one of the primary gendered social goods of the time. Together, these two texts offer an entry into a potentially rich discussion of the ultimate, eschatological significance of gender.

This leads to a final lingering question: What do the definition of gender as love and the emphasis on justice as an evaluative tool contribute to our contemporary conversations around transgender identities? Do Vale's insistence on the significance of sexed bodies and the distinction of the essence of gender from biology offer suggestive starting points, but he does not thoroughly explore this complex, complicated issue. His fullest statement comes in a footnote claiming the compatibility of his definition of gender with "full trans* affirmation" (using trans* to refer to a range of gender identities):

> To affirm trans* identities using this understanding of gender, one would simply have to add that what is at issue is perceived biological traits, that an individual need only be perceived as having a certain sexed body to be truly of a certain gender … All this is to say that, in the end, my view does not decide the matter one way or another. (p. 108)

In this respect, as in many others, do Vale's *Gender as Love* offers a fresh, theologically rich beginning for conversations in the church and academy.

Reviewed by Caryn Reeder, professor of New Testament, Religious Studies Department Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF12-25Hendel

GENESIS 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary by Ronald Hendel. Yale University Press, 2024. 466 pages. Hardcover; $85.00. ISBN: 9780300149739.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis provide a set of important texts in faith-and-science discussions. This well-informed, in-depth treatment of Genesis 1–11 enhances not only one's understanding of the original Hebrew, but also such things as the text's literary features and the cultural milieu out of which it arose. Add to this the author's forays into Jewish and Christian interpretation and there is something here for every keen interpreter of Genesis 1–11. It culminates more than forty years of the author's scholarly interest in Genesis and is helpfully preceded by his critical edition of the text of Genesis 1–11 (Oxford University Press, 1998).

Ronald Hendel, professor emeritus of Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at UC Berkeley, describes his approach as "a literary philology, which combines detailed historical-critical scholarship with attention to the nuances of literary conventions, style, and resonance" (p. xi). This wide-ranging approach offers further evidence that gone are the days of strictly historical-critical mainline commentaries, dominated as they were by speculative, quasi-scientific reconstructions of a text's prehistory that were of little interest or relevance to readers of the Bible as scripture for the church.

The book is structured as follows. Three sections precede the main body of the commentary: an introduction, a bibliography, and a fresh translation of the Hebrew text that signals in varied type his understanding of the sources and redactional elements. The body of the commentary consists of notes and comments on each pericope of Genesis 1–11. Each section begins by including the relevant portion of the translation offered earlier. Then come "Textual (i.e., text-critical) Notes," more general "Notes" that tease out nuances and, finally, synthetic "Comments" that include literary and structural features as well as parallel texts (Ancient Near Eastern, OT, NT, Jewish, and occasionally Christian).

The last time we saw an in-depth commentary on the same corpus was in the late eighties and early nineties by Gordon Wenham and Victor Hamilton. Not only is Hendel's commentary more up to date, but its consideration of Hebrew and cognate languages is at least as extensive. Hendel's comparative analyses (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Canaanite) also include much that is different. These are extraordinarily rich, bringing both clarity and vitality to the text. To be sure, evangelicals will still find Wenham and Hamilton more helpful on topics of particular interest to them than this work. Nevertheless, Hendel's deep engagement with philology, context, literary structure, et cetera, paves a good way toward rich theological engagement.

The commentary has a few shortcomings. First, the print size is ridiculously small. Second, the introduction reads as if to promise more to follow than actually appears. Thus, tantalizing introductory subsections, such as "Between the Figural and the Real"—which deliciously contrast the historical-literal stance of Luther with the more nuanced stance of Calvin that anticipated understanding Genesis 1 as accommodation to ancient cosmology—whet the reader's appetite for more than what follows. Third, although Hendel's separate discussion of the priestly and Yahwist sources is helpful for distinguishing the distinctive character perceived by historical critics in the accounts of creation and the flood, I would have liked to have seen more emphasis on the meaning of the text in its final canonical form. The reader is left thinking in terms of doublets—for example, two creation stories or, even more oddly, two

flood stories—rather than *the unified single text* of present form. Finally, although otherwise comprehensive, Hendel fails to engage with the work of several evangelical scholars, including Tremper Longman, Bruce Waltke, and John Walton.

These criticisms take little away from what is otherwise a remarkably good commentary. Hendel consistently demonstrates sensibility, judiciousness, and balance in his interpretation of texts. In what follows I hope to whet *PSCF* readers' appetites by sampling portions that are likely of particular interest.

Hendel's introductory discussion of the linguistic history of biblical Hebrew is a welcome polemic against a group of scholars who have recently sought to undermine the validity of using linguistic and grammatical criteria for dating the time in which a given passage was written.[1] The dating suggested by Hendel—ranging from the ninth century BC to the early fifth—is thus much older than that proposed by his dubious methodological naysayers.

Hendel translates Genesis 1:1–2 as "In the beginning, when God created heaven and earth—the earth was desolate chaos, and darkness was over the face of the ocean, and a wind of God was soaring over the face of the water—…" He thus regards the noun *re'shit* ("beginning [of]") as a construct noun followed by a verbal clause that is best rendered temporally. This issue is, of course, important to Christian theology because creation *ex nihilo* is not implied if one follows Hendel's translation, which entails verse 2 being a circumstantial clause that describes pre-existing chaotic material from which God created an ordered earth and heaven. Note that, although God is the only known subject of the verb *bara'* ("create"), creation out of nothing is not necessarily inherent to the meaning of this word. Yet, because the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is upheld elsewhere in the OT (e.g., Isaiah 44:14), I am inclined to concur with Hendel, whose translation of Genesis 1:1–3 aligns best with the Hebrew. (After all, *re'shit* by no means necessarily denotes a beginning that is absolute, but it may be an initial point in time, which leaves room to affirm God's earlier creation of the primordial chaos, to which no reference is here made.)

Hendel interprets the word "day" in Genesis 1 literally, beginning at dusk. Interestingly, he traces the roots of the nineteenth-century "day-age" theory not only back to Psalm 90:4 (according to which a thousand years is as a day in God's sight), but also to Jubilees 4:30, which drew on this Psalm to reconcile another seeming contradiction in timing, that between Adam's death at the age of 930 (Gen. 5:5) and Genesis 2:17, which states that Adam would die on the "day" he ate the forbidden fruit. (On this point, Hendel sympathizes with the idea that God was being merciful by postponing the time of death.) Further, on Hendel's literal one-day stance, he makes no attempt to reconcile the quick creation this implies with contemporary scientific theories that suggest a much longer process: Hendel is content to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 primarily within the context of Ancient Near Eastern mythological texts, which exhibit strong similarities (as well as key differences) with Genesis. In other words, Hendel's discussion of accommodative and figural interpretations of Genesis 1 reflects a deference to the growing interest within biblical studies in the biblical text's history of interpretation. This, in turn, reflects the idea that the interpretation and meaning of a text is affected by the context and circumstances in which it is being read, as in the case of current interest in reconciling Genesis 1–11 with modern-day scientific views.

Regarding Genesis 6:1–4, Hendel sees the "sons of God" (v. 2) as members of the divine council, akin to the host of heaven, whose behavior is abnormal here for being sexually inclined and not subservient to Yahweh. Thus, Hendel rejects the view that the "sons of God" refer to the descendants of Seth.

The reader should not infer that the commentary is an easy read from which interpretive gems can readily be picked—though well written, the commentary is as dense and technical as they come. Yet little is superfluous. Hendel limits his data to what matters: understanding Genesis as originally intended and understood (albeit with attention paid to important moments in the history of interpretation).

Hendel is to be commended for writing an exhaustive commentary on Genesis 1–11; it explains much, reflects sound judgment based on the most recent scholarship, and sheds much light. It is bound to be among the first commentaries to be pulled off the shelf for contemporary insight into the original meaning of the text and its cultural background.

Note

[1]See R. Hendel and J. Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study* (Yale University Press, 2018).

Reviewed by Glen J. Taylor, associate professor emeritus of Old Testament, Wycliffe College and the School of Graduate Studies, University of Toronto.