



NANCY S. DAWSON, PH.D.

SCIENTIST AND CURATOR OF BIBLICAL GENEALOGIES

Nancy Dawson grew up in South East Oklahoma, the eldest daughter of loving parents and grandparents. They instilled, by example, the value of having a strong moral compass and having excellent work ethic. These things provided foundational character qualities that would be needed for any profession, but for Nancy, this meant pursuing a passion and career in biology (God's created world and His "first testament-witness") and later, theology and biblical studies (God's "special revelation" in His Word). With the mentoring help of excellent educators along the way, Nancy completed an undergraduate degree in Biology at Oklahoma Baptist University (*magna cum laude*), a MS in Botany studying vascular plants under the direction of the world-class botanist R. Dale Thomas at University of Louisiana, and later, completing a Ph.D. in Cell Biology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she studied the ultrastructure of a 'little round green thing' (a single-celled alga) for her dissertation research using electron microscopy. Those educational achievements led Nancy to several academic appointments, including teaching biology, botany, and cell biology at Western Kentucky University and later, doing cell and molecular research and overseeing the Imaging Facility in the Department of Medical Physiology at Texas A&M. All the while, Nancy had taught adult Bible studies in churches that she and her husband attended. After they moved to North Carolina, Nancy studied theology at Duke Divinity School. While there, she looked for a reference book on biblical genealogies to make more sense of the individuals, families, and tribes that were being discussed in Old and New Testament classes. Not finding one—and feeling *called* by the Holy Spirit to research and write it herself—she began a long process of inquiry into 'all' the genealogies found in the Bible. Nancy's essay that follows is based, in large part, on that life-changing two-decade investigation that culminated with the publication of a reference book on the biblical genealogies. It attests to God's gracious calling and invitation to participate in *His* work and the grand story of salvation that leads to the Messiah and the formation of a covenant family not based on ethnicity, but on faith in Christ.

Nancy lives with her husband, two spoiled cats, and two Great Pyrenees dogs on acreage in Montgomery, Texas. She continues to do independent biblical research and is currently writing an academic work on all the women in the Bible.

The God of Natural and Special Revelation

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One is blessed to have a religious home when they grow up, but such was not the case in my early childhood. Thank goodness for teenage friends who invited me to go to church with them. That inclusive invitation started me on an exciting path as a believer. I think I had always believed in God, but the Bible lessons learned at the feet of some devout, Sunday School teachers and the transformative nature of the Word of God profoundly influenced me. After high school, I went on to study biology at Oklahoma Baptist University. The melding of nature and science turned out to make perfect sense to me and has stayed with me through the years.

After getting married and having children, I completed a MS in botany and a Ph.D. in biology before holding academic appointments at Western Kentucky University and Texas A&M. God gives us such wonderful opportunities to witness his detailed creation¹ — like the intricacies of the smallest organisms. For my doctoral work, I described the structure and function of an organelle in a single-celled alga by using electron microscopy, and it was *more intricate* and *beautiful* than any man-made phone or multi-storied skyscraper. Of course, such things as these exist just below the surface of our normal, observation experiences. But being a Christian means seeking to have *spiritual* powers of observation that go beyond the obvious. My experience has shown, that as we put on a kind of spiritual lens, we can see God through His world and revealed Word. He *wants* to reveal Himself, *does* show Himself, extends love and grace, and *dwells* in our midst.

After a professional career in the sciences, I had the chance to study at Duke Divinity School. There I felt a strong calling to write on biblical genealogies—a fascinating subject that has inherent complexities but, at the time, they had not been studied carefully or examined exhaustively. After two years in seminary, I began using the transferable analytical skills I had learned in science to do in-depth, theological research. Working from Genesis to Revelation, I found that genealogies are a remarkably well-documented literary genre, that were clearly highly valued by the ancients. Collectively, the genealogies in Scripture show how we are a part of a much larger metanarrative in which God works through a covenant family of faith to bring about a *new* family of faith throughout successive generations. After 20 years of systematic research and completing genealogical family tree charts for the relationships among individuals, families, clans, tribes, and nations, I had a book published in 2023 titled *All the Genealogies of the Bible*.² All 300 charts are presented canonically and make the “who-is-who” in the Bible very easy to visualize.

Praise God that He reveals Himself to us through the extraordinary outside world and through His Holy Word, gives us the great privilege of sharing the “Good News” with others, and makes a way for us to dwell with Him for eternity.

Footnotes:

1. Psalm 8; John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:15–17; Revelation 4:11

2. *All the Genealogies of the Bible*, published by Zondervan Academic in 2023