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Franklin, Patrick S. Review of *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, edited by J. Daryl Charles. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013. *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith: Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 66, no. 2 (June 2014): 124-126.

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SCIENCE & BIBLICAL STUDIES

READING GENESIS 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation by J. Daryl Charles, ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013. xxi + 240, with scripture index. Paperback; \$24.95. ISBN: 9781598568882.

Origins questions continue to generate controversy today, particularly among conservative evangelical Christians. Unfortunately, an adequate understanding of the interpretive issues involved in reading the early chapters of Genesis rarely informs popular debates. Reading *Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* brings careful, deeply informed, and leading biblical scholarship to bear on identifying and analyzing such issues, and is thus a welcome contribution.

The book presents five views on interpreting Genesis 1-2, each of which receives a chapter-length treatment written by a representative Old Testament scholar followed by brief (typically 2-4 pages) critical responses from the other four scholars.

Richard A. Averbeck presents the first view, which he calls the “literary day, inter-textual, and contextual reading.” His view is “literary” because it seeks to pay close attention to literary features such as grammar, genre, and discourse; it is “inter-textual”

because it seeks to read the creation account in light of the entire canon (he devotes considerable space to reading Psalm 104 and the days of Genesis 1 in light of each other); and it is “contextual” because it seeks to account for the ancient near eastern (ANE) historical context within and against which God spoke. Averbeck’s overarching view is that Genesis 1–2 describes the actual creation of the cosmos *expressed analogically*. Genesis 1 focuses on the universe as a whole and describes the creation of its parts phenomenologically in terms that ancient people could observe and understand. Its purpose is to teach the people of Israel to understand their lives as framed by the God who created and ordered the world. Genesis 2 then provides a more standard literary narrative which, unlike Genesis 1, contains recognizable historical markers (e.g., the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; Adam and Eve as historical individuals).

The second view is a “literal approach” endorsed by Todd S. Beall, which interprets Genesis 1–2 as a historical account of God creating the world in six literal twenty-four-hour days. Beall argues, first, that we should not use two different hermeneutics for reading Genesis (chaps. 1–11 vs. chaps. 12–50), but employ one hermeneutic consistently (he does not recognize that one consistent hermeneutic can identify various forms of literature in Genesis). Second, we should not separate the first two chapters of Genesis; both are narrative accounts, not poetry (the respondents point out that narratives can be fictional yet true, e.g., parables). Third, Genesis 1 does not represent an ANE worldview and admitting otherwise would compromise the uniqueness of scripture as God’s Word. Fourth, the New Testament writers refer to Genesis as a literal account of actual history. Finally, nonliteral views are motivated by a desire to capitulate to modern scientific theories. Beall fears that figurative approaches initiate a slippery slope of reinterpreting the Bible in light of modern biases.

The third view, presented by C. John Collins, seeks to read Genesis 1–2 “with the grain” and accordingly treats the six days of creation as *analogical days*. Collins reads Genesis 1–11 as “prehistory,” which involves recognizing historical features of the text but “without undue literalism.” Genesis 1:1–2:3 forms a preface to the book written as “exalted prose narrative.” Its chief (but not sole) observation is that GOD made us all! Specifically, God made all things: (a) from nothing; (b) by the word of his power; (c) in the space of “six days” (representing the pattern of a human work week); (d) very good; (e) so that creation bears God’s imprint; and (f) as the right kind of place in which we live out our story as human beings and as God’s people. Collins argues that we should

read Genesis 1–2 together and presents evidence that the two accounts are coherently linked (citing the immediate context, rabbinic tradition, and the broader biblical canon).

In his chapter, entitled “What Genesis 1–2 Teaches (and What It Doesn’t),” Tremper Longman III offers the view that “the main purpose of Genesis 1–2 is to proclaim in the midst of contemporary counterclaims that Yahweh the God of Israel was the creator of everything and everyone.” Further, the Bible does not intend to explain *how* God created the cosmos or human beings (the Old Testament presents multiple, differing descriptions of creation). Longman suggests that Genesis 1–2 is “theological history” written as “high style literary prose narrative.” For example, it teaches that the Lord of Israel is the GOD who created all things; that God is other than, yet involved with, creation; and that human beings are a part of creation, yet also have a special relationship with God and serve as God’s representatives. Longman also offers very helpful theological reflections on the relationship between science and exegesis, the doctrines of the perspicuity and sufficiency of scripture, and how to interpret Adam and Eve in light of modern science (biblical inerrancy does not require the affirmation of a historical Adam).

John H. Walton presents the fifth and final view, which reads Genesis 1 as ancient cosmology. He begins with some comments about what it means to read the Bible competently, ethically, and virtuously. He then proceeds with his thesis that Genesis, being an ANE text sharing an ANE cosmological worldview, should be interpreted in light of a functional rather than a material ontology (in a functional ontology, “to be” is to have a function and place in an ordered cosmos). In light of this reading, days 1–3 of creation record God creating the basis for the functions of time, weather, and food; days 4–6 describe God establishing functionaries to rule over or govern the functions created in days 1–3. Genesis 1 is a temple text, culminating with day 7, and thus the cosmos is a temple in which God “rests” (indwells and rules). Genesis 2 should also be interpreted functionally. The point of the story is not to record the material creation of Adam and Eve, but to depict their function in the cosmos with respect to God, each other, and the world. Thus, the story is archetypal rather than literal—which is not to say nonhistorical (Walton affirms Adam and Eve as historical individuals).

Among the five contributors, Beall is unique in rejecting the significance of the ANE context, excluding modern science from having any bearing on reading the text, and denying figurative features of the narra-

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tive. The other four authors hold much in common, but have different perspectives on how to use ANE literature, the relation of Genesis 1:1 to 1:2, the precise meaning and function of *bara'* (create) and *'asah* (make/do), whether to harmonize Genesis 1 and 2 (all agree on the unity of Genesis 1-2), and the significance of a historical Adam to the theological teaching of scripture.

Reading Genesis 1-2 is an excellent book. Each author treats his subject matter with care and detail and the book's general tone is congenial and constructive. My one disappointment was with the final reflection chapter written by Jud Davis, which seems overly dismissive of the significance of current scientific consensus and its relevance for biblical interpretation. It would have been more fitting to conclude a volume of this kind with a summary and constructive analysis of the key issues. That aside, readers of *PSCF* will find the book helpful for clarifying their own understanding of Genesis, as they seek to maintain faithfulness to the Bible *and* integrity in their scientific work.

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