

“This volume serves as an excellent introduction to the old earth/young earth debate. Dr. Van Dam argues for a plain reading of Genesis 1–2 and exposes the folly of rationalizing the creation miracle. The relevant portions of the original text are examined with the precision of an Old Testament scholar but at a level of detail that remains accessible to the layperson. The work of other scholars who have opined on the Genesis account of creation is reviewed, and the author’s bias is duly acknowledged. The analysis is crisp, frank, and, most importantly, pastoral. Highly recommended.”

—Peter Buist, professor emeritus, Department of Chemistry,
Carleton University

“This book on the proper interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2, as it relates to modern theories of Scripture interpretation and theories of evolution, is a very valuable resource for those who want to maintain a scriptural understanding of the origin of the universe and the creation of man. Dr. Van Dam rightly affirms that the Bible is not a science textbook and that the limits of science must be recognized. As Nobel Laureate Peter Medawar stated, ‘It is simply beyond the competence of science to answer the question “How did everything begin?”’ In this book, faith seeks understanding with a close reading of Genesis 1 and 2. Highly recommended.”

—Richard Buist, retired research scientist, University of Manitoba

“Dr. Van Dam gives an excellent defense of the traditional reading of Genesis 1 and 2. He tries to read the text on its own terms, informed by its use in the rest of Scripture, letting the exegetical chips fall where they may. It is a refreshing contrast to many Reformed commentators who have been unduly influenced by ancient Near Eastern literature or evolutionary science.

“This book gives well-grounded responses to various objections raised against the traditional view, good critiques of contrary interpretations, and many up-to-date references. I find it very readable, informative, and biblically sound. A worthwhile contribution to the current debate, also within Reformed churches, on origins. Heartily recommended.”

—John Byl, professor emeritus, mathematical sciences,
Trinity Western University

“If you want to get to the heart of the message of this book, you could say, ‘In the beginning, there is truth.’ In this in-depth investigation, Dr. C. Van Dam shows us that Holy Scripture opens with the revelation of facts. The first pages of Holy Scripture are in no way an oriental campfire fantasy or a human tale. In fact, the author convincingly argues that in Genesis 1 and 2

we have received the reliable account of how God brought the universe into being within a period of six days (qualified by evening and morning). It is no exaggeration that such an exposition about the origin of the world and about the historical Adam and Eve has probably ever been as necessary as it is today. This book definitely meets a big need!”

—Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke, dean, Academy of Reformed
Theology (ART), Giessen, Germany

“The first chapters of the book of Genesis form the foundation of God’s message for mankind. The last few years have witnessed more and more new interpretations of these chapters, with huge consequences for the church and its theology. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam has served the discussion well by thoroughly investigating these different visions and showing how they are in part based on current scientific notions of the origin of the cosmos and the human race. Those who want to honor the self-testimony of Genesis, however, have many good reasons to remain with the classic Christian understanding.”

—Mart-Jan Paul, professor of Old Testament, Evangelical
Theological Faculty, Leuven, Belgium

“This is an important book. Not only on Genesis 1 and 2 but also on the inevitable and crucial implications of the interpretation of these chapters for understanding the truth of Scripture as a whole, Van Dam succeeds admirably in meeting, in his own words, the ‘need to listen very carefully to God’s Word and conclude neither more nor less than what Scripture explicitly teaches.’ Clearly written, carefully and thoroughly researched, fair in dealing with views he disagrees with, and balanced in his own conclusions on issues, a commendable strength as well is the pastoral tone present throughout. Particularly helpful are the treatment of the place of extrabiblical evidence in interpreting Scripture and numerous comments at various points on the relationship between Scripture and science. One need not agree with Van Dam at every point to be both instructed and edified, as I have been, by this valuable work.”

—Richard B. Gaffin Jr., professor of biblical and systematic theology,
emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“With *In the Beginning* Cornelis Van Dam offers a thorough examination of recent developments among scholars who are desperately attempting to reconcile the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 with modern neo-Darwinist theory. Studiously avoiding technical jargon, Van Dam’s treatment is thorough and readable. His critique aptly highlights the awkward interpretive biblical contortions attempted by those who wish to weld an uncomfortable and untenable bond between Christian belief in a biblical Creator and

faith in biological evolutionary hypotheses. Though Van Dam focuses much of his attention on developments within Reformed churches, his book is worthwhile reading for any Christian who wishes to remain faithful to God's Word and avoid modern secularism and its unbiblical ethics as they attempt to creep into the church."

—Andrew E. Steinmann, distinguished professor of theology and Hebrew, Concordia University Chicago

"A most welcome work! Van Dam's defense of the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 is most of all humbly obedient to God and His Word—biblical in its hermeneutics, sound in its exegesis, up-to-date in its scholarship, and effective in its rebuttal of theistic evolution. Whether one seeks depth and relevance in the exegesis or a sophisticated yet accessible interaction with the multitude of nonliteral and nonhistorical theories around the biblical creation account, the work at hand provides this. In addition, Van Dam ably accounts for the ancient Near Eastern context of Israel while rightly arguing that such material is not normative for our interpretation of divine revelation. I found the emphasis on worldview and the chapter 'The Work of Creation and the Gospel' particularly helpful. I recommend this book heartily as a challenge for all to educate themselves in Scripture—some to rethink their positions and others to be bolstered in the confidence of faith."

—Theodore G. Van Raalte, professor of ecclesiology, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

"The first two chapters of Genesis form the creation account as transmitted to us through the people of Israel. Nowadays it is customary to place this account side by side with creation myths of other nations and on that basis to speculate about the origin of heaven and earth, life, and humankind. It was a great relief for me that this particular book does justice to the biblical notion that God entrusted His Word to the people of Israel and to no other nation."

—Cornelis (Kees) Roos, emeritus professor of mathematics, Delft University of Technology, Netherlands

"Do we need yet another book on the question of Bible and creation? Some will doubt it—but do not close the door too quickly! Professor Van Dam's dealing with many of the difficult issues around the Bible and creation is very much worth reading. His book offers a large number of illuminating, sober, and clear exegetical insights into Genesis 1 and 2 as well as many other related biblical passages. He relates these texts to scientific theories, especially the theory of evolution, in helpful ways, addressing also general methodological issues and reminding us of the limits of scientific knowledge in these matters.

His arguments for the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 deserve serious attention. From an Old Testament perspective, Van Dam's remarks against an uncritical reading of extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern views into Genesis 1 and 2 are particularly important. I highly recommend this book, both for laypersons and scholars, including as a textbook for seminary courses."

—Markus Zehnder, professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages,
Talbot School of Theology, California

"In this clearly written volume, Cornelis Van Dam defends a historical interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 as an accurate account of the origin of the earth and the human race, using the language of normal human experience. He points out why the divine revelation found in these chapters cannot be reconciled with the theory of evolution. I recommend his book especially to all those who ponder such reconciliation, for it presents all the counterarguments on which they should reflect."

—Gert Kwakkel, professor of Old Testament, Theologische Universiteit Kampen,
Netherlands; and Faculté Jean Calvin, Aix-en-Provence, France

"*In the Beginning* by Cornelis Van Dam is a brilliant defense of six-day creation. It is by far the most comprehensive work on this subject I have read. Van Dam carefully exegetes Genesis 1 and 2. Along the way he answers objections to the six-day view. He interacts gently but thoroughly with the various nonliteral approaches to these chapters and destroys the attempts to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 by Near Eastern cosmologies. He carefully interacts with theologians who assert theistic evolution, showing the futility and dangers of their approach. Moreover, the book is a treasure trove of bibliographic material (over sixty pages of bibliography). On top of all these things, Dr. Van Dam writes in a clear way so that readers, regardless of their theological or scientific background, may read it with profit."

—Joseph A. Pipa Jr., president emeritus, Greenville
Presbyterian Theological Seminary

In the
BEGINNING

In the
BEGINNING
Listening to Genesis 1 and 2

Cornelis Van Dam



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

In the Beginning

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For Niek and Dinie Gootjes

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Preface

This study was motivated in part by words allegedly spoken by Martin Luther:

If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages, the loyalty of the soldier is proved. To be steady on all the battlefield is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.¹

The meaning of the opening chapters of Scripture are very much a flash-point of contention within conservative Protestantism in North America as the theory of evolution is more and more promoted under the pressures of main-line science and its views of the origin of our world and its inhabitants. The topic of Genesis 1 and 2 is therefore very relevant, and I would like to join the conversation by carefully listening to the biblical text and interacting with the current discussion. The amount of published material on Genesis is enormous and not everything can be said within the confines of a single book. However, the footnotes often refer to related material, and thus this work can serve as a source for further study on the first chapters of Genesis.

To make the material as accessible as possible, the original languages of Scripture are used as little as possible. Transliterations and abbreviations are done according to *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press,

1. As associated with Luther in Elizabeth Rundle Charles, *Chronicles of the Schönberg-cotta Family* (New York: T. Nelson; Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1864), ii, 276; and, e.g., cited as a direct quote of Luther in Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1984), 50–51. This often repeated quote cannot be found in these exact words in the official edition of Luther's works, but something comparable is found in his letter to Albrecht, Count of Mansfeld, dated June 3, 1523, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*, vol. 3, ed. Ulrich Köpf (1933; repr., Weimar: Böhlau, 2002), 81–82.

2014). Unless noted otherwise, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

* * *

I am very grateful to the LORD God, the Creator and the Sustainer of everything, that this book on His revelation of heaven and earth's beginnings can see the light of day.

Friends in both theology and the sciences have been of help in reading over parts of the manuscript or its entirety and providing feedback. My thanks go to Peter Buist, Professor of Chemistry Emeritus, Carleton University; Richard Buist, former researcher in the Department of Radiology at the University of Manitoba; John Byl, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at Trinity Western University; John Helder, former Director of the Muttart Conservatory and Principal of Horticulture for the City of Edmonton, Alberta; Margaret Helder, scientist and President of the Creation Science Association of Alberta; our son, S. Carl Van Dam, minister of the Word, Canadian Reformed Church of Carman East in Carman, Manitoba; and my colleague Theodore G. Van Raalte, Professor of Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. I would also like to express my gratitude to Margaret VanderVelde, Librarian at the seminary, for the help that she was always ready to give. And last but certainly not least, I record my great thankfulness for all the support my dear wife, Joanne, continues to give me.

A book on the early chapters of Genesis had originally been conceived as a joint project with Nicolaas (Niek) Gootjes, Professor of Dogmatology, at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. But the Lord in His wisdom decided otherwise when my colleague became incapacitated with Alzheimer's disease, now already many years ago. He is still being cared for in a nursing home where his dear wife, Dinie, faithfully visits him. As a token of my great appreciation for my colleague and his wife I have dedicated this book to them.

Finally, I want to thank Reformation Heritage Books for their willingness to publish this study. It has been a great pleasure working with Jay Collier, Director of Publishing, and Andrew McGinnis, who copyedited this book. It has greatly benefited from his expertise.

May this publication be of service in promoting the glory of the Creator.

Abbreviations

Bible Translations

ASV	American Standard Version
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
DSV	Dutch Statenvertaling
ESV	English Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPS 1917	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text</i> (The Jewish Publication Society, 1917)
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation (The NET Bible)
NETS	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NIV	New International Version (both 1984 and 2011)
NIV (1984)	New International Version 1984
NIV (2011)	New International Version 2011
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> . 1985. Reprint, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988.
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version

TEV Today's English Version (= Good News Bible)

Grammars and Dictionaries

- BDAG Frederik W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- BDB Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014.
- GE Franco Montanari. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by Archer E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
- HALOT Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
- IBHS Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- Joüon P. Joüon. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. Subsidia biblica 14/1–2. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991.
- LSJM Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.

Other Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
<i>ACCS</i>	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CO</i>	J. Calvin. <i>Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia</i> . Edited by G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss. <i>Corpus Reformatorum</i> , vol. 29–87. Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1863–1900.
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2017.
<i>CRSQ</i>	<i>Creation Research Society Quarterly</i>
<i>CTA</i>	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiforms alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i> . Edited by Andrée Herdner. Paris: Geuthner, 1963.
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DCS</i>	<i>Dictionary of Christianity and Science</i> . Edited by Paul Copan, Tremper Longman III, Christopher L. Reese, and Michael G. Strauss. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
<i>GTT</i>	<i>Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JESOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)
<i>OTA</i>	<i>Old Testament Abstracts</i>
<i>PhRef</i>	<i>Philosophia Reformata</i>
<i>Presb</i>	<i>Presbyterion</i>

<i>PSCF</i>	<i>Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith</i>
<i>PTR</i>	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>S&CB</i>	<i>Science and Christian Belief</i>
Targum	All references to the Targum, unless otherwise noted are to Alexander Sperber, <i>The Bible in Aramaic</i> . 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Introduction

Do the opening chapters of Genesis constitute real history or not? The prevailing academic consensus is that Genesis 1 and 2 are not recounting actual historical events. Yet, on the face of it, these chapters do appear to give an account of what happened when God created the world. What do we make of this conundrum?

Closely related to the issue of whether Genesis recounts actual history is the uncertainty and confusion about the origin of the human race that many Christians experience today. How did we get here? Does science or Scripture provide the true account of the beginning of the world in which we live? Or is this a false dilemma? Can Scripture be honored and understood to agree with current scientific hypotheses of human origins?

These are momentous questions and there appears to be a growing consensus among conservative interpreters of Scripture that we can accommodate our understanding of Scripture to the view of origins as given by current mainstream science, particularly in astronomy, geology, and evolutionary biology. Secular science excludes any intervention by God and attributes all development to the laws of nature and very long periods of time, but Christians who embrace today's regnant scientific theories speak of theistic evolution to indicate God's involvement in bringing creation to its present form.¹ Due to

1. It is difficult to give a brief definition of the theory of evolution. E.g., biologist Keith Stewart Thomson has shown that the word *evolution* is "used in at least three quite separate senses," namely, "the general sense of *change over time*," as a process ("*organisms are related by descent through common ancestry*"), and as "a particular *explanatory mechanism* for the pattern and process described in the first and second meanings" (italics in the original). Keith Stewart Thomson, "Marginalia: The Meanings of Evolution," *American Scientist* 70 (1982): 529–30. Also see Dennis R. Venema, "Evolution, Biological," in *DCS*, 226–28. For an analysis and critique following Thomson's article, see Stephen C. Meyer, "Scientific and Philosophical Introduction: Defining Theistic Evolution," in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2017), 33–49.

the pressures of the dominant scientific evolutionary hypotheses, influential evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian scholars who testify that they want to honor the authority of God's Word are no longer certain that they can accept the biblical account of Genesis 1 and 2 at face value. Consequently, different proposals for understanding these chapters have been made so that current mainstream science and the opening chapters of Scripture can somehow be harmonized, but the common result is that Genesis 1 and 2 cannot be accepted at face value as narrating historical events. What are we to think of this? How should we interpret the opening chapters of Scripture? How does science relate to explaining or understanding the biblical record of creation? These issues need to be addressed.

This introductory chapter will briefly illustrate the changing attitudes to Genesis 1 and 2, note the purpose of this study, outline its basic presuppositions, and touch on some current mainstream assumptions that have a profound influence on how the Bible is understood today.

Changing Attitudes to Genesis 1 and 2

Fueling much of the downplaying or denial of the literal historicity of the events reported in Genesis 1 and 2 is the enormous prestige enjoyed by science and its championing the theory of evolution as the most attractive explanation of how this present world and its inhabitants came to be. As a result the previous several decades have seen a remarkable momentum toward the acceptance of theistic evolution in theologically conservative circles. Several fairly recent high-profile cases illustrate how distinguished evangelical Old Testament scholars who were or still are respected for their generally conservative approach to Scripture have embraced theistic evolution and adjusted their understanding of Genesis accordingly.

Peter Enns, who taught at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1994 to 2008, accepted that it has been shown beyond reasonable scientific doubt that humans share common ancestry with primates. He consequently argued that "one can no longer accept, in any true sense of the word 'historical,' the instantaneous and special creation of humanity as described in Genesis."² The

2. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012), xiv. Earlier, Enns had set out his views on Scripture in Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), which elicited considerable controversy. See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008).

controversy surrounding his views eventually led to his departure from Westminster.³ He now teaches at Eastern University in Pennsylvania.

During his long and illustrious career, Bruce Waltke served as professor at various conservative and Reformed seminaries, but he became controversial when he openly endorsed theistic evolution in a 2010 video in which he stated that “if the data is overwhelmingly in favor of evolution, to deny that reality will make us a cult.” During the ensuing dispute, Waltke submitted his resignation from Reformed Theological Seminary at Orlando, a resignation which according to a news report was accepted because of Waltke’s “mainline evolutionary views.”⁴ Waltke himself clarified that “I am incompetent to endorse evolution. My point is that the scientific consensus endorses it. . . . The Bible does not prescribe how God created the cosmos.”⁵ In Waltke’s view there is room for the theory of theistic evolution because Genesis 1 is an ancient cosmology. How closely such a cosmology “coincides with the material reality cannot be known” since that genre “does not attempt to answer that question.”⁶

The previous year, the same seminary had disinvited Tremper Longman III from further adjunct teaching due to his “questioning in a video whether Adam was a historical person.” Longman, a prolific and popular author who has taught at Westminster Theological Seminary (1980–1998) and Westmont College, continues to defend theistic evolution. In his view, as articulated in a 2014 blog post, “there is a good case, especially based on the genetic evidence, that God used evolution. So I find myself affirming an evolutionary creationist perspective.”⁷ He is able to make such an affirmation since he considers Genesis 1–11 to be theological history that recounts real events through the use of figurative language for theological purposes.⁸

3. For the official “Joint Statement by WTS and Professor Enns” (July 22, 2008), as well as links to all related documents, see the Westminster Theological Seminary website at <https://students.wts.edu/stayinformed/view.html?id=187>; see also, Peter A. Lillback, “‘The Infallible Rule of Interpretation of Scripture’: The Hermeneutical Crisis and the Westminster Standards,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church. Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 283–339.

4. Charles Honey, “Adamant on Adam,” *Christianity Today* 54, no. 6 (June 2010): 14; also see, e.g., Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 202–3.

5. In a letter to the editor, *Christianity Today* 54, no. 8 (August 2010): 43.

6. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 202–3.

7. Tremper Longman III, “Tremper Longman Responds to Justin Taylor on the Historicity of Adam,” *The Logos Academic Blog*, March 25, 2014, <https://academic.logos.com/tremper-longman-responds-to-justin-taylor-on-the-historicity-of-adam/>.

8. Tremper Longman III, “What Genesis 1–2 Teaches (and What It Doesn’t),” in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson,

A final example is John H. Walton, who teaches at Wheaton College and is well known for his work on the first chapters of Genesis. In these books he stresses that Genesis 1 is an ancient cosmological text that can only be rightly understood through the lens of the ancient culture that generated this literature. Since he considers ancient cosmology to be function oriented, Genesis 1 is not about material origins. “To create something (cause it to exist) in the ancient world means to give it a function, not material properties.”⁹ Consequently, Genesis does not tell us how the world came to be and “therefore whatever explanation scientists may offer in their attempts to explain origins, we could theoretically adopt it as a description of God’s handiwork.” So, Walton is willing to go along with whatever mainstream science espouses about origins and at the moment that is the theory of evolution. “Whatever evolutionary processes may have taken place, we believe that God was intimately involved in them.”¹⁰

Other prominent theologians have joined in supporting theistic evolution. A controversial but very influential British New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright, who is sometimes theologically very conservative, lent his support to Walton’s work by contributing to the latter’s book, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*.¹¹ Another well-known figure, Timothy Keller, founding minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, sees little difficulty in accepting theistic evolution and has supported the work of BioLogos.¹²

The work of the BioLogos Foundation, an evangelical organization founded in 2007, is most noteworthy in this context. It aggressively promotes what it calls evolutionary creationism and enjoys the backing of prominent Old Testament scholars.¹³ As part of its effort to convince people to accept the notion of evolutionary origins, it has published a book with the telling title,

2013), 103–12, 122; Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2018), 15–29, 91, 111.

9. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 35.

10. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 132, 137. For an incisive critique of John Walton’s approach, see Noel K. Weeks, “The Bible and the ‘Universal’ Ancient World: A Critique of John Walton,” *WTJ* 78 (2016): 1–28.

11. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*, with a contribution by N. T. Wright (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2015), 170–80.

12. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 95–98; Tim Keller, “Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople” (The BioLogos Foundation, 2009), https://biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf.

13. See the BioLogos website for more details: <https://biologos.org/>.

How I Changed My Mind About Evolution.¹⁴ In it, scientists, pastors, biblical scholars, and theologians tell how they have come to accept the theory of evolution and in their view still honor the authority of Scripture.

The current momentum among many conservative evangelical believers against taking the Genesis narrative at face value¹⁵ is a dramatic change from the centuries-old general acceptance of the historical truthfulness and plain reading of this part of Scripture that prevailed in the early and medieval church as well as in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. The Enlightenment challenged the literal reading of the biblical text, the repercussions of which are felt up to the present time.¹⁶ An important indicator of the ongoing effects of the Enlightenment and developments in the natural sciences is the fact that popular annotated evangelical study Bibles are now ambivalent about whether Genesis presents a straightforward historical account of God's creative deeds. Instead, this subject is treated as one that is open to discussion and divergent views.

For example, both the *New Geneva Study Bible* and its successor, *The Reformation Study Bible*,¹⁷ while mentioning the option of understanding the days of creation as real days, in their notes on Genesis 1:5 elaborate on other views, as can be expected in a study Bible, but without endorsing the plain reading of the text. The *ESV Study Bible* also mentions several options on how to understand the days of creation: as ordinary days, as geological ages, as analogous days, or as a literary device without a concern for temporal sequence.¹⁸ Again, the reader is left without clear direction.

The inability of these study Bibles, which are aimed at a conservative market, simply to accept the obvious literal meaning of the text stands in sharp contrast to what we could call the Reformed study Bibles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Very important and influential were the English Geneva

14. Kathryn Applegate and J. B. Stump, eds., *How I Changed My Mind About Evolution: Evangelicals Reflect on Faith and Science* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2016).

15. For more examples, see Terry Mortenson, "Adam, Morality, the Gospel, and the Authority of Scripture," in *Searching for Adam: Genesis and the Truth about Man's Origin*, ed. Terry Mortenson (Green Forest, Ariz.: Master, 2016), 466–71.

16. For a comprehensive study of the shift from the dominance of a literal understanding of Genesis 1 and 2 from the early church until today, see William VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

17. R. C. Sproul, ed., *New Geneva Study Bible: Bringing the Light of the Reformation to Scripture* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995); R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2015).

18. Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem et al., eds., *The ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), 43.

Bible (1560) and the Dutch States-General Bible (1636–1637), both of which had brief explanatory glosses in the margins of the biblical text. The Geneva Bible was officially endorsed by an act of the Scots Parliament in 1579, and the States-General Bible with its notes had been mandated by the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).¹⁹

It is striking that the notes of these two translations repeatedly accept the literal meaning of the text as a reliable historical record of what happened at the very beginning. For example, the Geneva Bible duly notes the days as sequential and the comment on Genesis 1:3 acknowledges that “the light was made before ether sunne or moone was created.” Similarly, the States-General Bible in a note on Genesis 1:5 affirms that day and night make a natural day, specifically understanding it as a twenty-four-hour period. The days are understood sequentially and what is stated as created on each day is accepted as such.

With respect to the creation of man, while *The Reformation Study Bible* clearly underlines the uniqueness of man,²⁰ another conservative resource, *The NIV Study Bible*,²¹ stresses what man and animals have in common. In its note on Genesis 2:7 it observes that the same verbs “are used to describe God’s creation of both man and animals.... Humans and animals alike have the breath of life in them.” That same note observes that the phrase translated as “living being” is also used of animals (Gen. 1:20, 24) and that “the words of [Genesis] 2:7 therefore imply that people, at least physically, have affinity with animals. The great difference is that man is made ‘in the image of God’ (1:27).” Although

19. *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated According to the Ebrue and Greke, and Conferred with the Best Translations in Divers Langages with Moste Profitable Annotations...* (Geneva: Rovland Hall, 1560). The Geneva Bible was probably the most important early English translation of Scripture and was widely accessible as the first mass-produced Bible. For the Scots Parliament endorsement, see Maurice S. Betteridge, “The Bitter Notes: The Geneva Bible and Its Annotations,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 44. *Bijbel, dat is de gansche heilige Schrift, bevattende al de canonieke boeken des Ouden en Nieuwen Testaments, door last van de hoog-mog. heeren Staten-Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden [= de Staten-vertaling]* (Kampen: Kok, 1913). The Synod of Dort gave the translators the mandate to include brief explanations to the biblical text where necessary with difficult passages. This annotated translation was also enormously influential and widely used in the Netherlands for centuries. For the Dort decision, see Victor E. d’Assonville, “‘Monumentum aere perennius’ – Discussions and Decisions by the Synod of Dort on the Translation of the Bible,” *KOERS – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 84 (2019): 8.

20. E.g., in notes on Gen. 2:7, *The Reformation Study Bible* states that “the Hebrew here does not say ‘a living being became man’—man is not formed from preexistent life” and reference is also made to man bearing God’s image and having authority over the animals.

21. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible. New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985).

the note is true to fact, it omits mentioning that only in the case of man did the breath of life come directly from God. It is difficult not to wonder whether the emphasis in the note on what is common to both man and beast could be a nod to evolutionary theory. The *ESV Study Bible* note on Genesis 2:7 makes similar comments, although man's special status is also noted.

Again a few centuries ago, there was a decidedly different emphasis. The States-General Bible specifically notes (on Gen. 2:7) the difference between man and beast. The fact that God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life shows that "the soul of man is not created from any preexisting material, like the soul of the beasts."²²

Happily, when it comes to annotated Scripture, mention can also be made of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*, which clearly affirms in its introduction to Genesis a plain, straightforward reading of the text as a real, historical, and authoritative narrative of the origins of the universe, biological life, and the human race.²³ Furthermore, in its note on Genesis 2:7 it unequivocally states, "The first man was not formed of creatures already made—no evolutionary process. God made Adam from dust—the literal dust to which he must return since the fall." This approach honors the long-standing tradition as articulated by Herman Bavinck that "Christian theology, with only a few exceptions, continued to hold onto the literal historical view of the creation story."²⁴

On the scientific front, it is good to note that there is significant opposition to the evolutionary theory of origins, and important critiques of it have been published.²⁵ Creationist societies like Answers in Genesis and Creation Research Institute enjoy considerable public support that enables them to thrive.²⁶ As can be expected, mainstream science tends to deride creationist efforts as unscholarly, and it not infrequently opposes their work vehemently. While any academic enterprise, including creationism, can and should be critically considered and, where necessary, criticized, the abuse the creationist movement sometimes takes is uncalled for.

22. My translation of "wijst ons aan dat de ziel des menschen niet is geschapen uit eenige voorgaande materie, gelijk de ziel der beesten."

23. Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 3.

24. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 2:495.

25. Most recently, Moreland et al., *Theistic Evolution*.

26. Their websites can be found at <https://answersingenesis.org/> and <https://creationresearch.org/>.

It is unfortunate, for example, that a prominent evangelical historian of the stature of Mark Noll would not only give his support to evolutionary science but go on to highlight the scientific work of creationists as an example of work unworthy of academic stature, since in his view creationists are mired in obscurantism. As he makes clear in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which was “meant more to incite than to inform,” he gives this negative evaluation of creationist work because they do not accept the scientific theory of evolution. He writes that, “if the consensus of modern scientists, who devote their lives to looking at the data of the physical world, is that humans have existed on the planet for a very long time, it is foolish for biblical interpreters to say that ‘the Bible teaches’ the recent creation of human beings.”²⁷ Some years later when reflecting on this book, he wrote that he was encouraged by the boldness and courage that some evangelicals showed in spelling out “why they are evolutionists and why they hold evolutionary theory to be compatible with traditional Christian orthodoxy.”²⁸ In other words, current scientific *theory* on origins has more authority than the biblical text of God’s revelation of the origin of mankind. Not surprisingly, Mark Noll also supports the work of BioLogos.

In the midst of the ongoing polemic about the meaning of Genesis 1 and 2, the question naturally and repeatedly arises whether it is justified to stick to an interpretation that is centuries old and continue to accept Genesis 1 and 2 as recounting real history. To answer that question, we will need to listen carefully to Scripture. After all, God was the only one present at the creation of all things and He has revealed to us what we need to know about those events at the beginning of time. So, the critical question is, what does Scripture teach, both in Genesis and elsewhere?

Compared to past generations of interpreters of Scripture, we are arguably even better equipped in terms of scholarship to tackle such a question. Modern scholarship has given us more insight into the cultural world of those who first received the revelation found in Genesis and we have greater knowledge about some of the vocabulary used. However, any interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 needs to be weighed and tested against the claims that Scripture itself makes. It is therefore to Scripture that we must turn for direction on the issues at hand.

27. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), ix, 207.

28. Mark Noll, “The Evangelical Mind Today,” *First Things*, no. 146 (October 2004): 37.

The Purpose of This Book

We are in the happy situation that Scripture is accepted as authoritative by Christians generally considered conservative whether they accept a literal reading of Genesis or not. This common commitment to the authority of the Word of God should make a fruitful discussion about the issues at hand possible. The purpose of this book is to contribute to that discussion.

The focus of this work is therefore not to give an all-round commentary and explanation of every verse in Genesis 1 and 2, but to listen to Scripture in order to find out what God is revealing to us about the historicity of the beginning chapters of Genesis. Concentrating on listening to what Scripture actually says brings with it the realization that the reader of the Word has a relatively modest place. The one who listens to Scripture acknowledges that the Word, not the reader, determines the meaning of the text.

A key question addressed in this book is whether the widespread departure from the historic Reformed and Presbyterian understanding of how to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 is justified. While no book can pretend to be comprehensive, this study does attempt to cover the most important elements concerning the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2. In doing so I will especially engage with and discuss approaches to Genesis by fellow conservative Christians who wish to honor the claims of Scripture but do not accept the plain sense of this part of Scripture as an accurate recounting of real historical events.

The topic of the historical value of Genesis 1 and 2 is a contentious one, and how one evaluates the evidence and what conclusions one comes to has enormous implications and consequences. After considering the evidence, this book comes to the determination that we should accept the plain, straightforward reading of the Genesis text as a reliable account of the historical events resulting in the creation of the world we now live in. This study will also try to convince fellow Christians that such a conclusion is justified.

Although the historical value of the opening chapters of Scripture is the primary focus of this study, the closely related discussion of the creation account and the theory of evolution cannot be ignored. A secondary purpose is therefore to ascertain the place of science in the study of Genesis 1 and 2 and the implications that the historicity of Genesis has for the credibility of the theory of evolution for explaining the origin of creation. Just as many theologians who have embraced the theory of evolution are not scientists, I am also not one, but I will share something of how qualified scientists who affirm the historicity of Genesis understand the scientific implications of what God's Word teaches in the first two chapters of Genesis.

To keep this study at a modest and manageable size, further discussion is sometimes relegated to a footnote or reference is made to a more detailed study that can be consulted.

Before continuing, it is proper to set forth the presuppositions that inform this work.

Basic Presuppositions

For the present purpose, one could simply define history writing as the accurate communication of events that have taken place in the past. Such a relaying of past events need not be exhaustive and include all the details we today would like to know about. But it communicates what really happened.

To properly appreciate historical information in the Old Testament, one must however realize that the Hebrew Bible is not simply an ancient history book or a collection of historical documents from the past. It is a record of historical events that was and remains unique. It emphasizes God's activity and plan in its narrating of His people's past. This history does not recount events for the sake of antiquarian interest or to provide all sorts of colorful detail for its own sake. Rather, the historical accounts are given within the context of the grand narrative of God's redemptive promises and His dealings with His people. For that reason what we generally call Historical Books, because they largely describe historical events, can better be designated as Prophetic Books. That is the way Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are identified in the Hebrew canon. The Lord Jesus could therefore refer to the Old Testament as the Law and the Prophets (Luke 16:31; 24:44). As prophetic books narrating historical events, their primary underlying purpose is to show how the LORD as covenant God was faithful to His promises and worked salvation for His people as He guided history to the goal of the coming Messiah. That basic purpose also holds for the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses, of which Genesis is a part. One implication of this purpose is that Scripture does not always inform us of details that would satisfy our curiosity.

Furthermore, what also makes the account of the history narrated in Scripture unique is that through this same prophetic Word God worked faith in His people by His Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 10:17). Indeed, it is also only through faith that God's unfolding plan of salvation can be discerned (cf. Acts 7:51–53). This necessity of faith to properly appreciate the history recounted in Scripture brings

us to the first presupposition that informs our understanding and interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis.²⁹

The Need for Faith

We need to read and study the biblical text in faith, receiving it as fully authoritative and trustworthy. This conviction is based on the fact that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). In his comments on this passage Calvin noted that “we owe to the Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God.”³⁰ And God does not deceive or lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). The sixteenth-century Protestant Belgic Confession speaks of the authority of Scripture in article 5: “We believe without any doubt all things contained in them [i.e., the books of Scripture], not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God.”³¹ In other words, the Bible is self-sufficient and self-attesting. It does not need our arguments and proofs to show that it is reliable.

Such an affirmation of the trustworthiness of Scripture has been the historic position of the Christian church throughout its history. Indeed, God’s Word teaches that without the activity of the Holy Spirit, who works faith, one cannot rightly interpret Scripture (1 Cor. 2:13–14; 2 Cor. 3:14–15; Heb. 4:2). We need to approach the text in faith. Also for the task of exegesis, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).³² Faith seeks understanding. As Anselm of Canterbury put it, “I do not seek to understand that I may believe; but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe,—that unless I believed, I should not understand.”³³ It goes without saying that such

29. For what follows, see in greater detail Cornelis Van Dam, “Interpreting Historical Narrative: Truth Claim, Truth Value, and Historicity,” in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 99–106.

30. John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 330.

31. Belgic Confession, art. 5, in Canadian Reformed Churches, *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg: Premier, 2014), 500.

32. Also see Fred H. Klooster, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relationship of the Spirit’s Illumination to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 451–72.

33. Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; an Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago: Open Court, 1903), 7 (= Anselm, *Proslogium*, I); cf. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2015), 129–34.

an approach needs to be accompanied with much prayer that the meaning and message of God's Word may be clear.

The Clarity of Scripture

Another fundamental assumption is that when God speaks to us in Scripture, His Word is clear. One must therefore accept the natural or obvious meaning of the text and not demand of it what it does not say. Calvin commented on Galatians 4:22 that "the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely. Let us not only neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions, which lead us away from the natural meaning."³⁴ Once again, faith seeks understanding.

Put another way, the clarity of Scripture presupposes that God accurately transmits exactly what He wants to convey using the medium of human language. Against those who would deny such clarity, Benedict Pictet, a successor of Calvin at the Genevan Academy, correctly posed the dilemma: "Either God *could not* reveal himself more plainly to men, or he *would not*. No one will assert the former, and the latter is most absurd; for who could believe that God our heavenly Father has been unwilling to reveal his will to his children...?"³⁵ Indeed, contrary to the notions of postmodernism, there is meaning in the written text. Scripture's perspicuity means that believers reading the Bible are not dependent on specialists, be they in theology or science, in order to understand its basic message. When believers read and study Scripture, humbly submitting themselves to the Word and asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then the Word is a lamp before their feet, a light on their path (Ps. 119:105).

The notion of the clarity of Scripture assumes that God speaks to us in language human beings can understand; in other words, God uses the language of normal everyday experience so that the natural or plain meaning of the text is clear to all who read it.

Affirming the clarity of Scripture does not mean that there are no difficult passages that require scholarly study and about which disagreement may remain. It does mean that the reader of Scripture is not dependent on scholars to understand the basic import and significance of the passage before them.

34. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 85; see further on Calvin's understanding of Gal. 4:22, T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 63–68.

35. Quoted by Mark D. Thompson, "The Generous Gift of a Gracious Father: Toward a Theological Account of the Clarity of Scripture," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 617 (italics in the original).

As a matter of fact believers should be able to discern and judge any scholarly interpretations of Scripture that are suspect (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; 1 John 2:20).³⁶

Finally, in the context of the clarity of Scripture, a brief general comment about the use of the term *literal* in this study is appropriate. The use of this term simply means understanding the biblical passage in accordance with the obvious, plain meaning of the text while taking into consideration its context. The exegetical chapters of this study will make clear what this approach entails. It does not suggest that we can fully comprehend what Scripture says when we accept the text at face value. Indeed, one often has to settle for what could be paradoxically called a precise ambiguity latent in much of what Genesis 1 and 2 tell us. God communicates what we need to know in plain and simple terms. But at the same time, the clear straightforward language can raise many questions for the inquiring reader. But such a situation is a good reminder of our limited capacities as created beings. There are clear limits to our understanding that need to be respected when we deal with the Creator's revelation of His awesome work of bringing the world and indeed the entire universe into existence. There is no shame in recognizing our limitations in not fully understanding what transpired, and such a respectful attitude is honoring to God in taking Him at His word when He graciously condescends to us and tells in clear language of His work of creation.

The Importance of Genre

Most often we can readily recognize or identify the genre of the text we are seeking to comprehend when we keep in mind its biblical context. Taking into account the genre is critical for correctly understanding the text. It would not do, for example, to read a parable and then interpret it as a true historical account to be accepted in the plain and ordinary sense of the word. It is, therefore, very important that we discern the genre of Genesis 1 and 2 correctly. We must be aware of the danger of imposing a genre on a passage in order to make it fit our preconceived notion of what it means or was meant to say. If the genre is determined to be historical narrative, then we must accept as historically true whatever Scripture affirms to be so.

36. Helpful recent articles on the clarity of Scripture include D. A. Carson, "Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?" in D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 179–93; and Thompson, "The Generous Gift," 615–43.

The Bible Does Not Contradict Itself

Since the entire Bible is the Word of God, who does not contradict Himself, the meaning of the opening chapters of Genesis should also be read in the light of subsequent biblical passages that deal with the same subject matter. Indeed, an important principle is that Scripture interprets itself so that less clear passages are interpreted in the light of those that are more clear. This basic hermeneutical rule was also clearly stated in early Reformed confessions.³⁷ And so a New Testament passage may, for example, throw light on a difficult Old Testament text. We will see many examples of this in the course of this study. Scripture must shape the understanding of the interpreter also for the first chapters of Holy Writ.

Use the Text God Has Given His Church

Finally, one further basic presupposition is that the text of Genesis to be used for exegesis is the canonical text God in His providence has entrusted to the church (cf. Rom. 3:2). We cannot, for example, build our understanding of Genesis 1 and 2 on the basis of a hypothetical literary reconstruction that attempts to detail the supposed process of the origin of these chapters from different traditions and documents. We must confine ourselves to the received canonical Hebrew text. We do not need to attempt to go behind the text in order to get at the so-called real account of creation.³⁸

Current Mainstream Assumptions

Mainstream (post)modern scholarship however does not hold to the presuppositions that honor the Bible as the trustworthy and infallible Word of God. Its radically different presuppositions in approaching Scripture have had enormous consequences for how the Bible has been interpreted. Under the

37. Westminster Confession of Faith 1.9, in *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Willow Grove, Pa.: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005). Second Helvetic Confession 2, in Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966). See further, e.g., J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014), 83–85; Mark D. Thompson, “Biblical Interpretation in the Works of Martin Luther,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 303–4.

38. In this connection, also see the helpful discussion in Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019), 112–15, earlier published as Vern S. Poythress, “Dealing with the Genre of Genesis and Its Opening Chapters,” *WTJ* 78 (2016): 220–22, where he concludes that “source criticism has very limited value when it comes to actually interpreting the texts that we have.”

pressures of Enlightenment rationalism, many reject the divine inspiration of Genesis and consider it to be only a human book. Purely human literary works are of course fallible and need to be carefully examined to establish whether they are credible. Consistent critical scholars can only accept as historically reliable and true what is verifiable. If that is not the case, then such an event recorded in Scripture cannot be accepted as real history.³⁹ Since Genesis 1 and 2 give a record of events that cannot be verified as having actually happened as recorded, that fact alone will mean that critical scholars cannot accept these chapters as a reliable historical account.

In order to salvage a meaningful understanding of those first chapters of the Bible in such a skeptical intellectual environment, many scholars now suggest that the purpose of these chapters is to pass on theological truths such as that God is the creator of all things. Others affirm that the intent of Genesis 1 and 2 is to give an explanation for the origin of the present world and, for example, institutions such as the day of rest and marriage. According to them the account was not meant to convey the actual history of the beginning of creation. A related view holds that the beginning of Scripture consists of myths with no historical value. Furthermore, under the influence of the evolutionary paradigm, these chapters have been made to yield meanings compatible with the current scientific understanding of the origin of the world and the human race even if such interpretations appear to contradict the clear testimony of Scripture.⁴⁰

In contrast to mainstream thinking, the basic presuppositional foundation of this study is to take seriously the integrity of the text of Genesis as part of God's Word. As such, it needs to be accepted and understood in faith, and its historical intent and meaning need to be judged on the basis of its own testimony.

The Structure of This Book

Before we embark on a study of Scripture, we need to be clear about the role that data from outside Scripture should play in our understanding of the Bible. The next chapter therefore deals with two important areas in this regard: the place of ancient Near Eastern accounts of earth's beginnings in interpreting Genesis and the role that scientific theories on the origin of our planet should play in seeking to understand what Scripture tells us.

39. See, e.g., the discussion in Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 3–50.

40. For an overview of different approaches to Genesis 1 and 2, see A. H. W. Curtis, "Genesis," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM, 1990), 253–54.

Subsequent chapters deal with the necessary exegetical details of the opening chapter of Genesis, such as the genre and historicity of Genesis 1, the meaning of the phrase “in the beginning,” the days of creation, and what the specific meaning of each passage is. Current popular interpretations that downplay, compromise, or deny the historicity of what the text relates will be dealt with. A similar detailed approach will be taken with Genesis 2. Overall, in discussing the text, the focus will be on those scholars who have a high view of Scripture but who have questioned the plain meaning of what is narrated. The issue of what Scripture says and teaches in Genesis 1 and 2 is of great importance and has consequences far beyond these opening chapters. This study therefore seeks to address all the main issues and to convince fellow believers that we should accept the plain meaning of the text as the LORD has given it to us. A concluding section will focus on the implications of the historicity of the creation account for the gospel and how the challenge of defending the truth of Genesis 1 and 2 can be met.