Notes on Reading Genesis 1-11

NOTE: Most of the notes here are direct quotes or paraphrases from the texts above (sources are indicated in each bullet point or section). The majority of the notes came directly from CBGT with similar arguments in other texts also cross-referenced and the notes are filled out by the other sources.

Sources:
H2RG = Tremper Longman III, How to read Genesis, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005)
RSF = Roger Forster and Paul Martson, Reason, Science and Faith, (Crowborough: Monarch, 1999)
GAC = John Walton, Genesis (NIV Application Commentary), (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001)
TCGS = David Wilkinson and Rob Frost, Thinking Clearly about God and Science, (Crowborough: Monarch, 1996)

Who wrote Genesis?
• Genesis is technically an anonymous book, it nowhere names its author. However, we need to expand the search for an author to include the entire Pentateuch, since the first five books of the OT present themselves as a coherent unit. Nowhere within the Pentateuch does Moses or anyone claim to have written it. [H2RG, p.43]

• Evidence for Mosaic Authorship:
• In the Pentateuch we hear the Moses was a recipient of revelation and a witness to redemptive acts. We read that he wrote down certain historical events (Ex.17:14; Numbers 33:2), laws (Ex. 24:4; 34:27) and a song (Deut. 31:22, see Deut. 32). [H2RG, p.44]
• In early biblical history a tradition arose that connect the Pentateuch with Moses. Joshua 1:6-7 indicates that Moses bequeathed some textual tradition to the following generations. Later in history the Israelites could refer to the book of Moses (2 Chron. 25:4; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1). These passages give strong biblical data for a Mosaic writing whilst not being specific about its shape or scope. None of these references specifically related to Genesis but they do connect Moses to the later books of the Pentateuch of which Genesis serves as a preamble. [H2RG, p.44-45]

• Problems with Mosaic Authorship:
• The account of Moses death (Deuteronomy 34) – He could not have written a record of his own death. [H2RG, p.45]
• Gen 11:28,31; 15:7 – ‘Ur of the Chaldeans’ – the Chaldeans were a first millennium BC Aramaic speaking tribe that came historically after Moses. [H2RG, p.45]
• Genesis 14 – Abram caught up with those who had captured his nephew Lot at the city of Dan, yet this city was named after Abrahams great-grandson in Judges 17-18. The city existed with a different name in the time Abram. Someone changed the name in the text to make so that later generations could understand where this city was. [H2RG, p.45-46]
• There are therefore indications of post-Mosaic editing of the book of Genesis.
There are also strong indications that parts of Genesis where written down before Moses - parts of the book are treated as sources that are woven into the main fabric of the book. [H2RG, p.46]

If Genesis is a narration of events from the moment of creation to the death of Joseph, these events happened long before Moses. How did Moses know about them or write about them? [H2RG, p.46]

The most blatant evidence for source is the so-called toledot formulas which have been translated in various ways including “these are the generations”, “this is the family history”, “this is the account”. There are eleven such formulas and these provide introductions to sections of Genesis that were likely original sources passed down the generations and included in the final book. [H2RG, p.46-47] [H2RG, p.63]

That these sources may have been written down by the time they came to Moses can be seen in the reference to ‘the book of the toledot of Adam’. However we do not know the details of transmission of these ancient sources of knowledge and aren’t sure whether they were all written or some were oral and others were written. [H2RG, p.47]

We can therefore say three things about Genesis:
1. The tradition of Moses writing the Pentateuch points to his role as an important foundational figure in its composition.
2. There most likely was editorial activity after Moses.
3. Sources were most likely available to Moses concerning the events that happened in Genesis. [H2RG, p.47]

It seems best to affirm Moses’ central role in the production of Genesis, while ultimately affirming its compositional nature … But when it comes down to it, it is both impossible and unnecessary to differentiate Mosaic and non-Mosaic material in any detail. It is impossible because the text isn’t interested in signalling to the reader in every case who might be responsible for what. It is unnecessary because in the final analysis the authority of the text is not located in Moses but in God himself. [H2RG, p.56-57]

Principles for reading: [H2RG, p.57]

Moses had a foundational connection with the production of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole.

Moses used sources, presumably oral and written, that were handed down to him from an earlier time.

Evidence of significant post-Mosaic redactional activity exists in the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

It is not possible or useful to definitely and completely dived the pre-Mosaic, Mosaic and post-Mosaic material from each other.

Biblical Interpretation and Genesis 1-11

Principles of interpretation: Look for the original meaning. Seek to understand what the passage would have meant to the original writer and readers. To do this we have to learn all we can about the language, history and culture of the times. We also need learn about the form of the literature. A good deal of historical material exists from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, from which we can discover the characteristics of history-writing at the time that the OT / Genesis was written. OT historical passages must be understood in the light of these characteristics, not in the light of how history is written in the 21st century AD. [CBGT, p.53-54]

If we misinterpret the Bible, it not the Bible that is in error, we are. [CBGT, p.57]
• Christians who believe that the Bible is free from error cannot claim that the same applies to their interpretations. [CBGT, p.60]
• The claim that the Bible is free from error must include a proper understanding of the types of literature and language used in the Bible and the intention of the original authors. [CBGT, p.60]
• If we are not careful and humble in our interpretation of the Bible we will bring the Bible into disrepute by creating unreal errors in it eg. Medieval scholars insisting on taking Gen. 1:16 literalistically and saying that the sun and moon are largest planets in the sky and then scientists coming along and saying this is not true. [CBGT, p.60]

What type of literature is Genesis?
• It is obvious that within the book of Genesis there is a variety of literary types: genealogy (Gen. 5), battle report (Gen. 14), poetic testament (Gen. 49) etc. [H2RG, p.60]
• Genesis has a united narrative plot that takes the reader from the creation of the world to the sojourn in Egypt. It recounts past events and does so with a clear chronological structure. There is a historical impulse and direction right throughout the book of Genesis eg. toledot formulas etc. [H2RG, p.60]
• In addition there is not dramatic genre shift between the book of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, and none between the Pentateuch and the so called historical books that would lead us to read it in any other way than as history. [H2RG, p.60]
• The style of the book leaves little space to argue the obvious conclusion that the author intended Genesis to be read as a work of history that recounts what has taken place in the far-distant past. [H2RG, p.60]
• The function of the history in Genesis is to provide a prologue and foundation for the nation of Israel and the giving of the law in the book of Exodus. It recounts how God chose Abraham and guided his family as his special people. [H2RG, p.61]
• Genesis like all biblical history writing may be described as ‘theological history’ [H2RG, p.61]

Theological History:
• History is never just a transcript of facts about the past. It is impossible for a human being to present the past as a mere collection of uninterpreted facts. History involves a historian who must interpret events for a contemporary audience. [H2RG, p.61]
• The author of Genesis believes that the event he describes by and large happened, however the fact that these events took place is assumed and not argued. The concern of the text is not to prove the history but rather to impress the reader with the theological significance of these acts. History and theology are closely connected in the biblical text. [H2RG, p.62]
• All history is ideological; that is, it adopts a perspective through which it tells the story. It interprets events and does not just record brute facts. Since it is impossible to narrate everything that happens, only those things that are most important to the author and the audience is included, and what is considered important depends on the stance of the author and his or her purpose. [H2RG, p.62]
• It is necessary to affirm the historical intention of a text like Genesis as well as to search for the theological motivation behind its particular shaping of past events. [H2RG, p.63]

The Literal Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3
• Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3 is a simple historical account of how God created the world. [CBGT, p.68]
• The days have to be literal chronological twenty-four hour periods. [RSF, p.244]
• Arguments for the literal interpretation and criticisms:
  • **God should say what he means:** He doesn’t lie BUT Jesus used figurative language eg. ‘born from above’ and ‘living water’ in John 3-4. Neither Jesus nor the Genesis writer should be accused of not saying what they mean if their hearers take them literally when they expect spiritual discernment. [RSF, p.244]
  • **The Sabbath law (Exodus 20:8-11) implies literality:** Does this imply literal days? If this were true we might ask what God did on the 8th day. Did God rest again on the 14th day and so on. In John 5:17 Jesus implies that the whole of time since creation is the 7th day. [RSF, p.244-245]
  • **The word ‘day’ is always literal elsewhere:** It is the context that determines which kind of meaning applies (figurative or literal) and not the word itself. The plural and singular word for day are used many times in the Bible in context where there is no intention of a 24hr day see [RSF, p.245-247]
  • **Not accepting Genesis 1-3 as literal is the slippery slope to dismissing the rest of the Bible:** We can hold to the infallibility of the Bible while acknowledging that our interpretation of it is fallible! This also helps us stay clear of the argument which goes ‘if you don’t believe Genesis you cannot believe the rest of the Bible’. But this ‘slippery slope’ argument only works if all the literature in the Bible is of the same type. We know that some is history, some is parable, some is poetry, some is theology, some is worship. What we need to do is interpret each passage on its own merits. [TCGS, p. 138-139]
  • **There is the problem that even those who hold to a literal view actually interpret parts of the early chapters of Genesis figuratively eg. Genesis 4:10 ‘the voice of his brother’s blood cries unto me from the ground’:** See also [RSF, p.248-255] for other examples of things that Literalists take figuratively.
  • If we insist Genesis 1 is literal historical account then we have to read the rest of Genesis in the same way including the genealogies. Youth earth creationists look at the genealogies and come up with an age of approx. 10,000yrs (accepting the fact that the genealogies in Genesis may be incomplete / selective). Science suggests the age of the earth being about 4500 million years. [CBGT, p.69-70]
  • **Earth appears to be old?** eg. God created trees in Garden of Eden with growth rings, God created the geological strata and fossils. God created all indications of age on the earth. Bible cannot help us either way with evidence for or against this theory. Scientists measure age of earth as God made it appear to be. We cannot find evidence for a young earth in nature, the only way we can find the true age of the earth is by a literalistic reading of Genesis. This implies God is inconsistent – creative work doesn’t match up to his revelation in scripture. We can’t take God’s revelation in nature at face value but we should take his revelation in scripture at face value. God is ultimately a deceiver. [CBGT, p.70-71]
  • Some young earth advocates appeal to the ‘appearance of age’ argument but also argue that there is evidence that the earth is only a few thousand years old. These two arguments are incompatible – if God created it to look old there should be no evidence for a young earth! [CBGT, p.71]
  • **Other scientific arguments for a young earth (eg. earth’s magnetic field, radioactive dating problems, fossil record created by the flood) are found to be flawed, see [CBGT, p.71-80 & p.141-142]**
• Scientific creationism (i.e. young earth creationism argued from a scientific perspective) took on a significant role in society because even as it declares science as the enemy, it used its own brand of theistic science to make sense of the Bible. It claims to take the Bible literally, yet attributes scientific sophistication to terms that could not possibly have had those meanings to the original audience or author … we need to make sense of the Bible on its own terms. [GAC, p.99]

Creation and processes

• Some Christians are not happy with the idea that in creation God puts processes into action eg. God commands the earth to produce life in Genesis 1:24. For them creation should be instantaneous and miraculous. God is however spoken of creating over time in the Bible eg. Isaiah 43:1,15 when God is called the creator of Israel, this uses the same Hebrew word as in Genesis 1. The creation of Israel happened over centuries. [CBGT, p.82-83]

• Scientists have not got very far in their attempts to explain how life might have arisen spontaneously on earth. This claim is essentially a statement of faith that has little scientific evidence to support it. [CBGT, p.83]

• We have repeatedly insisted that any Christian theism has to recognise that God can work both within and outside ‘natural processes’. It is God who creates the winds (Amos 4:13) but nothing supernatural is involved … We cannot see any philosophical objection from a consistent Christian theist to the idea of God ‘creating’ species through a natural process of organic evolution, any more than ‘creating’ winds through a natural process of meteorology. [RSF, p.274] See also Forster and Marston’s classification of Miracles into type-1 and type-2 [RSF, p.132ff]

• We should not simply read into Genesis a weight of presupposition on what it must mean. To be faithful to the text we should look to the Bible language itself to set the limits of interpretation. Genesis certainly does not teach organic evolution, nor does it teach a series of instantaneous miracles. Both these ideas involve modern categories of understanding neither relevant nor present to the ideas of the human writer. God could of course use instantaneous miracles in all his creating and forming, but the language does not necessarily have to carry this meaning. If anything, in fact phrases like ‘let the earth bring forth …’ and deliberate reference to the pre-existent materials of man’s body could give a hint of the use of natural processes … on balance we would conclude that the Genesis accounts are neutral as far as deciding whether God used natural processes or instantaneous miracles after the first initiating act of creation. [RSF, p.279]

Concordist interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3

• These are suggestions about how Genesis 1 may be interpreted in a way that is in accord with the findings of modern science. Most concordist interpretations reject evolution. [CBGT, p.91]

• The gap theory - A gap in God’s creative activity. An explanation of the evidence for a long history of life on earth. Genesis 1:1 = original creation of the earth, then the earth suffers ruin and destruction as a result of rebellion of Lucifer and some angels. Genesis 1:2 is translated to say ‘the earth became formless and void’ . The rest of the Genesis is read as the restoration of the earth by God in six days. All but recent rock strata and fossils are to do with the original ruined creation. Problems: Based on an unusual translation of Genesis 1:2. There is no biblical evidence for destructive effect that the fall of angels / Lucifer had on the earth. [CBGT, p.91-92] Even if you just
postulate a gap, in God’s creative activity, you still have to deal with the language in
Genesis 1 in a non-literal way eg. great lights – moon is not a light, but a reflector; see
[CGBT, p.60]

- **The days were ages** – The days of creation are taken figuratively, representing
successive ages – unspecified periods of millions of years each. In its strongest form
the Day-age interpretation considers the whole week of Genesis 1 to be metaphorical
– a form of picture language. Exodus 20:11 presents no problems for this
interpretation – it says no more than the pattern of the human week is to be based on
the pattern of the divine week of seven creative ages used (metaphorically) in the
creation story. There is general agreement between the order of creative acts and the
geological / fossil record. **Problems:** This correspondence is not exact eg. contrary to
the fossil record trees appear before marine creatures and birds before insects. The
fact the evening / morning appearing before the sun and moon is still a big problem.
[CGBT, p.93-94]

- **Days of revelation** – The days are 24hr days but they are not the days when God
carried out the acts of creation. The days on which God revealed his work of creation
to the author of Genesis. How could anyone know about God’s creative activity when
there was no-one there to witness it until it was nearly over? Answer: If God revealed
it to someone. Genesis 1 then becomes a record of the process of revelation spread of
six literal days. The order of revelation of creative acts is said to be a mixture of
chronological and topical. **Problems:** It is not clear from Genesis 1 that it is meant to
be read as an account of a process of revelation rather than the process of creation.
[CGBT, p.94]

- **NOTE:** Neither the day-age or revelatory day theories are necessarily pro-
evolution or anti-evolution. They leave open the question of how God brought
the living beings out of the earth and the waters.

The Literary-Cultural Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3

- What kind of literature is Genesis 1? Is it literal prose or poetry? What evidence is
there in the text itself to help us see what kind of literature it is? [CBGT, p.95]

- The two creation stories in Genesis 1-2 are unique kinds of documents in the Bible.
This should make us wary of too hasty or dogmatic a classification of them with other
kinds of literature in the Bible – whether historical, poetical, philosophical or
prophetic. [RSF, p.264]

- Identifying the genre of Genesis 1-11 is difficult because of its uniqueness. None of
these accounts belongs to the genre of ‘myth’. Nor is any of them ‘history’ in the
modern sense of eye witness, objective reporting. Rather, they convey theological
truths about events, portrayed in a largely symbolic, pictorial style. This is not to say
that Genesis 1-11 conveys historical falsehood. That conclusion would follow only if
the material claimed to contain objective descriptions … On the other hand, the view
that the truths taught in these chapters have no objective basis is mistaken.
Fundamental truths are declared: creation of all by God, special divine intervention in
the origin of the first man and woman, including humanity, the entrance of sin
through the disobedience of the first pair, the rampant spread of sin after this initial
act of disobedience. The certainty which these truths are presented in the Genesis
account implies the reality of the facts [OTS, p.20-21]

- How then is the unique literary genre of Genesis 1-11 to be understood? One may
suppose that the author, inspired by God’s revelation, employed current literary
traditions to teach the true theological import of humanity’s primeval history. The
book’s purpose was not to provide a biological and geological description of origins.
Rather, it was intended to explain the unique nature and dignity of human beings by virtue of their divine origin. They have been made by the Creator in the divine image, yet marred materially by the sin that so soon disfigured God’s good work. [OTS, p.22]

• To many Christians the apparent unreasonableness in Genesis 1 is to be taken as a pointer to the creation account being non-Chronological, topical and theological, than as pointing to God creating day and night miraculously for the first three days. [CBGT, p.96]

• When we take the text at face value, it means we are not trying to read anything into the text nor are we trying to squeeze something out of the text. We are not trying to sidestep the text or avoid what it makes obvious. We are not trying to subordinate the text to our own agenda or purpose, nor are we trying to co-opt it for our theology or make it answer our questions. We are simply trying to understand the text in a way that the author wanted it to be understood by his audience. [GAC, p.44] Taking the text as face value involves considering issues of literary genre, cultural background and issues of revelation. [GAC, p.46]

• **Literary Structure:** When the earth is first created it is said to be shapeless and empty (Genesis 1:2). The first three days of creation deal with giving it shape and the second three deal with filling it up with creatures suitable to its different parts. The two series of days parallel each other – Day 1 parallels Day 4 (light + darkness), Day 2 – Day 5 (sky + sea), Day 3 – Day 6 (land / plants + animals / humans). [CBGT, p.96-97] [RSF, p.264]

• The whole structure of the passage reflects and speaks of the order, harmony and beauty of God’s creation. God is present as a good craftsman and so perhaps the week is nothing more than a figure of speech. The purpose of the passage is to speak of the nature of God’s creative activity and its outcome, not the detail of how he went about it. To ask the questions which interest modern science is to ask the wrong kind of questions. [CBGT, p.97]

• Genesis 1 is not poetry or simple prose. It has some features of Hebrew poetry – repetition of phrases, parallelism, carefully balance phraseology and a rhythmical quality. Many words and phrases are repeated in the passage 3, 7 or 10 times. [CBGT, p.97]

• **Cultural Setting.** Why were the sun and moon referred to as ‘lights’? In semitic languages (Hebrew is one) the words sun and moon were also the names of Gods. The peoples around the Hebrews worshipped the heavenly bodies as gods and goddesses. Genesis 1 is an attack on this thinking – the heavenly bodies are simply lights created by the God of Israel. [CBGT, p.99]

• The Hebrew word to create which in the OT is only used of God’s creative activity is used only 3 time in Genesis 1 (v1 – start of creation, v21, v27 – creation of humanity). Why is it used in v21? Sea monsters were important in the other creation stories of Babylon which were around. In them the creator God has to subdue the forces of Chaos depicted as sea monsters before creating the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1 rejects this saying that sea monsters are simply part of God’s creation. He didn’t have to fight and subdue them – he created them! [CBGT, p.99]

• The meaning of Genesis 1 is then essentially theological and not historical or scientific. [CBGT, p.100]

• The literary-cultural approach is not directly affected by the scientific arguments about the age of the earth and evolution. Genesis 1 is theological rather than scientific. It concentrates on the nature of God and the world he created, and his purposes in creating. The questions of how he did it are left open. [CBGT, p.104]
• What Christians should be doing is to use linguistics, study of Hebrew culture, classic Christian understanding, and empirical science, to see what the most sensible way is to understand a particular verse – whether literally or figuratively. [RSF, p.243]

• What we would emphasise is that we are not saying that Genesis 1 is only a literary framework. The passage describes real events in an amazingly powerful way, magisterial in its vision of God, and the word only is inappropriate. [RSF, p.274]

• Criticisms: A literal reading of Genesis 1 is much simpler and more obvious. What is simple and obvious depends on the way you approach something. Literalists are more concerned with what is simple and obvious to them, rather than what would be simple and obvious to the first hearers or readers of Genesis 1. [CBGT, p.100]

• Recognition of literary artistry and form in Genesis 1 does not rule out an account of actual events. There is some validity in this point. However if it is right to conclude that the creation week is a literary figure of speech then there is no basis for taking it as a literal account of an actual chronological series of events. [CBGT, p.101]

• Seeing the creation account as an attack on the culture of the Ancient Near East does not rule out a literal interpretation of the account. There is validity in this point BUT the culturally specific nature of the passage should make us cautious about reading it as if it was written to address the concerns of our scientific culture in a straightforward way. [CBGT, p.101]

• The literary cultural approach ignores questions raised by science. This criticism assumes the exaggerated importance our culture gives to science and scientific truth. The questions dealt with by Genesis are in fact the more relevant ones, even in our culture. [CBGT, p.101]

Genesis in its cultural background

• Genesis was not written a cultural vacuum – it is the old part of scripture but it is not by far the oldest literature from the Ancient Near East. The earliest literatures that are important for the study of the Bible come from Mesopotamia and Egypt. Moses should probably be dated to the 15th century BC whilst the first pieces of Sumerian and Egyptian literature come from the first part of the 3rd millennium BC. Other literature that is significant for OT study is from Israel’s nearest neighbours and reflects Canaanite religious ideas. [H2RG, p.71]

• As we read Genesis today thoughts of biology and physics go through our minds. No doubt Genesis 1-2 has bearing on our evaluation of these modern scientific accounts of cosmic and human origins BUT the biblical account of creation was not written to counter Darwin or Stephen Hawking’s account of creation but it was written in the light of the rival descriptions of creation around at the time. [H2RG, p.72]

• The mythological literature of the Ancient Near East is relevant to all of Genesis because it provides an understanding of how people through about deity in the ancient world. It is more specifically relevant to Genesis 1-11 because the narratives in those chapters have parallels in the mythology of the Ancient Near East. [GAC, p. 27]

• Since God’s people were constantly tempted to worship the deities of other nations, we shouldn’t be surprised that the biblical accounts of creation were shaped in such a way as to provide a clear distinction from those of other nations. We therefore see similarities and differences between these accounts. [H2RG, p.72 & p.76-79]

• For summary of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Canaanite creation accounts see [H2RG, p.72-76] [IOT, p.248-249] [GAC, p.28-35]

• Similarities and differences between the biblical account of creation and other Ancient Near Eastern accounts:
• Most accounts presume a period of primordial chaos followed by order. Genesis 1 also describes the initial material of the earth as ‘formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters’ and on the second day the appearance of land results from the separation of waters of earth and the heavens. There also seems to be a similarity in the conception of creation from undifferentiated mass. [H2RG, p.77]

• In Memphite theology the word of Ptah brings created beings into existence. In Genesis 1 God speaks to accomplish acts of creation. [H2RG, p.77]

• The Mesopotamian texts provide a close similarity to the biblical account of creation. They describe how humans were made from the blood / spit of the gods and clay. One story makes it very clear that humans are created for a purpose – they are to perform manual labour to replace the lesser deities who had gone on strike! The biblical accounts describe how humans came into being through a combination of elements. Adam is created from the dust of the ground and the breath of God – probably indicating the human connection with the created order and their special relationship with God. [H2RG, p.77-78]

• The genesis creations texts treat humanity with considerably more respect than the Mesopotamian counterparts. Adam and Eve are created for manual labour, to tend the garden, but they are also described as being created in the image of God and the relationship with their God seems more personal. [H2RG, p.78]

• The Mesopotamian and Canaanite accounts of creation feature conflict at the centre of creation. Marduk defeats the forces of chaos, as does Baal. Yahweh faces no such rival in the Genesis account – God shapes the watery mass into a beautifully ordered world over the course of the six days of creation. [H2RG, p.78-79]

• The most important and fundamental difference between Genesis and all the creation accounts is that Yahweh created the cosmos! Marduk didn’t do it, nor did Baal, Atum, Re or any other God. There was no conflict at the time of creation because there was no rival who could stand against Yahweh. The purpose of the creation texts, when read in the light of alternative, contemporary accounts was to assert the truth about who was responsible. [H2RG, p.79]

• The main contrast between the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Canaanite creation accounts and the biblical creation accounts has to do with the identity and nature of the creator. The biblical account presents one God, who alone is God, who created the world. This one God created unopposed. In the other creation accounts the cosmos came into existence by means of conflict. According to Genesis, conflict is introduced into the world not by the gods but by humanity’s rebellion (Gen. 3). [H2RG, p.79]

• Many of the aspects of creation that were though to be divine in the ancient near east are said to be created in the biblical account eg. in Egypt the main God and creator is in most accounts the sun (called variously Amun, Aten or Re). According to the Bible, Yahweh created the sun on the fourth day along with the other heavenly bodies. [H2RG, p.79]

• In contrast to the exalted monotheism of Genesis 1-11, the Mesopotamian accounts present gods which are embodiments of natural forces. They know no moral principle. They lie, steal, fornicate, and kill. Moreover, humans enjoy no special dignity in these accounts. They are the lowly servants of gods, being made to provide them food and offerings. The biblical narratives present the true, holy and omnipotent God. The creator exists before the creation and is independent of the world. God speaks and the elements coming into being. The divine work is good, just and whole. After the human family rebels, God tempers his judgement with mercy. Even when as account shares common elements with the thought forms of nearby cultures, the distinctive nature of the Creator shines through the narrative. [OTS, p.21-22]
• Did the creation of Adam literally take place the way it is narrated, or is the story of Adam’s creation shaped to teach us things about the nature of humanity? Did God really use dust of the ground to form Adam’s body and blow his breath into it? If so, then we should probably see the Mesopotamian account as a perversion of the a fundamental truth preserved accurately in the biblical tradition. More like however is the idea that Genesis has take the Near Eastern tradition and then substituted God’s breath for either divine spit or blood. This communicates both the truth that humans are creatures connected to the earth and beings who have a special relationship with God, for it was God who created humanity. [H2RG, p.78]

Further comment on the similarities and differences between the Genesis text and the Ancient Near Eastern accounts can be found in [G1-15W, pp. xlvi – l][GAC, p.33-35]

Genesis 2: A contradictory account?
• As a document Genesis 1-3 falls into two distinct parts 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-3:24, which in turn form part of a wider pattern of sections of Genesis each beginning with the words: These are the generations of … (2:4; 5:1; 6:9;10:1). There is no reason to doubt the traditional view that the two passages were seen from the beginning as complementary. Genesis 1:1-2:3 serves as a kind of prologue and Genesis 2:4-3:24 speaks of what was engendered in a human sense from the creation of earth and the heavens [RSF, p.263]

• Some OT scholars say Genesis 2:4-25 contains a second creation story which contradicts Genesis 1. In Chapter humans are created before the plants and animals. 2:5 also seems to show early earth as an arid desert, not the watery chaos of 1:2. [CBGT, p.129]

• If God is a God of truth, we would not expect him to contradict himself. Can we harmonised the ‘contradictions’? It would be strange if the writer of Genesis put two contradictory accounts next to each other. It makes sense to see Genesis 1 as a panoramic view of God creative work and Genesis 2 as focusing in on the creation of human beings. 2:5-6 can be taken a referring to the state of things in the area where the Garden of Eden came into being. Arid but fertile of properly irrigated. The mention of plants being created refers only to the garden of Eden and need not imply that plants did not already exist elsewhere. In v19 the verb used allows us to translate to mean ‘Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field …” (NIV) referring back to an earlier act of creation. [CBGT, p.129-130]

Interpreting Genesis 2-3
• Interpretation of Genesis 2-3 come in two varieties – literal or literary-cultural.

• Literal Approach: It may seem simple and straight forward but it does have it’s problems. 2:7 – Did God really form a pile of dust into human form and breath into it? Surly the breathing at least must be metaphorical because God doesn’t have lungs and nostrils as we do!! 2:21-22 – Must we assume that God behaved like a modern surgeon carrying out an operation? 4:14 – Why was Cain afraid of being killed and where did he get his wife? We cannot rule out a literal understanding of these passages but it does seem reasonable to consider if they are meant to be taken figuratively. [CBGT, p.131-132]

• Even ardent literalists take parts of Genesis 2-3 figuratively. Surely as we consider how much of the trees, garden, snake etc. is meant to be literal and how much allegory, we should look to the Bible itself (and in particular the NT) for guidance. [RSF, p.279]
• John’s deliberate use in Revelation of the same imagery and language from Genesis shows clearly how first century Jews understood Genesis and as we believe him to have been writing by God’s direction there is especial reason for us as Christian to take our lead from it. We have little doubt that the tree of life, the serpent and the other imagery in these passages is intended as pure symbolism (and not literally as well) both in Revelation 20-22 and in Genesis 2-3. It deals with real events and issues, but describes them in figurative terms [RSF, p.281-282]

• Literary-Cultural Approach: There is quite a lot of evidence that Genesis 2-3 might be intended as more of a figurative account than as a simple historical one. There a quite a few word-plays in the Hebrew eg. word for pain of childbirth sounds like the Hebrew word for tree; Hebrew words of naked, crafty and curse sound alike. In the book of revelation the serpent (Rev. 12:15) and the tree of life (Rev. 22:2) are clearly used in a symbolic non-literal way. In the Ancient Near East – paradise, the serpent and the tree of life are common religious symbols. [CBGT, p.133-134]

• To say that Genesis 2-3 give a figurative, symbolic account is not to say that it is unhistorical. Real historical events can be described in a symbolic way eg. Revelation 12. The story in Genesis 2-3 may seem less obviously symbolic but is contains extraordinary elements (pile of clay becomes a man, talking serpent, a tree of life) and these are found in other Ancient Near Eastern literature. [CBGT, p.134]

• When a historical event is described in a non-literal, symbolic way we cannot get behind the language to reconstruct the historical events unless we have other evidence. Genesis 2-3 does seem to refer to a historical event because of the geographical setting given to it, the genealogies which follow it and which give it a chronological setting AND the use made of the story in the NT eg. Romans 5 & 1 Corinthians 15. [CBGT, p.134-135]

• The trees of life and knowledge of good and evil could have been literal in Genesis, but as we look to the NT to guide our interpretation (eg. references in Revelation etc) we tend to take the account of them as metaphorical history. Man faced a real, historical choice between life and the knowledge of good and evil – but the language used to describe this choice (like so much of Jesus’ language) is metaphorical. The ‘paradise of Eden’ was take by pre-Reformation commentators partly as literal and partly as metaphorical. [RSF, p.280]

Consequences of the Fall

• Some think that all death – human and non-human – is a result of the fall BUT how would the earth support an ever increasing population of creatures? There is no biblical reason for believing that death entered the animal world as a consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin. The bible only speaks of the death as the penalty for sin in relation to humans. [CBGT, p.142-143] [RSF, p.258]

• What does the Bible mean by death? Genesis 2:17 – “If you eat, you will surely die.” But they did not die immediately. What God bluffing as the serpent suggested (3:4)? The answer lies in the difference between the biblical view of death and ours. We tend of think of it in purely physical terms – the moment our existence ends. The various biblical references to death though make most sense when death is seen as a spiritual power, not just at the end of life. It is a power which weakens and diminishes life, eventually leading to its end. One falls into the power of death when cut off from God, the source of life. [CBGT, p.143-144]
• What is said of the tree of life in Genesis 2-3 (especially 3:22) implies that Adam and Eve were not naturally immortal. [CBGT, p.144]

• What other consequences apart from death did the fall have? Genesis 3:14-19. In these verse the emphasis is not on the changes in things (with the exception of the serpent, which is a symbol of all that is opposed to God), but on changing in relationships.
  1. The relationships between human beings and their creator is ruptured.
  2. A person relationships with themselves is damaged (there is guilt and shame)
  3. Relationships with others are broken – people no longer get on together in harmony (Adam blames Eve)
  4. The harmonious relationship between humans the rest of creation is lost. [CBGT, p.145-146]

• NOTE: The statement about thorns and thistle in 3:18 need not mean that they had not existed before but only that our ability to cultivate the plants we want has been impaired by the fall and the loss of proper harmonious relationship with nature. It also says nothing about changes in animal structures or general ecology outside the garden. [CBGT, p.146] [RSF, p.258-259]

Adam and Eve
• If much of the setting in the paradise of Eden is allegorical, were Adam and Eve actual people or is the whole story allegory? The account of the creation of Adam and Eve is one of the most important in scripture. Jesus cites it to teach that God intended marriage to be lifelong, heterosexual and monogamous (eg. Matthew 19:4-6). Genesis was inspired to and intended to convey important truths to us. Do this mean that Genesis 2-3 is all meant to be literal? Eg. God literally trooping the animals before Adam OR is it meant to teach us two basic truths – man was created with an inbuilt urge to create conceptual language in naming animals AND no animal can have a truly personal relation with a human person in the way epitomised by marriage. [RSF, p.283]

• Granted that elements of the account were clearly meant figuratively, were Adam and Eve actual individuals? The word Adam simply means ‘man’ ie. humanity in Hebrew AND it can be a proper name BUT it is not clear where it is first used in this sense in Genesis. Adam the first created man is representative of humanity. [RSF, p.284-285]

• The more modern Bible translations are right to translate ‘Adam’ simply as ‘the man’ it usually contains the definite article. It is really around Genesis 4-5 onwards that it can definitely be seen as a name. This implies in response to the problems of the story of Cain (who is his wife, why is he afraid) perhaps that Adam and Eve in Genesis 4 may not have been the only humans on the earth who were not part of Cain’s immediate family OR the writer of Genesis intended us to see the story of Cain and Abel allegorically and the real history of an individual unambiguously named Adam for the first time in Genesis 5:1 to begin from that point. [RSF, p.293]

• Origen saw Adam not as a particular individual but representative of the whole human race. [RSF, p.291]

• We would want to assert that the following is clear from the Genesis 1-3:
  1. Humans are made in the image of God
  2. The unity of a heterosexual lifelong marriage commitment
  3. Humanity are in a fallen moral state looking to a representative to crush the forces of evil.
On how it ties historically, rather than on it’s implication for us, it would be foolish to be dogmatic. Certain parts of the story are figurative but the is also historical truth in these passages as well. [RSF, p.294]

The non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 over history

- St. Augustine (c.400AD) argued in his commentaries on Genesis and other writings for a non-literal reading of Genesis 1. His reasons were theological, literary and philosophical and nothing to do with the theory of Evolution [CBGT, p.67]
- Philo a first century Jewish philosopher did not believe that the inspired author of Genesis intended us to take the days of Genesis 1 either literally or chronologically. [RSF, p.193]
- Philo is quite explicit that Genesis 1-3 is about real events, not myths, but God has chosen through Moses to use figurative or ‘allegorical’ language to speak to us. [RSF, p.193]
- Although Philo is very clear that much of Genesis 1-3 was not meant to be taken literally, at times he writes as though it was. It is easy to mistake an assumption that the text is inspired and meant to teach us something with a belief that it was meant literally. [RSF, p.194]
- There is a clear Jewish tradition of Rabbinical writings and exegetical work on Genesis 1-3 which consistently holds a high view of Scripture and the Pentateuch, but consistently specifically rejects overly literal understandings of Genesis 1-3.
- All mainstream Christians (and Jews) over history have agreed that certain parts of the literal meaning of Genesis 1-3 were metaphorically or figuratively expressed eg. ‘God said…’ God does not have bodily parts / vocal chords which enabled him to have a physical voice to speak. However people did disagree on how far the literal meaning of Genesis was expressed metaphorically. Were the days periods of time or not? Where the events chronological or not? [RSF, p.199]
- People throughout the centuries of Christian theology have found evidence for a non-literal reading in the fact that it seems to have a structure that makes excellent logical sense but not such good chronological sense eg. Origen (3rd Century AD) said that no person of intelligence could consider as reasonable that evening / morning existed without sun and moon and first day was without a heaven. [CBGT, p.95; RSF, p.199-218]
- Jesus’ reference to the seventh day of creation in John 5:17 seems to be require a non-literal understanding of the days of creation. The force of what Jesus says depends on the assumption that we are still in the ‘Sabbath’ of creation week. [CBGT, p.93]
- Studies of geology and fossils before the theory of Evolution lead more and more Christians to question this approach. Before the publication of Darwin’s ‘Origin of the Species’ was published in 1859 most Christian scholars including those who held that the Bible is divinely inspired / trustworthy accepted the fact that earth was millions of years old. The modern version of the view that the earth is only thousands of years old appears to have originated from the Seventh Day Adventists in the 1920s and taken on board popularly in the 1960s. [CBGT, p.69]
- In the 1820s and 1830s mainstream geology (which taught an old earth) was accepted by both Anglican and non-Anglicanism Evangelicalism, as well as high church ie. all those in the church who regarded the whole Bible as inspired. [RSF, p.221-222] It is important to realise that the old earth perspective came before the theory of evolution and therefore an old earth is not necessarily linked to evolution.
The most common views amongst leading Evangelicals between 1815 and 1859 (when Darwin published his book) were the age-day theory and the gap theory. [RSF, p.222]

After the publication of Darwin’s origin of species people generally held to an old earth view and youth earth creationism was virtually absent between 1859-1920. People incorporated the ideas of evolution / fossil record in different ways. From 1920-1950 young earth creationism had few advocates mostly Lutheran or Seventh Day Adventists in America. Young earth creationism rose to popularity after the publication of ‘The Genesis Flood’ by Morris and Whitcomb in 1961 [RSF, p.223]

In the period 1860-1910 there were some conservative theologians who rejected evolution and a number who were open to it – but none advocated a young-earth. [RSF, p.223]

The Genealogies in Genesis 1-11

- Accepting that the Genealogies maybe incomplete, should we take the ages in the genealogies as the literal ages? All the ages given in the standard Hebrew Bible (there are differences in the Samaritan and Greek versions) are multiples of 5 with either 7 or 14 added occasionally. Eg. Adam lived for 930yrs = 186x5; Seth lived for 912yrs = (181x5) + 7. This can hardly be a coincidence and may indicate the numbers are symbolic in some way in which we fail to understand. Other Ancient Near East genealogies have the same pattern of large ages. [CBGT, p.147-148]
- On of the kings on the Sumerian list En-mebaragisi is said to have reigned for 900yrs. He is known from other evidence to have been a real person who lived for quite a normal time. Clearly the numbers here do not seem to have been taken literally. Unfortunately we do not have any definite clues to help us understand the symbolic meaning of these large numbers in either the Sumerian or biblical lists. Presumably the decrease in the lengths of reigns and lives symbolises a decline of some kind in the human race. In Genesis this is no doubt moral decline. [CBGT, p.148-149]
- On chronology and the genealogies see also [GAC, p.48-49]

Genesis 6-8: The Flood

- On questions about the identification of the Nephilim / Sons of God see [CBGT, p.151-154]
- Until about a century ago nearly everyone took that story of the flood to refer to a universal flood covering the whole earth. It was primarily the impact of scientific considerations that led people to think again and re-examine the biblical account. Problems with the universal flood theory:
  1. There is no good evidence for a world wide flood – geologist should not be able to miss the sediment from this flood especially on the Himalayas (water would have had to have been 6 miles deep!!) however they have not found it. Seeing the fossil record as being created by the flood has it’s own problems!
  2. Where did all the water for the flood come from and where did it all go? [CBGT, p.156-158]
- A world wide flood would cause major changes to the surface of the earth, but the location of Eden is described in such a way that the reader is expected to recognise the location of this pre-flood site. At least two of the four rivers did not disappear in the flood. Perhaps a hint that the flood was not universal. [CBGT, p.159] [RSF, p.303]
- The Hebrew word translated earth in the story of the flood does not mean the same thing as the English word. In three-quarters of its occurrences in the OT it is better
translated by the word land – meaning a particular place. Also the special Hebrew word for the whole inhabitable earth is not used in the flood story. [CBGT, p.160] For an indepth discussion of the Hebrew word for ‘earth’ being able to be translated locally see [RSF, p.296-298]

- Genesis 6:13 – “I am going to put an end to all people”. ‘All’ may seem to demand a universal interpretation but Hebrew speech is full of ‘exaggeration to make a point’ which is not intended to be taken literally eg. Gen. 41:57 – all countries can hardly mean the Americas or China. Ahab searching all nations for Elijah in 1 Kings 18:10 is not meant to be taken literally. At the most Genesis 6:13 may mean all the land and people known to Noah were inundated by the flood. It is the question of all people or all known people? [CBGT, p.160]

- Another problem for the universal flood theory is how would all the animals from across the world fit in the ark and how would Noah cater for all the food and varying habit needs (some need could, some need dry desert conditions etc.) of these animals. If it was a local flood then these issues would be less of a problem. [CBGT, p.163]

- On the history of interpretation of the flood story and how across the centuries various people have considered it a local flood see [RSF, p.301-303]

Ancient Near Eastern Flood Stories

- Stories of great floods are known from cultures around the world. There is reason to believe that some of the stories are in fact retellings of the biblical story first heard from missionaries. Many of them differ widely in detail from the biblical story and could have the origin in some different flood experience (many places experience major floods at times) [CBGT, p.154]

- The Babylonian poem called The Gilgamesh Epic and another power from Babylonia called the The Atrahasis Epic are so similar to the biblical stories that they are generally agreed to have originated in the same historical event. [CBGT, p.154]

- In these accounts there is the creation of human beings, followed by various divine judgements which culminate in a flood. This parallels the events of Genesis 1-9. [CBGT, p.155]

- Unlike Adam, the Bible seems always to regard Noah as an individual within a particular historical context. The Genesis passages describe the historical events in a style more like that of a normal observer than in symbolic language. An acceptance of the authority of the OT seems therefore to imply that there was an individual called Noah and some kind of physical flood. Even Phil who took a more figurative interpretation of the Adam and Eve story insists that Noah is myth and is literal. [RSF, p.296]

- For a summary of the Gilgamesh Epic see [H2RG, p.82-85] [IOT, p.249]

- On the similarities and differences between these stories and the biblical one see [CBGT, p.155-156] [H2RG, p.84-85]

- Although there are differences between the flood stories of the ancient near east and the biblical account, the similarities are close enough that they cannot be disregarded. Did Genesis borrow and adapt a myth from ancient Mesopotamia? [H2RG, p.86]

- We cannot prove the relationship between the two stories beyond doubt. How we portray the relationship is largely shaped by our presuppositions. Certain interpretations are ruled out or rendered improbable by the nature of our knowledge. [H2RG, p.86]

- It is highly unlikely that the Gilgamesh Epic borrowed from the written account of the flood in the Bible. Mesopotamian tradition has its roots in Mesopotamian literature
from long before the written account of Genesis. Further more, rarely does an advanced culture borrow from an inferior (less developed) one. [H2RG, p.86]

- Another plausible explanation is that both accounts go back to a real event. Whatever the case, the flood being global or a large local one, the flood would have etched itself in the memory of the survivors. The story of the flood and its interpretation would have been passed down from generation to generation. It is possible to reconstruct a scenario where from this common event the two different flood stories developed. [H2RG, p.86-87]

- That any particular model of understanding the similarities and differences between the biblical and Mesopotamian traditions can be proved is not likely. However the view that Israel simply borrowed the Mesopotamian story and adapted it to its own viewpoint is not the only possible conclusion. [H2RG, p.87]

- If we study the biblical account in the light of the Mesopotamian account the contrast between the respective deities is thrown into sharp relief. While Yahweh reveals himself as a God who judges sin, he is not like the capricious deity Enlil. In the context of judgement we find grace in the biblical account; this is missing in the ancient near eastern account. [H2RG, p.87]

**Genesis 11: The Tower of Babel**

- It is possible that the Babel story is about making fun of the claims of pagan religions to be the way to God cf. story of Babel with the Babylonian literature. [CBGT, p.164-165]

- It is possible to read the events of the tower of Babel as a local confusion of languages as people became separate geographically and language developed differently in each geographical place from an original common language. [CBGT, p.165-167]

- Even if we believe in a universal destruction of humans by the flood (there are probably many years between the flood and the tower of Babel story) we should not insist that the Tower of Babel incident explains the origin of all languages. We should accept that it might refer to the origin of only one ‘family’ of languages. This ‘localised’ understanding of the Babel incident has been adopted by those who believe that the flood destroyed only part of the human race alive at the time. [CBGT, p.167]

**Science and its Limitations**

- Science (study of what is) cannot serve as a basis of deciding moral values (what should be) [CBGT, p.17-19]


- God the creator is still necessary. The most that scientist can claim for a theory about the origin of the universe is that it explains how God, if he exists, brought the universe into being – what mechanism he used. It certainly does not explain away the need for the God of the Bible. [CBGT, p.25]

- When there is an apparent clash between science and the Bible at least three possible conclusions could be drawn:
  1. The Bible might be right and the scientists wrong
  2. The scientists may be right and the Bible wrong.
  3. The scientist might be right and our interpretation of the Bible might be wrong

If we believe the Bible is the inspired word of the creator God – ultimately it must be possible to harmonize scientific truth and biblical teaching. [CBGT, p.26-27; See also CBGT, p.61]

Scientists are becoming more aware that the line between facts and theories is a fuzzy one. Theories are attempts to make sense of facts, but what we see as facts, and how
we assess them, is affected by the theories we already hold (or reject). As philosophers of science sometimes put it, all facts are to some extent ‘theory-laden’. [CBGT, p.32]

- On scientific theories as ‘Maps’ and ‘Models’ which correspond to reality but which are not to be confused with reality itself see [CBGT, p.33] On doctrines as models which make sense of theological facts see [CBGT, p.39-42]
- A theory may stand up to many tests but it can never be said to have been absolutely proved. A theory can be disproved by its failure in just one test but it can never be proved conclusively. All the same, it seems reasonable to have more confidence in a theory the more tests it passes. [CBGT, p.36]
- The word law as used in science (laws of nature) is about description (the ways things have been seen to happen) and not prescription (the way things have to happen). [CBGT, p.38]
- Faith plays a part in both science and Christianity. Scientists believe without proof (ie. have faith) that the world is ordered in a rational way and that the human mind is rational and can discover / understand this order. [CBGT, p.42]
- The scientific and Christian views of the world are complementary views of reality. They answer ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ These answers are neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive. [CBGT, p.43]

Scientific and Biblical language [CBGT, pp.54-60]

- Science had developed its own language which is carefully defined and used as precisely as possible by scientists. Scientist use language in more precise way than their use in ordinary speech.
- The Bible is not written in this precisely defined language. It is written in the popular language of the common people at the time.
- This language is:
  1. **Not very precise** eg. Genesis 1 – animals and plants produce offspring according to their ‘kind’. This does not mean the same as the scientific word species. Uses of the Hebrew word for kind in the OT make it clear that it is used in far too imprecise way to equate it to modern biological terms such as ‘species’.
  2. **Is the language of appearance** – describing things as they appear to the ordinary observer eg. talk about the sun ‘rising’ and ‘setting’; animals reproducing according to kind probably means that dogs have puppies and not kittens.
  3. **Is full of cultural idioms.** An idiom is a phrase that has a figurative meaning which is only known through common use; a figure of speech Idioms don't usually cross language boundaries. In some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, the meaning of the idiom is changed or does not make any sense at at as it once did in another language. Idioms don’t necessarily describe anything more than a popular understanding of science a specific time in history and culture. There is no problem, unless someone insists that everything that the Bible says must be taken as scientifically accurate (precise), totally ignoring the culturally bound, idiomatic use of language.
- The kind of factual statements God makes about creation are reliable where they touch on history and on the nature of the physical world. But God’s concern is neither that of the secular historian nor that of the physicist. On a historical level, a statement may have genuine historical content but be figurative in form. This is quite different from a ‘myth’ in any usual sense of the world. [RSF, p.197]
**Evolution**

- Apart from the literal interpretation of Genesis, there is no strong theological reason for denying the possibility that God used an evolutionary process to bring into existence the life-forms he wanted. [CBGT, p.104]
- Those who reject the theory of evolution, whether on the basis of a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-2 or some other grounds, regard the creation of Adam and Eve as a special act of God. They see some of the so-call fossil men as ape-like creatures which were in no way human, and others as fully human, so that there are not transitional forms. Cain’s wife, then has to be one of his sisters, and his fear expressed in 4:14 was a fear of future relatives of his, not yet born. [CBGT, p.137]
- Christians who accept evolution argue that God used that process to bring into being a physical body appropriate for the Spiritual nature made in God’s image – human nature. Genesis 2:7 is taken as saying in picture language that we are made partly of dust, just like the animals, but also have a spiritual nature which survives our physical death and the return of the body to the dust – man is form out dust and God breathed into him the breath of life. It is the Spiritual nature that makes us humans and not just animals. [CBGT, p.137]
- The fossil record is of little relevance in the debate about when the first humans (as defined in biblical terms – creatures bearing God’s image) appeared. Fossils can only be classified on the basis of physical features – the spiritual quality, possession of the image of God, is not thought to be related to physical form by any theologians. [CBGT, p.138]
- It is possible to date Adam and Eve to the Neolithic period [CBGT, p.135-140]
- Christian evolutionist who date Adam and Eve to the Neolithic era have to accept that when they received the image of God – human nature – there would have been many other creatures just like them physically. These too would have been able to receive human nature. Maybe, they suggest, after the fall God conferred (fallen) human nature on all those who shared Adam and Eve’s physical nature. The existence of these other beings would explain both Cain’s fear and where his wife came from. [CBGT, p.138-139] On how this fits in with other biblical passages see [CBGT, p.139-140]
- When reconciling scientific theories with scripture we should always recognise that any conclusions are tentative and may change as science itself advances. Both Augustine and Aquinas are clear on this very point. We are right to try to reconcile Genesis with current scientific ideas – but should do so as tentatively and discerningly as Aquinas linked it with his Aristotelian science. [RSF, p.243]
- It is of course highly unlike that the human writer of Genesis 1 had in mind an evolutionary process for creation. He probably did not have in mind any particular process at all – natural or instantaneous. Hebrew writers generally did not ask such questions any more than the Israelites stopping to wonder if the plagues in Egypt were natural processes or instantaneous miracles. [RSF, p.276]
- The Jewish-Christian doctrine of ‘creation’ is a statement about person and purpose. In this context ‘evolution’ describes a natural physical process, whilst ‘creation’ speaks of the person and purpose behind it. [RSF, p.276]

**Final Thought:** Though historical and scientific questions may be uppermost in our minds as we approach the test, it is doubtful whether they were in the writer’s mind, and we should be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with. Genesis is
primarily about God’s character and his purposes for sinful mankind. Let us beware of allowing interests to divert us from the central thrust of the book so that we miss what the Lord, our creator and redeemer is saying to us. [G1-15W, p. liii]