

BOOK REVIEWS

The Manifold Beauty of Genesis One: A Multi-Layered Approach, by Gregg Davidson and Kenneth J. Turner. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021. 210 pp. \$22.99.

Creation studies show no sign of abatement as interpretive disputes on the meaning of Genesis 1–2 persist. These authors propose a *via media* by focusing on the allegedly diverse perspectives provided by the biblical creation account. Gregg Davidson is professor and chair of the geology department at the University of Mississippi, while Kenneth Turner is Professor of Old Testament at Toccoa Falls College. The pairing of a geology professor with an Old Testament professor furnishes a clue as to the authors' shared perspective on the earth's origins. This is confirmed by the endorsements in the frontispiece from scholars such as Tremper Longman III, John Walton, Richard Averbeck, and C. John Collins, prominent for their alignment of Genesis with old-earth origin models. Davidson has previously published a book arguing for the essential harmony between Scripture and modern science when the former is interpreted properly in its literary and historical contexts (*Friend of Science, Friend of Faith: Listening to God in His Works and Word* [Kregel, 2019]). Davidson and Turner contend that Genesis 1 constitutes "theologically rich literature" providing multiple layers of perspective on God's work of creation. Divine creation, they suggest, is narrated through seven interpretive lenses that include song, analogy, polemic, covenant, temple, calendar, and land.

The authors begin by expressing their regret over the "acrimony" and "verbal wars" that too often characterize discussions of origins (3). They suggest that "much of this conflict derives from a failure to fully embrace what the church has long affirmed about the nature of the Bible as a whole," namely, that Scripture is multi-dimensional and open to a variety of interpretive conclusions (3–4). This early claim strikes the reader as somewhat disingenuous given the consistency of Jewish and Christian interpretations through history as to the meaning of Genesis 1–2. Rather, the inference that because some parts of Scripture are prone to multiple interpretations therefore any part of Scripture must be open to multiple interpretations is the fallacy of composition, which often leads to hasty generalizations (see Gula, *Nonsense: A Handbook of Logical Fallacies*, 85). To advance their tack, however, the authors propose that the Bible presents "*layers* of truth" that avouch multiple perspectives as simultaneously valid (4). The original cultural context of Scripture must be held supreme (7–8). Concerns that their work undermines the perspicuity, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture miss the

mark, they contend, as their approach is “free of any obligations or deference to science” and that their book is *not* “just a clever ploy to dismiss the historical veracity of the Bible” (12).

The first chapter builds on the introduction by suggesting ways in which Genesis 1 might offer multiple perspectives, using the analogy of genealogy. Biblical genealogies seem to be “a plain and straightforward documentation of history” (15) but in fact carry rich literary devices and theological nuances. They feature literary devices structured to aid memory, cultural accommodations addressed to theological errors, and symbolic numbers highlighting higher truths (17–21). In the same way, they contend, Genesis 1 carries a number of anomalies that point to “something more than a straightforward (literalistic) reading” (22). These features include the separation of light from darkness on two different days (Gen 1:4, 18); the mysterious act of “separating” light from darkness, when technically the latter is simply the absence of light; the notion of evenings and mornings on a sphere (on a rotating planet evening and morning are constantly occurring somewhere in the world); and the seemingly symbolic use of the number *seven* (22–24).

The next seven chapters deal consecutively with the interpretive lenses mentioned above. The authors make a case for their reading and then answer potential objections. The chapters conclude with discussion questions for further reflection. The first layer is *song*. The authors contend that due to the literary framework and parallelism evident in Genesis 1, the creation account is best read as a liturgy or hymn (33). Such an approach, allegedly, does not dismiss the text’s historical claims but nuances them in a way that allows for figural readings. The second layer is *analogy*. The authors argue that biblical typology, including Paul’s putative allegorization in Galatians 4 of the Sarah and Hagar narrative, provides precedent for understanding the creation narrative as typical. Here they focus on the Sabbath rest as a hermeneutical key in that it was not strictly necessary for God but rather a clue to the deeper significance of creation (47–50). The third layer is *polemic*. Davidson and Turner argue that Genesis 1 serves as a polemic against ancient Near Eastern creation mythologies. These polemical elements include the eternality of Yahweh vis-à-vis the theogonies of the ANE; monotheism versus polytheism; the distinction between the Creator and the created order with no deification of creation; intentional order in creation rather than chance or chaos; the value of humans as image-bearers; and creation as a divinely assessed good (65–72).

The fourth layer is *covenant*. The authors argue for a creation covenant or Edenic covenant as integral to the opening Genesis narrative. They unpack this covenant as a suzerain-vassal agreement and royal land grant. Part of their argument—and this point is crucial for an old-earth origin model—is that due to this originating covenant the nature of the earth did not substantively change as a result of the sin-curse. In other words, there were earthquakes, storms, floods, diseases, pests, and even death from the inception of creation: “Nature did not change. Rather, people’s *experience with nature* was transformed from something positive

to something negative" (90). Thus, lions eating wild animals was not a problem before the fall, but lions eating humans or their flocks became a painful result of the sin-curse. The fifth layer is *temple*. Here the authors tap into the popular themes of temple and cosmology motifs in creation, correlations advanced by numerous scholars such as Walton, Wenham, Alexander, and others. In this construal, creation furnished a sanctuary for God to dwell in as evident in the many parallels to tabernacle/temple imagery.

The sixth layer is *calendar*. Davidson and Turner argue that God's act of creation constituted times, seasons, and festivals. Thus, creation holds a liturgical paradigm for humanity. The seventh and final layer is *land*. The authors draw here upon the work of John Sailhamer to argue that creation prepared a land for people to inhabit, cultivate, and populate. The garden of Eden was to extend to the ends of the earth, and Adam, as Israel, was to serve as a king-priest extending God's reign. The final chapter is a conclusion in which the authors summarize their main points, tying each of their lenses to some aspect of God's (and Christ's) character. Thus, creation as song emphasizes God as artist; analogy: God as farmer; polemic: God as "I AM"; covenant: God as suzerain; temple: God as presence; calendar: God as sabbath; and land: God as redeemer. They conclude with some final points reiterating their desire for irenic interactions amongst believers who hold divergent views.

The strengths and weaknesses of the book are several. The authors write engagingly and accessibly, providing a popular-level introduction to scholarly discussions about a variety of themes in creation. Several corollaries mentioned seem plausible and helpful, such as the chapters explaining temple imagery in creation (although this is perhaps better nuanced in opposite terms: the temple reprises creation rather than the converse) as well as the one highlighting liturgical seasons as marked out by creation. In spite of these strengths, however, several weaknesses merit mention. First, despite the authors' many claims that the book is *not* an attempt to harmonize the biblical text with modern science, in the end this seems to be precisely what they are aiming for. Jeremiads about verbal acrimony often come from proponents of a minority position who are attempting to stretch the Overton Window for acceptance of their views. Such calls for a truce usually amount to a red herring. Would the original audience have conceived of the meaning of Genesis 1 in the way these authors construe without a predisposition to modern scientific theories?

Second, the book creates a false dilemma which underscores the first point. That is, because themes such as time, sanctuary, or kingdom are present in Genesis 1, does this mean that the narrative cannot or does not also present the actions as straightforward history? If we see these themes in the text, must we also espouse a figurative reading of the creation? I would counter that this creates a false dilemma. The creation account presents straightforward, actual history but also sets a trajectory for biblical-theological themes which find development across the canon of Scripture. Third, some of the lenses are not persuasive as legitimate

themes in Genesis 1–2. For example, Steven Boyd has conclusively proved elsewhere that the opening chapters of Genesis bear the hallmarks of normal Hebrew prose and should *not* therefore be interpreted as poetry or song (see Boyd, “The Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3: What Means This Text?” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, 163–92). Also, the authors do not persuade that the opening chapters of Genesis establish a covenant with creation despite the arguments advanced. Was a divine covenant necessary before the advent of human sin? Moreover, positing the presence of death before the fall runs contrary to the entire train of Scripture (e.g., Ezek 18:4; Rom 5:12; 6:16, 23; 8:19–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22; Jas 1:15).

In the end, this book will likely appeal to those readers who, as the authors, are eager for writings that confirm their already-held views on the earth’s age. The discerning reader may benefit from some of the discussions on themes in the creation account, as long as he or she reads the book in a way that one of my old professors compared to eating a watermelon: keep the good parts but spit out the seeds.

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The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ, by Richard E. Averbeck. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. 382 pp. \$40.00.

Richard E. Averbeck is professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. The author has researched and published extensively on matters pertaining to the law as the present volume well illustrates. Other introductions focusing comprehensively on biblical law include William S. Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law* (Eerdmans, 2017) and Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Baker, 2017).

With predictable clarity and cogency characteristic of the author’s writing and teaching, he offers us a lifetime of research distilled so that interested lay people can understand and apply it to their lives but sophisticated enough to meet the methodological rigors of seasoned scholars. His goal is to clarify what the law meant in its original historical and cultural context and therefore means to Christians in the church today.

In the first section of the book, the author treats “Covenant and Context.” Here he establishes the covenant framework without which the law cannot be understood. In the second section, he explains the Old Testament law in context. He rules out several entire interpretive frameworks and full-scale interpretations of what the law is. In the third major section, “The Old Testament Law in the New Testament,” the