



INTRODUCTION

Genesis has long drawn the attention of students of the Scriptures and has held nearly universal esteem within the Church. Despite this esteem, the book's opening chapters have challenged interpreters throughout the ages. Martin Luther once wrote that 'the first chapter is written in the simplest language; yet it contains matters of the utmost importance and very difficult to understand. It was for this reason, as St. Jerome asserts, that among the Hebrews it was forbidden for anyone under thirty to read the chapter or to expound it for others.'¹ While the matters in Genesis 1–3 appear to be written rather simply, varying opinion regarding its interpretation certainly supports Luther's claim.

Over the past several centuries some have argued that the great age of the earth is compatible with Genesis, and others claim that it is only several thousand years old. Some have taught that Genesis fits evolutionary theory and others that it contradicts it. More recently, especially in the Reformed community, debate has swirled around the issue of the length of the days

¹Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, LW, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), p. 3.

²On this debate, see David Hagopian, ed, *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo: Crux Press, 2001); James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow: Canon, 1999); Kenneth L. Gentry and Michael R. Butler, *Yea, Hath God Said?: The Framework Hypothesis/Six-Day Creation Debate* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1-2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Fearn: Mentor, 1997); Joseph A. Pipa,



of creation.² There are many debates and various theologians who represent different schools of thought. Is there a better way to approach the opening chapters of Genesis in spite of the debate? The answer to this question is an unqualified, Yes. The answer comes neither through the length of the days nor in using the canons of science to interpret Genesis. The way through the impasse is to interpret Genesis in the manner presented in the New Testament. More specifically, one must interpret Genesis 1–3 in the light of Christ and eschatology. Therefore, we should first examine current popular approaches to the interpretation of Genesis 1–3 and see their deficiencies in order to see the necessity for a christological and eschatological interpretation.

Popular approaches to Genesis

In the past two centuries debate over Genesis has largely centered upon science, particularly the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin.³ Christians, in one way or another, have sought to use the Scriptures as a bulwark against Darwin's theories regarding the origins of man. Various schools of thought have responded to evolutionary theory by developing different interpretations of Genesis 1–3.

Old Princeton: Warfield and Hodge

One of the best-known responses to evolutionary theory came from the Old School Presbyterianism of Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century. B. B. Warfield believed that evolutionary theory and Genesis 1–3 were in harmony. Concerning John Calvin's doctrine of creation, Warfield writes:

Jr. and David W. Hall, eds, *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Greenville: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999); E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg: P & R, n. d.).

³See Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859; New York: Modern Library, 1998); *idem*, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839; New York: Modern Library, 2001).



INTRODUCTION

It should be scarcely passed without remark that Calvin's doctrine of creation is, if we have understood it aright, for all except the souls of men, an evolutionary one. The 'ingested mass,' including the 'promise and potency' of all that was yet to be, was called into being by the simple *fiat* of God. But all that has come into being since – except the souls of men alone – has arisen as a modification of this original world-stuff by means of the interaction of its intrinsic forces. Not these forces apart from God, of course ... but in the sense that all the modifications of the world-stuff have taken place under the directly upholding and governing hand of God, and find their account ultimately in His will. But they find their account proximately in 'second causes'; and this is not only evolutionism but pure evolutionism.⁴

Warfield believed that God created everything *ex nihilo* by divine fiat, i.e. 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3). After the initial creation by God, everything else, including man's body, developed in an evolutionary fashion.⁵ God started it all and then secondary evolutionary causes took over, excepting God's direct creation of the soul of man. How did Warfield harmonize Scripture with evolutionary theory? He did so in the same manner as his predecessor, Charles Hodge.

Hodge argued that Genesis, when it says that the creation was completed in six days, conflicts with the evidence of geology, which says that the earth is much older. He writes that

⁴B. B. Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Creation,' in *Works*, vol. 5, ed. E. D. Warfield (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), pp. 304-05.

⁵B. B. Warfield, 'Review of James Orr, *God's Image in Man and Its Defacement in the Light of Modern Denials*,' in Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone, eds, *B. B. Warfield: Evolution, Science, and Scripture: Selected Writings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 233; also idem, *PTR* 4 (1906), pp. 455-58.





LAST THINGS FIRST

it is of course admitted that, taking this account by itself, it would be most natural to understand the word ['day'] in its ordinary sense; but if that sense brings the Mosaic account into conflict with facts, and another sense avoids such conflict, then it is obligatory on us to adopt the other. Now it is urged that if the word 'day' be taken in the sense of 'an indefinite period of time,' a sense which it undoubtedly has in other parts of Scripture, there is not only no discrepancy between the Mosaic account of the creation and the assumed facts of geology, but there is a more marvelous coincidence between them.⁶

Hodge's methodology is clear: geology informs his interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis. In this manner Hodge and Warfield harmonize Genesis 1–3 with evolutionary theory. Creation takes place, not in six 24-hour days, but in six undefined periods of time. Though not agreeing at every point, Hugh Ross has most recently employed this type of exegesis of Genesis 1–3.⁷ Others have interacted with Genesis and science much differently than Hodge and Warfield.

Creation science: Henry Morris

If one characterizes the Old Princeton position as accommodating Genesis to science, he may say the inverse regarding Creation science. Creation science adherents accommodate science to their interpretation of Scripture.

Henry Morris lists first among the teachings of Genesis that it tells of the origins of the universe. Morris writes that 'Genesis stands alone in accounting for the actual creation of the basic space-mass-time continuum which constitutes our physical universe'.⁸ With this

⁶Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1889; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 570-71.

⁷See Hugh Ross & Gleason L. Archer, 'The Day-Age View,' in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 123-64.





INTRODUCTION

presupposition and a literalistic hermeneutic in hand, Morris concludes that ‘the only proper way to interpret Genesis 1 is not to “interpret” it at all. That is, we accept the fact that it was meant to say exactly what it says. The “days” are literal days and the events described happened in just the way described.’⁹ Genesis, according to Morris’ interpretation, teaches that God created the cosmos in six 24-hour periods.

What about scientific evidence that suggests the cosmos is much older? This is where theologians accommodate science to their interpretation of Scripture.

One creation science proponent, Douglas Kelly, argues that scientific theory and the Genesis account conflict regarding the age of the universe because scientists consider the speed of light to be an unchanging constant. Scientists know that light travels at approximately 186,000 miles per second and can therefore calculate the time light from the nearest star takes to reach earth. This is how scientists conclude that the cosmos is millions of years old. If the nearest star, other than the sun, is 4.22 light-years away, then the cosmos must be at least this old. The distance to the furthest star, however, is some 18 billion light-years away. Kelly resolves this conflict by arguing that the speed of light is not constant. He states that ‘the speed of light in 1675 was 2.6% higher than today’. In other words, if light traveled 2.6% faster just several hundred years ago, then it must have traveled much faster thousands of years ago. Thus, the cosmos is not as old as most scientists think.¹⁰ Kelly and Morris reject current scientific claims and modify scientific theory to conform to their interpretation of Scripture. Creation

⁸Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific & Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), p. 18.

⁹Morris, *Genesis Record*, p. 54.

¹⁰Kelly, *Creation and Change* (Christian Focus Publications, 1997), pp. 144ff.





LAST THINGS FIRST

science has had a great deal of influence in recent years, even in the Reformed community. What makes this observation interesting is that the creation science movement grows out of theological and hermeneutical presuppositions antithetical to Reformed theology. How does creation science conflict with Reformed theology?

Presuppositions of the two popular approaches

Creation science

Since the advent of the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, several generations of Reformed theologians and ministers have learned to question presuppositions. In this regard Van Til writes,

We ought to find small comfort in the idea that others too, for example, non-Christian scientists, have to make assumptions... We all make assumptions, but we alone do not make false assumptions. The fact that all make assumptions is in itself a mere psychological and formal matter. The question is as to who makes the right assumptions or presuppositions.¹¹

Yet many within the Reformed community accept the conclusions of creation science without investigating its presuppositions. To find the presuppositions of creation science one must examine its history. The founder of the creation science movement was George McCready Price (1870–1963), a Seventh-Day Adventist and self-taught geologist. He was the only individual William Jennings Bryan cited in the Scopes trial as an anti-evolution scientist. The second generation of creation scientists came in the 1960s with the work of Henry Morris and the publication of *The Genesis Flood*, which he wrote with John Whitcomb. Few note, however, that Morris and Whitcomb are dispensationalists.¹² Whitcomb

¹¹Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1972), p. 50.



was a professor of theology at Grace Theological Seminary, a dispensationalist institution. What marks dispensationalism?

The hallmark hermeneutical principle of dispensationalism is strict literalism. Charles Ryrie writes that, 'If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle, and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist.'¹³ Reformed theologians almost universally reject the hermeneutical principle of dispensationalism in eschatology. They reject eschatological conclusions that presuppose literalism – as Ryrie's statement demonstrates, hermeneutical presuppositions drive conclusions.

What is perplexing, however, is that many within the Reformed community will reject dispensational eschatology but embrace its interpretation of creation, or as it is more broadly understood, protology. For example, Presbyterian and Reformed publishes Morris's book on the flood, one of its most popular books; it is in its forty-second printing.¹⁴

One sees evidence of Morris's dispensationalism throughout his commentary on Genesis. Morris holds to a trichotomous view of man, mediate imputation of original sin, and a restored water canopy during the earthly millennial rule of Christ. He argues that the tree of life had life-prolonging properties and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil toxic genetic-altering

¹²Raymond A. Eve and Francis B. Harrold, *The Creationist Movement in Modern America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), pp. 46, 51-52; also Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 72-101, 184-213.

¹³Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (1965; Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p. 51.

¹⁴John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (1961; Phillipsburg: P & R, 1998).




LAST THINGS FIRST

properties, and he defines *mystery* in a literalistic rather than biblical fashion.¹⁵

These positions are typical of dispensational theologians, as they are driven by a literalistic hermeneutic. But why do Reformed theologians accept Morris's interpretation of Genesis 1–3 without questioning his presuppositions? Moreover, many in the Reformed community do not even know his hermeneutical presupposition.

In the introduction to his commentary Morris sets forth his interpretive program. He emphasizes not the intended meaning of the text, but a questionable secondary significance. Morris writes:



The emphasis will be placed primarily on the exposition of the actual events and their historical significance in terms of God's purposes for the world in general, and as principles by which He deals with individuals of all times and places. Typological illustrations will be included where appropriate, but will not constitute the primary emphasis. We wish to stress most of all the real-life truthfulness and significance of this primeval record of man's origin and early history.

It should not pass by unnoticed that Morris gives little thought to typology. What typology does he slight? He ignores Adam as a type of Christ and Eve as a type of the Church.¹⁶ Elsewhere Morris admits the Bible 'is essentially concerned with the first Adam and the second Adam, and the relation between the two'. He nevertheless neglects this central theme of Scripture, indeed of Genesis as well, and treats secondary matters as primary. This methodology leads Morris to write that 'the Bible-believing Christian goes to the Bible for his basic orientation in all departments of truth. The Bible is his textbook of science as well as his guide to spiritual

¹⁵Morris, *Genesis Record*, pp. 61, 75, 87, 88, 102-03, 113.

¹⁶Morris, *Genesis Record*, pp. 31-32.

truth.’ In fact, Morris even says that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9) can be paraphrased as the ‘Tree of Science’.¹⁷ Morris labels anyone ‘neo-orthodox’ who claims that the Bible is theological, not scientific.¹⁸ If one applies a consistently Reformed hermeneutic to the interpretation of Scripture, he must reject Morris’s conclusions. Reformed theology neither embraces the Bible as a textbook of science nor employs an overly literalistic hermeneutic. What is it about the other scientific approach that is problematic?

Old Princeton

In Hodge’s approach to Genesis, there is a clear path of influence – the geology of the day drove Hodge’s exegetical conclusions. This is not a unique observation. Abraham Kuyper criticized Hodge on this very point.¹⁹ What is problematic about Hodge’s and Ross’ approach is that scientific theory changes. What is in vogue in today’s scientific community might soon be on its way out. For example, in 1951 the Roman Catholic Church commended the Big Bang theory and declared that it was in accordance with the Bible. Yet, some scientists now reject the Big Bang theory.²⁰ As Thomas Kuhn argued, scientific paradigms constantly shift, radically reshaping perceptions of the world.²¹ Kuhn observed that Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543) can be accepted only if Ptolemy (87–150) is wrong, and Albert Einstein (1879–1955) can be accepted only if Isaac Newton (1642–1727) erred.²²

¹⁷Henry M. Morris, ‘The Bible is a Textbook of Science,’ *BibSac* 121/4 (1964), p. 345.

¹⁸Morris, ‘Textbook of Science,’ p. 341.

¹⁹Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (1898; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 318–19.

²⁰E.g. Steven Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (1988; New York: Bantam Books, 1996), pp. 49–53.

²¹Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. ix.



²²Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 68, 98; also Alister McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, *Nature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 49, 51.



LAST THINGS FIRST

Moreover, using nature to interpret Scripture inverts the hermeneutical rule that Scripture is its own interpreter, as well as the idea that special revelation interprets general revelation, not vice versa. As the Westminster divines concluded some 350 years ago: 'The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly' (WCF 1.9). One must therefore reject not only the creation science approach to Genesis, but also the Old Princeton approach.²³ Are there more self-consciously biblical approaches to Genesis 1–3?

Current literalistic approaches to Genesis 1–3



Many in the Reformed community adopt a literal interpretation of Genesis 1–3, which centers its attention upon the length of the days of creation. Literalists claim a long-standing tradition and cite interpreters such as C. F. Keil, H. C. Leupold, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Geerhardus Vos, and others.²⁴ Literalists such as Ligon Duncan and David Hall argue that the literal, or classical, interpretation of Genesis 1–3 dominated from 2000 BC to AD 1800 and that non-literal interpretations of Genesis have arisen

²³This question might arise: If Genesis 1–3 is not about science, how should Christian theology and science interact? The answer lies in a positive development of natural theology. Special revelation, especially Genesis 1–3, should not be twisted into making scientific statements. Rather, special revelation should properly define the limits of natural theology, and from the principles of natural theology develop a positive relationship with the natural sciences (McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, pp. 21, 296). On the historical acceptance of natural theology within the Reformed community see J. V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, 'Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession,' in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, vol. 3, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn: Christian Focus, forthcoming).

²⁴Gentry and Butler, *Hath God Said?*, pp. 8–9.

only since the arrival of evolutionary theory.²⁵ There is a defect, however, with much of the literalist literature on Genesis 1–3. Literalists seem to pay little or no attention to other significant interpretive questions, when this need not be the case. One can affirm the 24-hour view regarding the length of days and yet be exegetically and theologically mindful of more significant events in the text. Some recent explanations of Genesis 1–3 are wanting simply because they focus too much of their exegetical energy on the one issue of the length of days.²⁶ When exegesis becomes so imbalanced, a re-examination of the most basic questions of interpretation is necessary. One may begin to move through the stalemate in the current literature by asking the question, What is the purpose of Genesis 1–3?

The purpose of Genesis 1–3

Scientific data and world history?

Much of the current literature on Genesis 1–3 claims that the purpose of the three chapters is telling not only that God created but how he created.²⁷ Morris, for example, writes,

The Christian polemicist frequently is confronted with the problem of the scientific ‘errors’ in Scripture, especially in its first eleven chapters. Often he is tempted to resort to the solution of Neo-orthodoxy and to protest that ‘the Bible is, after all, not a textbook of science, but rather

²⁵J. Ligon Duncan and David W. Hall, ‘The 24-Hours View,’ in *The Genesis Debate*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo: Crux Press, 2001), p. 24; see also Jordan, *Creation*, pp. 10, 17.

²⁶There are several volumes dedicated to this one subject: Gentry and Butler, *Hath God Said?*; Jordan, *Creation*; Pipa and Hall, *Did God Create in Six Days?*

²⁷Sid Dyer, ‘The New Testament Doctrine of Creation,’ in Pipa and Hall, *Did God Create in Six Days?*, p. 237; similarly Young, *Genesis One*, p. 86.



LAST THINGS FIRST

of religion.' It is meant to tell us the *fact* of creation, not the *method* of creation; it tells us *who is* Creator, not an understanding of earth history.²⁸

From a different perspective, Ross argues that Genesis 1–11 'is largely scientific' and 'structured like a modern research report'.²⁹ For Ross, then, Genesis reports about the scientific 'how' of creation. These scientific descriptions of Genesis rest on several pre-suppositions: (1) Genesis tells the method by which God created the heavens and earth; (2) Genesis 1–11 is about the general history of the earth; and (3) to propose that Genesis 1–11 is about religion, or a theological statement, is the response of neo-orthodoxy, or liberalism. These three points require critique to see the intended purpose of Genesis 1–3.

First, many Christians assume that Genesis 1–2 tells how God created. Yet, when one compares the Genesis account with God's interrogation of Job (Job 38–41), the two passages differ greatly.³⁰ God asks Job a series of how questions: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone?' (Job 38:4-6). Of the sixty-plus questions about the creation that God asks Job, none receives an answer. On this point, Derek Thomas writes that 'Job, of course, was not around when God made the world. He knew nothing of how the earth was made (38:4-7), or how the sea was formed (38:8-11), or how the planetary rotations constitute day and night (38:12-15, 19-21).'³¹ God asks the volley of questions

²⁸Morris, 'Textbook of Science,' p. 341.

²⁹Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question* (1998; Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), pp. 8, 19.

³⁰Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer UP, 1997), p. 118.

³¹Derek Thomas, *The Storm Breaks: Job Simply Explained* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1995), p. 291.





INTRODUCTION

regarding the how of creation to prove that Job does not know how the Lord created the world. If one assumes the common interpretive theory on Genesis 1–2, Job could have replied to God, ‘Yes! I do know. I’ve read Genesis!’ Job, of course, assuming he lived during the time of Moses, would not have done this even if Genesis 1–2 did provide the how of creation.

This point becomes clearer when one examines rabbinic interpretation of the creation account:

For it is written, ‘In the beginning God created the heaven.’ But it is not explained how. Where then is it explained? Elsewhere: That stretches out the heavens as a curtain (Isa. 40:22); ‘and the earth,’ which is likewise not explained. Where is that explained? Elsewhere: For He says to the snow: Fall on the earth, etc. (Job 37:6). ‘And God said: Let there be light’ (1:3), and the manner of this, too, is not explained. Where is it explained? Elsewhere: Who covers himself with light as with a garment (Psa. 104:2). (*Mid. Rabb. Gen. 1.6*)

While there is question concerning the interpretation of these passages (e.g. Isa. 40:22; Job 37:6; Ps. 104:2), the author does not see in Genesis 1 how God created but instead looks elsewhere in Scripture to answer this question.

The answers to many of God’s questions to Job, at least scientifically, lie not in Scripture but in the scientific investigation of nature. Thomas explains that, ‘Today, great advances have been made in understanding some of these questions: the earth’s rotation (38:12-15), oceanic currents (38:16), cartography (38:18), the origin and dispersal of light (38:19, 24) and meteorology (38:28-30, 35). These questions anticipate the great scientific advances made by such men as Newton, Maury, Faraday and Morse.³² The common idea that Genesis speaks to the ‘how’ of creation, therefore, is

³²Thomas, *Storm Breaks*, p. 291.



LAST THINGS FIRST

misguided. Yes, Genesis is historical – but its intended purpose is not to convey scientific information.³³ The Westminster divines long ago observed that Scripture is not scientific but that ‘the scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man’ (Larger Catechism 5). Building upon this historically Reformed approach to the Scriptures Paul Woolley writes that a

serious misapprehension concerning the Scripture is that the Holy Spirit so inspired the writers as to cause them to use modern scientific canons in their use of language. For example, it is argued that, when the inspired writer said, ‘it is he that sits above the circle of the earth’ (Isa. 40:22), there is in this form of statement a reference to the sphericity of the earth. Such an interpretation is mistaken for several reasons. a) Revelation came to an inspired writer for a specific purpose. Scripture was not written by mechanical dictation and God did not reveal to its writers truths quite irrelevant to the purpose in hand. The prophet at this particular point had no need of a revelation concerning the shape of the earth. b) The writer often, as we shall see, did not understand the entire import of his writing but he was not writing what were to himself obscure conundrums, and the interpreter of Scripture must not read into it meanings of an entirely different genus from those of the writer. The author here doubtless had in mind the rough circle visible to an observer from a point elevated above the earth’s surface. He was not talking about astronomical truth at all. c) Figurative forms of expression, when they appear in the Bible, are to be recognized as such and not interpreted as natural science.³⁴

³³Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 3; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 73-77, 80; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 528.

³⁴Paul Woolley, ‘The Relevancy of Scripture,’ in *The Infallible Word*, eds. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (1946; Phillipsburg: P & R, 2002), pp. 203-04.



Woolley basically sets forth the historical Reformed approach to the interpretation of Scripture, which is the use of the *analogia fidei* or *Scripturae*, the analogy of faith or Scripture, not the canons of science. In this connection Henri Blocher writes: 'In the case of the opening chapters of Genesis, it is not plausible that the human author knew what we are taught by astronomers, geologists and other scientists. Therefore we must curb the desire to make the scientific view play a part in the actual interpretation; the interpretation must cling solely to the text and its context.'³⁵

Second, contrary to Morris's claim, Genesis 1–11 is not about world history. Morris seems to imply that God set up a camcorder and taped everything that took place. Yet this type of interpretation ignores the details, particularly what is absent from the opening chapters of Genesis. For example, Genesis 1 includes nothing regarding the creation of angels or the fall of Satan. Furthermore, Genesis 4 leaves the reader with the impression that there are only four people on the earth: Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. Cain, however, kills Abel, leaves, marries, and builds a city. From where does Cain's wife originate? Cities require people; it is hardly a city if the only inhabitants are Cain and his wife. Contrary to the claim of Morris, Genesis 1–11 is a selective history – it does not deal with general world history but redemptive history, the *historia salutis*.³⁶

Third, contrary to the claim of Morris, to say that Genesis 1–11 is primarily a religious or theological work is not akin to neo-orthodoxy. This claim fails for two reasons: (a) Morris does not demonstrate any error from the writings of neo-orthodox theologians who claim that

³⁵Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), pp. 26–27.

³⁶Woolley, 'Relevancy of Scripture,' p. 207.



LAST THINGS FIRST

the Bible is primarily theological; this is problematic. Even if neo-orthodox theologians claim that Genesis 1–11 is primarily theological, it does not automatically mean that the claim is incorrect. This is the genetic fallacy, assuming error because of a questionable source. (b) Theologians outside of the neo-orthodox camp have made the same claim. It was R. L. Dabney who wrote:

When revelation says anything concerning material nature, it is only what is made necessary to the comprehension of theological fact or doctrine. And in its observance of this distinction the Bible is eminently a practical book, saying nothing whatever for mere curiosity, and stopping at just what is essential to religious truth. Hence, we ought to understand that when the Scriptures use popular language to describe physical occurrences or facts, all they mean is to state the apparent phenomena as they would seem to the popular eye to occur. They never intended to give us the non-apparent scientific mechanism of those facts or occurrences; for this is not essential to their practical object, and is left to the philosopher. Hence, when natural science comes and teaches us that the true *rationale* of apparent phenomena is different from that which seems to be suggested by the terms of Scripture and of popular language, there is no real contradiction between science and the Bible or between science and the popular phraseology.

Dabney criticizes both Roman Catholic and Protestant scientific misuse of Scripture. He states that for ‘the doctors of Salamanca to condemn Columbus’ geography as unscriptural and the inquisition and Turretin to argue against the astronomy of Galileo, as infidel, was mistaken’. Roman Catholic theologians argued that the Psalms speak of the heavens spread out like a canopy and the earth as unmovable and extended (Ps. 104:2; 93:1), and that the Copernican theory of heliocentricity was false because the Scriptures speak of the earth as



established and the sun moving in its circuit across the heavens (Ps. 19:6). Dabney condemns this as 'exegetical folly'.³⁷ Dabney was not alone in limiting the purpose of Scripture to speak to theological issues. For example, Calvin, commenting on Psalm 136:7, 'To him who made great lights,' writes: 'The Holy Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy.'³⁸ Genesis 1–11, more specifically 1–3, is therefore not about science and does not direct the reader to scientific data.³⁹ Rather, Genesis 1–3 is theological. What theological message, then, does Genesis 1–3 communicate?

Christological focus and purpose

The emphasis of Scripture is not generically theological but christological. Though taking note of the problematic christomonism that often colors neo-orthodoxy, it is appropriate to observe that Emil Brunner nevertheless correctly argues that

the uniqueness of this Christian doctrine of Creation and the Creator is continually being obscured by the fact that theologians are so reluctant to begin their work with the New Testament; when they want to deal with the Creation, they tend to begin with the Old Testament, although they never do this when they are speaking of the Redeemer. The emphasis on the story of Creation at the beginning of the Bible has constantly led theologians to forsake the rule which they would otherwise follow, namely, that the basis of *all* Christian articles of faith is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. So when we begin to study the subject of Creation in the Bible we ought to start with the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and

³⁷Robert L. Dabney, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, ed. Thomas Cary Johnson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 342.

³⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, CTS, trans. James Anderson (1849; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 184.

³⁹Young, *Genesis One*, pp. 43, 54.



LAST THINGS FIRST

some other passages of the *New Testament*, and not with the first chapter of Genesis.⁴⁰

This is an important interpretive presupposition, namely, the christological connection to the opening chapters of Genesis. Primarily, Genesis 1–3 is not about science, or the history of the world, but is the entry point to the person and work of Christ. On this point Alister McGrath similarly notes that

before setting out the concepts of creation found in the Old Testament, it is important to establish a fundamental point of interpretation. For Christians, the Old Testament is to be read in the light of the New Testament, and especially in the light of Christ. Scripture centers on and enfolds Christ, who can be known definitively only through its medium.⁴¹

Christology informs Genesis 1–3 and therefore one must constantly interpret these chapters in the light of the New Testament.

E. J. Young explains the importance of the connection between Genesis 1 and christology, writing that the Bible

always places the creation in the light of the central fact of redemption, Christ Jesus. When we examine the first chapter of Genesis in the light of other parts of Scripture, it becomes clear that the intention is not to give a survey of the process of creation, but to permit us to see the creative activity of God in the light of his saving acts, and so, in its structure, the chapter allows its full light to fall upon man, the crown of the creative work.⁴²

⁴⁰Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterwork Press, 1952), p. 6; cf. Richard A. Muller, 'Emmanuel V. Gerhart on the "Christ-Idea" as Fundamental Principle,' *WTJ* 48/1 (1986), pp. 97-117.

⁴¹McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, p. 142.

⁴²Young, *Genesis*, p. 45.



Why is it, for example, that the New Testament is replete with phrases and imagery taken from the opening chapters of Genesis, such as light and darkness (John 1:1ff), Christ as creator (Col. 1:16), or Christ as the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-19, 1 Cor. 15:45)? The answer lies in the purpose of Genesis 1–3. Genesis 1–3 should not be interpreted in isolation, but in the light of the New Testament, in the light of Christ. Genesis 1–3 sets forth the theological significance of the failed work of the first Adam, which serves as the entry point for the successful work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Genesis 1–3 must be approached in the light of Christ. In order to understand rightly the christological message of Genesis 1–3, what should mark one’s interpretive methodology?

Interpretive methodology: christology and eschatology

Many come at Genesis 1–3 in terms of the length of the days, science, old-earth or young-earth. Others treat it as merely an account of the origins of the physical world: Genesis simply reports the creation of the stage, the physical world, upon which the drama of redemption unfolds.⁴³ Genesis 1–3, however, does not record merely the construction of the stage but rather shows in shadows and types the person and work of Christ. This christological approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament is not new but has excellent scriptural precedence. When Christ was on the road to Emmaus with his two disciples ‘beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27). Likewise, Paul calls Adam ‘a type of the one who was to come’ (Rom. 5:14). This interpretive trajectory of the New Testament is why the Reformed community has placed such a premium upon the typological interpretation of

⁴³So Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 232, 237-39.



LAST THINGS FIRST

the Old Testament. In this regard the Westminster divines explain the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament as it pertains to the covenant of grace:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel; under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament (WCF 7.5).

One must note that according to the divines the Old Testament foreshadows Christ to come. This is why Genesis 1–3 must be interpreted by searching for the connections between the work of the first and second Adams. Moreover, the investigation should be broadened by treating Genesis 1–3, not under the systematic theological subject of creation, but under the broader category of protology. In fact, this essay represents a desire to alter permanently the traditional loci of systematic theology and add the locus of protology. Why?

Most systematic theological treatments of Genesis 1–3 include these chapters in the doctrine of creation, which entails the creation of the physical world *ex nihilo*, anthropology, constitution of man, *imago Dei*, fall, and perhaps the covenant of works.⁴⁴ When one examines

⁴⁴E.g. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 550-74; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 383ff; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 365-86; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 126-80; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 439-528.

Genesis 1–3 from the systematic theological perspective, he sees a picture almost exclusively through the lens of ontology. It is perhaps this ontological lens that has led to the fragmented reading of Genesis 1–3, namely, examining the opening chapters of Scripture almost strictly in terms of the origin of man vis-à-vis Darwinian evolution. This fragmentary reading, in turn, has led to the misuse of Genesis in the battle between the claims of Darwin and the teachings of the Bible.

While it is true that Genesis teaches the origins of man, this fact cannot be separated from redemptive history. One can only understand anthropology in light of the true man, Jesus Christ. The work of the second Adam teaches the significance of the first Adam, and vice versa. For example, the *munus triplex*, Christ as prophet, priest, and king, does not emerge in the middle of the Old Testament but in the initial chapters of Genesis. Adam is the first prophet, priest, and king. He was the first prophet, in that he was given the command of God to propagate, not to eat of the tree of knowledge. He was the first priest, in that he was to tend and keep the garden, the first temple, God's dwelling place among his people. And, he was the first king, in that he was given the dominion mandate to rule as God's vicegerent.

Redemptive history as a whole, then, necessitates exploring Genesis 1–3 in terms of protology rather than creation. Moreover, one must recognize the connections between protology and eschatology, connections that have important implications for the interpretation of Genesis 1–3.

The completed work of the second Adam appears in the final chapters of Revelation, or in the eschatological context. If the second Adam takes up the work of the first Adam, then eschatology has an irrefragable connection to the beginning, or protology. This connection becomes even clearer when one considers that the categories of the beginning are embedded in eschatology, the creation of the heavens and earth become the *new* heavens and earth

LAST THINGS FIRST

(Isa. 65:17; 66:22) and the garden of Eden reappears in the book of Revelation (2:7; cf. Isa. 51:3; Zech. 1:17).⁴⁵ The broader category of protology enables one to consider matters of ontology, or systematic theology, but also redemptive history, or biblical theology.⁴⁶ Under this broader rubric of protology one can see the connections between anthropology and christology, the first and second Adams, and protology and eschatology, Genesis and Revelation, the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega.⁴⁷ When one interprets Genesis 1–3, however, he cannot bypass the important spade work of interpreting the significance of the narrative within its original historical context.

Immediate historical context

Governing interpretation are two horizons: the immediate historical context of the fifteenth century BC and the greater amount of information given by progressive revelation. In other words, one must enter the world of the original audience but also examine Genesis 1–3 in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ Because Moses is the essential author of Genesis, one can therefore place the composition of Genesis sometime during the Israelite exodus from Egypt or wilderness wandering.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 151.

⁴⁶Neither systematic nor biblical theology should eclipse each other in the interpretive process (see Carl R. Trueman, 'A Revolutionary Balancing Act,' *Themelios* 27/3 [2002], pp. 1-4; also similarly Geerhardus Vos, 'The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,' in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. [Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980], pp. 3-24, esp. pp. 23-24).

⁴⁷Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 146; similarly Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), p. 28; McGrath, *Scientific Theology*, pp. 186, 191.

⁴⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 31.


⁴⁹Contra, e.g. Brueggemann, *Theology of the OT*, p. 533. On the




INTRODUCTION

This situation provides context as well as information about the intended audience. The Israelites had left Egypt, a land given over to idolatry and paganism; they were preparing to enter the promised land, a land occupied by idolaters and pagans. If this is the setting, far from calculating the age of the universe, the Genesis account reminded the Israelites of the character and attributes of the God they serve.

For example, Egyptian priests promoted the worship of the sun, moon, birds, sea creatures, cats, elephants, and bulls.⁵⁰ Because God created all of these, Genesis 1–2 reminded the Israelites coming out of Egypt that these so-called gods were creatures. Likewise, the creation account reminded the Israelites, as they entered a land occupied by Baal worshipers, that all blessings came from God. Fred Woods notes that



when the Hebrew tribes left the stable environment of Egypt and headed toward the land of Canaan, they encountered a people who worshipped the storm god called Baal and his retinue. Such an encounter created a culture conflict. Israel had been led by Yahweh through the sea and the desert, but as she entered the new land, Israel asked, ‘Was Yahweh also the god of Canaan?’ As the Israelites settled in Canaan, they were tempted to ask their Canaanite neighbors, ‘How does your garden grow?’ Such inquiry was seen by later writers as having led to eventual apostasy and exile as Israel became idolatrous and eventually drowned in Baalism.⁵¹



Mosaic essential authorship of the Pentateuch see Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (1964; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 109-24; Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 38-40; cf. Peter Enns, ‘William Henry Green and the Authorship of the Pentateuch: Some Historical Considerations,’ *JETS* 45/3 (2002), pp. 385-403.

⁵⁰John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), pp. 109-17.

⁵¹Fred E. Woods, *Water and Storm Polemics Against Baalism in the Deuteronomic History* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 2; similarly



LAST THINGS FIRST

Against this backdrop, the creation account displays a theological purpose. For example, God sends rain, not Baal: ‘When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land’ (Gen. 2:5). Throughout the Old Testament this struggle recurs and culminates with the showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. God created a drought (1 Kings 17:1) and then caused it to rain (1 Kings 18:45). In fact, the Pentateuch confirms these points (Deut. 4:15-19). In Deuteronomy 4:15-19 Moses warns against worshipping the creation. Likewise, in Deuteronomy 11:10-17 Moses reminds Israel who is the source of agricultural success, Yahweh.

All of this textual evidence suggests that one should analyze the creation account not with a view to twenty-first-century scientific questions but rather in the theological and religious context of the Israelite exodus and conquest of the promised land.⁵² But one must look further. The proximate significance of Genesis 1–3 is theological and bound to its immediate historical context, its ultimate significance is christological. The text’s meaning does not change from one context to the next, but as revelation progresses the ultimate significance becomes clearer. For example, the reader has hints of God’s triunity in Genesis 1:26, but this only becomes clear in the New Testament. Moreover, the text states that God created in Genesis 1 but the New Testament teaches that Christ created (Col. 1:16ff). One must therefore keep the immediate historical context in sight as well as its ultimate and christological significance. As the Westminster divines stated, the Old

Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), pp. 3-4. For a comparison between the cosmogonies of the ANE and Genesis see Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 33ff.

⁵²See Meredith G. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1989), pp. 53-57.

Testament foreshadows Christ. There is one last issue to consider.

Sources and method of investigation

In the course of the investigation a vast array of sources will be utilized, including the Scriptures themselves using the *analogia fidei*, extant documents contemporaneous with both the Old Testament and New Testament, rabbinic interpretation, ancient Christian sources from the patristic, medieval, Reformation, post-Reformation, and contemporary periods. Moreover, the insights of commentators from a variety of perspectives, liberal and conservative, will be used. Using this vast array of sources is important for several reasons.

First, one must use the Scriptures themselves, as *sacra Scriptura est sui interpretis*, or holy Scripture is its own interpreter. As previously stated, many fail to use the analogy of Scripture when it comes to Genesis 1–3. What does the rest of Scripture have to say about the opening chapters of the Bible?

Second, documents from the same historical context, such as the *Enuma Elish* or Hittite covenants, give a background for Genesis 1–3.⁵³

Third, ancient Jewish sources from the Qumran community and rabbinic interpretation at points illuminate what the original audience might have understood. Just as commentaries offer good insights, so also commentaries from ancient sources help the reader understand the text.

Fourth, an array of commentaries ancient and contemporary, liberal and conservative, prove useful for two reasons: (1) the Holy Spirit has never restricted himself to one geographic place or one manifestation of the Church; and (2) even on the general level, the Bible, in its perspicuity, is a book made up of nouns, verbs, adverbs, sentences, paragraphs and so on. One must

⁵³Hamilton, *Pentateuch*, p. 35.



LAST THINGS FIRST

allow that even an unbeliever can read the Bible and comprehend its message at an intellectual level, and therefore offer some insight.⁵⁴ Yet an unbeliever cannot create belief or regenerate himself through the power of intellect. Only the Holy Spirit can create belief in the heart and mind of an unbeliever.

Conclusion

One may now proceed to investigate Genesis 1–3. The reader should keep in mind that the hermeneutical presuppositions of this investigation include: the analogy of Scripture, analyzing the contextual historical information, and examining Genesis 1–3 in the light of the second Adam, or christology, and eschatology. The overall thesis of this essay is that Genesis 1–3 is not about science or world history but about the failed work of the first Adam, a fact which points the reader to the person and work of the second, or eschatological, Adam. The patterns in Genesis 1–3 recur throughout redemptive history and reappear in the eschaton with the revelation of Christ on the final day. Genesis 1–3 must be read, therefore, eschatologically and christologically in order to understand its ultimate significance. The investigation will proceed by first examining the creation of man in the image of God. From there the study will examine the nature of the garden of Eden, the work of the first Adam, namely the covenant of works, shadows and types of the second Adam, the second Adam and his work, and finally conclude with the Sabbath.

⁵⁴See Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 20-25.

