and future, it can never have a beginning or an end because then there would be a present time which does not have a past and one which does not have a future.

2. From any point in time, every other point in time is either past, present, or future, but it can only be one of those. Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as president of the United States on January 20, 1981. Every point in time is either past, present, or future from that point, but it cannot be any two or all three of those.

3. Any point in time itself has all three aspects of time at the same time. Ronald Reagan's inauguration is in past time from the inauguration of Bill Clinton, in the present time for those attending the inauguration, and in the future from the time of the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.

4. Only the present exists. The consequences of the past impact the present and the future, but the past itself no longer exists and the future does not yet exist. Take the old example of the depressed guy who jumps off a 30-story building. Right after he jumps, he realizes this was a bad idea and prays, "Dear God forgive me for jumping off this building." God says, "You are forgiven," as the guy falls past the 20th floor. He prays, "I mean I want to be forgiven right now!" God says, "You are forgiven right now," as the guy falls past the 10th floor. The act of jumping is in the past, it no longer exists. The consequences of the past impact the present which exists and the future that will exist, even though the future does not yet exist. Nonetheless, all decisions are only made in the present, because only the present exists. Apostolic exhortations, like the Apostle Paul's statement, *making the most of your time, because the days are evil*, can only refer to the present time (Ephesians 5:16, see also Hebrews 3:13). [The jumping illustration comes from an oral presentation by Walter Henriksen.]

5. Present time is temporary, not permanent. Since there is only present time, how long is the present? Let's think about the question, "How many points are there on a line?" Mathematically, the answer is, "There is an infinite number of points in a line..." This is true no matter what the length of the line, because a point is a location, and it does not take up any space. The same is true of any point in time. It is a location, not a duration. [quora.com/How-many-points-on-a-straight-line-segment-are-finite-in-length]

But the present is not only a location, it is also in motion, which is continually changing. For example, the current estimates say the human body has between 30 trillion and 100 trillion cells. 68 percent of the human body is made up of cells. The Scientific American tells us,

About 330 billion cells are replaced daily, equivalent to about 1 percent of all our cells. In 80 to 100 days, 30 trillion will have replenished—the equivalent of a new you.

[scientificamerican.com/article/our-bodies-replace-billions-of-cells-every-day/]

Our bodies are not the only thing continually changing. All of the three-dimensional cosmos appears to be continually changing, deteriorating in fact (proven via the Second Law of Thermodynamics). For

example, “More than 99 percent of all organisms that have ever lived on Earth are extinct.” [Sep 26, 2019, nationalgeographic.com › science › articles]

Some say we are like a flowing river, ever changing. Others say we are like a flip chart of instantaneous pictures, moved through to simulate motion. However you see it:

- (a) Only present time exists.
- (b) Present time is in motion, so every instant of time is temporary.
- (c) The nature of present time is that it creates the past. History is a record of what has been created by present time.

6. Time in heaven measures what does not deteriorate. Two basic observations:

First, there is time in heaven.

Revelation 4:8, *And the four living creatures... **day and night** they do not cease to say, “holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, Almighty, who **was** and who **is** and who **is to come.**”*

Revelation 8:1, *When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven **for about half an hour.***

Revelation 9:15, *And the four angels, who had been prepared for **the hour and day and month and year**, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.*

Second, the difference between time in our cosmos and time in heaven is that our time is measuring deterioration. Everything that is part of our material cosmos is deteriorating. Neither in this cosmos nor in heaven or hell, do we biblically observe time itself changing, or ending. The difference is, in this cosmos, time is observed in a context of deterioration. Time in heaven and hell is not, as far as we can observe biblically, in a context of deteriorating surroundings. The difference for time in the heavenlies is not that it goes away, or changes, but that it measures surroundings that do not deteriorate (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:11).

7. The human spirit experiences time, but does not change with time. Our spiritual nature, which will be somewhere forever, may become better or worse morally, but it does not deteriorate as an entity, like our current bodies do. The human spirit will leave this body (2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 6:10), exist in a temporary body (Luke 16:19-31), and then move to an eternal body (Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:12-22; Revelation 14:11), eventually to reside in the New Jerusalem or the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15; 22:14), without the ending of time or the deterioration of the resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:44, 50, 53).

Having considered the “Nature of Time,” we shall consider the second aspect.

The Duration of Time

Questions to Consider:

Where did time come from? Did time exist before the creation of our (three-dimensional) universe? Did time exist in eternity past? Will time exist in eternity future?

We shall attempt answering questions like these by discussing past time, future time, and heavenly time. Notice, we are not here dealing with present time, because present time does not have a duration.

Past Time

Genesis 1:1, 5, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and there was evening and there was morning, **one day.***

The GotQuestions web site says,

... the science of physics tells us that time is a property resulting from the existence of matter. As such, time exists when matter exists. But God is not matter; God, in fact, created matter. The bottom line is this: time began when God created the universe. [gotquestions.org]

Most Christians I have talked to about time have an opinion something like the “Got Questions” quote. But there are at least four significant problems with that.

First, where did they get the idea that “...physics tells us that time is a property resulting from the existence of matter”? For one thing, physics measures the material (the mass/density) of this physical cosmos, and only that material. But time is not restricted to the material cosmos. The heavenly realm is real without being of the same material. It is *imperishable* not *perishable* (1 Corinthians 15:50; Ephesians 6:12). For another thing, time is a function of motion. Time is not just a “property resulting from the existence of matter.” For time to exist, something must be in motion, and it does not have to be physical matter. [See the Appendix for a further discussion about time and motion.]

Second, Genesis 1 describes the creation of the heavens and the earth, not the creation of time. To say, the existence of time in Genesis 1 proves time began in Genesis 1, is circular reasoning. Since *evening* and *morning* describe *one day*, the existence of the time described as *one day*, may just as well have preceded the things created in that, already existing, measurement of time. At no time in the creation of the material universe do we read that God created time. Time is discussed in terms of divine action, not divine creation. Crocker states,

Claims that God created time also prove problematic in that time does not seem to be a thing that is created. Instead, time is the result of action and primarily the result of divine action.

[Ward Crocker, Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics 2022, “Dispensational Theology and the Necessity of Divine Temporality,” p. 5]

Third, there is another significant problem with the idea that “time began when God created the [material, three-dimensional] universe.” Heavenly beings existed, and were therefore created, before the creation of the material universe. God told Job that, at the time of the creation of this cosmos, ... *the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy* (Job 38:7). Whoever these beings are (presumably angels), time is passing for them as they *sing for joy* before the creation of the material universe, so it could not be true that time only “exists when matter exists.”

Ezekiel told us about what seems to be the original sin of Satan, who was an *anointed cherub*.

Ezekiel 28:14-15, *You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you.*

There was a *day* when Satan was created. He was, or became, an *anointed cherub*. Then there is a passing of time *until unrighteousness was found in him*. Even if one takes “the day” as something other than 24 hours, it still assumes the existence of time when angels were created, and obviously all this was before the Genesis creation, because Satan was in the garden in Genesis 3 (Revelation 12:9).

Fourth, it also seems that Jesus existed in time, before the creation of anything. There is no time when He was not. Jesus prayed,

John 17:5, *Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was* [literally, *before the cosmos existed* (πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι)].

In order for Jesus to have glory with God the Father, *before the cosmos existed*, there would have to be some time elapsing for that glory to be realized. And that glory was realized in a time which was in the past from the perspective of the time of the creation of this cosmos.

Future Time

2 Peter 3:12-13, ...*the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

Revelation 21:1, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away...*

Revelation 21:24-25, *The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.*

Peter told us, and the Apostle John confirms, this cosmos, made of physical elements, *will be destroyed by burning* to the extent that *the elements will melt with intense heat!* Peter also told us there will be a *new earth* where those who are righteous dwell. John described that dwelling in Revelation 21–22 with the progression of several events, all of which require time. It takes time for the nations to *walk by its light, and the kings of the earth... [to] bring their glory into it.* We are also told,

Revelation 22:2, *in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month...*

In our eternal home, the New Jerusalem, there is a tree of life which grows twelve kinds of fruit. And the *twelve* is comparable to *months* which sounds like our year. The most likely conclusion is, not only does time exist in the eternal state but it is the same time as we experience now on this earth. Even if we understand that the measurements are different, time definitely exists in our eternal state. Dwelling (walking, bringing, yielding fruit) is impossible without time.

Heavenly Time

Time is also not restricted to this material cosmos. Time progresses from past to present to future events in heaven, in the presence of God. For example, the saints martyred during the tribulation,

Revelation 6:10-11, ... *cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer.*

Consider the interaction between Satan and God about Job,

Job 1:6, *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD.*

There was a specific time indicated by יום (yōm), the common Hebrew word for “day,” which took place in heaven, in the presence of God. Considering the author’s intended meaning, Satan’s time before God in heaven seems to have occurred at the same time as Job’s time on earth. And, because of the interaction with Satan which followed, the time in heaven seems to be measured the same as the time on earth.

The same seems to be true of other angels. The angel who delivered an answer to Daniel’s prayer told Daniel he had been delayed 21 days by *the prince of the kingdom of Persia*, apparently a powerful demon in Persia. The angel did **not** say, “21 of **your** days, but seems to assume 21 days was the same for both he and Daniel.

Daniel 10:12-13, *Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days...”*

When the Apostle John was invited to the area of the throne of God, he witnessed a dimension in the heavenlies different from that on earth, yet he observed time (hours, days, months, and years) elapsing in heaven. The most obvious way to understand these time measurements is they are the same as on earth.

But even if they are a different measurement, they are still a testimony to the existence of time in heaven. (See also Revelation 4:8; 8:1; 9:15; 20:11-15.)

Time and the Nature of God

Questions to Consider:

Does God see time as a progression of events or does He see time all at once, or both? Is God involved in time or apart from time, or both? Are God and time a paradox or an antinomy (apparent contradiction between logical conclusions), like sovereignty and free will? Did God create time at some point outside of time or is time a part of God?

Here are five theories:

Theory #1, God Experiences All Time At the Same Time

Theologian Thayer Shedd states it this way,

. . . God knows a succession instantaneously and simultaneously. God sees the end from the beginning, and hence for him there is no interval or sequence between the end and the beginning.” [William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 281]

This theory comes close to seeing our time with the A-theory and God’s time with the B-theory. With Shedd’s idea, there would be no past, present, or future with God, for example, with God storing up wrath, or God having patience. If God sees all time instantaneously and simultaneously, where there is “no interval or sequence between the end and the beginning,” then in what sense is there first sin and then repentance from sin? Also, the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus would all be seen by God at the same time. It would also mean that God sees us as saved and unsaved at the same time, and that is impossible. The gospel, from God’s perspective, requires the passing of time.

In the Bible, we only know about God acting in present time. He never jumps forward in time or goes back in time to do a do-over (as if He was in the B-theory of time). For example, the people of Noah’s day were only evil continually, and God regretted He made man (Genesis 6:3-8). But He did not go back in time to the Garden of Eden and create something other than man to be a caretaker of the earth. He judged man in that present time by telling Noah to build an ark. Then 120 years later, He created a flood at that present time. All the judgments of God are God dealing with the past in the present, not going back into the past.

Another problem arises in the area of prayer. If God experiences all time at the same time, then He does not hear our prayers in the present time and then answers them in future time. He would hear and answer in one timeless moment. But it does not sound like that is what the Bible intended for us to understand. When Jesus said, “...*your Father knows what you need before you ask Him*” (Matthew 6:8), He did not mean *before* in the sense of a place on a static ribbon of events. He was referring to a sequence of events: first He knows, then we ask, then He answers. Jesus is talking about the omniscience of God, not the timelessness of God. Jesus made this comment before He gave (what we call) “The Lord’s Prayer.” That indicates a succession of time between our prayer for something (*do not lead us into temptation*) and His answer (to *deliver us from evil*). It seems like, from God’s perspective, these happen in a sequence of time, not simultaneously.

James 5:16, *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

This sounds like the effective prayer is in past time from what it accomplishes.

Theory #2, God Is Outside of Time

This seems to be a prominent view of the church through the Middle Ages. Crocker reports,

From Augustine through Aquinas, the major thinkers argued that God was not in time at all. They thought of God as eternal, in the sense that he is atemporal, without any connection to time. [Ward Crocker, CDH 2022, “Dispensational Theology and the Necessity of Divine Temporality” p. 9.]

C. S. Lewis put it this way,

We tend to assume that the whole universe and God himself are always moving on from past to future just as we do. But many learned men do not agree with that. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another.... [“Mere Christianity,” 7 July 1952]

Many of these church fathers seemed to think that the eternality of God eliminated any possibility of God seeing time sequentially. They saw eternality as something beyond time, not just an endless duration of it. Lewis declares that “God is not in time,” but he offers no biblical reference. He only appeals to “many learned men.” But as we have seen, the Bible is filled with references to God involved in time, and there are no references which separate God from time. Even His predetermined plans involve time.

Acts 1:7, *And he said unto them, “It is not for you to know the **times or the seasons**, which the **Father hath put in his own power**”* (KJV).

Theory #3, God Is Both Involved in Time and Outside of Time, At the Same Time

Wayne Grudem represents the thought that God is both outside of time yet involved in time. He writes, ...in his own being, God is timeless; he does not experience a succession of moments. Before God created the world, there was no passage of time ... God’s eternity may be defined as follows: *God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time, and he acts in time.* [Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 199 and 202, emphasis his]

We have already discussed the inaccuracy of the claim, “Before God created the world, there was no passage of time.” Grudem also does not deal with the contradiction between saying God is involved in time and God “does not experience a *succession of moments*.” If God has no *succession of moments*, then in what sense is He involved in our lives (say for example, in our discipline – Hebrews 12:5-11, care for our daily needs – Matthew 6:25-30, or hearing our prayers – Philippians 4:6-7)? Either God is involved in the moments of our lives, or He is not. The way they get around that dilemma is to treat it as another paradox or antinomy, like unity with trinity and predestination with free will. But it is not the same. With an antinomy, logic is applied to observations which leads to rational conclusions which contradict each other. In this case, the Bible never says God is apart from time. There is no biblical statement of God outside of time to observe and examine with logic.

Theory #4, God Is Omnitemporal

This view says that since God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, He may also be omnitemporal, i.e., in all time at the same time. Time would then be an attribute of God. This would mean that God being restricted to time is not a limitation, just like God being restricted to truth, holiness, and consistency are not limitations. If He can be in all places at the same time, can He also be in all time at the same time? If time is an attribute of God, then time is not a creation of God, it is part of who God is. In that case, He created the cosmos with time because time is inseparable from God.

This theory solves a lot of the issues, but it has several significant problems. It makes the same basic conclusions as the B-theory. If God is omnitemporal, then, for God, things are before, during, and after other things, but there is no past, present, or future. But the Bible is full of references that demonstrate the passing of time with God (*is-was-is to come*). Being in all time at the same time creates a problem with all the biblical passages that require a sequence of events, like, say, those connected to the life of the patriarchs, the gospel, and the events of the life of Christ. There is another significant problem with

the comparison to the other omni-s. Omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are all attributes of God in every instance of present time. God is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present in present time. For example, omniscience, which includes God knowing the future, is a knowledge of the future, in present time. To say God is also omnitemporal is a doctrine of a different sort, since it would take God beyond present time, which the other omni-s do not do.

Theory #5, God Is Eternal in that He Is Everlasting, Not Atemporal

This theory says God is always involved in every present moment of all time, not apart from time. Although it is hard to be dogmatic, and we should always remain teachable, if there is a better theory, this view seems preferable. It sees God as temporal not atemporal. It is unnecessary to say God was involved in past time, because He was involved in it when it was present time, and to say God is involved in future time, because He will be involved in it as it becomes present time. It is sufficient to say God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. One does not have to say He is omnitemporal. God can be sovereign over time and predetermine the future without being apart from time.

Psalm 90:2-4, *Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*

Psalm 93:2, *Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.*

Both Moses in Psalm 90 and the psalmist in Psalm 93 call God *everlasting*.

The word used here and throughout the Old Testament for *everlasting* is עוֹלָם (ōlam). It can be translated *eternal*, *forever*, or *everlasting* [Accordance notes]. The word indicates time without end, not an existence outside of time. These Psalms say God existed before the creation of anything He created, not that time did not exist until God began creating.

Psalm 102:24-27, ... *Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.*

Here the psalmist pictures God as having *years*. God's years extend throughout all generations and will *not come to an end*. Even if *years* is a metaphor, the word describes God as everlasting, not timeless.

2 Timothy 1:9, *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity*, [literally *before time eternal* (πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνιων)].

Titus 1:2, ...in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago [literally *before time eternal* (πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνιων)].

Revelation 4:9-10, *And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever*, (αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), *the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever* (αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων).

The word here translated *eternal* is the common Greek word αἰώνιος (aiōnios) usually translated "eternal," "forever," or "everlasting." [The definitions are my summary of Strong's Greek Dictionary notes]

2 Peter 3:8-10, *But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

Peter sees God as patient with time, using time, by His own schedule, but not apart from time.

There are three things we should notice about this passage:

- **First**, Peter did **not** say "with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day." The Greek word ὥς (hōs), English *as* or *like*, is in the original text, it is not just a translator's addition. Peter is giving us a metaphorical comparison about God's use of time, not saying God is atemporal.

- **Second**, Peter is assuming God uses the same time designations as we do, days and years. God is involved in time, not apart from time.
- **Third**, the context is about God not being subject to our schedule. Peter is answering the critical question, “*Where is the promise of His coming?*” He is saying we cannot schedule God’s events. His coming will be on His own time.

Tom Constable writes,

This verse does not mean that God operates in a timeless state... The idea of a timeless existence is Platonic, not biblical. God’s relation to time is different from ours since He is eternal, but this does not mean eternity will be timeless. Eternity is endless time. [Constable Commentary on 1 Peter, referencing Hiebert p. 153, Bauckham p.310 and Zane Hodges commentary on John p.106-107, emphasis mine]

Revelation 1:8, *I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” says the Lord God, “*who is and who was and who is to come...*” (the phrase is also in 1:4 and 4:8).

God describes His eternity in terms of past, present, and future time, *is–was–is to come*. I suspect the reason many Christians want to say God created time is because clearly God is not in submission to time. That would mean there is something over which God is not sovereign, and that is impossible. It is certainly possible that God created time, sometime before time in eternity past. But we have no logical way to understand that, and the Bible never mentions it. The Bible describes God’s eternity as everlasting (always existing)—not atemporal (apart from time).


Summary and Conclusion

It seems we cannot exhaustively describe time or be dogmatic when it comes to the nature of God as related to time. But there are many things we can know, and we should have those clearly in mind, as we think about the nature, duration, and the involvement of God, in time.

1. Time can be defined as the progression of existence. Time requires something to exist and that something to be moving.
2. Time is sequential, continual, measurable, irreversible, and unavoidable.
3. It is not just that some things are before, during, or after other things, as if they were in a static line of events. Time consists of a past which no longer exists, a present which exists, and a future which does not yet exist.
4. Only the present exists. The consequence of the past impacts the present and the future, but the past itself no longer exists, and the future itself does not yet exist.
5. The events of time are in progression, linear not cyclical, sequential not simultaneous. The present creates history, which can be placed on a timeline, which did not exist until some present time created it.
6. Time is not restricted to the creation of our cosmos.
 - a. Time existed before the creation of our cosmos (as in the creation of angels).
 - b. Time will exist in the future after our cosmos is destroyed (as in the heavenly New Jerusalem)
 - c. Time exists in the heavenly presence of God (as in the *day* God spoke to Satan about Job).
7. We can never exhaustively describe God’s involvement in time, but from the Bible we can conclude:
 - a. He is never in subjection to time, as if time somehow limited God.
 - b. He is never described as operating outside of time, or apart from time. He is not atemporal.
 - c. He predetermines what happens in time, but He never goes back or forward in time.
 - d. He is eternal in that He never runs out of time, not that He is outside of time.

God’s Eternity Is Expressed as His Being Everlasting, Not Timeless

Although many Christian songs say incorrect things about time (such as in heaven “Time shall be no more”), one song is accurate. The last stanza of AMAZING GRACE got it right.

 When we’ve been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing His praise than when we’ve first begun.

APPENDIX

Speculations About Time, Speed

Time Is a Function of Speed

In the definition section, I mentioned that two things must exist, for time to exist: (1) some entity (object or being) must exist and (2) the entity must be in motion. This is most easily seen when we measure time. The formula is $d = v t$ or $t = d/v$. Distance (d) equals velocity (v), the rate of motion, or speed, times time (t). We all know this simple formula. If I am driving an average of 50 mph (or km/h) for 2 hours, I will travel a distance (d) of 100 miles (or kilometers). That means if I want to measure (solve the equation) for time, $t = d/v$. If I drive 100 miles or kilometers (d) at 50 mph or km/h (v) it will take me 2 hours to get where I'm going. So, time is always measured as a function of motion. If time stops, then $d/v = d/0$ which is zero. So if linear motion (v) stops, then distance stops and time stops.

What if I am driving along and decide to stop to see the scenery. Why did time not also stop? Answer: because my motion did not actually stop. I am still moving through space at a tremendous speed.

Scientific American tells us,

As schoolchildren, we learn that the earth is moving about our sun in a very nearly circular orbit. It covers this route at a speed of nearly 30 kilometers per second, or 67,000 miles per hour. In addition, our solar system—Earth and all—whirls around the center of our galaxy at some 220 kilometers per second, or 490,000 miles per hour. [scientificamerican.com/article/how-fast-is-the-earth-mov/#:~:text=It%20covers%20this%20route%20at,or%20490%2C000%20miles%20per%20hour]

Our galaxy is also moving through space toward other galaxies. Our time is a function of all that speed. $t = d/v$ and $d/v =$ a lot of distance / a lot of speed, which creates a time (t) to cover that distance at that speed. So time is created when there is speed (linear movement).

Time Dilation

Another factor in time calculation is called “time dilation.” The formula is a bit more complex, but it is easily derived by using basic algebra and geometry. I will not here go through how the formula is derived but I will try to show what it means. This formula demonstrates that the faster we move, the slower time goes until we get to the speed of light, where all time stops. Nothing can go faster than the speed of light (in a vacuum). So, if I could travel at the speed of light and throw a ball forward, the speed of that ball would only be the speed of light. The speed of light is traditionally called “c”. If the speed of the thrown ball is “b” then $c + b = c$.

$$t' = \frac{t}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}}$$

- t' Time measured from an observer outside the frame of reference.
- t Time measured from an observer inside the frame of reference.
- v Speed of the object.
- c Speed of light

But we can also prove mathematically that the faster we go the slower time goes. It would actually be impossible, but let's suppose I was in a really fast spaceship that goes $\frac{1}{4}$ the speed of light. $v = .25 c$. In the formula, (t) is the time passing in our spaceship and (t') is the time passing on earth. If our spaceship goes $.25c$ then,

$$v^2 = .25^2 c^2$$

$$.25^2 = .065$$

$$\text{So } v^2 = .065 c^2$$

Put in our formula we have the square root of $1 - .065c^2/c^2$. The c^2 numbers cancel so we have the square root of $1 - .065 = .935$.

The square root of .935 is .966.

$$t' = t/.966 \text{ or}$$

$t = .966 t'$. So my time in my space ship (t) is slightly slower than my the time on earth (t').

Now let's suppose we had an even faster spaceship that goes half the speed of light ($.5c$). Then

$$v^2 = .5^2 c^2.$$

$$.5^2 = .25$$

$$v^2 = .25 c^2.$$

Put in our formula the c^2 numbers cancel and we have square root of $1 - .25 = .75$.

The square root of $.75 = .866$

$$t' = t/.866.$$

$t = .866 t'$. So, the time in our even faster spaceship, going $\frac{1}{2}$ the speed of light, is not only slower than the time on earth but it is also slower than my time in the spaceship going only $\frac{1}{4}$ the speed of light.

So, it is easy to mathematically prove that the faster we go the slower time goes.

But what would happen if we could go at c , the speed of light. Then $v^2 = c^2$ and in the formula $\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}$ $c^2/c^2 = 1$ and $1 - 1 = 0$. The square root of 0 is 0. Anything divided by 0 is 0, so time = 0.

Therefore, we can mathematically prove that all time stops at the speed of light. So, for example, it would take no time for light from the stars created on the fourth day, to reach the earth (Genesis 1:14-19) from the standpoint of the light, because light travels at the speed of light where time stops.

But what happens if we try to go faster than the speed of light. Let's say we want to go twice the speed of light ($2c$). Then, $v = 2c$ so $v^2 = 4c^2$. In our formula we have $1 - 4c^2/c^2$ which is $1 - 4$ which is -3 . Then we must take the square root of -3 . But it is mathematically impossible to take the square root of a negative number. So, it is mathematically impossible to go faster than the speed of light.

Appendix Conclusion

All this is to say we are moving at some speed less than the speed of light and that speed impacts our time.