

“For He Spoke, And It Came To Be”

A Survey of Issues within Genesis 1–2

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AN AFFIRMATION

I’m going to let the cat out of the bag: I have not yet been convinced to move away from the interpretation of Genesis 1 which I grew up with: a young earth; a literal six consecutive day creation. I have, however, certainly profited, both in interpretive principles, as well as the knowledge, intelligence, and humility of those that I would disagree with on this issue alone. There is much to be learned, and we must always be ready to adjust our interpretations based on what the text says. God is God, and we are not. We can learn from those we disagree with, and profit from discussions where we differ. Though I may differ in areas from many of the authors I cite, I am still glad they are on “our side,” firmly confessing evangelical Christianity. We must listen to the experts, but then make up our own minds. We ought to know what we believe and why. We should feel free to disagree with the experts, but we must have good (biblical) reasons for doing so.

Many of these issues arise within evangelical Christianity precisely because we hold fast to the truth of Scripture. It with sad irony that “liberal exegetes have no problem in seeing Genesis 1–3 as intended to be history (although they dismiss it as primitive); it is evangelicals who doubt its clarity, imposing an external *scientific* framework that entails a variety of tortured exegetical speculations.”¹ And so, our standard must always be the text of the Bible. There’s nothing more *inherently* spiritual about believing that God can create in six days, as opposed to six thousand days. We all believe that if God wanted to, he could have brought everything into being in a single instant. The timing of creation, then isn’t the heart of the issue; the issue is grasping *what God is saying to us in his word*.

That said, whichever way we turn, problems and difficulties arise. It is absolutely impossible to come to this text honestly and openly and not have our beliefs challenged in some way. There are no simple solutions, which I believe is yet another curative to pride.

AN APOLOGY

In a paper of this length, nothing can or will be treated with the depth it deserves. Each of the issues I mention has been written on at greater length and with greater erudition. I intend merely a to delimit this study to a survey of most of the major positions held, and then to draw some inferences and conclusions. So, I intend to act as more of a tour guide. For this reason, this paper may seem like a compendium of footnotes and quotations. I nevertheless hope it will be a useful resource.

1. Colin R. Reeves, “Bringing Home the Bacon: The Interaction of Science and Scripture Today” in *Theistic Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 718. He goes on to rehearse a statistician’s adage: “if you torture the data long enough, you will always get a confession” (note 48).

I take a deliberately irenic approach to many of these issues. Smarter people than I differ, so who am I to wade into the fray with anything other than a “report from the front?” I only speak about what I have discovered (and there is much still left to discover). After all,

It is a sad spectacle, and one that brings discredit on the Christian message, when those who profess to believe that message belie their profession by fighting among themselves or caricaturing others, rather than engaging in respectful discussion through which all sides might just learn something.²

AN ASSUMPTION

I am assuming we all hold to the inerrancy, inspiration, and infallibility of Scripture. God spoke and speaks in the Scriptures, and what it says is what happened. It is a true and accurate account of what actually happened. It portrays itself as truthful, and we take it on good authority that God, who was there before the beginning—if such a concept can even be humanly understood—preserved for our instruction. Our problem is not with the text itself, with the actual words that have been handed down to us, but rather our *interpretation* of them. As is universally understood, every interpreter comes to any text with a raft of presuppositions. Everyone has a worldview, a theological grid, a literary philosophy, temperamental rubric, and an interpretive lens through which every text (Scripture or otherwise) is evaluated. We live in a fallen world, and our faculties are touched by that. We must be patient with others and ourselves as we struggle to understand that which is abstruse.

There are many reasons why views on Genesis 1–2 need clarifying. A multi-dimensional space of difficulties stands in the way:

i) Philosophical difficulties

Each individual approaches the text with preconceived notions, so what is obvious to one is not to another. What seems to be the plain meaning for one is not so plain as others. Collins points out, “if I do not see what another person sees, that may mean I am blind (whether by lack of skill or by ideology); or it may mean I make different literary and linguistic judgments; or it may mean I am pursuing different questions.”³ Our task is to understand the text on its own terms.

ii) Anthropological limitations

More than simply asking different questions of the text, it is entirely possible that some questions we ask are simply the wrong questions. We might be completely missing the point. Our minds may need expanding before we have the categories to understand the full truth.

“By confronting Job with the vast complexity of the world, God shows that simplistic models are an inadequate basis for understanding what he is doing in the world. We trust his wisdom rather than demanding explanations for all that we observe in the world around us and in our own lives.... This is a lesson we still need to learn. God in his wisdom has done things in the way that he has. We cannot stand in judgment of that, and we cannot expect to understand it all. We

2. Lennox, John C., *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 32.

3. John C. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove: Zondervan, 2018), 29.

can still explore the what and the how questions, but the why will always lie beyond our understanding and beyond our models.”⁴

iii) Logical difficulties

Our minds are not perfect and objective; they are touched by sin. As such, even what seems straightforward to some may be a distortion of the truth. Colin Reeves writes, “to assume that human reason can sit in judgement on the ‘correctness’ of Scripture is thus an error. Reason is not a neutral and dispassionate umpire; indeed the unregenerate mind is bent on *suppressing* the truth about God that it sees in creation.”⁵

iv) Moral difficulties

Finally, sinful humanity always can use scholarship to avoid the truth. Mankind in his natural state does not want to understand, because that would mean the presence of a creator, which would necessitate relinquishment of authority, and recognition of accountability. For the believer, however, there is another problem: by and large, there is a dearth of biblical knowledge in our churches, and a “new priesthood” of commentators and specialists have been inserted between the people and the text. Many would say that the Bible needs the experts’ interpretation to be understandable.

So, we begin at the beginning.

ISSUES OF GENRE

The written word of God begins with a simple statement that God created. He acted and the heavens and the earth began to be.

The major interpretive issue with any text ought to be: how would the original audience have understood this? What was the author’s intent? What did he mean to elicit from his audience? Our primary interpretation must necessarily be that of the original audience. Any interpretation we place on the text must, out of necessity, be clear to the original audience. C. S. Lewis writes,

“The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous.”⁶

The following proposals have been put forward by their various proponents regarding the genre and historicity of Genesis. They are presented generally in increasing order of historicity:

GENESIS 1 AS MYTH

4. John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 133–134.

5. Reeves, “Bringing Home the Bacon,” 716.

6. C. S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 158.

Genesis is an ancient text, dealing with the period which is labelled *protohistory*. The first twenty-six verses of the Bible refer to a time before human beings existed, and the contents describe the ordering of the cosmos, the introduction of a Deity, the origins of space and time, as well as the origin of humanity. Multiple documents have been discovered within a similar Ancient Near East (ANE) culture, which all posit some form of a creation story, often a flood, the origin of mankind, as well as other parallels to the Genesis account.⁷ It is probable that the patriarchs knew these stories, given that Abram was called from from one of these contexts. Viewing Genesis 1–11 as merely myth proposes that the Israelites did not believe that this was actually history, but was a portion of their myth, their aetiology, why they are a people, and why they worship the God they do; basically as a background information for the story of Abram.

Samuel Sandmel, speaking at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1961, warned about an extravagant application of parallels in an address entitled, “Parallelomania.”⁸ He in no way denigrated the research which was being done to understand the ANE culture, but also emphasized the unique nature of the Biblical account. While there are similarities, due to a similar setting, and even intermixing of cultures, it is clear upon even a surface reading that there are also significant differences. For example, in the ANE, people were created “as slaves to the gods. The world was created by the gods for the gods, and people met the needs of the gods. In the Bible God has no needs.”⁹ In fact, as Vern Poythress points out, “Some degree of parallel is to be expected, because the false polytheistic religions of the ancient Near East present counterfeits of true religion. And the counterfeiting may extend to accounts concerning origins.”¹⁰

GENESIS 1 AS POETRY

Our next stop along the “spectrum of historicity” is the view of Genesis 1 as poetry. Reading the creation narrative, it is clear that artistic elements are present, (e.g. chiasm, strophic structure) but it does not follow from the presence of literary artistry that the record does not refer to actual historical events. Interpreting this passage as formal poetry allows the interpreter to sidestep the author’s intent and explain away many of the difficulties as metaphor or exaggeration.¹¹ There is a solid grammatical basis for denying the Genesis account is poetry. It lacks many of the consistent features of Hebrew poet-

7. Some of the better-known accounts are the Atrahasis (Akkadian), Eridu Genesis (Sumerian), and Enuma Elish (Babylonian).

8. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* (81), 1–13.

9. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 148.

10. Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3* (Wheaton: Crossway: 2019), 128.

11. That being said, we ought not to fall into the opposite mistake: to assume that scientific prose is a more accurate way of depicting events. C. S. Lewis makes this argument in his “The Language of Religion,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 129–41. Collins comments, “we ought not suppose that the scientific language is more literal in the sense that it lacks metaphor. Indeed, all our talk about anything beyond immediate sense experience is metaphorical” (*Reading Genesis Well*, 64).

ery, and contains all the features of narrative. Steven Boyd has demonstrated on a statistical basis that based on lexicographical, verbal, and syntactic bases, Genesis 1:1–2:3 is not poetry.¹²

GENESIS 1 AS ANCIENT SCIENCE

Elements of Scripture certainly reveal an ancient mindset. However, if a literalistic hermeneutic is applied consistently to the text, it contradicts clear facts. Authors such as John Walton write that If Genesis is ancient science, it is incorrect.

The idea that people think with their hearts describes physiology in ancient terms for the communication of other matters; it is not revelation concerning physiology. Consequently we need not try to come up with a physiology for our times that would explain how people think with their entrails.¹³

As a result, he and others would argue that since it contradicts clear facts, it cannot have been written with that degree of accuracy in mind, and to read it in such a way would lead to wholesale misunderstanding of the entire text.

Scripture includes the description of the “pillars of the earth” (1 Sam 2:8), the underworld (Phil 2:10), and the firmament (Gen 1:6). Each of these have been argued to convey an ancient cosmology or science that is incompatible with observational science. However, it must be understood that the primary function of Genesis is arguably not the “‘how’ of creation, nor even primarily about the ‘why’ of creation. Rather it is a passage about the ‘who’ of creation, and is an overture that introduces us to the Creator God.”¹⁴

After all, if the ancients believed the waters were literally piled up in storehouses in the sky (as posited by many scholars), does Psalm 78:23–24 also include a belief in a heavenly granary as well?¹⁵ This preposterous suggestion highlights the fact of its artistry in the Scriptures; it is not merely a one-dimensional story. Genesis, as has been argued many times, is not a science textbook. Walton again makes the point that interpreting Genesis strictly as science is problematic:

If God aligned revelation with one particular science, it would have been unintelligible to people who lived prior to the time of that science, and it would be obsolete to those who live after that time. We gain nothing by bringing God’s revelation into accordance with today’s science. In contrast, it makes perfect sense that God communicated his revelation to his immediate audience in terms they understood.¹⁶

Of course, all of this does not mean that the biblical record is wrong wherever it speaks on matters of science: rather, it cannot be interpreted *primarily* as a technical record of God’s works in the past. Poythress provides a needed counterpoint: “Everything it says is true, but it is not pedantically precise.

12. Boyd, S. W. 2005. “Statistical Determination of Genre in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for an Historical Reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3.” In *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth: Results of a Young-Earth Creationist Research Initiative*, L. Vardiman, A. A. Snelling, and E. F. Chaffin, eds. San Diego, CA: Institute for Creation Research and Chino Valley, AZ: Creation Research Society, 631–734.

13. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, 16.

14. David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 18.

15. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 180

16. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis*, 15. Cf. Lennox’s discussion of the same concept in *Seven Days*, 29.

We have many questions about the past that it simply does not answer.”¹⁷ He goes on to say, “Genesis 1 is not in principle antagonistic to the practice of science, but neither does it put forth any piece of technical science. In particular, it does not contain any faulty piece from an alleged ancient physicalistic cosmology.”¹⁸

Finally, aiming to put the matter to rest, Collins takes a step back and writes that scientific language is not the pinnacle of language. It is not the most authoritative voice:

Skeptics and “Bible-science defenders” share an assumption in common, namely, that scientific language is the most accurate and therefore the most truthful kind of discourse; and then it follows that for the Bible to be true, it must address these scientific questions. I count this assumption inadequate for real life.¹⁹

After all, “if the biblical explanation were at the level, say, of twenty-second-century science, it would likely be unintelligible to everyone, including scientists today. This could scarcely have been God’s intention.”²⁰

GENESIS 1 AS TEACHING TIMELESS TRUTHS:

A popular modern hermeneutic avows that it is the “big ideas” alone which are of significance when looking at a text like Genesis 1. The particulars are interesting, but not important—or in the views of some, inspired. Under this reading, the genre, structure, mythic parallels are merely the setting in which eternal truths are couched. Poythress disapprovingly labels this the “vehicle/cargo” approach. He explains,

The cargo is what the passage intends to teach theologically. The vehicle is the culturally conditioned, limited, erroneous cosmology that finds expression in Genesis 1. The vehicle is in service for the sake of delivering the cargo. But the vehicle is not what the passage intends to teach.²¹

One of the problems with this reading is that it is rather subjective. Any undesirable or difficult piece of data may be dismissed at will for being part of the “vehicle.” This view, and other associated problems, is discussed below in more detail under the heading “Outmoded Cosmology.”

GENESIS 1 AS HISTORY

Syntactically, Genesis 1–2 is historical prose. The verbal structure aligns with Hebrew narrative conventions, and internal evidence demonstrates that it portrays itself as referencing actual events. That said, and as mentioned earlier, there are additional artistic elements in the text which are not typical of prose. The highly ordered account of the days (“And God said... and there was evening and morning, the

17. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 133.

18. *Ibid*, 162.

19. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 261.

20. Lennox, *Seven Days*, 29–30.

21. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 66–67.

*n*th day”), and anthropomorphic language (God sees, speaks, and rests) demonstrate that the language is not bare narrative.²²

From a theological standpoint, an historical reading makes the best sense of the rest of revelation. Grudem makes the following fourfold case:²³

1. A nonhistorical reading of Genesis 1–3 does not arise from factors within the text itself but rather depends upon a prior commitment to an evolutionary framework of interpretation.
2. Internal evidence demands Genesis be read as historical narrative, reporting events which actually happened.
3. Both Jesus and the New Testament authors, in ten separate New Testament books, affirm the historicity of several events in Genesis 1–3.
4. If the historicity of several events in Genesis 1–3 is denied, a number of crucial Christian doctrines that depend on these events will be undermined or lost.

In sum, it is hard to improve on John Collins’ conclusion that the first chapter of the Bible is “exalted prose narrative.”²⁴

READING GENESIS 1

Space forbids an investigation into the historical interpretation of Genesis 1, although many works have been produced recently.²⁵ However, even a cursory reading of the Church Fathers provides insight into their own struggles with the text. This should “give us some comfort, make us more humble, and, in addition, show us that the difficulties are not all generated by modern science but arise from a serious attempt to understand the text itself.”²⁶

In dealing with Scripture, whether it be the beginning or end of the canon, humility and care are essential. Poythress issues a needed corrective to those on the literal end of the interpretive spectrum: “We should avoid reading Genesis in a flat way that ignores its depth dimensions. Rather, we should read it as the Word of God, who is Master of language in all its richness, and who wisely addressed the Israelites before we came along.”²⁷

Lennox agrees:

22. Collins discusses a number of other features atypical of narrative prose in *Reading Genesis Well*, 155–156.

23. The following is a summary from Grudem’s preface in *Theistic Evolution*, 76.

24. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 155.

25. InterVarsity publishes two separate series on this area: an Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, as well as a Reformation Commentary on Scripture.

26. Lennox, *Seven Days*, 60.

27. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 130.

It would be a pity if, in a desire (rightly) to treat the Bible as more than a book, we ended up treating it as less than a book by not permitting it the range and use of language, order, and figures of speech that are (or ought to be) familiar to us from our ordinary experience of conversation and reading.²⁸

The text of Genesis 1 has “universal implications because the beginning is intrinsically universal in its scope and, according to God’s determination, has effects on all of subsequent history.”²⁹

And so with this in mind, it is to the text of Scripture that we turn, observing God’s own record of how he spoke into existence the very means and mode by which we live, move, and have our being.

GENESIS 1:1

IN THE BEGINNING

Contention arises from the first word in Hebrew. Debate circles around its grammar: is it absolute (“In the beginning” [ESV]), or dependent (“in the beginning of...” [YLT] or “in the beginning, when...” [NRSV])?

Joshua Wilson investigates the category of relator nouns (e.g., beginning, end, above, before, etc.) and concludes that while these words are lexically relative, it is exceedingly common for them to be grammatically absolute.³⁰ To illustrate, he remarks, “No English speaker argues that because the word ‘end’ is relative in meaning, the phrase ‘The End’ must be relative in form as well and changed to ‘The end of.’ Furthermore, when reading the phrase ‘The End’ at the completion of a book or movie, the English speaker does not ask, ‘The end of what?’”³¹

As such, “In the beginning” (as used by most translations), is the most faithful to the syntax of the original.

GOD CREATED

The verb בָּרָא (*bara*³) always describes the divine activity of fashioning something new, fresh, and perfect. The verb does not necessarily describe creation out of nothing (see, for example, Gen 1:27, where it refers to the creation of man); it frequently stresses forming anew, reforming, or renewing (see Ps 51:10; Isa 43:15, 65:17). It is a verb which is “used exclusively of God. His creation reveals his immeasurable power and might, his bewildering imagination and wisdom, his immortality and transcendence, ultimately leaving the finite mortal in mystery.”³² It is therefore an “inherently a divine activity and not one that humans can perform or participate in.”³³

28. Lennox, *Seven Days*, 26.

29. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 127.

30. Joshua Wilson, “A Case for the Traditional Translation and Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 Based upon a Multi-Levelled Linguistic Analysis.” Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, SBTS: 2017, 10.

31. Ibid, 74. Isa 46:9–10 is an excellent example: “...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done...”

32. Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 59.

33. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 38.

As will be seen below under **Evolution**, the traditional concept of creation *ex nihilo*, even though not necessitated by Genesis 1:1, is nonetheless a “logical and theological inference of the creation narrative. Traditional theologians are on a sure linguistic footing when arguing for it.”³⁴ Otherwise, where else would matter come from? To argue that matter is coeternal with God, or was created by some other process goes against the biblical witness (see below discussion under **Now**).

THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

The merism “heavens and earth” is certainly valid, but we dare not flatten “heavens and earth” to universally equate with “the universe” (as per GNT, ISV), lest we lose the connection with verse 2. In fact, Wilson argues that “heavens and earth” is a unique construction: “They are the most prominent parts of the whole because they are the two halves that comprise it.”³⁵ So while they *can* function to reference the entirety of creation, they also may function independently of each other, which we see as necessary, given that verse 2 begins with the last word of verse 1.

GENESIS 1:2

NOW

Verse 2 in most of our English Bibles simply begins with “The earth was...” But in the original Hebrew, there is an important grammatical point which bears mention, and in fact which ought to constrain our interpretation. Some translations note this (KJV, Geneva, ASV) as “**and** the earth was...”; others LEB, HCSB, CSB, NIV, NET add the interpretation, “**Now** the earth was...”. In his translation, Wycliffe made it more explicit: “Forsooth the earth was...”. How we understand this opening verse of the Scriptures is critical for our interpretation of the rest of creation. Is Genesis 1:1 a summary statement, or the first event?³⁶

i) Summary Statement: The first view is that Genesis 1:1 is a summary of Genesis 1:2-2:3. It functions similar to a heading in the text, explaining the following narrative as God’s creation and forming of the cosmos, making it habitable and productive.³⁷

Bruce Waltke argues that the narrative of Genesis begins with a summary (verse 1), and then in verse 2 “with the planet already present.”³⁸ Waltke would point out that it is difficult to align the fact that God made the heavens in verse 1, and then made the heavens in verses 6-8. But if “day” can be used in multiple senses, why cannot “heaven?”

The summary view has potentially massive theological implications: God’s sovereignty “must include the original earth.... Otherwise, the earth is left as a potential independent entity. If God did not make it,

34. Wilson, “Traditional Translation,” 210.

35. Ibid, 139.

36. Vern S. Poythress, “Genesis 1:1 is the First Event, Not a Summary,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017), 97-121.

37. Much of the debate centres around the merism “heavens and earth,” which some scholars, (prominently Bruce Waltke) take as functioning in the place of the entire cosmos (*Genesis*, 58).

38. Waltke, *Genesis*, 59.

if it is just eternally there, its original constitution escapes God's sovereignty, and God just has to do the best he can with material that he did not originally specify. Moreover, the earth may be just as eternal as God himself. Anything coeternal with God, even an impersonal coeternal, is really a rival to complete sovereignty."³⁹

ii) First Event: The second view, that Genesis 1:1 is the first creative event concords well with the New Testament witness, as well as other passages in the Old Testament which depict God as creating the heavens and the earth. It is also explains best the syntactic link between verse 1 and 2:

To begin a sentence in a narrative with the conjunction 'and' attached to any other element besides a narrative verb puts that element into focus and signals that the author is commenting on the element. The comment, then, is most readily understood as commenting on the condition of the earth of 1:1 as the first creation day gets under way (1:3).⁴⁰

Wilson concurs:

Genesis 1:2 is then descriptive of that initial creation, explaining that the larger cosmological אָרֶץ [earth] created in Genesis 1:1 was in a state of desolation, or, תְּהוֹ וְבוּהוּ [without form and void]. Thus, the initial creation was still not yet in a complete state. This of course sets the tone for the rest of the narrative since the created world as a whole is never in a completed state until the end of the sixth day, hence the concluding statement of Genesis 2:1. Genesis 1:3 then describes the second act of creation, the creation of light. According to this translation and interpretation, the elements in Genesis 1:2 are then a part of the initial creation in Genesis 1:1.⁴¹

THE EARTH WAS FORMLESS AND VOID

Walton explains that the rhyming pair *tohu* and *bohu* (ESV: without form and void) do not describe the material structure of the planet. Rather, they describe the planet as “nonfunctional, having no purpose and generally unproductive in human terms.”⁴² He goes on to show through the use of these two terms that they ought not to be applied to material shape (especially when used together), but rather to the *functionality* of an area, person, city, or idol.⁴³ This is perhaps one reason why there is no pronouncement of “good” on the primordial planet until God’s creative actions: it was not functioning in such a way as to fulfill its ultimate purpose: to support life and reflect the creative power of God.

39. Poythress, “Summary,” 100.

40. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 162. Other examples of this same waw disjunctive construction are found in Gen. 1:1-2; 7:18-19; Deut. 4:11; 9:15; 22:22; Judg. 8:11; 1 Kings 6:6-7; 11:31-32; Is. 24:4-5; Jer. 34:9; 36:21-22; Ezek. 40:17-18; 41:16; 48:12-13; Hos. 2:23-24; Zech. 6:1; Eccl. 1:7; Esth. 5:1; 7:7-8; Neh. 10:39. Many of these examples are translated as a parenthesis or explanation of the preceding term.

41. Wilson, “Traditional Translation,” 209.

42. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, 48.

43. The ESV regularly translates *tohu* as “empty,” which is a helpful—though noncommittal—translation because the English word can refer to both the material and the nonmaterial. E.g. Is. 40:23 “who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness [*tohu*];” or, 1 Sam. 12:21 “And do not turn aside after empty [*tohu*] things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty [*tohu*].” Other translations use “insignificant,” “lacking substance,” “vain,” or “confused.”

GENESIS 1:3

AND GOD SAID

The Hebrew verbal form of verse 3 indicates that the narrative now resumes from where verse 1 left off. The circumstantial clause of verse 2 is now complete. God created the heavens and the earth, and now he speaks light into existence.

Arguably, this is the most important statement in Genesis 1. God is the subject of all the active verbs, and the witness of Scripture is that God created by word. It is a bold anthropomorphization: God is spirit, he does not have a mouth or vocal chords, yet he communicates. The Holy Spirit could have chosen any action he wanted to convey God's creative power: the wave of a hand; a look; a thought (other ANE myths are exquisitely creative when it comes to a deity's creative actions), but he chose the spoken word. In the New Testament, of course, we read that the word was more than just a thought; more than vibrations in the air: Jesus Christ, the Word, who was with *God in the beginning*, was the agent of creation. We are told as much in Col. 1:16 that "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Taken together with verse 2, with the Spirit of God hovering, we have the first recorded act in history linking together the three persons of the Trinity.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

God is able to call into being something which does not exist. This is mind-boggling power and ingenuity. Humanity is not imbued with this magnitude of creativity. We have neither the energy or industry, nor mental capacity to imagine something which is not, let alone to summon it from nonexistence. God merely commands it to be, and that which is not obeys and becomes.

AND THERE WAS LIGHT

The source of the light is unknown. Those who favour the framework hypothesis argue that since days 1 and 4 are in parallel, the light is in fact the sun, whose function and name are withheld until day four is mentioned. Those who favour an old earth system argue that the light is a radiating halo of hot gas and dust as it coalesces into the planet we call earth. Others emphasize the similarity with the eschatological state of Rev. 22:5 (They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light).

GENESIS 1:5

DAY

The fact that the same word, *yôm* (day) is used arguably five different ways, or referring to five different periods of time within the first thirty-five verses is remarkable. It is yet another evidence pointing to-

ward a high level of literary sophistication.⁴⁴ The point must be made that each time the days are referenced by a numeral, the most grammatically responsible reading is that they describe a day analogous to our own days, i.e., twenty-four hours.

Why did God have to call light “day?” Why doesn’t verse 5 say, “and God said that a day would consist of light and dark”? As Walton sympathetically moans, “why didn’t God simply call light “light?”⁴⁵ Wouldn’t it have been better to disambiguate, for our sake, and the sake of clarity, and keep “day” reserved only for twenty-four-hour periods? It cannot be careless writing; it is for a purpose. Whether we apprehend the purpose is another matter entirely.

One reason must certainly be that in Hebrew, just as in English, the word “day” has multiple primary meanings. The text of Genesis is not a flat piece of ancient history: it is an artistic retelling of God’s work of creation, which was itself anything but boring! Additionally, it is curiously interesting that in verse 5 there are three synonymous word pairs (light/dark, day/night, evening/morning).

THE FIRST DAY

Certain authors argue that Genesis 1:2 does not necessarily describe the first day of the universe, but rather simply the first day of *creation*. Elsewhere within the Pentateuch, יום אֶחָד (*yom echad*) is not translated as “day one,” but rather “one day.”⁴⁶ It also is clear that Hebrew does have a word for “first” or “start,” which is not used here. However, given that the rest of the creation days are in numbered series, “day one” is a perfectly legitimate and logical translation, hence “the first day.”⁴⁷

Given his non-material understanding of the text, Walton sees function as the predominant theme of creation. As a result, even though there was morning and evening the first day (and the second and the third), he writes, “we must inevitably consider day four as describing the creation of time.”⁴⁸ This reading, while imaginative, is suspect: in what sense do days 1–3 exist *previous* to the existence of time? Is a reading which would not have occurred to an ancient Israelite truly a valid reading? On the whole, however, it is difficult to understand *any* sense of day that the ancient Israelites would have understood prior to the creation of the daily rhythm of the sun and moon.

GENESIS 1:26

LET US MAKE MAN

44. Genesis 1:5 (twice; light and 24-hours); 1:5–13 (days 1–3: in what sense are these days when there is no sun to reference them by?); 2:2 (debatable: probably 24-hour day, but other have seen a very long seventh day because God didn’t start creating again—no eighth day); 2:4 (period of indefinite time).

45. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, 53.

46. Genesis 27:45; 33:13, Num 11:19.

47. Attention is drawn toward days six and seven, since it is only they which receive an article: “*the* sixth day, *the* seventh day.”

48. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, 54.

Mankind is the pinnacle of creation. The entire narrative leads to a culmination in verse 27. “Genesis affirms that man was the goal of creation and that his welfare is God’s supreme concern.”⁴⁹ Mankind (male and female) is blessed, and immediately assigned the role of multiplying, subduing, and having dominion. Man is to act as God’s representative and rule over everything that moves on the earth.

It bears mentioning that the Genesis account is drastically different from any of the other ANE creation myths on a number of topics, but the origin of mankind is undoubtedly one of the sharpest breaks: “Humanity’s creation is not for the purpose of being slaves to the gods and to carry their workload, but rather mankind is created in the image of God as the ‘crown of creation’ and as God’s co-regent, ruling over the created order.”⁵⁰

The importance of the historicity of Adam, as first human being, as will be discussed later. It will suffice at this point to say that Adam is portrayed by Genesis as well as the New Testament authors as an actual historical person. “Genealogies commencing with Adam both open the Hebrew Bible... and close the Hebrew Bible.... The final compiler evidently observes this element contributing to the overall structure of the biblical record.”⁵¹

It must not be overlooked that Adam is *created*. If God wanted to reveal to us that he formed mankind out of previously-existing life forms, Genesis 1:26–7 and 2:7 is the wrong way to do it. The earth “sprouts” or “produces” vegetation (1:11), and “brings forth” living creatures (1:24); man, on the other hand is made “in the image of God” (1:27), from the “dust” or “soil” of the ground (2:7). God breathes life into him. Even with limited vocabulary, the original Hebrew still had ways to explain forming from pre-existing matter.

IN OUR IMAGE

One particular theistic evolutionary understanding of the origin of man posits that at some point in human evolution, perhaps near the emergence of *homo sapiens*, God revealed himself to one couple, whom he named Adam and Eve. It is they, then, who received the image of God stamped in their beings, and because of this, were seen as the first real human beings.

The Image of God is still a much-discussed concept, but its implications are manifold: it lends dignity and value to human beings, it allows us to relate to God and function as his sub-kings. Importantly, when the image is marred because of the Fall, we learn from the New Testament that God has a plan in place to restore the marred image and institute a “new humanity” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

“Theologians say that the Bible describes God ‘anthropomorphically,’ that is, by analogy with human nature and human activities. That is true. But the analogy works because God made man ‘theomorphically,’ in the image of God.”⁵²

49. G. J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 60.

50. John Currid, “Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the Old Testament” in *Theistic Evolution*, 855.

51. William D. Barrick in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, eds. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 217–218.

52. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 147.

SIX INTERPRETATIONS FOR SIX DAYS

We turn now to the chronology of creation.⁵³ In pondering this question, we must be careful to not say less than Scripture says, but also not to say more. The following are six proposed interpretations.

GAP OR RECONSTRUCTION THEORY

Famously expounded in the *Scotfield Reference Bible*, it is taught that between verse 1 and 2 there was an angelic rebellion, and the earth underwent a cataclysmic change as the result of divine judgment. As a result, verse 2 is then translated “and the earth *became* formless and void...”. This view connects the chaotic earth with a testing and fall of angels. Following this line of interpretation, this original, angelic rebellion is the basis of the “formless and void” of verse 2. As a result, God needed to re-create the earth, since it had become formless and void.

Among other problems, the disjunctive clause at the beginning of v. 2 cannot be translated as if it were relating the next event in a sequence. It is also stretching syntax too far to translate the perfect form of the verb הָיָה (was) as *became*. Finally, the paucity of corroborating biblical evidence is also a difficulty for this view.

FRAMEWORK THEORY

An increasingly popular interpretation of the Genesis account highlights the strong parallel between the first three and the last three days of creation, with days 1–3 being the creation of the domains, with days 4–6 dealing with the establishment of each domain’s respective rulers. As a literary device, this is an obvious reading of the text. Advocates of this reading, however, often go further than the simple literary device and imply that the structure militates against a straightforward chronological reading of the text.⁵⁴

However, this unbalanced understanding “draws a false distinction between the literary aspects of the text and the orderliness of creation as well as the text’s chronological features, as if these features cannot coexist in one composition.”⁵⁵

Further, the parallels are not even exact:

The light of day 1 is not dependent on the sun, so the sun is hardly the “ruler” of it. Second, the waters existed on day 1, not just day 2. Third, in verse 14 the “lights” of day 4 are set in the “expanse” created on day 2 (not day 1). Fourth, the sea creatures of day 5 were to fill the “water

53. The fact that there are any time referents at all in the creation narrative is noteworthy. No one would deny that God could create everything together in an instant, so why separate creation into days?

54. Richter charmingly draws the analogy of a Disney World photo album which is organized by theme, not necessarily chronology in her *Epic of Eden* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 99.

55. Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2019), 60.

in the seas” which were created on day 3, not 2... and none of the sea creatures or birds or land creatures other than man were to “rule” anything anyway.⁵⁶

DAY-AGE THEORY

In this reading, the six days of creation are indefinitely long periods of time. This interpretation draws on the meaning of “day” (*yôm*) is a rather flexible word, much like in English, so it can represent:

- i) the twelve hours of daylight as opposed to night (i.e.: Gen 1:5)
- ii) twenty-four hour period (i.e. Gen 8:12)
- iii) an indefinite period of time (Gen 14:1)

At first blush, the main impetus behind this interpretation seems to be the desire to align the text of Scripture with the chronology demanded by evolutionary theory; however, a few of the early Church Fathers (such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and perhaps Augustine) seemed drawn to some form of this concept.

ANALOGICAL DAY THEORY

In this view, God is portrayed as a paradigmatic workman in the six days of creation, going about his creating work during the day, and ceasing each night. “God is presented as if he were a craftsman going about his work week.”⁵⁷ He works for six days and rests on the seventh, modelling for the ancient Israelites how their work week ought to function. The most glaring problem with this theory is that nowhere in Genesis, or the rest of Scripture, is the creation week described as “like six days.” In fact, a close analogy is drawn between God’s work week and the Israelites’ in Exodus 20:8–11.

SIX DAYS

The oldest, most traditional, and simplest of interpretive systems dealing with the six days of creation is to see them as six twenty-four hour days. Regardless of what we imagine those days to be like, in an effort to remain absolutely faithful to Scripture alone, the primary understanding of “day” is used throughout Genesis 1. The most pressing difficulty with this reading is its blatant conflict with modern scientific consensus.

COSMIC TEMPLE INAUGURATION

This view of Genesis 1 suggests that it was never intended to be an account of material origins. Rather it was intended as an account of functional origins in relation to people in the image of God viewing the cosmos as a temple. Walton states, “we must inevitably consider day one as describing the creation of

56. Todd S. Beall, “Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, eds. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest: Master, 2018), 157

57. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 164.

time. The basis for time is the invariable alteration between periods of light and periods of darkness. This is a creative act, but it is creation in a *functional* sense, not a *material* one.”⁵⁸

He would argue that chronology is ultimately unimportant. What is important in the narrative is the purpose of the elements:

“If the seven days refer to the seven days of cosmic temple inauguration, days that concern origins of functions not material, then the seven days and Genesis 1 as a whole have nothing to contribute to the discussion of the age of the earth. This is not a conclusion designed to accommodate science—it was drawn from an analysis and interpretation of the biblical text of Genesis in its ancient environment. The point is not that the biblical text therefore supports an old earth, but simply that there is no biblical position on the age of the earth.”⁵⁹

POPULAR CRITICISMS

“GOD OF THE GAPS”

One of the epithets bandied about the creationist interpretation is “God of the Gaps,” the perspective in which gaps in scientific knowledge are taken to be evidence or proof of God's existence.

John Collins defends the existence of very real gaps in knowledge: “there are gaps and then there are gaps. First, there are gaps due to ignorance (Latin: *lacunae ignorantiae causā*), which are simply gaps in our knowledge, which may eventually be filled. But there are also gaps due to the nature (Latin: *lacunae naturae causā*) of the things involved: The result goes beyond what these natural properties would have brought about.”⁶⁰ Christians should be wary of this because some gaps may one day be filled by science.

However, J. P. Moreland agrees that these gaps *may not even be gaps*. As it applies to abiogenesis (the production of life from inorganic material): “our present lack of knowledge of any such chemical process entails a ‘gap’ in knowledge of the actual process by which life arose *only if* such a materialistic chemical evolutionary process *actually did* produce the first life.... The perceived gap in our knowledge would merely reflect a false assumption about what *must have* happened, or a false assumption about the existence of a certain kind of process—namely, a materialist one with the creative power to generate life.”⁶¹

OUTMODED COSMOLOGY

Vern Poythress reveals three common modern myths as he looks at the apparently outmoded cosmology of Genesis 1. He explains the difficulty with what he coins as the vehicle-cargo analogy, where God “‘accommodates’ himself to the erroneous views of ancient addressees and allows such views to find a

58. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 55. Emphasis original.

59. Ibid, 94.

60. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 273.

61. J. P. Moreland, “Should Theistic Evolution Depend on Methodological Naturalism?” in *Theistic Evolution*, 589.

place in the Bible”⁶² for the purpose of teaching timeless truths. This has problems, for it depends on three modern myths to work:

i) Myth of Scientific Metaphysics: the argument is that the Bible contains demonstrable errors in cosmology. The clearest example of this is the statement that the sun moves through the sky. However, it is easily explained by using phenomenal language (how events appear from a human perspective). Poythress argues that point of view is no less valid than any other perspective: after all, every scientific observation is measured relative to some standard, and from a single perspective. As a result, it seems inconsistent to argue that the earth not a useful frame of reference: “Either the sun moves or it does not. But the assumption breaks down immediately when we ask, ‘Moves with respect to what?’”⁶³ Walton agrees on this subject: “Even today we can consider it true that the sky is blue, that the sun sets and that the moon shines. But we know that these are scientifically misleading statements. Science, however, simply offers one way of viewing the world, and it does not have a corner on truth. The Old World science in the Bible offers the perspective of the earthbound observer.”⁶⁴ Instead, Poythress borrows language from Bernard Ramm, who argues for a “non-postulational,” or “non-theorizing” view: “On a fair reading, Genesis simply does not address all the detailed beliefs of individuals.”⁶⁵

ii) Myth of Progress: This myth teaches that we are superior to the primitive tribes of the past, at least in part because they believed in the supernatural, and we understand how the world works without the need of such arcane explanations. This modern myth would say that Genesis 1 is “an ancient document from an ancient culture, and so can have little to say except perhaps for some core religious message about God, if indeed that message can rise above the limitations of its cultural trappings.”⁶⁶ This makes the mistake of attempting to understand Genesis 1 from a modern point of view, rather than the original author’s: it inhibits our accurate understanding of the context.

iii) Myth of Understanding Cultures from facts: The third myth which hinders proper interpretation is the myth that most cultures are similar, just with slightly nuanced beliefs here and there. The ancient Israelite mindset was dramatically different from ours. We still (and always will, probably) know so little about what they actually thought about the world around them. We are far removed from them with respect to time, and we always bring our modern “baggage” with us even when we try to read an ancient text like Genesis.

AREN'T SCIENCE AND RELIGION MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

62. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 67-68.

63. Ibid, 72. He continues, “The vehicle-cargo approach appeals to the contrast between ‘reality’ and mere ‘appearance.’ This appeal illustrates that the modern approach has still not grasped that it is caught in a myth. It speaks as if we could settle what ‘really’ is the case. But we could do that only if we eliminated what it thinks is the unenlightened observational standpoint of the ancient observer. However, as the theory of relativity has made amply evident, to eliminate the observational standpoint is to eliminate the very ability to talk coherently about motion and rest... Might it just be the case that the average Israelite did not worry about complicated physical and mathematical systems for describing motions of the heavenly bodies? Maybe he just thought that the sun rose, because it did (given his standpoint)” (73-74).

64. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 60.

65. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 104n32.

66. Ibid, 79-80.

Stephen Jay Gould famously proposed the concept of “non-overlapping magisteria,” where Science and Religion speak on mutually exclusive domains. Derek Kidner gives passing credence to this view in his commentary on Genesis. He argues that their respective styles of reporting are disparate enough that each should be disentangled from the other:

The interests and methods of Scripture and science differ so widely that they are best studied, in any detail, apart. Their accounts of the world are as distinct (and each as legitimate) as an artist’s portrait and an anatomist’s diagram, of which no composite picture will be satisfactory, for their common ground is only in the total reality to which they both attend.⁶⁷

The obvious problem with keeping religion out of science and vice-versa is that both stubbornly refuse to stay within those boundaries. The Bible clearly speaks (and claims to do so with divine authority) on issues which strike at the heart of Science and our ability to carry it out: a God who is truth, and who made all things, visible, and invisible. To enforce such a philosophical bifurcation is to believe “that science deals with reality, and religion with Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and God.... No one who is convinced of the truth, inspiration, and authority of Scripture could agree with that.”⁶⁸

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

One critical distinction that needs to be understood and rearticulated in our scientific age is the actual role of science. Science does not and cannot explain nature, but rather describes. When a dropped object falls, science supplies the equations: how long will it take to hit the ground, and how fast will it be moving when it hits? Science can measure electrical impulses in the brain and diagnose a wide variety of pathologies. But Science does not know *why*. What is gravity? What is consciousness? There are no current answers. Science theorizes about the observable and draws testable conclusions.

Modern empirical science is an excellent route to knowledge about our physical universe, and most likely a lot of what it promotes is true. Yet its very success lies in the contingent and revisable nature of its theories. Empirical science is a system that is only ever probably true—deliberately so—for by nature it must allow itself to be open to constant revision in the light of new evidence.⁶⁹

The progress and success of science in recent centuries, however, has caused society to place increasing trust in the scientific methodology; wedded to a metaphysical naturalism, the combination has marched steadily toward a scientocracy, the rule of science. This has progressed to the point where Steve Fuller writes,

Our world resembles the one faced by the Protestant Reformers in that people today are often discouraged, because of the authority of science, from testing their faith in its claims by considering

67. Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 34.

68. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 28.

69. Kirsten Birkett, “Science and Scripture,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 956.

the evidence for themselves. Instead they are meant to defer to the authority of academic experts, who function as a secular clergy.⁷⁰

At this point, any dissenting voices to the reigning paradigm (even those which take the science seriously, and who are not religiously motivated) are nearly universally met with condescension and mockery.⁷¹ Science, in principle is fluid; it goes where the data leads, but revolutions in science are necessary precisely because such paradigms are clung to firmly, not loosely.⁷²

While it is true that no Christian has anything to fear from true science,⁷³ the uniform animosity toward evidences which challenge, or exist outside of the naturalistic worldview is obvious. It is sadly true that “Christian theology is presumed to be corrigible in a way that science is not.”⁷⁴

It must be restated that the Christian worldview has been, and continues to be the only consistent, coherent grounds for conducting the scientific enterprise. The philosophical grounds on which the Christian worldview sits is the only which allows true knowledge. “We have a rational and wise creator who made a world that is able to be understood and described intelligently.”⁷⁵ As believers, we must not

One attempt to harmonize the apparent age of the earth with the a young earth is to suggest that God created the world with the *appearance* of age.⁷⁶ Adam was apparently created fully formed, so the argument follows that the rest of creation was made in a mature state. Light from stars billions of light-years away was created en route to earth, layers of sediment and fossils from “millions of years ago” were embedded in the earth’s crust from the moment of creation. David Wilkinson writes this is at the very least creates other biblical and scientific-philosophical problems:

Is there any biblical warrant for believing that God has purposefully designed the nature of the Universe in order to deceive us?...The growth of modern science stemmed from the Christian worldview that because the Universe was created by God, observations of the universe could give us truth in some measure. If the universe is designed deliberately to deceive us, then the whole philosophy of

70. Steve Fuller, “Foreword,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 29.

71. E. g., Avise, John C. “Footprints of Nonsentient Design inside the Human Genome” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (May 11, 2010), 8969–8976 ; Boudry, Maarten, Stefaan Blancke, and Johan Braeckman, “Irreducible Incoherence and Intelligent Design: A Look into the Conceptual Toolbox of a Pseudoscience” *Quarterly Review of Biology* 85: 473–482; Clements, Abigail, Dejan Bursac, Xenia Gatsos, Andrew J. Perry, Srgjan Civciristov, Nermin Celik, Vladimir A. Likic, Sebastian Poggio, Christine Jacobs-Wagner, Richard A. Strugnell, Trevor Lithgow and Roy Curtiss III. “The Reducible Complexity of a Mitochondrial Molecular Machine.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 106: 15791–15795 (Sep. 15, 2009).

72. This is one of the central tenets of Thomas Kuhn’s seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The classic example of a scientific revolution is, of course, the church’s handling of the Copernican revolution and Galileo. Birkett makes the point that rather than this being evidence of the church being anti-science (as is commonly argued), it is in fact a case of the church being *too pro-science*. The 17th century church was too firmly fixed in Aristotelian thought. Birkett, “Science and Scripture” in *Enduring Authority*, 949. It is also worth noting that the church was not alone; the vast majority of scientists also disagreed with Galileo.

73. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 86.

74. Reeves, “Bringing Home the Bacon,” 714.

75. Birkett, “Science and Scripture,” 985.

76. This idea was first formulated by Philip Henry Gosse, who named it the Omphalos Hypothesis, after the Greek word for navel. The idea was the Adam—since he was created fully functional—possessed a belly button.

the empirical method (that science is about observation) and those biblical passages that speak of some limited revelation through nature are called into question.”⁷⁷

In addition, this view would seem to suggest that we are unable to discern (due to our lack of omniscience) which appearances are trustworthy, and which are not. It introduces epistemic doubts about the utility of science as a whole. The “five-minute hypothesis” is a famous skeptical rebuttal put forth by the philosopher Bertrand Russell.⁷⁸ He opined that it would be just as likely that the universe sprang into existence five minutes ago from nothing, with human memory and all other signs of history included.

As we deal with competing authority claims, it would be wise to heed the words of Birkett: “Scripture must guide our science. But science must aid our interpretation. We must approach Scripture “reverently, contextually, and with all the literary tools available to help us understand what the text is actually saying, however ill that may fit with preconceptions.”⁷⁹ Wilkinson agrees: “Science does not show us that the Bible is wrong. It however does help us to see when our *interpretation* of the Bible may be wrong.”⁸⁰

When wading through issues such as this, we as believers must be careful to avoid two extremes: an entire distrust of science, or an entire trust of science. The Lord has given us powerful and ingenious minds to explore, observe, and investigate what he has made. As we fulfill our creation mandate of ruling over the earth, part of that role must be in its description and systemization. But we must always remember that we are not sovereign; we are under a great high king who has given us his words. And so while science is useful in the extreme; it must be consistently reminded to not overstep its bounds. “External philosophies, even ones as successful in explanatory power as modern science, do not have the final say.”⁸¹

EVOLUTION

Carl Sagan once famously stated, “if you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe.” Everything, from a naturalistic worldview, must be reducible in a causal chain to the formation of the universe. For thousands of years, a naturalistic philosophy has espoused the narrative that the universe invented itself. Well before Charles Darwin was born, philosophers hypothesized explanatory theories which sought purely natural explanations of the observable world around them. However, especially after Darwin published his most famous work, *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, evolutionary theory has steadily gained popularity until it has become the dominant paradigm in the sciences. According to the prevailing view, the universe is 13.8 billion years old. The earth was formed 4.5 billion years ago, and humans first appeared 2 million years ago.

77. David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 273–4.

78. Russell, *The Analysis of Mind*, 1921. He describes this hypothesis as “logically tenable, but uninteresting.”

79. Birkett, “Science and Scripture,” 985.

80. Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation*, 278.

81. Birkett, “Science and Scripture,” 985.

The evolutionary theory of origins teaches that mankind is one species in a long branching tree, the base of which at one point was one single living organism, which over great periods of time, and with processes such as mutation and natural selection, differentiated into the current diversity of life we see today. The first organism was assembled by random, unguided interactions of organic material, which itself came about by the random, unguided interaction of atoms, which were themselves formed by dying stars. All this was brought into being by the rapid expansion of a space-time-matter singularity, commonly known as the Big Bang.

The philosophical underpinnings of evolution is a naturalism, which teaches that only that which is observable is real. The supernatural is ruled out *a priori*. As Thomas Kuhn observes, rather than pure blissful discovery, science is a “strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education.”⁸² One immediately thinks of the Semmelweis reflex: the reflex-like tendency to reject new evidence or new knowledge because it contradicts established norms, beliefs, or paradigms.

The appeal of evolution seems to be twofold: it is a slick system; it would be comforting if life were indeed that simple, were everything explainable as a causal series of events between material forces. C. S. Lewis indeed admired aspects of it: “I grew up believing in this Myth and I have felt—I still feel—its almost perfect grandeur. Let no one say we are an unimaginative age: neither the Greeks nor the Norsemen ever invented a better story.”⁸³

Evolutionary science, however, sees itself as anything but a myth.⁸⁴ It is unwaveringly hostile to any potential usurpers of its authority. The broad unity of scientists marches on. Michael Crichton puts his finger on a troubling aspect of scientific consensus:

I regard consensus science as an extremely pernicious development that ought to be stopped cold in its tracks. Historically, the claim of consensus has been the first refuge of scoundrels; it is a way to avoid debate by claiming that the matter is already settled. Whenever you hear the consensus of scientists agrees on something or other, reach for your wallet, because you’re being had.... Consensus is invoked only in situations where the science is not solid enough. Nobody says the consensus of scientists agrees that $E=mc^2$. Nobody says the consensus is that the sun is 93 million miles away. It would never occur to anyone to speak that way.⁸⁵

Bill Nye, a popular scientist, epitomizes condescension and scorn, coupled with an undoubtedly willful ignorance of different opinions:

Inherent in this rejection of evolution is the idea that your curiosity about the world is misplaced and your common sense is wrong. This attack on reason is an attack on all of us. Children who accept

82. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

83. Lewis, “The Funeral of a Great Myth” in *Christian Reflections*, 88.

84. I am, of course, using “myth” here in the academic sense: a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. It is *achronic*, ignoring the aspect of history—by no means validating or devaluing historicity.

85. Michael Crichton, http://stephenschneider.stanford.edu/Publications/PDF_Papers/Crichton2003.pdf. Michael Crichton, “Aliens Cause Global Warming” California Institute of Technology Michelin Lecture January 17, 2003 (<http://www.sep-p.org/NewSEPP/GW-Aliens-Crichton.htm>)

this ludicrous perspective will find themselves opposed to progress. They will become society's burden rather than its producers, a prospect I find very troubling. Not only that, these kids will never feel the joy of discovery that science brings. They will have to suppress the basic human curiosity that leads to asking questions, exploring the world around them, and making discoveries. They will miss out on countless exciting adventures. We're robbing them of basic knowledge about their world and the joy that comes with it.⁸⁶

While it is undoubtedly true that this could be a description of a few, an overwhelmingly large portion of the dissenting voices would object to this description.

There is, however, a growing number of agnostic or atheistic scientists who criticize evolution on purely scientific or philosophical grounds. Problems with evolution are well-documented.⁸⁷ Nearly every branch of the science (as with any science) has been double-checked and peer reviewed. It has been criticized on multiple fronts, and alternate explanations for apparent difficulties have been provided.⁸⁸ One additional criticism is that based on observation, billions—or even trillions—of years are not enough to produce the organic diversity of life on earth.⁸⁹

The lack of explanatory power toward metaphysics is yet another source of difficulty for a naturalistic worldview. “This universe cannot explain itself, as secular atheism, by definition, must maintain. It tells us that this material universe is not the ultimate reality. God is.”⁹⁰ John Collins agrees: there has to be more to the universe than a random assemblage of atoms:

The origin of the universe confronts us with why there is something rather than nothing, and we do not think that the properties of the universe explain its existence. The origin of life from non-life involves instituting an information processing system, which uses the properties of the components but is not fully determined by them. The origin of the human mind leads to a capacity that participates in transcendence.⁹¹

THEISTIC EVOLUTION

86. Bill Nye, *Undeniable: Evolution and the Science of Creation* (New York: St. Martin's, 2014), 10. One facetiously wonders how the scientific enterprise even functioned prior to Darwin.

87. One such excellent current resource is *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, which contains article after article from different scientists in different fields, whose cumulative arguments leave evolutionary theory very little ground on which to stand.

88. For example, a recent paper by Rohde et al, Modeling the recent common ancestor states that a recent single common ancestor for the world's current population could have lived within the last few thousand years (565). This is confirmed by another independent study in computational genetics which appears to demonstrate the possibility of a single genetic couple as sole progenitors of the entire human race existing no more than 6000 years ago. (Ola Hössjer, Ann Gauger, and Colin Reeves, “Genetic Modeling of Human History Part 1: Comparison of Common Descent and Unique Origin Approaches,” *BIO-Complexity* 2016 (3):1–15.

89. John Sanford, Wesley Brewer, Franzine Smith, and John Baumgardner, “The Waiting Time Problem in a Model Hominin Population” *Theoretical Biology and Medical Modelling* 12 (18).

90. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 93.

91. Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 280

Given the scientific, philosophical, and even metaphysical difficulties that naturalism, it is curious to observe Christians adopting a version of evolution, but instead of random chance, they posit that God invisibly intervenes at key points in the process. At a deeper level, though, once the point of divine intervention is ceded, it is difficult to ascertain what is gained from backing an evolutionary understanding. If God works in the world, how that different is it from believing miracles like the virgin conception or the resurrection, or the notion that he made and sustains the world as the bible teaches? “In my experience,” writes J. P. Moreland, “theistic evolutionists are usually trying to create a safe truce with science so that Christians can be left alone to practice their privatized religion while retaining the respect of the dominant intellectual culture.”⁹² Al Mohler concurs, “the lesson of theological liberalism is clear—embarrassment is the gateway drug for theological accommodation and denial.”⁹³

It has been suggested that by aligning biblical interpretation more closely to the current scientific consensus would prove advantageous to evangelism: Carlson and Longman argue that by doing so, “insurmountable barriers to presenting the gospel to these friends are removed.”⁹⁴ But, counter to this argument, from the vantage of naturalistic science, “The idea that God acts in fits and starts, moving atoms around on odd occasions in competition with natural forces, is a decidedly uninspiring image of the Grand Architect.”⁹⁵

The future of apologetics and evangelism does not lie with surrendering to a prevailing alien philosophy. If, as Christians, we believe in the power of the word, we will consistently and carefully wield it. To wave the hermeneutical white flag is a mistake:

In the long run, the price to be paid for such an approach is the de-cognitizing of Christianity—making Christianity a religion that has nothing at all to do with the mind or reason—with the result that, over the long haul, most people will simply ignore Christianity as a silly superstition whose practitioners caved in to the prevailing contemporary currents of ideas, instead of holding their ground and eventually winning the argument due to hard-hitting scholarship and confidence in the Bible.⁹⁶

It is this kind of sentiment which is most God-glorifying. God does not need humans to defend him or his word. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

In addition to this issue, there are also deeper biblical problems with this notion that God uses or directs evolution.

Proponents of theistic evolution are claiming, in essence, that there are whole areas of human knowledge about which they will not allow the Bible to speak with authority. They will allow the Bible to speak to us about salvation, but not about the origin of all living things on the earth, the origin of human beings, the origin of moral evil in the human race, the origin of human death, the

92. J. P. Moreland, “How Theistic Evolution Kicks Christianity Out of the Plausibility Structure and Robs Christians of Confidence that the Bible is a Source of Knowledge,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 645.

93. Albert Mohler, “Air Conditioning Hell: How Liberalism Happens.” *9Marks Journal* (January/February 2010), 13–15. “<https://www.9marks.org/article/air-conditioning-hell-how-liberalism-happens/>.” Accessed 21 November 2019.

94. Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman III, *Science, Creation, and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010), 140.

95. Paul Davies, “E.T. and God,” cited in Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 162.

96. Moreland, “How Theistic Evolution Kicks,” 639.

origin of natural evil in the world, and the perfection of the natural world as God originally created it, and even the nature of Christ's own personal involvement as the Creator of all things 'in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible' (Col. 1:16)⁹⁷

Even further issues affect even the doctrine of perspicuity: "was a true interpretation of Genesis 1–11 even *possible* prior to the discovery of *Enuma Elish* and other ANE stories? Did a 'correct' understanding of Adam and the fall await the advent of Charles Darwin?"⁹⁸

Walton's own premise in his "lost world" series is that the culture and thought patterns of the Ancient Near East had been lost by the time of the writing of the New Testament, and so while the New Testament voices were authoritative, we cannot afford to read the Old Testament in light of the New since it is a Hellenistic document. The upshot of this kind of reasoning is that we need modern scholars to explain for us what the Scriptures say.⁹⁹ While it is absolutely true that the experts are indeed helpful, and adding every day to our understanding of the lost culture of the Israelites, this idea seems to impinge on the clarity of the Scriptures.

AN ADMISSION

We should never be ashamed of admitting ignorance. Science, properly understood and applied does this all the time. It is the very nature of science to explore the unknown, to seek a description of what can be observed. Science isn't able to explain what mass is, what gravity is, let alone more metaphysical concepts such as time and consciousness. Believers are, indeed the only people who have a firm basis for actually believing that the laws of nature are consistent: that the creator made them that way. For the unbelieving scientist, the same features of the universe must be taken on faith: "physical forces, electromagnetic or gravitational fields, atoms, quarks, past events, subsurface geological features, biomolecular structures—all are unobservable entities inferred from observable science."¹⁰⁰

There is much about this world that is not understood, and the seeming differences between God's "two books" (nature and Scripture) often confuse us. We dare not throw our hands up and turn our backs on nature *or* the Bible. While much remains mysterious, perhaps—just perhaps is it is *supposed* to be mysterious. We would do well to adopt the deferential attitude of Job, the psalmist, or Paul:

"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth" (Job 40:4)

"Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." (Psalm 115:3)

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33)

97. Wayne Grudem, "Theistic Evolution Undermines Twelve Creation Events and Several Crucial Christian Doctrines," in *Theistic Evolution*, 823.

98. Reeves, "Bringing Home the Bacon," 720.

99. "Between the one-two punch of Persian culture and then Hellenistic culture, the ancient world was lost. And the New Testament folks are no longer thinking in ANE terms." (Unbelievable? Have we misread the Adam and Eve story? John Walton vs Stephen Lloyd, Saturday 28th March 2015 <https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Have-we-misread-the-Adam-and-Eve-story-John-Walton-vs-Stephen-Lloyd> at 60m 30s). It must be asked: what of Tyndale's plowboy?

100. Moreland, "Should Theistic Evolution Depend?" in *Theistic Evolution*, 581.

C. S. Lewis, as always issues a helpful analogy: We are, he says, “like a man carrying a nut which he hasn’t yet cracked. The moment it is cracked, he knows which part to throw away. Till then he holds on to the nut, not because he is a fool but because he isn’t.”¹⁰¹

In the first book of his final commentary, Augustine warned believers not to make bold assertions on matters in which they were not skilled:

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth.... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics.... If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven?¹⁰²

Augustine is not suggesting that Christians should not be avoid facing ridicule over fundamental doctrines of the Christian message, like the deity of Christ, his resurrection, and so on. Such ridicule has been evident from the very beginnings of Christianity and still occurs today. Augustine does not propose that every aspect of the Christian faith which the world finds laughable should be jettisoned. In this oft-quoted passage, he makes an appeal that Christians not open themselves up to *unnecessary* mockery.

Lennox explains:

The take-home message from Augustine is, rather, that, if my views on something not fundamental to the gospel, on which equally convinced Christians disagree, attract ridicule and therefore disincite my hearers to listen to anything I have to say about the Christian message, then I should be prepared to entertain the possibility that it might be my interpretation that is at fault.¹⁰³

ADAM AND SALVATION: “NO ADAM, NO GOSPEL”¹⁰⁴

The most crucial facet of the issue of origins is not the age of the earth—though it has implications for how the entire Scriptures are read. Rather, the historicity of Adam rises above other issues of origins, for it has a weightier impact on doctrine and Christian belief. The historicity of Adam (not merely *an* ‘adam) must be maintained. He, as the federal head of the human race represented us in Eden; we were in him in the garden when he sinned and fell. His sin imputes plunges not just himself, but all who come after him into sin and guilt. As a result, we all are tainted with sin from our birth, a stain which none of us can remove by our own power. Adam’s historicity has a heavy bearing on our theology; it is not disconnected.

101. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 100–101.

102. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol 48. Translated by John Hammond Taylor, New York: Newman, 1982.

103 Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 32.

104. This heading is taken from the book of the same name by Richard Gaffin.

The New Testament weighs in heavily on the historical person of Adam. One of the key passages for understanding the importance of Adam is 1 Corinthians 42–49. There, Paul draws a close parallel between the roles of Adam and Christ. So tight is the comparison between these two figures that it is impossible—from Paul’s point of view—to defend a non-historical Adam.

The ways in which Paul tethers Adam to Christ has necessary implications for how we are to understand Adam’s historicity, and the relationship of Adam to the human race.... One is not able to extract Adam’s historicity, his relationship with the human race, or his historical work from Paul’s teaching without destroying the fundamental integrity of that teaching.¹⁰⁵

There are those who disagree. Some, like Walton, would argue that Paul’s understanding was faulty; that he was so entrenched in a Hellenistic setting that he was misunderstanding, or at the very least, misapplying the significance of Adam, and that Adam’s significance is his archetypal role as the first “significant human.”¹⁰⁶

There are also those that argue Adam was merely an advanced ape, or as John Stott termed, the first “*homo divinus*.” God, at some point in history set him and his spouse apart to be the head of all who would come after him. This, at first blush, would remove some difficulties with evolutionary understanding of origins.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to square with the uniqueness of Adam in 1 Cor 15:45–49, where he is described consistently as the first, whose image we all bear.

In order for Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15 to function, Adam needs to be a real man, embedded firmly in space and time. He cannot be imaginary or merely mythical. His role as federal head demands this. If Jesus Christ is to be the remedy for the problem Adam instituted, he needs to function on the same ontological plane as Adam. Else, he would be providing the wrong solution. As a result, the primacy of Adam’s actual material formation is important. John Lennox states: “it is crucial to the theology of salvation that Adam was the first actual member of a human race physically distinct from all creatures that preceded him.”¹⁰⁸

SIN

Adam’s historicity is essential to the doctrine of sin. Romans 5 states in no uncertain terms that sin entered the world through one man, Adam. The most drastic consequence of that was that death then spread to all men, since all sinned (v. 12) Paul reiterates in verse 17 that death reigned through *one man’s* offence. Verse 18 reinforces: judgement and condemnation came through *one man’s* offence, and as if that were not enough, Paul drives the final nail in verse 19: by *one man’s* disobedience, many were

105. Guy Prentiss Waters, “Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with the Teachings of the New Testament,” in *Theistic Evolution*, 881.

106. John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 188.

107. For example, where did Cain’s wife come from? According to this view, from the family of other sentient beings, who were on the cusp of evolutionary breakthroughs themselves. Are we to imagine, though, that the author of Genesis was unaware of this difficulty? No comment is made in the text of Genesis 4 regarding Cain’s wife, nor where the people from his city came from. It was either unimportant, or a solution seemed self-evident.

108. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World*, 73.

made sinners. Adam is portrayed vividly as the singularity of human sin. He is ground zero for the contagious human plague that is sin. Barrick writes, “in order for mankind to be accountable for sin there needs to be a common origin of all mankind in a state of goodness interrupted by voluntary rebellion. If this scenario does not represent historical fact, then God himself can be blamed for the existence of sin.”¹⁰⁹

Moreover, in order for salvation to be good news, it is logically necessary for sin to be an alien addition to the essence of humanity. In order to be “more human,” its presence must be removed:

The gospel, however, does not treat sin as a constituent part of our humanity. It is something that has entered our human experience after the creation of humanity. It is, therefore, something that may be removed from human experience by divine grace. Apart from this understanding of sin, redemption, at least on any biblical terms, is meaningless.¹¹⁰

After all, “if Paul is wrong in his diagnosis of the origin of sin and death, how can we expect him to be right regarding its solution?”¹¹¹

SALVATION

Adam’s historicity is also essential to the doctrine of salvation.

Waters summarizes: “were there a human being not descended from Adam, he would not be eligible for redemption. Only those who have borne Adam’s image may bear Christ’s image.”¹¹² Gaffin agrees: “Christ cannot and does not redeem what he has not assumed, and what he has assumed is the nature of those who bear the image of Adam and as they do so by natural descent.”¹¹³

Even if Paul did misunderstand the evidence for Adam in the Old Testament (ignoring the doctrine of inspiration, for the sake of argument), there is still a logical difficulty: if humanity’s problem is different from what Paul claims it to be, how then could the gospel, as presented by Paul, be understood as a remedy, or as good news for those suffering under the guilt of sin? “On what basis can the church proclaim to the world a gospel that poses a solution to a nonexistent problem?”¹¹⁴ Simply put, “absent either a historical Adam or the universal descent of humanity from Adam, Paul’s gospel is incoherent.”¹¹⁵

In his concluding essay in *The Historical Adam*, Ryken asks a much-needed question of how a denial of the traditional view of Adam aids in a strengthening of the church and believers’ confidence in the Lord and his word: how does it bolster the “universality of sin and guilt, the possibility of justification, the hope of resurrection, and other necessary doctrines of the Christian faith?”¹¹⁶

109. Barrick, in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, 214.

110. Waters, “Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible,” 924.

111. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World*, 76.

112. Waters, “Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible,” 907.

113. Richard Gaffin, *No Adam, No Gospel: Adam and the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2015), 12

114. Waters, “Theistic Evolution Is Incompatible,” 926.

115. *Ibid.*, 907.

116. Philip Ryken, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, 279.

CONCLUSION

The subject of creation from Genesis 1–2 is obviously an important one. We learn from it that God is powerful. We learn that he is our maker and therefore deserving of our praise. It is of grace that God would even prepare a stage on which to showcase his grand designs. “Genesis 1 invites us to praise God not only that we live in an environment suitable for human living, but that he had a plan to produce a world of that kind.”¹¹⁷ Creation also shines a light on our ugliness in rejecting him who made everything good, as well as provided for our eternal sinlessness.

It seems from this overview of issues related to Genesis 1–2 that it is of critical importance to understand the text as clearly and widely as possible. This is a passage of Scripture which has been (and will be) debated and discussed at great length. Many of the foundational doctrines of our faith have roots in these two chapters, so understanding and applying them properly is of the utmost importance. May the Lord bless our study of his word as we seek to grasp the greatness of his works, and may all the glory go to him.

117. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*, 163.

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