

Excerpt from *Coming to Grips with Genesis*

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Chapter 5

Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11

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I first met Dr. John Whitcomb over 37 years ago when I was a sophomore at Princeton University. Dr. Whitcomb gave a special series of lectures at Princeton on May 15, 1971. Though I was a believer who viewed Genesis literally (and did not accept evolution), I had never before heard such an intelligent defense of the Genesis account. I still have my notes of Dr. Whitcomb's lectures on that day. In particular, I remember being struck by his discussion on 2 Peter 3:1–6 and its implications for the theory of uniformitarianism. Three years later I visited Dr. Whitcomb at his home in Indiana and asked his advice on seminaries. He is the one who told me about Capital Bible Seminary in Maryland, just 30 minutes away from my home! I enrolled there in the fall, graduated in 1977, and began teaching at Capital the same year. Over the years, Dr. Whitcomb has taught the Pentateuch at our seminary, and students love him just as much as I did years ago. Dr. Whitcomb is a wonderful, gracious, humble man (with a marvelous sense of humor!) who demonstrates the essence of Christianity in his family life and his love for people, and yet has remained a steadfast and energetic defender of the truth of God's Word without compromise. He is a model for each of us to follow. I consider it a great privilege to be a part of this volume in his honor.

When originally given this chapter topic, I thought that the concept would be fairly easy to research. Surely there were three to five (or even five to ten) hermeneutical approaches to Genesis 1–11 that could be easily discerned and discussed. Now, after surveying over 200 sources and spending countless hours, I realize that, in fact, categorization of hermeneutical approaches is far from easy. The problem is at least three-fold. First, there is a vast amount of

literature on Genesis 1–11 (from all sorts of perspectives).¹ I venture to say that it may be the most-discussed section of Scripture. Second, most scholars are not clear on their hermeneutical method at all. Third, while some scholars do use a particular hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1, that approach is not applied consistently to the rest of Genesis 1–11 nor to the rest of the book as a whole (to be fair, some scholars are only concerned with Genesis 1, and do not deal with the issue in the later chapters). This presents a problem when one wishes to discuss a hermeneutical approach to the entire section.

It seems to this writer that the proper hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1–11 should satisfy two conditions: first, allowing for differences in genre, it should be able to be applied uniformly throughout these 11 chapters, and indeed through the rest of the Book of Genesis. In other words, the hermeneutical approach should only diverge in different sections of the book if it can be demonstrated that those chapters are a different genre. Second, the hermeneutical approach should arise from a study of the Scriptures themselves, not an external set of rules imposed on the Scriptures. Of course, this is easier said than done, because each interpreter comes to the Scriptures with preset opinions that often shape his or her interpretation rather than allowing the Scriptures to speak for themselves.

For sake of discussion, we will break the hermeneutical approaches into four basic groups: (1) Genesis 1–11 is basically myth, with little or no historicity; (2) Genesis 1–11 is not myth, but is largely figurative; (3) Genesis 1–11 is neither myth nor entirely literal, but partly figurative; and (4) Genesis 1–11 should be taken literally (i.e., at face value). The first view is held largely by critical scholars, who deny the inerrancy of Scripture. The second and third views are held by a variety of liberal and evangelical scholars. Those views both deny that Genesis 1–11 is myth, and yet have an uneasiness with the literal approach, especially as it relates to the creation account in Genesis 1. The fourth view is held largely by conservative evangelical or Jewish scholars.

Genesis 1–11 as Myth

Interestingly, the two hermeneutical approaches that seem most consistent in their interpretation of Genesis 1–11 are the first and the fourth: either the accounts are basically myth or they are to be taken literally. The first view, that Genesis 1–11 is myth, has been held in various forms by many critical scholars over the past two hundred years. While the term *myth* is notoriously difficult to define, the basic understanding is that a myth is a traditional pre-scientific story normally revolving around gods and heroes, which explains the origin of

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture in this chapter is from the NKJV of the Bible.

1. In his survey of recent literature on Genesis 1–11, J.W. Rogerson speaks of the three main hermeneutical approaches to Genesis 1–11 in recent years: feminist, literary, and liberation readings. He actually expresses great regret (and views it as a failure of proper education on the subject) that there are still more articles published on the “Genesis versus science” debate than on any other topic in Genesis 1–11. Rogerson, “Genesis 1–11,” *Currents in Research* 5 (1997): p. 68.

something.² A classic statement of the critical position is given by Hermann Gunkel, who regarded Genesis 1 as “a faded myth.”³

Essentially, Gunkel saw Genesis 1 as a late prose recension of the ancient Babylonian myths of creation.⁴ John Skinner likewise perceived a strong foreign influence (especially Babylonian) “in the primaeval traditions of chapters 1–11, where a mythical origin can be proved by direct comparison with oriental parallels, and is confirmed by slight touches of mythological thinking which survive in the biblical records.”⁵ Similarly, E.A. Speiser viewed the primeval history (Genesis 1–11) as “imported for the most part” from a single place, namely Mesopotamia, and that it represented “the best that was available in contemporary scientific thinking.”⁶ A more recent example of the same line of thinking comes from Thomas Thompson, who states that “Genesis 1–11 is a composition that epitomizes biblical mythology. The long historiographic narrative which follows Genesis 1–11 is but an expansive and ephemeral illustration of this mythical world.”⁷

The hermeneutical advantage of the mythical approach is its consistency, especially in its early advocates. Scholars such as Wellhausen and Gunkel not only viewed Genesis 1–11 as mythical, they saw Genesis 12–50 (the Patriarchs) in

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2. John Skinner differentiates between a legend and a myth in that the legend starts with a historical fact, but the myth does not. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930, 2nd ed.), p. ix. For four different definitions of *myth*, see J.W. Rogerson, “Slippery Words V: Myth,” *Expository Times* 90 (1978): p. 10–14. Rogerson states that “Gen. 1 is myth, i.e., it contains truths about God the creator; although the truths are expressed in terms of obsolete science” (p. 12). See also George J. Brooke, “Creation in the Biblical Tradition,” *Zygon* 22 (1987): p. 233–234.
 3. Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006 [orig. published in German in 1895]), p. 80. See also his *The Legends of Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003, reprint [orig. pub. 1901]).
 4. *Ibid.* Interestingly, Gunkel noted the vast difference between the “totally wild and grotesquely titanic barbaric poetry” of the Babylonian account and the “solemn, elevated tranquility” of the “temperate prose” of Genesis (p. 80). Gunkel believed that Genesis is late, because all of the other recensions of the myth are poetic, while Genesis 1 is prose (p. 81).
 5. Skinner, *Genesis*, x. Later Skinner stated that the Israelites “purified the crude ideas of pagan mythology and made them the vehicle of the highest religious teaching” (p. xi).
 6. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. liv-lv.
 7. Thomas Thompson, “Historiography in the Pentateuch: Twenty-five Years after Historicity,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 (1999), p. 280. See R. Davidson, *Genesis 1–11* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 8–12: “It is only when we come to the story of Abraham in chapter 12 that we can claim with any certainty to be in touch with traditions which reflect something of the historical memory of the Hebrew people” (p. 8).

largely the same non-historical light.⁸ And since they traced much of Genesis 1–11 back to Babylonian sources that were simply imported and refined by the biblical writers, the entire section (not simply Genesis 1) was regarded as non-historical.

Denial of Inspiration of Scripture

But there are two major problems with this hermeneutical approach. First, for evangelical scholars, the view that Genesis 1–11 is mythological, based on the (untrue) legends from Mesopotamia or elsewhere, is not consistent with the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture. Since there are numerous references to these chapters in the NT, it is not merely a question of the veracity of the OT — if untrue, then Jesus, Peter, and Paul are in error as well.⁹ Indeed, if there was no actual fall of man, then there would be no need for a Savior.¹⁰ While it is possible that there may have been some influence from other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) writings or traditions on Genesis 1–11, complete denial of the history of Genesis 1–11 is simply not an option. As Bruce Waltke well states, “The word *myth* misrepresents the Genesis account and does an injustice to the integrity of the narrator and undermines sound theology.”¹¹

A Babylonian Origin?

Second, even if the inspiration and integrity of the biblical text were not an issue, the mythological approach fails on another level as well. And that is simply that there is no evidence of literary “borrowing” in Genesis, from Mesopotamia or elsewhere. The early fascination by Gunkel and others with comparisons to the then newly translated Babylonian composition *Enuma Elish* is understandable. But his view that the similarities between the two accounts indicates that Genesis borrowed from *Enuma Elish*, though still repeated, is now widely disputed. In fact, one of Gunkel’s main contentions was that the Hebrew *tehom* (“deep”) in Genesis 1:2 was borrowed from the name of the Babylonian goddess Tiamat, the sea dragon who fought with Marduk before the cosmos was created.¹² But such a view is now discredited, since David Tsumura and others have shown that the

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8. Wellhausen especially held that all the patriarchs were non-historical. Gunkel thought that there was greater authenticity to the patriarchal narratives. See Albright’s introduction to Gunkel’s *The Legend of Genesis*, p. viii–ix.
 9. See, for example, Jesus’ reference to creation (Gen. 1:27 and 2:24) in Matthew 19:4–6; his mention of Noah and the Flood (Gen. 6:1–8) in Matthew 24:37–39; Peter’s reference to the Flood in 2 Peter 3:5–6; and Paul’s reference to Adam, Eve, and the Fall in 1 Timothy 2:13–14. These passages and others are discussed later in this chapter.
 10. See especially Romans 5:12–21.
 11. Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 74. See also Victor Hamilton’s excellent discussion of the treatment of Genesis 1–11 as myth in Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 56–59.
 12. Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos*, p. 74–79. See also Bernhard Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), p. 15–40.

derivation of Hebrew *tehom* from *Tiamat* is phonologically impossible.¹³ The actual similarities of *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 are few: Marduk splitting Tiamat into two spheres of water (similar to the waters of the firmament on day 2) is probably the most notable. The rest of the parallels (creation of light, dry land, the luminaries, and man) are of the most general type. James Atwell's conclusion is that these correspondences "are not striking," and the order of events "does no more than witness to a general ancient Near Eastern background to both accounts."¹⁴ Similarly, W.G. Lambert's conclusion after close analysis of *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 is that there is "no evidence of Hebrew borrowing from Babylon."¹⁵

A classic mistake made by Gunkel and others is to emphasize the parallels without considering the immense differences in the accounts.¹⁶ For example, the purpose of *Enuma Elish* was to exalt Marduk in the pantheon of Babylon, with creation being a minor part of the account, whereas in Genesis, God's work of creation is the central theme.¹⁷ Second, *Enuma Elish* confuses spirit and matter (reflecting the Babylonian concept of the eternity of matter). Third, as Westermann notes, the creation account of Genesis is devoid of either conflict or struggle in the formation of the earth, all of which are common features in the Egyptian, Babylonian, and other ANE creation accounts.¹⁸ In *Enuma Elish*

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13. David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), p. 36–53; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): p. 82–83; R. Laird Harris, "The Bible and Cosmology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5 (1962): p. 11–17; James E. Atwell, "An Egyptian Source for Genesis 1," *Journal of Theological Studies* 51 (2000): p. 446. The two words share a common etymology ("deep waters"), but *tehom* cannot be derived from *Tiamat*. See also Walter Kaiser's helpful discussion in *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), p. 60–63.
 14. Atwell, "Egyptian Source," p. 449.
 15. W.G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, eds. Richard Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 105.
 16. As N.M. Sarna notes, to ignore the differences between Genesis and ANE parallels "is to present an unbalanced and untrue perspective and to pervert the scientific method" (*Understanding Genesis* [New York: Schocken, 1970] p. xxvii). So also Gerhard Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): p. 4; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. xlviii-l. See also Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005) p. 26: while scholars initially exaggerated the influence of *Enuma Elish*, "as time went on, scholars generally began to develop a more sober appreciation for the relevance of the Babylonian material, mainly the recognition of these dissimilarities."
 17. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 8.
 18. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), p. 80–81.

the universe came into being as a consequence of an epic battle between the gods.¹⁹ Marduk's acts require much physical effort, while God's only required the spoken word. Fourth, there is no creation of light (as the first act of creation), nor is there a detailed creation account of vegetation, animals, birds, or fish. Fifth, the capriciousness of the gods in *Enuma Elish* is contrasted by God's determined purpose in Genesis. There is no female deity involved in creation in the Genesis account, as there are in the other ANE creation stories.²⁰ Finally, in *Enuma Elish*, man was created to be a servant, but in Genesis 1 man was created to rule the earth.²¹

A Canaanite Origin?

Some scholars have posited a Canaanite background for Genesis 1, seeing in Genesis 1:2 a demythologization of a Canaanite sea dragon myth.²² But the conflict of the storm-god Baal with the sea-god Yam mentioned in the Ugaritic texts has nothing at all to do with the creation of the cosmos. In Ugaritic texts, Baal is not treated as a creator-god at all.²³ Furthermore, as Tsumura points out, in the Ugaritic texts, the Canaanite sea-dragon is Yam, not Taham — but the term *yam* (“sea”) does not appear in Genesis 1 until verse 10, where the plural form *yammim* is used as the antithesis of *erets* (“land”).²⁴

An Egyptian Origin?

Other scholars have seen a strong Egyptian background to the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. This concept was first proposed in the late 1800s by the Egyptologist A.H. Sayce, who lamented the excessive interest in Babylonian creation texts.²⁵ It has been revived in recent years by James Hoffmeier,

19. John Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), p. 63.

20. David Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood,” in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, eds. Richard Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 31–32.

21. John Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), p. 71. See also George Klein, “Reading Genesis 1,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 44 (2001): p. 25–30.

22. J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 50–53.

23. Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood,” p. 32. The creator-god in Ugaritic mythology is El. See further Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, p. 55. As Marvin Pope notes, “There is hardly anything that could be called a creation story or any clear allusion to cosmic creativity in the Ugaritic texts.” Marvin Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), p. 49.

24. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, p. 54–56.

25. James K. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 and 2 and Egyptian Cosmology,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 15 (1983): p. 41.

John Currid, and James Atwell, among others.²⁶ One difficulty in analyzing the Egyptian cosmogony is that there is a multiplicity of texts with quite different accounts of creation.²⁷ Nonetheless, concepts such as creation stemming from a single god (though different sources name different gods as the creator — Re, Ptah, Khnum, Atum, and others); creation by divine fiat; creation of primordial matter; creation of the firmament; and making man from clay are all found in Egyptian sources.²⁸

Once again, however, the differences between the Egyptian accounts and Genesis 1 are far more striking. First, the primary Egyptian creation accounts (Heliopolis, Memphis, and Hermopolis) deal with the creation of the gods and the cosmos (heaven, earth, and sun), but do not mention creation of man or animals. These are covered in different Egyptian texts.²⁹ Second, the Egyptian creation accounts are concerned primarily with the creation of the gods themselves, not the universe. And, depending on the source, these gods are created in various ways: by command (Ptah spoke them into being);³⁰ by the god Atum's semen and fingers;³¹ by spitting ("Atum spit me out in the spit of his mouth");³² and

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26. Ibid., p. 39-49; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 53-72; Atwell, "Egyptian Source," p. 449-77. See also Gordon Johnston, "Genesis 1-2:3 in the Light of Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov 15, 2006), p. 1-24. The first portion of Johnston's paper (p. 1-8) has now been published under the title "Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (2008): p. 178-194.
27. These include Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, The Book of the Dead, and The Memphite Theology. Hoffmeier, "Egyptian Cosmology," p. 41-42; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 55. Currid cites John Wilson on the matter: "We cannot settle down to a single codified account of beginnings. The Egyptians accepted various myths and discarded none of them" (Ibid.).
28. Hoffmeier, "Egyptian Cosmology," p. 44-48; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 55-73.
29. There is a brief reference to man's creation in the "Instruction of Merikare" and another in the "Great Hymn to Khnum." Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 53-73. Tony Shetter ("Genesis 1-2 in Light of Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths" [paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov 15, 2006], p. 10) sees the creation traditions of Heliopolis, Memphis, and Hermopolis as paralleling the first creation account in Genesis (focusing on creation of the world in general), and the creation tradition of Khnum paralleling the second creation account of Genesis (creation of humans). He even suggests that the presence of two creation stories in Genesis results from the need of the Hebrews "to refute the two Egyptian creation traditions" (p. 14). But this is unlikely, especially since the climax and culmination of Genesis 1 is the creation of man, which is entirely omitted in the first Egyptian creation tradition.
30. Memphis "Shabaka Stone," in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 4-6. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *ANET*.
31. Ibid.
32. Coffin Text, Spell 76.3-4.

even by an act of masturbation by Atum.³³ The contrast between these texts and Genesis, where there is only one God, whose presence is assumed throughout, and who simply speaks everything else into existence, could hardly be greater.

Third, in Egyptian cosmogony the creative events are cyclical, with the sun being reborn each day and the Nile receding each year. By contrast, the creation of Genesis 1 occurs in a strict linear succession of days and is completed by the seventh day. There is no parallel to this concept either in Egyptian or Babylonian cosmogony.³⁴ Finally, in the Egyptian cosmogony (as in the Babylonian) there is an intermingling of the gods with creation: indeed, as Currid notes, “each of the gods fashioned was a personification of an element of nature.”³⁵ In Genesis, God is utterly separate from and precedes His created universe.³⁶

Summary of Differences between ANE Cosmologies and the Genesis Creation Account

Bill Arnold summarizes well the differences between the various ANE cosmologies and the worldview of Genesis 1–2. First, the Genesis account is monotheistic, contrasting with the polytheism of the ANE. Second, God is transcendent, “not continuous with the world he has created.”³⁷ Third, Israel is totally disinterested in the origins of God, whereas the ANE was preoccupied with this concern. Fourth, God is a nonsexual being (without physical progeny). And fifth, the ANE devalued history, whereas Israel “elevated history to an entirely new level in the ancient world,” attaching importance to the beginning of time and space (creation) and the beginning of the nation Israel. The result is that while the ANE cultures expressed their theology in the form of myths and legends, Israel was primarily interested in the writing of history. As Arnold observes, “such a role for historical narrative was radically new in the ancient Near East.”³⁸

Borrowing from ANE Flood Stories?

Though space will not permit a detailed treatment, we should also mention the similarities between ANE flood myths (most notably, the Gilgamesh Epic and the Atrahasis Epic) and the biblical Flood account. As in the case of the creation account, some scholars have used the similarities of these ancient flood stories to demonstrate the secondary and inferior nature of the biblical Flood account in Genesis 6–9. For example, Skinner states that the dependence of the biblical nar-

33. Pyramid Text, Utterance 527. See Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 56–62. Note that while much is made of Ptah’s speaking lesser gods into existence (supposedly paralleling God’s divine fiat in Genesis 1), in the same text Atum creates the lesser gods “from his semen and fingers.” *Ibid.*, p. 61.

34. Hasel, “Polemic Nature,” p. 84–85; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 73.

35. Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, p. 60.

36. See also George Klein, “Reading Genesis 1,” p. 31.

37. Bill Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), p. 49.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 51. Arnold’s whole discussion is found on p. 48–51.

narrative of the Flood on the Babylonian legends “hardly requires detailed proof.”³⁹

To be sure, as with the creation accounts, there are similarities between the ANE flood myths and Genesis: the impending flood is revealed to the hero; he is delivered from the flood with his family; a large boat is built; birds are sent out to determine how far the waters have receded; and the hero worships at the end of the flood. But once again, there are major differences: monotheism in Genesis versus the polytheism of the ANE myths; the reason for the flood (sin in Genesis; the people making too much noise in the Atrahasis Epic, disturbing the sleep of the gods⁴⁰); the holiness of God in Genesis versus the capriciousness of the gods in the Gilgamesh Epic (they swarm “like flies” around the sacrifice given by Utnapishtim); and the godliness of Noah versus the questionable ethics of Utnapishtim (the hero of Gilgamesh).⁴¹ After extensive analysis, Alexander Heidel concludes that there is insufficient evidence that Genesis borrowed from the ANE myths: “The arguments which have been advanced in support of the contention that the biblical account rests on Babylonian material are quite indecisive.”⁴² He observes that while the “skeleton” has some similarities, “the flesh and blood and, above all, the animating spirit are different.”⁴³

It should also be mentioned here that there are no real parallels in ANE literature either to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 or to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. As Albright writes, the Table of Nations “stands absolutely alone in ancient literature without a remote parallel even among the Greeks. . . . The Table of Nations remains an astonishingly accurate document.”⁴⁴ As for the Tower of Babel, as Wenham notes, “no good Near Eastern parallel to the tower of Babel story is known.”⁴⁵ There is a Sumerian text which mentions that the whole world

39. Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 177.

40. No real reason is given for the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic. Even Speiser, who holds to strong Mesopotamian influence on Genesis, acknowledges the strong moral emphasis in Genesis versus the lack of a plausible cause for the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic (*Genesis*, p. 54–55).

41. While Noah’s godliness is stressed, he is hardly an active “hero” as Utnapishtim is. In fact, Noah does not speak until the aftermath of the Flood, while Utnapishtim speaks throughout the story, and is given immortality at the end.

42. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 267. See further the detailed comparison by Nozomi Osanai, “A Comparative Study of the Flood Accounts in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis” (unpublished master’s thesis, Wesley Biblical Seminary, 2004), as well as Wenham’s excellent summary of the differences between the accounts in his *Genesis 1–15*, p. 164–66.

43. Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 268.

44. William F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1955), p. 70–71. Similarly, D.J. Wiseman states, “The origin of this material is unknown. It is impossible to be dogmatic as this chapter remains unique in ancient literatures” (D.J. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973], p. xviii).

45. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 236.

spoke the same language, but it is unclear whether the text is speaking of the past or looking forward to the future. In any case, there is no mention of judgment in the Sumerian text.⁴⁶

Conclusion on the Matter of Genesis 1–11 “Borrowing” from ANE Texts

What, then, should we make of the similarities between various ANE texts and Genesis? Far from Genesis “borrowing” from these various creation and flood myths, what seems clear is that Genesis stands apart in theme, purpose, and grandeur from these other texts. The reason is readily apparent: Genesis is truth as given by the Creator himself. The other ANE texts, in cultures marred by centuries of sin and rebellion against God, have preserved a vestige of the truth here and there from what their ancestors knew. If indeed we accept Genesis as truth, then all peoples came from Adam and Eve (and from Noah and his family), and all had the same history in the beginning. These ANE texts preserve elements of the truth taken from their collective memory.

Genesis 1–11 as Largely Figurative

The second major hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1–11 is that this section is not myth (i.e., untrue), but it is to be taken almost entirely figuratively, not literally. Those who take this approach believe that Genesis 1–11 is a genuine revelation from God (thus differing from the first approach presented above), but it is more like a story or parable, intending to convey theological truth and nothing more.⁴⁷

Many scholars who hold this position state that we must understand Genesis 1–11 through the framework of the ANE milieu, not through our own modern framework. For example, Peter Enns states that the Bible should be understood in light of the ANE cultural context in which it was given, rather than our own.⁴⁸ Enns even calls this section “myth,” defined as “an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who are we? Where do we come from?”⁴⁹ Since Abraham came from Mesopotamia, Enns argues, he

. . . shared the worldview of those whose world he shared and not a modern, scientific one. The reason the opening chapters of Genesis look

46. See Samuel N. Kramer, “The ‘Babel of Tongues’: A Sumerian Version,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968): p. 108–111.

47. Richard Bube calls this view the “essentially nonliteral view.” Bube, “Final Reflections on the Dialogue: Reflection 1,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, eds. J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 252.

48. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), p. 41.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Though Enns calls Genesis 1–11 “myth,” he differs from scholars holding the first view since he believes that it is a genuine revelation from God. That is why, despite his use of the term “myth,” it seems best to classify his approach in this section.

so much like the literature of ancient Mesopotamia is that the worldview categories of the ancient Near East were ubiquitous and normative at the time. . . . God adopted Abraham as the forefather of a new people, and in doing so he also adopted the mythic categories within which Abraham — and everyone else — thought.⁵⁰

Enns concludes that it is a

. . . fundamental misunderstanding of Genesis to expect it to answer questions generated by a modern worldview, such as whether the days were literal or figurative, or whether the days of creation can be lined up with modern science, or whether the flood was local or universal. The question that Genesis is prepared to answer is whether Yahweh, the God of Israel, is worthy of worship. . . . It is wholly incomprehensible to think that thousands of years ago God would have felt constrained to speak in a way that would be meaningful only to Westerners several thousand years later. To do so borders on modern, Western arrogance.⁵¹

Enns is not alone in this approach. In his article on “Creation” John Walton spends most of the article discussing the ANE documents rather than the biblical text. He states:

. . . the theological message of the Bible was communicated to people who lived in the ancient Near Eastern world. If we desire to understand the theological message of the text, we will benefit by positioning it within the worldview of the ancient world rather than simply applying our own cultural perspectives.⁵²

Later Walton states:

. . . nowhere in the ancient Near East did people think of creation primarily in terms of *making* things. It is only our post-Enlightenment, Western way of thinking that focuses so steadfastly and exclusively on physical structure and formational history. . . . The origin of matter is what our society has taught us is important (indeed that matter is all there is), but we cannot afford to be so distracted by our cultural ideas. Matter was not the concern of the author of Genesis⁵³

In his commentary on Genesis, Walton adds, “It is fruitless to ask what *things* God created on day one, for the text is not concerned about *things* and therefore

50. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

52. John Walton, “Creation,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 156.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 161–62.

will not address itself to that question.”⁵⁴

Similarly, Howard Van Till holds that Genesis 1 should be read as an “artistic portrait,” as a form of “storied theology,” an “example of something written in the form of Ancient Near Eastern artistic literature. . . . It is a piece of Ancient Near Eastern *primeval history* literature.”⁵⁵ Elsewhere Van Till makes a large distinction in Genesis between primeval history (Genesis 1–11) and patriarchal history (Genesis 12–50). Whereas patriarchal history is drawn from remembered historical oral tradition, primeval history is “Hebrew literature written in the literary tradition of ancient Near Eastern cultures.”⁵⁶ The stories of primeval history “serve as ‘packaging’ that contains the message content,” rather than the content itself.⁵⁷ Whether those stories are true or not

. . . is a Western question, not an ancient Eastern or Hebrew question. It shifts the emphasis away from the heart of the matter and directs attention to peripheral matters, to matters beyond the scope of the narrative. . . . The truth of a concrete story in ancient Hebrew literature does not necessarily lie in its specific details but rather in the eternal verities it illustrates.⁵⁸

Thus, according to this view, those who expect to find truth in the details of Genesis 1–11 are naive and perhaps even arrogant. Recognizing that Genesis 1–11 is not intended to be taken literally frees us from a host of knotty problems — problems that (according to this view) the text does not even address.

An ANE Worldview?

But this view, while it may at first sound appealing, fails miserably when one actually considers the arguments in a bit more detail. First, and foremost, the Bible claims to be the authoritative Word of God. This means that God superintended and directed what was to be written. To argue that Moses or whoever

54. John H. Walton, *Genesis* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 84.

55. Howard J. Van Till, “The Fully Gifted Creation,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, eds. J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 209–211. Though I disagree completely with Van Till’s conclusion, I agree with his analysis that old earth special creationists are “in the exceedingly awkward position of attempting to interpret some of the Genesis narrative’s pictorial elements (interpreted as episodes of special creation) as historical particulars but treating the narrative’s seven-day timetable as being figurative. I see no convincing basis for this dual interpretive strategy” (p. 211). Earlier, Van Till commends the young earth special creationist position of at least having “the merit of attempting to follow a consistent interpretive strategy in the early chapters of Genesis” (Ibid.).

56. Howard J. Van Till, *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 79–82.

57. Ibid., p. 82.

58. Ibid., p. 82–83. Van Till concludes that they are most similar to parables. “Though it is not to be taken literally, it is to be taken seriously” (Ibid.).

wrote Genesis 1–11 was so immersed in the ANE world that it caused him to write in the way of other ANE literature is to deny the uniqueness of the biblical record. Certainly God *could* have directed Moses to write in this way, but He was under no *obligation* to do so! In fact, ironically it is the creation account that would have had to be supernaturally revealed (whether passed on orally or directly given) to Moses, since no human was alive to witness the acts of the first five days! Why would God have used ANE myths to reveal His truth to Moses concerning this unique event?

The discussion of ANE literature under the previous view showed that while there are some similarities between the biblical record in Genesis and ANE myths, there are far more significant differences. Even those who wish to see a great deal of ANE influence in the biblical text admit that the biblical record is unique.⁵⁹ And the Lord continually tells the children of Israel in the OT *not* to be like all the other nations in their worship of other gods, in their worldview, and so forth: they are unique as a people, and they serve a God who alone is worthy of worship, trust, and obedience. Far from following the thinking of the ANE, Israel was told to reject it categorically.⁶⁰ In fact, the biblical account in Genesis is so unlike other ANE literature that many scholars hold that the creation account is actually a polemic against the ANE creation myths.⁶¹ If the perspective of Genesis 1–11 is so contrary to the ANE worldview, then why should we assume that it was written according to that same worldview? Actually, it stands apart from the ANE worldview in every respect, beginning with the most obvious difference: there is only one God, not many; He is eternal, not a created being; and He created the rest of the world in an orderly, purposeful way.⁶²

As noted earlier, it is not surprising at all that ANE myths contain vestiges of the (correct) biblical account, since the Bible states that all civilizations came

59. See Gunkel's comments in note 4 above.

60. See for example the warnings against following after the religious practices of Israel's neighbors in Deut 18:9–14.

61. For example, see Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), p. 42–46; John H. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?" in *Portraits of Creation*, ed. Howard J. Van Till (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 229–231; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 76; Hasel, "Polemic Nature," p. 81–91; Johnston, "Genesis 1–2:3," p. 10–14; Shetter, "Genesis 1–2," p. 30–33; and Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. xlv, 9.

62. These major differences have been discussed more fully in the previous section. Van Groningen points out that the attempt to draw out theological "facts" from Genesis 1–11 from a non-factually historical text is "a type of inverted allegorical exegesis." While allegorical exegesis drew spiritual truths from historic events, "contemporary exegetes attempt to draw historical facts from symbolic, mythical, religious stories which have been drawn from various deeply religious pagan sources." G. Van Groningen, "Interpretation of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970): p. 217.

from Adam (and later, Noah). As Noel Weeks states simply, “It would be rather ridiculous to argue that God chose to convey certain theological truths in terms of the flood concepts already possessed by the Mesopotamians. Obviously both Bible and Sumerian traditions mention a flood because there was a flood.”⁶³

Is Genesis 1–11 to be Interpreted Differently from Genesis 12–50?

A major argument of Van Till and others is that since Genesis 1–11 is primeval history, it is to be interpreted differently from the rest of Genesis and the rest of the OT.⁶⁴ In other words, a unique hermeneutic should be used for these chapters, since they are not “history.”⁶⁵ This permits scholars to treat Genesis 1–11 figuratively (or, as Van Till states, like a parable), but the remainder of Genesis (the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) as historical.

Unfortunately for this interpretation, such a distinction between Genesis 1–11 and 12–50 will not hold up under scrutiny. Genesis 12 would make little sense by itself, without the preparatory genealogy given in chapter 11 (where Abram, Sarai, and Lot are first introduced). But since Genesis 11 gives the genealogy of Shem, this connects it back to the genealogy of chapter 10, to the Flood account in chapters 6–9, and to the genealogy of chapter 5, where Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth are first mentioned. But since Genesis 5 is a genealogy that begins with Adam himself, this takes us back to the creation account in Genesis 1–2 where Adam is first mentioned! What kind of hermeneutical gymnastics will allow us to take Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as historical people, but not Adam, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth?⁶⁶ As Charles Mabee observes, the “modern theological distinction between primordial history and history as we know it” is “grounded in a false metaphysics of spatialized time. . . . What this distinction really implies is that the primordial history conceives of a different understanding of time than the contemporary sequential view: a distinction that does not exist in the text.”⁶⁷ Mabee notes that “as far as the Hebrew narrative is

63. Noel Weeks, “The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1–11,” *Themelios* 4 (1978): p. 14.

64. See also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 1–5.

65. Sadly, even Bruce Waltke succumbs to this argument, though only for the creation account. He writes, “The creation account is unlike any other history. History is generally humanity recounting its experiences. The Genesis creation account is not a record of human history, since no humans are present for these acts” (*Genesis*, p. 76). That argument strikes me as one of the silliest I have heard. The Genesis account is “history,” not simply human history. Why define “history” simply in terms of human history, and then claim that the creation account is not “history,” since humans were not present?

66. Westermann recognizes the importance of the genealogies in Genesis 1–11. He states that too much attention has been paid to creation and the Fall as the “themes” of Genesis 1–11, and the genealogies have been ignored (*Genesis 1–11*, 2–5). He concludes, “The genealogies are an essential constitutive part of the primeval story and form the framework of everything that is narrated in Gen. 1–11” (p. 6).

67. Charles Mabee, *Reading Sacred Texts Through American Eyes* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991), p. 87–88.

concerned, Adam and Noah are not any less authentic personages than Abraham and Jacob. The effect of placing the former in an earlier chronological frame of reference (which we may term *mythological*) is to domesticate this material under a preconceived framework and render it theologically impotent.”⁶⁸

Similarly, D.J.A. Clines notes that “there is no clear-cut break at the end of the Pentateuch. . . . The precise beginning of the Abraham material — and therefore with the conclusion of the pre-Abrahamic material — cannot be determined. . . . There is at no point a break between primeval and patriarchal history — 11:10 (descendants of Shem) resumes from 10:21–31 (family of Shem) and is directed toward 11:27–30 (Abram and Sarai).”⁶⁹

There are two other structural indicators that Genesis 1–11 is to be understood in a similar way to Genesis 12–50. First, Genesis 12 begins with a *waw* consecutive verb, *wayomer* (“and he said”), indicating that what follows is a continuation of chapter 11, not a major break in the narrative. Second, it is widely agreed that the structure of the entire book is based on the phrase *eleh toledoth* (“these are the generations of . . .” or “this is the history of . . .”) that occurs ten times in Genesis.⁷⁰ Each time this phrase occurs, it narrows the focus to something that has already been discussed: the heavens and the earth (2:4), Adam (5:1), Noah (6:9), the sons of Noah (10:1), Shem (11:10), Terah (11:27), Ishmael (25:12), Isaac (25:19), Esau (36:1), and Jacob (37:2).⁷¹ Since six of these occurrences are in Genesis 1–11 and four occurrences are in Genesis 12–50, it seems clear that the author intended both sections to be understood in the same way, as a consecutive history.⁷² Therefore, hermeneutically there is no warrant for treating Genesis 1–11 differently from the rest of the book.

Furthermore, if Genesis 1–11 is to be taken as a parable and not as history, there should be indications in the text to this effect. For instance, in the NT parables, either the word “parable” is used or a formula such as “a certain

68. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

69. D.J.A. Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, eds. Richard Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 305.

70. Eleven times, if the second mention of Esau in 36:9 is included.

71. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 2–8; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. xxii. Walter Kaiser observes that “The real key to the literary genus of this difficult section of Scripture is found in the author’s recurring formula ‘the generations of’ which demonstrates his organization and his understanding of the materials.” Kaiser, “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, TX: Word, 1970), p. 61.

72. So also Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), p. 145. Elsewhere, Kaiser makes the point that this linear view of history is quite different from the cyclical view of time found in ANE cosmologies: “It is this linear view of events and happenings [found in Genesis 1–11] that actually inaugurates the very discipline of history.” Kaiser, *Old Testament Documents*, p. 83. See also G.C. Aalders, *Genesis, vol. 1* (The Bible Student’s Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 45: “The entire design of the book [of Genesis] indicates that the positive intent was to present actual history.”

man . . .” or some other literary device.⁷³ But there are no such devices used in Genesis 1–11. While Walton’s statement that “it is fruitless to ask what *things* God created on day one, for the text is not concerned about *things*” may sound good, in fact, the text of Genesis 1 is quite concerned about *things*: there are 22 *things* created in Genesis 1 alone! Kaiser notes that Genesis 1–11 contains 66 geographical names, 88 personal names, 48 generic names, and 21 identifiable cultural items such as gold, bdellium, onyx, brass, iron, harp, pipe, and so forth.⁷⁴ He observes that Genesis 10 alone has five times more geographical data than that of the entire Koran.⁷⁵ To suggest that Genesis 1–11 is simply a parable or story and is not concerned with things or history has no support whatsoever in the text of these chapters.

How Did New Testament Writers Understand Genesis 1–11?

Another difficulty for those who hold a figurative/allegorical understanding of Genesis 1–11 is the New Testament understanding of these chapters. In other words, if Genesis 1–11 is to be taken non-literally, then the New Testament writers should provide important evidence for this hermeneutical approach. In fact, the opposite is the case. There are at least 25 New Testament passages that refer to Genesis 1–11, and all take the account literally. Mortenson and Minton discuss this point in detail in their chapters in this volume. But a brief summary is helpful for the argument here.

The creation account is referenced by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–6 (and the parallel account in Mark 10:6–8). This passage is especially significant since Jesus cites both Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 as Scripture that is authoritative in settling the question of divorce. There is no indication that He takes either the creation of man in Genesis 1 or the account of the creation of Eve in Genesis 2 as an allegory or a figure. Paul cites Genesis 2:24 (“and they shall become one flesh”) as authoritative in his section on marriage in Ephesians 5:31 and his argument against sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:16.⁷⁶ In a similar way, Hebrews 4:4 cites Genesis 2:2 (God resting on the seventh day) as authoritative Scripture.⁷⁷

The account of the Fall is also regarded literally by New Testament writers. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul refers to the serpent tempting Eve by his craftiness. Even more telling is Paul’s discussion of the role of women and men in 1 Timo-

73. See the helpful introduction to parables by Robert H. Stein, “The Genre of the Parables,” in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 30–50.

74. Kaiser, *Old Testament Documents*, p. 82. See also his excellent discussion in “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” p. 59–61.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Also in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9 Paul explains that the woman was created from the man.

77. Likewise 2 Corinthians 4:6 says that God said “light shall shine out of darkness,” a possible allusion to Genesis 1:2–5.

thy 2:11–14. In this passage, Paul gives two reasons why a woman should not have authority over a man: first, “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (referring to Genesis 2:20–23, which states clearly that Eve was created after Adam); and second, because “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression” (referring to the account of Satan tempting Eve in Genesis 3:1–13 — Eve specifically mentions being deceived by the serpent in Genesis 3:13).⁷⁸ Another important passage is Romans 5:12–14, which traces the beginning of sin specifically to Adam, explaining that “death reigned from Adam to Moses.” Here, both Adam and his sin are mentioned, in the same phrase as Moses. If Adam was not historical, then what about Moses?⁷⁹

Cain’s murder of Abel in Genesis 4 is also mentioned in the New Testament. First John 3:12 mentions Cain, “who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother.”⁸⁰ Jesus himself mentions “the blood of Abel” in Luke 11:51 and Matthew 23:35 when speaking of the prophets who had been killed. This is a clear reference to Genesis 4:10–11 in which the Lord tells Cain that his brother’s blood cries out to Him from the ground.⁸¹

What about the account of the Flood? Again, the New Testament writers have no doubt of the historicity of Noah or the Flood. Jesus says that His second coming will be similar to the days of Noah, when “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark” (Matt. 24:37–38). What is noteworthy here is not simply the reference to Noah and the ark, but the details about marrying — the precise context of the Flood according to Genesis 6:2–4. Time and again the New Testament writers refer to the details (not just the “concepts”) of Genesis 1–11. In Luke 17:26–27, Jesus speaks similarly about Noah, the ark, and the Flood, and then continues with the example of Lot and Sodom and the Lord’s judgment on Sodom and even on Lot’s wife (Luke 17:28–29, 32). Again, Noah and the ark are treated as history in the same manner as Lot and Sodom.⁸² There is no hermeneutical distinction to be made between Genesis 6–8 and Genesis 19 in Jesus’ thinking. Peter similarly speaks of Noah and the Flood in 1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 2:5, and 2 Peter 3:5–6.

In the great chapter on faith, the writer to the Hebrews begins by speaking

78. See also the reference in Revelation 12:9 to the serpent deceiving the whole world (cf. Rev. 20:2–3).

79. So also 1 Corinthians 15:22: “As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive.” The effect of the Fall on creation is expressed clearly in Romans 8:19–22.

80. See also Jude 11: “They have gone in the way of Cain, run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” Cain is regarded as historical, just like Balaam and Korah.

81. See also Hebrews 12:24.

82. So also John W. Wenham, “Christ’s View of Scripture,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), p. 9. Wenham’s entire essay is excellent, as is the following essay in the same book: Edwin A. Blum, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture,” p. 39–53.

of God creating the world (Gen. 1), then mentions Abel's better sacrifice than Cain's (another "detail" from Gen. 4:3–7), Enoch being taken by God and not seeing death (specifically quoting Gen. 5:24), and Noah's faith in building the ark (Heb. 11:3–7). In the following verses he praises the faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, the judges, David, Samuel, and the prophets (Heb. 11:8–32). How can we take the people and events in verses 8–32 as historical, but not those mentioned in verses 3–7? The writer to the Hebrews sees the entire Old Testament as historically accurate.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, it is important to remember that Genesis 1–11 is not simply about the creation, the Fall, and the Flood: it includes extensive genealogies.⁸³ And the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:23–38 ends with 20 names taken from Genesis 1–11 (Terah to Adam), taken as historical persons along with the first 55 names mentioned in the genealogy.⁸⁴ How can one decide that these final 20 names were part of "primeval history" and not historical, but the other 55 names are historical? Such an approach simply does not make sense. It is more consistent (with Wellhausen and some critical scholars) to view *all* of the Pentateuch as non-historical than to see only Genesis 1–11 as non-historical. They must be taken together, since there is absolutely no indication that the New Testament writers saw it any other way.⁸⁵

In an attempt to get around the clear evidence that the New Testament writers view Genesis 1–11 as historical, some scholars believe that Jesus, Paul, Peter, and other New Testament writers simply accommodated their teachings to the views of the people of the day.⁸⁶ But that position is untenable. First, in every case mentioned above, Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the writer of the Hebrews brought up the passages in Genesis to validate their point. There was no need for Jesus to cite Genesis 1 and 2 in His discussion about divorce, but He did. There was no need for Jesus to speak of Noah and the Flood in discussing His second coming, but He did. There was no need for Paul to speak of the creation of Eve from Adam to verify his position on headship, but he did. Such alleged accommodation on the part of New Testament writers is not consistent with the doctrine of inerrancy. And accommodation on the part of Jesus is doubly problematic — not only in terms of inerrancy but also in terms of Jesus' integrity

83. See Westermann's comment about the importance of the genealogies in Genesis 1–11 (cited in note 66 above).

84. Enoch is also mentioned as "the seventh from Adam" in Jude 14, thus verifying the genealogy of Genesis 5:1–18.

85. Van Groningen rightly emphasizes the importance of the New Testament witness in the interpretation of Genesis: "If the New Testament writers are properly considered as inspired writers, as they indeed are, their consideration of Genesis as revelation of historical events as well as facts, must be accepted and followed" ("Interpretation of Genesis," p. 215).

86. For example, H.R. Boer, *Above the Battle? The Bible and Its Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 95. Boer writes: "Jesus again and again accommodated himself to existing beliefs which we no longer accept."

and sinlessness. Furthermore, Jesus did not hesitate to correct the wrong views of the day.⁸⁷ In fact, five times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus draws a contrast between what the religious leaders of the day were saying (“You have heard that it was said”) and what He taught (“but I say”).⁸⁸ As one writer states concerning Jesus’ statements about the Old Testament, “They form together a great avalanche of cumulative evidence that cannot honestly be evaded.”⁸⁹ Clearly, Jesus and the Apostles saw Genesis 1–11 as historical fact, not incorrect “packaging” of theological truth.⁹⁰

Genesis 1–11 as Partly Figurative

The third hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1–11 is that it is not entirely mythical or figurative, but not entirely literal either. Select portions are to be taken figuratively.⁹¹ The approaches taken here vary widely, but as we shall see, they share a common thread. A few sample opinions follow.

John Stek sees basic conceptual affinities with ANE cosmologies, and views Genesis 1–2 as a polemic against ANE mythic theologies.⁹² Genesis 1:1–2:3 serves as the prologue to the rest of the Pentateuch. The manner and form of the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 belong to “the metaphorical character of the presentation.”⁹³ The days are regular days, but they are not to be taken literally:

In his storying of God’s creative acts, the author was “moved” to sequence them after the manner of human acts and “time” them after the pattern of created time in humanity’s arena of experience. Such sequencing and dating belonged integrally to the whole fabric of his account (the heavenly King commanding his realm into existence and ordering its internal affairs), whereby he made imaginable the unimaginable.⁹⁴

The author used a seven-day period because “throughout the ancient Near East the number seven had long served as the primary numerical symbol of fullness/completeness/perfection, and the seven-day cycle was an old and well-

87. As John Wenham wryly observes, “He did not show Himself unduly sensitive about undermining current beliefs” (“Christ’s View of Scripture,” p. 14).

88. Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44.

89. Wenham, “Christ’s View of Scripture,” p. 29.

90. It is sad that some evangelical authors pay so little attention to Jesus’ view of Genesis 1–11. For example, not one of the passages cited above is discussed in Peter Enns’ book *Inspiration and Incarnation*. (Jude 14 is mentioned, but in an entirely different context.)

91. This view is called by Richard Bube the “essentially literal view”: though Genesis 1–3 is essentially historical, it “allows for figurative nonliteral descriptions to occur in the text. The emphasis is on *harmonizing* the literal biblical text with scientific descriptions” (“Final Reflections,” p. 251–52).

92. Stek, “What Says the Scripture?” p. 226–231.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 234–237.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 237–238.

established convention.”⁹⁵ Thus, Stek’s approach is similar to Van Till’s (discussed above), but Stek limits this hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1:1–2:3.

John Collins holds that the genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is “exalted prose narrative”: “by calling it exalted, we are recognizing that . . . we must not impose a ‘literalistic’ hermeneutic on the text.”⁹⁶ So the days of Genesis 1 are not to be taken literally, but rather analogically: “the days are God’s workdays, their length is neither specified nor important, and not everything in the account needs to be taken as historically sequential.”⁹⁷

Gordon Wenham holds that the days of Genesis are literal, 24-hour periods, but because of the “literary nature of Genesis 1,” chronological sequence is not the narrator’s concern.⁹⁸ Wenham gives four reasons for his non-literal view. First, there are various literary devices used in the chapter the “six-day schema,” “repeating formulae, the tendency to group words and phrases into tens and sevens, literary techniques such as chiasm and *inclusio*, the arrangement of creative acts into matching groups, and so on.”⁹⁹ Second, evening and morning appear three days before the sun and moon. Third, Genesis 1 “stands outside the main historical outline of Genesis” (the *toledoths*). So it is “an overture to the rest of the story and therefore does not stand foursquare with the rest of Genesis, to be interpreted according to precisely the same criteria.”¹⁰⁰ Finally, “all language about God is analogical,” so we need not assume that “his week’s work was necessarily accomplished in 144 hours.”¹⁰¹

Victor Hamilton similarly holds that *yôm* (“day”) in Genesis 1 should be taken literally as a 24-hour day. However, a “literary reading” places the creation story in its historical context, as an alternative to the ANE worldview. So the term “day” should not be understood as “a chronological account of how many hours God invested in his creating project, but as an analogy of God’s creative activity.”¹⁰² Similarly, W. Robert Godfrey agrees that the days of Genesis 1 “are ordinary, twenty-four hour days,” but they are to be regarded as “a model for our working, not as a time schedule that God followed. . . . The days are actual for us but figurative for God.”¹⁰³ Derek Kidner likewise seems to take the days as literal days of a week, but it is “phenomenological language” (like our own talk of “sunrise”) which “turns ages into days.” God thus makes concessions to us in language that we may understand. Kidner concludes that “it is only pedantry

95. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

96. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), p. 44.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

98. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 19.

99. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

101. *Ibid.*

102. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 53–56.

103. W. Robert Godfrey, *God’s Pattern for Creation: A Covenantal Reading of Genesis 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), p. 90.

that would quarrel with terms that simplify in order to clarify.”¹⁰⁴

Finally, Bruce Waltke also views the six days of Genesis 1 as “our twenty-four hour days,” but then he adds that they are “metaphorical representations of a reality beyond human comprehension and imitation.”¹⁰⁵ Waltke believes that a non-literal view is “consistent with the text’s emphasis on theological, rather than scientific, issues.”¹⁰⁶ Waltke gives six reasons for not viewing the creation account as “straightforward, sequential history.”¹⁰⁷ First, reading it this way creates an irreconcilable contradiction between “the prologue of Genesis and the supplemental creation account in Genesis 2:4–25,” since according to Genesis 2 God planted a garden, caused trees to grow, and formed the birds and animals in between creating the man and the woman. Second, a straightforward reading of Genesis 1:4 and 14 “leads to the incompatible notions that the sun was created on the first day and again on the fourth day.”¹⁰⁸ Third, Waltke explains that the author’s concern is “not scientific or historical but theological and indirectly polemical against pagan mythologies.”¹⁰⁹ Fourth, Waltke observes that the “symmetrical nature of the account” indicates its non-literal nature.¹¹⁰ Waltke sees the days neatly divided into two triads of three days: the things created in the second three days rule over the corresponding resources created in the first three days.¹¹¹ Fifth, Waltke notes that the use of the “widely attested seven-day

104. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), p. 56–58.

105. Waltke, “The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter One,” *Crux* 27 (1991): p. 8.

106. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 61.

107. Indeed, Waltke informs us that the text is “begging us not to read it in this way” (“Literary Genre,” p. 6). Waltke gives three reasons in “Literary Genre” and another three reasons in *Genesis*. I have combined them here.

108. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 7.

109. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 76.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 76–77.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 57. This is in essence the framework hypothesis, first proposed by the Dutch theologian Arie Noordtjij in his work *Gods Woord en der Eeuwen Getuigenis*, published in 1924. An English translation of much of his work is given in N.H. Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957). The framework hypothesis has many advocates, including: Meredith Kline “Because It Had Not Rained,” *WTJ* 20 (1958): p. 146–57; Mark D. Futato, “Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen. 2:5–7 with Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3,” *WTJ* 60 (1998): p. 1–21; Lee Irons with Meredith Kline, “The Framework View,” in David Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001), p. 217–253; Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 58–59, 73–78; Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 54–56; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 39–40; Mark Throntveit, “Are the Events in the Genesis Creation Account Set Forth in Chronological Order? No,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990) p. 36–55; and Godfrey, *God’s Pattern*, p. 85–90.

typology” of the ANE shows that the narrator is using a stereotypical formula that is not intended to be taken literally.¹¹² Finally, Waltke states that “the language of our creation narrative is figurative, anthropomorphic, not plain: God lisped so that Israel could mime him, working six days and resting the seventh.”¹¹³ “The writer’s vantage point is with God in His heavenly court.”¹¹⁴

A Special Hermeneutic for Genesis 1?

It should be noted that all of the scholars mentioned above would hold to the essential historicity of Genesis 3–11. In fact, most would argue that all of Genesis 3–11 be taken literally. Thus their viewpoint is not the same as those who view all of Genesis 1–11 as a story or parable (view 2 mentioned above). Their problems are primarily with Genesis 1. So the first question to be asked is, hermeneutically should Genesis 1 (or, more precisely, Genesis 1:1–2:3) be separated from the rest of Genesis? That is what Stek holds (and thus justifies his non-literal reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3), calling it a “prologue” to the rest of Genesis.¹¹⁵ Wenham likewise holds that since Genesis 1 is outside the *toledoth* outline, it is an “overture” to the rest of the story, and thus doesn’t need to be interpreted the same way.¹¹⁶

Yet there is no basis for separating Genesis 1:1–2:3 from the rest of the book. Even Waltke, while also calling Genesis 1:1–2:3 a prologue, acknowledges that it is clearly linked to the remaining sections: “The author of Genesis links this prologue to the rest of his book structured about ten historical accounts by clearly linking it with his first two accounts. The first account . . . (2:4–4:26) is unmistakably coupled with the prologue by the addition, ‘when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.’ ”¹¹⁷ Indeed, each of the *toledoths* carries on the story of a subject mentioned in the preceding account¹¹⁸ So, contrary to Wenham, the first *toledoth* in Genesis 2:4 is linked to Genesis 1 in the same way that the second *toledoth* in Genesis 5:1 is linked to the account of Adam in Genesis 1–4. The same pattern is seen in the other *toledoths*. Those who seek to separate Genesis 1:1–2:3 from the rest of Genesis fail as miserably as those who seek to separate Genesis 1–11 from the rest of the book. To give just one example mentioned earlier, Jesus did not distinguish between Genesis 1 and 2 when he quoted from both chapters in answering the question about divorce (Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–8).

112. Ibid., p. 76–77.

113. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 8.

114. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 7. “The language is anthropomorphic, representing God in human dress.” (Ibid., p. 5).

115. Stek, “What Says the Scripture?” p. 241.

116. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 40.

117. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 6.

118. Andrew Kulikovskiy, “A Critique of the Literary Framework View of the Days of Creation,” (unpublished paper for Louisiana Baptist University, July 28, 2001), p. 15.

Is Genesis 1 a Separate Genre?

Many would argue that Genesis 1 should be viewed non-literally because it is a separate genre from the rest of the book. This argument is at once seemingly more sophisticated (what layman would dispute this claim, not being as aware of various genres, etc.?) and more elusive, since in fact a separate genre for Genesis 1 is difficult to demonstrate. Indeed, among those who view Genesis 1 as a separate genre, there is little unanimity as to its precise classification.¹¹⁹

Some see Genesis 1 as poetic.¹²⁰ Wenham calls it a “hymn.”¹²¹ If Genesis 1 was poetic, then one would expect to observe many figurative expressions in the text. But even Waltke rejects the classification of Genesis 1 as a poem or a hymn: “Is it a hymn? Hardly, for the poetic mode, the linguistic conventions, and doxological tone of known ancient Near Eastern hymns are notably absent in Genesis 1.”¹²² Gunkel, who viewed the genre of Genesis as “legend,” states that apart from Genesis 49, “all that the book contains is prose in form.”¹²³ It is not written using Hebrew parallelism, but rather the normal prose structure. The contrast between it and a genuinely poetic passage that celebrates God’s creation, such as Psalm 104, is striking. Psalm 104 is a poetic description of the creation; Genesis 1 is not.¹²⁴

The inescapable conclusion is that Genesis 1 is narrative prose. Even Westermann agrees that Genesis 1:1–2:4 “is a narrative.”¹²⁵ Collins calls it “exalted prose narrative,” acknowledging that it is not poetry, and that “we are dealing with prose narrative,” yet trying still to maintain the possibility of a non-literal hermeneutic.¹²⁶ Though acknowledging that Genesis 1 is narrative, Waltke then concludes that the genre is “a literary-artistic representation of the creation” — which, in fact, is not a genre type at all.¹²⁷ The best that Stek can do is to

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119. See John S. Feinberg’s excellent summary of the various views on the literary genre of Genesis 1 in his *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), p. 574–578.
120. For example, Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), p. 26–28. See also Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 23: “Its elevated style is more like poetry.”
121. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 10. But Wenham points out that Genesis 1 differs from the ANE creation stories, which are poetic: “Gen. 1 is not typical Hebrew poetry.” He ends up calling it “elevated prose, not pure poetry,” since “most of the material is prose” (Ibid.).
122. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 6.
123. Gunkel, *Legends of Genesis*, p. 37–38.
124. See the further discussion of this point by Boyd in his chapter.
125. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 80. See also Gerhard Hasel’s helpful summary of the genre of Genesis 1 in “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” *Origins* 21 (1994): p. 15–21.
126. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, p. 44.
127. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 9. Waltke has adopted this phrase from Henri Blocher. It is fascinating that in an article entitled “The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter One,”

call it *sui generis* (its own genre), which emphasizes the uniqueness of Genesis 1. Surely we would agree with Stek that in theme Genesis 1 is unique; but it is hardly unique in form.¹²⁸

Indeed, Genesis 1 is presented in a normal narrative form. The standard form in Hebrew for consecutive, sequential narrative prose is the *waw* consecutive imperfect.¹²⁹ Genesis 1 contains 50 *waw* consecutive imperfect forms in its 31 verses, an average of 1.6 per verse. This represents more *waw* consecutive forms than all but 3 of the first 20 chapters in Genesis.¹³⁰ By contrast, in the poetic section of Genesis 49:1b–27 (Jacob’s blessing of his sons), there are only a total of eight *waw* consecutive forms, or 0.30 per verse.¹³¹ To put it another way, Genesis 1 has five times more narrative sequential markers than a comparably long poetic section. There seems to be no doubt that the author of Genesis 1 intended that the narrative be understood as normal sequential action. The genre is clearly narrative, not poetry.¹³²

Are There Irreconcilable Contradictions between Genesis 1 and 2?

Scholars give various other reasons for taking Genesis 1 non-literally. As mentioned above, Waltke gives six reasons for a non-literal approach, many of which are shared by others who hold a similar non-literal view. These six objections to the literal view will be briefly discussed in turn.¹³³

First, there is supposedly an irreconcilable contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2, since in chapter 2 God apparently creates the man and then plants a

Waltke ultimately refuses to choose a normal genre category, and finds the need to make up a phrase that describes the content, not really the genre, of Genesis 1.

128. So also Hasel, “‘Days’ of Creation,” p. 20: “It is hardly *sui generis* in an exclusive literary sense which will remove it from communication on a factual, accurate and historical level.”
129. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 543.
130. The three chapters in Genesis 1–20 with more *waw* consecutive imperfect forms are chapters 5 (60), 11 (51) and 19 (64).
131. Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks, and Colin Smith, *Old Testament Parsing Guide* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), p. 1–15, 46.
132. See also Hasel, “‘Days’ of Creation,” p. 20: “The creation account of Genesis 1 is a historical prose-record.” Likewise Kaiser states, “Basically, there are two broad categories for arranging the material: poetry or prose. The decision is easy: Genesis 1–11 is prose and not poetry. The use of the *waw* consecutive with the verb to describe sequential acts, the frequent use of the direct object sign and the so-called relative pronoun, the stress on definitions, and the spreading out of these events in a sequential order indicates that we are in prose and not in poetry. Say what *we* will, the author plainly intends to be doing the same thing in these chapters that he is doing in chapters 12–50.” Kaiser, “Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” p. 59–60.
133. I am simply using Waltke’s objections as the basis of discussion because they are the most complete. The objections of Wenham and others mentioned above are also addressed within the course of the discussion here.

garden and creates birds and animals before creating the woman, whereas in chapter 1 the man and the woman are created after all the rest. But Genesis 2 is not a second, creation account; instead, it is topical, preparing the way for Genesis 3. Waltke is concerned that the trees God planted in Eden would not have had time to grow and bear fruit,¹³⁴ but since God can cause water to turn into wine in an instant, and can cause Aaron's rod to sprout and bud (Num. 17:8), somehow a fast-growing tree does not seem like such a great problem!¹³⁵ Whether God created special birds and cattle (Gen. 2:19–20) on day 6 specifically for Eden, or whether Genesis 2:19 simply refers to the birds and cattle already created on previous days, is of little consequence: either way, there is no contradiction with Genesis 1. Each element mentioned in Genesis 2 is necessary for a proper understanding of Genesis 3; there is no contradiction between the two accounts.¹³⁶

Was the Sun Created Twice?

Waltke says that “a straightforward reading of Genesis 1:4 and 14 leads to *the incompatible notions that the sun was created on the first day and again on the fourth day.*”¹³⁷ This objection is raised by many other scholars as well.¹³⁸ But the text does not speak of the sun being created on day one; only light was created then. We are not told what the light source is, but it clearly was not the sun. The light of day 1 is a special creation of God, distinct from the sun. If some have a problem with understanding light without the sun, then they should recognize that something similar will be true in the eternal state. According to Revelation 21:23 and 22:5, the sun will not be needed at all, since the Lord himself is the light. So just as in the first three days of the creation week, in the eternal state there will once again be light without the sun. Though we cannot conceive of

134. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 7.

135. See also James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999), p. 45–46. Interestingly, Waltke himself mentions Jesus turning water into wine, but rejects the instantaneous growth view since the text of Genesis 2 doesn't specifically state it (*Ibid.*, p. 7).

136. See also Robert V. McCabe, “A Defense of Literal Days in the Creation Week,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2000): p. 120–122; and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 303, where he notes, “Genesis 2 implies no description of sequence in the original creation of the animals or plants, but simply recapitulates some of the details of Genesis 1 as important for the specific account of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2.”

137. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 7 (italics his).

138. For example, see Van Til, *The Fourth Day*, p. 88–92; Meredith Kline, “Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 (1996), p. 6–8; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 40; Irons and Kline, “The Framework View,” 220.21; Throntveit, “Events in the Genesis Creation Account,” 37–40; Godfrey, *God's Pattern for Creation*, p. 41–45; and Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991, 2nd ed.), p. 26–27.

“evening and morning” apart from the sun, surely God can.¹³⁹

A Polemic against ANE Mythologies?

Next, Waltke asserts that the author’s concern was not “scientific or historical,” but was instead “polemical against pagan mythologies.”¹⁴⁰ Stek, Hamilton, Wenham, and Futato make similar observations.¹⁴¹ In response, despite the assertions of these scholars, it is not clear from the text of Genesis that this is the author’s purpose.¹⁴² In fact, scholars who hold this view do not even agree on whether Genesis 1 is a polemic against Babylonian, Canaanite, or Egyptian mythologies.¹⁴³ Regardless, even if Genesis 1 is a polemic against one or more of these ANE mythologies, why would this conclusion lead to the idea that Genesis 1 is not to be taken literally? The two concepts are simply not related. For example, John J. Davis argues that the ten plagues in Moses’ day were each directed against Egyptian gods, a supposition directly supported by the text (see Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4), unlike the supposition made about Genesis 1.¹⁴⁴ But that polemical purpose for the plagues in no way causes Davis to view them as anything but literally fulfilled. The same holds true for Genesis 1.

Does a Symmetrical Structure Indicate Non-literality?

Waltke, Wenham, and others also contend that the structure of the days of Genesis 1 is symmetrical, with days 4–6 paralleling days 1–3, and that this symmetry demonstrates its non-literal nature. Often the following pattern is noted:

Creation kingdoms	Creature kings
Day 1: light; day and night	Day 4: light-bearers: sun, moon, stars
Day 2: sea and sky	Day 5: sea creatures; birds
Day 3: land and vegetation	Day 6: land creatures; man ¹⁴⁵

139. See further Jordan, *Creation in Six Days*, p. 48–49.

140. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 76.

141. Stek, “What Says the Scripture?” p. 229–231; Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 55; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. xlv, 9; Futato, “Because It Had Rained,” p. 1–21. Others view Genesis 1 as a polemic, but do not necessarily reject a literal approach to the text. So Hasel, “Polemic Nature,” p. 81–91; Johnston, “Genesis 1-2:3,” p. 10–14; and Shetter, “Genesis 1-2,” p. 30–33.

142. See Jordan, *Creation in Six Days*, p. 235: “Nothing in these texts so much as hints that they were written as polemics against anything.”

143. Futato says Canaanite Baalism (“Because It Had Rained,” p. 1–21); Johnston (“Genesis 1–2:3,” p. 10–14) and Shetter (“Genesis 1–2,” p. 30–33) say Egyptian; Wenham says Babylonian and Egyptian (*Genesis 1–15*, p. 9); and Hasel says Babylonian, Egyptian, and Canaanite (“Polemic Nature,” p. 81–91).

144. John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1971), p. 86–96.

145. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 57–58, 76–77; Kline, “Space and Time,” p. 2–15; Irons and Kline, “Framework View,” p. 224; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 6–7; Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, p. 24; Youngblood, *Genesis*, p. 25–27.

This view is called the framework hypothesis, and seems to be increasingly popular among evangelicals.¹⁴⁶ A full critique of the framework hypothesis is given elsewhere in this book, so only a few comments will be made here. First, the light of day 1 is not dependent on the sun, so the sun is hardly the “ruler” of it. Second, the waters existed on day 1, not just day 2. Third, in verse 14 the “lights” of day 4 are set in the “expanse” created on day 2 (not day 1). Fourth, the sea creatures of day 5 were to fill the “water in the seas” which were created on day 3, not day 2, contrary to the chart above (see Gen. 1:10); and none of the sea creatures or birds or land creatures other than man were to “rule” anything anyway. Finally, man was created on day 6 not to rule over the land and vegetation (created on day 3), but over the land animals created on day 6 and the sea creatures and birds created on day 5. In other words, despite the nice chart, the patterns simply do not hold up.¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, even if the pattern held true completely (which it assuredly does not), it would hardly be an argument for a non-literal approach to the chapter, especially since the chapter has so many sequential markers. Just because something is presented according to a pattern does not mean that the pattern is non-literal.¹⁴⁸ After all, as was previously discussed, the entire Book of Genesis is patterned according to the *toledoths* (“this is the account of . . .”): does that mean that the accounts of Noah, Shem, Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob are not literal or chronological?¹⁴⁹ As E.J. Young states, “Why, then, must we conclude that, merely because of a schematic arrangement, Moses has disposed

146. See note 111 above.

147. See further, Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), p. 68–73; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 302; Todd S. Beall, “Christians in the Public Square: How Far Should Evangelicals Go in the Creation-Evolution Debate?” (paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov. 15, 2006), p. 6–10; and Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:2–2:3,” in *Did God Create in 6 Days?*, eds. Joseph Pipa, Jr. and David Hall (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege, 2005, 2nd ed.), p. 170–74.

148. The same observation holds true for other literary devices seen by Wenham (*Genesis 1–15*, p. 39) and others. Structure does not necessitate or even suggest non-literalness. And many of these so-called “literary devices” are questionable. For example, Wenham says that the number of Hebrew words in Gen. 1:1–2 and 2:1–3 are all multiples of seven (p. 6). But in order to arrive at this conclusion, Wenham needs to *add* the number of words in 2:1–3 together: separately they are 5, 14, and 16 words respectively. Are we to believe that the author of Genesis went through this exercise in mental gymnastics of adding the words in three verses simply to arrive at 35, a multiple of seven? Wenham mentions other phrases that occur seven times, but since creation occurred in seven days, it is simply the repetition of these phrases at the beginning or end of each day that create the “7.” See also my discussion on the use of seven in the immediately following paragraphs.

149. So also Weeks, “Hermeneutical Problem,” p. 17. See further Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 184–85.

of chronology?"¹⁵⁰

Does the Use of Seven Days Indicate Non-literality?

Waltke, Stek, and Walton believe that since the seven days of Genesis 1 reflects a "widely attested seven-day typology of the ancient world," it suggests that the author is using a stereotypical formula rather than a literal period of seven days.¹⁵¹ Waltke notes that "within ancient Near Eastern material, the pattern of six as incompleteness and seven as resolution is quite common."¹⁵²

There are indeed some interesting uses of seven days in ANE literature: the construction of Baal's palace in seven days (*ANET*, p. 134); the attack of King Keret upon the city of Udum (*ANET*, p. 144–45); Danel's seven days of offerings to the gods followed by seven days of feasting (*ANET*, p. 150); and in the Gilgamesh Epic, seven days for Utnapishtim's boat to be built, and seven days of the flood raging followed by seven days of waiting for the waters to subside (*ANET*, p. 93–94).¹⁵³

But there are a number of problems with Waltke and Stek's analysis. First, none of the cited texts have anything to do with creation, and none of the ANE creation texts mention a seven-day period of creation. Second, the only texts that have something to do with building *anything* are Baal's palace construction and the construction of Utnapishtim's boat. But these have nothing to do with the creation of the world. Third, even these two acts of construction from ANE texts indicate that the building was done in seven days. But Genesis 1 states that the world was created in six days, not seven. The seventh day was merely for God to rest. Fourth, just because there are some parallel ANE texts that mention seven days has nothing to do with the literalness of the days of Genesis 1. In fact, in all the ANE texts cited, the days were regarded as literal days, not symbolic: it took seven actual days to build Baal's palace, and so forth. In other words, the days were still 24-hour measures of time, not some symbolic figure without any

150. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, p. 66.

151. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 77; Stek, "What Says the Scripture?" p. 239; Walton, *Genesis*, p. 155. See also Youngblood, *Genesis*, p. 26, 31. Walton sees in the ANE texts a liturgical significance "connected to the construction of sanctuaries." He concludes that the seven-day creation cycle in Genesis "put the creation narrative in the context of an enthronement/temple dedication-type of setting" (*Genesis*, p. 157). That conclusion is a stretch, to say the least, since the Genesis text mentions nothing of a temple or a building/throne dedication.

152. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 77. See also U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), p. 12–13: "Akkadian and Ugaritic literature . . . prove that a series of *seven consecutive days* was considered a perfect *period* in which to develop an important work" (italics his).

153. Stek, "What Says the Scripture," p. 239. Note that in the case of the Gilgamesh Epic, the sevens could well be patterned after the actual Flood account, since Noah waited two periods of seven days before sending the birds out (Gen. 8:10, 12). In the Gilgamesh Epic, a dove, a swallow, and a raven were sent out on the seventh day.

actual time value or with a value of thousands or millions of years.

We wonder if it has ever occurred to these scholars that the reason the number seven was regarded as the number of completeness might be traced back to a distant memory of the actual literal creation week as described in Genesis. The reason that “seven” was so prominent in the ANE may very well have been that they knew (having descended from Adam and Noah) that God created the world in a period of seven days — a period that then became the measurement of time for mankind’s activity. Why must we assume that the author of Genesis “borrowed” his idea of seven from the ANE, rather than that he received it by special revelation from God and that the ANE pagans developed their idea from truth handed down about the Creator’s actual acts?¹⁵⁴

Did God Lisp so that We Could Understand?

Finally, Waltke, Kidner, Wenham, and others explain that God is simply using anthropomorphic, rather than literal, language in Genesis 1. Waltke states that “God lisped so that Israel could mime him, working six days and resting the seventh.”¹⁵⁵ Kidner likewise views God as making “concessions to us in language that we may understand,” but which apparently is not to be taken literally.¹⁵⁶

Certainly the Bible has anthropomorphic language. But in point of fact, Genesis 2 and 3 contain more anthropomorphic language than Genesis 1: God “breathing” into man’s nostrils (Gen. 2:7), His “walking in the garden” (Gen. 3:8), and so forth. Yet even understanding the occasional use of anthropomorphic language, how does that relate to our understanding of the days of Genesis 1? Anthropomorphisms usually take the form of a body part or organ or movement to describe God’s actions, but they never take the form of a unit of time such as a day. As Young states, the word anthropomorphic “can be applied to God alone and cannot properly be used of the six days.”¹⁵⁷ Pipa notes that “God is eternal, but once he created time and space his operations within time and space are in time as we understand it. . . . Are there any examples in Scripture in which the time markers of God’s work are anthropomorphic?”¹⁵⁸ In fact, Exodus 20:8–11 says that our week was patterned after God’s creation week: the same term for “days” is used both for His creation week and for our week.

Does God really have to “lisp,” as Waltke says, in order to communicate

154. By this statement I am not implying that other cultures were innocent in what they did. They rebelled against God and His revelation through their own sin, and made up competing cosmologies to substitute for the truth of God’s revelation. Satan is a master at using partial truth as a substitute for God’s truth (2 Cor. 11:14).

155. Waltke, “Literary Genre,” p. 5, 7.

156. Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 56–58. See also Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 40: “All language about God is analogical,” so there is no need to think that He finished His work in 144 hours. See also Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, p. 124, who advocates the “analogical days” position: “The days are God’s work-days, their length is neither specified nor important.”

157. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, p. 58.

158. Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 163.

with us? Does this not imply that God did a poor job in creating man in the first place? Did He not design our human capacity to speak and communicate? Are we not made in His image? Of course He is infinite and we are finite, and He is the Creator and we are the creatures; but isn't man's main problem of communicating with God due to our sin, not our finiteness?¹⁵⁹ Contrary to Waltke, Wenham, and Kidner, all of Genesis 1 begs that we read it as historical sequential narrative prose, not as some figurative or analogical or anthropomorphic account. Furthermore, if God could speak literally about the creation of Adam and Eve and their sin and about Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the Exodus, which most, if not all, of these scholars accept as literal history, then why can't God speak of literal events on literal days of creation in a way that we can readily understand? The logic of this "lisp" argument does not make sense. If God created over millions of years and in the order that evolutionary scientists say, then He is a very incompetent communicator in Genesis 1.

Once again, hermeneutically it is important to be consistent in our treatment of Genesis 1. As Pipa notes, the style of Genesis 2 and 3 is more figurative (with more anthropomorphisms) than Genesis 1, so why not regard these chapters as non-literal?¹⁶⁰ The same is true for the Flood account, Babel, and so forth. Such an arbitrary method of interpreting Scripture has no exegetical brakes: it is only one step away from denying miracles and the bodily resurrection of Christ.¹⁶¹ How do we determine what is literal and what is not, if we ignore the plain markings of genre in the text itself?¹⁶²

Accommodation to Scientific Thinking?

There is actually a seventh reason that Waltke gives for rejecting a literal understanding of Genesis 1, while accepting a literal understanding of the rest of the chapters of Genesis. Waltke notes that there are three basic interpretations for the "days": "literal twenty-four hour periods, extended ages or epochs, and structures of a literary framework designed to illustrate the orderly nature of God's creation." Then Waltke states that the first two interpretations "pose scientific and textual difficulties," which he explains in his footnote

159. See further Jordan, *Creation in Six Days*, p. 105–111, concerning anthropomorphisms in Genesis 1.

160. Pipa, "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 194.

161. *Ibid.*, p. 194–96.

162. Feinberg gives a similar warning: "If the days may be figurative, then why not God, etc., as figures to represent something else? What is the hermeneutic that tells us that some elements in this story are figures of speech and literary devices and others are not? . . . If this account is just a literary device, what does that tell us about other stories Moses recounts? Are the ten plagues at the time of the Exodus another literary device, not to be taken literally? . . . Once you treat a piece whose literary genre seems to involve history as though it does not, that also raises serious questions about other texts that appear to be history" (*No One Like Him*, p. 613–615).

as follows: "In the case of the first suggestion, most scientists reject a literal twenty-four-hour period. In the case of the second, the pattern in the text of morning-evening seems inconsistent with the epoch theory."¹⁶³ In other words, Waltke rejects a literal 24-hour "day" because "most scientists" reject it! This, we suspect, is the main reason for those who adopt an inconsistent hermeneutic for Genesis 1–11 and especially for Genesis 1: a straightforward reading of Genesis 1 conflicts with the current scientific theory of origins. Indeed, when presenting the three basic views on Genesis 1, Bube notes that the emphasis of "the essentially literal view" is "on *harmonizing* the literal biblical text with scientific descriptions."¹⁶⁴ What is especially sad is that Waltke, a wonderful Hebrew scholar, rejects the normal meaning of the text in Genesis 1 not on exegetical grounds, but on scientific grounds! As I have written elsewhere, I believe that many evangelicals take an inconsistent hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1 because they are embarrassed by the six 24-hour day approach and wish to distance themselves from it.¹⁶⁵

Confirmation of my suspicions comes from an unlikely source. In his work entitled *Fundamentalism*, James Barr takes conservative evangelicals to task for insisting on a literal interpretation of Scripture but then abandoning it when it comes to the creation story in Genesis. Barr explains that "as the scientific approach came to have more and more assent from fundamentalists themselves, they shifted their interpretation of the Bible passage from literal to non-literal in order to save . . . the inerrancy of the Bible." In order to avoid the consequence of an errant Bible, the fundamentalist "has tried every possible direction of interpretation other than the literal." Yet, Barr rightly continues, "in fact the only natural exegesis is a literal one, in the sense that this is what the author meant."¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

Barr is right on target. As this chapter has shown, there is no justification for applying a different hermeneutic to Genesis 1–11 or to Genesis 1 than to the rest of Genesis. As Weeks has observed, "The basic question is whether our interpretation of the Bible is to be determined by the Bible itself or by some other authority. Once science has been set up as an autonomous authority it inevitably

163. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 61.

164. Bube, "Final Reflections," p. 251–252. This view is equivalent to my "Genesis 1–11 as partly figurative" category (view 3, above).

165. Beall, "Christians in the Public Square," p. 6. So also Feinberg: "What I find particularly troublesome in too many presentations on the doctrine of creation is that a primary goal (if not *the* primary goal) in interpreting the biblical text is to harmonize it with the prevailing scientific understanding of our world. For me, that is not the way to do evangelical systematic theology. . . . Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself on its own terms" (*No One Like Him*, p. 579).

166. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1977), p. 42.

tends to determine the way in which we interpret the Bible.”¹⁶⁷ Our conclusion is that the only proper hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1–11 (including Genesis 1) is to regard it as historical narrative that is meant to be taken literally. To use some other hermeneutical approach and apply it in a piecemeal fashion is to ignore the plain evidence given by our Lord, the New Testament writers, and the text of Genesis itself.

167. Weeks, “Hermeneutical Problem,” p. 16.