

Interpretive Strategies for the Creation Account

Who is Monkeying
With Genesis?

I. Some Preliminary Considerations

- A. Faith in the **God** of creation the main point
- B. Unpack the *doctrine* of creation from its *date or description*
- C. Humility is always in order – We were not there!
- D. Finally, we all understand by faith
- E. Nevertheless . . .

II. Contextual Considerations

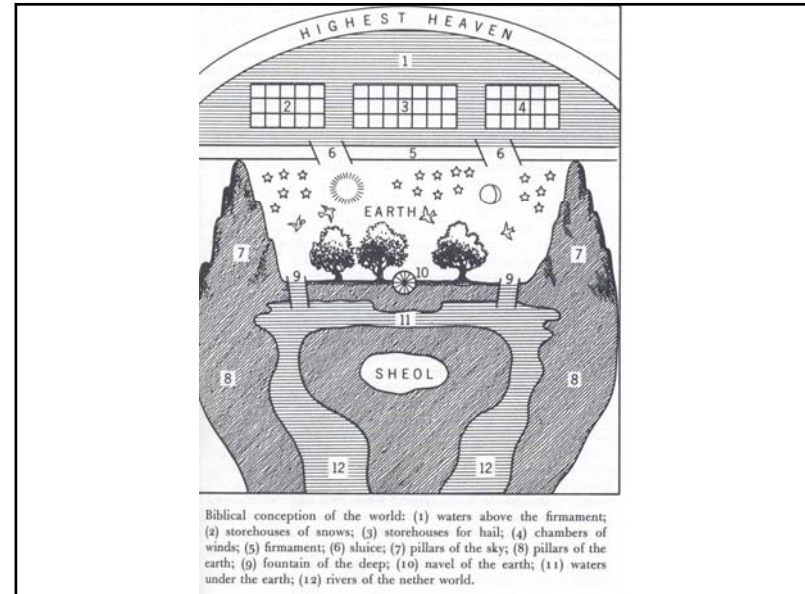
- A. Importance of Shared Context for Communicating
- B. Historical Contexts
 - 1. Common ANE cultural heritage
 - 2. Common ANE emphasis on immanent deity

“Within the premodern worldview the world is not under the grip of natural laws but is a stage in which natural causes form the backdrop and intelligent causes perform the primary action. Modernity absolutizes something that was never meant to be absolutized, namely natural causes and the natural laws that are said to govern them.”

-(Dembski, *Intelligent Design* 46)

II. Contextual Considerations

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 - 3. Ancient Cosmology



II. Contextual Considerations

- A. Importance of Shared Context for Communicating
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 - 1. Common ANE cultural heritage
 - 2. Common ANE emphasis on immanent deity
 - 3. Ancient cosmology
 - 4. Polemic against paganism
 - a. Against imitative magic
 - b. Against the sun and moon specifically
 - c. Against polytheism generally

II. Contextual Considerations

- A. Importance of Shared Context for Communicating
- B. Historical Contexts
- C. Biblical Context
 - 1. Shares primary purpose with rest of Scripture
 - 2. Is only one of many references to creation and the natural world
 - a. Job 38:4 – 7
 - b. Proverbs 8.27 – 28
 - c. Psalm 148.4

III. The Question of Genre

A. Genre Introduced

1. Defined: *A group of texts that share common characteristics and style*
2. Usefulness: it signals a reading strategy

B. Myth?

1. Defined: *traditional stories a society tells itself that encode or represent the beliefs, principles, and often the fears of that society.*
2. Missing mythic features in Genesis
 - a. Birth of the gods, war among the gods
 - b. Birth of the world (from the body of deity)
 - c. Imitative ritual
3. Non-mythic worldview

Enuma Elish

Genesis 1

A primordial realm of power exists beyond the gods and permeating the universe [metadivine]

No realm of power exists before or beyond God or is accessible in the world apart from God

Deity is derivative, dependent, diversified

Deity is underived, sovereign, unified

Deity is sexual in origin, sexual in character

Yahweh is not sexually derived or conditioned, has no consort

Natural fertility and sexuality are divine

Fertility and sexuality are created goods

Ultimate meaning is beyond history

History is the scene of God's acts

Emphasis on Influence - especially through power and magic

Emphasis on relationships - Ethics

Continuity/Immanence: Deity, society, nature, are one integrated system

Transcendence: Deity is independent of humanity and nature

A narrative about the emergence, conflicts, and acts of the gods in primordial time in which the power of the primordial realm is magically appropriated to preserve the integrity of existence

A narrative about the eternal God's free creation of all that exists in which the world and its history are established as the scene of His actions and interactions with humanity

III. The Question of Genre

A. Genre Introduced

B. Myth?

C. Science?

1. Originally given to a pre-scientific people – No evidence that Hebrews were technologically advanced over their neighbors
2. Subject - the action of God, not the workings of nature
3. Language - Common speech; no technical terms or mathematical precision approaching that of modern science
4. Concern - Ultimate origins and relationship to the Creator, not the relationships of the created things to each other
5. Validation - By faith, not one appeal to empirical research

"God addresses man, not as a researching scientist, but as a lost sinner." – J. C. Wenger

III. The Question of Genre

A. Genre Introduced

B. Myth?

C. Science?

D. History?

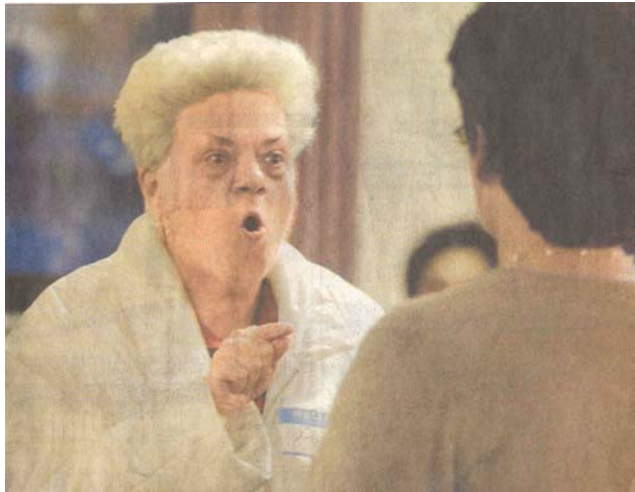
1. Yes, in that it describes real events from the past
2. Not modern history. More figurative in its approach - and may not be speaking to questions we might expect it to

III. The Question of Genre

- A. Genre Introduced
- B. Myth?
- C. Science?
- D. History?
- E. Straightforward Prose?
- F. Poetry?
- G. Theological Narrative?
- H. Unique

IV. Historical Overview

- A. Origen (c. 200)
- B. Chrysostom, Augustine (c. 400)
- C. Martin Luther (c. 1500)
- D. Three Conclusions
 - 1. No Historic Consensus
 - 2. Bible/Science tension not a new one
 - 3. Uncharitable rhetoric not helpful



V. Concordist Strategies

- A. Concordism – *an approach to Scripture seeking concord, or harmony between the biblical data and the results of science.*
- B. **The Days are Literal Days** (Young Earth Creationism) (Strict Concordism)(Scientific Creationism)
 - 1. Major Tenets
 - a. Straightforward prose throughout
 - b. Days are 24-hour days
 - c. “True age” of the universe is vastly different from its “apparent age”
 - d. Science, “rightly understood” will support the literal reading. Old earth science is a willful misinterpretation of the facts.

V. Concordist Strategies

B. The Days are Literal Days

2. Major Proponents

- a. Henry Morris, John Whitcomb – *Institute for Creation Research* www.icr.org
- b. Ken Ham – *Answers in Genesis* www.answersingenesis.org
- c. Kent Hovind www.drdino.com

V. Concordist Strategies

B. The Days are Literal Days

3. Some Questions

- a. Are all terms equally read “without interpretation”?
- b. If creation week is a week of special providence, why insist on standard days?
- c. Does not the idea of “apparent age” effectively invalidate most science?
- d. Are dishonesty and disobedience the only reasons to hold to the belief in an old earth?
- e. Isn't scientific naturalism, rather than varying geological theories, the real enemy of theistic creationism?

V. Concordist Strategies

C. The Days are Ages (Old Earth Creationism) (Progressive Concordism) (Creation Science) (Theistic Evolution)

1. Major Tenets

- a. Succinct narration explaining what, how, and in what order
- b. *Day* has a range of literal meaning including 24 hours, daylight hours, or any long (definite) time
- c. Science confirms the pre-creation conditions and the order of biological development described in Genesis

2. Major Proponents – Hugh Ross, *Reasons to Believe* www.reasons.org

V. Concordist Strategies

C. The Days are Ages

3. Some Questions

- a. If the narration is succinct (packed with information) as it stands, why does it need extensive elaboration?
- b. What plausible *internal* signs point toward the days being ages?
- c. Was there physical death before the fall? And would the scores of species dying out have seemed ‘very good’ to Elohim?

V. Concordist Strategies

D. The Days are Intermittent Days (Old Earth)

1. Days are normal and sequential, but not consecutive
2. Each day introduces a long creative period

V. Concordist Strategies

E. The Days are Days of Revelation (Old Earth)

1. The days mark a series of visions given by God to Moses
2. The account is a “prophecy of the past” which finds “fulfillment” as scientific research brings the past into focus.
3. E. J. and P. J. Wiseman are recent proponents (1985)

V. Concordist Strategies

F. Common Strengths and Weaknesses

1. Strengths
 - a. Serves as a “proof” of divine revelation
 - b. Affirms the authority of the Bible in all of life
2. Weaknesses
 - a. Imagination required to fill in the sketchy account
 - b. Today’s concord is tomorrow’s foolishness
 - c. May give science stature as the arbiter of all truth
 - d. The language used makes concord very problematic
 - e. Harmonizations tend to sacrifice the integrity of either the biblical text or scientific research

VI. Literary Strategies

A. The Days Provide a Literary Framework

1. Major Tenets
 - a. The account is “pictorial” or in “story” form
 - b. The days are normal days, but serve a literary, not a chronological function
 - c. The account is topically arranged (as is Gen 2)
 - d. The science is either figurative and “phenomenological” or literal and pre-modern

VI. Literary Strategies

A. The Days Provide a Literary Framework

2. Major Conservative Proponents

- a. James I Packer
- b. Bruce Waltke
- c. Meredith Kline

3. Some Questions

- a. Does this make God deceptive?
- b. Where else is God “accommodating” ancient (or modern) ignorance?

VI. Literary Strategies

B. The Days are Divine Days

1. Major Tenets

- a. The account is a story of God as master craftsman
- b. The days are outside of time as we know it, in a dimension with God
- c. Specifically, the days are anthropomorphic (like the breath of God)

2. Some Questions

- a. In what sense are the days given human characteristics?
- b. What internal clues are there?

VII. Conclusions

- A. Everyone should be convinced in his/her own mind
- B. Do not feel compelled to put God in a box – there is mystery to his greatness
- C. Do feel free to explore these strategies and come to your own conclusions
- D. Do not allow these uncertainties to dim the light of the revelation of God in this passage
- E. Do not embrace a view which reduces your confidence in Scripture

Postscript - Science and the Bible

A. Two Historic Trials

1. Galileo
2. Scopes/Bryan

B. Intelligent Design

1. Phillip Johnson. *Darwin on Trial, Reason in the Balance, The Case Against Naturalism in Science*
2. William Dembski. *Mere Creation*
3. Michael Behe. *Darwin's Black Box*

C. The Real Enemy – Naturalistic Philosophy