

EXCERPT

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The Liturgy of Creation
Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context

Available August 6, 2019 | \$30, 280 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5262-8

“Open these pages and let Dr. LeFebvre become your tour guide to an Israelite view of time and calendar. He did not always persuade me, and he may not always persuade you, but we can all benefit from his insights, and the suggestions that he makes are worth pondering.”

John H. Walton, Old Testament professor at Wheaton College and Graduate School, author of *The Lost World of Genesis One*

Not Just Another Creation Story

How were holidays chosen and taught in biblical Israel, and what did they have to do with the creation narrative? Michael LeFebvre considers the calendars of the Pentateuch, arguing that dates were added to Old Testament narratives not as journalistic details but to teach sacred rhythms of labor and worship. LeFebvre then applies this insight to the creation week, finding that the days of creation also serve a liturgical purpose. This excerpt of the foreword by C. John Collins, professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, outlines why this book on the oldest story of time is still relevant for today.

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What? Another book on the creation story? Why can't the scholars just let us read it for ourselves? Haven't these scholars already said enough? Is there anything more to be said?

If that's your response, you have my sympathy. Not everyone who has spoken or written an opinion deserves our attention. But with this book, Dr. Michael LeFebvre shows that he is one that we should listen to, that he belongs in this conversation, that his voice is an edifying one.

Dr. LeFebvre and I have never met face-to-face; we have corresponded by email over the past couple of years and offered one another comments and encouragements. He was in a program with the Center for Pastor Theologians, and I had just given a talk to another group in a similar program with the Center. I was strongly impressed with the quality of the young scholar-pastors that I met, and I have been likewise impressed with the academic depth and pastoral wisdom I have seen in Dr. LeFebvre. It is my pleasure to commend this book to your study.

All serious study of the Genesis creation account should begin with what that account does for the *Israelite* audience of the whole of Genesis, and of the whole of the Torah. Dr. LeFebvre has done this creatively, with a study of how the Torah uses its calendar references, connecting key events in Israel's history to dates in the liturgical calendar; in this he finds patterns that he can apply to the creation account—which, as we know, comes to us in the form of a calendar week.

You will find it worth your time to read this book for these first six chapters on the liturgical calendar. If you stop there, you will have gained a great deal of insight into the life-setting of ancient Israel, the function of the festivals and their relation to the agricultural calendar, and the literary style of the Mosaic narration. (Even having studied these topics a bit myself and written on some of them, I found much to learn and to think about.) But, if I might offer some advice, don't stop there! Go on to read the following chapters, which give a detailed look at the calendar-like style of Genesis 1:1–2:3. (Again, having studied and written about *that*, I found plenty to think about here.)

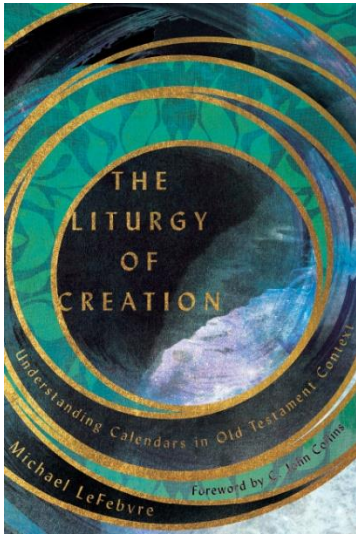
Dr. LeFebvre has accomplished something remarkable: he has written something that is academically responsible and creative and is at the same time readable and clear for the intelligent layperson. I might add that his overall case is



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attractive, enriching the conversation. Like any ambitious contribution, his particular arguments will be sifted, reviewed, appropriated, criticized; some of them might need revision, and some of them (or *many* of them) might change people’s minds! But that’s how it should be, and hardly detracts from the viability of his basic proposal. He has connected his own views to a version of the framework reading of the creation account; and in so doing, he has improved that reading and overcome some of the difficulties that others have found with it. All of this he has firmly based on textual evidence from the Bible itself.

Dr. LeFebvre argues that associating biblical events with festival dates does not assert the actual chronology of these events. He has also made it clear that this in no way undercuts the reality of these events themselves—and the same is true of the creation story. I earnestly hope all readers will catch *both sides* of that!

The final chapter does a fine job of putting a practical point on all this: he encourages us to use the creation story according to its proper purpose, especially as we observe the weekly rhythm of work and rest. That account has a limited use in Bible-science debates—whether from the perspective of faith, or that of unbelief; that’s not what it’s there to do. Dr. LeFebvre affirms, as I do, the traditional Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*; and far from being threatened by the scientific study of the world, and even of human beings, properly understood, this doctrine happily makes a place for these studies. There is plenty more to say on this, of course, but this book has pointed the way to wisdom in handling these matters.

That’s enough from me; now it’s time to read this book. You will discover that you are in the company of a competent and friendly guide, one for whom you can be thankful to God.

—Taken from the foreword



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