



Roy Clouser

Reading Genesis

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In the March 1991 edition of this journal, I published an article titled “Genesis on the Origin of the Human Race.” In that piece, I took the position that Genesis sees humans as essentially religious beings, and I went on to argue that this means that the origin of the human race is identical with the origin of religious consciousness in creatures. I still think that is correct. However, in that same article, I also took the position that the Adam of Genesis 2 was the first religious being on Earth, and was therefore the first human and the ancestor of all other humans. In short, I was still under the Augustinian spell of seeing Genesis 2 as a second creation story, contrary to an important rabbinical tradition I have discovered since then.

The following article presents the reasons why I am now forced to rescind my earlier position. In what follows, I will show why the Hebrew text does not present Adam and Eve as either the first humans or the ancestors of all humans, and that the New Testament actually denies both those claims. Neither can I any longer agree with Augustine’s view that Genesis presents Adam and Eve as created sinless so that their fall from grace is the origin of sin in the world. That runs counter to a longstanding rabbinical tradition as well as to the Eastern Orthodox Christian understanding. It is owing to Augustine’s great influence, I believe, that we tend to read such claims into Genesis, and are blinded to some crucial parts of the New Testament that could correct them.

The purpose of this article is to show why attempting to read early Genesis as supplying any scientific information whatever is wildly at odds with Genesis’s place and role in the Jewish canon, and with the way New Testament writers used and understood it. The interpretation that takes the view that Genesis does, indeed, supply scientific information, I will call the “fundamentalist” view. Fundamentalists are a minority among Bible scholars and theologians, but form a larger and very vocal segment of Christian laity, especially in Britain and North America. In contrast to fundamentalism, the most widely held view of Genesis among scholars is the one called “concordism.” Concordism opposes fundamentalism by holding that Genesis does not supply scientific information, but does take Genesis to make assertions that need to be harmonized with science. The canonical view I will defend here disagrees with both the fundamentalist and

concordist views, but in what follows, it is the fundamentalist position that I will focus on for two reasons: first, because it does the most mischief, and second, because if my case against fundamentalism succeeds, the concordist position goes away along with it.

The fundamentalist view of Genesis is one that a number of naturalists have also been delighted to endorse, since it makes the scriptures accepted by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as inspired by God to be at odds with science.¹ So it should be noted that not only do the vast majority of Christian scholars disagree with the fundamentalist reading of Genesis, but the clergy and leaders of most major Christian denominations also say that they find no inconsistency

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between Genesis and the results of contemporary science.² I must say, however, that if these clergy and scholars have good reasons for thinking there is no such conflict, they have done an extremely poor job of communicating those reasons to the lay members of their churches. The average lay worshipper knows only that whenever naturalists can get a voice in the popular media, they proclaim that science has disproven what Genesis teaches and so conclude that the scriptures teach falsehood. Since the average layperson is utterly unprepared to meet this challenge, I hope to show here how that can be remedied.

One final word before launching my canoe into this (un)Pacific Ocean: Augustine prefaced his commentary on early Genesis with the remark that the only interpretations he was sure were wrong, were ones that said “only my view can be right.” I second that sentiment. What follows is but one Christian’s take on the subject, offered in the hope that it may help others who are struggling with the same issues. Therefore, what is most important is not whether my readers find every interpretation I propose to be correct in every detail. Rather, it is whether exposing the false assumptions behind the fundamentalist agenda can help clear the way for understanding Genesis on its own terms and with respect to its own purposes.

The Fundamentalist/Naturalist Agenda

The naturalist view, that the Bible offers antiquated and disreputable science, gives scripture too much credit and too little credit at the same time. It gives it too much credit by regarding it as offering hypotheses—theories—long before theory making had been invented. As far as we know, theories were first invented by Thales of Miletus who was born around 625 BC. That is perhaps 700 years after the time of Moses, and brilliant as Moses may have been, it seems a bit far-fetched to attribute the invention of theories to him.³ Moreover, given the way theories caught on and replaced myth making after Thales invented them, it seems equally unlikely that had Moses really invented theory making, it would then have been abandoned as a mode of explanation and needed to be re-invented by Thales. Instead of offering hypotheses, the writers of Genesis use the ordinary language of their time and place when they speak about the cosmos. For example, both in Genesis and other writings, biblical writers use such terminology as “the heavens,” “the earth,” and “the

water under the earth” to speak of their world. But that does not show that they had a *theory* about the cosmos. For them, those were commonsense ways of speaking that were straightforward descriptions of what they saw around them every day: the sky was above them, the earth was beneath their feet, and both the sea and well water lay below ground level. Is that a three-tiered view of the world? Surely so. Is it a hypothesis? Surely not. It is the same sort of commonsense language we still use when we speak of sunrise and sunset.

At the same time, however, viewing Genesis as a theory gives it far too little credit. Trying to see it as offering hypotheses to answer scientific questions about the cosmos misses what it presents itself as being: a brief sketch of God’s redemptive activity in relation to humans that had preceded the covenant with Moses. So, the first fault with the fundamentalist agenda is that instead of reading Genesis 1–12 as part of the covenant with Moses—the part that attaches it to previous covenant editions—they regard it as also providing a scientific account of the origin of the universe and of humans. In what follows, I will be arguing that such a view has no basis in the text of Genesis or in the place of Genesis in the Jewish canon. Rather than supplying natural history, this prologue sketches the beginnings of redemptive history.

“Fundamentalism” is, of course, a term that is used in different ways. Some Christians use it simply to mean belief in the gospel or a reaffirmation of the central teachings of the gospel. Thus, I need to make clear that this is not how I am using it. Here the term will be used to pick out a very distinctive mindset and program for interpreting scripture, both of which I find to be at odds with the contents of the scriptures themselves. The core of what is distinctive about the fundamentalist mindset is best characterized as a combination of one central assumption and two accompanying subordinate assumptions. The central assumption is this: since the scriptures are inspired by God, they (and any theology taken to be the right explanation of them) must therefore deliver inerrant information about any subject matter they mention or touch on, even peripherally.⁴ This makes the scriptures a virtual encyclopedia of infallible information on any subject, including the subjects studied by such sciences as astronomy, geology, paleontology, physics, and biology. I call this the “encyclopedic

assumption.” The subordinate assumptions to the encyclopedic assumption are the following: (1) the default understanding of the events involved in God’s covenant dealings with humans should be to see them as having the widest possible impact on both the natural and human world, and (2) we may freely postulate miracles to defend both the encyclopedic view of scripture and the assumption that the covenant-events it records are to be taken as having the widest possible impact—even where no miracles are indicated by the text.

A clear example of the encyclopedic assumption can be found in the work of Henry Morris. Rather than seeking to understand the message of Genesis on its own terms, Morris tells how he approached the scripture with the encyclopedic assumption and therefore insisted on “finding” the information he was interested in. Morris says,

But there was still the problem of the age of the earth ... if this could be settled anywhere it would have to be in scripture ... It seemed impossible that God would have left so important a matter ... unsettled in his Word. Surely God has the answer in his Word!⁵

This adds an additional error to the encyclopedic assumption: to take for granted that the right approach to scripture is to expect God to tell us what *we* want to know, rather than to seek to understand what *God* wants to tell us. Moreover, this mistake not only lacks humility, but it is false to the texts. It is false to them because it ignores the way the scriptures repeatedly present themselves as the record of God’s redemptive dealings with humanity. This is the reason why early Genesis cannot be taken as a stand-alone essay. Rather, as a prologue supplying background for the covenant with Moses, it is part and parcel of that covenant so that both its intent and content are redemptive through and through. It does not purport to be an encyclopedia of nonredemptive information.

Likewise, the first corollary to the encyclopedic assumption is also mistaken. For example, fundamentalists take the flood from which Noah was delivered to have covered the entire planet, and the judgment of God against those who tried to build a tower at Babel as the origin of all languages. That sort of leaping to ascribe the most grandiose imaginable scope to covenant events is completely unwarranted. Often events that were of enormous importance to

God’s covenant people and to God’s plan of salvation seemed utterly insignificant to the vast majority of humans at the time they occurred. We need only recall the birth of Christ to see this point. The only people besides Joseph and Mary who even knew of the miraculous birth were one lone priest on duty at the Temple, a few unnamed shepherds on the night shift outside Bethlehem, and an undisclosed number of wise men.⁶ God’s actions in the world can be of enormous covenantal importance without (at first) causing a ripple in the prevailing culture or disturbing, in the least, the superpowers of the day.

The second corollary—the practice of inventing miracles to defend an encyclopedic interpretation—results in a tendency to replace God’s providential sustenance of creation with his specific actions in the cosmos, especially those actions that include miracles. This is an interpretive disaster because once the difference between providence and miracle is blurred, the result is that virtually every event in creation becomes partly miraculous. For example, whereas you or I would look out the window and say, “It has started to rain,” a prophet might phrase the same information as “The Lord is sending rain upon the earth.” The prophet’s words remind us that it is by God’s providence that the cosmos is ordered such that its natural forces have coincided to produce rain. God still sustains and controls those forces, of course, but they, under his plan, are the proximate cause of the rain. By contrast, there are fundamentalists who understand such a prophetic remark to require that any description of the meteorological conditions that bring about rain must be incomplete unless God is brought into the explanation. Instead of God being the creator who brought the cosmos into existence and who sustains all the laws and forces which cause rainfall, many fundamentalists want to find gaps in the creation order such that physics cannot adequately explain rainfall at all. The claim is that these gaps need to be filled by a direct action of God, although there is nothing in the outlook of biblical writers to suggest such a view.

On the proper Christian view as I see it, God’s creativity has produced the natural order; he is the ultimate reason why there are such things as planets, water, wind, rain, and the laws guaranteeing their orderliness. But it is precisely the order of nature he created that explains rain in the sense that science seeks to explain it. An explanation of rain by physics

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does not include why there is a cosmos at all, or why the laws governing it are what they are, but is an explanation of how the relevant parts of the cosmos work to produce rain. Why there is a cosmos at all is an extra-scientific, distinctly *religious*, issue.

There are, of course, occasions on which God did (and still does) act directly in creation, and these include both his encounters with humans that are accompanied by miracles and those which are not. It is a huge mistake in the interpretation of nature, however, to see every natural event as requiring a special act of God, since it encourages the mistake of postulating miracles whenever they seem needed to support the encyclopedic assumption. This is not to deny that scripture says that the creation can somehow point to its creator. But contrary to many fundamentalist programs, scripture does not suggest that the universe witnesses to its creator by requiring that God be imported into explanations of how nature works. Nor is there the slightest hint in scripture to the effect that its teachings can suggest or confirm any scientific hypothesis.⁷ Instead, as I see it, the scriptural statements that creation witnesses to its creator are best understood to refer to the way nature *exhibits itself as dependent rather than self-existent in part or in whole*. So, viewed from this standpoint, the fact that creation witnesses to God is no excuse for confusing God's providence with the occasions on which he acts within creation to make himself known.

Likewise, there is not the slightest suggestion that the way creation witnesses to God is by providing premises from which God's existence can be inferred, or by having truths revealed in scripture provide (or confirm) the best theories for explaining natural events in creation. Such ideas are further spin-offs of the encyclopedic assumption and lead to the pernicious expectation that revealed religious teachings may be either provable by, or confirmed by, the sciences. According to the New Testament, the real grounds for belief in God is the experience of God, and that the most common type of such experience is that of seeing it to be self-evident that some cluster of revealed teachings is the truth about God from God. Therefore Paul tells the believers at Ephesus that they "see with the eyes of your mind" the truth of the gospel (Eph. 1:8). Thus, taking God to fill gaps in scientific explanation is as unbiblical an idea of how to defend revealed truth as the encyclopedic

assumption is a mistaken idea of how to interpret it. The two mistakes encourage one another, of course. Once scripture is viewed as giving truths for every science, and once the theories it is taken to supply or support are seen as the best possible scientific explanations, it is an easy (and nearly) irresistible step to regard such scientific "successes" as confirming the truth of scripture.

Those who indulge in the encyclopedic assumption see it as honoring scripture, and regard objections to their program such as the ones I have just made as lowering scripture's authoritative status. But I reply that it is just as dishonoring to God's Word to claim for it more than it claims for itself, as it would be to claim less. For this reason it is important to see from the outset why encyclopedism and its corollaries are mistaken when compared to the view of scripture taken by Bible writers themselves. In support of this point, consider what Paul wrote on this very subject to his protégé, Timothy:

and from childhood you have known the scriptures which are able to give you *the wisdom that leads to salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for *teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*; (2 Tim. 3:15-16, NASB, emphasis mine)

How much clearer could it be? The inspiration of scripture is explicitly specified as attaching to truths that lead to the right relation to God—to salvation. That is what is declared to be inspired and reliable.⁸ To be sure, Paul does not explicitly *say* that scripture may contain inaccuracies on other matters. But his wording shows that he was unconcerned with leaving that as an open question—*something no fundamentalist could ever do!* Had Paul been working with the encyclopedic assumption, then once he had raised the subject of scripture's inspiration, he could not have failed to assert its encyclopedic inerrancy. But he did nothing of the sort. What is evinced by his statements is, on the contrary, a mindset that is a million miles from affirming anything like inerrancy-on-every-topic.⁹

The public media have long missed these basic assumptions of fundamentalism, and have instead described it as the "literal" or "overly literal" reading of scripture. This has led to some serious misjudgments of it. For while excessive literalism is at times true of fundamentalist's claims, the main thrust of

their claims does not always take scripture literally. Keep in mind that if a text is figurative, symbolic, metaphorical, anthropomorphic, or poetic, then its *prima facie* literal meaning is figurative, symbolic, metaphorical, anthropomorphic, or poetic. Similarly, whether a text is assumed to be a will, a contract, fiction, a grocery list, a court decision, or a scientific theory will also determine what we take to be its literal meaning. Clearly, then, it is the wish that scripture be an encyclopedia that drives the fundamentalist's literalism, and not the other way round.

The above explains why I said it is crucial at the outset to understand Genesis as a prologue to the covenant given to Moses. As such, the correct understanding of its literal meaning must be *canonical*: that is, its literal meaning is to be determined by *how it was to function as a religious authority within the community of believers to which it was revealed*. That its function was to be a *religious* authority is clear from the entire Jewish tradition and is reflected in the quote from Paul given above. So it is important to see that it is not over-literalism that is at the heart of the fundamentalist mistake, but a mistaken idea of what "literal" must mean in this case. Fundamentalists (and the naturalists who agree with them) take the literal meaning of Genesis to be what it would be were Genesis a modern science text arising from the background of western European culture rather than a text that may have sources over 3,000 years old, assumed a different cultural background from our own, and was written in languages and stylistic conventions that are completely foreign to us today.

The importance of this point is crucial. Think about how the meanings of many words can differ even within our own time, culture, and language. If I say, "I am mad about my flat" in the US, I will be understood to be angry about the failure of one of the tires on my car. But the exact same sentence in England would be understood to express my delight with my apartment. The point is that since the meanings of terms can vary greatly over time even within the same culture and language, we must be even more careful when reading a text that is in a foreign language, is from a remote time, and has a defunct culture supplying its background assumptions. This point should be obvious, so I will not belabor it: there is simply no excuse for reading Genesis as we would if it were a contemporary western European text. In short, there is a sense in which the fundamentalists'

claim to be taking the literal meaning of the text is correct, but it is the wrong sense. Their reading *would be* Genesis's literal meaning were it a modern western text. But since that is not what it is, its literal meaning must be what it meant for ancient Mesopotamians looking for religious guidance rather than for a modern reader preoccupied with scientific questions.

Some Corrective Principles of Interpretation¹⁰

Religious Focus

The first rule for interpreting scripture, then, is to recognize its *religious* focus. This is guaranteed by the fact that the scriptures contain a record of God's redemptive actions as they have been conveyed to humankind in the format of covenants. The Bible is the collection of books that claim to be an account of God's redemptive actions for rescuing the human race and the rest of the cosmos, and every part of that collection is to be seen as conveying something significant about that redemptive relationship. This point is part of the view I have been calling "canonical." It means that scripture's purpose is to be an authoritative guide for the religious life of the believing community to which it was revealed. At no point does it suddenly shift its purpose to that of providing a science handbook for insiders.

The Assumption of Ancient Common Sense

A second interpretive guideline is that biblical writers everywhere appear to assume what I will call a "commonsense background" for what they have to say. This means that the primary sense of their language is to be understood as what the everyday meaning of their words would have conveyed to people speaking that language, at that time, and in those circumstances. This is not to deny that, since it is God inspired, scripture can at times have an additional, deeper, spiritual meaning than its human authors were conscious of at the time of their writing. But it does require that any idea of such a deeper meaning can only be discerned and derived from its primary "commonsense" meaning.

In place of this, many fundamentalist writers seem to regard the proper meaning of a text as whatever they thought it meant the first time they read it. When such first impressions are then distorted by the influence of the subordinate assumption that everything

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in Genesis should be taken as having the greatest imaginable scope, even an offhand commonsense remark can be mistaken for a scientific law. One example of this is the way some fundamentalists take the expression “the life of the flesh is in the blood” to be a scientific principle instead of a commonsense observation that animals which have blood cannot live without it. (Some fundamentalists have gone so far as to take this expression as a strict equivalence, and therefore insist that plants and insects are not alive on the grounds that nothing without blood can be a living thing!¹¹) Once again this is a mistaken view of what the literal meaning of scripture is, because the reading was undertaken with a mistaken view of the *type* of literature to be interpreted. Were those books modern works on science, then their literal meaning could be what the fundamentalist takes them to say; in that case they would, indeed, be at odds with the discoveries and theories of modern science. But since the books included in the Bible are not modern and do not address scientific questions, their literal meaning is not what the fundamentalist says it is.

Taking the text as providing a scientific account is a serious failing because it serves to pervert its religious focus and canonical function.¹² By contrast, medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas took scripture to be the revelation of super-nature rather than of nature, and the Protestant Reformers also steadfastly insisted on its religious focus. For example, in his commentary on Genesis, John Calvin insisted that scripture has been written from the commonsense viewpoint of the average person and is aimed at giving information about how to stand in right relation to God, not at conveying science:

For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing here [in Genesis] is treated but of the visible form of the world. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception ... [Genesis] is the book of the unlearned.¹³ (brackets mine)

A Canonical View of the Text

Taking seriously the inspiration of scripture requires, in my opinion, that we accept not only that the original authors of its books were guided by God’s Spirit, but that those who consequently edited and compiled them were also. This point has the imprimatur of God himself because it is the final form of

scripture that the Holy Spirit uses to bring humans to faith in him. For this reason, it is the full and final text that is to be considered the Word of God. From the canonical viewpoint, therefore, tracing out the sources of texts or trying to reconstruct how and when they were edited may be interesting projects, but they can never justify regarding any preliminary stage of scripture’s development as its “true” message in order to dismiss its final form. (This rule will prove crucial especially for the story of Adam and Eve found in Genesis 2:4ff.) But since there is not the room for a detailed defense of the canonical view in this article, I can only cite Brevard Child’s excellent summary of it:

The reason for insisting on the final form of scripture lies in the peculiar relationship between the text and people of God which is constitutive of the canon. The shape of the biblical text reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel ... the significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation ... By shaping Israel’s traditions into the form of a normative scripture the biblical idiom no longer functions for the community of faith as a free-floating metaphor, but as the divine imperative and promise to a historically conditioned people of God whose legacy the Christian Church confesses to share.¹⁴

Employing the New Testament to Understand the Old Testament

A long-standing Christian rule for interpreting scripture is that the Old Testament must be read in the light of the New Testament. This does not mean reading back into an Old Testament text additional information supplied by the New Testament. Rather, it means that newer revealed truth is to be used to gain a proper Christian interpretation of the redemptive themes of the Torah, Psalms, prophets, and other Old Testament writings. An example of the application of this principle concerns the Christian understanding of God as the Creator of time. Jewish scholars and commentators had arrived at the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* before the rise of Christianity, but no Old Testament text explicitly stated that God created time. By contrast, the New Testament does explicitly say that God created the ages of time through Christ (Heb. 1:2), and that God’s plan (and thus God himself) is “before time of the ages” (1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2).¹⁵ Christians are therefore *required* to take that doctrine

into account when interpreting the creation story in Genesis, so that God's transcendence of time cannot be ignored. We are also obligated, of course, to be guided by how New Testament writers understood early Genesis—a point that will turn out to be of crucial importance to understanding the story of Adam and Eve.

With these guidelines in mind, let's now look at Genesis's creation account *without* the encyclopedic assumption and its corollaries. Let's see what happens when we try to understand it guided by maintaining its religious focus, seeing it as being expressed in the language of ancient common sense, maintaining its canonical status, and as supplemented by the light of new revelation from the New Testament.

Genesis Chapter One

"And God said ..."

The first thing to notice is that the way in which the account goes about affirming that God created everything *cannot be anything other than anthropomorphic with respect to God*. There is much in the Jewish tradition that already recognized this point prior to the New Testament,¹⁶ and we have seen that the New Testament is explicit about God being the creator of time and space and everything "visible or invisible" (Col. 1:16). So when the text describes him as speaking, it *must be anthropomorphic* since God could not literally have spoken. Speaking requires lungs, lips, vocal chords, and a tongue, whose existence and activities require a physical body and air, which in turn require space and duration in time.¹⁷ Thus we must view the account as describing God *as though he were a human while being fully aware that he was not*.

For this reason alone, anyone wishing to insist that the text must be read as teaching that the universe was created in six twenty-four-hour days must face the following unanswerable questions: (1) Why take the days as literal in the midst of an account that is from the outset so thoroughly figurative? (2) What could justify the claim that we must switch back and forth between the anthropomorphism of God speaking and a literal understanding of the days of his creating? and (3) How can such switches avoid being wholly arbitrary? Notice that such switching would have to be made *within* each of the days and not just between the opening "Let there be light" and

the introduction of days as units of creation. Since each day includes some additional anthropomorphic act—God "separates" things; God "calls" something by a name; God "sees" that something is good, and so on—the anthropomorphisms are internal to each day. Theologically, it is easy to see why the text proceeds in this way. Since God is independent of time and space and is the creator of all the laws found in the cosmos, there can be no way for us to conceive or describe *how* he created, because nothing we can conceive can fail to involve time and law-order. Therefore it seems obvious—if we read without the encyclopedic assumption—that God is depicted as creating in six days and resting the seventh because the creation story is a prologue to the covenant of Moses which is going to command a six-day work week as a requirement of the Jewish people: "... for six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the Lord ..." (Exod. 35:2).

The anthropomorphic character of the language in Genesis 1 is also reason to understand God's blessings and commands addressed to humans in verses 28–30 as expressions of his purposes for humanity rather than as speech actually directed to specific humans. It is only from Genesis 2:5 onward that God anthropomorphizes himself and, in a theophany, addresses actual speech to specific individuals named Adam and Eve.

The Days of Creation

The next point against an encyclopedic reading of the days of creation was raised by St. Augustine about 1,600 years ago. Augustine noticed that since the account has the sun, moon, and stars being created on the fourth day, the previous three days cannot be solar days.¹⁸ He then goes on to make the suggestion that the word "day" must have a figurative meaning and is an accommodation to our ordinary ways of thinking, needed because God's timeless creating is beyond literal description. Please bear in mind that the literal meaning of "day" is not incompatible with its also having a metaphorical meaning. In fact, unless the term's literal meaning was an ordinary workday, it could not function as a metaphor for the "work" of creation. (A metaphor is the calling of a thing by the name of something it is not, in order to call attention to how it is like the thing which it is not.) So unless the literal meaning of "day" was a 24-hour period of work and rest, it could not serve as

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a metaphor for God's timeless accomplishment of his purposes. Moreover, I find it impossible to suppose that the ancient authors and editors of Genesis could have failed to realize this themselves. Deliberately writing about "days" and asserting them to have occurred before the sun and moon existed shows that they intended "day" to mean more than merely twenty-four hours. They would also, at a minimum, have to have meant *God's* days: special episodes of creation that cannot be confined to time as humans experience it.¹⁹

So Augustine was right. But there is even more in favor of his view than the argument he gave. The additional evidence is the way the description of the creative days is structured. By "structured" I mean the way that the days are arranged. On day 1, God separates light from darkness; on day 2, he separates sea from atmosphere; and on day 3, he separates land from sea and creates plant life. On day 4, God creates the sun, moon, and stars; on day 5, God creates sea life and birds; and on day 6, he creates animals and humans. On day 7, he rests from his work. My argument is that this arrangement of the days counts against taking the days of creation only as solar days. They are arranged so that what God creates on the first three days are preconditions for—exist for the sake of—what he brings about on the next set of three days:²⁰

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
light darkness	sea atmosphere	land plants
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
sun, moon, stars	sea life/birds	animals/humans

Surely the correspondence here is too obvious and too prominent a feature of the story to be an accident! The first group of three days tells of God creating the background conditions for what he wished to bring about in the second group (the day-day matchup is not perfect, but is still hard to miss). Arranged in this way, the *teleological* character of the order is plainly exhibited. The focus here is upon *purpose rather than time*, although it expresses God's purposes by means of a temporal week. It deliberately represents God as a workman laboring through a workweek and resting on the Sabbath so as to serve as a model for what the rest of the covenant of Moses is about to require of God's people. But the point of what happens

within God's workweek is teleological rather than chronological.

The days, then, are intended both literally and metaphorically at the same time. They are literal twenty-four-hour days insofar as they express the workweek Israel was to follow. But insofar as the days are applied to God's creating, they are an anthropomorphic expression of the "why" of creation (for communion with humans) rather than the "how" (a cosmological description). Genesis is unlike its contemporary mythological cosmologies in precisely this way. Whereas most of them attempted an account of *how* the cosmos came about, Genesis focuses on God's *purposes* from the outset.²¹ For this reason, construing the days strictly as twenty-four-hour days or as geological eras should both be seen as mistakes driven by the encyclopedic assumption. The time frame of a workweek serves the end of conveying God's purposes, not natural history.²² Moreover, the arrangement of creation-days not only sets the stage for God's purpose of fellowship with humans in the next chapter, but also fills out what was lacking in the cosmos as it first appeared. According to Genesis 1:2, the cosmos was at first "without form and void." The Hebrew word for "void" is one that is used for a desert and so connotes "void of life." To rectify these two deficiencies, in some of the days God gives the cosmos form, while in others God fills it with living beings.

Another objection to taking the meaning of the days of creation only as twenty-four-hour days, is that the New Testament does not do that. Genesis's account not only mentions six days of work but a seventh day of God's rest, and the New Testament explicitly says that day seven *is still going on* (Heb. 4:1–10).²³ This rules out that the days of Genesis 1 are to be thought of either as only twenty-four-hour days or as geological eras. Once again they are used as metaphorical (anthropomorphic) expressions of God's purposes in bringing about the cosmos, while the processes by which he accomplished those purposes are not in view. What is more, in this same section of Hebrews (4:3), there is also the remark that God's works were actually finished "from the foundations of the cosmos"—an expression that is used interchangeably in the New Testament with the expression "from before time of the ages."²⁴ That being so, it amounts to saying that although God's rest is represented as a day, his creative purposes, creative acts, and rest from

creating are all actually independent of time.²⁵ Nor is that all. Recall that the anthropomorphism of God as workman is made more specific when Genesis goes on to depict him as a particular sort of workman: one who forms the first humans from the “dust of the ground.” But in Romans 9:20–23, Paul specifically takes that to be metaphorical. In a clear allusion to Genesis, he *compares* God to a potter and humans to clay pots. For him they are *alike*, not identical.²⁶

God’s Relationship with Humans: Adam and Eve

Covenant or Not a Covenant?

The first question to be tackled here is whether it is correct to see God’s dealings with Adam and Eve, beginning in Genesis 2:7, as having a covenant structure. There are several objections to seeing their initial relation as a covenant, but the decisive one is the theological objection that everywhere else in scripture, covenants appear as remedial and redemptive, whereas the initial arrangement with Adam and Eve could not have been. Since Adam and Eve had not yet disobeyed, the objection goes, there was nothing to be remedied concerning their relation to God. To be sure, some of the elements of a covenant are present: God takes the initiative, God sets the terms of the arrangement, God issues commands and makes promises, and God threatens punishment should Adam or Eve disobey. But the key missing element that does, indeed, disqualify this first relationship as a covenant is that it is not redemptive. This has led one Old Testament scholar to propose the term “probationary” to describe what is at the heart of the initial relationship of humans to God, and this proposal has the added value of explaining why the term “covenant” is so notably absent.²⁷

After Adam and Eve failed their probation, however, a redemptive element is introduced into their relationship to God so that at that point (Gen. 3:15) it becomes at least quasi-covenantal. This element appears most clearly when God adds to his earlier promises the eschatological assurance that one of Adam and Eve’s descendants will defeat the Tempter who had induced them to disobey and thus fail their probation. Besides, when the word covenant finally does appear (Gen. 6:18), it sounds more like a covenant renewal than like the initial appearance of that relationship. It sounds as though God is say-

ing to Noah, “Since my covenant did not work out with Adam and Eve, I will now make it with you.” Perhaps the reason the term “covenant” is avoided in Genesis 3 is that the element of redemption introduced there is so overshadowed by the imposition of God’s judgment upon human disobedience.

A final piece of evidence in favor of this point is found in Hosea 6:7. There the prophet quotes God concerning the faithless of Hosea’s day: “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously with me” (so the ESV, RSV, NIV, and New American Standard versions). If that translation of this verse is correct, then in fact there is confirmation elsewhere in scripture that Adam’s (later) relations to God had morphed into a covenant. There are, however, two objections that have been raised against this translation. The first is that outside of Genesis 2–5, “Adam” is most often used in the Old Testament to mean “humanity in general.” Against this objection, there is the point that if it referred to humans generally, the term would have to refer to Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel. But “Adam” could not possibly include Gentiles in Hosea’s remark, since Gentiles never had a covenant with God that they could transgress.

The second objection to the translation is that because the word “there” occurs in verse 7, “Adam” may be a place name rather than the name of the man who disobeyed God in Genesis 3.²⁸ Against this possibility, however, there is the weight of the LXX (Septuagint) translation which takes the word “there” to refer to the area of “Gilead” mentioned in the next verse. Since the seventy Rabbis did not think “Adam” was a place name, it remains at least highly plausible that Hosea 6:7 does, indeed, refer to the Adam of Genesis and to his transgression of God’s “covenant” – where that term stands for God’s commands rather than for a full-blown covenant relation (Paul also speaks of it as God’s “law” in Romans 5).²⁹ This second objection to the translation is, therefore, at best inconclusive, and the weight of argument seems to favor the translation as it appears in the versions cited above.

What the Text Says

The differences of interpretation that result from rejecting the encyclopedic program of interpretation are of even greater significance when we proceed to what the text has to say about God’s first encounter with humans. I take this new topic to commence

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with Genesis 2:4, so that the previous topic, the birth announcement of the universe, actually ends with 2:3. That is, when Genesis 2:4 says, “This is the generation of the heavens and earth when they were created, in the day the Lord made earth and heaven,” it serves as a superscription for the account that follows, thereby connecting the coming focus on humans to the general creation account of Genesis 1:1–2:3.³⁰ Because these are two accounts with different focal points and not two accounts of the same events, it is mistaken to read 2:7 (“the Lord God had formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath-of-life ...”) as a more detailed description of 1:27 (“God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them”). We will return to this point in detail later, but before tackling it, we need to notice two more things that have been introduced by Genesis 1 that can serve as background for the discussion to follow: the first is about God; the second, about humans.

In each case, the nature of the two parties to the probation is conveyed by means of a “making” story.³¹ The Creator-God is the cosmic potter who unilaterally proclaims his communion with humans; humans are his clay vessels formed to be his image bearers and live in fellowship with him. Because God has created humans for communion with himself, his nature is also shown to include that he is caring of humans. Human nature is also then further elucidated in Genesis 2:7 ff. Though humans are in the image of God, they are nevertheless still made of “the dust of the earth”—an expression that always signifies mortality in the Old Testament.³² In this way, Genesis denies that humans are bits of divinity stuffed into bodies as, say, some ancient Greeks thought. Rather, says Genesis, we are by nature totally dependent on God the way an image depends upon what it reflects, and—contrary to Augustine—we are naturally subject to death since the very stuff we are made of renders us mortal. At the same time, however, God’s purposes for humans include his glorious provision for them to overcome death. So long as humans continue to stand in proper relation to God, God will see to it that they do not die. Everlasting life is offered as a promissory gift precisely because it is not part of human nature. All this helps us to see a crucially important point, namely, Genesis’s (implicit) idea of the defining characteristic of what it means to be human.

The definition of “human” is central to all discussions of human origins since no discussion of the topic can avoid some idea as to what counts as a human. Is a human a featherless biped? A two-legged creature that walks upright and uses tools? A rational animal? An animal that makes tools? That cooks food? That uses language? Makes art? That has a sense of humor? That has a sense of right and wrong? All of these definitions (and more) have been defended in the past, and are inadequate compared with the definition we can frame on the basis of Genesis’s view of humans. For although Genesis never offers a formal definition of “human” as such, it clearly depicts humans as having been created for a relation of love (*hesed*) and communion with God—in other words, it treats humans as essentially *religious beings*. Humans are creatures who have what Calvin called an innate *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity). They can ask and understand answers to the question: What is the divine reality upon which all things (including we ourselves) depend?³³ Furthermore, Genesis and the rest of the scriptures speak of humans as beings who inevitably have some such belief, whether it is belief in the right divinity or in a false one (e.g., Romans 1). In the light of this view of human nature, we may conclude that the origin of humans on Earth is identical with the appearance of mortal beings who are in the image of God and who have an innate capacity for religious belief.³⁴ In Genesis’s view, there are no human beings until the appearance of beings with the capacity for religious belief.

The proposal that the “making” stories in Genesis should be understood to convey the nature of the Creator and of Adam, together with the point about humans as essentially religious beings, can also be applied to the making story about Eve’s having been made from a rib of Adam. The symbolism clearly implies that her nature is the same as Adam’s, but also conveys that her humanity, in some way, depends on his. This, however, would mean her *completed* humanity as it is fulfilled via their relationship with God. Since the story tells us that Adam received the terms of that relationship from God but does not say the same about Eve, it strongly suggests that she received it from Adam (if it were not told to her by God, who else could it have been?). In that case, Eve’s completed humanity came to her via Adam. It is important to notice that when Paul refers to this in 1 Timothy 2:13, he does not say that Adam was “created” first, as many translations render it. Instead

of using “created” (*ktizo*) as he often does, Paul uses “formed” (*plasso*) which often means intellectually or spiritually shaped. That fits perfectly with the view I am now advocating and with Paul’s main point in 1 Timothy. Since Eve had not received the conditions of her probation directly from God, she was the more easily deceived, and since Adam did have them directly from God, he was the more culpable—which perhaps explains why Paul says that it is *Adam’s* sin that left the human race subject to death.

Clearly, then, Genesis’s conception of what it means to be human is not merely a *biological* classification. Paul Tillich has captured this point nicely:

The famous struggle between the theory of evolution and the theology of some Christian groups was not a struggle between science and faith, but a struggle between a science whose faith deprived man of his humanity and a faith whose expression was distorted by biblical literalism ... A theory of evolution which interprets man’s descent from older forms of life in a way that removes the infinite, qualitative difference between man and animal is faith not science.³⁵

With this as background, we are now prepared to tackle the all-important key text on which so many issues depend, namely, the statement that God “breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). This is the crucial text for the fundamentalist/nonfundamentalist controversy. For if verse 7 is a literal description of an act by which God formed humans, the fundamentalists would be right in rejecting not only evolutionary theory but any and every scientific account of human origins. *For if Genesis 2:7 is a description of precisely how humans first appeared on Earth, then humans had no natural origin whatsoever.* So is what we have in Genesis 2:7 a literal description of an act performed by God by which the first human being appeared on Earth? Is it a more detailed description of the general statement that God created humans, as that was given in Genesis 1:27? My answers to these questions are yes, it is a description of an act of God, but no, it is not the act by which God initiated the human race on Earth.

The first point to be made here is one that I alluded to earlier. It is the way the Hebrew grammar governs the use of the term “generations” in Genesis 2:4: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created ...” It is certain from

the Hebrew syntax that this “generations of” formula (which is repeated ten times in Genesis) is required to be a superscription to what follows, not a reference back to what preceded it. This strongly implies that this is the place where the chapter break should have gone, and that we are being introduced to a new story.³⁶ Taking this point seriously means that we should not expect that what follows in relation to Adam and Eve will be a description of *how* God brought about the origin of humans as was stated in Genesis 1:27. Neither should we expect that the conditions described in Genesis 2:5 onward about plant life and rain, or about God’s transforming a desert-scape into a garden (Eden), refer back to the conditions (“without form and void”) that were original to creation.

Moreover, the text not only discourages the expectation of a repeated creation story, but from Genesis 2:5 onward, goes on to relate its own story in a way that shows it definitely was not intended to be a more detailed description of the statements in Genesis 1 about the creation of humans. One reason is that if Genesis 2:4 onward is taken as a second creation story, it is blatantly inconsistent with the story in Genesis 1 concerning the order in which trees, birds, animals, and humans were created. In Genesis 1:11–12, trees are created before Adam, whereas in Genesis 2:4–9, they would be formed after him if this were a second creation story. Likewise, birds and animals are created before Adam in Genesis 1:20–27, whereas in Genesis 2:19, they come after Adam. The same is true of the creation of Eve. In Genesis 1:27, God creates humans both male and female together, whereas in Genesis 2, God forms the woman after the man. Such obvious inconsistencies could not have failed to be noticed by the writers/editors of these two accounts; this is strong evidence that they did not intend them both as creation accounts.

What I find to be most helpful at this point is a long-standing rabbinical tradition concerning how to understand Genesis 2:7ff., a tradition that has been inexplicably missing from any recent Christian discussions I know of. The tradition concerns the meaning of the term translated as “breath of life.” The word there is not what we would have expected if the subject being discussed were the beginning of Adam’s metabolic respiration. Were Adam’s biological life the topic here, we would have expected “spirit” (*ruach*) or “soul” (*nephesh*). Instead the term

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used is “*neshamah*,” which is not only used for human breath but, when used of God, also signifies divine inspiration.³⁷ In other words, it signifies God’s own saving breath, speech, word, or Spirit, not Adam’s. This tradition is endorsed by none other than the distinguished scholar, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who cites the great medieval commentator on the Talmud, Nachmanides (d. 1270), in support of it: “He [God] breathed into his [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life [which was] God’s own breath” (brackets mine). Soloveitchik then goes on to speak of the Adam of Genesis 1 as the whole of humanity created in the image of God, while the Adam of Genesis 2 is the individual Adam of redemption.³⁸

In short, we do not have two creation accounts, one in Genesis 1 and another in Genesis 2. What we have is one creation account followed by another account of the beginning of redemption.

This understanding of the expression “breath of life” is further confirmed by how *neshamah* is used in the rest of the Old Testament.³⁹ There are, therefore, good reasons for rejecting the reading of Genesis 2:7 as though it were a description of an act by which God formed humans.⁴⁰ Rather, the statement that “God made man of the dust of the earth” must be read as parallel to the statement, “Henry Ford made the model T out of steel.” It is a statement of the material God used, not of how he formed it into a human. And the importance of mentioning the material is that it signifies that humans were created mortal from their beginning. By contrast, God’s putting his own Spirit into Adam is what enabled him to be bound to God in a relation that made possible an escape from death and thus to be a “living soul” in the fullest sense. Here we may recall Christ’s saying in John 10:10 that he came so that we might have “life and have it more abundantly.” The fullest sense of life is not merely to be carrying on metabolic and mental functions, but to live in communion with God and have his promise that the communion will be everlasting. It is what Paul calls “the real life” in 1 Timothy 6:19.⁴¹

This understanding of the expression “breath of life” is confirmed by how it is used elsewhere in the Old Testament.⁴² It is never used of animals; in every case, it employs a pun on the multiple meanings of the term: breath, Spirit, and speech. One of the places outside Genesis where it occurs is in Job 33:4–6. There one of Job’s friends, Elihu, remarks

that “the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath (*neshamah*) of God gives me life ... *Behold I belong to God like you ...*” Notice that while God’s own Spirit is said to be his creator, Elihu’s having God’s breath (Spirit, speech) means that he, like Job, stands in proper relation to God: he “belongs to God.”⁴³ A bit later the same speaker follows that remark with this one: “If he [God] should gather to himself his Spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together and man would return to the dust” (Job 34:14–15). Unless this is interpreted pantheistically to mean that God is himself the life in humans, it has to have the cluster-meaning of the life-giving Spirit/breath/word of God’s self-revelation. It means that without God’s gracious promise and the gift of God’s Spirit, there would be no hope of escaping death. By contrast, possessing God’s Spirit/speech/promise makes a person a “living soul” in the fullest sense, namely, being someone who is in proper relation to God and so has the promise of a life that will ultimately escape death altogether.

Finally, it is significant that the New Testament supports this understanding by the way it, too, repeatedly takes “Spirit” or “breath” of life to mean access to the Spirit and the word of God. Its focus, too, is religious, not merely biological. So, in John 6:63, Jesus says to his disciples,

... it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. *The words which I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.* (emphasis mine)

Moreover, this same point is re-enforced by Jesus’s action recorded in John 20:22 in a striking way:

And when he said this, he breathed on them and said: receive the Holy Spirit.

This is a deliberate re-enactment of God’s initiating his relation to Adam in Genesis 2:7.

Jesus’s action thus clarifies the meaning of Moses’s comment in Deuteronomy (which Jesus quoted in his contest with Satan): “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word of God.” In short, biological life is included in the religious meaning of life, but biotic life can be everlasting only if it meets the religious conditions set by God. This is the same point that is reflected in the Nicene Creed in which the Holy Spirit is called “the Lord, the giver of life.”

Given all this, I propose that Genesis 2:7 should be understood as follows:

And the Lord God [who had already] formed the man from the dust of the earth [now] breathed into his face [His own] life-giving Spirit, and the man became a living [redeemed] soul.⁴⁴ (brackets mine)

It therefore harks back to the original creation of humans in chapter 1, but does not repeat it. It mentions God's having formed humans in order to make clear that the generic Adam of Genesis 1—where "Adam" means humanity—had been created mortal by nature (the dust of the earth). This is for the sake of contrasting human nature as created with the promise of everlasting life through receiving God's Spirit. The fact that it brings up the formation of Adam again can mislead the unwary reader into thinking this is a continuation of the creation account of chapter 1. But the point of the repetition is that it stipulates exactly the information needed to establish the contrast between human nature as it was created and what human nature may become via the divine promise. In short, while chapter 1 is the birth announcement of the universe and the human race, chapter 2 is the announcement of God's purposes for humans. These purposes are shown by the terms of their probation in chapter 2, and are developed in chapter 3 with the start of their redemption.

What the Text Does Not Say

We should now also notice that there are a number of things that Genesis 2:4 onward *does not say*, but which people often read into it.

It does not explicitly say that Adam and Eve were holy or innocent before their fall from grace; it is simply silent on their pre-Fall nature or condition. I realize that there is a long theological tradition from Augustine that insists humans were created "good, just, and holy," which is the inference he drew from God's having declared the whole creation "good" in Genesis 1.⁴⁵ We will return to this point when we deal with what Paul tells us about Adam's fall in Romans 5. Meanwhile, I ask that you at least consider the possibility that Augustine's inference was not correct, and that his great influence on this point has had the deleterious effect of blinding generations of scholars and commentators to all that Paul has to say about Adam's fall in Romans 5.

Neither does the text say that all humans descended from Adam and Eve.⁴⁶ The closest it comes to anything like that is Adam's remark that Eve is "the

mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). But since Eve was not the mother of anyone at that point, the meaning of that expression should also be taken as referring to what God had just said about a future male descendant of Eve's who will crush the head of Satan. She confirms this interpretation by her remark upon the birth of Cain: "I have gotten a male child from the Lord" (Gen. 4:1). Apparently she was rushing things a bit and thought Cain was the promised covenant hero who would rectify their relationship with God. (By the way, the Hebrew text says that "he" – the descendant – will crush the head of Satan, not "she" – the descendant's mother – will, as the Douay-Confraternity translation has it.) So the meaning of "mother of all living" is that Eve will be the mother (ancestor) of the one who will restore the promise of everlasting life to all people by defeating the Tempter who had beguiled them through a snake.⁴⁷

The text does not even say that Adam and Eve were the first humans, although it can give that impression by the rapid way it goes from "God created humans in his own image, in the image of God created he them, male and female he created them" in chapter 1, to "the LORD God formed man (Adam) of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" in chapter 2. But we have just seen good reasons for taking Genesis 2:7 as the start of a new story, a story of redemption, and not as a continuation of the creation story. Moreover, there is yet another striking feature of the story that stands against regarding Adam and Eve as the first humans, namely, that when Cain is banished by God for the murder of his brother, he expresses the fear that "everyone who finds me will kill me" (3:14). Then, after God assures him of protection, Cain moves to "the land of Nod," marries there, and has a family. These parts of the story count heavily against Adam and Eve being thought of as either the first humans or the ancestors of all humans, *especially because of the way the reference to other people is dropped so casually into the story without any perceived need to explain them*. Had the writer(s) and editor(s) of the text thought for a moment that Cain was one of only four people on Earth, they surely would have offered some explanation of his life following his banishment.

Nor is that all. An additional factor that counts against Adam and Eve being viewed as the first humans are the clues Genesis gives as to the approximate time

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when they lived, clues that come in the form of comments about the occupations of their descendants. Their son Abel, for example, is a shepherd while his brother Cain is a farmer. If Adam's sons are engaged in farming and animal husbandry, that means they could not have lived much earlier than 10,000 years ago since we know that is (roughly) when farming and husbandry arose. In short, the hints for dating these stories point to a time much more recent than that of the first appearance of humans on Earth. Even using Genesis's own view of humans as religious beings, there is evidence that there have been beings on Earth who were religious, and thus fully human, for more than 10,000 years.⁴⁸ So what are we to make of all this?

Fortunately there is help from the New Testament.

Adam in the New Testament

In Romans 5:12–19, Paul draws both a parallel and a contrast between the probationary failure of Adam and the covenantal success of Christ. He speaks of Adam's sin against God's commands and says that because of that "sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death prevailed upon all humans inasmuch as all sinned" (v. 12). After this remark, however, Paul offers a startling side comment (v. 13): "... for before the law, sin was already in the world but was not imputed, for sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Now at first we might expect that by "the law" Paul was referring to the covenant with Moses that included the law we call the Ten Commandments. He was, after all, an orthodox Rabbi who knew the Torah inside and out, and often when he uses "law," it is short for "Torah." But what he is saying here makes no sense if what he has in mind is the law of Moses. Was there really no sin (in its primary religious sense⁴⁹) imputed to humans by God prior to the law of Moses? Surely that was not the case. God had already called Noah, Abraham, and others to abandon the false gods of their time and place. He had even brought about a great flood as punishment for the sin of returning to false gods, and the plagues upon Egypt were clearly intended to expose the Egyptian gods as fictions. But the great flood and the plagues upon Egypt both preceded the giving of the law at Sinai. *So clearly sin had been imputed to humans prior to the law given to Moses.* Paul's next words show that he did, indeed, have something different in mind from the law of Moses: "Nevertheless

death reigned from Adam to Moses, *even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam ...*" (v. 4). The "law" that Paul was speaking of, then, was God's commands to Adam. It is Adam who was the first lawbreaker by his violation of the conditions of probation God had placed upon their relationship. Indeed, Paul may well have had in mind Hosea 6:7 when he penned that line. There, in one of only two references to Adam in the Old Testament outside Genesis, God says of his unfaithful people: "But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant ..."

The implications of this are startling but hard to deny. In Paul's view, there had been other humans who were ancestors and/or contemporaries of Adam but whose worship of false gods was not held against them. *Adam and Eve are therefore not the first humans, in Paul's view, but the first humans called to stand in proper relation to God.*⁵⁰ They are the first people in what was to become a covenant genealogy, the history of which is then sketched from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to the people of Israel who were being called to be God's partners by this latest edition of the covenant, the covenant with Moses. So whereas Genesis 1 says that the entire cosmos was called into being by God, the message of chapter 2 is that God began the process which ended in his establishing covenants with humans by which they (and the cosmos) would be redeemed. Canonically speaking, chapter 2 onward was to function within the religious life of the people of Israel by connecting them to both a pre-covenantal and a covenantal-redemptive history that had begun thousands of years before them, by making them the religious descendants of those earlier covenant peoples and the new inheritors of God's redemptive plan.

Therefore, God's imparting his Spirit of life to Adam is described in language that echoes the original creation of humans: entering into relationship with God is the religious start for the human race that parallels its natural start. It is thus the transformation of the capacity for religious belief that was already in human nature due to their having been created in God's image. That capacity is converted in Genesis 2:7 from its defective condition by bringing it into relation to the true Creator, by whose Spirit death can be overcome and everlasting life attained.⁵¹ The election of Adam and Eve was necessary precisely because their contemporaries (along with the ancestors of those contemporaries) were

not already in right relation to God. I think that the reason this point has been missed by so many Bible commentators is the great influence of Augustine. Augustine took the assertions in chapter 1 about the creation being “good” to include that, from the outset, humans were religiously and ethically upright before God. As a result, many of the commentators who were influenced by him were blinded to what Paul says in Romans 5:13, 14.

Now there are, in fact, powerful objections to Augustine’s view in addition to the fact that Paul contradicts it. The first is that once the point is established that the original creation story is focused on conveying an order of purpose expressed as a time sequence, the most natural reading would be to understand the word “good” as also having a teleological meaning. In that case, it is equivalent in meaning to “accomplished God’s purposes.” The account speaks in such a way as to convey that no competing powers prevented God from accomplishing his purposes, nor were there any limitations to his accomplishing them owing to the materials he had to work with. Rather, everything turned out exactly as he had intended. In that sense, it is repeatedly declared to be “good” and the whole of it “very good” when he had finished. Notice that this is a Jewish idea of “good” as distinguished from a Greek idea. The Platonistic notion is that something is good if it conforms to an eternal and uncreated absolute standard. It is therefore a “perfection”: the maximal instance of a property that makes something better to have it than not.⁵² The Jewish idea is that something is good if it is complete and approved by God.⁵³

A second objection is derived from our knowledge of what the world was like when it was first brought into existence by God. It was, for many millions of years, a violent place filled with events that, from the human point of view, could only be described as the most appalling natural disasters. And once it became inhabited by living creatures it was, in Tennyson’s immortal phrase, “red in tooth and claw.” Clearly, that is what God had intended or it would not have been what happened.⁵⁴ But it is not anything that we would be inclined to call “good,” if that term is taken to mean “ideal” or even if it only means “user-friendly to humans.” Still less was it anything that would induce us to think of it as filled with moral goodness and religious rectitude. Yet, that is exactly how Augustine took it. Instead of seeing “good” as

synonymous with “having accomplished God’s purposes whatever they were,” he took it to mean that each thing created was brought into existence in a condition as close as possible to the ideal (perfect “form”) for that type of thing. Thus, once again we see him as guilty of IUI (interpreting under the influence). That is to say, interpreting under the influence of a doctrine of God that identified God with Platonic perfections. Since he takes it that God is the being with all and only perfections, he further infers that whatever God created was as close to perfection as a creature can be, a (nearly) ideal example of its type. It is that set of assumptions that guided his misunderstanding of the term “good,” and led to the conclusion that humans must have first appeared in the world with a nature that was religiously righteous and ethically blameless in relation to God—which is *precisely what Paul denies in Romans 5*.

A possible objection to the interpretation that I am proposing is that it requires not only that there were humans who believed in false gods prior to Adam and Eve, but also that death was a fact prior to their fall from grace. The objection is that such a view of death seems to be contradicted by what was already quoted: “through one man sin entered the world and death through sin so that death passed upon all humans, for all have sinned ...” (Rom. 5:12). Does that not sound as though there had been no death prior to Adam?

First, let’s be clear that in speaking of death in Romans 5, Paul has in mind only *human* death. He makes that explicit when he says “so death continued to rule *from Adam to Moses* even over those who had not sinned the way Adam did” (v. 14). So this has nothing to do with an allegedly idyllic time during which no animals or plants died, and to suppose that it does is, once again, to read the account as natural history rather than as redemptive history. (Indeed, had there been no such thing as death prior to Adam, he could not have understood the threat of death as the punishment for disobedience.) Genesis surely does describe Eden as a unique place: it was not like the rest of the world with respect to predation and death. Eden was special because it was the “garden of God,” a place in which humans were under God’s all-encompassing protection. Rather than telling us of a *time* when there were no predators or weeds, Genesis tells us of a *place* where humans were shielded from such things; shielded in a specific, limited environment of special protection.⁵⁵

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Second, what should control our reading of this passage is what is paramount from a redemptive point of view, namely, that God's gracious word to Adam and Eve was offered as the way for all humans to escape death. This requires us to recognize that what is implicit here is a distinction between death seen as a punishment for sin, and death seen as a natural phenomenon. It means that although death was already a reality prior to God's offer of his Spirit and his promise as the means by which Adam and Eve (and all the rest of humankind) could escape it, it was not yet a *sentence* deserved because of disobedience. Because Adam's failure resulted in his being sentenced to (remain subject to) death, that same sentence is passed upon all humans because they do the same thing. So when Paul says that because of Adam's failure "sin entered the world and death by sin," that has to be an elliptical expression for the *sentence* of death passing upon all humans. Paul himself confirms exactly that in verse 18 when he refers to Adam's transgression as bringing *condemnation* upon all humans. To what were all condemned? The answer can only be to remain subject to death.⁵⁶

Finally, Paul clearly intends that there is to be a strict parallel between what he says about sin and what he says about death. Since he first says that sin entered the world with Adam's transgression but then adds that sin was already in the world, the same must be taken to be true of death. Prior to the Fall, belief in false gods was not counted against those who had not received revelation from God, so their death was not a judgment from God. With the initiation of his communion with humans, God invests the natural phenomenon of death with probationary significance: it becomes a curse for disobedience.

That a pre-existing natural phenomenon can be sacramentally invested with religious import and thus signify either a blessing or a curse, is a recurring theme in Genesis. For example, the natural fruit of the tree of knowledge acquired sacramental significance by being the means of Adam and Eve's probation; and the fruit of the tree of life became the sacramental assurance of everlasting life because God had bound himself to it as the means for conveying that promise. Nothing else could explain why Adam and Eve had to be barred from that tree after their disobedience (Gen. 3:22). In neither case are these fruits presented as having intrinsic magical powers, but are instead to be understood as analogous to all the other sacraments the scriptures mention: they are

concrete things or actions to which God has bound himself by promises.

The same point also holds true for the reference to weeds in the curse put on the earth, and the increase of childbirth pain in the curse put upon Eve. The implication is not that there were no such things prior to the Fall (childbirth pain would have had to exist already for it to be "increased"), but that under God's special protection in Eden, they would not have been as onerous. After the fall from grace, they become reminders of the religious unfaithfulness that has left humans unprotected from them. Thus it is the earth of *Eden* that is then cursed, because it was what had been previously protected. The same can be said of the curse put upon work (again, work is not the curse, work *is* cursed). Work is natural to humans and, absent sin, is one of the great blessings of life as well as a necessity. But now work, too, will come under the curse for disobedience; it will be part of the struggle for life that humans will lose, and they will "return to the earth" as a just sentence. Similarly, after the flood of Noah, the natural phenomenon of a rainbow was made to be a sacrament of God's covenantal promise that he would never again destroy all the disobedient by a great flood. Paul therefore speaks of death as the punishment for disobedience to God precisely because unending life was the promised reward for obedience to God. In this way, the religious significance of the account remains intact without requiring the utterly implausible hypothesis that there was no such thing as death prior to the Fall. Death as a natural phenomenon surely already existed within the plant and animal biospheres prior to humans, and it seems abundantly clear that Paul did not think the pre-Adamite people he was referring to were still alive when he wrote.

Throughout this discussion, I have been accepting the strong implication both in Genesis and Romans that had Adam and Eve come through their probation successfully, their success would have somehow been passed to all humans. Had they been obedient to God, death would not have become a sentence they deserved, and the entire human race would have escaped death by being brought into proper relation to God.⁵⁷ But because of Adam's failure, humans were left in their mortal condition and "death continued to rule ... even over those who had not sinned the way Adam did." The parallel to this is, of course, that Christ succeeded in precisely the way

Adam had failed: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).⁵⁸

This is a momentous shift in understanding the role of Adam and Eve in salvation history. So, if this one line in Romans 5:13 were the only place where the New Testament referred to humans prior to Adam and Eve, we might well hesitate to overturn the traditional Augustinian view. But it is not the only place Paul refers to people whom God did not hold accountable for their sin because they lived before God revealed his law. Speaking to the Zeus worshippers at Lystra, Paul says of God that he "in the generations past allowed all the nations to go their own way" (Acts 14:16), and in his speech before the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens, he again refers to an era in which the worship of false gods was not held against humans, saying that "the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now declares to all humans everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Clearly these remarks are not about Paul's pagan contemporaries, since he did not view them as ones whose ignorance God had been overlooking. In his view, his hearers were not immune from having their sin imputed to them, but rather were being called upon to repent of their false gods as well as their evil deeds. The only people he ever describes as not held guilty for their sin are Adam's contemporaries and ancestors.

Summary Thus Far

With this guidance from the New Testament, we are now confirmed in distinguishing the general creation account in the first chapter of Genesis from the focus on the probation of humans and the beginnings of their redemption in the second chapter. This difference is easy to miss from Genesis alone,⁵⁹ so it is even more significant that (at least some of) the rabbinical tradition did not miss it. From the standpoint of the New Testament, then, the story of the earliest contact God made with humans can be paraphrased as follows:

At some point in human history, God initiated a loving relationship with two individuals he elected to live in communion with him. He set aside a garden of special protection as the setting for his revelation to them of his gracious life-giving word, and breathed into Adam his Spirit of Life thus binding Adam to himself in love. God's breath

(gracious word) and Spirit are both conveyed to Adam in this act of communion. The parallels and puns that abound here are deliberate. Just as God's Spirit/breath hovered over the newly existent universe and gave order to it by his breath/word/speech in Genesis 1, so his same breath/word/command is that which gives Adam the promise of never-ending life in the sense of providing a way of escape from the natural phenomenon of death that pervaded the world.

This makes the saying of Moses, which Jesus repeated in his (successful!) contest with Satan, literally true: humans do not live by bread alone but by the word (breath, Spirit) of God. For sure, we depend on sunlight, food, water, and shelter to live. These, however, are all penultimate conditions, as they too depend on God. The promise of God's redemptive covenant is that as long as humans stand in proper relation to God, God will preserve their lives. But, as Genesis tells us, the first humans to receive this promise failed to love and obey God. The human race was therefore not only left in its condition of sin so that death prevailed, but it was now also under the judgment of deserving that fate. Yet, Paul goes on, in time all of that was overturned by the new Adam, Jesus Christ: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

Only this understanding makes sense of Paul's view that Adam truly represents us all. Adam did what each one of us would have done in his place, *and this is shown by the fact that we all, in fact, do the exact same thing every day.* He committed the "original sin" by being the first to disobey God's word (law), God's gracious offer of communal-love. Moreover, he fell from grace for the same reason we do, namely, out of a failure to love God. Since we all recommit that same sin, we all merit that same judgment. It is this point that is so perfectly captured by the prayer of confession in *The Book of Common Prayer*: "We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves."⁶⁰ Thus we share Adam's natural inclination not to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. Every one of us has the same innately sinful disposition of heart by which we too trespass against those two great commandments: this is the same as sharing Adam's nature.

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Guided thus by Paul, I find that this reading of the Genesis story leaves the major traditional Christian doctrines intact—although with a new slant on their understanding. The new slant does not, however, require any change in the grand arc of the biblical narrative. That arc still remains: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Resurrection. The difference is that Adam and Eve’s fall from grace is not a fall from a sinless state and so is not also an account of the origin of sin because, as Paul puts it, “sin was already in the world.” Rather, it is a fall from the grace of God offered in his first relationship to humans who were already sinful in the sense of having false gods.⁶¹ Moreover, the failure of these first receivers of God’s grace and love to be faithful to him is still maintained by this interpretation as explaining the need for the other redemptive covenants God instituted with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. It also explains why those later covenants were aimed at restoring humans to their lost fellowship with God and thus to the lost promise of everlasting life. The requirements of those later covenants also went unfulfilled, however, until their actual fulfillment by Jesus the Messiah, the righteous Israelite, who fulfilled Israel’s covenantal mission and thereby crushed the head of Satan the serpent (Gen. 3:16, Rev. 12:9).

Despite its rejection of parts of Augustine’s interpretation, the view just presented retains all the rest of the traditional understanding of the relation between Adam and Christ. Adam failed his probation as the first human who was given the opportunity to secure an escape from death for all people. He failed by succumbing to the temptation to disobey God. Christ faced the same tempter but emerged triumphant (Matt. 4:1–11). So Adam is still to be seen as the first religious head of the human race, while Christ is the “second Adam” who succeeded where the first Adam had failed. Christ is thus the new religious head of the race because his sinless obedience fulfilled God’s covenant and his sacrificial death took the punishment deserved by the rest of humanity. By so doing, he opened the way of escape from death for all people. Moreover, just as Christ’s headship of humanity does not depend on anyone being his descendant, neither should Adam’s (failed) headship be seen as dependent on his being the ancestor of all other humans. Once again, no doctrine actually derived from scripture is lost by accepting this reading of Genesis.

Noah’s Flood

The great influence of the encyclopedic assumption and its corollaries is also at work in the way the flood story has been understood.⁶² This is especially obvious in the King James Version of the Bible, whose translators rendered several Hebrew terms so as to encourage the impression that the scope of the flood had global dimensions. They did this in opposition to Calvin’s sage advice, quoted earlier, which would have us understand Genesis’s reference to “all the earth” as all the land that those who recorded the flood could see, and likewise for the statement that the water covered the highest “mountains.” Once again, that would mean the highest mountains the author(s) could observe (not the Himalayas!). What is reflected here is the way the translators were under the spell of the assumption that covenantal events be understood as having the greatest possible scope. Without that assumption, the text tells us only that the flood covered all the land and the highest mountains the author(s) could see (in the foothills) of Ararat. In short, rather than taking the language here in the most exaggerated sense possible, the text should be seen as commonsense talk which amounts to saying, “This was just the worst flood ever!”⁶³

The assumption that miracles may be freely postulated is also at work here, and has led some fundamentalists to propose that the story records a flood that extended over the entire planet and covered the highest mountains on planet Earth. The subsequent disappearance of all that water is then made to be a miracle.⁶⁴ The same thing happens with the account of the farmer, Noah, saving his livestock. Instead of understanding this to mean that what went into his ark were all the animals he would need to restart his farm (“all the animals on the (his) land”), we are given the absurd interpretation that he rescued *every animal on the planet!* But if you read the account without the encyclopedic assumption and its subordinates, and if you substitute “land” wherever the translation has “earth” (they are the same word in Hebrew), it will leave you with a very different impression from that conveyed by translators in the grip of the encyclopedic assumption.⁶⁵

To be fair, we need to acknowledge that an additional factor in what led the translators to favor expansive translations was the stated purpose of the flood: it was to be God’s judgment upon sin. They assumed that to do that, the flood would have to have covered

the entire planet in order to wipe out all humans. But that supposition was based upon their having missed the meaning of the expression “the breath of life” in Genesis 2. They misunderstood it to refer to the air a living human breathes – to metabolic respiration – rather than to the redemptive indwelling of the Spirit of God. Thus they mistakenly assumed that the entire human race was being judged by the flood, rather than its being a judgment *only upon the people who had received God’s word and then abandoned it for false gods.*

This interpretation also makes better sense of the way Genesis specifies the cause of that fall away from God as inter-marriage with unbelievers.⁶⁶ It says that the apostasy from revealed truth came about because the “sons of God” (those who knew God’s word) married the “daughters of men” who were from people who worshipped false gods. That this is the right interpretation is established by the way the text describes the objects of God’s anger: “all in whose nostrils was the breath of the Spirit of life” (Gen. 7:22). Notice that not only is the term “*neshamah*” used here in the same way as it was in Genesis 2:7, but the expression is deliberately phrased in the same way: the breath of life is said to be “in the nostrils” of those with whom God is angry.⁶⁷ Since the expression is intended to have the same sense as it did in Genesis 2:7, it does not refer to everyone living but to *those humans who had received the Spirit (life-giving breath and word) of God but who had become faithless and disobedient to his covenant by reverting to the worship of false gods.*⁶⁸

This is not to suggest that animals did not also die on “all the (Noah’s) land”; Genesis 7:21–23 makes clear that they did. Nor am I suggesting that no one outside those involved in the apostasy could have drowned as collateral damage (we simply do not know). But the point of the flood was to begin a new covenant people, a line that would make possible another start for the entire human race to acquire the right relation to God. The death of animals is incidental in the story, and is mentioned only to explain why they also had to be taken into the ark. So when Genesis 7:15 refers to those who went into the ark “by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life,” it is not referring to the animals (since not all of them went in by twos) but has as its antecedent the subject of the sentence in v. 13, namely, Noah and his sons and their wives. Likewise when v. 22 reports that “all in whom was the breath of life died,” that refers back

to the last subject mentioned, namely, “mankind” in v. 21; it means all of humankind who knew of God’s covenant but were unfaithful to it.⁶⁹

What God is depicted as dealing with here is the fact that except for Noah and his family, all those who knew of his covenant had become devoted to false gods. *God’s judgment on them is that they will now lose their lives since they were the ones to whom it had been revealed that their lives depended upon maintaining a proper relationship with him.* It is also the reason why after warning Noah of the impending flood as punishment (Gen. 6:17–18), God immediately speaks of establishing his covenant with him. Noah is to be the next Adam. It is from Noah’s descendants, specifically from Shem, that the new line of covenantal people is to be established (Gen. 9:26–27). Therefore from that point on, Genesis traces that covenant line from Shem to one particular S(h)emite, Abraham, and from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, and then to Moses. As such, it is a covenant-genealogy constructed so as to be parallel to the genealogies of the king lists that were so important in ancient Mesopotamia.⁷⁰

Conclusions

1. By reading Genesis as canon, and guided by the principles of religious focus, ancient common sense, and the light of the New Testament’s teaching, nothing is lost of Christian theology that was truly biblically based to begin with. What is completely lost, however, is the unwarranted program of trying to read Genesis as though it were either a good or a bad scientific account of the origins of the universe or humans. Also lost is the hermeneutical program that assumes Genesis needs to be harmonized with the sciences that investigate those origins.

This position is not, however, a version of the NOMA view of the *general* relation between religion and science – the view for which Stephen J. Gould was famous.⁷¹ Genesis’s history of redemption may not overlap with the sciences but from that fact it does not follow that no religious belief whatever impinges on the sciences in any way. I hold that there is a point of convergence between religion and science at the deeper level of the way divinity beliefs set limits for theories and guide the interpretation of their postulates rather than supplying their postulates. (I explained this in some detail in my article in the

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March 2006 edition of this journal titled “Prospects for Theistic Science.”)

2. It is understandable why so many thinkers in the early history of modern science found it tempting to look in scripture for hints concerning information to which they had no access: the early stages of the cosmos, the origin of life forms, the age of the earth, the origin of humans, and so on. Many theologians – and founders of modern science – looked for hints about such information in scripture, since that information appeared impossible to get any other way. But understandable as their wishful thinking may have been, it never was the right way to deal with Genesis. It was wrong because it overlooked the interpretive significance of its being part of the covenant with Moses. It lost sight of the canonical purpose for which it had been revealed to humans: to make it possible for humans to lead their lives in faithfulness to God, not to satisfy their curiosity about the cosmos.

In fact, a similar failing is still true of many readers who now come to Genesis long after the rise of modern science has discovered much of the information that was once thought to be forever inaccessible. It is just because of the success of those sciences, that as soon as we read that God “created the heavens and the earth,” our minds almost irresistibly shift gears to the discoveries of cosmology, astronomy, physics, and biology. This can encourage seeing Genesis as though it is either in accord with those sciences or has a different *scientific* account, whereas both those options are false.

3. Finally, please notice that the position defended here is based solely on a strict reading of the text of Genesis as canon, upon the way an important rabbinical tradition understood it, and upon the way Paul speaks of it in Romans 5. It neither assumes in advance any particular theory about the text or its editors, nor is it driven by the discoveries and theories of the natural sciences.

4. Therefore, it is high time Christians buried the encyclopedic assumption and its subordinates once and for all. Not just because they give aid and comfort to naturalists, but because they are false to the text, the language, the stylistic conventions, the structure, and – most of all – the canonical purpose of Genesis. ☆

Acknowledgment

Finally, I want to thank Marvin Wilson, Professor of Biblical Studies at Gordon College, for checking my renderings of the Hebrew text.

Notes

¹Richard Dawkins, for example. In the debate between Dawkins and Francis Collins sponsored by *TIME* magazine, Dawkins asserted that there is contradiction between Genesis and science:

TIME: “Professor Dawkins, you think Darwin’s theory of evolution does more than simply contradict the Genesis story.”

DAWKINS: “Yes ...”

See Dan Cray, “God vs. Science, Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins interviewed by D. Cray,” *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science*, 2006, <http://inters.org/Dawkins-Collins-Cray-Science>.

In another interview for Revelation TV, <http://creation.com/media-search?q=Richard%20Dawkins>, Dawkins is even clearer. In response to Howard Condon’s question, Dawkins says, “Evangelicals have it right when they see Christianity as incompatible with evolution.”

²The report of the Pew Research Center for Religion in Public Life (Feb. 3, 2014) lists Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Methodist, Lutheran, and United Church of Christ as denominations affirming that there is no difficulty for theology in accepting the findings of modern science, including evolutionary biology. The Southern Baptist Convention and Missouri Synod Lutherans were the only major Christian denominations to say that there is genuine conflict between theology and evolutionary theory.

³This is not to suggest that Moses himself wrote all of Genesis as we now have it, though there is an important tradition ascribing a good bit of it to him. In *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 2011), Brevard S. Childs says:

The claim of Mosaic authorship ... was obviously not a historical judgment in the modern sense, but a measuring of the truth of a growing corpus of law by the tradition long experienced as authoritative ... The claim of Mosaic authorship therefore functioned theologically ... to establish the continuity of faith of successive generations with that once delivered to Moses at Sinai ... When correctly interpreted, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is an important theological affirmation which is part of the canonical witness. (pp. 134–35)

Think also of Jesus’s endorsement of this point: “the scribes and the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses; therefore do all that they tell you ...” (Matt. 23:2–3).

⁴In *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2003), C. Van Til says,

The Bible is thought of [by us] to be authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything ... either directly or by implication ... It gives us a philosophy of history ... It is only if you reject the Bible as the word of God that you can separate the so-called religious and moral instruction of the Bible from what it says about the physical universe. (pp. 19–20)

⁵Henry Morris, *History of Modern Creationism* (San Diego, CA: Master Books, 1984), 96. I find it puzzling and amazing that of all the things someone might want God to tell

us, Morris wants to know the age of the planet. Surely the causes and cures for diseases would rank ahead of that!

⁶See Kenneth Bailey, "The Manger and the Inn," *Theological Review of the Near East School of Theology* 2, no. 2 (Nov. 1979), reproduced at <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/11/08/The-Manger-and-the-Inn.aspx#Article>.

⁷Please notice that this point does not deny that Christians should reject theories that are prima facie and irredeemably inconsistent with teachings derived from scripture, for example, the hypothesis that humans are not morally responsible for what they do. There surely are theories that are directly ruled out by biblical teaching, even if none are directly ruled in.

⁸This is, in fact, the official Roman Catholic position given in "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965," http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html:

Therefore since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully, and without error the truth that God wanted put into sacred writings (5) for the sake of salvation. (chapter 3, section 11, emphasis mine)

⁹It is patently apparent that the scriptures we have are anything but inerrant, and many Bible commentators have acknowledged that fact. An example of a commentator acknowledging discrepancies concerning the order of events in the life of Christ, is Calvin: "It is well known that the Evangelists were not sufficiently careful with their time sequences nor even bothered with the details of what was done or said" (*Commentary* on Luke 8:19 and Dan. 7:12). This was, he said, because the Bible's writers had not always written "in a such a way as to preserve the exact order of events, but rather to bring everything together so as to place before us a kind of mirror or screen on which the most useful things ... could be known" (*Commentary* on Matt. 4:5).

The reply that it is the original documents that were inerrant rather than the copies we possess, only makes things worse. It requires postulating copy errors where there is no evidence for them, and entails that the only texts we will ever have (the imperfect copies) are not really God's word since they are not inerrant.

¹⁰Needless to say, the rules that follow are "rules of thumb" and are not intended to solve more technical hermeneutical issues.

¹¹"The Bible never refers to plants as living. They may 'grow,' or 'flourish,' but they do not live. Neither do they die ... since they are not 'alive' [because] 'the life of the flesh is in the blood.'" John Morris, "Are Plants Alive?," Institute for Creation Research, <http://www.icr.org/article/are-plants-alive>, the last paragraph.

¹²This issue overlaps with what was at stake in the conflict between Cardinal Bellarmine and Galileo. The Cardinal said an inerrantist view of scripture was required because of "who it is that is speaking" (God). See M. Finocchiaro, *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 67–69. In opposition to that, Galileo replied, "The Bible tells us how to go to heaven and not how the heavens go" – virtually the same position Calvin had already taken (see the next note).

¹³Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, 1.79–80. In commenting on Genesis 1:16, Calvin says:

Moses makes two great luminaries; but astronomers prove ... that Saturn is greater than the moon. Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which ... all ordinary persons ... are able to understand ... Moses, therefore ... adapts his discourse to common usage.

Despite these insightful remarks, Calvin and other reformers remained largely under Augustine's influence and so read much of the account as natural history.

¹⁴Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 75–77.

¹⁵This is not to suggest that no Christian thinker has ever denied that God created – and therefore transcends – time, although the vast majority of theologians have affirmed it. I have critiqued one such denial, Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). My reply, "Is God Eternal?" is in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Adolfo García de la Sienra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 273–300.

¹⁶Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's & The Sabbath* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), explains that "... there was no single word to describe what is called in Indogermanic languages 'world' or 'universe' ... When biblical writers intended to refer to all creation, they spoke of 'heaven and earth' or 'earth and heaven'" (p. 111).

¹⁷These same points were made by St. Basil around AD 370 in his *Hexameron*. Basil points out that God could not have spoken as humans do, and that God's creating was actually outside time (J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992], 117, 252). Of course, once God had brought time, space, and matter into existence and had brought about creatures capable of using and understanding speech, he could literally speak to them – as he did to Adam and Eve, Abraham, and Moses. Such speech could have been made in a number of ways: by his using an angel to speak for him (Exod. 3:2, 4), or by directly causing speech sounds to be heard (Exod. 20:22). He could also communicate by illocutionary acts, by deputizing humans to speak for him, and more. See N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁸Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees*; and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, SJ (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), says in AD 393,

How could there be days before there was time, if time began with the course of the lights, which scripture says were made on the fourth day? Or was this arrangement set forth according to what human frailty is used to and by the law of conveying exalted things to the humble in a humble fashion? (p. 149)

¹⁹There appear to be some important misunderstandings on the part of some writers over the relation between the literal meaning of a term and its being taken metaphorically. For a term to function as a metaphor, we must both start with and retain its literal meaning, adding to it a metaphorical use. If I call a wheat field a "sea of wheat," unless "sea" retains its literal meaning of "a large expanse of water," its ability to function as a metaphor would be lost. So, too, unless the term "day" continued to mean an ordinary workday, it could not serve as a metaphor for the

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creative acts of God that were outside time altogether. My point is that insisting on the literal meaning of a term does *nothing* to show it is not also used metaphorically.

²⁰As far as I know, the correspondence between the two groups of three days was first elucidated in English by N. H. Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957). Ridderbos notes, however, that viewing the days as some sort of literary framework is a view that has precedent in Philo of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine. See also the discussion of it by M. Kline, "The Framework View," in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. D. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), 217–304.

²¹Nahum M. Sarna in *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1966) says,

The religion of Israel is essentially non-mythological, there being no suggestion of any theo-biography. [The Genesis narrative] has no notion of the birth of God and no biography of God. It does not even begin with a statement about the existence of God ... To the Bible the existence of God is as self-evident as life itself ... For the first time in history, therefore, we have a totally new conception of cosmogony and one, strangely enough, that in its literary form has not hesitated to make use of some of the symbols of its ideologically incompatible predecessor." (pp. 9, 10, 13)

See also the comments of Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 60–61.

²²In *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), John Walton contends that Genesis 1 is not a creation story at all but depicts an inauguration ceremony by which the already existing cosmos becomes God's temple (pp. 87–88). He may well be right about the temple imagery; Meredith Kline had suggested that interpretation in *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 36–37, first published in 1980. But a number of Old Testament writers certainly seem to take Genesis 1 as a creation account: Ps. 33:6; Proverbs 8; Isa. 42:5; Jer. 10:12, for example. The same is true of New Testament writers: John 1:3; Rom. 4:17; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16–17. In the view of W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 52–59, and of G. Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1963), what is depicted is God giving laws for his kingdom. Interestingly, Kline takes the setting of Genesis 1 to be both temple and kingdom (*Images of the Spirit*, 114, n. 56).

²³In "The Seven Days of Creation," *Calvin Theological Journal* 46 (2011): 101–27, James Skillen argues that this is the way to understand all seven of the days. Each new day is layered upon the previous days because each is to be understood by the content it introduces. The days of creation are therefore to be seen as added to one another as we do when we speak of the day of the railroad, the day of the airplane, and the day of the computer.

²⁴Compare what 1 Cor. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Jude 1:25 say is "before time of the ages" with what John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; and Rev. 13:8, 17:8 say is "from (or before) the foundation of the world." It is clear that the extension of the two expressions is the same, strongly suggesting that their meaning is too.

²⁵Henri Blocher, in *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984): 56–59, gives a helpful appraisal of the relation of Hebrews 4 to Genesis 1.

²⁶In fact, the term in Genesis usually translated as "dust" of the earth refers to a clod of overturned earth, while Paul makes the metaphor more specific by speaking of a potter working with clay. In doing so, he follows the example of Isaiah 64:8. For the meaning of the expression "dust of the earth," see Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 80–84.

²⁷Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, n.d.), 27–33.

²⁸Peter Enns takes this view in *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 83.

²⁹Although the LXX attaches the "there" to Gilead, thereby supporting my view, it goes against my view when it translates "Adam" as "anthropos": "... they are as a man transgressing a covenant." I disagree with this for the reason that the comparison Hosea is making would then be lost. He would be saying that the faithless of Israel are "like a man transgressing a covenant" when, in fact, they are men who are transgressing the covenant. What would be the point of saying that? But comparing them with the Adam of Genesis 2 would be a poignant criticism.

³⁰Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 145–46.

³¹My view that the "making" stories of Adam and of Eve are intended to convey their nature rather than to give a literal description of the events by which they came into contact with God, has its background in the position of Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*:

No part of Genesis can be called "history" in the narrow, modern usage of the term because of the tangential relationship to objective reality, even though ... historical elements are evidenced throughout ... Conversely, there is no Old Testament myth in exact analogy to ancient Near Eastern mythology. The Genesis material is unique because of an understanding of reality which has subordinated common mythopoetic tradition to a theology of absolute divine sovereignty. (p. 158)

³²For example, Job 14:19, 17:16; Pss. 22:15 and 29, 30:9, 40:25, 103:14, 104:29; Eccles. 3:20, 12:7; Isa. 26:19; and Dan. 12:2.

³³I have argued elsewhere that the core meaning of "divine" across all known religions is the following: the self-existent reality on which all that is not self-existent depends. This is shared by all known religions although their descriptions of the divine reality differ sharply. See Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

³⁴Every answer to the question of the basic nature of humans is tied to the religious issue of what humans ultimately depend on. To put this point in the language of Genesis: every idea of human nature sees humans as "in the image of" whatever its advocates believe to be divine (where "divine" means "the self-existent Origin of all else")—whether or not they are conscious of doing so.

³⁵Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 83.

³⁶Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 145–46. Keep in mind that the original Hebrew text had no verse or chapter divisions at all. My point about where the chapter break should be is confirmed by the way the Jewish Friday evening home liturgy ends the reading at Gen. 2:3 and does not include v. 4. See the *Daily Prayer Book*, ed. Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), 273. The same break also appears in the

text as chanted in the annual and triennial cycles of the recitation of the Torah. See J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino, 1969), 6.

³⁷So, for example, Josh. 11:11, 14 uses *neshamah* for the breath that is naturally in humans. By contrast, Isa. 2:22 uses it where the point of the context is that God's people—who have been given his Spirit and word—will not be exempt from God's judgment if they are "proud and lofty" and have made for themselves "idols of silver and idols of gold."

³⁸Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 22.

³⁹The KJV also puts the expression "breath of life" into Genesis 1:30, but that is pure interpolation as *neshamah* does not occur there at all. Other places where it does occur include Deut. 20:16; Ps. 150:6; Prov. 20:27; Isa. 2:22, 30:33; Dan. 5:23, 10:17; Josh. 10:40, 11:11, 11:14.

⁴⁰Some translations (e.g., the updated New American Standard) start Genesis 2:7 with "Then," but that word is not in the Hebrew text. Moreover, Hebrew verbs have no definite tenses, so the addition of "Then" introduces a specific interpretation rather than translation, an interpretation that deliberately makes this sound like a second creation account.

⁴¹The NAS renders this "life indeed." It is Alfred Marshall who translated it "the real life" in *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1958), 833.

⁴²The KJV also uses the expression "breath of life" in Genesis 1:30, but nothing equivalent to those words (nor *neshamah*) is in the Hebrew text at all.

⁴³The LXX renders verse 4: "The Divine Spirit is that which formed me and the breath of the Almighty that which teaches me." Although this does not take the text to say "I belong to God like you," it still recognizes that the reference in both cases is to the Spirit of God, not to the breath of respiration in a human.

⁴⁴The part of the paraphrase that takes humans to have already been created is supported by the LXX since it translates "formed" in the aorist to indicate an action completed in the past.

⁴⁵It is significant that the LXX renders the Hebrew term for "good" (*tov*) as "*kalos*" in Greek, the word used to wish someone a good day. It does not use "*agathos*" which means good in the sense of virtuous, but Augustine nevertheless took it to mean that Adam and Eve were originally wholly virtuous.

⁴⁶My point here is contradicted by some translations of Acts 7:26. For example, the New American Standard, the NIV, the Contemporary English Version, and the Confraternity all have "He [God] made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth ..." But the word "man" is not in the Greek text. It is an interpretive insertion by translators that makes it sound as though Paul explicitly said that all humans descended from one person. Older translations, such as the KJV, that inserted "blood" instead of "man" seem to me to have been on the right track. In context, Paul is speaking of what humans have in common as creatures of God. Therefore, if "blood" is used in the sense of "nature," it should be the preferred reading. Similarly, Jesus's comment when asked about divorce (Matt. 19:8) could seem to go against my point here. Jesus says that marriage was between one man and one woman "from the beginning." But again, in context, he is referring to what God's law was for the first

people to be in proper relation to God, not for the first of all humans. And he was contrasting how God's law for them differed from the law as given to Moses. The "beginning," therefore, refers to the start of God revealing his law to his people, not the beginning of the cosmos or of the human race.

⁴⁷That it was Satan who was speaking through an animal is confirmed by Rev. 20:2.

⁴⁸Altars have been discovered which have been dated as 14,000 years old (*Science News* 120, no. 23 [Dec. 5, 1981]: 357), and more recently a temple has been discovered at Gobekli Tepi in southern Turkey that is now dated as at least 11,600 years old (*National Geographic* [June 2011]).

⁴⁹That it was religious rather than moral wrong-doing that Paul had in mind is shown by the way he makes the same point in Acts 17:3 and Rom. 1:18–25 and specifically states that he is speaking of the worship of false gods. Keep in mind here that Paul never uses "law" to mean anything other than revelation from God. It never has the sense of "natural law" that was prominent in Greek or Roman stoicism. See J. D. G. Dunn, *Commentary on Romans* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988).

⁵⁰The Romans 5 reference to sin, and therefore to other humans before and contemporary with Adam, was explained as a reference to angels by Augustine, and by others under his influence (e.g., Martin Luther and Matthew Henry). This, however, is wildly implausible since it would require that (1) angels believed in false gods despite being in the presence of (even though in rebellion against) the true God, that (2) their false belief was for a time overlooked because it preceded God's revelation to them, and that (3) they now remain subject to death owing to Adam's probationary failure—all patent absurdities. That it is actually a reference to humans other than Adam and Eve was noticed by Isaac Peyrere in *Men Before Adam* (London: 1656), and in the nineteenth century by Van Amringe who also concluded that Adam was the first in a line of believers who acquired the proper relation to God, rather than that he was the first human, in *An Investigation of the Theories of the Natural History of Man by Laurence, Prichard, and Others: Founded upon Animal Analogies: and an Outline of a New Natural History of Man: Founded upon History, Anatomy, Physiology and Human Analogies* (New York: Baker & Scribner, 1848), 52–62. More recently the same position was held by John Stott in *Understanding the Bible* (Sidney, Australia: Scripture Union Publishing, 1984), 49. For a fuller treatment of this point, see Richard James Fischer, *Historical Genesis: From Adam to Abraham* (New York: University Press of America, 2008).

⁵¹In his splendid devotional work *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Soloveitchik cites the Talmud (*Berakot*, 61a and *Ketuvoth*, 8a) to the effect that the Fall of Adam was not the origin of sin, but that from their creation humans had an "evil intent" as well as a "good intent" (pp. 10–11).

⁵²For example, the highest possible good, power, and knowledge would all be perfections. Plantinga calls them "great-making" properties. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 98.

⁵³This is not to suggest that God's approval of kindness and condemnation of murder are arbitrary; rather, it is that nothing is good *merely* because God says so. But then neither are good actions good because they instantiate self-existent values over which God has no control. Rather, God's commands *reveal* the norms of love and jus-

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tice that he had already called into existence and built into creation.

⁵⁴Ps. 104:21: "The young lions roar after their prey and seek their food from God."

⁵⁵In confirmation of this understanding, compare what has just been pointed out about Eden with what is said later to Abraham about the "Promised Land" being a place of God's special protection. Then recall the language used still later by Joshua in his report to the elders of Israel who were afraid to attack the formidable enemies who stood between them and that land: "They have *lost their protection* but the Lord is with us" (Num. 14:9). Moreover, the angel who drove Adam and Eve from the first place of special protection after their disobedience, then appears to Joshua in order to lead the people into the new place of special protection, the new Eden of the Promised Land (Josh. 5:13–15). Whereas in the original Eden faithfulness would have extricated humans even from death, in the Promised Land it would guarantee that God's people would "dwell secure" and "prosper." The New Testament continues this same line of thought when it speaks of the New Jerusalem, the final Kingdom of God, as the restoration of Eden because the tree of life will be there (Rev. 22:2). The idea of a place of God's special protection is a theme running all through redemptive history.

⁵⁶Thomas Aquinas makes a similar point: "Death is natural considering our material status, but penal considering how we lost the divine endowment of deathlessness" (*Summa Theologicae*, 2a-2ae. clxiv. I, ad 1). On my view, I would replace "endowment" with "redemptive gift."

⁵⁷The biblical view that humans are not naturally immortal and that everlasting life is a gift from God, was recognized by thinkers before Augustine, such as Theophilus of Antioch (d. 185). See his *Ad Autolykus* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 91. After Augustine, this idea tends to be replaced by the platonic idea of an immortal soul.

⁵⁸In his "Adam and Eve: An Evangelical Impasse?—A Review Essay" (*Christian Scholar's Review* 45, no. 2 [2016]: 179), Hans Madueme reports and rejects the interpretation of N. T. Wright that Adam and Eve were not the first humans or the ancestors of all humans, but were the first to be elected for a special relationship to God. He quotes Wright this way: "What Genesis is telling us is that God chose one pair from the rest of early hominids for a special, strange, and demanding vocation." Madueme then dismisses Wright's proposal as "implausible" for the reason that "there is no biblical evidence of Adam failing in his vocation on behalf of co- and pre-Adamites." But we have now seen why Adam's fall from grace was exactly the failure by which he left his fellow humans subject to evil and death. My position in this article therefore agrees with Wright except that I see no need to suppose Adam and Eve were "hominids" or that they lived any more than (roughly) 10,000+ years ago.

⁵⁹I think this explains why many intertestamental Jewish commentators as well as most early Christian commentators took Adam and Eve to be the first humans and the ancestors of all humans.

⁶⁰This has been part of the general confession in *The Book of Common Prayer* since the 1552 edition.

⁶¹It is significant that Adam's probationary failure is not seen as the origin of sin by either Jewish theology or Eastern Orthodox Christianity. See Joseph Telushkin,

Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991), 27–29. On Orthodox theology, see Alison Bennett, "Original and Ancestral Sin: A Brief Comparison" in the online journal *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy* (Aug. 16, 2013). The idea that by Adam's fall all humans became sinful by inheriting the guilt of his failure, is Augustine's view—a view he largely based on Romans 5:12. But the Latin translation of that text which Augustine used was faulty! It read "... death spread to all men in whom (Adam) all men sinned." But the Greek says: "... death spread to all men *because* all sinned." See Paul Blowers's entry "Original Sin," in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd edition, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publications, 1997), 839–40.

⁶²Since there is not the space to introduce the great life spans ascribed to the Patriarchs in early Genesis as a separate topic, I will simply mention here that many fundamentalists appeal to these life spans to bolster their contention that the laws of nature were radically different at the time of the events of early Genesis. This is a faulty inference as it is well documented that there was a widespread custom of honoring important people in ancient Mesopotamia by assigning them an age that was symbolic of their character or accomplishments rather than reporting their actual chronological age. For example, one such inscription in the list of Sumerian kings reports that King Eridu Alulim reigned for 28,800 years. See Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 71. See Carol Hill's excellent article, "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis," in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55, no. 4 (2003): 239–51, and Child's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 152–53.

⁶³Of course, the Hebrew text may also contain exaggeration as is common in ordinary language that describes a disaster. Here again Calvin offers a useful observation about such language: "... for we know that Moses and the prophets ordinarily speak in a popular style suited to the lowest apprehension. It would be absurd, then, to reduce what they say to the rules of [science]." See *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 305.

⁶⁴Other fundamentalists postulate natural causes rather than miracles to explain enough water to cover the planet, as well as natural causes for its subsequent disappearance. But these hypotheses are so outrageous and at odds with all geological evidence, as to be preposterous. For example, *The Hovind Theory* (Pensacola, FL: Creation Science Evangelism, 2002), DVD.

⁶⁵For clear evidence that there has never been a flood that covered the entire planet, see Paul Seely, "The GISP2 Ice Core: Ultimate Proof That Noah's Flood Was Not Global," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55, no. 4 (2003): 252–60. Seely reports that the yearly ice layers in a Greenland glacier have been counted to 110,000 layers and show no flood layer.

⁶⁶This is a recurring theme in the Old Testament (Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12, 13; Ezek. 9:1-4; and Neh. 13:23–25), and is repeated in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:14).

⁶⁷Rom. 1:18–32 reads like a Midrash on Gen. 2:4–9:29, since Paul specifies that the people he is speaking of in Romans are "those who hold the truth in unrighteousness." He is commenting on the apostasy that occurred between Adam and Noah whereby those who had been told the

truth by “God himself” reverted to the worship of the creature “rather than the Creator.”

⁶⁸In the story of Noah, two other words are also used to describe those judged by the flood, so that the objects of God’s judgment are also referred to as those who are a “spirit” or a “life.” These are therefore short-cut ways of referring to those people since Gen. 6:17, 7:15, and 7:22 specify just which spirits or lives were ended or spared. So, for example, the expression “all mankind” in 7:21, should not lead us to think all humans were wiped out, as it is immediately qualified by *neshamah* in v 22: “all in whose nostrils was the breath of the Spirit of life.”

⁶⁹Peter’s comment that the flood destroyed “the world” (2 Peter 3:6) cannot be used to establish a universal flood. The Greek word translated “world” is “cosmos” and cannot be a literal statement of the extent of the flood, as no flood upon Earth could possibly inundate the sun, moon, and stars. Rather the meaning of “world” must be the same as that found in the previous chapter (2:5) where Peter speaks of the flood destroying the “cosmos of the ungodly.”

⁷⁰This is also the way to understand Jesus’s genealogy given in Luke 3. It is a covenant-genealogy that ends by calling Jesus “the son of God,” where that expression draws from Gen. 6:2 but—in a double entendre—adds to it the gospel’s sense of his sonship. In *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Childs points out that

genealogy in its various forms emerges as an independent and highly significant literary form of antiquity. It performed an important function of legitimating royal dynasties ... Nevertheless, the major function of the genealogy in Genesis seems to differ from its analogue. Genesis pointed out ... the line of the chosen family. This is predominantly a theological function ... which uses the old traditions not primarily for political legitimation but for religious affirmation. (pp. 152–53)

⁷¹The NOMA view holds that religion and science are so different as to be isolated from one another, so that each can be an authority in its own domain but not in the other. Thus there can be no inconsistency between them.

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