



# Reading Genesis 1-2

## AN EVANGELICAL CONVERSATION

RICHARD AVERBECK

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C. JOHN COLLINS

JUD DAVIS

VICTOR P. HAMILTON

TREMPER LONGMAN III

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# FOREWORD

J. Daryl Charles

We are in the midst of an exciting season of dialogue regarding the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. Discoveries, for example, from the ancient Near East, fresh reading perspectives of literary genre and style, and significant engagement with Second Temple and Jewish literature all provide an opportunity to “take up and read” afresh the creation account in Genesis. Evangelicals in the church and the academy are involved in a robust conversation on how to read Genesis in its ancient Israelite context.

The early chapters of Genesis, it goes without saying, are foundational in constructing the framework and contours of a distinctly Jewish and Christian understanding of life and reality. As such, the doctrine of creation is critical for explaining the design and *telos* of the natural world and history. It provides the basis for a coherent view of the universe from beginning to end, allowing for a unified sense of truth and meaning. And it explains why the universe is intelligible at all, facilitating the ability of human beings to probe and study it as rational beings who bear the *imago Dei*. Interpreting the Genesis creation narratives raises intriguing challenges for both epistemology and textual authority, as well as for the nexus of biblical and scientific claims. How we approach the text has profound implications for theology, philosophy, and science.

The Apostles’ and Nicene creeds have been regarded by the church through the ages as consensually representative of the Christian faith and, therefore, authoritative summaries and interpretations of Scripture. In this way, deriving their authority from Christian accord, they serve as an essential means by which Christian unity around the nonnegotiables is maintained, thereby reaffirming the parameters within which orthodox and heterodox teachings are acknowledged. As it relates to the creation narratives of Genesis, this common confession entails the fact of creation by a self-disclosing God. That God created all things material and immaterial is not to require common confession (or agreement) around how, when, and in what manner this process occurred in space-time. Relatedly, creedal confession places a necessary ontological distinction between creator and creation, which in turn necessitates divine authority over all realms of creation—both human and nonhuman. Moreover, the doctrine of God as creator suggests

the inherent or original goodness of creation. This confession, alas, has enormous consequences for our understanding human nature, since human beings are fashioned in the image or likeness of God and thus as his viceroys reflect the very height of divine creation and share in stewardship over that creation. Given this “image” and human partaking in the divine nature, it is thus accurate to speak of an enormous metaphysical gap—a gap both qualitative and quantitative—which distinguishes human creation from all other life forms. What is not “good” is that which human beings introduced into the world via their capacity to sin. The fact of human fallenness is not the fruit of scientific theory, exploration, or analysis; rather, it stands as a foundational aspect of revealed theology, even when it is confirmed by philosophical and psychological reflection on human nature.

The essays gathered in this volume are the fruit of the fall 2011 symposium of the same name that was convened in Chattanooga, Tennessee, an event organized and hosted by the Bryan Institute for Critical Thought & Practice and made possible by the generous funding of the Maclellan Foundation. Given the lively—and at times contentious—debates that have emerged in recent years regarding origins and hermeneutical perspectives on the Genesis creation narratives (debates at the center of which evangelical OT scholars often stand), the Institute invited five individuals who have done serious work in Genesis to enter into dialogue over important interpretative and theological matters issuing out of the creation narratives in Gen 1–2. These five—Professors John Walton of Wheaton College, Tremper Longman of Westmont College, John Collins of Covenant Theological Seminary, Todd Beall of Capital Bible Seminary, and Richard Averbeck of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School—represent a variety of positions on the interpretive spectrum. (The reader should bear in mind that no weight should be attached to the order in which these five representative essays appear; they are published in the alphabetical order of these five professors’ last names.) Broadly representative of wider evangelicalism, these scholars simultaneously share important common ground and acknowledge sharp disagreement in their respective positions. A sixth individual, Prof. Victor Hamilton of Asbury University, author of the highly acclaimed two-volume *The Book of Genesis* (NICOT series), served as moderator of the two-day symposium and thus is well suited to provide the introduction.

The goal of the present volume is precisely that of the symposium from which it derives: namely, to foster irenic dialogue on matters deriving from the text of Gen 1–2 which are hermeneutically and theologically significant. Acknowledging areas of vast disagreement, the Bryan Institute and the contributors to this volume are committed to the conviction that conversation—indeed, even heated debate regarding contentious issues—can proceed in a charitable manner. As the reader will discover, the two additional reflective essays in this volume that are offered by our Bryan College colleagues—Professors Ken Turner and Jud Davis—mirror a notable, and at times stunning, diversity of opinion regarding interpretive questions emerging from the Genesis text. While all contributors to the present volume affirm the infallibility of Scripture, we all are aware that our individual attempts at interpretation of Scripture are not infallible; hence, the need for open and honest dialogue within the bounds of Christian charity and confessional integrity.

The Bryan Institute is representative of the community of Bryan College, whose collegial faculty enthusiastically teach and live under the authority of the Scriptures. Standing with confessional believers who are deeply indebted to the ancient creeds, the confessions of church history, and the church fathers of any era, the Institute encourages a congenial conversation among Christian people as they read, interpret, and practice what God has revealed in the opening creation story of Genesis. Amid a number of honest and sincere interpretations by thoughtful confessional scholars and laypeople whose ideas are represented in the ancient traditions of church history, we believe and confess that God has created all that exists, and that everything which constitutes the material and immaterial world was made and designed by God.

As part of a Christian liberal arts institution, the Bryan Institute does not adopt a particular interpretation concerning how the divine activity of creation occurred or how long it took in process. At the same time, we do affirm, with the mainstream of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the historical Adam and Eve, through whom disobedience to God introduced sin into the realm of space-time and human experience. The confessional rubric of creation-fall-redemption-consummation under which Christian theology proceeds leads the Christian community to confess that the divine purpose is incarnational in character, which presupposes an in-breaking of the suprahistorical into time-space and human affairs.

Although the biblical account of creation is communicated through human language that is poetic, artistic, and theologically rich, the fact that this literary account is set in an ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context in no way diminishes the authoritative and trustworthy character of divine revelation. Notwithstanding the, at times sharp, differences that characterize Christians' attempts at interpreting the Genesis creation narratives, it is essential that we do not foreclose the discussion of creation for either the church or the academy. Rather, we must encourage a robust conversation among Christian communities, which through theological studies, the humanities, and the natural sciences seek consensually to interpret the biblical text and are devoted to God and his Word for his world. For this reason, a discussion over reading Genesis is one that must take place, and do so in a context of reason, calmness, and Christian charity. To this end the "Reading Genesis" symposium resulting in the present volume was convened. We hope that, in the end, the reader will share this vision.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

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**Todd S. Beall** (BA Princeton University; ThM Capital Bible Seminary; PhD The Catholic University of America) is Professor of Old Testament and Chair of the Department of Old Testament Literature and Exegesis at Capital Bible Seminary. He is co-author (with William A. Banks and Colin Smith) of the *Old Testament Parsing Guide* (Nashville, TN: B&H, [rev.] 2000) and author of *Joseph’s Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Prof. Beall contributed “Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11,” a chapter in the volume *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth* (ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane Ury; Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008). Dr. Beall has served on the OT editorial team of the Holman Christian Standard Bible (editor, Jeremiah-Malachi;

translator, Isaiah 36–66) and is the author of the forthcoming commentary *Isaiah* in the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary Series (Logos, 2016). His essay “Christians in the Public Square: How Far Should Evangelicals Go in the Creation-Evolution Debate?” is accessible at [www.biblearchaeology.org/file.axd?file=Creation+Evolution+Debate+Beall.pdf](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/file.axd?file=Creation+Evolution+Debate+Beall.pdf). He and his wife, Sharon, reside in Maryland. They have two married children and three grandchildren.

**J. Daryl Charles** is director and senior fellow of the Bryan Institute for Critical Thought & Practice. He is author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of twelve books, including (with David D. Corey) *The Just War Tradition: An Introduction* (American Ideals and Institutions Series; Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2012); (with David B. Capes) *Thriving in Babylon: Essays in Honor of A. J. Conyers* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Critical Issues in Bioethics; Eerdmans, 2008); and *Virtue amidst Vice* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Charles is also translator, German to English, of Claus Westermann’s *The Roots of Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994; original: *Wurzeln der Weisheit: Die ältesten Sprüche Israels und anderer Völker* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990]). His work, which ranges from the natural law, bioethics, and criminal justice ethics to war and peace and faith in the public sphere, has been published in a wide array of both scholarly and popular journals, including *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Journal of Church and State*, *First Things*, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Books and Culture*, *Cultural Encounters*, *The Weekly Standard*, *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, *Philosophia Christi*, *Christian Scholar’s Review*, and *Touchstone*.

**C. John (“Jack”) Collins** (BS and MS Massachusetts Institute of Technology; MDiv Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary; PhD University of Liverpool) is Professor of Old Testament in the Department of Scripture and Interpretation at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, where he has taught since 1993. Prof. Collins has been a research engineer, a church planter, and, since 1993, a teacher. His early work focused on the grammar of Hebrew and Greek, but he has branched out into studies in science and faith, in how the NT uses the OT, and in biblical theology. He was OT chairman for the ESV and OT editor for the *English Standard Version Study Bible*. He is the author of *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God’s Action in the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000); *Science and Faith: Friends of Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NY: P&R, 2006); and *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). His recent contribution on the theme issue “Reading Genesis: The Historicity of Adam and Eve, Genomics, and Evolutionary Science” appeared in the September 2010 issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. He and his wife have been married since 1979 and have two children.

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field is the christological use of the OT in the NT. His doctoral thesis appears as *The Name and Way of the Lord: Old Testament Themes, New Testament Christology* (JSOTSS 129; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). He and his wife, Lynn, have five children.

**Victor P. Hamilton** taught OT studies at Asbury University for thirty-six years, from 1971 until 2007. After retiring he held a five-year appointment (2007–2012) as scholar-in-residence at the university. His degrees are from Houghton College (BA), Asbury Theological Seminary (BD; ThM), and Brandeis University (MA; PhD). Published works include *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982; 2002 [2nd ed.]); *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005); *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); and *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011). He has contributed to numerous other publications such as the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *An Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Genesis and Ezekiel), *The Wesley Study Bible*, *A Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the *NLT Study Bible* (1 & 2 Samuel), and was a member of the translation team for the NLT (Leviticus). He and his wife, Shirley, have four married children and thirteen grandchildren.

**Tremper Longman III** (BA Ohio Wesleyan University; MDiv Westminster Theological Seminary; MPhil and PhD Yale University) is the Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College. Prof. Longman has authored or co-authored more than twenty books, including commentaries on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, and Nahum; *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996); *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997). In addition, he is one of the main translators of the popular NLT and has served as a consultant on other popular translations of the Bible including *The Message*, NCV, and the Holman Standard Bible. He has also edited and contributed to numerous study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, and OT reference works. He is co-editor (with Peter Enns) of *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008) and serves as the OT editor of the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan). In 2010 he published *Science, Creation, and the Bible: Reconciling Rival Theories of Origins* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) with physicist Richard F. Carlson. Prof. Longman and his wife, Alice, have three sons and two granddaughters.

**Kenneth J. Turner** is Professor of Bible at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee. After his undergraduate studies (BAE in Physics and Math Education, Arizona State University), he received his MDiv and PhD (in OT theology) from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Besides several published essays and book reviews, Turner has written *The Death of Deaths in*

*the Death of Moses: Deuteronomy's Theology of Exile* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011). He is currently co-editing and contributing to a collection of essays on Deuteronomy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), and writing a commentary on Habakkuk (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015–16).

**John H. Walton** (BA Muhlenberg College; MA Wheaton Graduate School; PhD Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion) is Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and the Wheaton Graduate School. Previously, he served as Professor of Old Testament at Moody Bible Institute from 1981 until 2001. Prof. Walton is author of *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006); *Genesis One as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); and *Genesis* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); he is co-author (with Victor Matthews and Mark Chavalas) of the *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); and he is the general editor of the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009). He has served on the translation team of the popular NLT (Isaiah), NCV (1 & 2 Samuel), and *The Message* (1 & 2 Samuel) and has contributed to numerous OT reference works, including *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. W. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997). More recently, Prof. Walton contributed the essays "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order Out of Disorder after Chaokampf" and "Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document" to the *Calvin Theological Journal* (2008) and *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention? Archaeology, Ancient Civilizations, and the Bible* (ed. Daniel Block; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008) respectively. He and his wife, Kim, have three children.

## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

It was decided not to edit the ancient languages found in their respective scripts or in their transliteration within these chapters for unnecessary uniformity. Rather, it was felt each author was clear within the context of his presentation and thus it is best to allow the reader, whether scholar or informed lay person, to understand the use of these words by the context in which they are encountered. The Hebrew word for “generations” may be written in Hebrew script with vowels [with pointing], i.e., תולדות, or without vowels [without pointing], i.e., תולדות, and to be transliterated either in “academic” style, i.e., *tōlēdôt*, or in “general purpose” style, i.e., *toledot* (or *toledoth*). So also the Hebrew word for “and” may be written in “academic” style, i.e., *waw*, or in “general purpose” style, i.e., *vav*. Reference to technical grammatical terms or names for verbal forms, e.g., “*wayyiqtol*” and “*waw-consecutive*” (or “*vav-consecutive*”) are also left as the authors wrote them, since, while they are important to the grammarian, for this work they serve their purpose as a simple descriptor of a verbal form that does not have to be fully understood to appreciate the named form’s function in the text of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament).

# ABBREVIATIONS

## *General*

ANE	ancient Near Eastern
ca.	circa
ch.	chapter
col.	column
ET	English translation
Gk.	Greek
Heb.	Hebrew
lit.	literally
n(n).	note(s)
n.s.	new series
Sum.	Sumerian
v(v).	verse(s)

## *Bible: Portions, Ancient Versions, Modern Translations*

ASV	American Standard Version
CB	Century Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
HB	Hebrew Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society (Tanakh)
NKJV	New King James Version

NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

### *Hebrew Bible*

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Esth	Esther
Job	Job
Ps/Pss	Psalms/Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai

Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

### *New Testament*

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

### *Talmud*

<i>b. Hag.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Hagigah</i>
<i>b. Naz.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Nazir</i>

### *Dead Sea Scrolls*

1Q, 1Q frag.	Text from Qumran cave 1; text from Qumran, cave 1, fragment
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### *Classical Sources*

Josephus <i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
Philo <i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami (On the Migration of Abraham)</i>
Philo <i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis (On Dreams)</i>

### *Reference Works*

- ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freeman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
- ANET* *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969.
- ANF* *Ante-Nicene Fathers*
- CTA* *Corpus de tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939*. Edited by A. Herdner. Mission de Ras Shamra 10. Paris, 1963.
- COS* *The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. 3 vols. Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002.
- ETCSL* *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*
- FC* *Fathers of the Church*. Washington, DC: 1947–
- HALOT* *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Brill, 1994.
- IDB* *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Abingdon, 1962.
- NIDOTTE* *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by W. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Zondervan, 1997.
- NPNF* *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*
- TWOT* *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. L. Harris and G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980.

### *Series and Periodicals*

- ACCS* *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*
- AOAT* *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*
- AUSS* *Andrews University Seminary Studies*
- BA* *Biblical Archaeologist*
- BECNT* *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*
- Bib* *Biblica*
- BSac* *Bibliotheca sacra*
- BT* *The Bible Translator*
- CBQMS* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series*
- CSR* *Christian Scholar's Review*
- CTJ* *Calvin Theological Journal*
- EvQ* *Evangelical Quarterly*
- FRLANT* *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*
- GTJ* *Grace Theological Journal*
- IJS* *Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS Studies in Judaica)*
- JANESCU* *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*

<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JOTT</i>	<i>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of New Testament Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

# INTRODUCTION

Victor P. Hamilton

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find any serious reader of the Bible, be she or he a biblical academician or a lay person, who would not underscore the crucial importance of Gen 1–2 for a variety of reasons. After all, a cosmogony, such as one finds in Gen 1, is as much prescriptive as it is descriptive, if not more so. As W. P. Brown has said, a cosmogony is “an explicit indicator of the way in which the physical/social world may be structured by a particular culture.”<sup>1</sup> Such an affirmation would cut across all differing perspectives within the theological spectrum, from the most ardent liberal to the most ardent fundamentalist. This is not to say, of course, that all of the above theological camps come to identical conclusions about the meaning, interpretation, and implications of Scripture’s first two chapters.

Accordingly, while it is appropriate to refer to Gen 1–2 as a prologue (to Gen 1–11? Or to Genesis as a whole? Or to the entire OT/HB?), it is not a prologue in the sense that it is a brief, expendable preamble.

One could make an impressive case of the fact that without Gen 1–2 the rest of the Bible becomes incomprehensible. That includes both Testaments. At least with Gen 1–2 and Rev 21–22, the Bible ends the way it began, with an unsullied paradise, except the scene has shifted from a garden to a city, from Eden to the new Jerusalem. However, despite the consensus about the importance of Gen 1–2, there are few portions of Scripture whose interpretation and meaning are as hotly contested as are those of these two chapters.

This debate and questioning are as old as the Christian church, if not older. Origen (184–253/54 AD), one of the most esteemed church fathers and often designated as the best interpreter of the Christian faith since the apostles, wrote the following in his *On First Principles*:

What man of intelligence will believe that the first and second and the third day, and the evening and the morning existed without the sun and moon and the stars? And that the first day, if we may so call it, was even without a heaven? And who is so silly as to believe that God, after the manner of a farmer, “planted a garden eastward in

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<sup>1</sup> W. P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 207.

Eden,” and set in it a palpable “tree of life”? . . . I do not doubt that these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events.<sup>2</sup>

Augustine (354–430 AD), one of the giants of early Christendom, could not stop writing about Genesis. He authored several commentaries on Genesis (usually just Gen 1–3) and devoted several chapters in his *Confessions* to the topic. His most insightful work is *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* or *Literal Commentary on Genesis*.

Augustine used this title not because he opposed any interpretation of Gen 1–2 other than a strictly literal one, as we use that word today. Rather, Augustine was saying, via the word “literal,” that he read Gen 1–2 as the story of creation and not as a story about the church or salvation (as some were doing). In several places he expresses his position that a “literal” interpretation does not fit the text, and so he resorts to allegory. Hence, he writes in *Literal Meaning/Commentary* (1:10),

I fear that I will be laughed at by those who have scientific knowledge of these matters and by those who recognize the facts of the case . . . (1:11) at the time when night is with us, the sun is illuminating with its presence those parts of the world through which it returns from the place of its setting to that of its rising. Hence it is that for the whole twenty-four hours of the sun’s circuit there is always day in one place and night in another.

Augustine had no problem of light (day 1) without sun or moon (day 4), for he took the light of day one allegorically, that is, light as spiritual truth (1:9).

To bring the discussion up to today, one notes that the discussion is no longer between those who read Gen 1–2 as myth and those who read it as literal and actual history. Even in the wider evangelical portion of conservative Protestantism there are emerging divergent perspectives on reading Gen 1–2. To some this is salutary. To others it is a slippery slope. The essays to follow in this volume, all by highly esteemed and well-published OT evangelical scholars, will demonstrate this hermeneutical diversity.

Here is a sampling of some of these issues, several of which are science-related and several of which are theology-related. (1) Is belief in (some form of) evolution compatible with (or maybe even required by) a serious reading of Gen 1–2? (2) Can young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, theistic evolutionists, and believers in intelligent design (ID) all find, in their own way, support both from science and from Scripture, just as all four interpretations appeal to Augustine for support of their position? (3) What are the gains or losses of privileging a literary reading of Gen 1 over a literal reading, or can these two be somehow combined? (4) How do Gen 1–2 fit in with Gen 3–11 or Gen 3–50? (5) Does one’s reading of other creation accounts in Scripture (say, creation psalms like 8, 19, or 104 or Yahweh’s address to Job in Job 38–41) influence our reading of Gen 1–2, and if so, how? (6) Is Gen 1 about the origins of material matter or about the origins of something else, and if so, what may that something else be?

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<sup>2</sup>G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (London: SPCK, 1936), 288.

Two major points of dispute may overshadow the ones listed above. The first is, Must Adam and Eve be read as historical persons, or may they be read as literary persons? If it may be both, must we give hermeneutical priority to one over the other? What is one to make of the conclusions of the mapping of the human genome project (under the direction of the cutting-edge scientist and evangelical believer Francis Collins) that the human race began with a colony of ten thousand and not with one male human and one female human? And most importantly, especially for one who takes all of Scripture as God-inspired and fully authoritative, how do the different readings of and allusions to the Genesis creation story in the NT, especially those of Paul, contribute to the conversation about the historicity of Adam and Eve?

A second area for examination is the degree of influence other ANE creation accounts played in the shaping of Gen 1–2. Did the writer(s) of Gen 1–2 (Moses? The priestly school? The Yahwist? An anonymous author?) craft his or their masterpieces in a vacuum, or were such authors aware of cosmogonic traditions produced by their neighbors, and did they write against such a backdrop only to produce their own divinely inspired, literarily independent account of creation? Might it be that since creation narratives have a natural home in the celebration of the New Year (think of the annual reading of the *Enuma Elish* at the *Akitu* festival in Babylon), the Hebrews celebrated the New Year by celebrating creation, and that the seven “days” of creation are the seven literal days of the festival?

The fact that some evangelical scholars have not only raised these “new” possibilities of interpretation but have embraced them has raised concerns in some quarters of the evangelical tent. A few prominent scholars, some with tenure, have been shown the back door at the institution at which they taught or have been encouraged to exit quietly, because they advanced the idea of, say, the compatibility of evolution with Gen 1–2, or a literary Adam versus a historical Adam. Interestingly, most of these dismissed faculty have taught at institutions in the Reformed tradition. Scholars at Wesleyan/Arminian schools and those at more neutral evangelical colleges have not provoked the ire of administrators and alumni, at least not yet.

In this introduction I wish to commend to you, the reader, as strongly as possible all the essays that follow in this volume. Two things need to be said about the contributors and their contributions. First, all the authors identify fully and unapologetically with historic Christian orthodoxy and embrace wholeheartedly the basic tenets and historic creeds of the one holy catholic church. To label any of them heterodox because of the view presented in an essay would be both unfortunate and misguided. Furthermore, all of them would have no hesitancy about including themselves in the evangelical tradition as we commonly use that general phrase today.

Second, while all the authors stand in that evangelical persuasion, and while all of them are highly trained specialists in the OT/HB, no one essay reads Gen 1–2 exactly the same as another. Sometimes the differences are miniscule. At other times the differences are major. For example, one will argue for opening the door to evolution; another will argue for slamming the door shut on evolution. One will

make a case that Adam need not be an actual historical person, while another will argue that such a position undercuts and sabotages the basic foundation on which other crucial Christian beliefs are built.

The lay reader especially may take away several different responses to this diversity of interpretation of such a foundational portion of sacred writ. First, she or he may throw her or his hands up in despair and say, “If the scholars cannot get it all together, what am I supposed to do with Gen 1 and 2?” It is not the intention of any of us to create our own *tohu wabohu* [“without form and void”=chaos] (Gen 1:2), and leave our readers more confused than a chameleon on a piece of Scotch plaid.

A second response would be to cling to the essays you like, probably because you already agree with them or are most convinced by them, and discard or ignore the rest. We offer these essays not as a buffet line from which you may choose or pass by. To capture the genius of this symposium sponsored by the Bryan Institute at Bryan College in Tennessee under the capable leadership of Daryl Charles (and the essays in this book evolved from those delivered at that symposium), one will need to engage all the authors and the angle from which each views Gen 1–2.

A third response, and in my judgment the healthiest one, is to appreciate the differing perspectives on Gen 1–2 presented in this volume. We need to remember that a divinely inspired and authoritative Scripture does not mean that (my) interpretations of Scripture are equally divinely inspired and authoritative.

A community of believers tries, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to come to an understanding of a scriptural position or passage by thinking together, talking and dialoguing together, praying together, and by agreeing to disagree agreeably if the case need be. The title of the Bryan Institute symposium which produced this collection of essays was “Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation.” To which I say, let the conversation continue.

**Part One**

**Five Views on Interpreting  
Genesis 1–2**

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# CHAPTER ONE

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## A LITERARY DAY, INTER-TEXTUAL, AND CONTEXTUAL READING OF GENESIS 1–2

Richard E. Averbeck

This collection of essays and responses does not focus on the “scientific” issues. We are not scientists. But the discoveries in physical sciences most certainly cast a long shadow over the conversation. All the writers of the five views presented in this book believe in the truth, authority, and reliability (inerrancy) of the Bible, including Gen 1–2. We all specialize in the study of the OT in particular. To one degree or another, however, we all disagree on how to read and interpret these first two chapters of the Bible.

How does God himself intend us to read Gen 1? There are good substantial reasons for reading Gen 1 to refer to six literal days of creation and a seventh day of rest. The points are well-known; for example, the evening and morning formula throughout the chapter, day by day, and the reference to the six-day creation work week in the fourth commandment to reinforce the seventh-day Sabbath (Exod 20:11). So there is good reason to see these as regular literal days. For many years I was satisfied with this reading, and still today have a good deal of respect for it.

Could it be, however, that this may be an overly “literalistic” way for us to read the text (i.e., a misreading that does not properly allow for the genre and intent of the text and the figurative use of language)? The six/seven pattern is common in biblical and ANE literature. I will supply examples from the Bible and the ancient Near East below. But for now, here is the question: Could it be that this well-known pattern was used as a way of shaping the story, not intending that we read it as an ironclad account of the actual steps in God’s creation work? The well-known correspondence between days 1 through 3 (“forming the cosmos”) and 4 through 6 (“filling the cosmos”; cf. Gen 1:2a, “Now the earth was formless and empty”) and many other features of the chapter also suggest that perhaps the account has been schematized. The story has been given this literary shape for its effective telling.

### Preview and Method

This is not a matter of somehow finding more time in Gen 1 to accommodate the vast ages of evolutionary science. The concern is an honest reading of Gen 1

from a literary, exegetical, historical, and theological point of view. The view taken here is that the account in Gen 1 begins with the universe as a whole (Gen 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) and then step by step unpacks the parts that make up the whole (Gen 1:2–2:3). The author (whether we have the divine or the human author in mind) shaped the story of creation around what was observable and understandable to the ancient Israelites. Like the text, we need to start our thinking here with the observable world and see the creation story as an explanation of that observable world in terms of God as the creator. The primary purpose of the story was to help them think of their God as the framer of their lives by the way he fabricated and set up their world. It is as much about how the world works and how we fit into it as it is about the material creation of it.

The way of telling this creation story was determined and shaped by God’s concern that they know him as the only true God, that they know the kind of good God he is, and that they live well for him within his good creation. This would include, for example, living in God’s image and likeness by being good stewards of his good creation (Gen 1:26–28; see also 2:15–17) and by imaging God even through keeping the Sabbath (Exod 20:11 with Gen 2:1–3). God did create the cosmos. This chapter surely teaches that. But the scheme of the creation account was set up to correspond to what was observable to them and required of them. In fact, it corresponds quite well to the world as we experience it even today. The “days” here are snapshots of the world as they observed it in that ancient day. God was revealing to them what they needed to know about himself, about themselves, and about living in their world. He expects us to get the same from it today.

As for Gen 2, this narrative makes it even more clear that the God who created the whole cosmos in Gen 1 is none other than their covenant God, Yahweh (see the combined name “Yahweh God” in 2:4b, 5, 7, etc.; cf. Exod 3:15; 6:2–3, etc., as opposed to *’ēlōhīm*, “God” alone in Gen 1). In this particular account, however, we have a more standard literary narrative with historical markers. For example, the Tigris and especially the Euphrates rivers were known to the Israelites of Moses’ day by name and general location (Gen 2:14), and, in my opinion, Adam and Eve are viewed as actual historical individuals (see also 5:1–3, etc.). This account extends all the way through Gen 4. The accounts in Gen 1 and Gen 2(–4) vary in terms of scale: Gen 1 is the whole cosmos while Gen 2 is limited to the world of humans and animals. They also differ in terms of how they describe the creative acts of God and explain creation’s purpose.

In terms of method, “literary” in the title of this essay emphasizes the need to pay attention to the literary features of Gen 1–2, from grammar to genre to discourse and everything in between. This will provide the framework for the rest of our discussion as we move through Gen 1 and into Gen 2 unit by unit.<sup>1</sup> The term “inter-textual” in the title refers to the need to pay special attention to the inner-biblical

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard E. Averbeck, “Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives: Literary, Historical, and Theological Dimensions,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David Howard Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 115–17 for a brief introduction to the three main dimensions of the biblical text that need to be attended to: literary, historical, and theological.

parallels to Gen 1 in other parts of the canon—other creation accounts or reflections on creation in the Bible. Like the different ways the authors shaped the telling of the life of Christ in the four NT Gospels, there are different ways of articulating God’s work in creation. Psalm 104 has proven to be especially helpful in this regard.

The word “contextual” refers to the literary context in Gen 1–4 and beyond, and to the extrabiblical resources that help us capture the ANE contextual backdrop for these accounts.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been a long history of scholars illegitimately imposing ANE material on the biblical text. This is still an unresolved problem, but one person’s application is another person’s imposition. Scholars, including evangelical scholars, disagree over the sort of relationship Genesis and extrabiblical sources have to each other. Yes, God spoke his revelation into this ANE context, but he also spoke against it. He is meeting the readers where they are in their world, but he is also taking them where they need to go from there. This is how communication works—divine revelation too.

### In the Beginning: Genesis 1:1–2

Scholars debate the grammar and interpretation of the first two (or three) verses of the Bible. Traditionally, the first verse is taken as an independent clause that reports the creation *ex nihilo* of the starting material in v. 2. Some scholars still support this view.<sup>3</sup> I am not disagreeing with the fact that God created original matter *ex nihilo* but saying that Gen 1:1 is not talking about that. My disagreement with this reading is based on a combination of the grammatical analysis of the passage, the relationship between v. 1 and the structure of the book of Genesis, and consideration of the ANE environment. I will do my best to keep my remarks about Hebrew grammar as simple and clear as possible without leaving out essential elements.

One of the distinguishing features of Hebrew narrative grammar is the regular use of one single particle (Heb. *vav*) prefixed to the first word of a clause to connect one clause after the other. Often it simply means “and,” but it can mean “then,” “so,” or “now,” depending on the kind of word to which it is attached and the flow of the narrative. In general, if it attaches to a finite verb at the beginning of a clause it keeps the narrative action going forward in some way. If it attaches to anything other than a verb (i.e., a noun, adjective, preposition, another particle) it is called disjunctive and inserts information into the narrative but does not move the action forward. Genesis 1:2 begins with a *vav* disjunctive on the noun “earth” (“Now the earth was formless and empty”) and continues with two more such

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<sup>2</sup>See Richard E. Averbeck, “Sumer, the Bible, and Comparative Method: Historiography and Temple Building,” in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (ed. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger Jr.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 88–125 and the literature cited there for a discussion and application of the principles of the comparative method to the Bible.

<sup>3</sup>See the analysis of views in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 11–15.

clauses through the end of the verse: “and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

When the *vav* attaches in a certain way to the prefix form of the finite verb it is not only a conjunctive *vav* but also what we call a *vav*-consecutive. We call this the preterite verb; that is, the regular past tense narrative form of the verb. It is this kind of verb form that appears at the beginning of v. 3, “And God said.” This is the first regular past tense narrative verb in the Bible. So v. 2 provides information about the conditions into which God spoke his first creative word in v. 3. At that time, “the earth was formless and empty.” This is a common way to start a narrative account in Hebrew: first the circumstantial information, and then the action begins. Compare, for example, Gen 3:1 (“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, and he said”) and 16:1–2 (“Now Sarai the wife of Abram had not borne children to him, . . . and Sarai said to Abram”). All the major units in Gen 1 begin with “and/then God said” (1:3, 6, etc.). Days 1 and 2 as well as 4 and 5 have only one such unit. Day 3 has two units, and day 6 has three. Day 7 is arranged quite differently.

So, what does v. 1 accomplish here? I take it to be an independent clause serving as a title announcing the subject of Gen 1, not the actual beginning of God’s creation work in the chapter. It does not fall within the “and God said” units as do all the other action units in the chapter. Instead, it offers a first glimpse at the whole of creation as the starting point for the account, and around which the story is shaped so that the ancient Israelites would know that their God, and their God alone, created their world. The expression “the heavens and the earth” at the end of v. 1 is a merism; that is, the two opposite parts refer to the whole of the created order.

Moreover, in its function as a title, v. 1 corresponds to the generations formula that appears regularly throughout Genesis and breaks it into major units (Heb *‘leḥ tōlēdōt*, “these are the generations of”; 2:4; 5:1 [with variation]; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). All these formulas pick up something that comes before and introduce the section that will develop it further. This would make it unsuitable as a title for Gen 1, since there is nothing that comes before v. 1.<sup>4</sup> It has the effect of setting Gen 1:1–2:3 off as a sort of prologue to the remainder of Genesis.

The Hebrew verb *bārā*, usually rendered “created” in Gen 1:1, appears five more times in the account (once in 1:21, three times in 1:27, and once more in 2:3). The subject of the action is always God, never man or anyone else.<sup>5</sup> It has received

<sup>4</sup>See Averbeck, “Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives,” 117–20, 127–30, and nn. 2, 22 for a more detailed discussion of these generations formulas and their implications. See also the similar interpretations in John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); and Ellen J. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 185.

<sup>5</sup>*HALOT* 153–54. Only the Qal and Niphal stems of this verb appear in Gen 1–2. The Piel and Hiphil stems are treated as different root verbs in *HALOT* (154), and it is probably best to maintain this distinction (*contra* Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 130–31), lest we run the risk of mixing extraneous material into the discussion of Gen 1–2 that neither appears nor applies there anyway.

a good deal of scholarly attention as to its basic meaning and implications. It is a key verb, for it appears in the title of the account at the beginning (1:1) and in the concluding reference to the creation work of God as a whole at the end (2:3). Thus, it surrounds the account overall. Moreover, it occurs three times in the climax of the whole story, referring to the creation of humanity, male and female (v. 27). Interestingly, it is also used for the creation of the water and sky animals (v. 21). It is not used for the creation of the plants or the land animals, most likely because it is “the earth” that brings forth both, at God’s command (1:11–12, 24–25).

Gen 5:1–2 uses *bārāʾ* again three times for God’s creation of humanity, male and female, referring to Gen 1:26–28. Here it is used again in combination with the verb *ʾāśāh*, “to make, do,” as in Gen 1:26–27. They are not the same, and there have been a number of proposals about how to distinguish between these two verbs.<sup>6</sup> The main distinction in usage seems to be that *ʾāśāh* is about doing or making things, with no indication of whether they are new or not, whereas *bārāʾ* highlights the initiation of something new, whether things, events, or other phenomena. There is no space here to review all the usages of these terms.

Whatever view one takes of the grammar, translation, and interpretation of Gen 1:1–2, it is clear that the “and God said” units running through the chapter beginning in v. 3 progressively eliminate the conditions of v. 2. This corresponds to the common ANE pattern of starting creation accounts with the preexistence of a deep, dark, watery abyss. The sources for this are well-known. For example, at the beginning of the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*, the point of departure is a deep, dark, watery abyss:

When the heavens above did not exist,  
 And earth beneath had not come into being—  
 There was Apsû, the first in order, their begetter,  
 And demiurge Tiamat, who gave birth to them all;  
 They had mingled their waters together  
 Before meadow-land had coalesced and reed-bed was to be found—  
 When not one of the gods had been formed  
 Or had come into being, when no destinies had been decreed,  
 The gods were created within them: . . .<sup>7</sup>

Tiamat is known as the goddess of the depths of the sea (cf. *têhôm* in Gen 1:2b, “and darkness was over the face of the *deep*”), while Apsû is the god of the underground waters. The name *Enuma Elish* comes from the first words of the composition, “When (the heavens) above.” The similarity to the beginning of Gen 1

<sup>6</sup> See the review of the discussion in Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 127–38, who concludes that *bārāʾ* means to “bring something new into existence,” but what is “new” is its function, ontologically, according to him.

<sup>7</sup> This is the beginning of the composition (lines 1–9), cited from W. G. Lambert, “Mesopotamian Creation Stories,” in *Imagining Creation* (IJS Studies in Judaica 5; ed. Markham J. Geller and Mineke Schipper; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 37 with a full discussion of Mesopotamian creation accounts and a complete new translation of *Enuma Elish* (15–59). See also the helpful discussion of this text in Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 8; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 107–29.

(*bērēšit*, “In the beginning” or “When God began”) is obvious. Both compositions begin with a temporal clause, and at the beginning there was water—only water. Of course, in *Enuma Elish* there follows a theogony (i.e., creation of the various other gods), but in this way Gen 1 is completely distinct. There are no other gods at all. The deep, dark, watery abyss is also one of the standard starting points for creation in the Egyptian world. For example, in one Coffin Text we read: “on the day that Atum evolved—out of the Flood, out of the Waters, out of darkness, out of lostness.”<sup>8</sup>

A deep, dark, watery abyss was a most natural and understandable starting point for a creation story in the ancient Israelite world. Thus, in Gen 1 we watch God paint his literary picture of creation and the cosmos step by step, and he paints it against the same standard backdrop as would be normal in the ancient Near East. The picture itself is quite different in many important respects, but there are also other similarities to ANE accounts.

## ANE Texts and the First Three Days of Genesis 1

One of the most important points of comparison between the creation account in Gen 1 and the creation and cosmology texts of the ancient Near East is the three levels of the cosmos, corresponding to the first three days of Gen 1. The three levels are held in common, or at least they appear in one form or another across a substantial spectrum of texts. This is not a matter of one culture borrowing from the other or the Bible borrowing from its ANE environment. Instead, it reflects the observable realities of the place of humans within the cosmos. We need to go behind the ANE culture to the observational world of all humans, then and now. Humans have always naturally observed what is above us, what is below us, and the place where we stand between the two.<sup>9</sup>

### *Mesopotamia*

There are a good number of primary and secondary sources for Mesopotamian creation and cosmology, including Sumerian sources specifically.<sup>10</sup> As is well-

<sup>8</sup> See the Egyptian “Cosmologies” (COS 1.5–31) and specifically for the text cited here, “From Coffin Texts Spell 76,” translated by James P. Allen (COS 1.10:3d–4d).

<sup>9</sup> For a good collection of most of the important sources in translation and good bibliographies see W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002). See also Markham J. Geller and Mineke Schipper, eds., *Imagining Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 305–22; and Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*.

<sup>10</sup> See the important study of Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, but the most recent study of Lambert, “Mesopotamian Creation Stories,” must be taken into consideration now. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>) is an important online source for Sumerian compositions.