THE WORLDVIEW APPROACH TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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Abstract

The Worldview Approach is a new way of viewing Scripture in the science/Origins debate. It proposes a “dual nature” for the biblical text where the worldview of the biblical authors is superimposed over a historical base. In this dual view, God entered the time line of human history to give his revelation to certain selected individuals. This revelation was then passed down to the biblical authors who accommodated this revelation within the context of their own worldview. The Worldview Approach is compared to three other approaches to biblical interpretation: Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation.

Introduction

Before attending the 2009 ASA Annual Meeting in Waco, Texas, I had no intention of writing another paper for Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith (PSCF). At that meeting I gave a talk entitled “The Worldview Approach to Biblical Interpretation and Origins: What it is and How it Differs From Accommodation.” However, at that meeting a number of people asked if I would publish my talk, and so I began to consider the possibility. Upon reflection of what I had written in an earlier article in PSCF on the Worldview Approach,¹ and what I had talked about at the ASA Meeting,² I decided to focus this paper on:

(1) A fundamental concept of the Worldview Approach; that is, the dual nature of the biblical (especially Genesis) text. In this dual view, God entered into the time line of human history to give his revelation to certain people in His chosen line. This revelation was then passed down to the biblical authors, who accommodated this revelation to their pre-scientific and historical worldviews. Thus, biblical history is a modification of real history, where the worldview of the biblical authors is superimposed over a historical base.
(2) A table emphasizing the differences between the Worldview Approach and three other approaches to interpreting Scripture: Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation. Not all of the differences between these four approaches will be covered in this paper – only those that significantly impact the essential points being made in the timeline discussion.

**What is the Worldview Approach?**

The basic premise of the Worldview Approach is that the Bible in its *original context* records *historical* events if considered from the *worldview* of the biblical authors. By *original context* I do not mean the King James Version of the Bible, or even the Hebrew Masoretic text. I mean that archeological evidence relevant to the culture of that day be considered along with what has come down to us as the written text. By *historical* I mean not only history and pre-history in a traditional sense, but also the historical, time-related, scientific disciplines such as archeology, anthropology, geology, and astronomy. By *worldview* I mean the basic way of interpreting things and events that pervades a culture so thoroughly that it becomes that culture’s concept of reality – what is good, what is important, what is sacred, and what is “real.” Worldview is similar to culture, but there are important differences. Cultural aspects of society can be seen or discerned; worldview cannot be easily perceived, especially by the people who are molded by it. Worldview is all aspects of a culture bound up into a different way of thinking about the world. It is a *mindset* that stems from a culture – it is not the culture itself.

**How the Worldview Approach to Biblical Interpretation Differs From Other Approaches**

By comparison, let us examine the three approaches to biblical interpretation that are most popular today: Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation
Table 1. Theological position of the Worldview Approach Compared with Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Young-Earth Creationist</th>
<th>Progressive Creationist (concordist)</th>
<th>Worldview Approach</th>
<th>Accommodation Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Adam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but lived &gt;50,000 YBP</td>
<td>Yes, but lived ~4000-5000 B.C.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Garden of Eden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Noah</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Flood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Local extent; but killed all humans except Noah &amp; family; ~50,000YBP (?)</td>
<td>Yes; but local to Mesopotamian Basin; ~2900 B.C.</td>
<td>Has historical base, but not Noah’s Flood since Noah=historical person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchial Ages = real ages</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, numbers are numerological, not numerical</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation Days</td>
<td>24-hr view</td>
<td>Day-Age view</td>
<td>Literary View</td>
<td>Literary or other views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6000 yr age of Earth &amp; universe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of pre-Adamite humans</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No Adam &amp; Eve lived &gt;~50,000 YBP</td>
<td>Yes; Gen.1=pre-Adamites Gen.2=line of Adam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 1). In its theology, the Worldview Approach fits best between the Progressive Creationist (also called the “concordist”) Approach and the Accommodation Approach. It is farthest from the Young-Earth Creationist Approach, and disagrees with practically every aspect of this approach except for the historicity of the people and events in the early chapters of Genesis. It agrees with the very important position of the Progressive Creationist Approach that the universe and earth are old – about 13.7 billion years for the universe and 4.5 billion years for planet earth, as substantiated by the sciences of astronomy and geology. However, it disagrees with the Progressive Creationist position with respect to the sciences of anthropology, archeology, and biology (evolution).

The Worldview Approach is probably the closest theologically to the Accommodation Approach. It agrees with “General Accommodation” (GA), or the basic principle that God
condescends to interact with humans on any level – from becoming the Incarnate Christ, to directly interacting with humans, to giving his revelation to certain humans through dreams and visions, etc. It especially agrees with the “Specific Accommodation” (SA) position that the pre- ingrained scientific and historical ideas of the ancients have been incorporated into the biblical text. However, it disagrees with the Specific Accommodation position that God accommodates unhistorical people and events into his Bible in order to make his theological point. For example, to quote Paul Seely:

“I think it is evident that God can morally accommodate his message to the pre-ingrained cultural ideas of the people to whom he is speaking, even when that accommodation does not agree with the actual facts.”

Does this sound like God, who by his very nature does not lie, deceive, contradict, or “accommodate” untruth? More specifically, Denis Lamoureux had this to say concerning the unhistorical nature of the beginning chapters of Genesis:

“First, Adam never existed. Second, Adam never sinned. In fact, it is impossible for him to have sinned because he never existed. Consequently, sin did not enter the world on account of Adam...Adam never existed and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity.”

If this statement is true, then what about the foundational Christian doctrines of the Fall, Original Sin, and Paul’s entire theology of Christ as the new Adam and His dying to save us from sin? The Worldview Approach considers Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs to have been historical persons and the Garden of Eden and the Flood to have been historical events (Table 1).

The Time Line of Biblical History
In order to better understand the Worldview Approach a “time line” is presented illustrating my perception of how God entered into biblical history (Fig. 1). In the upper, “arrow of time set by God,” God can go backward and forward in His infinite (∞) time line (double arrow on left side of top line), but in the time line of human history (the physical world) time has a beginning and goes only in the forward direction. From His infinite time frame, God condescends to enter into the finite realm of human history and it is only in this sense that He “accommodates” (GA) humankind. God does not “accommodate” our cultural misconceptions: He is simply entering into the time line of human history at a specific time and place where culture has developed to a certain level of sophistication. Man is the one doing the accommodating: he (the biblical author) writes down God’s revelation by “accommodating” that revelation in terms of his own worldview. Or in other words, when God speaks and acts, He does so within the human drama as it is being played out at a certain time and place, with all of the cultural trappings that go with it. These cultural trappings, or worldview, then get incorporated into the biblical text alongside God’s revelation. This basic principle of biblical interpretation applies especially to the fields of history and science. The revelation is from God,
but the concepts of history and science are from man. Not recognizing this distinction has been one of the main causes of the so-called “war” between science and the Bible.

In addition, two other basic misconceptions have caused problems in biblical interpretation. The first misconception is that biblical history exactly equals real history. It does not: it is a modification of real history colored by the worldview of the biblical author. Or to quote Kenneth Kitchen in his book On the Reliability of the Old Testament:

“By and large, the ancients did not invent spurious history, but normally were content to interpret real history in accord with their views…Once detected, their viewpoint can be ‘peeled back’ if need be and the basic history made clear.”

The second basic misconception is that the Old Testament covers all of human history. It does not: it is only concerned with the genealogical line of Adam to Christ (Fig. 1). It is not concerned with the line of pre-Adamites and only marginally concerned with the non-Israelite line of Adam. The biblical authors’ main purpose was to relay the story of God’s interaction with, and revelation to, their ancestors. This concept is extremely important with respect to Origins: Adam and Eve were not the parents of the whole human race. They were only the parents of those in the line leading to Christ. This point can be illustrated by the rainbow in Genesis 9:13, which is the first of the covenant signs and which provides the key to understanding all of them. Covenant signs express covenant promises to covenant people; that is, to the line of Adam, not to all people on planet earth. Or, to quote John Walton: “The Old Testament does communicate to us and it was written for us, and for all humankind. But it was not written to us. It was written to Israel. It is God’s revelation of himself to Israel and secondarily through Israel to everyone else.”

The Worldview Approach to This Time Line
The Worldview Approach is that the people, places, and events in this time line are real. However, the description of these people, places, and events is necessarily colored by the worldview of the biblical authors. To “beget” someone is a physical act – either it happened or it didn’t. But a descriptive interpretation of a real event is a cultural act that stems from a particular worldview. Thus, the stories in the Bible (especially Genesis) have a dual nature:

(1) Historical: they have a historical base, one that can be at least partly substantiated by archeology or historical documents, and

(2) Worldview: the biblical author’s worldview is interwoven with this historical base. Sometimes this worldview involves figurative language or narrative style, and sometimes it involves the biblical author’s primitive conceptions of history or science.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, we are going to try and see how this dual nature “works” in practice along our time line. The numbers in the text, for example (1), refer to the numbers in the time line of Figure 1.

**Worldview Approach To Evolution (1) and Genesis 1 Creation Story (2)**

We will start on the left side of Figure 1 where the universe begins at about 13.7 billion years (by) ago and where the first life on earth is preserved in the fossil record at about 3.5 by ago. Creation of the physical world (galaxies, stars, planets) could have begun by direct fiat of God at the Big Bang (Gen. 1:1), and then could have evolved under God’s direction to its present form. Similarly, life could have started by the direct interaction of God and then could have developed by a long process of God-directed evolution, with humans capable of knowing God being the final product of this process. This position on evolution is based on the wealth of DNA evidence amassed over the last decade, which evidence is strongly supportive of evolutionary theory. With respect to the time line of human history, God let humans evolve
physically (evolution), emotionally, and spiritually until such time as they were ready for His “Progressive Revelation” throughout a biblical history that finally led to Christ.

The Genesis 1 Creation story is best understood in the framework of the numerological worldview and narrative style of the ancient Mesopotamians, where the whole chapter is based on a system of numerical harmony. Typical of the literary style of that day was for work to be accomplished in six days (broken down into two triads), with rest on the seventh day. This is called the “literary view” of Genesis 1 (as opposed to the “24-hour view” of Young-Earth Creationists, and the “day-age view” of Progressive Creationists; Table 1), and it is the interpretation of Genesis 1 favored by the Worldview Approach.

### Table 2. A “literary” interpretation of Genesis 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1. Light</th>
<th>Day 2. “Waters”; sea and heaven</th>
<th>Day 3. Earth or land; vegetation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 4. Light emanating from luminaries (sun, moon, stars)</td>
<td>Day 5. Fish (whales) and fowl</td>
<td>Day 6. Land creatures that eat vegetation; man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 7. Rest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From a literary view one does not have to worry about the sun, moon, and stars being created on the fourth day after vegetation because the Genesis text was never meant to be taken in chronological order. God’s revelation was simply written down in the narrative style and topical order of writing used by the biblical author(s) 4000 years or so ago. Note the parallel construction of Table 2, which was also typical of that narrative style. The light of Day 1 is general and parallel to the specific creation of the sun, moon, and stars on Day 4; the sea and heaven of Day 2 is general and parallel to the specific creation of fish and fowl on Day 5; and the land and vegetation of Day 3 is general and parallel to the specific creation of land creatures (who eat vegetation) on Day 6.

**Worldview Approach to Pre-Adamites (2)**
In Genesis 1 God creates humankind in His image. The Worldview Approach considers the “male and female” of Gen. 1:26-27 to be a generic reference to people living for generations before Adam – but not specifically to populations of *Homo sapiens* that existed from about 200,000 years before present (YBP), because the biblical authors had no scientific knowledge of such people. Genesis 1 and 2 simply portray the same parallel narrative style as used in the rest of Genesis: the more general reference to male and female in Genesis 1 and then the more specific reference to Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 – without the “male and female” in Genesis 1 being equivalent to “Adam and Eve” in Genesis 2. The biblical basis for this interpretation is that Gen. 2:4 refers to the “generations” of the heavens and earth when male and female humans were created. “Generations” pertains to descent over an extended length of time, and it tells how something has emerged from what has preceded Gen. 2:4 and the creation of Adam and Eve.\(^{11}\) This biblical interpretation also explains why pre-Adamites are hinted at in Gen. 4:17 (Cain’s wife) (Cain built a city), Gen. 6:2 (“daughters of men”), and in other verses of Genesis 4 to 6.\(^{12}\) The scientific basis for this interpretation is that numerous Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic\(^ {13}\) anthropological and archeological human sites exist around the world that are thousands to tens of thousands of years older than the biblical placement of Adam and Eve at around 4000-5000 B.C.

If this interpretation of Genesis 1 is correct, then pre-Adamite humans must have been created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27), and thus they had a spiritual nature that was able to perceive God in His creation (Rom. 1:19-20). Did pre-Adamites sin (murder, etc.)? Yes, because all humans have a sin nature. But were they judged for that sin? No, because sin is not imputed where there is no (knowledge of the) law (Rom. 5:13). God did not spiritually confer the “knowledge” of good and evil to humans until Adam (Gen. 3:5), so while pre-Adamites had a spiritual nature, they were not held responsible for their lack of knowledge of what God considers as good and evil.
Worldview Approach to Adam and Eve (3)

The Worldview Approach considers Adam to have been the first human that God directly interacted with, and the first person to be given a “soul” (spirit) (Gen. 2:7). With the Fall, sin was dispensationally conferred on the whole human race through Adam (Rom. 5:12), in the same manner as grace was later dispensationally conferred on the human race through Christ (Rom. 5:15). Grace was not biologically passed down through Christ because Christ is not the biological father of any of us. Similarly, sin was not biologically passed down through Adam. Rather, sin (the tendency to do evil) is inherent of the whole human race – both of Adam’s line and the line of pre-Adamites. The dispensation of sin on the human race occurred because this was God’s pre-ordained plan in the time line of human history to begin the process of judgment for sin. The first interaction of God with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden initiated the following chain of events: sin, judgment of that sin, blood-sacrifice atonement for sin, spiritual death, and spiritual (eternal) life, and it was the job of Adam’s line to spread God’s plan of sin atonement to all nations not in the direct line of Adam to Christ.

Adam and Eve: How Does the Worldview Approach Work?

We will now examine the “dual nature” of the Genesis text regarding Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is considered to have been a historical place, the four rivers of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14) pinpointing its location at the head of the Persian Gulf in today’s Iraq. Adam and Eve and their patriarchal descendents are also considered to have been historical people, as documented by the genealogies of the Bible. They are not considered to be allegorical or fictional persons, as is the common belief today, even among many Christians. However, Adam and Eve were not the first people to exist on planet earth – they were merely
the first in the line leading to Christ, which was the only line that the biblical authors were concerned about.

If Adam and Eve were historical people, then how does one explain Adam being created “from the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7), Eve being formed from the “rib of Adam” (Gen. 2:21-22), and other fanciful aspects to the Garden of Eden story? This is where the concept of worldview comes in. In the case of Adam and Eve, it is the worldview of the Mesopotamians that must be considered, because until Abraham moved from Ur (in Mesopotamia) to Palestine, that is where the biblical authors of the early chapters of Genesis lived.

Literary conventions of the ancient Mesopotamians included analogy, carefully woven into language, and the use of repetition – which repetition included not only words, but also numbers, phrases, and structural elements such as parallelism. Prime examples of repetition in words, phrases, and structure are Genesis 1:11-12, 1:27, and 2:1. The Mesopotamians loved to play on words; for example, “a[da]m” (generic humans) in Genesis 1 and A[da]m (a specific human) in Genesis 2, and “Peleg” in Genesis 10:25, whose name means “divided” as in “for in his days was the earth divided.” None of this play on words was gratuitous; it was the very basis of Mesopotamian intellectual thought. This type of thought, or worldview, is quite foreign to our way of thinking, but it needs to be considered when interpreting Genesis.

The use of figurative language was also typical of the literary mindset of the ancient Mesopotamians. Genesis 2:7 provides a good example of the use of figurative language: And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. The expression “dust of the ground” is a poetic figure of speech, one used by the culture of that time. According to the worldview of the people of the ancient Middle East, among the materials used by the gods for the creation of humankind was the “clay” of the earth. Therefore in using this poetic expression, the biblical author was conjuring up the creation process in the minds of the people (his readers) living at that time.
Similarly, the phrase “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” in Genesis 2:7 is to be taken figuratively.

A figurative approach can also be applied to the fashioning of Eve, “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), from the rib of Adam (Gen. 2:21). The Sumerian (Sumer was in southern Mesopotamia) word for “rib” was *ti*, which could alternately mean “life.” Eve (*hawwah*) sounds similar to the verb “to live” (*hayâ*), and the adjective “living” (*hay*) since she was the mother of life. Thus, in Sumerian literature, the “lady of the rib” came to be identified with the “lady who makes live” through what was another play on words. Such ancient literary puns represent “historical memories” in Genesis that attest to its early authorship because such word plays were typical of the Sumerian’s literary style.

In interpreting ancient Genesis stories like Adam and Eve, it is also important to consider how these stories may have been transmitted from one generation to another, and how the mixing of cultures between Adamic and non-Adamite lines might have influenced the writing of stories similar to the ones found in Genesis. It is suggested in Figure 2 how the story of Adam and Eve may have been passed down to later generations and how this event may have affected other Mesopotamian creation stories:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2. How and when the story of Adam and Eve could have been orally passed down to the biblical authors of the written text, and how it may have influenced other Mesopotamian creation stories.
The invention of cuneiform writing happened at about 3000 B.C. and that of narrative writing sometime between 2500-2000 B.C. Therefore the story of Adam and Eve must have been transmitted orally for approximately 2000-3000 years before it could have been written down. In other words, this was a prehistoric (pre-writing) story that involved a long transmittal time, so it is perhaps understandable why the story would have been told in the figurative language of that prehistoric culture, and later written down by the biblical authors in its original figurative form. This does not imply, however, that God did not directly interact with a historical Adam and Eve, that God did not inspire the biblical author as he wrote down the story, or that God did not get His main message across – that is, that man’s sinful nature will be judged. Other creation stories, such as the Akkadian Enuma Elish or the Sumerian Enki myth, may have stemmed from the Adamic creation story (Fig. 2), but these creation myths are significantly different from the Genesis creation story and are clearly the product of the polytheistic Mesopotamian culture in which Adam’s descendents lived as a sub-group.

How the Worldview Approach Differs From Other Approaches on Adam and Eve

We will now sidetrack from our time line to compare the Worldview Approach to Adam and Eve with the approach of Progressive Creationists. Note in Table 1 that these two approaches differ substantially on the time that Adam lived. Progressive Creationists place Adam at >50,000 YBP, whereas the Worldview Approach places him at about 4000-5000 B.C. The reason that Progressive Creationists place Adam at such an early date is because they cannot give up their theological commitment to Adam and Eve being the parents of the entire human race (i.e., there were never any “pre-Adamite” humans). However, since the fossil ages of Homo sapiens have now been extended to almost 200,000 YBP, this means setting the date for Adam very early (>50,000 YBP in the Paleolithic era). This is the reason why the
Worldview Approach does not consider Adam and Eve to be the parents of the whole human race: it is impossible to resolve this position with anthropological and archeological evidence.

Furthermore, the Bible does not place Adam in this time frame. It places him at about 4000-5000 B.C. Gen. 4:2 says that Abel was the keeper of sheep and Cain was the tiller of the ground. Both husbandry and agriculture have been documented archeologically for the Near and Middle East at about 10,000 B.C., so that would necessitate placing Adam and Eve after that time. Gen. 4:17 says that Cain built a city. The first cities in Mesopotamia date from about 3400 B.C. Gen. 4:20-21 says that Jabel was the “father” of those who dwelt in tents and have cattle and that Jubal was the “father” of the pipe and harp. Cattle were domesticated at about 6500 B.C.; nomadic life (those who dwell in tents) has been substantiated by at least 3000 B.C., and the harp by about 3100 B.C. Gen. 4:22 says that Tubal-cain was the “father” of bronze and iron, and the generally recognized date for the beginning of the Bronze Age in the Near East is ca. 3300 B.C. All of this information places Adam in the Ubaid Period (Table 3), the oldest archeological period in Mesopotamia (before this time there is no trace of human inhabitation). Radiocarbon (C-14) dates establish the Ubaid Period at about 5000 B.C. (Table 3), so the most likely date for Adam is somewhere between 4000-5000 B.C., or very close to when Genesis places him in time according to its genealogically-based chronology.

Table 3. Archeological periods of Mesopotamia
Worldview Approach to Noah’s Flood (4)

The Worldview Approach considers Noah to have been a real person and the flood a real event, but it does not consider the flood to be universal, as maintained by the Young-Earth Creationist position of “Flood Geology.” There are many reasons – both scientific and theological – for favoring a local flood in Mesopotamia. These have been covered by the author in other publications, and will not be repeated here. What will be discussed is the dual nature of the Genesis text; i.e., the historical base of the flood narrative, told within a worldview framework.

Noah and the Flood: How Does the Worldview Approach Work?

Archeological evidence exists for a historical Noah, for when he might have lived, and for a great flood that inundated the area where Noah lived. This evidence comes in the form of Sumerian cuneiform texts known as the Gilgamesh Epic and Sumerian King List. Both of these documents attest to a great flood survived by Ziusudra (or Utnapištim or Atra-hasis, alternate Babylonian names for Noah), who was the "king" of the ancient city of Shuruppak in southern Mesopotamia (Sumer). Gilgamesh was the fifth king of the first dynasty of Uruk following the great flood, and is known to have been a real person who reigned in Mesopotamia around 2650 B.C. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the flood happened sometime before 2650 B.C. – and perhaps at least two hundred years before, since Gilgamesh was supposedly the fifth king after the flood.

The Sumerian King List mentions ten antediluvian kings, with Ziusudra being the "king" who lived in Shuruppak just before the flood. The mention of Shuruppak is important because the ancient ruins of this city still exist today as the archeological mound of Fara, which has been partially excavated in modern times. On the basis of pottery types, cylinder seals, and cuneiform
tables found at Fara, it is known that this city was founded in the Jemdet Nasr Period, and that it was a significant urban center during this time.\textsuperscript{26} The Jemdet Nasr Period dates from ca. 3350-2960 B.C. (Table 3), and was named after the archaeological site of that age. The end of the Jemdet Nasr Period at 2960 B.C. may mark the date of the flood, as at Shuruppak (Fara), the last Jemdet Nasr remains are separated from the subsequent Early Dynastic I Period by clean, water-lain clay deposited by a flood. From the above archeological evidence, it can be deduced that the Old Testament Genesis flood most likely happened ca. 3000 B.C. ± 100 years – or again, very close to when the Bible places it in time according to its genealogically-based chronology.

The worldview of the biblical authors can be applied to the Noah story, as was done for Adam and Eve. The main problem with following a so-called “literal” interpretation of the Noachian account seems to be reading the text from a modern, scientific worldview rather than from the pre-scientific worldview of the biblical authors.\textsuperscript{27} For example, when the Genesis flood story uses the word “earth” it does not mean planet Earth (as we in the modern world would use the word). It means the earth or ground, as is its sense in Gen. 1:10: \textit{God called the dry land earth}. The use of “universal language” in the text (e.g., “all, every, under heaven”) was only universal in \textit{their} culture and time frame; i.e., it was a type of “Bible-speak” that people of that time used to emphasize a level of inclusiveness. Such universal language also extends to the rest of the Bible, including the New Testament (e.g., Acts 2:5 and Col. 1:60), even when the verses do not apply to Noah’s Flood.

Does the universality of the flood implied by the language of Genesis 6-9 apply to all people groups on Earth, who by the biblical date of the flood (~3000 B.C.) had migrated over the entire planet? No, because the only people group that was wiped out by the flood was the line of Adam (except for Noah and his family) – or the \textit{covenant} people who God was dealing with in the time line of human history (Fig. 1). The universal language used in the flood story
comes down to us in the biblical text because in the worldview of the people who orally relayed it to the biblical authors, the Mesopotamian region was the entire known world. Therefore, while it seems that the narrative is describing a world-wide flood, it is really describing a local flood in the land of Mesopotamia.

The text of Noah and the flood also contains figurative elements – especially when it comes to numbers. The numbers used in the Noah story are not real numerical numbers – they are the numerological numbers 7, 10, 40, and 60, which were considered to be sacred by the Mesopotamians.²⁸ Genesis 7:6 says that Noah was 600 (60 x 10) when the flood started, 600 being the “perfect” number in the sexagesimal (60-based) number system of the Mesopotamians. Noah waited 7 days for the flood to start (Gen. 7:7); it rained 40 days and 40 nights (Gen. 7:4); and the land was flooded until the 7th month, 17th (10 + 7) day (Gen. 7:24). The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat on the 7th month, 17th (10 + 7) day (Gen. 8:4); the waters decreased until the 10th month; in 40 more days the window of the ark was opened (Gen. 8:6); in 7 more days Noah sent forth a dove (Gen. 8:10), and the dove again in another 7 days (Gen. 8:12). The total duration of the flood was 365 days, or exactly 1 solar year. This numerology was incorporated into the story of Noah because in the worldview of the ancient biblical authors it was considered essential for the construction of a sacred text.

Thus, the evidence seems to indicate that the flood account was written as a sacred story, but one that was likely based on an actual historical event, where a great flood inundated the flat Mesopotamian plain. Besides Genesis, the King List mentions a huge flood in Mesopotamia, as do three other epic texts involving the flood heroes Ziusudra, Atrahasis, and Utnapishtim – other names for Noah (Fig. 3). So were these texts taken from Genesis, was Genesis taken from them, or did they all come from a common source? The Worldview Approach favors the idea that all of these accounts came from a common source, and that different people groups wrote down their versions of the story from their own religious/cultural
worldviews, and that is why these versions differ from each other. But the Genesis account has the decided advantage of being written by the direct descendents of Noah, where the flood story would have been faithfully transmitted to succeeding generations because of God’s involvement with their ancestor Noah. However, this account would have still been written by the biblical authors from their worldview as to what constituted a sacred text.

Figure 3. How and when the story of Noah and the flood could have been passed down to the biblical authors and how it could have spawned other Mesopotamian flood epics.

**How the Worldview Approach Differs From Other Approaches on the Flood**

The Worldview Approach disagrees with all three of the other approaches to Noah and the flood. The Accommodation Approach views both Noah and the flood as being non-historical (Table 1), or as stated by Denis Lamoureux:

“Scriptural and scientific evidence indicate that a flood never happened as stated in the Bible…Actual local incidents certainly lie behind the Mesopotamian flood stories, and a Noah-like individual/s survived to tell his/their story.”

The Progressive Creationist view is that that Noah’s Flood supposedly happened many of thousands of years ago, sometime after Adam and Eve since Noah was the tenth generation
from Adam. But this position is highly unlikely. How is it possible that the flood story could have been orally transmitted over such an extensive period of time? Genesis does not date the flood to the Paleolithic when humans were using scrapper tools. Rather, it places Noah in Mesopotamia at a time when large boats were being built using the tools then available for ship building.  

These disagreements are relatively minor compared to the severe disagreement that the Worldview Approach has with the position of Young-Earth Creationists. Their so-called “literal” reading of the Genesis account of Noah and the flood changes the text from a historically-based account into a pseudo-scientific account that is totally unsupported by modern science. The Worldview Approach agrees that Noah and the flood are historical, but it rejects completely a universal, planet-wide flood (“Flood Geology”) on the grounds of the overwhelming geologic evidence against it. For those interested in this subject, the reader is again referred to papers on the flood by this author, and especially the critique of Flood Geology by Hill and Moshier.

**Worldview Approach to the Patriarchs (5)**

The Worldview Approach considers the patriarchs from Adam to Abraham to have been historical people. (In this paper the word “patriarch” it is usually used in its general sense for any of the biblical personages regarded as the fathers of the line from Adam to Abraham, and where it is less frequently used in its specific sense of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, it is indicated as such.) The theological reason for this historical view of the patriarchs is that the Bible goes to great lengths to establish the genealogy of Adam to Christ in Genesis, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Matthew, and Luke. Why such a pre-occupation with proper descent records if it wasn’t theologically important that Adam be related to Christ, the “second Adam”? Furthermore, if these genealogies are not comprised of historical people, then where do the historical people start and the unhistorical people end? Many theologians consider all persons
and events in Genesis up to Abraham to be mythological, and “minimalists” deny this
genealogical descent from Adam up to and including the Exodus and even later. So what impact
does this kind of thinking have on the reliability and credibility of the Old Testament (and thus on
the New Testament, which is based on the Old Testament)?

The Patriarchs: How Does the Worldview Approach Work?

If the patriarchs were real persons, is there any evidence for their historicity? There is
very little evidence outside of the Genesis account itself, but this is not surprising considering
the antiquity of the Genesis stories. However, there is some evidence for the existence of Terah
(Abraham’s father), Nahor (Abraham’s grandfather), and Serug (Abraham’s grandfather): all
three of these names have survived from antiquity as names of towns in the vicinity of Haran
where these patriarchs supposedly resided (Gen. 11: 31-32). Also, there has been DNA
testing of Arabs and Jews linking both groups to a common male ancestor several thousand
years ago. While the exact DNA date of this common ancestor has not been determined, it
could be that future DNA studies will confirm the biblical record of a common ancestor for the
Arabs and Jews around 4000 years ago (Genesis says that it was Abraham).

If these patriarchal genealogies comprise a historical record, then why do people dismiss
them so readily? Because the ages assigned to the patriarchs are of unbelievably long duration,
and that automatically makes the patriarchs as historical persons suspect. What people
(including some theologians) are missing in their denouncement of the reliability of these
patriarchal genealogical records is the numerological worldview of the biblical authors. The
numbers (like the ones we discussed in the case of Noah’s Flood) dealing with patriarchal ages
are numerological (sacred numbers) rather than numerical (real numbers). This tradition of
using large (numerological) numbers for important persons was not unusual in the ancient
world. Similar to the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians had exaggerated “long reigns” for their gods
and kings,\textsuperscript{35} and this seems to have been a common religious tradition for the peoples of the ancient Near East. They (the biblical authors plus the people they wrote for) knew that these numbers were exaggerated, but this did not concern them because their worldview incorporated a dual conception of numbers. We have no such dual concept in our modern worldview, and so the exaggerated numbers in the Genesis text makes the patriarchs unbelievable to us. Or, in other words, the patriarchs are historical, but their exaggerated ages reflect the numerological worldview of the biblical authors.

\textbf{How the Worldview Approach Differs From Other Approaches on the Patriarchs}

The important point of the above discussion is that the patriarchal ages do not represent real absolute numbers. Therefore they cannot be used to construct a literal 6000 year-old age of the universe and planet Earth, as is one of the foundational precepts of Young-Earth Creationism (Table 1). However, this does not mean that these ages do not have some validity. Twice in this paper I have mentioned that the dates for Adam and Noah set by the Genesis genealogies are close to what has been documented from archeology and radiometric dating (Table 3). It seems like the biblical authors must have had some concept as to how much real time had elapsed since their ancestors lived and died, and so they may have constructed the numerological ages of the most important of these ancestors to fit within this rough time frame.

Progressive Creationists are in agreement with Young-Earth Creationists that the patriarchal ages are real (Table 1). They do not use these ages to construct the age of the Earth or universe, but they do use them in connection with their position on Adam and Eve having lived tens of thousands of years ago. They do this by claiming “gaps” in the genealogical record of the Bible. While there may be small gaps of time in this record, is it reasonable to push the date of Adam and Eve back tens of thousands of years based on these gaps? For example, the gap in time in Matthew 1:8 is limited to just three kingly generations comprising a total of 70
years – not 70,000 years! Known gaps can push biblical chronology back a few hundred years or so (if that much), but certainly they cannot extend biblical chronology back into the Paleolithic. By comparison, the Worldview Approach places Adam and Eve at ~4000-5000 B.C., which fits with the archeological evidence.

**Worldview Approach to Moses and the Exodus (6), and to the Monarchy (7)**

Unlike the minimalists, the Worldview Approach considers the Exodus to have been a real event that happened around 1400 B.C. and Moses and Aaron to have been real people who led the Israelites out of Egypt. This position comes both from scientific evidence and from the New Testament. DNA studies have confirmed a distinct paternal genealogy for Jewish priests, as claimed in Exodus 40:12-16: *And you shall bring Aaron and his sons into the door of the tabernacle and wash them with water...for their anointing shall be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations* (NIV). Although this DNA evidence doesn't prove that Aaron was a real person, it is supportive of that claim. Moses as a historical person was affirmed by Jesus and the apostles when Moses appeared and talked to Jesus at the time of his transfiguration (Mt. 17:3; Mk 9:4; Lk 9:30).

The Worldview Approach also considers Moses to have been the author of Genesis – albeit the *historian* author. While Moses is the traditional author of Genesis, this authorship is only assumed. Various Old Testament books ascribe the “books of the law” (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) to Moses, but nowhere in the Bible is Moses specified as being the author of Genesis. However, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Moses was the author of Genesis since he was well educated in Egypt (Acts 7:22) and probably was able to read, write, and translate many ancient languages, including translating ancient cuneiform texts that may have been handed down to him by his Levite ancestors. The *NIV Archaeology Study Bible* describes this view of Mosaic authorship thusly:
"We might view Moses as an editor/historian who, in addition to receiving God’s direct and supernatural communication drew, together the family histories of Abraham and his descendants, as they existed in the Israelite community in Egypt, into a single text."  

In addition to the family histories of Abraham and his descendants, the Worldview Approach would also attribute the compilation of the Genesis 1-11 stories to Moses. For the authorship of the book of Genesis, consider the following proposed scenario:

Figure 4. How the Genesis stories could have been passed down through Moses to the redactor scribes at the time of the monarchy.

The earliest stories in Genesis (the Creation and the Flood) must have been handed down by word of mouth for generations because the writing of cuneiform narrative texts did not occur until after about 2500 B.C. (Fig. 2). These oral versions would have already reflected an ancient Near Eastern worldview, so when written down, this worldview would have come across in the written text. After narrative writing was invented, these ancient stories could have become
inscribed onto cuneiform tablets by the descendants of Noah. The descendant biblical authors who transformed the oral version of the early stories of Genesis into a written version must have been scribes and mathematicians (Fig. 4) because Genesis 1-11 contains an amazing structure based on the sacred numbers 7, 10, 40, and 60 – a structure that is still being worked out for its mathematical complexity.

The Genesis record could have been passed down to Abraham who lived about 2000 B.C., and then Abraham could have taken this early Genesis account with him when he went to Canaan – either in oral form or, more likely, in written form since the colophon “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1) implies a written genealogy. Abraham passed on family tradition to Isaac; Isaac passed this tradition to Jacob; Jacob passed these traditions and his own experiences on to Joseph and his brothers; and they in turn maintained an ongoing tradition (written, oral, or both) that was eventually passed down the patriarchal line to Moses, who translated and compiled these stories into a single chronological narrative sometime between the 15th and 13th Centuries B.C. Historical and geographical information, as well as old words that had disappeared from the living language before the time of Moses, attest to these stories being handed down from more ancient times.

Later, during the time of the Israelite monarchy (~800-600 B.C.), redactor scribes could have edited the Mosaic Genesis text in order to put it into a smooth, effective, and understandable literary form suitable for their generation. This editing could have included “tidbits” of information that were known by this later time, superimposed over the more basic ancient text. At this time the text would have also been converted by scribes into Classical Masoretic Hebrew – a form of the Hebrew language that did not even exist in the time of Moses. Thus, all of these elements probably figure into the authorship of Genesis. Or, as stated in the basic premise of the Worldview Approach: Evidence from the time of the biblical authors needs to be considered when evaluating the “original” meaning of the text.
We now come to the end of our Old Testament time line and to the focal point of that entire 5000-year history: Christ. Adam, Noah, the patriarchs, Abraham, Moses, the prophets – the whole story of God’s covenants with Adam’s line – all lead up to Christ and his atonement for the sin of humanity. It is Paul, in Rom. 5:12-18 and in 1 Cor. 15:21-22; 45-47, who relates Christ to Adam and thus to our time line (Fig. 1).

Paul relates Christ to Adam in the matters of sin, death, and grace. Paul connects sin with death in Rom. 5:12 where he says: *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned* (NIV). We discussed this earlier in our section on the Worldview Approach to pre-Adamites. All humans sin (including pre-Adamites), and through one man (Adam) death came to all men. But Rom. 5:13 says that …*sin is not taken into account where there is no law*, so pre-Adamites were not judged for their sin.

It is important to realize that the “death through sin” that Paul is talking about is *spiritual* death, not physical death. This is clear from the Genesis 3:2-4 account of the serpent saying to Eve that she would not die if she ate from the fruit of the Tree of Life. Did Adam and Eve die on the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? No – they died many years later, but not as the immediate physical consequence of eating the fruit. First Corinthians 15:22 is also key to a spiritual-death interpretation: *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive* (KJV). How are we made alive in Christ? We are “born again” – not physically but spiritually. We are born again to eternal life.

Now we come to grace and how it ties in with Adam’s sin (trespass). Rom. 5:15 says: *For if the many (spiritually) died by the trespass of the one man (Adam), how much more did God’s grace and the gift (of righteousness, v. 17) that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus*
Christ, overflow to the many! (NIV). So we now have the following logic: Adam’s sin brought spiritual death upon all mankind – both upon the line of Adam and on the line of pre-Adamites because all humans are sinners. But grace to cover that sin came through Jesus Christ to all mankind – both to the line of Adam and to the “Gentiles” (the line of pre-Adamites + non-Israelites) because as Paul tells us in Romans 11, Gentiles are “grafted” into Adam’s line by faith (Fig. 1). This is Christ’s “New Covenant” that superseded all of the old covenants in our time line of biblical history from Adam to Christ. It is the covenant of grace that is the foundation of the Church Age up until today, a covenant that extends to all people on planet Earth – not just to the line of Adam.

Following on with the parallel construction of Paul’s logic in Rom. 5:15: Since Christ is assumed by Paul to have been a historical person through whom the dispensation of grace was actually conferred on humanity (a foundation on which our faith lies), then he must have also assumed that Adam was a historical person through whom sin was conferred on humanity. Romans 5:18 also implies the same thing: it says that Adam’s “one trespass” brought condemnation to all men. How can a person who is not real commit a trespass? Using this same logic of Paul: If one assumes that Adam was not a historical person, and that he and his trespass are to be taken symbolically, then from the parallel construction of Rom. 5:15 shouldn’t Christ and grace also be taken symbolically?

The Accommodation Approach is of the view that Adam was not a historical figure and that Paul’s assumption of the historicity of Adam is not proof that this historicity is fact. This position is exemplified by Daniel Harlow in a paper given at the 2009 ASA meeting in Waco, Texas:

This paper explains why most biblical scholars regard Adam and Eve as purely symbolic figures...The paper also examines Paul’s interpretation of Genesis in his typology of Adam and Christ, arguing that though Paul probably did regard Adam as a historical figure, we are not obliged to. Paul was chiefly interested in Adam as a representative
counterpart to Christ, and the role he assigned Adam in the entry of sin into the world was more temporal than causal. The doctrine of original sin does not require that Adam and Eve be historical figures.46

First, how can it be stated that Paul was “chiefly interested in Adam as a representative counterpart to Christ”? This sounds like a modern idea, and not what Paul really would have been interested in. From these and other passages in Romans, and from other of Paul’s books, it seems like Paul’s “interest” was in showing Christ as the fulfillment of God’s interaction with the line of Adam, starting with Adam himself. Furthermore, why aren’t we obliged to regard Adam as a historical figure if Paul regarded him as such? Does this mean that we can pick and chose Paul’s theology we like and cast out the theology we don’t like? What about Paul’s receiving God’s direct and supernatural communication on the important doctrines of sin and grace? Is this factor to be ignored? The Worldview Approach is that Adam was a historical person through whom sin came into the world, and Christ was a historical person through whom grace came into the world. The two persons – Adam and Christ – are historically (through genealogy) and theologically (through Paul) linked, and a denial of the historicity of Adam impacts on the historicity of Christ and the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith.

In applying the Worldview Approach to biblical interpretation, it should never be forgotten that God’s revelation is foundational to the biblical text whereas the worldview of the biblical authors supplies supplemental information for interpreting the text. The biblical authors were not only inspired by God through the Holy Spirit in the writing of the text, but they also faithfully transmitted the stories handed down to them from ancient times, even though these stories may be scientifically or historically inaccurate by today’s knowledge. Despite the limited knowledge of the ancients, we should not give up the concept of God’s revelation being given to them in “real” history. And, even though the biblical authors wrote down this revelation from their own
worldview, this worldview itself is part of “real” history and thus important to biblical interpretation.

Conclusions

This paper will conclude by answering the question: Why should there be a new approach to biblical interpretation in the science/Origins debate? Aren’t the old approaches adequate? The other approaches discussed in this paper are Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation. The Young-Earth and Progressive Creationist Approaches are not adequate because they do not resolve the conflict between the biblical text and the scientific data. The Progressive Creationist Approach does not incorporate all of the anthropological, archeological, and biological data into its theological framework, and the Young-Earth Creationist Approach ignores practically all of science or twists it into a pseudo-science that fits its own particular theological framework. The Accommodation Approach correctly recognizes the scientific issues, but is theologically weak in that it denies some of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The Worldview Approach tries to resolve the conflict between science and theology by proposing that the basic problem with compatibility involves understanding the pre-scientific worldview of the biblical authors. It is a mistake to try and impose our 21st Century scientific worldview on the biblical text. This is the main reason why there is so much confusion and contention in science-Scripture interpretation.

NOTES


2C. A. Hill, “The Worldview Approach to Biblical Interpretation and Origins: What it is and How it Differs From Accommodation” (abs.): 2009 ASA Annual Meeting, Baylor University, Waco, TX:


13The Paleolithic is generally considered by anthropologists to date from about 20,000 YBP to 1,000,000 YBP; the Mesolithic from about 10,000 YBP to 20,000 YBP; and the Neolithic from about 6,500 YBP to 10,000 YBP.


See references in Note #23.


FIGURE AND TABLE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Schematic time line of God’s interaction with humans throughout biblical history.

Figure 2. How and when the story of Adam and Eve could have been orally passed down to the biblical authors of the written text, and how it may have influenced other Mesopotamian creation stories.

Figure 3. How and when the story of Noah and the flood could have been passed down to the biblical authors and how it could have spawned other Mesopotamian flood epics.

Figure 4. How the Genesis stories could have been passed down through Moses to the redactor scribes at the time of the monarchy.

Table 1. Theological position of the Worldview Approach compared with Young-Earth Creationism, Progressive Creationism, and Accommodation.

Table 2. A “literary” interpretation of Genesis 1.

Table 3. Archeological periods of Mesopotamia.