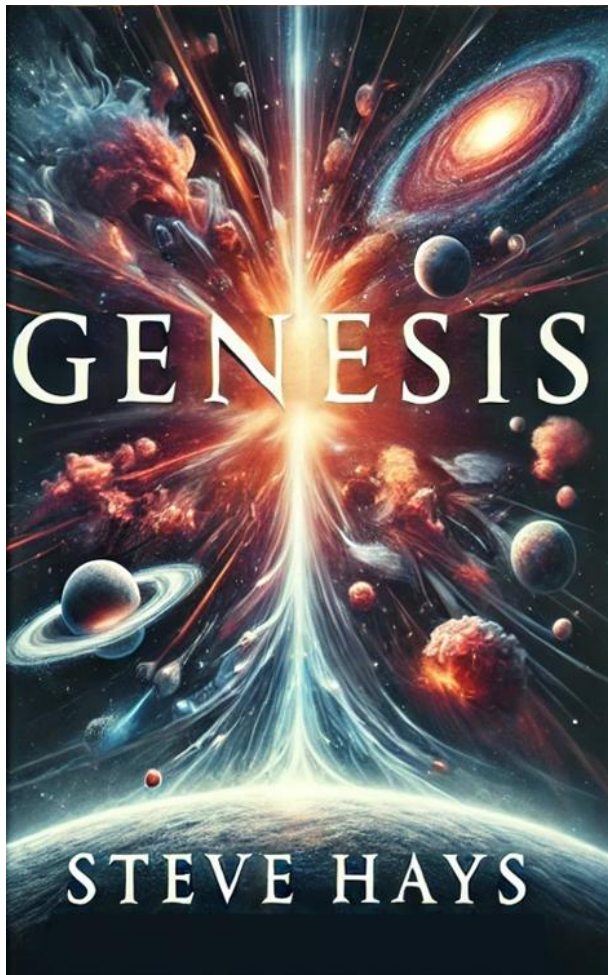




# GENESIS

STEVE HAYS



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# Genesis

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# **Preface**

As the title indicates, this is mostly about Genesis, with an emphasis on the creation account and the flood account. The chapters generally have a hermeneutical focus.

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# Creation

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# What does the tree of life confer?

What did the tree of life confer? There are three basic interpretations. Let's run through them by process of elimination

## 1. Glorification

According to the eschatological interpretation (favored by redemptive-historical theologians like Vos, Kline, Alexander), partaking of the tree of life glorifies the consumer. They justify this interpretation by appealing to Revelation, with its eschatological references to the tree of life.

However, a basic problem with their interpretation is that it's clearly premature, anachronistic. For it confuses the type with the antitype.

Yes, the tree of life in the Garden prefigures the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. But it's a basic principle of biblical typology that the antitype is something over and above the type, and not merely a recapitulation of the type.

## 2. Life-extension

According to this interpretation (favored by John Walton), the tree of life prevents aging as long as you partake. But you have to keep eating the fruit to stay young. It's a maintenance regime.

However, there are some basic problems with that interpretation:

**i)** It makes the tree itself the source of what it signifies. That's a chemical property of the tree. A natural supplement. Keep going back to replenish a natural deficiency. Immortality as pharmacopia.

But the pattern in Scripture is not to treat physical objects as the immediate source or cause of such effects. Rather, God assigns a particular blessing to some concrete token. Take the Pentateuchal example of the bronze serpent. It has no inherent healing properties. It was just a piece of metal. Its curative significance was purely emblematic. The snakebite victims were healed by God, not the bronze serpent. The serpent was just a sympathetic token.

**ii)** It's hard to see how Walton's interpretation comes to terms with the nature of the death penalty in [Gen 3:22](#).

**a)** The wording of [Gen 3:22](#) indicates partaking the tree would transform Adam and Eve, thereby changing the status quo ante. If, however, they already partook, then eating again couldn't very well effect a new condition. Rather, it would confirm their condition. Make them immortal sinners.

**b)** The adverb ("also", Heb.=gam) is another textual clue of a novel, additional transaction. Something they hadn't done before.

**c)** Before they fell, there was no urgency about partaking the tree of life. Even after the fall, Adam aged very slowly.

But when they fell, when they faced the forbidding prospect of divine exile from the safety of their gated garden, then the neglected value of the tree would suddenly assume a new urgency.



### **3. Immortality**

On this interpretation (favored by scholars like Barr, Currid, Hamilton, and Waltke), one bite conferred immortality. Youthful, ageless immortality. So they died because they were banished from the garden, and thereby blew that unique, irreversible, and unrepeatable opportunity.

## Revisiting the Days of Genesis

Last night I skimmed B. C. Hodge's **REVISITING THE DAYS OF GENESIS**. I focused on the parts that interested me, so it's quite possible that I missed some important caveats. But here's my general impression:

i) It's basically taking the same course charted by John Walton. There's something ironic about Walton's position. He entitled his book **THE LOST WORLD OF GENESIS ONE**. He meant that was a "lost world" because the true meaning was lost to later generations until modern archeology uncovered the background information necessary to recover or rediscover the original intent of the narrator.

Yet Walton also spends a lot of time trying to prove his position from sundry OT passages. That, however, raises the question of whether modern archeology is the missing key to understanding Gen 1. If Walton can make a good case for his interpretation from the biblical materials alone, then archeology seems to be, at most, a useful supplement which improves the accuracy of our interpretation, even though the basic interpretation can be gotten from Scripture alone.

I also find that tension in Hodge's treatment. It combines direct exegesis of the Biblical text with comparative Semitics. Is the basic interpretation dependent on comparative Semitics, or independent of comparative Semitics?

ii) Hodge gives the cosmic temple interpretation yet another workout, adding various details to the emerging

construct. The cosmic temple interpretation has become an academic fad. I don't necessarily mean that in a pejorative sense. One potential value of academic fads is the exhaustive examination of a particular thesis. The thesis is explored, developed, and critiqued from just about every conceivable angle. All the pros and cons are duly weighed.

**iii)** However, the danger of academic fads is to treat the hot new theory as a revolutionary and comprehensive explanation. In an interview, Claude Shannon once remarked on how some people were trying to make information theory explain too much. Chaos theory went through the same phase.

**iv)** I think Hodge does a good job of documenting architectural metaphors in Gen 1, teasing out the numerology in the creation account and the flood account, and discussing the nature of serpentine symbolism.

He also makes an interesting observation about how the first six days of the creation week are anarthrous. The definite article is reserved for the seventh day.

**v)** I'm not convinced by his treatment of Balaam's talking donkey. There's lots of evidence in Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature that snakes could function as symbolic, numinous figures. But one can't just switch from that to a donkey, as if a donkey held the same emblematic significance in ANE culture.

Moreover, Balaam's donkey doesn't seem to stand for something else. It's a beast of burden which Balaam is using for transportation. That's a far cry from the Egyptian tale of bearded, gilded talking serpent, from which Hodge segues into the narrative of Balaam, the donkey, and the angel. There's scarcely any connection.

**vi)** Then there's the use of comparative mythology to provide a backdrop. In principle, one can use alleged background material in two different ways.

You can try use it to flesh out a general cultural milieu or intellectual ethos. This supposedly supplies an unspoken preunderstanding which both author and audience shared. This may be something the narrator takes for granted, or it may be something he uses as a foil.

Or you can try to use it to pinpoint specific literary influence, where a Biblical text is allegedly indebted to an extrabiblical text.

**vii)** Apropos (vi), Hodge alleges fairly specific parallels between Genesis and the Enuma Elish. Of course, there's nothing new about that claim. However, I have serious methodological reservations about that analysis.

To my knowledge, the Enuma Elish doesn't represent mainstream ANE thinking—even assuming there is such a thing as mainstream ANE thinking. Rather, from what I've read, this is a sectarian, in-house document where one priestly faction is attempting to supplant another priestly faction by writing a new backstory to retroactively validate the supremacist claims of its own patron god. If that's the case, then there's no reason to think this would be a framing device for the Biblical writer. It's way too parochial. A literary outlier.

There's a danger of sampling bias when we use background material, or what we take to be background material. Scholars use what they have. They can only use what's available. And what's available is what happened to survive

the ravages of time. So we need to ask if what survived is likely to be representative or more provincial.

Just because we happen to have the Enuma Elish when so much other ANE literature perished doesn't automatically make that representative or relevant. It's natural to default to extant comparative material simply because it's extant. But is it really comparable? Or do we simply fall back on that because that's all we've got to work with, and so we treat it as if it's germane?

We need to remind ourselves that that's just an accident of history. If you're the last man standing, that makes you stick out. But there's no reason to assume it enjoyed that degree of prominence when the Pentateuch was written.

**viii)** Moreover, if all we had to go by was the Enuma Elish, I don't think ingenious scholars would find the same patterns. Rather, they are mapping Gen 1 onto the Enuma Elish.

**ix)** On another issue, Hodge uses Ezekiel's theophany (as well as [Dan 12:3](#)) to interpret Gen 1. But, of course, Ezekiel isn't the Pentateuch, so there's no antecedent reason to assume it sheds light on Gen 1.

But perhaps Hodge simply thinks that Gen 1 and Ezekiel both bear witness to a stock ANE cosmography, so you can indirectly use Ezekiel to illuminate Gen 1.

**x)** This also goes to the question of dating OT books. If you think the Pentateuch was written during the Babylonian Exile, or received its final redaction in that historical setting, then Ezekiel could actually antedate Gen 1. Ezekiel could influence Gen 1, or the Pentateuch generally. That's the opposite of the traditional view, where the direction of influence is in the reverse.

Since I accept the traditional dating of the Pentateuch, I reject that historical reconstruction.

**xi)** Another issue is whether there's a consistent ANE cosmography. For instance, Baruch Halpern thinks there was a dramatic shift in ANE cosmography from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Cf. "The Assyrian Astronomy of Genesis 1 and the Birth of Milesian Philosophy," "Late Israelite Astronomies and the Early Greeks," in **FROM GODS TO GOD: THE DYNAMICS OF IRON AGE COSMOLOGIES**.

My point is not to endorse his arguments, but that's in part because I don't share his views regarding the historical composition of the OT canon.

**xii)** In sum, I think Hodge's monograph contains some useful exegetical insights, but I also find it unconvincing or unsatisfactory in other respects. It takes its place alongside the work of Walton, Beale, Desi Alexander, Gordon Wenham and others in that general vein. It makes a limited, but helpful contribution to our understanding of Genesis, as long as you make allowance for the limitations I've noted.

## Genesis in the multiverse

I just had very interesting exchange with an eminent physicist (Don Page. For the record, he rejects Gen 1-2 as literally true. He believes in theistic evolution.

Before quoting him I'll briefly set the stage. He subscribes to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics. And that's the favored interpretation in quantum cosmology.

As David Deutsch put it,

I suppose the first reason [we should believe it] is that the theory which predicts them is the simplest interpretation of quantum theory, and we believe quantum theory because of its enormous experimental success: it really has been the most successful physical theory in history. **THE GHOST IN THE ATOM**, P. Davis & J. Brown, eds. (Cambridge 1993), 84.

So the evidence for this interpretation is inferential or nested: there's the primary evidence for quantum mechanics, combined with the fact that this is by far the simplest interpretation of quantum mechanics. The evidence for this interpretation piggybacks on the evidence for the underlying theory.

Here's a basic overview:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-manyworlds/>

Now my point is not to personally vouch for this interpretation. But it's a scientifically respectable and widely

respected interpretation.

In my correspondence with the physicist, I began by quoting something he said:

As a further rebuttal of the accusation of extravagance, a theist can say that since God can do anything that is logically possible and that fits with His nature and purposes, then there is apparently no difficulty for Him to create as many universes as He pleases.

The vast size of the entire multiverse makes it seem likely that almost all possible human experiences would occur somewhere.

I then asked:

But doesn't this suggest that there's at least one universe somewhere in the far-flung multiverse where Gen 1-2 is literally true?

Put another way, even if you don't think Gen 1-2 is literally true in our particular universe, there's nothing logically impossible about God creating a universe with that particular world history. Given the multiverse, or at least one version of the multiverse, wouldn't we expect that alternate history to in fact be realized in a subset of the multiverse? To some extent this piggybacks on my first question.

To which he replied:



I suppose there might be somewhere where something like Gen. 1-2 is in some sense literally true (though if one takes it too literally, one part contradicts another part, so just internally there is evidence that it should not be taken too literally). But if the multiverse is highly ordered, I would expect that the part where something like Gen. 1-2 is literally true would be a very tiny part of the multiverse, so that it would be extremely improbable for us to experience that part.

It poses an intriguing dilemma for critics of Gen 1-2. They don't think Gen 1-2 is unscientific merely in the factual sense that that's contrary to actual earth history. Rather, they think it's intrinsically unscientific. That it's literally absurd. Unscientific *in principle* as well a fact.

Yet here we have a distinguished theoretical physicist who's giving a scientific argument for something that really corresponds to Gen 1-2, only it takes place in a parallel universe. Quite a conundrum!

## Grubbiness is next to godliness

There are conservative Bible scholars like Ken Mathews (in his commentary on Genesis) and E. J. Young (in his popular monograph entitled **IN THE BEGINNING**) who consider the depiction of God in Gen 2:7 to be anthropomorphic. In addition, Mathews considers 2:21-22 to be anthropomorphic, as well as 3:8. I have problems with that interpretation:

**i)** I freely grant that Scripture contains many anthropomorphic depictions of God. However, it's insufficient to classify a representation as anthropomorphic. You need to be able to say what that stands for. Otherwise, what distinguishes an anthropomorphic depiction from a figurative depiction? If it's not literal, what really happened? Did anything really happen?

So you can't just say it's anthropomorphic and leave it at that. Not, at least, if you adhere to the historicity of the account.

**ii)** But are the depictions of God in Gen 2-3 anthropomorphic? For one thing, if God actually made Adam and Eve by an act of special creation, how else would the narrator express that idea except by using idiomatic verbs normally employed in human manufacture? That's the vocabulary he has at his disposal.

**iii)** In addition, the depictions of God in Gen 2-3 dovetail with Pentateuchal angelology. The Pentateuch contains many angelic apparitions, including the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord is a theanthropic angelophany.

Indeed, it's arguably a Christophany (although the point I'm making in this post doesn't turn on that identification).

I classify the depictions of God in Gen 2-3, not as anthropomorphisms, but angelophanies. (Theanthropic angelophanies, to be precise.)

In the Pentateuch, angels do rub shoulders with men. Occupy time and space. Interact with their physical surroundings.

**iv)** Finally, it's instructive to compare Genesis with the Gospels:

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (Gen 2:7).

*21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man (Gen 2:21-22).*

*And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue (Mk 7:33).*

*And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes*

*and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” (Mk 8:23).*

*Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud (Jn 9:6).*

*22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22).*

Seems to me that Jesus has a modus operandi that's very reminiscent of God in Gen 2. Jesus isn't afraid to get dirt under his fingernails. If Jesus doesn't mind getting grubby, up-close-and-personal, when he performs a miracle, why assume God's method is different in Gen 2?

## Shangri-La

A few years ago, Bill Arnold—an OT prof. at Asbury seminary—published a commentary on Genesis. I had a question for him, which led to the ensuing exchange:

Dear Dr. Arnold,

In your commentary on Genesis you said “The ‘mountains of Ararat’ of 8:4 most likely refers to the foothills where the Mesopotamian plains in the north yield to the highlands near the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers” (105).

What would you say is the elevation of the foothills in question?

Hi Steve.

I have no idea about the altitude of those foothills. The Zagros Mountains, which are spread along the eastern & northeastern border of the Mesopotamian plains, vary in altitude considerably.

Does it matter?

I appreciate his taking the time to answer my question, but his answer highlights a problem with some commentators on Genesis.

Commentators like Arnold treat Genesis as a literary construct rather than a historical record. So even though Genesis is given a real-world setting, it is irrelevant to them what the world in which the account took place was really like. For commentators like Arnold, my question makes no

more sense than posing geographical questions about Shangri-La.

When a modern reader turns to Genesis, it takes an effort to project himself into the world of Genesis. For one thing, most of us don't live anywhere near where the events took place. So we don't naturally visualize that setting.

Moreover, our lifestyle is completely different. Most of us don't live off the land. It's just an abstraction for you and me.

But for inhabitants of the ancient Near East, this is a real mountain range, with real rivers and foothills. And when the flood account refers to hills and mountains, it's presumably referring to foothills and highlands like we find in Northern Mesopotamia. That's the author's frame of reference. Somewhere in there was the high-water mark, delimiting the flood.

Which brings me to another point. I don't think scholars like John Walton or Bill Arnold necessarily understand ANE texts. They fail to take into account what ancient Near Easterners could know about their world through direct observation, in distinction to fabulous descriptions of "places" (e.g. the Netherworld) which no man ever saw, ever discovered, ever explored. How much of this is consciously imaginary on the part of ancient storytellers?

Finally, although they may not say so, commentators like Arnold approach the Genesis narrative naturalistically (i.e. methodological naturalism). The supernatural dimension (e.g. angels) is simply part of the mythological outlook which the narrator took over from his sources. They tacitly empty the world of supernatural entities. Those encounters never actually took place.

If, however, angels really exist, then many incidents we reflexively relegate to pious fiction or ancient mythology suddenly become realistic.

## Parallelomania

John Currid and James Hoffmeier document what they take to be parallels between Gen 1-2 and Mesopotamian or especially Egyptian creative motifs. Cf. J. Hoffmeier, "Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptians Cosmology" **JANES 15** (1983); J. Currid, **ANCIENT EGYPT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT** (Baker 2001), chap. 3.

I'll venture a few observations:

**i)** Seems to me their methodology is fundamentally flawed. You take Gen 1 as your framework, then ransack disparate Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources, chipping off or peeling away bits and pieces, which you then fit into the Gen 1 framework. But that's an ersatz scholarly construct. The parallel creation account doesn't exist in any actual Egyptian or Mesopotamian source. It's the modern scholar, and not an ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian writer, who edited them into that extraneous framework.

Moreover, when you glean isolated bits and pieces and rearrange them, you change the meaning. You recontextualize them.

**ii)** I wonder if hieroglyphics aren't somewhat ambiguous.

**iii)** If the Bible did use familiar idioms or stock metaphors, that wouldn't be surprising or disturbing.

**iv)** Hoffmeier claims an Egyptian parallel with primordial "chaos," but there's nothing "chaotic" in **Gen 1:2**.



**v)** They mention the use of the potter/clay relation as a creative metaphor in Egyptians source. But pottery was such a widespread practice, including figurines, that we'd expect that to be a popular creative metaphor.

**vi)** They mention the imago dei in Egyptian sources. However, Currid quotes a source saying "they are his own images proceeding from his flesh."

But to say a god made man in the image of his *flesh* is antithetical to OT theism, with its essentially invisible deity. So that's hardly comparable.

**vii)** The "breath of life" is a very generic idea. That's not unique to creation.

How does one distinguish between life and death? In a prescientific culture, the way to tell if someone died was when they stop breathing. So breathing is synonymous with life while cessation of breathing is synonymous with cessation of life, or the antonym: death. Even now we use "expiration" as a synonym for death.

That distinguishes Adam's newly-minted "corpse" from Adam as a living creature. How else would the narrator draw that distinction when addressing an ancient audience?

Moreover, the breath of life isn't a metaphor, but a biological necessity. That really is a constitutive distinction.

## "Because it hadn't rained"

I'm going to briefly evaluate a supporting argument for the framework hypothesis:

"Because It Had Not Rained" (Gen. 2:5) Although the above considerations make the framework interpretation a plausible understanding of the days of creation, we recognize that we have not yet demonstrated the impossibility of a sequential understanding of the creation days. One might still argue that day four need not be taken as a recapitulation of day one, proposing instead that God could have sustained day and night for the first three days by supernatural means prior to the creation of the sun, moon and stars. But Gen. 2:5 rules out such an explanation and further strengthens the link between days one and four in a figurative framework. Gen. 2:5a states that "no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted," and verse 5b provides a very logical and natural explanation for this situation: "for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground" (NASB). Then, in verses 6-7, we are told how God dealt with these exigencies. In verse 6, the absence of rain is overcome by the divine provision of a rain cloud ("a rain cloud began to arise from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground"); and in verse 7, the absence of a cultivator is overcome by the creation of man. [7] Notice that Moses offers his audience (ca. 1400 BC, long after the creation period) a perfectly natural explanation for the absence of vegetation. The Israelites would have been familiar with the idea that some form of water supply is

necessary for plant growth - whether God-sent rain or man-made irrigation. So when Moses states that God didn't create vegetation until He had established the natural means of sustaining that vegetation, i.e., the rain cloud (verse 6), he is assuming that the Israelites would recognize the logic of this situation based on their own experience. The very fact that Moses would venture to give such an explanation indicates the presence of an unargued presupposition, namely, that the mode of providence in operation during the creation period and that is currently in operation (and which Moses' audience would have recognized) are the same. Since the mere giving of a natural explanation presupposes providential continuity between the creation period and the post-creation world, we may infer a general principle, applicable beyond the case of vegetation, that "God ordered the sequence of creation acts so that the continuance and development of the earth and its creatures could proceed by natural means." [8] In other words, during the creation period, God did not rely on supernatural means to preserve and sustain His creatures once they were created. With this principle in hand, we now return to the problem of daylight, and evenings and mornings, prior to the sun. Although the sequential view attempts to explain this problem by hypothesizing that God sustained these natural phenomena by some non-ordinary means for the first three days, this speculation of human reason is contradicted by the disclosure of divine revelation that God employed ordinary means during the creation period to sustain His creatures. Thus, we are cast back upon our original suggestion that the fourth day is an instance of temporal recapitulation, narrating the creation of the normal physical mechanism God established to sustain the daylight/night phenomenon throughout the creation period and beyond. Gen.

2:5 necessitates a non-sequential interpretation of the creation account, and non-sequentialism in turn demonstrates that the week of days comprises a figurative framework.

[http://www.upper-register.com/papers/framework\\_interpretation.html](http://www.upper-register.com/papers/framework_interpretation.html)

**i)** This posits a false dichotomy between fiat creation and ordinary providence. Assuming for the sake of argument that the calendar-day interpretation is correct, it would still be the case that after each subsequent day of the creation week, God must conserve the creative results of the previous day. Day 2 will build on day 1. Day 3 will build on day 2. And so on. A chronological sequence of divine fiats is entirely consistent with the operation of providence.

**ii)** I don't think Gen 2 is conterminous with day 6 of Gen 1. Gen 2 isn't describing the "earth" in general, but the "land" of Eden in particular. Keep in mind that *eretz* can either mean "earth" or "land." Context determines which sense fits. This interpretation is complemented by the term *adama* (ground, soil, arable land).

**iii)** Gen 2 isn't reiterating the general creation of flora in Gen 1, on day 3. Rather, it refers to two specific types of flora. As one scholar explains:

The word for "shrub" in the expression "shrub of the field" occurs only a few times elsewhere; specifically, in Gen 21:15 and Job 30:4,7. In all its occurrences it refers to plants that grow in desolate wastelands (e.g. the bush under which Hagar placed Ishmael in Gen 21:15). The term "plant of the field" in the next clause is the same as that used in Gen 3:18 for the crops people would have to cultivate by the sweat of the

brow because of the fall into sin.

The remainder of vv5 and 6 expands on this by explaining the conditions under which the earth was functioning at the time. First, "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth [or land," and second, "there was no man to cultivate the ground" (v5b). How could these particular categories of plants exist if there was no rain, and especially if there was no man to cultivate the crops that would require cultivation (cf. Gen 2:15-17 with 3:17-19)? The point is this: There were already plants and trees on the earth with all the day 3 varieties (Gen 1:11-13), but no wilderness or weed versus cultivated crop conditions existed. That is what Gen 2:5-6 is telling us. The terms for plants here are not the same as those used for the plants on day 3 (Gen 1:11-12; eseb ["plant"] occurs there, but not eseb hassadeh [lit., "plant/crop of the field"]). The terms for vegetation in v 5 refer to desert wilderness shrubs (siah hassadeh [lit., "shrub of the field"]); see only elsewhere in Gen 21:15; Job 30:4,7) and cultivated crops (see, e.g. Gen 3:18; the plants man will need to cultivate for food in order to survive), respectively.

Richard Averbeck in **READING GENESIS 1-2** (Hendrickson 2013), 28-29,94.

**iv)** Given the Mesopotamian setting of the Garden (2:10-14), I assume the naturally available source of irrigation would be river water. River valleys can exist in otherwise arid regions (e.g. the Rio Grande) They may have lush growth along the river banks, but vegetation dries up beyond the green line, during the dry season—absent rainfall, flash-flooding, or farming.

In sum, even if we take both Gen 1 and Gen 2 to be internally sequential, there's no chronological conflict between the two narratives.

**v)** Although this consideration is secondary to the immediate issue at hand, I think it would probably be more accurate to render the Gen 1 refrain as "dusk and dawn" rather than "evening and morning." In context, I think the refrain refers to what demarcates night and day rather than periods of the day or night.

## Home is where the heart is



*5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground...9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are*

*there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Gen 2:5-6,9-14).*

"Edenic" is a popular adjective. Many folks have a preconception of paradise. For some, "Edenic" is a tropical island.

I once lived in South Carolina. Sometimes I'd go for walks at Middleton Plantation, on the banks of the Ashley river. For many visitors, Middleton Plantation was "Edenic," especially in the spring and summertime, when the flowers were out: camellias, magnolias, azaleas, dogwood, wisteria, crape myrtle. With the ponds, river, oak trees draped in Spanish moss.

I once visited a rococo church in Bavaria. I was less impressed by the church than the countryside, nestled in the foothills of the Alps.

Certain parts of the world are famous for their natural beauty, like Switzerland, New Zealand, Lake Como. On the other hand, some folks have a more rugged conception of paradise. For them, the scenic parts of Montana and Colorado are "Edenic." Georgia O'Keeffe had a passion for the New Mexican desert—the antithesis of a tropical island.

The Hudson River School used to depict the New World as the New Eden. Europe had been occupied and cultivated for centuries, but America was an unspoiled wilderness.



But what was Eden really like? Commentators are often less than helpful in answering questions like that. Liberals don't think Eden ever existed. For them, asking what Eden was really like makes no more sense than asking what Shangri-La was really like. And even conservative commentators tend to have a narrowly textual focus. Texts talking to texts, rather than reconstructing the real-world conditions.

Landmarks change over the millennia. Place-names may change, or be forgotten. Rivers may change course, or dry up.

However, to judge by the text, and what geographical correlations we are able to make at this distance, Eden was not a lush tropical paradise. Rather, it seems to be hot and dry, situated somewhere in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. Vegetation would crowd along the river banks, but quickly thin out from there.

I once lived in the San Luis Rey river valley. It had verdant growth along the river banks, but the surrounding countryside was rocky and dusty, except when it rained. After a heavy rain, barren patches of land would suddenly burst forth with vegetation. I expect Eden was less like a tropical paradise and more like stretches of the Rio Grande river valley.

If so, there's a sense in which God left room for improvement. Eden had fruit-trees, watered by the river. Dinner lay within easy reach. But Adam and Eve were in a position to develop their natural resources, had they so desired.

If we could go back in time and place, would returning to Eden feel like returning home? That depends.

For many people, "home" feels like wherever they grew up. Some folks love living in the big city. Others love the out-of-doors.

For many people, "home" is less about where than who. Home is wherever their loved ones are.

## Dog years and human years

The prediluvians lived about ten times longer than a normal lifespan for us. That raises the question of whether they aged at a steady rate, but simply aged more slowly, or whether they matured sooner or later, stayed youthful for most of their life, while the pace of aging accelerated towards the end. In that respect it's interesting to compare human maturation/aging with canine maturation/aging:

<http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/how-to-calculate-your-dogs-age?print=true>

## Existential eisegesis

A couple of responses are possible. First, some Arminians would say (like some Reformed theologians!) that the story of the fall in Genesis 3 is “saga,” not literal description of what happened in some geographical location during some datable time period past. Its point is theological, not historical. It is history-like without likely being history. To those who object that that is a “liberal” interpretation I ask if they believe Satan appeared to Adam and Eve as a literal serpent and, if so, which species of serpent (reduction ad absurdum)? And I ask if they believe the “fruit” of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was literal fruit and, if so, what kind? In other words, few people other than the most literally minded fundamentalists interpret every aspect of the story literally. Many Reformed and Arminian theologians consider Genesis 3 to be a narrative about us—humanity—and our existential condition. In that interpretation, God most certainly did not literally “put” Satan in the garden; the serpent represents (for example) the tension between finitude and freedom (Kierkegaard, Niebuhr, et al.).

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2014/03/is-the-arminian-god-good/>

Several issues:

**i)** The duty of an interpreter is not, in the first place, to ask what he himself finds believable, but what the author and his target audience found believable. An interpreter is supposed to assume the viewpoint of the narrator (and the implied reader) for purposes of exegesis. Whether he personally considers to be credible is irrelevant to exegesis.

Of course, the Bible is supposed to obligate the reader.

**ii)** If the action in Eden is "not literal description of what happened in some geographical location during some datable time period past," is there any reason to assume the call of Abraham (Gen 12) or the call of Moses (Exod 3) is a "literal description of what happened in some geographical location during some datable time period past"?

To ask if the Tempter is a literal serpent is akin to asking if the bronze serpent is a literal snake. Or the Uraeus in Pharaoh's crown. No. But the bronze serpent wasn't just a metaphor. It was a physical symbol, standing for something else. Same thing with the Uraeus. A concrete representation. Objects that occupy real time and real space.

**iii)** So Kierkegaard and Niebuhr think the serpent represents the tension between finitude and freedom. Who cares? What reason is there to think that's how the narrator understood the serpent?

**iv)** Why does Olson think it's absurd to ask what kind of fruit the Edenic trees produced? It's useless to ask, in the sense that the account doesn't furnish that specific information. But why think that's a silly question to the narrator or the original audience?

**v)** What Reformed theologians think Gen 2-3 is reducible to an Everyman parable?

## Inerrancy and illocution

I'm going to quote, then comment on Walton's theory of inspiration. I believe he initially discussed this in Reading Genesis 1-2, but has a more detailed discussion in the new book he coauthored with Sandy.

The communicator uses locutions (words, sentences, rhetorical structures, genres) to embody an illocution (the intention to do something with those locutions—bless, promise, instruct, assert) with a perlocution that anticipates a certain sort of response from the audience (obedience, trust, belief).

The implied audience refers to the audience as the communicator perceives it. In the same way, the implied author refers to what the audience can infer about the "author" and his or her meaning from the communicative act. That is the audience cannot cross-examine or psychoanalyze the "author." His/Her meaning is determined by unpacking the communication that has been offered by means available in the language, culture, and context in which it took place.

By applying the tenets of speech-act theory, evangelical interpreters are able to associate the authoritative communicative act (God's illocution) specifically with the illocution of the human communicator. God's authority in Scripture is therefore accessible through the illocution of the human communicator—that is how God chose to do it.

Accommodation on the part of the divine communicator resides primarily in the locution, in which genre and rhetorical devices are included. These involve the form of communication. Yet our conviction is that even though God accommodates the communicator and his audience in the trappings and framework of locution, he will not accommodate an erroneous illocution on the part of the human communicator.

God may well accommodate the human communicator's view that the earth is the center of the cosmos. But if God's intention is not to communicate truth about cosmic geography, that accommodation is simply part of the shape of the locution—it is incidental, not part of God's

illocution. In contrast, God will not accommodate a communicator's belief that there was an exodus from Egypt and speak of it as a reality if it never happened. God will accommodate limited understanding for the sake of communication—that is simply part of accommodation in the locution. But we would maintain that he will not communicate about how he worked in events (e.g., the exodus) or through people (e.g., Abraham) if those events never took place and those people never existed. Such accommodation would falsify his illocution and invalidate its reliability. Authority is linked to the illocution. Consequently there is a higher incidence of accommodation in the locutions; indeed that is entirely normal and expected. Authority is not vested independently in the locutions, and communication could not take place without such accommodation. In contrast, that which comes with authority (illocution) may involve accommodation to language and culture, but will not affirm that which is patently false.

We can distinguish "high context" communication as pertaining to situations in



which the communicator and audience share much in common and less accommodation is necessary for effective communication to take place; this is communication between insiders.

In the contrasting "low context" communication, high levels of accommodation are necessary because one is communicating to outsiders.

We believe that God has inspired the locutions (words, whether spoken or written) that the communicator has used to accomplish with God their joint illocutions (which lead to an understanding of intentions, claims, affirmations and, ultimately, meaning), but that those locutions are tied to the communicator's world. That is, God has made accommodation to the high context communication between the implied communicator and implied audience so as to optimize and facilitate the transmission of meaning by means of an authoritative illocution. Inspiration is tied to locutions (they have their source in God); illocutions define the necessary path to meaning, which is characterized by authority and inerrancy.

Even though people in Israel believed there were waters above the earth held back by a solid sky, or that cognitive processes took place in the heart or kidneys, the illocution of the texts is not affirming those beliefs as revealed truth.

We propose instead that our doctrinal affirmations about Scripture (authority, inerrancy, infallibility, etc.) attach to the illocution of the human communicator. This is not to say that we therefore believe everything he believed (he did believe that the sun moved across the sky), but we express our commitment to his communicative act. Since his locutionary framework is grounded in his language and culture, it is important to differentiate between what the communicator can be inferred to believe and his illocutionary focus. So, for example, it is not surprise that ancient Israel believed in a solid sky, and God accommodated his locution to that model in his communication to them. But since the illocution is not to assert the true shape of cosmic geography, we can safely set those details aside as incidental without jeopardizing authority or inerrancy. Such cosmic geography is in the belief set of the

communicators but it employed in their locutions; it is not the context of their illocutions.

In conclusion then, God accommodates human culture and limitations in the locutions that he inspired in the human communicator, but he does not accommodate erroneous illocution or meaning. The authority of Scripture is vested in the meaning intended by the human communicator and given to him by the Holy Spirit, which is guided by an understanding of his illocutions.

J. Walton & D. B. Sandy, **THE LOST WORLD OF SCRIPTURE: ANCIENT LITERARY CULTURE AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY** (IVP 2013), 42-47.

This analysis suffers from multiple problems:

- i)** Walton fails to explain how communication necessitates accommodation. This is not to deny that a communicator must sometimes accommodate his audience. But Walton lays this down as a universal principle.
- ii)** Even in cases where communication requires accommodation, it doesn't follow that communication, even at the locutionary level, requires *erroneous* accommodation.

Suppose a child asks his parents where babies come from. The parent might accommodate the child by using an illustration. The parent might use the illustration of planting a seed in the ground. Indeed, the parent might actually do that, or have the child do that. Or, to be a bit more graphic, the parent might use a turkey baster to illustrate insemination.

These accommodations employ *analogies*. But there's nothing inherently erroneous about using an analogy to illustrate insemination. Even though the parent is coming down to the child's level of understanding, the comparison can still be accurate.

**iii)** Walton fails to explain why divine communication necessitates accommodation. Perhaps the unspoken assumption is that since God is so different from man, divine revelation must resort to accommodation.

If so, that fails to distinguish what any particular revelation is *about*. For instance, an incorporeal God might use picturesque metaphors to disclose something about himself, viz. eyes, ears, arm.

However, a statement about God causing something to happen in the world needn't be accommodated. Take this statement:

***"So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind" (Gen 1:21).***

That's a statement about the world. A statement about God making avian and aquatic life. But does that require accommodation?

**iv)** Apropos (iii), if the communicator's world is the real world, why is accommodation required to describe the real world? If locutions are tied to the communicator's world, and that's the real world, why is accommodation even necessary at that level?

**v)** Assuming for the sake of argument that ancient Jews believed in a solid sky, this is not just a question of what the Genesis narrator *believed*.

Rather, according to Walton, he is using locutions to *express* his belief. He is committing his belief to writing.

In that event, how can Walton drive a wedge between the narrator's locution and his illocution? He chooses those words with the intention of expressing what he thought the world was like. "Asserting" or "instructing."

**vi)** By Walton's own admission, the reader has no direct access to the narrator's illocution. Rather, the reader must access the narrator's illocution via his locutions. He chooses those words and sentences to express himself. Yet according to Walton, that's erroneous.

**vii)** In addition, Walton thinks the original (implied) audience believed in a solid sky. So another entry point would be what the statement meant to them. Yet according to Walton, that's erroneous as well.

How can Walton distinguish the narrator's (allegedly) inerrant illocution from his errant locution? All a modern reader has to go by is the narrator's locutions, as well as

the scientific understanding of the implied audience. Those are the two reference points we have at our disposal.

We can't bypass the narrator's locutions to directly access his illocution. Our interpretive clues are confined to the locutions as well as the epistemic situation of the implied audience. Yet according to Walton, both the locution and the understanding of the implied audience is erroneous.

So how is a modern reader supposed to discern God's illocution regarding the historicity (or not) of the Exodus?

**viii)** If God is accommodating the misconception of the narrator and the implied audience, then the narrator intended his locution to purport a solid sky. That is what he meant to convey.

**ix)** Moreover, that is what he meant it to mean to his audience. That's the correct interpretation. That's how his audience is supposed to understand his locution. The narrator wrote with a view to be understood.

**x)** Not only does this make it hard to see how Walton can distinguish the narrator's errant locution from his (allegedly) inerrant illocution, but how he can distinguish God's inerrant illocution from the narrator's illocution. How can he distinguish what the narrator communicates from what God truthfully communicates through the narrator—if the narrator's locutions and illocutions are erroneous?

God knows what the narrator intends to convey. God knows how the implied audience will construe the locution.

According to Walton, the locution is false. So God inspired the narrator to use locutions which will mislead the implied audience into believing falsehood.

According to Walton, the locution describes (or implies or alludes to) a solid sky. That's what the implied audience would take it to mean. And that interpretation would be right.

Even though God knows the sky not to be solid, the narrator and the implied audience aren't privy to God's correct understanding.

Not only is it impossible to see how Walton's illocutionary model can salvage inerrancy, but it makes God an inept communicator.

## Genesis and polygenesis

I'm going to comment on this post:

<http://michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/2012/07/genesis-13-face-compatible-genome-research/>

Genesis 1 describes the creation of human beings. (The process is put in pre-scientific or supernatural terms, and so doesn't give us a scientific perspective on how this happened).

The human beings of Genesis 1 are not in a garden in Eden (there is no garden of Eden in Genesis 1; the command to "subdue the earth" would speak of the whole earth, wherever humans are, not Eden, which is nowhere in view).

Genesis 2 describes a distinct and separate creation of two humans. (Again, the process is put in pre-scientific or supernatural terms, and so doesn't give us a scientific perspective on how this happened).

The two humans of Genesis 2 are in a garden in a place called Eden (which is clearly not synonymous with the earth since it has specific geography on the earth).

Since the two humans created in Genesis 2 are not the humans created in Genesis 1, the two humans in Genesis 2 cannot be seen as the progenitors of the humans of Genesis 1. The humanity of Genesis 1 was to image God in all the earth, not Eden, and so the Genesis 1 creation speaks of a divine origin (by whatever means) of human life on the planet. The humans of Genesis 2 are parallel to and consistent with those goals, but their story is more specific. They have a more particular purpose, which is revealed in Genesis 3.



This view does not require that all human beings come from a single pair of humans. Rather, there were humans on the earth along with the pair known as Adam and Eve. It therefore matters not if the human genome data requires more than a single pair of humans. This view also doesn't require one specific view of how humans wound up here, so long as God is in the process.

ESV and other translations cheat here, translating `erets as "land" to avoid tension with [Gen 1:11-12](#), where the same word is used when God did indeed have the earth bring forth the plants prior to the creation of humans.

The whole point is that someone COULD begin with entirely new presuppositions about Gen 1-2 and read the text in a different way. So, when I get questions in the comments, I'm answering like a person with those "other" presuppositions. And I've said that many times. What you really need to do is start thinking about what if the genetics material is correct. That's far more useful. I don't think the science is settled, but in another 5-10 years, as genetics keeps advancing, this may be at the level of something unassailable. At that point, as has been done for centuries, biblical scholars and theologians will need to re-assess the meaning of Scripture. That process isn't at all new (a heliocentric solar system used to be thought heretical). This enterprise will either be done well, or not. It's best to start thinking about it now.

The post was intended (as I keep saying) as an exercise in reading the text at face value in the event the statistical genetics argument put forth by Venema (and embraced by others).

**i)** I view the relationship between Gen 1-2 quite differently than Heiser. I think these are two distinct, but overlapping creation accounts. Gen 1 is a general creation account whereas Gen 2 is more specific. Gen 1 is cosmic or global whereas Gen 2 is local.

Gen 1 sets the stage for Gen 2. We'd expect the Bible to contain a creation account that describes how the one true God is the Creator of all contingent beings.

But Scripture takes a special interest in the origin and history of mankind. After sketching the creation of man in Gen 1, Gen 2 goes into more detail regarding the origin of man and his immediate environment. Humans didn't live everywhere. Since the human race began with a single breeding pair, their ancestral homeland is naturally quite localized.

Gen 2 isn't about the origin of fauna and flora in general, but about the first humans and their aboriginal habitat in particular. "Subduing" the earth is a long-range task.

**ii)** It isn't "cheating" to translate the same word differently if the context is different.

**iii)** The relationship between Gen 1-2 is like the relationship between Gen 6-7, where Gen 7 circles back around and fills in more details.

**iv)** To say "The human beings of Genesis 1 are not in a garden in Eden (there is no garden of Eden in Genesis 1" is a deceptive argument from silence. Gen 1 isn't meant to tell the whole story. Taken by itself, Gen 1 is intentionally incomplete. By design, it was meant to be supplemented by Gen 2, especially in reference to Day 6 (the creation of man).

There's a difference between "Gen 1 does not say if humans were in the Garden" and "Gen 1 says humans were not in the Garden." Heiser is inferring a negation from silence. But that's fallacious. Gen 1 leaves it open.

v) We can't directly compare the sequence of events in Gen 1 with Gen 2 because Gen 2 lacks the seven-day frame of reference. Likewise, Heiser fails to distinguish a sequence *between* different "days" (Gen 1) and a sequence *within* the (unspecified) timeframe of Gen 2.

We wouldn't expect Gen 2 to be systematically synchronous with Gen 1, for Gen 2 doesn't cover all the same ground. Rather, it takes many of the prior stages in Gen 1 for granted.

This view makes other passages in the early chapters of Genesis more comprehensible. For example, the classic "conundra" created by [Gen 4:8-17](#) are now easily answered. The question of where Cain's wife came from is not difficult — she came from the other humans out there in the world into which Adam and Eve were expelled. Other people were already there. When Cain worries ([Gen 4:13-14](#)) that someone will find him and kill him after he murdered his brother and is exiled, his worry becomes legitimate — there are lots of people out there in the cold, cruel world, and he has no family now for protection. When [Gen 4:17](#) has Cain building a city (did his wife help?) this view handles that with aplomb — there were lots of other people already living to help him construct his city.

The traditional view has great difficulties in Genesis 4. It must either affirm that only Adam, Eve, and Cain are living after Abel is murdered (and that is the plain implication of Genesis 4) or posit (i.e., invent) long stretches of time for Cain to find a wife also born from Adam and Eve later on, and then more stretches of time to have enough people born and grown so Cain can build a city — something he obviously couldn't do by himself. These have been classic dilemmas given a traditional approach to Genesis.

The traditional view DOES need to invent long stretches of time to avoid Cain building a city by himself. And is the text really saying that Cain feared people yet unborn would kill him in 20 years or so?! That's special pleading if there ever was any. It's a real problem, not an imagined one. In other words, regardless of the Adam issue, these are problems for a traditional view of Adamic humanity, and have been well traveled for centuries

You'd need a workforce of hundreds or thousands to build a city — and that doesn't count all the mothers staying at home with kids. You are simply dramatically under-estimating.

**i)** We need to distinguish between what the narrator says and what a character within the narrative (e.g. Cain) says. The narrator's viewpoint is normative. What Cain says is not. Cain may just be imagining things.

**ii)** Cain's statement is proleptic. Adam and Eve had other kids ([Gen 5:4](#)). The prediluvians lived for hundreds of years. The population would expand exponentially. Likewise, Cain's own offspring could help him build the "city."

**iii)** Why would humans who are unrelated to Adam's family avenge Abel's death? Cain envisions a blood feud, where murder dishonors the victim's kinfolk. But if the humans whom Cain alludes to aren't relatives of Abel, they wouldn't even know who Cain is, much less would they be motivated to execute him. A revenge killing only makes sense if the avengers are relatives of Abel.

**iv)** Heiser exaggerates what is meant by a "city." As one commentator notes:

The city refers to some form of fortification. Hulst explains, "Any settlement, more-or-less permanently inhabited, protected by

the erection of a 'fortress' or simple wall, can be called 'ir," B. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Zondervan 2001), 99.

## Wright on Adam

OK, Genesis one, two, and three is wonderful picture language, but I do think there was a primal pair in a world of emerging hominids, that's the way I read that.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2014/01/23/evolution-death-adam-wright-rjs/>

The way I see it is that there were many hominids or similar creatures, part of the long slow process of God's good creation. And at a particular time God called a particular pair for a particular task: to look after his creation and make it flourish in a whole new way.

<http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/06/02/n-t-wright-bible-isnt-inerrantist/>

There's an obvious problem with that position. That's not something you find from studying the Bible, and that's not something you find from studying evolutionary biology. On the one hand, Genesis doesn't have "a world of emerging hominids, part of the long slow process of God's good creation." On the other hand, evolutionary biology doesn't have Adam and Eve. It's a makeshift combination that's unsupported from either source. It arbitrarily splices together two independent, divergent narratives.

## Animals on day 6

*24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so.  
25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good (Gen 1:24-25).*

**i)** On the face of it, the reference to livestock is odd. By definition, that refers to domesticated animals. At a minimum, taming wild animals, but often animals which are the product of selective breeding.

Yet in what sense did God create domestic animals on day 6? Is this like instant Jersey cows?

**a)** Perhaps the usage is deliberately or unavoidably anachronistic. In the nature of the case, most occurrences of the word date from a later time. Since, however, there's a contrast between livestock and wild animals, that's not the best explanation.

**b)** Another possibility is that the usage is proleptic. God created domesticable animals on day 6. Animals suitable for domestication. God leaves it to humans to tame them and artificially breed them (to suppress undesirable traits and enhance desirable traits).

**ii)** Commentators agree that the first category (Heb=*behema*) denotes livestock, like cattle.

There's general agreement on the fact that the third category (Heb=*hayya*) denotes wild animals, although

Walton and Waltke think it has a more specific denotation (see below).

There's disagreement on the identity of the second category (Heb=*remes*). Currid thinks it denotes "small animals."

Hamilton thinks it denotes reptiles (e.g. snakes, lizards). This assumes the classification is based on modes of locomotion.

Based on cognate (Akkadian) usage, Walton thinks it denotes wild herd animals. He thinks this involves a contrast between wild prey and wild predators. (Waltke takes a similar position.)

**iii)** How the animals are classified has a bearing on whether Gen 1 indicates that all animals were originally herbivorous. If Walton and Waltke are correct, then carnivory was in place from the get-go.

Likewise, if the second category denotes reptiles, many reptiles are carnivorous. Of course, some Christians think that represents a subsequent development.

I'd say the textual evidence is inconclusive for either position.



## Adam, Eve, and Cain

According to traditional Christian theology, Adam and Eve were the first human beings. There were no pre-Adamites. Theistic evolutionists usually disagree on scientific rather than exegetical grounds. About the only exegetical argument one runs across to challenge the traditional view is the claim that Cain's fear of retribution ([Gen 4:13ff.](#)) implies the existence of other human contemporaries (besides Adam, Eve, and Cain's late brother).

Now, there are multiple problems with that inference, but for now, let's grant, for the sake of argument, that this solves the alleged problem of Cain's statement. That solves one problem by creating another.

If Adam and Eve were not the first humans, then why did God make a wife for Adam? if there were other humans on the scene, why didn't Adam simply take a wife from one of the many eligible women already in existence? The theistic evolutionary appeal to Cain's statement implies the availability of other women. Why didn't Adam get a wife the way Isaac got a wife? According to theistic evolution, as well as the theistic evolutionary interpretation of [Gen 4:13ff.](#), there were plenty of women to choose from. So why does the narrator depict God specially creating Eve to resolve Adam's lack of female companionship.

## From Eden to new Jerusalem

I'm going to quote and comment on Iain Provan's analysis of Gen 1-2 in **SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS RELIGION** (Baylor 2014):

The sacred nature of the world is first intimated in Gen 1 through the metaphor of the temple. Temples in the ANE were designed primarily as residences for the gods, rather than as places of worship. It is this close connection between cosmos construction and temple construction that we see also in [Gen 1:1-2:4](#), where the cosmos is presented as God's temple. First, temple-dedication ceremonies in the ANE often lasted seven days...second, we are told of God's gathering of the waters into one place so that they could serve a useful purpose as seas ([Gen 1:9](#)). This reflects the reality of the later temple in Israel's capital city of Jerusalem, within whose precincts was to be found an impressive "sea of cast metal, circular in shape" ([1 Kgs 7:23-26](#)). Third, we also read in Gen about the creation of the sun and the moon ([Gen 1:14-16](#))...the Hebrew word used here for "light" (ma'or) is most frequently used elsewhere in the OT for the sanctuary light in the tabernacle (the Israelites' portable temple prior to Solomon's time). Fourth, the end of the creation account in [Gen 1:1-2:4](#) also reminds us of the construction of the tabernacle in [Exod 40:33](#)...Finally before God finishes this creative work, we read in Genesis that he places in "image" in creation (1:26-28). In the ANE more generally, the deity's presence in his temple was also marked by an image, in which the reality of the deity was thought to be embodied (32-33).

**i)** The cosmic temple interpretation of Gen 1 is already becoming old hat in Bible scholarship. Provan isn't breaking new ground here.

**ii)** I agree with Provan and like-minded scholars who find temple motifs in Gen 1. I think Gen 1 foreshadows the tabernacle—as well as Noah's ark. In fact, I think we could augment the evidence. The "firmament" (1:6ff.) is arguably an architectural metaphor for a roof or ceiling, such as a temple would have. So, up to a point, I think this analysis is valid.

**iii)** That said, Provan overplays the temple interpretation. There's a big difference between saying Gen 1 contains a few suggestive descriptions which cue the reader to anticipate the tabernacle—quite something else to make that the dominant interpretive paradigm. Most of the content of Gen 1 bears no resemblance to a temple, even at a figurative level.

And that's what we'd expect from a global creation account. It's not a residence for God, but a residence for creatures. It contains lots of stuff you don't find in temples. At best, Provan might try to argue that it's God's residence in the vicarious sense that man functions as a priest of God.

For the most part, Gen 1 is describing a physical world with the furnishings necessary for physical existence. To make the temple metaphor the controlling interpretive lens is very disproportionate to the actual content and emphasis, which is more mundane.

**iv)** The comparison between the oceans in 1:9 and the "sea of brass" in Solomon's temple is rather desperate:

**a)** To begin with, the sea of brass has a completely different function. It's for ceremonial ablutions, whereas the ocean in Gen 1 is the habitat for marine creatures (1:20ff).

**b)** It's exegetically dubious to use a text outside the Pentateuch to interpret the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is a literary and conceptual unit. To some extent, the books of the Pentateuch mirror each other. They are mutually interpreting. Genesis lays down some markers which will be picked up in subsequent books of the Pentateuch. That's the primary frame of reference.

c) By the same token, even granting the presence of temple motifs in Gen 1, the counterpart to the "cosmic temple" in Gen 1 is the wilderness tabernacle, not the Solomonic temple.

v) If Gen 1 is a realistic creation account, then we'd expect it to describe the origin of water and bodies of water—like oceans.

Put succinctly, the creation narrative in Gen 1 is retold in Gen 2, this time through the metaphor of the garden rather than the temple (34).

What we are likely dealing with in Gen 2, then, is exactly what we are certainly dealing with in Gen 1. It is the idea that the whole world is sacred space. In Gen 2, however, this idea is developed using garden imagery (36).

A fundamental problem with this analysis is that if, according to Provan, the temple account (Gen 1) includes garden imagery while the garden account (Gen 2) includes temple imagery, then it's hard to claim these are two different ways of saying the same thing. According to his own analysis, Gen 1 contains garden motifs as well as temple motifs while Gen 2 contains temple motifs as well as garden motifs. So these aren't two different metaphors to express the same idea. The distinction between the two is blurred by shared motifs. His analysis works at cross-purposes with his conclusion.

### The Impossible Garden

The sacred nature of the world is also strongly suggested by the metaphor of the garden that is used for it in Gen 2. This is often missed, however because of a long reading tradition that understands this garden ("in the east, in Eden"; 2:8) as a place within the world rather than as a picture of the world...The authors of Genesis almost certainly did not have a particular location in mind when writing about the garden. Three features of their description strongly suggest this. First, the region to the "east" of ancient Israel was

Mesopotamia...However, as we read the first eleven chapters of the Genesis story, we discover that human beings only end up in Mesopotamia as the result of an eastward migration from their starting point in the garden...They first leave the garden via the entrance/exit on its east side...Cain's failures lead him further eastward into the land of Nod (4:16); further eastward migration ultimately leads to Babylon (11:2). Eden, it seems, must actually be in the west... (33-34).

i) That fails to distinguish between east as a direction and east as a location. If, say, I sail north from Antarctica, I can travel for hundreds of miles in a northerly direction, but still be in the southern hemisphere.

ii) The migration to Babylon in 11:2 doesn't represent a continuous, linear migration from Eden. Provan fails to take into account the disruption of the deluge. We're not dealing with the geographical origin of the human race, but where the ark bottomed out. That becomes the new epicenter for humanity—via the survivors. The postlapsarian migration represents a new beginning. A new starting-point.

Second, we must remember that Gen 2 follows Gen 1... It has already described the creation of trees in that global context (1:11-12,29), as well as the creation of beasts, birds, and humans (female as well as male; [Gen 1:20-27](#)). Chapter 2 repeats all of this in the context of the garden. The natural implication is that the garden is not located somewhere on the earth, but represents the whole earth (34).

i) An obvious problem with this conclusion is that Gen 2 doesn't repeat all the items in Gen 1. It's more restricted. It has a river, not an ocean. No marine creatures. It doesn't describe the origin of the sky, sun, stars, dry land, &c.

ii) According to the traditional interpretation, Gen 1 and Gen 2 do overlap. There's some carryover. Gen 2 is a more detailed description of man's creation and his original habitat.

iii) The tacit assumption of Provan's interpretation is that Gen 2 simply uses a garden metaphor. But if, in fact, this is a real garden, then we'd expect it to contain trees and wildlife. Those are realistic features.

If God did make a first human couple, by special creation, where would they live? A riverine location is a practical location. That's why you have the great river valley civilizations of Egypt, India, China, South America, and—yes—Mesopotamia.

River valleys have lush vegetation (e.g. fruit trees, shade trees) on both sides of the river bank. They supply water for cooking, washing, bathing, and irrigation. Drinking water for humans, livestock, hunting dogs, and game animals. Fishing and transportation. Solid waste disposal. When rivers overflow their banks, they leave a layer of silt which replenishes the topsoil. What biologists call a riparian zone.

Indeed, if the garden is not the whole earth, it is unclear how the whole earth is supposed to be populated and governed by human beings in line with [Gen 1:28](#), for there is no hint in Gen 1-3 that human beings were ever supposed to leave the garden (34-35).

i) Actually, I'd draw the opposite inference. The cultural mandate (1:28) assumes that after man outgrew the confines of the garden, he'd expand outward, colonizing and domesticating other parts of the earth. Since Gen 2 says the human race began from just one breeding pair, most of the earth was initially unpopulated by humans.

ii) Moreover, the terms of the curse on Adam imply that conditions outside the garden were fairly inhospitable compared to conditions inside the garden. Provan's interpretation erases that invidious contrast.

Third, there is the puzzling matter of the geography of [Genesis 2:10-14](#) (35).

That's an old chestnut.

i) Given the lapse of time, it's unsurprising that some of the geographical markers may be hard to identify this far down the pike. Rivers change course. Rivers dry up. Place-names change.

ii) Provan is ignoring scientific and archeological evidence that locates Eden in Mesopotamia. Cf. K. Kitchen, **ON THE RELIABILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT** (Eerdmans 2003), 428-30; <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2000/PSCF3-00Hill.html>

Like other temples in the ancient world, this (cosmic) garden-temple incorporates within it a spring, from which the primeval waters flow out to water the four corners of the earth (2:6)... (36).

Which assumes the riverine imagery is figurative. But, of course, real people do settle alongside real rivers. That's true the world over.

We see this in 1 Kings 6, where its interior is said to be "carved with gourds and open flowers...palm trees and open flowers ([1 Kgs 6:18,29](#)) (37).

i) Although that may be Edenic imagery, it may just be decorative.

ii) Even if it is meant to evoke the Garden of Eden, Provan's analysis is backwards: the garden doesn't imitate a temple; rather, a temple imitates the garden.

iii) There's also the problem of literary anachronisms, where later texts are used to gloss earlier texts. Perhaps, though, Provan thinks the Pentateuch was written after the construction and destruction of Solomon's temple.

We see it also in [Ezk 47:1-12...](#) (37).

No doubt that deliberately fuses temple motifs with Edenic motifs. But that's visionary and surreal. That's a different genre than historical narrative (e.g. Gen 1-2).

The particular "tree" that is the tree of life in the garden of Eden ([Gen 2:9](#)) is represented in the tabernacle by the branched lampstand with its floral motifs ([Exod 25:31-40; 37:17-24](#)) (37).

That may well be, but once again, Provan has the cart before the horse. The garden prefigures the tabernacle, not vice versa.

Provan continues in this vein. But that misses the point. Yes, biblical descriptions of the temple and tabernacle allude to Eden. But the garden is not a figurative temple; rather, the temple (or tabernacle) is a figurative garden. Although the garden can function as sacred space, it's still a garden.

This brings us back around to the Hebrew word *miqqedem* in [Gen 2:8](#) which has so often been translated as "in the east"...[but] it is not so much an expression of physical direction...The sun rises in the east (*miqqedem*), and light is a common OT metaphor for the divine presence (39).

**i)** To begin with, identifying "the east" with "light" would be better suited to the temple interpretation of Gen 1, where the celestial luminaries presage the Menorah. That's a temple metaphor, not a garden metaphor.

**ii)** The sun really does rise in the east—to an earthbound observer. That's not a metaphor, but a reality. Of course, sunrise and sunlight can function as metaphors, but there's no presumption that an allusion to sunrise or sunlight is figurative.



iii) Moreover, the narrator may not intend the reader to associate "the east" with sunrise or sunlight. Oftentimes "east" is just a location or direction, rather than a synonym for sunrise or sunset.

Of course, if you're traveling by foot, then sunrise gives you a rough compass point. But at that juncture we've strayed far from the prosaic reference in [Gen 2:8](#).

## In the Director's chair

From time to time, Hollywood directors film parts of the Bible. Usually the Gospels, or Genesis, Exodus, Judges, and 1-2 Samuel. These cinematic adaptations of Scripture are widely variable in quality (not to mention orthodoxy). Sometimes they're visually impressive. Sometimes campy, subversive, or banal. Needless to say, most Hollywood directors aren't orthodox Christians, so they're not concerned with accuracy.

That said, it's actually a useful exercise for a Christian to put himself in the director's chair when reading the Bible. By that I mean, a director who films the Bible has to visualize what the narrative is describing. He must make judgment calls on how it happened.

If we take the Bible seriously, as we should, then it's good to mentally visualize Biblical narratives. If you were a Christian director, what would you show? When you read the narrative, what do you see in your mind's eye? Part of interpreting Scripture and honoring the historicity of Scripture is to have a realistic picture of what the narrative describes. Let's take some examples:

**i)** One question scholars debate is whether **Gen 1:1** is an introduction to the creation week, or part of day one. If the former, then the primeval sea preexists creation. But I think 1:1 is part of day one.

**ii)** How would you depict the Spirit of God hovering over the waters? One possibility is a dove. Obviously, you can't see anything or show anything absent a light source.

Another possibility, drawn from other parts of the Pentateuch, is to depict the Spirit of God as the Shekinah hovering above the waters. In OT, the Shekinah has the appearance of a plasma cloud. Luminous. Technicolored (like a rainbow). That would enable the viewer to see the primordial ocean, illuminated by the Shekinah.

The separation of light and darkness refers to the origin of the diurnal cycle. So you could show first light, dawn, morning light, noonday light, afternoon light, and dusk. And fading from day into night would separate each day from the next. You'd show the beginning of each new day by first light or dawn. That would distinguish and transition from one scene to the next.

**iii)** On day two you'd shift from showing the primordial ocean to showing the sky. Illuminated clouds. The horizon line between sky and sea.

**iv)** On day three you'd show the land rising out of the sea. Like volcanic islands. Ascending mountain ranges. Valleys. Coastlines. Lakes and rivers.

You'd then show, like time-lapse photography, the barren earth erupting in foliage.

**v)** Day four might be a flashback to day one, catching up to days two and three. If days one-through-three show lighted objects, day four shows the light sources. The perspective would shift from a downward view of the illuminated earth to an upward view of the luminaries. You could also show moonlight on lakes and seas. Day four would fade out with a view of the star-studded night sky.

**vi)** Day five might show fish materializing in the sea, lakes, and rivers—as well as birds materializing. One might show

matter organizing into fish and birds. Show atoms forming molecules, forming cells, forming bodies. From the inside out, in ascending scales of complexity and magnitude. Rather like Ezekiel's description in Ezk 37.

**vii)** Day six would repeat the process for land animals.

**viii)** When we come to the creation of man, day six in Gen 1 shades into Gen 2. Gen 2 is basically a localized expansion of day six in Gen 1. That also means the seventh day would come after the events of Gen 2.

To some extent, Gen 2 is a microcosm of Gen 1. God plants a garden. God makes plants and animals for the garden. You'd show the same type of process you did in general creation week.

**ix)** You could depict Eden as a river valley or river plain. It would be sheltered by steep hills on either side. There'd be verdant foliage on the river banks.

**x)** In view of various angelophanies in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, it would be logical to depict the Creator in 2:7 as the Angel of the Lord. Adam might materialize as the theophanic angel passed his hand over the ground. Dust particles rising from the ground and arranging themselves a body-like a sand man. He'd animate Adam the way Jesus breathed on the disciples ([Jn 20:22](#)).

Likewise, he'd take flesh from Adam and reconfigure that into Eve. We have other examples of metamorphosis in the Pentateuch, like Aaron's budding rod.

**xi)** Day 7 would show the completed creation.

**xii)** As I've discussed before, the name for the tempter in Gen 3 is probably a pun. The word can mean "snake," "diviner," or "shining one." Based on the varied connotations of the word, as well as Pentateuchal angelophanies, I think the tempter is a fallen angel.

That would also explain why Adam and Eve aren't surprised by this visitor. They are used to angels.

**xiii)** Let's shift to Exodus. If you were a director, how would you depict the "burning bush" episode? In context, I think the "burning bush" is an observational description of how it appeared to Moses at a distance (presumably at night). But I doubt the bush itself was on fire.

Rather, the luminosity came from the angel, inside or behind the bush. From a distance, it looked like a bush was on fire, but as Moses drew closer, it becomes evident that the angel is the light source. You see the fire through the bush. Like a candle in a jack-o'-lantern. The bush is not consumed because it's not physical firelight. Rather, it's a radiant angel.

In Scripture, angels can take on different aspects. Sometimes they look like ordinary men. Sometimes they are luminous. And in the case of the seraphim/cherubim, they have inhuman features. You also have the cherubic "flaming sword" in [Gen 3:24](#). [Exod 3:2-3](#) is a fire theophany or fire angelophany.

This also relates to the "pillar of smoke and fire" in the desert. It's like a preternatural firenado. A natural firenado is an ephemeral, directionless physical phenomenon. But the pillar of fire is stable and directional. That's probably an accurate way of showing the pillar of cloud and fire.

In theology, there's a technical distinction between natural, preternatural, and supernatural. A preternatural phenomenon is natural insofar as it employs a physical medium, but it's unnatural or supernatural insofar as it is miraculous.

**xiv)** To take a few more examples, if you were filming Balaam's donkey, what would you show? Recent cinematic adaptations of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have shown how CGI can depict talking animals. Another possibility is telepathic communication, although that would be auditory rather than visual.

But as I've recently discussed, given the fact that Balaam was a seer, this may have been a vision.

**xv)** What about Joshua's Long Day? Due to the poetic nature of the description, it's hard to pin down the precise cause. The main thing is to depict the physical *effect* of Joshua's Long Day. An analogy would be the miracle of the "sun dial" (a la Ahaz, Isaiah).

**xvi)** To take a final example, what about Lot's wife? Consider the pyroclastic flow that instantly fossilized the victims of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

**xvii)** In filming the flood, you'd have to decide whether to depict a global or local flood. If global, you'd show rising seas. Coastal flooding, which continues to moving inland and upland to overtake the hills until the mountains are submerged.

If a local flood, you could depict torrential rain downing trees. Rivers become clogged with debris, causing them to back up—submerging a huge floodplain. Yes, water can move upstream if it has no outlet.



## OEC interpretations

**i)** One of the challenges for old-earth creationism is to specify what happened in Gen 1. Young-earth creationism has a straightforward position: everything happened in the way it's described.

But for OEC, there's some distinction between what it describes and what it represents. And depending on the version of OEC, there are varying degrees of correspondence. For instance, some versions are sequential (day/age theory; analogical days) while others are nonsequential (framework hypothesis; revelatory days; cosmic temple interpretation).

Part of the vagueness is due to the fact that OEC tends to treat Gen 1 as a thumbnail sketch whose details are pencilled in by astronomy and geology. But it balks at evolutionary biology.

**ii)** One of the internal problems with the framework hypothesis is that it grafts a nonsequential arrangement onto a sequential arrangement. On the one hand, it views the days as a week of days. A 7-day week, based on a 6-day workweek, with one day off (the Sabbath). That's sequential, though it regards that as figurative schema.

On the other hand, it views the interrelationship of the days as nonsequential: 1 is to 4 as 2 is to 5 and 3 is to 6. The days match up in 3 paired days. Three sets of two days, in a staggered collation.

Now one could be right, or both could be wrong, but they don't mesh. And that's even before you get to the baroque



embellishments of late Kline's upper/lower register cosmology.

**iii)** Let's turn to the cosmic temple interpretation. It's striking that, to my knowledge, proponents of this view, like John Walton, don't attempt to work it out systematically. By that I mean, if Gen 1 uses that architectural metaphor, then it's proper to ask what events correspond to what features of a temple. How does Gen 1 parallel the construction process of a temple? What items in Gen 1 correspond to parts of the temple? Items like a floor, walls, roof, doors, windows, interior furnishings.

Let's give it a try:

Day 1. God creates light. A builder must have light to see by. (Anthropomorphic.)

Day 2. The sky corresponds to the ceiling or roof.

Day 3. The dry land correspond to the floor or foundation. Maybe hills and mountains correspond to walls or pillars. Flora are part of the interior decor or furnishings.

Day 4. Stellar luminaries correspond to windows which admit light to illuminate the enclosed interior.

Day 5. Fish and birds represent the interior decor or furniture.

Day 6. Land animals supply additional furniture. Man is like a statue of deity in the temple. The imago Dei.

**a)** There are, of course, some incongruities in this sketch. The order in which things happen doesn't reflect the order in which a temple is erected. Most obviously, you don't

install the roof or ceiling before you lay the foundation or raise walls. So the order is backwards in that respect.

**b)** If flora correspond to decor or furniture, wouldn't a builder wait until the exterior was up? Perhaps, though, we could salvage that by saying they are like murals. Once the walls are in place, they are decorated. The temple had floral decorations.

I suppose you could say bodies of water correspond to the basin in the tabernacle or temple. Fish and birds are a bit of a stretch.

There's also the enigmatic relationship between light on day 1 and lights on day 4. Part of the explanation is that you can't put lights in the sky before you make the sky. In that respect, day 2 must precede day 4. Likewise, it's the sky as seen in relation to the land, from the perspective of a ground-based observer. In that respect, day 2 must precede day 3, while day 3 must precede day 4—inasmuch as you can't see lights in the sky from earth until the earth (i.e. dry land) is made.

Put another way, there's a distinction between light without land supplying the frame of reference (day 1), and light with land supplying a frame of reference (day 3). If the land is submerged, an observer can't see light overhead, because he has nowhere to stand. And that analysis of day 4 is true whether or not we endorse the temple interpretation.

At the same time, I think this exposes some limitations of the cosmic temple interpretation. There's a lot in Gen 1 that doesn't correspond to a temple. Even if Gen 1 contains some temple motifs, the narrative doesn't use that as an extended metaphor to model creation.

**iii)** Another possibility is if the the arrangement taxonomical rather than chronological. Based on different kinds of creatures. The day/night alternation is a way of grouping and demarcating different kinds of creatures. God creates one type of creature, then another type of creature. Or God creates several different kinds at a time. God creates groups of creatures.

Even if God did this all at once, it can't be stated all at once. The narrator can only describe one thing at a time. On that interpretation, this isn't just an account of who made it, but what was made.

Suppose, as an analytical exercise, we mentally we strip away the numbered 7-day schema. That's like muting the soundtrack on a movie to study the flow of images, as well as the transition from one scene to another. A soundtrack can impose a sense of continuity.

Even without the day/night refrain, the sequence in Gen 1 still has a functional or teleological progression. Certain things must be in place before other things can be put in place. You can't have fish without bodies of water. You can't have land animals without dry land. You can't have trees without land. You can't have birds without a sky to fly in or trees to nest in or perch on. It's not just the explicit temporal markers (days 1-7) that give it a forward motion.

So the arrangement isn't merely an abstract classification scheme by natural kinds. There's temporal succession. Mind you, OEC, as I understand it, doesn't deny that some things must happen first, as preconditions for other things happening.

## Birth-pangs

*I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children (Gen 3:16).*

This post is primarily about the cursing of Eve, but I will make some preliminary observations before getting to the main point:

**i)** Unbelievers think this reflects the mythological character of Genesis. Just as 3:14-15 is an etiological fable about how snakes lost their legs, 3:16 is an etiological fable about the historical source of birth-pangs.

**ii)** There's a grain of truth to that allegation insofar as Genesis is certainly a book of origins. It explains, in part, how events in the past gave rise to the present status quo. Of course, saying that doesn't mean I agree with how unbelievers construe the text.

**iii)** In addition, some interpreters think that all three curses involve a physical transformation. Because the cursing of Adam and the "snake" are physically transformative, the cursing of Eve is physically transformative. I'd just point out that there's no antecedent reason why if one or two are physical, all three must be physical. There's no moral or logical principle that demands physical punishment in all three cases. Punishment needn't be symmetrical in that respect.

**iv)** Moreover, I disagree with their interpretation. Cursing Adam didn't transform conditions in the Garden. To the contrary, it's because the Garden remained unchanged that Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden, so that they

could no longer benefit from that idyllic setting. Likewise, they were banished to the wilderness precisely because conditions outside the garden were naturally less hospitable.

Likewise, Walton has argued that cursing the "snake" trades on familiar imprecations. Due to the prevalence of venomous snakes in the ancient Near East, there were customary imprecations to render them harmless or docile. A cobra raises itself to strike. By contrast, a cobra that's flat on the ground is not in a hostile posture. So he thinks 3:14 plays on that symbolism. And it's plausible that that's how ancient readers, accustomed to such formulas, would understand it.

**v)** Strictly speaking, it's not men, women, and "snakes" generally that are cursed in Gen 3, but Adam, Eve, and the Tempter. We move too quickly if we simply assume that this refers to men, women, and "snakes" in general. The curses are specific to Adam, Eve, and the Tempter.

Now, one might argue that since Adam and Eve are prototypical, what happens to them happens to their male and female counterparts down the line. That's worth considering in terms of the continuing narrative. My point is that we shouldn't jump to that conclusion. Tradition has conditioned us to automatically universalize the curses in Gen 3, but you don't get that from Gen 3 itself.

**vi)** It's often said that Christians opposed sedating women in labor because that subverted the divine punishment. But from what I've read, that's a malicious urban legend:

<http://bedejournal.blogspot.com/2008/12/deep-sleep-of-adam.html>

**vii)** Apropos (vi), many readers assume the cursing of Eve refers to the origin of birth-pangs. Apart from the Fall, childbirth would have been painless. Unbelievers then attack this as prescientific nonsense. Childbirth is inherently painful. Unless the heads of babies were smaller, or the cervix was larger, before the fall, that's bound to be a tight squeeze.

Now, I'm going to question that interpretation, but even on its own terms it's theoretically possible for the body to secrete a natural sedative that anesthetizes pain. In principle, there wouldn't need to be morphological changes for childbirth to be fairly painless.

**viii)** Like the English word, the Hebrew word can denote either physical or psychological pain. The word itself doesn't select for labor pains.

As, moreover, one scholar points out:

The Hebrew that stands behind the NIV's "pains" ('tsp) is never used in the OT to refer to pain experienced during the process of giving birth. Birth pangs are referred to using quite different terms. Moreover, the Hebrew word translated in the NIV as "childbearing" (herayon) clearly refers elsewhere in the OT to conception or pregnancy, not birth. I. Provan, **SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS RELIGION** (Baylor U Press 2014), 117.

**ix)** The original audience for Gen 3 had extensive, personal experience with infant mortality. Mothers expected some or many of their children to die before adulthood. When pregnant, there was always the apprehension that the baby you bore might be the baby you bury. This could happen in

many ways. Miscarriage. Accident. Disease. Malnutrition. An infected wound. Pregnancy was full of foreboding. Mothers were used to outliving their children.

Likewise, it was not uncommon for women to die in childbirth, leaving their children motherless. That's another maternal apprehension. And unless a wet-nurse was available, a motherless newborn would quickly die of malnutrition.

Dread of watching your children die. Dread of leaving your children orphaned. Dread of dying in childbirth.

**x)** In addition, Eve did, in fact, experience the grief of outliving Abel. And he died under the worst imaginable circumstances. One son murdering another son. In a sense, she lost both sons. One was murdered, while the murderer was banished. Even if Cain hadn't been banished, there'd be the alienation of affections. She could never look at him the same way again.

**xi)** Because many modern readers benefit from modern medical science, I think we overlook the possibility or probability that the curse in 3:16 concerns psychological pain rather than physical pain. There are, of course, many Third World mothers who experience all the forbidding that original audience knew all too well.

Furthermore, in cultures where girls are married off before they are physically mature, childbirth can be physically destructive.

## Is Gen 2 a one-day creation account?

One stock objection to YEC is that it's hard to squeeze everything that happens in Gen 2 into a 24-hour timeframe.

Now I think that objection is somewhat overdrawn. If, say, God only named the animals in the Garden, then that drastically reduces the amount of time required.

That said, it's pretty rushed, pretty congested, if everything had to happen in the span of 24 hours. Why the hurry?

Now, what's interesting about this question is that, unlike Gen 1, Gen 2 has no time-markers. There's nothing in the account itself to indicate when it began and when it ended. So there's nothing in the account itself to limit the action to a single day. In principle, it could be spread out over two or more days. And you could still take everything literally.

What's driving the 24-hour interpretation of Gen 2 is synchronizing Gen 2 with Gen 1. If you take Gen 1 as the temporal frame of reference, then day 6 supplies the terminus ad quo for Gen 2 insofar as man can't be created in Gen 2 before man is created in Gen 1.

However, assuming that we accept that frame of reference, even if day 6 supplies the terminus ad quo, that doesn't mean day 6 supplies the terminus at quem. Although, on that reference frame, it can't begin before day 6, that doesn't mean it can't end after day 6.

Perhaps, though, the objection is that Gen 1 says both male and female were made on day 6. So that's the cutoff. However, day 6 is a shorthand account of what's detailed in



Gen 2—with special reference to man's creation. The telegrammatic description of man's creation on day 6 pencilled in by the more expansive account in Gen 2.

But it still might be said that if day 6 marks the terminus ad quo, then day 7 marks the terminus ad quem. That's if we bookend Gen 2 between day 5 and day 7.

However, to say that day 6 supplies the terminus ad quo oversimplifies the relation. If you attempt to coordinate Gen 2 with Gen 1, then events in Gen 2 begin on day 3. For in Gen 1, the creation of flora antedates the creation of fauna by 3 days.

On the calendar-day interpretation, you can't synchronize days 3-6 with a one-day creation in Gen 2. 24 hours  $\neq$  74 hours. But if, in Gen 2, some things happen sooner than day 6, why can't some things happen later than day 6?

Of course, this discontinuity goes to the fact that even though Gen 1 and Gen 2 overlap, the events in Gen 2 are in some measure independent of Gen 1 inasmuch as Gen 2 is a local creation account with special reference to the Garden of Eden. So, as a matter of act, they were never meant to be strictly synchronous. In Gen 2, God prepares a home for our first parents. He plants a garden. He furnishes the garden with animals he creates (on the spot). It's more diagonal than parallel to Gen 1. Given the complicated relationship between Gen 1 and Gen 2, there's no compelling reason to view Gen 2 as a one-day creation account. It may reflect a more leisurely pace.

## Is ancestry destiny?

*You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me (Exod 20:5; par. Deut 5:9).*

Does the Bible teach generational curses? This is a popular proof-text for that position.

Does this envision a fatalistic scenario in which God has hexed a family line so that every descendant is doomed to suffer misfortune?

Punishing descendants for the sins of their ancestors seems unjust. Commentators offer different interpretations of this commandment (or prohibition) to relieve the apparent injustice.

**i)** One question is the significance of the "third and fourth generation."

**a)** On one interpretation, that's an idiom for "whatever number" or "plenty of."

**b)** On another interpretation, it denotes extended families—children through great-grandparents. The fourth generation represents the outer limits of the normal human lifespan.

**ii)** There is sometimes thought to be a contradiction between this verse and Deut 24:14. However, Exod 20:5 is providential whereas Deut 24:14 is jurisprudential. Exod 20:5 is about something God does, whereas Deut 24:14 is about something human judges do. Roughly speaking, it's a difference between sins and crimes. The latter fall under the human administration of justice (i.e. the Hebrew justice system), whereas the former involves God acting directly or through ordinary providence (e.g. history).

**iii)** On one interpretation, this refers to remedial punishment rather than retributive punishment. That's possible. However, that distinction doesn't address examples like the collective punishment of Achan's family—which some commentators invoke (see below).

**iv)** On another interpretation, this involves the principle of corporate solidarity and collective responsibility. And we certainly find that principle in Scripture.

However, that amounts to a disguised description rather than an explanation. It essentially paraphrases [Exod 20:5](#) in terms of collective guilt. But that only pushes the question back a step, for that, too, raises the specter of injustice. By itself, it doesn't give a reason for why later generations should be held accountable or liable for the misdeeds of their forebears. So, if the intention of that interpretation is to relieve the apparent injustice, it fails to solve the problem it posed for itself.

That doesn't mean corporate solidarity is necessarily unjust. But merely that invoking that category is not a solution in itself. The category itself must be defended, if that's deployed in theodicy.

**v)** Another interpretation is that God punishes subsequent generations who repeat the offenses of their forebears. On that interpretation, God isn't punishing the innocent. Rather, they take after their parents and grandparents.

Although that's an appealing solution, it's not without problems:

**a)** One issue concerns the grammatical object of "those who hate me." Does that refer back to subsequent generations, or to the fathers? I don't find commentators discussing the syntactical question. Unless subsequent generations are, indeed, the grammatical referent, that interpretation is stillborn.

**b)** Moreover, it seems rather trite or banal to say that God punishes those who hate him. Isn't that a given? He punishes the disobedient.

**c)** Furthermore, that fails to explain why it's to the "third and fourth generation"—especially in contrast to the "thousandth generation" (v6).

If God is only punishing the generations that continue to hate him, then that could end with the second generation or extend to the tenth generation. It depends on how long subsequent generations hate him. The punishment stops when the last impious generation dies off.

Likewise, why use more restrictive language for duration of punishment (to the third and fourth generation) than the duration of blessing (to the thousandth generation) if the differential factor is who loves him or hates him?

**vi)** A final interpretation says this refers to descendants who suffer the consequences for their forebear's misdeeds. I think that explanation is in the ballpark, but it could be made more specific.

I suggest we look to the book before Exodus, as a frame of reference. In particular, the history of the patriarchs.

God calls Abraham out of Ur. But Abraham is by no means the sole, or even primary, beneficiary of God's selection. Abraham takes his wife and father with him.

And consider all the inhabitants of Ur whom God didn't choose? They were left in darkness.

God makes Isaac rather than Ishmael the child of promise. That has generally beneficial consequences for Isaac's descendants and generally detrimental consequences for Ishmael's decedents.

Likewise, God favors Jacob over Esau. That, too, has generally beneficial consequences of Jacob's decedents and

generally detrimental consequences of Esau's descendants. What happens to the ancestor impacts his descendants.

They veer off into a life apart from God. A tribe or clan that's diverted into a godless existence. They develop their own subculture. Their own social mores. Their own religious beliefs and practices. That's hard to break out of.

When groups fork off and go their separate ways, the members of each group become more alike in their outlook and behavior. For instance, endogamy makes people culturally as well as genetically ingrown.

For better or worse, that internal development becomes entrenched tradition. Consider the gypsies, with their distinctive customs and honor-codes.

In modern times, some localities are more Christian while other localities are more atheistic. What groove you are born into tends to set the pattern for your own life.

Consider the history of the Edomites. Having branched off, the Edomites became enemies of Israel.

I expect that's the sort of thing that lies in the background of [Exod 20:5](#). The threat is tersely stated because that's tacitly illustrated by the past and future history of affected people-groups.

Of course, Scripture also bears witness to God's gracious intervention. God can, and sometimes does, break the vicious cycle. Ancestry isn't destiny.

## Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?

I recently read a new publication in the Counterpoints series: **GENESIS: HISTORY, FICTION, OR NEITHER?: THREE VIEWS ON THE BIBLE'S EARLIEST CHAPTERS**. Several snapshot observations:

**i)** Stan Gundry is the series editor. In that capacity I assume he picks the editor for each book in the series. If so, this book reflects his theological deterioration. What in the world possessed him to choose Charles Halton as the general editor? Halton is a flaming liberal. As general editor, he writes the introduction, conclusion, and picks the contributors. As such, the thumb is on the liberal side of the scales.

**ii)** The three contributors are James Hoffmeier, Gordon Wenham, and Kenton Sparks. Presumably, the idea is that these three contributors span a spectrum: Hoffmeier (conservative), Wenham (moderate), Sparks (liberal).

**iii)** Both Hoffmeier and Wenham have useful things to say. But even Hoffmeier's position is unsatisfactory. For instance, he says:

God possibly took a human or hominid (with genetic links to earlier forms of life) and made him the first true "man" (*adam*), made uniquely in the image and likeness of God (**Gen 1:26-27; 5:1b-2; 9:6b**), and thus a special creation. Such an approach does not militate against a historical Adam whose way of life is described as Neolithic (144-45).

Problem is, that's not how Gen 2 depicts the origin of Adam (or Eve). So that's not the historical Adam of Genesis. Rather, that begins with the theory of human evolution, lifts some Biblical language out of context, then grafts that onto a hominid.

However, he also scores some good points. Sparks' makes establishment science his standard of comparison. In response, Hoffmeier says:

Then one must ask, by what biological law or principle can the incarnation of Jesus Christ, his virgin birth, and his death followed by his resurrection on the third day be explained? (142).

Clearly, some miracles transcend scientific explanation. But once you make allowance for that fact (or even possibility), then you can't preemptively exclude the historicity of other Biblical events on scientific grounds. To be consistent, Sparks would have to go all the way with Bultmann. So his position is ad hoc and unstable.

**iv)** Other than a few BioLogos articles, this is the only thing I've read by Sparks. Along with Enns, he's a prominent critic of inerrancy. So it was revealing to see how he makes his case.

Much of his position is based on boilerplate comparative mythology, etymological fallacies, and source criticism of the Wellhausen variety. I won't comment on this, in part because Hoffmeier and Wenham critique it, and because he simply ignores other scholars—conservative, moderate, or even liberal—who scrutinize the type of source criticism, etymologies, and comparative mythology he resorts to.

He says:

From where we stand, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, in a time when we've sequenced the Neanderthal genome and traced out the DNA our shared genetic heritage with primates and other mammals, it is no longer possible for informed readers to interpret the book of Genesis as straightforward history. There was no Edenic garden, nor trees of life and knowledge, nor a serpent that spoke, nor a worldwide flood in which all living things, save those on a giant boat, were killed by God (111).

This paragraph bristles with difficulties:

**i)** To begin with, the second sentence is a non sequitur. It just doesn't follow from the first sentence. Even if we grant human evolution for the sake of argument, how would that falsify the existence of an Edenic garden, trees of life and knowledge, a talking snake, or global flood? Their possibility (or actuality) is logically independent of human evolution—even if that were true.

**ii)** What does he mean by "the Neanderthal genome"? Is there a single Neanderthal genome? From what I've read, this was sequenced from three fossils. At best, that's a tiny sample.

For instance, Christopher Hitchens had his genome mapped. That means there's a distinction between an individual human genome and the homo sapien genome. Same principle applies to Neanderthal.

**iii)** Why does Sparks think the Neanderthal genome is significant? How does he relate Neanderthal to Homo



Sapiens? Does he think Neanderthals were human, or does he regard them as different hominids on a separate twig or branch that died out? Or does he regard them as a transitional species? What about possible evidence of interbreeding between Cromagnon and Neanderthal?

In my opinion, there's nothing in Biblical anthropology that precludes Neanderthals from being homo sapiens. Descendants of Adam and Eve.

**iv)** How does shared DNA imply common derivation? Wouldn't we expect organisms that live in the same ecosystem to share some common genetic structures? Doesn't that follow from carbon-based life forms?

**v)** He simply disregards scientific criticisms of the alleged genetic evidence for universal common descent.

**vi)** He disregards the arguments of flood geologists for a global deluge. And he disregards the arguments of some scientists and exegetes for a local flood.

**vii)** He assumes the tempter was a snake, although the Hebrew word has multiple connotations.

**viii)** Another oddity is that elsewhere in the same book, he doesn't think the redactors even intended many of these depictions to be factual. He says:

He [the narrator] might (for instance) intend the serpent in Genesis as a *symbol* of temptation's origins rather than as a literal creature that once walked upright and, having erred, was sentenced to life as a mute and slithering snake (103).

Given the level of creativity in the paradise/fall story, it is very doubtful that the author regarded his myth as

historical in the strict sense of the word. It was a theological composition, steeped in allegory and symbol... (126).

The Antiquarian knew that serpents do not talk...While it is unlikely that the Apologist believed in a literal six-day creation and even less likely that the Antiquarian believed in a literal garden with trees... (138-39).

But if, according to Sparks, that's the case, then science can't disprove an account that was never meant to be realistic in the first place. So why does he even invoke establishment science as his standard of comparison? By his own lights, that's a category mistake, inasmuch as these accounts were never intended to describe real-world events. He's resorting to contradictory objections to attack inerrancy.

**ix)** Conversely, he says:

I continue to suspect that the much-discussed "Black Sea deluge" is behind it. Such a catastrophe could have spawned the belief in a universal flood...By the time this story reached the biblical authors, the written flood traditions were already several millennia old (131).

Everyone in antiquity seems to have believed that this deluge took place because they were not privy to the insights of modern geology and evolutionary biology (139).

So, by his own admission, Noah's flood has a factual basis. He thinks it overstates the scale of the event, but it wasn't fictional.

## Etiologies

Critics of Scripture think Genesis contains etiological fables about the origin of the world, origin of life, origin of evil, and origin of death.

One problem with that analysis is that it's an explanation which demands an explanation. Why would primitive people assume these things even had a point of origin?

Put yourself in the moccasins of pre-Columbian Plains Indian before white missionaries made contact. All you have to go by is your experience or oral history. As far as you can tell, things have always been this way. The hawks, wolves, bears, bison, and rattlesnakes were always there. The prairies and sandstone buttes were always there. Indians existed for as long as anyone could remember. There was never a time when it wasn't just like this.

Why would they assume humans *lost* the chance at immortality? Why think human death is any different than animal death? Why think human suffering is not how things were supposed to be?

The paradise lost motif isn't something you can derive from nature or human experience alone.

Atheists keep assuring us that an infinite regress is perfectly coherent. So, from that viewpoint, why would primitive people imagine the need for origin myths in the first place?

That's not to deny that some of them do in fact have such legends. Of course, if humans share a common history in Adam, then ancestral memories may account for that.



## Let there be space

OT scholars and Hebraists disagree on the meaning of *raqia* in Gen 1. John Walton used to think it denoted a solid dome, but changed his mind. Nicholas Petersen has his own theory. Some versions render it as an "expanse." But what, exactly, does that mean—or refer to?

One reason for the disagreement is that we don't have enough occurrences of the word to nail down the meaning. In addition, the meaning is contextual. How does it function in relation to the other elements (e.g. sky, heavens)?

Here's a suggestion: what if *raqia* is a synonym for "space." Suppose it denotes the space between rainclouds and terrestrial bodies of water (e.g. lakes, oceans, rivers)? Suppose we translate Genesis this way:

*6 And God said, "Let there be space in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the space and separated the waters that were under the space from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

If you think about it, that would make perfect sense to the original audience. After all, "space," air, is what separates rainclouds from terrestrial bodies of water. It's the spacious

air in-between seems to keep them apart. And that's what the birds fly in.

That's what ancient Hebrews saw when they went outside. That's what they experience. On the one hand there's water at ground level. Bodies of water on the surface of the earth. On the other hand, there's the water that comes down from the sky. Rain or snow from clouds up above. And in-between is empty space.

I think we miss this if we think of the sky or atmosphere as something up above. Overhead. But that's just a part of the space. The space is up and down and all around. Birds fly through space. They fly up from a tree, shrub, grass, or bare ground. And they fly down from to a tree, shrub, grass, or bare ground. Although the sky is the limit, the space begins at ground level. That's the space we freely move through. That's our natural element, in contrast to bodies of water.

In modern parlance, "space" refers to "outer space," but here, space refers to the airy buffer between lakes, oceans, and rainclouds.

Sure, there's space above the clouds, but the description in Genesis is from the perspective of a ground-based observer.

## Thorns and thistles

We don't know a lot about the Garden of Eden. According to Gen 2, it was located somewhere in Mesopotamia. It was irrigated by river water. It contained fruit trees and tame animals.

It's interesting to compare Eden to an oasis. For instance:

<http://www.theamazingpics.com/beautiful-oasis-in-the-middle-of-libyan-desert/>

<http://feel-planet.com/desert-oasis-in-libya/>

The oasis presents a drastic contrast involving a miniature "paradise" embedded in the vast, enveloping desolation. This is a very extreme example.

One can imagine a little paradise that's utterly idyllic on the inside. If you're within the confines of the enchanted sanctuary, it will be lush in all directions. A thin rim of trees obstructs the view of the outside world. Yet only that ring of foliage a few trees deep partitions paradise from desolation. If you were to take a few steps into the verdant barrier, then step outside and see the world from the other side, your impression would be completely different. There's so little that separates you from the wasteland. An oasis, fringed by fruit trees and shade trees. An eye drop of life in a sea of sand.

Imagine if you were banished from the oasis. Nothing but desert as far as the eye can see.

I'm not suggesting that the buffer between the Garden of Eden and the world beyond was quite that tenuous. For one thing, the Garden was a riverine setting rather than an oasis. Still, the Garden may well have been situated in a narrow river valley. The countryside just over the ridge might be arid and barren. The Garden was a gift.



## Genesis, monogenesis, and polygenesis

While some postevangelicals run screaming from what Gen 1-2 says about the creation of man, the account is rather remarkable, if you think it about. It may be so familiar to us that we miss it.

The account teaches monogenesis: all humans descend from a single pair of ancestors. If, however, you think Genesis is just pious fiction, and the narrator was guessing at the origin of man, why would he posit monogenesis rather than polygenesis?

After all, in the view of postevangelical scholars, the narrator had no idea how man actually originated. Indeed, he couldn't—given his lack of scientific knowledge.

But if we grant their assumption for the sake of argument, then wouldn't be at least as likely if not more so that the narrator would posit polygenesis? To my knowledge, it's not uncommon for some people-groups to view themselves as intrinsically superior to other people-groups. And they use a theory of racial superiority to justify the conquest and subjugation of other people-groups. It would be very convenient to ground that pretension in a theory of separate origins. Different people-groups originated independently of each other, which accounts for the (alleged) superiority of one in relation to the other.

Although this may be more commonly associated with European imperialism and American slavery, the general attitude is hardly confined to that. To my knowledge, the Japanese traditionally view themselves as superior to other people-groups, and that justified their wars of conquest. Likewise, consider Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. I've

also read that some African and South American tribes teach polygenesis.

Take another comparison: in Greek mythology, some men are fathered by gods. Yet there's a pecking order in the pantheon. If Zeus is your father, I assume that might put you a few notches above somebody who was fathered by Hermes, or somebody who had merely human parents. You have a superior or inferior pedigree.

If the Pentateuch is pious fiction, surely it would be very logical for the narrator to make the Israelites a separate and superior race. To say the Israelites and Canaanites were created independently of each other, which is why God treats both groups differently.

But, of course, that's not the actual story. Rather, all people-groups share a common origin in Adam. That threads its way through the creation of Adam and Eve, the survivors of the flood, the Table of Nations, and so forth.

I don't think it's coincidental that the Pentateuch teaches monotheism as well as monogenesis. Polytheism and polygenesis naturally go together inasmuch as each god or goddess of sufficient power could create a human or humanoid breeding pair or population. In Genesis, by contrast, there's only one Creator.

Evolution teaches polygenesis. On that theory, although humans have a common ancestor, they don't have an absolute point of common origin. Rather, they're an offshoot of the evolutionary tree of life. They have animal ancestors. In addition, there's interbreeding between different hominids.

## Death threats in Eden

**16** *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:16-17).*

This raises various issues, which I've discussed before. For instance, "in the day" is a Hebrew idiom for "when". So it doesn't mean you'd die on the same day you eat it.

Take a statement like, "When you have kids of your own, you'll understand!" That doesn't mean the instant they have a child, they'll understand. Rather, it refers to insight that results from the process of childrearing. It can take years for that to sink in.

But here's another issue I haven't discussed: If Adam and Eve had no experience of death, how could they grasp the threat, much less appreciate the gravity of the threat?

Admittedly, there's a distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. Even so, what would death connote to them, what would be the force of that threat, if that was just an abstract idea?

Was there death in the Garden? I don't think human death antedated the Fall. And I don't believe in pre-Adamites. But what about animal death? Could there be animal death in the Garden? If so, what kind?

Of course, young-earth creationists deny that possibility. There are roughly three components to YEC:

- i) Mature creation
- ii) Global flood
- iii) No antelapsarian mortality

These are logically separable propositions. You can affirm all three, deny all three, affirm one or two. Let's assume for the sake of argument that animal death preexisted the fall. And if you don't want to assume it, that's fine. That just means this post is not for you.

In principle, the Garden of Eden could contain small predators. Adam and Eve could observe predators killing prey animals. Even if they were wild predators, they wouldn't attack creatures the size of Adam and Eve.

I have in mind small predators like the fox, bobcat, Ocelot, Caracal, weasel, and otter. I'm not suggesting these exact species existed at that time and place. Just using them to illustrate the general idea (small predators).

Likewise, there could be predatory birds that would swoop down to snatch snakes, rodents, or whatever. Likewise, nonvenomous snakes could kill and eat rodents.

In theory, you could even have major predators so long as they were tame. As such, they wouldn't be dangerous to Adam and Eve.

A lot depends on the size of Garden, and other details. We tend to think of Eden as a tropical paradise, but it may have been located in a hot, dry region. What made Eden lush was the river.

There's also the question of whether Adam and Eve raised livestock for meat. Although some readers take Gen 9 to

mean man only acquired a carnivorous diet after the Fall, the terminology arguably has reference to hunting wild animals—in distinction to livestock. In any case, that's not essential to my argument.

Theoretically, even if there was no death in the Garden, it might be possible to observe predation outside the Garden the elevation of the Garden in relation to the surrounding countryside, natural barriers, and so forth.

For that matter, God could give Adam and Eve dreams of death. Examples of human or animal death in dreams.

The last two examples are more speculative, but they show the range of possible explanations.

## Fluvial islands

There are different ways to visualize the garden of Eden. There are several reasons for that. We weren't there. It no longer exists. Gen 2 gives some basic details, but is fairly sketchy.

It's a useful exercise to mentally reconstruct Biblical scenes. In Gen 2-3, you have a clear-cut distinction between the world inside the garden and the world outside the garden. That raises the question of natural barriers. There are different kinds of natural barriers. One possibility is that Eden was located in a narrow river valley, where steep hills separated Eden from the outside world.

In theory, water can be a natural barrier. Take a tropical island, surrounded by the ocean. Consider the fabled island paradise of Dilmun. However, the geographical markers in Gen 2 are centered on rivers.

Mind you, some rivers are wide enough to have islands (fluvial islands or river archipelagoes). Take the Brazilian island of Marajó (situated at the mouth of the Amazon River), the size of Switzerland. Bananal Island is another example. That's upriver.

Moreover, some fluvial islands have tidal rivers. They have rivers inside and out.

On a related note are river deltas. Indeed, there's the Tigris-Euphrates delta. Of course, the topography has changed over the millennia.

But just as water can be a natural barrier, absence of water can be a natural barrier. Eden was lush because its rivers

provided natural irrigation. But by the same token, it might have been surrounded by desert. Expansive deserts can form impenetrable barriers for many animals.

This might link Gen 2-3 to [Gen 1:28](#). Why the command to subdue the natural world if the whole world was paradisiacal before the Fall or the Flood? Well, perhaps because the prelapsarian, prediluvian world wasn't paradisiacal in general. Eden was exceptional, due to its auspicious location. Indeed, God was the Edenic landscaper.

## What's the image of God?

The image of God in man ([Gen 1:26-27](#)) is an important concept. In some way it distinguishes man from the animals. It grounds the prohibition against murder, and singles out the fitting punishment. Yet because the narrator doesn't define this category, it has spawned a vast theological literature of competing interpretations. In historical theology, it becomes a cipher for whatever theologians happen to think distinguishes man from the animals, viz. rationality. More recently, you have functional as well as ontological interpretations.

Some scholars distinguish between "image" and "likeness", but I suspect that here they are synonymous. A pleonastic expression for emphasis.

On the face of it, the image of God presents a paradox: given Israel's aniconic piety, how can man be an image of an invisible deity? The very fact that the category is undefined suggests the narrator expected the target audience to be able to figure out what it means. There are two ways that could be. It could play on extrabiblical associations that were familiar to the target audience. Or it could play on intertextual associations. Genesis is part of a literary unit: the Pentateuch.

Nowadays, one popular scholarly interpretation is that in the ancient Near East, the statue of a king or statue of a god stood for him. It represents his presence. It doesn't necessarily reflect his physical appearance, but his prerogatives. By analogy, man is a representative of God on earth, acting in his stead.



This may be a perfectly adequate interpretation. I would, however, like to explore an alternative interpretation. In the Pentateuch you have angels. There are different kinds of angels, or angels under different aspects.

With one notable exception, angels are a class of creatures. They vary in appearance. Cherubim (and seraphim) may have multiple wings and multiple faces.

By contrast, you have humanoid angels. Outwardly, their appearance is indistinguishable from humans. In addition, angels can become luminous.

Finally, you have a theophanic angel: the angel of the Lord. That's not a creature, but a local manifestation of Yahweh.

The theophanic angel has a humanoid appearance (e.g. Gen 18), but it can also become luminous (e.g. Exod 3). The "burning bush" is something of a misnomer. The bush was never on fire. It seemed to be on fire due to a montage between the bush and the luminous angel.

Here's my point: human males resemble God insofar as the theophanic angel resembles human males. In that respect, the image of God could have a visual counterpart. It isn't necessarily just symbolic. To be made in the image of God could mean (at least in part) to resemble God insofar as humans look like the angel of the Lord. In that respect, there could be physical correspondence insofar as the theophanic angel assumes, or simulates, audiovisual and tactile properties.

There's also an argument to be made that the theophanic angel is a Christophany. If so, it foreshadows the Incarnation. If so, it represents the culmination of this theological motif. On the one hand, Jesus and the

theophanic angel are both divine. On the other hand, Jesus and man are both human. If the image of God is defined (at least in part) by reference to the theophanic angel, then Christ unites the twofold significance of that category in his own person.

## Wrestling Jacob

Gen 32 records a very evocative and enigmatic incident. I'd like to scrutinize the liberal interpretation.

**1.** On the liberal interpretation (e.g. Gunkel, von Rad, Westermann, Robert Alter, Bill Arnold, H. W. F. Saggs) , Jacob's adversary reflects two different traditions. One tradition concerns trolls that guard crossing-points at rivers. The other tradition concerns nocturnal demons who lose their powers between dawn and dusk. That would explain the riverine setting, as well as why his adversary seeks to break off the attack as dawn approaches. So it has a certain prima facie appeal. There are, however, serious problems with that interpretation:

**2.** It assumes the redactor combined elements from two different tales or traditions. The troll-motif and the nocturnal demon-motif. Either two different sources or at least two different archetypal characters (trolls and nocturnal demons). These don't normally go together. But the redactor allegedly fused the two characters into one.

In addition, the redactor expunged the overtly pagan elements. In the redacted version, Jacob's adversary turns out to be a theophanic angelophany.

That, however, is a very convoluted editorial process. If, moreover, the narrator is writing pious fiction, why bother with such unpromising material in the first place? Why not write something from scratch, rather than engage in this cumbersome scissors-and-paste procedure?

**3.** Moreover, Jacob's adversary doesn't play the role of a troll. Jacob crosses the river without opposition at least

twice: first to lead his caravan across the river, then to recross the river so that his caravan is on one side while he's alone on the other side (22-24). Indeed, he may have to crisscross the river several times to conduct his entire caravan to the other side. There is no trollish agent that blocks his entree.

As for nocturnal demons, from what I've read (Sarna), the tradition depicts them like Proteus in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. But Jacob's adversary is not a shapeshifter. He retains a humanoid form throughout the wrestling match.

**4.** Furthermore, even though trolls are mythological agents, they may have a basis in fact. Historically, people do guard fords and bridges to collect tolls from travelers. Likewise, fords and bridges would be natural settings for bandits to lie in wait. Travelers on foot bottleneck at that juncture, because that's the only crossing-point within miles up or down the river. So that's an opportune location for bandits to lurk. As such, the mythology of trolls may represent the legendary embellishment of bandits or toll collectors at fords and bridges.

Likewise, traditions of night hags may have a basis in fact. Occultic entities do exist. I don't think that figures in Gen 32. I'm just challenging secular assumptions.

**5.** If, however, we reject the nocturnal demon identification, then why is Jacob's adversary eager to leave before the break of dawn? Maimonides construed the account as a "prophetic vision" (*Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 2, chap 62). I assume he means a supernatural dream. It can't merely be a night vision, because the experience is interactive. A tangible as well as visual experience.

Up to a point, that's an appealing interpretation. It's not the first time Jacob had a supernatural dream. Moreover, his first supernatural dream, about angels, took place when he was leaving Palestine (Gen 29). So it would form a nice inclusio if he had another dream, about angels, upon reentering Palestine. It would also explain the urgent distinction between night and day. If his adversary is a character in a dream, it would vanish the moment he awoke.

However, an impediment to that interpretation is the fact that Jacob is injured during his wrestling match. While it's possible to experience pain while dreaming, or have a simulated injury while dreaming, that only exists in the dream. It disappears when you awaken. Yet Jacob was objectively injured.

Mind you, it's possible to injure yourself while you sleep, if you thrash about. And it's possible that hurting yourself when you're in bed prompts you to dream about hurting yourself. But as far as Gen 32 is concerned, that's backwards.

**6.** There's a bit of playacting on the part of Jacob's adversary. He pretends that Jacob is a well-matched opponent. He lets him feel that Jacob has the upper hand. But then, with a mere touch, he injures Jacob, demonstrating that in reality he was just toying with Jacob. All along, he could effortlessly overpower Jacob if he wanted to.

**7.** It may well be that Jacob's adversary chose a night-time setting to conceal his true identity under cover of darkness. The initial anonymity creates suspense, preparing for the last-minute recognition scene.

**8.** In addition, you have the familiar theme that seeing God face-to-face is potentially fatal to humans. The night-time setting would prevent that lethal exposure.

To be sure, that's a somewhat puzzling or paradoxical hazard, since the Pentateuch does have examples of men who "see" God and survive to tell the tale. I think that tension trades on degrees of exposure. In this case, the divine encounter is mediated by the Angel of the Lord. To see God in the person of the theophanic angel.

In what sense is it potentially fatal to see God? Two possibilities suggest themselves. One is cultic holiness, like touching a ritually pure object (e.g. the ark of the covenant). It's not that the object is intrinsically toxic. Rather, God strikes the person dead as a warning. The other possibility involves a vision so terrifying that it triggers a heart attack. It's possible to be literally scared to death.

## The lesser light to rule the night

**14** And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. **16** And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day ([Gen 1:14-19](#)).

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? ([Ps 8:3-4](#)).*

i) Before I get to my main point, I'd like to make a preliminary observation. Although Genesis is technically anonymous, that doesn't create any presumption against Mosaic authorship. The reason the name of Moses crops up so often in Exodus–Deuteronomy is because he's a contemporary, and, indeed, major participant, in the recorded events. So there's a natural reason for him to be named. But by the same token, it would be anachronistic to mention him in relation to Genesis, since that narrates events long before he was born. There's no occasion to name him within the narrative. Within the text. Genesis tells the backstory. And he's not a part of that story.

In principle, he could be the named author in the title, but ironically, if he composed Genesis, I think it would be anachronistic to suppose the text originally contained a named author. It wasn't originally a book for publication. If he wrote it, it was composed in the Sinai desert, like a chronicle written by a traveler during his trek. It's not a book in the formal sense of a publication. It is, of course, written for posterity, but it's written on the run. It will only be published at a later date when the Israelites settle down.

**ii)** As I've often said, when we interpret Genesis, I think we should initially bracket the relationship between Genesis and science. That often interferes with the interpretation. When we interpret Genesis, we should try to put ourselves in the shoes of the original audience.

**iii)** Likewise, as I've often said, one thing I find striking about Gen 1 is the motif of light and dark, day and night, dawn and dusk.

**iv)** Which brings us to the creation of the moon and stars. As commentators note, the narrator avoids naming the sun and moon. Presumably because the designations were names for pagan gods. The sun god and moon god. So the narrator uses circumlocutions to avoid their heathen associations.

**v)** Assuming that Genesis was composed in the Sinai desert in the 2nd millennium BC, imagine how impressive the night sky would be at that time and place. There was no light pollution from city lights to compete with the moonlight and starlight. Desert skies are typically crisp and clear. Likewise, the generally flat, treeless landscape makes it big sky country. That combined with the relative silence would



make it an overwhelming experience to sit under the night sky in the Sinai desert, under that shimmering canopy.

**vi)** In general, the starry heavens are impressive in different ways to ancient stargazers and modern urbanites or suburbanites. On the one hand, many people in modern cities and suburbs never see the night sky in its full splendor. Trees and buildings obstruct the view. There's light pollution from ubiquitous electrical lighting—as well as ubiquitous noise from cars, TVs, and so forth. So we don't see nature in the raw. There are so many distractions.

On the other hand, because we benefit from modern astronomy, observatories, and space telescopes, we can see vastly deeper into outer space, so we have a much better sense, not merely of the breadth, but the depth of outer space. The unimaginable scale of the cosmos, as well as the variety of formations that escape the naked eye.

## 9 AM, October 23, 4004 B.C.

John Lightfoot (1602-1675) notoriously dated the moment of creation to 9 AM, October 23, 4004 B.C. Which has given rise to the oft-quoted trope that "Closer than this, as a cautious scholar, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University did not venture to commit himself."

Attempting to put a calendar date on the moment of creation is certainly mock-worthy. Even if young-earth creationism is true, it's not possible to date the origin of the world with anything near that degree of precision.

That said, if young-earth creationism is true, or old-earth creationism, for that matter, then some of God's creative fiats are datable in principle, even if we necessarily lack the requisite information to do so in practice. On either view, God made some things by special creation. That being the case, you could, for instance, step into the proverbial time-machine and go back to the day when God made Adam. And you could even tell if it was morning, noonday, or afternoon by the angle of the sun. That's true for some other primeval events. In principle, these could be assigned calendar dates. The year, month, week, and day. Even time of day. Of course, any particular calendar is a human convention, and not a fact of nature. Yet you can measure time because there's a time to measure.

In principle, you could to step into the time-machine and travel back to any Biblical event, although the earth might not be too hospitable in primordial time. Like a submarine or spaceship, your time-machine might need an artificial environment. Indeed, it's a good exercise for Christian readers to mentally take a ride in the time-machine, then imagine what they'd see when they step out.



## Shall we gather at the river?

I'll comment on an interesting post by Bnonn:

<http://bnonn.com/what-is-the-kingdom-of-god-3/>

I believe that to a great extent, Bnonn is channeling Michael Heiser in this series. Bnonn makes some interesting connections with the Book of Job.

Regarding the identity of the Tempter in Gen 3, I agree with Bnonn, but I'd like to anticipate an objection. The OT sometimes uses "folk etymologies" or puns.

Some people might object that "folk etymologies" are incorrect, but that misses the point. It's like saying a pun is incorrect. But the function is to trigger associations. That communicates. The meaning we attribute to word is arbitrary, in the sense that words mean whatever the linguistic community assigns to certain phonemes. The objective is successful communication.

Now I'd like to comment on Bnonn's position that the Garden of Eden was the meeting place for the divine council. He offers the following corroborative evidence:

A garden. Most obviously, the divine council was thought to meet in a garden—which is what Adam was created in. Rivers. In Genesis 2, we learn that Eden was the source of four rivers. If you recall the codewords I listed in the previous installment, this was another common motif for divine council meeting places; in Ugarit, for example, El's divine council met in a lush garden at the source of two rivers.

A holy mountain. This garden meeting-place was also held to be on a holy mountain; and the Bible explicitly names Eden as such [Ezk 28:13-17).

Here I'm afraid I must demur.

1. Although I think OT scholars like Heiser and John Walton can be useful, I disagree with their liberal use of comparative mythology. I favor realistic interpretations of OT historical narratives.

2. Apropos (1), what exactly is the divine council? Michael Heiser says:

The term divine council is used by Hebrew and Semitics scholars to refer to the heavenly host, the pantheon of divine beings who administer the affairs of the cosmos.  
<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/>

Unfortunately, that's ambiguous. Is the heavenly host synonymous with angels?

In a previous installment, Bnonn says:

The Old Testament seems to distinguish angels—mere messengers—from the sons of God—the royal family; and in doing so it follows Ugarit, which had two tiers of gods: the sons of El, who ruled certain districts and provinces, and a larger group of lesser gods who acted as messengers and warriors.

So this suggests that the divine council consists of aristocratic angels.

**i)** In a pagan context, the "sons of God" would be the literal offspring of high gods and goddesses. Divine princes.

Now, that might be tolerable as mythopoetic picture language, but it can't be more than that in OT monotheism.

**ii)** Apropos (i), why would God have a terrestrial meeting place with angels? It's understandable that God appears to Adam and Eve on terra firma. That's because Adam and Eve are earthlings. But surely God doesn't need a physical meeting place to communicate with angels. In the case of Ugaritic mythology, that might well be taken literally, just like Greek mythology locates the dwelling place of most high gods in a palace on the summit of Mt. Olympus. But surely that's not a realistic interpretation of OT historical narration. At best, that would be using human social metaphors which depict God as a king with his retinue of princes and courtiers.

**iii)** It's possible that Ezekiel's mountainous depiction of Eden is figurative. That may trade on the Mt. Zion motif.

However, it's possible or even probable that Eden was actually located in the high country. For one thing, there's a natural link between rivers and mountains inasmuch as mountains are a major source of rivers. The melting snowpack produces mountain streams which swell into rivers. Moreover, Eden is located somewhere in Mesopotamia. Possibly the highlands of Armenia.

But in that event, Eden isn't associated with a mountain because that's the location of a divine council. Rather, it's based on physical logistics. Mountains and rivers naturally go together.

**iv)** Apropos (iii), that, in turn, dovetails with a river and a garden. It's logical that man's ancestral home would be a garden with fruit-trees. That supplies a natural human foodstuff. Likewise, the garden provides grazing land for livestock (and possibly game animals). So, once again, Eden isn't associated with a garden because that's the location of a divine council. Rather, it's based on provision for human subsistence.

**v)** Apropos (iii-iv), that pans into the riverine locale. Humans typically settle near bodies of water—a spring, well, lake, river, ocean. Rivers are especially valuable because humans can do so many things with a river:

- Irrigation for farming
- Fruit trees and garden plots along the moist river banks
- Fishing
- Waste disposal
- Transportation
- Bathing water
- Cooking water
- Drinking water (for humans)
- Watering hole for livestock and game animals
- Driftwood

So, once more, Eden isn't associated with a river (or rivers) because that's the location of a divine council. Rather, that's

for the benefit of human inhabitants. The implicit rationale is very practical, very down-to-earth. Providing for the physical needs of human creatures. That's of no earthly use to a divine council. Angels don't need a mountain retreat or garden resort to hang out with God. Angels don't need bodies of water to survive and thrive. If you push that, it pushes you into a mythological conception.



## Does Gen 1 teach creation ex nihilo?

**1.** Grammatically, it's possible to render **Gen 1:1**, as well as the syntactical relationship between 1:1, 1:2, and 1:3, in a way that indicates preexistent matter. But is that consistent with the aim of the text?

**2.** There's a sense in which the original audience for Genesis weren't orthodox Jews. Rather, the Pentateuch is what made them orthodox Jews. It has a pedagogical or catechetical function in teaching them how to think properly about God and their place in the cosmos. Imagine what they believed before they had the Pentateuch. What they believed when they read it or heard it for the very first time.

I daresay their beliefs were a hodgepodge of folklore, local mythology, perhaps some oral traditions about Abraham, and their memories of the Exodus. To some degree, their default frame of reference is pagan mythology and primitive folklore.

One purpose of Genesis is to set the record straight. To teach them what really happened. To correct the heathen creation myths floating around the ancient Near East. Not necessarily by directly alluding to them, but by presenting the real history of events.

**3.** When theologically orthodox scholars and commentators leave the door open for preexistent matter, I think they have in mind a three-stage process:

### **i) In the beginning was God**

God did not come into being. He always existed.

## **ii) Preexistent matter**

At some point, he made matter. This was the raw material for creation.

## **iii) Creation**

Gen 1 picks up where (ii) leaves off. God organizes the preexistent matter into the universe. Preexisting matter is like the clay from which God fashions a pot.

But a basic problem with this analysis is that, from a pagan perspective, there's no presumption that God or gods preexist nature. Indeed, the presumption is that nature or the world process preexists God or gods. Nature never came into being. Gods came into being. Gods are the byproduct of the world process. So they'd understand the three-stage process this way:

### **i) In the beginning matter (or nature, or the world process)**

### **ii) Then God**

### **iii) Then God fashions preexistent matter into something more specific**

If Gen 1 doesn't rule out preexistent matter, then it doesn't rule out paganism. But that would be counterproductive to the narrator's aim.

**4.** If possible, it gets even worse. Modern western readers think of natural elements as inanimate or impersonal. But in paganism and animism, it isn't just preexistent "matter" or

stuff. Rather, darkness might be a god, the deep might be a god. Indeed, the original gods, from whom Yahweh came.

If Gen 1 doesn't rule out preexistent matter, then it doesn't rule out polytheism or cosmogony. Once again, that would be counterproductive to a major aim of the narrator. For those reasons alone, I think Gen 1 must intend to convey creation ex nihilo.

**5.** But here's another consideration. If the narrator wanted to convey creation ex nihilo, how could he do so with the available vocabulary and categories? One strategy would be to express the idea through negations. Indicate that before God's creative activity, there was nothing apart from God.

Look at v2. Darkness is a negation. The absence of light. And darkness is more abstract than night.

To be formless is to have no structure. And a void is synonymous emptiness. Vacuity. A blank.

Taken in combination, isn't this a way of suggesting that prior to God's creative activity, there was nothing at all? An "earth" without form and void, covered in darkness, is a paradox. A way of saying there was no earth. For the "earth" in v2 is defined by totalistic negations.

## Animals of Eden

*10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.*

*19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.*

*24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

Before I get to the main point, this post is only relevant to Christians who believe there was predation before the Fall. I'd like to reiterate an observation I've made before: the definition of young-earth creationism typically includes three planks: age of the universe about 6-10K years old; Noah's flood was a worldwide event; no animal death (predation, parasitism) before the Fall. However, these tenets are logically independent of each other. You could affirm one, two, or all three. If you affirm just two, there are three different ways you could pair them off.

The description of the garden raises intriguing questions about how we should visualize the setting. What keeps tame animals inside the garden? What keeps them from leaving the garden? What keeps dangerous animals out of the garden? Likewise, posting guards at the eastern end or edge or side of the garden implies some sort of barrier around the garden. It had one entrance or exit.

Perhaps the garden was situated in a narrow river valley with sheer escarpments forming a natural barrier. Maybe there was a waterfall downstream. Maybe the river emerged upstream through a rocky opening. Or maybe it was a subterranean river that surfaced in the garden. Maybe there was an interstice on the eastern side, permitting ingress or egress.

Another possibility: the garden was located on a fluvial island. In that event the river would form a natural barrier on all sides. Perhaps there was a rope bridge connecting the island to the mainland.

On a related issue, although the garden animals were tame, that doesn't necessarily mean they were harmless. It may only mean they were tame in relation to Adam and Eve. But tame animals like tame lions, bears, and honey badgers can still be ferocious in relation to other animals. In theory, the garden might have predatory animals that guarded the garden from incursion by wild animals that might be dangerous to humans. On that scenario, the garden might be less physically isolated from the surrounding wilderness.

## Wall of fire

*He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24).*

What are we supposed to visualize when we read Gen 3:24? In what sense did Eden have an entrance or exit? What did the seraph with the fiery sword look like?

I've speculated on the topography of Eden. Perhaps it was a high river valley or fluvial island. Both might fit with the Mesopotamian locale (Gen 2:10-14).

But let's try come at it from another angle. The Pentateuch is a literary unit. To some degree, the books of the Pentateuch are mutually interpretive. That includes foreshadowing and backshadowing. So the seraph with the fiery sword might be the same phenomenon as the pillar of fire in the wilderness. For instance:

*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people (Exod 13:21-22).*

*Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. It came between Egypt's camp and Israel's camp. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long (Exod 14:19-20).*

*And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic (Exod 14:24).*

*And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward (Num 12:5).*

*and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For you, O Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night (Num 14:14).*

*And the Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud. And the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent (Deut 31:15).*

There are clear similarities. The association of fire with angels. The defensive function of the fiery pillar. The parallel between the fiery figure before the entrance to Eden and the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Mind you, that falls short of telling us what, exactly, the pillar of fire was. In the past, I've noted that descriptions of the pillar of fire and pillar cloud, especially in the desert setting, are reminiscent of desert devils in daytime and fire devils at night. A flaming tornado.

I'm not suggesting that the pillar of fire is a merely natural phenomenon. It doesn't behave like an inanimate object. It has a stability and directionality unlike a desert devil or fire devil. So it might be a preternatural phenomenon. I don't think God is a shapeshifter like the heathen deity Proteus.

But God can produce concrete phenomena that represent his presence.

Or, if it's an angel in the usual sense, perhaps angels can assume the appearance of a desert devil or fire devil, performing a similar function. This would trade on natural symbolism but surpass what is naturally possible. And it would dovetail with the ambiguities of the burning bush.

Perhaps, then, a wall of fire was blocking reentrance to the Garden of Eden. For that matter, maybe there was always a ring of fire around the Garden, excepting the entrance, to protect the Garden. A wall of fire encircling the Garden, as an impenetrable barrier to keep the tame animals inside and the wild animals outside. But when God expelled Adam and Eve, he sealed that off, so the Garden now had a continuous wall of fire on all sides. Or perhaps it has some other natural barrier.



## Wall of water

Liberal scholars typically think [Gen 1:14](#) refers to a vault or solid dome. Suppose we grant, for the sake of argument, that the narrator is using an architectural term connoting a roof or ceiling. Let's compare that to [Exod 14:22](#), where God divides the Red Sea. The narrator describes a "wall" of water on either side of the Israelites, as they walk along the (temporarily) dry seabed. That's an architectural term for the defensive walls of fortified cities. But, of course, the narrator didn't think this was a solid wall, made of stone. He's using an architectural metaphor to describe the appearance and function of the phenomenon. Since the Pentateuch is a literary unit, it would make sense for the narrator (the *same* narrator) to use an architectural metaphor to describe the appearance and function of the sky. It's a hermeneutical virtue to have consistent principles of interpretation.

## Cool of the day?

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden (Gen 3:8, ESV).*

To my knowledge, Meredith Kline was the first scholar to challenge the traditional rendering of Gen 3:8. Rather than a refreshing afternoon breeze, he thought it denoted a storm theophany. Jeffrey Niehaus, who developed that interpretation, renders the verse: "*Then the man and his wife heard the thunder of Yahweh God as he was going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden*".

And that's been defended by John Sailhamer and Douglas Stuart. John Walton is sympathetic, but noncommittal. John Collins is critical, but that's because he's invested in the theory that Gen 2:5 reflects the dry season.

Linguistically, there's not much to go on one way or the other. However, a storm theophany would certainly fit the judicial context.

If, moreover, Adam and Eve had never experienced rain or thunderstorms (Gen 2:5), then a storm theophany would be all the more terrifying.

It would be similar to the inaugural theophany that Ezekiel witnessed (Ezk 1). From afar, that appeared to be an electrical storm, but as it drew near, it was clearly far more than that. Ps 18 provides a poetic description.



## The creation of Adam

**1.** I've discussed this before, but I'd like to explore a variation. If I stepped into a time machine and went back to Eden, just before God created Adam, what would I see? We can't say for sure since the narrative is sketchy, so there's more than one way to mentally pencil in the details, but here's one way.

**2.** I see a man standing in the garden. I'm not saying the figure is a man. I'm just referring to what he looks like. In reality, the "man" is God, who assumed angelic form to create Adam. In Scripture, some angels are seraphim/cherubim. But we wouldn't expect God to assume cherubic form. They are symbolic guardians of the divine throne room.

Other angels are luminous beings. It's possible that God was luminous.

At other times, angels appear to be indistinguishable from human males. Suppose that's the case.

In that event, Adam was literally made in God's image. He was made in God's image when God assumed human form to create Adam.

**3.** So let's say I see a man in the garden, although he's God in the form of a humanoid angel. Suppose he reaches down and scoops a lump of clay from the ground. He begins shaping the clay. At the same time, he multiplies the size of the lump. Like a sculptor, he creates a life-size clay figurine of a human male. He then brings it to life by breathing into its nostrils. The clay is transformed into a human body, and the human body is animated.

**4.** I don't mean animated in the sense of ensoulment. I'm referring to biological life. The narrative is silent on the question of dualism. The primary biblical witness to dualism occurs in eschatological texts concerning the intermediate state.

## **Adam, Eve, and Eden**

I find it interesting to speculate on what it would be like to be born deaf or blind, then see or hear the world for the first time. Indeed, I find that unimaginable. It would certainly be overwhelming. So much to absorb, distinguish, sort out and filter out.

In the case of babies, their minds and senses gradually adjust to the world that bombards their senses. But consider Adam and Eve. They had no experience using any of their five senses. No warm up. They go straight from unconsciousness to full-fledged sensory perception. Even supposing the garden of Eden was rather austere, it would be a sensory feast to someone who had no sensory experience whatsoever until he suddenly came alive and self-aware.

## Change in the air

Depending on where you live, you can sense a change in the air as we pass from summer to autumn. You don't have to look at a calendar. You can feel it. And the shift may be fairly sudden.

When Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, there were some obvious consequences. They left behind the tree of life, thereby forfeiting their shot at physical immortality. Likewise, they moved to a far less hospitable environment. Perhaps an arid environment, away from the riverine setting of Eden.

But to be exiled from Eden had more subtle connotations. I assume that many people associate gardens with spring and summer. For vegetable gardens, that's the growing season. For flower gardens, that's when most flowers bloom. And that's true in the wild, even if it's not technically an orchard or garden. So gardens have a seasonal connotation. And that also carries with it warmer, sunnier weather, when the world thaws out.

By contrast, we associate winter with denuded trees. Fruitless trees. Chilly or frigid weather. In winter the world contracts. Of course, that's subject to geographical variations.

Some people prefer living in a part of the world with four distinct seasons. Some people like snowy weather. They like to ski.

People generally like autumn, when leaves turn red, yellow, and orange. And sometimes autumn can be a relief after a

sweltering summer. Again, depends on where you live. But, of course, autumn is the prelude to winter.

In many parts of the world, the amenities of modern technology make winter much easier to take than in the past. Winter used to be a more dangerous season. Harder to survive in winter. Some American settlers froze to death or starved to death because they were not equipped for winter. They didn't know what they were moving into. Their experience was ill-adapted to their new environs.

We don't know how long Adam and Eve resided in Eden before their expulsion. Even if they lived there for at least a year, the river might mitigate the effects of winter. And it was a naturally warm climate.

Consider the first time they experienced autumn outside the garden. To them, it may have been deceptively enjoyable, with all the colors. And perhaps the cooler autumnal weather was pleasant.

But unlike us, they didn't know that autumn is a harbinger of winter, or what lay in store. In many cultures, winter symbolizes death. And that symbolism trades on the fact that winter is a deadlier season. If you do not or cannot make adequate preparations for winter, you are likely to die of starvation or exposure. In addition, major predators are more desperate in the wintertime, which makes them even more dangerous to humans.

In a hot dry climate, the fall might seem to be a temporary improvement, but even though things appear to be getting better, they are really getting worse. And some people don't get a chance to learn from their mistakes.



The effects of their expulsion from Eden were not instantaneous. Rather, there were delayed effects. They discovered one ordeal after another.

## Genesis: a phenomenological reading

**1.** I'm going to offer a neglected interpretation of Gen 1. A phenomenological interpretation. I'm not suggesting the account is merely about appearances. The account is constitutive. But it visualizes creation in phenomenological imagery.

The account has a few basic structuring principles. The seven-day progression gets the most attention, but other structuring principles include borderline conditions, progression from invisible to visible, and general to specific.

**2.** In many respects, the opening scene is reminiscent of a world right after a flood. Down below, the land is submerged in standing water. Up above, rainclouds block the sunlight.

**3.** Some scholars think the account doesn't represent an absolute beginning; rather, creation begins with preexistent matter. Water and darkness. That interpretation depends in part on the syntactical relationship between v1 and the following. Is v1 a summary statement, or part of day 1? For one interpretation:

<https://frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/PoythressVernGenesis1.1IsTheFirstEventNotASummary.pdf>

**4.** Another question is whether darkness is metaphor for nothingness. If so, that wouldn't be a preexistent something.

**5.** What's the relationship, if any, between water and light? On the face of it, these may seem to be unrelated substances. However, the combination of water and light may foreshadow the rainbow ([Gen 9:13-17](#)). And that, too, would fit the diluvial imagery or connotations. A rainbow is a borderline phenomenon, briefly existing between sunshine and rainclouds, as the sun begins to emerge from behind the clouds. And emergence from invisibility to visibility is one of the motifs in the creation account.

**6.** Another example is the emergence of dry land. The description is reminiscent of flood waters abating. The dry land resurfaces after the floodwaters recede.

**7.** A further example is the emergence of foliage. In a desert, the land may seem to be barren and deluded, but after a flash flood, there's a burst of foliage. The invisible seeds were dormant, waiting for water to spring to life. Conversely, flooding can produce an underwater forest.

**8.** Then there's the paradoxical relationship between day 1 and day 4. How can there be dawn and dusk, and how the diurnal cycle be in place, before the creation of the sun?

There is, however, a very familiar condition, indeed, it happens twice a day, when you can see sunlight without seeing the sun. And that's when the sun is below the horizon. Before sunrise or after sunset.

In addition, in winter, there's the polar twilight at arctic or antarctic latitudes, when there's daylight and sunlight even though the sun is invisible because it remains just below the horizon. So there can be a diurnal cycle without sunrise or sunset. (Of course, an ancient Near-Eastern audience would not be privy to that phenomenon.)

**9.** Sometimes light and darkness are opposites. That's the dichotomy between day and night in reference to sunlight. In that case, light is present when darkness is absent while darkness is present when light is absent.

But sometimes light and darkness are complementary. That's the relationship between darkness, moonlight, and starlight. It requires a darkened sky to see the stars. In that situation, light and darkness are simultaneous rather than successive.

Likewise, hills, mountains, and shade-trees cast shadows, blocking the sunlight. Patterns of light and darkness can be spatial as well as temporal.

**10.** You also have borderline conditions at twilight where Venus and the moon are visible in the waxing or waning sunlight. If it's dawn, they fade. If it's dusk, they brighten.

**11.** There's a relationship between general partitions of space (land, sky, sea) and their specific occupants: land animals, aquatic animals, birds, the sun, moon, and stars.

There's a relationship between generic light and darkness, and specific light and darkness (day and night, dawn and dusk).

I think these aspects of the Genesis account are usually neglected because commentators aren't very observant about the natural world. Yet Genesis was revealed to people who were very attentive to their natural surroundings.

## Choose life!

*but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die (Gen 2:17).*

An old crux. If the penalty denotes physical death, then it seems like the warning was an empty threat inasmuch as God didn't strike them dead. Of course, the narrator would have to be pretty inept to relay such a blatant contradiction.

One explanation is that "in the day" is an idiom for "when", and therefore says less about sequential timing than sequential consequences. In the past, I've discussed that explanation. But now I'd like to consider an alternative explanation. A neglected interpretation.

What is meant by "life" and "death" in Gen 2-3? When we interpret Genesis, it's often useful to employ the Pentateuch generally as a frame of reference. That's partly because the Pentateuch is a literary unit, and partly because, by design, Genesis foreshadows later developments. There are common motifs in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch.

Where else do we have a life and death contrast in the Pentateuch? A conspicuous example is Deut 30:

*15 See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are*

*entering to take possession of it. 17 But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live (Deut 30:15-19).*

Even in this summary statement, it's about the *quality* of life. Life in the promised land—in contrast to exile. The meaning of "life" and "death" in that context is detailed by the covenantal blessing and bane in Deut 28. "Life" is characterized by:

*The Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. 5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.*

*7 "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. 8 The Lord will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the*

*commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. 11 And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow (Deut 28:1-12).*

That explicates "life" in terms of spiritual and material prosperity. By contrast, "death" is characterized by famine, cannibalism, illness, oppression, bondage, invasion, exile, idolatry, insecurity, terror (28:15-68). That explicates "death" in terms of spiritual and material bane.

On the one hand, the promised land is like a second Eden:

*the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord (Gen 13:10).*

*7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey (Deut 8:7-8).*

A well-watered land, irrigated by rivers. A land lush with fruit trees. Sound familiar? (cf. Gen 2:9-10.)

On the other hand, the woes in Gen 3:14-19 anticipate the snake-infested wilderness (Num 21:6), as well as the

accursed womb and the accursed ground in the Deuteronomic imprecations (Deut 28).

The Assyrian deportation and Babylonian exile parallel the banishment from Eden. To be cut off from the sanctuary and the land of blessing. Adam and Eve "died" when they were expelled from Eden.



## Was meat on the menu?

To a modern reader, [Gen 1:29-30](#) and [9:1-4](#) suggest meat-eating was a postdiluvian development. But to an attentive Jewish reader, that would not be the case. In [Gen 4:2-3](#), we have two offerings which foreshadow the offerings of the firstborn and firstfruits in the Mosaic cultus. Sacrificial meat was either eaten by the priest or the worshipper (e. g. [Deut 15:19-23](#)). Therefore, the default inference to draw from Abel's offering is that meat eating antedated the flood. [Gen 9:1-4](#) probably involves a distinction between livestock and game. And because game animals would not be hunted, they would become fearful of man (9:2). If, moreover, humans consumed meat prior to the flood, then it seems all the more likely that animal predators did as well.

## True love waits

*3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth...25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he fathered Lamech...28 When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son...32 After Noah was 500 years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 5:3,25,28,32).*

- 1.** Commentators puzzle over the longevity of the antediluvians. There've been some ingenious efforts to decode the ages as symbolic, but I haven't seen any consistent numerological principle.
- 2.** There's nothing especially surprising about the longevity of the antediluvians. From the standpoint of biblical anthropology, man originally had the capacity for biological immortality. That opportunity was lost when Adam and Eve were put out of reach of the tree of life, but in the world to come, the redeemed will regain what was lost in Adam.
- 3.** A more puzzling, but neglected feature of the genealogies, is the age at which the antediluvians fathered kids. Was Adam a virgin until he reached 130? Was Lamech a virgin until 182? Was Methuselah a virgin until 187? Was Noah a virgin until 500 years of age? That would certainly make the antediluvians impressive, if discouraging, role-models for abstinence-only programs. Lends exponentially new meaning to "True love waits!"

On the face of it, there are two possible explanations:

- i)** The reason the antediluvians lived so long is because their lifecycle was slower. They took much longer to reach

sexual maturity. Slower means longer. Like the difference between human years and dog years. Or to put it in reverse, the lifespan of postdiluvians is accelerated.

**ii)** The other, perhaps more reasonable explanation, is that Gen 5 isn't recording the age at which they first fathered a son. Rather, the genealogies are selective. The purpose is to sample some representative descendants to establish a lineage. List enough descendants to trace a starting-point and end-point.

If the age at which the genealogies record the birth of a son has that function or significance, then it's evidence that the genealogies are open rather than closed. If so, that has some bearing on using the genealogies to reconstruct an absolute chronology.

## Back to Eden

*10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Gen 2:10-14).*

*24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24).*

I often circle back to certain issues, because they interest me, and because there's always more to be said. One issue concerns the location and landscape of Eden. When we read the account, what should the reader try to visualize?

What's intriguing about [Gen 3:24](#) is the implication that the Garden was enclosed space. There was one way in and one way out. So it wasn't wide open. You couldn't just walk into the Garden from anywhere. There was some kind of natural (?) barrier separating the Garden from the surrounding territory. But what might that be?

One possibility which suggests itself from the account is the river system. Perhaps the Garden was encircled by a meandering, impassable river. A river too wide and deep to wade across or swim across. On that view, the eastern access point was like an isthmus. Depending on whether Eden was near the ocean, it might even be a tidal river that

submerged the access point at high tide, leaving it briefly exposed at low tide. That's a simple explanation.

Another possibility is a river valley, where the surrounding hillside forms a solid boundary, like a brick wall. Or a fluvial island.

## All in a day's work

A stock objection to young-earth creationism is that too much is happening in Gen 2 to wedge into one day. Indeed, it describes daylight activities, so it has to be squeezed into about 12 hours, give or take, and that's unrealistic.

I think some of the strain can be relieved by recognition that, contextually, Adam didn't name every kind of animal on earth, but only animals that frequented the garden. But there are additional issues.

One striking difference between Gen 1 and Gen 2-3 is that unlike Gen 1, with its 7-day framework, Gen 2-3 lack temporal markers. Considered on its own terms, there's no indication as to how long it took for incidents described in Gen 2 to happen. It doesn't say one thing happened at a particular hour, or day later, week later, month later, year later. There's some chronological progression, but no indication how long a particular incident took, or how soon after one incident another incident occurred. If all we had to go by was Gen 2, there'd be no reason to assume it all happened on the same day. Like Jonah, the action in Gen 2-3 reflects narrative compression.

So where does the pressure to wedge it into one day come from? Well, it comes from attempting to synchronize day 6 in Gen 1 with events in Gen 2. Since Gen 1 says mankind was made on day six, and Gen 2 recounts the creation of Adam and Eve, the assumption is that Gen 2 must be synchronized with day six in Gen 1—at least in regard to the origin of Adam and Eve.

There may be an element of truth to that, but I think it's simplistic. To take a comparison, consider the "discrepancy"

between [Gen 6:19](#) & [7:2](#). Yet that's not a real contradiction. Rather, that's what Mark Futato dubs the synoptic/resumptive-expansive technique, where the narrator introduces a subject in general terms, then talks about something else, then circles back to that subject, but qualifies the original statement with additional information. [Gen 7:2](#) is the definitive statement, not 6:19.

With that compositional technique in view, while it's necessary to say that Adam was created on day six, I don't think it's necessary to confine all the activities in Gen 2 to day six. The creation of man would be initiated on day six, but needn't terminate on day six.

The description of day six in Gen 1 is a general statement that can be further modified by Gen 2—just as [Gen 7:2](#) modifies the scope of 6:19. Indeed, a basic function of Gen 2 is to supplement Gen 1 by providing more detailed information regarding the creation of mankind. As such, I think the synchrony can be limited to the terminus ad quo rather than the terminus ad quem. Although Gen 2 overlaps with day six of Gen 1, they needn't coincide.

If we make that adjustment, then I think Gen 2 is consistent with young-earth creationism—although that adjustment is equally consistent with old-earth creationism.

## "Doublets"

*5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf."...9 Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Gen 37:5-7,9).*

*5 And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation (Gen 40:5).*

*After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. 3 And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. 4 And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5 And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream (Gen 41:1-7).*

**i)** Traditionally, liberal scholars regard "doublets" as evidence for independent traditions which redactors edited



into a single narrative. However, many of the "doublets" are clearly integral to the narrative. So that's a bad explanation.

**ii)** More recently, scholars like Robert Alter regard "doublets" as literary devices. That suggests fictional conventions.

**iii)** There is, however, a realistic explanation. The reason Joseph and Pharaoh both receive two related dreams is to confirm the message. Two different ways to say the same thing. It's similar to Peter's threefold vision, which is reiterated to lend certainty to the disclosure:

*9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven ([Acts 10:9-16](#)).*

Emphatic repetition underscores the revelatory, authoritative nature of the dream or vision. It's not a fluke or coincidence. Rather, there's a pattern.

**iii)** The dreams of the baker and cupbearer aren't doubled. They have one dream apiece. Two dreamers. That's a "doublet" of sorts, but it has a different function. To begin with, their coordinated dreams indicate special providence. God sent and synchronized their dreams. In addition, the two dreams forecast divergent fates for the two dreamers. And the survivor belatedly brings Joseph to Pharaoh's attention.

## Life from life

An interesting principle in Gen 1 is that it takes life to make life. Unlike dead, impotent idols, the "living God" creates the world. And he makes living creatures who reproduce. So it takes one living thing to make another living thing. Life is *transmitted* from one living thing to another. Procreation is an act of *sharing* and *transferring* life from a being that's already alive. Regeneration involves the same principle on a spiritual plane.

This principle is illustrated in the creation of Adam ([Gen 2:7](#)), where the Angel of the Lord breathes into the inanimate body of Adam, thereby making it alive.

Procreation is like a candlelight service, where one burning candle lights another candle until the sanctuary is flooded with candlelight. That's how the human race spread from a single breeding pair.

## Pictograms

I was asked to comment on this essay:

[https://www.academia.edu/29550502/A\\_Historical-Grammatical\\_and\\_Polemical\\_Reading\\_of\\_Genesis\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/29550502/A_Historical-Grammatical_and_Polemical_Reading_of_Genesis_1)

for the most part I find the questions posed by both YEC and OEC advocates to be somewhat puzzling, because both positions appear, to me at least, to be asking thoroughly modern questions of a completely ancient text. I simply cannot understand how anyone believes that the author of Genesis had the hydrologic cycle of the early earth in mind when writing about the separation of the waters above and the waters below in the 2nd millennia BCE.<sup>2</sup>

the best understanding of Genesis 1 is not as a scientific account of creation (a la YEC or OEC), nor is it a kind of demythologized and wholly non-historical plagiarism of other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation myths (a la Delitzsche, Gunkel, or Enns); but rather, it is a purposeful, literary, and polemical taunting of the religious and cultural foes of the early Israelites as they were about to enter the land of Canaan in order to steer them toward religious fidelity to YHWH alone.

That's a strawman. Sure, Gen 1 is not a scientific description of cosmic and biological origins. It uses prescientific language. But that's beside the point. The point, rather, is whether this is a factual description of cosmic and biological origins. A scientific interpretation is a second-order exercise.

Proponents of FM [the Framework Model] will often point to some of the contradictions that arise from a strictly historicist chronological approach to the days, as well as other theological problems. For example, what sort of ethical problems arise if God created the earth, not just with the appearance of maturity, but with the illusion of having a history that it did not in fact have?<sup>25</sup>

While some will have problems with the appearance of maturity, anyone who believes that Adam could be created as mature should have no problem. The dilemma arises not in the appearance of maturity, but in the illusion of a false history. If the Earth did not exist for as long as science shows us that it does, then that would mean that God created the earth with craters from meteor impacts that never happened. It would be like creating Adam not only mature but with scars on his body with cuts that he never endured. That kind of pointless deception seems to provide a real ethical dilemma.

**i)** But that's not an *exegetical* objection. What's the evidence that the narrator or the original audience would regard that as posing a "real ethical dilemma"?

**ii)** I don't see this as any more of an ethical dilemma than "the illusion of a false history" in a period stage set or period CGI. A historical movie about ancient Rome or the Wild West breaks in at a fairly arbitrary point within the ongoing history of the world. But that's when the plot begins. To be accurate, it has a setting and artifacts that antedate the plot, which fall outside the timeframe of the plot. It's like the world begins at that moment, with the opening scene of the movie.

In addition, how can there be three literal 24 hour earth days (one complete rotation in reference to the sun) when God does not create the sun and moon until day 4, expressly with the purpose of marking out days and “to separate day from night” (1:14)?<sup>26</sup>

I think that's a stronger objection to the YEC reading.

The first thing that Kline et al. would like to draw our attention to is the genre of Genesis 1. If Genesis 1 is a straightforward account of history (we will argue shortly that it is not), then it may be placed alongside the hard sciences and ask the question of how the cosmos materially came into being. That is, Genesis 1 would be, on this view, the kind of literature that asks the same questions as the astronomy or geology text books. However, if Genesis 1 is not strictly historical narrative, then it would be placed within the social sciences, because its primary concern would be with who was involved.

Same strawman I noted before.

We can now see why Kline and Waltke describe the structure as following this sort of pattern, where an sphere is made to be inhabitable, and then it becomes inhabited...Kline and Waltke both show us the relationships between the parallel triads of days. The first three days show the creation and preparation of kingdoms/spheres as a kind of environment, and in the following three days, populating those environments with the proper inhabitants of those environments. This means that days 1-3 are dealing directly with forming what was formless in 14 1:1—no longer is the cosmos formless but now it has distinct form and structure.

God has now made an orderly cosmos, fit for populations of living beings to live in, which also means that days 4-6 are meant to show that the heavens and earth are no longer void– they are no longer empty, but rather are inhabited. Days 1-6 show that YHWH has acted to make creation habitable and to populate the created order with creatures according to their spheres.

**i)** There's a grain of truth to that, but that's consistent with a YEC reading, where it's natural to create the sky before birds, bodies of water before fish, dry land before land animals.

**ii)** There there's the problem with his matching scheme. According to his own representation, the sky ("waters above") on day 2 has fish and fowl on day 5 as its counterpart while seas on day 3 parallel has man and animals on day 6 as its counterpart. But how are they parallel? flying fish? Likewise, man and land animals don't correspond to marine life.

This means that FM advocates, like myself, will often just sit on the sidelines of YEC, OEC, and evolutionary debates baffled as to what is unfolding in front of us.

That's pretty simplistic. There's far more to the creation/evolution debate than whether Gen 1 is chronological.

The strongest example is seen in the connection between Genesis 1 and the Memphis Shabaka Stone. This Memphite text was most likely produced during the New Kingdom period (16th–11th C. BCE.) and would have been likely prior, but possibly concurrent with the composition of Genesis. 36 The similarities can

be catalogued as follows...This chart shows us that while there are some slight modifications to the overall order, there was plainly a strong familiarity of the Shabaka Stone, or at least with the mythology it presented, that was present during the time of the composition of Genesis 1.

**i)** He has a diagram of alleged parallels arranged in two columns, side-by-side. However, I'm dubious about that comparison. To begin with, the text of that stele is damaged.

**ii)** In addition, although I'm no Egyptologist, it's my impression that a hieroglyphic text, consisting of pictograms, is far more equivocal and open-textured than a verbal text, consisting of linguistic propositions. Gen 1 is already verbalized whereas a hieroglyphic text but first be translated into a verbal text. So there's a prior interpretive step. A reader of a hieroglyphic text must turn that into words before comparison is possible. For instance:

Hieroglyphics is an ancient Egyptian script and a premier example of a medium that combines word and image to convey meaning. Hieroglyphic script constantly switches between icon and symbol to complicate the word/image relationship. At times, characters function as icons that represent the objects they depict. At other times, characters function as arbitrary signs, requiring the reader to assign phonetic value. The amalgamation of word and image not only makes the translation of hieroglyphics difficult...

Logograms can represent not only the exact object they depict, but also extensions of that image. For example, the logogram of a sun may represent the actual object of the sun, or the concept of day. The



drawbacks of a pictorial writing system quickly become apparent as iconic signs fail to represent complex concepts. Logograms are sometimes used as arbitrary characters with no correlation to the object they depict. Called phonograms, these arbitrary signs convey meaning phonetically. For example, you can convert the visual images of "bee" and "leaf" into their phonetic value to create a final visual image of the word "belief." Hieroglyphics combine phonograms and logograms to complicate the word/image relationship. In addition, hieroglyphic script uses determinatives to assist in translation. Located at the end of words, determinatives help to clarify remnants of ambiguity. For example, an icon of a male or female may be used to disambiguate names. Hieroglyphic script is a collage of logograms, phonograms and determinatives that operate under complex grammatical principles. Its unique combination of word and image has deterred translation for over a thousand years and has contributed to a mysterious veil that continues to cover this medium.

<https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/hieroglyphics/>

Egyptian hieroglyphs were pictograms, illustrative of objects and ideas, rather than abstract symbols. These pictograms could be further classified as phonograms, representing consonantal phonemes [20], or ideograms (also called logograms) in which the pictogram depicted a concept [21]. Additionally, there were also a number of signs (determinatives) used to clarify the meaning of words composed partially or primarily of phonograms [22]. Many hieroglyphs could serve more than one of these functions [23], although in practice, only a few were regularly employed in all capacities

[24]. Even the fraction of hieroglyphic script that is phonemically based is not comparable to alphabetic systems in which each letter roughly corresponds to one phoneme. In Egyptian hieroglyphs, a single phonogram could represent one, two, or three consonants [25]. Since vowels were not represented in writing, the same phonogram could be used to represent words (or parts of words) that contained different vowels; this is comparable to using a single sign to represent the English words "mess", "miss", "moss" and "mice". Because of this ambiguity, the ideographic use of hieroglyphs was maintained throughout Egyptian history

<http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-iv/volume-iv-essay-11/>

Back to the essay:

Another thematic connection is the role of supernatural light in the comparative narratives. In the Hermopolis tradition, after a long period of nearly infinite darkness, the god Atum emerged out of primordial waters (Nun) and, being a sun deity, manifested himself as pure light—before the creation of the sun.<sup>42</sup> This fueled the Egyptian myth that the supernatural light from these primordial gods is what dispelled the infinite darkness.<sup>43</sup> This abnormality in the existence of light prior to the creation of the sun likely explains the long debated nature of the light in the first few days of creation prior to the creation of the luminaries on day four in the Genesis account. However, the author of Genesis is careful not to attribute the light to the creation of a deity as in the Egyptian myths, but rather that it was created by divine fiat, that is, by a divine command, "Let there be light."

This meant that the author was keen to show that, unlike Rê-Atum, YHWH was not brought into existence, and did not result in an act of self-creation, but was himself preexistent and was responsible for bring into being even the first light, and that light itself not divine. Johnston notes that this "is a case of the Hebrew author indulging in a bit of one-upmanship. YHWH is superior to Rê/Rê-Atum, Egypt's god of light."<sup>44</sup> That "one-upmanship" just is the polemical intent described throughout this present paper.

But doesn't the Framework Model, if correct, already explain that "abnormality"? On that view, the paired days are not two separate days. So the "Hermopolis tradition", if correct, presents an alternative explanation for the same phenomenon. Either one or the other is redundant.

## The lion and the lamb

**i)** [Isa 11:6-9](#) & [Isa 65:25](#) are YEC prooftexts: in particular, belief that there was no antelapsarian carnivory. No antelapsarian predation, parasitism, disease, &c.

**ii)** One alternative interpretation is that Isaiah's golden age passages are political allegories for the cessation of warfare. Harmony between predator and prey symbolizes the outbreak of universal peace (e.g. Childs).

There may be grain of truth to that interpretation. Certainly the larger context includes the end of warfare.

**iii)** At the same time, the imagery suggests a restoration of Edenic conditions, and that's consistent with the political interpretation. The end of political violence doesn't rule out a literally Edenic interpretation, since there was no warfare in Eden.

**iv)** One complication is that metaphor and literality aren't necessarily opposites, but can range along a continuum. Indeed, prosaic discourse contains many dead metaphors.

So it's possible for Isaiah to predict something like Eden redux even if the picturesque imagery is somewhat figurative. Was there no carnivory in Eden? Presumably, the animals weren't dangerous to Adam and Eve. That doesn't necessarily mean they weren't dangerous to each other. They might be tame animals, that are safe around humans, but still predatory or violent. For instance, domestic dogs and cats are still predatory, even though they are docile around their owners.

**v)** We might also consider how realistic a particular interpretation is. I mean "realistic", taking biblical supernaturalism into account.

Some wild animals don't seem to be tamable. I don't think you can tame sharks, crocodiles, venomous snakes, Komodo dragons, &c. So it's hard to see how all wild animals could be safe around humans, even if some might be.

Perhaps, then, there'd be a degree of providential protection. For that matter, even if Adam, Eve and their posterity were never banished from the Garden, they'd still need to take reasonable precautions. The world is not a theme park. There are natural hazards.

## Cyclic cosmology

If we discovered evidence for cyclic cosmology, would that disprove biblical cosmology? For the original audience, Gen 1-2 describes the world they could see. The earth and the visible stars. Modern readers have a greater sense of scale.

Yet that doesn't mean Yahweh only created what naked-eye astronomy can observe. It doesn't mean that if the universe extended far beyond what ancient Jewish readers would be able to see on a starry night, God was not the creator of what lay beyond the reach of naked-eye astronomy. What you could see was a synecdoche for what you couldn't. It was all of a piece.

Genesis sets the stage for human history, and God's activity in human history. In so doing, it places humans in a larger cosmic context, but that's undeveloped.

If, say, there are extraterrestrials tucked away in some undetectable corner of the universe or multiverse, their existence wouldn't mean God didn't make them, even if that falls outside the immediate purview of Genesis—or NT counterparts (e.g. [Col 1:16](#)).

A cyclic cosmology is to time what a multiverse is to space. In both you have multiple worlds, but in a multiverse these are spread out over space whereas in cyclic cosmology these are spread out over time. A diachronic rather than a synchronic ensemble. But the principle is the same. God would be the creator of all—whether one or many.

Mind you, I'm not aware of any evidence for cyclic cosmology. If such turned up, it would require Christian philosophers to retool some of their cosmological

arguments, yet cosmological arguments from contingency (e.g. Leibniz, Pruss) would apply with equal force to cyclic cosmology.

## Counting the animals

*18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him ([Gen 2:18-20](#)).*

I'd like to say a few more things about this passage. The launchpad is Randal Rauser's dismissive comments about young-earth creationism.

**i)** It's deceptive when folks like Rauser attack young-earth creationism, because their true target is much broader. It's not as if Rauser is an old-earth creationist. I'm quite sure he's a theistic evolutionist.

More to the point, as you can see from his glowing review of Robin Perry's book (**THE BIBLICAL COSMOS**), it's pretty obvious that Rauser views Gen 2-3 as fictional. So his actual position is far more radical than whether day 6 was a calendar day.

**ii)** Scholars like John Walton and Peter Enns say we should interpret Genesis in the way the original audience would understand it. I agree. But there's a bait-n-switch.

When scholars like Walton and Enns classify Genesis as mythology, that's a retroactive classification. That doesn't



reflect the viewpoint of the original narrator but the viewpoint of modern scholars who don't believe anything like that ever happened or even could happen. In reality, they are doing the polar opposite of what they claim to be doing: rather than adopting the viewpoint of the original narrator, they superimpose the viewpoint of a modern scholar who regards the outlook of the original narrator as antiquated and erroneous.

**iii)** In context, I don't think **Gen 2:18-20** means Adam named every kind of animal on earth. Gen 2 is about the land of Eden rather than planet earth. In particular, it's about God preparing the Garden of Eden. Fauna and flora God made for that particular locale, as man's original habitat. That's the setting for vv18-20. So it's quite possible that Adam would have time to name all the animals in the course of one afternoon. That's not unrealistic given the narrative parameters.

**iv)** In addition, the function of the naming is to make Adam aware of the fact that he has no human companions generally, as well as no female counterpart in particular. The animals have male and female pairs, but nothing corresponding to Adam. Adam doesn't even need to name every animal in the garden to get the message. A sample would drive home that point. The purpose is not to exhaustively name the animals but to create a point of contrast between animals, including male and female animals, and Adam's lack of human companionship and female companionship.

(For that matter, there's a difference between naming kinds of animals and naming each individual of the same kind.)

**v)** The account itself doesn't say how long it took Adam to name the animals. It doesn't say he had to do it all in one

afternoon. The assumption that it all had to happen in the span of one day isn't based on Gen 2, which lacks temporal markers, but the attempt to synchronize Gen 2 with day 6 of Gen 1. I think the reasoning goes like this:

In Gen 1, God creates man and woman on day six, then ceases his creative labors on day seven. In Gen 2, God creates Adam, Adam names the animals, then God creates Eve. If the creation of Eve succeeds the naming of the animals, but precedes the divine rest, then all that has to happen on day 6.

Maybe that's the correct interpretation, but maybe not. As Rabbi Brichto pointed out, there's the OT technique of narrating the same event twice. The first account is simpler or more general while the second account is more detailed. This relates to similar techniques like narrative compression and prophetic telescoping. Applied to the question at hand, day six may mark the terminus ad quo for the creation of man, but not the terminus ad quem. That might also account for the vaguer timeframe of Gen 2.

## Are the genealogies complete?

Are the genealogies in Genesis complete or incomplete? Let's consider two striking features:

**i)** Unless I missed something, the genealogies only mention male descendants. But the antediluvians undoubtedly had female descendants as well.

**ii)** In addition, even if the genealogies only mention the firstborn, it's statistically unlikely that the firstborn child was always a son rather than a daughter.

**iii)** Then there's the extraordinary age at which they are first mentioned as fathering offspring. Did it take that long for them to reach sexual maturity? Were they all virgins up to that point? Or is the tacit assumption that the first mentioned decedent is not in fact the firstborn?

**iv)** Take the curious case of Noah. Was he really childless until the ripe age of 500? And did he father all three sons in the same year?

**v)** I think all these factors suggest that the genealogies are selective. In principle, they could be selective about naming siblings, but still be complete in naming a representative of each successive generation. But the fact that they're that selective may mean there's no presumption that they name representatives of every generation.

**vi)** An unbeliever might say they don't make sense because they're fictional or legendary. However, they made sense to the narrator. Presumably they made sense to the original audience. So unless he's randomly picking ages out of the

blue, there's a pattern—even if it may be obscure to modern readers.

## What's a rainbow?

*8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth" ([Gen 9:8-17](#)).*

**i)** As a rule, the aim of biblical exegesis is to read the text like the original audience would read it. Modern readers know both more and less about the world than the original audience. We know less about a particular time and place in the ancient world than the original audience to whom a book of the Bible was addressed, but we know far more about the world in general than the ancient audience. This carries the risk that we sometimes unconsciously import

assumptions into the text that the original audience didn't share.

For instance, a 21C American doesn't have to travel to Africa to recognize African animals. In theory, a 21C American could never travel beyond a 50-mile radius of his birthplace, but know a lot about the rest of the world. By contrast, many ancient readers had an extremely provincial knowledge of the world they lived in. In many cases, no knowledge of the world at large. Just their little corner of the world. Their village and thereabouts.

**ii)** In addition, the same text can reflect more than one viewpoint. In the case at hand, there's the viewpoint of Noah and his descendants (e.g. Abraham), to whom the covenant sign was first revealed. In addition, there's the viewpoint of audience that Moses was writing for. The Exodus generation.

**iii)** Consider the impression a rainbow might have on the original audience. Let's assume that Noah resided in Mesopotamia. And that's certainly Abraham's fatherland. At least by modern standards, rain is rare in most of that region. Mind you, we have to be careful about extrapolating from the present to the past. From what I've read, the ancient Near East has become more arid over the millennia. But that means for Noah and his descendants (e.g. Abraham), sightings of rainbows might be highly unusual.

Egypt is much drier. And depending on the area, rainfall is rarer by far in the Sinai desert.

Now the implied audience for the Pentateuch consists of people who migrated from Egypt to the Sinai. It's possible that most of them never saw a rainbow. An unheard of phenomenon. Imagine the impact of a downpour in the

Sinai, followed by a rainbow—if that was a novel experience. An extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime spectacle.

On the other hand, Palestine has rainy seasons, so they will be moving into a region where rainbows are more common. As such, the text had a shifting significance, depending on the reader's experience of rainbows. It's a useful exercise for a modern reader to put himself in the situation of Noah and Abraham, then Israelites in Egypt, then Israelites in the Sinai, then Israelites in Palestine, to consider the impression a rainbow would make depending on the regional climate.

## How to read Genesis

I recently read/skimmed *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and the Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Zondervan 2018) by John Collins.

**1.** It's a seasoned and erudite exegetical defense of old-earth creationism. Collins has a sophisticated hermeneutic that he applies to Genesis.

The book fights on two fronts. On the one hand, it takes aim at the hermeneutics of young-earth creation.

On the other hand, it takes aim at scholars like Peter Enns, Dennis Lamoureux, Robin Perry, Paul Seely, Kenton Sparks, and John Walton—who think the Bible suffers from a hopelessly obsolete, prescientific outlook. (Kyle Greenwood is another example, but he doesn't figure in the discussion.) That target looms larger in his treatment than young-earth creationism.

Collins does a nice job of showing that the way Enns, Walton et al. read the Bible is naive. Does a nice job of showing that ancient Near Easterners were more observant than Enns, Walton et al. give them credit for.

That's not just his conservative opinion. Take this quote:

People in the ancient Near East did not conceive of the earth as a disk floating on water with the firmament inverted over it like a bell jar, with the stars hanging from it...The textbook images that keep being reprinted of "the ancient Near Eastern world picture" are based on typical modern misunderstandings that fail to take into account the religious components of ancient Near



Eastern conceptions and representations. O. Keel & S. Schroer, **CREATION: BIBLICAL THEOLOGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST** (Eisenbrauns 2015), 259-60n34.

So his monograph defends the inerrancy of Scripture against an influential academic fad that's eroding evangelicalism. In that regard it's useful for young-earth and old-earth creationists alike.

**2.** I disagree with some of exegetical decisions. And there's a disappointingly thin discussion of the flood account. But in general this is an exceptional treatment.

**3.** I'd like to focus on one particular issue, and that's his provocative endorsement of anachronism in Scripture (6.C).

**i)** Normally, anachronism is a telltale sign of fiction, forgery, or the limitations of an author who's out-of-touch with the period he's writing about. However, Collins argues that anachronism can be a technique to make the past come alive for a later audience. If successful, his argument pulls the rug out from under a stock objection to the historicity of some biblical accounts.

**ii)** One concern is whether his argument proves too much. Anachronisms are a way in which we distinguish apocryphal Gospels from 1C Gospels. Or take the Donation of Constantine. Likewise, what if a Mormon apologist redeployed this argument to salvage the Book of Mormon? Admittedly, Mormonism has many defeaters.

**iii)** At least from my reading, it isn't clear to me if by anachronism, he means a Biblical narrator sometimes

updates the treatment, or if he's staking out the more radical position that there's nothing in the past which underlies the narrative. Consider two possible illustrations:

**a)** Long-range prophecy depicts the future in terms of the past. It uses imagery familiar to the original audience. The oracle reflects the kind of world they knew.

**b)** *The Warriors* (1979) is a cinematic adaptation of a novel by Sol Yurick, which is, in turn, a modern adaptation of a true story by Xenophon. In the original, the Greeks are trapped deep behind enemy lines and must fight their way back to the homeland. In the modern adaptation, this is recast in terms of New York street gangs. That preserves some correspondence between the original setting and the modernization, but with great artistic license.

I don't know if that's the sort of thing Collins has in mind. One issue is whether that's too loose a view of historicity. I find some of his examples more plausible than others.

## The creation of Eve

As I often say, I think a useful interpretive step when we read historical narratives of Scripture is to imagine what the scene looks like. What did the narrator intend the reader to see in his mind's eye? If we can't visualize it, we don't really understand it. We lack a clear idea of what was happening. That's an element often missing in commentaries.

Take the creation of Eve. When he wrote that description, what images did the narrator have?

Scholars dispute how to render a key word. Is it an anatomical term or an architectural metaphor? Traditionally, God is said to make Eve from one of Adam's "ribs". In support of the traditional rendering, Adam says Eve is "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" ([Gen 2:23](#); cf. [Gen 29:14](#); [37:27](#)).

However, scholars point out that almost uniformly, the word is an architectural term-especially in reference to the construction of the tabernacle furniture and Solomon's temple. For instance:

The word designates a side or the shell of the ark of the covenant...the side of a building...or even a whole room ("side chamber, arcade, cell"). Hamilton 1:178. It is typically an architectural or structural term referring to a single object that has two matching sides (e.g. a pair of doors). John Walton in J. Daryl Charles ed. **READING GENESIS 1-2**, 166.

Mind you, the disjunction between anatomical and architectural terminology may be a false dichotomy inasmuch as some architectural terms are anatomical metaphors, viz. "rib" vaulting in Gothic architecture, or "ribs" in the hull of a wooden ship.

So the word may be a pun. If so, what's the intended symbolism?

In context, the passage has to have an anatomical emphasis, even if the term is figurative, because it describes Adam's body as the source or raw material for Eve's body.

Another issue is that if we think this was meant to be a historical account, then we need to offer a realistic interpretation-albeit supernatural. Some scholars don't take the account seriously, which allows them to propose impossible scenarios, viz. Adam was originally androgynous. God created male and female by bisecting Adam. That's the stuff of pagan mythology.

It's possible that the imagery prefigures or trades on the tabernacle. On the other hand, that could be the incidental consequence of the fact that most construction descriptions in the Pentateuch and OT generally concern details of the temple and tabernacle. So the clustering of terminology may be sample bias.

If it means "rib", should we visualize the Angel of the Lord extracting a rib from Adam, then replicating the rib to produce a rib cage for Eve, then extending the body from the torso, upwards and downwards?

If it's an architectural term, that presents more than one option. If it's like French doors, the symbolism evokes bilateral symmetry and chirality. And that would suit the identity of Eve as a counterpart to Adam. Moreover, Scripture often uses left-handed/right-handed imagery.

However, human bodies are wholes, not halves. So it's unclear how to convert that symbolism into a creative action the reader can picture.

"Side" is ambiguous inasmuch as human bodies are four-sided objects. So which side? Front? Back? Sideways?

Then there's the holistic meaning of the term: cell, shell, chamber, room. If we play along with that imagery, it might conjure up a casting process using Adam's body as a mold. When the mold is removed, it reveals the inner object, shaped by the mold into a negative 3D image. From what I've read, that technology existed in ancient Near Eastern metallurgy, at the time Genesis was written. So the original audience would have that frame of reference.

Of course, that presses the imagery in a way that's unrealistic. Adam's body isn't a hollow shell. And his body would be destroyed by the casting process. If, however, the creation of Eve is meant to be analogous to a casting process, it's useful to press the imagery in order to make the necessary adjustments.

Perhaps, then, the reader is supposed to visualize Eve emerging or rising out of Adam's body. Think of movies in which someone dies, then you see a translucent astral body float out of the corpse. The Angel of the Lord would summon her forth from Adam's body. Out steps Eve, like she was in a case.

## Hiding in the bushes

*8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen 3:8-11).*

This has always been a puzzling passage. It's understandable why they tried to hide from God. Although that's comical, they knew less about God than we do. So they might believe they could successfully elude divine detection.

Even so, why did they hide because they were naked? What does nudity have to do with it?

Is it because they were embarrassed to be seen in the buff by God after they ate the forbidden fruit? But once again, what's the logical connection? Perhaps their reaction is inexplicable. When caught redhanded, wrongdoers may react in irrational ways.

It won't do to say the account is fictional, for even fictional stories are supposed to make sense on their own terms. It had to be meaningful to the narrator. Indeed, good fiction has to be more logical than real life because it lacks factuality to lend it plausibility.

God's question implies that Adam wasn't conscious or self-conscious of his nudity until he ate the forbidden fruit. At one level, that's reasonable. Having been made that way, Adam had no point of contrast. No occasion to give his nudity a second thought. That was his exclusive experience.

Perhaps they took shelter in the bushes to provide a barrier against physical harm. Nudity is a vulnerable state which leaves one more exposed to physical harm. There's nothing between you and the elements—or weapons. They were unarmored and unarmed.

If, as Jeffrey Niehaus has argued, the divine visitation is a storm theophany, perhaps they took refuge in the bushes to provide a measure of protection against the approaching storm. Assuming it was a storm theophany, we don't know what form it took. A thunderstorm? A whirlwind?

Perhaps a fire theophany? The Angel of the Lord may assume a luminous appearance or even, according to Exodus, the appearance of a fire whirl. If they saw something like that touch down and head in their direction, it's not surprising that they ran for cover.

## Primeval ice

*1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

*3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen 1:1-5).*

Progressive/secular Bible scholars think v2 alludes to a preexistent primordial ocean. But is that consistent with what ancient people were in a position to know? What state does water take in the absent of sunlight? Ice. Denizens in the Middle East knew from personal experience that desert temperatures plummet after dark. They were acquainted with hail and snow. They knew about icy mountains.

Ice wasn't a foreign substance to them. And the relationship between sunlight and heat wasn't a foreign concept to them.

So, from a natural standpoint, if water preexisted sunlight, that wouldn't be a primeval ocean. That wouldn't be liquid, but solid.

Of course, from a supernatural standpoint, God doesn't need sunlight to have liquified H<sub>2</sub>O. And even humans can melt ice with fire. But my immediate point is that the mythological conception which some Bible scholars impute



to ancient Near Eastern writers doesn't mesh with what they knew about the world, if they gave it much thought.

To be sure, many people are thoughtless. However, there are always some observant, reflective people who do think things through. So this is another example where a desk-bound Bible scholar makes questionable assumptions about the ancient mindset. Modern scholars don't think about these things because they don't live off the land. They don't have to be keen observers of nature to survive. They are cocooned from the harsh elements by modern technology. But ancient people had to be highly attentive to the workings of nature to survive.

## Is Genesis "mytho-history"?

After completing his research program on penal substitution, Craig moved on to his next research program regarding the historical status of Genesis. This seems to be an interim report, but I'm guessing it's a forecast of his final views:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC9zwO0Gw40&t=165s>

No one was expecting Craig to emerge from his studies a young-earth creationist. I wonder if he even bothered to read the best of the young-earth creationists. The question was whether he'd land on the side of old-earth creationists like Vern Poythress and John Collins or the BioLogos crowd. Now we know.

Myths are not always best interpreted literalistically... Now we want to make application of these insights to Gen 1-11...A non-literal interpretation of these narratives (Gen 1-3) is very plausible. First and foremost is the creation of the world in 6 consecutive 24-hour days. A description that doesn't require a knowledge of modern science to recognize as metaphorical.

**i)** An equivocation or category error that runs through his analysis is failure to distinguish between symbol and metaphor. While a metaphor is symbolic, it doesn't follow that a symbol is metaphorical. A metaphor is a literary device. By contrast, a symbolic be an object in the real world. For instance, the tabernacle and the temple were loaded with symbolism, but they weren't metaphors.

**ii)** I'm inclined to agree with him that Gen 1 isn't strictly chronological. The major impediment to that interpretation is the relationship between day one and day four. The diurnal cycle is already operative on day one. Sunrise and sunset are what constitute morning and evening, dawn and dusk. So days 1-3 appear to be solar days.

**iii)** That said, nonlinear narration doesn't imply a metaphorical story. Take documentaries with flashbacks. That's nonlinear narration. But that doesn't make a documentary metaphorical. So Craig's inference is illogical. In fairness, maybe he's provided a stronger argument in one of the precedent episodes in the series.

Next is the humanoid deity which appears in chapters 2-3—in contrast to the transcendent Creator of the heavens and the earth in chapter 1.

That's such a wormy chestnut. Naturally God is more "transcendent" in Gen 1. It's an account of creation in general. Inorganic, inanimate, and subhuman creation. By contrast, God is interacting with humans in Gen 2-3, so God is inevitably more down-to-earth in that context. God doesn't relate to human beings the same way he relates to rocks and trees and stars.

The anthropomorphic nature of God, which is merely hinted at in chap. 2, becomes inescapable in chap 3, where God is described as walking in the garden in the cool of the day, calling audibly to Adam, who is hiding from him...Read in light of Gen 3, God's creation of Adam in Gen 2 takes on an anthropomorphic character as well. Here God is portrayed like the Mesopotamian goddess...shaping bits of clay into a human being, or the Egyptian god...sitting at his potter's wheel, forming man—as fashioning man out of the dust of the ground

and then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life so that the earthen figure comes to life.

We're not told whether God similarly formed the animals when—I quote—out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and bird of the air (2:19). But we can't help but wonder if they weren't formed in the same way as man.

When God takes one of the sleeping Adam's ribs, closes up the flesh and builds a woman out of it, the story sounds like a physical surgery which God performs on Adam, followed by building a woman out of the extracted body part.

Similarly, given God's bodily presence in the garden, the conversations between God and the protagonists in the story of the fall—namely Adam, Eve, and the serpent, read like a dialogue between persons who are physically present to one another. God's making garments for Adam and Eve out of animal skins and driving them out of the garden sound like physical acts by the humanoid god.

Given the exalted, transcendent nature of God described in the creation story, the Pentateuchal author could not possibly have intended these anthropomorphic descriptions to be taken literally. They are the figurative language of myth.

**i)** The general problem with this objection is that he fails to take Pentateuchal angelology into consideration, including the theophanic angel (Angel of the Lord). Paradigm examples include Gen 18, Exod 3 & Exod 33. In fact, Craig fields a question about that. His response is that God isn't identified as the Angel of the Lord in Gen 2-3. But that's

shortsighted. Readers would be expected to understand Gen 2-3 against the background (or foreground) of the Pentateuch generally. Everything isn't stated all at once. Details are filled in over the course of the Pentateuchal storyline. Certain characters are introduced with minimal exposition. You learn more about them as the plot progresses.

**ii)** He reads more into the creation of Adam than is actually stated. The description is sketchy and impressionistic. While it triggers associations with a potter (which is no doubt intentional), it doesn't detail that comparison. So the intention is probably that the creation of Adam is analogous to pottery, but not the same process.

**iii)** God poses rhetorical questions to elicit a confession.

Moreover, many features of these stories are fantastic. That is to say, they are palpably false if taken literally. And here I'm talking about features of the narrative that the author himself would have plausibly thought fantastic...For example, chap 2 begins by saying that when God created man, it had never rained upon the earth. Now this seems fantastic. Ancient Israelites understood the water cycle, as is abundantly attested throughout the OT. In light of chap. 1's affirmation that God had separated the waters above from the waters below, it's hard to believe that the author thought that there was ever a time in the earth's history when the earth was utterly devoid of rain.

It never dawns on Craig that Gen 2 describes the land of Eden, not the earth in general. The garden was situated somewhere in Mesopotamia. It's watered by one of the rivers. The reader should envision something like a riparian zone or a fluvial island.

Then there is the description of the garden of Eden, with its tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These are plausibly symbolic. The idea of an arboretum containing trees bearing fruit, which if eaten would confer immortality or yield sudden moral knowledge of good and evil, must have seemed fantastic to the Pentateuchal author. Keep in mind here that we are not dealing with miraculous fruit—as if God would on the occasion of eating impose immortality or supernatural knowledge of good and evil on the eater, for these were against his will. The fruit is said to have their effect even contrary to God's will.

**i)** The tree of life wasn't forbidden.

**ii)** Although Craig thinks it's "fantastic" that the God would on the occasion of eating confer supernatural knowledge of good and evil on the eater, contrary to his prohibition, what's the exegetical evidence that the narrator shared Craig's scruples? Indeed, it turns out that eating the forbidden fruit is punitive in itself. They expect one thing but what they experience is not what they hoped for. A rude surprise. A shocking revelation.

To take a comparison: suppose you're told not to eat berries from a particular bush. But you disregard the warning. Turns out the berries are poisonous. That in itself is a punishment for flouting the admonition. You ate the berries because they look delicious. Maybe they are delicious. But the pleasure is short-lived.

They don't know in advance what the tree of knowledge represents. They only know what the Tempter told them it stands for. They take his word for it. Then they found out the hard way it's not what they were counting on.

The garden of Eden may have described an actual existing geographical location—plausibly the Persian Gulf oasis, but like Mt. Olympus in Greek mythology, that site may have been employed to tell a mythological story about what happened at that site.

Does he apply the same reasoning to the patriarchal narratives, or the Exodus, or the Gospels?

Then there is the notorious walking and talking snake in the garden. Now he makes for a great character in the story: conniving, sinister, opposed to God. Perhaps a symbol of evil. But not plausibly a literal reptile such as you might encounter in your own garden. For the Pentateuchal author knew that snakes neither talk nor are intelligent agents. Again, the snake's personality and speech cannot, like Balaam's ass, be attributed to miraculous activity on the part of God lest God become the author of the Fall. The snake is not identified as an incarnation of Satan. Rather, he is described simply as the craftiest of the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made—a description which is incompatible with his being Satan.

**i)** Craig is evidently unaware of the fact that Hebrew syntax is ambiguous. Does it include the Tempter in the animal kingdom (comparative construction), or exclude the Tempter from the animal kingdom (partitive construction)? The context must decide.

**ii)** God has created a causal order in which things have an effect even when misused or abused. Even when we break God's law. If you commit fornication or adultery, God isn't going to suspend the possibility of pregnancy. The reproductive system will still perform its God-given design,

even though you act contrary to his commands and prohibitions. Whether the effect is natural or supernatural has no bearing on theodicy.

When you look at snakes in the ancient Near East, they are used as symbols for a wide range of things...they could be worshipped but they could also represent evil and sinister powers...so snakes could be regarded as wicked and so forth.

True, but in that event the original audience might well be expected to recognize in the Tempter, not a reptile, but a malevolent numinous being. In that case, the designation of the Tempter is paronomastic. A code name or pun to play on the evil, sinister connotations of snake-gods.

"...upon your belly you shall go"—this sounds like an etiological explanation of why snakes slither on the ground.

**i)** As Walton explains in his commentary on Genesis, imprecations against venomous snakes were commonplace in the ancient Near East. The imagery involves a contrast between a snake poised to strike, and a snake facedown. For instance, a cobra, with its short, backset fangs, must raise itself to a vertical position to strike (unlike vipers). Facedown is not an attack position.

**ii)** That interpretation also dovetails with the imagery of the next verse. Snakes usually bite the lower extremities. So the curse is not an etymology about why snakes slither, but continues the serpentine symbolism by treating the Tempter like a snake—thereby evoking a range of cultural associations with "snakes".



**iii)** Keep in mind that in many cultures, humans adopt animal names, hoping to reflect whatever is impressive about the animal. Merely having an animal name carries no presumption that the individual is in fact an animal.

When God finally drives the man and his wife out of the garden of Eden, he stations at its entrance "cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:24). What makes this detail fantastic is that the cherubim were not thought to be real beings but fantasies composed of a lion's body, a bird's wings, and a man's head. The Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna...observes that the motif of composite human/animal/bird figures was widespread in various forms throughout the ancient Near East, and he thinks that it is prominent in both art and religious symbolism and that the biblical cherubim seem to be connected with this artistic tradition. Cherubim filled multiple roles in the biblical tradition, such as symbolizing God's presence or God's sovereignty. Artistic representations of such creatures were to be found in the tabernacle and the temple, including in the holy of holies. Sarna points out that they are the only pictorial representation permitted in Judaism—an otherwise anti-iconic religion. They don't violate the prohibition against images because they are purely products of the human imagination and so do not represent any existing reality in heaven and earth. And thus images of them could be made in ancient Israel without breaking the second commandment prohibiting images of things in heaven or on earth, for the cherubim were not real.

**i)** Are the cherubim in Ezekiel not real beings but artistic fantasies? Are the cherubim in Ezekiel mere figments of human imagination? To the contrary, the artistic cherubim in the tabernacle are modeled on real angels. A point of correspondence between heaven and earth.

**ii)** The Mosaic code allows for pictorial representations of flora in the tabernacle.

**iii)** How does it follow that pictorial representations are permissible so long as they are purely products of human imagination rather than representing real things in heaven? Isn't the problem of idolatry nearly the opposite? The idolater misrepresents God by depicting deities that are figments of the human imagination. That don't correspond to what God is really like? Would an idol of Baal or Ishtar not violate the second commandment because Baal and Ishtar don't exist?

And yet, here in Gen 3, they are posted as guards, at a time and place in history, along with a rotating, flashing sword to guard for an indeterminate time the garden of Eden against man's reentry into the garden. Now since cherubim were regarded as creatures of fantasy and symbol, it's not as if the author thought what realism would require—that the cherubim remain at the entrance to the garden for years on end until it was either overgrown with weeds or swept away by the flood.

**i)** Even if we grant how he frames the issue, it raises speculative questions about angelic psychology. Do angels get bored? Do angels get tired? How do angels ordinarily pass the time? Do they require external stimulation? From what little Scripture reveals about angels, they seem to be telepathic. If so, they presumably have a group

consciousness. They can tap into the minds of fellow angels. In that respect, their minds may roam far and wide even if they are "stuck" in one place.

**ii)** However, that's all unnecessary. Why assume the same cherubim guarded the garden round-the-clock? The text doesn't say that. Why not rotate? How about two-hour shifts?

For that matter, why assume the garden requires sentinels on duty round the clock? The text doesn't say that. Why not leave it unguarded unless and until a human approaches, at which point cherubim resume their stations.

## God's audible voice

Having done a general commentary on Craig's treatment of Gen 1-3, I'd like to zoom in on one detail:

The anthropomorphic nature of God, which is merely hinted at in chap. 2, becomes inescapable in chap 3, where God is described as walking in the garden in the cool of the day, calling audibly to Adam...many features of these stories are fantastic. That is to say, they are palpably false if taken literally.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC9zwO0Gw40&t=165s>

- 1.** Is Craig suggesting that if Gen 2-3 attributes an audible voice to God, that's palpably false if taken literally? In his overall treatment of the account, that's one of the "fantastic" features he singles out as metaphorical.
- 2.** If so, that's a remarkable position for a Christian apologist to take. It would be understandable from John Spong or Rudolf Bultmann. If he's stating a general principle, then it can't be confined to Gen 2-3 or Gen 1-11. The same principle extends to the patriarchal narratives, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Historical Books, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, &c.
- 3.** Over and above Scripture, many Christians claim that God spoke to them in an audible. I'm not suggesting that we should credit every reported voice of God. But if enough Christians say God spoke to them in an audible voice, that's evidence that it happens some of the time. Not all of them are wackos or charlatans.

**4.** Perhaps, though, what Craig means by an "audible" voice is not a voice you hear in your mind, not God communicating telepathically, but a physical external voice. If God spoke to someone in an audible voice, and someone else was standing next to him, they'd both hear the voice. An objective sound. Maybe that's what Craig deems to be "fantastic" and "palpably false".

If so, what is the basis of Craig's objection? Surely God can miraculously structure sound waves to create a disembodied, but external voice. I'd at that even on the telepathic interpretation, God is able to communicate the same message to two or more people at the same time.

**5.** But maybe what Craig has in mind is not a disembodied voice, but an embodied voice. If God is an incorporeal being, then he can't use an audible voice in that sense.

But consider the Angel of the Lord. Consider the "mechanics" of the Angel of the Lord. In the OT, angels sometimes have physicality. They can materialize and dematerialize. In principle, the Angel of the Lord might have one of two modalities:

**i)** God takes possession of an actual angel. A preexistent angelic being—like Michael or Gabriel. He uses the angel as a vehicle to express himself—akin to how God sometimes takes possession of a human seer.

**ii)** God creates a temporary body every time the Angel of the Lord appears. A temporary material vehicle to speak to humans and interact with the physical surroundings. And it ceases to exist after it serves the immediate purpose. It might be a humanoid body, or a luminous body, depending on how God wants to present himself.

**6.** But maybe Craig's point is not that God's audible voice is "palpably false" considered in isolation, but as one more contribution to the overall scene in Gen 2-3. One of several cumulative, telltale signs that "these stories are fantastic (i.e. palpably false if taken literally)".

Yet the "fantastic" details are a fixture of biblical supernaturalism. Unfortunately, Craig's treatment of Gen 1-3 is a gift to infidels. He argues that Gen 1-3 is pious fiction. While he avoids the term, that's what his position amounts to. And to judge by his treatment of Gen 1-3, we can expect him to treat the flood account as fictional, too.

## Is Gen 1 merely functional?

John Walton has various strategies to dissolve the conflict between Gen 1 and the scientific establishment. Indeed, his position suffers from overkill. On the one hand, he says God accommodated erroneous depictions of the world. On the other hand, he drives a wedge between functional and material origins. If Gen 1 is merely about functionality rather than materiality, then it can't conflict with mainstream science. If, however, God accommodates error, then why bother with the functional/material dichotomy?

Be that as it may, let's consider that dichotomy on its own terms. Were ancient worshippers really concerned with the functional value of shrines rather than the material value of shrines?

Fact is, it takes very little to discharge the functional value of a shrine. Consider numerous references to impromptu shrines in the OT, many forbidden, Take the Asherah pole. That's pretty modest. Or a particular tree under which to perform human sacrifice.

For that matter, compare the tabernacle to the temple. They were functionally equivalent. If functionality is the ultimate consideration, why the lavish outlay for the Solomonic temple?

Moreover, pagan civilizations build physically imposing shrines. Take Mesopotamian ziggurats and Mesoamerican pyramids. Or sprawling Egyptian temples—with their forest of columns. Take the Parthenon. The Temple of Artemis. The Pantheon. Vast Hindu and Buddhist temples.

These are designed to impress the viewer. A statement of wealth and power. If anything, functionality takes a backseat to materiality.



## Birthdays

**1.** Controversy surrounds the antediluvian genealogies in Genesis. Are the ages realistic? As I've often observed, if professing Christians find it hard to believe that people could live that long, do they believe Christians will live forever after the resurrection of the just? What's a 1000 years compared to eternal life?

**2.** But now I'd like to make some different points. The objection has it backwards. The antediluvian genealogies are not about longevity but mortality. What was lost when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. Loss of immortality. Loss of access to the tree of life for Adam's posterity.

**3.** In addition, the controversy can blind us to other interesting things about the genealogies. We take birthdays for granted. That's a fixture of our culture. I don't know how widespread it is.

But because we take birthdays for granted, that may cause us to overlook how far back that extends. It goes all the way back to the history of the antediluvians.

**4.** Of course, babies weren't born in hospitals until modern times, and the antediluvians may not have had calendars, so they couldn't date and celebrate birthdays with the same accuracy we can. Maybe they marked one's age in terms of solar years or seasons. If the area had recognizable seasons, and you were born in spring, summer, fall, or winter, you might mark your age by when the same season came around. Likewise, certain constellations have a seasonal position or magnitude. In that regard, the fourth

day (esp. [Gen 1:14](#)) may, among other things, foreshadow birthdays and genealogies.

**5.** Birthdays are more significant in a fallen world characterized by mortality and the lifecycle. The sense that life has a beginning, middle, and end.

And the significance of birthdays would be intensified in the past by high rates of mortality due to the prevalence of fatal illness, famine, untreatable injuries, crime, and war. Unlike modernity, there was no presumption that you'd still be alive from one year to the next. So I expect that lent birthdays a certain suspense, foreboding, and poignancy that is lacking today.

By the same token, will we still have birthday celebrations in the world to come? We might if we continue to have children in the world to come. At least through childhood. But what about adults? When your sainted mother turns 1 trillion-years-old, do you compliment her: "You don't look a day over 999-billion-years old!"

## Calendar narratives

Flood stories were widespread in the ancient world. One distinctive of the biblical flood account is its use of dates. There are five dates in the Genesis flood narrative. This is remarkable, since those are the only dates in the entire book of Genesis.

Typically in ancient literature, an event's timing was indicated by relating it to another event, not by using dates. *Timeline dating*—plotting events on a transcendent timeline with dates—is common today, but ancient texts used *event sequencing*, temporally marking an event by relating it to other events.

Throughout Genesis, event sequencing is used. But five dates appear in the flood narrative and nowhere else in the entire book of Genesis.

An important insight emerges when these dates are plotted against the festival calendar of Israel. Three of the five fall directly on Mosaic festival dates. The only exceptions are the first and last, which nonetheless fall at the midpoint of Israel's grain-harvest festivals. All five dates appear to be "scheduled" with reference to Israel's festivals.

1. The beginning of the flood ([Gen 7:11](#)). The flood's beginning date (2/27) is at the center of Israel's grain festivals.

2. The ark's landing ([Gen 8:4](#))...In later Israel, this date would fall during the Feast of Booths.

3. When the mountaintops became visible ([Gen 8:5](#))... In later Israel, that same date was a new-moon day in between israel's festival days.

4. When the waters were gone ([Gen 8:13](#)). By New Years Day (1/1) the waters were gone. New Year's Day is a natural "new beginnings" point.

5. When the ground was dry ([Gen 8:14](#)). The ground was completely dry on 2/27. The significance of the flood's beginning in the heart of the grain harvest has already been noted. The same applies to its conclusion on a date one year later and even ten days after.

These correspondences suggest that the alignment between the five dated flood events and later Israel's festival calendar are not coincidental. Noah's flood was retold in a manner that related his "exodus" to Israel's festival worship and agricultural labors. If this reading is correct, one may still ask whether Noah's flood actually took place on these dates, or whether these dates were added anachronistically. One further feature indicates that these are not dates recorded from observation but are a literary construction: the flood narrative uses schematic, thirty-day months rather than actual varying-length months. This is prima facie evidence of a constructed (rather than observed) timeline.

The flood narrative uses schematic, thirty-day months. The five months between the beginning of the flood (2/17) and the ark's resting on Mount Ararat (7:17) are rendered as 150 days ([Gen 7:24](#); [8:3](#)) being five months of thirty days each...The use of aesthetically balanced dates and numbers throughout the passage, such as 7s, 10s, 40s, 150, along with the use of

schematic months, indicates the constructed nature of this narrative's dates for a legal (rather than journalistic) purpose). It is therefore proposed that the flood account is an agricultural and festival calendar in narrative form: a calendar narrative.

This function for the flood narrative is comparable to the contemporary practice of telling Jesus' birth story on December 25. Churches do so, not to assure that Jesus was actually born on that date, but to inform Christian observances on that date. Similarly, the flood narrative re-maps the events of Noah's deluge to the calendar of Israel's agricultural labors and harvest festivals for its instructional value.

There are at least three calendrical features of the flood narrative and exodus narratives that are also found in the creation week, suggesting all three date-laden narratives serve this calendrical purpose. First, the creation week is structured around dates like the flood and exodus narratives. The creation week does not provide month dates like those other calendar narratives, but it does give week dates. Days of the Hebrew week were identified by number.

This reading cautions against both young-earth and old-earth efforts to read Genesis 1 as a chronology of original creation events...This reading leads to conclusions largely congruent with "analogical day," "literary day," or "framework" views. Michael LeFebvre, "Reading Genesis 1 with the Fourth Commandment: The Creation Week as a Calendar Narrative," G. Hiestand & T. Wilson, eds. **CREATION AND DOXOLOGY:**

**THE BEGINNING AND END OF GOD'S GOOD WORLD** (IVP 2018), chap. 1.

That's a very intriguing proposal. I appreciate LeFebvre's fine-grained reading of the text. That said, I find his interpretation unconvincing:

**i)** I agree with him that the calendar dates in the flood account may be anachronistic, but not in the sense he intends. Rather, they're anachronistic in the sense that modern historians use the Gregorian calendar to date events in ancient history or Far Eastern history. Obviously, the Gregorian calendar was not in use at that time or place. But the anachronistic calendar dates synchronize with actual events.

By the same token, the narrator may well be using a calendar that didn't exist at the time of the flood. Rather, he's using a calendar that developed in Mosaic times. But that's to be expected if the narrator is Moses. And that would be comprehensible to a Mosaic-era audience.

**ii)** Insofar as the Jewish religious calendar was a year-round calendar, any calendar dates in the flood account will land somewhere in the cycle of Jewish festivals (including the Sabbath).

**iii)** If the narrator intended the dates in the flood account to evoke Jewish festivals, I'd expect him to date turning-points in the flood account in reference to the first day or last day of a Jewish festival, rather than in-between festivals or in the middle of festivals. There's too much leeway in LeFebvre's attempted correlations.

**iv)** The use of 7s, 10s, 30s, and 40s suggests round numbers or numerological figures that aren't reducible to the Jewish calendar. While there seems to be a schematic element to the figures in the flood account, that's more complex than a single structuring principle.

**v)** The creation account and flood accounts may be date-laden to prefigure the Mosaic religious calendar. In addition, the creation and deluge occur in phases, so it's natural to use temporal markers to indicate chronological divisions, progressions, or turning-points. Another narratives don't have the same internal requirements.

**vi)** The creation account and flood account aren't reducible to agricultural motifs. That's simplistic.

## Seven is your lucky number!

In his new commentary on Genesis, Andrew Steinmann says:

The crafting of the table can be seen in the fondness of its use of the number seven and its multiples... (122).

In correspondence, I asked him if he could be more specific. He responded:

The table contains 70 names listed as "sons" of Ham, Shem, Japheth or their descendants. (The Philistines are different, since they are not said to be "son," but are part of the Casluhim "from whom came the Philippines.") Japheth has 7 sons and 7 grandsons. Mizraim has 7 "sons." Shem has 21 grandsons/ great-grandsons.

That septunarian pattern could be produced by starting with real, albeit larger figures, then omitting certain links or individuals to get it down to groups of seven or multiples of seven. The result of editorial selectivity.

In the past I've noted how the seven motif is embedded in the flood account:

Take with you **seven** pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate ([Gen 7:2](#))

and also **seven** pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth ([Gen 7:3](#))



**Seven** days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made” (Gen 7:4)

And after the **seven** days the floodwaters came on the earth (Gen 7:10)

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the **seventeenth** day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened (Gen 7:11)

and on the **seventeenth** day of the **seventh** month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4)

He waited **seven** more days and again sent out the dove from the ark (Gen 8:10)

He waited **seven** more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him (Gen 8:12)

By the **twenty-seventh** day of the second month the earth was completely dry (Gen 8:14)

If Noah's flood is a real event, then it has a certain natural rhythm. So we wouldn't expect it to be so repetitively septunarian. As such, the seven motif in the flood account seems to be a stock number, just like forty is a stock number in Scripture. In some cases it might be due to rounding up or rounding down to seven of something. And in some cases there's no natural interval, so the interval will be stipulative. But the frequency appears to be artificial by design.

So it's interesting to see the same motif in the Table of Nations. That kind of numerology suggests the narratives are somewhat stylized to highlight artificial septunarian patterns. Nature in the raw isn't that symmetrical. It doesn't normally operate in cycles of seven.

There's nothing deceptive about that so long as the numbers were understood to be stock numbers, sometimes used for their symbolic connotations. It may be code language for God's control over events. Septunarian iterations clue the reader to the hidden hand of providence. Too coincidental to be sheer coincidence.

Since we see this in the flood account as well as the Table of Nations, it has backward casting implications for the creation account. By analogy with the flood account and the Table of Nations, is the number of days in Gen 1 a stock number, too?

## The seventh position

The purpose of this paper is to focus, once more, attention on a genealogical procedure which obtained among Hebrew chronographers<sup>2</sup>. Simply stated, this paper will hold that, in some cases, minimal alterations were made in inherited lists of ancestors in order to place individuals deemed worthy of attention in the seventh, and, to a much lesser extent, fifth position of a genealogical tree.

It has often been noted that Enosh, third in position, was considered by S as a »repeater-of-birth« (to borrow a term from Pharaonic Egypt). His name meaning »man« appeared as a synonym of »Adam«. Hence he too was, in a sense, the founder of the human race<sup>12</sup>. It may be that the mysterious statement of 4:26 »It was then that men began to invoke YHWH by name« (which is attributed to J by some and to P by others) was intended, at least partially, to highlight the primacy of Enosh even in the cultic beginnings of mankind. Enoch stands third in position in K. But in S, he is placed seventh. This change, almost certainly must have been due to the fact that important material concerning Enoch was remembered; »Enoch walked with God 300 years ... Enoch walked with God and then he was no more, for God took him« (5:22,24). As it is, except for an insertion to explain the name of Noah, one that is usually assigned to J, no other personality in S is provided with information. In placing Enoch in 7th position, S was forced to alter the succession of ancestors from the pattern he inherited. In this, he attempted to make minimal changes. Qenan/Qayin, Yered/Irad, Metuselah/Metusa'el, Lemek, and, to a

certain extent, 'Adam were kept in their proper order. By exchanging the slots reserved for Enoch and Mahalal'el (K's Mehu/iya'el), S succeeded not only in placing Enoch in a favored position in the stock-genealogy of mankind's ancestors, but also in keeping Mahalal'el in 5th position, the same as that held by Melu/iya'el in K's line.

Biblical genealogists, as is argued here, often time display a definite predilection for placing in the seventh-position personalities of importance to them. It is likely that such a convention was but one of many employed by ancient chronographers. In order to test this hypothesis, I shall apply its tenets to three major genealogical trees preserved in the MT. A. The lines of Shem. **Gen 11:10-26** preserves another table of ancestors which follows the pattern of »stock-genealogy« ten numbers deep. The line of last person in this list, as usual, spreads horizontally to divide into three branches. The great patriarch Abraham is reckoned as the seventh since Eber, the tenth since Shem and the twentieth since Adam.

**Gen 46:8-25** records the number of persons that descended to Egypt along with Jacob. Scholars have rightly stressed the »artificiality« of this list whose main aim is to present, somewhat imprecisely at that, the Hebrew as a community of 70 males (d. **Ex 24:1-9**; **Gen 10**; **Num 11:16**; **Luke 10:1-17**). The use of the number seven, and multiples thereof, is not unobtrusive. Rachel's descendants (7) and those of Bilhah (14) are added up to 21 (3 X 7); while those of Leah (33) and her maid Zilpah (16) are added up to 49 (7 X 7). It is not surprising, therefore, to note that Gad, whose gematria is 7 (gimel = 3; dalet = 4) is

placed in seventh position. Furthermore, he is the only one in this list who is recorded as bearing seven sons.

Lists (b) and (e). List (b- [Gen 35:23-26](#)) also places Joseph in seventh position. This list follows a strict order in naming the issues of Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah. It is interesting that without the linguistic and numerical elaborations which characterized the work of (a) and (c), there was no need to place Gad in seventh position. Freed from this exigency, the genealogist of (b) was pleased to record the sons of Rachel and those of her handmaid Bilhah, before returning to Leah's children through Zilpah. List (e- [Ex 1:2-4](#)) depended on (b). But due to the circumstances of the narration, it was necessary to mention neither Joseph's name nor those of his sons. The genealogist of (e) simply pushed up his tree one slot. In this instance, I do not attach much significance to Benjamin's occupation of the seventh position.

Note, however, that in both (d) and (k), Dan occupies the seventh slot. That the seventh-position is favored in (d) is fairly certain for it is highlighted by a very unusual cri-de-coeur: »For your salvation I am waiting, oh Lord« (v. 18). Jack M. Sasson, "**A GENEALOGICAL 'CONVENTION' IN BIBLICAL CHRONOGRAPHY**" (1978), ZAW 90.

This provides further evidence that the number seven often functions as a stock number in the Pentateuch. It has a numerological significance. And that, in turn, raises the question of whether the septunarian scheme in Gen 1 uses seven as a stock number rather than an actual calendar day.



## The creation dream

What's the source of Gen 1? Liberals assume it must be a redacted pagan myth. However, there's no extant creation myth that resembles Gen 1.

Sometimes Bible writers narrate events which they themselves observed. Sometimes they incorporate written sources. Sometimes they use informants.

But, of course, Gen 1 is narrating a series of incidents before any human observer existed. Humans come on the scene sometime on Day 6.

Direct revelation would be the obvious source. However, revelation has different modalities. Dreams are one mode of revelation. Perhaps Gen 1 is a recorded dream. Let's consider some possible evidence:

**i)** Except for Balaam's two oracular dreams ([Num 22:7-21](#))—which are rather anomalous, given his pagan pedigree—Genesis is the only book of the Pentateuch that contains recorded dreams.

**ii)** By my count, Genesis contains no fewer than a dozen oracular dreams: 20:3-7; 26:24; 28:10-17; 31:10-13; 31:29; 37:5-7; 37:9; 40:9-11; 40:16-17; 41:1-4; 41:5-7; 46:2-4.

**iii)** Two dreams contain imagery that echoes Gen 1:

**a)** Jacob's dream about a flight of steps, rising from the earth below to the heaven above, with God at the top of the staircase, involves the same hierophanic cosmography as Gen 1.

**b)** Joseph's dream of the sun, moon, and stars evokes the fourth day.

In addition, for Joseph to see the sun, moon, and stars means his dream was set both during the day (for the sun to be visible) as well as night (for the moon and stars to be visible). So that also evokes the day/night, morning/evening motif.

**iv)** An inspired dreamer is a seer. He recounts what he saw in his dream (e.g. 28:12; 31:10,12; 37:9; 41:22).

This echoes the theme of God seeing the work of his hands (1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31).

**v)** Some dreams in Genesis are theophanic dreams, where God himself appears to the dreamer. Where God is the speaker—just as God is the speaker in Gen 1. In Gen 1, God is both seer and speaker.

**vi)** When a dreamer recounts his dream, he typically relays it in the first-person. When a narrator recounts a character's dream, he relays it in the third-person. For instance, see the alternation in 41:1,17.

So Gen 1 could be a third-person report of a revelatory dream.

**vii)** Finally, some oracular dreams are quite prosaic—while others are symbolic or allegorical (e.g. 37:7,9; 41:1-7).



## Introduction to Genesis

Genesis is formally anonymous. However, the authorship of Genesis is inseparable from the authorship of the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is a literary unit. So it would be artificial to consider the authorship of Genesis in isolation to the authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole. Other Pentateuchal books indicate Mosaic authorship. That, in turn, reflects back on Genesis.

This is reinforced by the fact that Genesis introduces many motifs which prefigure later developments in other Pentateuchal books. This implies the Pentateuch (or at least the "final form" of the Pentateuch) was the work of one hand. That would account for its thematic unity, and the author's apparent foresight—which is creative hindsight. Although he actually wrote the Pentateuchal books in chronological sequence, in his mind's eye he had the entire narrative arc in view. He mentally wrote the Pentateuch backwards, beginning with the denouement, and working back to events leading up to the denouement. Compositionally speaking, he knew where he was going before he got there. The process of execution is in reverse order to the process of planning. The Pentateuch is essentially one book with one continuous story.

It's possible that Moses had a scribe take dictation. After completion, the text would be deposited in the ark of the covenant. Mosaic authorship allows for post-Mosaic scribal updating here and there.

Liberals are alert to apparent anachronisms in the Pentateuch that seem to point to a later date, but that cuts both ways. They ignore anachronisms that point to an earlier date than their theory postulates, viz. the nomadic wilderness setting of Exodus–Deuteronomy.

In commenting on Genesis, I'll refer to the author as the "narrator" rather than Moses, because that's the role that Moses is assuming in Genesis.

Depending on whether we favor the early or late date for the Exodus, Genesis was written in the early to mid-2nd millennium BC. Interpreting the book doesn't depend on which date we choose, especially since all events in Genesis considerably predate the time of composition.

Assuming Mosaic authorship, Genesis was written to emancipated Jewish slaves in the Sinai desert. It filled in the backstory of their history as a people-group. It clarified the identity of the one true God. The God who delivered them from Egypt was the same God who made the world, saved Noah, and guided the patriarchs. The God who delivered them from Egypt isn't a local God or tribal God. He is not one God among many. Rather, he is the Creator of the world. All other concrete entities are creatures.

It's possible that Moses made some use of oral or written historical sources in Genesis. However, his knowledge of certain events was presumably the result of direct revelation.

Genesis is a flashpoint of controversy in the debate over the relationship between science and Scripture. Christians have a duty to believe whatever God tells us in his word. In case of conflict, Scripture trumps science. And there's a necessary place for defending the claims of Scripture.

However, exegesis shouldn't be distracted by extraneous issues. Exegesis shouldn't be shaped with a view to modern debates. An interpreter ought to try as best he can to clear his mind of modern concerns and assume the viewpoint of the original author and his target audience. When reading Genesis, we need to ask ourselves what would be significant to the original audience? What would stand out for them?

We need to imaginatively project ourselves into their situation. Check our own concerns and preconceptions at the door. Leaving modernity behind is, in turn, the best way to revise and correct our prejudices in the clarifying light of God's word. We need to adjust our perspective to the narrator's perspective. See the world afresh through the eyes of the narrator, rather than superimposing our cultural reference points onto the ancient text.

Commentators use comparative ancient Near Eastern literature to interpret Genesis. To some extent this can be useful, but it's easily overused. The first task of a commentator is to interpret the text before him, not compare it to another text and use the other text as the frame of reference. Even if we assume that the narrator is interacting with common ancient Near Eastern conceptions, the question at issue is what that means to the narrator, and not what it might have meant to the authors and editors of comparative literature. We must interpret Genesis on its own terms, according to the narrator's own vision.

In addition, using comparative literature to interpret Genesis assumes we know how to interpret the comparative literature. So the exercise can quickly devolve into vicious circularity.

In my opinion, many scholars fail to put themselves in the situation of the narrator and the immediate audience. Fail to experience the world as someone living in the ancient Near East would experience the world. Their world was not a literary construct. There are many things that even prescientific peoples would be aware of. The methodology of scholars is often backwards. Instead of viewing ancient Near Eastern art or and literature through the world the author experienced, they view the world through the art or literature.

**For further reading:**

Hess, R. "Language of the Pentateuch," T. D. Alexander & D. Baker, eds. **DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT:**

**PENTATEUCH** (IVP 2003), 491-97.

Mathews, K. **GENESIS 1-11:26** (Broadman 1996), 42-46.

## The Ur-story

It's striking that the opening scene in the Bible has all the elements of a story. A short story. Plot, characters, setting, and dialogue.

And not just any story, but the Ur-story. This is the story that lays the basis for all other stories. Every story is contained in this story.

God and his Spirit are the Ur-characters. They, in turn, create other characters. Human characters, and animals. God is the Ur-speaker who creates other speakers.

It has a plot. The creation of the world. The Ur-plot. All other plots take this for granted. All other plots build on this plot.

It has dialogue. Ur-dialogue. Initially, God is the only speaker. He seems to be talking to himself. A divine soliloquy.

But then, in v26, the monologue switches to dialogue. There are competing interpretations for what this means. I agree with David Clines that it probably refers back to the Spirit as God's conversation partner.

Initially, it has no setting. It begins nowhere. In a void. God is the only existent.

Then God proceeds to create the setting. A setting can be spatial or temporal. God creates a physical setting. Places, high and low, large and small. The cosmos. Outer space. The solar system. Sun, moon, and visible stars. The earth.

Land and sea. Trees. Progression from nowhere to somewhere.

But a setting can also be a time of day or time of year. An epoch. The Middle Ages, the Old West, the Roaring Twenties, the Psychedelic Sixties.

God creates day and night, dawn and dusk. God creates the seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter. Like watching a stage set assembled piece-by-piece.

It's interesting to compare the creation account to its counterpart in Jn 1. Many scholars have noted the studied parallels between [Jn 1:1-5](#) and Gen 1.

But the allusions to the creation account pick up again at the baptism of Jesus. Water and Spirit. The avian image of the Spirit hovering above the waters, between heaven and earth. And it picks up at other points. In Gen 1, the Spirit as the breath of life. In Jn 3, the Spirit as the breath of new life.

## Were humans originally vegetarian?

The prooftext of original human vegetarianism is [Gen 1:29](#). And it's possible that the traditional interpretation is correct. However:

**i)** The language is permissive rather than contrastive. It doesn't say they were granted vegetation as opposed to meat. Although the verse allowed for that distinction, it's not a logical implication of the verse. The verse isn't worded in terms of two antithetical sources of food, where one is verboten.

**ii)** Explicitly stating that vegetation is generally permissible to eat might be theologically relevant insofar as it foreshadows the significance of two particular trees in Gen 2, one of which is forbidden.

**iii)** [Gen 1:24-26](#) includes a category of livestock. Normally, certain kinds of livestock are consumed. Indeed, that's one reason to domesticate them. It's easier than hunting.

But even if we don't press that issue, some livestock are also used as a food supplement for milk and eggs. But even on that "vegetarian" interpretation, the intended scope of [Gen 1:29](#) can't be confined to an exclusively plant-based diet (fruits, nuts, roots). Rather, it presumptively includes supplementary food provided by farm animals, even if, for the sake of argument, we don't insist that they were butchered for meat. But that means the licit original diet of man was already wider than [Gen 1:29](#).

The only alternative is to suppose the livestock were used as beasts of burden, rather than a food source of any kind. But that's highly artificial, and unlikely that the original

audience would draw that dichotomy.

**iv)** In addition, the tree of life wasn't given for food, but it was permissible to eat. So a food stuff isn't the only function of plants, in the creation account.

**v)** Humans often prefer herbivores to carnivores for meat. (That depends in part on what's available for consumption.) So there's an indirect link between a meat diet for humans and a vegetarian diet for livestock and game animals. A vegetarian diet is foundational to a meat diet.

**vi)** Another way of putting this is that [Gen 1:29](#) is permissive rather than prohibitive. Although the wording is consistent with a ban on meat-eating, that's not entailed by the wording.

Moreover, given repeated references to livestock in the same account, it's implausible that a human diet consisting only of vegetation was originally allowed. The narrator couldn't reasonably expect the original audience to have such a restrictive view of what livestock is for.

Even if, for the sake of argument, we think [Gen 1:29](#) excludes the consumption of livestock, how could it also be understood to exclude the consumption of milk and eggs from livestock?

What's the point of livestock? Other than a source of food, the only other function is beasts of burden, but God created Eden with an orchard, It already had fruit trees. So there was no pressing need farm the land with oxen.

Of course, humans domesticated wolves for guarding and hunting, but that's not terribly consonant with the vegetarian interpretation.



Mind you, the reference to livestock might seem anachronistic in a creation account. Did God directly create livestock? Are they not, by definition, domesticated wild animals?

So the reference might be proleptic. But even so, livestock are represented as part of the original goodness of creation, and not a natural evil due to the fall.

## Hobbits

1. This raises a potential challenge to biblical creation:

<https://humangenesis.org/2019/04/22/asian-diversity-and-the-seafaring-hominin/>

As we discover more fossils, there may be further challenges in kind. One issue this raises is whether Christians should just admit that human evolution is true. Is the time past due to throw in the towel? Sure, we can contrive ingenuous explanations to reconcile this with biblical creation, but isn't that special pleading? It's only because Genesis is part of the sacred canon of Christianity rather than **THE ARGONAUTICA** that we make an effort to defend the historicity of Genesis when we'd never make a comparable effort to defend the historicity of **THE ARGONAUTICA**. So goes the argument.

It would, indeed be special pleading to defend the historicity of **THE ARGONAUTICA**, but the comparison is inapt. If there's abundant evidence that Christianity is true, then it's not special pleading to treat the Bible differently than we treat **THE ARGONAUTICA**.

Not to mention that there are scientific objections to the theory of evolution. The evidence isn't one-sided.

2. Another issue is how we tell that something has humanoid intelligence. For instance, there are animals that use things designed by humans. It would be invalid to infer that animals invent what they use. For that matter, lots of

humans are smart enough to use a cellphone who aren't smart enough to design a cellphone. So there's a distinction between inventing tools and using tools. Suppose you had a jungle inhabited by humans and apes. Apes might steal human tools and toy with them. Discovering apes with tools wouldn't ipso facto prove the apes had humanoid intelligence.

**3.** There's also the question of how we identify humanoid intelligence. This goes to the larger issue of what makes humans human or unique compared to animals. A common criterion is a certain level of intelligence. A capacity for abstract thought. Imagination. Deliberation. Thinking about the past and future. Is it possible for a creature to have humanoid intelligence, yet be inhuman?

In Christian theology, angels have humanoid intelligence, yet angels are unrelated to humans. To take another example, there's a sense in which psychopaths are both human and inhuman. On the one hand they have human intelligence. Indeed, above-average intelligence. Yet a psychopath lacks normal human psychology. Psychos are expert at mimicking human emotions, but they lack human emotions. In particular, they lack empathy. They have no conscience.

A psychopath is like a vampire. A vampire retains human intelligence and memories. But its psychological makeup is inhuman. When it looks at a human being, it views the human as food. By the same token, psychos are predators who hunt human prey. So there's something fundamentally inhuman about psychopaths (and sociopaths).

Or take someone like Bobby Fischer who's a genius, but devoid of social intelligence. He can relate to the game of chess, but he can't relate to human beings.

Or, to consider this from the other end of the telescope, consider people with Down syndrome who, in a sense, have subhuman intelligence, yet they have a human emotional makeup. In a sense, someone with Down syndrome has greater humanity than Bobby Fischer.

Another example, albeit fictional, is rational aliens. Suppose you had a conversation with an E.T. Initially, you might find that you have a lot in common with the E.T. But as the conversation progresses, you come to the terrifying realization that there's something fundamentally foreign about its outlook. Suppose what humans find beautiful, our hypothetical aliens don't find beautiful. What we find emotionally compelling, they don't. They don't respond to music. They don't gaze in awe at sunsets. They have no instinct to comfort a crying child.

**4.** Apropos (3), imagine if God created some animals with humanoid intelligence that are, nevertheless, unrelated to humans. Imagine if you had a conversation with one of them. At first you seem to share a lot in common. But as the conversation deepens, it becomes increasingly apparent that they operate on a different wavelength. Humanoid intelligence is, at best, a necessary but insufficient condition to make one human. And even that may be overstated (e.g. Down syndrome).

**5.** Scripture doesn't detail the animals God created. It classifies them by ecological zone. Land animals, aquatic animals, and volant animals. Even if God created (now extinct) animals with humanoid intelligence, there's no presumption that Scripture would mention that fact. Just as there's no expectation that the Genesis narrator would list the Tasmanian devil. For one thing, the original audience would have no idea what the narrator was referring to.

Indeed, the narrator wouldn't have the vocabulary. And even if the Bible did use the word "Tasmanian devil", that term would be co-opted by Bible readers to refer to something other than the marsupial. By the time the Tasmania devil was discovered, it would be called something else.

**6.** Inspiration doesn't make a Bible writer omniscient. The Genesis narrator was ignorant about the existence of most species. But ignorance is not the same thing as error. And even if he knew about Australian/Tasmanian fauna, there'd be no occasion to mention that in the creation account. By the same token, even if God created (now extinct) animals with humanoid intelligence, there'd be no reason for Genesis to mention that.

# The Tempter

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## The Fall

### *3 Now the serpent*

**i)** The Tempter makes an abrupt appearance, without any preparation. That may be in part because the reader is supposed to pick up clues from other parts of the Pentateuch. That may also be because "snakes" had preexisting cultural connotations which the narrator could trade on. More on both momentarily.

**ii)** Although the Hebrew word is a common name for snakes, the word also has occultic overtones with pagan divination (Hamilton 1991). That's lost in translation, so the modern reader can be thrown off by the deceptively ordinary sense of the English word.

**iii)** In the ancient Near East, venomous snakes were objects of fear and veneration. In fact, fear gives rise to veneration. You try to placate what you fear.

**iv)** Ophiolatry and ophiomancy were commonplace in the ancient Near East. "Snakes" often stood for numinous entities. The Tempter, with his sinister, preternatural abilities, is clearly associated with the symbolic universe of "snakes" in paganism.

**v)** There are Pentateuchal examples of this. Take the confrontation with the Egyptian magicians in Exod 7:8-12. That's a direct affront to Egyptian religion. Pharaoh's crown contained an image of a spitting cobra. That was the royal emblem of an Egyptian snake-goddess. Likewise, the bronze serpent episode (Num 21:8-9) is a polemic against serpentine sympathetic magic (Currid 1997; Currid 2013).

So the Tempter is not an actual reptile, but a personification of a malevolent supernatural agent. The narrator uses

serpentine symbolism to evoke familiar occultic connotations.

**vi)** Gen 3 doesn't unmask the identity of what lies behind the emblematic serpentine imagery. That awaits further revelation. However, in addition to various "earthlings" like humans and animals, the Pentateuch also refers to angelic "extraterrestrials" (as it were). So there's another class of rational agents. Creatures which, unlike Gen 1-2, aren't composed of earthly elements. Even at this early stage of progressive revelation, it's a short step from the serpentine Tempter to fallen angels.

**vii)** The narrative function of the Tempter is to explain the origin of suffering and death in human affairs. Since the garden comes direct from God's hand, there's nothing in man's nature or man's environment to explain the downfall of Adam and Eve. Rather, the catalyst must come from an outside agent. From something or someone interjected into the garden. An alien influence.

That, of course, doesn't explain the ultimate origin of evil. It pushes that question back a step. But it's not the purpose of Gen 3 to explain the ultimate origin of evil. Gen 3 is focused on the fate of mankind.

*was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.*

The Hebrew syntax is ambiguous. Is this including the Tempter in the animal kingdom (comparative construction), or excluding the Tempter from the animal kingdom (partitive construction)? The context must decide.

*He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"*

Although this is the first time the Tempter has put in an appearance, notice that he's been eavesdropping on



conversations between God and Adam in the garden. Invisible surveillance. Biding his time for an opportune moment.

*2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"*

Eve is too unsuspecting to appreciate the danger of conversing with this deceptively innocuous stranger. She allows herself to be drawn into his net. She's no match for his fiendish sophistication.

*4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

A half-truth is more persuasive than a baldfaced lie.

*6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

Sin makes them acutely self-conscious. When the devil makes an offer, there's always a catch. What he said was true—in a twisted sense. Consuming the fruit did make them wise—wise like the devil, rather than wise like God. God-like knowledge without God-like virtue.

*8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his*

*wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

There's a question as to how to render the Hebrew. This might describe a stormy theophany of judgment: *"The the man and his wife heard the thunder of the Lord God going back and forth in the garden in the wind of the storm"* (Niehaus 1995; Sailhamer 2008). That would certainly fit the context.

*9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"*

God poses rhetorical questions to elicit a confession.

*10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

They shift blame.

*14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life."*

**i)** Some Christians take this to mean the "snake" was originally bipedal. Since Exod 4 & 7 describe the metamorphosis of snakes, we can't rule out that interpretation. However, that interpretation makes assumptions about the identity of the "snake." Treating the "snake" as a natural animal.

In addition, it reduces the curse to an etiological fable. How snakes lost their legs.

**ii)** Another interpretation views this as a stock imprecation against venomous snakes (Walton 2001). That involves a contrast between a snake poised to strike, and a snake facedown. For instance, a cobra, with its short, backset fangs, raises itself to a vertical position to strike. Conversely, vipers, with their long retractable fangs, strike from a coiled position.

That interpretation also dovetails with the imagery of the next verse. Snakes usually bite the lower extremities.

*15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."*

**i)** Once again, the narrator is using serpentine imagery to personify something or (especially) someone else. This is not an etiological fable about the origins of ophiophobia. For one thing, it's not as if venomous snakes are only hazardous to women. So there's no reason women would be singled out if that's what's in view.

**ii)** Traditional Jewish and Christian interpretation regards Gen 3:15 as a Messianic prophecy. Liberal scholars reject this, both because they deny predictive prophecy, and because they think the "seed" is collective rather than singular. But that's simplistic.

**iii)** The "seed" is both collective and singular. The oracle is diachronic. It forecasts a history of perennial conflict between two warring parties. Two representative groups.

And this will come to a head in a climactic context between two individuals.

**iv)** It's a mistake to interpret Gen 3:15 in a vacuum. There's a Messianic seed of promise motif in the Pentateuch (Alexander 2012; Sailhamer 2009). There's also a raging conflict between the people of God and their enemies. Between the faithful and the heathen. Between true believers and idolaters. That threads its way through the entire Pentateuch and beyond.

**v)** Some commentators think a "bruised head" is mortal injury whereas a "bruised heel" is an irritant. But in context, the "bruised heel" represents envenomation. And this was long before the age of antivenin. Back then, a venomous snake-bite (unless it was a dry bite) was fatal. Keep Num 21 in mind when you read Gen 3:15. In the symbolism of the passage, these are two well-matched opponents. The outcome could go either way. Christians know how the story ends, but the original audience did not. So it's more suspenseful for them.

*16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children."*

**i)** This translation is somewhat misleading. For one thing, the Hebrew isn't confined to childbirth, but covers the whole period from conception to birth.

**ii)** In addition, Scripture frequently uses labor pains metaphorically. To think the curse is mainly about birthpangs reduces it to an etiological fable.

**iii)** Apropos (ii), I think this is a lead-in to chap 4. It anticipates the birth of Cain and Abel, the first murder (indeed, fratricide), and Cain's punitive banishment. Due to the fall, pregnancy is now a time of mixed emotions. Hope and apprehension. In a fallen world, you don't know how your kids will turn out. It may end in tragedy. Heartache and heartbreak. Had Adam and Eve stayed faithful, that would not be the case.

*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."*

This predicts for domestic strife, as husbands and wives try to domineer each other. We see examples of this play out in the patriarchal narratives. Spouses who undercut each other rather than supporting each other.

*17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.*

Some Christians think this refers to drastic ecological changes. But in context, this looks ahead to the expulsion from Eden. Life was easy in the garden. Conditions outside the garden are far less hospitable.

*19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Death marks the reversal of Adam's creation.

*20 The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.*

This confirms the fact that Adam and Eve were the first human breeding pair.

*21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

This brief statement is provocative. What's the significance of God's action?

- i)** It might simply mean that, given their shame, God was putting them at ease. Judgment tempered by grace.
- ii)** It could be in preparation for the harsher conditions they would face after God banished them from the garden.
- iii)** The terminology is also used in the Mosaic cultus (e.g. Exod 28:39-41; Lev 7:8; 8:7,13), so it may foreshadow the tabernacle.

*22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—"*

- i)** In a fallen world, death is both a blessing and a curse. Loss of loved ones and the indignities of old age are a curse. But immortality in a fallen world would also be a curse. That is graphically illustrated by the rest of the Pentateuchal history, with its litany of suffering and depravity.

**ii)** Man was created mortal, but with the opportunity to become immortal. However, Adam and Eve took the tree of life for granted. By consuming what was not permitted (the tree of knowledge) rather than consuming what was permitted (the tree of life), they lost both at one stroke. They forfeited immortality for themselves as well as their posterity.

**iii)** Yet that was God's plan all along. In the long run, a redeemed world is greater than an unfallen world. Indeed, Gen 3:15 already provides a glimpse of better things to come.

*23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

**i)** The eastern orientation is another link to the tabernacle (Exod 27:13).

**ii)** The description suggests the garden was enclosed by natural barriers. Perhaps a narrow river valley, like a deep ravine or gorge. By the same token, the river might be subterranean before it surfaced in the garden. There'd only be one way out—downstream. So there'd only be one exit to guard.

**iii)** Cherubim seem to be a class of warrior angels. Statuary cherubim symbolically guarded the ark of the covenant. So this is yet another prefiguration of the tabernacle.

**iv)** The fiery whirling "sword" conjures up the image of a fire devil. That foreshadows the pillar of fire in the wilderness.

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## The role of Lucifer

In the cosmology of Lewis's Space Trilogy, as I understand it, each inhabited planet has a guardian angel. Mars is an explicit example. And Lucifer was the guardian angel for earth.

Mind you, that schema raises the question of where the guardian angel was for Venus. Why did he not repel Weston, especially after Satan took possession of Weston? Seems inconsistent. What's the point of Venus having a guardian angel if he doesn't protect it from Satanic invasion and assault?

But perhaps in Lewis's mind, the guardian angel couldn't interfere with the temptation. That had to run its course.

Be that as it may, an additional point of interest is that Lewis's fictional cosmology may have an albeit very slender basis in Scripture. On one reading of Ezk 28, Lucifer is the guardian of the garden.

That identification turns on a crucial ambiguity in the Hebrew syntax of v14. There are two ways to render it:

**You** were an anointed covering cherub

You were **with** an anointed covering cherub

Does it describe the fall of Adam or the fall of Lucifer? Is Adam the guardian of the garden? Is Adam depicted in exalted angelic terms—as if he's a cherub? Or is Lucifer the guardian?

Does the narrative describe one character or two? Is Adam the guardian or is he with the guardian?

Scholars are divided on how to render the syntax. And that in turn affects the identification of the figure(s) in the narrative

Suppose we go with the view that Lucifer is the guardian. That answers some questions or solves some problems. It explains why the Tempter was in the garden in the first place. It might explain why Eve wasn't surprised or taken aback by the Tempter—if he was a visible sentinel. It explains the reference to other cherubic sentinels in [Gen 3:24](#)—who replace him. And it explains why NT identifies the Tempter with Satan.

What's the implied chronology? Presumably, Lucifer had to be created before Adam. And either created before God made the garden or around the same time God made the garden. So Lucifer was guarding it before Adam was created and put there. At that point he coexisted with them in the garden. He fell before or after Adam (and Eve?) were created.

It's difficult to squeeze the fall of Lucifer (and other angels) into a six-day timetable. But if Gen 2 is separate from Gen 1, as a localized creation of the garden, that frees up more time (even assuming we regard Gen 1 as strictly chronological).

That said, it's precarious to lay too much weight on an ambiguous passage of Scripture. But it does have the explanatory power to fill some gaps or tie up some loose ends.

## Snakebite

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”*  
(*Gen 3:15*).

**i)** This is, of course, a very famous passage. One interpretive issue is to explore the picturesque metaphor. The meaning of the word that's translated "bruised" in the ESV is disputed. It's a very rare word in Biblical usage, and its other two occurrences aren't very clarifying.

Given the Hebrew parallelism, some scholars argue that it should be rendered the same way in both clauses. That might well be the case.

On the other hand, it's possible that the Hebrew word has more than one sense, and trades on that fact so that it carries a different, and appropriate, nuance, in each clause.

**ii)** However, the interpretation doesn't necessary turn on how we define that one word. Even if we had no idea what it meant, the overall word picture supplies the gist of the meaning. The reader is expected to visualize the snake hurting the man and the man hurting the snake. What are the likely scenarios?

**iii)** There are roughly two kinds of snakes: venomous and nonvenomous.

There are roughly two kinds of nonvenomous snakes: those harmless to man and those dangerous to man.

**iv)** Clearly, the passage envisions a snake that's dangerous to man. So that rules out innocuous, nonvenomous species—leaving either venomous snakes or large constrictors.

Nonvenomous snakes dangerous to man are large constrictors. Constrictors bite, though not to envenomate, but to get a lock on the victim, so that they can then encircle the victim. However, I don't think that's a likely candidate for this passage:

**a)** To my knowledge, Jews in OT times would be unfamiliar with large constrictors.

**b)** The image of biting a man's heel, or a man stomping on a snake's head, seems less congruous in the case of a large constrictor.

**c)** Keep in mind, too, that the original audience for Genesis consisted of emancipated slaves from Egypt who wandered in the Sinai. They'd be familiar with black cobras, Egyptian cobras, carpet vipers, and sand vipers.

**v)** Assuming it's a venomous snake, I think there are roughly two possible scenarios in view:

**a)** The snake strikes the man's heel and the man strikes the snake with a long stick.

**b)** The snake strikes the man's heel and the man stomps on the snake.

Trying to kill a snake with a long stick is the smart way to dispatch a snake. The stick keeps you out of striking range.

However, if it's the stick rather than the heel that does the damage, then it's unclear why the passage mentions the heel. Reference to the heel naturally conjures up the image of stepping on a snake. And that's a common way of getting bitten. As a rule, trying to kill a venomous snake by crushing its head with your foot would be a good way of getting bitten.

So, if the imagery is consistent, this isn't a case of attacking the snake, but inadvertently stepping on it. And one is bitten in the process of stepping on it. Stepping on it injures both the snake and the man. Action and reaction. The snake doesn't necessarily die instantly. And even dead snakes can reflexively envenomate you.

I assume your back must be turned to a snake (or at least be sideways) for the snake to bite your heel. If you're facing a snake, it can't bite you in the heel.

Likewise, if you're facing a snake, and it's either attacking or defending itself, I think it would strike higher than the heel.

So it seems to me that the imagery suggests accidentally stepping on a snake. A one-time event.

Again, there's the danger of overinterpreting the implied imagery.

It's easy to step on venomous snakes, both because they are often nocturnal, so you can't see them at night, and because their skin is camouflaged, so that you can't see them in daylight. So perhaps the intended image is of a man who steps on the head of a snake. Although that's fatal to the snake, when the man lifts his foot, the dying snake, or dead snake, reflexively bites the raised heel, that's just

above or ahead of the snake. At this point the snake is inches behind (or below) his foot, but within striking distance.

It's possible that this analysis carries the imagery too far. Perhaps it was never meant to be that precise. But then again, perhaps the reader is expected to envision the complete scene which that image provokes. And, indeed, I assume the original audience had enough experience with snakes, personally or by word-of-mouth, that they'd have a vivid mental image of the encounter.

**vi)** It's often said that a head injury is fatal whereas a "bruised heel" is not life-threatening. But a bite from a venomous snake (unless it's a dry bite) is usually fatal. The more so given the toxicity of the venomous species known to the original audience, and the absence of antivenom.

**vii)** Although it would be risky to press the imagery, it's literally true that what Jesus suffered wasn't merely harmful, but deadly. Metaphorically speaking, he died of snakebite.

Strictly speaking, Satan can't be killed. To be killed, you must be alive. But angels aren't living organisms in the biological sense. They can't die.

Yet they can suffer. Not only is it possible to suffer psychologically, but if human experience is any analogy, mental states can include simulated physical pain. You can feel pain in a nightmare.

Death can be an escape from physical pain. Ironically, Satan's natural immunity to death or physical injury leaves him vulnerable to far more fearful, punitive suffering.

**viii)** I take for granted that **Gen 3:15** is prophetic and messianic. That's not just a question of treating the passage in isolation, but tracking that unfolding motif in the rest of the Pentateuch.

## Standing Bear

**1.** To infidels, the talking "snake" in Gen 3 is all you need to know to know that Scripture is ridiculous mythological fiction. I've discussed the identity of the tempter on various occasions. Now I'd like to approach the issue from two new angles.

**2.** When we read a book from a different culture, it's easy for us to think we know what something means even though we are way off the mark. Likewise, the things that strike us as the most palpably false may seem that way because we misunderstand it. It didn't seem false to the original audience.

Suppose a Biblically and theologically illiterate college student were to pick up a copy of **THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS** by John Bunyan. There's a lot that still comes through. The plot still works. Our reader can still appreciate the psychological characterizations.

However, consider some of the names of the characters, viz. Christian, Evangelist, Worldly Wiseman, Formalist, Prudence, Piety, Charity, Apollyon.

Bunyan is an evangelist as well as a storyteller. He isn't subtle. He gives the reader very broad clues by how he names the characters.

Even so, for a biblically and theologically illiterate reader, these names would be opaque. There are lots of things a reader will miss if he lacks the requisite theological background.



**3.** The frame of reference that a modern, Western, secularized reader brings to Gen 2-3 doesn't necessarily equip him to catch certain nuances. Suppose we compare that to a storyteller from a very different cultural milieu. For instance, suppose a village atheist read a traditional American Indian story. The story has characters with names like Raven, Black Elk, Black Hawk, Black Fox, Standing Bear, Running Eagle, and Lone Wolf. In addition, the characters speak.

Our village atheist shakes his head: "Those poor primitive Indians with their superstitious belief in talking animals!"

That illustrates the danger of interpretation when you don't know the cultural code language. The reader thinks the storyteller is ignorant when, in fact, it's the reader who's ignorant. The patronizing reader makes himself look foolish.

The fact that an American Indian story has characters with animal names doesn't mean these were talking animals. Rather, it means Indians gave people animal names. Real people!

I think that's the kind of thing we should keep in mind when we read Gen 3. We need to make allowance for these interpretive options.

**4.** When reading the Bible, it's useful to appreciate the emblematic significance of venomous snakes in the ANE and Roman Empire. The connotations of snakes in cultures that practice ophiolatry and ophiomancy.

However, that's not just a thing of the past. Venomous snakes (as well as constrictors) exert a perennial fascination. That's transcultural.

Lots of boys like to collect snakes, including venomous snakes—much to the consternation of their mothers. Some of these boys grow up to be herpetologists. And some of these boys grow up to be private snake collectors.

They import the most dangerous snakes on the planet. Mambas, cobras, kraits, Bushmasters, gaboon vipers, golden lancehead vipers, &c. For some men, venomous snakes have a magnetic appeal: the more death-defying, the more appealing. So the aura that venomous snakes had in the ancient world isn't culturebound.

5. I'd add that this can illustrate the limitations of Bible scholarship. Boys who grow up to be Bible scholars tend to be nerdy, bookish boys. I daresay few Bible scholars are herpetologists or private snake collectors.

When they write commentaries on Gen 3, there's a dimension to the "snake" that's apt to elude Bible scholars—a dimension which a herpetologist or snake collector might naturally tune into.

**6.** This, in turn, may help explain why the narrator gave the tempter a serpentine name. He's trading on popular connotations of snakes.

**i)** A venomous snake is a natural symbol of death. To call a character a snake clues the reader into the fact that this is a threatening character. A potentially deadly character.

Indeed, I think that's what motivates some snake collectors. They are literally staring death in the face. In fact, some of them take it to the next level by handling venomous snakes with their bare hands. You have the same

dynamic with Appalachian snake-handling cults. Tempting fate.

The fact that Eve is oblivious to the malevolent character of the tempter generates dramatic tension. The reader knows something she doesn't. Notice that she doesn't address the tempter as a snake. That's between the reader and the narrator.

**ii)** Not only are venomous snakes natural symbols of death, but uncanny death. Except for pythons and anacondas, snakes don't look dangerous. It's only their reputation that makes them fearsome.

Especially for a prescientific audience, there's something mysterious about how snakes kill their prey—or humans. What makes a snakebite fatal? If you're bitten by a house cat, that won't kill you. But if you're bitten by a venomous snake, you may pine away in a few hours, or less.

Of course, we have some understanding of venom, as well as different kinds of venom (e.g. haemotoxic, neurotoxic). But ancient people weren't privy to that information.

There's nothing mysterious about how a lion, bear, or crocodile kills its prey. And predators like that look dangerous! There's nothing inexplicable about the lethality of a lion or crocodile, but there *is* something inexplicable about the lethality of a snake, if you lack scientific knowhow.

So that may be an additional reason why the narrator gave the tempter a serpentine name. That triggers magical associations.

## The Tempter as shapeshifter

**1.** One of the oddities of Gen 3 is how the Tempter is introduced with so little exposition or backstory, as if the original audience would be familiar with a character like the Tempter. The name of the Tempter is a pun or triple entendre, so it has a dual identity. There's the image it projects and then there's its true identity. This suggests the Tempter is an entity in the tradition of shapeshifters. Agents that alternate between identities. Agents that may appear to be animals but that's not their true identity or original identity. Conversely, agents that appear to be human, but they've undergone a transformation.

**2.** The tradition of shapeshifters is ethnographically quite diverse. Two standard academic monographs are Montague Summers, **THE WEREWOLF IN LORE AND LEGEND** (Dover 2003 reprint) and Sabine Baring-Gould, **THE BOOK OF WEREWOLVES** (2002 Blackmask Online). There's also American Indian folklore about skinwalkers and totemic animal spirits among Plains Indians, desert southwestern tribes, as well as Algonquian tribes (e.g. Manitou).  
cf. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ae\\_Xw8IIW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ae_Xw8IIW8)

**3.** Shapeshifters are naturally impossible, but within the worldview of Christian supernaturalism and pagan witchcraft, they may be realistic. It's necessary to sift evidence for shapeshifters from different phenomena:

- i)** Orphaned feral children misidentified as werewolves
- ii)** Lycanthropy as a psychotic condition (e.g. Dan 4).

**iii)** People who aspire to be animals (e.g. (Berserkers). They may aspire to be possessed by an animal spirit or actually be transformed into an animal. That, however, is a kind of playacting.

**iv)** Distinguishing folkloric shapeshifters from literary and cinematic shapeshifters.

**4.** The role of magic also requires sifting:

**i)** Witchcraft spawns lots of mythology and legend that have no basis in fact. Ingrown folklore that's passed on.

**ii)** Defamatory accusations of witchcraft.

**iii)** Conversely, cultivating a reputation for witchcraft can have propaganda value by making the individual an object to be feared and placated.

**iv)** A distinction between having the ability to be shapeshift and the ability to hex others: S. Augustine declared, in his **DE CIVITATE DEI**, that he knew an old woman who was said to turn men into asses by her enchantments. Sabine Baring-Gould, **THE BOOK OF WEREWOLVES** (5).

**5.** It may not be coincidental that shapeshifters are often associated with the desert. That's the case in American Indian folklore, and it has biblical parallels. Consider the ambiguous references in **Isa 13:21** & **34:14**. And the further fact that the Devil tempted Jesus in the desert.

**6.** Of even greater potential interest is whether **Lev 16:8** and **17:7** allude to goat demons in the desert. Occultic shapeshifters.

This might resonant with to the original audience for Gen 3, because the Israelites were living in the desert at the time Genesis was written. So even though Gen 3 recounts an incident that happened millennia before, the idea of a malevolent shapeshifter may well be a recognizable entity in their experience.

This also explains the fluid identity of the Tempter, not only in Gen 3 but Rev 12 and 20. An evil spirit (fallen angel) with an animal name and reptilian imagery or symbolism.

## Fables

I'd like to compare two objections that unbelievers raise to the Bible:

#1. Science has disproven Gen 2-3.

#2. Stories like Gen 2-3 are fables. For instance:

As a child, I enjoyed reading Aesop's fables and biblical stories. Both have talking animals, along with moral lessons and universal truths.

<https://www.onfaith.co/onfaith/2013/01/26/why-this-atheist-likes-the-bible/11741>

But rather than just make fun of such fables, I also think it's important to read the Bible and try to understand why it has so deeply influenced our culture. Even non-religious people can find meaningful messages in "holy" books. In a previous piece, I gave a few [moral lessons from the Bible](#), including the snake fable.

<https://www.onfaith.co/onfaith/2014/03/05/making-sense-out-of-nonsense/31173>

Let's consider #2 in more detail. It's common for unbelievers to dismiss the Bible as a book of fables. From their standpoint, Gen 3 is a case in point. Talking animals are stock characters in fables. What is more, the Tempter in Gen 3 is a trickster, which is another stock character in fables. On this view, the Tempter is a serpentine variant on animal tricksters like the fox, coyote, raven, and rabbit. That's a common motif in world folklore.

But here's the rub: #2 cancels out #1. If Gen 2-3 is a fable, then science hasn't falsified Gen 2-3. On the fabulous

classification, Gen 2-3 would be consistent with, say, theistic evolution.

To my knowledge, American-Indian beast lore was pedagogical: cautionary tales designed to teach young people how to be shrewd like the trickster and avoid getting outsmarted like the trickster's hapless dupes. Such tales were intentionally fictional and satirical.

Now, my point is not to endorse the fabulous interpretation, but to note that an atheist can't consistently deploy both #1 and #2.



## The anonymous Tempter

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" **2** And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" **4** But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." **6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

This may be a case of dramatic irony, where the audience senses something about a situation or a character (the Tempter) that another character (Eve) does not. The name of the Tempter instantly tipped off the audience that there may be something sinister about this character. "Snaky" characters have a reputation that precedes them. The connotations of the Hebrew designation are ominous.

The question is whether Eve knew the name of the Tempter. To begin with, she wasn't around when Adam named the animals. Moreover, as some commentators note (e.g. Mathews, Sailhamer), the syntax is ambiguous as to whether the Tempter even is one of the garden animals. It

could be rendered that he was "subtle as none other of the beasts"—which would place him in a class apart.

Eve never addresses the Tempter by name. It's the narrator who uses that designation. So the dialogue between Eve and the Tempter resembles a movie in which viewers watch a character strap on a shaheed belt, concealed under his jacket, leave his apartment, then board a crowded subway train. It could go off at any time. Passengers are oblivious to their imminent peril.

By the same token, the narrator clues the audience into an alarming piece of information that Eve may lack. But while the audience is on the alert, Eve suspects nothing.

## Snake in the grass

**i)** One reason we need to be circumspect about using comparative mythology to decode Biblical symbolism is that the same items can have varied significance in world mythology. So there's the risk of sample selection bias. Of superimposing an alien gloss onto the text.

**ii)** It's possible that the symbolic import of some natural elements is a cultural universal. But it's hard to make confident generalizations given the vast scope of the topic over time and place. The available evidence is unmanageably large, and even then, that's only scratching the surface.

**iii)** Some natural elements, because they have different functions, inevitably give rise to different or divergent symbolic meanings. Take fire. That can be used for heating and cooking. Keeping predators at bay. Purifying ores (metallurgy). But, of course, it can also be destructive.

Likewise, take water. Too much water may be fatal (drowning). Too little water may be fatal (dying of thirst—or dying of hunger from famine due to drought).

Water is used for so many different things. Washing, cooking, drinking, &c.

That's why scholars disagree on the significance of baptism. It's often thought to represent cleansing. But some scholars think it represents amniotic fluid, while Meredith Kline thought it represents deliverance from death by drowning.

**iv)** Fauna, flora, and landscape have symbolic significance in many different cultures. But, of course, different cultures

often have different fauna, flora, and landscapes. Had Gen 3 been revealed in a culture with different animals, the Tempter might have been named Fox rather than Snake—since the fox is a trickster animal in some folkloric traditions.

**v)** Moreover, the same natural elements can have variable symbolic significance. For instance, many different symbolic roles and properties are attributed to snakes.

**vi)** To take another comparison, consider rivers. I suspect temperate rivers have a generally benign symbolism, but tropical rivers might well have an ambivalent or ominous connotations. For instance, the Nile has hippos and crocodiles. That makes the Nile river hazardous to humans. Likewise, many hidden dangers lurk in the Amazon river, viz., the Piranha, tiger fish, anaconda, electric eel, stingray, Bull shark, black caiman.

**vii)** To take another comparison, some mythologies view fabled islands as heaven on earth (e.g. Dilmun, the Isles of the Blessed). Yet an island which appears to be a tropical paradise can be very menacing beneath the balmy surface. The sandy beach main contain deadly cone snails. The waters may contain sharks, stonefish, box jellyfish, &c. The scenic jungle may contain venomous snakes, giant pythons, or poisonous spiders. The island would have very different associations to a native than a passerby.

**viii)** By the same token, mythological utopias like Dilmun and the Garden of the Hesperides are both "Edenic" or paradisiacal, yet these are gardens for the gods, not humans.

**ix)** Now I'd like to quote from a standard reference work to illustrate the diverse ways in which world mythology

interprets "Edenic" motifs:

As the center of the world, linking heaven and earth and anchoring the cardinal directions, the mountain often functions as an *axis mundi*—the centerpost of the world...One of the most important such mountains is Mount Meru, or Sumeru, the mythical mountain that has "centered" the world of the majority of Asians—Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. "Mountains," L. Jones, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan, 2nd ed., 2005), 9:6212a.

Mountains are the source not only of nourishing waters but also of rains and lightning. Storm gods are often associated with mountains: Zeus, Rudra/Siva, Baal Hadad of Ugarit, Catiquilla of the Inca, and many more.

Mountains, the source of the waters of life, are also seen as the abode of the dead...Among the Shoshoni of the Wyoming, for instance, the Teton Mountains were seen primarily as the dangerous place of the dead. The Comanche and Arapaho, who practiced hill burial, held similar beliefs. "Mountains," *ibid.*, 9:6214b.

Above all, the influence of the desert environment appeared in the way in which, in the West, the garden was seen as an oasis, in stark contrast to the barren wastes outside...Confusingly, there was another more puritanical tradition in which the roles were reversed, and the garden, with its luxury, was condemned as the scene of temptation, while the wilderness was celebrated as the true paradise. "Gardens: An Overview," *Ibid.* 5:3277a.

In China and Japan, both the awesome mountains and the streams that issued from them were thought to be possessed by spirits, and they were considered to be

alive like plants animals and human beings themselves...To the Buddhist, the garden furnished a lesson on time. The flowers opened and withered within a month. The seasons revolved. But stone decayed on a far longer time scale that turned the present into a moving infinity. The symbolism was as varied and extensible as the clouds that gathered around the mountain peaks. Ibid. 5:3277b.

The garden contained both friendly and unfriendly spirits. But threatening spirits were not persecuted as they might have been in the West: they were either left undisturbed (for example, by not digging the ground too deeply) or frustrated (as in the case of the demons who traveled in straight lines, who were thwarted through the construction of zigzag bridges). Ibid, 5:3277b.

Real-life peasants and laborers, on the other hand, with families to feed, know that in temperate latitudes the skills involved in planning and maintaining a subsistence garden are greater than those called for in a recreational or cosmic garden because most of the edible plants are annuals....Things are different in parts of the tropics where three crops may be harvested in a year and the division between extensive fields and intensive gardens breaks down. There, the subsistence garden may assume an idealized form. Ibid. 5:3278b.

Dilmun [is] a place that is pure, clean, and bright, a land of the living who do not know sickness, violence, or aging...a garden with fruit trees, edible plants, and green meadows. Dilmun is a garden of the gods, not for humans, although one learns that Ziusundra, the Sumerian Noah, as exceptionally admitted to the divine paradise. "Paradise," ibid. 10:6981b.

Crossing the river at the time of death, as part of the journey to another world, is a common part of the symbolic passage that people have seen as part of one's journey after death. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the hero encounters a boatman who ferries him across the waters of death, as he seeks the source of immortality. The river Styx of Greek mythology is a well-known as the chief river of Hades.

The dry riverbed of Sainokawara is said to be the destination of dead children. In the Buddhist tradition, nirvana is referred to as the "far shore". "Rivers," Ibid. 11:7862b-63a.

To Hindus, the Ganges is the archetype of all sacred waters; she is a goddess, Mother Ganga, representative of the life-giving maternal waters of the ancient Vedic hymns...According to Hindu belief, the Ganges purifies all she touches...Pilgrims go to these places to bathe in the Ganges, to drink her water, to worship the river, and to chant her holy name.

Especially in Banaras, many come to cremate their kin, to deposit the ash of the dead in the river, or to perform religious rites for their ancestors. Some come to spend their last days on the banks for the river, to die there and thus to "cross over" the ocean of birth and death...All who come to the Ganges come in the firm belief that bathing in this river, even the mere sight of Mother Ganga, will cleanse them of their sins... "Ganges River," ibid. 5:3274.

Clearly, it's unreliable to assume that ancient Near Eastern mythology encodes culturally universal intuitions regarding the emblematic significance of a river, mountain, or garden paradise. We can't just default to that frame of reference as the presumptive background material for decoding the symbolism of Eden.





## Dragons of Eden

Ut-Napishtim reveals to Gilgamesh the existence of a "thorny" herb (that is a herb hard to access) at the bottom of the sea, which, though it will not confer immortality, will definitely prolong the youth and life of whoever eats of it...Gilgamesh fastens stones to his feet and goes down to search the bottom of the sea. Having found the herb, he pulls a spring from it, then unfastens the stones, and rises again to the surface. On the road to Uruk, he stops to drink from a spring; drawn by the scent of the plant, a snake draws near and devours it, thus becoming immortal. Gilgamesh, like Adam, has lost immortality because of his own stupidity and a serpent's strike.

Iranian tradition, also, has a tree of life and regeneration which grows on earth and has a prototype in heaven...Ahriman counters this creation of Ahura Mazda's, by creating a lizard in the waters of Vourakasa to attack the miraculous tree Gaokerena.

The serpent is present beside the Tree of Life in other traditions, too, probably as a result of Iranian influences. The Kalmuks tell how a dragon is in the ocean, near the tree Zambu, waiting for some of the leaves to fall so that he can devour them. The Buriats believe in the serpent Abyrga beside the gee in a "lake of milk". In some Central Asiatic versions, Abyrga is coiled round the actual tree trunk.

There are gryphons or monsters guarding all the roads to salvation, mounting guard over the Tree of Life, or some symbol of the same thing. When Hercules went to steal the golden apples from the garden of the

Hesperides, he had either to kill or put to sleep the dragon guarding them...The golden fleece of Colchis was also guarded by a dragon, which Jason had to kill to obtain it. There are serpents "guarding" all the paths to immortality...They are always pictured round the bowl of Dionysos, they watch over Apollo's gold in far-off Scythia, they guard the treasures hidden at the bottom of the earth, or the diamonds and pearls at the bottom of the sea...In the Baptistery at Parma, dragons mount guard over the Tree of Life. The same motif can be seen in a bas-relief in the Museum of the Cathedra of Ferrara.

The "snake-stone" offers a very good example of a symbol displaced and changed. In many places, precious stones were thought to be fallen from the heads of snakes or dragons...The origin and the theory underlying these legends and so many others are not far to seek: it is the ancient myth of "monsters" (snakes, dragons), watching over the "Tree of Life", or some specially consecrated place, or some sacred substance, or some absolute value (immortality, eternal youth, the knowledge of good and evil, and so on). Remember that all the symbols of this absolute reality are always guarded by monsters which only allow the elected to pass; the "Tree of Life", the tree with the golden apples or the golden fleece, "treasures" of every kind (pearls from the ocean bed, gold from the earth and so on) are protected by a dragon and anyone who wants to attain to one of these symbols of immortality must first give proof of his "heroism" or his "wisdom" by braving all dangers and finally killing the reptilian monster. From this ancient mythological theme, via many processes of rationalization and corruption, are derived all beliefs in treasure, magic

stones and jewels. The Tree of Life, or the tree with the golden apples, or the golden fleece, which symbolized a state of absoluteness (gold meant "glory", immortality, &c.)—became a golden "treasure" hidden in the ground and guarded by dragons or serpents.

Mircea Eliade, **PATTERNS IN COMPARATIVE**

**RELIGION** (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 289-91; 441-42.

**1.** This analysis is very suggestive. However, it suffers from some methodological problems:

**i)** Eliade doesn't date his sources.

**ii)** There's the assumption that these motifs must be the result of cultural diffusion: they can't arise independently.

**iii)** There's a certain straining to reduce all these stories to variations on a common theme—under the assumption that there must be some common thread. Is that, however, something Eliade is deriving from his sources or imposing on his sources? There's the danger of shoehorning the stories into a preconceived grid by treating the similarities as primary and the dissimilarities as secondary. There's a risk of comparing elements from one story with elements from another story, rather than considering how all the elements within a given story relate to each other. Do they have a common significance? Or is their significance determined by the particular role they play within the world of the story?

**iv)** Adam and Eve don't "first give proof of their heroism or wisdom by braving all dangers and finally killing the reptilian monster." They were created in the Garden. They had automatic access to the prize.

And that's not an incidental detail. The trials by ordeal are essential the quest genre. Moreover, the quest genre typically involves a male protagonist. Gen 2-3 just aren't parallel.

**v)** In Genesis, immortality and longevity are not interchangeable principles. Adam and Eve didn't lose their longevity. They enjoyed fabulous longevity—as did their predeluvian posterity. What they lost was the opportunity to become immortal. They lost that both for themselves and their posterity.

**vi)** Are deep-sea pearls symbols of immortality? Does the golden fleece confer symbolic immortality? What about Apollo's gold?

**vii)** Perhaps worst of all, Eliade's comparison centers on the dragon, the hero, and a tree of life, but Gen 3 centers on the Tempter, Eve, and tree of knowledge—not the tree of life. It was the tree of knowledge, not the tree of life, that was forbidden. The "snake" tempts them to break a prohibition regarding the tree of knowledge, not the tree of life. There's no textual evidence that the "snake's" duty is to guard the tree of life—or even the tree of knowledge. Eliade is forcing the story into a groove where it doesn't belong.

**2.** Having registered all those caveats, does Eliade's comparison have any residual value? Oddly enough, he overlooks two texts that seem to provide supporting material for his theory:

*10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.*

*12 And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. 14 And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Gen 2:10-14).*

*"You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. 14 You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. 16 In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire (Ezk 28:12-16).*

**i)** In both Gen 2 and Ezk 28, there's some linkage between Eden, gold, and gemstones. In Gen 2, the link is indirect. There's no gold or gemstones in the Garden. Rather, that's in outlying areas.

In Ezk 28, the link is more direct. The difference is that Gen 2-3 is historical narrative, whereas Ezk 28 reflects poetic license.

**ii)** In Ezk 28, you have the character of a treasonous guardian seraph. That, however, is different from Eliade's

counterparts, for this sentinel, rather than protecting the prize, becomes the tempter. Moreover, the comparison is complicated by the fact that Ezekiel is using imagery of a primordial fall to characterize a historical tyrant. So it's not just a theological interpretation of Gen 2-3. Rather, there's some "interference", by mixing Gen 2-3 with the king of Tyre.

**iii)** That said, if ancient readers were accustomed to the motif of a snake or dragon that guarded something forbidden to outsiders, do certain otherwise puzzling pieces in Gen 3 fall into place? That would explain what the Tempter was doing there in the first place. That would explain why Eve wasn't startled by the Tempter. She was used to seeing angels patrol the perimeters of the garden—maybe to keep dangerous animals from penetrating the precincts. Moreover, that made the Tempter a seemingly benign figure.

Furthermore, a guard who betrays his position can do unique damage. Consider a sentinel that's tasked to guard the city gates. If he's bribed to open the gates to the invading army, that's an inside job. And it's far more damaging than what outside assailants could do.

**iv)** However, that interpretation isn't necessarily unproblematic. It seems to make their disobedience a set-up. They'd be in no position to suspect the motives of a guardian seraph. Is it fair to punish them?

Strictly speaking, Adam and Eve are not entitled to live in the Garden. They are not entitled to immortality. They are there at God's indulgence.

Then you have Paul's statement that Eve was deceived, but Adam was not ([1 Tim 2:14](#)). How do we account for that

distinction? Perhaps it's based on the assumption that Adam experienced God firsthand, whereas Eve's knowledge was secondhand.

So why did Adam succumb? Who knows? Perhaps he was overcome by cupidity and curiosity. A tree of knowledge! Maybe that aroused covetous feelings. And the fact that it was forbidden made it all the more enticing.

## Fox spirits

I attempt to read the Bible counterculturally. I was raised in a hitech civilization with strong secular and Christian crosscurrents. That's completely different from the world of the Pentateuch, where paganism and witchcraft were pervasive. So I like to ask myself how certain Biblical narratives might come across to people with a background that's more like ancient pagans.

I haven't done in-depth study of fox spirits, but from what I've read, it's a fixture of Chinese and Japanese folklore. Here's one example:

<http://www.koryu.com/library/dlowry12.html>

There are different ways to interpret this kind of material:

- i)** We might discount it in toto as sheer folk mythology.
- ii)** By the same token, we might discount it on the grounds that where there's a preexisting explanatory category, many people default to that generic category.
- iii)** Or we might say it has a basis in fact, but it's undergone legendary embellishment. In other words, this derives from actual encounters with malevolent supernatural agents, but as a result, people invent a backstory to explain where these "spirits" came from, where they normally reside, how their world intersects with our world. Stories about their origins, social order, &c., are mythological, but a genuine experience underlies the narrative overlay.



I'm sure that (ii) is often the case, but I also think (iii) is likely to be the ultimate reason.

If fox spirits exist, what are they? In principle there are three possible candidates:

**i) Animal spirits**

**ii) Demonic spirits**

**iii) Ghosts**

What's notable is the distinction between a physical animal and a roaming "spirit" that's detachable from the body. Given the association in some cultures between animals and malevolent free-ranging "spirits," it may be instructive to consider how the Tempter in Gen 3 would register to the original audience. What cultural connotations would that evoke?

## Depicting the Tempter

There's a conventional interpretation of Gen 3 which visualizes the Tempter as a bipedal reptile that's able to communicate with Eve due to Satanic possession. I'm curious about the historical origins of that tradition.

In my limited knowledge, early artistic representations of the Tempter depict a zoological snake (e.g. Trinity sarcophagus, sarcophagus of Junius Bassus) while later artistic representations depict the Tempter as a hybrid creature: a human-headed snake (e.g. Ghiberti, Mantegna, Masolino, Michaelangelo, Holbein the Younger)—although later artists sometimes continue to depict the Tempter as a zoological snake (e.g. Cranach).

In Milton, the Tempter is a fallen angel who's cursed to become a snake, after the Fall. Hugo van der Goes depicts the Tempter as a human-headed lizard, standing on its hindlegs, leaning on the tree of knowledge.

In none of these examples is the Tempter a Satanically possessed bipedal reptile that became a snake after the Fall. So I wonder when that exegetical tradition developed.

## Seamonsters

- 1.** If you were a director, filming Gen 3, how would you visualize the Tempter? As Michael Heiser has noted, the name of the Tempter is a triple entendre: snake, diviner, shining one.
- 2.** One question is whether angels, or certain kinds of angels, are shapeshifters. The seraphim and cherubim seem to be shapeshifters. Indeed, the technical designation is Tetramorph.
- 3.** Another issue is whether there's any relationship between the Tempter and the river or tributaries of Eden. In Dan 7, the prophet has a dream or night vision of hybrid sea monsters rising from the ocean. And in Rev 13, John has a vision of a hybrid sea monster rising from the ocean.

Related examples include Leviathan ([Isa 27:1](#) [Ps 74:13-14](#)).

- 4.** In Rev 12, the Devil originally appeared to be a serpentine constellation. The background of the night sky is like an ocean.
- 5.** Perhaps, in Gen 3, the Tempter originally emerges from the river like an anaconda or sea-monster, then assumes a more humanoid shape when engaging Eve in conversation.

The curse might indicate a shift from an aquatic to a terrestrial zone, which would be quite a comedown.

The predominate imagery is serpentine. The iconography of the medieval dragon seems to be anachronistic. However, ancient Jews were certainly familiar with the Nile crocodile, and the fire-breathing reptile in Job 41 resembles a Nile

crocodile with some legendary enhancements or accessories.

This list doesn't include extinct prehistorical snakes like Titanoboa and Gigantophis.

## He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel

Many Christians interpret Gen 3 as follows:

They think the Tempter was originally a bipedal reptile which underwent metamorphosis when God cursed it. They attribute the snake's intelligence, malevolence, and speaking ability to Satanic possession.

In addition, they think **Gen 3:15** is the first messianic prophecy.

*And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise his heel.*

There is, however, a problem with combining all these identifications. In the narrative, they think the Tempter is a literal snake or physical reptile. But in the prophecy, they think the adversary is not a literal snake; rather, the adversary is the devil—nothing more and nothing less.

In other words, they don't think a snake bit Jesus. They don't think Jesus crushed the head of a snake by stomping on it.

So there's a lack of consistency in how they identify the referents.

A solution is to drop the literal reptilian or serpentine identification and consistently interpret the Tempter in

angelic/diabolical terms. On that view, both the narrative and the oracle use serpentine imagery and symbolism.

Although I often disagree with him, I think Walton is on the right track in this regard:

Serpents are often the object of curses in the ancient world, and the curse in v14 follows somewhat predictable patterns. The Egyptian Pyramid texts (2nd half of the 3rd millennium BC) contain a number of spells against serpents, but they also include spells against other creatures considered dangerous or pests. The serpent enjoys some prominence, however, since it is represented on the crown of the pharaoh. Some spells enjoin the serpent to crawl on its belly (keep its face on the path). This is in contrast to raising its head up to strike. The serpent on its belly is nonthreatening while the one reared up is protecting or attacking. Treading on a serpent is used in these texts as a means of overcoming or defeating it. This suggests we should not think of the serpent as having previously walked on legs. Instead, the curse combats its aggressive nature.

Likewise, we should not think of the curse of eating dust as a description of the diet of snakes. The depiction of dust or dirt for food is typical of descriptions of the netherworld in ancient literature...These are most likely considered characteristics of the netherworld because they describe the grave. Dust fills the mouth of the corpse...Given this background information, the curse on the serpent can be understood as wishing upon it a status associated with docility (crawling on belly) and

death (eating dust). John Walton, **GENESIS** (Zondervan, 2001), 224-25.

This could be deployed to defend a symbolic interpretation, just as the uraeus represented the cobra god of Egypt.

## Craig's backwoods exegesis

William Lane Craig recently expanded on a defense of a position he took regarding the depiction of God in Gen 2-3:

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/genesis-2-3-anthropomorphism-or-theophany>

I've already discussed his original presentation:

<https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2019/08/is-genesis-mytho-history.html>

<https://triablogue.blogspot.com/2019/08/gods-audible-voice.html>

I will reproduce his entire answer at the bottom of my post. By way of comment:

**i)** One of the revealing things about Craig's interpretation of Gen 2-3 is the contrast between his philosophical prowess and his exegetical prowess. How that exposes the difference between his philosophical sophistication and his hermeneutical naivete. Over the decades, Craig's philosophy and philosophical theology have undergone great development. By contrast, it's like he still reads the Bible the same way he did as a teenager. His grasp of biblical hermeneutics never developed in tandem with his grasp of philosophy. His hermeneutic is in a state of arrested development. Intellectually, part of Craig never grew up. His philosophical toolkit matured while his hermeneutical toolkit remains immature, stuck in Sunday school.



It reminds me of some apostates who become proficient philosophers and scientists, but when they attack Christian theism, they never brought their understanding of the Bible up to the same level of their mastery of science or philosophy. In the age of specialization, that's understandable, but it lays bare a big hole in Craig's skill set.

**ii)** The way Craig frames the alternatives is an understatement. As he explained in his original presentation, what he means by "anthropomorphic" is "palpably false if taken literally".

**iii)** A basic flaw in Craig's analysis is assumption that in order for something to count as a theophany, the criterion is not the nature of the event but whether the account is introduced by a verbal formula: "God appeared to..." Likewise, that a figure must be explicitly called the "Angel of the Lord".

**iv)** Another flaw in his analysis is his failure to appreciate that Gen 2-3 isn't told from the viewpoint of Adam and Eve. It's not a first-person, indexical description of how God looked to them. Rather, it's told from the third-person, external viewpoint of the narrator.

**v)** Yet another flaw in Craig's analysis is the equivocal notion of an "appearance". It doesn't even seem to occur to Craig that that word or concept has multiple meanings, and so it's necessary to identify which one or ones may be germane to the issue at hand. Among other things, "appear/appearance" can mean the following:

- Materialize
- Be present or show up

- Come into view; become visible or noticeable
- Perform (e.g. Franco Corelli appeared in *Il Travatore*)
- How something is perceived by one or more senses (e.g. an indirect realist says appearances are all we have to go by—we can't peel back the veil of perception. Or a Catholic says that in transubstantiation, the Host retains the appearance of bread and wine)

**vi)** Apropos (v), does a "theophany" mean God "appears" in the sense that he's present or localized at a particular time and place? Does it mean God "appears" in the sense that he can be seen? These are distinct ideas. For instance, an angel might be present but invisible. Take the Balaam account where the Angel of the Lord was present, but initially invisible to Balaam.

**vii)** Although the default connotation of "appear" may signify to a visual appearance or apparition, theophanies often include auditions as well as visions. God's audible voice. Or preternatural thunder. So "appearance" can be shorthand for something that's perceptible to one or more of the senses. In principle, it could be tactile as well.

**viii)** Some incidents in Scripture indicate that angels are able to materialize and dematerialize. So that's another sense of "appearance" which is applicable to theophanies and angelophanies. In the case of the Angel of the Lord, the two categories overlap. He's the theophanic angel.

**ix)** Then there's Craig's frankly silly objection that Adam and Eve didn't exist at the time of the theophanies. But once God brought them into existence, they were in a position to see their Maker, if he took the form of the Angel

of the Lord to create them. Likewise, Adam regained consciousness after the operation. So even on his own grounds, Craig's objection is hairsplitting.

**x)** Craig reads biblical narratives atomistically, as if similar incidents in the Pentateuch can't shed light on one another. To take a comparison, consider movies, novels,, or a miniseries where earlier scenes raise questions that are answered as the plot unfolds. You don't understand it all at once. Rather, as you go deeper into it, later plot developments retroactively illuminate earlier scenes.

Likewise, it isn't necessary to pedantically use the same clues each time the same kind of event is narrated. That's woodenly repetitious. Readers are expected to analogize from explicit examples to comparable examples.

For readers who lack the background, let me set the stage for your very important question, Thomas. In my Defenders lectures I claimed that the descriptions of God in Genesis 2-3 as a humanoid deity are inconsistent with the transcendent concept of God in Genesis 1 and are therefore not to be taken literally. Rather these descriptions are figurative anthropomorphisms, descriptions of God in human terms, a style of speaking with which we're all accustomed, as when we say, for example, "God's eyes are upon the righteous and His ear is open to their prayer."

The challenge raised to this interpretation of Genesis 2-3 is that in these chapters we have theophanies of God, that is, appearances of God in human form. Yes, God really is transcendent, but here God appears to people in human form. For example, in Genesis 18 God

appears as a man to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. Therefore, the descriptions are literally true of how God looks to people.

Now that's certainly a possible interpretation. There are lots of theophanies in the Old Testament. But is that the most plausible interpretation of Genesis 2-3? I raised two reasons for thinking that it is not: (1) Genesis 2-3 lack the language indicative of a theophany. In **Genesis 18.1** we read, "And *the Lord appeared* to him by the oaks of Mamre. . . ." There is nothing like that in Genesis 2-3. (2) God is described anthropomorphically in Genesis 2-3 even when He is not appearing to anyone. The first example is in the description of His fashioning Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. This cannot be an appearance to Adam because Adam wasn't even alive yet! The second example is God's fashioning Eve out of Adam's rib. Since God had put Adam to sleep to perform this surgery, God cannot be appearing to Adam, since he is unconscious (and, of course, Eve doesn't even exist yet, so God isn't appearing to her).

Now you challenge my first reason for thinking that Genesis 2-3 are not describing theophanies. You point out that the language of "appearing" is absent from some theophanies. Consider the cases cited from the Pentateuch, since these are the relevant cases for Genesis. Notice that although Jacob's wrestling with a man in **Genesis 32.22-30** does not use the language of God's appearing to him, it is so characterized in retrospect: "God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name'"

([Gen 35.9-10](#)), the very re-naming of Jacob mentioned in the wrestling episode. Similarly, [Genesis 35.1](#) says, "God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau,'" referring back to Jacob's dream in [Genesis 28.10-17](#). Jacob's life was apparently punctuated by a series of divine theophanies providentially directing Jacob.

In some cases there are other expressions that tip off the reader that one is dealing with a theophany. For example, in the appearance to Hagar [n.b. not [Exodus 3.7-13](#), but [Genesis 16.7-13](#)], we encounter the mysterious figure of "the angel of the Lord," who is described as an angel and yet also as Lord and God. In [Genesis 31.3-13](#) Jacob describes a similar figure in a dream who is both "the angel of God" (v 11) and yet "the God of Bethel" (v 13), Who, you'll remember, appeared to Jacob there ([Genesis 35.1](#)). In the appearance to Moses in [Exodus 3.2](#), we read, "the angel of the Lord appeared to him."

Now in Genesis 2-3 this sort of language is entirely missing. There is neither language of God's appearing nor of the mysterious angel of the Lord. These stories just don't read like theophanies.

Taken together with my second point, that in Genesis 2-3 God is described anthropomorphically even when He is not appearing to anyone, I think that construing the human descriptions of God in Genesis 2-3 as literary anthropomorphisms is more plausible than taking them to be literal theophanies.

## Enmity between serpents and women

*And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.*  
(*Gen 3:15*)

**1.** On the secular interpretation, the nemesis in Gen 3 is a talking snake. Because the narrator suffered from a primitive, mythological outlook, he believed in talking snakes. In addition, *Gen 3:15* is an etiology to explain women's aversion to snakes.

**2.** But does that interpretation make sense even on secular assumptions? It's true that *Gen 3:15* trades on serpentine imagery. On the one hand, people inadvertently step on snakes. On the other hand, venomous snakes usually strike at the lower extremities (although a King cobra can strike higher). However, that would be the case whether the imagery is literal or figurative, so that by itself doesn't establish the identity of the nemesis.

**3.** The secular interpretation trades on the stereotype that women have a greater aversion to snakes than men. In a sense that may be a valid generalization, but it needs to be qualified. Although boys are more likely than girls to handle snakes with their bare hands, those are usually nonvenomous snakes. As a rule, it's a foolhardy boy who picks up a venomous snake. It takes great skill to do that, and it's reckless to do even if you have the skill.

It's true that lots of guys are fascinated by snakes (and other reptiles). Some collect venomous snakes, including

exotic imports. Some men become herpetologists.

However, before the development of antivenom and snake tongs, men were naturally wary of venomous snakes. Just consider the reaction of Moses to a venomous snake ([Exod 4:3](#)). So I don't think the etiological interpretation is realistic. That interpretation singles out women, but the antipathy to venomous snakes extends to men as well. And I'm sure the same holds true for tribes in tropical jungles where reticulated pythons lurk. Dangerous snakes in general.

**4.** But the etiological interpretation suffers from another flaw. If the nemesis was a talking snake, then to preserve the parallel, this is a prophecy (after the fact) to explain the animus between women and talking snakes. Not between women and mute snakes. Not merely between the first woman and a talking snake. Rather, this is couched as a prediction. And on the secular interpretation, the narrator thought talking snakes existed. So the initial scenario is projecting into the future.

But as an etiology, that fails since ancient Jewish women never encountered talking snakes. On a secular interpretation, that might be plausible if you push it back into the past, to a legendary time when there were talking snakes, but the oracle is forward-looking. So for the secular interpretation to be consistent, this is a backstory to account for the aversion that women at the time of writing had towards snakes. And secularists traditionally date the composition of the Pentateuch to the Babylonian Exile or thereabouts. But of course, secularists don't think women in general had any experience with talking snakes—since they don't exist! So the secular interpretation suffers from internal tensions.





## Snake river

This may be a suggestion without merit, but I'll float it for consideration. Streams and rivers have a serpentine appearance. Of course, the resemblance isn't close, but to human imagination there's a suggestive association. Rivers as serpentine metaphors.

A river (or four tributaries) is a prominent feature in the Garden of Eden. It's essential to the life of the garden. Irrigates the orchard, provides drinking water for the humans and animals.

Could it be that one reason for the serpentine symbolism of the Tempter that it trades on the visual and subliminal association between snakes and rivers? Just as the river is a source of life, the Tempter is a counterfeit life-giving savior?

## Parsing the tree of knowledge

*9 The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen 2:9,17).*

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths (Gen 3:1-7).*

**1.** This is rather cryptic. Commentators puzzle over it due to lack of definition or explication. Unlike psychological novels, biblical narrators often refrain from telling the reader what characters are thinking, so the reader is like a bystander who sees and overhears the action. It remains on the surface.

**2.** What is meant by the knowledge of good and evil? What was lacking in the experience of Adam and Eve prior to eating from the tree? In what sense were their eyes opened? Did the Tempter lie to them?

**3.** Some commentators focus on word-studies, but you can't get much mileage out of that to answer these questions. Some commentators speculate that Adam and Eve were morally immature, in a state of diminished responsibility.

**4.** It's possible that the tree of knowledge doesn't confer the knowledge of good and evil. Rather, they discover or experience what evil means by doing what's forbidden. It's not so much about the nature of the tree, but the nature of their defiant action. When they violate the prohibition, they discover or experience the nature of evil through their wrongdoing.

They are now in a different mental and moral state than before they transgressed the prohibition. They can't turn back the clock to their prior inexperience.

**5.** So their eyes are opened, not in the sense that the tree in itself confers knowledge of good and evil, but because they now know what it feels like to do something forbidden. That's a change. The contrast between respecting the prohibition and defying the prohibition.

**6.** In addition, they find out what it's like to be deceived. In a sense, the Tempter didn't lie to them, but he tricked them. He told a half-truth. What happened was a letdown. Not what they were expecting or hoping for. In a sense he held up his end of the bargain, but they were too naive to appreciate what they are in for. They gain insight through

hindsight rather than foresight, at which point it's too late to recross the line.

**7.** In itself, their action changes next to nothing. They now know what it feels like to do something forbidden. That's all. But that's disappointing. That's very thin. Like running a red light at a deserted intersection.

**8.** However, violating the prohibition is punishable. So their action fosters a sense of dread. Knowledge of good and evil instills foreboding about what awaits them. And, indeed, retribution is swift, as they are banished from the garden. Shut off from access to the tree of life. From hereon out they must struggle with inhospitable conditions, aging, and death.

## The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil

- 1.** I don't think word-studies provide the answer.
- 2.** It's an interesting question who God's dialogue partner is in [Gen 3:22](#). "Become like us". Perhaps it's the Spirit of God, who seems to be God's dialogue partner in Gen 1.
- 3.** In my post I suggested that knowledge of good and evil refer to obedience or disobedience to God's command/prohibition:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2020/03/parsing-tree-of-knowledge.html>

Adam and Eve learn what evil is by simply doing what's forbidden. And it's a disappointing experience. There's no payoff. The only insight or enlightenment they gain is what it feels like to do what's forbidden. That's a very empty experience. They were hoping to get something out of it, but it's big letdown.

- 4.** There has to be some kind of analogy between their experience and [Gen 3:22](#). I'd say God already knows the consequences of obedience and disobedience, because he knows the future. He knows the aftermath of what Adam and Eve set in motion.
- 5.** A feature of human contentment or discontent is that we can be blissfully happy and contented so long as someone doesn't propose that there's something better we're missing out on. Simply planting that idea in the mind, that

comparison with something hypothetically better, can foster discontent. The imagination does the rest.

The mere suggestion that there's something better can foster the suspicion that we've been cheated. It isn't based on any actual tangible good they're aware of. It isn't based on any perceived good that's been withheld. Just the bare idea,

**6.** An example might be illicit teenage sex. The boy and girl are curious about what sex is like. They've been conditioned to believe there's nothing more enjoyable than sex, So they're in a big hurry to find out. They rush through it. As a result, they find sex is a big letdown. Natural goods can lose value if we approach them with false expectations.

**7.** An example from classic literature would be *Othello*. Initially Othello and Desdemona are blissfully in love, but Iago seeks revenge. He knows that Desdemona is Othello's vulnerability. He plants in Othello's mind that Desdemona is having an affair with another man or simply in love with another man. Even though there's no evidence, the mere idea gnaws away at Othello. The groundless suspicion drives him to insane jealousy.

The Tempter uses the tree of knowledge that way. Adam and Eve are happy until the Tempter suggests that God is holding back on them. They are getting second best.

The mere idea is sufficient to make them dissatisfied with what they've got. They violate the prohibition to find out what they're missing. But all they discover is what it feels like to disobey. So now they have nothing to show for their transgression. They lost what they had without gaining anything in return, much less something better.



## Heiser's methodology

I'm going to venture some observations about Michael Heiser's methodology in reference to the nephilim. I say "venture" because I'm not deeply read on his position.

**1.** In fairness to Heiser, his interpretation of Gen 6 is certainly the mainstream view in OT scholarship. And it's a traditional Jewish interpretation. It might be the dominant Jewish interpretation, although that depends on how representative the Intertestamental literature which survived happens to be.

**2.** As I've noted before, while this is the mainstream view in OT scholarship, that's somewhat misleading. Many OT scholars think Gen 6 reflects a mythological outlook. They don't think the Bible is divine revelation. They think it's merely ancient religious literature, on the same level as ancient Near Eastern mythology or Greco-Roman mythology.

They don't think their interpretation of Gen 6 has to be realistic. But Christians do think our interpretations of Scripture need to be realistic, albeit in the sense of supernatural realism.

**3.** I consider the Intertestamental literature on the nephilim to be exegetically worthless. **Gen 6:1-4** is very intriguing. Part of what makes it so intriguing is that it's terse and enigmatic. So that fuels pious speculation. An urge to fill in the gaps.

The Enochian literature, and other suchlike, reflects the same mentality as the apocryphal infancy Gospels. And it has the same exegetical value as the apocryphal infancy



Gospels. It's just a load of pious nonsense. No reputable scholar would use the apocryphal infancy Gospels to interpret the canonical Gospels. They wouldn't use that later, fanciful material to interpret the canonical Gospels. But the Enochian stuff operates at the same level. Fictional filler. Thriller filler.

The only way to legitimately justify the angelic interpretation of Gen 6 is either by direct exegesis of Gen 6 or via the NT. If you can do it that way, then you've got a case. But the Enochian stuff isn't suitable background material, any more than the apocryphal infancy Gospels are suitable background material for the canonical Gospels.

**4.** Heiser also appeals to linguistic usage in the Intertestamental literature and Dead Sea Scrolls. There he's on firmer ground, as a general principle. NT usage draws from a well of preexisting usage, where words and phrases have established associations and connotations that may carry over into NT usage. But that needs to be isolated from the wholesale usage grand Enochian narratives as a frame of reference.

## What are demons?

Recently I watched a Michael Heiser interview about his new book on demons:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv7Yyv887rE&t=240s>

I haven't read his book, so that may contain answers to my questions which are left hanging in the air by the interview. In this post I'll just respond to issues raised by the interview. This is less about evaluating the position than clarifying the position by posing questions or considering the implications of the position.

- 1.** If I understand his position, he classifies demons as nephilic souls. The damned souls of nephilim. The rest of my post will proceed on that assumption.
- 2.** As a Protestant, I have no antecedent objection to alternative readings that reject traditional interpretations of Biblical passages.
- 3.** On the face of it, there's nothing heretical about his identification. And it's certainly not liberal. One question is what shifts would his interpretation entail in traditional Christian theology.
- 4.** The NT doesn't really say anything directly about the origin of demons. The fallen angel identification is a default explanation. Fallen angels are obvious candidates.
- 5.** Does Heiser classify the Nephilim as inhuman? Are they demiangles? Do they have minds that aren't angelic or human but hybrid minds?

If that's the claim, it raises the question of whether it's metaphysically possible for a creature having an angelic mind, mating with a creature having a human mind, to produce an agent having a hybrid mind. That angelic minds and human minds are able to combine to generate a kind of mind that isn't one or the other.

**6.** Assuming (5), God is not the Creator of every kind of being. Some creatures have the natural ability to produce new kinds of beings. In traditional Christian theology, God creates each kind, then creatures procreate after their kind. They procreate examples of their kind. New examples of the same kind, not new kinds of beings. That's why it's called reproduction. But on this view, every kind of being doesn't have its origin in divine creativity. On this view, there are second-order creatures. That's a radical principle.

**7.** One reason fallen angels are a default identification for fallen angels is that it gives them something to do. After all, they didn't cease to exist. So what have they been up to all this time?

**8.** Apropos (7), what does Heiser think happened to the fallen angels? Are they all in hell (i.e. the realm of the dead)? Or do some of them have access to our world?

**9.** On this view, the dark side has three classes of beings: fallen angels, nephilim, and damned humans. How do they interact? Are fallen angels and nephilic souls both active in our world? That's more to sort out. Can we tell which is which in terms of phenomena we encounter on earth (i.e. the realm of the living)?

**10.** Apropos (9), is the power of witchcraft angelic or nephilic? Does it have its source in fallen angels or nephilim empowering sorcerers and witchdoctors?

**11.** Although the NT is very sketchy about the origin of demons, it clearly associates Satan with demons. So on this view, Satan isn't merely the leader of fallen angels, but the leader of nephilic souls as well. But what if Satan is associated with demons because both he and they are fallen angels?

**12.** On this view it seems to be the case that nephilim are evil and damned by virtue of their parentage. Evil and damned simply because they are hybrids. Because they were conceived by sexual intercourse between fallen angels and women. Their process of origin makes them evil and dooms them to damnation. They were created evil, though not by God.

Does this mean there's no salvation for a single member of the nephilim? Or does it make allowance for the salvation of some nephilim?

**13.** On this view, is the fall of angels a single event, or does it happen in phases? There's the fall of Lucifer, followed in Gen 6 by the fall of the other angels. Were the angels in Gen 6 already fallen some time prior to the timeframe of Gen 6, or was that when they fell? In addition, he seems to say the principalities and powers fell during the Tower of Babel timeframe.

# Flat Earth

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## Paul Seely

*(Posted on behalf of Steve Hays.)*

Over at Green Bagging, Paul Seely has come to the defense of Peter Enns.<sup>1</sup> He's posted several related comments, so I'll rearrange the material by topic:

To help one arrive at an answer to my question regarding accommodation, it may help to look at the question from a slightly different perspective via the issue of "phenomenal language." Scripture often speaks of the sun "rising," and "going down." Since people in biblical times believed the sun was literally moving, when a biblical author made a statement of this nature, he thought he was saying that the sun was literally rising and literally going down. In other words, he would have been surprised and unwilling to agree that he was just using phenomenal language, just speaking about appearances.

If you will read those papers, even though I did not specifically address the movement of the sun, you will find a plethora of evidence from both ancient literature and anthropology that Peoples in OT times, including the educated, did not distinguish between the appearance of the universe and its factual nature. That is, they believed that the appearance was the reality. The earth looks flat, so they thought it is flat. The sky (especially at night) looks like a solid dome, so they thought it is a solid dome. The sea at the horizon looks circular, so they thought the sea must surround the earth. Mutatis mutandis, the sun looks like it is moving, so it is moving. In addition to this, because the earth is fixed, a revolving earth is excluded. And because the

earth is flat even if you forced the concept of revolving upon it, there would never be any nighttime unless the sun moved. Given the flat earth and the nighttime, the sun has to literally move. Given all of the evidence I cited in my papers (and more) the burden of proof falls on anyone supposing the Israelites, or even Moses, distinguished the appearance of the sun's movement from the reality.

To summarize Seely's contention:

**i)** The ancients didn't distinguish between appearance and reality.

**ii)** As a consequence of (i), they thought the earth was flat, the sky was a solid dome, the sea surrounded the earth, the earth was immobile, and the sun was mobile.

By way of response:

**1.** Seely is attributing naïve realism to the ancients. Things were the way they appeared to be.

By this logic, the ancients thought that mountains really were smaller at a distance. As you walked toward a mountain or hill, it literally grew taller.

Is it Seely's contention that the ancients were, in fact, that clueless? Could it not occur to an ancient Israelite that mountains only *seemed* to be smaller at a distance?

**2.** I'd add that Bible writers describe mountains and hills as if they really *are* taller than the surrounding countryside. So they don't speak as if they think the size of mountains is observer-relative.

**3.** Likewise, did an ancient sailor really think an oar was bent in water?

**4.** Assuming Seely would concede that the ancients did make allowance for certain optical illusions, then they did distinguish between appearance and reality. Yet that's the linchpin of his subsequent argument. He ascribes ancient belief in geocentrism and a flat earth to the fact that the ancients didn't distinguish between appearance and reality. But once he is forced to admit that, at least in some cases, they did draw such a distinction, then he loses the major premise in which he grounded his conclusions.

**5.** Let's remember that you would have had the same bell curve in the ancient world that we have in the scientific age. The ancient world had its share of brilliant men. Its Bronze Age version of Dirac, Da Vinci, Einstein, Feynman, Gauss, Mandelbrot, Newton, Pauling, Penrose, Poincaré, Shannon, von Neumann, Witten, &c.

Men of native, scientific genius. Of course, employment opportunities were limited back then, viz. scribes, tanners, farmers, shepherds, hunters, carpenters, fishermen, masons, blacksmiths, &c. But the raw intelligence was already in place. And with it comes the natural aptitude to draw inferences from observations.

**6.** Yes, the earth looks flat. And the sun seems to move across the sky. But how do those two observations go together?

**i)** The sun apparently travels from east to west. Yet this happens everyday. But if the earth were flat, how did the sun make its way back to the east in time to repeat the cycle?



Logically, we'd expect if the earth were flat, for the sun rising in one place and set in another, then reverse direction, so that it alternates direction from one day to the next.

But, of course, that's not what we observe. So there's a certain tension between the motion of the sun and the flatness of the earth.

**ii)** Would the sun go *under* the earth? But what does that mean if the earth is flat? Why wouldn't the flat earth be solid all the way down until you hit bedrock? Why would there be anything underneath the flat earth?

**iii)** The only way for the sun to go *under* the earth is if there were empty space under the earth. But that's not something an earth-bound observer could see. Rather, that would be an inference.

**iv)** And if an ancient Israelite could imagine that the sun went *under* the earth, then it would be just as easy to imagine the sun going *around* the earth. But if the sun *circles* the earth, then it's more natural to think of the earth as a *round* object. Two globes floating in space. One globe circles another other.

But if you think it through to that point, then there's no way of telling which object is moving in relation to the other.

**v)** Ancient stargazers would have noticed the phenomenon of retrograde motion. That's easier to account for in a system of mutual motion. And the calculations are simpler in a heliocentric system.

**vi)** The ancients were well aware of the seasons. Their calendars and agricultural cycles were dependent on the

seasons.

Surely they noticed a correlation between the seasons and the shortening or lengthening of day and night. Surely they also noticed that the sun didn't rise or set in the same place along the horizon throughout the year. And yet, if the sun were moving across the sky of a flat earth, what would account for the seasonal variations?

But if the earth were spinning like a top, with an axial tilt, then that would explain the seasons.

**vii)** The ancients were well aware of solar and lunar eclipses. From these events it's possible to draw some inferences regarding the size and shape of the sun, moon, and earth.

**viii)** How big was the sun? Did it look smaller because it was smaller? Or it did look smaller because it was farther away?

If, in fact, then sun were bigger than the earth, then—intuitively speaking—it seems more natural for the smaller object to orbit the larger object, rather than vice versa.

**ix)** The ancients were also familiar with whirlwinds. And these exhibit the Coriolis effect. Suppose you were a Bronze Age Richard Feynman. What might you infer from that phenomenon?

**x)** Ancient mariners could observe ships “sink” below the horizon, or vice versa. That makes sense if the earth were spherical rather than flat.

**xi)** How would the sun, moon and stars move through a solid dome? If you really think the sky is a solid dome,

then, logically, the earth would be illuminated because the dome was backlit, with holes in the dome, through which shafts of light would beam down. But, of course, that doesn't allow for the *motion* of the luminaries through space. So would the sky need to be a movable dome?

**7.** I've been drawing attention to empirical phenomena which any attentive observer could see with his own eyes. Phenomena in tension with a literal triple-decker universe.

Perhaps Seely would say that not every ancient Israelite would be smart enough to ponder the deeper implications of empirical evidence. But he's the one who indulges in sweeping generalities about what the ancients believed.

**8.** Let's also recall that heliocentrism was originally an armchair theory. Long before the space age. Ground-based observers came up with this theory. Naked-eye astronomy.

**9.** And consider the role of thought-experiments in science,<sup>2</sup> such as Newton's spinning water pail. Later, Mach came up with a counter thought-experiment.

In principle, there's nothing to this experiment that a Bronze Age "scientist" couldn't visualize or duplicate.

Then there's Newton's thought experiment involving an orbital cannon ball. In principle, an ancient archer could have drawn the same inference.

**10.** My point is that men in Bible times might well have been far more sophisticated than Seely gives them credit for.<sup>3</sup>

**11.** Even more to the point, Seely is setting up a false

dichotomy between a phenomenal interpretation of the text and a grammatico-historical interpretation of the text—for the natural phenomena don't implicate geocentrism or a flat-earth or a triple-decker universe. An alert observer would be able to perceive the fact that what he saw called for a more complex model behind the scenes to account for what he saw.

**12.** Another fundamental problem with Seely's argument is that that ANE cosmography in general, as well as Biblical cosmography in particular, was rather stylized, using architectural metaphors to signify sacred space—as the symmetrical counterpart to sacred time.<sup>4</sup> The universe was a temple. As such, architectural metaphors were used to depict the universe. That was a way of denoting its sacral significance. Seely is very insensitive to the cultic dimension of Biblical cosmography. But grammatico-historical exegesis would take this into account.

I hope you will read my papers, and you might add the discussion of the biblical/ANE universe in Chapter 7 of John Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*. He is a very conservative professor of OT at Wheaton, but too well educated in ANE literature to take the Bible out of context. The same might be said for John Currid, professor of OT at Reformed Theological Seminary in Mississippi. And see my comments in the *Save our Seminary* thread that Charles Hodge and E. J. Young acknowledged that the OT was speaking of a solid sky, and Warfield acknowledged specifically that the merely human [and erroneous] opinion about the sun's relation to the earth might show up in inspired Scripture outside of the scope of the writer's teaching [hence as an accommodation.]

Three issues:

**i)** This statement overlooks important OT scholars who demure.<sup>5</sup>

**ii)** It's also deceptive for Seely to cite Currid and Walton when—in fact—they interpret Genesis very differently than he does. Yes, they agree with him on 1:6, but they disagree with him on so much else.<sup>6</sup> If he's going to invoke their expertise in ANE literature, then that carries over to all the times in which they differ with Seely.

**iii)** Even if we construe **Gen 1:6** to denote a “solid firmament,” that misses the point—for if Moses is using architectural symbolism, then the sky is the roof of the cosmic temple. But this doesn't mean Moses really thought the universe was just a scaled up version of the tabernacle or pagan shrines.<sup>7</sup> The imagery is emblematic, not representational.

Historically, this has led to two different responses in the Reformed tradition. Turretin argued on the basis of such passages that since God cannot lie and he knows more about these things than we do, we ought to agree with Scripture and reject the Copernican theory. (*Compendium Theologicæ Didactico-Elencticæ*, (Amsterdam, 1695.) He rejected the idea that such passages were accommodated to the beliefs of the times. Calvin, on the other hand, when dealing with the size of the sun, moon, and stars (**Gen 1:16**) set the example of reducing such statements to merely phenomenal language, and Warfield's statement (above) about such matters follows Calvin's example.

The biblical evidence cited by Turretin, which I would also cite, is given by T. as follows: "First. The sun is said [in Scripture] to move in the heavens, and to rise and set. (Ps. 19, 5.) The sun is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. (Ps. 104, 19.) The sun knoweth his going down. (Eccles. 1, 5.) The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down. Secondly. The sun, by a miracle, stood still in the time of Joshua. [As Luther had said, Joshua commands the sun to stand still, not the earth.] (Joshua, 10, 12-14,) and by a miracle it went back in the time of Hezekiah. (Isa. 38, 8.) Thirdly. The earth is said to be fixed immoveably. (Ps. 93, 1.) The world also is established, that it cannot be moved. (Ps. 104, 5.) Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. (Ps. 119, 90, 91.) Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances. [He missed the best evidence: **Eccles 1:5** ends with the statement that the sun rushes back to its starting place, which could not be phenomenal language because no one sees it do this.]

Several issues:

**i)** Isn't it anachronistic to interpret Biblical statements in light of Ptolemaic astronomy? And if Bible writers were that self-conscious about celestial mechanics, then they were capable of entertaining heliocentric as well as geocentric speculations.

**ii)** Statements about the (im-)mobility of the earth have reference, not to the *relation* of the earth to other celestial bodies, but to eschatological earthquakes—which symbolize divine judgment.

**iii)** John Walton doesn't interpret Joshua's Long Day the same way that Turretin or Seely does.<sup>8</sup>

**iv)** The description of the sun in **Eccl 1:5** is figurative. Solomon personifies the sun as a runner who is "gasping" or "panting" to make his way around the racetrack.<sup>9</sup> And note the similes and metaphors in **Ps 19:5**.

Did ancient Israelites think the sun literally dwelt in a tent, was literally a bridegroom, was literally a runner? Isn't it quite arbitrary of Seely to selectively take one part of this description literally and another part figuratively?

My question can then be framed as, On what basis do we reject the historical-grammatical meaning of any passage in Scripture and replace it with the meaning that it is just phenomenal language? Or, What is the criterion or criteria for deciding when an inspired statement in Scripture can be set aside as not really speaking of the actual facts but only of the misleading appearances?

This takes us back to my questions, which could be summed up as, On what basis do those who follow Calvin, Hodge, and Warfield in believing that merely human opinions have been accommodated into inspired Scripture, separate those errant opinions from the inerrant teachings of Scripture? Since Hodge and E.J. Young acknowledged that Scripture is speaking of a solid sky, a concrete example would be **Gen 1:6, 7**. What is the inerrant teaching in those verses, and what is the accommodated human opinion? And on what basis do you tell the difference?

Seely has failed to give us any examples in which we must set aside the grammatico-historical meaning of the passage. He's failed to give us any examples in which Scripture has accommodated errant human opinions.

On a final note, I'm struck by how supporters of Enns play the Devil's chaplain in this debate. They're casting about for some wedge which they can use to punch through a more liberal view of Scripture. Can they find some verse of Scripture at which the inerrantist will balk?

Their strategy is to instill a spirit of doubt in the mind of a Christian. It's a game of chicken with the Word of God.

This is nothing short of diabolical. If that's the only way they can defend Enns, then that, alone, is sufficient reason for Westminster to fire him.

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1 <http://greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2008/03/28/on-peter-enns>

2 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thought-experiment>

3 Incidentally, there are contemporary Christians who defend geocentrism. That's not the position I'm arguing for, but I doubt that Seely would have the scientific expertise to win an argument with an astute geocentrist. For example:

<http://www.geocentricity.com/ba1/no71/selbrede.html>

4 E.g. J. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (Princeton 1994).

5 C. Collins, *Genesis 1-4* (P&R 2006), 45-46; V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Eerdmans 1991), 122; G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word 1987), 19; R. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Wipf & Stock 1999), 28.

6 J. Currid, *Genesis 1:1-25:18* (EP 2003); J. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old*



*Testament* (Baker 2006); *Genesis* (Zondervan 2001).

7 Cf. V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Sheffield 1992); O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Seabury 1978).

8 *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 262-63.

9 D. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Broadman 1993), 285; I. Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Zondervan 2001), 55.

## Earth and sea in Gen 1

Since the sky is usually thought by pre-scientific peoples to be a solid hemisphere literally touching the earth (or sea) at the horizon, the earth must necessarily be thought of as flat. It is impossible to conceive of the sky as a hemisphere touching the earth at the horizon, and yet conceive of the earth as a globe. If the earth were a globe but the sky just a hemisphere touching the earth, half of the earth would have no sky. The shape of the earth is accordingly explicitly or implicitly described by all pre-scientific peoples as being flat, and usually circular--a single disc-shaped continent. Paul H. Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in [Genesis 1:10](#)." **WTJ 59** (1997), 232.

Even if, for argument's sake, we bracket the inspiration of Scripture, there are problems with Seely's generalizations:

- i)** He fails to distinguish between landlocked countries and coastal countries with maritime activities.
- ii)** Apropos (i), the horizon is relative to the position of the viewer. It's not a fixed point but extends forward or backward as the viewer moves towards it.
- iii)** Ancient mariners were aware of the North and South poles. That's hard to square with belief in a single disc-shaped contingent or celestial solid dome resting on the horizon. Empiriccal observation belies Seely's rigid schema.
- iv)** Presumably, Seely believes the Pentateuch was compiled/redacted around the time of the Babylonian

captivity. That raises the question of when Arctica and Antarctica were discovered and knowledge of their existence was popularized (e.g. Virgil, Ovid, Diogenes Laërtius).

Bk I:32-51 The earth and sea. The five zones.

When whichever god it was had ordered and divided the mass, and collected it into separate parts, he first gathered the earth into a great ball so that it was uniform on all sides. Then he ordered the seas to spread and rise in waves in the flowing winds and pour around the coasts of the encircled land. He added springs and standing pools and lakes, and contained in shelving banks the widely separated rivers, some of which are swallowed by the earth itself, others of which reach the sea and entering the expanse of open waters beat against coastlines instead of riverbanks. He ordered the plains to extend, the valleys to subside, leaves to hide the trees, stony mountains to rise: and just as the heavens are divided into two zones to the north and two to the south, with a fifth and hotter between them, so the god carefully marked out the enclosed matter with the same number, and described as many regions on the earth. The equatorial zone is too hot to be habitable; the two poles are covered by deep snow; and he placed two regions between and gave them a temperate climate mixing heat and cold.

<https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph.htm#488381090>

To this end the golden Sun rules his circuit, portioned out in fixed divisions, through the world's twelve constellations. Five zones comprise the heavens; whereof one is ever glowing with the flashing sun, ever scorched by his flames. Round this, at the world's

ends, two stretch darling to right and left, set fast in ice and black storms. Between these and the idle zone, two by grace of the gods have been vouchsafed to feeble mortals; and a path is cut between the two, wherein the slanting array of the Signs may turn. As our globe rises steep to Scythia and the Rhiphaean crags, so its slopes downward to Libya's southland. One pole is ever high above us, while the other, beneath our feet, is seen of black Styx and shades infernal.

<https://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilGeorgics1.html>

156 And there are five terrestrial zones: first, the northern zone which is beyond the arctic circle, uninhabitable because of the cold; second, a temperate zone; a third, uninhabitable because of great heats, called the torrid zone; fourth, a counter-temperate zone; fifth, the southern zone, uninhabitable because of its cold.

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diogenes\\_Laertius/Lives\\_of\\_the\\_Eminent\\_Philosophers/7/Zeno\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diogenes_Laertius/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers/7/Zeno*.html)

## The pillars of the earth

JAYMAN SAID:

*(1) The comment about Job's historicity was in the context of God's apparently unscientific statements in the book of Job (e.g., ch. 38). If you have the time, I would be interested to hear how you reconcile such statements with science? Or, since the passage is poetry, do you find it unnecessary to even try to reconcile it with science?*

Your final sentence states my position. [Job 38:1-11](#) is using stock imagery. We can tell that the imagery is figurative because the narrator uses mixed metaphors: God as carpenter, midwife, and seamstress.

*(2) I'm not sure what your general outlook on Revelation is. I did not go into detail either, other than to say that the images are more symbolic than literal.*

The imagery is symbolic, although the imagery stands for real-world events. But it's not a representational depiction.

*(3) I wrote to Edward: "The primary question, in my opinion, is the intended message of the biblical authors."*

Agreed.

*(4) Certainly some passages are from the human perspective but I'm guessing Edward will not find such reasoning persuasive in all cases.*

Since Ed is not a reasonable critic, that doesn't bother me.

Also, the objection is too vague to specifically address.

*(5) I have no objection to the assertion that world is depicted as a temple in at least some places in the Bible. But, as Edward will say, that does not mean the authors did not believe the earth was flat.*

**i)** What matters is not the private opinion of Bible writers, but what they intend to convey.

**ii)** I don't have any uniform position about what ancient peoples generally believed. I suspect that's person-variable. Some individuals were more observant and intelligent than others. To take a few examples:

**a)** Suppose the Bible uses "pillars of the earth" as metaphors for hills and mountains, which seem to support the sky. However, ancient peoples had occasion to climb hills and mountains. When they reached the summit they could see for themselves that the hills and mountains weren't supporting a solid dome.

**b)** If the moon was a disk, and the earth was flat, the apparent shape of the moon would vary depending on which part of the flat earth the observer occupied. But ancient peoples traveled. Yet the moon was the same shape wherever they went. At a minimum, that would imply the sphericity of the moon. And if the moon, why not the sun?

By analogy, it wouldn't be hard for a clever man or woman to infer that the earth was also a sphere, floating in space-like the sun and moon.

So I don't assume that there was any unanimity of belief among the ancients.

*(6) I agree that those under the earth are probably the*

*dead in the passages cited by Edward. However, I'm also open to the possibility that some biblical authors thought Sheol/Hades was actually under the earth.*

**i)** Once again, the question at issue is not what they believed, but what they taught.

**ii)** In addition, as Daniel Block points out, [Ezk 32:22-23](#) makes use of ancient mortuary customs to model the netherworld. That's just one example. But it illustrates the way in which certain cultural conventions were a springboard for generating cosmographic metaphors.

*(7) Since you're a Calvinist, I would be interested to hear your take on John Loftus' claims in ch. 7 of The Christian Delusion regarding God's alleged failure to communicate. See the second to last paragraph for my summary of his claims. If you want more details on his claims just ask and I'll try to provide more information.*

*The seventh explanation is offered by Calvinists. They say that God has a secretive will that is different from his revealed will. The revealed will is not his true will but can be used to get people to follow his secretive will. God's secretive will sometimes decrees that people commit horrible acts for a higher purpose. Loftus states that if this is true we have no reason to trust God's revealed will. I'll leave it to Calvinists to respond to this depiction.*

Well, that's a deceptive way for Loftus to describe their interrelation. The preceptive will of God is just as truly God's will as the decreative will of God. For the preceptive will of God facilitates a number of divinely appointed purposes. As such, God's preceptive will is true to God's intentions. In the nature of the case, the purpose of God's

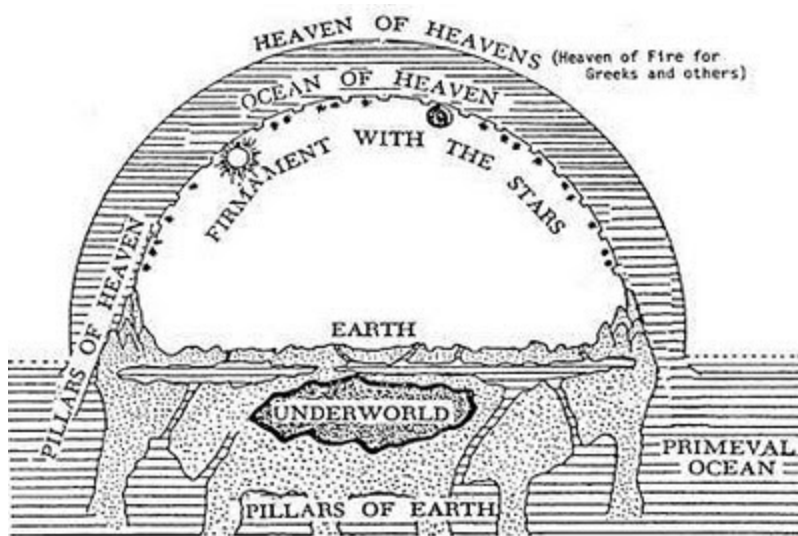
law is indexed to the function which he assigned it to perform.



# The firmament

(Posted on Steve's behalf.)

Last January, Peter Enns posted a diagram of the triple-decker universe:



Many of us have seen diagrams like this. And according to Enns, that's how Bible writers viewed the world. But let's consider this diagram for a few minutes:

**1.** We're told that Bible writers thought that heaven was literally *up*. However, if the firmament were truly a dome, then heaven would surround all sides of the hemispheric firmament, from the zenith to the horizon. In that case, heaven wouldn't just be *up*. Heaven would be all around us. Sideways. Ahead and behind.

**2.** That being the case, it should also be possible to walk to heaven or sail to heaven if you went far enough. Did any ancient Near Easterners have that experience?

**3.** This diagram also presents the earth as a single landmass or supercontinent (like "Pangaea"), surrounded by the primeval sea. However, some ANE peoples were seafaring peoples. Surely there were some adventurous sailors who either accidentally or intentionally found out that the "known world" of the ANE was not the only land mass.

**4.** Likewise, if ancient Near Easterners really thought the Netherworld was under the earth, would they not have attempted to contact their departed loved ones by exploring caves?

**5.** In addition, notice that the primeval sea is cropped and squared off, like a picture frame. But that raises another question: if the primeval sea surrounded the earth, then what surrounded the primeval sea? What lay beyond the picture frame? Did the primeval sea float in empty space—like the final scene in *Dark City*?

Surely there were savvy ancient Near Easterners who would ask these questions.

## The flood and the flat-earth

One of the glaring incongruities in reading standard attacks on Noah's flood is the total disconnect between the view of the world which critics ascribe to the narrator, and the view of the world which critics use as their frame of reference in attacking the flood account.

On the one hand, critics tell us that the narrator subscribed to a triple-decker cosmography. On this model, the earth was flat. The "earth" comprised a single landmass or supercontinent, with mountains at the "corners" or "ends" of the "earth" to support the sky. The sky was a solid dome with sluice gates allowing the cosmic sea to precipitate rain and snow. Under and around the supercontinent was the primeval sea.

When, however, critics attack the coherence of the flood account, they pose objections like this: How did all the animals cross natural barriers to reach the ark? And how did they disperse? How could the ark accommodate so many species? How could animals adapt to very different climates and diets survive on the ark? How much water would it take to submerge Mount Everest? What would be the rate of precipitation to generate so much water? What would be the rate of runoff for the floodwaters to subside?

But an obvious problem with this whole line of attack is the way in which these critics using the wrong model of the world to attack the flood account. Notice the systemic failure to use a triple-decker cosmography as the point of reference when disputing the logistics of the flood. Yet the same critic assures us that the prescientific narrator was operating with a triple-decker cosmography.

Well, assuming for the sake of argument that this is the case, then the stock objections miss the mark. Indeed, we end up with two mutually exclusive arguments.

The critic needs to ask what natural barriers the animals had to cross on a flat-earth with a single landmass to reach the ark as well as disperse. Needs to ask the number of "species" which occupied this supercontinent. Needs to ask the number of ecological zones on this supercontinent. Needs to ask the size of the flat-earth. How much rainwater would it take to submerge the flat-earth?

Is the flood account internally coherent given the "primitive" cosmography which the critics ascribe to the narrator? Isn't that the proper way to direct the question?

Critics need to get their stories straight. If they are going to attribute a triple-decker cosmography to Genesis 1, then that also has to be the frame of reference for Gen 6-9.

It doesn't speak too highly of their intelligence when critics raise self-contradictory objections to Gen 1-9. For one set of objections cancels out the other set of objections.

## Angels in wetsuits

It isn't easy being the angel Gabriel. You see, commuting from heaven to earth and back is a cumbersome and perilous exercise in a triple-decker universe.

To begin with, the only way for Gabriel to get here is through the sluice gates of the firmament. So every time he makes the trek, he has to don a wetsuit to keep his feathers dry. The wetsuit has zippers on each shoulder so that once he makes it through, he can unzip the shoulders to stretch his wings. But sometimes the zippers get stuck, which makes for a hard landing.

Needless to say, every angelic apparition is preceded by a quantity of rain. For every time the sluice gates of heaven are opened to let Gabriel come and go, there's a downpour as the cosmic sea pours through the drain. So keep an umbrella handy whenever you're expecting a visit from your guardian angel.

Gabriel also has to wear a football helmet so that he doesn't suffer a concussion from banging his head against the solid dome of the firmament when he returns to heaven.

## Does the Enns justify the memes?

I'm reposting some comments I left at Jim Hamilton's blog.

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steve hays November 7, 2011 at 10:10 pm #

According to Paul Seely:

“And it is precisely because ancient peoples were scientifically naive that they did not distinguish between the appearance of the sky and their scientific concept of the sky. They had no reason to doubt what their eyes told them was true, namely, that the stars above them were fixed in a solid dome and that the sky literally touched the earth at the horizon. So, they equated appearance with reality and concluded that the sky must be a solid physical part of the universe just as much as the earth itself.”

Let's put that to the test. To take a few examples:

**i)** According to the diagram supplied by Peter Enns, ancient Near Easterners supposedly thought a divine palace was floating above the firmament.

Question: Did any ancient Near Easterners ever observe a divine palace floating above the firmament? Is that what the world looked like?

**ii)** An implication of this diagram is that heavenly beings (e.g. angels) came down through windows in the firmament. But does Peter Enns or Paul Seely think ancient

Near Easterners ever observed heavenly beings coming down through windows the firmament (or going back up the same way)?

**iii)** According to Babylonian mythology, Marduk split Tiamat (the sea goddess) in two, using one half to roof the sky, while her breasts formed the mountains, the Tigris and Euphrates were her tears, and clouds were her spittle.

Is this because that's what their eyes told them?

**iv)** Mesopotamian art contains depictions of griffins, centaurs, lion-centaurs, lion-dragons, snake-dragons, humanoid scorpions, mermen, a seven-headed snake monster, and so on. Is that because ancient Near Easterners were used to observing these creatures in real life? Was that a part of their empirical experience?

Same thing with Mayan or Egyptian iconography. Is that a reflection of how the world appeared to them?

**v)** According to the diagram, the netherworld is a subterranean cave or cavern. Did ancient Near Easterners depict the world that way because they saw the shades of the dead wandering around the underworld? Is that what their eyes told them?

**vi)** According to the diagram, the earth is supported by submarine pylons. Did ancient Near Easterners depict the world that way because ancient skin-divers swam under the earth and saw the earth supported by pylons? Is that what their eyes told them?

But Seely and Enns don't believe it was possible for ancient Near Easterners to experience the world in that way, since they don't believe that's how the world is configured.

steve hays November 8, 2011 at 7:51 am #  
Chris Skinner

“Nevertheless, isn’t it possible that two well-intentioned, well-educated, intelligent, devoted Christian scholars can look at the same evidence and disagree on what’s there?”

Actually, these are fundamentally asymmetrical positions. As Peter Enns himself recently conceded:

“If one accepts evolution, the first thing to note is that one has left the biblical worldview. I think this is an obvious point, but needs to be stated clearly. As soon as evolution is accepted, the invariably result is some clear movement away from what the Bible says about Adam.”

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/peterenns/2011/11/talking-to-pastors-about-adam-and-evolution-options/>

So by his own admission, Enns is making a clean break with the viewpoint of Scripture. Hence, that’s not a difference of opinion regarding the meaning of Scripture, but whether or not we accept the meaning of Scripture.

steve hays November 8, 2011 at 8:45 am #  
Stephen

“Contextual data is relevant for establishing ranges of cultural codes, sensitivities, ways different kinds of discourse are used, etc., to help calibrate out interpretive questions for reading Genesis 1 (to stick with that example).”



Which doesn't yield belief in a solid dome.

i) For instance, John Currid has argued that OT cosmography employs architectural metaphors. Cf. **ANCIENT EGYPT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**, 43.

ii) Beale has extended this approach in terms of cosmic temple imagery.

So citing intertextual considerations doesn't select for your position rather than Currid's or Beale's.

steve hays November 8, 2011 at 11:20 am #  
Stephen

"Just for fun, Beale's so-called approach works primarily from Jon Levenson's and other ANE scholars' work on ancient mythic cosmography and cosmology. Beale simply removes the word 'myth' from his account and also doesn't mention that the scholars whose work he draws upon also consider Genesis to be participating in the various kinds of cosmological ideas that Beale rejects."

Just for fun, you might try drawing some rudimentary distinctions:

i) For starters, distinguishing the significance of something in the primary source from the significance of something in the secondary source. For instance, Solomon's temple incorporates various ANE architectural motifs. But that doesn't mean they retain the same symbolic import. There's a process of transvaluation.

ii) Likewise, you also beg the question regarding how “mythic” cosmography was understood by Egyptians, Mesopotamians, et al.

To take a comparison, when we study Mayan hieroglyphs, it would be silly to assume the artist thought that was a literal description of the world. It’s clearly stylized. It didn’t resemble the world he saw.

steve hays November 6, 2011 at 2:50 pm #

One thing I’d point out is that Enns is drawing a false dichotomy. It’s not just Mohler who distinguishes between appearance and reality. Astronomers tell us that when we look at stars, we’re not seeing the star as it is, but as it was, many millions or even billions of years ago. The star is actually far older than it looks, if you factor in the amount of time it took for that image to reach us.

Although we see the star now, we’re not seeing the star as it is right now. There’s a vast time lag. So, according to modern astronomy, appearances are deceptive.

Enns, no less than Mohler, must distinguish between appearance and reality: apparent age and real age.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 1:19 pm #

Enns says apparent age makes the facts fit the theory. I’d simply point out that when both naturalistic evolution and theistic evolution employ methodological naturalism, that methodology also makes the facts fit the theory. The only facts that are allowed to count as evidence for a scientific theory are naturalistic facts.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 2:32 pm #  
Don,

So on your philosophy of science, the aim of the scientific method is not to discover the true cause of some effect, but to stipulate in advance of the evidence what the world can or can't be like.

On your view, even if a miracle was the true explanation for the crime, your methodology commits you to excluding the true explanation.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 2:53 pm #  
Don,

So you're telling us that cosmology and paleontology are unscientific inasmuch as they reconstruct the past, which is unrepeatable.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 3:07 pm #  
Don,

How does your criterion of repeatability square with your hypothetical regarding the crime scene? Say a murder occurred. Is the murder repeatable?

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 3:14 pm #  
Don Johnson

"This is because a miracle by its very nature cannot be reliably repeated. What science will do in that case is be silent."

How can science know ahead of time what is or isn't repeatable? You're assuming the future resembles the past, but, of course, that's not something you can inductively establish.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 5:17 pm #  
Don,

That's not an intellectually responsible answer. Try to present a serious reply.

"No, the preferred way to do science is to do repeatable experiments, but sometimes that is not possible. But there are other ways to do science. I think you know this."

If there are other ways to do science, then your repeatability criterion was not a scientific criterion in the first place.

You keep making armchair claims about science, then introducing ad hoc caveats when challenged. You're making up the definition as you go along.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 6:45 pm #  
Don,

Here is how it works. You raise an objection, I answer you on your own terms.

For instance, the **BLACKWELL COMPANION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE** has an entry on "induction and the uniformity of nature" in which the contributor admits that the problem of induction remains an insoluble conundrum in the philosophy of science.

So your dismissive statement about my "skepticism" indicates that you're the one who's not up on the issues.

Yes, I'm asking you leading questions to expose your inadequate philosophy of science. Yes, I know how to answer my own questions because the answers make a hash of your position. It's called the Socratic method.

Finally, you're the one who's reducing science to a game with arbitrary, made-up rules that don't correspond to reality. Science is supposed to be a descriptive discipline. Based on observation. Methodological naturalism is prescriptive. It's fundamentally unscientific.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 10:37 pm #  
Don Johnson

"If you really believe what you are saying, then you should live it and decline to use the advances of science."

That reflects a terribly naive philosophy of science on your part. I'd suggest you read somebody like Bas van Fraassen.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 11:19 am #  
Or, like the Atheist Missionary, you can hide behind intellectual rhetoric, but never back up your claims with

suitable arguments.

steve hays November 7, 2011 at 12:35 pm #  
The Atheist Missionary

“Steve, where is the rhetoric? If you disagree with the observation I made in my first comment, please explain why.”

What’s the topic of this post, TAM? Whether or not Scripture teaches a flat earth. How did you respond? By making this a choice between scientific evidence and the veracity of Scripture.

But that would only be relevant if Hamilton was defending the thesis Scripture teaches a flat earth. Since the point of his post was to oppose that thesis, how is it unscientific for Hamilton to deny the flatness of the earth?

For a rationalist, reasoning isn’t your strong suit.

“I rely on the authority of those who are specialists in their fields of endeavour to support my beliefs (as do you in most other facets of your life).”

So you rely on the authority of scientifically trained writers like Andrew Snelling, Kurt Wise, Marcus Ross, John Byl, and Jonathan Sarfati to support young-earth creationism.

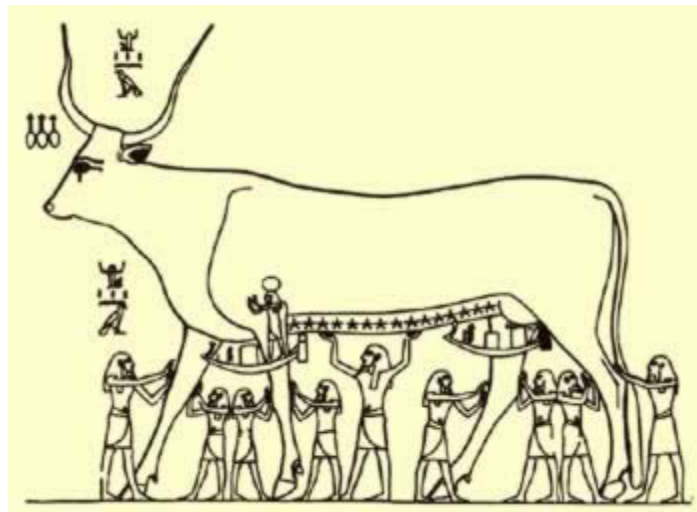
steve hays November 7, 2011 at 6:55 pm #  
Regarding Hamilton’s allegedly condescending, dismissive tone, or questioning the motives of Enns, it’s revealing that Hamilton’s critics don’t apply the same yardstick to the tone adopted by Peter Enns, which epitomizes the very faults they impute to Hamilton:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/peterenns/2011/10/fear-leads-to-anger-unpacking-theological-belligerence/>

But, of course, they share the outlook of Enns, so they give him a pass.

## Bovine cosmography

Liberals and outright unbelievers routinely say the cosmography of Gen 1 is mythological. Well, let's compare Gen 1 with ancient Egyptian cosmography, then ask yourself which depiction is clearly mythological:



Afterwards, the sun god, Re, withdrew to the sky on the back of the celestial cow who is the Goddess **Nut** transformed. The cow is supported by **Shu**, the eight Heh-gods along with the Pharaoh. This would account for the importance of the book for the king, who was the "son" and successor of Re, and who withdraws to the sky upon his death, like Re, on the back of the heavenly cow.

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/celestialcow.htm>





## Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology

Yesterday I read John Walton's **GENESIS 1 AS ANCIENT COSMOLOGY** (Eisenbrauns 2011). This is the scholarly version of his **THE LOST WORLD OF GENESIS ONE**.

Walton has written on these themes fairly often, so there's a certain sense of déjà vu in reading his new monograph. I don't like to repeat myself, but to the extent that he repeats himself, some of my criticisms will be repetitious.

**i)** However, before we get to that, the new book does have some useful material. For instance (146-52), he defends the traditional rendering "Spirit of God" rather than "mighty wind," which is popular among some modern, liberal translations of **Gen 1:2**.

**ii)** Unexpectedly (155-61), he denies the common claim that *raqia* denotes a solid dome. He argues that *raqia* denotes empty space. A spatial buffer or airy cushion between earth and sky.

He still believes that Hebrews carried over the ANE conception of the sky as a solid dome, but he associates that with the Hebrew word for "sky" rather than *raqia*.

**iii)** A basic problem I have with his general analysis, and this is true of other works which take the same approach, is a methodological flaw. OT scholars and other scholars in cognate disciplines (e.g. Egyptology, Assyriology, Sumerology) emphasize artistic and textual representations of the world. The meaning of words. Coins, pottery, reliefs.

That's fine up to a point, but that needs to be counterbalanced by another consideration. For we need to project ourselves into the physical world in which ancient people actually had to live and survive. What was the world like which they experienced on a regular basis?

Ancient people didn't live in paintings or texts. They had to live in the real world, just like us.

It's important not to reconstruct an ancient cosmography purely from texts and artifacts that's clearly at odds with the external world which the ancients actually perceived.

**iv)** Walton says:

Similar views of the structure of the cosmos were common throughout the ancient world and persisted in popular perception until the Copernican revolution and the Enlightenment. These ancient perceptions were not derived from scientific study (modern scientific techniques, of course, were not available to the ancients) but expressed their perception of the physical world (89).

The problem with this claim is that Walton fails to consistently apply that criterion. Rather, he attributes certain views to them in spite of what they could or did perceive. For instance:

What kept the sea from overwhelming the land (88)?

This assumes ancient people thought there was some natural barrier, like a seawall, that kept the ocean in place.

But is that realistic?

Ancient peoples of the Levant lived on the Mediterranean coastline. Suppose you walk down to the beach, where earth and sea meet. There you stand, right on the shoreline. What do you see? Is there something that keeps the sea from overwhelming the land?

Well, there's nothing like a retaining wall. The beach is almost level with the water. Indeed, that's the definition of sea level.

The only thing that keeps the sea from flooding the land is the fact that the dry land is generally higher than the ocean. The difference in elevation may be gradual, or there may be cliffs. But it doesn't require an artificial cosmography to account for that phenomenon.

Hasn't Walton ever gone for a walk along the beach? The seaboard isn't fundamentally different in modern times. It doesn't require modern science to see how the ocean and a coastal plain (for instance) match up. That's something you can see for yourself, using your own eyes.

In general, people believed that there was a single, disc-shaped continent (88).

Did they? Weren't ancient mariners in a position to know that wasn't the case?

Take the Levant. Take the Mediterranean. Instead of the sea surrounding the land, you have the land surrounding the sea. Ancient Mediterranean sailors were certainly acquainted with the general shape of the Mediterranean Sea in relation to the general shape of the surrounding

landmasses. The sea didn't encircle the land; the land encircled the sea.

Scholars like Walton bury their heads in ancient texts and facsimile drawings. They don't pull their heads out of books to see what the ancients inevitably saw.

Precipitation originated from the waters held back by the sky and fell to the earth through openings in the sky (88-89).

Really? But surely that's not what ancient people actually observed. For instance, take the common phenomenon of rain clouds on the horizon. The rest of the sky is clear. You can see the clouds releasing sheets of rain, against the background lighting.

Also, it's not uncommon to observe the cloudbank approaching the observer. As it passes over the observer, it deposits rain.

So rain isn't seen coming directly from the sky, through sluice gates in a solid dome. Rather, the rain clouds are distinct from the sky. You can see clear sky above the clouds and around the clouds. So the rain is clearly localized in the clouds.

Not only is this something ancient people were in a position to see from time to time, but we have a literary description of this very phenomenon in Scripture:

*41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the*

*top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. 43 And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. 44 And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'"* 45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel ([1 Kgs 18:41-45](#)).

v) Walton says:

The stars of the Egyptian sky were portrayed as emblazoned across the arched body of the sky goddess, who was held up by the god of the air. In another Egyptian depiction, the Cow of Heaven was supported by four gods who each held one of her legs. She gave birth to the sun every day, and the sun traveled across her belly and was swallowed up by her at night (89).

And did they portray the world that way because that's how the world *appeared* to them when they looked up at the sky? Have *you* ever seen that?

Mesopotamian imagery refers to "breasts of heaven" through which rain comes (92).

And is that because ancient Mesopotamians could see heavenly breasts emitting rain? That might be a great

adolescent fantasy, but it's hardly empirical.

**vi)** Walton says:

Finally, the earth was believed to be undergirded by pillars... (97).

Metaphors such as locks, bolts, bars, nets, and so on were used to express the means by which the sea was kept in its place (97).

Why does Walton admit that these are metaphors, but act as though the ancients thought there were literal sluice gates in the vault of heaven or literal pillars supporting the land?

And, of course, it's not as if people living on the coast saw locks, bolts, bars, or nets keeping the sea from overflowing the land.

**vii)** Walton says:

Another perception in the ancient world is that a great tree stands in the center of the world, sometimes referred to as a "World Tree" or a "Tree of Life." The idea that a cosmic tree is at the center of the world is a common motif in the ancient Near East...The tree is often flanked by animals or by human or divine figures (96).

Biblical texts that share some of these ideas are Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 31 (96n271).

And was that depiction based on observation? Did the ancients actually witness a cosmic tree at the center of the world? Keep in mind that Walton also says:

As previously mentioned, from a sociopolitical perspective, it was commonplace for peoples of any area to see themselves and their land or their capital city as being located at the center of the earth (95).

So if they took the cosmic tree literally, then that would be readily observable. They would live within eyeshot of the cosmic tree.

But, of course, no one had that experience. So this must be an intentionally symbolic depiction of the world. And if the cosmic tree was symbolic, why take other types of imagery literally? Walton isn't consistent.

**viii)** Walton says:

Often, the transition from the precosmic condition to the activities involved in creation is the separation of heaven and earth (35).

Keep in mind, though, that in Gen 1, separation has an addition function, for it prefigures different types of cultic separation in the Mosaic law. So that's not a carryover from ANE cosmology.

**ix)** Walton says:



The *raqia* and the *sehaqim* are pieces of ancient cosmic geography that have been rendered obsolete by modern cosmic geography because we have learned, through science, of the evaporation/condensation cycle (160).

Isn't **1 Kgs 18:41-45** an example of the evaporation/condensation cycle?

## The waters above

*6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day (Gen 1:6-8).*

**i)** Some think this refers to ancient cosmology, where the solid dome of the sky held back reservoirs of water (the source of rain, snow, and hail).

A problem with this interpretation is that ancient Near Easterners knew that rain clouds were the source of rainfall. So this interpretation imputes an unrealistic level of ignorance to the narrator and his audience. It doesn't require modern science to know that rain comes from rain clouds. That's something you can see with your own eyes. And people back then were keenly aware of their natural surroundings, for their survival depended on it.

Indeed, we have various Bible passages that attribute rain to rain clouds. But even if we didn't, it stands to reason that ancient people could see clouds emitting precipitation—just like we can.

It's naïve to assume that literary or artistic depictions were taken at face value. As the author of a standard monograph on Mesopotamian cosmography notes:

This investigation attempts to glean evidence from the widest possible variety of surviving sources in order to present as clear a picture as possible of Mesopotamian views of the universe. At the same time, however, it must be recognized that this approach poses certain dangers, not the least of which are our distance and time and space from the ancient writers, as well as the vagaries of archaeological discovery...Ancient Mesopotamian authors do not distinguish between cosmographic ideas drawn from direct observation of the physical world (for example, the movement of stars in the sky) and those not derived from direct observation (for example, the geography of the Heaven of Anu above the sky or the fantastic regions visited by Gilgamesh in Gilg. IX-X). The current evidence simply does not allow us to know, for instance, if ancient readers of Gilgamesh really believed that they too could have visited Utnapistim by sailing across the cosmic sea and "the waters of death," or if a few, many, most, or all ancient readers understood the topographical material in Gilg. IX-X in metaphysical or mystical terms. W. Horowitz, **MESOPOTAMIAN COSMIC GEOGRAPHY** (Eisenbrauns 1998), xiii-xiv.

**ii)** Furthermore, they could see passing clouds obscure the sun, moon, and stars. So they knew the source of rain was lower rather than higher than the celestial luminaries.

**iii)** Hence, some commentators think this is figurative imagery for rain clouds. An objection to that interpretation that this passage places the source of rainwater on the far side of the "firmament," rather than our side—looking up at the sky. If, however, this is figurative, then pressing the picturesque details misses the point.

Moreover, the account doesn't say that the "waters above" were above the sun, moon, and stars. At best, that's an inference. And since the account also says that birds fly in the "firmament," it's not a discrete barrier, with a clear line of demarcation between what's "above" and what's "below." It has depth rather than surface.

**iv)** In addition, [Deut 33:26](#) treats the clouds and the heavens as interchangeable, in synonymous parallelism.

**v)** There's also a point of tension in modern scholarship. On the one hand, John Walton thinks that this reflects the antiquated science of the ANE. On the other hand, Walton also interprets Gen 1 as a cosmic temple. If, however, we're going to interpret Gen 1 in terms of temple imagery, then we'd expect "the waters above" to have an architectural rather than a cosmological analogue. So Walton's interpretation lacks consistency.

If the "firmament" is roof or ceiling of the temple, you have blue sky above the temple. So that might be the suggestive imagery behind [Gen 1:7](#).

## The sun, moon, and stars

It's common for liberals or outright unbelievers to claim that the Bible adopts or accommodates antiquated ANE beliefs. In addition to denying the inspiration of Scripture, this makes assumptions about what ancient Near Easterners believed. I'm going to state, then comment on three claims:

- 1.** Ancient Near Easterners were geocentrists because it looks and feels like the earth is stationary while the sun, moon, and stars move around the earth.
- 2.** Ancient Near Easterners thought the celestial luminaries were embedded in the firmament:

The terminology of KAR 307 33 suggests that the stars and constellations were thought to be etched directly onto the jasper surface of the Lower Heavens...A tradition that the fixed-stars were inscribed onto the surface of the heavens implies that this surface rotated every 24 hours, since inscribed stars could not move independently. This tradition is reasonable since stars and constellations maintained fixed positions relative to one another as if inscribed on a rotating sphere. The Sun, Moon, and planets do not maintain fixed positions in relation to the stars, leading later Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic astronomers to speculate that these heavenly bodies were located on different levels or spheres from the fixed stars.

No text explains in detail how the stars, Sun, Moon, and planets move through the sky. In KAR 307, the stars are said to be inscribed upon the lower jasper heavens. As noted on p15, stars inscribed onto the

stone floor of heaven would to have been able to move independently. Thus, the author of KAR 307 may have explained that stars appear to move in the night sky because the entire sky rotated. Such a cosmographic belief could not explain the independent motion of the Sun, Moon, planets, comets, or shooting stars, nor could it explain why circumpolar stars remained above the horizon throughout the year while other stars rose and set.

W. Horowitz, **MESOPOTAMIAN COSMIC GEOGRAPHY** (Eisenbrauns 1998), 14-15,258.

**3.** Ancient Near Easterners believed the celestial luminaries were deities:

In ancient Mesopotamia both the sun and the moon were male deities. In Sumerian, the moon god was called Suen or Nanna (Nannar), and sometimes he was called by both names together, Nanna-Suen. In Akkadian, Suen was later pronounced Sin.

Utu was the Sumerian sun God, whose Akkadian name was Shamash.

**GODS, DEMONS, AND SYMBOLS OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: AN ILLUSTRATED DICTIONARY** (U. of Texas 1997), 135,182.

Now let's evaluate these claims:

## **1. Geocentrism**

**i)** It's quite possible that most ancient Near Easterners were geocentrists. From the standpoint of an earthbound observer, the celestial motion appears to be geocentric.

**ii)** However, even if we assume most ancient Near Easterners were geocentrists, that doesn't mean most of them believed the sky was a solid dome, through which precipitation was emitted. Unlike the phenomenology of geocentrism, a solid dome is not an observational datum. Moreover, the postulate of a solid dome goes against observational data or inferences thereof (see below).

**iii)** We must also make allowance for the possibility that some ancient Near Easterners were not geocentrists. If you see celestial bodies circling around you, it's possible to analogize relative motion. All you need is a good head for mental geometry. Certainly Near Easterners were acquainted with relative motion. They would see one ox cart passing another, one boat passing another.

Scientific breakthroughs often involve analogical thought-experiments, viz. Newton's cannonball or Einstein's train. So we shouldn't underestimate ancient Near Easterners. Some were undoubtedly brilliant and observant.

## **2. Solid dome**

As Horowitz himself points out, believing the sky is a solid dome is *prima facie* inconsistent with the apparent motion of the celestial luminaries. Horowitz conjectures a partial harmonization by suggesting that ancient Near Easterners thought the sky itself rotated. However, that's just his speculation. He doesn't quote an ancient primary source that says that or shows that. Moreover, he admits that this expedient fails to reconcile the apparent motion of all celestial bodies. At most, it only works for the fixed stars.

So it's quite possible that ancient Near Easterners never took the solid dome representation literally. It may just be architectural symbolism.

### **3. Celestial deities**

Another problem is the interrelation between (2) and (3). Did ancient Near Easterners think gods were etched onto the surface of the solid dome? That's difficult to visualize or comprehend. Even if they thought celestial luminaries were like gemstones embedded in metal castings, that's an odd way to think of gods. On the face of it, (2) and (3) are incompatible representations.

In principle, there are different way of harmonizing the divergent representations: One or both representations might be figurative. Or these might reflect different conflicting traditions. If the former, there's nothing for Scripture to accommodate. If the latter, there's no common ANE tradition for Scripture to adopt.



## Rocking the boat

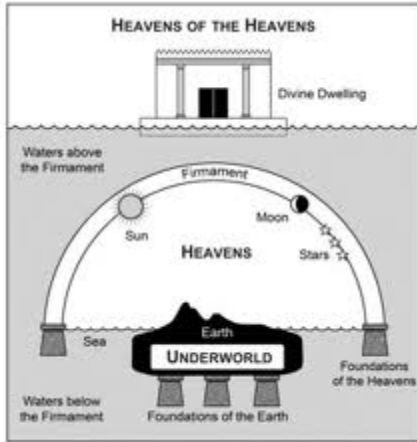
Recently I was thinking a bit more about the notion, beloved by liberals and atheists alike, that Bible writers believed in a triple-decker universe. On this view, as I understand it, there was a central landmass which floated on the primordial sea. The sea was under and around the land.

Let's bracket inspiration for a moment and just consider if this would make sense to an ancient Near Easterner, with no modern scientific knowledge. What would that cosmography entail?

Well, on that view, the earth would be a boat or raft at sea. And that's something ancient fishermen and mariners were acquainted with. But in that event, you'd expect the land to bob up and down with every wave and ripple—like a waterbed or cork in a bathtub. But although ancient Near Easterners experienced the occasional earthquake, life on dry land was quite different than stepping into a boat.

It would also be a pretty top-heavy ship, what with those mountainous pillars supporting the solid dome overhead. During an earthquake, wouldn't the ship capsize?

# The cosmic waterbed



Peter Enns has favored us with a new diagram of how the ancients viewed the world.

**i)** Evidently, the ancients thought God's dwelling (picture of a temple) was made of Styrofoam. That way it could float on top of the waters above the firmament.

**ii)** Of course, every time it rained, the divine dwelling would sink a little lower. Since a flat floor can't rest on a round dome, it would eventually tip over to one side or the other. Hopefully God knows how to swim when his dwelling place is submerged.

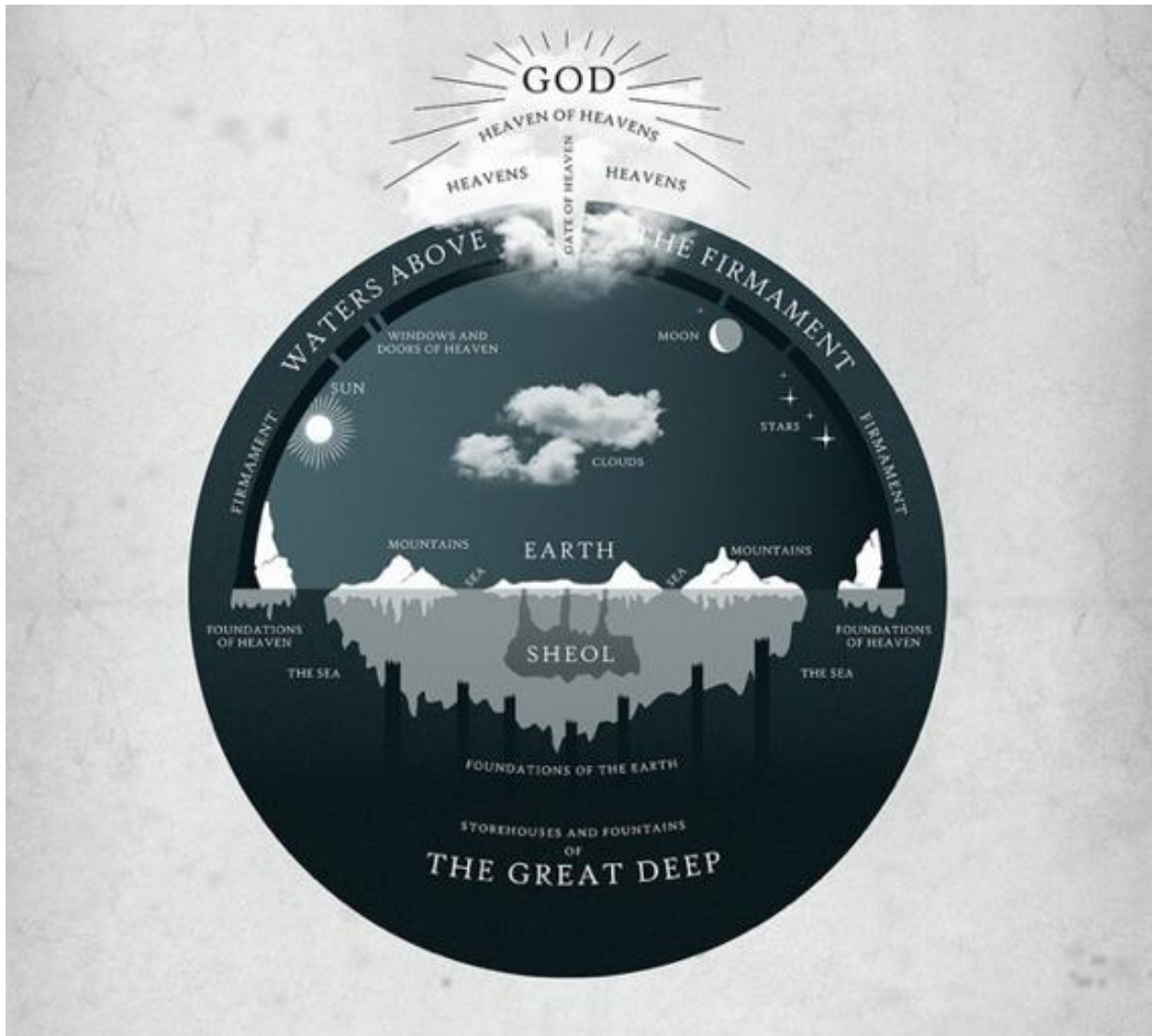
**iii)** Evidently, the ancients thought the earth rested on Styrofoam pylons. We see them supporting the earth, but nothing is supporting them. Just water underneath. Same thing with the "foundations" of the firmament.

**iv)** Evidently, ancient mariners had experience banging into the solid firmament on the horizon.

**v)** The heavens are a pocket of air within the half-dome of the firmament. Unfortunately, the diagram fails to explain what prevents the empty space from filling up with water from below. There's no barrier to keep the water above the firmament from equalizing.

You'd think Mesopotamian engineers, with their floodworks, could devise a more efficient design.

## Solar submarine



i) There are many variations on this familiar diagram. That, itself, is rather telling. The same basic diagram is reproduced ad nauseum. So we're being treated to thirdhand

scholarship. Scholars copying other scholars copying other scholars. We're not getting original, independent research. What we're getting, instead, are scholars who unquestioningly reproduce earlier scholarship. Indeed, that isn't real scholarship. It's just handing down rote tradition.

You have to wonder who produced the initial diagram. How far back does this go?

**ii)** However, let's examine this diagram on its own terms. Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that this is how Bible writers viewed the world. What are implications of this depiction?

How does the sun restart in the east every morning? It has to go under the earth. But what's under the earth is the primordial sea. So, in order for the sun to rise in the east and set in the west every day, it must go under water at night. A solar submarine.

Suppose the ancients thought of the sun as a giant ball of fire. What would be the effect? Well, there are two possible effects:

**iii)** Submerging the sun in the ocean would cause the ocean to boil. In fact, Revelation plays on that sort of imagery:

*8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (Rev 8:8-9).*

Question: was that the daily experience of folks living on the Mediterranean coastline?

**iv)** Conversely, the sun would be extinguished by sustained submersion. And I daresay ancient Near Easterners had experience dousing fire with water. That's not very hitech.

So how did the soggy sun reignite every morning?

**v)** I'd add that these aren't mutually exclusive explanations. (iv) could naturally follow (iii).

**vi)** In sum, this diagram isn't realistic even from the perspective of somebody living in the ANE.

## It's all a matter of perspective



I've discussed this issue on other occasions, but I'll return to the issue from a somewhat different angle. According to liberals like Paul Seely, the ancients judged by appearances.

They thought the world was flat because, to all appearances, it seemed to be flat, and given their prescientific ignorance, they had no reason to question their naked-eye perception. Hence, we're treated to that widely circulated diagram of the triple-decker universe.

I grew up in the Greater Seattle area. That's a hilly, mountainous region. Depending on weather conditions, and where you're facing, you can see rows of hills—hills behind hills. These turn into foothills, behind which you can see mountains or mountain ranges, like the Olympics, Cascades, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Rainier.

It looks like mountains are the most distant objects. There's nothing between the mountains and the sky. The mountains appear to be right up against the sky. So it looks like mountains ring the outer edges of the flat earth. The only thing beyond the mountains is the sky.

But there's a problem with that inference. For sightlines depend on the vantage-point of the observer. If you stayed in the same area all your life, I suppose you might labor under the illusion that you were at the center of the world, while the mountains marked the outer limits of the world.

But, of course, ancient people also traveled by boat or by foot. If you took a boat down the Pacific coast, if you saw Mt. Hood looking East rather than looking South, then you'd see that Mt. Hood wasn't the end of the world. The world continued on the other side of Mt. Hood. There was something between the mountain and the sky. That wasn't the edge of the world. Your perspective undergoes a radical shift. The viewpoint is relative to your particular position.

Surely lots of Indians did that sort of thing. Moreover, explorers like to brag about their discoveries. So is it



realistic to think ancient people were that clueless about the world they inhabited? And that's even before we bring inspiration to bear.

Here's another thing to consider: before the invention and popularization of three-point perspective, how could the ancients accurately depict a landscape even if they knew better? Many of us have seen geometrically inaccurate Medieval paintings. But lack of foreshortening doesn't mean the painter lacked depth perception. He knew that what's farther looks smaller.

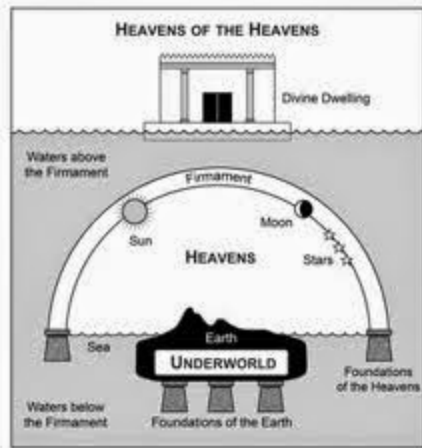
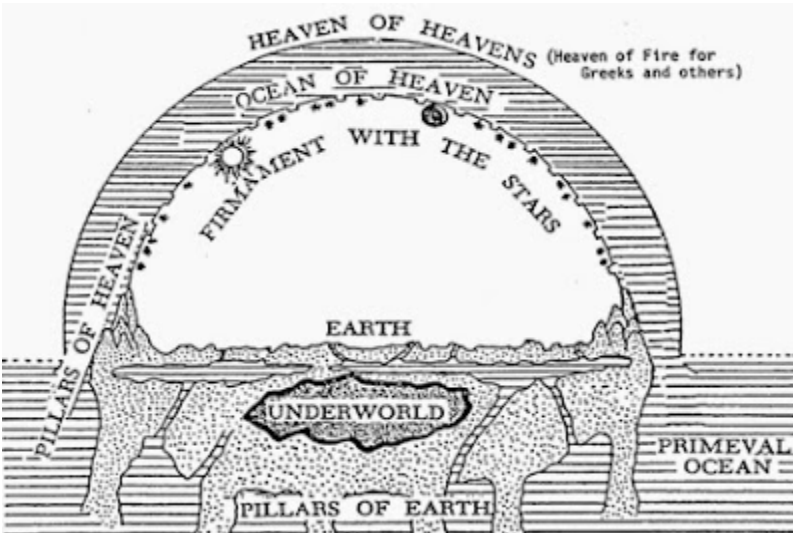
And even if a painter knew three-point perspective, he might still paint objects out of scale because that's a way of indicating the comparative importance of different objects: bigger is better. His culture assigns great importance to some objects.

## Scripture and the sphericity of the earth

Evidence of the earth's sphericity follows from the teaching of Moses himself, who stipulates (according to Philoponus) that the earth was initially entirely covered with water [[Gen 1:2,9-10](#)]. But for this to take place it would be necessary for its form to be spherical...Water tends to cover earth's sphere also in a symmetrical way, in a form of a sphere of larger diameter. According to Philoponus, the fact that earth was entirely covered by water necessities this theory, and so demonstrates earth's sphericity. E. Nicolaidis, **SCIENCE AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY: FROM THE GREEK FATHERS TO THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION** (John Hopkins U Press, 2011), 37.

# Discworld

If this is how ANE peoples (e.g. the Israelites) conceived of cosmology...



...then not only would the sun have cast a shadow on the Earth, but couldn't the sun have likewise cast a shadow backwards against the firmament? If so, then couldn't this shadow be discernible at least at certain locales and/or at certain times of the day or year?

## Deskbound exegesis

*2 He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times ([Mt 16:2-3](#)).*

The notion that Scripture reflects a three-story cosmography has been around for generations. The main development is that more recently, this has been popularized by "evangelical" scholars like John Walton, Peter Enns, and Kyle Greenwood.

This is what I call deskbound exegesis. It's only plausible to scholars who don't spend much time out of doors, unlike the original author and audience. Only plausible to scholars who are out of touch with the natural world, unlike the original author and audience. I'd add that there are modern people who spend time out of doors, but they are inattentive to their surroundings, unlike the original author and audience.

I've often discussed this. Let's take another example: consider fishermen. Say they live in a coastal village. Suppose these are "primitive," prescientific fishermen.

Even so, don't they pay attention to the weather before they set sail? Do they go fishing when the skies are full of dark lowering clouds? Or do they go fishing on a clear sunny day?

If they thought the sky was a dam that kept water back, except when sluice-gates were opened, rain would be utterly unpredictable. It could rain at any moment, on a clear sunny day. If rain was thought to come from the sky

rather than the clouds, then it both could and would rain on cloudless days. A downpour could occur literally out of the blue.

But, of course, fishermen know from experience that that isn't the case. Their life depends on it. It's dangerous to venture miles into the open sea with stormclouds on the horizon, much less right overhead. It's completely unrealistic to imagine that ancient people didn't notice these things.

I grew up on the shore of a lake, in a heavily wooded area. I spent lots of time out of doors as a kid.

As a result, I became attuned to certain natural cues. I could predict when it was going to rain, before rainclouds appeared on the horizon.

I could sense an atmospheric change. A shift in the air. A light onshore breeze (as I recall), would be a precursor to a weather front.

That's not something I read in a book. That's not something I consciously observed. Rather, it's something I simply acquired by osmosis through regular exposure to the natural world.

## Optical illusion

Where I used to live, I noticed an optical illusion. As I was walking, there was a clearing ahead of me with a spectacular mountain view. In the foreground were two hills. One partially obscured the mountain, although the mountain towered above it. One hill was directly in front of the mountain while the other was alongside the other hill. Looking through the dip between the two hills, you could see some foothills of the mountain in the background. The foothills were blanketed in snow. The hills in the foreground had no snow. Yet they appeared to be about three times higher than the snowy foothills in the background. Therein lies the paradox: how could the foothills have subfreezing temperatures when they appeared to be about two-thirds lower in elevation than the hills in the foreground, which were dry?

The explanation, of course, is that relative distance generates an optical illusion. In reality, the foothills in the background are far higher than the hills in the foreground. Probably above the tree line.

Now I say all that to say this: unbelievers infer from certain passages that Scriptures asserts a flat earth and/or three-story universe. Inerrantists counter that this is a phenomenal description.

By the same token, young-earth and old-earth creationists debate how to construe geographical markers describing the extent of the flood. Old-earth creationists say that's phenomenal language.

There's nothing inaccurate about phenomenal descriptions. That depicts a scene from the sight-lines of an observer. And that's how it really looks from his vantage-point.

Spatial descriptions always have some frame of reference. They implicitly have an indexical perspective, even when they are expressed in third-person terms.

Likewise, the original audience for Gen 6-9 certainly had a different sense of world geography than modern readers do. How they'd correlate those descriptions with their own sense of world geography doesn't correspond to a modern reader's default frame of reference. So we need to be on guard in that respect.

The larger point is that we'd expect a historically accurate, eyewitness account to have phenomenal descriptions. That's not erroneous—just the opposite. It is, to be sure, a somewhat provincial viewpoint. Yet that's the nature of firsthand observation.

But my example illustrates the how easy it would be to draw fallacious inferences from phenomenal descriptions. That's something we need to guard against.

## The chariot of the sun

The question, however, arises in the modern mind, schooled as it is in the almost infinite nature of sky and space: Did scientifically naive peoples really believe in a solid sky, or were they just employing a mythological or poetic concept? Or were they, perhaps, just using phenomenal language with no attending belief that the sky actually was a solid object? That is, were they referring to the mere appearance of the sky as a solid dome but able to distinguish between that appearance and the reality?

The answer to these questions, as we shall see more clearly below, is that scientifically naive peoples employed their concept of a solid sky in their mythology, but that they nevertheless thought of the solid sky as an integral part of their physical universe. And it is precisely because ancient peoples were scientifically naive that they did not distinguish between the appearance of the sky and their scientific concept of the sky. They had no reason to doubt what their eyes told them was true, namely, that the stars above them were fixed in a solid dome and that the sky literally touched the earth at the horizon. So, they equated appearance with reality and concluded that the sky must be a solid physical part of the universe just as much as the earth itself.

[https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/seely-firmament-wtj.pdf](https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/seely-firmament-wtj.pdf)



There are several problems with Seely's argument, but I'll focus on two:

**i)** One obvious problem with his argument is that many ancient people had occasion to travel to, and past, the horizon. Suppose there are hills in the distance where you live. That's your horizon. That appears to be where the sky meets the earth. But of course, many people traveled over the hills or through a slope between two hills. So they knew, as a matter of common experience, that there was no solid dome which literally touched the earth at the horizon.

**ii)** As a boy I engaged in a certain amount of stargazing. You can see the moon and stars travel across the night sky. However, you can't tell by sight whether the stars are moving *with* the sky or *through* the sky.

On one model, the stars are embedded in a solid, rotating dome. On another model, the stars move through empty space.

Consider the Greek myth about the horse-drawn chariot of the sun. On that view, the sun is not embedded in a solid firmament. It's not the firmament that moves. Rather, the sun moves through the air.

**iii)** However, one observation that's inconsistent with the firmament model is retrograde motion. If the celestial luminaries are embedded in a solid dome, they must move in the same speed in the same direction. It's the rotating dome that moves them. They must move in tandem with the rotating dome.

If, however, stars move through empty space, then they are free to reverse course. Keep in mind, too, that according to some ancient mythologies, the celestial luminaries were

gods or living beings. On that assumption, there's no reason they couldn't change course of their own accord.

Naked-eye astronomy doesn't select for a solid dome. Even if you go by appearances, mere appearances don't distinguish the stars moving *with* the sky from the stars moving *through* the sky.

I'm struck by how often "scholars" like Seely, Enns, and Walton presume to speak for how the ancients viewed the natural world, when it's evident that "scholars" like Seely, Enns, and Walton are utterly out of touch with nature. Clearly they don't spend much time out of doors. They don't observe the workings of the natural world.

**iv)** As I understand it, the scientific explanation for retrograde motion is that the solar system is like a race track. Planets on inner lanes have less distance to cover, so they can overtake planets on outer lanes. In the time it takes a planet on an outer lane to make it around the track just once, a planet on an inner lane can do it twice. Like passing a car: It's ahead of you until you pass it, after which it's behind you. But on a circular path, you may once again catch up to it.

## Flat-earth cartography

I don't think it's worthwhile to debate flat-earthers. And I didn't initiate this debate. But one thing leads to another, so I will say a bit more. There are folks more qualified than I to discuss this. Since, however, I doubt there are any scientifically qualified flat-earthers, my only disadvantage is that if you spend all your leisure time defending a conspiracy theory, you have prepared answers to stock objections. Likewise, you can cite factoids that ordinary folks haven't investigated.

**1.** I Googled some modern flat-earth maps. One thing I notice is that there doesn't seem to be any standardization in flat-earth circles regarding the distribution of oceans and continents. Flat-earth maps vary.

That, itself, is problematic for zetetic astronomy. If you can't show us, in detail, what the flat earth looks like, what's your empirical evidence that the earth is, indeed, flat?

**2.** That said, the maps had something in common. They resemble a projection map of the globe. Reducing a global image to a flat map.

The difference is that flat-earth maps take a topdown approach whereas conventional maps take a sideways view. The flat-earth maps I saw have the north pole at the center, surrounded by the continents. Continents in the northern hemisphere are closer to the center, while continents in the southern hemisphere are closer to the circumference. Flat-earth maps vary somewhat on where to put the oceans.

**3.** However, this immediately poses problems for flat-earth-ers:

**i)** Since, on their view, the sun shines directly on what would be the northern hemisphere, how does that square with climate zones?

**ii)** Likewise, how does that square with time zones? Suppose a flat-earth-er views the sun like a spotlight that moves incrementally across the terrestrial disk. Even if that would explain longitudinal alternations in day and night, how would that synchronize with latitudinal alternations? Everything above and below the spotlight would be dark.

**iii)** Even more problematic, once the sun completes its progression from left to right, it would have to travel under the flat earth to resume the cycle. But that would plunge the entire earth into darkness for however long it takes the sun to pass under the flat earth.

**4.** It's demonstrably the case that a pilot can, by flying continuously in a straight line, return to his point of departure. How is that possible on a flat earth?

Sure, if you fly in a circle on a disk, you can return to your point of departure. But I'm talking about a flight path in a straight line.

It is, of course, possible for a trajectory to be both straight and circular. But that only works on a sphere where you have an extra coordinate.

**5.** I should have been more explicit about what I mean regarding satellite photography.

**i)** I'm not primarily alluding to the fact that the earth appears to be spherical according to satellite photography. Rather, this is what I mean. Consider a class room globe. You can only see whatever part of the earth is facing the viewer. To see the whole earth, you must either walk around the globe or remain in place and spin the globe.

**ii)** We have an equivalent situation with spy satellites and earth observation satellites. They can't photograph the earth all at once. They only display a portion of the earth facing the satellite.

But as the earth rotates under the satellite, in the course of one rotation period the satellite can photograph the entire earth. That makes perfect sense if the earth is spherical and spinning on its axis.

**iii)** If, by contrast, the earth is flat, why can't we see the whole earth from space, all at once, just like we can see a flat map of the earth at a glance?

**iv)** And even if a flat-earth postulates that a satellite is too close for a wide shot, there's still another problem. Suppose a satellite begins to photograph the earth at the meridian. After an orbital period, the meridian is once again facing the satellite. Continuous photography tracks the continuous counterclockwise rotation of the earth.

If, however, the earth is flat, and the satellite is photographing the earth from left to right or right to left, then it must reverse direction to return to the starting-point. Yet, when photographing the earth from space, there is no break. You see the same portions of the earth coming into view in the same direction. Admittedly, I'm no expert on satellite photography, but do flat-earthers have any hard evidence to the contrary?

**6.** In addition, zetetic astronomy must rewrite the laws of physics. That's extremely complicated. Has any flat-earther produced detailed alternative physics to make it work? Is there anything comparable to the level of detail and empirical confirmation in standard astrophysics?

**7.** Finally, flat-earthers have to prop up their theory by invoking conspiracy theories to discount empirical evidence that runs counter to zetetic astronomy. Now, I don't deny the existence of conspiracies. However, a conspiracy theory loses credibility when the scale of the conspiracy involves too many independent players, sometimes with rival motivations. As well as too many people who must somehow be kept in the dark.

From the combox:

There's a difference between an abstract actual infinite and a concrete actual infinite. When you mention infinity in relation to geometric inversion, I assume you're discussing mathematical relations as abstract objects. If so, it doesn't follow that physical instances of mathematical abstractions can exemplify the outer limits of mathematical abstractions (e.g. infinitely large, infinitely small). What's possible for spaceless, timeless relations may not be possible for spatiotemporal relations, if matter is granular. Kinda like the Planck length.

This goes back to ancient debates over the infinite divisibility of time and space. So it's unclear to me that a purely mathematical model will coincide with the physical universe. At best, we may expect it a physical approximation.

For instance, how can physical objects be infinitely large? Is

there not an upper limit to covalent bonding?

You may say that's why there must be corresponding adjustments in the laws of physics, but is that anything other than a verbal placeholder with little conceptual content?

Dr. Byl's argument reminds me of science fiction stories about miniaturizing humans. No doubt it's possible to produce a mathematically coherent model of a human being who's several orders of magnitude larger or smaller. You can scale it up or down, but preserve the same internal relations.

Yet it's not physically possible for a viable human being to be several orders of magnitude larger or smaller. A human being can't be as tall as a skyscraper or as small as a molecule. Anything material has in-built physical constraints. (Not that humans are purely physical.)

In fairness, he admits that a flat-earth cosmology requires different laws. But I think that's a token concession. Has any flat-earther ever developed a detailed system of alternative physics to make that work? If not, then flat-earth cosmology isn't competitive with the standard view.

I don't think it's metaphysically possible for physical space to instantiate actual infinities, whether infinitely large or infinitely small (or wide or deep or long or thin).

So I guess one question concerns Byl's ontology of math—what he thinks mathematical objects are, and how they interface with the physical world.

To me, his position is like confusing what's possible in a dream with what's possible in reality. Surreal things can

happen in dreams because dreams are imaginary.  
Dreamscapes aren't subject to physical constraints. Dreams  
are visualized ideas.

But I think energy and matter are intrinsically finite states.  
It may be a convenient simplification or idealization in  
physics to speak of infinities or infinitesimals, but I don't  
take that literally.



## Defending a flat-earth

This is a sequel to my previous post:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2016/07/flat-earth-cartography.html>

I'd like to revisit Dr. Byl's comment:

Sorry, Steve, but your arguments against a flat earth don't work.

A flat earth model of the universe can easily be made empirically equivalent to a spherical earth model. Simply apply a mathematical transformation called a "geometric inversion". For each point in the universe, measure its distance  $R$  from, say, the earth's South Pole, and move this point along the Pole-to-point half-line to a new distance  $1/R$ .

This transforms the spherical surface of the earth to a flat disk, centered on the North Pole, with the South Pole infinitely far away (i.e., this is the stereographic projection of geography). All points inside the Earth are transferred beneath the disk; all points in the sky are transferred above the disk. Galaxies that were infinitely far away end up a short distance above the new North Pole.

The laws of physics are also transformed, with consequences that may seem strange for those accustomed to thinking in terms of the more conventional universe. For example, sunlight now travels in circular arcs, the sun and stars become much smaller than the (now infinite) earth, etc. See my post

Mathematical models and reality: <http://reformation.edu/scripture-science-byl/pages/09-mathematical-models.htm>

Terrestrial objects increase in size as they travel away from the North Pole, becoming infinitely large at the South Pole. However, since inversion is a conformal transformation, local shapes are preserved. Hence you won't notice any changes as you travel.

It is not my intent to defend a flat earth, but only to point out that, with some ingenuity, one can construct a mathematical model of the universe with almost any feature one wishes (the Duhem-Quine thesis), as long as one is willing to make adjustments elsewhere (e.g., sunrays become circular arcs, size is not preserved, etc.).

Since this flat-earth model is empirically equivalent to the spherical earth model, the choice between these models must be made on the basis of non-empirical factors, such as philosophical or theological considerations.

**i)** Several commenters, myself included, responded to Byl's argument. He never replied. That's his prerogative, but when you ignore objections, it weakens your case.

Now I'd like to discuss some additional problems. His defense has some paradoxical aspects.

**ii)** When dealing with geocentric/flat-earth imagery in Scripture, mainstream inerrantists say the descriptions are poetic or phenomenological. In general, a round earth looks flat to an earthbound observer. Mind you, there's subtle

evidence that that an optical illusion, even from the standpoint of an earthbound observer.

Byl is making the same move in reverse: it's possible for a flat-earth to look round. What's paradoxical about this move is that Byl's own argument involves a phenomenological interpretation of the Biblical data or observational data. But in that event this comes down to a choice between two competing phenomenological interpretations: a spherical earth that has a flat appearance or a flat earth that has a spherical appearance. In that case, the flat-earther's appeal isn't any more straightforward than the alternative. Both positions save appearances. Both positions go behind naive realism.

**iii)** Given, moreover, a choice between two phenomenologically equivalent interpretations, there may be other considerations that tilt the scales. Geometric inversion gives you mathematically equivalent descriptions, but they're hardly equivalent in other respects. The physics is different—as Byl concedes. And to my knowledge, flat-earthers haven't produced a detailed scientific alternative to standard astronomy in that regard. If one model has a lot of physics to back it up, whereas the physics hasn't been worked out for the other model, these aren't evidentially on a par. There's a difference between mathematical coherence and natural coherence. A scientific model has to balance out natural forces. I'm not saying modern astrophysics is complete. There are some well-known problems. But you can't beat something with nothing.

**iv)** Another paradoxical aspect of Byl's argument depends on a mathematical model that would be incomprehensible to the original audience. Assuming ancient readers thought the earth was flat, did they think it was flat in *that* sense? Did they think the South Pole was infinitely large and

infinitely far from the North pole? Did they think the flat earth was shaped in *that* way?

The irony is to defend a flat earth by substituting a mathematical model that doesn't match the mental image which ancient readers (allegedly) entertained. It defends a particular interpretation of Scripture through a bait-n-switch. That's analogous to people who defend the historicity of Adam by combining theistic evolution with ensoulment. Although that maneuver can give you a "historical Adam", it's not the Adam of Gen 2.

Typically, scholars who think the Bible reflects a flat-earth cosmography impute a three-story universe to Scripture. They do that by cobbling together scattered references in Scripture, without regard to genre, which they supplement with depictions from other ancient Near Eastern sources. That includes the solid dome, with the cosmic sea above the dome, and so on. Yet Byl pours scorn on that particular model:

<http://bylogos.blogspot.com/2010/02/genesis-and-ancient-cosmology.html>

If, however, we don't think Scripture reflects a flat-earth cosmography in *that* sense, then what's the evidence that it reflects a flat-earth cosmography in *any* sense? Surely the esoteric alternative that Byl proposes (for the sake of argument) would be inaccessible to ancient readers.

# Helios

I've going to revisit a topic I frequently discuss. Even though it's an old topic, I'm going to attack it from a fresh angle. It's commonplace in "critical" Bible scholarship to allege that Bible writers thought and taught the world was flat. The three-story universe. Most of us have seen diagrams of this claim. Nowadays, even some so-called evangelicals are pushing this claim.

**1.** In Greek mythology, Helios, the sun god, pulls the sun across the sky in a chariot with fireproof horses. One consideration in evaluating this depiction is that no ancient Greek ever saw a celestial chariot pulling the sun across the sky. So we have to ask ourselves how seriously ancient Greeks took that depiction. You can't say Greeks believed it because that's what it looks like to an earthbound, naked-eye observer.

**2.** According to the three-story model, which is just a scholarly construct, the sky is a solid dome supported by mountains. Prescientific people believed that because that's what the earth looks like from the standpoint of an earthbound observer. They had no other frame of reference.

**3.** Apropos (2), recently I was sitting outside on a partly cloudy day, looking at a hillside. I doubt that's something scholars who impute a three-story cosmography to ancient people bother to do.

**i)** According to the three-story model, the sun, moon, and clouds are inside the dome. They move across the face of the firmament.

However, clouds appear to rise over the hill from behind the hill. But according to the three-story model, clouds would have to be in front of the hillside.

The same holds true for setting sun (or moon). If, moreover, that was the case, then the setting sun would sometimes cover part of the hillside. But, of course, we never see that happen. Rather, we see the hillside cover the descending sun. To all appearances, when the sun dips below the horizon, it passes behind the hillside or mountain range, not in front of it.

**ii)** According to the three-story model, the setting moon would be on top of the hillside (or mountain range), since it has to move on the face of the firmament. If the dome is resting on the hillside or mountain range, then the moon cannot be behind the hillside or mountain range. The moon is inside, not outside, the dome. On a treelined hillside, we should see the moon crushing the trees. As it descends, the trees will bend under the weight of the moon. But, of course, no one ever sees that happen. By the same token, the setting sun ought to set the trees on fire. But no one ever sees that happen.

**iii)** If, moreover, the sun and moon are in front of or on top of the hills and mountains, how do they descend below the hills and mountains? Is there supposed to be a hole in the hill or mountain? Since, in the course of a year, sunrise and sunset occur at different points along the horizon, it wouldn't just be a bottomless hole, but a bottomless trench. But in that event, what is the solid dome resting on?

**iv)** Watching sunset on a hillside has the same appearance as watching sunset on a mountain range. The only difference is that a mountain range is farther away. If,

however, the ancients just went by appearances, then it would be a very small world if the neighboring hillside marks the boundary of the world. Suppose you live in a valley. Do you really think the whole world is no bigger than the hills surrounding the valley? Have you never ventured outside the valley?

**v)** Mountain ranges are often jagged. With slopes. How is the solid dome supposed to rest on such an uneven surface? And, of course, a treelined hillside is even more indented. Trees at different heights. Spaces between branches. How does the dome rest on top of a treelined hillside? Wouldn't the weight of the dome flatten the trees?

**vi)** People who live off the land pay attention to their natural surroundings. Here's an example of how Sioux Indian boys used to be raised:

My uncle, who educated me up to the age of fifteen, was a strict disciplinarian and a good teacher. When I left the teepee in the morning, he would say:

"Hakadah, look closely to everything you see"; and at evening, on my return, he used often to catechize me for an hour or so.

"On which side of the trees is the lighter-colored bark? On which side do they have most regular branches?"

When I was a little older, that is, about the age of eight or nine years, he would say, for instance:

"How do you know that there are fish in yonder lake?"

"Because they jump out of the water for flies at midday."

He would smile at my prompt but superficial reply.

"What do you think of the little pebbles grouped together under the shallow water? And what made the pretty curved marks in the sandy bottom and the little

sandbanks? Where do you find the fish-eating birds? Have the inlet and the outlet of a lake anything to do with the question?"

"Remember that a moose stays in swampy or low land or between high mountains near a spring or lake, for thirty to sixty days at a time. Most large game moves about continually, except for the doe in the spring."

M. Fitzgerald, ed. **THE ESSENTIAL CHARLES EASTMAN**

**(OHIYESA): LIGHT ON THE INDIAN WORLD** (World Wisdom, Inc. 2007), 91-92.

I daresay ancient people were far more attentive to the natural world than armchair scholars. Should we really presume they'd be oblivious to detectable incongruities in the three-story cosmography?



## The waters above

**1.** In Gen 1, there are three divine actions of separation: (i) separating light from darkness and (ii) day from night. Those are interrelated. And (iii) separating the waters above from the waters below.

**2.** Many "scholars" think the waters above allude to a celestial reservoir, which the "solid dome" of the sky held back. One problem with that identification is that ancient Israelites were aware of the fact that rain comes from rainclouds. Indeed, depending on your physical vantagepoint, you can see rainclouds emit rain. Moreover, did ancient observers never notice that it only rains when skies are cloudy rather than clear? Did they never notice that it's dry on a clear day, then watch a cloud approach and dump rain? Were they that inattentive to the natural world around them? How would they survive?

**3.** But we might also consider the symbolic significance of "waters above". Ancient people associated "up there" with God, gods, and angels—while "down below" was the human realm.

Both sunlight and rain are necessary to sustain human life. In addition, rainwater is drinking water. Very pure.

Moreover, collected rainwater is safer than venturing down to the riverbank or watering hole, frequented by predators.

The fact that life-sustaining water comes from above is emblematic of the fact that life and death depend on God's provision. The God "up there" discharges the waters "up there" to make life possible here below. Drought and famine

occur in the absence of rain. And even lakes and rivers begin to dry up after a prolonged drought. Water for cooking, drinking, irrigation, game, and livestock becomes scarce. And the Middle East is an arid region to begin with.

It's natural for ancient people to associate rain with God's celestial abode. God sends rain, or God withholds it. The terrestrial realm relies on the celestial realm to survive and flourish.

## Genesis and the ancient Near East

It's become very popular to say we should interpret the OT in light of its ancient Near Eastern background. That's true or false depending on how we develop the idea. Two of the more prominent exponents are John Walton and Peter Enns, but there are others. This is becoming influential in evangelicalism.

But one problem with this line of thought is that scholars like Walton and Enns speak with great confidence about their interpretations, as if once you grant the ancient Near Eastern frame of reference, then there's scholarly consensus on how to interpret Genesis. But that's far from monolithic. There are scholars who agree with the frame of reference, but arrive at very different conclusions.

It's my impression that Walton is to the right of Enns. In addition, it's my impression that Walton is a better scholar than Enns. However, David Tsumura is a more distinguished scholar than either one. And it's revealing to compare his conclusions to theirs. I'll be quoting some excerpts from David T. Tsumura, "Rediscovery of the Ancient Near East and Its Implications for Genesis 1–2," Kyle Greenwood, ed. **SINCE THE BEGINNING: INTERPRETING GENESIS 1 AND 2 THROUGH THE AGES** (Baker 2018), chapter 10.

Mark Smith now agrees that the translation "chaos" should be avoided...If Gen 1 were a polemic against Tiamat, its author would have used a form such as t'mh or t'mt based on the Akkadian proper noun directly, or perhaps have used yam, "Sea", the enemy

of the storm god Baal, who was the counterpart of Marduk.

When one takes a closer look at both accounts [Gen 1-2], it is evident that they are not two "parallel" versions of the same or similar "creation" stories...Gen 2, which in a strict sense is not a creation story but an organizational text and serves as an "introduction" to Gen 3. A story without any reference to the sun, the moon and the stars, or the sea is not a true cosmological account. Gen 1, which locates the creation of humanity as the grand climax of the creation of the cosmos, is not of the same literary genre as Gen 2-3, which is concerned with the immediate situation of humanity on the earth. Both chapters, however, do reflect essentially the same cosmology. In **Gen 1:2** the initial situation of the "world" is described in linguistically positive terms as an unproductive and uninhabited "earth", totally covered by an expanse of water, while in 2:5-6 the initial state of the "earth" is described by the negative expressions "no vegetation" and "no man"...In **Gen 2:6** the underground ed-water was flooding the whole arid of the "land" (adama), but not the entire earth (eretz) as in **Gen 1:2**, so it describes a stage, as in **Gen 1:9-10**.

The two stories view the creation of human beings from two different perspectives. The first presents their nature and function in the framework of the entire creation of the world and as the Creator's representatives on earth; the second explains their relationship with each other and with the other

creatures in their physical environment. This is the discourse-grammatical phenomenon of "scope change," that is, "zooming in from an overall perspective to a close-up, with a corresponding shift in reference."... Since biblical narratives such as Gen 1-2 were aural discourses, written to be heard, it is not surprising that they are characterized by repetition and correspondence, like poetic literature.

According to one theory [the framework hypothesis], places were created on days 1-3, and their corresponding inhabitants are created on days 4-6. However, such correspondences do not work well, for sea creatures (day 5) live not in the heavens (day 2) but in the seas (day 3). More important is the fact that in day 3 the land (eretz) is created, and in day 6 its inhabitants are created, namely, "plants," "animals," and "human beings."

While the ancient Hebrews held a cosmology different from the modern scientific view, they seem to have had one similar to the ANE cosmologies. yet their similarities are sometimes overemphasized. The similarities are often due to linguistic similarities with a metaphorical purpose, as in the case of *tnn* and "fossilized" expressions such as "to crush the heads of Leviathan" (cf. Ps 74:14 NJPS). Furthermore, terms such as "foundations" and "pillars" of the earth appear only in poetical texts of the Bible, and we see the term "Sheol" only in a collocation with verbs such as "to descend". They are not to be taken as indicating the Hebrew understanding of the structure of the cosmos. They are simply idioms in which the original meaning of each element is already "ossified" or fossilized. [In a

footnote, Tsumura illustrates his point by drawing some comparisons with Japanese Christian terminology.]

Nicolas Wyatt holds that bara "implies, in the process of separation, the preexistence of that thing or those things that are separated." Similarly, John Walton's "functional" theory holds that the Gen 1 creation story has nothing to do with material origins but simply describes the functional origins of the cosmos. He interprets **Gen 1:1** as, "In the initial period, God brought cosmic functions into existence." However, Wardlaw's recent detailed study concludes that the qal and niph'al of br' (bara is qal) mean "to create, do (something new)," while only the piel means "to cut, hew."

The OT describes the cosmos as either bipartite, "heaven and earth" (e.g. **Gen 1:1**; Ps 148), or tripartite, "Heaven, earth, and waters" (**Exod 20:11**; **Neh 9:6**; **Ps 96:11**; **146:6**; **Hag 2:6**)—but in the latter case the "water(s) is always "the sea" or the like, never the underground fresh *tehom* water.

The uniqueness of Genesis is in its order of commands: the waters' gathering together and the dry land appearing, not the other way around as in the cosmogonic myths in Egypt and Japan, in which a hill or an island appears out of the oceans.

Recently Walton, following Weinfeld and Levenson, has claimed that as in the ANE, "the cosmology of Gen 1 is built on the platform of temple theology: both of these ideas—rest [**Gen 2:2**] and the garden [**2:8-9**] are

integral to the temple theology of the ancient world." He holds that "in Genesis, the entire cosmos can be portrayed as a temple, because the cosmos and temple serve the same functions, that is, to house a deity. Peter Enns holds a similar view, but he assumes that "God's victory over chaos" enabled him to create the world, which is his temple. But Enns makes no distinction between the so-called Chaoskampf motive and the theomachy for Baal's temple building "after his defeat of Yam." One should note that in Ugaritic myths the god Baal cannot be called a "creator"; he did not make or create anything.

Creation in Gen 1 has nothing to do with temple building. Even though in poetic texts such as Pss. 18:15; 24:2; 75:3; and Job 38:4 the cosmos is sometimes described using architectural terms as "foundation" and "pillar," the only such term in Gen 1 is *raqia* (vv6-8), which can be translated as "firmament," that is, a dome. Conversely, there is nothing garden-like about Israel's tabernacle or temple, while the main purpose of a garden is to provide food for humans. Eden is said to have become a pattern for describing the Israelite sanctuary, and even the land of Israel. It is indeed possible that "the tabernacle menorah was a stylized tree of life." However, many of the suggested similarities seem suspicious, such as comparing the tunics of animal skins with which God clothed Adam and Eve to the tunics of linen worn by the priests... Walton's mistake, it seems to me, is that he tries to combine the temple motif, which he thinks is in Gen 1, and the garden motif (Gen 2-3).

It is more likely that ed was borrowed directly from the Sumerian. Both ed and edo mean "high water" and refer to the water flooding out of the subterranean ocean. The phrase "was watering" suggests an ample supply of water, rather than just moisture.

Although there is a Sumerian word edin, "plain, steppe," the etymology of Eden is better explained by the Semitic word 'dn found in Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Old South Arabic...which probably has the literal meaning "to make abundant in water supply." The Aramaic term is parallel to Akkadian tahdu, "well-watered"...The biggest problem for a gardener would be how to control the abundant waters. God drained the garden by the four rivers that flow down from it. The geographical relationships are as follows: the garden is in Eden, which is in the land, which is in the earth.

Despite the fact that a majority of scholars support a Sumerian connection for the "tree of life," there is no evidence for such a tree in Mesopotamian myth and cult. Its identification with trees on various Mesopotamian seals is pure hypothesis. Also, no phrase such as "tree of life" is attested in Canaanite mythology, though we do find the phrase "tree of death".

**Gen 2:10** says that a river went out from (or in) Eden. Since this is the river that watered the garden within Eden, the river likely came out in the garden part of Eden, which was probably the highest part of Eden, so the movement of this water is most likely vertical, like a spring (cf. ed-water in **Gen 2:6**), for in order for the river water to water the garden, it has to flow from the



highest place in the garden. In **Gen 2:20**, the adverb "there" (sam) means the garden, where the river divided into four "branches" (NJPS) and flowed downward from the garden.

Some scholars compare the garden of Eden and four rivers with the ANE motif of four rivers flowing from the temple, as well as the abode of the Ugaritic god El at the "source of the two rivers". However, Eden is not the Lord's abode, and the four rivers are introduced as real rivers with proper names rather than as symbolic indications of the four quarters of the earth.

The "southern" hypothesis is that the garden of Eden was in the Sumerian Dilmun, "the land of the living," which lay near the head of the Persian Gulf. This hypothesis identifies the Pishon and the Gihon with actual rivers not far from the mouths of the Tigris and the Euphrates and interprets the rivers as converging at Eden. However, the problem is that **Gen 2:10** says the rivers start in the garden.

The "northern" hypothesis is that Eden is in eastern Turkey or Armenia...The items bdellium (NIV, "aromaic resin) and soham (usually, "onyx stone") are difficult to identify, but if soham were rather to be identified with lapis lazuli, Havilah might be in Afghanistan...Cush [may be] "the eponym of the Kassites," [the original homeland of the Kassites may be located in the Zagros Mountains, east of Tigris river] and the only one that would fit the phrase "in the east" of **Gen 2:8**. Cush thus probably refers to somewhere in the northern or possibly southeast Mesopotamia. The author's vantage point is most probably near the Euphrates, looking

east. From these details, it seems the author is locating the garden somewhere in Eastern Turkey or in Armenia, near the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates, and this is a long established, widely held view. Certainly the garden was not simply a Utopia in the semiheavenly place (cf 2:15-17).

What does it mean that God "ceased on the seventh day from all his work that he had done" (22, my trans.)? Did God become tired and rest on the seventh day? Both the verbs in the Genesis passage and the Fourth Commandment (Exod 20:11) are carefully distinguished. In Gen 2:3, *sbt* means basically "to cease from, stop (the work)," focusing on the "completion" of God's creative work, hence "cessation" but in Exod 20:11 *nwh*, "rest," emphasizes the result of cessation.

Did the biblical author expect his readers to read ANE religious views into these chapters? Did they combine the motifs of "rest" and "garden" to get the themes of the temple as a divine dwelling?...The Genesis account takes a very different stances from the ANE toward the divine, the world, and the human being's calling, and there is a clear distinction between the divine world and the human world. The Lord is the sole divine agent and significantly is without any female consort. In fact, in the ANE only Genesis deals with the creative actions by a personal deity without any involvement of a goddess.

For the modern Western reader the similarities between the Bible and the ANE religions may be a problem. However, an ancient polytheistic reader would

not be struck by the similarities but would take them for granted...It is the differences that would surprise him...We can see this from the reactions of later polytheists on hearing the Genesis creation story for the first time, such as the Japanese Jo Nijima and Kanzo Uchimura, at the end of the 19C, when the country was opened up to Western cultural and religious influence.

## The astrodome

To revisit a pet issue of mine, there are scholars who insist that Bible writers operate with a flat-earth/three-story cosmography. They say we should interpret the Bible in the same way an ancient Near Eastern audience would understand it. And there's nothing wrong with that general principle. Ironically, I think the scholars in question lack the imagination to do justice to their own principle.

According to flat-earth cosmography, mountain ranges prop up the solid dome of the sky. So the mountain range marks the outer limits of the world. It's like the mountain ranges are flat in back. Half-mountains. Now consider some phenomena that prescientific observers see:

1. Clouds coming over the horizon or receding over the horizon. The most natural way to explain the appearance is that clouds are coming over the hills and mountains from *behind* the hills and mountains. So the world continues on the other side of the mountain range. That's not where the world ends.

But if flat-earth cosmography were true, there'd be no space between the sky and the back of the mountains. In the case of receding clouds, if flat-earth cosmography were true, drifting clouds would strike the side of the sky, spreading up and down the solid dome.

Visualize putting red or blue dye in an aquarium. It will spread out laterally until it reaches the sides of the aquarium. Then it will spread out veridically (up and down the sides of the aquarium) because it can't go any further in a straight line.

2. Likewise, in flat-earth cosmology, either sun, moon, and stars rise from behind the hills and mountains or in front of them. But they can't rise from behind the hills and mountains because the solid dome of the sky comes down at the highest point of the mountain range. If the sky is solid and the mountains are solid, the sky will rest on the mountain peaks. It can't go any lower. But in that case, the sky forms a vertical barrier or wall on the ridge of the mountain range. So there's nothing behind the mountain range.

And even if sun, moon, and stars were positioned behind the sky rather than up and down the face of the sky, the solid dome would have to be transparent to see them, like clear glass. But it's blue, like colored glass. Yet the sun isn't blue.

The alternative is for sun, moon, and stars to rise out of the earth at the foot of the mountains. If, however, they're in front of the mountains, observers would seem them block the view of the mountains as they ascend to the sky.

So when we assume the viewpoint of an ancient Near Eastern audience, how is the flat-earth construct that some scholars posit consistent with what ground-based, naked-eye observers see? Even from a prescientific perspective, three-story cosmography doesn't make sense. And these are just two examples. I've discussed several others.

## From sea to shining sea

I'm going to comment on two related arguments for the claim that Scripture teaches a flat earth:

The phrase which he thereby introduces is "from sea to sea" as found in Ps 72:8 and Zech 9:10b, both of which describe the geographically universal rule of the coming Messiah as being "from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

The context of these verses which are clearly speaking of the geographically universal rule of the Messiah over all nations on earth (Ps 72:9-11; Zech 9:10b; Cf. Ps 2:8 and Mic 5:4) implies that the phrase "from sea to sea" is a reference to the "two oceans on either side of the world", which enclose within their grasp the entire earth, the two oceans "in the middle of which lies the earth like an island." The phrase "from sea to sea" refers to two specific bodies of water, but not to these bodies of water just in themselves but as representative parts of the "two oceans on either side of the world."

The biblical terms "eastern sea" and "western sea," especially as used in Zech 14:8, where the context is one of apocalyptic universality, also seem to refer to the eastern and western halves of the ocean that surround the earth.

[http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/seely\\_earthseas\\_wtj.htm](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/seely_earthseas_wtj.htm)

There are several glaring problems with Seely's argument:

**i)** His claim is unintentionally comical to American readers. After all, we have a national anthem that locates the continental US "from sea to shining sea." That doesn't imply a mythical cosmography.

**ii)** Seely fails to take genre into account. The prophets and psalmists often use poetic imagery.

**iii)** Yes, the verses in question refer to the Messiah's global reign, but they do so by using symbolic geography.

**iv)** Standard commentaries identify the two seas as the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the Red Sea, Dead Sea, or Gulf of Aqaba, on the other hand. Those are real bodies of water, not mythical bodies of water.

On a related note is the claim that when Scripture refers to the "ends of the earth," that presumes a flat-earth cosmology. In this regard, it's instructive to consider a statement by Jesus:

The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here (Mt 12:42; par. Lk 11:31).

That's illuminating because Jesus attaches a landmark to the stock phrase, where Sheba represents the "ends of the earth." Scholars usually locate Sheba in Yemen. Cf. E. Yamauchi, **AFRICA AND THE BIBLE** (Baker 2004), 90-91.

Although Yemen occupies the far end of the Arabian peninsula, Yemen is adjacent to Africa—separated by the Red Sea. And Africa extends far below Yemen. I daresay

many people living in the Roman Empire knew perfectly that the world (or even dry land) didn't literally come to an end at Yemen. Even in Solomon's time, Jewish mariners were familiar with that part of the world (1 Kgs 9:26-28). They may not have known where Africa bottoms out, but they knew that Yemen doesn't mark the terminus of the S. Hemisphere. So Christ's statement is idiomatic and hyperbolic.



## The setting of Scripture

**i)** Writers like John Walton, Peter Enns, Paul Seely, Bruce Waltke, and Tremper Longman are lobbying to redefine inerrancy. Trying to shift how we view the Bible. Yet they also claim that, in a fundamental respect, they are not saying anything new. They are simply attempting to make evangelicals more consistent with hermeneutical presuppositions that conservative scholarship has accepted for some time now.

We ought to understand the OT in its ancient Near Eastern context or setting. That's part and parcel of the grammatico-historical method. Who could object to that?

There's something right in what they are saying, but there's something wrong in what they are saying. And that makes it initially difficult to identify the source of the problem. I've seen their critics struggle to formulate the problem.

**ii)** One aspect of the problem is easy to identify. Although they talk about the original setting, their real frame of reference isn't the ancient Near East but the HMS Beagle. They think science has decisively refuted Gen 1-11. There's no going back from that.

So in that respect, all their talk about the ancient Near Eastern context of OT scripture is an exercise in misdirection. Mock pious window-dressing. The scientific establishment is their real standard of comparison. That's what they measure the Bible by.

**iii)** But there's another aspect to the problem that's less overt. What do they mean by the ancient Near Eastern "setting" or "context"? What do they mean by "background information"?

Briefly put, they lay myopic emphasis on *comparative literature*. Walton, for one, talks about the "cognitive environment," or "world of ideas" which OT writers held in common with their neighbors and contemporaries. If you stop to think about it, that's a very revealing and very narrow way to frame the issue. That's a seriously deficient definition of background information.

Notice what is implicitly missing in his comparison. He accentuates the *literary* setting rather than the *geographical* setting. The *cognitive* environment rather than the *physical* environment. The world of *ideas* rather than the world of *nature*.

Writers like Walton, Enns, et al. focus on ancient Near Eastern literature rather than the actual world which informed or produced ancient Near Eastern literature. They focus on the effect rather than the underlying cause.

Now, there's some value in comparative literary approach. That can help us to identify the genre of an OT book, or rhetorical conventions. That helps us to interpret the book.

But consider all of the background information which comparative literary analysis ignores. Climate. Terrain. Fauna. Flora. Diet. Natural resources. Technology. Transportation. Architecture. Politics. Economic systems. Social structures. Urban life. Rural life.

For me, that kind of background information is far more useful to reentering the world of the OT than comparative literature. That helps a modern reader reconstruct what it was like to live back then. A day in the life of an Egyptian fisherman in the 2nd millennium BC.

If we could step into the time machine, and go back to prediluvian times, what would we see? What's an average day in the life of Noah?

When, for instance, commentators talk about Eden, they focus on intertextual allusions to the tabernacle, or alleged parallels to other ancient Near Eastern literature. They spend little if any time trying to realistically envision a day in the life of Adam and Eve. The climate. The terrain. They stay outside the text rather than projecting themselves into the world the text describes.

Likewise, when they talk about the flood, they focus on Mesopotamian flood traditions. They spend little if any time on the technicalities of flooding. They fail to discuss various types of flooding (areal, riverine, estuarine, coastal), and which type of flooding matches the Genesis account. They don't discuss whether the water table would affect the duration of the flood. They don't make the same effort to situate the event in a real-world setting outside the text.

This deficiency is due in part to the limitations of their training. Their specialization lies in the language and literature of the ancient Near East.

This deficiency is due in part to their lifestyle. Most OT scholars have a lifestyle that doesn't bear any resemblance to the lifestyle of an ancient Near Easterner. They aren't primitive hunters or farmers or fisherman. They don't live off the land.

As a result, commentators talk about what they know about. But what they don't know about may be far more germane to understanding Gen 1-11 than comparative literature.

**iv)** Bill Arnold is another good example. Two things stand out in his commentary on Genesis:

**a)** He views the stories in Gen 1-11 as redacted traditions or redacted legends. Literature interacting with other literature. They don't go back to real world events.

**b)** His viewpoint is methodologically naturalistic. And that's because, I daresay, his personal experience is effectively secular. Angelic apparitions are alien to his experience. Things like that never happen to him, so they have an air of unreality. Same thing with other liberal commentators (Alter, Brueggemann, Childs, Driver, Fretheim, Gunkel, Sarna, Skinner, Speiser, von Rad, Westermann). For them, Gen 1-11 is *obviously* mythological. It radically conflicts with their plausibility structures.

Far from attempting to view the world from within the outlook of the narrator, they keep that at a studied distance.

## The sky is falling!

Writers like John Walton and Peter Enns are popularizing the notion that Bible-writers believed in a three-story universe. Let's play along with claim that ancient Jews thought the world was like a building with walls and a roof. What would happen in a major earthquake? There are many references to earthquakes in Scripture. In a major earthquake, unreinforced buildings collapse. Whole towns and villages are leveled. That's something ancient Near Easterners experienced from time to time.

If a triple-decker universe was rocked by an earthquake, it would be like Samson collapsing the temple or the walls of Jericho collapsing. The firmament would come crashing down as the "pillars of the earth" buckled. Minimally, chunks of the cracked firmament would rain down in meteor showers during/right after an earthquake. Huge rocks falling from the sky. There'd be gaping holes in the damaged firmament, through which the cosmic sea would empty itself. Like an overhead dam that gives way.

Was that the experience of ancient Jews? Did they observe that?

## Losing faith in Santa

Atheists routinely compare faith in God to childish faith in Santa Claus. According to one study I read about, conducted by two Cornell professors, children generally outgrow belief in Santa Claus around the age of 7-8.

It's striking that kids that young already have the cognitive development to become skeptical of Santa Claus. This is something they generally figure out on their own.

Let's compare that to another claim. Atheists, as well as "progressive Christians," think Bible writers espouse a three-story universe. So, for instance, Bible writers allegedly thought the dead descended to the Netherworld.

The origin for that belief supposedly goes back to burial customs. If the dead are buried, then it's natural to associate the place of the dead with the underworld. It must be underground.

There are, however, obvious problems with that inference. To begin with, it's not as if the average grave had a backdoor or trapdoor that tunneled down to the Netherworld. You dig a shallow grave for the corpse, and that's that. And, of course, the skeleton remained.

Another problem is traditions of the dead going up rather than down. The soul ascending to heaven.

But here's the larger issue. On the one hand, many children around the age of 7-8 lose faith in Santa Claus. They begin to ask common sense questions about the feasibility of that scenario. They do this without any prompting from adults.

On the other hand, atheists assure us that adults in the ANE were incapable of posing logistical questions about the feasibility of a three-story universe.

## Oceanus

It's fashionable in some "scholarly" circles to claim that Scripture assumes an antiquated cosmography in which there's one central continent encircled by an ocean. Let's examine that claim for a moment.

What was the observational experience of people living in the Levant? The Mediterranean is the ocean they were acquainted with.

Is the Levant a central landmass surround by the ocean? Just the opposite: a central ocean surrounded by land, viz. coastal countries, as well as landlocked countries further inland.

In addition, liberals and outright unbelievers think Israel borrowed her cosmographical ideas from the major civilizations surrounding her.

But Egypt, Ras Shamra, and Philistia (to name a few) are Levantine civilizations.

Surely ancient Mediterranean mariners didn't think the Mediterranean was boundless. Both for purposes of trade and naval warfare, they knew that it was encircled by coastal countries. Some countries had fleets which crossed the Mediterranean to invade other Levantine countries, or import and export goods. The Mediterranean was well-explored.



## Mt. Olympus

In evangelical circles, John Walton has done a lot to popularize the notion that Bible writers rely on an antiquated three-story cosmography. Of course, he's hardly alone in this. He's merely the most influential. It's a case of reintroducing an old idea to a new generation under the auspices of an "evangelical" scholar.

One of the striking things about this academic fad is the overemphasis on this particular cosmographical model. There's so much written on the three-story cosmography. On how Bible writers, as well as ancient Near Easterners generally, viewed the world in these terms.

According to this depiction, God, or the gods, live in the sky. There's a celestial palace above the "firmament" where he or they reside.

When the gods visit men, then come down from the sky. Indeed, Daniel Dennett calls them sky-gods (how original!).

What's striking about this claim is how it neglects and conflicts with another ancient cosmographical depiction. And that's the notion of a cosmic sacred mountain where the pantheon dwells.

Mt. Olympus is a familiar example. Many of us are acquainted with that depiction from Greek mythology, or Hollywood movies based on the same.

But that's not an isolated case. It has ANE counterparts. In Canaanite mythology, Mt. Zaphon (i.e. Mt Casios in northern

Syria) was Baal's dwelling place.

Moreover, in an instance of polemical theology, Ps 42:2 betrays a critical awareness of this tradition. Mt. Zion supplants Mt. Zaphon. Indeed, Mt. Zion theology is generally thought to trade on the cosmic mountain motif in ANE culture.

However, that doesn't mesh with the tripledecker universe. For on this alternate depiction, the dwelling place of God or gods is *terrestrial* rather than *celestial*. Not *above*, but *below*, the firmament. A mountaintop is *earthly*, not *heavenly*. God or gods are descending from a *mountain* rather than the *sky*.

It reflects the hidebound character of Biblical scholarship that so much attention is given to the three-story cosmography, while basically ignoring, or failing to relate that depiction to a conceptual rival.

Why don't Enns, Walton, Seeley et al. champion the cosmic mountain as the paradigm of ANE cosmography? It's not as if Walton, for one, is unaware of this. It's something he briefly discusses in his monograph on **ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN THOUGHT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**. But it doesn't seem to occur to him that this presents opposing locations for the divine dwelling place. The two are not naturally integrated.

In addition, while a celestial palace is empirically unfalsifiable, a terrestrial place is empirically falsifiable. It would be a simply matter to confirm or disconfirm whether God or gods reside on mountaintops. Indeed, on a clear day, you could see whether there was a palace up there. Not to mention hiking to the summit.

So did they really think that's where their gods resided? Maybe *some* did, but what about the locals?

On a related note, we can see how OT writers embellish Mt. Zion in ways which are clearly symbolic. Although an omnipotent God could raise Mt. Zion to an elevation higher than Everest, the expanded base of the mountain would destroy Jerusalem. That would necessitate relocating Jerusalem. Likewise, if the river of paradise flows from Mt. Zion, that's nowhere near the original river of paradise.

OT writers are simply manipulating *imagery*. It was never intended to be a realistic description.

Another example is the cosmic tree motif (e.g. Dan 4; Ezk 31). It's not as if Bible writers actually saw a tree that tall, in real life. It's patently symbolic.

## Apparent motion

Does Scripture teach geocentrism? Many unbelievers claim it does, and use that to disprove Scripture. A few Christians defend geocentrism. By way of reply:

**i)** Astronomers want to translate observations into objective third-person descriptions. But in ordinary language, a statement like "the sun goes around the earth" is shorthand for "I see the sun pass overhead." It's inherently indexical: a statement which takes the earthbound observer as the frame of reference.

That's the origin of the statement: the experience of the earthbound observer.

To treat that as a geocentric claim involves translating it into a different kind of statement.

**ii)** An observational statement about the apparent motion of the sun is not a statement about the sun moving in relation to the *earth*, but the sun moving in relation to the *observer*.

Compare climbing a staircase to riding an escalator.

When I climb a staircase, I'm in motion in relation to the staircase and the room, while the staircase and the room are stationary in relation to me. I go from one step to another step.

When I ride an escalator, I'm stationary in relation to the escalator, but in motion relative to the room. I remain on the same step moving up or down. I'm not moving, the escalator is.

Am I moving in relation to the room? That's ambiguous. In one sense, I'm *motionless*. I remain in the *same position* relative to the step I'm standing on.

I'm *moving* in the sense that I'm *being moved*. The escalator is *moving me* from one location to another. So, in another sense, I'm in motion—even *though* I'm stationary.

That's like standing still on a revolving earth, and watching the sun shift position throughout the course of the day.

And it *does* shift position from one side of the horizon to the other. Does that mean it shifts position by *moving*? But that's ambiguous in the same sense as the escalator.

When I ride an escalator, does my position shift? In relation to the escalator? No. In relation to the room? Yes.

Biblical descriptions of apparent motion are consistent with more than one underlying explanation. They don't single out geocentrism. The language is not that specific. It's not a direct statement about the sun shifting position in relation to the *earth*, but a direct statement about the sun shifting position in relation to the *earthbound observer*, who is stationary on a revolving earth. At best, it's an indirect statement about the sun's shifting position, via the stationary earthbound observer.

Suppose I'm in a valley. The sun is just above the eastern side of the horizon. I'm standing on the western side. Suppose I sprint to the eastern side. The sun is now shifting position in relation to my changed perspective. When I'm in motion, moving from west to east or east to west in the valley, the stationary sun shifts position. It's at a different angle, relative to me.

Some people are impatient. In a hurry. They both ride and climb the escalator. They are moving in relation to the escalator while the escalator is moving them in relation to the room.

**iii)** Here's an anecdote by William James, which exposes the ambiguities of relative motion:

SOME YEARS AGO, being with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find every one engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The corpus of the dispute was a squirrel – a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: *Does the man go round the squirrel or not?* He goes round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel? In the unlimited leisure of the wilderness, discussion had been worn threadbare. Every one had taken sides, and was obstinate; and the numbers on both sides were even. Each side, when I appeared therefore appealed to me to make it a majority. Mindful of the scholastic adage that whenever you meet a contradiction you must make a distinction, I immediately sought and found one, as follows: "Which party is right," I said, "depends on what you practically mean by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then

to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away. Make the distinction, and there is no occasion for any farther dispute. You are both right and both wrong according as you conceive the verb 'to go round' in one practical fashion or the other."

Although one or two of the hotter disputants called my speech a shuffling evasion, saying they wanted no quibbling or scholastic hair-splitting, but meant just plain honest English 'round', the majority seemed to think that the distinction had assuaged the dispute.

## Raindrops keep fallin' on my head

Reposting a couple of comments I left here:

<http://blog.drwile.com/?p=13895>

steve hays

Ben,

You're deliberately ignoring the fact that as a matter of observation and experience, people in Bible times could tell that rain came from rain clouds. Likewise, it might look as if the sky rests on mountains, but if you scaled the mountain, you wouldn't bump your head against the sky. By the same token, it might look like a mountain range marked the end of the world, but many people had occasion to travel beyond the local mountain range.

You're interpreting literary notices without regard to how ancient people actually experienced in their environment. Your flat earth/3-story cosmography is simply inconsistent with what people back then were in a position to know.

This is an example of what I call deskbound exegesis. You have modern scholars who are out of touch with nature. But ancient people had to be keen observers of nature to survive.

steve hays

“There is a difference between the ‘phenomenon’ of rain and the ‘explanation’ for the rain. As you point out, people can certainly observe that the appearance of a certain type of cloud presages rain and plan accordingly. This does not mean that they know where



the rain comes from besides that it comes down from the sky through the clouds, just as a child can recognize the danger of fire without knowing the mechanics of combustion.”

Benjamin,

Did ancient people never notice that it only rains on cloudy days? Never when the sky is clear? Did they never make the connection?

And it's more than inference. There are times when you can see rainclouds on the horizon. Above the clouds, the sky is bright and clear. You can actually see rain coming *from* the clouds. It's not coming from the sky *through* the clouds. The clouds are emitting the rain.

The sky above the clouds is clear. The sky below the clouds is dark, due to rain. You can see the sheets of rain at a distance, from an eye-level viewpoint. They obscure the sky behind the clouds and under the clouds, until the clouds dissipate.

There's no rain *between* the sky and the clouds. Only rain *beneath* the clouds.

Likewise, you can be outside as rainclouds approach. At first it's clear and dry overhead. When, however, the clouds are overhead, it begins to rain.

Do you really think ancient people were so clueless that they never made these elementary connections?

A lot of modern people are simply unobservant because they don't live in the wild. Even if they go for a nature walk, they are glued to the display on their smartphones.

“Egyptian cosmogony has the body of the goddess Nut as a barrier between the order of our world and the surrounding chaos. The Babylonians had Tiamat, the ancient embodiment of the primordial waters, whose body forms the vault of heaven.”

And when “scientifically naive” people looked up at the sky, did they see the body of a naked woman overhead? Why does it not occur to you that that depiction is intentionally anthropomorphic?

“In Gen. 1:2, the spirit of God moves (or hovers) over the waters. What waters? Apparently it is this same primordial, universe-encompassing ocean that other ancient peoples envisioned. There is no world because God has yet to form it.”

The creation of the world begins in v1, not v2.

“And it was logically consistent within their experience. Ancient peoples were not stupid—they just didn’t have the storehouse of accumulated science which we take for granted and which colors our viewpoints.”

My arguments aren’t based on modern scientific knowledge, but on what any attentive, prescientific observer would be in a position to experience or notice.

## Cosmic waterfall

I'm going to briefly revisit an issue I often discuss. Did ancient people believe the world was flat? Did appearances indicate that the world was flat? Was prescientific observation inadequate to detect the falsity of a flat earth?

Consider a beach. The ocean extends from the shoreline to the horizon. Is the horizon the end of the world? If the world is flat, then the horizon is a waterfall, at the outer limits of the world.

But if the horizon is a waterfall, wouldn't the ocean rapidly empty? It's not like a river with a continuous flow of water upstream. From an observer's standpoint, the ocean extends from the shoreline to the horizon. If the horizon is a waterfall, there's no source of water to resupply the ocean.

An ocean isn't like a channel of water, narrow and long, where downstream water pouring over the waterfall is constantly replenished by more water upstream. Rather, there's a vastly wide expanse of water with nothing behind it except dry land. Yes, there may be the mouth of a river somewhere along the beach. But if the horizon is a waterfall, the pipeline is hardly equal to the waterfall. A river, however, wide and deep, is slender and shallow compared to the sea. If there's a waterfall from one end of the horizon to the other, a river won't maintain the water level. The flow rate is hopelessly inadequate to keep it from draining away. The seabed would be dry in a matter of hours, or less.

I'm not saying every ancient observer thought this through. But it stands to reason that the ancient world had some

very smart, attentive observers who noticed every detail of their natural surroundings and drew inferences from what they saw.

## "The Biblical Cosmos"

The most helpful fundamental question raised concerns whether I am over-confident in thinking I know what ancient Israelites thought about the physical structure of the cosmos. This is a tricky issue. It is the case that there is a lot that we cannot be sure about regarding ancient biblical cosmologies. All we have are the texts that we have and we cannot be sure that they represented the views of everyone. Furthermore, we cannot always decipher the meanings of some of the texts, which can be infuriatingly obscure. Other texts are poetic and it is somewhat unclear how literally to take the imagery. (A point Peter makes well.) It is quite likely, given the historical and cultural gap between the Bible and now, that here and there in the book I have over-interpreted this or that image. Nevertheless, I don't think that things are so unclear that we must simply fall back into a global agnosticism about biblical cosmology. I still think that the overall shape of the world-view is clear enough and is as set forth in the book. I tried to detail the case for it (and my case is not simply mine, but that of the majority of OT scholars, so if I err on this score then so does most everyone else).

<http://theologicalscribbles.blogspot.com/2015/01/a-quick-response-to-peter-leitharts.html>

Several problems:

**i)** We have more than texts. Modern readers share the same basic physical world as ancient readers. Of course, the constituency for Parry's book is usually urbanites whose

experience of the world is mediated by layers of modern technology. Therefore, it takes some effort on the part of a modern reader to imagine human life in more direct communion with nature in the raw. Mind you, even now it's not that hard to put modern civilization behind you. Just drive to a national park. Go hiking in the wilderness. It's a question of how much civilization you wish to take along with you or leave behind.

**ii)** This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the scholars in whom Parry abodes so much faith. But although they interact with ancient texts, they have little occasion to interact with the kind of world in which the texts were produced. They are out of touch with that experience. The fact that Parry takes comfort in the analysis of Peter Enns doesn't inspire confidence.

**iii)** The extent that "the majority of OT scholars" agree with his interpretation overlooks the fact that the scholars in question don't believe the OT is true. Indeed, most of them don't believe the OT could be true. Because they are emancipated from concerns about the authority of Scripture, they feel free to indulge in interpretations which, in their opinion, contradict known facts about the world. They don't feel responsible for upholding the veracity of Scripture. Indeed, they presume that Scripture is often wrong. They operate with a secular outlook.

As, however, an "evangelical universalist" (cough, cough), Parry needs the authority of Scripture to leverage his optimistic eschatology.

# Nephilim

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## The harrowing of hell

**18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, **19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared ([1 Pet 3:18-20](#)).

This is an obscure passage that's generated several competing interpretations.

**1.** In the person of Noah, the preexistent Son commanded Noah's contemporaries to repent.

**i)** A basic deficiency of that interpretation is that the passage doesn't say or imply that Jesus spoke through Noah.

**ii)** This interpretation depends on rendering the dative *pneumati* in locative terms ("in the spirit") rather than instrumental terms ("by the Spirit"). Hence, Christ spoke through Noah via the intermediate agency of the Spirit.

However, the distinction between "put to death" and "made alive" alludes to the crucifixion and Resurrection respectively. Jesus was raised by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Given the conceptual contrast between physical death and physical resurrection, it makes more contextual sense to render *pneumati* in instrumental terms ("by the Spirit"). Otherwise, we have a Docetic/Gnostic Resurrection.



**iii)** In defense of (1), it dovetails with 1 Pet 1:11, with its reference to the prophetic "Spirit of Christ." However:

**a)** That's not what 3:18-20 says. Even if it's consistent with 3:18-20, there's nothing in vv18-20 which indicates that referent.

**b)** 1:11 has its own interpretive issues. What exactly is meant by the "Spirit of Christ"? Is Christ the subject? Did he take possession of OT prophets?

Or is Christ the object? Is he the topic of OT prophecy? In context, it refers to prophecies about Christ rather than prophecies by Christ. It is not through the agency or instrumentality of Christ, but the Spirit of God.

**iii)** The sequence of the passage suggests this took place after the Resurrection, and not in prediluvian times:

death>Resurrection>Ascension (v22).

**2.** During Holy Saturday (between Good Friday and Easter Sunday), Christ went to the limbus patrum to release the OT saints from Purgatory. This is the traditional "descent into hell" or "harrowing of hell."

**i)** Aside from the anachronism (see above), this assumes the dogma of Purgatory. But that's hardly something an exegete can take for granted.

**ii)** Likewise, "spirit" is not a synonym for the discarnate soul of Christ. How could that be "made alive" at the moment of death?

**3.** After the Resurrection, Christ proclaimed final condemnation to imprisoned angels who fell in the days of

Noah. A variation on this view refers it to the souls of their offspring (Nephilim), whom they begat with women.

The subjection of angels to Christ in v22 supports this interpretation. The "spirits" in v19 are the same as the beings in v22.

**i)** This typically assumes that Peter is alluding to 1 Enoch's interpretation of Gen 6:1-4. The imprisoned "spirits" are the fallen angels.

One contextual problem with this identification is that the fall of angels isn't synchronized with the construction of the ark in either Scripture or 1 Enoch.

**ii)** Likewise, God's "patience" is in reference to Noah's disobedient neighbors. The ark was, itself, a sign of impending judgment. God gave human sinners time and opportunity to repent.

**iii)** Angels are mentioned in v22, not because that ties into the netherworld setting of v19, but because that ties into the heavenly setting of the Ascension—and Session—of Christ. The Ascension not only represents the Son's "return" to heaven, but the Messiah's enthronement and coregency with the Father. All angels are subject to the Risen Lord.

**iv)** But even if the passage refers to angels, that doesn't require an Enochic background. There's a similar motif in Isa 24:21-22:

**21** *On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth.* **22** *They will be gathered together as prisoners*

*in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished.*

The "host of heaven" suggests angels. In context, fallen angels. They are "imprisoned," to await sentencing and final judgment. Cf. G. Smith, **ISAIAH 1-39** (B&H 2007), 424-25.

**4.** After the Resurrection, Christ extended the opportunity of postmortem salvation to Noah's deceased contemporaries.

**i)** The passage doesn't actually say that. Rather than an offer of postmortem salvation, there's precedent for postmortem taunt-songs (e.g. Isa 14).

**ii)** Peter is exhorting his readers to remain steadfast in the faith despite persecution. It would subvert his message to hold out hope of a postmortem second chance.

**5.** After the Resurrection, Christ proclaimed final condemnation to the damned.

That fits the context of Noah's disobedient neighbors, who spurned God's forbearance. That ill-fated generation constitutes a paradigmatic sample-group of the damned.

## Demon seed

**i)** There are three variations on the angelic interpretation of Gen 6:1-4:

**a)** Fallen angels morphed into human males. I've discussed that variation.

**b)** Fallen angels reanimated human corpses. Aside from B horror flicks about voodoo zombies, I don't know of any real-life cases.

**c)** Fallen angels took possession of human males.

Let's briefly consider (iii). Given the frequency of possession in some parts of the world, both past and present, the odds are that some children were conceived by demoniacs. Are they giants? Do they have superior athletic prowess?

I expect that many missionaries in Africa and Asia can tell stories of demoniacs and their offspring.

**ii)** Offhand, I'll give one example. I should begin by explaining how I approach this material:

**a)** It could be that Nicky Cruz is exaggerating or confabulating. Sensational conversion stories can jumpstart a career. Moreover, that's not uncommon in charismatic circles. So I make allowance for that possibility.

But with that caveat in mind, I'm prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt:

**b)** Given the prevalence of the occult in Latin America, I think it plausible that his parents were deeply involved in

the occult.

**c)** I could be mistaken, but from what I've read, his life and ministry has been scandal-free since he converted, over 50 years ago. Given the temptations of a celebrity convert, charismatic superstar, and televangelist, the fact that, to my knowledge, he's avoided scandal suggests to me that he's not a charlatan. He seems to have a solid Christian character. (That's not to vouch for his theology.)

**iii)** Even if we consider his account to be credible, there's still the question of how best to interpret the phenomenon.

One issue is whether possession is a permanent state, or something that comes and goes. Alternately, is the alien personality always present, but only surfaces a certain times?

With those considerations in mind:

Well I'm so happy that I know Christ as my personal savior. My life was very sad. I was born in Puerto Rico. I was born in a witchcraft home. My mother was a witch; I was planted in the womb of a witch. My father was a satanic priest.

for many years I lived in a curse, my generation, my father and for so many generations there were involved in sacrifice of animals, the drinking's of animals Santeria, witchcraft, black magic, that was my, I was elusive in that kind of environment.

So then when I tried to commit suicide when I was nine years old, hanging myself from a mango tree.

[http://waysoflife.info/Literatur/E\\_NickyCruz.html](http://waysoflife.info/Literatur/E_NickyCruz.html)

Seances, satanic worship, animal sacrifices... they were all a normal part of his parent's lives.

"I saw my mother possessed by the devil many times," Nicky recalls. "My mother had to eat everything when she was under the influence of Satan. So did my dad. All those animals sacrifice, all the blood, all the blood that was shared and the smell was so repulsive and the spirit used to manifest. It was scaring."

[https://www.cbn.com/700club/guests/interviews/nicky\\_cruz112105.aspx](https://www.cbn.com/700club/guests/interviews/nicky_cruz112105.aspx)

Behind the home, about a hundred yards into the woods, still stood the large round building—the place that so frightened me as a child and now sent chills to the center of my being. As a boy I knew it only as the "Spirit House," the place where my mother and father went regularly to summon the healing spirits. The town was convinced that they knew what went on here, and rumors ran thick throughout Puerto Rico, but few had seen it up close and personal. They suspected evil and talked of the hideous things going on inside the infamous Spirit House; I had seen it firsthand.

As I stood staring at the large round building framed by trees, the memories began to rise to the surface. Memories of strange and unexplainable things that happened here on a regular basis—things that I still resist speaking of, all these years later.

My father was a spiritist—some say the most powerful in all of Puerto Rico—and my mother was a medium. So many times I watched helplessly from outside the window as their bizarre séances raged out of control. People inside would wail and moan and scream, summoning the spirits of the dead to awaken in their presence. Sometimes these spirits would take over my mother's body, turning her face white and her eyes

violently yellow. Once I saw an evil spirit come upon her with such force that it catapulted her through the air. Though she was a small woman, it took four or five men to contain her.

Another time I saw my father become possessed by a spirit he couldn't control. He grabbed my youngest brother, put a rope around his neck, and tried to hang him from the limb of a tree. It took the combined strength of the whole family to hold him down as my brother slipped free. Later my father had no memory of the ordeal. In his right mind he would never have done such a thing to his children.

Even at a young age I understood the dangers of dabbling in the occult. Yet I found myself living in a home that did far more than dabble. We were known throughout the island as the home of El Taumaturgo (the Wonder Worker, the Great One). The place you go to find the warlock and the witch of Las Piedras.

[http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/pdf/SneakPeek\\_SoulObsession.pdf](http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/pdf/SneakPeek_SoulObsession.pdf)

## Enochic Judaism

More point/counterpoint:

<http://bnonn.com/fallen-sinning-incarcerated-angels/>

I do, of course, think that Peter and Jude are referring to angelic *sin*. That much is obvious. Referring to it as an angelic *fall* seems to bring far more theological baggage to the text than is warranted.

If the text refers to a drastic shift from their original status, how does that not describe an angelic *fall*?

The point being that writers don't usually introduce new material without explaining it. Since Peter and Jude don't trouble themselves to explain their references—as evidenced by the puzzlement most Christians evince over these passages—they are evidently making a high-context allusion. The question is, to what? And the first place to look is for prior scriptural accounts. But the only plausible candidate is [Genesis 6:1-4](#).

**i)** Actually, both texts ([2 Pet 2:4/Jude 6](#)) have affinities with [Isa 24:21-22](#).

**ii)** Moreover, belief in fallen angels was already in the air. The existence of such popular beliefs is attested in Intertestamental literature.

I think they are alluding to [Genesis 6:1-4](#)—but they are doing so in a cultural context which understood that passage as referring to an angelic fall.



Yet he just admonished us that this "brings far more theological baggage to the text than is warranted." So which is it?

I take a fall, theologically, to be an *initial* sin from a sinless state.

Don't [2 Pet 2:4](#) & [Jude 6](#) contrast the initial state of angels with their subsequent defection?

For example, it is in principle possible that some angels were on the fence in Genesis 3, but then fell in Genesis 6.

Even if that distinction is valid, how is that consistent with the Enochic interpretation of [2 Pet 2:4](#) & [Jude 6](#) which Bnonn champions? Does 1 Enoch draw that distinction?

I think, of the sons of God who were *going* to go bad, they probably all went bad between Genesis 2 and 3. Reading between the lines, the angelic fall occurred when some of the sons of God, incited by Satan, got their noses bent out of shape that a lower being (Adam) was given dominion over the earth rather than being put under their authority.

**i)** To begin with, that has an ironically Miltonian cast—ironic given that he imputed Miltonian conditioning to me.

**ii)** Moreover, that's a different narrative, with a different timeline, than the Enochian angelic fall. There's a lack of consistency in Bnonn's use of sources. He takes a little here and a little there to produce his own idiosyncratic harmonization. But that's a very different hermeneutic than the claim that Peter and Jude use Enoch as an interpretive filter to gloss [Gen 6:1-4](#).

Supposing Jude and Peter take the Enochian view of Genesis 6, neither of them link that to a "fall" in the

theological sense. That's not a biblical gloss.

But that illustrates the unstable tension in Bnonn's approach. If they take the Enochic view of Gen 6, then that synchronizes the angelic fall with the ramp-up to the flood.

No, it's not a biblical gloss. Rather, it's an Enochic gloss. Yet Bnonn says that's the interpretive prism which Peter and Jude are using for Gen 6.

Paul's situation in Acts 28 seems unusual for a prisoner. Compare Peter's imprisonment in Acts 12. The normal mode of incarceration—as today—was not at home, but in a prison. It is special pleading to interpret a passage about incarceration with reference to extraordinary, rather than ordinary, forms of such.

What's the historical or exegetical basis for that cocksure statement? To my knowledge, Roman law had roughly three forms of pretrial custody: *custodia liberia*, *custodia militaris*, and *custodia publica*. Cf. Brian Rapske, "The Purposes and Varieties of Custody in the Roman World," **THE BOOK OF ACTS AND PAUL IN ROMAN CUSTODY** (Eerdmans 1994), chapter 2.

*Custodia publica* (e.g. state prison, stone quarry) was the most restrictive and onerous.

*Custodia liberia* was the least restrictive. Recast in modern terms, it would be equivalent to posting bail, or release on personal recognizance.

*Custodia militaris* lay somewhere in between. That, itself, had variations. It could involve confinement to a military camp or barracks. Or it could take the form of house-arrest. Recast in modern terms, it would be equivalent to an ankle monitor.

From what I've read, there's nothing "extraordinary" about the terms of Paul's custody. He wasn't given exceptional treatment. It was a standard form of Roman custody. And it was less lenient than *custodia liberia*.

It's funny for Bnonn to accuse me of special pleading in this regard, since—from what I can tell—he's pulling his assertions out of thin air rather than Roman law.

Apropos (8), your interpretation simply ignores the meaning of the words that Peter and Jude use. If we were to take their language and ask which kind of imprisonment it seems to represent—Acts 12 or Acts 28—which would it be? The angels in 2 Peter and Jude have been “cast into” Tartarus (“held captive” as the NET puts it), where they are kept in eternal chains or possibly pits, under utter darkness and gloom. This is dungeon language. Tartarus in Greek mythology was a subterranean dungeon of torment lower than Hades, where divine punishment was meted out—a belief which largely extended to Israelite apocalyptic theology too. Now, even if we think it is not literally under the earth, and even if we think it is a holding cell rather than a place of punishment, clearly it is a *dungeon*. It is separated from the world of man. Reinterpreting Peter and Jude to be making a metaphorical comment that God “has the demons’ number” simply doesn’t take the text seriously. It defies the meaning of the words they use to argue that these beings are afforded considerable freedom, given that the *precise point* of the phraseology is that they have *no freedom*. They are, in fact, in prison. Whatever that means for a spiritual being, it can’t be so loosely understood as to mean the opposite.

**i)** To begin with, that suffers from a terribly crude approach to metonymic metaphors.

**ii)** Some Biblical passages depict evil spirits as captives. But other Biblical passages depict evil spirits as having considerable freedom of action. Now, a liberal would say these reflect conflicting traditions.

If, however, we're concerned with harmonizing the data, if we appreciate the fact that the physical confinement of discarnate spirits is necessarily figurative, and if we appreciate the period legal distinction between pretrial custody and final punishment, then I think my explanation integrates the data based on the available evidence and the poetics of narratology.

**iii)** Furthermore, we have a striking illustration:

*"What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Mt 8:29).*

That's a good example of custodia liberia. The evil spirits are doomed, but in the mean time they have a fair amount of freedom. Like a distinction between conviction and sentencing, where you can't leave town. You must turn in your passport. Because demons pose no flight risk for God, they have that temporary window of freedom.

Postulating that the Enochian interpretation goes back further than the second century BC is speculative. But so is postulating otherwise. So calling it a late Jewish innovation begs the question.

**i)** Actually, I was holding Bnonn to his own standard of comparison. I was responding to his previous statement that "we can only work with the evidence available."

Now, however, he abandons the available evidence and resorts to the conjecture of Enochic-style interpretations which antedate our extant sources.

**ii)** Moreover, from what I've read, it isn't just coincidental that the Enochic literature arose at that time and place. Rather, it's a response to Hellenism (e.g. Seleucid, Hasmonian, and Roman rule). Its cosmography is Hellenistic. And Enoch's netherworld explorations reflect Greco-Roman *nekylas*. It is, by turns, syncretistic and reactionary.

## Reanimated corpses

This will probably be my final reply to Bnonn:

<http://bnonn.com/titans-ae/>

But as I pointed out, if there were blatant syncretism between Genesis 7–8 and Greek mythological tales (which for all I know there is), we would hardly take that as impugning the traditional interpretation of Genesis 7–8. It would simply illustrate that the Jews believed the competing accounts were describing a common event.

It would certainly impugn the traditional interpretation if that's been polluted by Hellenistic syncretism.

The question is simply how the Jews understood their own text.

That's equivocal. On traditional dating, Genesis was written 1000+ years before these belatedly "traditional" interpretations arose in the Hellenistic era. That doesn't bear witness to how the original audience construed the text.

It's like saying, "The question simply is how do Anglo-American high school students understand Beowulf?" It really isn't "their own text."

This is question-begging. As I've said, we need to ask how the original readers would have understood these passages. Given how widely-known the book of Enoch was, it seems these passages obviously are allusions

to [Genesis 6:1-4](#). When we try to put ourselves in the shoes of a first century Jew, given what we know, that certainly looks like how he'd read it.

As I've documented, Titanomachy was widely-known to Jews. In addition to what I've already presented, 1 [Enoch 88:1-3](#) seems to be indebted to the Titanomachia in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Does that mean we should view [2 Pet 2:4](#) and [Jude 6](#) as a literary allusion to the War of the Titans? Or assume that was their interpretive filter?

Moreover, Enoch is clearly on Jude's mind in vv 14-15, so it's not much of a stretch to think vv 5-7 are dealing with similar material.

i) That may indeed be why many commentators are misled into presuming an allusion to [Gen 6:1-4](#) via 1 Enoch. However, that's methodologically unsound, and actually implies the opposite.

We think Jude is referring to 1 Enoch in 14-15 because we have specific textual clues to that effect. Their absence in v6 tells against that identification.

ii) This also raises the question of authorial intent. Let's grant for the sake of argument that Jude intends an allusion to [Gen 6:1-4](#) via 1 Enoch. If Peter borrowed from Jude, does that mean Peter intends whatever Jude intends? Does that mean Peter intends an allusion to [Gen 6:1-4](#) via 1 Enoch? Or is Peter merely seconding the truth of [Jude 6](#) without intending anything else with respect to Jude's underlying sources?

iii) I'm also puzzled by Bnonn's reference to similar material in 5-7. We don't need 1 Enoch to mediate OT allusions in v5 or v7.

There's also the problem of what Jude and Peter are talking about if it's not Genesis 6. It could be

something else—but what? Why discount the plausible explanation we have, when there's nothing to replace it with?

Here's a good example of how a popular interpretation can so condition a reader that he can't even discern a more evident alternative. The text is referring to the fall of angels. It's nearly explicit in that regard.

The fact is we just have no idea what the son of a demoniac would be like.

Given the prevalence of witchcraft and possession in many parts of the world, past and present, there'd be many examples of children fathered by demoniacs.

When I suggested they could have taken pre-existent human bodies, I was actually thinking of recently deceased corpses.

Notice how far we've strayed from the wording of [Gen 6:1-4](#). Nothing in that passage says or suggests that the "sons of god[s]" had union with women through the instrumentality of preexisting bodies which they commandeered or reanimated. There are no intermediaries or third-parties in v2. It's a direct transaction between two parties. That's how it's presented.



## Titans

This is a surrejoinder to Bnonn's rejoinder:

<http://bnonn.com/how-many-sons-of-god-can-dance-on-the-head-of-a-pin/>

To our knowledge, alternative readings are late innovations in the history of understanding the text. That lends *prima facie* weight to the traditional reading.

A problem with appealing to Second Temple literature is that, during the Intertestamental period, there's blatant syncretism between [Gen 6:1-4](#) and Greek mythological cosmogony or theomachy. Some Jews assimilate Gen 6:1-4 with a war in heaven between the Titans and the Olympians:

Not by youths was their champion struck down, nor did Titans bring him low, nor did tall giants attack him ([Jdt 16:6](#), NABRE).

For their hero did not fall at the young men's hands, it was not the sons of Titans struck him down, no proud giants made that attack ([Jdt 16:6](#), NJB).

And the allophytes came and converged on the valley of the Titans ([2 Sam 5:18](#), cf. v22; LXX).

Occupying the valley called that of the Titans (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7:71).

And then afterward again  
Oppressive, strong, another second race  
375 Of earth-born men, the Titans. All excel  
In figure, stature, growth; and there shall be  
One language, as of old from the first race  
God in their breasts implanted. But even these,

Having a haughty heart and rushing on  
380 To ruin, shall at last resolve to fight  
Against the starry heaven. And then the stream  
Of the great ocean shall upon them pour  
Its raging waters. But the mighty Lord  
Of Sabaoth though enraged shall check his wrath,  
385 Because he promised that again no flood  
Should be brought upon men of evil soul (Sibylline  
Oracles, Bk. 1).

130 And then the generation tenth appeared  
Of mortal men, from the time when the flood  
Came upon earlier men. And Cronos reigned,  
And Titan and Iapetus; and men called them  
Best offspring of Gaia and of Uranus,  
135 Giving to them names both of earth and heaven,  
Since they were very first of mortal men.  
So there were three divisions of the earth  
According to the allotment of each man,  
And each one having his own portion reigned  
140 And fought not; for a father's oaths were there  
And equal were their portions. But the time  
Complete of old age on the father came,  
And he died; and the sons infringing oaths  
Stirred up against each other bitter strife,  
145 Which one should have the royal rank and rule  
Over all mortals; and against each other  
Cronos and Titan fought (Sibylline Oracles, Bk 3).

Back to Bnonn:

If 2 Peter 2 and Jude are referring back to [Genesis 6:1-4](#), as they appear to be...

There's nothing in the actual wording of 2 Pet 2 or Jude which either states or implies an allusion to [Gen 6:1-4](#).

We know next to nothing about the abilities of the sons of God, save that they are literally godlike.

They're "godlike" on Heiser's interpretation, but of course, that's not something I grant. For instance, in his commentary, Sailhamer thinks "sons of God" alludes to the immediate origin of Adam from God whereas "daughters of men" alludes to the mediate origin of Eve from Adam. One can debate that, but it has contextual merit.

Under biblical anthropology, human beings are a composite of spirit and matter. Is there some reason—some definitive, scientific reason—that the sons of God could not form human bodies to inhabit, or *take* human bodies to inhabit, in much the way that demons inhabit people?

**i)** To begin with, the text doesn't say or imply that the "sons of god[s]) took possession of human males.

**ii)** But let's play along with that scenario for the sake of argument. Suppose a demoniac fathers a child. In fact, given the prevalence of possession at sundry times and places, it wouldn't surprise me if some mothers or fathers are demoniacs.

Assuming, however, that you're the child of a demoniac, that doesn't make you a genetically-enhanced human being. You don't have an upgraded body because your father and/or mother was demonically possessed at the time you were conceived. Is the child of a demoniac a hybrid physical specimen?

Mind and body are two distinct domains. At most, there'd be some psychological rather than physical transference. The child of a demoniac might be mentally ill, or have paranormal abilities (e.g. ESP, psychokinesis).



## Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh was the legendary king of Uruk, the ancient Mesopotamian city-state. Apparently, he was a historical figure who became the subject of legendary embellishment.

Since these were warrior cultures, it's probably the case that he was a warrior king. But in Mesopotamian mythology and royal propaganda, he became a demigod.

It's quite possible that's the kind of figure which Gen 6:1-4 is alluding to. It demythologizes what ANE culture mythologizes. Cuts him down to size. A mere mortal who goes the way of all "flesh" (v3).

And his legendary associations with a catastrophic flood would be a natural lead in to the account of the deluge in Gen 6-9. A historical figure, a historical flood. But in both instances, Genesis provides a corrective to what became garbled in heathen myth political or national legend.

## Angels from the realms of glory

I've discussed this before, but now I'll approach it from another angle:

**i)** In Gen 1, the creation of angels is conspicuous by its absence. That despite the fact that angels figure prominently in Genesis.

**ii)** Then there's the identity of the Tempter in Gen 3. According to the NT, that's Satan.

**iii)** This in turn raises the question, not only of when the angels were made, but when they fell. If the creation of angels is implicitly included in Gen 1, and you have the Tempter on the scene in Gen 3, that's a rather brief interval between the Lucifer's creation and Lucifer's fall.

Admittedly, Gen 3 doesn't indicate how long after the creation of Adam and Eve this took place. Was it days, weeks, or years?

I'd add that this is more of a problem for YEC than OEC.

**iv)** A liberal would say this chronological tension is due to two conflicting traditions: the serpentine Tempter in Gen 3 reflects a different tradition than the Satanic Tempter in the NT—which reinterprets Gen 3.

But even if we granted liberal assumptions (which I don't), that proposal lacks explanatory value. It simply relabels the same issue.

For you still have the issue of how evil entered creation so early. Even if you claim the primordial Tempter wasn't

Satan, it still functions as an evil agent. The archetypal villain, who resorts to solicitation. Enticement to commit mutiny against their Creator.

**v)** Indeed, I think the very fact that so little is said about the Tempter is an indication that his reputation precedes him. Not from the standpoint of Adam and Eve, but the reader's. That's part of the dramatic tension. Although this is the first time he makes his appearance on the stage of Bible history, the record of the event took place long after the fact, so it's more like a flashback. The audience is expected to be more discerning than Adam and Eve, because the audience has the benefit of hindsight.

**vi)** Now, even if Gen 1 implicitly includes the creation of angels, I don't think that puts an intolerable strain on the narrative chronology—not even from a YEC perspective. As I say, the interval between Gen 1 and Gen 3 could be considerable.

Even so, there's a sense in which the Tempter in Gen 3 seems to be much *older* than Adam and Eve. Has a degree of experience and worldly knowledge which they lack, because it's been around so much longer than they. That's what gives it a tactical advantage.

**vii)** One solution is that Gen 1 does not include the creation of angels. Not even by implication.

After all, an obvious explanation for the omission is that it didn't happen. It wasn't recorded because there was nothing to record in that respect. Although that's not the only possible explanation, certainly one plausible reason it wasn't mentioned may be because the angels were not created within that timeframe.

And when you think about it, that wouldn't be surprising. Gen 1 is basically an account of how the physical universe came into being. Physical creatures. Even if Cartesian dualism is true, the emphasis in Gen 1 is on the physical side of things. The incorporeal soul is a refinement that's left to subsequent Biblical revelation.

Although angels have the ability to interface with the physical world, they are not a part of the physical world. That's not their natural realm. That's not where they come from. Not their "country of origin" (as it were).

So it's quite possible that they were created apart from or "before" the creation of the physical universe. They normally exist in an alternate reality.

**viii)** I put "before" in scare quotes because it isn't clear if it's meaningful to arrange these two different scenarios (assuming if they're different) along the same timeline. It's like theories of an oscillating universe. Is it meaningful to say there was a universe before ours came into being? Is it meaningful to say there will be another universe after ours ceases to be? That presumes a common timeline transcending each universe. But how is that grounded?

A better comparison might be the relationship between the physical world and the dream world. "When" did my dream take place? If I take the physical world as my frame of reference, I could say it happened after I went to bed but before I got out of bed.

But what if I take the dream world as the frame of reference? When did I go to sleep or awaken in relation the dream world?



Both the physical world and the dream world have their internal chronologies. And these are independent of each other. The sequence of events in the dream world can't be intercalated with the sequence of events in the physical world, or vice versa. Can't be synchronized. Can't be arranged on a common timeline. Things happen in a certain order within their respective histories, but because what happened in one realm didn't happen in the other, they don't line up. Since what occurred in one realm did not occur in the other, you can't say what happened in one realm is sooner or later than what happened in the other.

When angels "come" to earth, or "return" to heaven, that could be analogous to how humans pass back and forth between the physical world and the dream world. When we awaken, our mind uses the body to interact with the physical world. When we dream, our mind interacts directly with the dreamscape.

Over the course of a lifetime, we have a history of dreams, although most of them are forgotten. By the same token, angels may have a history in the angelic realm. *Ancient* history. When they "enter" the physical universe, the way our minds use a brain and body, they bring that experience with them.

**ix)** This dovetails nicely with Synoptic accounts where demoniacs encounter Jesus. Even though it's the first time that the demoniac met Jesus, the possessive spirits act as if it's hardly the first time *they* met Jesus. Even though Jesus is empirically human, they sense his deeper identity. There's instant recognition. In part, that seems to be spirit sensing the presence of another spirit.

But it's more than that. There's shared history. They *remember* the Son. They knew him from before their

downfall. He is their Creator.

## Josephus on Gen 6:1-4

It's often said that the angelic interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 represents the traditional interpretation of the text. The most ancient interpretation. Let's consider a statement by Josephus:

For many angels (11) of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength; **for the tradition is**, that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants. **ANT.** 1.3.1.

What's striking about this statement is the caveat: "for the tradition is..."

That disclaimer seems to distance Josephus from the interpretation he recounts. He shares that interpretation with the reader, without committing himself to it. Indeed, it suggests tactful skepticism on his part.

## Menes

This post is a sequel to this post:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2015/05/gilgamesh.html>

What would the original audience make of **Gen 6:1-4**?

Some scholars think it alludes to heathen myths about gods coming down from the sky to mate with women and produce demigods.

In some Jewish apocrypha, it alludes to the fall of angels. I don't put too much stock in that interpretation because I have no reason to think Intertestamental Jews had the inside track on the meaning of Genesis.

I think it refers to people like legendary warriors, conquerors, and founders of empires, dynasties, and city-states. Nimrod is a case in point (**Gen 10:8-11**). We don't have enough information to nail down who he was. Proposed identifications include Hammurabi and Sargon of Akkad. But that's a scholarly guess.

Another example is Menes, founder of Egypt, who reputedly united upper and lower Egypt. Whether he's the same man as Narmer, or a composite, is debated.

Gilgamesh is another notable example. Stories about their fabled exploits may well have been in circulation when Genesis was written. The text might have triggered those associations for the original audience. At the same time, the text takes them down a peg. They are mere mortals.

Someone might object that Gilgamesh is a counterproductive example. He was a demigod, right? But we need to distinguish between the historical Gilgamesh and the literary Gilgamesh of popular folklore or official mythology.

Moreover, even the famous epic has some plausible elements. It depicts his interest in monumental architecture and fortifications. He's portrayed as deflowering virgins. And it's quite realistic that a man in his position would, indeed, practice the *droit du seigneur*.

## Quest for the Nephilim

There are both natural and supernatural interpretations of **Gen 6:1-4**. My preferred interpretation is that it alludes to conquerors and legendary warriors like Nimrod who found empires and dynasties.

The standard supernatural interpretation views this as miscegenation between fallen angels and women. That, in turn, is sometimes viewed as a domestication of pagan tales about gods siring demigods by women.

In modern times, we predictably have ufological interpretations of **Gen 6:1-4** as well. I suppose that's a natural interpretation, inasmuch as extraterrestrials (if they exist) would be physical creatures.

Although I've indicated my exegetical preference, suppose we consider a supernatural alternative for the sake of argument. Typically, the competing interpretations involve two kinds of beings: humans and angels. That's in large part because the Bible only explicitly describes the existence of two kinds of rational creatures: humans and angels.

However, the Bible is not an encyclopedia. It doesn't profess to record everything that exists. Indeed, the Bible is severely selective in what it records. The Bible does have some obscure references that are hard for a modern reader to pin down (e.g. **Lev 17:7**; **Job 4:12-16**; **Ps 91:5**; **Isa 13:21**; **34:14**). It's possible that there are other kinds of

rational creatures which Scripture doesn't have occasion to mention.

In theory, it's possible that a supernatural interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 is true, but it alludes to something other than angels. The angelic interpretation is a forced option based on very restricted conceptual resources, but there may be more to choose from. Again, though, I raise that possibility for the sake of argument

## Blasphemous warrior cultures

Commenting on Gen 6:1-8:

Precisely the same three types of offenses committed by King Lamech are attributed to these figures: (1) Abuse of marriage. They collected in their royal harems "all that they chose" (v2). (2)...They filled the earth with violence (cf. vv5,11). (3) Blasphemous assumption of the name of deity. M. Kline, **GENESIS: A NEW COMMENTARY** (Hendrickson 2016), 31.

That's a striking comparison. If the parallel holds, that suggests the Nephilim in Gen 6 are human rather than demonic. They don't spawn demigods. And that would be consistent with the human identity of Nimrod, who's described in terms evocative of that account (Gen 10:8ff.).

However, Kline's comparison needs to be fleshed out a bit. He does that somewhat in his comments on Lamech, in Gen 4:17-24 (p27).

That the Nephilim were polygamous or promiscuous is not explicit, although that's a typical M.O. of ancient pagan rulers (e.g. Gilgamesh).

The violence motif is something they share in common with Lamech. The theme of blasphemy is more oblique.

On the one hand, Kline is alluding to the fact that God mandated sevenfold retribution for anyone who assaulted Cain, whereas Lamech insolently abrogates that standard



and multiplies it exponentially (seventy-seven times) in reference to his own sacrosanct person. There is a kind of deific hubris in that action.

By itself, "sons of God" (or sons of gods) may not be blasphemous, but in the pagan-flavored context of Gen 6:1-8, it may well suggest heathen rulers who adopt an idolatrous royal mythology of divine pedigree (kings as demigods). There are intriguing parallels with the thought-world of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Sumerian King List, reflecting the degenerate attitude of the Nephilim and the warrior culture they inaugurate.

Kline defends his thesis in more detail in an early article, although his argument hasn't commanded widespread scholarly assent:

[http://www.meredithkline.com/files/articles/Divine-Kingship-and-Genesis-6\\_1-4.pdf](http://www.meredithkline.com/files/articles/Divine-Kingship-and-Genesis-6_1-4.pdf)

## Randy angels

**1.** Gen 6:1-4 is enigmatic, in part because it's so compressed, and in part because it uses a designation ("sons of God") that has no parallel elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

A popular interpretation is that it describes fallen angels mating with women, thereby spawning a race of hybrids.

**2.** There are problems with that interpretation. For one thing, even if the "sons of God" are angels, they are never identified as *fallen* angels. The passage contains no background information concerning a primordial angelic fall. So on the angelic interpretation, there's no narrative assumption that angels mating with women was illicit. That requires a backstory regarding *rebellious* angels. But that context is missing.

**3.** Scholars fall into two basic camps. Some scholars think the text is mythological. They have no problem with mythological interpretations of Scripture because they think Scripture frequently reflects a mythological outlook. They don't think this incident ever happened—or could happen.

**4.** Moreover, the interpretation offered by critical scholarship isn't angelic but polytheistic. They think the text describes gods siring demigods by mating with women.

**5.** Yet other Christians think the angelic interpretation is realistic. But in that event, the angelic identification is equivocal. In order for angels to sire offspring by mating with women, the angels would have to transform into men, with male sexual anatomy and seminal fluid. At least

temporally, the angels would cease to be angels, becoming human males at an anatomical, genetic, and chromosomal level.

But even assuming that angels have that ability, the offspring wouldn't be hybrids or half-breeds but purebred humans. So that fails to explain what made the Nephilim superior to normal human males.

# Balaam

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## Balaam's vision

There are three prima facie cases of talking animals in Scripture.

**1.** There's the case of the "snake" in Gen 3. But that's quite ambiguous. The Hebrew phrase has three different meanings: "the snake," "the diviner," and "the shining one."

I think the name of the Tempter in Gen 3 is probably a pun or double entendre that trades on associations with occultic forbidden knowledge, as well as ophiomancy and ophiolatry. I think the Tempter is actually an angelophany. A fallen angel. I've discussed this identification in more detail elsewhere.

**2.** A second example is the talking eagle in Revelation:

*Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"*  
([Rev 8:13](#)).

Now, someone might object that this isn't a real eagle. Rather, this is something that John sees and hears in his vision. A simulated talking eagle. Even in ordinary dreams, we can see and hear things that are naturally impossible.

And I agree with that. But that, in turn, raise questions about the third example:

**3.** If the talking eagle in [Rev 8:13](#) wasn't a real eagle, but a vision of a talking eagle, what about Balaam's talking donkey?

In Num 22-24, Balaam is clearly a seer. 22:8-13 and 22:19-20 describe nocturnal visions or revelatory dreams. Among

other things, Balaam may well have been an oneiromantist. In addition, 24:3-4 describe him as a seer and visionary.

There's a potential distinction between dream visions and waking visions. Moreover, the description in 24:3-4 (par. 24:15-16) is idiomatic and formulaic. There's the distinction between eyes "covered" (closed) and eyes "uncovered" (opened). Perhaps that's equivalent to falling into a trance and coming out of a trace. Or perhaps that differentiates revelatory dreams and/or nocturnal visions from waking visions.

Indeed, in this context, "falling" denotes drifting into a revelatory dream state or hypnotic trance. Cf. B. Levine, **NUMBERS 21-36**, p194.

Notice the same stereotypical language in 22:31:

*Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face.*

This takes place *after* the talking donkey incident.

Given the fact that Balaam was a seer, combined with the use of visionary formulas 22:31 & 24:3-4, this may be a narrative clue to the reader that Balaam was in a trance when he saw and heard his donkey speak. In other words, it was a vision. A simulated talking donkey, like the simulated talking eagle in [Rev 8:13](#).

[Num 22:31](#) may mark the point at which Balaam emerges from his trance. Or perhaps the entire episode is a vision, and this is a recognition scene within the vision. In Scripture, angels sometimes appear to people in visions. Dreams and visions have shifting scenes.

In this analysis is correct, then Scripture doesn't record any examples of actual talking animals. Even if it did, that would be miraculous. But I'm exploring an alternative interpretation.

## Dan shall be a serpent in the way

*Dan shall be a serpent in the way,  
a viper by the path,  
that bites the horse's heels  
so that his rider falls backward.*

([Gen 49:17](#)).

Perhaps this is just coincidental, but there are some intriguing connections:

- i)** On a traditional interpretation, the only two talking animals in Scripture are a snake (Gen 3) and an equid (Num 22).
- ii)** Both are mentioned in the Pentateuch.
- iii)** In the ANE, both snakes and equids sometimes have occultic associations. As one scholar notes, donkeys are connected with dream omens. Cf. K. Way, **DONKEYS IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD** (Eisenbrauns 2011), 99.

In that regard, it makes sense that Balaam is a pagan seer. Almost like the donkey is his familiar.

**iv)** There are ANE texts which express enmity between snakes and equids. Ibid. 99.

**v)** Gen 49:17 is a case in point. A snake biting a horse prompts the horse to panic and throw its rider.



**vi)** Gen 49:17 alludes to Gen 3:15, where the snake bites the woman's seed in the heel.

There may also be an allusion to Jacob's name (Gen 25:26; 27:36).

**vii)** Joseph's oracle occurs in the Pentateuch.

## Seers, angels, and talking donkeys

In Scripture, angels sometimes appear to people when they're awake, but at other times in a dream or vision. That raises the question of whether Balaam's encounter with the angel and the talking donkey ([Num 22:21-35](#)) was a vision. An additional consideration is Balaam's identity was a seer. If you combine the fact that angelic apparitions sometimes occur in dreams and visions with the additional fact that Balaam was a seer, it may well be the case that his surreal experience was visionary in nature—like the talking eagle in [Rev 8:13](#).

We wouldn't necessarily need an explicit textual clue that the scene was visionary, since the fact that he was a seer, combined with the fact that angelic apparitions sometimes take place in dreams and visions, already clue the reader to that interpretive option.

## Balaam the seer

In the past I've explored the possibility that the talking donkey episode (Num12) is a vision:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2014/07/balaams-vision.html>

That interpretation goes back to Maimonides. As I think about it, there's an additional argument for that interpretation. The reason Balak hires Balaam to hex Israel is due to Balaam's reputation as a seer. It would therefore make ironic sense for Yahweh to give Balaam a humiliating satirical vision. Here's a renowned heathen diviner, but in the vision he's outwitted by a talking mule! Reputed to be a seer and visionary, but the only vision he's granted is a scene that casts him in the role of a blind blithering fool. That's poetic justice. Turning Balaam's "gift" against him.

## On donkeys and divination

I've often commented on the "talking donkey" episode in Numbers because it's a favorite target of atheists. I'd like to make another observation. As Kenneth Way documents in his groundbreaking monograph on the significance of donkeys in the ancient Near East (**DONKEYS IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD: CEREMONY AND SYMBOL**), donkeys were, among other things, objects of divination. And Balaam is a diviner. At least his career trades on his reputation as a diviner. He might be a charlatan or the real deal. In that context, I doubt the role of the donkey is coincidental. God makes an object of divination rebuke the diviner. So there's divine irony in how God cuts Balaam down to size. That's a nuance modern readers will miss since we don't associate donkeys with divination.

# Noah's flood

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## Introduction to the flood

Before commenting on the specifics of the flood account, a few preliminary observations are in order:

**i)** A basic purpose of the grammatico-historical method is to read a text from the past through the eyes of someone from that time and place. To set aside our modern preconceptions, our modern points of reference, and assume the viewpoint of the author and his target audience.

When reading the flood account, our default perspective is to begin with the present, then extrapolate back in time and space from the present to the past. We take our view of the world as our frame of reference. We unconsciously (or even consciously) map that onto the ancient text.

But this is backwards. We have to ask ourselves what the landmarks would represent to the ancient audience. What was their sense of scale? What was their frame of reference? What was their geopolitical center and circumference?

Modern readers tend to have one of two reactions when reading the flood account. Either they say, "A global flood is impossible, therefore the flood must be local!" or, "A global flood is impossible, therefore the Bible must be wrong!"

But we can't prejudge whether the account depicts a local or global flood based on considerations extraneous to the text. We have to construe the text on its own terms, consistent with narrative clues, intertextual parallels, Pentateuchal usage, and the background knowledge of the original audience—insofar as we can reconstruct their

cultural preunderstanding. That's grammatico-historical exegesis in a nutshell.

The narrator wrote to be understood. So we have to ask how the target audience would likely understand his references. We need to clear our minds of our modern cultural conditioning.

What might be "worldwide" from the viewpoint of the original audience might be more limited from our own vantage-point. This wasn't written to readers living in North America.

Conversely, what's impossible in a closed universe is not impossible—or even improbable—in a theistic universe.

**ii)** Some critics say there's no evidence for a global flood. Some critics also say there's no evidence for a local flood within the ancient Near Eastern timeline of the narrative.

However, the narrative doesn't give a calendar date for the flood. The closest it comes to dating the flood is to correlate the onset of the flood with Noah's age at the time of the flood. But we don't know Noah's birthdate.

**iii)** Christians need to avoid two opposing mistakes when reading the account. On the one hand, some Christians discount a global interpretation in advance because they think a worldwide flood is unscientific. However, we have to let the text speak for itself. We can't gag the text due to extraneous concerns. It means whatever it means. The converse error is to superimpose our modern map of the world onto the ancient text.

Let's consider the major arguments for the global flood interpretation. In so doing, we're simultaneously considering the arguments for the local flood interpretation, inasmuch as these are logical alternatives:

## 1) Universal quantifiers

Flood geologists appeal to universal quantifiers in the flood account to prove the universality of the flood. But that's inconclusive:

i) Even flood geologists exempt marine life, despite the universal quantifiers.

ii) In Pentateuchal usage, universal quantifiers can have a geographically restrictive scope. Let's take some examples:

***12** Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left." **13** So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. **14** And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them. **15** For they covered the face of the **whole earth**, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt (Exod 10:12-15, NKJV).*

Exod 10:15 mentions the "whole earth," but in context it is clearly referring to the land of Egypt.



*This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the **whole heaven**, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you (Deut 2:25).*

Although this mentions people-groups "under the whole heaven," in context this is clearly selects for Israel's neighbors.

*For who is there of **all flesh**, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived? (Deut 5:26).*

Although this mentions "all flesh," in context it is clearly selects for humans in particular, not biological organisms in general.

*Moreover, **all the earth** came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth (Gen 41:57).*

Although this mentions "all the earth," in context this is clearly referring to people from famine-stricken lands surrounding Egypt. They didn't come from Iceland, Hawaii, Zimbabwe, Japan, Paraguay, or the Yukon to fetch grain from Egypt and take it home.

***1** Now the **whole earth** had one language and the same words. **2** And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there (Gen 11:1-2).*

Although this mentions "the whole earth," in context it is clearly referring to immigrants from somewhere west of Sumer. They didn't ford the Amazon, cross the Rockies, or sail across the Pacific or Atlantic oceans to get there. That's not what's in view.

*Now no shrub of the field was yet in **the earth**, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon **the earth**, and there was no man to cultivate the ground (Gen 2:5, NASB).*

Taking the "earth" in a planetary sense makes this harder to harmonize with Gen 1. Since the word (eretz) can mean "land" as well as "earth," and since the context is arguably local (i.e. the garden of Eden), some translations (e.g. ESV) rightly opt for "land" (i.e. land of Eden) rather than "earth."

*The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the **whole land** [eretz] of Havilah, where there is gold (Gen 2:11). The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the **whole land** [eretz] of Cush (Gen 2:13).*

Although both verses say the "whole earth (eretz)," they mean "earth" in a local sense.

*Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They **cover the face of the earth**, and they are dwelling opposite me (Num 22:5,11).*

Clearly the newly-liberated Israelites didn't occupy the entire globe. Indeed, at that time they were confined to the Sinai desert.

*And they shall **cover the face of the earth**, so that no one will be able to see **the earth** (Exod 10:5, NKJV).*

Clearly the plague of locusts was directed at the land of Egypt, and not the planetary earth.

Indeed, the plagues of Egypt provide striking comparison. Like the flood, these utilize natural disasters as a form of

divine judgment. And they also employ categorical language. Compare these statements back-to-back

### **Fifth plague:**

**3** Behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks...**6** And the next day the Lord did this thing. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one of the livestock of the people of Israel died (Exod 9:3,6).

### **Seventh plague:**

**19** "Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them." **20** Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, **21** but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field.**22** Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, so that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast and every plant of the field, in the land of Egypt." **23** Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. **24** There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. **25** The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field (Exod 9:19-25).

### **Tenth plague**

**29** *At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock (Exod 12:29).*

Even though the terminology in the fifth plague appears to be all-inclusive, it makes exception for subsequent plagues. For if all the livestock perish in the fifth plague, there'd be no leftover livestock to perish in the seventh plague. And if all the (remaining) livestock perish in the seventh plague, there'd be no leftover livestock to perish in the tenth plague. So the universal quantifiers are hyperbolic.

Another problem with pressing universal quantifiers is that, taken strictly, this suggests a flat-earth:

*For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die (Gen 6:17). And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered (Gen 7:19).*

If all creatures and all mountains are literally *under* the sky, then that conjures up the image of the earth as a floor under the ceiling of the sky. But flood geologists usually regard this depiction as phenomenological. How the world appears to an earthbound observer, looking up at the sky. From that local perspective, the "earth" is underfoot while the sky is overhead. If the earth is round, then it's not under the sky, but surrounded by sky (Poythress 2006).

The fact that universal quantifiers don't always have a universal range of reference doesn't mean they never have a universal range of reference. It just means they don't have a default range of reference. Their intended scope must be contextually determined.

## 2) The depth of the flood

Flood geologists measure the depth of the flood by the height of the mountains (Gen 7:19-20; 8:5). But there are problems with that appeal:

i) The appeal is equivocal. Flood geologists don't think the prediluvian mountains were the same as the postdiluvian mountains. They think the postdiluvian mountains were higher (Snelling 2009). But in that case, they can't use index mountains (e.g. Mt Ararat) to gauge the depth of the flood when the "mountains" lack a consistent referent.

ii) What mountains is the text referring to? All the mountains of the *whole* world? But that violates grammatico-historical exegesis, for that identification relies on information that wasn't available to the original audience. They knew nothing about the Alps, Andes, Rockies, or Hindu Kush—to name a few.

The ostensible audience for the flood account is Jews who resided in the Nile Delta before they were liberated. They had been there for generations. About 400 years. The newly-liberated slaves have some exposure to mountains in the central and south Sinai peninsula. They hadn't seen any mountains or foothills in Mesopotamia. Neither had their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. So their frame of reference is pretty limited. In reading a text from the past, we need to project ourselves into the situation of the original readers.

Of course, if the flood *was* global, then it would be global despite the geographical ignorance of the ancient reader. These hermeneutical constraints pose no constraints on the objective nature of the event. It was whatever it was. But they do constrain what we are entitled to impute to the

text. Even if there may be more to it than that, we are not at liberty to substitute different landmarks based on modern world geography.

All the mountains of the *known* world? If so, that automatically shifts the narrative viewpoint to a local perspective. The "world" geography which the original audience was familiar with.

Also keep in mind that Gen 8:5 parallels Gen 1:9. That's the intertextual frame of reference.

### **3) The duration of the flood**

**i)** Flood geologists say a local flood wouldn't last a year. But that objection cuts both ways. If that's too long for a local flood, then it's too short for a global flood. In the case of a global flood, there's nowhere for the water to go. So the waters would never abate.

Of course, flood geologists postulate special drainage mechanisms, but that expedient loses the simple appeal to the duration of the flood to determine the scale of the flood.

**ii)** In addition, flood geologists tend to assert that a local flood wouldn't last a year, rather than explaining why that's the case. I'm no expert, but if a floodplain is enclosed by natural barriers (like hillsides), and there's a logjam downstream, wouldn't that be like plugging a bathtub? What if the water backs up because more water keeps gushing in, but there's no outlet (which generates counter-currents)?

Likewise, isn't the drainage rate related to the gradient?

Once the surface of the land there [Mesopotamia] had been inundated, the comparatively high water table could sustain a flood for a considerable period of time (*NIDBA*).

The Mesopotamian alluvial plain is one of the flattest places on earth. The surface of the plain 240 miles (400 km) inland from the head of the Gulf is less than 60 feet (20 m) above sea level,<sup>25</sup> and at An Nasiriyah, the water level of the Euphrates is only eight feet (<3 m) above sea level, even though the river still has to cover a distance of more than 95 miles to Basra (Fig. 1). Once As Samawah and Al 'Amarah are passed, the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers are lost in an immense marshland-lake region (Fig. 1), where water flows very slowly to the Persian Gulf. During spring this whole region—from the Euphrates east to the Tigris—can become severely inundated.<sup>26</sup> The level surface of the plain and shallow river beds of the Euphrates and Tigris, which offer the right conditions for irrigation,<sup>27</sup> can also cause immediate, widespread flooding. And, however difficult it is to get water to the land via irrigation canals, it is just as difficult to get it off the land when it floods.<sup>28</sup> Before any dams were built (before ~1920), about two-thirds of the whole area of southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia) could be underwater in the flood season from March to August.<sup>29</sup>

<http://bibleapologetics.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/carol-hill-flood-hydrology-2.pdf>

#### **4) The size of the ark**

Flood geologists say the ark is too large for a local flood. But that objection cuts both ways. If it's too large for a local flood, then it's too small for a global flood. It doesn't seem big enough to accommodate every kind of bird or land animal.

Flood geologists field that challenge by postulating explosive postdiluvial speciation, but that expedient loses the simple appeal to the size of the ark to determine the scale of the flood.

#### **5) The purpose of the ark**

Flood geologists say the ark would be pointless if the flood was merely local. With advance warning, Noah's family could evacuate the flood zone ahead of time. And animals outside the flood zone would repopulate the flood zone. However, that objection is deceptively simple:

**i)** Strictly speaking, the ark is unnecessary to protect Noah's family and the animals during a global flood. God could miraculously protect them, the way he miraculously shielded Daniel's friends in the furnace (cf. Dan 3:19-27).

**ii)** The ark is emblematic as well as utilitarian. A floating temple. As one scholar observes:



The three stories of the ark correspond to the three stories of the world conceptualized as divided into the heaven above, the earth below, and the sphere under the earth, associated especially with the waters (cf. e.g. Exod 20:4; Deut 4:16ff.; Rom 1:23)...Clearly, the window of the ark is the counterpart to "the window of heaven," referred to in this very narrative (7:11; 8:2). Appropriately, the window area is located along the top of the ark, as part of the upper (heavenly) story (Kline 1989).

Moreover, the covering of the ark (Gen 8:13) prefigures the hide covering of the tabernacle (Exod 26:14; 36:19; Num 3:25).

Furthermore, the ark foreshadows an incident in the life of Moses, when his mother put him in a watertight basket, by the riverbank, where the Egyptian princess used to bathe.

## **6) The purpose of the flood**

Flood geologists say a local flood is inconsistent with the stated purpose of the flood: to execute judgment on all sinners, as well as animals. However, there are some tensions in that argument:

- i)** Animals aren't sinners. So destroying every animal is secondary to the primary purpose of the flood.
- ii)** It isn't necessary to submerge mountain ranges to kill off the animals. If the floodwaters rose to the tree line, anything above the tree line would eventually perish from starvation or exposure.

## **7) Fossil distribution**

Flood geologists say an anthropologically universal flood is equivalent to a geographically universal flood, given the global distribution of human fossils antedating the flood.

However, that argument cuts both ways. For the age of those fossils is much older, according to conventional dating techniques, than flood geologists are willing to concede. In addition, flood geologists routinely contest the identification of "early human" fossils.

## **8) Widespread flood traditions**

Flood geologists appeal to widespread flood traditions to corroborate a global flood. But that's difficult to assess:

**i)** There's a difference between universal flood traditions and traditions of a universal flood.

**ii)** Cultural diffusion can account for common, far-flung traditions. As the survivors of the flood migrated from Ararat to other parts of the world, they thereby disseminated the story of the flood.

At the same time, we also need a critical edition of flood traditions. We need sources with dates. James Frazer is not a reliable resource.

**iii)** Conversely, it's striking that we don't have flood traditions from Egypt or Ugarit, even though we do have flood traditions from Mesopotamia that are clearly reminiscent of the Genesis account. That evidence points to a flood centered in Mesopotamia.

**iv)** Appealing to flood traditions around the world to multiply attest a global flood generates a paradox. If the flood was global, then you can't have truly independent local reports by observers from different parts of the world who witnessed the flood firsthand at the time it overlook their part of the world. For, in the nature of the case, those observers perished in the flood. The only witnesses who lived to tell the story were the eight passengers on the ark. Even if there were humans in North and South America at the time, they didn't survive to share their experience or pass that along to posterity. All flood traditions, if authentic, trace back to the same point of origin.

Of course, flood geologists don't assume that postdiluvian islands and continents correspond to the prediluvian islands and continents. I simply use "North and South America" to illustrate a principle. They can function as placeholders.

## **9) The rainbow**

Flood geologists contend that if the flood was local, then God has often broken his promise to never again flood the earth (Gen 9:8-17). However, that argument simply revisits the issue of how we should construe *eretz*: does it mean the (planetary) earth, or does it mean the "land"?

## **10) The flood and the parousia**

Flood geologists contend that Peter's comparison between the flood and the Parousia (2 Pet 3:3-7; cf. Mt 24:37) implies the universality of the flood. If the day of judgment is universal, so is the flood.

**i)** But that's equivocal. The day of judgment isn't just a terrestrial event. Fallen angels will also be judged.

**ii)** Moreover, Peter's usage is more qualified. As one commentator notes:

The phrase "ancient world" may suggest that Peter is thinking here of a universal flood that submerged the entire globe. But in the latter part of the verse, Peter uses the word we translate "world" again (kosmos), but this time he qualifies it as "the world of the ungodly people"...As often in the Bible, "world" refers to human beings rather than the earth itself (Moo 1996).

**iii)** Furthermore, the Parousia involves time as well as space. It terminates fallen world history. It makes an epochal change from the fallen world order to the new world order.

## **11) Population explosion**

Flood geologists contend the longevity and fecundity of the prediluvians would result in a population explosion, leading to mass migration (Snelling 2009).

**i)** However, that's, at best, a possible inference from Genesis. Genesis never says anything about a population explosion or mass migration.

[Gen 2:10-14](#) situates Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia. So that would be the epicenter of human population. Man would migrate from that focal point.

And the ark lands in northern Mesopotamia ([Gen 8:4](#)). That would be consistent with a flood that originates in Mesopotamia. The diluvial point of origin would correspond to the human point of origin. The scope of the flood would correspond to the biogeography of human dispersion at that stage of human history, where man radiates out from Eden,

but is still confined to the ancient Near east—which would also be consistent with the Table of Nations (Gen 10).

**ii)** In addition, the genealogies don't indicate a population explosion. Prediluvians only begin fathering children at an advanced age, and few offspring are recorded. Of course, it's quite possible that the genealogies are very selective. However, some creationists reaffirm the 6000-year-age of the earth by defending closed genealogies.

## **12) The "fountains of the deep"**

Flood geologists contend that this phrase indicates "vast geological disturbances" that are inconsistent with a local flood (Snelling 2009).

**i)** This appeal is circular. Because rainwater is inadequate to supply a global deluge, flood geologists have to make the "fountains of the deep" the major source of floodwaters. So they don't really construe the extent of the flood from the "fountains of the deep." Rather, they construe the "fountains of the deep" from the extent of the flood. They take the universality of the flood as axiomatic, then interpret the "fountains of the deep" accordingly, since that's their only recourse.

**ii)** They overinterpret the "fountains of the deep" by reinterpreting that phrase according to their postulated flood mechanisms. That's not exegesis.

**iii)** Commentators generally regard the phrase as poetic. It clearly alludes to the creation account. It represents the "waters below" in contrast to the "waters above." Based on passages like Deut 4:18, this probably carries the mundane sense that lakes, rivers, and oceans are lower than dry land. That's what makes the dry land dry. It's higher than bodies of water. Swollen rivers overflowing their banks

would be quite consistent with this usage. It could also include spring water.

**Cyclonic Storms.** The “Land of the Five Seas” refers to the lands encompassed by the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, and Arabian Sea.<sup>1</sup> This entire region is (and has been for thousands of years) controlled by the Asiatic pressure system.

**Storm Surge.** There is the possibility that a storm surge (in addition to rainfall and snow melt) may have helped maintain flooding in the southern part of Mesopotamia. Storm surges are where a low-pressure meteorological system causes high winds and tides, which can drive sea- water inland for hundreds of miles.

<http://bibleapologetics.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/carol-hill-flood-hydrology-2.pdf>

In conclusion, we didn't live during the time of Moses. What was common knowledge for the original audience isn't common knowledge for you and me. Likewise, we didn't live just before, right after, or during the flood. Given our distance from the original event as well as the historical horizon of the original audience, I think the most prudent course of action is to make allowance for both local and global interpretations of the text.

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## Hydrodynamics

One issue regarding the scope and historicity of Noah's flood is the depth of the flood waters. I recently ran some questions by a field geologist who specializes in fluvial geomorphology. Before reproducing our exchange, I'll quote something I recently said:

Regarding [Gen 7:20](#), the text doesn't say the waters rose to a depth of 15 cubits above the mountains. The Hebrew text simply says the waters rose 15 cubits above, and the mountains were covered.

So "15 cubits above" may well have reference to ground level, which was sufficient to wash over the surrounding hillside. Think of a flood plain or river basin skirted by hills. Keep in mind that "mountain" isn't a technical term in Hebrew, but a synonym for "hill".

With that in mind:

### **Hays**

Is this a correct understanding of the issues:

i) In some river systems, the riverbanks are higher than the surrounding terrain. Due to periodic flooding, which deposits silt and coarse gravel, the riverbanks build up over time. They become high ground in relation to the surrounding terrain.

### **Geologist**



Yes, the coarse material carried by rivers tends to settle out on the margins of the channel during floods, thereby building levees and high ground right next to the river. This means that the surrounding valley bottom can readily flood to the level of the levees when the levees do (eventually) overtop in a big enough flood. The Mesopotamian rivers are classic examples of this kind of river (which tends to be in estuarine environments).

## **Hays**

ii) Is it the case that riverbeds acquire layers of silt? If so, does that mean riverbeds rise/become higher over time?

## **Geologist**

Rivers can aggrade (fill in) or incise (cut down) over time depending on the balance of sediment they receive to the power of the flow to move it.

A river with a balance between the two will just shunt sediment on downstream.

## **Hays**

If there was nothing to counteract the accumulation on riverbeds, would that make rivers shallower over time?

## **Geologist**

The transport capacity of the flow keeps the channel open. Most channels are adjusted (in the width/depth) to carry

what is known as the “bankfull” flow, which tends to be close to the annual high flood. Floods are events that overtop the banks and spill out on to the floodplain or surrounding terrain.

## **Hays**

**iii)** Is that offset by (i)? Do rivers retain the same general depth, even if the beds are higher, because the banks are higher?

## **Geologist**

In aggrading rivers (those with excess sediment) the bed can fill in and the river can shallow — unless the sedimentation on the floodplain raises it (which happens if the floodwaters can spread across the floodplain).

## **Hays**

**iv)** This seems to imply that the low ground becomes incrementally lower in relation to the river banks (or levees) as the riverbanks become incrementally higher due to the cumulative effect of flood deposition.

## **Geologist**

Yes, this can happen when a river aggrades.

## **Hays**

**v)** The upshot, I take it, is that it takes less volume of water to inundate the surrounding terrain when the terrain is lower than the riverbanks. If the surrounding terrain was higher, it would take more water to submerge the area, or submerge the area at the same depth.

## **Geologist**

What happens when a river aggrades and builds its levees up higher is that when a big enough flood comes along to overtop the higher levees then the surrounding terrain is inundated under deeper flow.

## **Hays**

**vi)** Not only depth but breadth. It takes less water for the scope of a flood to be on the same scale if the surrounding area is low ground compared to the riverbanks.

**vii)** Is that intensified if there's something like a mountain range (or ridge of hills) to form a barrier that contains the water?

**viii)** I've read the claim that "Noah's flood" couldn't be merely regional because Mesopotamian topography is a drainage system, so there's nothing to keep the water building up. It will pour downriver into the Persian Gulf.

## **Geologist**

I don't understand the logic of the argument here; a big enough flood there will of course eventually drain into the Persian Gulf, but it could be a monstrous flood while doing so because it can take a lot of time to drain the whole valley

bottom after if floods under tens of feet of floodwaters that the levees keep from flowing rapidly back into the channel.

So to me that claim you reference is simply nonsense that demonstrates the writer doesn't understand what he/she is talking about.

## Is Noah's flood a legend?

Some people view Noah's flood as sheer fiction. Others view Noah's flood as a reflection of a dim historical memory that's undergone legendary embellishment.

One of the striking things about the flood account is how it presents the flood as a natural event. The account as a supernatural framework. It gives God's motivation for sending the flood. God repeatedly speaks to Noah. And God "shuts" them in. Those are the most explicitly supernatural elements.

It also says the animals "came" to Noah, which might suggest God sent them. And there's a reference to God sending a "wind" (which may be a Hebrew pun).

But the flood itself is depicted as an event caused by natural mechanisms. In that respect it's not different in kind from other floods. If you were an outside observer, you wouldn't notice anything about this particular deluge to distinguish it from other floods in terms of what caused it.

Put another way, the flood account has far fewer supernatural elements than the Exodus. In that regard, the flood account is conspicuously unembellished.

If you think any supernaturalism is a mark of mythology or legendary embellishment, so that we must strip away all the supernatural elements to arrive at the historical core, then the flood account reflects legendary embellishment. But that says everything about secular prejudice and nothing about the realism of the account. Reported miracles are only ipso facto evidence of pious fiction or legendary embellishment on the assumption that naturalism is true.



## Flood traditions

**1.** One argument for the Noah's flood, in particular for the global scope of the flood, is appeal to flood traditions scattered worldwide. While that's a tantalizing line of evidence, what's been lacking in my experience is primary source documentation. I haven't seen young-earth creationists point readers to collections of flood traditions from around the world. Instead, there's just a vague reference to their existence. But that's a poor substitute for reading actual accounts.

I recently read Bernhard Lang "Non-Semitic Deluge Stories and the Book of Genesis a Bibliographical and Critical Survey." **ANTHROPOS**, vol. 80, no. 4/6, 1985, pp605–616.

Over the decades, anthropologists have collected flood traditions. Lang reviews a large number of collections. He himself regards Noah's flood as a myth, so his survey reflects that bias. It is, however, useful in sifting many collections, some in foreign languages.

**2.** There are multiple complications in attempting to correlate an extrabiblical flood tradition with Noah's flood. The best-known examples are Mesopotamian flood traditions. And these have some unmistakable parallels. If Noah's flood was a regional flood, centered in the Middle East, then it's not surprising that there are independent traditions of that catastrophe from the same area. And I do think those count as extrabiblical corroboration for Noah's flood.

**3.** What about other traditions? Lang mentions "some

patristic references relating to Armenian flood stories." It would be interesting to read those.

**4.** In addition, he says that "when the New World was discovered, Christian missionaries and travelers reported that natives had their own stories of the flood." Again, it would be interesting to read the accounts of missionaries who first made contact with indigenous peoples and recorded their flood traditions.

**5.** One difficulty with correlating extrabiblical flood traditions with Noah's flood is that many examples come from oral cultures. That makes it hard to determine the antiquity of the flood traditions. In the case of the Mesopotamian traditions, we know that these were committed to writing thousands of years ago. But in the case of oral cultures, one issue is how long authentic flood traditions could be transmitted orally. Even on a young-earth creationist timeline, Noah's flood happened thousands of years ago.

**6.** Another issue is the interval between the time missionaries make contact and anthropologists collect flood traditions. There's the danger of cultural "contamination," where the flood tradition the anthropologist records from some indigenous people-group is not in fact an independent flood tradition, but something they absorbed from Christian missionaries long before the anthropologist arrived on the scene. Lang mentions:

A map of the world indicates where the author was able to locate elaborate flood stories, traces of them, and versions which refer to the rainbow. According to his map, flood traditions are most common in Asia and



on the islands immediately south of Asia, and on the North American continent. Though found in Africa, they are not nearly as common as on other continents (cf. map 1).

One issue is whether those cultures were deeply impacted by Christian missionaries. If Christian contact was superficial or negligible, then I assume that indicates the independence of their flood traditions.

**7.** In addition to missionary diffusion, it's necessary to rule out other factors. One theory is that some flood traditions are etiologies to explain petrified seashells on mountaintops.

However, I have questions about that theory. Did observers have a penchant for inventing tales to provide a backstory for that phenomenon? And even if individual observers did that, would it catch on and become part of the canonical lore of that people-group?

**8.** Another consideration is whether the area from which the flood tradition is found is subject to disastrous coastal or fluvial flooding. If so, then while it may be an independent flood tradition, it probably memorializes an indigenous deluge.

**9.** Here's a further question: suppose some of Noah's descendants carry the flood tradition with them as they migrate to another part of the world. But in the absence of written records, and separated from the original landmarks (e.g. the landing zone for Noah's ark), would the original setting of the flood tradition begin to blend with the fauna, flora, landscape, and climate of the new environment? The description might reflect the local conditions of the new environment. At this distance in time, is it possible to

untangle the two and recover the underlying original?

**10.** A final question is whether it's possible to distinguish a local flood tradition from a global flood tradition. Consider two scenarios:

**i)** The flood was universal. Descendants of Noah who migrated to far-flung corners of the world carried flood traditions with them.

**ii)** The flood was regional, centered in the Middle East. Descendants of Noah who migrated to far-flung corners of the world carried flood traditions with them.

Are these distinguishable? Can someone on the ground gauge the scale of the disaster? It's not like they have a bird's-eye view. They only take in as much as they can see, from their limited vantage-point.

Suppose you're living in a village. You know about the existence of other tribes or villages. But those are the only other humans you know about. You have no idea how many human beings there are in general. Suppose a flood devastates your homeland. For you, that's the known world. From an outsider perspective, it's a local flood, but from your perspective, it's worldwide.

When we see news reports of massive flooding, the natural disaster is put on a map. We have an aerial view. Satellite photography. And we place it in the context of world geography. But a ground-based observer lacks that larger frame of reference.

**11.** Even if the narrator was shown the deluge in a vision, would he be in a position to tell if it was regional or global in scope? What was his geographical frame of reference?

Would he recognize the Rockies, Andes, or Hindu Kush if he saw them in a vision? Modern people are able recognize landmarks from parts of the world they never visited. But prescientific observers on the ground lack that context, and even direct revelation doesn't automatically provide it.

## Where does the Bible say that?

Sometimes, when I'm defending the Bible, my opponent will challenge me: "Where's that in the Bible?" Here's a recent example:

### Hays

Regarding [Gen 7:20](#), the text doesn't say the waters rose to a depth of 15 cubits above the mountains. The Hebrew text simply says the waters rose 15 cubits above, and the mountains were covered.

So "15 cubits above" may well have reference to ground level, which was sufficient to wash over the surrounding hillside. Think of a flood plain or river basin skirted by hills. Keep in mind that "mountain" isn't a technical term in Hebrew, but a synonym for "hill".

### Kenton

Okay, if I accept that dubious definition then how come there weren't survivors? Surely people could have headed toward higher ground that wasn't covered or, more importantly, use their own boats? Pretty sure boats were a common thing back then.

### Hays

Heading for higher ground may save you from drowning, but with contaminated drinking water, how long will you survive?

## **Kenton**

I missed that part of the Bible. Which verse was that in?

## **Hays**

The account doesn't say they all died by drowning. It just says they all died in the flood. You do realize, do you not, that there's more than one way people may die as a result of flooding? Having a boat might prevent you from drowning, but it doesn't prevent you from death by starvation, exposure, or cholera.

**1.** Kenton's objection represents a misunderstanding of sola scriptura. When we interpret the Bible, we combine what the Bible says with extrabiblical background knowledge. To take a comparison, if I read a news report about a passenger plane crashing, I can mentally fill out certain details not included in the report. Indeed, the reporter expects me to know what airplanes are.

At one level, my knowledge of the event is dependent on the report. Absent the report, I wouldn't know that a passenger plane crashed on that day in that place. However, I can mentally supplement the report with my general knowledge of airplanes and airplane crashes.

So there's the direct information supplied by the report. It tells me that a particular kind of event occurred. But over and above the report, the nature of the event in itself is an additional source of information. It would be silly for someone to object: "Where did the report say that?"—if I'm making common sense assumptions or drawing reasonable inferences from the nature of the event. The report doesn't

have to say that. Once the report says it happened, then the nature of the event is an implicit source of information, in addition to what the report explicitly mentions. An event of that kind may raise a number of possibilities. More than one possible explanation or reconstruction.

If the Bible says King David was a man, we can infer certain things from that identification. He had hands and feet, five senses, and male anatomy. To ask, "Where does the Bible say that?" is confused. For certain things follow from what the Bible says. That's understood. The reader is responsible for filling the gaps. If the Bible says King David was a man, that's both a direct source of information about David as well as an indirect source of information about David. There's what it specifically says. But based on what it says, we justifiably draw further conclusions. And the reader is supposed to do that.

If the Bible says people died in the flood, it needn't specify how, exactly, they died, as if they all had to die the same way. While it's possible that they all died the same way, that's not an implication of death by flooding. Death by drowning is a direct result of death by flooding, but that doesn't rule out death by "complications" caused by flooding. A massive deluge may well generate different causes of death. Some more immediate while others are more drawn out and roundabout. To take modern examples, consider people stranded on the roof of their house, waiting to be rescued. Although they survived death by drowning, that doesn't mean they survived death by flooding. Some of them still perish as they wait in vain to be rescued.

You needn't agree with that interpretation of the flood account. I'm just using it to illustrate a hermeneutical principle.

**2.** Of course, that's a question we frequently press against Catholics: "Where does the Bible say that?" But there's a difference.

**i)** We wouldn't object to Catholic dogmas if those were implied by what Scripture does say. The problem with Catholicism isn't simply that they believe things we can't find in the Bible. Rather, they believe things when there's no good evidence *anywhere!* No good evidence in Scripture. No good evidence outside of Scripture. Indeed, they believe some things that run contrary to extrabiblical evidence (not to mention things contrary to the witness of Scripture).

**ii)** In addition, they insist on a duty to believe or firmness of belief that goes beyond what the evidence warrants. Suppose there's some evidence that Peter ministered in Rome. Fine. But they turn that into a dogma. They make that belief obligatory. A sacred duty. Yet our late, spotty, even contradictory records of Peter's stay in Rome might be mistaken. We should be able to make allowance for the possibility of error.

## Biblical hyperbole

*This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits ([Gen 6:15](#)).*

**i)** I'd like to revisit two issues I've discussed before. One objection to the historicity of Noah's flood is the claim that a wooden ship that big wouldn't be seaworthy. It would lack structure integrity.

But as I've noted in the past, we don't even know for sure that the ark was made of wood. Although that's sometimes how the word is translated, if you read commentaries you see that scholars don't know what the word means. They assume it refers to some kind of tree, but that's just a guess.

**ii)** Why does the flood account even state the dimensions of the ark? It could tell the same story without including that detail. One explanation is to stress the scale of the impending deluge. A big evacuation vessel for a big flood.

However, that's also consistent with a hyperbolic interpretation. On that view, it states the dimensions of the ark in the same way that it uses other comparisons to indicate the scale of the deluge. Yet some of those phrases are used elsewhere hyperbolically. So it's possible that the ark, while a wooden vessel, was actually smaller and seaworthy.

*Every eye shall see him ([Rev 1:7](#)).*



**i)** Critics say that reflects a flat-earth cosmography. But as I've noted in the past, if the sign of the Son of Man hovered for one rotation period, everyone would see it over the course of 24 hours.

**ii)** But another possibility is that the statement is hyperbolic. A way of saying this is a public event. There will be many eyewitnesses, but not necessarily that every human being will see it.

**iii)** Actually, the "sign of the Son of Man" comes from Mt 24:30. One question is whether the sign is distinct from Jesus or if Jesus is the sign. Does it refer to seeing Jesus in the sky or a symbolic celestial harbinger that heralds his impending approach?

**iv)** Even if everyone doesn't see Jesus at the moment of his arrival, everyone might eventually see Jesus after he arrives. Although the Parousia refers to the physical, bodily return of Christ, it's possible for Jesus to simultaneously appear in multiple locations as a visionary Christophany. In that mode, he could even be visible to the blind.

## Egypt and the flood

Every serious student of the Bible knows that there are other flood stories from the ancient Near East, particularly from ancient Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria. One brief account from Ugarit, but interestingly, none from Egypt. T. Longman & J. Walton, **THE LOST WORLD OF THE FLOOD** (IVP 2018), 53.

If Noah's flood happened, why are there no Egyptian accounts? Even if it was a regional rather than global flood, should we expect a notice in Egyptian records?

**i)** We only have a random sampling from Egypt. Most records never survived. And even if some records survived, there's a lot that has yet to be discovered, excavated, deciphered, and published.

**ii)** Egypt is located in Africa, separated from Western Asia by the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Perhaps the flood didn't reach Egypt. And if it happened in prehistoric times, traditions might only be passed down by survivors and their descendants in affected areas—assuming a local flood.

**iii)** It might also depend on when Egyptians think it happened. The ancients have a poor sense of relative chronology. If they thought it happened in Pharaonic times, royal historians might not record it because an ecological disaster like that would reflect a failure on the part of the "divine" Pharaoh to protect his country.

## Correlating the flood

I'm going to list a few considerations regarding Noah's flood:

**i)** At the risk of stating the obvious, the Bible commits us to the historicity of the flood. I realize that there are hipster churchgoers (a la Rob Bell) who don't think the Bible commits us to anything we don't want to believe.

**ii)** If the Bible teaches a global flood, then that's what we're obligated to believe in. I also think the global flood interpretation is worth exploring and defending.

**iii)** Assessing the nature of the flood is an interdisciplinary task. On the one hand, a Christian geologist has no particular expertise when it comes to exegeting an ancient text. On the other hand, an OT scholar has no particular expertise on flooding.

**iv)** To some extent, these are mutually interpretive. There's the meaning of the text. Then there's the historical event outside the text. The real-world referent. On the one hand the text gives us some pointers on what to look for. On the other hand, we need to know something about the world to identify references in the text. Correlating the word with the world is a two-way street. To some degree, we can't know the answer to one without knowing the answer to the other, and vice versa.

**v)** If young-earth creationism is true, then there's a tight timeframe into which to shoehorn the flood. If old-earth creationism is true, then there's more play in terms of when

it might of happened, and what historical or prehistorical events might trigger or match up with the flood account.

**vi)** Noah's flood is sometimes dated by reference to Mesopotamian flood traditions. One problem with that inference is that ancient people tend to depict the past in terms of their present. They didn't know much about the past. So they update the past, using their own time and place to pencil in the details.

**vii)** Noah's flood is sometimes dated to the Bronze Age or thereabouts by synchronizing Gen 4:17-22 with ancient Near Eastern archeological periods. One problem with that inference is that Gen 4:17-22 might be quite localized.

**viii)** Underlying the question of how to synchronize that pericope with ancient Near Eastern chronology is the deeper question of how secure that framework is. As Noel Weeks recently observed:

The earliest historical records that we have, and here I mean written texts, go back to around 3400BC. (This is on conventional dating. There are huge problems in ancient chronology and we cannot be certain about dates that far back.) This earliest evidence comes from southern Iraq. Incidentally, we can't read the text but it looks like writing. It's not until about 3000BC or later that we can get anything that we can read, either from Iraq or Egypt. If you want to base evidence on things other than written texts, it gets rather difficult.

<http://ap.org.au/images/2011AP/AP0211.pdf>

**ix)** How many commentators on Genesis have extensive firsthand experience of Mideast geography? When they

comment on Ararat, how many of them have actually spent much time poking around hills and valleys in Armenia?

Seems to me that only an archeologist or geologist who's done fieldwork in the area is really qualified to comment on that. Otherwise, it's just a textual abstraction.

**x)** And, of course, we must also make allowances for changes in the regional topography. Indeed, the flood itself might have altered the terrain. So historical reconstruction is a bit circular.

## Is the flood of Noah a parabolic legend?

I'm going to comment on Paul Seely's classification of the flood account as a "parabolic legend." I'll be quoting from parts 1-2 of his 3-part series at BioLogos, as well as his WTJ article:

"Noah's Flood: Its Date, Extent, and Divine Accommodation," WTJ 66 (2004): 291-311.

<http://biologos.org/blog/the-flood-not-global-barely-local-mostly-theological-i>

<http://biologos.org/blog/the-flood-not-global-barely-local-mostly-theological-ii>

Before commenting on Seely, I'd like to make a general observation. There are scholars like Bill Arnold and Peter Enns who engage the flood account at a purely textual level, as if this is just a story. A literary construct with no real world correlative.

But why think ancient people took no interest in natural disasters? Why think ancient people didn't have a cultural memory of natural disasters? They led precarious lives, at the mercy of natural forces that could, and sometimes did, wipe them out.

Take this passage of Scripture:

*The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in*

*the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1).*

Amos is using a major earthquake to date his calling. He takes for granted the fact that his audience remembered the event. That this was an unforgettable experience for those who lived through it.

Take St. Lucia's flood in 1287. Take the volcanic destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 AD. Take the Antioch earthquake in 115 AD. Take the Minoan eruption (c. 1600 BC), which may have inspired the legend of Atlantis.

Why assume ancient people just invent stories about natural disasters?

Data from various scientific disciplines provides a clear indication that Noah's Flood did not cover the globe of the earth.

There are, of course, evangelical scientists who field stock objections to a global flood. For instance:

Leonard Brand & Arthur Chadwick, **FAITH, REASON, AND EARTH HISTORY: A PARADIGM OF EARTH AND BIOLOGICAL ORIGINS BY INTELLIGENT DESIGN** (Andrews University Press; 3rd ed., 2016)

Jonathan Sarfati, **THE GENESIS ACCOUNT: A THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS 1-11** (2015)

Andrew Snelling, **EARTH'S CATASTROPHIC PAST: GEOLOGY, CREATION, & THE FLOOD** (2014)

Kurt Wise, **FAITH, FORM, AND TIME: WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES AND SCIENCE CONFIRMS ABOUT CREATION AND THE AGE OF THE UNIVERSE** (2000)

Before considering that data, however, we must first determine a rough earliest probable date for the Flood. If the Flood is an actual historical event, it must touch down in the empirical data of history somewhere. We can make a rough approximation of its date from the two genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11. At one end is Adam, whose culture is Neolithic and therefore can be dated no earlier than around 9,000 or 10,000 B.C. At the other end is Abraham who can be dated to approximately 2000 B.C. In both genealogies the Flood occurs in the middle of these two ends, and therefore roughly at 5500 or 6000 B.C. An even clearer indication of the Flood's date is implied by the statement that shortly after the Flood, Noah planted a vineyard. This implies the growing of domesticated grapes, which do not show up in the archaeological record until c. 4000 B.C.<sup>1</sup> The biblical Flood is therefore probably not earlier than 4000 or maybe 5000 B.C.

The genealogy in Gen 5 begins with Adam, who is clearly described as a farmer in a garden (Gen 2:15) and who after his expulsion from the garden continues to do the very same kind of work (Gen 3:23 and 2:5,15). Genesis 4:1,2 in the light of 4:25



imply that Cain and Abel were contemporaries of Adam. Since Adam and Cain were farmers and Abel a shepherd, and neither domesticated crops nor domesticated sheep or goats appear in the archaeological record until c. 9000 B.C., Adam's earliest possible date is c. 9000 B.C.' Adam's probable date, however, appears to be later. Genesis 2:8 tells us that God planted a garden (see 9:20; 21:33; Lev 9:23) that had fruit trees (2:9, 16; 3:2, 7). The implication of the words "plant" and "garden" are that the fruit trees are domesticated fruit trees. Adam has to "work" the garden (2:15), but he does not have to domesticate wild trees.

**i)** Notice that his entire argument hinges on a Neolithic date for Adam. That's the terminus ad quo. All his subsequent arguments build on that pivotal assumption.

**ii)** A Neolithic dating scheme usually assumes a chronological progression, where human culture passes through a series of stages, viz.,

Paleolithic  
Mesolithic  
Neolithic  
Copper Age  
Bronze Age  
Iron Age

This is subject to further subdivisions, viz. Neolithic prepottery.

Neolithic culture is characterized by bone and stone implements, primitive husbandry and horticulture.

**iii)** There are problems with using this classification scheme to date Adam. For one thing, Gen 2 says precious little about Adamic technology. Moreover, nothing in Gen 2 requires farming or the domestication of animals. The garden animals were already tame. Moreover, the garden already had edible wild vegetation.

Indeed, life in Eden stands in contrast to conditions outside the garden. That's one reason the expulsion from Eden was a physical hardship (Gen 3:17-19).

**iv)** In addition, it's my impression that many cultures subsist in a state of technological stasis, absent some external stimulus. Cultures don't automatically undergo technological progress. A lot depends on the natural resources which their particular locale provides. There's not much incentive to develop more technology than you need to survive or flourish. Some environments are more hospitable than others. Life is easier in some places than others.

For instance, Mesopotamians were motivated to develop flood control technology. But unless you live in a flood zone, there's not the same incentive.

Likewise, competitive military technology can be a spur to innovation (e.g. metallurgy). If your enemy uses spears, it behooves you to develop long bows. If your enemy uses long bows, it behooves you to develop crossbows. If your enemy uses bronze weaponry, it behooves you to develop iron weaponry. If your enemy uses swords, it behooves you to develop muskets. If your enemy uses fortified cities, it behooves you to develop cannons. And so on and so forth.

Take North America, South America, and South Pacific Islanders before contact with Europeans. Didn't many

“Indians” operate at a roughly Neolithic level for centuries on end? If European colonization hadn’t jump-started their culture, wouldn’t many of those cultures remain at a Neolithic level indefinitely?

To take another comparison, weren’t some Mesoamerican Indian cultures (e.g. Maya, Inca, Aztec) more “advanced” than many North American Indian tribes (e.g. Iroquois, Plains Indians)?

The fact that a particular culture is technologically primitive doesn’t strike me as a reliable chronological indicator. Even in the 20C, we’ve discovered “stone age” tribes in the Amazon jungle.

**v)** Seely also confuses technological innovation with cultural diffusion. Technological innovation only requires a smart inventor. But technological innovation could be quite localized. Archeological evidence assumes fairly widespread practice. After all, given how little evidence survives the ravages of time, there had to be a large initial sample to have trace evidence millennia later. The first datable evidence we happen to have for a particular custom is hardly concomitant with when the custom was first introduced. We’d expect the custom to antedate our residual evidence.

When tells in the Near East which date from 5000 to the time of Abraham are examined, no evidence of a global flood is found. In fact, overlapping layers of occupation, one on top of the other, often with the remains of mud-brick houses in place, are found intact spanning the entire period. No matter what specific date one might put on the flood after 5000 B.C., there were sites in the Near East at that date where people lived and remained undisturbed by any serious flood.

In other words, not only is there no evidence of a flood that covered the Near East, there is archaeological evidence that no flood covered the Near East between 5000 and the time of Abraham.

In fact there are continuous cultural sequences which overlap each other from 9500 to 3000 B.C. and down into the times of the patriarchs and later.

Let's grant that contention for the sake of argument. It's only as good as his Neolithic starting point. What if the flood took place *before* then?

So, there is an objective basis for an actual biblical Flood. Why then do I title this post "Barely Local?" The answer is that neither the flood of 2900 B.C. nor any other actual local flood, such as the Black Sea flood, nor the melting of ice caps at various historical points closely fits the biblical description. Local flood theories do not fit the biblical account with regard to secondary issues such as lasting one year and destroying all the birds (even in a local area).

The fact that all birds died in the Flood, leaving alive only Noah and those with him on the ark (Gen 7:21-23) makes it clear that the Flood was not local. In a local flood a small minority of birds might die, but most of them would fly away to dry land.

**i)** Which assumes the birds were brought on board to preserve them from the flood. But a local flood doesn't require that rationale. Rather, ravens and homing pigeons were used in ancient maritime navigation to locate land.

**ii)** Keep in mind that even in a global flood, some waterfowl could presumably survive on carrion, driftwood, &c.

More importantly, no local flood theory agrees with the biblical account at the most critical points: landing the ark in the Ararat mountains, covering the entire Near East (Genesis 9:19, "all the earth" = Genesis 10),

The statement of Gen 7:19 that water covered "all the high mountains under all the heavens" contextually includes the high mountains under the heavens of the country of Ararat (Gen 8:4), ancient Urartu which centered around Lake Van. Since the country of Ararat was thought to have been located at the northern extent of the earth (Gen 10:2; Ezek 38:6) at the "the nether end of the known world," it is not just Mesopotamia but the entire extent of the earth as it was then conceived that is in view.

**i)** Notice that Seely distinguishes between a worldwide flood and a local flood which covers the *known* world. In his opinion, the narrator is describing what is actually a local flood, but global from the blinkered perspective of the ancient narrator.

**ii)** But if, by his own admission, the flood was actually local, then what would localize the flood are natural barriers like mountains.

**iii)** What about the Lake Van area?

The "mountains of Ararat" of 8:4 most likely refers to the foothills where the Mesopotamian plains in the north yield to the highlands near the sources of the

Tigris and Euphrates rivers. B.  
Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge 2009), 105.

The plateaus around the lakes are about 1.6 km. (1 mi.) above sea level, surrounded by even higher mountains. "Urartu," **THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY**, 463.

According to Seely's own depiction, the land of Ararat marks the outer limits of the flood. And what, exactly, would prevent the floodwaters from extending beyond that region? Presumably the mountain range.

So the mental picture this generates is rising water submerging the plateaus or foothills, but contained by the mountain range behind it. Like water in a saucer. That would be consistent with the landmarks that Seely educes.

In addition, although the ark is said to come to rest on the "mountains" (plural) of Ararat rather than on a particular peak like Mt. Ararat, Gen 8:3-5 implies that the ark landed very high up in the Ararat mountains, because after the ark grounded the water had to recede for another two and a half months before the tops of the surrounding mountains became exposed. It is perhaps possible that the ark did not land on what is now called Mt. Ararat, but it must have landed on some higher-than-average mountain in Urartu or else the tops of the surrounding mountains would have been exposed much sooner. Genesis 8:3-5 thus implies that the water was even deeper than 8000 feet.

It's not clear to me how Seely is visualizing this process.

**i)** Seems to me that where the ark ran aground would depend on whatever the ark happened to be floating above at the time floodwaters were receding. From what I've read, the land of Ararat is a hilly region with many narrow valleys. So, for instance, the ark might be caught in the eddy of a steep mountain cove. The walls of the cove would ring the ark, like a toy boat in a bathtub after you pull the plug. The elevation would vary, depending on the location of the cove.

**ii)** If the ark came to rest in a steep mountain cove, Noah wouldn't be able to see above or around the surrounding hillsides. Indeed, that would be a good reason to release the raven and the homing pigeon.

That the Bible is describing the Flood as covering the entire earth as it was then conceived is perhaps most conclusively seen in the fact that the primeval ocean of Gen 1:2, half of which was placed above the firmament on the second day of creation (Gen 1:6, 7) and half of which was placed around and under the earth on the third day of creation (Gen 1:9, 10; Job 26:10; Pss 24:2; 136:6; Prov 8:27b) comes back from above the firmament and from below the earth (Gen 7:11; cf. 8:2) to again cover the earth with water."

Of course, the flood is not a literal de-creation. It is analogous to creation in reverse.

Given the probable date of the Flood, we can also ask the question. Is there any archaeological evidence for a Flood in the Near East between 4000 (or 5000 at the earliest) and 2300 B.C.? The short answer is that the only evidence of serious flooding in the Near East during that time period is from riverine floods.

And since the biblical account is describing a flood much more extensive than that, we have no archaeological evidence for the Flood as it is described in Scripture.

In addition, since even local riverine floods normally leave some evidence by way of silt layers, a year-long flood (Gen 7:11; 8:13-14) covering all the high mountains (Gen 7:19) from around Sardinia to Afghanistan and from the Black Sea to the Gulf of Aden (Gen 9:19; 10:32) would certainly have left physical evidence in the tells of the Near East. These tells should all show a silt layer or at least a sterile layer dating to the same time period throughout the Near East.

The walls of mud brick buildings, which are found on most sites, should show serious water erosion, and this erosion should appear at the same time period throughout the Near East. Also, if the Flood destroyed all but eight people, most of these tells should show a long period of vacancy following their silt or sterile layer, while the population regrew and expanded.

**i)** This objection piggybacks on Seely's dubious timeframe.

**ii)** Also, although I'm no expert, I don't see why we'd expect evidence for an ancient flood to be coextensive with the scope of the flood. Wouldn't the evidence tend to be intermittent, even if the flood was more widespread? Depending on local terrain and precipitation, spring melt, wouldn't some silt layers be washed away? Wouldn't subsequent water erosion erode some of the flood deposit?

From these passages in Ezekiel, Gen 49:25, and Deut 33:13 along with ancient Near Eastern parallels, OT



biblical scholars, including the consensus of evangelical OT scholars, agree that the "fountains of the great Deep" which supplied the water for the Flood were fresh water terrestrial fountains drawing upon a subterranean sea.

Ground water and soil moisture, which would be the modernized counterpart to the subterranean ocean that supplied the water for the tree in Ezek 31, the agricultural crops in Gen 49 and Deut 33, and the terrestrial fountains of Gen 7:11, constitute just 0.615 percent of all water on earth. If 100 percent of it flowed out upon the earth, it would flood the earth to a depth of less than 60 feet. It is obvious then that if they are transmuted into modern terms, the "fountains of the great Deep" are completely inadequate to cover all the high mountains of even the Near East.

Let's grant that contention for the sake of argument. If, according to Seely's own analysis, the narrative doesn't identify adequate water reserves to flood the whole world or even the entire ANE, then, on *internal* grounds, why is that not an argument for a local flood from the viewpoint of the *narrator*?

Most telling is the fact that Noah is treated in Gen 9 as a new Adam, a new beginning for mankind.

But that would be consistent with a local flood that's anthropologically universal. And some of the narrative landmarks dovetail with that particular outlook.

Gen 2:10-14 situates Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia. So that would be the epicenter of human population. Man would migrate from that focal point.

And the ark lands in northern Mesopotamia (Gen 8:4). That would be consistent with a flood that originates in Mesopotamia. The diluvial point of origin would correspond to the human point of origin. The scope of the flood would correspond to the biogeography of human dispersion at that stage of human history, where man radiates out from Eden, but is still confined to the ANE—which would also be consistent with the Table of Nations (Gen 10).

I conclude that Seely's objections to the local flood interpretation are fallacious. Moreover, he doesn't engage the most astute proponents of the global flood interpretation. So his argument fails on both counts.

## Rainbows

- i)** Why is the rainbow the sign of Noah's covenant? An obvious reason is that rainbows signal the end of a rainstorm. Some rainstorms produce flash flooding. So there's a natural symbolic association.
  
- ii)** Another reason may be the universality of rainbows, compared to regional phenomena like the Northern lights. The universality of rainbows match the universality of Noah's covenant. A covenant with creation. A covenant that signifies ordinary providence.
  
- iii)** Because rainbows are generated by sunlight and rain water, they evoke the Creator God of Gen 1—the Maker of the sun and rainclouds. That points to the divinity of the Son of Man in **Ezk 1:25-28**, whose nimbic aura resembles a rainbow.
  
- iv)** In a dry climate like the Middle East, rainbows have a beneficent connotation. They signify life-giving rain. A sign of divine favor and blessing. An emblem of divine benevolence.

## Mixed nuts

I recently read **THE LOST WORLD OF THE FLOOD** (IVP 2018) by Tremper Longman & John Walton. It's like a can of mixed nuts.

It's noteworthy that the two main collaborators, as well as one contributor, are all affiliated with the BioLogos Foundation, which is the flagship of theistic evolution.

**1.** This is part of an ongoing series: The Lost World of Genesis One, The Lost World of Adam and Eve, The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest, The Lost World of Scripture.

Although it's not entirely fair to judge a book by its title, since a title is simpler than the content of a book, it is, nevertheless, misleading to frame the issue in terms of a "lost world" of Scripture, as if the Bible was a complete cipher until the advent of biblical archeology.

**2.** Chap. 1 reviews hermeneutics and their theory of inspiration. They distinguish between what Bible writers allegedly believe and what the text affirms. Among other things, they say:

First, there is a real world, but the Bible does not *describe* that world authoritatively. Its description is both culturally conditioned (solid sky, waters above, etc.) and rhetorically shaped...There was a real, cataclysmic event [Noah's flood], but the Bible does not *describe* that event authoritatively...Nevertheless,

the Bible does *interpret* that event authoritatively (11).

In chap 3 they say:

...the writing, while referential, is not particularly interested in *reporting* the event in a way that allows us to *reconstruct* the event, but rather focuses on the interpretation of the event. In other words, the author depicts the event in a way that furthers his theological message (21).

There's a problem with affirming the historicity of reported Biblical events while driving a wedge between the report and what really happened. For one thing, surely ancient readers were interested in what really happened.

Although photographic realism shouldn't be the standard for assessing the accuracy of ancient historical writing, yet unless there's a discernible correspondence between the narrative description and the actual event, affirming the historicity of the event is a pretty empty exercise.

For instance, there are scholars who affirm that the Exodus has a kernel of fact, buried in layers of legendary embellishment. Likewise, there are scholars who affirm that the Gospels have a factual core, heavily garnished by pious imagination. But that's a very Pickwickian definition of historicity.

Even though Bible history—and historical writing generally—isn't audiotape and videotape, yet if you step into the time machine and go back to the reported event, you should be able to recognize the event on the basis of the report. Sure, you can make allowance for literary conventions. But if the report isn't comparable to what actually happened, then it's

not a faithful record. Jews and Christians are supposed to believe in the event behind the record and not a theological interpretation that's independent of what happened. The two are supposed to go together. If the description bears little identifiable resemblance to the underlying event, then we are at best in the realm of historical fiction.

Assuming the Gospels are faithful to events, when I step out of the time machine and follow Jesus around with my Bible in hand, I'll notice differences, where Gospel writers simplified what happened, grouped some teachings by topic, sometimes gave the gist of what was said, and so forth, but if I can't recognize where I am in the story, then the affirmation that the record goes back to a real event is hollow, if the underlying event is too dissimilar to the report. Same thing with OT history. If, say, you "affirm" the Exodus, but strip away all the miracles, the "historical" Exodus is not the Exodus of Scripture. Not even close. What are you obligated to believe? A theological gloss that doesn't correspond to what happened? Or an underlying event that doesn't correspond to the theological gloss? It's an untenable dichotomy either way.

They say:

The accounts in Gen 1-11 can be affirmed as having real events as their referents, but the events themselves (yes, they happened) find their significance in the interpretation they are given in the biblical text. That significance is not founded on their historicity but in their theology; not *what* happened (or even that something *did* happen) but in *why* it happened (17).

But once you pry the interpretation away from the original event, you're in no position to affirm the event since,

according to Walton/Longman, the accounts don't give you access to the event.

"Yes, they happened"? *What* happened? We're told that Scripture doesn't describe events "authoritatively" or enable us to reconstruct the underlying event. Of course, it's unnecessary to reconstruct the event if the description is faithful to the event. But they erect a false dichotomy, as if the significance is an artificial coating. There's the event, and there's the theological veneer, and these are separable.

They say:

...biblical texts are written from the author's "cognitive environment". The Bible was written for us, but not to us. We have no reason to believe that God gave ancient authors special knowledge of perspectives on geology, cosmology, astronomy, or any other scientific information beyond that known at the time (47).

But in that case, the creation accounts regarding the origin of the world, life on earth, and man in particular, *cannot* be true. They're no different than ancient creation stories in general, which combine imagination with prescientific understanding.

Longman and Walton deny revelation outright. Do they think the biblical narrator shared their viewpoint? Do they think OT prophets were self-deluded in believing that God revealed himself to them? Was the audible voice a hallucination? Were their dreams and visions hallucinatory? Did God show them nothing in reality?

**3.** They base their position on the claim that ancient people–Bible writers included–believed we think with our

hearts and entrails (8,10). But how do they verify that claim? Do they simply think that because Bible writers use that imagery, they meant it literally? Yet scripture is full of anatomical metaphors. Moreover, writers have been using anatomical imagery, not just in ancient times, but all the way up to the present. Did ancient people never notice that a blow to the head impairs cognition?

**4.** In chap. 3, the authors say Gen 1-11 employs "rhetorical devices".

**i)** It is, of course, undeniable that Scripture uses rhetorical devices. However, that can be misleading. For instance, a prosaic report may contain figures of speech, but that doesn't make the whole report figurative. A history of the Civil War may be sprinkled with figures of speech, but that doesn't make the historical account an extended metaphor. To the contrary, the account is literal.

**ii)** In addition, many of their examples are tendentious:

We should say that there are a number of items that almost everyone would agree are figurative. A partial list would include the description of animals coming forth from the ground (Gen 2:19)... (25).

**a)** To begin with, that's a misleading summary of Gen 2:19. It doesn't merely say animals sprang from the ground but that God formed animals from the ground. Quite a difference!

**b)** In addition, what "almost everyone would agree are figurative" is exegetically irrelevant. That's not the hermeneutical frame of reference. The question is whether the original audience would agree that it's figurative?



Walton/Longman are theistic evolutionists, but the original audience was not.

Indeed, the rhetorical shaping helps us see that the creation account is not presenting an account of material origins but rather equating the seven days of temple inauguration (25).

That's Walton's hobbyhorse, but many scholars who aren't young-earth creationists nevertheless reject his false dichotomy between material and functional origins.

They then quote Origen on the Fourth Day (26). I agree with them that the Fourth Day poses a challenge to a strictly chronological reading of Gen 1. But I'm not sure how that qualifies as a "rhetorical device".

On the next page they once again quote Origen:

And who will be found simple enough to believe that like some farmer "God planted trees in the garden of Eden, in the east" and that he planted "the tree of life" in it, that is a visible tree that can be touched, so that someone could eat of this tree with corporeal teeth and gain life, and further, could eat of another tree and receive the knowledge of "good and evil"? Moreover, we find that God is said to stroll in the garden in the afternoon and Adam to hide under a tree. Surely, I think no one doubts that these statements are made by Scripture in the form of a figure by which they point to certain mysterious (27).

**i)** Why do Walton/Longman think Origen's allegorical, Platonizing gloss is any kind of model for exegeting Gen 2-3? How does that reflect the original intent of the narrator, whose outlook was undoubtedly far different?

**ii)** Origen acts as though it would be unseemly for God to plant a physical garden with physical trees. But that says a lot more about Origen than Genesis.

**iii)** A river valley is a very practical location for the first humans. Indeed, Gen 2 indicates that Eden was situated in Mesopotamia, which is a logical location, since rivers make life much more hospitable.

**iv)** Perhaps Origen is reacting, in part, to the superstitious notion that natural objects have magical properties. To that extent he's correct. But how does he interpret an account, like say, 1 Sam 5? It's not that the ark of the covenant has magical properties. Rather, God causes certain things to happen in association with the ark for symbolic reasons. Same principle applies to the trees in Gen 2-3.

Commenting on Gen 2:7, Walton/Longman say:

Such a description of the creation of the first man is patently figurative once we realize that God is a spiritual being and does not have lungs (27-28).

**i)** But this occurs in a book that's full of angelophanies, including the angel of the Lord. Indeed, the Pentateuch generally is sprinkled with angelophanies, including the angel of the Lord.

**ii)** In addition, as Walton has written elsewhere:

The Israelite worldview certainly accepted intercommunication between the divine and human realms, so that the realms are not isolated from one another...There are no statements that differentiate between the material substance of humans and angels.

In fact Genesis 18-19 and 32 give every indication of corporeality. "Sons of God, Daughters of Men," T. D. Alexander & D. Baker, eds. **DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: PENTATEUCH** (IVP 2003), 795.

If the divine figure in Gen 2-3 is an allusion to the Angel of the Lord, foreshadowing the theophanic angel, then it's consistent with the narrator's viewpoint that Yahweh can assume or simulate physical or corporeal form.

The authors say:

The early chapters of Genesis contain a number of obvious anachronisms to everyone but those who refuse to pay attention to the evidence we have from the ancient world:

- the care of domesticated animals occurring in the second generation of humanity (Gen 4:2-5)
- the construction of the first city in the second generation of humanity (Gen 4:17)
- musical instruments in the eighth generation (Gen 4:21)
- Bronze and iron making in the eighth generation (Gen 4:22).  
(28-29)

**i)** Given the longevity of the prediluvians, combined with the fact that these may well be open genealogies with gaps between named descendants, is there a presumption that they wouldn't domesticate animals, make musical instruments, or settle down in a village? To a modern

reader, "city" has very different connotations. Many primitive people have musical instruments.

As one commentator points out, the reference may be to meteoric iron and surface deposits of copper rather than metallurgy (Hamilton, 1:239). Walton/Longman deceive the reader by presenting one-sided interpretations. Most readers don't have access to good commentaries and reference works, so they can't double check the claims. They rely on Walton/Longman for their information, which is treacherous.

In chap. 5 they say it is helpful to compare the discussion of primordial cosmic cataclysm in the flood narrative to what we find in apocalyptic literature, which often portrays future cosmic cataclysm...The genre of apocalyptic show us that a portrait of sociopolitical cataclysm can be rhetorically shaped with cosmic proportions (37).

In the final chapter they say:

The rhetoric we recognize from the ancient Near East depicts the scope and effect in cosmic proportions. We can classify the flood narrative as a "cataclysm account" and then identify cataclysm accounts in the ANE and the Bible being characterized in cosmic proportions. This same characterization was noted as also another genre, apocalyptic. As such it uses hyperbole as part of a universalistic rhetoric shown to be part of the repertoire of biblical authors in other places in Scripture (178).

**i)** It's true that Scripture can use end-of-the-world imagery for historical judgments.

**ii)** It is, however, prejudicial to assume they always have a local referent. After all, if there are worldwide judgments, how is that to be described if not in universal language?

**iii)** The term "cosmic" is inapt in reference to the flood account. The earth is not the universe, even by ancient standards.

**iv)** Likewise, the flood is not a "primordial" event but one occurring well into the ongoing history of the world.

**5.** In chap. 4, the authors say the Bible uses hyperbole to describe historical events. To some extent that's undoubtedly true, and it may well be germane to interpreting the flood account.

It's odd, though, that their showcase example comes from Joshua rather than the Pentateuch. In chap. 5 they cite Lam 2:22 and Zeph 1. Although that illustrates hyperbole, it's a bit far afield in relation to Genesis. And there are genre differences.

In chap. 8 they cite examples of hyperbole from the Pentateuch (Gen 41:57; Exod 9:6,19; Deut 2:25). That's more pertinent to the flood account. In chap 5 they cite Gen 6:5 as an example of hyperbole.

In chap. 5, they deploy the principle of hyperbole to say the dimensions of the ark are hyperbolic. In reality, the ark was however much smaller.

A stock objection to the historicity of Noah's flood is that a wooden ship that size would lack structural integrity. If, however, the description is hyperbolic, that neatly disposes of that objection.

This is one of the better arguments in the book. I think readers should take that explanation into consideration.

In the same chapter they attack Ken Ham's reconstruction of the ark. They point out that it's even larger than the conventional understanding of a cubit. It was built using modern equipment with a large crew of skilled workers. It was never tested for seaworthiness. Those are legitimate criticisms.

Other criticisms are less secure. They pour scorn on the notion that Noah's family had any assistance. But Noah was not a shipwright. So, apart from divine revelation, how would he and his sons have the know-how to build it? And why is it unreasonable to suppose that Noah retained hired help?

They say:

Only the most gullible can possibly believe all of the exceptional conditions that are needed to understand the description of the flood story as anything but hyperbolic (39).

But the flood account has supernatural elements. The audible voice of God speaking to Noah. God sending the animals to Noah (7:8-9), and God closes the hatch from the outside (7:16). Keep in mind, two, that all these narratives are sketchy, omitting many details. While we need to resist ad hoc appeals to the miraculous, we need to resist the opposite tendency of explaining the entire event naturalistically. Do Walton/Longman explain the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah or the signs and wonders of the Exodus and wilderness wandering naturalistically?

They say Gen 7:11 reflects

an ancient cosmology where under the flat earth were the subterranean waters... (40).

Yet that contradicts chap 15, where a contributor summarizes Carol Hill's evidence. It's worth quoting her in full:

The Bible mentions the "fountains of the deep" (springs) twice in its narrative—once when the springs start (Gen. 7:11) and once when they stop (Gen. 8:2). Springs are a prime factor that could have caused prolonged flooding. When it rains or when snow melts, water does not only flow over the ground as stream runoff. It can also travel underground as "groundwater," finally exiting at springs. Genesis 7:11 says that the fountains of the great deep (subterranean water or groundwater) were "broken up." "Broken up" comes from the Hebrew "bâqa," which means to "break forth," or be "ready to burst," and so the literal meaning of Gen. 7:11 is that these springs began gushing water.<sup>40</sup> The connotation of Gen. 7:11 is that a surging mass of water burst forth from a deep subterranean water supply. Springs exist all over Mesopotamia and surrounding highlands, and most of these are limestone (karst) springs. Ras-el-ain (ain means "spring"), near the border of Syria and Turkey, is one of the largest limestone karst springs in the world and is the effective head of the Khabr River, a major tributary of the Euphrates.<sup>41</sup> Water from this spring (actually a complex of thirteen springs) comes from maximum winter infiltration (snow melt and rain in the Taurus Mountains) in January–February, but this water does not actually discharge at Ras-el-ain until the following July or August. This type of delay is typical of many karst springs, where recharge may be

distant or convoluted from the spring discharge point. Some springs flow all the time, some springs flow only when it floods, and some springs have a delayed reaction between recharge and discharge. In the case of a delayed reaction, a continuous supply of water may be supplied for many months after a heavy rainstorm (or storms). The Bible seems to indicate that at least some springs began gushing water immediately as the Flood started (Gen. 7:11), but that others continued for up to five months (Gen. 8:2). Specific springs (among many) that could have contributed water to the Mesopotamian hydrologic basin during Noah's Flood are those located near ancient Sippar, Babylon, and Kish;<sup>42</sup> those in the vicinity of Hit;<sup>43</sup> and those in the Jezira desert region between Baghdad and Mosul.<sup>44</sup> Tributaries to the Tigris also emerge from karst springs (large caves) along the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. When severe rains occur in the Zagros, these springs respond with a strong outflow, causing the rivers to swell and overflow onto the plains.<sup>45</sup> In antiquity, one of the most important of these springs emerged from Shalmaneser's Cave, which was thought to be the "source" of the Tigris when Shalmaneser III visited the cave in 852 BC. <sup>46</sup> It is also recorded that Sargon II had learned the secret of tapping water from subterranean strata during his campaign against Ulhu and Urartu (the land of Ararat).<sup>47</sup> Numerous springs also exist in the deep canyons of the Cudi Dag (Jabel Judi), Cizre region of southeastern Turkey. Various karst features such as springs, sinks, and caves have developed in the Jurassic-Cretaceous Cudi Limestone of these mountains. The best known of these springs is located west of Beytiebab; other smaller ones occur further south.<sup>48</sup> Runoff from these springs can prolong



flooding in the upper Tigris River Valley-Cizre Plain area —just where Noah's ark may have landed (Fig. 1).

<https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2006/PSCF6-06Hill.pdf>

Far from reflecting an obsolete, three-story universe, the description fits the specific hydrology of the region.

**6.** It's hard to classify their position. On the one hand, they think Noah's flood was a regional flood. Based on that, you think they'd classify their own position as a defense of the local flood interpretation.

Yet in chap. 6 they attack the local flood interpretation. They quote universalistic passages. And they raise stock objections to the local flood interpretation that are usually adduced by proponents of a global flood.

Their position is that Genesis depicts a local flood in global terms. It uses hyperbolic language to represent a regional flood as if that's a worldwide catastrophe. Yet that's consistent with the local flood interpretation. The local flood interpretation doesn't mean the descriptive language is specifically or intentionally localized. Rather, it means the language is neutral or noncommittal. Sometimes universal expressions are universal, and sometimes universal expressions are hyperbolic. The language in itself doesn't specify the scope one way or the other. Rather, that's context-dependent.

They say:

Can we imagine all man beings at this time were in one specific place that could be covered by a large, local flood? Of course, it is difficult to answer this question

because the Bible does not tell us when the flood took place. Nor does it provide information about the distribution of humans from the moment of their creation. For that matter, the location of Noah's family isn't named either. The only geographical reference in the story is to the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4). While not a specific reference to a particular mountain, the region is found in eastern Turkey near Lake Van.

From what we know through scientific inquiry, humanity's history began in Africa and eventually spread to the Middle East and Europe and beyond. Thus, unless we are talking about an early local flood in Africa (which would make little sense of the Ararat landing), there was no time when all humans were concentrated in a specific area so that even an extensive, regional flood could wipe them all out (45-46).

But that objection is deeply confused from a hermeneutical standpoint. It's not an exegetical objection but a "scientific" objection, predicated on assumptions alien to the viewpoint of an ancient Near Eastern reader. In Genesis, the origin of man is out of Mesopotamia, not out of Africa.

Likewise, the original audience might well think a regional flood could wipe out humanity if for them the extent of the known world was coextensive with the Middle East (or thereabouts). Walton/Longman are interpreting the account by appeal to modern geography and evolutionary biology, but of course, the original audience didn't have that frame of reference. It's really strange that they constantly chide modern readers for failing to construe the text according to the historical horizon of an ancient Near Eastern reader, when they themselves do an about-face.

The narrator is depicting a deluge on a scale that engulfs the known world. Yet that doesn't speak to the actual scope of the event one way or another, since, in the nature of the case, an event beyond the outer limits of what the original audience was acquainted with falls outside their purview. From their provincial outlook, a local flood of sufficient magnitude might appear to be a worldwide phenomenon. Even Walton/Longman say

That doesn't impugn the inerrancy of the account because the account doesn't contain identifiable geographical markers beyond Uratu, Mesopotamian river system, and the karst terrain. In that respect the viewpoint is local.

To take a comparison, when we say the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, we're not speaking in absolute terms but relative to the horizon, which varies depending on where you live. Likewise, if I say I live in the South or I live in the North, or Southwest or Northwest or Southeast or Northeast, those are relative compass points. "North" for someone in Canada is different from "north" for someone in Biloxi Mississippi, which is different from "north" for someone in Argentina.

**7.** Chap 8 is one of the better chapters in the book:

**i)** Walton/Longman note the formulaic intervals in the flood account (71).

**ii)** An interesting discussion of "academic arithmetic" in relation to the temple in Babylon (75).

**iii)** Noting the reliefs in Karmac, where Pharaoh is larger-than-life compared to his enemies. Observers would understand that wasn't to scale, but visual hyperbole.

**iv)** An interesting analysis of Gen 6:14, where obscure Hebrew words are compared to Akkadian cognates. Thus, "rooms" might mean "reeds", used as caulking material (77-78).

**v)** They say:

There is no evidence to suggest that the ark in Genesis recapitulates sacred space. The rectangular dimensions suggest instead that it recapitulates the standard shape of boats (77).

That's an odd oversight inasmuch as the tabernacle and the temple both had rectangular dimensions, so that's entirely consistent with emblematic sacred space.

In sum, their book has a few tasty cashews mixed in with lots of stale chestnuts.

## Rising sea levels

If the primary objective of Noah's flood was to wipe out the human race, how much dry land would need to be flooded? For instance, consider this map if sea levels rose by about 1500 feet or 0.3 miles (see below)

Depending on the size and distribution of the prediluvian human population, it wouldn't be necessary to flood all the dry land to drown the human race. Moreover, even if some humans could escape to high ground, that doesn't necessarily (or even probably) mean there'd be enough food to live on. Depends on the availability of edible fauna and flora, shelter, firewood, drinking water, weapons for hunting &c., on high ground.

This map takes for granted the current land distribution. If you think the prediluvian earth was different in that respect, then we have to make adjustments for that hypothetical variable.

Suppose, before the flood, there were massive polar ice caps...which melted.

<https://twitter.com/TerribleMaps/status/860002858795753473>



## Death and flooding

I suspect that when many people read about Noah's flood, they assume the victims died by drowning. And that has some implications of the depth of the flood, since you can only drown in water that's over your head (or above your neck).

Now, I'm no expert, but it seems obvious to me that there are various ways to die in a flood short of drowning. Suppose there's standing water at waist-level or chest-level for just a month. You can still breathe. You won't die by suffocation. However:

**i)** You can't sleep because you can't lie down. But there comes a point when the urge to sleep is irrepressible. So you can only keep your head above water for so long.

**ii)** Other than fruit trees (which are seasonal), you have nothing to eat. You can't even see where food is, because it's submerged.

Stored dry foods will be spoiled by the flood waters. Wineskins suffer the same fate. No waterproof containers. No tupperware in the ancient world.

You can't hunt game. Standing water impedes mobility. Even if you could catch game or livestock, you can't cook it. And the flood will drown the low-slung livestock.

**iii)** You don't have drinking water. The flood waters are polluted. So you either drink contaminated water or die of thirst.

**iv)** Depending on the temperature, you can die of hypothermia.

**v)** Depending on the rapidity of the deluge, Noah's neighbors might not have time to evacuate to high ground, assuming they lived in the vicinity of high ground.

It also depends on the direction of the floodwaters. If torrential floodwaters are rushing downstream, that will impede ability to reach high ground. You'd either be heading into the floodwaters or be overtaken by the floodwaters.

And even if coastal flooding was the primary source, causing rivers to back up, you could still be overtaken by the deluge, and swept away by strong currents.



## The Flood and the Ice Age

The nature of the flood mechanism required to generate Noah's flood depends in part on the scope of the flood. If the flood was worldwide, then that requires a more ambitious flood mechanism. If, however, the flood was regional, then different flood mechanisms might be available.

One of the challenges for a scientific explanation of the flood is where the extra water came from, and where it went. On old-earth chronology, the flood may have been pre-Holocene. Suppose it took in the late Pleistocene era. According to conventional geology, there were cycles of glaciation and deglaciation. Frozen water is a source of extra water. Ice can both store and release extra water.

What are sources of flooding? The annual springtime snowmelt is one example. Of course, that's insufficient to produce a regional flood. Some mountains have a year-round snowcap. The springtime thaw only affects a lower portion of the snow cap.

Above a certain elevation, the temperature is always subfreezing, so the snowcap never melts. Hence, many high mountains have a permanent snowcap or icecap.

If, however, it's a volcanic mountain, and it erupts, the entire snowcap suddenly melts, which creates massive flooding. I assume a similar dynamic could take place in the case of continental glaciers. That would release vast quantities of water.

Collapsing glacial dams are a related phenomenon.

In addition to fluvial flooding is coastal flooding. Submarine volcanoes can melt frozen seas, which raises the sea level. Although that might not flood the interior, if population centers are located on the coast, it can wipe them out.

Sometimes the forces combine. Some rivers empty into the sea. A coastal location at the mouth of a river is appealing to humans because it gives them the benefits of a river for fishing and freshwater along with the ocean for fishing.

Glacial periods cause many species to migrate to warmer latitudes. They are concentrated in a smaller area. That would make it easier for Noah to collect the animals, since the local fauna would be both more representative and more accessible. Likewise, glacial periods expose continental shelves, which facilitate animal migration. Admittedly, that's less of an issue on the local flood interpretation.

This is all hypothetical. I'm just discussing some neglected explanations.

## The dove and the flood

In his recent book on Genesis, Iain Provan recycles a number of stock objections to Noah's flood, especially on a global interpretation. I'm not going to respond to most of those objections, in part because I've discussed that issue on multiple occasions, in part because these don't pose the same challenge for the local flood interpretation, and in part because young-earth creationists (e.g. Jonathan Sarfati, Andrew Snelling, Kurt Wise) have proposed solutions—which Provan simply ignores. But I'd like to comment on one particular objection, which is somewhat unusual:

At its most extreme, this approach results in a highly literalistic reading of the flood story that leads us into very problematic areas when it comes to squaring its perceived truth-claims with what is otherwise known (especially nowadays) about reality...If the sea level rose all over the earth as high as the peak of Mount Ararat (c. 16,946 feet), the oceans would have had to triple in volume in the course of 150 days and then speedily return to normal...And after the floodwaters receded, how did the dove fly down the mountain to find an olive tree (only found at low elevations) and then back up again to the top of the mountain, given that doves are not physically equipped to fly at such altitudes? How did Noah, his family members and the animals make the trek down such a formidable mountain? I. Provan, **DISCOVERING GENESIS** (Eerdmans, 2015), 117-18.

A few issues:

**i)** I don't know what Provan means by "literalistic". Does he mean the account is stylized? Or does he mean the account is legendary?

**ii)** Since I'm not an ornithologist, I can't assess Provan's claim. Sarfati says:

Doves and pigeons have very strong light muscles, around a third of their weight. So they are powerful flyers... J. Sarfati, *The Genesis Account* (2015), 574.

**iii)** Be that as it may, the text doesn't say the ark ran aground on Mt. Ararat. Rather, it bottomed out somewhere in that general mountain range:

*4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen (Gen 8:4-5).*

Many of us have seen mountain ranges from above when we flew over them in airplanes. At least in my experience, aerial views of mountain ranges frequently show rows of mountains with a trough in-between. Parallel ridges. Small areas may be encircled by the massif.

I can envision the ark becoming caught within a mountain range. Mountains on all four sides would be higher than the draught of the ark. The ark wouldn't rest on a mountain peak, but in a basin within the massif. Water would drain through slopes. As the waters lowered, the ark lowered until

it bottomed out on the floor of the basin. So it wouldn't be at anything like the elevation of Mt Ararat.

Do the "tops of the mountains" refer to all the mountains the region, or just the cluster that trapped the ark within their well?

Noah's party and the animals could climb out or climb down the slope or dip, between mountains, which functions like a natural mountain pass.

I'm not saying that's necessarily correct. I wasn't there. I don't know exactly or even approximately where the ark came to rest. But on the face of it, Provan's objection lacks imagination. Is he really trying to visualize the scene?

## Floating zoo

A common objection to Noah's ark is that prescientific people found the story credible because they didn't know any better. I'm going to quote two ancient Jewish sources which show that prescientific Jews were quite capable of raising logistical questions about Noah's ark. My point is not to comment on their solutions, or to provide my own solutions—which I've discussed on various occasions—but to simply document that it's fallacious to discount Noah's ark on the grounds that the narrator was too ignorant to anticipate practical objections to his account. Even before the advent of modern science, ancient readers were in a position to pose common sense questions like how and what to feed all the animals on the ark:

This applies to Noah, who fed and sustained the animals. What food did he feed them? R. Akiba maintained: All of them ate dried figs, as it is written: And it shall be for food for thee and for them (Gen 6:21). Our sages, however, said, This is not so. He provided each of them with the kind of food it was accustomed to eat—straw for the camel, barley for the ass, and so forth. Each animal was fed what it was accustomed to eat.

Certain animals were fed at the first hour of the day, others at the second, and still others at the third; while some animals were fed at the third of night, others at midnight, and still others at the time of the crowing of the cock. Our sages declared that during the twelve months in the ark, Noah slept neither during the day nor at night because he was occupied constantly with feeding the creatures in his care [Tanh. B. 58.2].

Samuel A. Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu with an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (KTAV, 1996), 41-42.

R. Hana b. Bizna said: Eliezer [Abraham's servant] remarked to Shem [Noah's] eldest son,<sup>42</sup> 'It is written, After their kinds they went forth from the ark. Now, how were you situated?'<sup>43</sup> - He replied. '[In truth], we had much trouble in the ark. The animals which are usually fed by day we fed by day; and those normally fed by night we fed by night. But my father did not know what was the food of the chameleon. One day he was sitting and cutting up a pomegranate, when a worm dropped out of it, which it [the chameleon] consumed. From then onward he mashed up bran for it, and when it became wormy, it devoured it. The lion was nourished by a fever, for Rab said, "Fever sustains for not less than six (days) nor more than thirteen."<sup>44</sup> As for the phoenix,<sup>45</sup> my father discovered it lying 'in the hold of the ark. "Dost thou require no food?" he asked it. "I saw that thou wast busy," it replied, "so I said to myself, I will give thee no trouble." "May it be (God's) will that thou shouldst not perish," he exclaimed; as it is written, Then I said, I shall die in the nest, but I shall multiply my days as the phoenix.' Sanh. 108b.

## Was the ark a lark?

**19** And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. **20** Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them"...**2** Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, **3** and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth ([Gen 6:19-21](#); [7:2-3](#)).

**i)** The rationale for this is pretty straightforward on the YEC interpretation. Since a global flood will destroy all land animals, breeding pairs are preserved on the ark to replenish the earth after the flood.

**ii)** Mind you, that position is not without complications. For instance, after the predators and prey disembark, what are the predators supposed to eat? The prey species. But if there's just one pair for each unclean species, and a predator eats the male or female member before they have a chance to reproduce, that species becomes extinct. Even with seven pair of clean species, that's an awfully slim margin with all those hungry predators afoot.

There are other familiar questions, like whether the gene pool is rich enough. Whether there's enough time for such a small sample to reproduce and diversify to where the



situation is today. Of course, young-earth creationists are used to fielding those objections.

**iii)** But what's the rationale, if any, on the OEC interpretation? That's a neglected interpretation. Consider some stock objections to the OEC interpretation: the size of the ark is out of all proportion for a local flood. Indeed, the ark is pointless since Noah and his family could just hike out of the flood zone in advance, while the flood zone would be repopulated by neighboring species after the fact. What about that?

**iv)** I'm not a shipwright, much less an authority on ancient shipbuilding, but it's my layman's impression that larger vessels are apt to be more seaworthy than smaller vessels. So even if, on the OEC interpretation, an ark that size was unnecessary to accommodate a regional sample of species, perhaps it would still be necessary or beneficial for stability.

**v)** What about the objection that on the OEC interpretation, neighboring species could simply repopulate the flood zone, so preserving a sample on the ark is pointless?

Although, on the OEC interpretation, neighboring species probably expedited a restoration of the status quo ante, I think that, by itself, is a shortsighted objection. To begin with, consider the destruction of habitat. What's the impact on flora to be submerged for a year? I'm not a botanist, but I'm guessing many plants would die under those conditions. To be under standing water for about a year will block sunlight, which will, in turn, impede photosynthesis. So I'm guessing the flora would be fairly devastated in the flood zone.

But neighboring herbivores can't repopulate the flood zone until there's enough flora to support their diet, and

neighboring predators can't repopulate the flood zone until there's enough prey to support their diet. So it might take a fair amount of time for the flood zone to naturally recover.

What is Noah's family supposed to eat in the meantime, after they disembark? If most of the fruit trees and other edible plants perished in the flood, the fallback might be a diet heavy on meat. But in that case, it would be advantageous or even necessary to have game animals aboard the ark. That would give Noah's family something to eat after the flood. Indeed, that may be one reason there's an emphasis on a carnivorous diet after the flood.

On the OEC interpretation, moreover, Noah's family might continue to supplement their diet from food stored on the ark. Because the ark wouldn't need to accommodate so many animals, there's been more available space for food storage.

**vi)** In addition, there might be animal breeding on board the ark. On the OEC interpretation, the ark would have lots of extra space for animal breeding and food storage. The number of animals that debarked the ark might greatly exceed the number of animals that boarded the ark. That would expedite the process of repopulating the flood zone.

That doesn't work as well on the YEC interpretation, where space is at a premium.

**vii)** Furthermore, even if wild animals are replaceable by neighboring species, the same can't be said for livestock. It would make sense for Noah's family to bring their livestock on board. Imagine if all the livestock was destroyed in the flood, so that Noah's family had to start from scratch by catching, taming, and domesticating wild animals. That's a Herculean So on the OEC interpretation, preservation of

livestock on the ark would still be beneficial or even necessary.

**viii)** Also, the suggestion that Noah's family could just hike out of the flood zone in advance is pretty facile. To make a trek on foot, you need to know where the terrain is passable. Where there's fresh water along the route. Where there's edible plants and game. You need to be able to catch game animals. You need temporary shelter.

And even if Noah's family had the hunting skills and survival skills to hike out of the flood zone, that doesn't mean they could take their livestock with them. Consider modern farm animals like pigs, cows, and chickens. Imagine trying to take those with you on an expedition through the wilderness. Trying to keep them fed and watered. Keep them from escaping. Protecting them from predators. Likewise, to my knowledge, hens and cows require a certain routine to produce milk and lay eggs. Imagine the disruption to their daily regimen.

I'm not claiming that Noah's family had modern farm animals. My point is that we have to take that sort of thing into consideration when critics of the local flood interpretation breezily suggest that Noah's family didn't need the ark.

There are, of course, other stock objections to the local flood interpretation, just as there are stock objections to the global flood interpretation. But my aim in this post is to say something new, and not to rehash my answers to other stock objections.

## The wind and the flood

*And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided ([Gen 8:1](#)).*

**1.** On the face of it, this explanation is a headscratcher. How could wind cause the flood waters to abate? If anything, this is more puzzling on the global-flood interpretation. If the spherical earth was submerged in water, wind would simply generate continuous wave action.

Flood geologists like Kurt Wise (**FAITH, FORM, AND TIME**), Andrew Snelling (**EARTH'S CATASTROPHIC PAST**), and Jonathan Sarfati (**THE GENESIS ACCOUNT**), invoke catastrophic plate tectonics as the real mechanism causing the flood waters to subside. But on that view, the wind has no effect on the flood. So that substitutes an entirely different explanation. On that view, the wind has no explanatory value at all. It does no meaningful work. If, however, the text attributes the abatement of the flood waters to the wind, then we should seek an interpretation which takes that seriously. At the very least, that should be a primary cause.

**2.** One possible alternative is that it doesn't mean "wind" but "Spirit". Commentators are quick to say 8:1 echoes 1:2. If 8:1 refers to the Spirit of God, then it might mean God miraculously caused the floodwaters to abate. There are, however, some difficulties with that identification:

**i)** In Gen 1:2, you have a title: "the ruach of God". Gen 8:1 doesn't use that title. So I don't assume these have equivalent referents.

**ii)** If it was a miracle, it's odd that it still took months for the flood waters to subside.

**iii)** Since Gen 7:11 cites natural mechanisms as the source of the floodwaters, we might expect, by parity, that the source of their abatement to be a natural mechanism as well.

**iv)** This isn't the only place in the Pentateuch where God sends wind to perform a providential task. As one commentator notes:

Moses witnessed the might of God's "wind" to induce and chase away a locust plague (Exod 10:13,19) and deliver his people from Egyptian armies at the sea on "dry ground" (Exod 14:21; 15:10). It was with the same "wind" that the Lord provided cal for the vagabond people of the desert (Num 11:31). K. Mathews, Genesis 1:11:26, 384-85.

That suggests a preternatural force. It isn't strictly natural or supernatural. Rather, it's a natural force that's supernaturally directed.

**3.** Yet that leaves unanswered the question of how wind could make the floodwaters recede. The answer depends on how we visualize the flood. Consider a local-flood interpretation: Among other things, rivers serve as drainage

mechanisms. In case of torrential rain, they become swollen. As a result, river basins are flood basins.

However, this can be magnified by the further fact that torrential rain causes debris to flow downstream. Debris can dam a river when it forms a logjam. That, in turn, causes water to back up, thereby expanding the inundated area upstream.

It doesn't take much imagination to visualize how a strong wind like a tornado or waterspout could disrupt a logjam, thereby releasing the pent-up waters. If it broke it up entirely, the runoff would be explosive. If it weakened the logjam, it might cause the natural dam to leak. In that event the runoff would be more gradual.

**4.** It might be objected that my explanation is speculative. No doubt. However, postulates involving hydroplate theory or catastrophic plate tectonics are speculative. Moreover, my explanation is an extension of the text, whereas attributing the recession of the flood waters to tectonic and seismic activity has no connection to the text, and sets aside what the text says.

If we wish to understand the flood as a real event, then we need to go beyond the text to visualize a more specific scenario, extrapolating from the text to a more detailed reconstruction. That has the limitations of any conjectural reconstruction. My explanation at least has a toehold in the text, by developing explanation that's given in the text—rather than replacing that with something wholly extraneous to the text.

## Neither fish nor fowl

*So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens" ([Gen 6:7](#)).*

A common objection to the flood account is that Noah's ark wasn't big enough to house all the animals, and even if it was big enough, eight passengers are hardly enough to care for them. A dilemma.

That's not an issue for old-earthers, who espouse the local flood theory. From their standpoint, the ark only contained a representative sample of regional species.

For young-earthers, it's more complicated. Of course, young-earthers have standard answers to standard objections.

One issue concerns the scope of [Gen 6:7](#). The wording seems to describe land animals. It's a shorthand for classifications in [Gen 1](#), although it tellingly omits to include aquatic creatures.

Whether insects were included is a tricky question. But let's skip that for now.

One question is where to draw the line between land animals and aquatic creatures. That's because we have borderline cases. In terms of their degree of adaptation to an aquatic or terrestrial environment, animals range along a

continuum. A shark, dolphin, orca, and octopus (to name a few) is totally adapted to an aquatic environment.

However, a sea krait is more adapted to an aquatic environment than a water moccasin or anaconda, but less adapted to an aquatic environment than a sea snake, while a horned viper is a land animal, although it can swim in a pinch (I assume).

A seal or crocodile is more adapted to an aquatic environment than the beaver, otter, or hippopotamus, but less adapted than a shark, dolphin, orca, or octopus, while a mink or raccoon is less adapted to an aquatic environment than a beaver, otter, or hippopotamus, but better adapted than a marten.

The tortoise is a land animal while a turtle is aquatic. Most crabs are aquatic, yet there are land crabs. Some frogs are primarily aquatic while other frogs are primarily terrestrial or even arboreal.

For the young-earthier, it's an interesting question which animals would be included or excluded from the ark when it comes to borderline cases. Of course, young-earthiers deny a one-to-one correspondence between prediluvian and postdiluvian species. I'm using modern-day examples to illustrate a point. Presumably, there'd be prediluvian analogues (i.e. borderline cases).

Rather than a taxonomic distinction, a young-earthier could draw a pragmatic distinction. Which animals made the cut would be a question of which animals could survive (or not) outside the ark.



## The rainbow sign

When unbelievers attack Noah's flood, they typically target flood geology and the global flood interpretation. As a result, the local flood interpretation has been neglected. In the past I've discussed how I think both the local and global flood interpretations are broadly defensible on scientific and exegetical grounds. In this post I'd like to revisit a few objections to the local flood interpretation.

There are some objections to the local flood interpretation that I won't cover in this post because I've discussed them before, and I having nothing new to say in that regard. For instance:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2013/09/flooding.html>

<http://butthesethingsarewritten.blogspot.com/2013/09/introduction-to-flood.html>

**I.** A local flood makes Noah's ark a pointless waste of time.

The underlying assumption here is that Noah's ark had a utilitarian purpose. However, let's consider a comparison. Take the Mosaic cultus. You had the tabernacle and its furnishings. Later you had the Solomonic temple. An entire tribe was reserved for the priesthood. You had a system of offerings and animal sacrifice. That represents a tremendous outlay of human and material resources. Just consider the sheer number of sacrificial animals that were slaughtered over the centuries. Not to mention the construction of Solomon's temple.

Yet all that was strictly unnecessary. God never forgave a single Jew on the basis of animal sacrifice. The death of an animal cannot atone for human sin.

So the whole Mosaic cultus is a humongous object lesson. Its value is symbolic or pedagogical rather than utilitarian. Teaching by showing. In graphic, picturesque terms, it depicted God's holiness, human sin, guilt, remission, and vicarious atonement.

By the same token, the value of Noah's ark could be symbolic or pedagogical rather than utilitarian. It illustrates the principle of a godly remnant. Divine judgment and deliverance. The ark is a microcosm of the cosmic temple. It represents sacred space. It foreshadows the tabernacle:

The ark was a temple structure. It was designed to be a copy of the cosmic temple made by the Creator. Its three stories correspond to the cosmos conceptualized as divided into the three levels of the heavens, earth, and the sphere under the earth. Its window corresponded to the window of heaven and its door to the door of the deep (cf. **Gen. 7:11**).<sup>26</sup> The ark's temple identity is corroborated by the reflection of its architecture in the Mosaic tabernacle and the Solomonic temple. Their structure too reproduced the three story pattern of the cosmos both in their horizontal floor plan and in their vertical sectioning.<sup>27</sup> Note also the three-storied side chambers of the temple. In addition, the temple had the features of the door and upper window, and it shared the ark's vertical dimension of thirty cubits.

<http://www.kerux.com/doc/0902A1.asp>

That's no more or less a wasteful than the Mosaic cultus. I'd say the outlay for the Mosaic cultus, including the Solmonic temple, is at least comparable to Noah's ark.

**II.** The rainbow sign makes no sense if the flood was local.

**2.** If an old-earther subscribes to an anthropologically universal flood, then he can easily account for the rainbow sign. It's a promise that God will never again destroy the entire human race in a flood.

**3.** In addition, what's the scope of the rainbow? Does Gen 9:12-17 mean that's the first time a rainbow ever appeared on earth? A problem with that interpretation is the fact that the rainbow in Gen 9 hearkens back to the rainless state in Gen 2:

*5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up —for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and streams came up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground (Gen 2:5-6).*

*13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and*

*the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh (Gen 9:13-15).*

So we'd expect the scope of the rainbow to be roughly conterminous with the scope of the rainless state. That, in turn, raises the question of how extensive the rainless state was in **Gen 2:5-6**. There are different proposals.

**i)** John Collins thinks it's a seasonal reference. It refers to the dry season, in contrast to the rainy season. Cf. **GENESIS 1-4** (P&R, 2006), 111.

**ii)** On another interpretation, the scope is limited in space rather than time. On this view, Gen 2 is referring, not to the condition of the earth in general, but to the condition of Eden in particular. The land of Eden was rainless. That interpretation has two things going for it:

**a)** It's a simple way to harmonize the chronology of Gen 1 with the chronology of Gen 2.

**b)** The dry climate of Eden stands in contrast to a terrestrial source of irrigation: river water. Eden is arid in reference to rain, but moist in reference to fluvial irrigation or flooding.

Although scholars don't know what ed means in 2:6, I think the river system in vv10-14 supplies a broad contextual clue. Eden lies in a river basin. It is watered by a tributary

of that river system. Possibly a subterranean river that surfaces in the garden.

In that event the novelty of the rainbow is not a general phenomenon, but geographically localized.

**III.** An anthropologically universal flood creates a chronological problem by pushing the date of the flood back to an unrealistically distant point in the past. For instance, according to conventional dating techniques, Aborigines have inhabited Australia for 40,000 years.

There are two possible ways an old-earthier might respond:

**1.** He could borrow a page from young-earthers and challenge conventional dating techniques. Although that might seem ironic, old-earth and young-earth positions are sets of independent tenets with independent supporting arguments. There's nothing inherently incongruous about taking these apart and recombining them.

**2.** Consider what might be a more controversial move: suppose he denies an anthropologically universal flood?

**i)** Perhaps a young-earthier will object that denying an anthropologically universal flood does violence to the "all flesh" quantifier:

*11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to*

*make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

However, young-earthers drastically restrict the scope of "all flesh" to birds, bats, and land animals. They exclude aquatic animals, which is hardly a measly exception. They exclude insects, which is hardly a measly exception. Technically, it might be said that insects don't have "flesh," but that's a bit of modern scientific precisionism.

Even in Gen 6:12-13, "all flesh" has a different scope in v13 than it has in v12. In v12 it refers to humans, but in v13, to organisms in general. And the scope is specified in v7:

*So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."*

So "all flesh" is something of a cipher. What it denotes or refers is variable. The phrase itself doesn't indicate how much that includes or covers.

**ii)** More to the point, what was the purpose of the flood? What did it accomplish? In one respect, Gen 6:5-13 tells the reader why God sent the flood. Yet the flood didn't solve the underlying problem. Indeed, in Gen 8:21, the cycle repeats itself (cf. Gen 6:5).

**iii)** Here's a suggestion: what if the flood has the same purpose of holy war? In the Pentateuch, God commands the Israelites to evict the Canaanites when they take possession of the Promised Land. The purpose is to give God's people some breathing room. His people can't survive and thrive in a world that's completely overrun by the godless. There's no room for God's people in places like Ur, Sodom, and Gomorrah.

By the same token, evil had become so pervasive by the eve of the flood that it would strangle the godly remnant, strangle the seed of promise, strangle the messianic line. So the flood resets the chess board. Although the cycle of evil reboots after the flood, it will take a while to reach the peak of depravity before the flood. Even though the aftermath of the flood gives evildoers a fresh start, it also gives the remnant a fresh start. It buys the remnant some time.

**iv)** On that interpretation, the flood needn't be anthropologically universal to achieve its aim. It wouldn't matter if there were Australian Aborigines untouched by the flood, because they were too far away to pose an existential threat to the God's people in the Fertile Crescent.

**v)** As a bonus point, if the flood wasn't anthropologically universal, then that disarms objections to the flood based on a population bottleneck in the event that all postdiluvian humans descend from the eight passengers on the ark.

## That crazy ark park!

Karl Giberson is indignant about Ken Ham's Ark Park:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karl-giberson-phd/ken-hams-crazy-ark-park\\_b\\_10893232.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karl-giberson-phd/ken-hams-crazy-ark-park_b_10893232.html)

Giberson is cofounder of BioLogos, the flagship of theistic evolution.

**1.** Giberson is a physicist by training. How does his area of specialization make him professionally qualified to comment on Noah's flood?

**2.** Certainly the YEC interpretation of Gen 6-9 raises some daunting logistical challenges. But these are exaggerated by the fact that critics of the YEC interpretation, like Giberson, load up the text with claims it doesn't make, then proceed to show how the account conflicts with reality. They are reframing the issue.

**3.** The issue of vicariance isn't just a problem of creationists. It's a problem for Darwinians. You have some very remote, very isolated islands with fauna and flora. The plants and animals didn't fly there or swim there. So how did they get there? Darwinians must resort to ingenious conjectures.

Or take the issue of "invasive species". These are generally introduced into the indigenous habitat by humans. They didn't get there on their own steam.

**4.** Giberson rattles off some stock objections to the YEC interpretation. Yet the whole point of the ark park is to show how the Biblical account is feasible. Now, Giberson



may take issue with the adequacy of their explanations, but it's intellectually dishonest to attack the ark park on scientific grounds when the ark park is fielding those very objections. An honest critic would at least acknowledge the explanations and then assess the explanations.

**5.** Giberson also ignores scholars and scientists who advocate a local flood interpretation. For instance, when a modern reader scans the flood account, it's natural for him to filter that description through his mental image of world geography. So he unconsciously recontextualizes the account. But, of course, the original audience didn't have that frame of reference. It didn't mean the same thing to them. It couldn't. We need to make allowance for that difference.

**6.** It is, however, somewhat to his credit that he's candid enough to admit that he denies the Biblical account outright. He doesn't pretend that his objection is to the YEC interpretation of the account. Rather, he openly denies the historicity of the account.

**7.** I'm always struck by how nominal believers like Giberson presume to tell both Bible-believing Christians and atheists what Christianity really stands for. By his own admission, Giberson is a borderline atheist. So what makes him think he should be the spokesman for a faith he himself barely believes in?

**8.** Finally, he says:

Noah's story, as a tale for children, has a certain adventurous charm and I was fascinated by it as a kid in Sunday School. But I am horrified by the story as an adult. Taken literally—the point of Ham's new park—the story suggests that God drowned all the children on the

planet for their parents' sins. Even if we assume that all adults not sired by Noah were terrible sinners deserving to be drowned, the collateral damage in the deaths of innocent children and animals dwarfs every major genocide in history combined. If Noah's story is literally true, God is a monster.

**i)** The account doesn't say or suppose that children were punished for the sins of their parents. Humans are social creatures. Kids are physically and psychologically dependent on parents. For better or worse, the wellbeing of kids is inextricably bound up with the wellbeing of their parents.

For instance, does Giberson think it would make sense for God to drown all the parents but spare the kids? Then what? Should God create a cosmic orphanage?

**ii)** Collective judgment is hardly confined to Noah's flood. Jewish children suffered during the Assyrian deportation and Babylonian Exile, both of which represent divine judgment. Likewise, when Jesus threatens divine judgment on Israel, children will suffer in that ordeal. To be consistent, if you're going to attack the flood account on moralistic grounds, it doesn't stop there. You have to attack what Jesus said.

**iii)** Denying the flood doesn't solve the problem Giberson raises. After all, children die outside the pages of Scripture. Children drown in floods and tsunamis.

God made the mechanisms that generate natural humanitarian disasters. So you can't let God off the hook by denying the Bible. That simply relocates the problem of evil. You still have the problem of evil outside the Bible.

Just about any minimally theistic position makes God ultimately complicit in moral and natural evil. That's a logical consequence of bargain-basement theism. Process theism may be the only exception.

**iv)** Conversely, any theodicy that's adequate to address evil outside the Bible is adequate to address evil inside the Bible.

**v)** Finally, as is so often the case with cradle Christian apostates like Giberson, they find Christianity far more objectionable than atheism. They fail to probe the utterly nihilistic consequences of atheism.

## How long was a cubit?

How long was a cubit? I've seen scholars use conflicting criteria. On the one hand, they generally define a cubit as the distance between the elbow and the fingertip. On the other hand, they define a cubit as about 17.5 inches.

Problem is, if you define a cubit as the span between the elbow and the fingertip, then that would be relative rather than absolute, since it would vary depending on the height of the individual. As a rule, taller people have longer arms and longer fingers. In addition, people in the ancient world were generally shorter than their modern counterparts due to poor diet. And I've read that ancient Jews were generally shorter than some other people-groups in the Mideast.

This can be relevant to questions concerning the size of the ark or the height of Goliath. Unbelievers object that the size of the ark would exceed the structural integrity of wooden ships. (Mind you, the text doesn't actually say the ark was made of wood. The Hebrew word is a hapax legomenon.) If, however, the cubit was shorter, then the ark was smaller.

## Evolutionary biogeography

A familiar challenge to flood geology is how the animals surmounted natural barriers to repopulate the post-diluvian planet. That's not a problem for local flood interpreters.

If, however, this poses a problem for flood geology, it poses a similar problem for evolutionary biogeography. Let's take a concrete case: the coral snake. They belong to the Elapid family. Most species or subspecies inhabit the Old World (e.g. Asia), but we also have them in the New World (the SE and gulf coast).

But if they originated in the Old World, how did they get here? They didn't swim.

**1.** One traditional explanation is vicariance, as Pangea broke up.

**i)** However, I believe that would require Elapids to evolve prior to the breakup. Although Darwinians think snakes are ancient, they think venomous snakes are more recent. Constrictors are the most primitive snake. The Ur-snake.

So does vicariance fit the evolutionary timeframe, according to evolutionary geology and biology? Can that be coordinated?

**ii)** But another complication is the relationship between the eastern coral snake and the scarlet king snake. Didn't the scarlet king snake have to evolve or adapt after the coral snake in order to mimic its markings?

So either both originated in the Old World, or the coral snake originated in the Old World while the scarlet king

snake is descended from a New World ancestor. That also complicates the evolutionary synchrony, does it not?

**2.** Another mechanism for biogeography is dispersal. Here's a definition: Either a population can slowly expand from the margins of its geographical range or a small number of individuals can disperse to a new location some distance from the current edge of the species range, or a combination of both of these processes can occur.

Here's an exposition:

Various dispersal routes might have been followed in the biogeographic history of a species.

- Corridors

Two places are joined by a corridor if they are part of the same land mass: Georgia and Texas, for example. Animals can move easily along a corridor and any two places joined by a corridor will have a high degree of faunal similarity.

- Filter bridges

A filter bridge is a more selective connexion between two places, and only some kinds of animals will manage to pass over it. For instance, when the Bering Strait was above water, mammals moved from North America to Asia and vice versa, but no South American mammals moved to Asia and no Asian species moved to South America. The reason is presumably that the land bridges at Alaska and Panama were so far apart, so narrow, and so different in ecology that no species managed to disperse across them.

- Sweepstakes

Finally, sweepstakes routes are hazardous or accidental dispersal mechanisms by which animals move from place to place. The standard examples are island

hopping and natural rafts. Many land vertebrates live in the Caribbean Islands, and (if their biogeography is correctly explained by dispersal) they might have moved from one island to other, perhaps being carried on a log or some other sort of raft.

[https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/ridley/tutorials/Evolutionary\\_biogeography9.asp](https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/ridley/tutorials/Evolutionary_biogeography9.asp)

Applied to the issue at hand, that would involve a horseshoe journey of many thousands of miles from a tropical and/or subtropical zone in the S. hemisphere of the Old World up to the Bering land bridge, just south of the Arctic Circle, then all the way down to a tropical/sub-tropical zone of the New World. Raises lots of logistical issues:

**i)** Do snakes cross ecological zones? Aren't they adapted to a particular climate?

**ii)** Do snake populations migrate thousands of miles?

**iii)** Would there be enough food along the way?

**iv)** Apropos (i), is it just incidental that some snake species cluster in the tropics/subtropics while others cluster in the temperate zone? To take a comparison, why are there rattlesnakes in the SW and Eastern Washington, but not in Western Washington? Surely climate is the differential factor.

But if dispersion is a viable mechanism, and they are fairly indifferent to the climatic difference, why aren't there rattlesnakes in Western Washington?

**i)** Surely the dispersion of rattlesnakes from the SW to Western Washington would be orders of magnitude easier

than the dispersion of coral snakes from, say, India to the SE, a continent away, via a Bering land bridge.

**ii)** Also, didn't the postulated Bering land bridge only exist during the last Ice Age, when sea levels were lower? But even if tropical snakes can survive in the temperate zone, how could they survive in the arctic zone?

**iii)** Many exotic snake collectors living in the temperate zone. Every so often one of their snakes (native to the desert, tropics or subtropics) escapes. To my knowledge, these have not become established—unlike Florida!

If, however, objections notwithstanding, dispersal is the mechanism which accounts to the presence of coral snakes in the Americas, that explanation is available to flood geologists as well as Darwinism.

**3.** I suppose, if they got sufficiently desperate, Darwinians could postulate convergent evolution.

**4.** Perhaps a Darwinian could postulate that they got here on downed trees, or something like that.

**5.** Or perhaps a Darwinian could postulate that they were introduced into the New World by ancient mariners. Maybe they brought coral snakes along to dip arrow points in the venom. Or maybe they worshipped venomous snakes and brought their "gods" along for the ride.

**6.** Or maybe the snakes were stowaways. Ships have rats. Where you have rats, that attracts snakes.

However, these explanations (4-6) are available to flood geologists.



**7.** I suppose one final explanation is that eastern coral snakes derive from seasnakes which reverted to land snakes. Given that contemporary young-earth creationists subscribe to microevolution and adaptation, that explanation is available to flood geologists as well as Darwinians.

## What did Noah's ark look like?

Short answer: we don't know. Genesis gives the raw dimensions, but says little if anything about the shape. Terrence Mitchell says that:

While [6:16] can be taken in the traditional sense of describing three stories, it is also possible to understand it to indicate three layers of logs laid crosswise, a view which would accord well with a construction of wood, reeds and bitumen. **THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE DICTIONARY**, 1:110.

Here's one hypothetical design, which shows how different it might have been than popular representations:

Meir Ben-Uri Rhomboidal Design.

Reported by Ya'Acov Friedler "What the Ark was Really Like"  
Jerusalem Post 10 Oct 1967

Friedler, a reporter for a major Israeli newspaper, describes Noah's Ark as proposed by Mr. Meir Ben-Uri. His ark is 150m (492 ft) long, weighed about 6,000 tons and had a carrying capacity of 15,000 tons. Ben-Uri, Director of the Studio for Synagogal Arts took several years to complete his study, based on the numerical values of the Hebrew words of Genesis 6:14-16. From this he prepared a scale on which he based his measurements, which led to a cubit length of 500mm (19.7 inches).

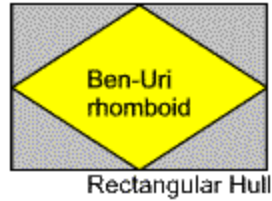
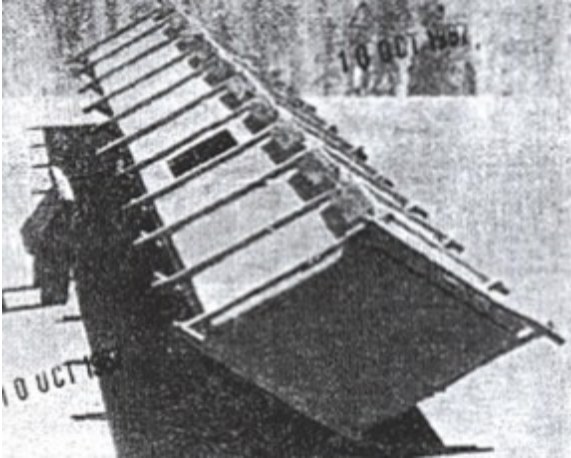
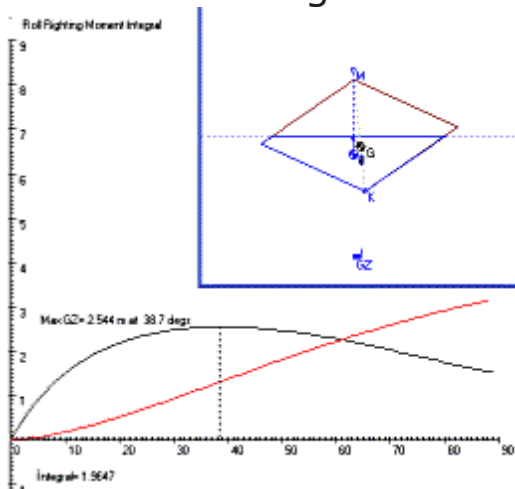


Image The Jerusalem Post 1967

The most striking aspect of Ben-Uri's ark is the rhomboid cross-section - almost a Vogt hull in appearance, but with a "V" bottom (deadrise). Ben-Uri claims a rectangular vessel would have less space inside due to the need for a "maze of supporting beams", and that the rhomboid design is more buoyant. (This is testable, the enclosed rhomboid has exactly half the area of the bounding rectangle, so the interior space is halved. Worse, the sloping sides will make inefficient use of space. There is also no reason to expect the rhomboid will have substantially less interior structure than the rectangular hull. TL)



The roll stability of Ben-Uri's ark is a substantial improvement over the Vogt hull, but it is not as stable as the rectangular hull. The rhomboid design is also very sensitive to variations in draft.

Naval architect Dr Dan Khoushy commented on the design; "I would not have chosen this shape for the vessel, but I must say that it is practically optimal for the purpose;

According to Ben-Uri, the hull would be built up in identical triangular compartments, forming ten "holds" in a virtual "mass production" process. Laying the ark on one side, the roof mounted door would be accessible, but when buoyed by the floodwaters the door is in the roof. (Seems like a lot of effort walking around on sloping floors for the sake of sealing a little door. TL)

The last claims of the article refer to the cubit length being the same as for Solomon's temple, which is an interesting point, and finally that the reed basket of baby Moses may have been rhomboid also. (This assumes "tebah" refers to shape, and make the dubious assumption that Jocabed took a rhomboid basket when Egyptian reed basket were more likely rounded.

[http://worldwideflood.org/general/ark\\_history.htm](http://worldwideflood.org/general/ark_history.htm)

## Legends of the flood

I'm going to comment on this article:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2014/01/28/new-discovery-raises-flood-of-questions-about-noahs-ark/comment-page-19/>

We have known for well over a century that there are flood stories from the ancient Near East that long predate the biblical account

Actually, Josephus and some church fathers knew about Mesopotamian flood traditions from Berossus. So this is hardly revolutionary.

(even the most conservative biblical scholars wouldn't date any earlier than the ninth century B.C).

**i)** Actually, the most conservative biblical scholars date the Genesis flood account to the time of Moses in the 2nd millennium BC. They differ on whether the early date or the late date for the Exodus is correct. But on either reckoning, that's well before the 9C BC.

**ii)** Baden fails to distinguish between the date for Genesis and the date of the source material which the narrator may have used.

The people who wrote down the Flood narrative, in any of its manifestations, weren't reporting on a historical event for which they had to get their facts straight (like what shape the ark was). Everyone reshapes the Flood story, and the ark itself, according to the norms of their own time and place. Neither version is right or wrong; they are, rather, both appropriate to the culture that produced them. Neither is history; both are theology.

That's sloppy reasoning on several grounds:

**i)** To begin with, the fact that you may have multiple accounts of an event doesn't cast doubt on the historicity of the underlying event. Suppose a reporter collected oral histories of the Johnstown Flood (1889). Survivors would give personal accounts of the ordeal. Details would vary. But that wouldn't mean it never happened.

**ii)** We need to distinguish between fiction and legend. The Mesopotamian traditions are legends of the flood. But legends aren't necessarily fictitious. To the contrary, legends can have a basis in fact.

Legends can have a historical core, but be inaccurate in varying degrees if this was passed down for several generations. It's not an eyewitness account by a survivor, but a thirdhand account. By the time it's written down, inaccuracies may creep into the account. For the writer can't check his materials against the event. He wasn't on the scene when it happened.

In addition, you sometimes have deliberate legendary embellishment. Mesopotamian accounts have a political and/or theological agenda. It may be to promote the state religion, or promote a rival religious faction.

Take the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. That's legendary rather than fictional. It's a real event, but the details are fuzzy because we don't have enough firsthand accounts to determine exactly what happened.

In ancient Mesopotamia, a round vessel would have been perfectly reasonable – in fact, we know that this type of boat was in use, though perhaps not to such a gigantic scale, on the Mesopotamian rivers. The ancient Israelites, on the other hand, would naturally have pictured a boat like those they were familiar with:

which is to say, the boats that navigated not the rivers of Mesopotamia but the Mediterranean Sea.

Since liberals typically think the Pentateuch was composed or finalized during the Babylonian Exile, the difference between the two accounts runs counter to the Babylonian provenance which liberals attribute to the Pentateuch.

What, then, of the most striking parallel between this newly discovered text and Genesis: the phrase "two by two"? Here, it would seem, we have an identical conception of the animals entering the ark.

I don't find anything striking about that. It doesn't reflect literary dependence. Rather, "two by two" is a natural breeding pair. That's the bare minimum needed to repopulated the devastated area. That's realistic. Indeed, Baden even admits that lower down when he says:

If the goal of the ark is the preservation of the animals, then having a male and female of each is just common sense. And, of course, it's a quite reasonable space-saving measure.

Moving along:

More accurately, it's one thing that the Bible says – but a few verses later, Noah is instructed to bring not one pair of each species, but seven pairs of all the "clean" animals and the birds, and one pair of the "unclean" animals. (This is important because at the end of the story, Noah offers sacrifices – which, if he only brought one pair of each animal, would mean that, after saving them all from the Flood, he then proceeded to relegate some of those species to extinction immediately thereafter.) This isn't news – already in the 17th century scholars recognized that there must be two versions of the Flood intertwined in the canonical Bible.

But even on his own explanation, that's not a discrepancy. There were more clean pairs than unclear pairs because clean animals were sacrificial animals (as well as edible animals for human consumption). So you needed extra clean animals to spare.

Moreover, it's standard compositional technique for the narrator to make a general statement, then follow-up with specific details.

One version says the Flood lasted 40 days; the other says 150.

That confuses the duration of rainfall with the duration of the flood.

One says the waters came from rain. Another says it came from the opening of primordial floodgates both above and below the Earth.

As if the flood could only have one source of water. Keep in mind, too, that these are linked. For instance, torrential rain causes rivers to flood their banks. So that's realistic.

One version says Noah sent out a dove, three times. The other says he sent out a raven, once.

The birds have different functions. Doves are used as homing pigeons to find your way back. Ravens are used to find new land when you travel by sea to a new destination. Once again, that's realistic.



## Uncharted waters

The use of birds which could be released for determining the presence and direction of land ([Gen 8:6-12](#)) is not a folkloristic invention, but reflects actual navigational practice...A cage full of homing pigeons is not a bad method of direction finding.

C. Gordon, **BEFORE COLUMBUS** (Crown Publishers 1971), 77.

James Hornell ["The Role of Birds in Ancient Navigation"] shows that several ancient peoples used birds for the purpose of finding out whether there was land within a navigable distance, and in what direction. Hornell adduces references to the practice of carrying aboard several "shore-sighting birds" among the ancient Hindu merchants when sailing on overseas voyages contained in the Hindu *Sutta Pitaka* (5C BC), according to which these birds were "used to locate the nearest land when the ship's position was doubtful." The same practice is mentioned in the Buddhist *Kevaddha Sutta* of Digha, written about the same period.

R. Patai, **THE CHILDREN OF NOAH: JEWISH SEAFARING IN ANCIENT TIMES** (Princeton 1998), 10-11.

## Birds in ancient navigation

*6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth ([Gen 8:6-7](#)).*

In traversing their seas, the people of Taprobane [Ceylon] take no observations of the stars, and indeed the Greater Bear is not visible to them; but they carry birds out to sea, which they let go from time to time, and so follow their course as they make for the land.

Pliny, **NATURAL HISTORY**, 6.24.

One of the first Norwegian sailors to hazard the voyage to Iceland was a man known as Raven-Floki for his habit of keeping ravens aboard his vessel. When he thought he was nearing land, Raven-Floki released the ravens, which he had deliberately starved. Often as not, they flew "as the crow flies" directly toward land, which Raven-Floki would reach simply by following their lead.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/secrets-of-ancient-navigators.html>

## Ancient logistics II

I'm going to begin by quoting from a classic attack on the biblical account the flood:

When one reads the story of the great flood in the book of Genesis, one is struck by the matter-of-fact style of the narrative. While it definitely has the larger-than-life flavor typical of legends, the reader would not suspect that he or she is dealing with the bizarre impossibilities we have detailed above. After all, the ancient Hebrews lived on a small, disc-shaped world with a dome overhead and waters above and below. There were only a few hundred known animals, and subjects such as ecology, genetics, and stratigraphy were not even imagined. The deluge was a mighty act of God, to be sure, but nothing that the ancient Hebrews would have found too extraordinary.

When, however, this same story is brought into the twentieth century and insisted upon as a literal account of historical events, a considerable change is observed. No longer a simple folk tale, it has become a surrealistic saga of fantastic improbabilities. Events which seem relatively straightforward at first glance—building a boat, gathering animals, releasing them afterwards—become a caricature of real life. The animals themselves are so unlike any others that they may as well have come from another planet; genetic Frankensteins with completely unnatural social, reproductive, and dietary behavior, they survived incredible hazards yet remained amazingly hardy and fecund.

How can we account for this transformation? Put simply, the tale of the ark grows taller in inverse proportion to the advance of science. Two centuries ago, when biology and geology were in their infancy, the theory of a worldwide flood as a major event in the earth's physical history seemed perfectly plausible and, in fact, was advocated by various scientists.

<http://ncse.com/cej/4/1/impossible-voyage-noahs-ark#Conclusion>

Notice Moore's underlying assumption: the flood account is unrealistic because the primitive, unscientific author didn't know any better. People back then were in no position to ask common sense questions about the logistics of the flood.

Let's compare Moore's assumption with some of Augustine's observations on the flood account, as he considers various objections to the account by critics of the day:

### **Augustine**

For, not to mention other instances, if the number of the animals entailed the construction of an ark of great size, where was the necessity of sending into it two unclean and seven clean animals of each species, when both could have been preserved in equal numbers? Or could not God, who ordered them to be preserved in order to replenish the race, restore them in the same way He had created them?

But they who contend that these things never happened, but are only figures setting forth other things, in the first place suppose that there could not be a flood so great that the water should rise fifteen cubits above the highest mountains, because it is said that clouds cannot rise above the top of Mount Olympus, because it reaches the sky where there is none of that thicker atmosphere in which winds, clouds, and rains have their origin...They say, too, that the area of that ark could not contain so many kinds of animals of both sexes, two of the unclean and seven of the clean...As to another customary inquiry of the scrupulous about the very minute creatures, not only such as mice and lizards, but also locusts, beetles, flies, fleas, and so forth, whether there were not in the ark a larger number of them than was determined by God in His command...

For Noah did not catch the animals and put them into the ark, but gave them entrance as they came seeking it. For this is the force of the words, They shall come unto you, [Genesis 6:19-20](#) — not, that is to say, by man's effort, but by God's will.

Another question is commonly raised regarding the food of the carnivorous animals,— whether, without transgressing the command which fixed the number to be preserved, there were necessarily others included in the ark for their sustenance...

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120115.htm>

There is a question raised about all those kinds of beasts...propagated by male and female parents, such as wolves and animals of that kind; and it is asked how they could be found in the islands after the deluge, in which all the animals not in the ark perished, unless the breed was restored from those which were preserved in pairs in the ark. It might, indeed, be said that they crossed to the islands by swimming, but this could only be true of those very near the mainland; whereas there are some so distant, that we fancy no animal could swim to them.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120116.htm>

## Flooding

[Noel Weeks] The prominent alternative explanation is that the text is referring to a local flood in the Tigris/Euphrates' valley. However, in both the Mesopotamian flood accounts and the biblical narrative the ark ends up in the north. The problem is that floods always take things downstream. Floods never take objects upstream. If this was a normal flood in the Tigris/Euphrates' region, the ark would have gone downstream. The fact that it landed in the north in a mountain range goes against any local flood theory.

<http://ap.org.au/images/2011AP/AP0211.pdf>

I have the greatest respect for Weeks. And his statement sounds very logical. Water seeks its own level, right? Due to gravity, water travels downstream, right? Seems obvious.

Now, I'm no expert, but I don't think it's that simple. I've lived around rivers. I've lived in two different areas of the country that are prone to flooding.

i) Unless I'm mistaken, current depends, to some extent, on the gradient. If the gradient is fairly steep, then nothing

will stop river water from hurtling downstream. Mountain streams come to mind.

**ii)** But what about a river on a coastal plain? That's far more level.

**iii)** Moreover, some rivers are tidal rivers. Although it sounds counterintuitive, the current will reverse, go upstream, during a rising tide. From what I've read, this used to happen in the Nile Delta. (That may have changed after the Nile was dammed)

**iv)** Furthermore, tides vary. You can have positive high tides and super tides. Those, in turn, will affect both the water level and the direction of the current (vis-a-vis a tidal river).

**v)** Finally, a tidal river is also subject to a storm surge via coastal flooding.

**vi)** Let's take a different example. Where I was raised, we got heavy rain in winter. We had three streams close to where I lived, as well as a nearby river.

Streams are swollen after heavy rains. In addition to water flow, they carry debris. Streams and rivers can become clogged by cumulative debris. When that happens, they back up. They generate eddies and countercurrents. Debris moves upstream as the stream pools and backs up behind the logjam.

Moreover, flow resistance from large woody debris would also slow the drainage rate.

**vii)** I'm no expert on Ararat, but from what I've read and seen, it's a mountainous country with many mesas, valleys,



and foothills. It's not hard to me to imagine an object being caught in a mountain cove. Swirling around. Bottoming out on a ledge as the water finally receded.

BTW, I've been to Cappadocia, which isn't far from Ararat. There I walked along the ledge of a dry river valley.

Now, this may not be an accurate model of Noah's flood. I'm just saying, these are the kinds of questions I ask myself when I try to visualize the account. I read scholars make armchair statements about what would or wouldn't happen in a flood, and from what I can tell, this isn't based on close observation or experience. It's just a gut reaction.

It seems to me that we need far more detailed information the topography. We also have to make allowance for changes in topography over the millennia.

Likewise, topography can vary dramatically within, say, 50 miles upstream or downstream. So you'd have to imagine the ark in different locations, at different elevations, up and down the river. Consider the physical ramifications of each hypothetical scenario.

# Qualitative Hydrology of Noah's Flood

Carol A. Hill

<https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2006/PSCF6-06Hill.pdf>

**Springs.** The Bible mentions the "fountains of the deep" (springs) twice in its narrative—once when the springs start (Gen. 7:11) and once when they stop (Gen. 8:2). Springs are a prime factor that could have caused prolonged flooding. When it rains or when snow melts, water does not only flow over the ground as stream runoff. It can also travel underground as "groundwater," finally exiting at springs. Genesis 7:11 says that the fountains of the great deep (subterranean water or groundwater) were "broken up." "Broken up" comes from the Hebrew "bâqa," which means to "break forth," or be "ready to burst," and so the literal meaning of Gen. 7:11 is that these springs began gushing water.<sup>40</sup> The connotation of Gen. 7:11 is that 124 Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith Article Qualitative Hydrology of Noah's Flood A number of hydrologic factors could have been responsible for 150 days of flooding as recorded by Gen. 7:24: rain, heavy and continuous; snow, melted by heavy rains; springs, groundwater finally exiting; and a storm surge, high winds and tides that drive seawater inland for hundreds of miles. a surging mass of water burst forth from a deep subterranean water supply.

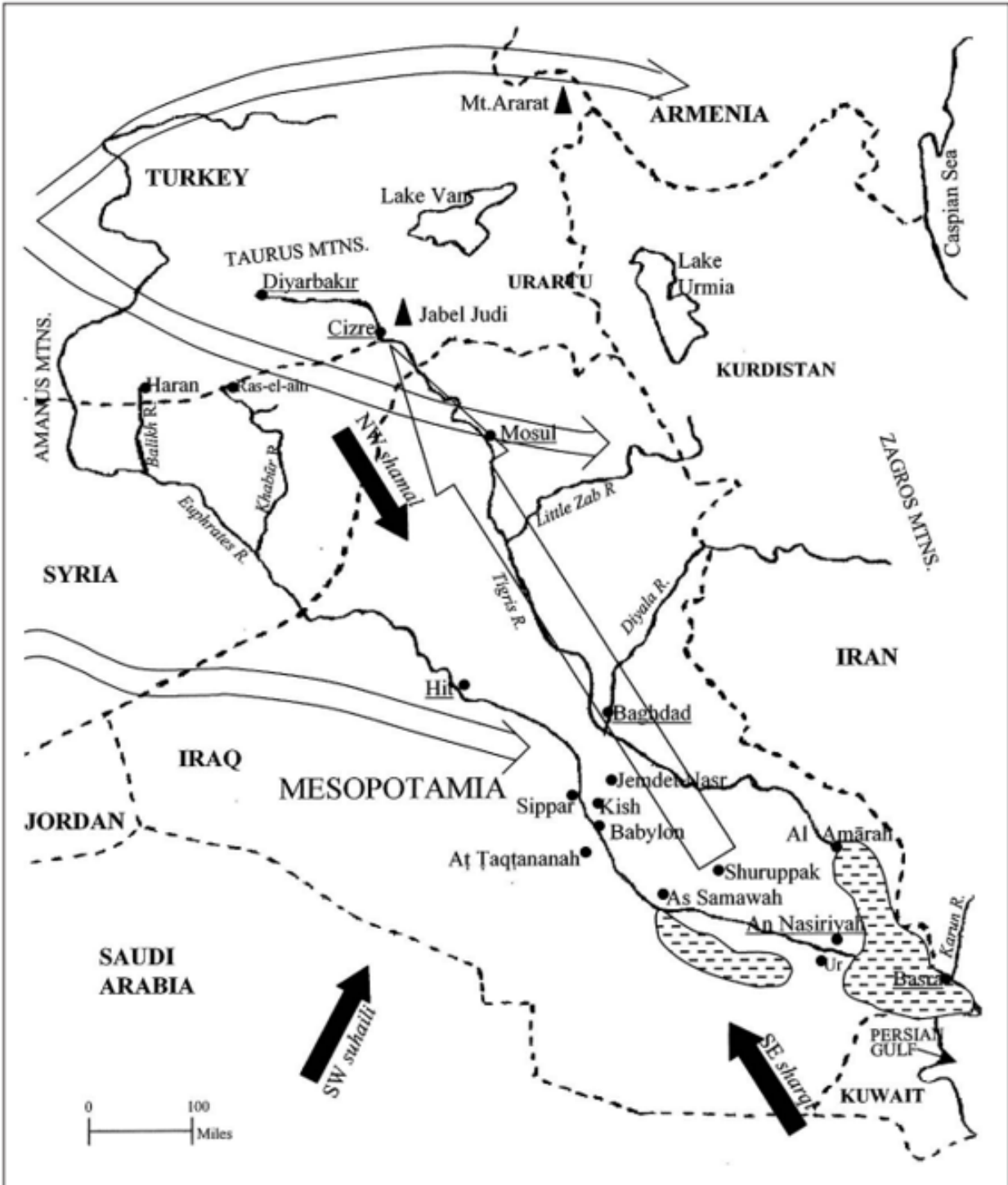
Springs exist all over Mesopotamia and surrounding highlands, and most of these are limestone (karst) springs. Ras-el-ain (ain means "spring"), near the border of Syria and Turkey, is one of the largest limestone karst springs in the world and is the effective head of the Khabr River, a major tributary of the Euphrates.<sup>41</sup> Water from this spring

(actually a complex of thirteen springs) comes from maximum winter infiltration (snow melt and rain in the Taurus Mountains) in January–February, but this water does not actually discharge at Ras-el-ain until the following July or August. This type of delay is typical of many karst springs, where recharge may be distant or convoluted from the spring discharge point. Some springs flow all the time, some springs flow only when it floods, and some springs have a delayed reaction between recharge and discharge. In the case of a delayed reaction, a continuous supply of water may be supplied for many months after a heavy rainstorm (or storms). The Bible seems to indicate that at least some springs began gushing water immediately as the Flood started (Gen. 7:11), but that others continued for up to five months (Gen. 8:2).

Specific springs (among many) that could have contributed water to the Mesopotamian hydrologic basin during Noah's Flood are those located near ancient Sippar, Babylon, and Kish;<sup>42</sup> those in the vicinity of Hit;<sup>43</sup> and those in the Jezira desert region between Baghdad and Mosul.<sup>44</sup> Tributaries to the Tigris also emerge from karst springs (large caves) along the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. When severe rains occur in the Zagros, these springs respond with a strong outflow, causing the rivers to swell and overflow onto the plains.<sup>45</sup> In antiquity, one of the most important of these springs emerged from Shalmaneser's Cave, which was thought to be the "source" of the Tigris when Shalmaneser III visited the cave in 852 BC. <sup>46</sup> It is also recorded that Sargon II had learned the secret of tapping water from subterranean strata during his campaign against Ulhu and Urartu (the land of Ararat).<sup>47</sup>

Numerous springs also exist in the deep canyons of the Cudi Dag (Jabel Judi), Cizre region of southeastern Turkey. Various karst features such as springs, sinks, and caves

have developed in the Jurassic-Cretaceous Cudi Limestone of these mountains. The best known of these springs is located west of Beytiebab; other smaller ones occur further south.<sup>48</sup> Runoff from these springs can prolong flooding in the upper Tigris River Valley-Cizre Plain area—just where Noah’s ark may have landed (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Geography of Mesopotamia, showing the direction of west to east cyclonic storms across the area (curved nonsolid arrows), predominant wind

directions (straight solid black arrows), possible route of the ark from Shuruppak to the mountains of Ararat (largest straight nonsolid arrow), marshlands (stippled areas), and locations mentioned in the text. The black triangles show the two most favored landing places for the ark. Modern cities are underlined; river and wind names are italicized.

# Appendix

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## Vegetarians or carnivores?

Young earth creationists (YECs) typically argue there was no animal death either before the Fall or before the Flood. Moreover YECs typically argue animals were vegetarians either before the Fall or before the Flood, but became carnivorous either in the postlapsarian or postdiluvian period. The basis for their arguments is exegetical.

By contrast, OT scholar Iain Provan offers a different exegetical argument about animal death and animal feeding behavior in **SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS RELIGION** (pp 226-234).

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### A Challenging Task

As the language of [Genesis 1:26-28](#) reveals, however, this human vocation—the responsibility to govern, serve, and conserve creation—is evidently not regarded by our biblical authors as an easy one. From their perspective, the world does *require* ruling and subduing, along with serving and keeping. This is not, in Genesis 1–2, because evil is to be found in the world, for evil does not enter the world until Genesis 3. Rather, it is because the good world that God has made is a *wild* world. As human beings explore it and settle it, they will need to be proactive, rather than passive, if it is to "work" in an optimal way.

What this means, precisely, is not made explicitly clear in the book of Genesis, but it does not take much imagination to guess what it *probably* means. In chapter 5, I suggested that Genesis 3, when it details the entrance of evil into the world, is not interested in providing a *global, all-encompassing* explanation of suffering in terms of evil. Suffering is inevitably involved, I argued, in bringing children into God's good world and in working the land. This



kind of suffering is not, for the Genesis authors, incompatible with life in God's good creation; indeed, it is *intrinsic* to living such a life. Although God has created a *good* world, it is not devoid of challenges and problems that we must overcome in order to live a blessed life in it—and indeed to bring blessing to creation itself.

It is this reality that is alluded to, I suggest, in the Genesis 1 reference to ruling and subduing. God's good world will always need to be *controlled* and *shaped* in various ways if life is to flourish. Jungle and forest will need to be pushed back and kept back for human settlement and agriculture to take place. Wild land animals (Heb. *khayyat ha'arets*; 1:24-25) will need to be kept away from domestic ones ("livestock," Heb. *behemah*; 1:24-25). Rivers will need to be contained and directed if they are to provide water for crops and be beneficial (rather than destructive) to all life—to bring life rather than death. This is just the way the world is. The earth does not just need to be kept, but also controlled; it needs further *shaping*, beyond what God has done in the original creative moments of the cosmos. The human relationship with the remainder of creation, therefore, is inevitably a relationship marked by struggle as well as by harmony—from the beginning. This is not the case simply because human beings have embraced evil, although inevitably this makes the struggle more intense. The struggle is already built into the fabric of things. It is intrinsic to the good world that God has created.

### **War on Creation**

Evil does later enter the world, of course, and the human embrace of it inevitably impacts the human relationship with creation, just as it has impacted the human relationship with God and with other human beings. The impact on animal creation in particular, first introduced in [Genesis 3:14](#) (where the serpent is "cursed . . . above all

the livestock and all the wild animals"), is more fully explored in [Genesis 9:1-7](#). Here, after the great flood, the human race receives once again the original creation mandate of [Genesis 1:28](#): "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (9:1). [Genesis 9:1-7](#) opens and closes by alluding to these earlier words.

However, whereas Genesis 1 and 2 marry the development of human society to the task of looking after the rest of creation, Genesis 9 now envisages human society as developing *in tension* with that task—specifically its governance of *animal* society. In Genesis 2, all the animals pass before human eyes to be named, as a search is made for the earthling's partner ([Genesis 2:19-20](#)). As this happens, the animals find their place in the scheme of things, in relation to human beings and to each other. Kinship and friendship between animal and human creation are the keynotes of Genesis 2. In Genesis 6, likewise, the birds and the land animals come to Noah to be kept alive on the ark (6:20); once again the emphasis lies on friendship and on a shared destiny. The atmosphere of Genesis 9, however, is very different. While it is the same Genesis 1 command that (re)starts creation—"be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth"—*this* time the command is accompanied neither by an instruction to keep nor by an instruction to rule animal creation. It is accompanied, rather, by words that tell of fear and conflict in the human-animal relationship: "the fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands" ([Genesis 9:2, NIV](#)). I shall object to one aspect of this translation ahead, for it brings into the frame more animals than are probably envisaged by the text. For the moment, though, let us allow it to stand. The animals (or many of them) are now envisaged as looking upon their human

counterparts not as their keepers nor even as their rulers but in the way that the residents of a land might look upon a conquering army.

That is what the language of "fear and dread" implies, as a text like [Deuteronomy 11:25](#) makes clear: "No man will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go." This verse refers to the Israelite conquest of Canaan, in which God gave Israel's enemies "into their hands" (e.g., [Deuteronomy 20:13](#), using the same language as [Genesis 9:2](#)). Human beings are thus envisaged in Genesis 9 as having abandoned their God-given responsibility to exercise just and appropriate dominion over the earth. Instead, war has been declared on animal creation. The multifaceted nature of human kingship is reduced to one aspect—conquest. In essence, the dimensions of the curse of Genesis 3 on the animal world are now being more fully revealed, as evil works its way deeply into creation. Here, indeed, are the (fallen) men who, if they could fly, would "lay waste the sky as well as the earth" (Thoreau, in the second epigraph to this chapter).

### **Vegetarians or Carnivores?**

What are the implications of this newly declared "war" on animal creation? One of them is made explicit in [Genesis 9:3](#): "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." Once again, I have an objection to aspects of this translation, but let it stand for the moment. The allusion here is to [Genesis 1:29-30](#), where God provides plants and trees that give both human beings and animals food to eat—language that has sometimes been interpreted as indicating that the author of Genesis 1 thought of the original creation as a vegetarian place, unmarked by

predation.<sup>6</sup> On this view, there were no carnivores in the pristine creation; meat eating became a facet of life on earth, whether in the human or the nonhuman world, only at some point after human beings embraced evil. [Genesis 9:3](#), on this view, identifies the point. It is in this verse (it is argued) that God explicitly gives human beings permission to move from a vegetarian to a carnivorous state, and it is here (implicitly) that some other animals also fall into such a state. This, however, represents an implausible reading of Genesis 1–9.

### **Animal Sacrifice in Genesis 1–8**

In the first place, there are various indications throughout Genesis 1–8 that the authors, before we get to Genesis 9, already think of animal sacrifice as an important aspect of human life. [Genesis 3:21](#) refers to garments of skin being provided for human beings by God, which certainly involves at least animal *death*. [Genesis 4:2-4](#) tells us of Abel's sacrifice of sheep. In [Genesis 7:2-3](#), Noah is instructed to take "two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate" into the ark, but also "seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and seven of every kind of bird, male and female." He needs sufficient animals to allow *both* conservation of species *and* also sacrifice (for which ritually "clean" animals are required). All of this implies a functioning sacrificial system prior to Genesis 9, and in the Old Testament a considerable amount of sacrificial ritual involves the eating of the sacrificial victim. Sacrifice and eating go together. The authors of Genesis, then, clearly do *not* regard Genesis 9 as the beginning of the human carnivorous state.

### **Carnivores and "Creeping Things"**

Nor do they say anything that implies that carnivorousness entered the animal world only as a result of the human

embrace of evil. To the contrary, in detailing the sixth day of creation in [Genesis 1:24-25](#), they clearly portray God's original creation as already including three different categories of land animals. Their Hebrew "labels" are *behemah*, *remes*, and *khayyat ha'arets*. The first of these is easy to translate: "livestock." These are the animals that human communities raise and look after as part of their domestic economy (e.g., cows, sheep, goats). The third is also easy: "wild land animals" (lit. "beasts of the earth")—animals that do not form part of the domestic economy. To categorize the world of land animals in this way, as including both the domestic and the wild, is already to imply predation; it is to root in the original creation the reality of the world that was known to the Genesis authors, in which many wild land animals were certainly predatory. More than this, it is plausible to interpret the distinction between the second and third terms, *remes* and *khayyat ha'arets*, as being drawn on the basis of predation and nonpredation within the class of these wild animals.

In order to see this, we must first be clear that the *remes* (sometimes translated as "creeping things") are indeed wild. A translation like the NIV does not help us here, since it translates *remes* as "creatures that move along the ground," reserving the adjective "wild" only for its translation of *khayyat ha'arets* (wild animals). As we review other occurrences of *remes* in Genesis 1–11, however, we find that this noun is used in various texts, just like *khayyat ha'arets*, to refer to wild land animals as an entire class. In [Genesis 1:26](#), for example, the *remes* are the only such animals mentioned: human beings are to rule over all the earth—that is, over "fish . . . birds . . . livestock . . . *remes*." The same is true in [Genesis 6:7](#), where God vows to wipe out all "livestock . . . *remes* . . . birds," except those found on the ark.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, *remes* includes what is elsewhere indicated by *hayyat ha'arets*. The opposite is the

case in [Genesis 9:9-10](#), where God makes a covenant "with the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals [*khayyat ha'arets*]" on the ark. Only the *khayyat ha'arets* are explicitly mentioned here, but the covenant certainly includes the *remes*. Both *khayyat ha'arets* and *remes*, then, can refer to wild land animals as an entire class. However, this obviously cannot be the case when they are used together, as they are in [Genesis 1:24-25](#). Here, a distinction of some kind is clearly intended—a distinction within the world of the wild. This understanding of the sixth day of creation fits well with what we read of the fifth ([Genesis 1:20-23](#)). Here, two categories of animal life are initially described (sea life and birds, v. 20), but they soon become three, because a distinction is drawn (in v. 21) between "the great creatures of the sea" and "every living and moving thing with which the water teems" [Heb. *ramas*]. The "living and moving things" form a subset within sea life. In the same way, in [Genesis 1:24-25](#) *remes* most likely refers to a subset within wild land animals.

Which animals are these? They have often been understood, historically, as small, wild land animals (e.g., mice, reptiles, insects) as opposed to large ones. This is, however, nothing more than a guess arising from the alleged nuance of the verb *ramas* (to creep, move lightly), which has suggested smallness to some interpreters.<sup>8</sup> The implausibility of this guess becomes evident, however, when we consider [Psalm 104:20](#), where "all the animals of the forest [*kol khayto-ya'ar*] prowl [*ramas*]." It is not only of small land animals, then, that *ramas* is used in the Old Testament; all wild land animals can "prowl" (or creep). The distinction often drawn between *remes* and *khayyat ha'arets* in terms of small and large animals is, therefore, unconvincing. Much more plausible is the distinction that has sometimes been proposed between predators and nonpredators. Following this proposal, we should

read [Genesis 1:24-25](#) as distinguishing between domestic animals (*behemah*); wild, nonpredatory land animals (*remes*); and wild, predatory land animals (*khayyat ha'arets*). It is then particularly clear that the Genesis authors did not believe that predation entered the animal world only as a result of the human embrace of evil. It was a feature of life from the beginning.

## **Carnivores and the Goodness of Creation**

There is, in fact, no positive evidence *anywhere* in the biblical tradition that its authors believed in an original vegetarian state of creation, either in the human or in the animal realm. A prophetic passage like [Isaiah 11:6-9](#), with its vision of a day when predatory and nonpredatory animals will lie down together in peace, has sometimes been cited as if it had something to contribute to our understanding of the biblical perspective here. This idea arises, however, only from the (faulty) logic that insists that everything that is true about the *future* in biblical thinking is also true about the *past*.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, a text like Psalm 104 stands firmly against the idea that creaturely eating habits now are very different from those in the past. Here the psalmist celebrates God's many creative acts, from the beginning of time to the present. All of God's creatures look to God "to give them their food at the proper time" (v. 27), and this applies as much to the "lions [that] roar for their prey" (v. 21) as to any other creature. Here is a wonderful creation functioning as it should under God's sovereign care: "in wisdom you made them all" (v. 24; including carnivores). For the psalmist, then, one of God's most praiseworthy creative acts is the creation of a carnivorous lion. As one commentator has rightly said, "The predatory lions are not an evil (unless they prey on the flock!)." <sup>10</sup>

## **Where the Wild Things Are**



If [Genesis 9:3](#) cannot plausibly be interpreted as marking a transition from a vegetarian to a carnivorous human state, to what *does* it refer? We can make significant progress toward an answer to this question, first of all, by offering a better translation than the NIV of [Genesis 9:2](#). The NIV text reads as follows:

The fear and dread of you will fall upon *all the beasts of the earth* and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground and upon all the fish of the sea.

However, the Hebrew behind "the beasts of the earth" (*khayyat ha'arets*) is exactly the same as the Hebrew we find in [Genesis 1:24-25](#), which the NIV itself correctly translates as "wild animals," *not* as (land) animals in general.<sup>11</sup> The NIV also offers the same (correct) translation of the term in [Genesis 9:10](#). It is baffling, then, that the translator offers us in [Genesis 9:2](#) "beasts of the earth." The reader is thereby misled into thinking that the verse refers to *all* land animals, not just to a particular *class* of land animal. We *ought* to translate the verse in this way:

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the wild (predatory) land animals and all the birds of the air, upon all the wild, non-predatory land animals ["every creature that moves along the ground," Heb. *ramas*], and upon all the fish of the sea.

### **The Lost Sheep (and Cows)**

This translation allows us to notice something rather striking when [Genesis 9:2](#) is compared with [Genesis 1:24-25](#) and [Genesis 9:10](#). In [Genesis 9:2](#), one class of animals is not mentioned at all—the *behemah*, "livestock." Genesis 9, we thus realize, is concerned only with animal life in the *nondomestic sphere*: the predatory wild land animals, the birds, the remaining wild land animals (*remes*), and the fish. It is *wild* creatures, and not creatures in general, that



now live their lives in fear and dread of human beings. The livestock *already* "belong" in human hands, from the perspective of Genesis. We may go further: the animals explicitly singled out in [Genesis 9:3](#) as being given over to humans now for food are not *animals in general* but only some of the *wild land animals*: "Every wild but nonpredatory land animal [Heb. *remes*] that is living shall be food for you. As I gave green plants to you—everything" ([Genesis 9:3](#); my translation). Why are these particular animals (e.g., deer) singled out? Most likely it is because they are to become a much *more important* food source for humans than the others mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

## Hunters and Warriors

We can now say confidently that [Genesis 9:2-3](#) is not a passage about human beings beginning to eat animals. It is a passage about a change in the human relationship with the animal world, whereby wild creatures of land, sea, and air become targets of human aggression rather than subjects of human governance and care. They become first and foremost menu items. The authors of Genesis already know of human beings as meat eaters prior to Genesis 9. Human beings sacrifice and eat the domesticated animals that they have themselves raised (as [Genesis 3:21](#); [4:2-4](#); and [7:2-3](#) imply). Nothing is thought to be amiss with this practice, nor is there any indication in Genesis that the hunting of wild animals is itself intrinsically problematic.<sup>13</sup> Meat eating is not itself a problem, insofar as it is practiced out of human need and in an overall context of creation care.

What [Genesis 9:2-3](#) envisages, however, is the replacement of a care mind-set with a conquest mentality. This new mentality conceives of wild creatures as an enemy people that needs to be subjugated—a kingdom to be conquered so that the victor may benefit from the collected spoils. It is an

exploitative, rapacious approach to the wild. Human need would not of itself require people to move much beyond the domestic economy in pursuit of food, and if need were determinative, the hunting that did occur beyond those confines would have minimal impact on the world of wild creatures. Genesis 9 envisages a world, however, in which such distinctions between the domestic and the wild have been obliterated. There is no longer any order to the world; there is only chaos. Another boundary has been breached, in a biblical book that is replete with examples of such boundary infringements. It is now open season on all nonhuman creatures, insofar as they might possibly satisfy human desires. The force of [Genesis 9:3](#) in this context is *not* "just as I gave you plants, now I give you animals"; it is "just as I gave you plants that you had not cultivated, now I give you wild creatures that you have not domesticated." These are some of the fuller dimensions of the curse on the animal world that is first pronounced in Genesis 3. Creation is not right; even the animals are being deeply affected by human dysfunction.

### [Notes]

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 313: "The opening chapter of Genesis was quite explicit that in the beginning man and the animals were vegetarian." Also Kass, *Wisdom*, 48, 177–80.

<sup>7</sup> See also [1 Kings 4:33](#), where the NIV's "animals and birds, reptiles and fish" should be "livestock and birds, wild animals [*remes*] and fish."

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> See further our chap. 11, where we return to the matter of reading Isaiah 11 well.

<sup>10</sup> Collins, **GENESIS 1–4**, 165. Collins also draws attention to [Psalm 147:8-9](#), where the text moves seamlessly from a description of God supplying the earth with rain and making grass grow to his provision of food for cattle and for ravens alike. The latter certainly eat meat. Again, this is just how creation *is*.

<sup>11</sup> The NIV makes the same mistake in [Genesis 1:30](#). The focus of concern in this text is how the land animals in the nondomestic, nonhuman sphere will eat. Domestic animals (Heb. *behemah*) do not need to worry about this, because they are looked after directly by human beings.

<sup>12</sup> Engaging our imaginations about why this might be so, we could suggest that predatory wild animals are often dangerous (as well as being forbidden as food by later Israelite law), that birds are more difficult to catch and offer less "gain" for effort than, for example, deer, and that at least some fishing involves boating on the sea, which the ancient Hebrews were famously reluctant to do. *Remes* in [Genesis 9:3](#) *could*, of course, mean to refer to *all* wild land-animals, given the "fluidity" of its usage in Genesis 1–11, but nothing important in my argument hangs upon this point.

<sup>13</sup> Hunting is first mentioned in [Genesis 10:9](#) with respect to Nimrod, who hunts "before the Lord" (which certainly does not imply disapproval of the practice), and later it is mentioned with respect to Esau in [Genesis 25:27-28](#), where no evaluation of it is apparent.

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OT scholar John Walton argues along similar lines in his *NIV Application Commentary* on Genesis.

### **Blessing (9:1-7)**

Is "the fear and dread" experienced by animals over against human beings a new element that God adds to the psyche of the animal kingdom? The text stops short of implicating direct divine action by using passive formulations. The only action of which God is the subject is granting animals for food (v. 3). Consequently, the fear and dread can be viewed as the natural response to being hunted prey.<sup>1</sup>

Literarily the statement about "fear and dread" replaces the "subdue and rule" clause in 1:28. What brings about this alteration? In our study of Genesis 1, I suggested that the end result of ruling was domestication and control (see subdue). The statement in this chapter goes beyond rule (actions to be carried out) in that all creatures are given into human hands (passive recipients). Rule is not taken away, but neither is it reiterated.

Moreover, the blessing of God still includes reproduction (9:1) and procurement of food. Just as God's pronouncement in chapter 3 made it clear that despite the Fall the blessing was still intact, here the text makes clear that despite the Flood, the blessing is still largely intact. After the Fall the ground would not be cooperative, so that food was not as easily obtainable. Likewise here we find that animals will not be cooperative, with the result that obtaining food will continue to be a challenge.

It is likely that permission to use animals for food should be seen as a concession of grace. If so, it is parallel to the making of skin garments for Adam and Eve and putting the mark on Cain. It also suggests the possibility that a contributing factor to the pre-Flood violence was the shortage of food, but these are inferences that go well beyond the statements of the text.

Note also that the category given for food is *remés* (NIV, "everything that moves"). The noun (*remés*) and the

associated verb (*rms*) each occur seventeen times in the Old Testament, ten times each in Genesis 1–9. This word group is distinct from both the wild (predatory) beasts and domesticated flocks and herds. Neither verb nor noun is ever used to refer to larger wild animals or to domesticated animals. In no place is *remés* a catch-all category for all creatures.<sup>2</sup> It is one category of creature only. The division of the Hebrew terms used up to this point in Genesis reflects the nature of the animal (not the locomotion, genre, species, or the morphology).<sup>3</sup>

If this is true, we are mistaken to translate *remés* as if it describes a type of locomotion (e.g., "creeping things"). An alternative is suggested by the Akkadian cognate *nammašu/nammaštu*, which typically refers to wild animals that travel in herds<sup>4</sup>; they are distinct from wild animals that hunt or scavenge,<sup>5</sup> from the domesticated cattle, and from the docile beasts that do not tend to be found in herds.<sup>6</sup> It is most familiar as the group that Enkidu watched over in his precivilized days in the Gilgamesh Epic.<sup>7</sup> These animals were typically characterized as being the prey of hunters and predatory beasts. The most common members of this group were wild cattle, antelope, fallow deer, gazelle, and ibex. Some of these could be managed, though not domesticated. Whether animals such as rabbits are included in this group depends on whether the primary characteristic is "herd living" or "serving as prey."

There is a difference between being a meat-eater (people who use flocks or cattle for food at least on some occasions) and being a predator (hunting for food). Since this verse only grants the *remés* group for food, it is logical to assume that it gives people permission to be predatory hunters of food. It is unclear whether butchering cattle for food is already assumed or has not yet been permitted.<sup>8</sup> Note the

interesting fact that when [Genesis 1:29–30](#) granted permission for food, its terminology describes that which grew wild rather than referring to crops that were planted—though the terminology is general enough not to exclude what is sown.<sup>9</sup> I tentatively propose, then, that domesticated plants and animals were always considered legitimate sources of food, while permission was granted for gathering of food growing wild (1:30) and hunting animals for food (9:3). Meat was not a common portion of ancient meals. Animals were kept primarily for their milk, hair, and wool, not for their meat.

In giving permission to eat this meat, the text introduces two caveats. (1) In verse 3, the qualification is that the animal is living. This presumably rules out feeding from dead carcasses found in the wild. (2) In verse 4 is the qualification that the meat cannot be eaten with the lifeblood in it. This presumably assures that the animal has been killed.<sup>10</sup> In ancient times the blood was considered a life force ([Deut. 12:23](#)). The prohibition does not require that no blood at all be consumed, but only that the blood must be drained. Ritually speaking, the draining of the blood before eating the meat was a way of returning the life force of the animal to God who gave it life. This offers recognition that they have taken the life with permission and are partaking of God's bounty as his guests. Its function is not unlike that of the blessing said before a meal in modern practice. No comparable prohibition is known elsewhere in the ancient world.

Human life, because of the image of God, remains under the protection of God. Accountability to God for preserving human life is put into humanity's hands, thus instituting blood vengeance in the ancient world and capital punishment in modern societies. In Israelite society blood vengeance was in the hands of the family of the victim.

Capital punishment was the recognized right of the family and was considered an act of justice.

## [Notes]

*subdue*. While the image of God defines a role for humanity (vicereagents for God), the blessing indicates the functions that people will have as a result of the role to which they were created. The first function is to "subdue" (*kbs*) the earth, the second to "rule" it (*rdh*, the same as used in v. 26, but different from the verb used in vv. 16–18, *mšl*). In its biblical usage the first word is usually employed in political contexts but is also found sociologically (with objects such as women and slaves). Genesis 1 is the only occurrence with "the earth" as an object. The profile is pretty clear, however, and is applicable to this context. The term *kbš* means to bring something or someone under control.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noticed that the word for domesticable or docile cattle (*behema*) is not included in this list. That suggests that they are not necessarily characterized by this fear. The one exception that has been identified is [Gen. 7:21](#), where many have seen as a catch-all category parallel to all flesh and encompassing the birds, livestock, wild animals, and swarming creatures. But the other groups are all introduced with the preposition *bet*, which can easily be understood as meaning "along with." There are a few places where *bet* is used to present the two elements of merism ([Ex. 12:19](#); [13:2](#), "whether man or beast"), but it is unclear whether the preposition can function this way in a list. The preferred translation of [Gen. 7:21](#) is therefore: "All flesh expired that (*rms*) on the earth, along with the birds and along with the cattle, and along with the wild beast and along with the swarming things...." A similar structure is used in 8:17, but there is included in the "along with" group, and a different category leads off the list.

<sup>2</sup> The one exception that has been identified is [Gen. 7:21](#), where many have seen *remés* as a catch-all category parallel to all flesh and encompassing the birds, livestock, wild animals, and swarming creatures. But the other groups are all introduced with the preposition *bet*, which can easily be understood as meaning "along with." There are a few places where *bet* is used to present the two elements of merism ([Ex. 12:19](#); [13:2](#), "whether man or beast"), but it is unclear whether the preposition can function this way in a list. The preferred translation of [Gen. 7:21](#) is therefore: "All flesh expired that (*rms*) image on the earth, along with the birds and along with the cattle, and along with the wild beast and along with the swarming things...." A similar structure is used in 8:17, but there *remés* is included in the "along with" group, and a different category leads off the list. The distinctions between the general terms typically used in the text are given much more refinement in the dietary laws, where the text establishes a number of new categories that it has to define rather than subsuming them under a single convenient word.

<sup>3</sup> The distinctions between the general terms typically used in the text are given much more refinement in the dietary laws, where the text establishes a number of new categories that it has to define rather than subsuming them under a single convenient word.

<sup>4</sup> *CAD*, N/1, 233–35. can be general ([Gen. 2:19](#); [6:17](#)); when it is specific, it refers to wild animals (differentiated from domesticated or docile animals ([Gen. 2:20](#); [Ps. 50:10](#); [74:19](#); [Isa. 35:9](#); [43:20](#); [56:9](#); [Jer. 12:9](#); [Ezek. 5:17](#); [34:5](#), [25](#); [Hos. 13:8](#)), mostly of the scavenger/predator/meat-eating variety that are considered a threat.



<sup>5</sup> *hayya* can be general ([Gen. 2:19](#); [6:17](#)); when it is specific, it refers to wild animals (differentiated from domesticated or docile animals ([Gen. 2:20](#); [Ps. 50:10](#); [74:19](#); [Isa. 35:9](#); [43:20](#); [56:9](#); [Jer. 12:9](#); [Ezek. 5:17](#); [34:5, 25](#); [Hos. 13:8](#)), mostly of the scavenger/predator/meat-eating variety that are considered a threat. Both of these latter two fall into the category of , which typically refers to livestock of the domesticated variety ([Gen. 36:6](#); [Ex. 20:10](#); [22:10](#); [Lev. 1:2](#)) or in general to slow-witted, dumb, or docile beasts. These serve as prey rather than seek prey.

<sup>6</sup> Both of these latter two fall into the category of *behema*, which typically refers to livestock of the domesticated variety ([Gen. 36:6](#); [Ex. 20:10](#); [22:10](#); [Lev. 1:2](#)) or in general to slow-witted, dumb, or docile beasts. These serve as prey rather than seek prey. It is intriguing that prior to his "fall" (= becoming civilized), Enkidu was a protector of these animals, but after his "fall" they were afraid and ran away from him (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.126–133; 195–198).

<sup>7</sup> It is intriguing that prior to his "fall" (= becoming civilized), Enkidu was a protector of these animals, but after his "fall" they were afraid and ran away from him (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.126–133; 195–198). Abel's offering is intriguing on this count. Since the fat parts were offered, it is clear that the animal was butchered, but the text stops short of indicating what was done with the meat. In later times, when the fat was offered, the meat was eaten at a ceremonial meal by the offerers and the officiants.

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offerers and the officiants. The Hebrew word is occasionally used to refer to crops that people have sown ([Ps. 104:14](#); [Amos 7:2](#)) but in most instances refers to general vegetation and often carries a contextual implication of that which grows wild and goes untended (as in [Deut. 29:23](#)).

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word *eseb* is occasionally used to refer to crops that people have sown ([Ps. 104:14](#); [Amos 7:2](#)) but in most instances refers to general vegetation and often carries a contextual implication of that which grows wild and goes untended (as in [Deut. 29:23](#)). This view was expressed as early as the Talmud (59a), presumably based on the idea that in the ancient world where no refrigeration was available, sometimes an animal was kept alive as long as possible while it was used for meat.

<sup>10</sup> This view was expressed as early as the Talmud (*b. Sanh.* 59a), presumably based on the idea that in the ancient world where no refrigeration was available, sometimes an animal was kept alive as long as possible while it was used for meat. Most recent commentators recognize this parallelism. For a representative list of the parallels, see Mathews, 414.