**Article**

# Inerrancy and Navigating Bible-Science Tensions

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*Conflicts between science and the Bible are too often engaged in isolation, without the development of a consistent methodology to approach challenges as they arise. A critical first step is an improved understanding of inerrancy. In the most abbreviated form, inerrancy means the Bible is without error in all that it affirms, but there is considerable disagreement among Bible-believing scholars over what the Bible intends to affirm. Qualifiers such as unlimited versus limited inerrancy have been employed to differentiate various positions, but the breadth of perspectives, especially under the "limited" umbrella, is unhelpfully large. New qualifier terminology (comprehensive inerrancy versus message inerrancy) is proposed to refine two competing views on what the Bible affirms, with a pastoral focus on building a methodology for navigating current and future Bible-science tensions. Applying the proposed methodology, a case is made for message inerrancy as the more biblically defensible position, with implications for improved understanding and appreciation of both science and Scripture.*

The particular combination of tools, methods, and logic that kicked off the Scientific Revolution introduced a new set of challenges to biblical scholarship and apologetics. Descriptions of the structure, function, and history of the natural world found in the Bible began to be increasingly questioned by the practitioners of science. Minor debates had long existed over what the Bible had to say on subjects such as the shape of the earth or the possible existence of antipodal land,[1] but the intensity of disagreement began in earnest in the 16th century with the publication of Copernicus's work on the movement of the earth and planets—a view that many considered to represent a direct challenge to biblical authority.[2]

Since that time, advances in scientific methods and discoveries have presented a series of apparent conflicts, including debates over the age of the universe, the origin and development of life, the history of death, the impact of sin on nature, the historicity of a first human couple, the history of the Exodus and Davidic kingdoms, and, most recently, the nature of human sexuality.

Uncritical acceptance of scientific claims erodes confidence in the truth and authority of Scripture. Ironically, rejection of scientific claims, without considering the possibility of errors in biblical interpretation, can have the same result. If a mistaken biblical interpretation is vigorously defended against truthful scientific theories, it will inevitably undermine confidence in the authority of the Bible for both non-Christian seekers and science-minded Christians. There is a need for a systematic approach for assessing Bible-science tensions that avoids both of these mistakes.

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Christians today, with the exception of a small contingent of flat-earth adherents, do not believe that the earth sits at the center of our solar system. But if asked why they are comfortable accepting the scientific consensus over what many would consider the historical (pre-1500s) view of the Church, the answer is likely to be either a sense that the scientific evidence for a sun-centered system became too overwhelming to reject, or just a shrug—their pastor is okay with it, so they are too. Oddly, these answers are just as likely to come from Christians who claim a belief in biblical inspiration and inerrancy, not realizing an unqualified acquiescence to science is a tacit disavowal of biblical inerrancy.

Few modern Christians are aware of the hermeneutical basis for simultaneous belief in a sun-centered solar system *and* an inerrant Bible. That lack of awareness poses a problem for navigating more-recent Bible-science tensions, for each topic that arises seems to catch the Church, at large, by surprise, with insufficient awareness of any hermeneutical toolkit built from prior experience. Without such tools, too many Christians experience the cognitive dissonance of (1) accepting science over the Bible for some topics but not others, (2) rejecting all science that disagrees with presuppositional assumptions about the Bible even in the face of overwhelming evidence, or (3) compartmentalizing beliefs about science and the Bible and hoping they won't be pressed to reconcile.

In this article, I argue for an improved understanding of biblical inerrancy as a crucial first step in developing a methodology for navigating perceived conflicts between the Bible and science.[3] Given the ocean of ink already penned on the subject of inerrancy, it would be natural to think there is little left to add. It is thus worth stating up front what this article will and will not attempt to accomplish—beginning with the "will nots." I will not make an argument for the truth of Scripture or the general principle of inerrancy. While there is value in considering whether the Bible is truthful and trustworthy, the focus of this article is limited to topics of disagreement and confusion among those who subscribe to the doctrine (or principle) of biblical inerrancy.[4] I will not delve deeply into the origin and history of inerrancy debates, map out the modern spectrum of views on inerrancy and their nuances, or suggest an entirely new understanding of what inerrancy means.[5]

What I will offer is (1) new qualifier terms (*comprehensive* and *message*) for inerrancy, defined in ways to improve engagement with scientific challenges, (2) a methodology for assessing the relative merits of competing views, consistent with biblical inspiration and authority, (3) an

argument for message inerrancy as more faithful to the Bible's self-understanding, (4) an example application of message inerrancy from Genesis 1, and (5) potential theological, societal, and scientific implications moving forward.

An additional note of clarification is warranted to avoid perception that I am claiming a previously unrecognized way of understanding the Bible. I am not. Rather, I am packaging existing theological arguments in fresh terminology and definitions that I think have greater pastoral efficacy for addressing science-Bible tensions. Similarly, the proffered methodology for assessing competing claims draws on and organizes the logic of previous scholars. My approach and assessment of Scripture finds considerable alignment with Iain Provan's "fifth way" of reading, described in *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*.[6]

## Defining Inerrancy

The two most common terms related to the truth and trustworthiness of the Bible are *infallibility* and *inerrancy*. Each varies in precise definition depending on the source, though, to have any usefulness at all, they must have at least a generally accepted base-level meaning. Infallibility refers to the belief that the Bible, by virtue of its divine inspiration, is trustworthy and will not fail in its mission.[7] Inerrancy is considered a subset of infallibility, with a more specific focus on the Bible's inability to affirm error. Inerrancy is the more recent term, gaining prominence late in the 19th-century and early 20th-century through the writings of the Princeton theologian Benjamin B. Warfield.[8]

Warfield was motivated by a growing secularism in America and abroad that increasingly questioned the veracity and divine origin of the Bible. In the defense of Scripture, *inerrancy* became a convenient label for the belief that the Bible was inspired by God and free from error in all it intends to teach. Within a few decades, the term became part of the common Christian vocabulary, particularly following the 1978 International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, resulting in the famed Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI)[9] and its subsequent affirmation by the Evangelical Theological Society as a condition of membership.[10]

The CSBI leads off with a series of five short summary statements. Excerpts from statements 2 and 4, touching on both infallibility and inerrancy, follow:

> Holy Scripture … is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms …

Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

Superficially, it may have seemed that affirmation or rejection of inerrancy would serve to differentiate those who accept the truth and inspiration of the Bible and those who do not, but it did not turn out to be that straightforward. The existence of a book titled *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, published by a major Christian press (Zondervan), is one indicator that inerrancy is more nuanced than suggested above.[11] Kevin Vanhoozer, a contributing author, wrote, "As I see it, one of the chief challenges facing evangelical theology today is the deep confusion over just what inerrancy means and entails."[12] In his assessment, confusion includes both how the term is defined and what that then means for biblical interpretation.

Of particular note are the phrases "in all its teaching" and "in all that it affirms." This is not unique to the CSBI, as similar language is found in other modern confessional documents. Statement 2 of the Lausanne Covenant begins with "We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error *in all that it affirms …*" (emphasis added).[13]

Implicit in these phrases is recognition that not all that is found in Scripture is included with the intention to teach or affirm. The phrases themselves are not controversial, as can be demonstrated with an example from Hezekiah's song in Isaiah 38 after God granted him an additional fifteen years of life. Verses 18–19 include statements that "Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, he thanks you." The song is understood by inerrantists of many flavors to be a truthful record of the thoughts and feelings of this king, without intention of instruction or affirmation of the non-existence of an afterlife.

Division among inerrantists is also not fundamentally about whether everything is intended to be understood literally or not. All sides acknowledge the presence of figurative language such as idioms, metaphor, simile, and hyperbole, and genres such as poetry and visions that depart, by design, from literalistic reading. The divisions arise primarily wherever biblical language or genre is not obviously figurative *and* appears to conflict with modern understanding of nature, archaeology, or literary norms.

Efforts to clarify varying positions employ qualifying terms attached to inerrancy. At one end of the spectrum, inerrancy coupled with *total*, *full*, *absolute*, or *unlimited* indicates a belief that the Bible speaks with intention to instruct on all subjects it intersects with, including the natural sciences, history, and geography.[14] A degree of accommodation is permitted, in the sense that God must, by necessity, simplify some subjects for limited human comprehension, but God never accommodates his truth to human error.[15]

At the other end of the spectrum, *limited* inerrancy has been employed to describe a belief that the truth claims of the Bible are limited in scope to subjects of redemptive theology and may otherwise include errors in the understanding of nature, geography, or history.[16]

The binary distinction of unlimited versus limited gets complicated when reading scholars who argue that the Bible itself does not teach unlimited inerrancy, sometimes tapping into common understanding at the time of writing to illustrate the message (employing without affirming), yet who also recognize a critical importance of a real history in the theology and redemptive story of the Bible and who push back against many claimed errors. The concept of limited inerrancy is thus too broad to adequately describe the range of positions in the debate.[17]

In my own writing and speaking on the trustworthiness of Scripture, I have found it helpful to describe biblical truth in terms of *comprehensive* inerrancy versus *message* inerrancy.

### Comprehensive Inerrancy
The Bible speaks truthfully with the intention to instruct on all subjects that it touches upon, including science, history, and geography, employing language that anticipates and withstands future discoveries and technical advances.

### Message Inerrancy
The biblical writers were inspired to employ common knowledge of nature and geography at the time, as well as culturally familiar literary tools—without intention of affirmation or correction to fit future technical understanding or literary norms—in order to truthfully communicate the character of God, the historical and eternal nature of his kingdom, the condition of humans, and the plan for redemption of his people.

Neither definition above is intended to stand alone without some additional description. Both comprehensive

and message inerrancy affirm the full inspiration, truth, and infallibility of Scripture, each arguably falling within David Dockery's general definition of inerrancy:

> When all of the facts are known, the Bible (in its autographs, that is, the original documents), properly interpreted in light of the culture and means of communication that had developed by the time of its composition, is completely true in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author's purpose, in all matters relating to God and His creation[18]

The first term, comprehensive inerrancy, is similar to qualifiers others have used such as total, unlimited, or full, but it uses a word that intentionally moves away from the unhelpful limited/unlimited dichotomy. *Comprehensive* captures the sense that all subjects mentioned in the Bible, whether integral or ancillary, are communicated with technical accuracy. *Message* has a more pastoral focus on the communicative intention of Scripture, leaving room for the possibility that culturally bounded literary tools and common understanding of nature may be brought to bear in ways that run contrary to modern Western expectations of accuracy, but nonetheless communicate what was intended without legitimate charge of error. Interpretations may be in error, not the text itself.

## What These Terms Do and Do Not Entail

*Comprehensive inerrancy* recognizes figurative literary forms in the Bible, but where such literary tools are not clearly at play, the text is understood to be communicating factual information, free of error due to exaggeration, inexact memory, cultural misunderstanding, ignorance of the writer, or societal naïveté. Historical events happened as described, including locations, travel times, dates, numbers, and ages. Any apparent inconsistencies are attributed to a scribal error (not in the autographs), a problem of translation, or our own misunderstanding of the text. Where the Bible intersects with science, phenomenological language is recognized—for example, movement of the sun relative to an observer—but the possibility that a writer might employ a technically incorrect contemporary view of the structure or function of nature to communicate a theological truth is rejected.

*Message inerrancy* does not limit affirmation or teaching merely to redemptive theology. Much of the Christian faith is critically tied to real events in history. The theology of the Old Testament makes little sense if the deliverance from Egypt, promise of land in Canaan,

Davidic kingdom, or record of miracles did not really happen. And, of course, if the death and resurrection of Christ was not a real event in history, there is no rational Christian faith.[19] In the words of historian Mark Noll, the Christian faith has an "irreducibly historical character."[20]

What message inerrancy does allow for is the possibility that writers, under God's inspiration, tapped concepts commonly understood at the time about nature, geography, and literary norms to illustrate the truth of God's kingdom, without affirming those ancillary understandings. Because the culture of ancient Israel was not like ours, this means that there may be occasions where it seems to us to be error, but only if forcing a 21st-century Western-secular rubric onto an ancient text.[21] This is consistent with the Augustinian sense of divine accommodation, expressed long before the challenges of modern science, in which God condescends to our limited capacity to speak to us in ways we can comprehend.[22]

There are a few additional understandings that tend to be attributed to unlimited inerrancy that, I will suggest, are shared by comprehensive and message inerrancy under the umbrella of the full inspiration and authority of Scripture.

1. Unified message
   Both comprehensive and message inerrancy affirm the unified theological message of the Old and New Testaments. Anything less compromises not only the trustworthiness of Scripture, but also the pertinence of the Old Testament for understanding the New Testament.[23]

2. Fixed message
   Following from point 1, the meaning of Scripture is not culturally or temporally fluid, yet there may be multiple layers to the intended message, with some that speak more specifically to questions a particular society may face in its time and place.[24] Message inerrancy may lead to recognition of more layers to the meaning of a text (relative to comprehensive assumptions), but not to a plurality of internally inconsistent meanings.[25] (More layers recognized by message inerrancy will be fleshed out later in this article.)

3. Textual editing prior to canonization
   Both comprehensive and message inerrantists agree that the Old Testament was not originally produced entirely in its present form and that (inspired) additions or updated language prior to canonization is consistent with inerrancy. As a non-controversial

example, Moses obviously did not record his own obituary at the end of the Pentateuch (Deut. 34:1–8). Whether the addition was by Joshua or someone later, it is still considered inspired text.[26]

Some disagreement about whether message inerrancy conflicts with the CSBI is to be expected. Norman Geisler, one of the drafters of the CSBI, argued that the intention of the CSBI signatories was to affirm comprehensive inerrancy.[27] Whether true of all signatories or not, an argument can be made that the CSBI qualifier of being without error "*in all it affirms*," leaves the door open to a biblical hermeneutic consistent with message inerrancy. An observation that current membership of the Evangelical Theological Society—which continues to require subscription to the CSBI—includes many who do not hold to a comprehensive view of inerrancy is *de facto* evidence of some liberality in interpreting the CSBI.[28]

## Either Could Be True …

Either view, comprehensive inerrancy or message inerrancy, *could be* true for a divinely inspired text. But how does one ascertain which *is* true (or which is more defensible)? Is there an objective methodology that can be applied that moves beyond subjective assessments of what constitutes truth? And is it possible to diverge from a comprehensive understanding of inerrancy that does not step out onto the proverbial slippery slope where the line between what is and what is not intended for instruction drifts with the cultural breeze?

I will take a stepwise approach to an affirmative answer, starting with consideration of internal evidence—using Scripture to understand Scripture—to understand the intention of verses that intersect with science.

### Step 1: Employing Scripture to Understand Scripture

Is there internal evidence *within* the Bible that some references to nature fit common knowledge of the time but were not intended to be read as affirming that understanding, consistent with message inerrancy? To answer, I will draw on an example from church history. Charles Schulz touched on our difficulty with church history in an episode from his Peanuts series. In a cartoon from 1975, Charlie Brown's sister, Sally, is working on an essay. After writing the title, "Church History," she contemplates the subject for a moment and begins. "When writing about church history, we have to go back to the very beginning." It is a promising start, but

Charlie Brown's eyes roll upward when she continues with, "Our pastor was born in 1930."[29]

The cartoon captures our myopic sense of the history of the Church, in which I think that if my godly grandmother thought a certain way, and her godly father thought the same way, that must be how Christians have understood things since the days Jesus walked upon the earth. We fail to realize that previous generations of Christians did not always see the world as we do. To address the question of biblical truth, we need to go back a bit further than three generations. It is helpful to go back a few hundred years to the days when debates began to rage over the relative movement of the sun and planets. In doing so, my intention is not to rehash the Galileo controversy for the thousandth time, but to draw attention to a biblical methodology for discerning authorial intent.

For thousands of years, it was understood that the sun, planets, and stars all moved around a stationary earth. This seemed self-evident, as every day one watched the sun rise and set, the stars move in unison across the night sky, and the planets carve their own pathways across the heavens. But there was one perplexing observation. If carefully tracking the movement of a planet, it would sometimes seem to stop, *reverse direction* for a time, and then continue on its way.

Ptolemy (AD 100–170) came up with an explanation.[30] As the planets orbit the earth, they also have their own circular pathways called epicycles. Along the backside of each epicycle, the planet moves in the opposite direction of the general orbit. This explanation stood as the accepted explanation for centuries until Copernicus (1473–1543) came along to argue that there was a much simpler explanation that did not require epicycles—if the earth and planets all orbited the sun. Galileo (1564–1642) followed a century later with physical evidence to support the heliocentric argument.

The pushback in the church against Copernicus and Galileo was not universal. There were some who saw no conflict between heliocentrism and Scripture, but others pushed back strongly, arguing that science was being used to overturn the clear teaching of the Bible.[31] At issue were verses such as Ecclesiastes 1:5 that does not simply mention observational (phenomenological) sunrises and sunsets, but states that the sun *hastens back* to its place where it can rise the next day, and Psalm 19:6 that seems to explicitly refer to the *transit* of the sun, as "its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them." There is also the record in Joshua 10,

when Joshua prayed for more daylight during the battle with the Amorites. The text, set squarely in a historical narrative, does not say that the earth stopped its rotation, or even that the sun *appeared* to pause, but says straightforwardly "the sun stood still, and the moon stopped … The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day" (Josh. 10:13). Additional verses may be added that seem clear in stating the immovability of the earth. Psalm 93:1 says, "the world is established; it shall never be moved," and Psalm 104:5 tells us, "He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved."

If you were living through the Galileo affair, it might have occurred to you that there were two possible interpretations for these verses, one tapping nature for theological purpose and one regarding the physical character of nature. Both could be true with no internal contradiction. For Psalms 93 and 104, the verses could simultaneously refer to God's providential care of the earth (tapping nature for theological purpose) and the earth being stationary in space (how nature normally operates). Ecclesiastes speaks of the futility of human existence, so Ecclesiastes 1:5 could also refer both to the repetitiveness of human experience and to the actual flight path of the sun.

The work of Copernicus and Galileo did not call into question the points in theological understanding, but it directly challenged the physical understanding of nature, dividing people into different camps over the intention of Scripture on subjects that "intersect with science." Applying my suggested terminology to the historical debate, there were two options that retained belief in a divinely inspired Bible.

Option 1 — comprehensive inerrancy
   The intention of Scripture, wherever Scripture intersects with nature, includes instruction on the subject. The Bible speaks authoritatively and accurately on the motion of the earth and celestial bodies.

Option 2 — message inerrancy
   Scripture makes use of nature as it was observed and understood at the time to illustrate truth about the nature of God and his Kingdom—neither affirming or correcting understanding about the normative structure and function of the cosmos.

I will not argue that what follows is precisely how the question was resolved in the years immediately after Galileo, but the reasoning is consistent with the conclusions that developed over time.

The apparent conflicts with the Bible prompted some to return to Scripture to determine if it had been properly understood. Using Scripture to understand Scripture, the larger biblical context at the time of Galileo included verses such as Psalm 21:7, where King David said, "For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved." The expression "not be moved" is the same Hebrew wording used in Psalms 93 and 104 when addressing the stability of the earth.[32] In Psalm 21, we know David was not referring to his geographical position—his feet fixed at a point in space—but to his spiritual condition and providential protection. It makes sense, then, that Psalms 93:1 and 104:5 are not referring to the celestial position of the earth, but to God's providential care and protection.

Further, the observations above are consistent with what Scripture has to say about its own intention, notably, 2 Timothy 3:16–17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The purpose of Scripture is for growing in godliness (enduring persecutions, avoiding evil, growing in faith and understanding of God), not for correcting possible misunderstandings of the day-to-day functioning of nature. All of this fits with the expectations of message inerrancy.

### Step 2: Assessing Authorial Intent Vis-à-Vis Extra-biblical Clarification of Common Understanding

If internal biblical evidence is found to be consistent with message inerrancy, a second step is not necessary but can serve to strengthen the argument. The motivation for step 2 is for verses that intersect with science for which there is no internal biblical evidence to clarify intention concerning the day-to-day function of nature. Verses that mention the heart and seeds serve as good examples, particularly as some statements include the direct teachings of Jesus, who, one may argue, could speak with authority about creation.[33] Matthew 15:18–19 quotes Jesus as saying, "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

In the most straightforward reading, Jesus claims that the heart is capable of evil thoughts and motivation. This is consistent with the rest of Scripture with frequent reference to the heart as carrying out various forms of cognition.[34] There was a Greek word for brain

(*enkephalos*, ἐγκέφαλος), but it makes no appearance in the New Testament. Apologists are quick to declare this a simple idiom, just as we use similar expressions of the heart today as literary expressions, not statements of biological fact.[35] This assumes, however, that the writers of Scripture had the same basic understanding of the heart and brain as we do now and knew it to be merely a literary expression. Exploring this is a simple matter of reading what scholars of the day wrote about bodily organs.

In Egypt, where the Israelites lived for four centuries, embalmers took care to preserve the heart, while scrambling and disposing of the brain.[36] Hippocrates (460–370 BC) guessed more correctly that the brain was the bodily organ associated with thought, but followers of Aristotle (384–322 BC) held that the heart served as the root of intelligence.[37] Galen of Pergamum (AD 129–216) corrected many errors of his predecessors with his detailed studies of anatomy, yet asserted the heart was where the soul resides.[38] Even as late as the start of the second millennium, Avicenna (AD 980–1037) argued that the heart was an intelligent organ.[39]

What this tells us is that the function of the heart was being actively debated at the time Jesus made the statement recorded by Matthew. Expressions about the heart were *not* idioms. Under the umbrella of comprehensive inerrancy, Jesus was setting the record straight. The author of creation cleared up all uncertainty. Emotions and thoughts emanate from the heart.

A second example is another statement from Jesus, this time on seeds. John 12:24 records Jesus saying, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Contemporary thought on seeds and death is harder to analyze as there are few, if any, direct extra-biblical references to seeds dying. Instead, there is a wealth of imagery in ancient mythology of specific gods dying or entering the underworld and returning alive as symbols or shepherds of fertility and agriculture—for example, Osiris (Egyptian), Tammuz (Akkadian), Persephone (Greek). Later expressions of slow-germinating seeds making trips to the underworld are thought to derive from Greek mythology.[40]

There is no record of Jesus's listeners questioning the death of seeds. Further, the context of John 12:24 is within a discussion of Jesus's very literal death and glorification. There is nothing figurative anywhere in this passage. The straightforward reading of the text, as it intersects with science, is that Jesus affirms seed death and resurrection.

In case any readers wonder, if a seed planted in the ground actually dies, it will not bring forth new life. It just dies. Jesus, as the Author of creation, could have anticipated this future knowledge. To avoid later confusion, it would have been simple enough for Jesus to say, "I know you think seeds die when planted, so here is an analogy …" or "Seeds *appear to* die when planted." But consider the likely result. Listeners from this agriculturally savvy audience would suddenly be focused on the questionable statements about nature rather than the intended message. And do we understand the message any less today because we have a more scientific understanding of the life cycle of seeds? Not at all.

With hearts and with seeds, the normative understanding of the statements made by Jesus adhere to the concept of message inerrancy. Jesus was not affirming or correcting his listeners' understanding of nature. Their common understanding of nature was tapped to illustrate an eternally truthful message about the Kingdom of God. Those adhering to comprehensive inerrancy must rationalize verses such as those above as anachronistic literary expressions to exempt the text from genuinely intersecting with science.[41]

My contention with hearts and seeds is *not* to argue that the biblical writers (or Jesus) made errors that don't really matter because the intended message was just theological or redemptive. Rather, the contention is that Jesus—and by extension the biblical writers—knowingly tapped common understanding of nature at the time to illustrate and illuminate understanding of the intended message. Consequently, if there is no intention in the text to instruct on the material function of the heart or the nature of seeds from the perspective of a scientist (or natural philosopher), there is no error.

### Step 3: Assessing the Doctrinal Landscape

The final step is an assessment of doctrinal challenges that may arise from acceptance of message inerrancy. Does a non-literalistic (non-comprehensive inerrancy) reading of a text, as it pertains to the normative function of the natural world, alter any core doctrine of Christian faith or suggest that the meaning of the text was only accessible to believers after the Scientific Revolution? Hans Madueme suggests three tests that must be met to be considered a "central" Christian doctrine: (1) it is clearly attested in Scripture, (2) it is central to the integrity of Scripture's redemptive-historical story, and (3) it is widely supported by catholic tradition (particularly in creeds, major ecumenical councils, and later Protestant confessions).[42]

Working backward, I am not aware of any creeds or ecumenical councils linking the intended message of Scripture to any specific understanding of planetary motion, bodily organ function, or seed physiology. For the second criterion, the intended message of each verse in question is arguably equally understood regardless of whether references to the earth, heart, and seeds are literal or illustrative. No redemptive-historical story is called into question. The remaining criterion, a clear attestation in Scripture, is a matter of perspective. Different people at different times have disagreed on how clearly the Bible speaks with respect to the normal functioning of nature. Overall, a "message-inerrancy understanding" of these verses does not call any central Christian doctrine into question.

Doctrinal assessment also includes the question of whether acceptance of message inerrancy means ancient readers were at a theological disadvantage, with scientific advances required to determine what was and was not intended. By virtue of tapping common understanding of nature *at the time of writing* to illustrate and illuminate, ancient readers faced no disadvantage in arriving at an intended interpretation. But what about *unintended* interpretations, specifically regarding instruction on the function of nature? Here the answer is more nuanced. If there was no apparent discord between the wording of a biblical text and what was commonly observed in nature, it made no practical difference if the intention included instruction on nature or not. The question gained practical importance only with the expansion of scientific discoveries that raised questions not previously asked. So the answer to this question is that God provides his people with the tools needed to understand his Word in accordance with the challenges unique to their time and place. The message itself remains unchanged.

## Putting It All Together

Considering steps 1–3 together we can note several things.

1. The study of nature (cosmos, hearts, seeds) did result in changes in the historical interpretation of the referenced biblical passages.

2. In no case did science overrule Scripture. Re-interpretation did not move from truth to error; rather, it drew distinctions about what was intended as instruction and what was not. The intended messages of God's providential care of the earth, of thoughts of evil or good emanating from within our inner being, and the reality of life rising up from death are

understood just as well today as by the ancients. Updated observations of God's natural realm simply assisted in dropping never-intended secondary interpretations.

3. Christians today who hold to a heliocentric understanding of the solar system, to thoughts emanating from the brain rather than the heart, or to seeds germinating without dying, have embraced message inerrancy. It is an acknowledgement that the writers of these verses utilized common understanding of nature at the time of writing—without affirming or correcting—to illustrate eternal truths about the character of God and his kingdom.

This leads to a counter-intuitive assertion: Message inerrancy is actually *normative* today among Bible-believing Christians of all traditions. Even ardent comprehensive/unlimited inerrancy advocates unconsciously affirm the principle of message inerrancy, though employing it selectively.[43]

## Secular Roots of Comprehensive Inerrancy

This brings me to a question of where the idea of comprehensive (or total/full/unlimited) inerrancy comes from. This is a difficult subject as the answer is not necessarily the same for inerrantists before and after Galileo. For most of human history, there was minimal conflict between what was observed in nature and what was recorded in the Bible.[44] Tension was limited to subjects such as Augustine's observation that a literalistic reading of evening and morning in Genesis 1 was problematic for the first three days when there was not yet a sun or questions about the shape of the earth.[45] As such, my assessment is directed primarily at the root of comprehensive inerrancy developed over the last few centuries.

Considering the origins of modern belief, it is useful to be reminded (again) that our perceptions and worldview did not develop in a generational vacuum. We are products of the culture of the generations that came before us. For Western society, this history comes largely out of Europe. The cultural and philosophical milieu of the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution steadily elevated the perceived importance of human reason, logic, and scientific thought. With this, I suggest, came a sense that the highest form of communicating factual truth about the world was scientific or journalistic. As offspring of this heritage, many Western Christians came to a belief that if the Bible was the ultimate source

of truth, it too must be a scientifically defensible document, imposing anachronistic expectations on the text.

Kevin Vanhoozer refers to this as a "modernist/rationalist" version of inerrancy, which he contrasts with more classical or "original" versions.

> [Original inerrancy] focuses on the communicative intention of the divine author: what Scripture says, God says, and says truly. In contrast, the modernist/rationalist view takes the text as history and science without error in the modern scholarly sense of error. It is this move that turns the wine of biblical meaning into the water of literalistic interpretations. Rationalist inerrancy insists that the Bible speaks truly on our terms rather than those of the divine author's. In short, original inerrancy is about God's authorial intentions; rationalist inerrancy is about the interpreter's modern presuppositions.[46]

Comprehensive inerrancy today is a byproduct of Western cultural evolution. It does not derive *from* Scripture, but from a secularized hermeneutical framework *imposed on* the text—a framework that ignores or pays insufficient attention to the cultural norms and knowledge of the original audience.

## Implications for Bible-Science Tensions: Biblical Understanding

1. Message inerrancy does not free science from the Bible, but rather *frees Scripture* from artificial constraints that force it into alignment with modern science or modern literary norms.

2. Following from implication 1, shifting the focus of a biblical text on how the original audience understood it has the potential for recognizing a greater depth and richness of the message.[47]

3. Greater acceptance of message inerrancy can mitigate internal conflict in the Church, not by diluting the biblical message under a larger doctrinal tent, but by removing unintended and unhelpful interpretational constraints that divide the body.

I will illustrate the value of message inerrancy with an example, selected to address the greater richness of a text that flows from freeing Scripture from secular literary expectations (implications 1 and 2 above).

## Creation: Genesis 1

The basic understanding of the creation story discussed below is not new, but some unique arguments are offered in its support and in its message for us.

It has been widely recognized that Genesis 1 contains poetic elements.[48] Those with literalistic leanings, typically operating under the assumption of comprehensive inerrancy, attempt to dismiss the significance of any poetic language, insisting it is simple historical narrative, with specific instruction on the sequence, timing, and development of earth history.[49]

From the perspective of message inerrancy, the story *could* still be intended as a straightforward listing of events, but it also could be something more. As with the general approach for evaluating comprehensive vs. message inerrancy, questions can be asked of the text to understand the intention of the writer.

### Internal Evidence of Non-literalistic Intention

The poetic structure and literary devices used in a passage can evidence non-literalistic intention. Consider, for example, the opening of Genesis 1:

> "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was *tohu wa-bohu* (formless and empty)." Genesis 1:1–2a

The opening sets up what is to follow, employing rhyming words to signify two initial problems: *formlessness* (tohu) and *emptiness* (bohu). These problems are solved in two sets of parallel days.[50] The first three days solve the formlessness problem with creation of the realms of light and dark, the realms of sea and sky, and the terrestrial realm complete with plants. The second set of three days solves the emptiness problem, filling the realms of light and dark with sun, moon, and stars; filling the realms of sea and sky with fish and birds; and filling the terrestrial realm with animals and humans (table 1).

| Table 1. Parallel Day Structure of Genesis 1 | |
|---|---|
| *Tohu* | *Bohu* |
| forming of realms | filling of realms |
| Day 1 | Day 4 |
| light / dark | sun / moon / stars |
| Day 2 | Day 5 |
| sea / sky | fish / birds |
| Day 3 | Day 6 |
| land with plants | animals / humans |

The parallel structure of days was recognized at least as far back as Aquinas (AD 1225–1274).[51] Western expositors gave more attention to the alignment starting in the mid-1800s,[52] which later became generally known as the Framework View.[53] Various writers have

referred to the parallel days as Kingdoms and Creature-Kings,[54] Preparation and Population,[55] Preparation and Accomplishment,[56] Form and Fullness,[57] or Function and Functionaries.[58] All have their justification, though I prefer terms that focus on the problems being solved: Forming (solving the formlessness problem) and Filling (solving the emptiness problem),[59] or the longer version of Forming of Realms and Filling of Realms. God is not just the maker of things; he created the very realms in which things can exist and have purpose.

For those who argue that these alignments are superficial or mischaracterized,[60] consider the construction of repeated phrases (table 2). An a-b-c pattern of "God said," "there was," and "good" is followed before "evening and morning" of each day (with one missing phrase in days 2 and 5). Day 3 and day 6 are unique, each employing a *double set* of a-b-c phrases before closing with evening and morning. The pattern emphasizes day 3 as the culmination of solving the formlessness problem, and day 6 as the culmination of solving the emptiness problem.

| **Table 2**. Construction of Repeated Phrases in Genesis 1 | |
|---|---|
| **1**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) And there was …<br>(c) God saw that … was good<br>(d) There was evening and morning | **4**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c) God saw that it was good<br>(d) There was evening and morning |
| **2**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c)<br>(d) There was evening and morning | **5**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b)<br>(c) God saw that it was good<br>(d) There was evening and morning |
| **3**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c) God saw that it was good<br><br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c) God saw that it was good<br><br>(d) There was evening and morning | **6**<br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c) God saw that it was good<br><br>(a) God said, "Let …"<br>(b) It was so<br>(c) God saw … it was very good<br><br>(d) There was evening and morning |

The missing phrases in days 2 and 5 may cause hesitation in recognizing intentional parallelism in this text, until seeing the importance—and remarkable poetic beauty—of how the number 7 is used. Seven, a *symbolic* number of completeness or fullness, is employed repeatedly in the creation story with the frequency of words in

a verse or the number of times a word or phrase is used in multiples of seven.[61] For this article, I will focus on the word *good*.

| verse / phrase | occurrence |
|---|---|
| Gen. 1:1 | 7 Hebrew words |
| Gen. 1:2 | 14 words (2 x 7) |
| "it was so" | 7 times |
| "it was good" | 7 times |
| "firmament" | 21 times (3 x 7) |
| "heaven and earth" | 21 times (3 x 7) |
| "God" | 35 times (5 x 7) |
| Gen. 2:1–3 | 35 words (5 x 7) |

Imagine sitting down to write the creation story and wanting to use the word *good* seven times. Most of us wouldn't have to think long. *Hmm … seven days of creation … drop one into each day.* But the writer did not do that. To emphasize days 3 and 6 as the culmination of solving each problem, *good* is used twice in each. In order to keep to seven, this means it had to be left out of one of the remaining four days—day 2. To match, a different phrase was left out of the parallel day 5. In Hebrew poetry, this is known as elliptical parallelism.[62]

## Assessing the Doctrinal Landscape

Is any core doctrine of the Christian faith compromised by this reading of Genesis 1? A central, or at least important doctrine of creation, understood from antiquity, is that the material world is not eternal or divine; it was brought into existence by God from nothing, given purpose, declared good, and remains subservient to God. This message is equally grasped by a reader with an ancient or modern understanding of the cosmos, understood literally or as poetically communicated history.

If nothing else, recognition of the poetic elements in the creation story should tell us that God values artistic literary expression. He is the original Artist. All that we see is derived from a singular God who not only made things, but also the spaces or realms in which things can exist and, critically, to give them purpose. It is not ahistorical. It is a true history of creation, recorded as a song of creation[63] with a message far greater than a sequence of days.

Freeing the Bible from the assumptions of comprehensive inerrancy does not *reduce* the Bible to *merely* redemptive theology, as critics argue,[64] but actually facilitates the opposite. The tendency to dilute Scripture with human understanding (e.g., adding scientific expectations) is mitigated, and our understanding of the richness of the text *expands*. In *The Manifold Beauty of Genesis One*, the description above is just one of seven

unique-but-complementary layers of understanding derived from the text, each consistent with the principle of message inerrancy.[65]

## Implications for Bible-Science Tensions: Scientific Understanding

The preceding arguments are not offered with any suggestion that scientific understanding is always correct or should always be accepted. Even without apparent tensions with Scripture, a commonly held scientific understanding may simply be wrong. Further, I am not suggesting that the Bible and science have no intersection, operating as non-overlapping *magisteria*, as Stephen Jay Gould famously argued.[66] Romans 1:20 tells us that God's attributes, power, and nature are reflected in his material creation since the beginning.[67] As such, we have an expectation that there may be times when biblical insights provide direction for scientific investigation or challenge a widely held scientific belief. Historical examples include challenging an 18th-century scientific claim (and some modern variations) that the universe had no beginning[68] and a 21st-century claim that population genetics eliminated the possibility of a first *imago Dei* couple.[69]

This observation may seem at odds with the premise of this article. After saying the biblical writers tapped common understanding of nature for literary purposes rather than scientific instruction, I have noted examples in which the Bible appears to have challenged errant scientific perspectives. The explanation lies in the difference between the day-to-day functioning of nature and actions that are explicitly supernatural phenomena. Turning water into wine, raising the dead, and feeding thousands from a few loaves and fish are understood to represent God's unique insertion into the routine operations of nature.[70] In similar fashion, the initiation of the universe from nothing, and the introduction of an enduring, relational soul into a pair of humans (whether instantly created or from hominid stock) represent bringing something into being that did not previously exist.[71]

Young-earth advocates, of course, argue that the days of creation fall into the supernatural category, that all of Genesis 1 is about bringing into being what did not previously exist. Yet the text is clear that after Genesis 1:1, everything that was made was derived from what was already present. God did not make plants or animals from nothing but commanded the earth to bring them forth (Gen. 1:11, 24). Instantaneous and evolutionary creation are both possible realizations of the command.

It is not until we recognize the poetic elements and structures within the text, and compare the internal conflicts with a literalistic reading,[72] that we see its intention is not scientific. To summarize:

1. Message inerrancy *does not* give science free rein, unfettered by biblical constraints.

2. Message inerrancy *does* free the study of nature from unbiblical restrictions imposed by a secularly derived hermeneutic, one that presupposes instruction about nature where none is intended. In keeping with Romans 1:20, we should be able to trust that nature contains evidence of a truthful story of its own history, without the need to force-fit into a predetermined narrative.

3. When the study of nature is freed from a hermeneutic that artificially forces rejection or suspicion of sound science, there is potential for a greater sense of wonder and appreciation of scientific discoveries as reflections of God's creativity (mitigating misguided feelings of disdain for scientific discovery of God's handiwork).

## Closing Thoughts

A cautionary note is warranted before closing. Space did not permit delving into the intersection of biblical morality with modern and ancient culturally nuanced norms. Message inerrancy is relevant to such discussions, though consistent application to that sphere may not result in the same conclusions. Human nature, while certainly connected to the material world, is not just a biological or physiological phenomenon. One cannot simply say that because the Bible does not intend to instruct on the routine function and behavior of the natural world, it does not intend to instruct on the function and moral behavior of humans. Given the profound spiritual nature of human existence, my expectation is that the biblical message has much to say about human behavior that may contrast with various ancient and modern norms.

Adoption of comprehensive inerrancy and message inerrancy into our theological vocabulary has the potential to bring greater clarity to pastoral conversations on what it means for the Bible to be without error in all it affirms.[73] While either view is, in principle, consistent with a fully inspired and infallible text, message inerrancy is argued here to be the more defensible view from an internal assessment of the Bible—using Scripture to understand Scripture—and from assessments of what the original audience would have understood based on extra-biblical sources from the period of writing.

Comprehensive inerrancy derives not from Scripture, but from a Western cultural expectation imposed on the text. When the Bible refers to nature, Scripture provides internal evidence that instruction on nature is not the intention. Common understanding of nature is tapped to illustrate and illuminate a message without the need for caveats or disclaimers that would have been meaningful only to generations far removed in time and place from the original audience.

## Acknowledgments

## Notes

[1]Antipodal land: A surface location on the opposite side of a sphere after passing through the center.

[2]Copernicus did not view his work as contrary to Scripture, as evidenced in his preface of *De revolutionibus* (On the Revolutions) addressed to Pope Paul III: Nicholas Copernicus, *De revolutionibus*, 1543, trans. Edward Rosen (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), https://www.webexhibits.org/calendars/year-text-Copernicus.html.

[3]I include archaeology under the umbrella of science, though space will not allow for a thorough engagement with archaeological examples or challenges.

[4]Given the focus, the work of influential scholars arguing against inerrancy (e.g., Peter Enns, Kenton Sparks, Donald McKim, Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Jack Rogers) is not relevant to this discussion.

[5]For any contributors to the topic who feel slighted at not being cited, I offer my humble apology and genuine empathy. In researching for this paper, I discovered I was twice quoted in Geisler and Roach's book, *Defending Inerrancy*, without referencing me by name (only citing a now defunct URL). Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Baker Books, 2011), 352, 358.

[6]Iain W. Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Baylor University Press, 2017), 15–16, notes five ways of reading: (1) Historical Criticism, (2) Postmodern, (3) Chicago Constituency (literalists), (4) Counter-Reformation Protestant, and (5) Reformed or "seriously literal" (in an Augustinian/Reformation sense). See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Landmarks in Christian Scholarship (Zondervan, 2009); and C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Zondervan, 2018).

[7]"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). All Scripture quotations taken from the ESV.

[8]Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs," *The Independent* (March 23, 1893): 2–3, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/624a13314aabab6e6ad7cf5c/1649021748000/Warfield%2C+Benjamin+Breckinridge%2C+The+Inerrancy+of+the+Original+Autographs.pdf; and Warfield, "The Deity of Christ," *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1 (Testimony Publishing, 1910), 21–28, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/5e603e0498107976837bf3fd/1583365636632/Warfield%2C+Benjamin+Breckinridge%2C+The+Deity+of+Christ.pdf. Warfield did not coin the term "inerrancy," as it can be found in much earlier documents, but he was responsible for supplying the first detailed exposition of biblical inerrancy. See Mark D. Thompson, "The Divine Investment in Truth: Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James Karl Hoffmeier and Dennis Robert Magary (Crossway, 2012), 77, 98.

[9]The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, adopted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978, https://reformation.net/uploads/1/1/7/6/117618790/the_chicago_statement_on_biblical_inerrancy.pdf.

[10]Jeff Robinson, "Evangelical Theological Society Adopts Inerrancy Statement," *Baptist Press*, November 20, 2006, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/evangelical-theological-society-adopts-inerrancy-statement/.

[11]J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Zondervan, 2013).

[12]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Response to R. Albert Mohler Jr.," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 74.

[13]*The Lausanne Covenant* (The Lausanne Movement, 1975), https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov; and John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide* (The Lausanne Movement, 2009).

[14]Some qualifying terms addressed are "unlimited": Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 254; "total/full": R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine*, R. C. Sproul Library (P&R Publishing, 2005), 25–37; and "absolute": Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Baker Books, 1986), 237.

[15]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 1st edition (Zondervan, 1995), 98–99, 135; and Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 256–60.

[16]David S. Dockery, *The Doctrine of the Bible*, 2020 edition (Seminary Hill Press, 2020), 85; example advocates are Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Baker Academic, 2008); and Peter Enns, *How the Bible Actually Works: In Which I Explain How an Ancient, Ambiguous, and Diverse Book Leads Us to Wisdom Rather Than Answers—and Why That's Great News* (HarperOne, 2019).

[17]Kevin Vanhoozer effectively summarizes the difficulty when he says, "I regularly refuse to say whether I hold to inerrancy until my interlocutor defines the term (or allows me to do so)." Vanhoozer, "Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 206.

[18]Dockery, *The Doctrine of the Bible*, 77.

[19]Graham A. Cole, "The Peril of a 'Historyless' Systematic Theology," chap. 2 in Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*

[20]Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2012), 5. For an in-depth assessment of challenges raised against the real history of Israel, see Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*

[21]John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary, Genesis* (Zondervan, 2001), 92–108; and Thompson, "The Divine

Investment in Truth," in Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 80.

22Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John Hammond Taylor (The Newman Press, 1982); and Davis A. Young, "The Contemporary Relevance of Augustine's View of Creation," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 40, no. 1 (1988): 42–45, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1988/PSCF3-88Young.html.

23John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Abingdon, 1967), 199–200; and James Hoffmeier, "'These Things Happened': Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology," in Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 100.

24Some draw distinctions between meaning/interpretation and application/significance (Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 132–59). I use message or meaning as what God intends readers to understand.

25Message inerrancy recognizes that God's intended message may go beyond the inspired writer's understanding—in agreement with Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 61–62; and in contrast to Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 268.

26Michael A. Grisanti, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 4 (2001): 577–98, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241799090_Inspiration_Inerrancy_and_the_OT_Canon_The_Place_Of_Textual_Updating_in_an_Inerrant_View_of_Scripture.

27Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 249. Iain Provan concurs with Geisler's assessment, referring to a "third way" of reading Scripture as "The Chicago Constituency." Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*, 15–16.

28There is some irony here, as this raises the question of the proper interpretation of the CSBI with respect to the proper interpretation of Scripture.

29Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, September 4, 1975. Permission to reprint from Peanuts Worldwide was not granted.

30Alexander Raymond Jones, "Ptolemaic System," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2002), https://www.britannica.com/science/Ptolemaic-system.

31Ernan McMullin, "The Galileo Affair," Faraday Paper No. 15, April 2009, https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Faraday%20Paper%2015%20McMullin_EN.pdf; and John L. Hebron, *Galileo* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

32Ps. 21:7 uses 'bal-yim-mowt; and Pss. 93:1 and 104:5 use *bal-tim-mowt*, reflecting differences in "*he* cannot be moved" and "*it* cannot be moved."

33Expanded versions of the examples that follow may be found in Gregg Davidson, *Friend of Science, Friend of Faith: Listening to God in His Works and Word* (Kregel, 2019), chap. 3.

34Robert D. Branson, "Science, the Bible, and Human Anatomy," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 68, no. 4 (2016): 229–36, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2016/PSCF12-16Branson.pdf.

35Kevin Short, "Phenomenological Language and Semantic Naïveté," *Answers Research Journal* 10 (2017): 115–20, https://assets.answersresearchjournal.org/doc/v10/phenomenological_language.pdf.

36Andrew D. Wade and Andrew J. Nelson, "Evisceration and Excerebration in the Egyptian Mummification Tradition," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 40, no. 12 (2013): 4198–206, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2013.06.017.

37Charles G. Gross, "Aristotle on the Brain," *The Neuroscientist* 1, no. 4 (1995): 245–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/107385849500100408.

38Christopher Gill, "Galen and the Stoics: Mortal Enemies or Blood Brothers?," *Phronesis* 52, no. 1 (2007): 88–120, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4182825.

39Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine*, Vol. 3: *Special Pathologies* (11th century), trans. Peyman Adeli Sardo and ed. Laleh Bakhtiar (Kazi Publications, 2014).

40Michael J. Black, J. Derek Bewley, and Peter Halmer, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Seeds: Science, Technology and Uses* (CAB International, 2006), 330.

41Short, "Phenomenological Language and Semantic Naïveté"; and Brian Edwards, "Literary Forms and Biblical Interpretation," *Answers in Depth* 4 (2009): 60–65, https://assets.answersingenesis.org/doc/articles/aid/v4/literary-forms-biblical-interpretation.pdf. For an example of the convoluted historical sequence required for an idiomatic understanding of biblical phrases to have been originally understood, then forgotten and assumed literal, then discovered as idiomatic again, see Davidson, *Friend of Science, Friend of Faith*, 43–45.

42Hans Madueme, *Defending Sin: A Response to the Challenges of Evolution and the Natural Sciences* (Baker Academic, 2024), 61–75.

43The final chapter of *Defending Inerrancy* by Geisler and Roach identifies many apparent Bible-science conflicts and how they should be resolved. In my estimation, the solutions often apply the tools of message inerrancy in defense of comprehensive inerrancy. Geisler and Roach, *Defending Inerrancy*, 332–40.

44Thompson, "The Divine Investment in Truth," in Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 73.

45Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

46Vanhoozer, "Response to R. Albert Mohler Jr.," in Merrick and Garrett, *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 74.

47E.g., Adam A. Miglio et al., eds., *For Us, but Not to Us: Essays on Creation, Covenant, and Context in Honor of John H. Walton* (Pickwick, 2020).

48Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning, The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (InterVarsity Press, 1984), 32–33; Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Wipf & Stock, 2001), 108–13; Frank H. Polak, "Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Genesis 1.1–2.3)," in Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, eds., *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 319 (Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2–31, https://www.academia.edu/899362/Poetic_style_and_parallelism_in_the_creation_account_Genesis_1_1_2_3_; Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (InterVarsity, 2008), 98; Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Penguin Books, 2008), 92–95; and Collins, *Reading Genesis Well*, 72, 147–57.

49Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (P&R Publishing, 1964), 43–76; Nigel Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible* (Paternoster Press, 1983); Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 300–304; Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1–2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Christian Focus Publications, 1997), 37–49; Todd S. Beall, "Reading Genesis 1–2: A Literal Approach," in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Hendrickson, 2013), 45–59; and Madueme, *Defending Sin*, 91–122.

50Parallelism is a common tool of Hebrew poetry, though normally found in tightly worded phrases within a single stanza, such as found in Gen. 1:27. Parallel blocks of text is "a form of

narrative parallelism that is exactly what one might expect to see in oral literature, where paneling is common." Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Old Testament Source Criticism: Some Methodological Miscues," in Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 200.

51Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Question 70, Art. 1, "Whether the Lights Ought to Have Been Produced on the Fourth Day?" (1920), https://www.logoslibrary.org/aquinas/summa/1070.html.

52G. Rorison, "The Creative Week," in *Replies to "Essays and Reviews"* (D. Appleton and Company, 1862), 242–98, https://archive.org/details/repliestoessays01goulgoog/page/n6/mode/2up; Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 4th ed. (Methuen & Co., 1905), 2; and W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Religious Tract Society, 1909), 20–21.

53Meredith Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48, no. 1 (1996): 2–15, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1996/PSCF3-96Kline.html; and Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 49–59.

54Ted Davis, "The Framework View: History and Beliefs," September 30, 2013, https://biologos.org/series/science-and-the-bible/articles/the-framework-view-history-and-beliefs.

55Conrad Hyers, "The Narrative Form of Genesis 1," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 36, no. 4 (1984): 208–15, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1984/JASA12-84Hyers.html.

56Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 2.

57Kidner, *Genesis*, 50, 58.

58John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (InterVarsity, 2009), 53–70.

59Richard F. Carlson and Tremper Longman III, *Science, Creation and the Bible: Reconciling Rival Theories of Origins* (IVP Academic, 2010), 109; and Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Zondervan, 2001), 57.

60Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, 43–76; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 300–304; Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week," paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 19, 2008, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238693749_a_critique_of_the_framework_interpretation_of_the_creation_week; and Terry Mortenson, "Adam, Morality, the Gospel, and the Authority of Scripture," chap. 16 in *Searching for Adam* (Master Books, 2016).

61John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the Use of Numbers in the Bible* (Baker, 1968), 103–24,136–37; W. Robert Godfrey, *God's Pattern for Creation: A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1* (P&R Publishing, 2003), 32–33; Umberto Cassuto, *Part 1, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 3rd ed., trans. Israel Abrahams (Magnes Press, 1961), 12–17; Carol A. Hill, "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55, no. 4 (2003): 239–51, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2003/PSCF12-03Hill.pdf; and Hyers, "The Narrative Form of Genesis 1," 208–15.

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64Simon Turpin, "Influential Pastors and Theologians on the Days of Creation and the Age of the Earth," *Answers in Depth*, August 28, 2013, https://answersingenesis.org/creationism/old-earth/influential-pastors-and-theologians-on-the-days-of-creation-and-the-age-of-the-earth/; and Norman L. Geisler, "A Review of Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 25, no. 1 (2014): 69, https://tms.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/tmsj25e.pdf.

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66Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (Random House, 2002), chap. 2.

67"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

68For a secular challenge to 18th-century understanding of no beginning, see Arthur S. Eddington, "On the Instability of Einstein's Spherical World," *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 90 (1930): 668–78; and Arthur S. Eddington, "The End of the World: From the Standpoint of Mathematical Physics," *Nature* 127 (1931): 447–54. For a modern version of the Hartle-Hawking proposal, see Natalie Wolchover, "Physicists Debate Hawking's Idea That the Universe Had No Beginning," *Quanta Magazine*, June 6, 2019, https://www.quantamagazine.org/physicists-debate-hawkings-idea-that-the-universe-had-no-beginning-20190606/.

69Gregg Davidson, *When Faith and Science Collide* (Malius Press, 2009), 58–65; Kenneth W. Kemp, "Science, Theology, and Monogenesis," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2011): 217–36, https://www.freddoso.com/papers/kemp-monogenism.pdf; Gregg Davidson, "Genetics, the Nephilim, and the Historicity of Adam," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 67, no. 1 (2015): 24–34, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2015/PSCF3-15Davidson.pdf; and S. Joshua Swamidass, "The Overlooked Science of Genealogical Ancestry," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 70, no. 1 (2018): 19–35, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2018/PSCF3-18Swamidass.pdf.

70The ancients generally did not make a distinction between the natural and supernatural, but nonetheless recognized radical departures from the normal function of nature as uniquely divine acts—what we refer to as miracles.

71I recognize this assumes a dualistic relationship between soul and body, which some Christians take issue with. Engaging in this debate is beyond the scope of this article, other than to say that if I continue to exist after my body decomposes, what defines me has to be something more than what is contained in the natural world—something gifted by God, apart from a beating heart.

72Davidson, *Friend of Science, Friend of Faith*, 57–67.

73I am under no illusion that this resolves all tensions or disputes among inerrantists (an impossible task) or that it will be the last word on the subject.