

Introduction

Why this new Genesis commentary?

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, and its translations into Early Modern English have shaped the English language and Western culture in general, as even atheists acknowledge.¹ Most importantly, it is the foundational book for the Christian faith. And the foundational book of the Bible is the first, called Genesis in English.

However, Christianity has been under more vociferous attack than ever.² Not surprisingly, the Book of the Christians, the Bible, has likewise been the target of opponents of Christianity. And it's not surprising that the book of Genesis, especially in its early chapters, has been especially singled out. With the rise of dogmatic materialistic philosophy disguised as science, Genesis has been both marginalized and ridiculed.

Yet in much of the Christian West, it goes undefended. However, if Genesis is indeed foundational to Christian theology and Christian morality—and it is—these latter teachings will not survive long without the foundational book.³ This commentary is thus designed with several aims, which fall into two basic categories:

1. Genesis and the Christian faith.

First, this is a detailed exposition of Genesis itself, as would be expected in a commentary on a part of God's written Word. Furthermore, it will aim to demonstrate that Genesis is foundational to Christian doctrine and the Gospel itself. It will indicate where a Genesis passage is cited by the other authors of Scripture, and by Jesus Christ.⁴ As will be shown, the other writers of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, treat the people, events, timeframes,⁵ and even the order of events, as real, not merely literary or theological devices.⁶ And the reality of the *history* is foundational to crucial teachings about faith and morality.⁷

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1. E.g. leading British antitheist Richard Dawkins detests God and biblical morality, but calls the Bible a “great work of literature”, thinks that anyone who has not read a classic translation “is verging on the barbarian”, and has listed “129 biblical phrases which any cultivated English speaker will instantly recognise and many use without knowing their provenance.” Dawkins, C.R., Why I want all our children to read the King James Bible, theguardian.com, 19 May 2012,
 2. See Kumar, S. with Sarfati, J., *Christianity for Skeptics*, 2012.
 3. Compare “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3), albeit this refers to the foundations of the Israelite theocracy over which David ruled.
 4. A new resource documenting this is *Genesis Verse-by-Verse*, creation.com/genverse.
 5. Wieland, C., Jesus on the age of the earth, *Creation* **34**(2):51–54, 2012.
 6. Sarfati, J., Genesis: Bible authors believed it to be history, *Creation* **28**(2):21–23, 2006. See also Batten, D., and Sarfati, J., *15 Reasons to Take Genesis as History*, 2013.
 7. Sarfati, J., Why Bible history matters, *Creation* **33**(4):18–21, 2011.

It's notable that the New Testament authors cited Genesis frequently.⁸ Furthermore, they also presupposed that their readers, as new converts in the first churches, had received detailed instruction in Genesis.⁹ So churches today have ample precedent for sound instruction in the Book of Beginnings.

Another feature of this commentary is looking at the wisdom of Christian and Jewish interpreters throughout the ages. Some may argue, "Isn't the Bible all we need? Don't you realize that interpreters can err?" Indeed, the correct view must be obtained from the Bible alone. But then, modern exegetes are not the first who have known about the original languages and cultures of the Bible.

The onus is on those proposing a novel interpretation to prove their case. This commentary will document that a lot of the currently popular explanations of Genesis are novelties. For example, if long-age interpretations had always been popular, then a case could be made for assuming that the Bible hints at this. But if they were absent until they became popular in 'science', it's more likely that such interpretations were motivated by trying to reconcile the Bible with 'science'.

Thus we hope this commentary will be useful to pastors and teachers—the structure lends itself to helping with expository preaching. But we also hope that it will be useful and interesting for laypeople for their Bible study time. It certainly falls under teaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and equipping believers to "have the mind of Christ" (Romans 12:2).

Because I am writing for a wide range of readership, every chapter has a short summary at the beginning. Some of the more technical or peripheral content is placed in **shaded boxes**. Also, since it is a commentary, it lends itself to being a reference book that readers will look into for information on a specific passage of Genesis 1–11. But sometimes the relevant information will be explained in more detail in other places. So I frequently use cross-references to other headings in various chapters for more information on a topic.

2. Genesis, real science, and refuting objections

Sometimes the opponents of Genesis-defending individuals and organizations like *Creation Ministries International* (CMI) rebuke us by claiming, "Genesis is not a scientific textbook." If in a playful mood, I'll reply, "Thank goodness, because scientific textbooks become outdated in a few years". Otherwise I reply that we claim it's really a book about *history*—events that really happened in the past.¹⁰

British OT scholar Gordon Wenham (1943–), a leading evangelical commentator, basically concedes all old-earth history in his commentary that is informative in other ways.¹¹ He acknowledges "the most serious problem for the modern reader of Genesis is to know how to relate Genesis 1–11 to current scientific and historical knowledge." But he is rather dismissive of these concerns, claiming "it is doubtful that they were in the writer's mind, and

8. Cosner, L., The use of Genesis in the New Testament, *Creation* **33**(2):16–19, 2013.

9. Cosner, L, What the New Testament doesn't say, creation.com/nt-doesnt-say, 11 September 2012.

10. Sarfati, J., "But Genesis is not a science textbook", *Creation* **26**(4):6, 2004.

11. Wenham, G.J., *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1, 'Genesis and modern thought', pp. lii–liii, 1987.

we should therefore be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with.”¹²

However, there is no doubt that many attacks on Genesis these days have come from what presents itself as science and thus allegedly indisputable. So it’s important for all Christians, especially leaders, to be able to defend the Book of Beginnings from these sorts of attacks in particular. This is a twofold process, with a positive and negative aspect:

1. **Positive:** “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15) and to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).
2. **Negative:** “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Both of these are aspects of obeying Jesus’s “great and first commandment”, to “love the Lord your God with all ... your *mind*” (Matthew 22:37–38, emphasis mine).¹³

Thus this commentary will engage the main scientific arguments from both those aspects. But some would ask, “What’s the point of science if we have the Bible?” or, “Aren’t many of our problems due to placing science above God’s Word?” The solution is understanding the difference between the *ministerial* and *magisterial* uses of science.

1. The *magisterial* use of science occurs when science stands over Scripture like a magistrate and judges it. The ‘problems’ are due to this faulty approach. Indeed, there is an inconsistency in many ‘scientific’ critics of the Bible: they condemn the Bible for being a fixed reference point while science is self-correcting. But if something is ‘self-correcting’, then it’s not correct now! Conversely, the Bible claims—with ample justification^{14,15}—to be the Word of God¹⁶ that never needs correction. If we marry our theology to today’s science, we may well be widowed tomorrow.
2. The *ministerial* approach accepts that all things necessary for our faith and life are either expressly set down in Scripture, or may be logically deduced from Scripture, the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. Thus science must submit to this, and its self-correcting properties should lead it asymptotically closer to the biblical truth. However, there is much information not revealed in the above—Scripture is ‘true truth’ but it is not exhaustive truth. So science can *minister* to the Bible in elaborating upon its clear teachings in areas where it is silent. This may help us decide from among equally biblically-plausible alternatives *consistent with the language*. This includes developing *models* that help us to understand this history, or provide a plausible explanation for events. In contrast, the magisterial use all too often *overrules* the clear teaching of the Bible to come up with a meaning *inconsistent* with sound hermeneutics.

12. Wenham, Ref. 11.

13. Sarfati, J., Loving God with all your mind: logic and creation, *J. Creation* **12**(2):142–151, 1998.

14. Sarfati, J., Should we trust the Bible? *Creation* **33**(1):32–36, 2011.

15. See also Sarfati, J., Using the Bible to prove the Bible? Are biblical creationists guilty of circular reasoning? *Creation* **30**(4):50–52, 2008.

16. Sarfati, J., The authority of Scripture, *Apologia* **3**(2):12–16, 1994.

Some of the models referred to in the ministerial approach will be explained in this commentary, particularly on the created kinds and the Flood. The models can show how *known* processes in biology, information science, hydrology and sedimentology would work under the *constraints* of the biblically-derived propositions. However, by their nature of being ministerial, these models must never be elevated to the same level of authority as Scripture, but should be held loosely.^{17,18}

Science and miracles

But how can we relate science to a book like Genesis that reveals major miracles by God? Actually, the founders of most branches of modern science were creationists. They believed that we are made in the image of a rational God (Genesis 1:26–27), who is a God of order not of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33); that God gave man dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28), and He commanded honesty (Exodus 20:16). Indeed, without these biblical assumptions, modern science would not have arisen at all, historically and logically, which is why it was stillborn in cultures like ancient Greece and China. (See also ‘How the plain meaning of Scripture inspired modern science’ in Ch. 2; and ‘How belief in the Fall of Adam inspired modern science’ in Ch. 12.)^{19,20,21}

With this background, the biblical way to think of science does not involve a ‘hands-off’ approach by some deistic God. Rather, ‘natural laws’ are *descriptions* of the way God, the divine Lawmaker, upholds His creation in a *regular* and *repeatable* way (Colossians 1:15–17). Conversely, miracles are God’s way of operating in His creation in a *special* way for special reasons, rather than capricious interruptions of the natural order at some whim.

It is often claimed today that science by definition requires the exclusion of miracles; how could one trust natural law if it was capable of being violated by some arbitrary event? However, the founding fathers of most branches of science had no problem believing in the Bible’s miracles; their relative rarity in history confirmed the general regularity of natural law. The fact that nature is both lawful and non-capricious was seen as consistent with, even derived from, the same characteristics of God Himself.²²

Thus miracles should be regarded not as a ‘violation’ of natural law, but an *addition*. This is because natural laws are formulated in isolated systems. For example, Newton’s First Law of Motion states that objects will continue in a straight line at constant speed—if no unbalanced force is acting. But there is nothing in the law to prohibit unbalanced forces acting—otherwise nothing could ever change direction!

If God exists, there is no truly isolated system. He could certainly bring other forces into play in addition to the normal ones. Thus there is no basis for disallowing miracles unless one could prove that God doesn’t exist, and such a universal negative claim is unprovable.

17. Wieland, C., ‘Hanging Loose’: What should we defend? *Creation* **11**(2):4, 1989.

18. Sarfati, J., Flood models and biblical realism, *J. Creation* **24**(3):46–53, 2010.

19. See Hannam, J., *God’s Philosophers: How the Medieval World Laid the Foundations of Modern Science*, p. 5, 2010.

20. Sarfati, J., Why does science work at all? *Creation* **31**(3):12–14, 2009.

21. Sarfati, J., The biblical roots of modern science, *Creation* **32**(4):32–36, 2010.

22. For more, see my refutation of a critic, Miracles and science; creation.com/miracles, 1 September 2006.

C.S. Lewis applied these concepts to the virginal conception of Christ:²³ that is, the zygote was made by the Holy Spirit's action on Mary's ovum, i.e. an *addition* to the system. But after that, the embryo developed in the normal manner.²⁴

However, there is another horn to the atheist dilemma, as follows. Miracles are viewed as an impossible exception to the regularity of nature—but without God, there is no justification for believing in the regularity of nature in the first place.

Furthermore, the attempt to use scientific laws against miracles forgets that these laws are *descriptive* not *prescriptive*. Thus they cannot prescribe what cannot happen, so they cannot rule out miracles. Scientific laws do not cause or forbid anything any more than the outline of a map causes the shape of the coastline. (The fallacy of imputing a reality to an abstraction is called *reification* or *concretism*.)

To apply these concepts to this book: because creation *finished* at the end of Day 6 (Genesis 2:1–3), creationists following the Bible would expect that God has since mostly worked through 'natural laws' described by operational science. The main exceptions would be where He has revealed in the Bible that He used a miracle.

Overall aim

This book aims to expound on both the historical and theological perspectives on Genesis in a way that does justice to both.

- Genesis is a book of *history*: it discusses things that actually happened in a way that accurately (though not exhaustively) portrays the events. The science touched upon in the book, and/or relevant to it, can function as a ministerial support to the historical record.
- Genesis is a book of *theology*: the historical events tell us about God's nature and how He intervened in history. Indeed, we shall see that the theology is meaningless if it is not historical, which is why it's so important to defend Genesis history. Also, Genesis is the beginning of God's outworking of His messianic program planned before He created the universe.²⁵ If we can't trust the history in Genesis, how can we trust God's future promises?

23. Sarfati, J., The Virginal Conception of Christ, *Apologia* 3(2):4–11, 1994.

24. Lewis, C.S., *Miracles*, 1960.

25. Sarfati, J., The Incarnation: Why did God become Man? *Creation* 35(1):34–37.