

Recent Scholarly Perspectives on Genesis

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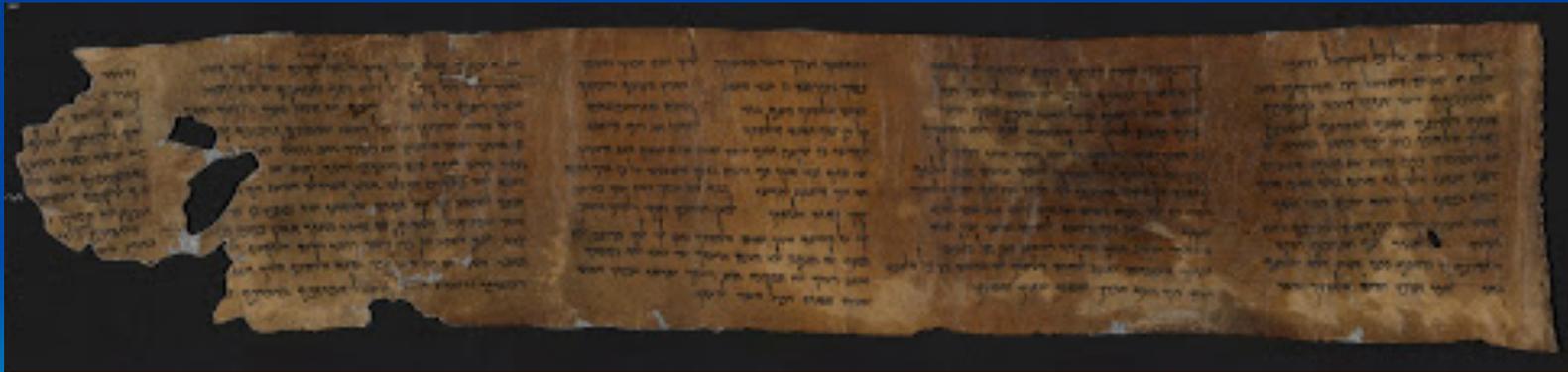


Photo by Shai Halevi, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority



Sabbatical – Time to Play



Sabbatical – Time to Sightsee



Sabbatical – Time to Work



Sabbatical – Time to Teach



Sabbatical – Time to Learn



Overview of Genesis

- Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch, a five-part collection on the birth of the nation of Israel – from Creation to Israel entering Canaan
- Authorship is traditionally attributed to Moses, following the exodus of Israel from Egypt, around 1400 BCE.
- Most modern scholars accept that Genesis is a redacted literary work, reaching its final version as late as post-exilic Israel around 400 BCE.



Overview of Genesis

- Genesis 1-11 is a brief outline of history beginning with creation, the fall and the spread of sin, to the origin of people groups and languages, all in need of redemption.
- Genesis 12-50 are the patriarchal stories: God partners with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & Joseph, in establishing Israel and a plan of redemption.
- Understanding the purpose and meaning of Genesis has been a challenge for Bible scholars long before the advent of modern science.



Genesis 1 – Creation

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. And the earth was formless and void...”
- The “formless void” is transformed by God over 6 days into an earth that is ordered and filled.
- 7 times “God saw that it was good”
- Each “day” is described as “and there was evening and there was morning”
- Man is created “in the image of God”
- God “rests” on the seventh day, blessing it



Pattern of each day

- 1. Announcement: “And God said”
- 2. Creative command: “Let there be...”
- 3. Fulfillment: “And there was”
- 4. Description: “And God [action]”
- 5. Blessing: “And he called/blessed”
- 6. Evaluation: “And it was good”
- 7. Concluding, temporal formula: “There was evening and morning”



Overall Pattern of Week

Earth

Formless

Void

- Day 1 (light/darkness) -- Day 4 (sun/moon/stars)
- Day 2 (sky/water) -- Day 5 (birds/fish)
- Day 3 (land/plants) -- Day 6 (animals/man)
- Day 7 - Rest (Sabbath)

Ordered

Filled



Transition in Literary Styles

- Contrasting texts within Genesis:
- Name of God – “Elohim” (God) in Gen. 1-2:3
- Name of God – “Yahweh Elohim” (LORD God) in Gen. 2:4-3
- Gen. 1 is an overview of the entire created order; God *speaks* and it is so
- Gen. 2 focuses on man; God *formed* man from the dust of the Earth and places him in garden



Literary Genre

- Historical assertions – God created all
- Literary structures within Genesis 1
 - similar pattern for each day
 - overall pattern for entire week
- Many figures of speech used in Genesis 2-3
- Anthropomorphisms – God in human terms
- Mythological elements
- Identifying genre not a simple decision



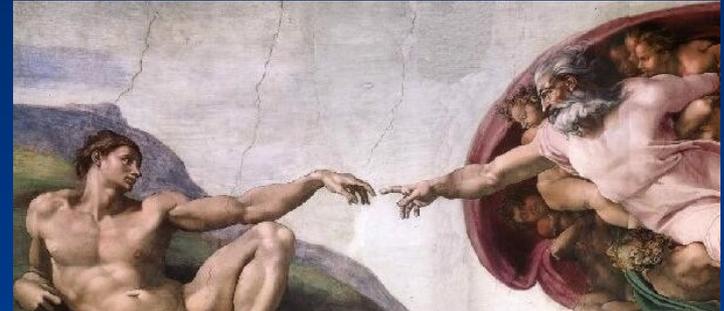
A Divided Christian Community

- Understanding the intended message of Scripture:
 - Protestant Tradition of “Sola Scriptura”
 - “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” II Tim. 3:16-17
- And how should we use sources external to Scripture to help us understand Scripture?
 - Ancient Near East Myths
 - Archaeological Findings
 - Modern Science

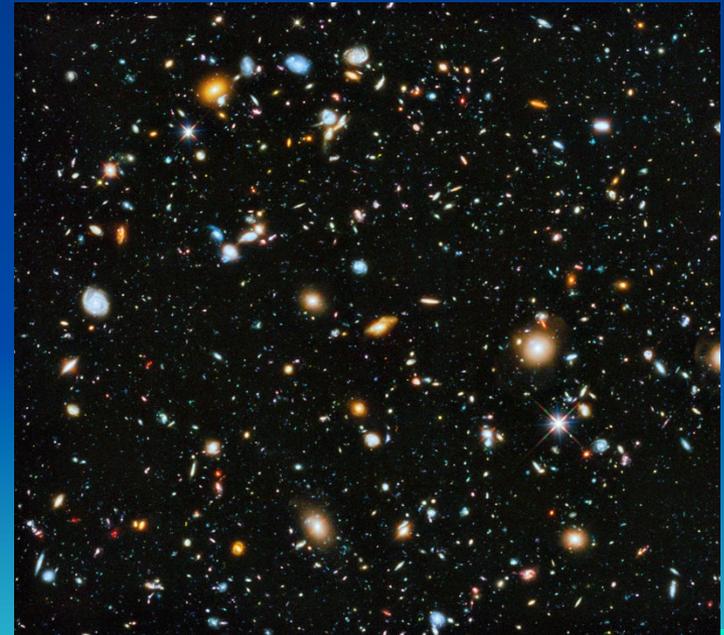


Clash of Authority

- Biblical Account of Origins
 - Genesis 1 – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God speaks things into existence in a formal seven day format.
- Scientific Account of Origins
 - Modern Cosmology reveals a dramatic beginning to the universe 13.7 billion years ago with clear evidence of its vast age (distant starlight, expansion of universe, cosmic microwave background)



www.infiniteunknown.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Michelangelo-Sistine-Chapel-Adam-.jpg



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Ultra-Deep_Field

The Concordists

- Concordists expect agreement between the Biblical and scientific accounts of origins.
- Starting assumption is that the Bible was written with literally scientifically accurate descriptions.
- Concordists require ancient Hebrew not only be translated into our modern languages, but also expect meaning from their limited vocabulary to correspond to our modern, scientific vocabulary.
- Concordists range from those who give more validity to their understanding of Scripture (Young-Earth Creationists) to those who give equal validity to understanding Scripture and modern science (Old-Earth Creationists).



Young-Earth Creationists

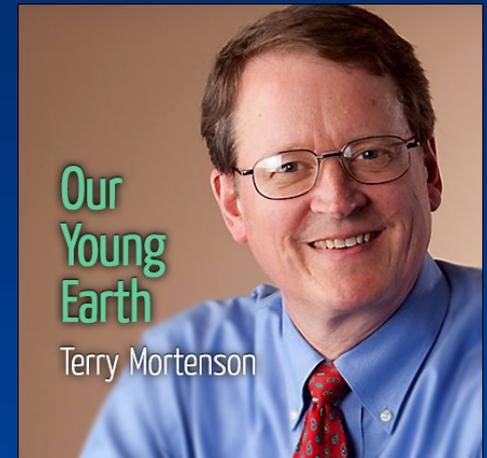
- Ken Ham – Australian Young-Earth Creationist (1951-present)
- Co-founder of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum, Petersburg, Kentucky



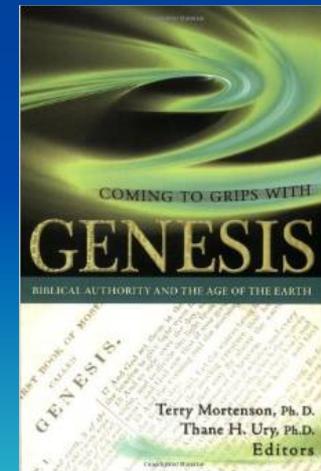
<http://theamericanjesus.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ken-ham.jpg>

Young-Earth Creationists

- Terry Mortenson (Answers in Genesis)
- Ph.D. History of Geology, Coventry University
- Insists that inerrancy of Scripture demands literal view of the Genesis 1 creation account.
- Creation days must represent the chronology of God's creation of the heavens and earth.
- Co-editor of *Coming to Grips with Genesis*
- *"The authors of this book are convinced that no properly interpreted scientific facts will ultimately contradict a straightforward reading of Genesis" p. 427*
- Use of terms "compromise" and "slippery slide" to describe believers accepting an older earth.



scriptureawakening.com/shop/beyond/beyond-audio-our-young-earth-with-terry-mortenson/

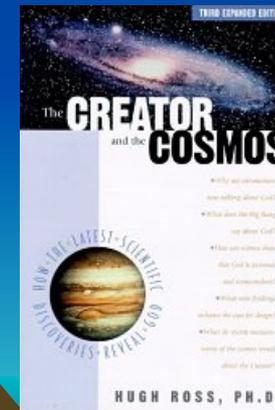


Old-Earth Creationists

- Hugh Ross – Canadian-American Astronomer (1945-present)
- Founder of Reasons to Believe Ministries
- Author of many books: *Fingerprint of God*, *Creator & the Cosmos*, *A Matter of Days*, *Creation as Science*, etc.
- Proposes a testable model based on merging Scripture and science.
- Promotes a day-age view of creation days in Genesis 1 to accommodate an old earth
- Accepts most mainstream science, but rejects Darwinian evolution as explanation for the unity and diversity of life.



www.reasons.org/about/who-we-are/hugh-ross

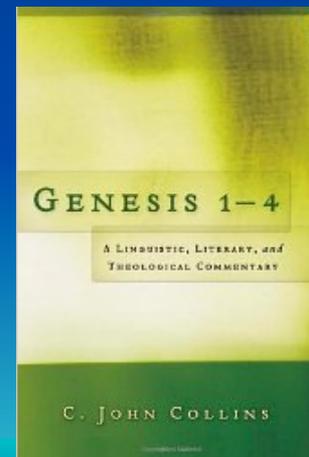


Old-Earth Creationists

- C. John “Jack” Collins – Old Testament Scholar at Covenant Theological Seminary
- B.S., M.S. in computer science and systems engineering
- Ph.D. in Biblical Hebrew linguistics, Univ. of Liverpool
- Wrote *Science and Faith, Friend or Foes?, Genesis 1-4, Did Adam & Eve really exist?*
- Has sought to harmonize Biblical account of origins with valid science.
- Contends for the historicity of Genesis 1-4 narratives, even allowing for evolutionary development of life.



<http://www.covenantseminary.edu/academics/faculty/#!/jack-collins/>



Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

- While exegesis is the process of drawing out the meaning from a text in accordance with the context and discoverable meaning of its author, eisegesis occurs when a reader imposes his or her interpretation into and onto the text. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
- Concordism poses a big risk of eisegesis
- Concordism increases the risk of imposing our 21st century perspectives onto an ancient text

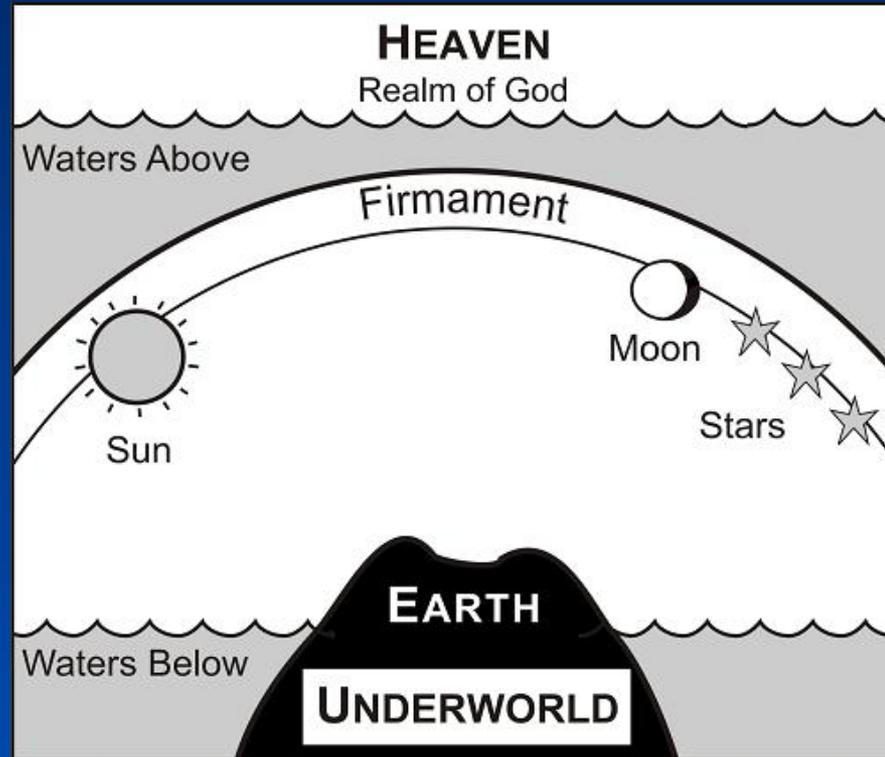


The Non-Concordists

- Non-Concordists do not expect the Bible and science to give us similar information on origins. Also, the two creation accounts (Genesis 1 & 2) need not be concorded with each other.
- How, when, and what order God created are not the big idea. The authoritative messages are the rich theological messages, not the “medium”.
- No need to harmonize the Bible with science beyond the overarching claim “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”.
- No need to fear science, since the order of the cosmos itself is testimony of the wisdom of God.



Ancient Near East View of Cosmos



theologicalscribbles.blogspot.com/2010/12/old-testament-cosmologypaul-seely.html

Vault or Firmament in Sky on which Sun,
Moon, and Stars move

Augustinian Accommodation

- Augustine – Early Christian Theologian (354-430) Bishop of Hippo, Africa
- Wrote *Confessions*, *City of God*, *On Christian Doctrine*
- “in the matter of the shape of heaven the sacred writers knew the truth, but that the Spirit of God, who spoke through them, did not wish to teach men these facts that would be of no avail for their salvation.” *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk. II, ch. 9; 1:59.
- Galileo Galilei – Italian Scientist and Theologian (1564-1642)
- passages of Scripture “were set down by the sacred scribes in order to accommodate them to the capacities of the common people, who are rude and unlearned.” *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
File:Saint_Augustine_Portrait.jpg



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
File:Justus_Sustermans_-
_Portrait_of_Galileo_Galilei,_1636.jpg

Rediscovery of Ancient Near East Historical – Cultural Context

- Ancient Near East creation accounts
- Mesopotamian (Akkadian, Sumerian) myths: e.g. Enuma Elish, Altrahasis Epic, Epic of Gilgamesh, Tale of Adapa
- Egyptian myths: e.g. Heliopolis Pyramid Text, Great Hymn Aten, Coffin Texts
- contain many similarities to Genesis accounts, strongly differ in description of Deity (or deities)



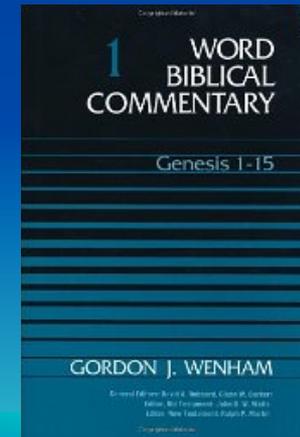
[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:British_Museum_Flood_Tablet.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Museum_Flood_Tablet.jpg)

Genesis in light of Ancient Near East Mythologies

- Gordon Wenham – Old Testament Scholar (1943-present) Trinity College, Bristol
- Hebrew author assumes a view of the cosmos common to ANE world
- The major difference is theological.
- "Gen 1:1-2:3 is a polemic against the mythico-religious concepts of the ancient Orient...The concept of man here is markedly different from standard Near Eastern mythology: man was not created as the lackey of the gods to keep them supplied with food; he was God's representative and ruler on earth, endowed by his creator with an abundant supply of food and expected to rest every seventh day from his labors. Finally, the seventh day is not a day of ill omen as in Mesopotamia, but a day of blessing and sanctity on which normal work is laid aside. In contradicting the usual ideas of its time, Gen 1 is also setting out a positive alternative. It offers a picture of God, the world, and man...man's true nature. He is the apex of the created order..." (p.37, Vol. 1, "Explanation," Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* [Word Biblical Commentary, 2 vols.], Word Books, Waco, Texas)



www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/assets/images/faculty/gordon_wenham2.jpg

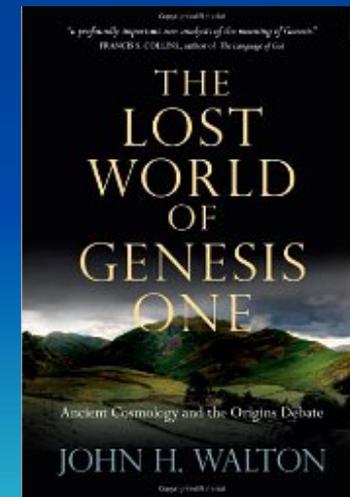


Genesis in light of Ancient Near East Mythologies

- John Walton – Old Testament Scholar (1952-present) Wheaton College
- Ph.D. Hebrew and Cognate Studies, Hebrew Union College
- Wrote *Lost World of Genesis One: An Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*
- Insists that we must view Genesis 1 as the original audience would have understood it.
- Claims creation account describes the functions, not an account of material origins.
- The seven day format represents the inauguration of the heavens and earth as the temple of God.



www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Faculty/W/John-Walton

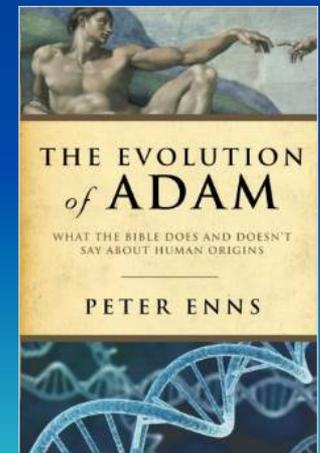


Genesis in light of Ancient Near East Mythologies

- Peter Enns – Old Testament Scholar (1961–present)
- Ph.D. Harvard in Near Eastern Languages
- Points out that Adam is not a central figure in the Old Testament, occurring early in Genesis, then no mention until intertestament and New Testament.
- The narrative of Adam & Eve mirrors the history of Israel, from being in the promised land (“Eden”), Israel’s sin of worshipping other gods (“the fall”), to their exile to Babylon (expulsion from the garden).
- The early chapters of Genesis reflect the national identity of Israel during the crucial post-exilic period, lacking the original temple worship to unify them.



<https://www.google.com/#q=peter+enns>



Contrast with ANE Mythologies

- God is not a part of creation, rather He is transcendent of it
- Creation is the result of God's purpose and primary role and represents something very good, in contrast to a haphazard, after-thought
- The heavens do not exercise control over humans, are merely created objects
- Man was created to have a special, unique relationship with the Creator
- Man was given dominion over creation and expected to exercise responsible rule



Conclusion

- Genesis viewed in light of its Ancient Near East origins highlights the theological messages, not the ones from concurring with modern science.
- While strong similarities can be found with the creation myths of the Ancient Near East, Genesis exhibits stark contrasts.
- God is portrayed as all-powerful and creation as the product of His design.
- Man is portrayed as the apex and centerpiece of creation, uniquely linked to God.



Resources on Science & Faith

(Listed on Resource page of Dept. of Chemistry & Physics Website)

- [American Scientific Affiliation](#) (diverse views on science & faith)
- [Answers in Creation](#) an old earth counter to the Answers in Genesis
- [Answers in Genesis](#) (Ken Ham) a young-earth creationist view
- [BioLogos](#) a theistic evolution site founded by Francis Collins
- [Discovery Institute](#) the intelligent design think tank that promotes views of notables: Bill Dembski, Michael Behe, Stephen Meyer, etc.
- [Reasons to Believe](#) (Hugh Ross) an old-earth creationist view
- [Talk Origins](#) a mainstream evolutionary science and Christian faith perspective

