

With this book, Dr. Gentry has thrown down the gauntlet, especially for evangelicals, including Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This challenge confronts those views of the Genesis creation account that choose for the literary against the literal, for poetic metaphor instead of historical sequence. The arguments are lawyer-like in their cumulative force, and prophetic in their call to listen to the Bible's very text. The author has served us well with his clearheaded writing and broad-based defense of the traditional understanding of God's creation of the world in six sequential 24-hour days.

— Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman

Dr. Kenneth Gentry has taken a scholarly approach in dealing with the subject of creation as expressed in Genesis 1. This book, *As It Is Written*, is designed in particular to contrast the differences between the "Framework Hypothesis" interpretation of the Genesis account in light of a "Literal six, twenty-four hour Creationist" interpretation. Dr. Gentry masterfully explains the theories, concedes areas of agreement in order to rightfully present each view faithfully and establish the objectionable areas of conflict that are key to understanding Genesis 1. This polemic is designed to reject that system of interpretation which allows for reconstructing various texts to support alternative renderings of the Genesis account that rejecting a literal six day, twenty-four hour interpretation which is the historical orthodox view of Geneses, especially as maintained in the historical church based on the grammatico-historical method of interpretation. This book is a must-read by scholars, pastors, students, and laymen alike. If there is one book you need to read in a time when the literal interpretation of the Scripture, and in particular Geneses 1, has come under attack, this is that book!

— Dr. Kenneth Gary Talbot

As It Is Written: Dismantling the Framework Hypothesis is a book that helps guide readers across the debate between the traditional,

six-day creation view, and the framework hypothesis or literary framework theory, which attempts to create a bridge between the Genesis account and modern secular science. Kenneth Gentry provides a detailed analysis and powerful refutation to the arguments in favor of the framework hypothesis, while clarifying the exegetical reasoning to defend the literal interpretation of these passages of Genesis. Clear, concise, and thought-provoking!

— Dr. Kevin Clauson

Kenneth Gentry provides a powerful response to the revisionist views of the Genesis creation narrative that arose as rebuttals to evolutionist attacks on Scripture. *As It Is Written* is a succinctly documented, logically flowing work for the layperson and scholar alike, focusing on the issues of the foundational truth of God's Word from the first pages, and defending their literal nature over the literary structure that others are trying to impose. These are subjects of great concern, with a growing number of well-meaning biblical scholars yielding to the temptation to submit Scripture to a modernist view of science rather than letting its authority stand on its own.

— Dr. Geoff Downes

As It Is Written is a superb defense of 6-day creation by one of the finest Bible scholars of our time. Dr. Gentry demonstrates that the text of Scripture is clear about the timescale of creation and that non-literalist views, such as the framework hypothesis, collapse under careful scrutiny.

— Dr. Jason Lisle

Dismantling the Framework Hypothesis

AS IT IS *Written*

The Genesis Account
Literal or Literary?

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D.

First printing: February 2016

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Dedicated to:

Al Miller

A good friend I have never met
A great encourager I will never forget

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Preface

Since ancient times, men have been literally star-struck at the majesty of the sky above. Around 1000 B.C., King David expressed this awe when he contemplated the stars and considered the universe and man's place in it:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him? (Ps. 8:3–4).

Our earliest records show men attempting to understand the origin and structure of the world and the universe — at least that portion that could be seen without the aid of the telescope (which was not invented until 1608 by Hans Lippershey).¹ German

1. Based on his observations made between 1922 and 1924, Edwin Hubble (1889–1953) was the first astronomer to provide substantial evidence that galaxies exist beyond our own. Until then astronomers believed that what we know as the Milky Way Galaxy was the entirety of the universe. Now we know that billions of other galaxies exist. According to one of the most popular astronomy websites, *Universe Today*: “The most current estimates guess that there are 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the Universe, each of which has hundreds of billions of stars.” Fraser Cain, “How Many Galaxies in the Universe.” May 4, 2009. <http://www.universetoday.com/30305/howmanygalaxiesintheuniverse/>.

philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) famously declared that the fundamental question of metaphysics should be: “Why is there something instead of nothing?”² And that certainly is an important question for any comprehensive worldview.

Indeed, there are several compelling reasons Christians ought to study the issue. Evangelical theologian Millard Erickson presents the case for our study of creation in the following: (1) The Bible stresses this doctrine. (2) The Church has included the doctrine of creation in its creeds. (3) The unity of biblical doctrine requires the doctrine of origins. (4) The biblical doctrine of creation is distinctively different from other religions and philosophies. (5) It confronts modern secular, naturalistic science.³ In the final analysis, the doctrine of creation is essential to the ultimacy of God, for it shows that God alone is the Creator of the entire universe and the temporal order. Therefore, “the Book of Genesis is a record of the highest interest . . . because it is the foundation upon which the whole Bible is built.”⁴

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the study of geology began to suggest a long course of development of the earth. Then with the 19th-century work of Charles Darwin (1809–82) and the publication of his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the matter of (biological) origins became a universally debated question. The debate accelerated by Darwin involves not only biological origins but the very origin of the universe itself. Today, of course, the prevailing “mainstream” view of cosmic and life origins is some form of evolutionary theory. Cosmic evolution teaches that the universe is ultimately self-creating and self-organizing, without need of an intelligent Creator.

2. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 7–8.

3. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2d. ed.: Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), p. 392–93.

4. R. Payne Smith, “Genesis” in Charles John Ellicott, ed., *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, rep. 1954), 1:3.

The rise of evolutionary theory with its rapid and widespread acceptance presented a strong intellectual and cultural challenge to Christianity. For the Christian, evolutionary theory impacts such issues as the integrity of the Bible as God's revelation to man, the legitimacy of the Christian faith that is rooted in that Bible, and the integrity of the comprehensive worldview erected from the Bible. That debate has certainly risen to a boiling point in the last half century, with evolution dominating government policy, scientific research, educational theory, media reporting — indeed, all areas of modern life. Unfortunately, too many Christians have either become wholly dispirited by the culture-wide challenge to their faith or have removed the challenge by attempting to adapt the Bible's message to the evolutionary outlook.

In response to the evolutionary assault on our faith, new views of the Genesis creation narrative have arisen in an attempt to reduce the conflict. Tremper Longman (2005, 104) observes that the Christian understanding of the creation days changed because of “the discoveries of modern science. Scientific research concluded that the world is old, the process that brought the cosmos into being took huge amounts of time.” B.A. Robinson (2014) highlights several views of creation that developed in response to the evolutionary hegemony that rejects a literal six-day creation. Those views include the following: theistic evolution, indefinite age, gap theory, revelatory day, revelatory device, intermittent day, days of divine fiat, expanding time, replicated earth, analogical day, progressive creation, and the framework hypothesis. On page 2 of his report, Robinson suggests that there are four main views in this list: calendar interpretation, day-age, framework, and analogical day. Theologian Vern S. Poythress (2013) presents ten views of the interpretation of Genesis 1 and includes the following: young-earth creationism, mature creation theory, revelatory day theory, gap theory, local creation theory, intermittent day theory, day age theory, analogical day theory, framework view, and religion only theory. While presenting the 24-hour day view as an option, Kenneth D.

Keathley and Mark F. Rooker (2014, Part 2) reduce the remaining field to the gap theory, day age theory, temple inauguration theory, and historical creationism theory. Zondervan's CounterPoint series, Moreland and Reynolds (1999) reduces the options to three basic positions: young-earth creationism, old-earth (progressive) creationism, and theistic evolution.

In addition, many Christians have turned to one of the newer approaches to the creation-evolution debate that has gained national media attention since the mid-1990s: intelligent design. This view teaches that "certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection."⁵ Though challenging evolutionary theory, its advocates clearly state that the view is not rooted in Scripture, nor is it a creationist viewpoint. As the leading intelligent design website (just cited) puts it: "Creationism typically starts with a religious text and tries to see how the findings of science can be reconciled to it. Intelligent design starts with the empirical evidence of nature and seeks to ascertain what inferences can be drawn from that evidence." This view is causing controversy not only among evolutionists, but even among traditional, biblical creationists.⁶

A further example of a popular view is the progressive creation approach, which has been rejuvenated and promoted most recently and most effectively by Christian astrophysicist Hugh Ross. Progressive creationism is a form of old-earth creationism that accepts mainstream scientific estimates of the age of the universe.

5. "Definition of Intelligent Design," <http://www.intelligentdesign.org/whatisid.php>. Center for Science and Culture.

6. See, for example, the debate in Tony Carnes, "Design Interference" *Christianity Today*, 44:14 (December 4, 2001): 20; Alan G. Padgett, "Creation by Design," in *Books & Culture*, 6:4 (July/August, 2000): 30; Scott Swanson, "Debunking Darwin," *Christianity Today*, 41:1 (Jan. 6, 1997): 64; John G. West, "Intelligent Design and Creationism Just Aren't the Same," Center for Science and Culture (Dec. 1, 2002), <http://www.discovery.org/a/1329>; Henry Morris, "Intelligent Design and/or Scientific Creationism," Institute for Creation Research (Apr. 2006), <http://www.icr.org/article/2708/>.

It holds that God created new forms of life gradually over long periods of time by means of occasional bursts of new life forms. These “bursts” are instances of God Himself creating new types of living organisms by direct divine intervention. This allows its adherents to deny the biological evolution of all life forms from simpler ancestors. Hence its name: *progressive creationism*.⁷

Another new perspective is the framework hypothesis, a view of biblical origins that has been around the evangelical world since introduced to it by the Dutch biblical scholar Arie Noordtzij in 1924. It seems to have first appeared, however, almost 150 years earlier in the writings of the liberal⁸ German romanticist philosopher, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803).⁹

I will define the framework view more fully later in this book, but for now one of its leading contemporary evangelical proponents, Lee Irons, provides us with a succinct definition suitable for a general introduction: “It is that interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3 which regards the seven-day scheme as a figurative framework. While the six days of creation are presented as normal solar days, according to the framework interpretation the total picture of God’s completing His creative work in a week of days is not to be taken literally. Instead, it functions as a literary structure in which the creative works of God have been narrated in a topical order. The days are like picture frames. . . . There are two essential elements of the framework interpretation: the nonliteral element and the nonsequential element” (Irons and Kline 2001, 219). The evangelical formulation of this view is enjoying a growing

7. See, for instance, Robert C. Newman, “Progressive Creationism,” in Moreland and Reynolds 1999: 105–06.

8. Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1962), p. 194. In his *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (1782–83), Herder argued that we must accept falsehood and inconsistency in the Bible. In *On the Spirit of Christianity* (1798) he described God as a mind.

9. Marc Kay (2007a: 73) cites von Herder’s *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* as stating that the “history of the creation [account] is entirely a sensuous representation arranged by days’ work and numbers; in seven pictures of the separate portions of the created universe; and placed with reference to their parallel or corresponding relations.”

influence among evangelical theologians and commentators, but it is also influencing an increasing number of average Christians in the pews.

Though having its genesis (pun intended) in the writings of the liberal theological scholar von Herder, I should note up front that contemporary evangelical proponents of the framework hypothesis hold a high view of Scripture, as well as a devout and reverential view of God as the Creator. Two of its leading spokesmen, Lee Irons and Meredith G. Kline (2001, 220), clearly declare that “we do not equate a nonliteral interpretation with a nonhistorical interpretation of the text.” Another framework proponent, Mark Ross (1999, 114–115), states as the first of his “working boundaries” in dealing with creation that “the Bible is without error in all that it teaches.” He goes on to declare another boundary by noting that the framework interpretation does “not aim to call into question the whole historical character of the Genesis narrative.” Even its most vigorous opponents recognize that it is an “in-house” debate among Bible-believing scholars. Framework critic Joseph A. Pipa Jr. (Pipa and Hall 1999, 151) states that advocates of the framework do not “have a weak view of Scripture or deny the historicity of Genesis 1.” Thus, evangelical framework theologians believe both in the inerrancy of Scripture and the creation of the universe by the God of Scripture, even while disagreeing on what Scripture teaches in Genesis 1–2 and the method whereby God created the world.

Nevertheless, it does seem rather odd that neither historic Judaism nor Christianity properly understood the first chapter of the first book of their Bible for over 3,000 years (from Moses in 1450 B.C. until von Herder in the late 18th century). That it does not leap out from the text may explain why it lay hidden from the greatest rabbinic scholars of Israel and the brightest minds of the Church for so long. Intelligent Christians, however, ought to keep abreast of such issues — issues impacting the integrity of the Christian faith in the modern world and the Christian

apologetical enterprise. After all, we are obliged to bring “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). And we must be always “ready to make a defense” of our positions as Christians (1 Pet. 3:15).

Within this work the reader will discover solid exegetical arguments for the traditional understanding of creation: the literal, sequential, six-day creation viewpoint. In addition, he or she will discover a thorough presentation, analysis, and rebuttal to the leading arguments of the framework hypothesis. These will not only rebut the framework view as such, but more fully elucidate the implications of the literal viewpoint.

I would like to thank Mischelle Sandwich for looking over the manuscript in a never-ending quest to uncover typos, grammatical errors, and such. Her keen eye is much appreciated and very helpful. Two sets of eyes reading over a manuscript are better than one. Especially when that second set is owned by an excellent proofreader.

So then, I present this work to the evangelical theological world in the hope of furthering the debate, while at the same time providing material to assist intelligent lay-Christians and ordained ministers committed to the literal view. As Winston Churchill once observed, “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.”¹⁰ I pray that this careful presentation of the traditional view of six-day creation over the innovative framework hypothesis might confirm the historic position of the Church in the modern world.

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., Th.D.

10. This Churchill quote is variously attributed on the Internet to Churchill. Apparently it went through several versions, in that he used this in several contexts, including a speech to the House of Commons. This version is from *Reader's Digest*, Volume 40, April 1942, <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/05/26/stumble-over-truth/>.

Part I

The Framework / Literalism Debate

...the who loves pleasure will become
poor, whoever loves wine and oil will
become rich.
Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint and
12 Or The righteous
who seek death

Chapter 1

Introduction and Definition

Introduction

The Christian is confronted with the fundamentally important matter of creation immediately upon opening his Bible to its first chapter. In Genesis 1, we possess the direct revelation of God through Moses¹ regarding the divine origin of the material universe and the temporal order, the divine filling of the earth with all its flora and fauna, and the creation of man as the special image of God and high point of creation. Consequently, “As the first book of the OT, Genesis provides the foundation for the Pentateuch and for the rest of Scripture” (Turner 2003, 350). This is especially significant in that, as Currid (2007, 49) has aptly noted, “Creation constitutes a unique feature of the biblical worldview, and along with the existence of God comprises the very first worldview issues that a person confronts in reading the Bible.” And as such it “provides the context out of which the

1. In this book I accept the traditional Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1 and 2, as per many conservative scholars. See Young 1964, 67 n59; Collins 2006, 37; Currid 2003, 28–31), including some framework advocates (Kline 1970, 79). I accept this over the doubts of some framework advocates (e.g., Ridderbos 1957, 17, 28). Even some scholars who stop short of a dogmatic conviction, can conclude that “the principal inspired, purposeful, and creative mind behind Genesis was Moses” (Walton 2001, 42).

rest of the biblical narrative, with all of its many dimensions, develops.”

The Christian Church has historically — though not universally — understood the Genesis account as revealing that God created the world according to the chronological order of the narrative of chapter 1.² And until 1869 when the day age theory first appeared,³ the traditional exegesis also held that the duration of the creative process transpired “in the space of six days,” as stated, for instance, in the 17th-century Westminster Standards (WCF 4:1; LC 15, 120; SC 9). Noted 19th-century theologian Charles Hodge (1973, 1:570) recognized this when he wrote that “according to the generally received interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, the process of creation was completed in six days.” Thus, the “generally received interpretation” of Genesis 1 understands the creation narrative as presenting a series of successive divine fiat results resulting in the sequential progress of creation over the span of six days of 24 hours’ duration each. B.A. Robinson (2014, 2), writing for the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, states that “this is the historical belief taught by the Christian religion.”

Indeed, even framework advocates admit that six-day creation is the “traditional view,” as we may see in the following statements:

- Henri Blocher (1984, 46): It is “the reading that enjoys the support of the majority throughout church history, notably that of the Reformers.”
- Meredith Kline speaks of the chronological sequence view that has “long been traditional.” He notes that “these traditional interpretations continue to be dominant in orthodox circles” (Kline 1996, 11). He also speaks of “the more traditional types of exegesis” (1996, 11). Even some 40

2. See for example the following ancient writers (references to Ante-Nicene Fathers): Barnabas (1:146); Irenaeus (1:551, 557); Theophilus (2:9); Victorinus (7:341); Methodius (6:333); Disputation of Archelaus and Manes (6:203).

3. Blocher 1984, 43; Ramm 1944, 211.

years later, he lamented: “Advocacy of the literalist tradition, however, is as clamant as ever” (1995, 2).

- Lee Irons (1998, 23) refers to the “more traditional interpretations,” which are “time-honored exegetical options.”
- Bruce K. Waltke (2012, 3, 9): “Straightforward readings of the two creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 respectively lead to the traditional beliefs that the creation of all things took place in six consecutive twenty-four hour days.” He later states that “a traditional reading of Genesis 1 and 2, is the largest hindrance to narrowing the gap between biblical faith science and secular science.”

Unfortunately, these “time-honored exegetical options” (Irons 1998, 23), which represent the traditional position of historic Christianity, are derided by some framework advocates as “biblicist” (John R. Muether and Bruce K. Waltke), “anti-scientism” (Blocher 1984, 22, 48, 224, 227), “a deplorable disservice to the cause of biblical truth” (Meredith G. Kline), “extreme” (J.A. Thompson), and “folk-science” (Van Till).⁴

Non-framework advocates mention this fact when responding to framework advocacy:

- Carl F.H. Henry: “It is fair to say that six-day creationists, and not theistic evolutionists, reflect what may be taken as the Christian tradition before the rise of modern science.”⁵
- Frances Young (DBI 147): “Before the development of modern geology and evolutionary theory, it was normal for Christians and Jews to understand the account in Gen. 1 as a literal description of the creation of the world.”
- James Bibza and John Currid (1986, 44): “This interpretation has had the greatest support throughout the history

4. See Muether 1990, 254; Waltke 1975d, 338–39; Kline 1996, 15 (n 47); Thompson 1968, 20; Van Till 2006, 6.

5. Carl F.H. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays* (Part Two), Vol. 6 of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), p. 142. Henry criticizes Noordtzij, Ridderbos, and Kline on pages 134–35.

of the church. The majority of the Reformers, for example, held this view.”

- A.W.H. Curtis (DBI 147): “These indications of the thought of the Reformation period underline an attitude to Genesis which prevailed until the nineteenth century. . . . The factual basis of the earlier chapters [of Genesis] in particular was challenged by modern scientific thinking about the origins of the universe and the evolution of the animal kingdom.”
- Douglas Kelly: “Simply stated, the writer of Genesis meant to say what the historic Christian Church (until the mid-nineteenth century) believed he said.”
- David W. Hall (1990, 267): “The long history of biblical interpretation, and specifically the Westminster divines’ written comments, endorse only one of the major cosmological views considered today: *They thought creation happened neither in an instant nor over a long period, but in the space of six normally understood days.*”

Otto Zöckler explains the change of views regarding the creation process that was effected after the Reformation period during the Enlightenment:

In the period of the Reformation . . . the commentators began to keep more closely to the words of the biblical narrative, and to avoid more carefully any trace of allegorization. But there came a time when natural science felt called upon to construct a doctrine of creation; and from that moment, the middle of the eighteenth century, until our time, a more or less noisy controversy has gone on between the orthodox party of the Church and the radical students of natural philosophy.

It was, in the beginning, chiefly from the science of geology that the arguments against the biblical representation were drawn. Evidences derived from the most authentic

document (the earth itself), and by the most infallible method (scientific observation), were marched up to show, that, instead, of a creation in six days, there was, indeed, a progressive development through huge periods. The scriptural narrative was ridiculed as childish; and captious questions were put to those who still adhered to its very letters. (SHERK 1, 569)

Today, evangelicalism is witnessing the growing influence of the “framework hypothesis,” which readily admits its non-traditional standing. What are the distinctives of this approach to Genesis? What are its problems that many traditional Christians deem of great concern? Is the hypothesis a tolerable option on the crowded scene of approaches to biblical origins?⁶ These are a few of the questions that I hope to answer in this work.

Much of my early work for this study arose in the context of an ecclesiastical debate within a conservative, evangelical denomination of which I was a ministerial member, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This debate came to a head in the mid-1990s and resulted in the 1998 establishment of a Special Committee to Study the Framework Hypothesis, to which I was appointed as a defender of six-day creation. In 1999, the committee’s rather detailed and extensive report was published. I will refer often to this Majority Report (1999) due to its clear and focused presentation of both sides of the debate.

So now, let us begin.

Working Definition of the Framework Hypothesis

A framework proponent, Mark Ross (1999: 113), provides the following succinct definition: “The Framework Hypothesis is a view of Genesis 1:1–2:3 which claims that the Bible’s use of the seven-day week in its narration of the creation is a literary (theological) framework and is not intended to indicate the chronology

6. For a survey of the options, see: Poythress 2013. Robinson 2014.

or duration of the acts of creation.” Howard Van Till (1986, 84) concurs: “The seven-day chronology that we find in Genesis 1 has no connection with the actual chronology of the Creator’s continuous dynamic action in the cosmos. The creation-week motif is a literary device, a framework in which a number of important messages are held.”

In the Special Committee “Report,” the framework members presented a fuller definition of the hypothesis. And although the definition “evolved” (!) over the course of the Special Committee’s labors, both sides to the debate agreed upon a definition that was acceptable for framing (no pun intended) the issue:

The Framework Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the view which maintains that, while the six days of creation are normal solar days, the total picture of God’s completing His creative work in a week of days is not to be taken literally, but functions as a literary framework for the creation narrative; and that the eight creative historical works of God have been arranged according to other than strictly sequential considerations, and that where there is sequential order it must be determined by factors other than the order of narration alone.⁷

In his own explanation, framework theologian Henri Blocher (1984, 50) draws a clear distinction between a *literary* approach to Genesis 1 and a *literal* approach. He does this while providing what he deems to be the theological reason why the author of Genesis expresses the manner of creation as he does:

The literary interpretation takes the form of the week attributed to the work of creation to be an artistic arrangement, a modest example of anthropomorphism that is not

7. The original definition we used for a year in our deliberations read in part: “The Framework Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the view which maintains that the days of the creation week are not normal solar days, but function as part of a literary framework for the creation narrative. . . .”

to be taken literally. The author's intention is not to supply us with a chronology of origins. It is possible that the logical order he has chosen coincides broadly with the actual sequence of the facts of cosmogony; but that does not interest him. He wishes to bring out certain themes and provide a theology of the sabbath. The text is composed as the author meditates on the finished work, so that we may understand how the creation is related to God, and what is its significance for mankind.