Interpreting What We See through the Sciences, Scripture, and *PSCF*

James C. Peterson

Chong Ho Yu, William Whitney, and their team open this issue with a survey of the relationship between scientific and biblical literacy. Seeking truth requires listening carefully to the data in both the sciences and in scripture. Each one requires thoughtful interpretation to understand what is really there. For example, physics and biochemistry are both sciences, yet they offer distinct foci and kinds of description to approach different aspects of one reality.

There are different foci and kinds of description in the Bible as well, to express aspects of one revelation. The disciple John writes about the life of Jesus, telling what he saw and heard and touched (1 John 1:1–3). This is the genre of history. John also reports Jesus using metaphors, such as he (Jesus) is the vine, and his disciples are the branches (John 15:5). That instruction is about their relationship, not gardening. When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again (John 3), Nicodemus is flummoxed that he is too big to re-enter his mother's womb. Jesus tells Nicodemus not to take him so literally. He is using what Nicodemus knows about physical birth to tell him something about the spirit, of a new start in life. John also writes the book of Revelation that tells of what is to come, in apocalyptic visions of a beast with ten horns and seven heads (13:1) and the ocean turned to blood (16:3).

We see then that one apostle uses different types of writing within the library that we call the Bible. One will miss what John is saying if one insists that everything should be in only one format of history, or metaphor, or apocalyptic vision. So much more, when reading multiple authors of scripture, the reader needs to listen for what a particular text is teaching through the genre the author has chosen. This is crucial in reading the opening chapters of Genesis too. In this issue, S. Joshua Swamidass and Luke Janssen agree substantially on the involved science, but write their essays to address different readings of the literary forms in those chapters. Is the opening of Genesis to be read more like the Revelation of John, or the Gospel of John, or yet some other genre of its own?

Swamidass, a computational biologist, and the three geneticists who peer reviewed his essay (alongside peer review from other relevant disciplines) are all convinced that the genetic evidence is clear that no one couple is the origin of all human DNA. One couple was not, together, the first to have human anatomy. The genetic evidence from multiple concurring angles is that human beings anatomically came from incremental changes over time in a population. They also agree that most of the people alive 10,000 years ago had children who had children who had children, until now the earliest ancestors are genealogically linked to most of the people who are alive today.

Each human being today has so many ancestors that we are all genealogical descendants of particular people in the past. Among them there might even be some particular couples. Swamidass argues, in his article, that God could have called a particular couple in that population of anatomical human beings to be ancestors to everybody alive today. Despite the genetic dispersal and dead ends of various lines of heredity, the people of this generation could all be *genealogically* related to such a couple. Descendants alive today would likely not carry any specific genes from that couple, but there could be a genealogical connection of relationships, parent to child to grandchild to great grandchild ... Swamidass thinks further that such a line could include people who intermarried and migrated quickly and extensively far enough that the genealogical relationship could extend from the inhabitants near the Euphrates River to the aboriginals of Australia and the denizens of southern Argentina—in other words, to all current human beings.

Would such a genealogical connection to one particular couple be theologically important? Romans 5 describes Jesus as the one in whom all human beings

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can be reconciled with God. Yet there is no claim there that all human beings are genetically or genealogically related to Jesus of Nazareth. Why would it be important that a couple, called Adam and Eve, be genealogically related to all human beings? Is the brokenness of sin passed on by the physical connection of parent to child? It could not be by genetics because people alive today have very few, if any, genes from any one or two persons in the past. Is there something about a genealogical connection of parent to child that passes on actual guilt or something else?

If, in this proposed scenario, that genealogical connection determines one's guilt or character, then what of the people who have *not* been genealogically related to Adam and Eve as that connection may have slowly spread across the world? And why would there be such an inheritance? Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasize that God holds each generation accountable for its own actions (Jer. 31:29–30; Ezek. 18:1–4). Would it be consistent to affirm then that each human being's relationship with God is established by an ancestor at least 250 generations in the past (following Swamidass's working estimate of say 10,000 years since Adam and Eve, and each generation as about forty years)?

In contrast with Swamidass's effort to make room in what we have learned from genetics for Adam and Eve as a particular couple, Luke Janssen offers a different reading of Adam and Eve. He thinks that the opening chapters of Genesis are to be read more like the call to be born again in John chapter 3 or the dramatic imagery of the book of Revelation. When you read a story of a bone being molded into a woman, a fast-talking snake, a tree with fruit that makes one eternal, and an angel guarding it with a flaming sword, such a story appears to be using symbols to represent something deeper, as Jesus does in much of his teaching and as John does in the book of Revelation. Janssen thinks that the opening chapters of Genesis are a symbolic story, expressing essential truths that God still wants us to hear. As in the thought of the church father Irenaeus, for Janssen, our devastating fall as human beings came from not accepting an offered relationship and calling; that is, it was not from already-present perfection in two particular people.

In the last article of this issue, George Murphy, a physicist and pastor, wants us to see the grand scale of time in which God chooses to enable choices other than the Creator's. God's intentional self-limitation in creation, and later in incarnation, makes possible life that can be received and freely returned by grace to a right relationship with the Creator.

A wide range of book reviews rounds out this issue. There is much to consider. Many thanks to the thoughtful authors. ✯

James C. Peterson, *Editor-in-Chief*

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