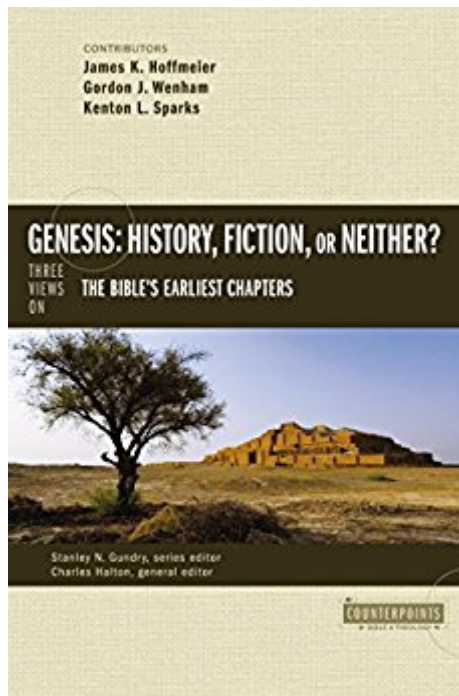


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Genesis: History, Fiction, Or Neither?: Three Views On The Bible's Earliest Chapters (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

There is little doubt that in recent years the nature of the Genesis narrative has sparked much debate among Christians. This Counterpoints volume introduces three predominant interpretive genres and their implications for biblical understanding. Each contributor identifies their position on the genre of Genesis 1-11, addressing why it is appropriate to the text, and contributes examples of its application to a variety of passages. The contributors and views include: James K. Hoffmeier: Theological History; Gordon J. Wenham: Proto-History; Kenton L. Sparks: Ancient Historiography. General editor and Old Testament scholar Charles Halton explains the importance of genre and provides historical insight in the introduction and helpful summaries of each position in the conclusion. In the reader-friendly Counterpoints format, this book helps readers to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of each view and draw informed conclusions in this much-debated topic.

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Customer Reviews

I don't think there is any part of the Bible that is more disputed than the opening chapters of Genesis. It is not only the meaning of these verses that is the subject of endless debate, but their very nature. What is their genre? Are Genesis 1-11 meant to be understood as history? As fiction? Or are they something else altogether? This is the subject of a fascinating new "Counterpoints" book from Zondervan. The format of the "Counterpoints" series is well-known to most of us: A number of authors present their understanding of a controversial passage or subject, and then interact with one another. In *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither*, each of the authors is asked to respond to four elements: identify the genre of Genesis 1-11; explain why they believe this is the genre; explore the implications of this genre designation for biblical interpretation; and apply their approach to three specific passages: the story of the Nephilim, Noah and the ark, and the Tower of Babel. James Hoffmeier defends Genesis as history and theology, Gordon Wenham defends Genesis as proto-history, and Kenton Sparks insists it is ancient historiography. While the terms may be intimidating, each viewpoint can be simply summarized. Hoffmeier admits that there are various literary genres on display in Genesis, but says that "the general tenor of the book, and Gen 1-11 in particular, is intended to be thought of as describing real events." He understands the geographical precision of the author, as well as the framing of the book into various family histories, as clues that Genesis is meant to describe history. This means that an ancient audience would "consider the Nephilim episode, the flood, and Tower of Babel narratives as historical events." And if they read it that way, so too should we.

Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters tackles one of the thorniest and most contentious topics facing Christians today, namely the genre of Genesis 1-11 and the nature of its historicity. The three contributors differ significantly on the issue itself: James Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archeology at Trinity International University Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, champions the Genesis as history and theology view; Gordon Wenham, tutor in Old Testament at Trinity College, Bristol, England, and professor emeritus of Old Testament at the University of Gloucestershire, the proto-history position; and Kenton Sparks, professor of biblical studies and vice president for enrollment management at Eastern University, an ancient historiography view. Charles Halton, assistant professor in theology at Houston Baptist University, provides introductory comments and closing remarks. As the latest addition to the ever-expanding and helpful Counterpoints series from Zondervan, this volume provides an accessible introduction to this much-debated subject. Each chapter consists of a brief introduction, the author's main defense of their position and a concise summary. It is worth noting that each of the contributors was

asked to respond to four elements with their essays: 1) identify the genre of Gen 1:1-11; 2) explain why this is the genre of Gen 1:1-11; 3) explore the implications of this genre designation for biblical interpretation; and 4) apply their approach to the interpretation of three specific passages: the story of the Nephilim (6:1-4); Noah and the ark (6:9-9:26), and the Tower of Babel (11:1-9).

The book of Genesis and specifically the exegesis and application of its first eleven chapters have resulted in a plethora of opinions among scholars and layman alike. Does the Genesis creation account reflect actual history or is it merely a symbolic representation of God being Creator. Did God truly flood the entire earth during the day of a man named Noah? How does science inform our understanding of these biblical accounts or vice versa? Finally, is Genesis actual recorded history or are these merely stories provided by God to engage the pagan ideals of the surrounding cultures, kind of a I am better than your gods type concept? Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?, part of the ever expanding and helpful Counterpoints series from Zondervan books, contains three essays on how to approach Genesis. Each author also takes a stab at evaluating the essays of their fellow contributors. James Hoffmeier shares the perspective that Genesis shares both factual history and reliable theology, Gordon Wenham takes a similar yet slightly different approach noting Genesis 1-11 are more of a protohistory, a somewhat "fuzzy" picture that is not exactly history but isn't exactly not history, and finally, Kenton Sparks takes the view that these chapters represent not actual history, but more of a reflection of the viewpoints one would find in that time period with God merely helping the people of that day understand how He differs and His actions differ from the gods of the surrounding cultures. Each author was tasked with identifying the overall genre of Genesis 1-11, supporting their choice of genre, examining the implications of their genre choice, and then applying that genre by interpreting the story of the Nephilim, Noah and the ark, and the Tower of Babel.

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