

Richard Averbeck et al., *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation*, ed. J. Daryl Charles (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2013). xiv + 240pp. \$14.98.

This book is the result of a symposium which was held at Bryan College, 2011 with seven Old Testament (OT) scholars, namely Richard E. Averbeck (Professor of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), Todd S. Beall (Professor of Capital Bible Seminary), John Collins (a professor of Covenant Theological Seminary), Tremper Longman III (a professor of Westmont College), John H. Walton (a professor of Wheaton College and the Wheaton Graduate School), Kenneth J. Turner (a professor of Bryan College), and Jud Davis (a Greek professor of Bryan College).

There is no doubt that there have been many debates regarding the interpretation and meaning of Genesis 1-2 among scholars. As the title indicates, this book aims to demonstrate the hermeneutical diversity of Genesis 1-2.

Part I presents five different views on interpreting Genesis 1-2. Part 2 deals with pedagogical format with the creation account in Genesis 1 in terms of modern discussions (chapter 6) and seven barriers which prevent the readers from joining the current evangelical majority as the reflection of symposium (chapter 7).

In chapter 1, Richard E. Averbeck deals with three purposes: a literary day, inter-textual and contextual issues. Regarding literary features of Genesis 1-2, he mentions *vav consecutive* (and/then) which serves to express actions or events which are to be regarded as logical sequel of preceding actions or events. He explains days of creation from day 1 to day 6 in relation to *vav consecutive* which is the first word of each day and begins a common Hebrew account: circumstantial information with action; for example, "and/then God said." Unlike this formula, he ascertains that Genesis 1:1 should be understood as an independent clause which is the title of the book because it does not begin with *vav consecutive* and it just provides the readers with the first glimpse of the whole creation account. He believes that there is a common literary pattern in each day of creation such as divine decree, a narrative description of the fulfillment of the decree, and an evening and morning formula. Furthermore, he says that the seven days should be understood as the cosmic framework in which we live although they are not to be taken literally.

Aside from much commendation for his essay, I am very satisfied with his uses of Ancient Near East (ANE) materials. He is well balanced in terms of the handling of ANE texts. While he finds helpful and significant parallels of ANE texts with the biblical texts, he does not neglect to mention the contrasts among them.

In chapter 2, unlike the shift in evangelical scholarship over the past twenty years from a literal understanding of Genesis 1-11, (especially Genesis 1-2) to a figurative reading, Beall insists that the literal approach to these chapters is the correct approach. In other words, he ascertains that Genesis 1-2 as well as

Genesis 1-11 should be taken as a literal, historical account, just like Jesus and the New Testament writers did. For this matter, he presents five key questions regarding different hermeneutics for Genesis-11 and Gen 12-50, a separate hermeneutic or genre for Genesis 1, Genesis 1 as representing an ANE worldview, the New Testament writers' approach to Gen 1-11, and recent non-literal views motivated by current scientific theories.

One of the interesting issues is that the New Testament passages referring to Genesis 1-11 were used literally, such as 2 Corinthians 11:3 (account of the fall in Genesis 3), John 3:12, Luke 11:51 and Matt 23:35 (Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis 4), Matthew 24:37-38 (account of the flood in Genesis 6-8), and so on.

I agree with the author's understanding that Genesis 1-11 should not be separated from the remaining chapters in terms of genres. Wehnam's treatment of Genesis 1 as a hymn is not the proper way. As Beall mentions, we can easily recognize that the doxology of hymns known to the ANE is absent. Furthermore, Genesis 1 uses *vav* consecutive which is the standard form of Hebrew normal narrative fifty times in Genesis 1. In the same way, the starting word of Genesis 12 is *wayyomer*, which means "and he said."

In chapter 3, C. John Collins explains that we should read Genesis 1-2 for what it aims to say and do. In other words, he ascertains that we should approach Genesis 1-2 based on its context, to whom it was written, and for what purpose. He believes that Genesis 2 elaborates on the events of the sixth day of Genesis 1 rather than being a second, separate creation account. In addition, he insists that Genesis 1-2 should be treated as a preface for the rest of Genesis. In this way, the difference in style between Genesis 1 and 2 can be understood as complementary rather than contradictory. Furthermore, he believes that Genesis 1-2 and Genesis 1-11 need to be read as part of a coherent whole.

Personally, I am not persuaded by his argument that Genesis 1-2 needs to be read as a preface of the book, which comes before the ordinary historical narrative. It is the account of creation which uses the normal marker for narrative such as the fifty occurrences of *vav* consecutive in Genesis 1. In this matter, to treat Genesis 1-2 as a preface of the book is not reasonable and understandable.

In chapter 4, Tremper Longman III tries to present what Genesis 1-2 teaches us. He ascertains that the main goal of Genesis 1-2 is to proclaim that God is the real creator among other contemporary gods. Genesis 1-2 should be read as the device which helps the readers to know that God is the Creator as opposed to any other god, and the Bible is not interested in describing how God did it at all. He insists that the genre of a passage is one of the most significant things for proper interpretation. He classifies Genesis 1-2 as theological history which conveys figurative narrative. The major point of his article is to present the teachings that readers should find from reading Genesis 1-2 in terms of God, humanity, and the world. These teachings include: God who created creation is the Lord God, the God of Moses, and God of Israel who is sovereign and supreme; the creator God of Genesis is not gendered like other gods of nations;

and humans have a special relationship with God because they are a part of creation.

One of his strong arguments is to understand that the ANE plays important roles when we see Genesis 1 and 2 in terms of comparison and contrast. For instance, his elucidation of the Babylonian account of creation involves contrast as well as comparison with the biblical account. Both mention similar components such as earth, breath, blood, and spit from the divine. However, he did not neglect to highlight the different view of humanity: a low view by the Babylonian account, but a dignified picture by the biblical account.

However, his understanding about the genre of Genesis 1-2 is not clear enough. From the beginning of his article, he emphasizes that the description regarding creation of the world and of humanity in chapters 1-2 should be read as figurative language which is not literally true. Finally he arrives at "theological history" as its fine genre. Unfortunately, he does not define what he means by the term "theological history." Definitely, it brings his readers into confusion.

In chapter 5, John H. Walton argues that we have to be competent and ethical readers. By competent, he means the Bible should be read in the light of the culture in which it was conveyed. On the other hand, by ethical, he means we need to embrace Bible teachings as valid and agree with the text and be instructed by it. He suggests that we read the first chapters of Genesis as cosmology whose central intention is to provide an elucidation of the cosmos. In order for the readers to understand Genesis 1-2 in a proper way, he insists that we have to know ANE cosmology. For this purpose, he ascertains first that we read the text competently based on literary genre as well as its ANE context, second, that we have to read the text ethically according to what it intends to teach the readers and third, that we need to read the Bible virtuously as it was intended to challenge both ancient and modern readers.

Having read his article, I recognize that it is helpful and significant in terms of its uses of ANE materials for Old Testament studies. However, it seems he puts too much focus on ANE materials rather than the OT text itself for its interpretation. Though it is true to say that we need to investigate the surrounding materials for the information of its culture and custom, it is more significant to depend upon other OT texts first as long as we are talking about OT interpretation.

This book is helpful for those who want to understand more thoroughly the variety of ways of interpreting Genesis 1-2. Definitely, its various interpretations will broaden the perspectives of its readers.

David Im Seok Kang