

## Chapter 6

# The Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3: What Means This Text?

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*Portions of this chapter were originally published in my chapter, Steven W. Boyd, “Statistical Determination of Genre in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for an Historical Reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in RATE II (Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth: Results of a Young-Earth Creationist Research Initiative, edited by Larry Vardiman, Andrew A. Snelling, and Eugene F. Chaffin [El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research and Chino Valley, AZ: Creation Research Society, 2005]), p. 631–734. This revised material is used with permission from the Institute for Creation Research. Below, I refer to my RATE II chapter as RATE chapter.*

### 1. Introduction

The starting point for understanding any text is to read it according to its genre.<sup>1</sup> The original readers (or listeners) an author had in mind when he wrote<sup>2</sup> would have recognized intuitively what type of text they were reading (or

1. *Genre* is the category of literature into which a particular text falls, which was clearly recognized by its original readers. For surveys of genre theory written by literary theorists, see *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (NPEPP)*, s.v. “genre”; *The Harper Handbook of Literature*, 2nd ed., s.v. “genre criticism”; *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 4th ed., s.v. “genre criticism”; and Paul A. Bové, “Discourse,” in F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 2nd ed.), p. 50–51, hereafter cited as *CTLS*. See further Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Narrative and Truth in the Bible,” *JETS* 48/4 (December 2005): p. 679–683 and the references he cites for the concept of genre applied to biblical texts. Also see *RATE* chapter, p. 631–639.
2. There are sound reasons for assuming the Mosaic authorship of this text and an Exodus date of 1446 B.C. Thus, the *latest date* for this text is the death of Moses in

hearing), because they would have been familiar with the literary conventions of their day.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the author — aware that his readers had this knowledge — worked it into his text.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, we modern readers must deduce what would have been obvious to the original readers: perforce we must marshal the data to determine the genre of a text.<sup>5</sup>

For Genesis 1:1–2:3, three characteristics stand out: it is a magisterial literary composition; it is a foundational theological treatise; and it is a literal<sup>6</sup> historical account.<sup>7</sup> I will touch on the first and second of these below, but

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approximately 1406 B.C. The original readers therefore would have been 15th century B.C. Israelites, who were about to enter and conquer the Promised Land.

3. This would have been part of the *conceptual representation* of the original readers, which is *the particular historical, cultural, linguistic, and ideological context an author shared with his original readers*. For discussion, see Nicolai Winther-Nielsen, “Fact, Fiction and Language Use: Can Modern Pragmatics Improve on Halpern’s Case for History in Judges?” in V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel,”* p. 44–81 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p. 53–69; and *RATE* chapter, p. 639–641.
4. Winther-Nielsen memorably says, “Words are anchored in worlds by the will of the writer” (Winther-Nielsen, “Fact, Fiction, and Language Use,” p. 67) and citing Thomlin, Forrest, Pu and Kim: “Instead the speaker [or author] becomes the architect of his text who guides his listener [or reader] in construing a *conceptual representation* of events and ideas. The speaker [author] as the architect and the hearer [reader] as constructor must both construe a coherent text through their integration of knowledge and management of information. The hearer [reader] makes pragmatic implicatures from the contextual situation and builds cognitive inferences from the text and the world knowledge he shares with the speaker [author]” (Ibid., p. 69) [emphasis mine]. For additional discussion see *RATE* chapter, p. 639–641.
5. See my elaboration of these ideas in *RATE* chapter, p. 640–641, and the references cited there.
6. “Literal” denotes both corresponding to reality and exact or, as Westermann says about this text, straightforward: “The average reader who opens his Bible to Genesis 1 and 2 receives the impression that he is reading a sober account of creation, which relates facts in much the same manner as does the story of the rise of the Israelite monarchy, that is, as straightforward history” (Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, trans. Norman E. Wagner [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1964], p. 5). For further discussion on “real” see *RATE* chapter, p. 690–691, in particular, Sailhamer’s quote explaining what a realistic portrayal of events means.
7. Meir Sternberg discusses three issues in his marvelous introduction to his magnum opus, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), which are germane to this study: (1) in the Bible there is a *non-contradictory balance* between its three characteristics: it is a literary masterpiece, it purports to be reporting historical events, and it is giving a clear ideological message; (2) it is easy to under-read the Bible but almost impossible to counter-read the Bible (in other words, many times readers do not pick up all the subtleties of the text, but the theological message is clear); (3) the biblical authors

will concentrate on the third, because it is at the center of a maelstrom of controversy.

The first characteristic is that it is a *magisterial literary composition*. Hardly any thinking person would deny that this chapter is one of the greatest in literature. Words can at best only inadequately describe the extraordinary first text of the Bible and quickly spend the repertoire of superlatives of the English language: profound, majestic, full of grandeur, foundational, fundamental, vast, sweeping, towering, incomparable, unplumbable, and inexhaustible. At the same time it has been described as austere,<sup>8</sup> tranquil,<sup>9</sup> patient,<sup>10</sup> reticent<sup>11</sup> and forgiving.<sup>12</sup>

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believed that they were writing real history. Sternberg's main thesis is that the genius of Old Testament narrative is that the historiographical, literary and theological (what he calls "ideological") aspects of the text are not only in balance but dependent on one another in a non-mutually exclusive nexus. On the three-fold character of biblical texts, Winther-Nielsen echoes Sternberg: "... historical narrative in the Hebrew Bible is an intricately woven material or 'texture' of historical, literary, and ideological threads" (Nielsen, p. 45). On the non-contradictory balance of the literary and historical, Osborne asserts, "While biblical history is presented in narrative form, this by no means obviates its status as history. There is no theoretical reason why literary and historical interests cannot coincide, and why the stories cannot be trustworthy representations of what really happened" (Osborne, p. 683). Merrill emphasizes the relationship of the historical and the theological and exposes the false dichotomy that a text cannot be both theological and historical, when he writes that the narrative's "... character as sacred history — a notion that must never be ignored — does not in any way diminish its value as a source of 'ordinary' historical information" (Eugene H. Merrill, "Archaeology and Biblical History: Its Uses and Abuses," in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Text*, ed. David M. Howard and Michael A. Grisanti, p. 74–96 [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003], p. 78).

8. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 8.
9. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998), p. 7.
10. "Patient" in the context of literary theory means a text's "ability to endure and survive rigorous criticism." I owe this description of Genesis 1:1–2:3 to John Hotchkiss (chairman of the English department at The Master's College), which he offered in a private communication about the qualities of a magisterial literary composition.
11. This term, also used by Hotchkiss, means that a text does not say everything; thus, it allows room for interpretation.
12. "Forgiving" means that a text can survive incorrect interpretation, such as has been applied to Genesis 1:1–2:3. It must be said that in light of this avalanche of adulation, which has been heaped upon this text, the words "incoherent" (Bruce K. Waltke, *Literary form of Genesis 1:1–2:4a*, p. 1–20 [unpublished paper presented at Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004], p. 11) or "messy," (Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005], p. 109), which also have been used to describe it, seem oddly out of step. See further, Beale's blistering review article of Enns's book, G.K. Beale, "Myth, History, and Inspiration: A Review Article" of *Inspiration and Incarnation* by Peter Enns, *JETS* 49/2 (2006): p. 287–312.

By any standard, Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a great literary classic. Sainte-Beuve defines a “classic” as literature that enriches the human mind, increases its treasure, advances it a step, is broad and great, refined, sensible, sane, beautiful in itself, which has spoken to all in a unique way, easily contemporary with all time, a text with uniformity, wisdom, moderation and reason, a text which is elegant, clear, noble and has an airily veiled strength.<sup>13</sup>

But perhaps it is the word “sublime,” which best apprehends these 34 verses. In his essay, “On the Sublime,” Longinus characterizes sublime literature as literature that transports the reader. It has a spark that leaps from the soul of the author to the soul of the reader. There is an echo of greatness of spirit (of the author). It contains great thoughts and stirs noble feelings.<sup>14</sup>

So, in every sense, it is a *magisterial* text in that one never tires of reading it, it invites a closer reading, it inspires awe and wonder and deep respect, and it lies at the foundation of worldviews. The literary aspects of the text will be explored in **Section 2.2** below.

The second characteristic of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is that it is a *foundational theological treatise*. It is the foundation of Christian theology: our God, our Savior, is both Creator and Redeemer. In addition, it presents a powerful polemic against the prevalent polytheism of the Ancient Near East. These ideas will be further developed in **Section 2.3** below.

The third characteristic goes to the heart of the matter: Genesis 1:1–2:3 is also a *literal historical account*. Whereas, few would disagree with the first two characteristics mentioned above, the stumbling block for many is to accept this text as historical narrative, which therefore speaks authoritatively about the origin of the universe, life, and man and about the age of the earth.

It should be obvious to modern readers (just as it was to its original readers) that this text should be approached mindful of this third characteristic. But unfortunately, to many it is not. Hence, the bulk of this chapter (**Section 2.1** below) will be devoted to proving — by means of statistical, literary, and theological arguments — what would have been axiomatic to its original readers: this text is a literal historical account. In addition, there is a need to demonstrate that reading this text as a literal historical account leads to the conclusion that the earth is thousands . . . not billions of years old.

### 1.1 The Implications of Genre

Two principal genres have been proposed for this text: extended poetic metaphor and narrative. If this text is poetic metaphor, what are the implications for determining the age of the earth? On the other hand, what are they if it is narrative?

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13. From Saint-Beuve’s essay, “What is a Classic?” (translated by Elizabeth Lee) in J. Smith and E. Parks, *The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 596–599.
  14. Longinus’s essay “On the Sublime,” is discussed in J. Smith and E. Parks, *The Great Critics*, p. 62–63.

Let us consider first the implications if the text is poetic metaphor. A metaphor has two parts: the *vehicle*, the actual words of the metaphor, and the *tenor*, the meaning of the words.<sup>15</sup> The *tenor* is derived by exploring the similarities and differences between the words of the metaphor. For example, consider Exodus 15:8a: “By the breath of your nostrils the waters heaped up.”<sup>16</sup> The reference to God’s nose is anthropomorphic language — God does *not* have a nose, for, as the Scriptures teach, He is a spiritual being, not a material being (John 4:24). The presence of such clearly figurative language signals metaphor. So, “nose” does not refer to a literal nose in this verse. Similarly, the phrase “the LORD is my rock” prompts the question: in what sense is the Lord like a rock?<sup>17</sup> And, conversely, in what sense is He not?

In metaphor, words do not have their normal range of meaning; instead, the meaning of individual words is controlled by the metaphor. The individual words of the *vehicle* do not have a one-to-one correspondence to people, things, states, and actions in the world. So if the text is poetic metaphor, the real life referents of the words in the text and the sequence of events portrayed by them is not the meaning of the text. That is to say the words do not tell us what really happened. But scientists can only work with observable, measurable reality. So if the text is poetic metaphor, it has nothing to say about scientific theories of origins and therefore nothing about the age of the earth.

On the other hand, if the text is narrative, it could have much to say about origins and the age of the earth. It depends on the *intent* of the author.<sup>18</sup> Did

15. *NPEPP*, s.v. “metaphor.”

16. Unless indicated otherwise, Scripture quotes are my translations.

17. Below, I will follow the usual convention, translating *YHWH* (the covenant name of God, which testifies to His self-existence) as “LORD,” but *Adonai* (meaning “master”) as “Lord.” Outside of translation, I will use “Lord.”

18. Wimsatt and Beardsley stated in their classic essay “The Intentional Fallacy”: “The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in ed. D. Newton-De Molina, *On Literary Intention: Critical Essays*, p. 1–13 [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976], p. 1). In their essay (originally published in *Sewanee Review* 54 [summer 1946]) they argued that we cannot know an author’s intent, because it was in the mind of the author, a place inaccessible to us. Wimsatt emended this quote to “The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging *either the meaning or* the success of a work of literary art” in his essay “Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited,” in Newton-De Molina, p. 136 [emphasis mine]. The original essay, Wimsatt’s second essay, *Hirsch’s* rejoinders and clarifications on both sides during the heat of the debate are in Newton-De Molina’s anthology. More recently, Patterson traces the issues in the debate among literary theorists, starting with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s seminal essay, continuing with Hirsch’s insistence on authorial intention and determinancy of meaning, interacting with the deconstructional hermeneutics of Derrida and Foucault and concluding with the admission of de Man that the deconstructive impulse is dependent on the preexistence of a certain kind of reading (Annabel Patterson, “Intention,” in *CTLS*, p. 140–146).

he want his narrative to be read as a historical account or not? If he did not, we are at an impasse again. But if he did, this text speaks directly to the age of the earth. Because if the text is a literal historical account, there is a one-to-one correspondence between words and reality and a careful philological study of them, comprising morphology, syntax, and lexicography, will allow the reconstruction of the events reported in the text, in particular their sequence and duration.

To answer the question about the author's intention, it is necessary to expand the question to biblical narratives in general. How did authors of biblical narratives understand the events about which they wrote? Did authors of biblical narratives believe that they were referring to real events? If they did not, we are at a dead end yet again. But if they did — it can and will be argued — so does this text at the beginning of Genesis.

Why is it necessary to prove what would have been intuitive to the original readers of this text, namely, that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a literal historical account? Because, if we get this wrong, we *will* misinterpret the text. But why is it so important that *this* text be correctly interpreted? Its location. And what is at stake? The truth.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the foundation of theology and is at the interface of Scripture and scientific interpretation of empirical evidence. The battle for truth has escalated to a full-scale war. The battlefields where opponents fight over this interface used to be limited to the arcane world of academic journals, books, and conferences, but it is confined to them no longer. The field of combat has expanded to the forum of popular culture, primetime TV, newspapers, popular magazines, and the courts.

Why has this happened? The first reason is that postmodern man has come to realize that one's view of origins — inextricably linked to the understanding of this text — defines one's worldview. Determining the genre of this text therefore is not merely an academic exercise, of interest only to specialists, but is the essential

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Graff contributes significantly to the discussion on intention by cogently arguing that we infer other peoples' intent in speech and writing from the *context* of the utterance: "At first thought, it may seem that because an intention is a private experience that happens in one's own head, nobody but the person harboring the intention could know what it is. But a little further reflection and observation should suggest that we come to conclusions all the time about the intentions of other people. . . . we infer the intentions of speakers and writers from situational clues of various kinds — the form and features of the utterance itself, the circumstances in which the utterance is made, the information we already may possess about the speaker or writer. Such inferences about the circumstances of an utterance that help us infer a picture of the probable kind of utterance it is are what we call the 'context' of the utterance" (Gerald Graff, "Determinacy/Indeterminacy," in *CTLS*, p. 166). Vanhoozer shows how the post-Hirschian hermeneutics of Fish and Derrida have taken away the author, the text, and the reader (Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and The Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998]). Finally, see the discussion of authorial intent and how to discern it in *RATE* chapter, p. 639–641.

first step for anyone wanting to correctly interpret this text.

Were it not for the unproven and unprovable theories of evolutionary biology, geology, and cosmology, and the faulty but rarely challenged assumptions of radioisotope dating, no one would be questioning what kind of text this is or the age of the earth.<sup>19</sup>

This is a needless tragedy among evangelicals, “needless” because evangelicals do not have to adjust Scripture to accommodate to science and a “tragedy” because by taking this stand, they unwittingly ally themselves with those who are trying to destroy the Bible.

The second reason the age of the earth has become such a cultural issue is that any statement to the effect that the earth is thousands — not billions — of years old, assaults “fortress uniformitarian-geology,” an edifice built since the 18th century, and thereby provokes its defenders to demand evidence supporting such a claim.

Creationists have been presenting this evidence for years. The man we honor through this publication has been a pioneer in this effort and has labored tirelessly to convince the Church of the importance of the early chapters of the Bible. The warning to the Church is clear. A largely immoral and godless society is stark testimony to the effect that embracing evolution has on a people.

Others have picked up the gauntlet — most recently, the RATE Group.<sup>20</sup>

And the third reason for this issue’s prominent currency is that the philosophical idea that the text is not admissible as evidence in the creation-evolution debate is being challenged as arbitrary and presumptuous. The biblical evidence has been barred or belittled based on two unproven suppositions connected with the relationship between text and empirical evidence. The first is that the textual evidence is inferior to physical evidence. And the second supposition is

19. The history of the Church’s thinking on this issue, discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this volume, shows this to be the case.

20. The RATE Group engaged in the following pioneering research on radioisotope dating. Austin and Snelling applied all four long-age radioisotope dating methods to the same rock unit. Snelling also exhaustively studied polonium radiohalos in biotite in granodiorite and fission tracks in volcanic tuff. Humphreys developed an alternative geochronometer from a previously ignored by-product of radioactive decay, helium, by measuring the helium “leak rate” as a function of temperature. Baumgardner applied carbon-14 dating techniques to diamonds. Chaffin developed new nuclear decay models to account for accelerated decay. The results of their experimental, field, and theoretical research are dumbfounding. They found that a previously unknown phenomenon, accelerated decay of radioactive isotopes, occurred in the past. This means that the age of a rock cannot be derived from radioisotope dating methods. Moreover, the presence of helium in zircon crystals, radiohalos from short-half-lived polonium in biotite, and carbon-14 in diamonds prove that the earth is thousands, not billions, of years old. For the technical discussions of the RATE scientists’ projects and findings see their chapters in *RATE II*. For a technical summary of the RATE Group’s findings, see Vardiman’s concluding chapter in *RATE II*, p. 735–772. For a less technical layman’s summary, see Donald DeYoung, *Thousands, not Billions: Challenging an Icon of Evolution, Questioning the Age of the Earth* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2005).

that an anti-supernatural bias allows for an objective evaluation of the evidence, which will lead us to the truth. Belief in the supernatural, it is claimed, distorts a person's ability to ascertain the truth.

Let us consider the validity of the first of these. The idea that Scripture is not a reliable source of scientific and historical information is an elaborate superstructure built on the most arbitrary, flimsiest and — on the face of it — most fatuous and contumacious of philosophical presuppositions: God's statements are not admissible in the question of origins!

This ephemeral foundation was laid even before the Enlightenment. In 1615, Galileo wrote to the Grand Duchess Christina that the intention of the Bible is "to teach how one goes to heaven not how heaven goes."<sup>21</sup> The implication of this audacious assertion is that the Bible, God's revealed message to man, whom He created in His image so that he could rule over His creation, offers no contribution to man's understanding of His creation! He argued in a different context that not only should the Bible not be used to judge scientific theories but also that those theories should be used to judge the Bible:

Nothing physical which sense experience sets before our eyes, or which necessary demonstrations prove to us, ought to be called in question . . . upon the testimony of biblical passages which may have some different meaning beneath their words. . . . On the contrary, having arrived at any certainties in physics, we ought to utilize these as the most appropriate aids in the true exposition of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

Francis Bacon expressed similar ideas:

For our Saviour sayeth, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God;" laying before us two books or volumes to study, if we will be secured from error; first the Scriptures, revealing the will of God and then the creatures expressing his power; whereof *the latter is the key unto the former* [emphasis mine].<sup>23</sup>

But the 18th-century philosopher Emanuel Kant (who offered "the most

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21. Cited by Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point: the Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology — Before Darwin* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004), p. 20.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 20–21. Contrast this statement of Galileo and those of Bacon and Kant below with Article XII of the Affirmations and Denials of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which clearly states: "We **affirm** that Scripture in its *entirety* is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We **deny** that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further **deny** that *scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood*" [italics mine] (from R.C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy* [Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1996], p. 36). Interestingly, many of the participants at the Chicago summit on inerrancy at which this article was crafted were old-earth creationists.
  23. Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point*, p. 21.



clear-cut descriptions of the entire century to be found anywhere”<sup>24</sup>) went much further than Galileo and Bacon by asserting that if the Bible was not brought to the bar of human reason and passed its judicial review, then it could not lay claim to sincere respect:

Our age is the age of criticism, to which everything must be subjected. The sacredness of religion, and the authority of legislation, are by many regarded as grounds of exemption from the examination of this tribunal. But if they are exempted, they become the subjects of just suspicion, and cannot lay claim to sincere respect, which reason accords only to that which has stood the test of a free and public examination.<sup>25</sup>

But these men were wrong! It is arrogant to suggest that the plain statements of the Word of God should stand at the bar of man’s transient scientific theories or that the incomprehensible profundities of God’s revelation should have to stand up to a way of human reasoning which *a priori* is forbidden to appeal to the supernatural and is therefore made incapable of plumbing Scripture’s depths! The Bible does not just teach us how to go to heaven but also how the heavens go!

There is real content in the biblical texts that deal with matters commonly considered to be the exclusive jurisdiction of scientists and historians. These biblical texts are not vacuous, ripe to be filled with whatever meaning their reader chooses. Their words are not bereft of meaning; they correspond to reality. In matters of history, they do more than say *that* something happened; they actually tell us *what* happened, in what order, and when. And when *properly* read they yield a treasure trove — largely untapped by scientists — of God’s perspective on His creation. In particular, for the geologists, physicists and geophysicist on the RATE team, the assumption that the biblical chronology is correct led them to postulate a ground-breaking theory in physics and geology, accelerated radioisotope decay. They then designed experiments to test for its existence, and consequently discovered that it did indeed happen in the past.

But I will go even further than to contradict the statements of Galileo, Bacon, and Kant. I maintain that we cannot rightly understand how the heavens go *unless* we see them through God’s perspective and, conversely, that *a priori* exclusion of this biblical evidence will actually mislead scientists into drawing the wrong conclusions. In other words, the physical evidence cannot be properly understood unless it is coupled with and interpreted through the divine perspective. This is the meaning of Proverbs 1:7a, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *knowledge*” (emphasis mine). But it is two additional texts which decisively quash the two suppositions concerning the relationship between text

24. J. Hayes and F. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 53.

25. From Emanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 15 (as cited by Hayes and Prussner, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 53).

and empirical evidence: Joshua 4:1–9 and 2 Kings 6:8–12.

### 1.2 Joshua 4:1–9. The Indispensable Role of Text as an Interpretive Grid

This text illustrates how the Lord views physical evidence that He caused to be put in place and thereby demonstrates that divine revelation is necessary to correctly interpret empirical evidence. Consequently, this invalidates the first supposition.

This account of the relocation of 24 stones is noteworthy. After the nation had crossed the dry riverbed of what had been the roiling Jordan at flood-stage and while the priests were still standing in the middle of it, carrying the ark of the covenant, Joshua ordered at God's behest that stones be placed as memorials to the miraculous parting of the river, which reprised the crossing of the Red Sea a generation before. Twelve men, one from each tribe, were to take stones from the midst of the Jordan riverbed and place them on its western bank. In addition, they were to carry stones from the western bank and pile them in the riverbed at the very spot where the priests were standing. And finally, in a frame-break (an author's direct address to his contemporary readers) Joshua told his readers that the stones were still there — a claim they easily could confirm or confute.

What was the purpose for these two piles of stones? Apart from the divine signifying of their meaning, the Israelites who were there and particularly their descendants who would follow — let alone our generation — could only have guessed. But we are not left bewildered, nor were they. The answer is given in the text:

... in order that this might be a sign in your midst. When your sons ask tomorrow, 'What are these stones to you?' Then you will say to them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off from before the ark of the covenant of the LORD when it passed through the Jordan. So the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones will become a memorial to the Israelites in perpetuity" (Josh. 4:6–7).

This brings out the point alluded to above: the divine interpretation is necessary to understand the meaning of the physical evidence.

The stones provided a durable memorial, which theoretically could have lasted forever, provided they were not moved. Yet, the Lord commanded that the significance of the memorials was to be conveyed to subsequent generations when (not if) they asked the question, "What do these stones mean?" In fact, they would be perpetual signs and memorials. Although the stones are long gone from both the bank and center of the river, the record of their placement is their lasting memorial.

We are now in the position to extract a principle applicable to our study. God has given us two witnesses to everything He has done: tangible physical evidence and His Word. As far as the former is concerned, men must convert evidence into words for it to be accessible and coherent, and then added to the body of

knowledge. But the latter is already in words, positioned to test the conclusions men draw from the physical evidence. The witnesses are innately unequal in value: the Bible trumps science, not the other way around, as is customarily thought.

### 1.3 Second Kings 6:8–12. The Inevitable Result of Anti-Supernatural Presuppositions

The second supposition is that an anti-supernatural bias allows for an objective evaluation of the evidence, which will lead us to the truth. But 2 Kings 6:8–12 shows us that just the opposite is the case: such a bias will mislead the seeker of truth!

According to the text, Ben Hadad, the king of Aram, held secret strategy meetings with his generals to set ambushes against the army of Israel. Likely, he was attempting to kill or capture Joram, the king of Israel at that time. But his every attempt at ambushing the army of Israel was thwarted by Elisha, who having been informed by the Lord about the location of the ambush, warned Joram. The latter sent scouts each time to confirm that an ambush had been set at the location told to him by the prophet. The king of Aram was completely frustrated and drew the conclusion that anyone would draw *if the possibility of supernatural intervention is not even entertained*: one of his men was a spy for the king of Israel! How else could the king of Israel know the location of his camp? Gathering his highest officials together and not knowing the identity of the putative traitor and assuming that he could not have acted alone or at least not without the knowledge of the others, he effectively and collectively accused them all of treason, hoping no doubt that one of his officials would break and divulge the identity of the turncoat in order to mitigate his own punishment. One of his officials did speak up, but not to unmask a betrayer. Rather, he wanted to quickly disabuse the king of his line of reasoning, to correct the king, a thing normally not done. But the situation was not normal. This was no time for the usual sycophantic prattle to the king. The king was looking for a scapegoat to assuage his fury. So the man blurted out to the king, to which he immediately appended, “My lord, the king,” to lessen the audacity of his outburst. He was saying in essence, “Your assessment of this situation is wrong, O my lord, the king. There is something going on here that you have not considered: a prophet of Israel can tell the king of Israel what you say in your most private moments!” Ben Hadad’s blind rage then turned toward Elisha, whom God protected in an extraordinary way, dispatching a heavenly army to surround the army of Aram.

Consequently, Ben Hadad’s initial interpretation of the evidence, as he saw it, was completely wrong, because *a priori* he had excluded any supernatural explanation for what he was observing. And so it is with all anti-supernatural bias: it leads to faulty, rather than accurate, interpretation of the evidence.

Having employed the Scriptures to dispense with these suppositions, we now turn to examine the genre of the creation account.

## 2. Characteristics of the Text

## 2.1 Literal Historical Account

The proof that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a literal historical account has three parts. Part one is a statistically rigorous, irrefutable proof that it is narrative. Part two is a literary argument, in which a ponderous weight of evidence is adduced, which shows that authors of biblical narratives believed that they were referring to real events. Part three is an argument from the doctrine of inspiration.

### 2.1.1 Statistical Determination of the Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3.

Elsewhere I have surveyed Hebraists' descriptions of biblical Hebrew poetry and narrative and concluded that their qualitative approach has failed to precisely distinguish these two genres.<sup>26</sup> I developed a quantitative alternative therefore to distinguish the genres, a statistical method applied to Hebrew finite verbs,<sup>27</sup> which can determine the genre of Hebrew texts to a high degree of accuracy. This statistical study consisted of seven steps.<sup>28</sup> [Editor's note: This section outlines the procedure of the statistical study detailed in *RATE* chapter and concludes with its findings (the last two paragraphs of this section 2.1.1)].

The first step was to use the descriptions of narrative and poetry, which are found in the literature, to identify all narrative and poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible. This population of 522 texts consists of 295 narrative texts and 227 poetic texts.

The second step was to generate a stratified, random joint-sample of 48

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26. *RATE* chapter, p. 642–648.

27. The biblical Hebrew verb forms marked for person (1st person [I, we], 2nd person [you] and 3rd person [he, she, it, they]) as well as gender and number are *qatal* (perfect), *w<sup>q</sup>qatal* (waw-perfect), *yiqtol* (imperfect) and *wayyiqtol* (preterite). The translation possibilities for the verbal root שָׁמַע *šm<sup>c</sup>* (“hear”) in past tense narrative are as follows: for *qatal*, “he heard” or “he had heard” (“tense” determined by context; this form is usually not at the beginning of a clause or sentence); for *w<sup>q</sup>qatal*, “he would hear” (must be at the beginning of a clause or sentence); for *yiqtol* (usually not at the beginning of a clause or sentence), “he would hear”; and for *wayyiqtol*, “he heard” (must be at the beginning of the clause or sentence). For a discussion of the suitability of finite verbs for this analysis see *RATE* chapter, p. 650–651; 720–721 n. 39.

28. What follows in this section is a simplified explanation of my statistical study. The details along with very helpful graphs and tables can be found in *RATE* chapter, p. 650–676, and 693–704, appendices A, B, and C. All of the following are from *RATE* chapter: the details of the mathematical analysis of the classification accuracy, p. 669–674; the most dramatic visualization of the contrast between narrative and poetry, p. 658–659 figure 4 and 660–661 figure 5, respectively; the distribution of the relative frequency of *wayyiqtol*s varying with genre (p. 662 figure 8); the logistic regression curve used to predict the genre of texts from the joint-sample of known genres (p. 667 figure 9); the prediction accuracy (p. 668 table 1); and, finally, the band of possible logistic regression curves for the entire population of texts at a 99.5% confidence level and where Genesis 1:1–2:3 falls on this curve (p. 674, figure 10). I will cite further specific sections of *RATE* chapter in the abbreviated discussion below.

narrative texts and 49 poetic texts.<sup>29</sup>

The third step was to calculate the different ratios among the finite verbs for each text and test to see if the distribution of these ratios were significantly different enough to use them to predict whether a given text within the sample was narrative or poetry.

The fourth step was to develop a logistic regression (LR)<sup>30</sup> classification model for different ratios in order to test the null hypothesis against the alternative hypothesis.<sup>31</sup> My null hypothesis was that there is no logistic regression model derived from these ratios that classifies texts any better than random classification. Conversely, my alternative hypothesis was that there is a logistic regression model derived from these ratios that classifies texts better than random classification. Subsequent analysis showed that the ratio of *wayyiqtol*s to the total number of finite verbs yielded the best classification model.<sup>32</sup> So the null hypothesis was refined, accordingly.

The fifth step was to classify all the texts in the joint sample using the model logistic curve, which was generated from the ratios of *wayyiqtol*s to finite verbs for these texts.<sup>33</sup>

The sixth step was to compare the classifications by the model to the actual classifications. The results were astonishing. The model classified 95 of the 97 texts correctly (either as narrative or poetry), which is an extraordinary level of accuracy, and allowed us to reject the null hypothesis at a highly significant statistical level. It was also determined that the model reduced classification errors at an extremely high level. All in all, the model is a superb classifier of texts within the sample.<sup>34</sup> But the sample, by design, did not include Genesis

29. This is a random sample of narrative and poetic texts, generated by a statistical program, which ensured that the texts to be analyzed represented all portions of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Torah, the Prophets (both former and latter) and the Writings. For further explanation and the raw data, see *RATE* chapter, p. 657 and 698–702, appendix B.

30. A type of statistical analysis suited for two-value data. More precisely, a non-linear regression model, based on the log of the odds ( $P/(1-P)$ ), where P is the probability of the occurrence of an event. LR is ideal for categorical data — when there are only limited values for the dependent variable (in our case, two: narrative vs. poetry). For further details, see *RATE* chapter, p. 663–665 and references and discussions in *RATE* chapter, p. 721–722, endnotes 43–51; and *The Oxford Dictionary of Statistical Terms (ODST)*, s.v. “logistic regression.”

31. A *null hypothesis* is a testable hypothesis formulated in a statistical analysis, which “determines the probability of the type I error” (*ODST*, s.v. “null hypothesis”). A *type I error* is the rejection of a hypothesis when in fact it is true (*ODST*, s.v. “type I error”). Rejection of the null hypothesis means acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. For the full statements of the null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis that I employed, see *RATE* chapter, p. 657.

32. For a description of the models see *RATE* chapter, p. 665–666.

33. The logistic curve derived from the raw data was used to classify the texts of the joint-sample (see *RATE* chapter, p. 667, figure 9).

34. See further *RATE* chapter, p. 667–669. This conclusion arises from a statistical analysis

1:1–2:3.

A seventh step was necessary therefore to extend the results from the level of the sample to the level of the population, which included Genesis 1:1–2:3. My findings in this step were that the probability that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is narrative is between .999942 and .999987 at a 99.5 percent confidence level. I conclude therefore that *it is statistically indefensible to argue that this text is poetry*.<sup>35</sup>

Having proven that the Genesis text is certainly narrative, we now turn to examine the implications of that finding. And in order to understand the intention of the author of this text with regards to his narrative, we will look at the perspective biblical authors at large had toward the events to which they refer in their narratives.

### 2.1.2 Literary Argument

In *RATE* chapter I adduce 15 proofs that authors of biblical narratives considered that their narratives referred to real events.<sup>36</sup> But below I will sketch only ten: (1) customs are elucidated, (2) ancient names and current sayings are traced back to their origins, (3) monuments and pronouncements are assigned a concrete reason as well as a slot in history, (4) historical footnotes are sprinkled throughout the text, (5) written records used as sources are cited, (6) precise chronological reference points are supplied, (7) genealogies are given, (8) prophetic utterances are recalled and related to events in the narrative, (9) “time words” invite ancient readers to validate historical claims made in the text, and (10) historical “trajectories” link different portions of the text and widely separate historical periods.<sup>37</sup>

**(1) Customs are elucidated.**<sup>38</sup> Authors would have had little reason to

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of the classification accuracy (*RATE* chapter, p. 669–674).

35. See the conclusions of the statistical study in *RATE* chapter, p. 675–676.

36. The complete list in *RATE* chapter is: (1) God’s people are defined in terms of their past; (2) God’s people are commanded to keep the memory of their past alive; (3) God’s people engage in retrospection on their past; (4) the remembrance of the past devolves on the present and determines the future; (5) customs are elucidated; (6) ancient names and current sayings are traced back to their origins; (7) monuments and pronouncements are assigned a concrete reason as well as a slot in history; (8) historical footnotes are sprinkled throughout the text; (9) written records used as sources are cited; (10) precise chronological reference points are supplied; (11) genealogies are given; (12) observations of cultic days and seasons are called acts of commemoration; (13) prophetic utterances are recalled and related to events in the narrative; (14) “time words” challenge ancient readers to validate historical claims made in the text; and (15) historical “trajectories” link different portions of the text and widely separate historical periods. The details are found in *RATE* chapter, p. 676–690 and 705–712 (Appendix D, Tables D1–D8).

37. The discussions below are based on the originals in *RATE* chapter, the locations of which will be given in the notes.

38. Details and more examples of narrative texts exhibiting this characteristic are in *RATE* chapter, p. 677–678.

elucidate customs if they were not convinced of their historicity. As a first example, consider the explanation given for a dietary exclusion: it was originated to memorialize when God dislocated Jacob's hip with a touch while they wrestled (Gen. 32:26, 32–33).

A second elucidated custom involved the removal of a sandal, which signified that a kinsman redeemer had refused to engage in levirate marriage, that is, a brother's duty to raise up children for his heirless, deceased brother, by marrying his widow (Deut. 25:5–10). In Ruth 4:7, the author explains this custom, which the author thought might not have been familiar to the reader. The custom is introduced with the phrase, "This was (the way) formerly in Israel concerning redemption and exchange, to confirm any word: a man would draw off his sandal." The word "formerly" suggests that the custom was not practiced in the author's day — a fact that the author deemed important for his readers to know (Ruth 4:8).<sup>39</sup>

The third custom is discussed in 1 Samuel 30. Upon returning to Ziklag, David discovered that a band of Amalekites had raided and kidnapped his family. He and his six hundred men immediately set off after the criminals. Arriving at the Wadi Besor, two hundred of his men were too exhausted to continue on. Four hundred continued with David. After slaughtering all but four hundred of the Amalekites (who had escaped on camels) and rescuing his family, David returned to the two hundred who had remained behind and shared the booty with them against the protests of some of the four hundred. The author of the text offered this account in part to explain that the custom, that those who stayed with the supplies would receive the same portion of the booty as those who fought in the battle, originated in an order from David, issued at that time (1 Sam. 30:24–25).

**(2) Ancient names and current sayings are traced back to their origins.**

A biblical author frequently explained how a place received its name by appealing to the historical context in which the naming occurred. Often this name persisted in the author's day. It is clear that the author expected his readers would be interested in the explanation of the origin of names current in their day. Also, historical tracings of the origins of sayings are attested in many passages.<sup>40</sup>

**(3) Monuments and pronouncements are assigned a concrete reason as well as a slot in history.**<sup>41</sup> Biblical authors frequently explained the purposes for the placement of monuments, which often involved the naming of these monuments. Four of these stand out. First, there is the dual naming of Gilead. Laban gave it an Aramaic name; Jacob, its Hebrew name (Gen. 31:44–54). Second,

39. See proof (9) below for further discussion on authorial claims of discontinuity, such as this.

40. A few passages proving this point are Genesis 4:17; Numbers 11:4–34; Deuteronomy 3:14; Joshua 7:26; Judges 1:26; 2 Samuel 6:8; 1 Kings 9:13; 2 Kings 14:7; and 1 Chronicles 13:11. For many more examples and a thorough discussion of this point see *RATE* chapter, p. 682 and 705–706 (Table D2).

41. An expansion on the following discussion and more examples of narrative texts exhibiting this characteristic are in *RATE* chapter, p. 682–684.

monuments were created to mark the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 4:1–9). Third, a cairn was erected over the corpses of Achan and his family (Josh. 7:25–26). And fourth, in Joshua 14:6–14 we are given the explanation of how Caleb obtained his inheritance.

Biblical authors also explained why things were the way they were in their day. Three examples of this will suffice. The first concerns Israel; the other two do not, and, in fact, take place outside of the land of Israel. All three accounts move us to ask the question how did the author know this? The first, although it involves Israel, is about a non-Israelite, Rahab. The author anticipated and supplied the answer to the question: how did a non-Israelite former prostitute end up living in their midst (Josh. 6:25)?

The second story explains why the lands and crops of the Egyptian people and the people themselves belonged to Pharaoh in the author's day, but the priests were not so subjected (Gen. 47:13–22).

The third story recounts how the Lord degraded, defeated, and destroyed Dagon after the Philistines defeated Israel at the Battle of Aphek. They captured the ark of the covenant, brought it to Ashdod, and inferring that Israel's humiliation implied that Dagon had defeated the Lord, positioned the ark next to the statue of Dagon to proclaim his victory. But it was the Lord who was victorious and the fallen trunk of the idol, headless and handless on his dais, precluded his priests from treading on his dais even in the author's day.<sup>42</sup>

**(4) Historical footnotes are sprinkled throughout the text.** In most cases, details of the narrative, which at first appear to be tangential to the narrative turn out not to be so.<sup>43</sup> Our concern here is those instances in which we cannot ascertain how a detail impinges on the development of the narrative. This historical information — supplied apparently for the benefit of the interested reader — can be divided into three categories: details concerning persons, details about places, and miscellaneous details. One example from the first category is the information recorded in Deuteronomy 2:10–11: the name which the Moabites called the former inhabitants of their land. An example from the second category is that Hebron was *formerly* called *Qiryat Arba* (Josh. 14:15; Judg. 1:10). And an example from the third category is that we are informed of the lyrics of Heshbon's previous victory chant over the Moabites (Num. 21:26–30).<sup>44</sup>

**(5) Written records used as sources are cited.** Not surprisingly, there are references made to the Book of the Law of Moses (Josh. 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6; Neh. 8:1), the Book of Moses (2 Chron. 35:12; Ezra 6:18), the Book of the Law

42. See proof (9) below for a discussion on testable authorial claims of continuity, such as this.

43. Narrative studies argue — and for the most part, correctly — that inclusion of details in the text is driven by the plot of the narrative (*RATE* chapter, p. 724 endnotes 59 and 60).

44. For many more examples and a thorough discussion of this point, see *RATE* chapter, p. 684 and 706 (Table D3).



of God (Josh. 24:26), the Book of the Law (Josh. 8:34), the Book of the Law of the Lord (2 Chron. 17:9) and the Book of the Covenant (2 Kings 23:21).<sup>45</sup>

**(6) Precise chronological reference points are supplied.** The Bible begins with an account locked into time. A prominent feature of the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the steady sequence of six days (explicitly marked off by the phrase “evening was; morning was: Xth day” after God’s creative acts on each of the first six days). Consider four of the many examples like this. First, the five fixed dates pertaining to the Flood are referenced to the years of Noah’s life (Gen. 7:6, 11; 8:4–5, 13–14). A second example (and there are many of this type) is Sarah’s age given at her death (Gen. 23:1–2). A third, well-known example is the year of the Exodus given with reference to the year Solomon began to build the Temple (1 Kings 6:1). A fourth is that “in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib the king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them” (Isa. 36:1).<sup>46</sup>

**(7) Genealogies are given.** This preoccupation with the progenitors of the past is not gratuitous; rather, it serves at least three historiographic purposes. Alone or often intertwined with narrative,<sup>47</sup> these genealogies serve to *structure* history, *survey* history, and *support* history. Taking these in turn and offering one example of each, genealogies (such as Gen. 4) furnish a type of historical record for a given a historical period. Sometimes no events are recorded. In these cases they therefore provide the actual *structure* of history. Moreover, when long periods of time are to be covered (such as in 1 Chron. 1–9), genealogies can *survey* history. And finally, they can *support* history, such as in linking David to Judah through Perez; thus, legitimizing his reign (Gen. 49:10; Ruth 4:18).<sup>48</sup>

**(8) Past prophetic utterances are recalled.**<sup>49</sup> With this rubric and the two that follow, the bi-directionality of the biblical time-line is established and aligned with a largely continuous narrative from Genesis 1:1 through Nehemiah 13:31. We begin by looking at the time-line in two directions. The first direction is an orientation toward the prophet’s future. When reporting declarations about the future, the biblical authors often explicitly linked prophetic statements to particular contexts. But by the nature of things, verification of a prophet’s authenticity by this measure was only possible after the fact. Mentions of such verifications are rare in the text and are significant therefore when they occur. When an author from a later time and further along in the development of the canon of Scripture mentioned a fulfillment of a prophetic pronouncement, he makes us focus on the second direction, an orientation toward the past (both his

45. For a thorough discussion of this point see *RATE* chapter, p. 684 and 707 (Table D4).

46. For many more examples and a thorough discussion of this point see *RATE* chapter, p.684–685 and 708–709 (Table D5).

47. I.e., with narrative imbedded in genealogies or genealogies imbedded in narrative.

48. For more examples and discussion see *RATE* chapter, p. 685 and 710 (Table D6).

49. The following discussion is an expansion of *RATE* chapter, p. 685–686.

and that of his characters), in particular the context, which provoked the initial utterance. We will look at four: three cursorily; one in detail.

The first three are these. Joshua had cursed anyone who would rebuild Jericho (Josh. 6:26) and the fulfillment was announced after the death of the sons of Hiel, who rebuilt Jericho (1 Kings 16:34). The second is a prophet's decree that Eli's line would be removed from the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:31) with the fulfillment announced after the banishment of Abiathar (1 Kings 2:27). Third, Daniel prayed that the Lord would repatriate the nation (Dan. 9:2–19), because he recalled that Jeremiah had prophesied that the duration of the captivity would be 70 years (Jer. 25:11–12).

The fourth example is the link between the prophecy concerning Josiah and its fulfillment. This was fully developed by the author in 1 Kings. Not only did the narrator point out the connection between prophecy and fulfillment, as in the first two examples above, but also one of the characters in the story makes the observation. So an unnamed man of God cursed the altar at Bethel, which Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, was consecrating. He said: "O Altar, O Altar, thus the Lord says, 'Indeed a son will be born to the House of David — Josiah, his name — and he will offer upon you the priests of the high places, who burn sacrifices on you, and human bones will be burned on you'" (1 Kings 13:2). Three hundred years later Josiah was not only zealously removing the pagan altars and high places from his kingdom, but also desecrating them (2 Kings 23). At Bethel, he ordered that bones from the tombs be burned on the altar. The author of 2 Kings comments: "So he defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God, who had proclaimed these words, had proclaimed" (2 Kings 23:16). Subsequently, when Josiah inquired about the identity of a monument, the inhabitants of that city answered, "It is the tomb of the man of God, who came from Judah. He proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar at Bethel (verse 17)." Josiah, out of respect, ordered that the bones of the man of God not be disturbed.

**(9) The use of "time words" to explicitly indicate testable temporal continuity or discontinuity.** Biblical authors could have told their stories without making any connections to their present. And thus their texts would only have been unverifiable tales — riveting, to be sure — but of little historical interest.<sup>50</sup> But they did just the opposite, anchoring their stories to testable and therefore falsifiable claims. Indeed, their express statements linking the past to their present or severing the present from the past was a risky business if they did not

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50. This rubric militates against those biblical historians who maintain, as Ian Provan states, that biblical narratives depict a "'fictive world,' entire in itself and referring only to itself. Its integrity must not be compromised by seeking to relate it to anything outside itself." On the contrary, it is obvious that the author went out of his way to relate his history to his readers' time by breaking away from his narrative and addressing his readers directly (called "breaking frame"). Provan's quote is cited by Michael Grisanti, *BibSac* 161 (April–June 2004): p. 167.

know their facts! In essence, they were challenging their contemporary readers to disprove their claims.<sup>51</sup>

Two classes of temporal markers are attested which link at least two separate times, the author's present and his past. The first group of time words indicates temporal continuity with the past. The most common of these is *עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה*, "until this day." A special case of this class are those accounts which also include the phrase *לְמִיּוֹם*, "since the day," or its equivalent, because it suggests an uninterrupted continuity. The more common "until this day," on the other hand, allows for a break in continuity as long as it was reestablished by the author's time. As a result, the special case would be "easier" for a reader, who was a contemporary of the author, to falsify. The second group of time words marks discontinuity with the past. The most important word in this class is *לְפָנַיִם*, "formerly." We will look at these in turn below.

Our first examples from the continuity class are remarkable statements in which Moses claimed knowledge of Egyptian history. Commenting on the unprecedented phenomenon of the fiery hail to come, Moses said, "There has not been like it in Egypt since it was founded until now" (Exod. 9:18). And in describing the severity of the locust plague to come, Moses said, ". . . which neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen since they were upon the land (of Egypt) until this day" (10:6).

The following are three more from the Book of Joshua, in which he noted situations that obtained during his time, the truth of which could have been easily tested: Ai was still in ruins after Joshua destroyed it (Josh. 8:28); the corpse of its king was still buried under the same pile of rocks, which Joshua had heaped on him (8:29); and the Hivites who lived in Gibeon, who through a clever (and desperate) ruse, had duped Joshua into making a covenant with them, were still a servant class of "hewers of wood" and "drawers of water" in Israel (9:27).

The author(s) of the Books of Samuel also made additional historically verifiable statements about his (their) day: the deposition of the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 6:18) and Ziklag still belonged to the kings of Judah (27:6).

Turning to the Book of Kings we discover more of the same type of claims — some of them quite interesting. The ark was placed in the temple, with its long axis in line with that of the temple's long axis (1 Kings 8:8). Solomon had incorporated all foreign enclaves into a greater Israel (9:20–21). Israel had seceded from Judah, forming the northern kingdom of Israel (12:19). Water, which had been miraculously purified by Elisha, was still potable (2 Kings 2:22). Moab had

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51. Sternberg comments: "Whatever the truth value of the references and explanations made, their very making strengthens the truth claim by anchoring the discourse in public and accessible features of reality. 'You see how the traces of time within our observation make perfect sense within our account of time,' the narrator seems to be saying to his audience. . . . the present witnesses lend an air of truth to the evocation of the past from which they issued" (Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 31–32).

broken away from Judah (8:22). Rezin, the king of Aram had forcibly removed the Judahites from Eilat and subsequently, the city had been occupied by the Edomites (16:6).<sup>52</sup>

Now we turn to the discontinuity class. By using the term “formerly,” a biblical author was stating that the present names, customs, sayings, and situations, which were familiar to his readers, were different in the past. Although not verifiable, the very mention of these differences enforces the historical nature of the account. As I mentioned above, why would the author go to the trouble of concocting an elaborate past, which would only tangentially engage his readers. If there were only a few of these it would be one thing. But in fact, there are many.<sup>53</sup>

**(10) Historical trajectories.** This is perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the Old Testament’s historiographic presentation. I call this category *historical trajectories*, because certain people, statements, and ideas were projected with such great force in the first five books of the Bible that their trace is found through large expanses of text and time. Outside of the obvious promises made to the patriarchs are the not so obvious — but very important — trajectory of Joseph’s bones, the enigma of Balaam, the Lord’s dogged pursuit of the Amalekites,<sup>54</sup> and the checkered history of Moab and Ammon. We will only look at the first and last of these, beginning at the deathbed of Joseph.

Recognizing that he was to die soon, Joseph asserted that God would intervene on their behalf and bring them up from Egypt and into the land, which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Gen. 50:24). Moreover, repeating his assertion and even strengthening it (“God will surely intervene”) in an act of faith reminiscent of his father’s, Joseph charged his family to not leave his bones in Egypt (Gen. 50:25). But Genesis ends with Joseph embalmed in a sarcophagus in Egypt.

We do not hear again the slightest rattle of these bones until suddenly they are clanking quite loudly at the Exodus: “Moses took the bones of Joseph with

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52. The only difference of the Hebrew names for the Arameans and the Edomites is 7 (*daleth*) versus 7 (*resh*). In the history of the Hebrew language — and evidenced in the preceding sentence in this note — the shape of *daleth* has closely resembled (and in some cases been identical to) the shape of *resh* in all periods (cf. Ada Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script: History, Paleography, Script Styles, Calligraphy and Design* [London: The British Library and New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2002], p. 2, figure 1). Paleographical considerations cannot resolve the textual problem. Nevertheless, “Edomites” — rather than “Arameans” — is the preferred reading based upon the context, since the author described Tiglath Pileser III’s destruction of Aram in the next paragraph in the text.

53. Examples of the second class are Deuteronomy 2:10, 12, 20; Joshua 11:10, 14:15, 15:15; Judges 1:10–11, 23, 3:2; Ruth 4:7; 1 Samuel 9:9; 1 Chronicles 4:40, 9:20; 2 Chronicles 9:11; and Nehemiah 13:5. For more examples of the first class and a thorough discussion of this point see *RATE* chapter, p. 686 and 712 (Table D8).

54. An expansion on the following discussion and a tracing of Balaam and the Amalekites through the Scripture are in *RATE* chapter, p. 686–690.

him, because he had clearly made the children of Israel take an oath, ‘God will surely intervene for you, then you will bring out my bones from this place with you’” (Exod. 13:19).

Again there was silence, and the skeleton quietly hung in the closet until the children of Israel buried it back in the land: “And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up from the land of Egypt, they buried in the portion of the field, which Jacob had purchased from Hamor, the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver” (Josh. 24:32). The burial of Joseph’s bones, a historical closure, completed an *inclusio*<sup>55</sup> in the narrative. That is, Joseph was the first son of Jacob to leave the land and with his burial he was the final son to return.

For a second example, we will trace back to the patriarchal period the checkered history of Moab and Ammon. What is most significant about this trajectory is the way in which later texts refer to incidents reported in earlier texts, forming the links of a chain that goes back to the origin of these peoples. The author of Chronicles has the latest mention of Moab and the sons of Ammon. He looks back to the time in which Jehoshaphat — pleading for the Lord to deliver Judah from an invading horde which included Moabites and Ammonites, made the following biting observation: “So now as far as the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir are concerned, among whom you would not allow Israel to enter, when they came from Egypt, with the result that they turned aside from them and did not destroy them, they would recompense us by coming and driving us from your possession, which you caused us to possess” (2 Chron. 20:10–12). The original records of these divine prohibitions are found in Deuteronomy 2:9 and 19. Concerning Moab, the Lord said, “Do not harm Moab and do not stir up strife for battle against them, because I have not given you any of his land as a possession; because to the sons of Lot I have given Ar as a possession (2:9).” The Lord’s prohibition regarding Ammon is almost identical (2:19). These texts look back to the time just before the children of Israel arrived at the plains of Moab. They had just defeated the Canaanites and Amalekites at Hormah. Fresh from this victory and perhaps wanting more, Israel was eager to fight the Moabites and Ammonites, but the Lord forbade it. In explaining to them His reasons for this prohibition, He affirmed that they were sons of Lot. This of course takes us back to the story about Lot and his daughters told in Genesis 19. His daughters made Lot drunk on two successive nights. In his inebriated state he impregnated each of his daughters. Their sons by their father were the progenitors of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

The chain is complete. It extends back from the days of the author of Chronicles to the time of Jehoshaphat; from his time to the days before the Conquest; from the days before the Conquest to the patriarchal period.

The statistical study described above (section 2.1.1) established by mathematical rigor that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is narrative, not poetry. The just-concluded

55. *Inclusio* is a literary device whereby a section of Scripture (whether a few verses or many chapters) is framed by placing similar material at the beginning and end of a section.

literary arguments adduce a weight of evidence that makes it clear that the authors of these narratives believed that they were referring to real events. That is, narratives are historical narratives. As I have stated elsewhere, “Since Genesis 1:1–2:3 has the same genre as historical narrative texts and is linked lexically and thematically to these texts it *should* be read as these texts are read: as a realistic portrayal of the events.”<sup>56</sup>

### 2.1.3 Doctrinal Argument

As modern readers, we are faced with a choice: to believe or not to believe that it happened the way the author described. *Should* we as readers believe what the authors wrote? If we are faithful to their presentation, we should. These historians do not allow us to be dispassionate observers of the past as we read their texts. They *compel us* to believe the past they portray. But *will* we believe what Genesis 1:1–2:3 then is clearly saying?

Sternberg forcefully argues:

Were the narrative written or read as fiction, then God would turn from the lord of history into a creature of the imagination, with the most disastrous results. The shape of time, the rationale of monotheism, the foundations of conduct, the national sense of identity, the very right to the land of Israel, and the hope of deliverance to come: all hang in the generic balance. Hence, the Bible’s determination to sanctify and compel literal belief in the past. It claims not just the status of history but . . . of *the* history, the one and only truth that, like God himself, brooks no rival . . . *if as seekers for the truth, professional or amateur, we can take or leave the truth claim of inspiration, then as readers we must simply take it* — just like any other biblical premise or convention, from the existence of God to the sense borne by specific words — ***or else invent our own text.***<sup>57</sup>

Will we believe this text? Sternberg’s words should challenge us as Christians to see that this text is meant to be read as a historical narrative. That was the intent of its human author, who carried out the intent of its divine Author. To read it any other way is to read it against His intent. So, to return to the question, will we believe this text? If we are faithful followers of Christ, we must.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.2 Magisterial Literary Composition

How does the text’s magisterial literary composition interact with its proven historical literalness to inform our understanding of the text? It does so in at least two ways. First, our understanding must be informed by the realization that the author also wrote from a divine perspective, writing about

56. *RATE* chapter, p. 690–691. An expanded discussion is in *RATE* chapter, p. 690–692.

57. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 32–34. Italics are Sternberg’s emphasis. The bold is my emphasis.

58. This is an abridgment of the conclusion of the *RATE* chapter, p. 690–692.

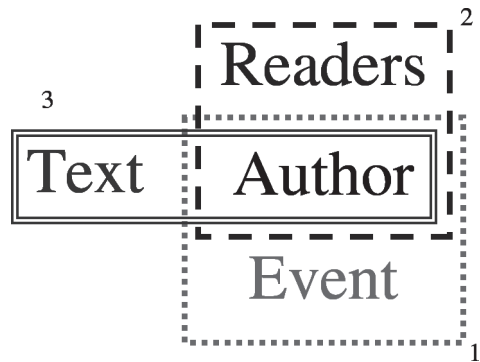
events absent of man or inaccessible to man, such as men's thoughts, events happening at a distance or hidden from men, and, of course, all the creation events of Genesis 1.

Secondly, our understanding must be tempered by the fact that we must read this text as its first readers would have read it.<sup>59</sup> The human author certainly wrote his text with his first readers in mind, but the timelessness of the text is testimony that the divine Author had a wider readership in mind. Nevertheless, our starting point must be the understanding of the first readers.

The procedure an author followed to write his text can be pictured as in figure 1. The author looked first at an event (1) and then at his original readers (2) in order to produce his text (3).<sup>60</sup>

Obviously, texts mean what words mean, but words mean what the original readers would have thought them to mean.<sup>61</sup> This is particularly the case with historical narratives.<sup>62</sup> Our consideration of these readers constrains us to approach the text cognizant of two caveats. The first is that the original readers were not scientists. The author therefore did not write a science textbook. And we should not approach it as a science textbook. What this means is that we should not expect it to have the wording of a so-called "precise" scientific description.

The second caveat is that it was originally written to a 15th-century B.C. audience, whose perception of the world was limited to their five senses. They could not see microscopic organisms and structures with their naked eyes any more than we can. Only observations accessible to the unaided senses are discussed. The author employed therefore a phenomenological perspective in his writing,



**Figure 1.**

59. See **Section 1** above and notes 3, 4, and 5.

60. For more discussion on the hermeneutical significance of the relationship of author to readers, see *RATE* chapter, p. 639–641 figure 1.

61. Although it is possible that we would understand the text better than the original readers, it is improbable, because unless later Old Testament texts or New Testament texts elucidate the text in question — all other things being equal — they knew the language and culture of their day better than we. And in light of this they should be our guide.

62. In historical narrative there is much less linguistic latitude than in poetic prophetic passages, which are frequently metaphorical, and thus more difficult to understand. I believe that in 1 Peter 1:10–12, Peter is referring to texts of the latter type.

consistent with the narrow linguistic constraints of historical narrative.<sup>63</sup> He described the world as it appears to the naked eye, heard by the ear, touched by the hand, smelled by the nose, and even tasted. Moreover, ideas utterly unknown to them because they are based in modern thought would have been utterly foreign to the readers' approach to the text.

Let us consider two examples in light of these caveats: the terminology used for sunset and the descriptions of the rock hyrax.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.2.1 Terminology for Sunset

The Hebrew expression for sunset, **מְבוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** (*m<sup>o</sup> bô' haššemeš*) literally means "the entering place of the sun" (it is also one of the ways to indicate the direction west). Are we to infer from this that the ancient Hebrews erroneously understood that the sun orbited the earth? No! No more than our English expression *sunset* implies that the sun moves around the earth. Both of these are phenomenological language.

### 2.2.2 Descriptions of the Rock Hyrax

For a second example, we turn from astrophysics to zoology. According to Leviticus 11:5–6 and Deuteronomy 14:7, hyraxes were excluded from the ancient Israelite diet because they chew the cud<sup>65</sup> but do not have split hooves. But as a matter of fact, they are not true ruminants.<sup>66</sup> They do not regularly bring up partially digested food and re-chew it. Nevertheless, zoologists have observed them chewing some distance away from their browsing area.<sup>67</sup> But these scientists are equivocal on the reason for this chewing. Rahm says the animals ruminate.<sup>68</sup> What he means by this is unclear, since they do not have multiple stomachs.

63. Thus, for example, in Genesis 1:16–17 the Hebrew verbs **שָׁעַל** ("make, do, perform") and **וָתַן** ("give, place, allow") mean "make" and "place," respectively, in context.

64. Translated "cony" by the ASV, KJV, NIV and NJB; "badger" by the NAS and TNK; and "rock badger" by the ESV and NKJ, the **שָׁפָן** (*šāpān*), is the *Procavia tanensis* of the family *Procaviidae*, order *Hyracoidea*. Immortalized by Agur in Proverbs 30:26 for their prowess among the crags (also in Psalm 104:18), these small mammals still today frequent rocky areas and can be seen gamboling about the boulder strewn ruins of the synagogue at Chorazin by the Sea of Galilee. For a defense of the identification of the *šāpān* as the rock hyrax, see Nosson Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax: A Study of The Laws of Animals with One Kosher Sign in Light of Modern Zoology* (Nanuet, NY: Targum Press, 2004), 99–105. Slifkin also definitively argues that the *šāpān* is not a rabbit, hare or jerboa (Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, p. 120–125).

65. Literally, "one which brings up" in Hebrew.

66. A *ruminant* is a mammal with four stomachs (sometimes only three), which allows it to digest cellulose in stages.

67. As Cansdale remarks: "The hyrax never seems to stop chewing as it sits outside of its hole and it could be easily said to ruminate" (George Cansdale, *All the Animals of Bible Lands* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970], p. 130–131).

68. *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12, s.v. "hyraxes" (by Urs Rahm) [1975], p. 513–522, esp. 514.



Heock (from a later edition of the same encyclopedia) disagrees.<sup>69</sup>

Slifkin discusses three possible reasons why Scripture says hyraxes chew the cud in ruminant-like fashion: (1) they produce chewing motions unrelated to eating,<sup>70</sup> (2) they have a highly complex digestive system<sup>71</sup> and (3) they are engaging in *myrecism*.<sup>72</sup> What is significant is that it *appears* to be chewing the cud.

In any case, visual inspection is sufficient to show that they do not have split hooves.<sup>73</sup> They have four stubby digits on their front feet with hoof-like nails and three on the rear with the center toe having a claw. In short, because they appear to ruminate (or might actually ruminate) and do not have split hooves they were considered ceremonially impure.

### 2.3 Foundational Theological Treatise

And finally, we must understand that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a *foundational theological treatise*.<sup>74</sup> Commonly, scholars compare Genesis 1:1–2:3 with ancient

69. *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, Vol. 15: *Mammals IV*, s.v. "Hyracoidea" (by Hendrik Hoeck), *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Thomson Gale, Trial Site Database, [http://find.galegroup.com/gvrl/infomark.do?&contentSet=EBKS&type=retrieve&tabID=T001&prodId=GURL&docId=CX3406700925&cisbn=0-7876-7750-7&source=gale&userGroupName=special\\_gvrlonly&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/gvrl/infomark.do?&contentSet=EBKS&type=retrieve&tabID=T001&prodId=GURL&docId=CX3406700925&cisbn=0-7876-7750-7&source=gale&userGroupName=special_gvrlonly&version=1.0) (accessed January 18, 2007).
70. Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, p. 107–110 (where he cites conflicting authorities!).
71. The digestive system of the hyrax is complex and almost unique among mammals, having three separate areas for food fermentation: the fore-stomach, the caecum, and the paired colonic appendages (Ibid., p. 115–117, in particular the drawing on page 116; and Hoeck). The additional chambers slow down the digestive process and culture bacteria, both necessary to digest cellulose (Dennis Englin [Professor of Biological Sciences at The Master's College], personal communication). Recent studies have concluded that the hyrax digests cellulose as well as a ruminant (Johan J.C. Sauer, "The Efficiency of Crude Fiber Digestion in the Hyrax *Procavia Capensis*" [Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria (South Africa), 1987], Abstract in [proquest.umi.com](http://proquest.umi.com); J.R. Paul-Murphy, C.J. Murphy *et al.*, "Comparison of Transit Time of Digesta and Digestive Efficiency of the Rock Hyrax, the Barbados Sheep and the Domestic Rabbit," *Comparative Biology and Physiology A* 72/3 [1982]: p. 611–613, [cited by Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, p. 117]).
72. A behavior in which the animal regurgitates a little food and re-chews it, but it does not play as significant a role in digestion as it does with ruminants (Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, p. 110–111).
73. Photographs of their feet are in Slifkin, *The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, p. 106. Zoologists originally classified them as *Ungulata*, "hooved," but since have changed their taxonomy to superorder *Paenungulata*, "near ungulates" (Rahm, *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12, s.v. "hyraxes" p. 513).
74. This is one of the most profoundly theological texts in the Bible, in that the Hebrew word for God, אֱלֹהִים, occurs 35 times. In biblical Hebrew, normally, when a sentence continues the topic of the previous sentence, the topic is not relexicalized (repeated as the subject) but carried by the pronominal clitics in the verb inflection. Redundant

Near Eastern (ANE) creation accounts, emphasize the similarities, and draw conclusions based on them.<sup>75</sup> But this is a flawed approach, because it ignores the fact that it would be the atypical nature of the Genesis account that would attract the attention of the original readers.<sup>76</sup> We will consider briefly therefore three radical contrasts between this text and ANE creation myths, which makes the Genesis account into a polemic against such ANE texts.<sup>77</sup>

The first comprises five ways the Lord essentially differs from ANE “deities.” First, the Lord is self-existent and eternal; the ANE gods are born from eternal matter. Second, the Lord is uncreated; the ANE gods are created in some way. Third, the existence of the Lord is neither proved nor asserted but rather assumed; in the ANE texts the focus is on theogony (the origin of the gods). Fourth, the Lord is separate from His creation; the ANE gods are deified natural forces. And fifth, the Lord is an unopposed sovereign Creator; the ANE texts feature battles among the gods, after which the victor creates.<sup>78</sup>

relexicalization emphasizes the topic (its uniqueness, contrast with other possible topics, etc.). But here we have a 35-fold relexicalization, an unprecedented and unmatched level of redundant relexicalization, to drive home the point that *God* is the *Creator*.

75. Most often the Babylonian accounts (both *Enūma Elish* and *Atra-hasis*) are examined for parallels. But John Currid looks at the Egyptian (John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997], p. 53–73). So does Gordon Johnston. He argues that Genesis 1 is an anti-Egyptian-cosmogony polemic, noting both “striking similarities” and “dramatic differences” between Genesis 1 and the Egyptian creation myths (Gordon H. Johnston, “Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 [April–June 2008]: p. 178–194, esp. 182–194). I will be mostly discussing the Babylonian material below, but the same arguments apply to the Egyptian.
76. When the ANE creation and flood texts were unearthed, scholars noted the similarities between them and the biblical account. And so they began to read the Bible in light of these “so-called” parallels. But an ancient reader would not have reacted this way to the biblical texts in light of the ANE texts. The latter were familiar to them. Thus, what would have stood out for them would have been the differences between the biblical account and the ANE account. The author meant for the similarities to be an impetus to the reader to note the contrasts.
77. Also because of the wider purposes of the divine Author, the text functions as a polemic against all erroneous views, of our time as well as those of when it was written. Gordon Wenham comments forcefully on the latter, “Gen. 1 is a deliberate statement of [the] Hebrew view of creation over against rival views. It is not merely a demythologization of oriental creation myths, whether Babylonian or Egyptian; rather it is polemical repudiation of such myths” (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 [Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987], p. 9).
78. For further details see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Gen. 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *AUSS* 10 (1972): p. 19–20; idem., “The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *EvQ* 46 (1974): p. 81–102; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation / Commentary by Nahum M. Sarna* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 3–4; and Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, p. 9–10.

The second contrast is six-fold, pertaining to the nature of creation. (1) The Lord created by fiat and unopposed actions; the ANE gods, by birth, battle, magic and opposed action. (2) The Lord created from no preexistent matter; the gods, from eternal matter or vanquished foes.<sup>79</sup> (3) The Lord created in a sequence of days; the gods — there is no analogy. (4) The Lord purposefully progressed in His creation toward the creation of man; the gods created man as an afterthought. (5) The Lord created man deliberately and personally; the gods created man from the entrails of a vanquished foe,<sup>80</sup> because they needed someone to feed them (as in *Enūma Elish*) or created him from one of the lower hierarchy of gods,<sup>81</sup> because they needed someone to dig the canals (as in *Atra-ḫasīs*). (6) The Lord blessed man and placed him as vice-regent over the natural realm; the ANE texts have man subservient to the nature gods and terrified of them.

The third contrast is between the mythical ANE accounts and the patently anti-mythical character of Genesis 1:1–2:3. The latter is evidenced by its lack of struggle or competing deities, the preexistence of the Creator rather than matter, the distribution of בָּרָא (*bārāʾ*, “create”) the mention of תְּהוֹמֹת (t<sup>o</sup>hôm, “world ocean”) and the account of the fourth day.<sup>82</sup> I will explain the last three in order below.

In biblical Hebrew, the verb בָּרָא (create) always has God for its subject and never mentions the material from which He created. Its presence in a verse therefore underscores that *God* is the *Creator*. With this emphasis, its occurrence in verses 1, 21, 27(3x) and 2:3 (elsewhere in Genesis 1, עָשָׂה [*ʿāsāh*, “make”] is used) is decidedly anti-mythical. In verse 1 it proves that *God* is the creator of matter. This is in stark contrast to the pre-existence of *matter* in all the ANE texts. The three-fold usage of בָּרָא which makes verse 27 a poetic tricolon, drives home the points that 1) God deliberately and purposeful created man to be His representative, 2) he was the pinnacle of creation and 3) God created him to rule over the natural world. This differs altogether from the ANE myths, in which man is created as an afterthought and serves the nature deities. The occurrence of בָּרָא in verse 21 shows that *God created* the gigantic sea creatures; they are *not* gods and goddesses, as they are portrayed in the ANE myths.<sup>83</sup> Finally, in 2:3 in an *inclusio* with 1:1 the presence of בָּרָא confirms that *God is the Creator of everything. Only He was pre-existent.*

79. In *Enūma Elish* (a Babylonian creation myth) the victorious *Marduk* fashioned the universe by arching the exploded carcass of his nemesis, the monstrous serpent goddess *Tiamat*.

80. *Kingu*, the monstrous serpent god, who was *Tiamat's* henchman.

81. *Ilu-wer*

82. Sarna states, “The outstanding peculiarity of the biblical account is the complete absence of mythology in the classic pagan sense of the term” and “Nowhere is the non-mythological outlook better illustrated than in the Genesis narrative. The Hebrew account is matchless in its solemn and majestic simplicity” (Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1966], p. 9–10).

83. For example, *Kingu* and *Tiamat* in *Enūma Elish*.

Second, the significance of the word תְּהוֹם ( $t^{\theta}h\acute{o}m$ , “world ocean”) in the text arises from its unmistakable phonetic similarity to *Tiamat* (the Babylonian goddess).<sup>84</sup> But according to verse 2, תְּהוֹם ( $t^{\theta}h\acute{o}m$ ) is the result of God’s creation; it is not an ANE goddess.

Lastly, four aspects of the amazing account of the fourth day of creation week prove it to be blatantly anti-mythical, in that it relentlessly strips the sun, moon, and stars of the divine status vested in them in Egypt and Mesopotamia and relegates them to serve man as navigational aids and time-markers rather than to determine his future. First, the sun and moon are not named to show that they are not even sentient, let alone gods. The lack of both naming and blessing in these verses is striking, in that in the other days of creation week, the Lord either named or blessed.<sup>85</sup> Second, this lack is almost awkward as the author carefully avoids mentioning the common Hebrew (and Semitic) names for the sun and the moon, שֶׁמֶשׁ (*šemeš*, cf. its obvious phonetic equivalent to the Babylonian name for the sun god, *Šamšu*) and יָרֵחַ (*Yārēah*), respectively. Yet, elsewhere there is no such reluctance (e.g., Ps. 121:6). Third, the complex palistrophic structure of the passage delimits their “rule” to *servicing man*, by linking verse 16b (“the great light for the ruling of the day and the small light for the ruling of the night”) with verse 14b (“let them be for signs, for appointed times and for days and years”).<sup>86</sup> This is diametrically opposed to the ANE concept of

84. See note 79 above.

85. On the first three days of creation week He named light, darkness, firmament, dry land, and the gathering of water, “day,” “night,” “heaven,” “earth” and “seas,” respectively. On the last three days He blessed the sea creatures and flying animals, man, and the seventh day.

86. The palistrophic structure (corresponding clauses form an ABCDD’C’B’A’ or similar pattern) in Genesis 1:14–19 comprises eleven purposes clauses *a–k*. Six (*a, f* and *i–k*) are construed by ל + infinitive construct of three different verbal roots: 1) להבדיל “to divide,” 2) להאיר “to shine light” and 3) למשל “to rule.” Three (*b, c*, and *d*) are in verse 14b, “for signs, for appointed times, for days and years.” Two (*g* and *h*) are imbedded in verse 16, “the big light source for the *ruling* of the day and the small light source for the *ruling* of the night.” “For ruling” in this verse is לממשלה, which is ל plus a noun from the verbal root of clause *j* (root 3). Finally, clause *e*, “for light sources,” is connected to clause *f*, “to shine light on the earth,” and thus, corresponds semantically to the latter.

The clauses are arranged as follows: the last clause (*k*) clearly corresponds to the first (*a*), because both have root 1 and they have semantically equivalent objects. We will call them therefore *a* and *a’*. Furthermore, the third (*f*) is identical to the third from last (*i*). So they are *f* and *f’*. In addition, *g* and *h* are the same, enabling us to assign *g* to both. This leaves us *b, c* and *d* and *j*. The schema, then, is as follows: *a* [*b, c* and *d*] *f-g-gf* [*j*] *a’*. That is, among the clauses corresponding to one another because they have identical roots, the *b, c* and *d* grouping is between the first and second and *j* is between the last and the second to last. The result is that the precision of the author’s meticulously crafted structure directs the reader to semantically equate *b, c* and *d* with *j*. And since *g* and *j* have the same root, we can thus understand the meaning of “the

their role as capricious, merciless, implacable, divine judges, unmoved by their supplicants' servile appeasements to avert being smitten. And, fourth and finally, the creation of the stars, not of man (as in the ANE texts), is described almost as an afterthought, commonly translated, "He made the stars also."<sup>87</sup>

### 3. Conclusion; or, Why the Earth Must Be Young

Three major implications arise from this study. First, it is not statistically defensible to read Genesis 1:1–2:3 as poetry. Second, since Genesis 1:1–2:3 is narrative, it should be read as other Hebrew narratives are intended to be read — as a concise report of actual events in time-space history, which also conveys an unmistakable theological message. Third, when this text is read as narrative, there is only one tenable view of its plain sense: these were six literal days of creation. The words mean what a 15th century B.C. Israelite would have understood them to mean in any other historical narrative, with the referents and events corresponding to the words. So, יום (*yôm* "day") in this text, just as in any historical narrative, refers to a normal day. This text's original readers would never have thought it meant "age."

Other modern readings<sup>88</sup> are as much counter-readings<sup>89</sup> as the ANE creation accounts are. The following thrust by Sternberg silences such:

Suppose the Creation narrative elicited from the audience the challenge "But the Babylonians tell a different story." . . . Would the biblical narrator shrug his shoulders as any self-respecting novelist would do? *One inclined to answer in the affirmative would have to make fictional sense of all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary; and I do not see how even a confirmed anachronist would go about it with any show of reason. This way madness lies — and I mean interpretive, teleological as well as*

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big light source for the *ruling* of the day and the small light source for the *ruling* of the night."

87. The creation of the stars is presented as an afterthought, because the verb "make" (at the beginning of the verse) is separated from its third direct object "the stars" by the interposition of the description of the role of the great light and the small light. The verb is not repeated in spite of the length of the intervening phrase. An interpretive translation would be "He made (the great light with a certain role and the small light with a certain role) and the stars."
88. For a discussion of objections to an historical reading of this text and answers to these, see *RATE* chapter, p. 635–639.
89. In a narrow sense, a "counter-reading" is any incorrect interpretation of a text, and is a reading therefore against the author's intent. Such a reading will be assured by not reading a text according to its genre. Reading Genesis 1:1–2:3 incorrectly as poetry rather than as narrative is an example. But, in a wider sense, a counter-reading is also a counter-reading of reality. Asserting the big-bang theory or macro-evolution against the literal historical account of this great text is as much a counter-reading as the bizarre "reality" portrayed in the ANE texts. For additional thoughts see note 7 above.

*theological madness.*<sup>90</sup>

When the biblical creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is read as an ordinary narrative text, albeit, with extraordinary theological content, it is clear what the author is asserting: eternal God created space, time, matter, the stars, the earth, vegetation, animals, and man in one week. Furthermore, if the Flood account (Gen. 6:5–9:29) is read in the same way (and it should be for it also is clearly historical narrative), we must conclude that that same author is asserting that the originally created earth was inundated with a global catastrophic deluge. Based on this approach to these texts, the only tenable view for the age of the earth is that it is young — only thousands of years old, not billions of years old.

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90. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 32, emphasis mine.