

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#64—Anthropology—I¹
The Primacy and Historicity of Genesis
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Helpful for the studies in biblical anthropology is House, section 46. Of special value for the present study are the pages in Reymond referred to in the notes.

Biblical anthropology² is the study of what the Bible teaches about human beings—their nature and purpose. When we begin the study of biblical anthropology, we find that we are on familiar and unfamiliar ground. We are human beings and so we know a lot about ourselves. However, apart from biblical revelation we actually are very ignorant of *why* we are here. General revelation teaches us that there is a God who created the universe and therefore us but it does not teach us where we fit in that universe. It does not teach us what our purpose is—if there is one. For this and related information we have to turn to the pages of Scripture—to the very first pages, especially. The book of Genesis—particularly its early chapters—is crucial for understanding where we came from and why we are here.

The hopelessness of today's world view

I am emphasizing these two points of understanding—origin and purpose—because they must be considered together. We cannot understand one without understanding the other. We cannot have one without the other. From the time of the first human sin, human beings have rejected the idea of God's having created us, and we have as a race sought our own reasons to explain why we are on earth. Since the 19th century human beings have formalized this rejection in the movement called evolution. By 'formalized' I mean that people have erected an organized system that expresses in great detail this self-generated explanation for humanity. And while it attempts to explain our origin, it is completely unable to account for any purpose for our existence. In fact, the system *must* say—it is forced to say by its own assumptions and conclusions—that there cannot possibly be any purpose for our existence. We exist totally by accident and therefore cannot have any reason for being. Jerry Bergman shows the hopeless view of the evolutionist on the reason for existence:³

These scientists have a belief structure, which Harvard's Stephen J. Gould notes includes the conclusion that humans are “. . . a wildly improbable evolutionary event . . .”⁴ and “. . . a cosmic accident . . .”⁵ and that if the evolutionary tape were played again and again, humans would not be expected—even if it were replayed a million times or more. . . . The dominant view of naturalistic scientists is that we are only “a detail” of history and do not exist for a purpose.⁶ The only purpose of life, they teach, is that which we arbitrarily give to it if we so choose.

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² The student of Scripture should differentiate sharply between biblical anthropology and secular anthropology, which is a social science and which deals with human cultures, languages, history (including the approaches of evolution) and physical makeup.

³ “[The New State Religion: Atheism](http://www.icr.org/article/new-state-religion-atheism)”, Institute for Creation Research, <http://www.icr.org/article/new-state-religion-atheism> (accessed February 25, 2009). Dr. Gerald R. “Jerry” Bergman is an adjunct associate professor at Medical University of Ohio and an instructor in the Division of Arts and Sciences at Northwest State Community College in Archbold, Ohio.

⁴ S. Gould, *Wonderful Life; The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 291.

⁵ Ibid, 44.

⁶ Ibid, 291.

Robert Reymond addresses the issue this way:⁷

Modern cosmologists who insist that men are the product of an *impersonal* beginning plus time plus chance are really saying that there is no intelligible ground for asserting personal significance for the human race. Shakespeare's Hamlet aptly captures their point:

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
(*Hamlet*, IV. Iv. 35-37)

But then, if no real distinction exists between man and beast, there is no intelligible base for human morals either. For these theorists to continue to insist on their personal worth and the necessity of morals under such a condition is simply sheer mysticism—the existential leap to an unfounded assertion, for if we are only products of chance, why should not the laws of the jungle—only the fit should survive; might is right—prevail?

Rejection of the account

The opening chapters of Genesis (especially 1-3, but also 1-11) provide insight into our origin and purpose, but have been rejected on various grounds and to various degrees by liberal students of Scripture as well as those who would call themselves evangelical. Reymond describes the general view of Genesis today, a view that more and more Christians are moving toward:⁸

Modern thought, nevertheless, regards the early chapters of Genesis as at best religious saga, that is, as mythological stories that, while not actually historical, nevertheless intend to convey religious truth. The problem in these chapters for modern men and women, influenced as they are by modern scientism's unfounded dogmatic dictum of cosmic and biological evolution, is the distinctly *supernatural* character of the events which they report—namely, the creation of the universe *ex nihilo* and the creation of man by the direct act of God. Because of the supposed “prescientific” nature of the events that these chapters record, the trend in modern critical thought is to regard the co-called two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 as ancient Hebrew cosmogonies comparable to the *Enuma Elish* of ancient Babylon, that is, as religious mythology.

At heart this amounts to a rejection of the strongly supernatural character of these chapters. Here are some of the specific points of rejection that Reymond suggests:⁹ 1) the creation of the universe out of nothing; 2) The fall of Adam, involving a talking serpent, trees that give life and death and guardian cherubs; 3) the unusual long life of the patriarchs; 4) the universal flood and 5) the events of the tower of Babel.

The key issue

The question of our origin and purpose—with the associated evaluation of evolutionary ideas—is above all an issue of the trustworthiness of the Bible. It is not primarily an issue of having access to scientific data or of evaluating scientific methodology or scientific writings. What is at stake is whether or not we will believe the Bible and put ourselves under its authority. I am convinced that as soon as we begin to depart from a face-value reading of the opening chapters of Genesis, we have left dependence on Scripture and yielded to

⁷ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 116.

⁸ 117.

⁹ 384.

man-made ideas. To put this another way, our reaction to evolution reveals whether or not we are biblicists—Christians willing to put Scripture first in all things and willing to wait for Scripture to be proven correct when there is information that *apparently* contradicts it. Ken Ham rightly says, “The battle is not one of young earth vs. old earth, or billions of years vs. six days, or creation vs. evolution—the real battle is the authority of the word of God vs. man’s fallible opinions.”¹⁰ I appreciate Reymond’s exhortation:¹¹

It is vital that the church resist the current secularistic trend and continue to insist that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are reliable history, preserved from error by the superintending oversight of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Certainly we may encounter difficulties in interpreting some of the details of Genesis 1-11, because we are working exegetically and hermeneutically with highly circumscribed, greatly compressed, nontechnical narrative accounts of the beginning of the entire universe, but these interpretive difficulties are infinitely to be preferred to the scientific and philosophical difficulties which confront modern interpreters who propound nontheistic responses to the issues of the origin of the universe, the presence of evil in the world, and man’s spiritual and moral ills.

As foolish as an agnostic

It is extremely interesting that long ago Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), known as Darwin’s Bulldog for his aggressive defense of the ideas of Charles Darwin, recognized the importance of the opening chapters of Genesis to Christianity, asserting that to reject the historicity of the biblical account of creation or of the flood automatically means rejection of the authority of any other statement or doctrine of the Bible. Here are the words of this self-described agnostic:

I am fairly at a loss to comprehend how anyone, for a moment, can doubt that Christian theology must stand or fall with the historical trustworthiness of the Jewish Scriptures. The very conception of the messiah, or Christ, is inextricably interwoven with Jewish history; the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with that Messiah rests upon the interpretation of the passages of the Hebrew Scriptures which have no evidential value unless they possess the historical character assigned to them. If the covenant with Abraham was not made; if circumcision and sacrifices were not ordained by Jahveh; if the ‘ten words’ were not written by God’s hand on the stone tables; if Abraham is more or less a mythical hero, such as Theseus; the Story of the Deluge a fiction; that of the Fall a legend; and that of the Creation the dream of a seer; if all these definite and detailed narratives of apparently real events have no more value as history than have the stories of the regal period of Rome—what is to be said about the Messianic doctrine, which is so much less clearly enunciated: And what about the authority of the writers of the books of the New Testament, who, on this theory, have not merely accepted flimsy fictions for solid truths, but have built the very foundation of Christian dogma upon legendary quicksands?¹²

Ham explains, “Huxley was definitely out to destroy the truth of the biblical record. When people rejected the Bible, he was happy. But when they tried to harmonize evolutionary ideas with the Bible and reinterpret it, he vigorously attacked this position.”¹³ Huxley clearly saw that there was no middle ground. Ham goes on to say, “Once you accept evolution and its implications about history, then man becomes free to pick and choose which parts of the Bible he wants to accept.”¹⁴ Huxley was right. We can’t have evolution plus a sinless Messiah or evolution plus an atoning Cross. It is tragic that so many Christians today do not

¹⁰ Ken Ham, *The New Answers Book*, (Green Forest, AR: Master Books), 2008, 38.

¹¹ 384.

¹² T. Huxley, *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 207, as quoted in Ham, 33.

¹³ 32-33.

¹⁴ 32.

made us and we revolted. We see creation, sin, the flood and promise. But by Rev. 21 we find that sin is excluded. All of history in between shows sin's effects and the movement toward its defeat.

4. **Salvation, grace and the redeemer.** Grace enters in ch. 3 with the promise of the Redeemer. In Rev. 5 we see the Cross triumph of that Redeemer, then in Rev. 19ff. the victory on earth of the Redeemer and finally in Rev. 21-22 his glory. Priesthood enters in ch. 3 with the provision of skins, a covering so people could still have access to God; then enter Abel, Noah, Abraham, the Law, etc., culminating in Rev. 22 with perfect access to God.
5. **Faith, blessing and cursing.** We see faith in ch. 4 with Abel, then Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, etc. Faith finally brings about the blessing of Rev. 22. Those in Genesis are blessed as they exercise faith, and the same is true everywhere in the Bible. Those who disobey and shun faith in what God has revealed are cursed—the serpent, Cain, those killed in the flood, Lot, Esau, etc. See Rev. 21:7-8!
6. **Israel.** The first 11 chapters of Genesis lead up to the selection of Abraham and his line for blessing, the formation of the Israelite nation. Rev. 21 describes the final dwelling place of Israel in the New Heavens and New Earth, after the Kingdom in ch. 20. With regard to faith, Israel becomes a test case for the faith principle with attendant blessing and cursing.
7. **The overall plan of God.** The overall plan of God in biblical history is to glorify Himself in His creation mainly through one race after reversing human rebellion. The original garden is recalled in Rev. 22 after the victory of the Lamb in Rev. 21. There follows bliss with God and the removal of the curse (22:3). It is not surprising that Rev. is saturated with words, phrases and ideas from Genesis.

Key reasons why Christians must take Genesis at face value

Here are some of the reasons why we must take both the early chapters and all of Genesis at face value and as a record of history:

1. **Satan wants to discredit this book** in your mind and the minds of others, with denials of face-value creation history. In coming studies I will emphasize the importance of the creation account. He wants also to discredit all the miracles. Over the years non-conservatives have attacked the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and the Pentateuch, placing the book in its final form in the 6th century B.C. Discredit the author and you discredit the miraculous events (such as the Exodus) and their placement in time. **You and I cannot be ostriches about this, with our heads in the sand.** Satan hates Genesis.
2. Your view of **miracles** is affected. If a person denies miracles in creation and elsewhere in Genesis, he will deny them throughout the Bible. Then the resurrection and the virgin birth go. When Christians today deny the fiat creation of the universe by God and allow science to determine their cosmogeny, they will soon deny miracles elsewhere. Creation was a series of instantaneous miracles, not the result of natural causes and processes.
3. Your **view of the historical veracity** of the Bible is at stake. Gen. 1-3 is historical, not myth. Are we willing to believe it? If we begin to explain Genesis, especially the early chapters, as myth and not historically true, we will eventually do the same with the cross. Many have. Both details within Genesis and in the rest of Scripture argue for taking the early chapters of Genesis as actual history (although we must acknowledge that these chapters certainly do not tell us anywhere near as much as they could about the events they touch on).¹⁵

¹⁵ Reymond (117-18) presents seven reasons for the historicity of Genesis—drawn from the book itself and the rest of Scripture.

4. Your regard for the **inspiration of the Bible** is also at stake. Genesis is not myth or fable. Do you realize that there are many people who believe that the account of creation and Adam and Eve was made up to explain why human beings exist on the earth today, and that the accounts were not given by God to tell us things we could not know otherwise? Because it is a seedbed book, if you believe that Genesis is fable and myth created by human beings, you have abandoned belief in the inspiration of the Bible.

5. Finally, **your faith** is affected. Let's face it: it is a test of faith to believe that God created the way He did. Many Christians are not willing to believe the creation account versus the evolutionary teaching all around us today. Heb. 11:3 says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." The writer of Hebrews is telling us that that faith is the same faith you and I are expected to use in walking with God. Erase the faith element in accepting Genesis and you won't even have faith for a walk with God.

I encourage you to commit yourself to the historicity and dependability of Genesis as the basis for your understanding of the origin and purpose of human beings.

Questions for Further Study

1. In terms of human values and purpose, where does evolution lead? Why?
2. Why is the issue of our origin and purpose not a matter of evaluating scientific conclusions?
3. Comment on the issue of the rejection of the supernatural. Where do we find this addressed in Scripture?
4. What are some of the consequences of errors in the interpretation of Genesis?

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiriation* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning 'standard'; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation
30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.

39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.
51. Efficacious grace: Efficacious grace is the working of God in an individual that cannot be thwarted and that leads that person to faith in Christ. It is also described as effective calling and irresistible grace.
52. Regeneration: Regeneration is the unseen and unfelt work of the Holy Spirit that overcomes depravity and brings spiritual life and the capacity to please God and exercise faith.
53. Spirit baptism is the nonphysical act of the Spirit of God that places a believer in the Body of Christ and makes him a partaker, along with all other believers, of the work and merits of Christ; should be distinguished from filling, sealing, and indwelling; cannot be felt or noticed, and hence must be appropriated by faith; there is no warrant in Scripture for assuming a second act of God for power, a 'baptism,' after salvation.
54. Sealing is a guarantee that the believer will persevere in Christ all the way to entrance into heaven, when God completes his work of purchasing the individual. It begins at the moment of salvation when the Father places the Holy Spirit in the believer for permanent indwelling. It is unseen and unfelt and should result in praise and obedience to the Spirit.
55. Indwelling is the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual who has placed personal trust in Christ as Savior. Described in Jn. 14:17, this is the basis of His other ministries to the believer, such as sealing, anointing and filling and establishes the believer as a part of the spiritual temple that God is building today.
56. The filling of the Spirit is 1) A constant characteristic of a believer's life that consists of regular control by the Spirit that produces Christlikeness through Scripture; 2) A special enablement at particular times for service during the first century.
57. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service.
58. A cessationist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are not present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
59. A continualist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
60. An angel is an individual, personal spirit being originally created by God to assist him in his plan for saving the elect.
61. The cosmos is Satan's organized spiritual system, in rebellion against God.
62. A demon is a fallen angel that is free to assist in carrying out Satan's plan of opposition to God.
63. Biblical anthropology is the study of what the Bible teaches about the nature and purpose of human beings.