

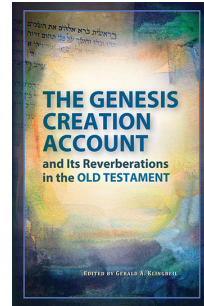
Book Review

Gerald A. Klingbeil, ed.

The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament

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Reviewed by, Viktor J. Tóth, PhD candidate, Fuller Theological Seminary



The scholars who contributed to this volume were asked to interact particularly with the question: “What is the relationship of Genesis 1 and 2 and its inherent creation theology to other texts and textual genres in the Hebrew Bible” (p. 2). The outcome is ten well written essays on the cosmology of Genesis 1 and 2, its echoes in the other parts of the Pentateuch, in selected Psalms, in the wisdom literature, and in the prophetic literature.

One major line of argument throughout the whole book is that the biblical creation account is a polemic against the mythological struggle and polytheistic tendencies found in other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation texts (especially Babylonian). Hence, the creation account documented in the first two chapters of Genesis needs to be treated as an absolute unique record of how the world came into being. It also sets the tone for the beautiful saving message of the entire Bible which then occupies the cosmology of all the authors of the other books of the Old Testament. Most of the contributors vehemently argue against any notion that the biblical account is an adaptation of other ANE creation accounts. On the contrary, it combats the records of the other nations.

The authors also agree that the creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis is not a myth but history in its literal sense. Furthermore, the so-called Documentary

Hypothesis is heavily criticized, and a plain reading of the text is favored. In one of the essays, Richard M. Davidson, puts forward what he calls the “passive-gap theory.” The theory advocates for an old universe but young life on earth. Genesis 1:1 describes the origin of everything, and verse 2 describes the condition of the earth just before “creation week starts” in verse 3 (p. 99). Consequently, the “pre-fossil raw material being created at a time of absolute beginning of this earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres at the unspecified time in the past” (p. 101). However, what is described in Genesis 1:3–2:4 happened only a several thousands of years ago, and the “Creation Week” is divided into six, “approximately” twenty-four-hour long days (p. 81). Paul Gregor also argues for a plain interpretation of the Genesis creation account by relating it to other parts of the Pentateuch. For example, he argues that if the world was not created in six twenty-four-hour days there is no foundation to keep the fourth commandment (i.e., the Sabbath). When it comes to the Book of Psalms, the creation account is observed from three perspectives: (1) creation is the reason to praise God, (2) it clarifies the difference between God and humans, and (3) it delves into the relationship between God and humans. It is also argued that the same creation cosmology was the point of departure for the Old Testament prophets’ worldview.

The book ends with two stimulating essays about evolutionary ideas in ANE texts, and

evolutionary ideas compared with “biblical” ideas about life and death. The authors argue that, on one side, many ANE creation myths (especially Egyptians, p. 299) surprisingly supportive for an evolutionary world view, but on the other side, the biblical narrative “rejects them by emphasizing their negative impact on human existence” (p. 328). More importantly, the unique Hebrew view of death rejects the “intellectual submission to death” promoted by evolutionary teaching (p. 340). Separate chapters are dealing with the question whether the Bible advocates for a geocentric model (it does not), and whether the biblical cosmology supports a notion of a “solid heavenly dome” (again, the answer is in the negative). The notion for a flat earth theory is also judged as non-biblical. The reflections on these issues are well informed and enriches the book’s intellectual sphere.

The authors were able to fulfill the main purpose, that is, to prove the close relationship of the first two chapters of Genesis with the rest of the Hebrew Bible. But doing so they also launched three other lines of arguments: the genesis creation account is (1) a polemic against other ANE creation accounts; (2) textual criticism of the texts is unwarranted; and (3) it claims a six-day, twenty-four-hour creation week. There is a strong argument for the first notion. The essays contain very detailed information about ANE creation texts and might be of appeal to anyone who is interested in this field of study. The second and third notions are reflecting points of views that have been debated for more than a hundred years, and the authors failed to bring any new material to the table. The essays disregard the uniformity of geological field evidence, the outcomes of radiometric determination, and the evidences from biochemistry, molecular biology, and molecular developmental biology.

These all points into the same direction: our planet is approximately 4.5 billion years old, and life, as we know it today, is an outcome of a long evolutionary process. The authors also disregard the work of a growing number of Evangelical scholars who argue that the most recent scientific discoveries do not challenge the authority of the Bible. Overall, the book presents very careful exegetical work on various important passages about creation in the Old testament and in ANE texts. However, some of the more moderate Evangelicals will find the positions taken up in this book overly outdated, and extremely conservative.