

STRUGGLING

WITH

GOD & ORIGINS

A PERSONAL STORY



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PROFESSOR OF SCIENCE & RELIGION
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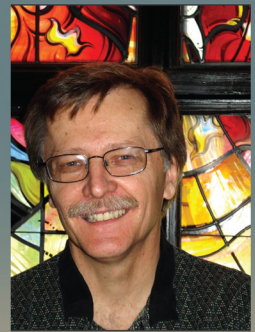
#1 INTERNATIONAL BEST SELLING BOOK IN EIGHT CATEGORIES INCLUDING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY & EVOLUTION

This is a story about struggling with God. As a freshman college student, Denis Lamoureux lost his boyhood Christian faith because of one course on evolution. With no spiritual foundation, he made medical school his idol and eventually became an immoral atheist. By God's grace, and in an answer to his mother's prayers, Denis read the Gospel of John and fell in love with Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace while serving in the military as a United Nations peacekeeper on the island of Cyprus.

This is also a story about struggling with origins. Like most evangelical Christians, Lamoureux was a staunch young earth creationist. But the Lord had a plan for his life and led him to complete a PhD in theology followed by a PhD in biology. Unexpectedly, Lamoureux discovered the Creator had evolved intelligently designed living creatures that declare his glory. Through miraculous signs and wonders, the Lord Jesus called Dr. Lamoureux to be a college professor and to proclaim a peaceful and complementary relationship between his evangelical Christian faith and the modern evolutionary sciences.



Denis O. Lamoureux is the Professor of Science & Religion at St. Joseph's College in the University of Alberta. He is also a research associate in paleontology. Lamoureux has written several books on the origins debate. Denis worships at Bible believing Pentecostal church.



Cover artwork: Jonah and the whale
courtesy of Robert T. Barrett



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Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Romans 12:1–2

For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12–13

1

A Story About My Story

“**Y**ou want me to do what?!?”

“I want you to share your personal story.”

“Are you kidding me? Have you lost your mind? I didn’t go to university for twenty years so that I could tell silly little bedtime stories. I’ve got a PhD in theology that explored the interpretation of the creation accounts in the Bible, and I can translate Greek and Hebrew words in the Word of God standing on my head! I’ve also got a PhD in biology and I can explain how the teeth and jaws of animals have evolved over hundreds of millions of years with my eyes closed! And you want me to tell stories about my life?”

“That’s right. You can certainly talk about your views on how to interpret the first chapters of Scripture and how you think that God created living creatures, but you need to share your personal story. *It’s important for you to understand that sharing our stories is one of the most effective ways to communicate our cherished beliefs and spiritual experiences.* I am certain that my students will benefit from hearing about how you struggled with God and origins for many years.”

“That’s pathetic. I think you’re crazy. There is no darn way I will tell stories about my personal life in a university lecture. Never. Sorry. End of story!”

This was a conversation that happened in early 1997 only a month after I had finally finished university. And yes, I was a student for twenty years and I graduated at 43 years of age! I was invited to speak at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Regent was one of

the best graduate schools of evangelical theology at the time, and I was blessed to have completed two masters' degrees there, with one degree that focussed on Genesis 1–11. The person who was encouraging me to share my story was my former professor, Dr. Loren Wilkinson. He was a literary scholar who had had a huge impact on me. Like most Christians, I assumed that the correct and faithful way to read the biblical creation accounts was to read them literally. This is what I was taught in Sunday school at my church. But Wilkinson in the most gentle and respectful way encouraged me to re-think how the Holy Spirit had inspired the writers of the Bible.

So, what did I do at Regent? Even though I had said that I would never tell my story in a university lecture, I trusted Loren. The presentation was entitled, "Beyond the 'Evolution' vs. 'Creation' Debate." It outlined the various views of origins, including three positions held by evangelical Christians (see Appendix). I then explained a non-literal interpretation of the creation accounts in Genesis. The lecture also presented some of the scientific evidence for biological evolution. I ended the talk with my story of the many struggles I had experienced in trying to make sense of how God created the world and how he had inspired the first chapters of the Bible.

What was the response of the students? After the lecture, about fifty of the sixty students in the class came to the front and surrounded the lecture podium. The *only* questions they asked were about my personal story! They wanted to know more about my spiritual voyage. For example, how did I feel when I moved away from a strict literal understanding of the biblical creation accounts? Was there any sense of guilt? What did my church and Christian friends say about my new way to read Scripture? How did they react when I told them that I accepted evolution?

And who was in the last row of the classroom? Yes, it was Loren Wilkinson with a look on his face, as if to say, "I straightened you out on how to read the Bible, and now I'll straighten you out on how to teach at university!" To be sure, this experience back in 1997 has significantly shaped my academic career in that I often include personal stories in my teaching and writing. Thank you, Professor Wilkinson. This was another valuable lesson from you in my education.

* This lecture can be found at: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/wl.html>. There is also a high school version of the lecture at: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dlamoure/wlws.html>. Both lectures include an episode with my personal story.

Another Personal Story

I became a Christian in the spring of 1980 after being an immoral atheist for many years. By that summer I began to attend a wonderful evangelical church. It was such a breath of fresh air to be around Christians my age who wanted to follow Jesus and live a holy life. The senior pastor of this church had a mastery of the Bible. His sermons were filled with scriptural passages and he always showed us how these could be applied to our walk with the Lord. Thanks to this pastor and church, my faith grew quickly and the many lessons that I learned there continue to shape my spiritual voyage today.

On Wednesday evenings, I often attended church. There was a fifteen-minute period in the service called “The Witness Box.” Different people would share the story of how they became a Christian. However, many who spoke had lived shamefully sinful lives, and they often shared too many details from their past. As a new Christian, I was learning to discern when the Holy Spirit was talking to me, and I got the distinct message that people were bragging about their sins. I sensed a spiritual pride in their stories. As well, there were several Christians in my church who had followed Jesus from a very young age and had lived righteously, but they felt bad because they did not have a personal story of a dramatic conversion from a filthy sinner to a godly saint. Again, I sensed the Lord saying to me this was wrong. To have lived a life in rebellion against God is nothing to be proud of. And a story not filled with countless acts of debauchery is a great thing!

Now, I believe it is important that when we share our faith, we should admit our sins. For non-Christians who hear our story, it tells them that there is no sin too great that God will not forgive. It also says that the Lord can heal them from their sense of guilt and the harmful consequences of their sins. However, offering our spiritual journey should not degenerate into a gossipy, grocery store tabloid. We should never glorify the sins of our past, but instead honor the God who died on the Cross for our sins, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My story is one of those dramatic conversions from a filthy and selfish lifestyle to a life of peace and joy in a personal relationship with Jesus. But let me make it very clear: I am not a perfect Christian. I am a sinner. It is by God’s grace that I experience the joy of trying to live by his holy laws and commands. In this book, I will share a few stories about where my sinfulness led me. I pray that these are not interpreted as boasts about sin or spiritual pride. There is nothing to be proud of with some of the

pathetic and shameful things I have done. But through these stories I want to show that there was a close connection between my behavior and my view of origins. How we understand the appearance of humans on earth shapes our worldview and ultimately the way we act in life. For example, if blind chance drives evolution, then the universe has no true purpose. For some people, like myself many years ago, this atheistic view of evolution leads to the belief that there is no ultimate right or wrong. They then assume that they can live selfishly without any moral standards. Indeed, the topic of origins is an important issue.

The Story of Jacob

I want to share one last story. It is the well-known account in the Bible of when Jacob wrestled with God throughout the night, and then God gave Jacob the name “Israel.” Genesis 32:22–30 records,

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So, Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. So, Jacob called the place Peniel saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

I believe that the story of Jacob is also the story of every one of us. I am convinced that to struggle with God is an essential part of our spiritual voyage. In fact, the word “Israel” is made up of two Hebrew words. The verb *sārāh* means “to struggle, wrestle, and persist.” The noun *ēl* refers to “God.” Christians often view the church as the “New Israel.” Therefore, we should expect that our journey of faith will include some difficult periods

of wrestling with God. I am convinced that the Lord allows these struggles so we can know him better and experience his unfathomable love for us.

This book is an expanded account of my personal story that I first offered in the lecture I delivered at Regent College in 1997. Over the years I have written short chapters on my spiritual voyage in various books.¹ Encouraged by the many positive comments of Christians who have read these, it became clear to me that most evangelical Christians struggle with God and origins, as I have. In sharing my story, I hope and pray that it encourages you and strengthens you in your love for the Lord and your love for his creation.

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Theology Is a Contact Sport!

I needed a year to recover from the years of battling God and his call for my life. I was spiritually and psychologically exhausted. As I immersed myself again in the Word of God, I personally identified with Abraham in the great biblical chapter on faith in Hebrews 11. Verse 8 reveals, “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.” I underlined the last clause of this verse in my Bible and dated it October 1983. Even though I was headed to Regent College, I had no idea where in the end the Lord would lead me.

With a military background, it was natural for me to outline a few provisional plans and strategies. I wrote down a modest and realistic plan in my diary. “If stopping at the Sunday school level is my place in life, then so be it. Amen.”¹ I had made my peace with the Lord that if my grades at Regent were only ‘B’ and ‘B+’, as they were at Canadian Theological College in 1981, then there was no way I would be accepted into a PhD program in theology. It was reasonable to think that one year of graduate school was about as far as I would go academically. If this was God’s plan, then I would certainly be a better Sunday school teacher. I would return home, set up a dental practice, and get married and have children. But I made a promise to the Lord that I would work as hard at Regent as I would have worked in medical school.

There was also a grand and fanciful plan. The vision to be a creation scientist was still alive in my heart and mind. I had lost my Christian faith in first year university by Christmas because of a course on evolution. I

wanted to declare war on the secular scientific community and protect college students from Satan’s vicious lie that living creatures and humans had evolved over hundreds of millions of years. To equip myself for the battle, I fantasized about getting two PhD degrees—one in theology and the other in biology.

Beware of the Liberal Professors

In the spring of 1984 before entering Regent College, I wrote letters to creation scientists Henry Morris and Duane Gish at the Institute for Creation Research. I informed them that I believed the Lord was calling me to join them in the war against evolution. I also said that I would attend Regent College and specialize in Genesis 1–11. Dr. Gish kindly replied to my letter. He was delighted to hear of my plans and looked forward to working with me in the future. However, Gish warned me about Regent and told me to beware of the liberal professors because they rejected the literal interpretation of the creation accounts in the Word of God.

During the mid-1980s, Regent College had some of the greatest evangelical scholars in the world—systematic theologian J.I. Packer, spiritual formation professor Jim Houston, evangelist Michael Green, New Testament scholar Gordon Fee, and of course, Old and New Testament professor Bruce Waltke. Many refer to this period as the “Golden Age” of Regent, and I had the privilege of studying there at that time. What I found to be truly remarkable about the school was the incredible balance between evangelical spirituality and first-rate academics. Indeed, Regent College taught students how to do scholarship for the glory of God.

Though I had a modest plan when I entered Regent College, it was the fanciful plan that was my burning desire. On registration day 30 August 1984, I entitled a diary entry in capital letters, “THE GRAND PLAN.”² There was only one main objective: “Declare absolute and pure hell on the so-called ‘theory’ of evolution.”

In the first week at Regent, evidence surfaced about Duane Gish’s concern that there were liberal professors at this college. Dr. Bruce Waltke taught the introductory course on biblical interpretation. This academic subject is known as “hermeneutics.” He emphasized that a common mistake made by many Christians is to force their modern ideas into the Bible. Waltke gave the example of evangelicals using the Bible to date the age of the earth. He then raised the possibility that we live on an “old planet” and this is “something we need to study.”³ As a young earth

creationist, I was quite troubled with Waltke's proposal. Yet, I had previously experienced his reticence toward creation science in the 1981 spring school at Canadian Theological College.⁴

But the next challenge to my hermeneutics came when Waltke dealt with the topic of the literary genres in Scripture. He pointed out that the Bible included many different types of literature, such as poetry, narrative, parable, history, letters, proverbs, laws, hymns, prophecies, and others. Of course, this made perfect sense to me because I had already discovered this notion of genres in my study of Scripture and various theology books before coming to Regent.

However, Waltke shocked the class when he introduced the literary genre of legend. He suggested that the first books of the Bible included different legends that had been put together. A few students attempted to question Waltke, but most of us were in awe of him and intimidated by the fact he had two doctoral degrees in biblical studies. Who were we to question him? But my mind raced. How could we trust Holy Scripture if there were legends in it? After all, most legends are nothing but made-up stories with a sliver of historical truth. I concluded that there was no way the Bible had legends, especially in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. This was a non-negotiable belief in my mind because *God does not lie in the Bible!*

More liberal theology appeared in the first term at Regent College in the class of Professor J.I. Packer. During the 1980s, he was arguably the most important evangelical theologian in the world. His best-selling book *Knowing God* (1973) had led many people to Jesus. I even knew a few of them. In a lecture to about a hundred students on how God inspired Holy Scripture, Packer stated that the creation accounts in the Bible "were obviously written in picture language." I could not believe what I was hearing! After the class, I wanted to confront him, but about half of the students stormed him at the lecture podium. The conversation was loud and intense because most of my classmates were anti-evolutionists and scientific concordists, like me.

Packer was British and we knew that most British evangelical Christians were theistic evolutionists. As North Americans, we felt that the Brits did not take the Bible seriously enough because they disregarded the scientific and historical events stated in the creation accounts. Packer's view of the first chapters of Scripture rocked me. The idea that Genesis had "picture language," alongside Bruce Waltke's belief that the Bible included several legends, seeded an uncomfortable tension in my mind during

the first term at Regent College. It would take the next three years at this college for me to fully appreciate what Packer and Waltke were saying about the Word of God.

The new ideas about Scripture were spinning my mind in the first month at Regent College, and so too was the academic intensity. I comment in my diary, “The reality of the academic bar being set very high is sinking in. Help!”⁵ I certainly felt the pressure by the end of September. At a Sunday lunch in the home of Professor Jim Houston, I said to him that it might make more sense for me to return home and set up a dental practice. This way I could fund the education of four or five Regent students every year. I will never forget what Houston said to me. “That’s a reasonable plan. However, if it is not God’s will for your life, it will never work. You can’t buy your calling or sell your calling. You can only receive your call from the Lord and follow it.” I knew immediately that Houston was right. The Lord was speaking directly to me through him. It was another divine revelation in further understanding the will of God for my life.

So, I went back to the university and locked myself in the library everyday from 8 AM in the morning to 10 PM at night! I knew my calling was to work on the issue of origins and Genesis 1–11. In fact, one day after class, J.I. Packer asked me what my plans were in the future. I told him, “I want to be a scholar in the evolution vs. creation debate.” He looked at me curiously as if I was deranged, didn’t say a word, and then just walked away. But that did not discourage me. I continued to push forward. And when I received the grade on my first paper at Regent, it was only a ‘B+’. There was a sick feeling and my stomach knotted, but I never gave up.

I knew that I needed help to write papers. I had masterfully dodged English courses as an undergraduate student at university because I hated English. But my “sin” had found me out! Yet the Lord sent a woman my way with an honors Arts degree in English (and what did I say about degrees in Arts as an undergrad?!?). She was ideal because she also had a “take-no-prisoners” personality. I hired her and over the next three years at Regent, she mercilessly whipped the “Science is King” boy into literary shape!

Christian Trench Warfare

Regent College had a short 3-week interterm in January 1985. I was coerced by a friend to take the Science and Christianity course. I didn’t want to because I knew it was going to be ugly. I had been assaulted by

enough liberal theology in the fall term and suspected it would only get worse in this class. My friend registered with me, but then at the last minute, he dropped out! I was stuck.

The course was a classic confrontation that has been repeated in seminaries between a liberal professor pitted against faithful conservative students. The class was well-equipped with well-read young earth creationists. It didn't take very long for the first shot to be fired at the mild-mannered professor of interdisciplinary studies—Dr. Loren Wilkinson. He was a literary scholar. It became clear early in the course that he believed the earth was very old. Wilkinson was barraged by our young earth creationist arguments. But he couldn't respond to any of them, after all his academic specialty was literature, and not science or geology. And we were vile, and I was the vilest. Thankfully, Wilkinson absorbed our cheap shots and took charge of the class and called for a prayer time-out. The Holy Spirit convicted us that we were behaving badly.

To meet our challenges, Wilkinson invited a geologist from the University of British Columbia. The onslaught of young earth creationist arguments continued, and we went after his weakness—the interpretation of Noah's flood in Genesis 6–9. The geologist seemed flustered, and it was obvious he had not thought seriously about this biblical account. When we dealt with the age of the earth, and I still find this amazing today, he could not offer us simple and persuasive reasons why the earth was billions of years old. This poor performance by a professional geologist only strengthened our belief that the earth was only six thousand years old.

The second week of the course was to be led by a chemistry professor from my home university, the University of Alberta. Prior to his visit, Wilkinson said to me in front of the class that he would be in attendance because this visitor and I were “quite volatile.” Truer words have never been spoken. For a reason unknown to any of us, the visiting professor began his lecture by slandering the school system in Alberta, and he followed this by berating University of Alberta students. He then asked each of us to introduce ourselves. When my turn came, I said with seething sarcasm, “I'm a product of the Alberta school system and a graduate of the University of Alberta with degrees in biology and dentistry. Thank you very much for your kind comments. By the way, why are you here in my home country? I notice you have an American accent. Couldn't you get a job in the States?” All heck broke loose between the visitor and me, and Wilkinson quickly intervened with another prayer timeout.

The session with this guest lecturer continued to degenerate. He then mocked young earth creationists. I shot back, “So, you’re an evolutionist. Tell me how the cytochrome system evolved?” He dodged the question. But I kept pressing him, “You don’t know what the cytochrome system is, do you? Aren’t you supposed to be a chemist? Cytochromes are biomolecules and you should know something about them, especially if you are a competent chemist.” The visiting professor snapped and angrily blasted me, “You just don’t know enough!” I fired back, “I don’t know enough? You obviously don’t know anything about cytochromes. You’re telling us evolution is true, but you can’t explain the evolution of cytochromes. You’re incompetent!” The room exploded, and once again, Wilkinson jumped in with another prayer timeout.⁶

Frustrated by the one-sidedness of this course on Science and Christianity, the class demanded that there be a presentation from a young earth creationist perspective. We wanted some balance in our education. So, I took charge and invited creation scientist Dr. Donald Chittick from Oregon. He held a PhD in chemistry and had just published a young earth creationist book entitled *The Controversy: Roots of the Creation-Evolution Conflict* (1984). He accepted my invitation, and I paid for his speaking fee and travel costs. The lecture went well as he presented scientific and biblical arguments against evolution and an old earth. Wilkinson sat in on the session and didn’t say one word.

But the next day after Chittick had left to return home, Wilkinson complained about Chittick’s creationist views. Then instantly a student in our class with a PhD in chemistry launched into Wilkinson with a raised voice. “Dr. Chittick was here for two hours yesterday, and you could have raised your concerns with him.” It was an incredibly awkward moment because this woman was gentle and demure. It was not her personality to be so confrontational. Nevertheless, her point was made. Our professor had blown an opportunity to show us why this creation scientist was wrong.

In the last week of the Science and Christianity course, I ran into Wilkinson in a narrow hallway at the college. I asked him directly, “Tell me what you think about young earth creation? Was the world created in six literal days about six thousand years ago?” He answered bluntly, “It is an error.” I can still remember how the word “error” shook my soul. Even though I completely disagreed with Wilkinson about origins, I had a great respect for him as a professor. In the fall term, I had been thoroughly blessed by his introductory philosophy course. It was obvious to

me that he was a wonderful born-again Christian. He loved the Lord. And I admired his honesty with students. However, Wilkinson did not believe in young earth creation. He was the first *real* Christian in my life who said that creation in six days is wrong.

On the last day of the course, in front of all my classmates, Professor Wilkinson looked directly at me and said, “Denis, I have a concern. If you gave up your belief in young earth creation, would you also give up your faith in Jesus?” Ouch! That was one question I never expected. As I look back at that moment, I am convinced that it wasn’t Wilkinson who was talking to me. The Holy Spirit spoke through him to challenge my understanding of what are essential truths in Christianity. I mumbled and stumbled and never really answered his question. Deep in my heart of hearts, I knew that my personal relationship with Jesus was so much more important than any view about how God had created the universe and living creatures.

The Straw that Broke the Back of a Young Earth Creationist

For most Christians who have studied theology at the graduate school level, there is a common experience. We soon discover that what we were taught in Sunday school at our church is quite different from what we learn in seminaries and universities. Please don’t get me wrong on this. God bless the Sunday school teachers for all they do by encouraging us to follow Jesus, read our Bibles, and live a holy lifestyle. However, academic theology challenges many assumptions that we once believed were the foundations of the Christian faith, like young earth creation.

There is one aphorism that perfectly summarizes my experience of studying Genesis 1–11 at Regent College. Biblical scholar George Eldon Ladd states, “The Bible is the Word of God written in the words of men in history.”⁷ Like Ladd, I believe the Bible is the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God. This is a belief that is absolutely and totally non-negotiable for me. The moment I do not believe that Holy Scripture contains “the very words of God,” as the apostle Paul asserts in Romans 3:2, then I will no longer call myself a Christian. Nor will I teach at a Christian college. I will resign my academic position at that very moment.

However, there is a challenging aspect of the Bible that graduate school in theology thrusts into our mind. The Word of God includes many ancient features that were written by ancient humans during ancient periods in the past. As Ladd claims, the Bible is “written in the words of

men in history.” Regent College opened my eyes to ancient writing techniques, ancient literary genres and, especially significant for someone like me interested in the origins debate, ancient concepts about the natural world. Or to state this last feature in another way, I began to see in Scripture an *ancient science*. My discovery of these ancient characteristics did not all happen at once, but slowly over the three years I was at Regent. Near the end of my education there, I condensed Ladd’s aphorism in a diary entry, “Mystery of the Word: human yet Godly.”⁸

There were two significant projects at Regent College that completely reshaped my understanding of how God had inspired the human authors of Holy Scripture and had revealed to us life-changing, inerrant spiritual truths—my thesis and my last paper.

Genesis 6:1–4 & the Sons of God and Daughters of Humans Episode

As a specialist in Genesis 1–11, my thesis explored one of the most puzzling passages in the Bible. Genesis 6:1–4 states that “the sons of God” procreated with “the daughters of humans.”

¹When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.” ⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Of course, the question that every generation of theologians and Christians have asked about this passage is, “Who are these sons of God?” Are they human beings or celestial beings, like angels?

As I look back at my numerous struggles to make sense of Genesis 6:1–4, I cannot think of a better passage in Scripture to challenge the strict biblical literalism of a young earth creationist. I am convinced the Lord directed me to these four verses to teach me valuable lessons about the Word of God. As my research progressed, it became clear that the sons of God were celestial beings, not human beings (see Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Ps. 29:1, 82:6, 89:6; Dan. 3:25). But with a college education in biology, this made absolutely no sense to me. How could male angel-like creatures procreate with female humans?

Very slowly, I came to realize that the problem was with my interpretation of the Bible, and not the Bible itself. The greatest lesson the Lord taught me in struggling with the sons of God and daughters of humans episode is that our theology must always begin with Scripture, even if what we read confuses us or makes us uncomfortable. The Bible is the absolute starting point, and our interpretations of it are always open to criticism and revision. I formulated an aphorism to capture this interpretive principle and it continues to dictate my approach to Holy Scripture today: *I will submit to the very words in the Word of God.*

There were other important lessons the Lord taught me in Genesis 6:1–4. Even after writing a 214-page thesis, I didn't know what to make of this passage. Yet this was a valuable experience for someone with a science background who routinely thought in a simple black-and-white way. I began to learn how to live with ambiguity and uncertainty. My thesis research also revealed that throughout history some of the greatest theologians have struggled with this passage and have offered a wide variety of different and contradictory interpretations. With this being the case, they could not all be right. It means that many of the most important biblical scholars had mistaken interpretations. Again, this made me aware that the Bible was not the problem; but human interpretations of Scripture were the problem. Finally, the Lord put the sons of God and daughters of humans episode in perspective. My Christian faith and personal relationship with God did not depend on four obscure verses in the Bible. Instead, my faith was deeply rooted in Jesus and his death on the Cross for our sins.

Yet in my thesis research, a very disturbing issue arose in my mind. Theological papers and biblical commentaries on Genesis 6:1–4 repeatedly used the term “myth” to describe the literary genre of this passage. This was a word I absolutely detested. In my mind, the Word of God did not have myths because *God did not lie in the Bible!* However, as my knowledge of biblical interpretation advanced, I learned that there were different genres of ancient literature. Gradually, I became more comfortable with the idea that the Holy Spirit might have employed ancient story-like myths in Scripture to reveal messages of faith. This would be like the parables of Jesus in that he made up stories about events that never happened in order to teach us spiritual truths.

I also began to appreciate that the word “myth” did not necessarily mean something that is false and a lie. Instead, this ancient literary genre was like an allegory with a spiritual lesson. If God wanted to use non-historical and made-up accounts in the Bible, *that was his decision*, not ours,

even though we may not like it. Our task as interpreters of the Word of God is to identify these ancient mythical stories, if indeed they are present, and then draw out the inerrant messages of faith that they transport.

Genesis 1:1–3 & the Pre-Creative State

In the spring of 1987, I was near the end of my graduate education at Regent College. I had handed in my thesis to be graded, and there was only one paper and two short exams to complete for the Master of Divinity and Master of Christian Studies degrees. In one of my previous classes, I had learned that there were some grammatical challenges in the translation of Genesis 1:1–3. A study of these first three verses in Scripture for my final paper fitted well into my program that focussed on Genesis 1–11. But little did I know what the Lord had in store for me.

The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible is a well-known modern translation that is used in evangelical churches. It follows the traditional rendition of the first three verses of Genesis 1.

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is also a modern translation, but it is employed more often within academic circles. It offers a variety of translations and these reflect the grammatical issues in these opening verses.

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,
² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.
³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

In the footnote to Genesis 1:1, the NRSV translates, “When God began to create” and the traditional “In the beginning God created.” Verse 2 can also be rendered “Spirit of God” or “mighty wind.” It must be emphasized that all these variant translations are possible. The ancient Hebrew language allows for them.

As I studied these first three verses of the Bible, a serious problem arose for me as a young earth creationist. Now equipped with biblical Hebrew, I noticed that Genesis 1:2 was the opening scene in the six-day account of creation in Genesis 1. The grammar made that undisputedly

clear, and there was no debate about that whatsoever.⁹ In fact, my Old Testament professor Bruce Waltke had proven that this was the correct translation of the original Hebrew in a series of classic papers.¹⁰ In the NIV and all variations of the NRSV, there is a dark watery earth already in existence with no mention of when it was created. This is termed the “pre-creative state.”

It is this biblical fact of the existence of a pre-creative state in Genesis 1:2 that destroyed my belief in young earth creation. *I could no longer date the earth because the Bible did not reveal when the earth was created.* More specifically, it was not possible to add up the genealogies in Scripture and use them to determine the age of the earth. Genesis 1:2 simply states that the earth was already in existence when God began the six days of creation.

I remember the moment I fully grasped the meaning of the second verse of the Bible. That happened over thirty-five years ago, and it feels like yesterday. It was a fresh and spectacular spring morning in Vancouver with the snow-capped mountains above the lush green forests in the distance. The pink cherry blossoms were in full bloom and sunlight flooded into the library. I was sitting at my favorite desk where I had worked from 8 AM to 10 PM every day for the last three years. One simple single verse in Scripture exploded in my mind and shattered my belief in young earth creation. It was the proverbial straw that broke the back of a creation scientist.

Instantly, there was a deep sense of alienation, and even betrayal. My mind raced back to September 1983 when I had left medical school and my incredible military career. I had come to Regent to arm myself with Scripture to attack evolution and defend young earth creation. But now my existence and so-called “calling” were an absolute joke. The alienation and betrayal quickly turned into a wicked rage that consumed me. I cursed up a storm. “To hell with this religious hysteria! I’m going to get up from my desk and leave my books there. I won’t even go back to my apartment for my clothes and other things. I’ll just get in my car and drive seven hundred miles home to Edmonton and reinvent my life.” As I mentioned, I was only this paper and two short exams away from two masters’ degrees in theology. But there was no point to complete these. My calling to be a creation scientist had died. Ironically, the Word of God had murdered it.

By God’s grace, this extremely dark and horrific experience lasted no more than twenty to thirty seconds. I glanced outside of the library at the magnificent spring morning in Vancouver. The creation was declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). I sensed that Jesus was in complete control. The

alienation, betrayal, and wicked rage vanished, and his peace and love filled and comforted my soul. Then I heard his voice in my heart, as I had heard it countless times before. The Lord assured me that he had indeed called me to Regent College. My job was to be the best student I could be. And yes, his will for me was to specialize on Genesis 1–11 and understand the implications of these biblical chapters for the origins debate. But Jesus was in control of my education. The Lord was my Teacher, I was his student. And this paper on Genesis 1:1–3 and the pre-creative state was another lesson in my education as an evangelical theologian.

Reflections on Genesis 1–11

Restored from the momentary darkness and horror of fully understanding Genesis 1:2 for the first time, I returned to my calling as a theology student and finished my paper on the first three verses of the Word of God. It was the best paper I wrote at Regent. I added a post-script to this paper and reflected over my newly emerging hermeneutics of Genesis 1–11.

I entered Regent College in September 1984 as a fire-breathing, dragon-slaying, card-carrying young earth creationist. It seems appropriate, nay, maybe even ordained that my last paper after three years at this college is this one. How I have fallen from grace!

My parting thoughts on this issue of origins are now in a suspended state. I do not regress to my earlier atheism where, ‘In the beginning hydrogen . . .’ The idea of molecules into people defies all known biochemical laws. The sociobiological implications of the naked ape make me wonder how man could be the apple of God’s eye if humanity came about through evolution.

Yet now, as a student of the Old Testament, I am beginning to question the ‘narrative-ness’ of the opening chapters of the Bible. There seem to exist masterfully constructed, almost poetic, literary structures in this section of God’s Word. It may well be that, through the creation, the fall, the sons of God and daughters of humans episode, the flood, and the tower of Babel, God has given us stories which bear significant truths. In other words, the first part of Genesis may well be *mythopoetry*.

It’s funny, you know. I once met a theological hockey “expert” who told me that examining evolution in light of the Bible was “an irrelevant abstraction.” He may be right.¹¹

As I read this post-script today, there are several things that strike me. By the spring of 1987, I no longer accepted the “narrative-ness” or strict literal interpretation of Genesis 1–11. I was beginning to see “stories” and “poetic, literary structures” in these early biblical chapters. This led me to consider the possibility that the literary genre of the accounts of origins in Scripture might be “mythopoeetry.” I no longer detested the word “myth” and now understood this term to mean a story that was inspired by the Holy Spirit, somewhat like the parables of Jesus.

However, I still firmly believed that Scripture was “God’s Word.” I also fully believed that the Lord had revealed to us “significant truths” through the “stories” and “mythopoeetry” of Genesis 1–11. If I had to write this passage again, I would say that God revealed *inerrant* spiritual truths in the Bible. That is, truths that are absolutely and totally true. And these spiritual truths are delivered by ancient literary genres and techniques. My personal experience of being both a strict literalist and non-literalist proved to me the power of Scripture. The Word of God transcends our hermeneutical skills (or lack of them) because we arrive at the same spiritual truths. The only requirement to read the Bible is an earnest desire to hear the Lord speak to us.

Notably, by the end of my studies at Regent College, my views on how God created the world were “in a suspended state.” That was quite a radical shift since I confidently entered this college “as a fire-breathing, dragon-slaying, card-carrying young earth creationist.” However, I was still fiercely opposed to evolution. It made no sense to me how humans were the “apple of God’s eye,” (Ps. 17:8), if the Lord had created men and women through evolution. My reference to “the naked ape” was back to the title of Desmond Morris’ atheistic book on human origins that I had read as an undergraduate student. My view of evolution was still conflated with atheism, and I could not envision the Lord creating through an evolutionary process.

Even though I was uncertain about God’s creative method, I was still a creationist because I believed in a Creator. During that brilliant morning in the library when I moved away from young earth creationism, I saw the splendor of the creation pointing to his existence. I also sensed Jesus’ comforting presence in my heart at that critical moment in my walk with him. To know how God made the world paled compared to the reality of these powerful spiritual experiences.

Finally, the “theological hockey ‘expert’” in the post-script was the professor for whom I wrote this last paper at Regent College. He came

from Australia and rarely missed the opportunity to jab me whenever my beloved Edmonton Oilers hockey team lost a game. He often frustrated me because he would not engage me on the origins debate, calling any discussion about Scripture and evolution an “irrelevant abstraction.” Stated another way, the Bible is not a book of science and it is a waste of time to use the Word of God to determine how the Creator had made the world. Today, I fully appreciate the wisdom of my former professor.

Believing in a Creator without Creation Science

In my worst nightmares, I never dreamt that studying Genesis 1–11 at one of the best evangelical graduate schools in the world would lead me away from the traditional and strict literal interpretation of the biblical creation accounts. It never entered my mind that the Bible itself would destroy my calling to be a creation scientist. And I never thought that one day I would come to the outrageous conclusion that young earth creation is un-biblical.

Reports of my shift in understanding the first chapters of Scripture made their way back home to the creation science community. A meeting was arranged so I could explain some of my discoveries in Genesis 1–11.¹² I emphasized that though I was no longer a young earth creationist, I still firmly believed in the Creator. I also stressed that I did not for a moment accept evolution. But my views were mocked and harshly criticized. The idea that the literary genre of Genesis 1–11 was not historical or scientific was viciously attacked. I was written-off as brainwashed by the liberal professors at Regent College. In retrospect, this experience was another lesson from the Lord. He was preparing me for my future career when I would face similar ruthless criticisms from evangelical brothers and sisters.

Regent College was the most challenging academic experience of my life. I was pushed harder in my two master’s degrees at this college than any of the three doctoral programs I have completed. But more importantly, following God’s call for my life gave me an incredible sense of peace and satisfaction. My “modest and realistic plan” at the start of Regent was to spend just a year there and then come home to be a better Sunday school teacher. Even though my first mark was a ‘B+’, the grades increased over time and so did my confidence that the Lord was calling me to pursue a PhD in theology.

And if you will allow me to make a small Pauline boast for the Lord (2 Cor. 10–12), I was awarded the Governors' Prize for both the Master of Divinity and Master of Christian Studies degrees. I also won prizes for both Evangelism and Hebrew Proficiency. I've never been one for awards and graduations, but my mother came to Regent for the ceremonies. It was an affirmation that the Lord had graciously answered her prayers for me. Yes, she was proud of her son. The best part of the evening was when I gave her my degrees, and I discovered that graduations are for moms!