

# Following Christ in a Scientific World

**Week 4: “Scripture and Science,  
I: Nonconcordist Approaches”**

**October 7, 2012**

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**with Steve Schaffner**



**GCScience**

*A Network of Scientists at Grace Chapel*



## **Disclaimer**



**This series represents the personal views of members of GC Science.**

**The views herein should not be taken as absolute truth.**

**Alternative views on science and faith are possible, expected, and encouraged.**

# What is Problematic About Origins?

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- **Young-Earth Creationism**  
(popular *interpretation* of Gen 1-2)
- **Disagrees with science**
- **What do we need to rethink?**
  - **Genesis interpretation**
  - **Theological issues**

# **Biblical Interpretation: Approaches to Genesis 1**

- **Concordist**

**ASSUMPTIONS:**

- 1) Gen 1 gives account of material creation events
- 2) This account must agree w/ modern science

**GOAL:**

**Find strategies for making Gen 1 agree w/ science**

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- 1) Gen 1 gives account of material creation events
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Find strategies for making Gen 1 agree w/ science

- **NonConcordist**

**ASSUMPTION:**

Gen 1 made sense to original hearers (ancient Israel)

**GOAL:**

Forget modern science, read Gen 1 on its own terms

# Genesis 1 In Cultural Context References

**J. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006)**

**J. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009)**

**P. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012)**



# Genesis 1 In Cultural Context

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“Ancient Near East” (ANE)

# Map of Ancient Near East



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- Ancient Israel didn't exist in a vacuum
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“Ancient Near East” (ANE)
  - Embedded in *cognitive* environment
  - “Thought world” Set of shared  
knowledge/ways of knowing/assumptions  
about reality

# Genesis 1 In Cultural Context

- **What did Gen 1 mean to ancient Israel in its ANE cognitive environment?**

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  - Features shared with ANE thought
  - Features that contrast
- Knowing what it meant to them helps us see what it means for us today
- How can we reconstruct ANE thought?
  - Cultural comparative studies



# Source Material from ANE



Epic of Gilgamesh  
Tablet 11  
("Flood Tablet"),  
in British Museum  
*Source:*  
Wikimedia  
Commons

# Genesis 1 & ANE Thought: Shared Features

## *Stuff vs. Function*

- Our material ontology

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Physical aspects of the cosmos did not define its existence or its importance; they were merely the tools the gods used for carrying out their purposes. (Walton, 2006)

- **Caution! Must not project our ontology onto theirs**

# Genesis 1 & ANE Thought: Shared Features

*Physical shape of world*

- **3-tiered universe**



# Mesopotamian Picture

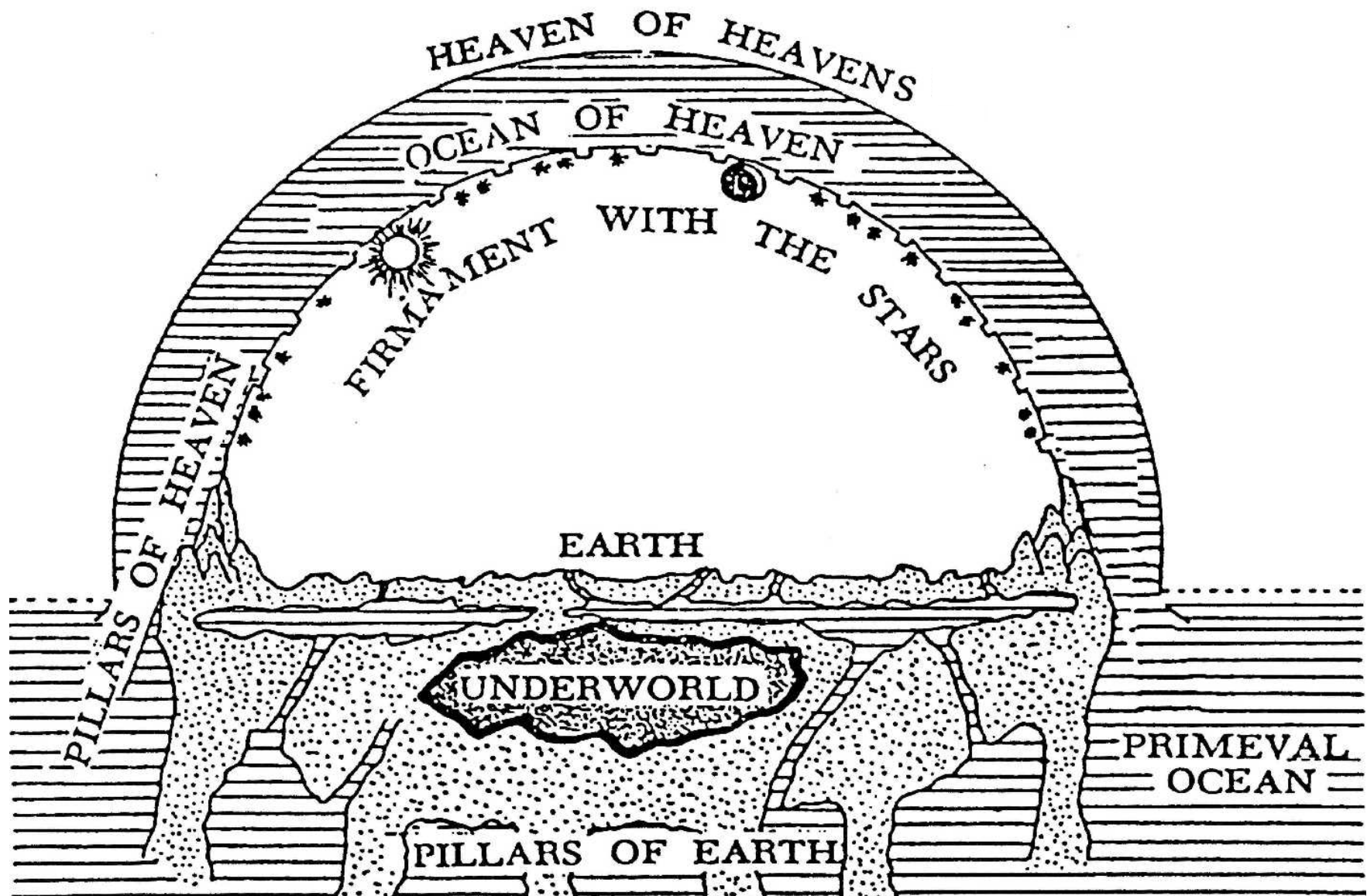
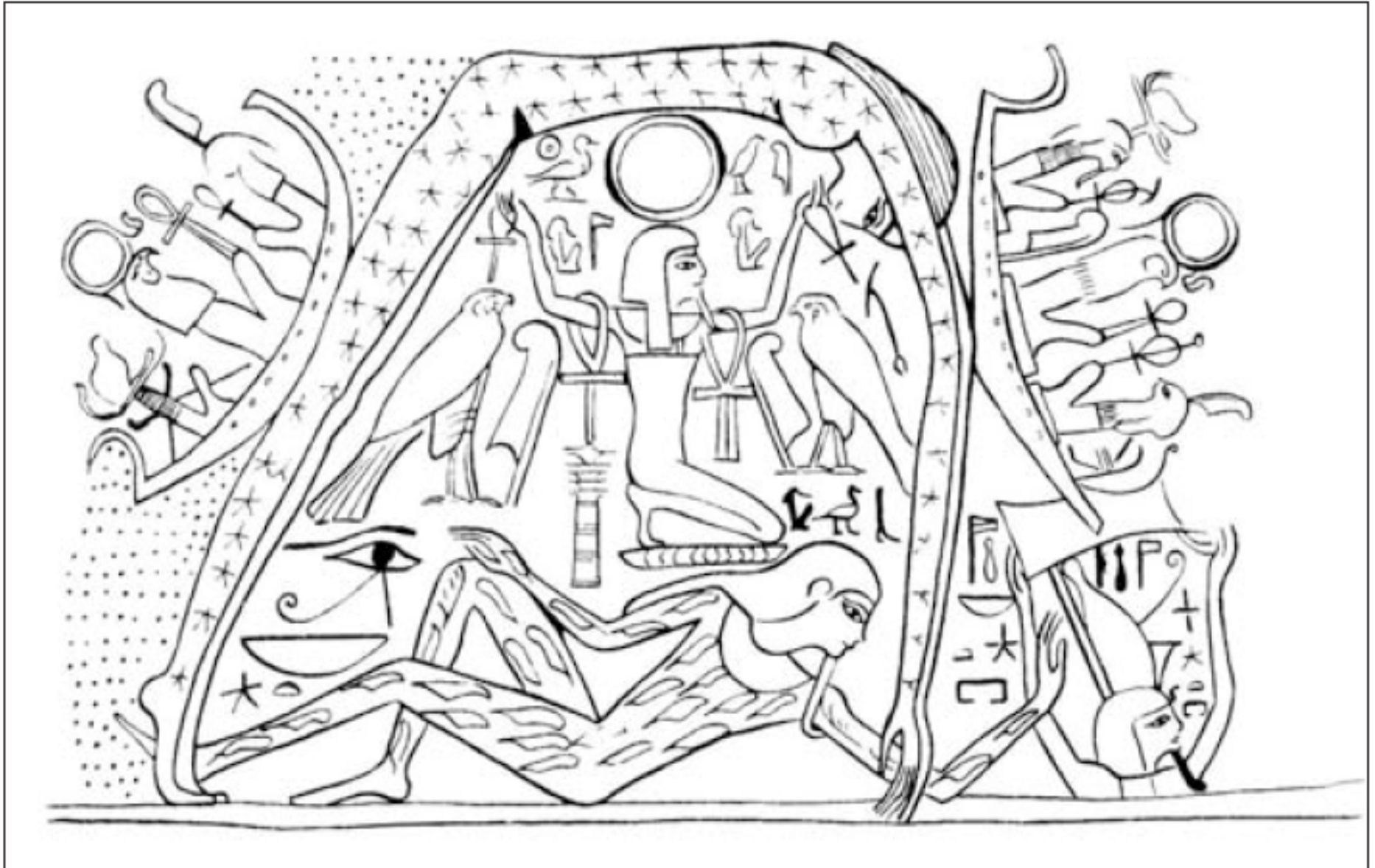


Image credit: Simon Prado

# Egyptian Picture

Image: Public Domain



# Genesis 1 & ANE Thought: Shared Features

## *Physical shape of world*

- 3-tiered universe
- “Habitable zone” created by separating primeval waters (symbolizing chaos, nonexistence) into waters above & waters below



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- Text does not “teach” this model, merely assumes

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*Theological shape of world*

- **Polytheism**

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- Polytheism
  - Mesopotamian pantheon, e.g. Anu, Enlil, Ea, Marduk, Shamash, Sin, Ishtar, Nergal...

# Mesopotamian Sun God Shamash

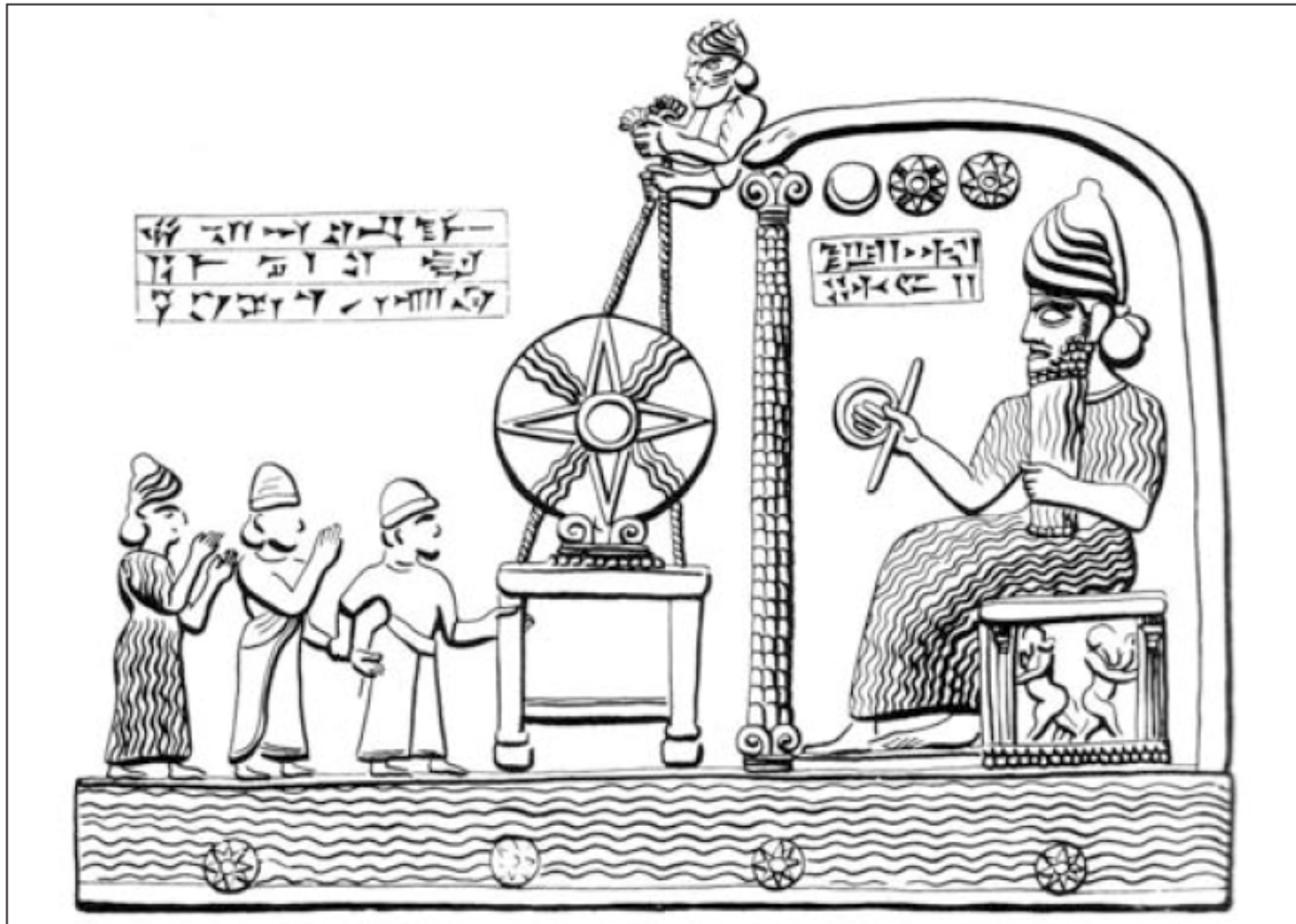


Image: Public Domain

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- Temptation to Israel

[Josiah] did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD... 2 Kings 23:5-6

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- **Conception of divine attributes**
  - Anthropomorphic
  - Cosmically bound
  - Fallible, limited

# Genesis 1 & ANE Thought: Contrasting Features

## *Theological shape of world*

- **Typical ANE creation story**
  - Precosmic condition is water, darkness
  - Gods emerge from chaos, birth more gods
  - One heroic god
  - Defeats sea god/armies of sea monsters
  - Brings order to cosmos
  - Becomes chief god
  - Humans created to do gods' work for them

# **Genesis 1 on its Own Terms:**

## **Polemic against other ANE creation stories**

### **Physical picture similar**

- **Precosmic condition is water, darkness**  
Gen 1:2 “...darkness was over the surface of the deep...”
- **Boundaries set for the sea**
- **Fixed sky separates waters above/below**
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### **Theological picture radically different**

- **Creator vs. pantheon**
- **Transcendent vs. cosmically-bound**  
 (“outside” vs. “inside”)
- **Commands vs. strife**

# Genesis 1 on its Own Terms:

## Polemic against other ANE creation stories

### Mythological elements removed from cosmos

- Sea monsters demoted to God's harmless creatures

Gen 1:21 So God created the great creatures (*tannin*) of the sea... [related to *Tiamat*]

Ps 104:24-26

How many are your works, O LORD...

There is the sea, vast and spacious...

There the ships go to and fro,

and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. [related to *Lotan*]

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- Sun, moon, stars demoted to “lights” for human use

Gen 1:16-17 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth...

# **Genesis 1 on its Own Terms:**

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### **Role/dignity of humans very different**

- **In ANE thought...**
  - **Cosmos functions for gods**
  - **Humans are slaves to meet gods' needs**
  - **Human kings as divine image-bearers**

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- **In Genesis...**
  - **Cosmos functions for humans**
  - **Humans serve God, but not as slaves**
  - **God has no “needs”**
  - **Humans rule as God's vassal kings**
  - **All humans are divine image-bearers**

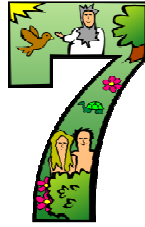
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  - **Separating**
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- **Deep structure to account**
  - **In literary terms (Framework Hypothesis)**
    - **Days 1-3: days of forming**
    - **Days 4-6: days of filling**

# Framework Hypothesis



**God Rests**

**Created Kingdoms**

**Creature Kings**

**1**

**Light/Darkness**



**4**

**Luminaries**

**2**

**Sky/Sea**



**5**

**Birds/Fish**

**3**

**Land/Plants**



**6**

**Animals/Mankind**



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- **These are not material, chronological descriptions**

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  - Humans are his vice-regents, imagebearers
  - Cosmos functions for human benefit
- Corollary
  - If Genesis 1 & modern science aren't talking about the same things, they can't conflict
  - Whatever science says about origins,  
...that is how God did it

# Theological Questions

## References

**D. Harlow, *After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science* PSCF 62 (Sept. 2010) 179-195.**

**BioLogos website: <http://biologos.org>**

- **The Questions**
- **Video Conversations: NT Wright & P. Enns  
“Paul's Perspective on Adam”**

**J. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009)**

**P. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012)**

**Grace Chapel “Genesis” class, Ben Bythewood (2007)**

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***A: Adam as figurehead or historical figure, Paul's point stands***

# ...More Theological Questions

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**Tell me, if you understand.**

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**Q: Is it a problem that the scientific account of origins makes no explicit mention of God?**

***A: No—reality as layer cake vs. reality as a pie***

# Conclusions

- **Reading Scripture in the light of science is a big reframe—takes some getting used to**
- **New ways of reading the Bible**
- **New formulations for some old doctrines**
- **Essential core of Christianity emerges, stronger:**

**If anything, evolutionary biology...substantiates...the absolute necessity of God's supernatural grace in Christ, not only to forgive sin but also to transform sinful human beings into new creatures whose lives conform to the image of Christ. (Harlow, 2010)**