

Robert Vannoy, Old Testament History, Lecture 7
Literary Framework of Genesis 1, Mesopotamian Creation Stories –
Enuma Elish

Literary Framework Hypothesis: Vannoy's Objections

At the close of the hour yesterday, we were looking at what's often termed the framework hypothesis, in connection with the days of Genesis 1. The idea of this view is that the days of Genesis 1 are not actual days, but they are a literary device utilized by the author of the chapter in order to provide a means of presentation of how God created the earth. Now, I said that I wanted to continue this discussion today, and what I want to do is mention a few objections, that seem to me reason to not accept this view as a valid view, although as I mentioned in the last class hour, it seems to increasingly be a view advocated by evangelical scholars. Now, let me mention just a couple things by way of objection to it.

First, I don't think there is anything in the text in Genesis 1 itself that gives us the slightest hint that the days are to be regarded simply as a literary form, rather than as descriptive of actual periods or sequences in God's creative activity. I don't think that there is any hint of that at all in that chapter; that is something that you have to bring to that chapter. It seems to me if you allow here what appears to be a historical description, to be really not a historical description but rather to be simply a literary form, then why can't that be said of many other narratives in the Bible that also present themselves as historical narratives? Instead which you could say they are really not historical narratives, but they are a literary form of some sort, something other than a record of what actually happened. I don't think that there is any evidence in the text that this is just a literary form. It presents itself as a description of actual periods of time and sequence in God's creative activity. So that's one consideration. I think if you adopt a principle of allowing that sort of interpretation of a literary device, that you open a door to

applying it to many other places, and pretty soon you have little left of real history of things that really happened.

Secondly, I think more importantly to me, this is the key objection. In Exodus 20, the creative activity of God and then his rest, is said to be the pattern that man has to follow in man's six days of work and one day of rest. Now today, that presupposes that there was a reality to the activity of God as he worked in creation in six periods and then rested in one. It seems to me that implies that there is a reality to that activity of God. If you accept the framework view, then what you are really saying is that man is not following God in his pattern of six days of work and one day of rest, but man is just patterning himself on the basis of humanly devised literary form. To put it a bit differently, according to this view, the origin of the six-one pattern is not the reality of God's creative activity itself, but the idea of God's creative activity in the six plus one sequence is rooted in a humanly devised literary form.

In other words, what this does is destroy any basis in reality for God's activity and rest providing the pattern for man's activity and rest. You are basing man's imitation of God as it were, not on what God actually did, but on what an author did in structuring the material in Genesis 1. Now it seems to me that what is said in Exodus 20 is that God did work six days and rested one, and man and his imitation of that is to pattern his own life after what God did. There is a subtle shift there, from the basis of which man works six days and rests one, a shift of reality from what God did to the creation of the author of the chapter and the literary form which he used for it. Now to me that is an important consideration, well he feels that it is structured with these parallels of two sets of three to lead to a climax up to the seventh day, so it highlights the special significance of the Sabbath. That's the way he feels it is structured, pointing down into the special significance of the Sabbath.

You notice on page seven of your bibliography in the second entry, there is a recent article by Dr. Robert Newman, "Are the events in the Genesis creation

account set forth in chronological order?” His answer is yes, and that’s in a book called *The Genesis Debate*. I don’t know if you have seen those published about 1986. The opposing viewpoint is several entries down. If you want to read something further that discusses this matter of sequence in the days of Genesis 1, you might want to look at those articles.

Newman’s conclusion is that there may be this pattern, you may find that pattern but the discovery of that pattern is not something that necessarily leads to the conclusion that it is simply a literary device, not something that necessarily portrays reality. So he doesn’t totally dismiss finding that kind of a pattern in Genesis 1, but he does object to understanding that simply as a literary device which then gets rid of the actual sequence of divine activity. I think that he has a legitimate point there. God may have so ordered his sequence in his creative activity, so that it did reflect something of this parallelism climaxing in the seventh day. I’m still not so certain as to the course of that analogy as being so strong, because of the third day and the fifth day, I don’t know whether it’s something we’re more reading on to the text and if its legitimately there. But however you come down on that, it doesn’t necessarily lead to a pure literary framework hypothesis where there is no reality to the six-day view.

A. The Creation of the Universe in Genesis 1:1-2:3

7. How Was the Knowledge of Genesis 1 Imparted?

Let’s go on to number 7. under letter A. We’re discussing the creation of the universe in Genesis 1:1 to 2:3. 7. is: “How was the knowledge of Genesis 1 imparted?” The question is the view that the earth was created with age built into it. What about that? That has often been argued. The problem that I have with that is that it proves too much. If you are going to argue in that kind of a way, how do you know that the earth and all of reality and everything in it wasn’t created two seconds ago? We can say, well I’ve been living for x number of years, well maybe you were created a few minutes ago with a memory of all of

that and you really weren't here five minutes ago. That kind of an argument easily slips into something that is nonsense because there is no way you could really know anything other than perhaps that you really are here right now.

Well, all these data, have nothing to do with ordinary processes and that the fossil record is put there really to make us think that there has been this long period of time, but it really wasn't because God created it all in place. You see that same argument that the historian used that I read to you from White's book, *The Warfare of Science and Christianity*, about the Egyptian civilization, that was all created by God in place. There was no early period of Egyptian history where there was a gradual development into a full-blown civilization, rather it was created in place. That kind of an argument can be applied in almost limitless ways to the point where you really can't know anything and it destroys all scientific investigation. Well, I think it suggests, as critics of Christianity have said, that God did this to deceive us. I don't know if you necessarily have to conclude that but what's the point of it. If there wasn't the history that seems to be reflected in these strata that existed, then why did God do it in that way? I don't think that is a strong argument, that things were created with an appearance of age that has been often used. Ultimately it leads to uncertainty about everything and implied deceit on God's part.

How Has the Knowledge of Genesis 1 Been Imparted; Before Getting to Gen. 1

Let's move on to the question of how has the knowledge of Genesis 1 been imparted; before getting to Genesis 1. Let's just reflect on how the writings of Scripture have come to us generally. I think from looking at Scripture that we find that some parts of Scripture contain direct communication by God through the author, then puts it in writing and it has been preserved for us. Sometimes the author received a vision, particularly in the prophetic books, you read there are the prophets having a vision, which they record and then transmit onto us. Other writers appear to do much of what we do, they do some research and they find

materials that pertain to the subject about which they are writing and utilize those materials in the composition of the book that they write. Luke, in the prologue to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4), indicates historical research is the way he went about writing a lot of his material. I think the same is clearly true for the author of 1 and 2 Kings because he frequently mentions sources that he utilized composing the material in the book of Kings.

Whatever method of gathering or receiving material is utilized, I think that the important thing is not so much what type of method it is, but the important thing is that the writers were kept from error in what they produced. As the Spirit of God superintended their work, they were kept from error in what they wrote.

Now, when you come to Genesis 1, it is of course an interesting question how did the knowledge contained in that chapter come to Moses? Questions like that are much easier to ask than they are to answer. There is no indication here in Genesis chapter 1 exactly how that knowledge came to Moses. I don't think that is so terribly important. What is important is that it is a revelation from God to us and it is true. It's a revelation from God to us on how the world came to be and how man was created, and it's true and reliable. It's quite obvious that Moses was not there, when the things recorded happened. Did God speak to Moses, telling him these things? It's possible Moses received them in a vision and recorded what he saw, that's possible, but we don't know exactly how that material came to Moses.

Now let me pose a hypothetical suggestion, I think that you already have read Finegan on this and maybe are somewhat prepared for this. But if it could be demonstrated, that Genesis 1 was the adaptation of a Babylonian account of creation, with polytheistic elements removed, and things of that sort changed, I think if we could demonstrate that then we could say it is quite possible that God could have led Moses to utilize a tradition of that sort. Maintaining the parts of it that were true, discarding the rest, and this would be the Word of God. Now I don't think that is likely and I don't think that there is any evidence to support

that. I'm just speaking theoretically. The thing that I think is important is that the Holy Spirit has inspired the writing of Scripture, so that the result is the written Word of God. When we speak of verbal inspiration, every word in Scripture is trustworthy, reliable, and the truth. Often we do not know the method. The method is not the important thing.

Now to get back to this hypothetical thing, suppose Moses had some traditions about the creation, and the Holy Spirit decided to use and guide him in the way in which he shaped the material and what he transmitted to us as the very words of God. I think theoretically that is possible, but I don't think that there is a lot of evidence as to that happening.

Babylonian Origins – Pan-Babylonian School Approach

Let's discuss this claim of the Babylonian origins. In 1875, a man named George Adam Smith, of the British Museum in London, wrote a letter to a British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, in which he described the contents of about twenty tablets that have come from Mesopotamia describing a story of creation. Smith later wrote a book called, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*, and that stirred up an enormous amount of interest in the Bible and archeology because here was the beginnings of that whole area of research and study and people were interested.

Here's the Babylonian account of creation, how does it differ than the creation story of the Bible in Genesis? That was 1875. By 1902, a man named Fredrich Delitzsch had a very low view of Scripture. Ironically his father Franz Delitzsch wrote a major commentary on the Old Testament and held a very high view of Scripture. Friedrich gave a series of lectures in 1902 entitled, *Babel and Bible*, that's on your bibliography page seven. It was published in German in 1902 and translated and published into English in 1903, and there are copies in the library if you would like to look at it. He became the leader of what came to be known as the Pan-Babylonian School of approach to the Old Testament. The idea

of that school of approach to the Old Testament was that the biblical and Babylonian worldviews were very similar, and the biblical view was dependent on the Babylonian and derived from the Babylonian view.

Delitzsch claimed that both the creation story of Genesis as well as the flood story of Noah, were derived from the Babylonian stories. Of course, a part of that argument is that the Babylonian stories are earlier. Moses is about 1400 B.C., these Babylonian stories date from about four or five hundred years prior to that time. So he said that the Bible's creation and flood accounts are adaptations of the Babylonian stories. Now, let me give you, not from the *Babel and Bible* book, but from another book which is also listed here on your bibliography page seven, the second entry under Delitzsch, three quarters of the way down the page, it's a German title which in English means the "Great Deception," which was a two volume work that he published in 1920. On top of page eight on the bibliography, you see the book, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* by E. G. Kraeling. Kraeling quotes from the book *The Great Deception* that Delitzsch wrote on page 158. This will give you some idea of Fredrich Delitzsch's interpretation of the Old Testament because he is one of the most radical critics that you will ever come across.

Here's what he says, "the Old Testament is full of deceptions of all kinds of veritable hodge-podge of erroneous and incredible, undependable figures including those of biblical chronology of veritable labyrinth of false portrayals, misleading rewordings, revisions and transpositions. Therefore also the anachronisms, a constant intermixture of contradictory particulars and old stories, legends, and folktales." In short, a book full of intentional and unintentional deception, hence the title of the book, *The Great Deception*, it's about the Old Testament. He continues, "The Old Testament and all of its books are filled with linguistic beauties of archeological information, and retains its value as a historical document, in spite of its defects, but it is in all directions a relatively late and cloudy source. A propagandistic document from the first chapter of Genesis to the

last of Chronicles.” He did not have a very high view of the Old Testament and a large part of this is the idea that a lot of the materials are derived from Babylonian sources. A lot of it is following the Welhausen view, late material that is represented as being earlier, not historically reliable, etc.

Enuma Elish

I don't know what the relationship is to the father. It is a striking thing moving from his father Franz who was a faithful and good Bible scholar, to a son with such radical views; it would be interesting as to what went on. Let's get on with this Babylonian origin idea. The Babylonian story of creation is known by the Enuma Elish. Those two words, Enuma and Elish mean “when on high.” Most scholars date the composition at about 1700-2000 B.C., even though the earliest extant text dates from about 1000 B.C., so we don't have a text that goes back to 1700 B.C. There is pretty general agreement that the original composition goes back that far because of the various historical allusions that are found throughout the document that find their context and setting during this period of history. So I don't think there is a lot of question as to its origin being back 1700-2000 B.C., even though the oldest text is about 1000 B.C.

Then compare that to the biblical material. We understand Moses to be responsible for the material in the first five books of the Old Testament. Moses lived at the earliest in the 1400's, we'll discuss the date of the Exodus later and of course the date pertaining to Moses. The early date of the Exodus is the mid 1400's and the late date is around 1290, so you place Moses somewhere between 1400 and 1200 approximately. In any case, substantially later than 2000-1700, so I don't think that there is much question that the Enuma Elish is older than Genesis chapter 1, as far as its composition is concerned.

There has been a very thorough study of Enuma Elish written by a man named Alexander Heidel, this is on your bibliography, the last entry on page seven. The book is entitled *The Babylonian Genesis*. Heidel does a very careful

analysis of the Enuma Elish and he points out a number of things that are helpful in comparing the Enuma Elish to the Genesis creation account. One thing he notes is the object of the Enuma Elish, and he points out two things in respect to the object of the story. He says first, it is primarily not a creation story at all. There are seven tablets on which the Enuma Elish is written and only a very small part of it concerns creation, so it's not primarily a creation story. You have lengthy descriptions of the chief characters in the Enuma Elish, Marduk who is the chief deity of the city of Babel. You have lengthy descriptions of his birth, his growth and the document seems to be an apologetic supporting Marduk as the god of Babylon rather than a creation story per se. Well we'll have to pick up from there next time.

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