

TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

EXPOSITIONS OF CHALLENGING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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10TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

ARE GENESIS 1–3 REALLY IMPORTANT?

GENESIS 1:1

AUGUST OF THIS YEAR MARKS THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of *Truth On Tough Texts*. Scribbling these little articles and receiving feedback from our readers has been a blessing that cannot adequately be put into words. To show our appreciation, we have enclosed a tiny token that we pray will be of use.

We begin our eleventh year of TOTT by considering not an individual tough *text* but rather a tough *section*. Sadly, however, as we will see with crystal clarity, the opening chapters of Genesis pose a difficulty not because of *their* ambiguity but because of *human* compromise. We begin, therefore, with the following quotation. In 1998, when asked for a position on the Genesis creation account, the founder of a well-known Christian men's organization said this. Please read very carefully and then ask yourself, "Do I agree or disagree?":

You need to know that the ministry of [our organization] takes no stand on issues like this. In fact, we specifically try to avoid such debates. Our efforts are designed to bring men together based on the *historically* "essential" doctrines of orthodox Christianity, as represented by our Statement of Faith, or to focus on things that unite the body of Christ, instead of those which tend to divide it. Since different churches and individual Christians hold varying views about creation, it is one of those things we believe falls under the category of "*secondary doctrines*," just as we do such things as spiritual gifts, eternal security, the rapture, etc. In short, when it comes to subjects like creation, we believe Christians need to extend grace to each other as summed up in the statement, "In essentials unity and non-essentials liberty and all things charity."¹

What's your answer to our above question? Do you fully understand that statement? Here we have a Christian organization that has unilaterally decided what the "second class" doctrines are. Do you not find this shocking? The fact of the matter is that there is no other issue that is *more primary* than Genesis 1–3 (actually 1–11) because Creation is the first issue you are confronted with when you open your Bible. To say that Creation—and therefore the first 3 chapters of Genesis—is secondary, is extremely troubling to say the very least.

Notice that the speaker actually uses the term "historically essential" but then turns right around and says that *biblical* history is not important. It is also demonstrable fact that much of Christianity today either denies the Genesis account as literal history or at the very least considers it a non-issue, irrelevant, or even divisive.

As has also been reported, the following question was put to 106 member colleges in The Christian College Coalition: "Do you believe completely in the literal interpretation of Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2?" What was the result of the survey? Only five said *yes*, while the other 101 said *no*. Is there any doubt as to why Christianity is steadily growing weaker? If our schools are not teaching what Scripture unambiguously declares, what does the future hold?

Let us, therefore, consider three points: the *clarity* of the literal account of creation followed by the *causes* and then the *consequences* of rejecting the literal account of creation.

The Clarity of the Literal Account of Creation

The question we must always ask as our starting point on any given issue is this: *do we implicitly and absolutely trust the Bible?* There are many tests of this throughout Scripture, but the first test is in the very first verse: **In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.** What a simple but enormously profound statement! No rationalistic explanations, no apologetic arguments, just a simple statement of fact. We would, therefore, submit: if we do not believe the Creation account as it is recorded here, then we do not believe the Bible. Period. If we cannot believe the first chapter of the Book, in fact, how can we possibly believe any of the rest of it. Why? Because this is the statement of how everything began. If we don't believe that, there is not a single reason to believe anything else it says.

First, then, **created** (or "create") is the Hebrew *bārā'*, which appears some 53 times and is used of God alone. Unlike other words that speak of making something, *bārā'* speaks of creating from nothing. The word *yāšar*, for example, means "to form, fashion, or shape," as a potter makes a vessel (Is. 29:16) and as God made man from dust (Gen. 2:7). Simi-

larly, *ʿāsāh* means “to do, to make, to accomplish,” as in constructing something with existing materials (Gen. 13:4). There is also *kûn*, which means “to set up, to make firm, to establish,” as in founding a city (Hab. 2:12). Amazingly, all four words appear together in Isaiah 45:18: “God himself . . . formed [*yāšar*] the earth and made [*ʿāsāh*] it; he hath established [*kûn*] it, he created [*bārā*] it not in vain.”

Bārāʾ is, therefore, unique. While the potter needs clay and the builder needs materials, God needs nothing. He merely speaks into existence whatever He chooses, as we repeatedly read “And God said” in Genesis 1. Further, God will also create the New Heavens and New Earth (Is. 65:17; Rev. 21:1–5).

So, in Genesis 1, we see the creation of all three basic elements of the physical universe: space (“heavens”), matter (“heaven[s] and earth”), and time (“beginning”). God did it all, and any compromise with the idea of “millions of years” is a denial of God’s unique, finished work of Creation and is the result of the brainwashing of people’s minds by ungodly men.

We read the same truth in Psalm 33:6–9, where the psalmist says of creation: “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” “Spake” is *amar*, which means not only “to say or speak,” but also “to say to one’s self,” that is, to *think*. It is also used for “said” in the ten “God said” statements in Genesis 1, as well as in Psalm 14:1, “The fool hath said in His heart [or, thinks] there is no God.” We need *tools*; God needs only His *thoughts*.

Another particularly intriguing appearance of *bārāʾ* occurs in Psalm 51:10, where David, after his terrible sin, pleads, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” We are reminded here of Ephesians 2:10, which declares that the believer is “created in Christ Jesus.” “Created” is the Greek *ktizō*, the word often used in the Septuagint to translate *bārāʾ*. God created the believer from nothing. Before Christ came into our lives, each of us was a worthless lump of clay, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–3). But then God created us! And unto what were we created? “Unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (v. 10).

Second, we must also carefully note the word “day,” which appears 16 times in the first two chapters of Genesis (11 in just chapter 1). It is sad, indeed, that there have been some Christians who compromise with evolution by actually allowing for “millions of years.” The idea of the “geologic column” was literally invented by the God-hating and Bible-denying lawyer turned amateur geologist Charles Lyle (1797–1875). It exists nowhere except in the textbooks, and has not even the smallest shred of empirical evidence to support it, but has nevertheless become “gospel” to the evolutionist.

Inexplicably, Christian leaders became so intimidated by evolution that they concocted theories that would accommodate both the Bible and the “millions of years” of the geological ages. The “Gap Theory,” for example, was created for the sole purpose of fitting the geological ages into the Bible, teaching that Genesis 1:1 indicates complete creation, while 1:2 and what follows is the *recreation* after a “gap” of millions of years between the two verses. Similarly, the Day Age Theory teaches that each “day” of Creation consisted of millions of years, which again allows for the geological ages.

Still another popular view that tries to make Genesis fit with the geological ages (and millions of years) is the “Framework Hypothesis,” which as one might surmise was

originally proposed by liberal German theologians in the 19th-century, but has more recently been adopted by evangelicals.² Because of the parallelism of the “days,” it looks at the Genesis account basically as poetry. Days 1, 2, and 3 describe the *formation* of the world, while 4, 5, and 6 answer to each of those with the *filling* of the world (e.g., Day 1, darkness, light, paralleled with Day 4, heavenly light-bearers). So, it is argued, the biblical account is nothing more than a framework that should overlay our scientific understanding of origins.

All such God-dishonoring theories are shown to be false not only by the statement **God created**, but also by the word “day.” While the Hebrew *yôm* at times refers to an indefinite time, such as the span of life (Ps. 102:3) or even a “full” year (Lev. 25:29; 1 Sam. 27:7), its most common and natural reference in its more than 2,200 appearances is to a normal 24-hour period. A graphic example is Genesis 39:10, where Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph “day by day” to commit adultery with her. Another is that we are to meditate on His Word “all the day” (Ps. 119:97). That obviously does not mean millions of years. The same is true of the fourth commandment: keep the Sabbath Day holy. This makes no sense whatsoever if we do not view the creative days as literal days. The Sabbath Day simply cannot be millions of years.

This is all the more clearly demonstrated in the Creation account by the qualifiers “first,” “second,” “third,” etc., being coupled with “evening and morning,” which is *never* used in the Old Testament in a non-literal manner. Further, why were the sun and moon created? To distinguish between and “rule” the two parts of a solar day (Gen. 1:16). Further still, non-literal usages, such as “the day of the Lord” (e.g., Is. 2:12; Ezek. 30:3), a period that is longer than a single day, are always clarified by the context. This is common even in modern usage (e.g., President’s Day) and is always clear in context. To deny such truth is not only to dishonor God but to show oneself foolish.³

With those foundation stones firmly in place, one can then move on to the details of the creation story with no difficulty. We can take Scripture for what it says: “in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Ex. 20:11). It didn’t evolve over millions of years, Adam and Eve were real, not myth or allegory, and the fall and resulting curse occurred exactly as described.

If I may also interject, it is deeply disturbing when a Christian asks the question, “Well, God could do all this in any way He wanted, so couldn’t He have *used* evolution to accomplish the task?” If we may be blunt, No, He could not because such an act would detract from not only His character but also His purpose. He deliberately chose to create every aspect of the natural world and its processes—not let the natural processes create themselves—in six literal days to fully manifest His omnipotence. Nineteenth century theologian Charles Hodge wrote:

The doctrine of creation flows from the infinite perfection of God. . . . So that the doctrine of creation is a necessary consequence of Theism. If we deny that the world owes its existence to the will of God, then Atheism, Hylozoism [the philosophical point of view that the universe is in some sense alive], or Pantheism would seem to be the logical consequence. Hence, on the one hand, the Scriptures

make that doctrine so prominent, presenting it on the first page of the Bible as the foundation of all subsequent revelations concerning the nature of God and his relation to the world, and appointing from the beginning one day in seven to be a perpetual commemoration of the fact that God created the heaven and earth. And, on the other, the advocates of Atheism or Pantheism contend against the doctrine of creation as the primary error of all false philosophy and religion.⁴

Was Hodge alone in his view on Creation? Hardly. Like many other orthodox doctrines (such as the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness discussed in TOT #95), the doctrine of Creation has always been at the root of orthodox Christianity. John Calvin, for example, was explicit in His *Institutes*. He believed in a young earth (I.14.1), wrote that God spoke the universe into existence to display His grace and glory (I.14.22), did it all in six literal days (I.14.2), and did so *ex nihilo*, out of nothing (I.14.20). John Gill was also explicit: "God created with the heavens whatsoever are in the heavens, and with the earth whatsoever are in the earth; that is, the substance of all things in them. . . . These are said to be 'created,' that is, to be made out of nothing" in six 24-hour days.⁵ Likewise, in his sermon "Hideous Discovery," preached on July 25, 1886, Charles Spurgeon thundered this on the subject of evolution:

In its bearing upon religion this vain notion is, however, no theme for mirth, for it is not only deceptive, but it threatens to be mischievous in a high degree. There is not a hair of truth upon this dog from its head to its tail, but it rends and tears the simple ones. In all its bearing upon scriptural truth, the evolution theory is in direct opposition to it. If God's Word be true, evolution is a lie. I will not mince the matter: this is not the time for soft speaking.

Neither is today "the time for soft speaking."

While we're on the subject of orthodoxy, the Roman Catholic Church once again shows its true colors on yet another theological issue. Back in 2014, Pope Francis I stated:

When we read about Creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so. God created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that He gave to each one so they would reach their fulfillment. The Big Bang, which today we hold to be the origin of the world, does not contradict the intervention of the divine creator but, rather, requires it.

It is distressing, indeed, that even in the face of such utter blasphemy, there are still evangelicals who inexplicably defend something that is as indefensible as the Catholic Church.

So, if I may lovingly, yet unapologetically, say: there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Christians today who deny or in any way compromise the clarity of the opening chapters of Genesis do so simply because they have been tainted by Rationalism, Liberalism, and Evolution. My Dear Reader, this is monumentally serious error. The growing number of Christians who compromise Genesis are essentially the product of God-dishonoring, Bible-denying skeptics, some of whom are atheists while others are not necessarily anti-theism but rather just hate the God of the Bible. Such Christians have abandoned the very foundation blocks of Scripture, and

thereby Christian orthodoxy, and have actually aligned themselves with avowed (and proud) unbelievers.

The Causes of Rejecting the Literal Account of Creation

So, why has this happened? What has caused this defection from "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)? As alluded to above, this has come about simply because of fear and intimidation. Not only did evangelicals turn tale and run in panic in Darwin's day, but they are still running and making accommodations to the lies Spurgeon observed long ago. Because the prevailing "scientific" view is a universe billions of years old, many are rejecting the literal six day creation because it demands a "young earth" view.

One particularly renowned Old Testament scholar is a case in point. On March 24, 2009, he made this statement during an interview:

If the data is overwhelmingly in favor of evolution, to deny that reality will make us a cult . . . some odd group that is not really interacting with the world. And rightly so, because we are not using our gifts and trusting God's Providence that brought us to this point of our awareness. . . . I believe that creation by the process of evolution is a tenable Biblical position, and, as represented by BioLogos, the best Christian apologetic to defend Genesis 1-3 against its critics.⁶

In other words, if we do not accept what *unregenerate* scientists tell us about evolution, we will lose our academic respectability! My Dear Reader, are you appalled yet? Since when do Christians pander to the world for respectability? These same people think salvation and all other biblical truths are "cultic" and mythological. Are we going to abandon all that too? Well, yes we will if we stay on the road we're on!

If we may also add, to make the statement, "If the data is overwhelmingly in favor of evolution," is astonishing! As has been demonstrated repeatedly not only by creationists but even non-Christian Intelligent Design scientists, there is no empirical evidence for evolution. The above statement is a total capitulation to the enemy.

Still another prominent evangelical Old Testament scholar has also abandoned the literal meaning of Genesis 1 and 2. In a video titled "Is There A Historical Adam?" (Sept. 12, 2009), he stated:

A lot of people believe that Genesis 1 and 2 insist on the idea that there is one literal, historical Adam, and they might go on and say that that historical Adam was created by a special act of God and not a result of an evolutionary process. There are a lot of difficult questions associated with it, but I think you could only insist on the idea that there is only one historical Adam if you read Genesis 1 in a very highly literalistic way rather than understanding that it is using ancient Eastern concepts to express how God did create the first human beings. I just personally don't think that Genesis 1 and 2 prohibits the idea that there is an evolutionary process and whether there's one moment when God says, "This is the first human being, and it is one individual," or whether Adam stands for mankind; after all, the Hebrew word Adam does mean mankind. That's a different question, one that I haven't completely resolved in my own thinking. There are still open questions.⁷

Again, we must ask, if we don't look at Genesis 1 in a "very highly literalistic way," then why would we do so for the rest of Scripture? Who decides what is literal and what is allegorical? And why should we believe that God created Adam as the first human being, one individual? Because that is what the text says! If we may say again, this kind of error from professing evangelicals is heart wrenching and demonstrates just one more way we have strayed from the Truth and surrendered to the world. Did not James warn that "friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4)?

The Consequences of Rejecting the Literal Account of Creation

As we also illustrated in our study of the doctrine of imputation (TOTT #95), doctrine is at stake. In fact, in this case, there are *several* doctrines at stake. We need to realize that if the opening chapters of Genesis are not literal and historical, several key doctrines of the Faith quite literally vanish.

First and foremost, it effects the doctrine of Scripture itself (Bibliology). Why? Simply because it goes to the issue of the infallibility, trustworthiness, and authority of Scripture. If the Bible can't be trusted in the first two chapters, what makes it trustworthy throughout the rest of the book? Further, if it is just allegory, how many other things in Scripture are also allegorical.

There is no better illustration than the 3rd-century church father Origen, who while he didn't invent the allegorical method of interpretation is still considered its "father." He often replaced the ordinary sense of the text with his own allegories, which then became the real meaning of the text. In fact, in his view, "the scriptures are of little use to those who understand them as written."⁸ To Origen, then, "Israel" meant "the Church," the 42 places Israel stopped during her journey in Numbers 33 describe growth in the spiritual life, and the threats of eternal punishment were not literal but only "gracious deceit on the part of God to deter men from sinning,"⁹ which resulted in Origen's universalism. The nastiest result of this approach is that you can't challenge the allegories on the basis of the text because what the text actually says is not what it means!

So, if you're going to allegorize anything you want, why not just allegorize Creation, too? And Origen did just that: "I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally."¹⁰ And that is exactly what is still going on more than 1,760 years later!

Second, it effects the doctrine of God (Theology proper). God is no longer the sole omnipotent Creator. He is the God of the Deist. He just got everything started (sort of) and then let it evolve on its own without His sovereign design and control. If one then argues, "Oh, well, God could still be sovereign over what something evolves into," he is grasping at air. Since evolution talks of randomness, to argue thus is fundamentally incompatible with the very "science" you are trying to compromise with.

Third, it effects the doctrine of man (Anthropology). If Adam and Eve were not real historical figures, then who is our real ancestor? Where did man come from? Did he, in fact, spring from the primordial ooze? This leads directly to an-

other doctrine.

Fourth, it effects the doctrine of sin (Hamartiology). If Adam's fall was not a real event in history, then what is sin? Where did sin come from? Who is to blame for it? If Adam was not real, the entire Bible doctrine of sin makes no sense. This leads to still another link in this chain of doctrines.

Fifth, and of major significance, it effects the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology). In fact, the doctrine of *salvation* is absolutely dependent upon the doctrine of *creation* and the existence of a literal person named Adam. Twice in his epistles, Paul links our *salvation* in Christ with our *identification* in Adam. In other words, if we did not *fall* in Adam, we simply cannot be *redeemed* in Christ. Why? Because Christ's position as the Head of the *redeemed* race exactly parallels Adam's position as the head of the *fallen* race. This is stated clearly by Paul:

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit (1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45).

The entire human race is in a fallen state by virtue of being "in Adam" through natural birth. In similar manner, those whom God has chosen for salvation are saved by virtue of being "in Christ" through spiritual birth. The "in Adam/in Christ" distinction is crucial to a proper understanding of Christian soteriology, and this distinction makes no sense whatsoever if there was no literal Adam from whom all humanity descended.

Paul argues in a similar vein in Romans 5:12-21. What makes this passage unique, though, is that it explicitly says in verse 12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." This verse is the key verse in the argument for total depravity, and like the 1 Corinthians passage, it depends upon the existence of a literal Adam for it to make any kind of sense. Without a literal *Adam*, there is no literal *sin* and no need for a literal *Savior*. Paul goes on to say in verses 18-19:

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

So, in a very real sense, everything Scripture has to say about salvation hinges on the literal truth of what Genesis 1-3 states about Adam's creation and fall. But there is more.

Sixth, and coupled with the former, it effects the doctrine of Christ (Christology) in two ways. First, it contradicts the biblical teaching that Christ Himself was the Creator of all things. While John 1:1-3 comprise the classic declaration of the Deity of Christ and His position as Creator, Colossians 1:16 is even more specific: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." If Genesis 1 is not historical fact, then Christ was not the actual Creator. Second, in the crucial pro-evangelium (first gospel) of Genesis 3:15, we read the first mention of the Re-

deemer who is to come: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” But wait, if the story of the Fall is not historical fact but rather allegorical, then how is it consistent to maintain that this prophecy is literal, not allegorical? In other words, how can the same incident be both allegorical and literal?

Seventh, if Adam and Eve weren’t created just as Genesis records, then the doctrine of marriage is meaningless (which nowadays is pretty much the case). The concept of marriage comes right out of the creation account (Gen. 2:24) and is referred to by Jesus in all three synoptic gospels. Our Lord Himself acknowledges that man was created male and female “from the beginning of creation” (Matt. 19:4). These references rely on the historical accuracy of the Genesis creation account or they make no sense.

That, in fact, is exactly the attitude today, even among those who call themselves Christians. It is getting more and more common for couples to live together outside of marriage, and again, even professing Christians. Further, without the Genesis account, today’s controversy concerning “same-sex marriage vs. one man, one woman” is rendered pointless because there is no precedent.

Eighth and finally, if the days of Creation aren’t ordinary days, then there is no basis for the 7-day week. We should be trapped in just one very long day that is comprised of millions of years. Once again, God’s Word, therefore, does not mean what the language unmistakably says.

Conclusion

So, we say without apology: Genesis 1–3 are absolutely foundational to theology itself. My Dear Christian Friend, if I may challenge you, and please forgive my bluntness: *Please don’t allow anyone to go unchallenged when they say that the Creation account is “secondary.”* If we abandon the literal, historical meaning of Genesis 1–3, we not only have given up the ship, we don’t even have a dinghy!

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NOTES

- ¹ Bill McCartney of Promise Keepers, as reported in a 1988 *Answers in Genesis* newsletter (emphasis added).
- ² For example, Meredith Kline of Westminster Theological Seminary.
- ³ The word studies here were adapted from the author’s *A Hebrew Word for the Day* (AMG Publishers, 2010), 56–57.
- ⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), Vol. 1, 36–37.
- ⁵ John Gill’s *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, comments on Gen. 1:1ff.
- ⁶ Bruce Waltke from Reformed Theological Seminary, who resigned from there shortly after this interview.
- ⁷ Tremper Longman III, professor of OT at Westmont College, author of numerous commentaries, and co-author of the acclaimed, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*.
- ⁸ Cited in Junius B. Reimensnyder, *Doom Eternal: The Bible and Church Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment* (Philadelphia: Nelson S. Quiney, 1880), 30.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ *De Principiis*, IV, 16

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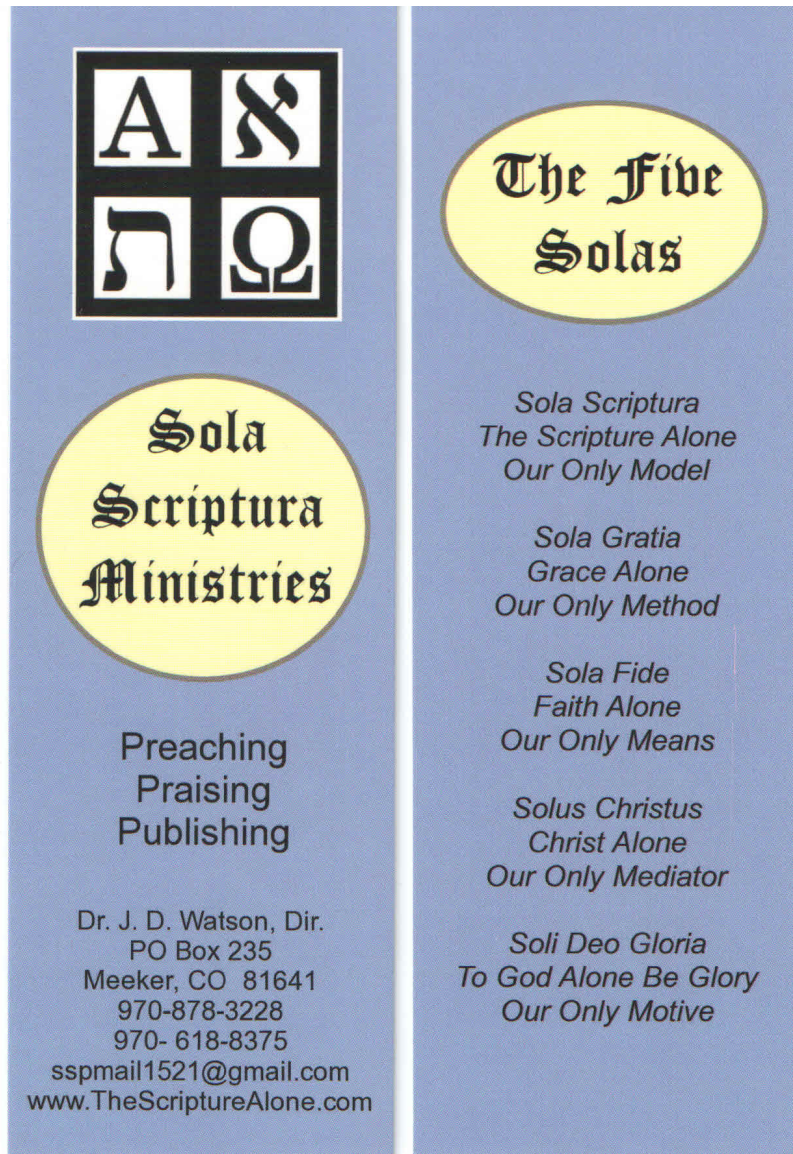
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