

## IT TAKES A MIRACLE: AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN H. WALTON'S VIEW OF COSMIC TEMPLE INAUGURATION

MARTIN HANNA  
Andrews University

### *1. Introduction and Justification*

In this article, I present a brief analysis of some interrelated issues that are highlighted by John Walton in his recent book *The Lost World of Genesis One*.<sup>1</sup> My goal is to evaluate his interpretation of Genesis 1 in connection with his view of miracles and theology-science relations. The focus of my analysis is justified in three ways:

First, it is justified by Walton's summary description of what he has presented in his book:

The position that I have proposed regarding Genesis 1 may be designated the *cosmic temple inauguration* view. This label picks up the most important aspect of the view: that the cosmos is being given its functions as God's temple, where he has taken up his residence and from where he runs the cosmos. The world is his headquarters.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Walton introduces the concept of miracles in close connection with his first two propositions concerning the inauguration of cosmic temple functions. He proposes that Genesis 1 is ancient cosmology (proposition 1) and, therefore, it is functional cosmology (proposition 2).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he concludes that in Genesis 1, as in other ancient cosmologies, "there were no [supernatural] 'miracles' (in the sense of events deviating from that which was 'natural')." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 162, emphasis original. The "cosmic temple," as Walton terms it, is what we commonly refer to as the cosmos or universe.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 16-37. Each chapter of Walton's book addresses a specific proposition. In this article, I reference these propositions in parenthetical notations.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 20. Walton also makes the same point about miracles in an opposite way: "There is nothing 'natural' about the world in biblical theology, nor should there be in ours" (ibid.). These two ways of describing miracles are possible because Walton regards God's actions as supernatural from a theological perspective and as natural from a nontheological perspective. According to Walton, "a biblical view of God's role as Creator in the world does not require a mutually exclusive dichotomy between 'natural' and 'supernatural'" (140). "The common dichotomy drawn today between 'natural' and 'supernatural' did not exist in the ancient world" (134). See also the discussion of propositions 15-18 below.

Third, Walton draws implications for theology-science relations based on his cosmic-temple-inauguration interpretation of Genesis 1. At the beginning of chapter 13, he writes: “We have now completed the presentation of the view that Genesis 1 presents an account of functional origins and will begin to integrate this view into the broader issues of science and society.”<sup>5</sup> His goal is that “God’s work is [to be] fully integrated with our scientific worldview.”<sup>6</sup>

While my brief review seeks to present an accurate interpretation of Walton’s views, I recognize that every interpretation inevitably involves the risk of misinterpretation. In my assessment of Walton’s views, I can only present some areas where I agree or disagree with him and some reasons for my conclusions. His book deserves a much more extensive analysis than I can present here. I have learned much from reading his book and I hope that my review will highlight additional aspects of some important issues that he has addressed. In the next section, I describe and assess his view of miracles and the inauguration of cosmic-temple functions as described in Genesis 1.

## 2. Interpretation of Genesis 1

### 2.1. Description of Walton’s View

Walton seeks to ground his views of miracles and cosmic-temple inauguration in what he believes to be an accurate interpretation of what Genesis 1 “really says” (i.e., “the intended communication of the author and the ability of the audience to receive that same intended message”) in its cultural context.<sup>7</sup> In this way, Walton also seeks to understand God’s intention, since “God has communicated through human authors and their intentions.”<sup>8</sup>

Walton’s interpretation of Genesis 1 may be summarized as follows: cosmic functions were created (proposition 3) from a nonfunctional beginning

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 114. Sean Cordry suggests that Walton’s “thesis has tremendous potential to reshape much of the ‘science-religion’ debate” (“*The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*,” in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 62/3 [2010]: 2270.

<sup>6</sup>Walton, 143.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 102. This is the “face value” or “literal” interpretation of the text (ibid.). Walton, 102-104, further explains, “The same words can be used in a straightforward manner, or be used in a symbolic, metaphorical, sarcastic or allegorical way. . . . If a communication is intended to be metaphorical, the interpreter interested in the face value will want to recognize it as a metaphor. If the author intends to give a history, the interpreter must be committed to reading it that way. . . . If the Israelites, along with the rest of the ancient Near East, thought of existence and therefore creation in functional terms, and they saw a close relationship between the cosmos and the temple, then those are part of the face value of the text and we must include them in our interpretation.”

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 106.

state (proposition 4) during three days of establishing functions (proposition 5), three days of installing functionaries (proposition 6), and one day of divine rest (proposition 7) in the cosmic temple (proposition 8).<sup>9</sup> “These [creation days] are seven twenty-four hour days. This has always been the best reading of the Hebrew text.”<sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of my assessment below, I must ask the following question: How could all the events mentioned in Genesis 1 happen in seven days without supernatural miracles? Walton’s answer to this question is evident in his interpretation of Genesis 1, which he believes to be a statement about God’s ceremonial/liturgical inauguration of cosmic functions (proposition 9), rather than a statement about the material origins of the cosmos (proposition 10).<sup>11</sup> While not denying that God is the source of material origins,<sup>12</sup> Walton regards the functional-origin interpretation of Genesis 1 as providing a more accurate interpretation (proposition 11) than other approaches (proposition 12)<sup>13</sup> that “are struggling to reconcile the scientific findings about the material cosmos with the biblical record.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 38-86.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 91. See also John Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 71.

<sup>11</sup>Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 87-101.

<sup>12</sup>Walton writes: “If we conclude that Genesis 1 is not an account of material origins, we are not thereby suggesting that God is not responsible for material origins. I firmly believe that God *is* fully responsible for material origins, and that, in fact, material origins do involve at some point creation out of nothing. But that theological question is not the one we are asking. We are asking a textual question: What sort of origins account do we find in Genesis 1? Or what aspect of origins is addressed in Genesis 1?” (ibid., 44). He proposes that “A very clear statement must be made: *Viewing Genesis 1 as an account of functional origins of the cosmos as temple does not in any way suggest or imply that God was uninvolved in material origins—it only contends that Genesis 1 is not that story*” (ibid., 96). Therefore, “If we say that the text includes a material element alongside the functional, this view has to be demonstrated, not just retained because it is the perspective most familiar to us” (ibid., 93-94).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 102-113. Walton discusses the interpretive approaches of Young and Old Earth Creationism, the Framework Hypothesis, and various forms of Gap Theory (ibid., 108-113).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 113. Walton, *ibid.*, rejects approaches that “assume that the biblical account needs to be treated as an account of material origins, and therefore that the ‘different’ scientific account of material origins poses a threat to the credibility of the biblical account that has to be resolved. This book has proposed, instead, that Genesis 1 was never intended to offer an account of material origins and that the original author and audience did not view it that way. In fact, the material cosmos was of little significance to them when it came to the question of origins.”

The nature of Walton's inauguration interpretation of functional creation in Genesis 1 is evident in his comment on the relationship of the temple and the cosmos.

[T]he creation of one is also the creation of the other. The temple is made functional in the inauguration ceremonies, and therefore the temple is created in the inauguration ceremony. So also the cosmic temple would be made functional (created) in the inauguration ceremony. . . . The inauguration of the cosmic temple—its actual creation, [was] accomplished by proclaiming its functions, installing its functionaries, and, most importantly, becoming the place of God's residence.<sup>15</sup>

For Walton, Genesis 1 does not describe the material origin of the cosmos as taking place in seven days. Rather it describes the ceremonial and liturgical creation of the cosmos in seven days.<sup>16</sup>

#### Assessment of Walton's View

One way in which Walton's view of miracles and the inauguration of cosmic functions should be evaluated is in terms of the success or failure of his goals, which are to understand "what the Bible communicates," to "preserve" and

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 88, 93. Walton argues that from the perspective of the ancient Near East, "Creation takes place by giving things order, function, and purpose, which is synonymous with giving them existence" (*Ancient Near East Thought and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 135). Compare an earlier statement: "It is difficult to discuss comparisons between Israelite and Mesopotamian literature concerning creation because the disparity is so marked" (John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989], 26).

<sup>16</sup>Vern S. Poythress comments: "Walton correctly observes that Genesis 1 focuses on practical functions rather than on chemical (material) composition. But sometimes he shifts to a second meaning of 'material' and 'function.' He construes 'function' as narrowly religious: The seven days of Genesis 1 (which he construes as 24-hour days) describe the inauguration of a cosmic temple to its full functioning as a temple. Before the seven days there would still be an earlier ordinary operation of the astronomical, geological, and biological worlds over extended periods of time. These earlier events belong to 'the material phase' that Genesis allegedly does not mention ([Walton] pp. 92-99). The label 'material' now includes all aspects of physical appearance" ("Appearances Matter" in *World Magazine* 24/17, 29 August 2009 (<[www.worldmag.com/articles/15785](http://www.worldmag.com/articles/15785)>). Walton asks in response: "Did the Israelites believe their Old World Science? Undoubtedly they did. Did they ever think about the material aspect itself? Again, undoubtedly. Does this mean the Bible is offering an authoritative revelation of material origins? Not at all. The material language simply represents what they understood about the material world to convey the functional significance" ("John Walton Responds to Vern Poythress's Review of 'The Lost World of Genesis One,'" in *The BioLogos Forum: Science and Faith in Dialog* (<<http://biologos.org/blog/john-walton-responds-to-vern-poythress>>).

“enhance” its “theological vitality,”<sup>17</sup> and “to identify, truly and accurately . . . the thinking in the world of the Bible.”<sup>18</sup>

Walton seems to present his interpretation of Genesis 1 with a mixture of confidence and tentativeness. On one hand, he writes confidently: “I believe that this *is* a literal reading. A literal reading requires an understanding of the Hebrew language and the Israelite culture. I believe that the reading that I have offered is the most literal reading possible at this point.”<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, Walton writes tentatively:

Even if the reader is not inclined to adopt the proposed interpretation of Genesis 1, his or her theology could still be greatly enhanced by the observations offered here by embracing a renewed and informed commitment to God’s intimate involvement in the operation of the cosmos from its incipience and into eternity. We all need to strengthen our theology of creation and Creator whatever our view of the Genesis account of origins.<sup>20</sup>

This tentativeness is proper given the availability of significant scholarly research that provides a viable alternative to Walton’s interpretation of Genesis 1. Richard Davidson<sup>21</sup> and Kenton Sparks,<sup>22</sup> like Walton, seek to interpret Scripture with attention to the divine and human dimensions and the cultural context, without forcing a harmony with current scientific conclusions.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Davidson and Sparks propose views that are substantially different from Walton’s concerning supernatural miracles.

Davidson proposes that Genesis 1 does present the concept of supernatural miracles with regard to material and functional origins, as well as with regard to divine interventions within the material and functional order. This interpretation is based on several factors: (1) the central doctrines of

<sup>17</sup>Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 7.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 150. Similarly, concerning Moshe Weinfeld’s suggestion “that Genesis 1 could have served very effectively as the liturgy of . . . a [creation] festival,” Walton comments that this “suggestion has much to commend it both textually and culturally, though definitive evidence is lacking” (ibid., 91). Later he states that “Even though it is natural for us to defend our exegesis, it is arguably even more important to defend our theology” (ibid., 150).

<sup>21</sup>Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” in *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 4-43.

<sup>22</sup>Kenton Sparks, *God’s Words in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>See Davidson, 24, n. 69, and 86; see also idem, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 58, 60, 69, 85, 86, 95. See also Sparks, 313-322.

Christianity, (2) the literal, historical genre of Genesis 1 and the book of Genesis as a whole, (3) intertextual evidence from other parts of the Bible, (4) the polemic of Genesis 1 against other ancient cosmologies, (5) profound theology, (6) the commentary of a majority of scholars during the history of the church, and (7) the research of a large number of critical scholars who are not committed to traditional doctrines.<sup>24</sup>

Davidson's conclusions are complemented by Sparks's proposal that the concept of supernatural miracles<sup>25</sup> was widespread in ancient cultures. Sparks distinguishes between a providential miracle, which may be explained naturally, and a sign miracle, which is "an overt sign of God's supernatural power. . . . [Supernatural miracles] are not concealed within the events of history but occur . . . as obvious evidence that God's hand has moved in history."<sup>26</sup> Concerning supernatural miracles, Sparks states:

[T]he universal scope of miracle testimonies gives one reason to suspect that miracles, while exceptional, do occur. . . . [These] miracles are possible only if there is a sacred or divine realm that could break into the world of our existence. . . . Indeed, the human perception that there is another dimension of reality, to some extent distinct from our own, is a widespread phenomenon. Any student of religion knows this.<sup>27</sup>

In the next section, I describe and assess how Walton's interpretation of Genesis 1 and his view of miracles influence his perspective on theology-science relations.

### 3. *Application to Theology-Science Relations*

#### Description of Walton's View

Walton's interpretation of miracles and Genesis 1 is closely connected with his perspective on theology-science relations. First, as he views it, Genesis 1 does not contemplate any contrast between primary and secondary causation,

<sup>24</sup>Davidson, "The Biblical Account of Origins," 10-19. Compare Walton's comments on ancient culture, genre, intertextual evidence, polemic, profound/strong theology, traditional interpretations (Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 23-37, 97, 102-107, 142-151, 171). Contrary to Walton, Paul Copan suggests that "A solid case can be made for *creatio ex nihilo* in the OT—that it is indeed *demand*ed by the text" ("Creation *ex Nihilo* or *ex Materia*? A Critique of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation," in *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9/2 [2005]: 34, emphasis original).

<sup>25</sup>Sparks, 316.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 316. What Walton describes as natural miracle signs of God's constant action (Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 20), Sparks, 316, identifies as providential miracles.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 317. By using this quotation, I do not intend to imply that Walton rejects the distinction between God's reality and our reality. My purpose is to show how Sparks draws a different conclusion about supernatural miracles from this distinction.

just as it does not contemplate any supernatural miracles that deviate from what is natural. For this reason, he proposes that theology and science present different perspectives on the same reality. The metaphysics of primary causation is presented in theological accounts of cosmic origins, while the metaphysics of secondary causation is presented in scientific accounts (proposition 13).<sup>28</sup> According to Walton, God is “carrying out his purposes through the naturalistic operations of the cosmos . . . that . . . were decreed by the word of God.”<sup>29</sup> “What we identify as natural laws only take on their law-like quality because God acts so consistently in the operations of the cosmos.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, “we should not expect anything in the Bible . . . to engage in the discussion of how God’s level of creative activity relates to . . . the laws of nature.”<sup>31</sup>

Second, the impact of Walton’s view of miracles on theology-science relations may be perceived in his proposal that Genesis 1 supports a unity in diversity between God’s actions of creating and sustaining the functions of the cosmos (proposition 14). One might be tempted to assume that Walton opens a space for fundamentally different kinds of miracles in his distinction between God’s acts of creating and sustaining. That assumption, however, would be unfounded since he subsumes the act of sustaining under the act of creating such that there is an ongoing creation that does not deviate from the natural processes that are studied by science.<sup>32</sup> He is also critical of “the interventionist view [of miracles] that treats the functionality of natural processes too lightly, as being inadequate to accomplish God’s purposes.”<sup>33</sup>

Third, Walton proposes that, from a theological perspective, the cosmos is a designed and purposeful supernatural divine activity (proposition 15), while, from a scientific perspective, the cosmos is natural, without purpose or design (proposals 16 and 18).<sup>34</sup> Therefore, he suggests that we should not separate “various aspects of origins” according to “whether God did it [supernaturally] or [whether] a naturalistic process could be identified.”<sup>35</sup> Walton regards this as “a distinction that is essentially unbiblical.”<sup>36</sup> For him, this distinction also leads to a “God of the gaps” theology in which the

<sup>28</sup>Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 20, 114-118.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 119-124.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 125-141, 152-161.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

progress of natural scientific explanations leaves less and less space for divine actions.<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, Walton reasons that, within the reigning paradigm of science, “to appeal to purpose is to shift to a different kind of [nonscientific] explanation (e.g., metaphysical, theological). . . . If scientists simply threw up their hands and admitted that a metaphysical, teleological explanation was necessary, they would be departing from that which is scientific.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, Walton questions “whether we can assume such hard and fast lines of distinction between the scientific and the metaphysical. It is true that observations can be put into one category or the other, but the fact is that such a categorization is artificial because none of us has a worldview comprised of only one of them. Science and metaphysics blend together in life.”<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Walton takes a neutral theological position with regard to what science suggests about material origins, possibly because scientists “at this point . . . are not willing to rewrite the current rules of science.”<sup>40</sup> He concludes that theology cannot be threatened by what science proposes because theology does not propose a description of material origins.<sup>41</sup> For him, this approach to theology-science relations does not produce a weaker theology; it produces a stronger one (proposition 17).<sup>42</sup> “When God’s work is fully integrated with our scientific worldview and science is seen to give definition to what God is doing and how he is doing it, we regain a more biblical perspective of the work—a perspective that is theologically healthier.”<sup>43</sup> For Walton, such a theology should emphasize the following themes: (1) God’s role in everything, (2) an ongoing Creator role, (3) God’s control of cosmic

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 130, 116-117.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>41</sup>According to Walton, “Science cannot offer an unbiblical view of material origins, because there is no biblical view of material origins aside from the very general idea that whatever happened, whenever it happened, and however it happened, God did it” (ibid., 113). “[Genesis 1] looks to the future (how this cosmos will function for human beings with God at its center) rather than to the past (how God brought material into being)” (ibid., 118). “Q: When and how did God create the material world? A: According to the interpretation offered in this book, the Bible does not tell us, so we are left to figure it out as best we can with the intellectual capacity and other tools that God gave us. But the material world was created by him” (ibid., 169). “Genesis 1 gives us no cause to argue with the idea of the physical world coming about by a slow process” (ibid., 150).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 142-151.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 143.



functions, (4) sacred space, (5) Sabbath, (6) order and disorder (sin), (7) the human role, and (8) the goodness of creation.<sup>44</sup>

#### Assessment of Walton's View

I agree with Walton's concerns that (1) theological and scientific perspectives on causation should be kept distinct but not separate, (2) there is a sense in which divine creativity extends beyond the end of God's activity during the creation week, (3) theology should not be threatened by scientific progress or feel pressured to accommodate itself to current scientific theories, and (4) scientists sometimes fail to be metaphysically neutral. I disagree, however, with some aspects of his response to these concerns.

With regard to the first two concerns, I see no contradiction between the purposeful perspective of Scripture and the terminology of primary and secondary causation. It seems to me that Genesis suggests that God acts as primary cause when he miraculously creates the cosmos out of nothing, miraculously sustains it so that it continues to exist, and miraculously intervenes within it. Yet there is room for freedom, since God's miracles establish the cosmos as a secondary cause and enable secondary causes within the cosmos. This interpretation provides a viable alternative to Walton's proposal that primary and secondary causation are simply different ways of interpreting the cosmos. My interpretation also gives more definition to the paradox of intimate divine involvement with everything without compromising human freedom.<sup>45</sup>

With regard to Walton's other two concerns, his comments imply that theology and science inevitably influence each other either positively or negatively. Therefore, I propose that his effort to be neutral is futile. Moreover, his neutrality aims for full theology-science integration, which leads to a compromise of biblical revelation concerning supernatural miracles. Instead, what we need is a mutually respectful dialogue between theology and science. In contrast to Walton's theology-science integration, theology-science dialog can result in a stronger theology grounded in biblical revelation and a stronger science grounded in God's general revelation in the cosmos.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 142-151.

<sup>45</sup>Walton, 122, mentions "several times" that his proposal "does not result in a view of God as a micromanager, but it insists that he cannot be removed from the ongoing operations." He concludes that "the paradox of intimate involvement without micromanagement defies definition."

<sup>46</sup>Martin Hanna, "The Use of Science in Theology: Case Studies of Thomas F. Torrance and Langdon B. Gilkey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2004). Walton's proposal seems closer to the dialectical or correlational model for theology-science relations proposed by Gilkey, where theology is involved with "correlatively . . . interpreting the human situation," which is "formed largely by . . . science" (*Message*

In addition, I agree with the themes that Walton includes in his version of a strong theology. I disagree, however, with the extent to which he neglects the concept of supernatural miracles when he (1) emphasizes the role of science to “give definition to what God is doing and how he is doing it,”<sup>47</sup> (2) minimizes distinctions between functional creation and ongoing creative-sustaining activity, (3) limits the significance of the creation of cosmic material, (4) distinguishes God’s person from his place in sacred space, (5) limits human imitation of God’s creative work and Sabbath rest, (6) discusses the cosmic order and the disorder of sin, (7) relates the human role to God’s intimate involvement with everything, and (8) explains the relations between moral and natural good and evil.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, Walton has commented on the negative impact that secular scientific presuppositions can have on the credibility of the biblical revelation.<sup>49</sup> Also, he has interpreted Genesis 1 in a way that seems to place the content of its revelation beyond the threat of these scientific presuppositions. It may be, though, that scientific presuppositions have indirectly led him to underestimate the significance of the scholarly research that suggests that Genesis 1 does present God as supernaturally creating, sustaining, and intervening in the cosmos. Therefore, the theological challenge of scientific presuppositions should be addressed more directly.

Both Davidson and Sparks point out the scientific presuppositions of the historical-critical method and the need for Christian theology to clarify its response to these presuppositions. Sparks allows for scientific criteria of historical criticism (i.e., methodological doubt, analogy, and correlation)<sup>50</sup> to

---

*and Existence* [New York: Seabury, 1979], 53, 57-58). I prefer the dialogical approach proposed by Thomas F. Torrance. “A theological science . . . cannot but contribute to the purity of the human sciences, but it can hardly do that unless it is prepared to enter into a genuine dialogue with them. . . . This in turn will have a healthy impact upon theological science” (*Theological Science* [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], 284).

<sup>47</sup>Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 143.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 142-151.

<sup>49</sup>“The historical-critical method suggested that we should accept as true only that which can be empirically proven. The new historiography was concerned only with natural cause and effect in history” (John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, Mark William Chavalas, eds., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000], 211).

<sup>50</sup>Sparks, 213-322. Modern skepticism about miracles has been influenced greatly by David Hume’s famous essay “On Miracles” (1748). The most influential advocate of Hume in biblical and theological studies was Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), who introduced three fundamental principles of historical criticism: methodological doubt, analogy, and correlation (Sparks, 314). According to Davidson, “The word ‘criticism’ is used here in the technical sense of Descartes’ ‘methodological doubt’ and refers to the autonomy of the investigator to interrogate and evaluate the scriptural witness, to

provide evidence for or against the historical accuracy of biblical accounts of supernatural miracles. But where Walton expresses theological reasons for rejecting the concept of supernatural miracles, Sparks proposes that there may be theological reasons for affirming certain supernatural miracle accounts even when there may be insufficient historical-critical evidence to validate them. He regards some of the supernatural miracles mentioned in the Bible as theologically necessary.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast with Sparks, Davidson proposes that secular scientific presuppositions are unsuitable for historical-biblical research, though he uses similar study tools as Sparks.<sup>52</sup> This approach to the study of the Bible leads Davidson to a very different conclusion than Walton on the subject of supernatural miracles. Davidson regards it as theologically necessary to recognize the need for “supernatural spiritual assistance” in interpreting Scripture.<sup>53</sup> In addition, biblical scholars “must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether naturalistic (closed system of cause and effect without any room for the supernatural),

---

judge the truthfulness, adequacy, and intelligibility of the specific declarations of the text. . . . The principle of analogy . . . assumes that present experience is the criterion for evaluating events narrated in Scripture, inasmuch as all events are, in principle, similar. . . . The principle of correlation states that history is a closed system of cause and effect with no room for supernatural intervention. . . . This is not to say that all historical critics deny the existence of God or the supernatural. But *methodologically*, historical criticism has no room for the supernatural” (“Biblical Theology,” 90).

<sup>51</sup>Sparks, 315-316, points out that “it is the very nature of the case that miracles are not caused by antecedent *historical* events. Their cause is not a product of human agency or of natural events; their immediate cause is divine agency, which moves into history from without.” Nevertheless, miracles may be evaluated positively within a historical-critical approach because “Troeltsch seems to have overlooked something in his analysis of miracles: once they occur, miracles certainly produce posterior historical effects. . . . Genuine miracles leave historical effects in their wake” (ibid., 318). Where there is insufficient historical evidence, “Perhaps we believe in the Bible’s miracles precisely because they are miracles of the right sort. . . . So critical historiography does not hold all of the cards when it comes to making judgments about history” (ibid., 319). “There is no reason at all that the church should consider these matters *only* in terms of modern historiography. The theological reflection of the church . . . also counts as evidence in our historical equations” (ibid., 320, emphasis original).

<sup>52</sup>Davidson writes: “Those who follow the historical-biblical method apply similar study *tools* utilized in historical criticism. Careful attention is given to historical, literary and linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and theological details, as outlined throughout this article. But while utilizing the gains brought about by the historical-critical method in sharpening various study tools for *analysis* of the biblical text, there is a consistent intent to eliminate the element of *criticism* that stands as judge upon the Word” (ibid., “Biblical Theology,” 96).

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 66.

evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (human beings as the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes).<sup>54</sup> Therefore, his face-value reading is very different from Walton's. Davidson concludes that "a Bible-based hermeneutic accepts at face value the biblical accounts of the creation of this world . . . and the other historical assertions of Scripture, including the supernatural, miraculous events."<sup>55</sup>

#### 4. *Summary and Conclusion*

Walton's view of miracles, Genesis 1, and theology-science relations is interrelated with his proposal that ancient cosmologies do not describe supernatural miracles. This led me to ask the question: How could all the events mentioned in Genesis 1 happen in seven days of creation without supernatural miracles? Walton's answer is that creation involved ceremonial and liturgical divine acts that established cosmic functions and installed cosmic functionaries. Therefore, viewed theologically, these actions are supernatural; and viewed scientifically, these actions are natural. This overlap of perspectives also applies to the material origins of the cosmos, which, for Walton, may be investigated by science. In this way, he avoids a "God of the gaps" theology that is threatened by the progress of scientific explanation.

In addition, Walton makes important distinctions between supernatural primary causation and natural secondary causation, and between God's actions of creating and sustaining. At the same time, he blurs these distinctions in a way that unfortunately leads to a practical identity between the cosmic process and God's design, purpose, and action. This leads to the paradox of how God can be intimately involved in this way without micromanagement that precludes human freedom. Nevertheless, Walton concludes that the full integration of theology and science will lead to a stronger theology that is not threatened by scientific presuppositions and conclusions. However, science may have influenced him to underestimate significant scholarly research that provides an alternative to his proposal.

In contrast with Walton's proposal, the historical-biblical research by Davidson suggests that Genesis 1 *does* indicate that supernatural acts by God were involved in the material and functional origins of the cosmos. Moreover, these divine acts include supernatural interventions during and after the creation week. Also in contrast with Walton's proposal, the historical-critical research by Sparks suggests that, since the concept of divine action from outside the cosmos through supernatural miracles was widespread in ancient cultures, we have historical reasons to believe that such miracles do occur.

Bible students would do well to explore the evidence supporting the interpretation of Genesis 1 as indicating that it takes various kinds of

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 70.

---

supernatural miracles for God to create, sustain, and intervene in the cosmos. From this perspective, the origin of the cosmos cannot be reduced to cosmic processes. Neither can God be explained away by the progress of science. In addition, God's intimate involvement creates, sustains, and interacts with human freedom. While God does act indirectly through natural processes, he also acts directly to create, sustain, and intervene within them. God is always active, directly and indirectly. Either way, when God acts, it takes a supernatural miracle.