

The Gracious Illusion of Time

By Jeremy Lucas

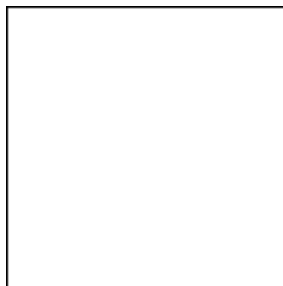
No matter where you turn in this life, you'll find the physical properties of restraint that weigh upon your perceptions. Be it the physical property of gravity which makes the story of the parting seas difficult to fathom or the physical realities of death which makes the story of Lazarus challenging to conceptualize. Each of these properties affects, on some level, what we believe, what we perceive, and what we do from there. Certainly if one of us believes that we are affected by gravity and the inability to simply "float" on the air, then we are not going to do so because it is outside our frame of reference. Please read on with the consideration of how these internal perceptions can sometimes have an unhealthy/unproductive affect on our perceptions of God's Word (yes, even rightly divided).

To begin, let me introduce a very standard and scientific definition of time. The following are several meanings for the term:

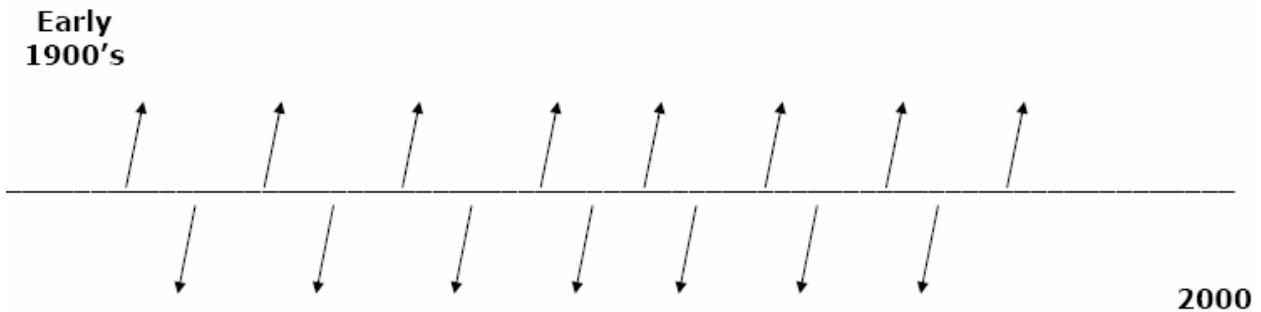
- A nonspatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future.
- An interval separating two points on this continuum.
- A duration.
- A number, as of years, days, or minutes, representing such an interval.
- A system by which such intervals are measured or such numbers are reckoned.

All in all, what we see is that time can be measured. It is a physical property of our world and there is no way to circle around it within our limited minds. Additionally, time varies (scientifically) with mass, acceleration, and gravity. Depending on where you are in the universe, the speed at which you are moving, and the mass that you are representing, time will not be the same process for all locations in God's creation. It is, however, still measurable.

Along the way to searching the depths of limited time, we often think of it in a linear sense. A two-dimensional image, if you will, that defines how we view the entire property.



We look on a line and visualize time in the sense of a beginning and an end.



This is not altogether foolish or ignorant because it is how we are trained, educated, and taught to look at history, the present, and the future. Having been raised to believe in linear time, it's easy to perceive God has having "lots of time." Yet how can we conceive of God in these terms if we'd all agree that He is not bound, held, or restricted by the laws that He created? Is the Creator bound by the Law of Gravity that He might not hover above it? Is the Creator bound by the Law of Mass that He might only have one form?

The answer to these questions is uniformly... no. God is not bound by any of these properties. So why then, do we think of time in terms of limitation as though when Scripture speaks of a timed event, that it must fit into a linear frame of reference? It is my hope that through this brief article, you'll consider time in a larger sense.

Many years ago, the famed Albert Einstein was nearing the end of his life when he was quoted as saying the following:

"People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between the past, the present, and the future, is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."

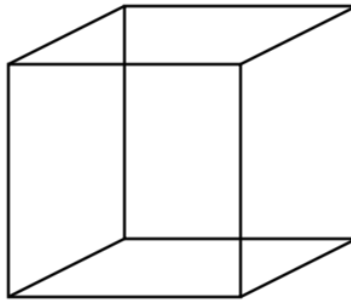
To Einstein, physics were an opening of the mind to greater things. He could not, however, get past the internal dilemma he faced in which time itself never went away long enough for the discovery to be made that it actually doesn't exist like we think it does.

My wife often gets frustrated with me because of what I call "an internal clock." By this, I mean that each time there is a place to be, a social event to go to, or a responsibility that needs to be accomplished before something else can be done, I am working on this internal clock. It's a ticking in my head that is always aware of the passing of the numbers. An awareness that if we don't do this, then we won't have "time" to do that. As I said, it drives her crazy at times, but I use it as an example of how many of us currently observe time.

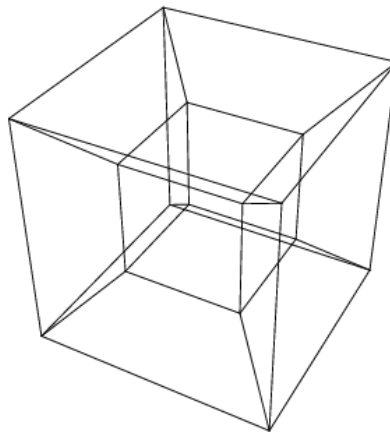
How many of you look at your watches 6 or 7 times an hour? Why? Is there always a sense that you should be moving forward? Perhaps, but is that innate drive to move forward a reality or, as Einstein suggested, an ever present illusion of your mind?

Several years ago, a movie came out on HBO entitled, "Tuesdays With Morrie." It told the story of a dying man and one of his former students who has become very successful in the "real world." The elder man invites the younger to his home for regular companionship, but the younger man is always on the go with the business of life. So much so that it takes him to near the end of the movie to realize that this man he adores won't be there any longer if he doesn't slow down and invest some "time" into life.

Sound familiar to any of you? The "go go go" and bustle that sends us through heavy traffic, storming crowds, and steady pressures to accomplish what we may not pull off if we don't work fast enough? Truly... is this familiar to you? I have no doubt that it is.

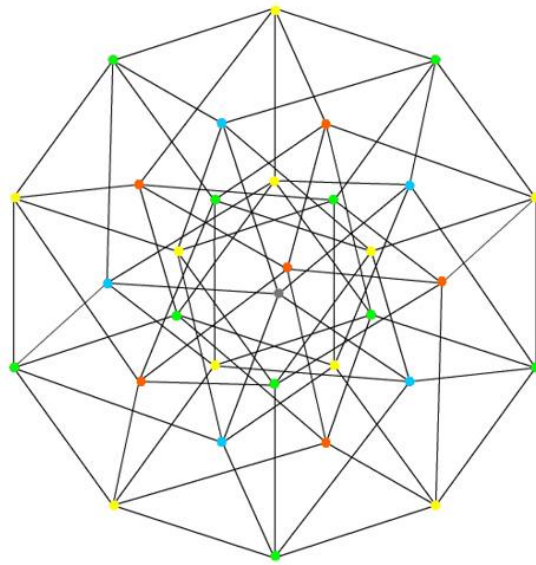


With all this in mind, consider also, if you will, the concept of dimensional perception. Most of us view the world through three dimensions. Things are neither flat, nor are they solitary, but they appear to be "3 dimensional." Much of how we perceive truth and the operations of the God's miracles (such as the seemingly impossible rise of the Red Sea or the ability to potentially move a mountain) is limited by our visual blocks. We see three dimensions and yet... there are dimensions that we do not see looking straight on.

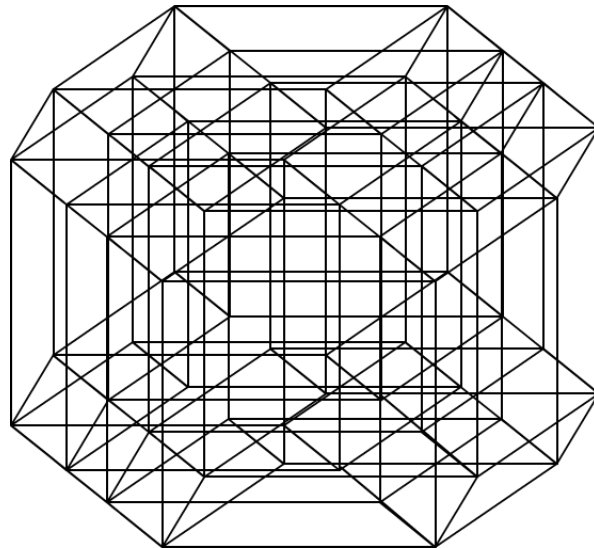


This is an example of a "4 dimensional" cube (also called the Hinton Cube) through which one can see beyond the standards of a 3-dimensionally perceived universe. But perhaps you don't see a cube. Look really hard at the image and see if you can find the cube through the 4 dimensional lens. It gets tougher and tougher the more dimensions that one might see. Take a look at the following:

A 5 Dimensional Cube:

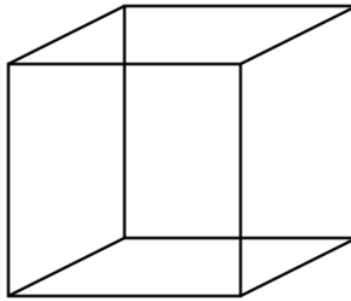


A 6 Dimensional Cube:



If you consider that there are now believed to be 10 known dimensions as accepted in modern physics, you can probably imagine how difficult it is to continue seeing what is normally not so commonly

perceived. But after looking at those previous images, let's take it back down to the most basic of our senses. Let's look at the three dimensional cube...



Can you see how one might even look at this cube and not see the cube itself? How difficult would it be for someone to stare and stare and stare at the object above and only see a hexagon with arrows pointing to the center? Pretty easy depending on your point of reference and vision, right?

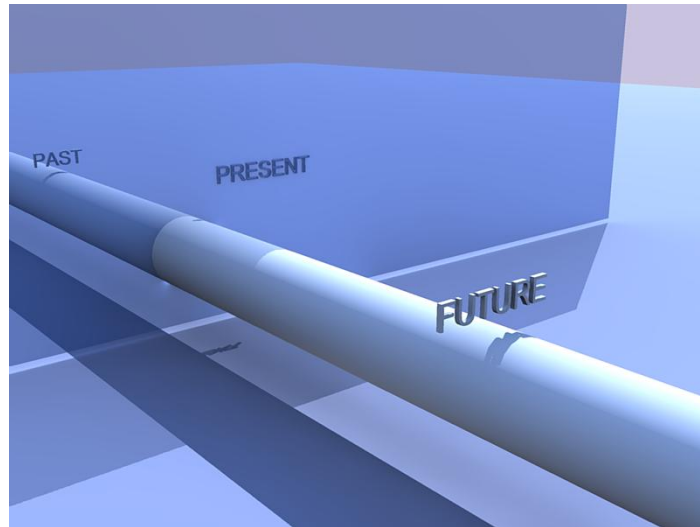
Physics is perception. So is time.

Imagine now, that we are focused on time alone and not anything with regards to dimension or cubes. Let's consider that linear equation as presented earlier. The one in which we see only a beginning and an end. Recall the passage in which God says...

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Revelation 22:13

God says of Himself that He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last. How can one be both the beginning and the end at the same time? Are we meant to believe that God "was" the beginning (when time began) or that He "will be" the end (when time ends)? Surely not. For when Scripture makes this bold statement of our God, we see that He is, at this very moment, both the beginning and the end equally. These are not facets of His being that were or will be... they simply are as He is. How can this be possible within the mind of man to conceive?

It is on this note that we have to reconstruct our concepts of time. We have to look at time in terms of the "illusion" that it represents. Considering that it may, in fact, not actually exist at all outside our frame of reference, let's look at the following image:



Think, for a moment, of the possibility that you were outside of time, while yet time was still moving. Would you be affected by points within that frame or would you be seeing it all happen at once? Would you perhaps be able to do things within time to immediately affect other points on the curved line? If, say, you were able to see the past and the future at the same time, what would you do in the present that would affect the future of those who are living at that point in time?

Confused yet?

Eternity involves God's unbound nature to the things of this universe.

"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Ecclesiastes 3:11

Having known the beginning from the end and BEING the beginning and the end, He hovers over all that we see, know, and perceive in this world. As the previous passage implies, there is NO MAN who can or will find out the entire work that God has made through His creation. Why? Because from the beginning to the end, only He can see the first and the last, the prophetic and the historic. All things have been done in His time because He is the AUTHOR of time.

For just a moment, take that last statement to its most extreme. God is the AUTHOR of time. What then, is He capable of? Can He manipulate the time table that we see? Can He alter the perception of the universe in a moment? Can He turn the wheel in reverse order for His own magnificent glory? Absolutely. All of these things God can do because He is JUST that glorious.

So after ALL of this, what then does it have to do with our perceptions of His grace in our dispensation? What affect does any of it have on the gospel we consistently try to understand more thoroughly? Personally, I believe it has everything to do with it.

All too often, we look at passages of God's Word (even rightly divided) and limit ourselves to a bias outlook of humanity. We, as grace believers, tend to view most things in terms of logic and common sense. It's as though we base our comprehension of the things unseen on the things understood. In most cases, this is a phenomenal approach to considering the truth of His matchless glory, but in this case, I believe it pushes us outside the freedom of seeing more.

If you're with me so far, perhaps you'll journey just a little bit further.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

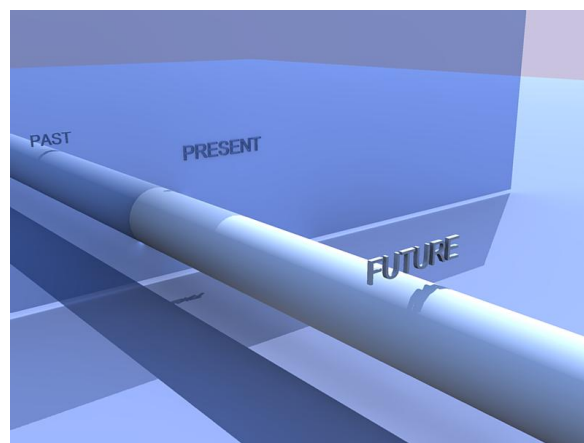
Notice in this passage that there are two aspects of time referred. We see the past and the present working simultaneously in the context of who we Paul says he is in Christ Jesus. He IS crucified with Christ because why? Because Christ WAS crucified. He LIVES because Christ LIVED. Here we have time being grouped together in terms of varying factors. But what does it mean? How can it be possible that the things in the past can be taking place in the present/future or vice versa?

Let's consider another passage...

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," 2 Timothy 1:9

Not only are we talking about a case and point of things that happened on the cross, but of things that were "in Christ Jesus" BEFORE the world even began. How is this fathomable? How can we conceive of a pre-world occurrence that had to do with us in the present/future? Here we return to the diagram of eternity. It's all in the perception of elusive time.

Look again:



Here we see the eternal looking at the past, the present, and the future at the exact same time. Knowing, henceforth, that in order to affect the future, there has to be a strategy in the past that will immediately change the course of the present without the knowledge of those living in the present. All things are happening, have happened, and will happen in the mind of God.

Imagine, if you will, a parade going through the city. From a location of normal humanity, the standard "parade watcher" is looking at only the moments of the parade that pass him/her by at each present time. For instance, the person watching will only see what is within his frame of reference at any given moment. He does not have the capacity on his own to look into the "end" of the parade and see what is going to happen in the future of his present. He can't even conceptualize it unless given some sort of hint regarding what is to come. Though he may gain ideas upon the suggestions of those who give him feedback, he will never quite see the end of the parade fully in his understanding until the end reaches his present. But here are the questions that plague the haunting of elusive time...

Simply because the little boy cannot see the end of the parade at his present moment, does it mean that there is no end in sight to someone else? What about those nearer to the other side of it who observe that it has already completely passed? For them, the present has become the past and the little boy has yet to experience the future. All has happened in one form or another, but not to the same individual.

Now take into consideration the helicopter above that sees the varying factors that will come into play for the parade. Imagine that the individual in the helicopter sees a threatening man with a gun aiming toward the town mayor. Imagine that the only possible way for anyone to have seen this situation coming was to have been in that object above where all things (past, present, and future) are happening at the same time and yet there exists an ability to adjust and operate accordingly to the needs of those working in the parade.

This is the observation of God from an eternal perspective. To watch from above is not to observe the confines of time, but to analyze the data that is outside of time and how such events WITHIN time are affected.

One aspect of our salvation is described in the following:

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."
Ephesians 2:5-7

A few things are available in this passage for honorable mention, but let's key in on just a couple of them. Firstly, we WERE raised up with Him. How can there be a "were" playing in a field of those who have not yet been born? How can it be possible that we "were" raised up together if we have not yet all come into existence? Very simply put... we are eternal through the call and foreknowledge of God. We are NOT confined by time in spiritual terms.

Likewise, the passages says that the result of us having been "raised up" to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" means that the "ages to come" might observe the exceeding riches of His grace. So those in the elusive future will observe the grace of God by having come to know the past in terms of eternity. For the past, the present, and the future are not measured by the universe, but by the hand of God who fills and completes all things.

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.." Colossians 1:16-17

Nothing in the universe operates freely without the grace given such things by God Himself. Certainly these are points that we need not always comprehend or agree upon when it comes to the ever growing understanding of physics and natural observation, but a look into these things can shed light on those truths that we have often found unfathomable within the Word of Truth.

May you each be encouraged, challenged, and enriched through the things presented here. By no means do I fancy myself a scientist, a professor, a theologian, or a rich man of wisdom. I do, however, always hope to impart some spiritual blessing through the limited sight that has been given me (whether accurate or in need of additional counsel).

Grace be with you this day and each day following.