

The Old Testament and the Comparative Method

By Bryan D. Estelle

How would you respond if I told you it was possible to have a conversation with someone who has been dead for thousands of years? I am not speaking of a face to face conversation; rather, one that is like reading a letter they wrote, or a poem, or a story and leaving with a sense that you understood the gist of what they were saying. To be more precise, therefore, I guess it would be a one-way conversation. Of course you would not really have a very good understanding of what they said unless you knew their own cultural context, their own language, and kind of letter, poem, or story they were writing. Were they writing a love letter or a legal brief? Is it a novel or an autobiographical story? These criteria and questions would have a tremendous bearing on whether you could hold a “conversation” with this ancient person. Even so, it is really possible to understand ancient literature, that is, to let these authors speak to us if we take pains to understand some of these matters.¹ This article on Scripture is concerned with how the Old Testament should be understood in its broader literary context.

The geographical area which I am describing begins in the southeast at the Persian Gulf, stretching northwards through the Mesopotamian valley (between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers) northwards along the Fertile Crescent, embracing eastern Syria and Turkey (Anatolia) and moving down into the Levant (which includes the modern states of Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria west of the Euphrates), and finally into and including Egypt itself. That cultural environment consisted of the languages, literatures and peoples of the ancient Near East: an area that was vast and diversified geographically, politically and culturally. The biblical writers communicated their thoughts and ideas informed and influenced by, and at times marshalling polemics against, their literary and cultural surroundings. When I talk about Sumerian and Akkadian below, I am talking

about languages and literatures that had their origins in modern day Iraq and Iran (although Akkadian became the trade language of that part of the world for many years). When I talk about Ugaritic, I am talking about the very important finds made in 1929 in a coastal city that is in modern Syria.

I. PROLEGOMENON

Discussing the relationship of the Old Testament to her ancient Near Eastern neighbors is risky and complex, especially considering the antiquity of the data in question.² Recent publications have shown just how

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1. See Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of ParaLaetic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 1–80.

2. For an introduction to the comparative approach, see Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (AOAT 227; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verl., 1990); Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Comparative Method in Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Problems,” and “The ‘Navel of the Earth’ and the Comparative Method,” in *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible: Form and Content* (Jerusalem: the Magnes Press, 1993), 11–75; Ignace J. Gelb, “Comparative Method in the Study of the Society and Economy of the Ancient Near East,” *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 45 (1980): 29–36; W.W. Hallo, “Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach,” in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White (Pittsburgh:

volatile the issue may become.³ Indeed, the methodological principles considered here have implications, for example, for evaluations of recent developments in Pauline theology as well.⁴

Closer to home, with respect to Old Testament studies, consider one example of abuse in the past. With the dawn of numerous discoveries from Mesopotamia in the nineteenth century there was much interest in comparative studies, especially between Assyriology and the Old Testament. Friedrich Delitzsch, for example, argued for the great indebtedness of the Old Testament to the ancient Near Eastern cultures surrounding the Hebrews (Malul, 5).⁵ This assertion met a firestorm response from the fundamentalistic side (Malul's term) of scholarship that was arguing for the complete independence of the Old Testament. Subsequently, the discipline of Assyriology grew into an independent discipline of its own, specifically at the University of Chicago and in Germany. Consequently, greater care and precision were exercised in comparative studies between the Bible and its ancient Near Eastern environment.⁶ Examples of abuse could also be drawn from Ugaritic studies, the prolific studies flowing out of the discoveries of the

Pickwick, 1980), 1–26; Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 23–36.

3. Consider, for example, the controversy stirred up by Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

4. Consider, for example, the opinion regarding the New Perspective on Paul of the OPC *Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification*, that states that as one of the points at which the NPP is out of accord with Scripture and our Standards is “Compromising the self-authenticating and self-interpreting nature of the Scriptures by giving the literature of Second Temple Judaism undue [emphasis mine] interpretive weight,” *Justification: Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification: Commended for Study by the Seventy-third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania; The Committee on Christian Education, 2007).

5. Malul, *Comparative Method*, 38.

6. See Richard Hess, “One Hundred and Fifty Years of Comparative Studies on Genesis 1–11,” in *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 1–11.

7. Although see Peter Machinist, “The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel: An Essay,” in *Ah, Assyria ... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, Scripta Hierosolymitana 32, ed. Mosechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al (The Magnes Press, 1991), who turns to the logically prior issue and asks, “how did Israel, in its Biblical canon, pose and answer the distinctiveness question for itself?” 202. Machinist is positioned where most of the rest of the academy is with respect to the composition and date of the Hebrew Bible, spread “roughly over the sixth century B.C.E. through the first century C.E.” 202.

Dead Sea Scrolls, and the burgeoning amount of data coming from Egyptian studies.

The dangers of the comparative method run in different directions. One path emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Old Testament with a virtual denial of any cultural influence whatsoever; the other direction leads to facile assertions of historical or analogous connections between the Old Testament and parallel phenomena in the surrounding cultures and alternative explanations are ignored or missed.⁷ Often, the interest of Old Testament studies has had merely an apologetic purpose, especially in conservative circles. Regrettably, this has led to a skewing of the true picture. The usual point of contention is whether one has overemphasized the similarities while effectively minimizing the differences, or vice-versa (see Malul for further examples).

Even so, the vast majority of most Old Testament scholars would concede some kind of historical connection and influence between the cultures of the ancient Near East and Israel's faith as recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. As Meir Malul states:

The contextual approach is based on the general assumption that the Old Testament shares the common cultural tradition with the ancient Near East, and this assumption, accepted by most scholars, is based on cumulative evidence, both internal biblical (various hints in the Old Testament about Israel's ties with her neighbors), as well as external kinds (archeological, epigraphic, etc.) (Malul, 100).

Assuming then that this connection was a real one, a few words are in order regarding a responsible use of the comparative method.

First, let us draw distinctions between the types of methodologies used in comparative studies between the Old Testament and its surrounding ancient Near Eastern culture. Broadly speaking, those performing comparison studies have fallen into two camps: those who compare dissimilar cultures and historical periods based upon the fundamental assumption of the spiritual unity of mankind, and those who conduct comparative approaches based upon the possibility of a historical connection or influence existing between the Old Testament and a relatively contiguous and contemporaneous society or culture. The former may be labeled the “typological comparison approach,” (Malul, 13) which commonly integrates studies from the disciplines of anthropology and the social sciences. The latter may be called the “historical comparison approach” (Malul, 13).

In the following comparisons, I am interested in the

historical comparison approach. An attempt at balanced affirmations of the integral relationship between both general and special revelation is not a denial of the perspicuity or sufficiency of Scripture. Although our standards (e.g., WCF) are straightforward about the clarity of Scripture regarding salvation and the duty of the Christian,⁸ nevertheless, as A.A. Hodge stated years ago, “it is true that, with the advance of historical and critical knowledge, and by means of controversies, the Church as a community has made progress in the accurate interpretation of Scripture and in the full comprehension of the entire system of truth revealed therein.”⁹ In other words, by reading the Old Testament Scriptures in their ancient Near Eastern context we may actually help the church recover some valuable background information.¹⁰

Methodology in the use of the comparative method is the center of the academic discussions today. What are the methods that should be used to determine the nature of the historical connection (Malul, 81)? Shemaryahu Talmon has written influential essays on the comparative method. He has cited abuses of the comparative method in biblical studies that clearly demonstrate the many existing pitfalls. His own robust approach is to examine the Hebrew Bible internally and seriously before beginning the comparative approach. This may sound somewhat akin to the *analogia fidei*,¹¹ when he says:

The comparison of any biblical facet with a presumed counterpart in other cultures should in any case be guided by this principle: before positing a resemblance of a biblical phenomenon with contemporaneous, a pre-biblical, or a postbiblical counterpart, it is imperative to examine biblical literature itself for possible parallels, foremost the immediate context under discussion (Talmon, “Navel of the Earth,” 51).

Additionally, he says elsewhere:

The solution of a crux of a text in the biblical text should be attempted first and foremost by reverting to the immediate context and to synonymous expressions in similar contexts.... Comparison with extrabiblical material should be brought into play only when a properly executed innerbiblical analysis does not produce satisfactory results (Talmon, “The Comparative Method,” 36).

As much as this approach seems to commend itself by surface simplicity, the problem and issues are really more difficult than this.¹² What is needed is a

responsible use of the comparative method. Therefore, the goal of this article is to demonstrate principles of the comparative method in concrete areas of Old Testament research. The first two examples are areas that have shown some measure of promise with respect to the use of the comparative method in order to illuminate certain Old Testament themes: covenant and wisdom. Following this discussion, I will discuss a few areas that illustrate a failed use of the comparative method.

II. EXAMPLES THAT HAVE SHOWN PROMISE

A. Covenant in the ANE and the Bible

One of the most fruitful—but also controversial—areas that has been illuminative for Old Testament biblical studies has been the study of treaty documents or covenants. Between 2400 BC and 650 BC there are some eighty or ninety examples of treaties made in the ancient Near East.¹³ These treaties come from both the Hittites and the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The treaties recovered from the literary remains of the Hittites are extremely important for understanding the book of Deuteronomy, which is a linchpin for a proper understanding of the Historical books and also covenantal history as a whole as expressed in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy’s instruction is her constitution.¹⁴ Moreover, a “covenantal orientation controls the entire disposition of these narratives [i.e., the historical narratives], the arrangement

8. Westminster Confession of Faith, I.VII, which says: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”

9. A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 40.

10. Tremper Longman III, “Evangelicals and the Comparative Method,” in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Reformed Theological Seminary, 2000), 40.

11. WCF, I.IX, which says: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

12. See the author’s “Proverbs and Ahiqar: Revisited,” *The Biblical Historian* 1/1 (August, 2004): 1–9, for an outline of some of the difficulties with respect to the type of connections possible.

13. Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 54.

14. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 138.

as well as the selection of the materials.”¹⁵ If Deuteronomy—a foundational constitutional document for Israel—was shaped in some sense by the treaty model, then understanding this background can help illumine for us how an original audience might have resonated with the theology contained in the biblical book. My own opinion is that Deuteronomy is far from mere imitation of the treaty pattern; however, the idea that there is flexibility in the adaptation of these patterns is common among scholars committed to the position of source criticism of the Pentateuch as well as more conservative scholars, even though they themselves will disagree as to how much permanent value these comparisons can yield.¹⁶ Therefore, a few words of introduction about the Hittites are important for a proper understanding of the history of Israel and its implications for the life, faith, and theology of the Israelites.

The powerful Hittite Empire settled in central Anatolia (modern Turkey, over to but not excluding the regions of Lake Van and Urmia) in the second millennium BC. At one time the Hittites were thought to be

15. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), 55.

16. See, for example, Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986), 71. In fairness to Nicholson, his conclusion as to the helpfulness of comparing treaties is summed up as follows: “though for a time research into the possible influence of suzerainty treaties upon Old Testament covenant texts seemed to offer striking results, in reality it has yielded little that is of permanent value” 81.

17. I have found the following resources to be of great help in understanding this important civilization. Philo H. J. Houwink Ten Cate, “Hittite History,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992); O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1961); C. W. Ceram, *The Secret of the Hittites* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); Peter Daniels and William Bright (eds.), *The World’s Writing Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael C. Astour, “Ugarit and the Great Powers,” in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritics*, ed. Gordon Douglas Young (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981); Harry Hoffner, “Hittite,” in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archeology in the ANE*, ed. E. Meyers et al. (Oxford University Press, 1997); Richard H. Beal, “Hittite Military Organization,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson, et al. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995); Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); Hans Gustav Güterbock, “Resurrecting the Hittites,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995); K. Kohlmeyer, “Anatolian Architectural Decorations, Staturary, and Stelae,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995); Hoffner, “Legal and Social Institutions of Hittite Anatolia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995).

18. Here, I am following Harry A. Hoffner’s classification, “Hittite,” 80–84.

only a relatively insignificant nation based upon scant references in the Bible. The fact of the matter is, however, that this empire was so powerful that it was to become a dominant force throughout the ancient Near East, especially during the Late Bronze Age (hence, LBA, 1400–1200 BC); at the height of its influence, it even kept one of the mightiest empires in the ancient Near East (i.e., Egypt) from expanding its own influence northwards.¹⁷

Like the discoveries in art that were made when Bogazkoy was unearthed, the bulk of our extant literary material from the Hittites comes from the same discovery. The discoveries at Bogazkoy unearthed some 600 compositions on several thousand tablets, most of which come from the fifteenth through the thirteenth centuries. The writing system is designated as “Hittite cuneiform” (i.e., cuneiform has been adopted for writing a familiar language, Indo-European), using a cuneiform script with at least 375 signs.

Previous to the discoveries of the Hittite capital at Khattusha, five stones were discovered in 1870 in the Syrian town of Hana. The script on these stones was similar (not too similar, however) to Egyptian hieroglyphs and has been identified as Luvian. In fact, a Norwegian named Knudtzon had come to the conclusion on the basis of his study of the Arzawa letters that cuneiform Hittite was an Indo-European language as early as 1902. That idea, however, had received such scorn by the academic guild that the Norwegian Orientalist actually retracted his theory.

It was the discovery of the Hittite state archives at the capital of Khattusha in 1906 that made our knowledge of the life and history of early Asia Minor possible. Here, among the shelves that had been knocked down when the famous city was destroyed in 1180 BC, were found the remains of over 10,000 clay tablets. The resurrection of the Hittites had begun. After the initial discoveries in 1906, both World Wars slowed progress on the excavations. From 1952 onward, work continued on the discovery unimpeded.

It is important at the outset to clarify what I mean when I speak about Hittite literature. As one scholar has said, “the concept of literature is more limited for the twentieth century reader than for the ancient Near East. Hittite literature comprises everything that was deemed worthy of being recorded in writing” (Ten Cate, 224). The literary remains are varied and extensive. They come from a wide variety of genres.¹⁸ First, there are texts that are classified as historiographic. These texts relate information about particular kings, civil servants, or a particular time. These texts also

demonstrate a focused concern for events surrounding state treaties. Like other ancient Near Eastern texts, they do not follow the conventions of modern scientific historiography.

The treaties recovered from the Hittite archives show a remarkable consistency with regard to their form and content. Analysis by cuneiform legal scholars reveals a pattern that often manifests itself as follows:

1. Title/Preamble
2. Historical Prologue (the Suzerain relates what he has done for the vassal)
3. Stipulations
4. Depositing and regular reading of the treaty
5. Witnesses to the transaction
6. Curses and blessings.

Comparative studies of these treaty formulas by biblical scholars and ancient Near Eastern scholars unleashed a flood of articles and books dealing with their correspondence to the biblical material. Suffice it to say that there are some notable similarities and differences between the Hittite treaties and the biblical material. A full treatment is beyond the scope and space constraints of this article; however, I will discuss this more below.

The second genre in the Hittite literature is the procedure handbooks. This is the largest group of extant texts. They have to do with religious ceremonies both within and outside the cult. They signify the prescriptions regarding the invoking of deities.

The third group of texts may be classified as legal literature. Although the king was the supreme ruler and administrator of the law, he was also subject to the law and could be impeached by it. These laws deal with marriage, divorce, and sexual crimes; whereas, according to Hoffner, the topics of inheritance, contracts, loans, debts, and business are left largely untouched (Hoffner, 80–84). Reflected in the laws are the betrothal customs of the Hittite people. In the marriage laws adultery is seen as a breach of the marriage contract; moreover, the guilty parties are both punished by death. Additionally, adultery in some sense is considered an offense against another's property. The concept in the Bible often referred to as levirate marriage is attested in Hittite law as well. This is the custom that expects a brother of a man who dies to take his deceased brother's wife and children under his care. In contrast to the Bible, which forbids bestiality in all instances, certain allowances are permitted in the Hittite laws. Sorcery is touched upon in the Hittite laws.¹⁹ Interestingly, magical practices were only illegal if directed against another Hittite. Hittite

court records exist as well, known through minutes of court proceedings (Hoffner, "Legal and Social," 1.560).

The fourth category of extant material may be classified as archival and administrative texts. These were records kept for bureaucratic purposes (e.g. censuses, but also records of various omens).

A fifth category was texts that can be classified as scribal training. These are texts that were used among the polyglot scribes. The scribe's training occurred using Mesopotamian texts. In fact, some classic Mesopotamian literary works were translated into Hittite (e.g., the Gilgamesh and Atrahasis epics). There was a high esteem attributed to those who could write in cuneiform. As Ten Cate comments, this "is evident from the two groups of persons for whom genealogies are available: the kings of the second half of the Empire period and a fairly large number of scribes" (224). Finally, the sixth group of writings may be classified as native literature. These include myths about deities of the old Hittite stratum. Hittite civilization was a powerful force in the ancient Near East especially during the Late Bronze Age. The statecraft, legal institutions, military genius, defensive bulwarks, and literature made their influence apparent long after the demise of the great defensive structure at its capital in Bogazkoy. But what kind of influence did they have on the biblical writers, especially with regard to the important biblical category of covenant?

This area of comparative studies is currently an area of intense discussion and debate.²⁰ After the discovered

19. Hoffner, "Legal and Social Institutions of Hittite Anatolia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 1.557.

20. Instead of listing the multitude of secondary sources on this subject here, the reader should consult the following works which contain the relevant bibliography: Scott Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3.2 (April 2005): 263–92; Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions*; K.A. Kitchen, *On The Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), especially 283–307; Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.4 (1995): 670–697; Ernest W. Nicholson, *God And His People*; Noel Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 407 (London, T & T Clark, 2004). Weeks' book, arguing against the diffusionist model of treaties in the ANE, is a recent and important contribution to the subject of the relation of texts from Mesopotamia, the Hittites, Syria, and Egypt to the treaty concept in the ancient Near East, and I hope to interact with his claims in another venue in the future, especially some of his thesis as it relates to Sinai. I agree with Nicholson's review (*The Journal of Theological Studies*, 57/2 [October 2006], 607–08) that "the book suffers in places from a lack of clarity and the argument and conclusions are at times needlessly frustrating to follow." Even so, it is an important book that

EARLY (HITTITE) TREATY	DEUTERONOMY	LATE (ASSYRIAN) TREATY
Preamble	Preamble 1:1-4 (K 1:1-5)	Preamble
Historical Introduction	History 1:5-3:29 (K 1:6-4:45)	God list
Stipulations	Stipulations (4-26 (K 5-26)	Stipulations
Document clause	Document clause (27)	
God list (witnesses)		
Curses/Blessings	Blessings/Curses (28) (K 27-30, Curses & Blessings or Cov. Ratification.) (K31-34, "Succession Arrangements or Covenant Continuity, in which are included the invocation of witnesses and directions for the disposition and public reading of the treaty)	Curses (Blessings)

Hittite texts were translated, the application of Hittite treaty structure to the biblical material really began with two extremely influential articles published by G. E. Mendenhall in 1954.²¹ Almost all scholars are agreed about the importance of these two articles which generated a flood of publications evaluating the claims. Later publications have diminished the influence of Mendenhall's original claims.²²

One of the largest issues at stake emerging from the debate was whether the analogies between the second millennium Hittite treaties and the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy in particular, could provide evidence for an early dating scheme of the Pentateuch vis-à-vis the vast majority of Old Testament scholars that hold to a late date for the composition of the Pentateuch.²³ At stake here is whether the form of Deuteronomy was more akin to the Hittite treaties or to the late Assyrian treaties which seem ostensibly to lack a historical prologue. Put

sharply, the following question emerges: are features of Deuteronomy closer to the Hittite treaties of the second millennium or Assyrian treaties of the first millennium BC? McCarthy, Weinfeld and others argued that the form was closer to the seventh century Assyrian treaties. Kitchen, Kline and other conservative scholars argued that the parallels were closer to the earlier Hittite texts.²⁴ The chart above illustrates the gist of the issue (K = Kline's division of the different aspects of the treaty structure as applied to the book of Deuteronomy itself).

What can be learned from the previous discussion and the current state of scholarly reflection into which I have not even entered with detail, especially in regards to our apologetic method? The fact of the matter is that we now know that the section of the treaty known as "the historical prologue" was "anything but formulaic."²⁵ Indeed, a closer examination of motivation clauses in the Hittite treaties and a recognition of the fact that we have relatively scant evidence from the neo-Assyrian period, together with the fact that history and law are actually bound together in Qedar treaty of the Assyrian period, should chasten some intellectual claims that have been made in the debate.²⁶ What do I mean? Kline had mitigated his claims about differences between treaties in light of the scant evidence in his book *Structure of Biblical Authority* (p. 150), but I agree with my colleague that this statement "should be amplified" given our available evidence and limited knowledge at this time (Van Ee, 17). Van Ee's statement is judicious in light of recent studies:

I think it is clear that the Hittite material provides a much closer parallel to the biblical covenants than the Neo-Assyrian, but both provide illuminating comparisons. And the biblical covenants are identical to neither. If Moses had been trying to copy a Hittite treaty, he could have

will demand engagement with the evidence cited and the manner in which it is organized in future discussions of treaty and covenant.

21. "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law" and "Covenant Forms in Israelite Traditions" in *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954): 20-46 and 50-76.

22. See Nicholson, *God and His People* or Weeks, *Admonition and Curse* for a history of the scholarship. Nicholson is clearer in his argumentation than Weeks, although I do not follow Nicholson's thesis, whose end result returns to Wellhausen's view that covenant was a late introduction in the prophetic period.

23. An even greater issue that emerges from these discussions will not be taken up at this point: whether interaction between the vassal-treaties and covenants in the ancient Near Eastern literature and the Bible signal for us whether the type of covenants are of grace or contract or both in some qualified sense.

24. M. G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* and M. G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

25. Joshua Van Ee, "Prologues, Treaties, and Apologetics: Another Look at the Historical Prologue," unpublished paper.

26. See W. Johnstone's review of Weeks' *Admonition and Curse* in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29.5 (2005): 175-76.

done a much better job. The biblical material is unique in many ways, so maybe it is best not to posit direct ties to other existing treaties to explain all the details.... We should also remember, that the biblical material is unique not only in some of its forms and elements, but more so in the fact that it contains the narrative of God making a covenant with Israel, not just the covenant document. So we cannot always discern what was in the document and what was a part of the ceremony or its accompanying instructions. All of this should cause us to limit our claims and rhetoric in the apologetic arena (18).

Such a chastening of previous held apologetic views, based on external extra-biblical proofs (now shown to be specious), should not be unsettling to the believing Christian's confidence in the biblical material. Our confidence in Scripture's inspiration and veracity does not hinge ultimately on the validity or cogency of external proofs.²⁷ This is not to say that there is not value in comparing the book of Deuteronomy with the treaties and covenants in the ancient Near East in order to note the unity of the whole vis-à-vis the divisive tendencies of source critics that want to make the book a piecemeal collection. In other words, there are extant extra-biblical documents that show the same kind of elements that Deuteronomy as a unified whole does and those individual elements are preserved in extra-biblical texts. Hence, this should give pause to anyone tempted to follow source critics that would undermine Deuteronomy as a unified and cogent whole.²⁸

B. Egyptian Wisdom Literature and the Bible

As Tremper Longman says, "When it comes to the background of Proverbs, most attention has been placed on wisdom writings recovered from Ancient Egypt. As noted ... the Bible itself recognizes the wisdom of Egypt (1 Kgs 4:29–31). Except for the Bible, no other ancient wisdom tradition has been so carefully studied."²⁹ *The Wisdom of Amenemope* is the document usually discussed at this point of comparison with Proverbs 22:17–24:22.³⁰ This section is bounded by 22:17, "words of the wise" and 24:23, which reads "these too, pertain to the wise." A careful comparative analysis of *Amenemope* seems to reveal that the Israelite sage "made suitable adjustments to reflect his own theology" (Overland, 284). This is especially the case, argues Overland, when the relative position of the proverbial sayings is taken into account, something which has not received due attention in past scholarship (Overland, 279). Although space restrictions prevent a detailed analysis,

Overland maintains that there are seventeen sayings in Prov. 22:17–24:22 that resemble parallel statements in *Amenemope*. Indeed, there is at least thematic overlap and at some points verbal correspondence as well (Overland, 280). Below, I list just five of the examples:

Example #1

In both these comparisons, the proverbs function as a kind of exordium.

Prov. 22:17–18a

"Incline your ear and hear words of wisdom: apply your heart to my knowledge. For it is pleasant if you guard them within you.

Amen. lii 9–11 (1:1–3)

"Lend your ears; hear what is said. Give your heart to interpret them. To them in your heart is advantageous."

Example #2

This continues the exordium, but both deal with one's speech.

Prov. 22:18b

"If they are established together on your lips...."

Amen. lii 16 (1:8)

"It shall be a mooring-post for your tongue...."

Example #3

Prov. 22:20

"Have I not written to you 30 [sayings] of counsels and knowledge?"

Amen. xxvii (30:1–2)

"You see for yourself these 30 chapters—they please, they educate.

Example #4

Prov. 22:29

"Do you see a man who is skilled in his work? He will stand before Kings. He will not stand before obscure men."

Amen. xxvii 16–17 (30:9–10)

"If a scribe is skilled in his office, he will find himself worthy of being a courtier."

Example #5

Prov. 23:5b

"Surely it will make wings for itself, and like an eagle fly heavenward."

Amen. x 4–5 (7:15–16)

"They have made themselves wings like geese; they have flown heavenward...."

In this last example, wealth takes wings and "eludes the miser's grasp" (Overland, 288). There are many

27. It does not follow that such a statement deprecates sound scholarship which can and is a tremendous benefit to the faith of the Christian.

28. A point made to good effect in Van Ee's paper.

29. Longman, *How To Read Proverbs* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 65.

30. See Paul Overland, "Structure in the Wisdom of Amenemope and Proverbs," in *Go To the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, ed. Joseph Coleson and Victor Matthews (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 275–291.

other parallels also on topics such as “moving boundary stones,” “the hot-headed man,” and also “wealth and toiling after riches.”

In short, what does Paul Overland conclude about these striking parallels? “Of the first seventeen sayings having *Amenemope* parallels, over sixty per cent are significantly positioned in the source document ... The chapter location of parallel sayings in *Amenemope* suggest that the Israelite writer excerpted statements that would most effectively summarize the longer Egyptian collection.... This pattern of borrowing (and sometimes adapting) significantly positioned implies that the Israelite sage was aware of the way *Amenemope* was structured” (Overland, 290).

Now that we have looked at two areas that have made a productive use of the comparative method for illuminating the Bible, I will turn to several areas that have proven less fruitful. The following examples will illustrate the complexity and difficulty of applying the comparative method to Old Testament study.

III. EXAMPLES OF FAILED USES OF THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

A. E.J. Young’s appeal to Heptadic Structures on the issue of creation days

Readers of this journal are probably familiar with E. J. Young’s book, *Studies in Genesis One*.³¹ If they should be unfamiliar with this work, it is an attempt to explain

31. E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, International Library of Philosophy and Theology, Biblical and Theological Studies, ed. J. Marcellus Kik (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964).

32. Some of the following material may be found in the Appendix section of the *Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation*, which is located in the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly: Meeting at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, June 2–8, 2004*.

33. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 66.

34. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the book of Genesis: Part I, Genesis 1–6:8* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press at the Hebrew University, 1961), 12–15.

35. See Levenson, *Creation*, 67 and Cassuto, *Genesis*, 12–15 for examples.

36. See, for example, Shalom Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the book of Amos* (Hermeneia Series; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991), 27–30 and Francis Anderson and David Noel Freeman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 24E; Garden City: Doubleday, 2000), 478–79. For a recent discussion of the use of numerical sequence in the book of Proverbs and a survey of recent investigations into the issue, see R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1995), 93–95.

the creation week and has a special interest in polemicizing against the so-called framework view of the creation days as interpreted by Young’s (at that time) younger colleague, Meredith G. Kline. Professor Young was exercised with Kline’s view for a number of reasons, but especially because of Kline’s non-chronological view of the days of creation. “And a non-chronological scheme destroys the reason for observance of a six-day week followed by a seventh day of rest” claimed Young (Young, 79). In order to support this point in his argument, Young goes on to suggest that “the scheme of six days followed by a seventh is also deeply embedded in the literature of the ancient near east” (Young, 79). He then cites passages from the Gilgamesh epic as well as various Ugaritic literature to bolster his point and concludes, “From the evidence just adduced it is clear that in the ancient near eastern world there was recognized a scheme of six successive days or items followed by a climactic seventh. In its best known form this scheme appears in the ordinary week. That man thus began to distinguish the days did not derive from chance. It is rooted in the very creation” (Young, 81). In short, this is an argument using the comparative method. Therefore, I will now examine the evidence to see if Professor Young has rightly handled the evidence.³²

The heptadic (sevenfold) structure of Genesis one is perhaps the most significant formal feature distinguishing it from its ancient Near Eastern counterparts.³³ Nevertheless, it is also important to say that “the absence of the idea of creation in seven days elsewhere in the ancient Near East must not be taken to mean that Genesis 1:1–2:3 is radically discontinuous with its cultural background” (Levinson, 68). The heptadic structure of the text extends to levels well beyond the mere use of numbers, as was pointed out by the conservative Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto many years ago.³⁴ Multiples of seven, artistically arranged, can be observed throughout the text, revealing its sophistication and beauty.³⁵

The importance of the number seven (as a symbol of completeness) is a concept with an ancient pedigree. Especially germane to this topic are the many recent studies dealing with the “graded numerical sequence.” This pattern, commonly known as X,X + 1 (and X,X – 1 less frequently) has received serious and sustained study in recent years.³⁶ What we will observe is that the evidence undermines E.J. Young’s argument, or at least represents a picture much more complex than Young presented.

A well-known example of this “graded” numerical saying from the Bible is Proverbs 30:18–19. In his 1962 study, Roth concluded that these formulas (X,X + 1)

occur at least thirty-eight times in various forms in the Old Testament and the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus. Then in 1965, his more in-depth study notes that these formulas occur in both wisdom literature and narrative literature in the Old Testament. Especially significant is his conclusion that the formulas are sometimes used to express an indefinite number and sometimes they are used to express a definite number. Sometimes the use of the graded numerical is *sui generis*, in other words, its use is unique stylistically and structurally, as it is, for example, in the book of Amos (Paul, 27). The graded numerical sequence is a pattern that is not merely restricted to the Semitic languages and literatures; rather, it is present in Sumerian texts (non-Semitic), in Hittite texts (Indo European, ancient Anatolia),³⁷ and in Greek literature.³⁸ This phenomenon continued at least six centuries after Christ as evidenced from an incantation bowl inscribed with Aramaic.³⁹ Although the material from Egypt doesn't seem to speak to the issue of graded numerical sayings as it might have a bearing on the issue of creation days in the Bible, when the use of numbers is examined in other areas of ancient Near East (e.g. in the Akkadian material from Mesopotamia and in Ugaritic texts from the Northwest Semitic area), there are texts recording either a numerical sequence or a heptadic pattern and sometimes a graded numerical sequence that do have a bearing on the discussion of creation. As Roth noted in his 1962 study, "there are numerous passages in ancient Near Eastern Literature which show that the numerical sequence X/X + 1 was a firmly well known poetic device, employed in the two halves of verses exhibiting parallelism (Roth, "Numerical Sequence," 304).

In the Akkadian texts (East Semitic), this number parallelism is primarily, although not exclusively, found in incantations (Andersen and Freedman, 479). For example, texts on fortune telling are built on a pattern of seven.⁴⁰ Texts with the burning of seven objects and a goddess laying on a sick person use the pattern of seven as well. Here, interestingly, the seven accounts all differ from one another but they have the same ending, saying, "The goddess come out, I see light" (Loewenstamm, 33). Striking is the fact that the seventh has an added festive introduction which marks the importance of the seventh day and emphasizes it!

A similar pattern is observed in a well-known passage from Gilgamesh (as was noted by Young). In tablet XI: 141–146, we encounter the following [see text as presented at the top of the page].

"One day, a second day, Mount Nisir held the ship fast and did not let it rise.
A third day, a fourth day, Mount Nisir held the ship fast and did not let it rise.
A fifth day, a sixth (day) Mount Nisir held the ship fast and did not let it rise.
When the seventh day arrived, I sent forth and set a dove free...."

(Translated by Loewenstamm)⁴¹

The pattern (as rightly noted by Loewenstamm) begins with an action about to take place, then repetition of a pair of days with the refrain repeated three times. It is a clear example of graded numerical sequence (X,X + 1). Therefore, this pairing of numbers is common and expected in the ancient Near Eastern world and the Bible's own world, especially in poetry. Sometimes it may have even been automatic, and as Haran says, "It has been correctly remarked that such an employment of numbers is foreign to our modern Western taste, but it fits ancient oriental poetry" (Haran, 240). It was this pattern as it was known in East Semitic (Akkadian) that influenced Northwest Semitic practice (Canaanite and Ugaritic).

In other words, the pattern was picked up by the Ugaritic scribes (Northwest Semitic along the coast of modern Syria) and used in the Epic literature and other types of literature as well. Consider, for example, a passage from Aqhat (also quoted in part by Young):

*Now Daniel, man of Rapiu
The hero, man of the Harnemite,
Slaughters an ox for the Katharat,
Dines the Katharat,
And wines the moon's radiant daughters.*

*One day, and a second,
He dines the Katharat,
And wines the moon's radiant
Daughters.
A third, a fourth day,
He dines the Katharat,*

37. Menehem Haran, "The Graded Numerical Sequence and the Phenomenon of Automatism in Biblical Poetry," *Studia in Veteris Testamenti* 22 (1972), 238–267 but especially 242.

38. See W. M. W. Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* XIII (Leiden, Brill, 1965).

39. See W. M. W. Roth, "The Numerical Sequence x/x + 1 in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962), 300–311, especially 307.

40. Samuel Loewenstamm, *The Tradition of the Exodus in its Development* (Jerusalem, The Hebrew University at the Magnes Press, 1965), 32–35 [in Hebrew].

41. Loewenstamm, "The Seven-Day-Unit in Ugaritic Epic Literature," in *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Verlag Butzon & Berker Kevlaer, 1980), 192–93.

And wines the moon's radiant
 Daughters.
 A fifth, a sixth day,
 He dines the Katharat,
 And wines the moon's radiant
 Daughters.
 Then on the seventh day,
 The Katharat leaves his house,
 The moon's radiant daughters.⁴²

Although those at Ugarit were influenced by the Akkadian pattern (X, X + 1), the numerical pattern evidenced in the earlier Akkadian texts (often used in the scribal schools at Ugarit) went through a process of breakdown in the Ugaritic literature with the Keret epic evidencing the “last stage of the evolvement of the numerical scheme in Ugaritic literature” (Loewenstamm, “The Seven-Day-Unit,” 200).

In the Keret Epic, we encounter a number of texts where Il (the god) commands Keret to perform deeds for the duration of six days and then culminate in the desired event which takes place on the seventh day (Loewenstamm, “The Seven-Day-Unit,” 200).

- - - halt, a day and a second,
 A third day, and a fourth,
 A fifth day and a sixth.
 Fire none of your arrows into the
 City,
 None of your hand-flung stones.
 Then, at sunrise, on the seventh,
 King Pauli will sleep no more.
 (Keret I iii, lines 10–15)⁴³

Il's order, as Loewenstamm points out, was preceded by a similar command earlier in the same column:

Like a locust swarm, they'll inhabit the
 Steppe;
 Like crickets, the desert's edge.

42. Translation by Simon Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series (Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 56–57.

43. The following translations from *Keret* are done by Edward L. Greenstein, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series, (Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 16.

44. Indeed, Loewenstamm notes that at least one translator was troubled enough by this observation to propose emending the text to “five” instead of “four.”

March a day, and then a second;
 A third day, and a fourth;
 A fifth day, and a sixth.
 Then, at sunrise, on the seventh:
 When you arrive at Udum the great,
 Arrive at Udum majestic.
 (Keret I iii, lines 1–4) (Greensteing, 15–16).

Later, the expression of the command is represented but a rather surprising thing happens: “the passage which describes the execution of the command expands the framework of the action which had been delineated in the command itself—a modification which constitutes a revolutionary innovation in the history of Ugaritic literature” (Loewenstamm, “The Seven-Day-Unit,” 203–04). They read:

Like a locust swarm, they inhabit the
 Steppe;
 Like crickets, the desert's edge.
 They march a day, and a second.
 Then at sunrise on the third,
 He arrives at the shrine of Asherah of
 Tyre,
 At the shrine of the Goddess of
 Sidon.
 He there makes a vo[w, Ki]rta the
 Noble:
 “As Asherah of Tyrians lives,
 The Goddess of the Sidonians,
 If I take Huraya into my palace,
 And have the girl enter my court,
 Her two parts I'll make silver,
 Her third part I'll make gold!”

He marches a day, and a second,
 A third day, and a fourth.
 Then sunrise on the fourth,
 He arrives at Udum the great.
 (Keret I iv. 29–48) (Greenstein, 19–20).

Since the text says that the second part of the action lasted for a duration of four days, as Loewenstamm says, “we would therefore expect to read that the new event occurred on the fifth day—the same day on which the previous action had terminated” (Greenstein, “The Seven-Day-Unit,” 203).⁴⁴ But if it were changed, then Keret would have reached Udum on the eighth day, not the seventh! How are we to explain this development? Loewenstamm indicates:

The author has here attempted to describe a new but secondary occurrence that took place on the third day in addition to the new and major event that occurred on the seventh day ... [he could have written otherwise]. The fact that the author did not formulate the second part in this manner is however quite understandable. For as we have observed earlier, Ugaritic literary tradition required that the days in which the action takes place be enumerated in groups of two, whereas the formulation dictated by our own logic must, perforce, isolate the third day in which the action continued to take place and leave it without a chronological partner! The author, then, did not entirely succeed in resolving the new problem and enmeshed himself in difficulties that generally confront all innovators. This does not mean that the author's innovation was a *creation ex nihilo*. Actually it appears to have been confined to the attempt to superimpose a three-day scheme on the original seven-day scheme (Loewenstamm, "The Seven-Day-Unit," 203–04).

There is, consequently, in the Keret text a modification in the numeric scheme that constitutes "a revolutionary innovation in the history of Ugaritic literature" (Loewenstamm, "The Seven-Day-Unit," 201–02), i.e., in the numeric scheme of the strict pattern of a day and a second, a third day and a fourth, culminating in the seventh. This pertinent passage was noted by Young but it *was not treated fully by him*. Therefore, he misinterpreted the evidence. This passage (from the Keret Epic) when quoted in its full context actually represents the last stage of "the evolution of the numerical scheme in Ugaritic literature" (Loewenstamm, "The Seven-Day-Unit," 200).

As a competent authority on these matters, Loewenstamm thinks that the "numerical schemes ... have also left their mark on biblical literature" (204). Nevertheless, his opinion is that there are fundamental differences between the biblical creation account numerical pattern and the Akkadian-Ugaritic pattern. For example, he states, "The cosmogonic account in Genesis 1 is generally cited as a classical example of the seven-day scheme. But this scheme [i.e., the biblical one] differs fundamentally from the Akkadian-Ugaritic scheme discussed here in that a new event takes place on each of the six days of creation and each day contains a narrative of its own" (205).

Now I return to the question which E.J. Young really introduced: can the ancient Near Eastern material—specifically the scheme of six plus one—help us determine whether Genesis one provides a chronological

sequence? Young thought yes; I think that the answer is emphatically no. The above evidence, albeit only partial, has demonstrated that the material from the extant Near Eastern texts cannot be used to prove that one interpretation of the sequence of the days in Genesis one is right while other interpretations are wrong. Nor can the sequential use of the six and one pattern from the texts of the ancient Near East even be said to place the burden of proof on those who would affirm or deny the rigidity of the sequential use of the days in the biblical text of Genesis one. This is for several reasons.

First, the issue of sorting out the material from the ancient Near East is complex—much more so than E.J. Young made it appear. Some of the texts quoted by Young and others, for example, from the ancient Near Eastern materials in attempts to prove a necessary sequence are fundamentally different than Genesis one: they follow a graded numerical sequence (i.e., X,X+1) and do not represent a new event taking place on each of the six days with a narrative describing a new event (as we have in Genesis 1:1–2:3). Moreover, at Ugarit, the evidence testifies to the breakdown of the sequential pattern and reveals at the latest stage a scheme (in a text actually quoted by Young) which, when the full context is taken into consideration, demonstrates a "revolutionary innovation" in expected numerical schemes. Other studies could be cited which would bring us into even more detailed evidence on the subject, but this discussion would take us too far away from the immediate points under discussion.⁴⁵

Secondly, some of the texts quoted in an attempt to prove "a scheme of six successive days or items followed by a climactic seventh" (Young, 81) have nothing to do with creation. Indeed, even if such a simple pattern could be demonstrated in the ancient Near Eastern material, the meaning of the pattern of days in the early chapters of Genesis must be decided by the literary standards of the context of those inspired chapters of holy Scripture, and not by any alleged established pattern in extra-biblical material. Having stated that, the question of cultural influence upon the biblical text of creation remain difficult, complex, and occasionally illuminating (more on this will be discussed under Peter Enns and mythology below). In short, Young's treatment was an oversimplification and was wrong. Now I will turn to another area of research in the comparative method

45. Yitzchak Avishur, "The Numerical Sequence in the Bible and other Semitic Literature in the Near East," in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Hebrew University, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 1–9 [in Hebrew].

and the Old Testament: the origin of the personification of wisdom in the Bible.

B. Wisdom literature parallels on the issue of personification

Regrettably, the proverbs of Ahiqar have been neglected as a source of comparative information in studies of the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, with most of the attention turning to Egyptian writings as the

46. See Christa Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*, WMANT, 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966) and *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheit*, Biblische Studien 55 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969).

47. Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Longman goes further than Waltke in recognizing the importance of Ahiqar; however, he doesn't go far enough probably—at least in part—because of his dependence upon the outdated work of Lindenberg.

48. John Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel," in *Wisdom in Israel*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63.

49. An exception is the recent and fine commentary by Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ABC 18A (Doubleday, 2000). However, as will be shown below, in relying upon Lindenberg, Fox's treatment needs additional nuance and refinement.

50. Lindenberg, "Ahiqar: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, ed. James J. Charlesworth, 491. First of all, although sometimes the dating of a book in the Bible can have a tremendous significance for interpreting the book, I don't think that this is the case with Proverbs. See also Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*. Whybray starts with the late nineteenth century and then continues up to the present (1995) and traces thirteen significant studies that have contributed to a substantive discussion on the composition of the Book of Proverbs. He concludes that the traditional view, i.e., the view that attributes the parts directly attributed to Solomon to the authorship of Solomon and then also states that he collected the other parts not attributed to him, "has long been given up in critical scholarship" (p. 150). Even so, it is possible that Solomon did write some of the proverbs attributed to him (cf., I Kings 4–5); however, in the end we probably have a composition that represents "many domains of ancient Israelite society through numerous generations" (Fox, *Proverbs*, 11). See Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 26, who states that, "Whether 1–9 itself has a history of growth is an open question," 26. In fairness to Kidner, however, he does see chapters 8 and 9 as marked with antiquity.

51. Much of what follows in this section is adapted from a paper delivered 28 July 2004 at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Groningen, Netherlands.

52. Thanks to Bruce Zuckerman and the West Semitic Research and *Inscriptifacit* Projects at the University of Southern California.

53. A full treatment of the tradition of Ahiqar may be found in Max Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionem*, OBO 26 (Universitäts-

background for biblical wisdom.⁴⁶ In scholarly literature, for example, *Amenemope* is the document usually discussed as an example of foreign influence on the book of biblical proverbs, as was discussed above. Recent commentaries on Proverbs have shown very little progress in this area.⁴⁷

This is at the very least intriguing since as John Day has stated, "it [i.e., Ahiqar] is one of the very few ancient Near Eastern wisdom compositions that can claim to be contemporary with the Old Testament."⁴⁸ Indeed, a closer comparative study of the Ahiqar material with the proverbs of the Hebrew Bible is a desideratum.⁴⁹ Consider, for example, what Lindenberg says:

If it is correct that the proverbial portion of the text represents sayings current among the Aramaic-speaking population of Syria in the sixth or seventh century (or even earlier), that is of particular importance for the study of the Old Testament wisdom literature. It means that in this text, as in no other, we have an independent record of the wisdom traditions of one of Israel's immediate neighbors, dating from the period when much of Israel's own wisdom literature was being formed and collected.⁵⁰

Such a close contemporary witness, one that had close proximity to Israel during the formation of her own wisdom literature, surely is a desideratum and therefore warrants closer examination. This section of the article, however, is seeking to isolate one area—*personification*—and discuss the possible influence of Ahiqar on the biblical Proverbs.⁵¹

This section of the article, therefore, will reexamine the claim for the personification of wisdom in Ahiqar and its parallel in Proverbs 8 using the latest scholarly tools at our disposal. This will include the fine critical edition of Aramaic literary documents by Porten and Yardeni and also some high-resolution photographs.⁵² Before comparing these two works, however, let me say a few more words of introduction with respect to Ahiqar, since the text's history and importance may be somewhat new to some readers.

The Aramaic tale of Ahiqar from Elephantine (Egypt) is the earliest source of the various ancient versions.⁵³

verlag: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 319–411. See also Jonas C. Greenfield, "The Wisdom of Ahiqar," in *Wisdom in Israel*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43–54, especially 43. The figure of Ahiqar is also known from the book of Tobit, the Apocrypha, and the later Syriac tradition, and there are Armenian and Arabic texts of the tale of Ahiqar as well. For an accessible and fuller rendition of the Ahiqar story incorporating later renditions, see Lawrence M.

Although classifying Aramaic dialects has been the subject of much discussion,⁵⁴ the Elephantine text of Ahiqar is written in OfA (Official Aramaic),⁵⁵ by which I mean the standard to which scribes in the Persian period conformed their writing.⁵⁶ This extant Aramaic version of Ahiqar dates from about the fifth century BCE and was discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century,⁵⁷ although the origin of the composition probably dates back to the seventh century BCE.⁵⁸

The figure of Ahiqar is known from many different sources as the chief counselor to the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. For the past century, a vigorous debate has raged as to the provenance and cultural background of the sayings attributed to him. Until recently it was often assumed that the Aramaic version found at Elephantine was merely a translation of a lost Akkadian text. E. Y. Kutscher and J. C. Greenfield have demonstrated, however, that the language of the sayings and the framework narrative are written in two different dialects of Aramaic. In the last two decades, there has been a growing consensus that Aramaic was, in fact, the document's original language.⁵⁹ Supplementary material from the later Syriac and other versions of Ahiqar is needed to complete the logic of the framework story, which is not complete in its OfA version.⁶⁰

When studying the proverbs in Ahiqar and the role of personification, an important question is raised and

Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends*. HDR 26. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 44–49.

54. See M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation*. OLA 68. (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 7–9 for a recent synopsis on the history of Aramaic studies, especially of the Achaemenid period. Folmer argues for great linguistic diversity among the Aramaic texts from the Achaemenid period (538–333 BCE).

55. Douglas M. Gropp, "Imperial Aramaic," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. Eric M. Myers; 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.144–46, especially 145. Classifying Aramaic dialects has been the subject of much discussion. See, for example, M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation*. OLA 68. (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 7–9 for a recent synopsis on the history of Aramaic studies, especially of the Achaemenid period. Folmer argues for great linguistic diversity among the Aramaic texts from the Achaemenid period (538–333 BCE).

56. See Douglas M. Gropp, "The Language of the Samaria Papyri: A Preliminary Study," *Maarav* 5–6 (1990): 169–187. Gropp defines Official Aramaic as "the ideal standard dialect of the Persian period to which Aramaic scribes evidently aspired to conform when drafting documents of an official nature. Any given Aramaic text of the Persian period may adhere more or less to this standard dialect. It is noteworthy that genre is a considerably more significant factor in differentiating between those texts which deviate from the standard, than either geographical, chronological, or ethnic provenience. Thus the Aramaic of private letters deviates somewhat from the OfA of the legal and administrative documents. In my view, then, the Aramaic of the private

keenly debated: should Lady Wisdom be understood as a personification (the poet treating something non-human as if it were) or as a goddess (i.e., a hypothesis)?"

letters from Hermopolis is a complex product of the interference between the standard OfA and the local vernacular. The deviations from the standard give us the best clue as to the character of this vernacular. In fact, a systematic grammatical description of the Elephantine legal papyri, the Samaria papyri, and the Arsames correspondence (with due respect to the variation between these groups of texts) could constitute the nucleus for a more comprehensive grammar of OfA," 170.

57. Bezalel Porten, *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translation* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976). Porten states in the foreword, "The archive of the communal leader Jedaniah was discovered by O. Rubensohn in excavations conducted in 1906 and was published by Ed. Sachau in 1907 and in full in 1911. The discoveries of Rubensohn included miscellaneous legal documents, lists, and copies of the Words of Ahiqar and the Behistun Inscription," iii.

58. John Day, "Foreign Semitic influence," 55–70 and especially page 63. Also see J. Lindenberg, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*, 20; Ingo Kottsieper, *Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche*. BZAW 194. (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1990), 241–6; and J. C. Greenfield, "The Wisdom of Ahiqar," in *Wisdom in Israel*, 43–52.

59. James M. Lindenberg, "The Gods of Ahiqar," *UF* 14 (1982): 105–118, especially 105–106.

60. The framework story of the Ahiqar narrative contains a number of Akkadian loan words. The proverbs of Ahiqar are basically OfA with an admixture of some Westernisms. See, for example, J. C. Greenfield, "The Dialects of Early Aramaic," *JNES* 37 (1978): 93–99; J. M. Lindenberg, *Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*; Also see F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Story of Ahiqar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions*. Second Edition, Enlarged and Corrected (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1913). In light of these later versions, the story of Ahiqar can be recounted as follows. Ahiqar, who was the wise counselor to king Sennacherib and subsequently to his son Esarhaddon, was himself childless and without a successor. Therefore, Ahiqar appointed his nephew Nadin (or, Nadan) as his successor and heir. Nadin proved himself untrustworthy, and Ahiqar soon became the victim of his nephew's court intrigue. Nadin formed a plot in which his benevolent uncle was saddled with trumped-up charges of treason and consequently was condemned to die by the king. Nabusumiskum, who had previously experienced the mercy of Ahiqar himself, was appointed by King Esarhaddon to carry out the death penalty against Ahiqar. Ahiqar, who had formerly hidden Nabusumiskum in his time of crisis, was in turn hidden by him. Meanwhile a eunuch was slain in Ahiqar's stead—unbeknownst to the king. (We also know the conclusion to the rest of the story from the versions, the so-called Egyptian interlude, although Greenfield points out that the interlude is usually considered a late addition to the Ahiqar tradition, the reason being that a justification for Ahiqar's coming out of hiding was needed). Egypt challenged the Assyrian monarch to a contest with the winner receiving tribute from the loser. King Esarhaddon despaired at the prospect of having to pay a very costly tribute since his wisest courtier had been supposedly put to death. On learning of the survival of Ahiqar, the Assyrian monarch dispatched him to Egypt, where he quickly proved his wisdom and won a handsome revenue from Egypt for his Assyrian liege.

This is keenly debated.⁶¹ In my own view, personification as a literary device is the best explanation of Lady Wisdom. The ancients were tremendously sophisticated and well able to use metaphor and abstraction in ways that boggle the mind by their genius. Such an assertion needs further justification and argumentation and there is much in the way of renewed discussion about the role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Although I hope to do future work integrating the findings of these scholars and recent work on personification, a discussion of this is

61. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, pp. 331 and following for different positions. See the position of David Noel Freedman and Fox in Fox's commentary, p. 354. Freedman says: "Lady Wisdom emerges as superhuman, a heavenly person, and a companion of God from before Creation: that's a goddess in my book!" See the excellent book by Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985).

62. Murphy, *Proverbs*, 55. XXXX

63. R. N. Whybray, "Proverbs VIII 22–31 and its Supposed Prototypes," *VT* 15 (1965): 504–514. Also, see Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, ABC 18A (Doubleday, 2000), 293–95; 331–45; and 352–59.

64. Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972) 144–176, especially 153. In fairness to Von Rad he states, "But what does all this prove? Only that ideas which had their roots elsewhere came to Israel's help when she needed them, in order to be able to progress in her thinking within her own domain. For in the process of this transference of foreign ideas to the Hebrew thoughtworld, many of them have become completely different. What is described in Prov. 8 as 'wisdom,' as world order, can be compared only with difficulty with the Egyptian concept of Maat. It has no divine status, nor is it a hypostasized attribute of Yahweh; it is, rather, something created by Yahweh and assigned to its proper function." For a thorough rebuttal of the idea of the goddess *Maat* being a model for Woman Wisdom, see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 335–336, and also 288.

65. Although the West Semitic Research and *Inscriptifact* projects have helped to ameliorate that problem.

66. Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3, *Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1993), 23; (hereafter, *TAD C*).

67. Porten and Yardeni, *TAD C*, 23. They state, "Four plates (A–D) with five columns cover the narrative (lines 1–78) and seven plates (E–H, J–L) with nine columns present the proverbs (lines 79–222).

68. E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraca aus einer jüdischen Militärkolonie zu Elephantine. Altorientalische Sprachdenkmäler des 5. Jahrhunderts vor Chr.* Volume 2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911). Sachau arranged the proverbs in the order J, E–G, K, H, L.

69. P. Grelot, "Histoire et sagesse de 'Ahiqar l'assyrien," *Documents araméens d'Égypte, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient* 5 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1972), pp. 427–434 [introduction, translation, notes]. Grelot inserted the proverbs into the narrative itself in the following order (A, J, E–G, K, H, L, B–D).

70. Ingo Kottsieper, *Die Sprache der Ahiqar-Sprüche*, BZAW 194 (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1990). Kottsieper's order of the proverbs was G, K, J, E–F, H, L.

71. Basically, a piece of writing material with effaced earlier writing of some kind on which later writing material has been superimposed.

72. Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1999) 16–17.

beyond the scope of this article since the objectives of this discussion are different than that major undertaking. We now turn to the first step in understanding the relationship between the personification of Wisdom in biblical Proverbs and possible prototypes. As Professor Murphy has stated regarding Proverbs 8:22–31, "No other passage in Proverbs has enjoyed the *Nachleben* [afterlife] that vv 22–31 has had."⁶² As is well known, many prototypes have been suggested for Proverbs 8:22–31.⁶³ Gerhard Von Rad's famous chapter, "The Self-Revelation of Creation," attributes the personified entity of wisdom at least in part to the Egyptian concept of Maat.⁶⁴ Others have followed more recently in the same vein but their arguments have been rebutted as well.

Most of the remains from Elephantine Ahiqar are located in the Berlin Museum, although some text remains at the Cairo Museum. Lindenberger conceded in his scholarly study of Ahiqar that "a new publication of photographs of the Ahiqar papyrus is a desideratum."⁶⁵ This is directly related to one issue that is crucial in this analysis is the proposed order of the columns, which I will discuss now.

According to Porten and Yardeni, the words of Ahiqar "may originally have comprised as many as twenty-one columns ... but only fourteen are preserved in whole or in part, and these are spread across eleven plates."⁶⁶ As Porten and Yardeni observe, the right order of the columns has been a matter of debate from the beginning of the discovery.⁶⁷ Sachau, for example, arranged the columns in one way.⁶⁸ Next, Grelot inserted the proverbs into the narrative account.⁶⁹ More recently, Ingo Kottsieper proposed yet another order for the proverbs.⁷⁰

I myself am following the order of the columns suggested by Porten and Yardeni. Their proposal for the order of plates finds solid justification because of the identification of a palimpsest.⁷¹ Building on earlier work but suggesting a different order, they argue, "Our decipherment of the erased Customs Account on the recto and verso reveals a succession of the Egyptian months which provides an objective criterion for a different ordering of the plates (Porten and Yardeni, *TAD C*, 23). The important point in this clarification of ordering of columns is that it effectively removes line 94b from the immediate following line 95. This has consequences for the interpretation of the personification of wisdom in Ahiqar, as will be discussed below.

As mentioned previously, Professor Fox notes that only "once in foreign Wisdom literature is wisdom personified—in the Aramaic Ahiqar, 11. 94b–95" (Fox, 332). He follows Lindenberger's reconstruction. Other recent commentaries make similar statements.⁷²

[מִן] שְׁמִיָּן [חַנַּן] יְנוּ עַמְמָא
 [חַכְּ] מִזֵּה [מִן] אֱלֹהִיא [הַ] יְ
 (94b)

אִף לְאֱלֹהִין יִקְ[וּ] רַה הִי
 ע[וֹד] לְעַלְמֵי [מִן] לָהּ [מַלְכוּתָא
 בְּשָׁמַיָּן שִׁימָה הִי
 כִּי בַעַל קִדְשָׁן נִשְׂאָה [הַ]
 (95)

From heaven the peoples receive favor.
 Wisdom is from the gods.

Also, she is precious to the gods.
 Rulership is hers f[or eve]r.
 She/it has been placed in heaven,
 Because the lord of the holy ones has exalted her.
 (Fox's translation, 332–33).

Lindenberger's reconstruction is given above, with Professor Fox's translation:⁷³

The similarities between Proverbs 8 and this reconstruction by Lindenberger are striking indeed. As Professor Fox suggests:

The passage (as reconstructed) speaks of wisdom as an eternal entity given by the gods to humanity and thus distinct from both. The personification is inchoate, not developed. The next sentence says she has been "placed" or "laid away" (*symlh*). This verb, together with the statement of wisdom's preciousness, pictures wisdom as a treasure rather than as a person (cf., 3:15; 8:11). There are significant similarities between the personification of wisdom in Ahiqar and Proverbs. In Prov 8, Wisdom is in effect "from God," though that locution is not used. Though Lady Wisdom in Proverbs does not reign, she is the means of righteous rule (8:15–16). She is not exactly *in* heaven, but she was with god when he created it (v 27). And like wisdom in Ahiqar, Lady wisdom is precious (v 11) (Fox, 332–33).

For Fox, "inchoate" seems to mean undeveloped. He says previously, "The personification of wisdom evolves from a trope found elsewhere in Proverbs, namely inchoate personification, where person metaphors are used in passing but not developed as figures" (Fox, 331).

In spite of these striking similarities, however, it is time to recalibrate judgments of the parallels between the two passages, Proverbs 8 and Ahiqar saying 13 (in Lindenberger's reconstruction). In other words, if Porten and Yardeni are correct, which it seems they undoubtedly are based upon their ordering of the columns relative to the palimpsest, then this removes the immediate antecedent from 95. If these two proverbs are to be separated along the lines of a more careful reconstruction of the column order as suggested by Porten and Yardeni, then this entails a more judicious evaluation of whether feminine pronouns in the text

can unqualifiedly be referenced to "Deity and Wisdom." That is what Porten and Yardeni do in the marginal note of their critical edition, which *de facto* identifies the feminine pronoun in the reconstructed text with Wisdom. My point is that this is conjectured, not the actual material reading of the Aramaic text. On a personal note, this research and discovery was very disappointing to me. I had hoped when I embarked upon this study in the comparative method, that I might actually find the triggering mechanism for personification of Wisdom in Proverbs in the Aramaic text of Ahiqar.

In light of my findings, although I think Professor Fox's fine commentary on Proverbs was misguided by his reliance on Lindenberger's dissertation and its construction of the columns (quoted above), his final comments on personification in Proverbs are more judicious. He proposes, "The personification of wisdom has no exact parallel elsewhere in the Bible or ancient Wisdom literature" (Fox, 331).⁷⁵ In fact, in the very fine summary and evaluation of the various prototypes of

73. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 68, says, "Behind the fragmentary texts of these lines can be discerned an ancient Aramaic hymn in praise of wisdom.... The imagery of wisdom's 'kingdom' and 'exaltation' is reminiscent of the poetic personification of Wisdom in Prov. 1–9 (especially Prov. 8) and later Jewish literature."

74. See Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 68, translated "From heaven the peoples are favored; Wisdom is of the gods. Indeed, she is precious to the gods; Her kingdom is *et[er]nal*. She has been established by Šamayn; Yea, the Holy Lord has exalted her." As John Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence," points out, "Although the word for wisdom ... has to be partially reconstructed, this reading is generally accepted" 70. Day also states, "Although it has sometimes been supposed that the personification of Yahweh's Wisdom in Proverbs took place in Israel quite independently, the parallel in Ahiqar makes it more natural to suppose that this is yet another instance in which Israel was indebted to the West Semitic tradition," 70.

75. This seems much more measured than the recent statement by Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT, who says, "The striking similarities in form and concepts between vv. 22–31 [chapter 8] and the Egyptian texts [coffin texts] suggest that Solomon invested an Egyptian literary form with Israel's ethical monotheism," 408.

“models” for Lady Wisdom that have been suggested (Fox, 331–45). Michael Fox concludes:

While we can tease out some of the literary, mythological, and real-life background images that entered into the portrayal of Lady Wisdom, we should remember that *are* background and are not to be equated with Lady Wisdom (Fox, 341).

Nevertheless, Fox continues to trace the growth of the personification from earlier literary stages but concludes, “The existence of inchoate personification shows that the full-fledged personification of wisdom is an organic literary development in the book of Proverbs” (Fox, 332). The personification of wisdom in Proverbs is *sui generis*, i.e., of its own kind. That is not to say that there was no outside influence. Nor is this to fall into the trap of the fundamentalistic (Meir Malul’s term) who avoids foreign influence and independence upon the biblical texts at all costs. Rather, it is a cautious statement based upon the best evidence at this particular time. Now I will turn from a discussion of Wisdom to a discussion of creation.

C. Enns’ appeal to myth and the early chapters of Genesis

The readers of this journal are probably well aware of the firestorm created by the publication of Peter Enns’ book, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*.⁷⁶ After leaving Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Enns became a biblical studies fellow at the “Biologos Foundation,” a science and Scripture think tank, and has published on the “Biologos Forum” regularly on the web on issues pertinent to creation. In this article, I will not engage the numerous questions and issues raised by Enns’ book except for one area which is directly related to the subject of this article: the comparative method, creation and the use of myth. First, I wish to discuss the topic of “myth.”

Most controversies about myth, according to C. Stephen Evans, seem to stem from “the purpose or function of myths, and the truth of myths.”⁷⁷ The crucial question for him, and for me as well, is observing anyone’s view of myth and whether “any of these views of myth, some myths might embody historical truth” (Evans, 51). This is crucial, because in ordinary language myth is understood as implying “unhistorical.” I state this up front because I disagree with Enns’ views but I also want to retain some category of “myth” properly defined. Now I will discuss Enns.

One of the major areas that created such critical response to Enns’ book was his engagement with concepts of ancient Near Eastern myth and the topic of how the Old Testament was influenced by these categories, especially with regard to its magisterial creation narrative in Gen. 1–3.⁷⁸ Before I interact with Enns, I will discuss my own current thinking on the relationship between the similarities and differences in the ancient Near Eastern creation epics and the Old Testament account.⁷⁹

Although no “ancient Near Eastern counterpart matched the biblical account concept for concept,”⁸⁰ it is striking to enumerate some of the similarities and differences between the Old Testament creation account and its neighbors. Lambert (and others) has long recognized some significant parallels between Mesopotamian and Hebrew accounts of creation.⁸¹ For example, there seems to be a very similar general outline of events in Genesis 1–11 to the Mesopotamian materials. The overall scheme in Genesis 1–11 is similar to the Babylonian histories: Creation-Rebellion-Flood.⁸² With regard to the creation account, however, Lambert is extremely cautious about positing any kind of dependence upon the Babylonian materials. The fact that the cosmos is cleft into parts in the ancient cosmologies has parallels in

76. See footnote #3. Numerous reviews and even books have been written in response to *Inspiration and Incarnation*. For history, and just some of the bibliography and response to the issues raised by Enns’ book, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008) and D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), especially 255–283. I am not necessarily agreeing with all the critiques or conclusions of the previous two books, but they will allow the reader to observe some of the history of the response to Enns’ book. Although Beale’s book contains some of Enns’ own response to critics, it also provides for the reader the relevant bibliographical material if one wishes to pursue the full text of Enns’ own responses to his critics.

77. C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49.

78. The gist of Enns’ discussion can be read especially on pages 49–56 under the subheading, “Is Genesis Myth or History?”

79. Some of the following material may be found also in the *Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (see footnote #32).

80. John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 73.

81. W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” in *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 107.

82. A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian ‘Genesis Story’ Story,” *Tynedale Bulletin* 18 (1967): 3–18, especially 6ff.

Sumerian King List	Atrahasis	Eridu Genesis	Genesis 1-11
1. Creation assumed; kingship came down from heaven	1. Creation assumed; gods create humans to do their work	1. Creation; cities are instituted	1. Creation (1-2)
2. Series of eight kings in five cities	2. Noisy humans alienate deities	2. [Alienation]	2. Alienation (3) genealogies (4-5)
3. The flood	3. The flood; ark	3. The flood; ark	3. Flood; ark (6-9)
4. Kingship again; Dynasties follow to	4. New start	4. New start	4. New start; then genealogies, down to
5. "Modern times"	(5. Modern times, implied)	(5. Modern times implied)	5. "Modern times"

("Modern times" = about the beginning of the second millennium)

almost every tradition (Lambert, 103). It is true that the act of creation in the biblical account and the mythologies is described in terms of separation (e.g. Genesis 1:14) and this has been duly noted by others.⁸³ Nevertheless, the differences do seem greater than the similarities. Even in this act of separation, it is possible that the biblical author was not working under the aegis of pagan cosmologies as much as trying to "overcome it" (Hasel quoting Westermann, 9).

At least one Egyptian account, like the Hebrew cosmology, has been identified as showing similarity because of the role of the creative word (the so-called logos doctrine) in its cosmology (Currid, 60ff.). However, N. M. Sarna considers the comparison merely superficial.⁸⁴ Again, there seems to be more distance than similarity at this point. For in Genesis 1, there is a complete absence of any notion of magic utterance (Hasel, 12).

When it comes to the matter of the Flood narrative, Wenham lists three categories of assent to some kind of literary dependence: the minimalists who argue for strong differences with the Mesopotamian materials; the maximalists, who argue that the Genesis editor was familiar with some of the Mesopotamian traditions; and finally, those who fall somewhere in between.⁸⁵ Moran, for example, the great Harvard Semitist was convinced that Genesis 9:1ff. was direct polemic or rejection of the *Atrahasis Epic*. Nevertheless, with regards to the Flood, some scholars (e.g., Lambert and Millard) see the differences between *Atrahasis* and the Genesis account as too great for any direct connection; however, they do see some kind of possible dependence but concede that

the problem is very complex. Was there possibly then a common literary heritage? Jacobsen, P.D. Miller, and K.A. Kitchen think possibly so. Kitchen, for example, presents a very helpful table (reproduced above) in his recent book showing similarities in the so-called, "primeval protohistories" of Mesopotamia. After illustrating the similarities, he declares, "The overall correlation of the primeval protohistory in all four sources should be clear almost without further comment" (Kitchen, 424).

The only "further comment" that Kitchen offers is that the "non 'dynastic' nature of *Atrahasis* and Eridu account for their unconcern with dynasties or genealogies" (Kitchen, 424); indeed, there are striking parallels here, although I will make further comments about interpreting the similarities and differences below.

Did the Hebrews borrow from the Babylonians? Or, have both descended from a common original?⁸⁶ Even though the overall scheme may be similar, as Millard says, "most of the detail is different; on a few points only there is agreement" (Millard, 125). Such groupings on a continuum along a spectrum, ranging from minimalist to maximalist may be helpful for the creation account.

83. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972), 1-20, especially at page 8.

84. Quoted by Hasel, "The Significance," 11.

85. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, Texas: Word Book, 1987), 163.

86. David Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood," in *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard Hess and David Tsumura (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 52.

If the intentions of the Old Testament creation account were polemical, then against which winds is it leaning? This is the kind of question that is fruitful to explore in my opinion.⁸⁷ Some, for example, have seen such a clear demarcation between the mythology of the ancient Near Eastern texts and the biblical text that they can assert robustly that Genesis broke “the correspondence pattern mythology” (Barr quoted by Hamilton, 59). As Hamilton states further, “Nature is not deified; God is not naturalized” (Hamilton, 59). In this line of thinking, some authors have noted that the Genesis account by its description of the creation of the luminaries seems to be polemicizing against the astrologically minded Babylonians (Hasel, 13–15).

In the past, there has been great energy devoted to noting that in Mesopotamian cosmogonies the idea that human beings were created to do the work of the gods is prominent. Although it has been somewhat customary to say that this is a distinct difference in the Hebrew mindset, recently this has been challenged by Greenstein in his work.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, with respect to differences in anthropology, there is, in the biblical creation story, no attempt to quell the din of man’s noise as we see in *Atrahasis*. Furthermore, it is striking that the Genesis account stands in glaring contrast to the Sumerian and Babylonian counterparts with respect to whether God needed any assistance in his sovereign fiat creation. As Castellino notes, “The spiritual and monotheistic conception of God (the anthropomorphism should not deceive us) could not permit the notion that God had need of material help from humanity.”⁸⁹ In the biblical narrative, man is portrayed as the priestly guardian vassal king, who watches over the sanctuary of Eden entrusted to him by God.

In the ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, the universe is seen to be fairly complete without humans. On the other hand, the biblical view is essentially anthropocentric in the sense that man is undoubtedly

portrayed as the climax of the creation week. There is no female deity in the biblical creation account, which is almost unique among ancient Near Eastern cosmologies (Tsumura, 32). Another striking difference is that the Hebrew account represents God as beyond nature, whereas many of the cosmologies of her neighbors portray the universe as a cosmic society or machine. But as was maintained above, the similarities between Genesis 1–11 and the ancient Near Eastern parallels are striking as well. So what are we to make of the similarities and differences? Much could be said in answer to this question, and there will probably have to be serious and sustained reflection and writing on that question, given the recent flurry of material in print and on the internet. However, for now let me make points in just two areas: first, the reasons for similarities and distinctions between the biblical account and her neighbors, and second, the Bible’s use of the imagery of ancient myths.

First, let us address the issue of similarities and differences. How do we explain them? My own view is that as history progressed, mankind would remember the basic outline of what really happened through oral tradition, remembered history (what scholars sometimes call “mnemohistory”), perhaps even through writing no longer preserved. This would inform his traditions but mankind would warp the essential outline and that is now represented in some of these creation epics. A similar point was made by Cornelius Van Til years ago.⁹⁰ In other words, Genesis 1–11 is the inspired deposit of the information on the one side, and the pagan epics are the perversion of what is represented in the inspired oracle on the other. M.G. Kline, working within this very trajectory and building upon the work of Van Til, makes this very point: “The pagan cosmogonic myth, [is] a garbled, apostate version, a perversion, of pristine traditions of primordial historical realities.”⁹¹ How does Enns respond to such a position? I quote him at length below to illustrate:

Again, it may be safe to assume that the stories of Genesis existed by this time but the available evidence leads to the conclusion that they were not recorded in their present form until sometime in the first millennium. In both their oral and written versions, the stories of Genesis seem to be younger than the stories of other ancient Near Eastern cultures. If pressed, one could attempt to mount the argument that the Israelite stories were actually older than all the ancient near Eastern stories but were only recorded later in Hebrew. Such a theory—for that is what it is, a theory—would need to assume that the biblical stories are the pristine originals

87. See Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 56–58.

88. Edward L. Greenstein, “God’s Golem: The Creation of the Human in Genesis 2,” pages 219–239 in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 319 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

89. G. Castellino, “The Origins of Civilization according to Biblical and Cuneiform Texts,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 91.

90. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 77–78.

91. M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 28.

and that all the other stories are parodies and perversions of the Israelite original, even though the available evidence would be very difficult to square with such a conclusion.... To argue in such hypothetical terms can sometimes become an excuse for maintaining a way of thinking that is otherwise unsupportable. It is just such explanations that some readers might find problematic, for they seem motivated by a desire to protect one's theology rather than to engage the available evidence. Despite what has been said about the origins of Hebrew, we still have not squarely addressed the most fundamental issue: regardless of when Genesis was written and in what language, it still reflects an ancient Near Eastern worldview that clearly is significantly older. It stretches logic and common sense to try to protect the uniqueness of the Genesis accounts by arguing that Mesopotamian peoples, who existed long before Israel came on the scene and who were the dominant cultures of the day, had no creation myths for hundreds of years and simply waited for Israelite slaves to provide the prototype, which they then corrupted (Enns, 52).

Many of these statements could and should be engaged (not excluding the logic contained therein); however, given space restrictions suffice it to say for now that I find the last part of this paragraph a caricature of the position of Van Til and Kline (even though they were not mentioned in Enns' book here) at this point. Enns' position is not only a caricature, it seems to bear some resemblance to what I call the "mythological revisionism" view that was published twenty years earlier in the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship project of John Stek and others.⁹² A careful read of that project will reveal that there was a diminution of the historical. In my understanding, such views undermine the necessity of a historical Adam and do not provide anywhere near a radical critique of the ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. Kenneth Matthews is more helpful when he sustains:

... if we interpret early Genesis as theological parable or story, we have a theology of creation that is grounded neither in history nor the cosmos. It is unlikely that the community of Moses, which understood its God as the Lord of history, would have tolerated such a cosmology. The *toledot* structure of Genesis requires us to read chap. 1 as relating real events that are presupposed by later Israel. If Genesis 1–3 is theological story without corresponding to reality, the creation account conveys no information about creation except that it owes its existence to God. This undermines the very purpose of the preamble, which establishes a real lineage between

creation and covenant history, for the latter is rooted in history ... Also if taken as theological story alone the interpreter is at odds with the historical intentionality of Genesis ... Interpreting "Adam" as a symbolic figure alone flies in the face of the chronologies (chapt. 5 & 11) that link Adam as a person to Israel's father, Abraham.⁹³

The second point that needs to be addressed is the Bible's use of well-known mythological motifs and imagery. It may be true that there is some overlap and even use of the intellectual conceptual stock of language from the neighbors of Israel in the ancient Near East. However, it seems to me from my study of Creation, the Psalms and other parts of Scripture that far from merely parroting or borrowing in some facile manner the imagery, the Bible rather has a propensity here as elsewhere to use selectively and sometimes even undermine the idolatrous notions of its neighbors while at points even using this imagery. This is so not only in the creation narrative, but also in other parts of Scripture, e.g., Isaiah and the Psalms.

The view of the Bible is radically different on several counts and as Lambert has declared, "the differences must not be overlooked" (Lambert, 108). Some scholars have wanted, for example, to affirm some kind of battle behind the cleaving of the waters because of later reflections in Scripture alluding to creation incorporating Leviathan; however, Lambert affirms that no sure proof can be offered that there is a battle implicit behind the cleaving of the waters imagery in the biblical creation account (Lambert, 105).

The biblical creation account, however, has some stark differences with its neighbor's cosmogonies. In the Genesis account of creation, there is no polytheism. There is no theogony. There is no theomachy. Indeed, the portrayal of God and his deeds is fundamentally and categorically different. There is a different anthropology as was mentioned above. There is a different theology. Meredith Kline elegantly focuses on the distinctions:

Creation as described in the Genesis prologue is strictly a constructive process, without any undercurrent of conflict. Elohim, the Creator, is portrayed not as a mighty warrior but as an omnipotent artisan, not as a cunning conqueror but as an omniscient architect.

92. See John Stek, "What Says the Scripture?" in Howard J. Van Till, Robert E. Snow, John H. Stek, and Davis A. Young, *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), especially 240–42.

93. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, New American Commentary (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 110–11.

There is no sense of the tumult of war in the account; everything proceeds in orderly and stately fashion according to architectonic plan ... God has no adversary in his original creating. He does not build with trowel in one hand and sword in the other. There is no need for the sword. More than that, there is no need for the trowel. This builder does not use tools. He does not really work with his hands. The word of his will is his all-effective instrument (Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 27–29).

Therefore, it seems to me that the church would best serve its people by situating the biblical creation story in its cultural setting and then demonstrate how it is distinctly different and unique in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern worldviews. The Bible sets forth a robust view of God as Sovereign King and Lord of all that was called into existence.

I cannot set forth my own views of the Bible's interaction with ancient Near Eastern myth in detail at this point, though I hope to do so in the future in another place; even so, I think that it is very important for confessional Christians to think through these issues in a thoughtful and non-reactionary way. So in the following section, I will set out a few parameters for thinking about the issue of the Bible's use of and engagement with her ancient Near Eastern neighbors on the subject of myth.

Herman Gunkel's seminal book, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (ET = *Creation and Chaos*), brought about a profound consensus in biblical scholarship. His point was that the mythopoeic imagery found throughout Scripture derived ultimately from the recently discovered Babylonian creation materials, and more specifically from the notion of *Chaoskampf*, the struggle articulated in the creation account between the powers of chaos and the creator-god. Professor von Rad's notion, that Israel's faith and the reception of that faith was originally considered in a number of independent sources, and that late in the development of her religion, she incorporated a creation theology that

had included in it these borrowings from the world of the ancient Near East has also been a dominant feature in biblical scholarship. But there are also scholars who believe the opposite is the case: that "Israel participated fully in the thought world and in the creation faith of the world of the ancient Near East and understood—and indeed could only understand—her particular experiences of history and experiences of God in this horizon."⁹⁴ This fundamental and foundational approach is not only shared by those committed to the tenets of higher critical scholarship but exists among evangelicals as well, as was noted above in the work of Enns (and I would add Stek to this category as well).

There is no consensus among OT scholars with regard to a uniform definition of myth and the Bible's use of it. The important point to emphasize when dealing with this topic is that neither the historical dimension nor the Bible's use of mythopoeic language should be marginalized. For the biblical writer, both elements probably stood in tension, as Cross has noted: "In Israel, myth and history always stood in strong tension, myth serving primarily to give a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning to the historical, rarely functioning to dissolve history."⁹⁵

In general terms, there have been two dominant schools of thinking with regard to the Bible's use of mythic categories and language: the so-called *history-of-redemption school* (the *Heilsgeschichte* school) and the *myth-and-ritual school*. Both schools show weaknesses in their approach. The latter school, although it draws heavily upon the monarchy and its period and capitalizes upon the royal ideology in the psalms and its reconstruction of the cult during the monarchy; nevertheless, it is hamstrung to distinguish between the influences of the Canaanite cult of Baal and the alleged influences flowing from the reconstructed cult. The other major school, that *history of redemption of school*, although it draws on strong historical motifs unlike the myth-and-ritual school, nevertheless sees the revelation of Law at Sinai and the Exodus-Conquest theme as separate traditions. Furthermore, this school is hard pressed to explain the pervasive role of mythological motifs in Israel's articulation of its faith during the monarchical period.⁹⁶ It bears repeating that neither the historical nor the mythic should be marginalized. Both must be given their appropriate weight after careful scrutiny of the text in light of the ancient Near Eastern cultural mindset of Israel's neighbors. After all, the Bible did not occur in a cultural vacuum. It did not merely fall out of the sky.

So how did the biblical writers use the lexical stock and conceptual ideas of her neighbors? My position is

94. H.H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation," pages 102–117 in *Creation in the Old Testament*, Issues in Religion and Theology 6, Edited with an introduction by Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984), 111.

95. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 90.

96. See Lynn Clapham, "Mythopoeic Antecedents of the Biblical World-View and Their Transformation in Early Israelite Thought," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 110.

that the writers of Scripture could employ the language of mythopoetic categories without wholesale adopting the world view of her neighbors in the process. Elmer Smick, in his study of this dynamic, has summarized it in the following way:

The contexts prove the authors were not committed to myth but were keenly aware of contemporaneous mythology from which they drew colorful figures to enrich their theological expression.... The many linguistic and cultural continuities between Ugaritic and the Bible make it reasonable to assume the god-language of the Canaanites and Israel was related.... What does appear in the Psalms are idiomatic metaphors ... and conscious demythologizing ... where mythic terms served to show how ... God ... is both a unique and supreme cosmic being.... The psalmists also tend to be polemical about their monotheism (cf. Ps 121) but they never hesitate to use mythological terminology for graphic vividness (cf. Ps 18:10, 68:4, etc.). This mythopoetic language is most evident in the three great poetic masterpieces of the Bible, Job, Psalms, and Isaiah.⁹⁷

The danger lies in two directions here. On the one hand, to not have enough explanation of the mythopoetic language utilized by Scripture (the *history-of-redemption school* previously discussed), but it is also to draw too close of a connection between the thought forms and patterns found in the Bible and those of her ancient Near Eastern neighbors. Looking for similarities between the biblical material and her neighbors is all well and good; nevertheless, the liability of such approaches is often a facile and overly simplistic conclusion.⁹⁸

The distinctiveness of the biblical material seems to take pains to protect the Creator-creature distinction, that is, to be disinclined with any view that would make God part of his creation or in some sense on a par with it, or perhaps even subject to it. Clapham is worth quoting at length in this regard:

We must recognize and deal with an element in biblical thought which sets it apart from its mythopoetic environment. Although depicted as the Divine Warrior and King, Yahweh is never a manifestation of or encompassed within any part of nature. The notion that the divine transcends every aspect of the universe is always assumed in Israel's treatment of Yahweh's relations with both history and nature. This feature alone radically distinguishes the Divine Warrior in biblical tradition from the same motif in adjacent cultures and produces important consequences. Although Yahweh

is free to use the storm wind and associated meteorological phenomena in holy warfare, he stands over and separate from them (cf. Exodus 15), unlike the divine warriors Baal, Marduk, or Zeus.... This means that Yahweh's political hegemony cannot seriously be challenged by one or another power of nature whatever form it may take.... Yahweh's kingship stands above the fluctuations of seasons or cycles in nature. This also means that relations between Yahweh and Israel may take political and historical forms of long duration, permitting the structure of covenantal relationships ... which govern that relationship. It also means that even in those periods of Israel's history in which the imagery associated with the Divine Warrior permitted the strong resurgence of mythopoetic themes (principally the ideology of the monarchy and apocalyptic), the actions of God in the historical continuum provide the important clues for Israel's self-understanding (Clapham, 116).

Much of this is helpful, and confessional Christians will need to take great pains to think through the many issues that recognition of "mythic" elements in the Bible bring up. Is it possible that the Bible contains mythic elements, albeit historical mythic elements? I think so. The challenge for pastors is to help people see how the Bible can interact with these ancient literatures and still teach history.⁹⁹ In conclusion, I think that the methodological flaw which Enns made was not his bold suggestion that the Bible engages ancient Near Eastern myth, for it definitely does (one cannot honestly read through the Psalter without conceding this). His error was not to say enough, at least by careful qualification with respect to the historical. In other words, his error was not to say too much, but too little. Since the concept of myth in ordinary language usually implies "historically untrue," I think that Enns should have definitely expressed his views with more carefulness and pastoral maturity, something becoming of a seminary professor.¹⁰⁰ We are now in a position to ask what the preceding detailed treatment teaches us.

97. Elmer B. Smick, "Mythopoetic Language in the Psalms," *WTJ* 44:1 (Spring, 1982): 88–89.

98. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Motif in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 207.

99. Evan's work, *The Historical Christ*, especially pages 48–66 is a good place to start.

100. A point which I have made to my students when they have asked about Enns' book, and a conclusion which I notice that D. A. Carson also arrived at independently of my own opinion on the matter.

IV. CONCLUSION

The first thing is humility. After all, if competent Old Testament scholars with time on their hands for research and writing, well-trained in the disciplines of Semitic philology and ancient Near Eastern literatures and cultures, can make mistakes, what does that say with regards to the pastor, busy every week writing sermons and visiting the sheep in hospitals and applying the word of God week in and out to their hurts and pains? Some of the issues discussed in the application of the comparative method are tremendously complex and difficult and take a great deal of time to think through. I myself, for example, was hoping to find significant help from Ahiqar with regards to the issue of the personification of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. Even so, I had to follow the research and eventually concede that Ahiqar probably wasn't going to grant me what I had hoped for: an origination for biblical personification of Lady Wisdom. Humility is necessary for another reason also. There is still much work that needs to be done by Old Testament scholars and pastors alike.¹⁰¹ The relationship between biblical covenants and what has been discovered by scholars of the ancient Near East still needs more analysis. This is work that potentially will have profound effects on both our theology and pastoral care. The same could be said about the several other examples that were given above.

Secondly, in spite of the challenges, we can still draw strength from our doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. I myself have found immense help from the Old Princeton professor, B.B. Warfield. One of the first chapters I read as a young man was the very important article by Professor Warfield ("God-Inspired Scripture") that talked about 2 Timothy 3:16. As is well known to readers of this journal, Professor Warfield argued that the verse taught that Scripture is "breathed out" by God; it is the production of God. It has its origin and source

in God Himself and its product is nothing less than the authoritative out-breathing of the Holy Spirit. He argued elsewhere for the "organic inspiration" of Holy Scripture, meaning that God uses the personalities, education (or lack thereof), cultural background, and experiences of biblical authors to write Scripture; nevertheless, what they write is exactly what the Holy Spirit intended they write and although their final words are human words, they are very much divine words at one and the same time. In other words, there is an identity between God's words and the author's words such that the final product is nothing less than an inspired, God-ordained product that does not bypass the human side of the equation in the process. ■

101. For example, the recent trends in "Theological interpretation," following in the footsteps of Childs and Seitz, among others and its tendencies towards Canonical interpretation are causing discussion about the comparative method. See for example, S. A. Cummins, "The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recent Contributions by Stephen E. Fowl, Christopher R. Seitz and Francis Watson" in *Currents in Biblical Research* 2.2 (April, 2004): 179–96; Christopher B. Hays, "Bard Called the Tune: Whither Theological Exegesis in the Post-Childs Era?" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4.1 (2010), 139–52. Also see the unpublished paper by Don Collett, "Trinitarian hermeneutics and the unity of Scripture." Also noteworthy are the recent discussions in *Themelios* interacting with Jeffrey J. Niehaus' book, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008).