

IS GOD GUILTY OF FRAUD?

Chapter 7

Science and Faith

I HAVE CULLED FROM THE LARGE LESSON THE NEW MATERIAL FOR THIS WEEK TO SAVE YOU FROM READING THE ENTIRE LESSON...

HERE IS THE NEW CONTENT FOR THIS SUNDAY (AND THE NEXT FEW)

SCRIPTURE AND ISSUES OF CREATION VS. EVOLUTION

Many people of faith debate the issue of creation or evolution. For a good number of creationists, the issue seems especially important because of two reasons: (1) a belief that the integrity of the Bible is at stake if Genesis is not accorded a literal meaning; and (2) a belief that creationism means a Creator God; therefore, evolution must mean no God. In other words, some believe that without creationism, atheism must be true. Some even argue that creationism is scientifically required in an effort to “prove” God exists.

Before delving into some significant implications of science and the cosmos from a Biblical perspective, these issues confronting many creationists should be addressed. The first measure of consideration is what the text says.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 – an overview

At first glance, it might seem as if there are two different creation stories. In fact, many biblical scholars assert that there are. Genesis 1-2:3 speak of the seven days of God’s creation and rest. God made light and separated it from darkness on day one. On day two, God made an expanse called “heaven” and separated the waters above from the waters below. The third day, God took the waters below the expanse (below heaven) and gathered them into one place so that dry land appeared. God called the land “earth” and the waters “seas.” God then had the earth bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed and fruit trees.

On day four, God set lights in the heavens to separate day and night, and to establish seasons. God specifically made the two great lights: the sun to rule the day, and

the moon to rule the night, as well as the stars, setting them in the expanse called heaven.

On day five, God created great sea creatures and every living creature that moves in the water. God also made the birds that inhabit the sky. God blessed the creatures and said for them to be fruitful and multiply.

Day six is when God created the living creatures of the earth. God then made man after his own likeness and in his image. God created man as male and female. As with the fish and birds, God issued the command to be fruitful and multiply.

Day seven is a day without creation; it is the day God rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. This takes up all of Genesis chapter one and the first three verses of chapter two.

Beginning in Genesis 2:4, it seems a second creation story is given. No longer is “God” the acting subject, but now it is the “LORD God” (adding “Yahweh” – LORD – to the Hebrew for God). Chapter two speaks of the LORD God making man at a time “when no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—” (Gen. 2:5-6).

God does not provide rain until the flood, but he does make man. The LORD God creates man from the dust of the ground, breathes the breath of life into his nostrils and *then* plants a garden in Eden, placing man there. Man is given the charge of working the garden. In chapter one, God made plants on day three, and man on day six. Chapter two seems to reverse the order with man coming *before* plants. This adds to the concern of some that the stories reflect two different traditions.

Genesis two continues with the LORD God determining that man needs a helper. After giving the man time to name all creatures, God caused him to fall deeply asleep and then created woman from one of his ribs. Awakening, man named her “woman,” out of recognition that she was made like him and from him. Genesis then transitions to chapter three and the Garden of Eden story.

How should one read Genesis 1 and 2?

Some believe the debate over a proper reading of Genesis 1 and 2 is simply a question of whether it is literal or figurative. That is actually an oversimplification. To me, the most accurate comment and supposition of the text is that the text is authoritative. By that I mean that it conveys what God intended it to convey. If one is to treat the text fairly, one must first try to understand what the text meant to the original recipients. It is dangerous and unfair to change the meaning of Genesis 1

and 2 (or any other part of the Bible) into something that it was not intended to mean.

Wheaton Old Testament scholar John Walton explained the interpreters chore,

God communicated his revelation to his immediate audience in terms they understood.”¹

What the interpreter has to do is deal with not only translating the Hebrew words into English, but also communicate the ancient mindset into a reading of the text such that it makes sense to the reader today. Some may not like this approach, some may think it difficult, but God sets the agenda for God’s revelation, not me or anyone else. If we “commandeer the text to address our issues, we distort it in the process.”²

In reading the text, three important aspects of reading it within its cultural context surface. In question form they are: (1) What is the cosmology with reference to how the ancients viewed the universe’s structure? (2) What is the significance of the Hebrew words and language? (3) What are the messages God was trying to convey to the ancient Israelites when giving this revelation?

Ancient Cosmology

The ancient cosmology of the Middle East at the time of Moses was fairly consistent across the people groups. It was a somewhat common sense view of the structure of things to those without telescopes, modern physics, limited exposure to geography, no modern maps or globes, limited communications with other parts of the world, no real understanding of the science of weather, the atmosphere, etc.

Having grown up during the era of modern science, most people understand space as a vacuum where solar systems occupy space, where stars are distant suns and where the planets rotate around those suns. Most think of the earth as round, surrounded by an atmosphere. Clouds are a gathering of condensation and moisture. Mountains are areas where earth has projected up from the planet. The seas are the waters that have accumulated in low-lying areas. The tides are gravitational response to the moon. This is the modern language of the earth, and people can write, speak, and communicate with these terms and ideas.

Israel and its neighbors did not speak this same language of cosmology. If one goes through a thorough analysis of the cosmological language of the Ancient Near East, one readily sees that the Israelites spoke the same language as its neighbors. Hence,

¹ Walton, John H., *The Lost World of Genesis One*, (IVP 2010), at 26.

² *Ibid.*, at 29-30.

God's revelation uses terms that would have made sense to the Israelites, even though they are at odds with the terms of scientific understanding today.

Walton makes the point:

If we aspire to understand the culture and literature of the ancient world, whether Canaanite, Babylonian, Egyptian, or Israelite, it is essential that we understand their cosmic geography. Despite variations from one ancient Near Eastern culture to another, there are certain elements that characterize all of them.³

Toward that end, one can see that the ancients thought of the cosmos as layers, much like a three layer cake. The earth was the middle layer. The heavens were the top layer and the netherworld was the bottom (literally the “underworld”). The people did not think of multiple continents but thought of one stretch of land that was shaped like a disk. We might consider the sky as the frosting between the top two layers with the heavens (layer three) being above the sky.

People knew they stood on earth. They knew if they ventured far enough they came to the sea. They figured that the land, a flat disc, must rest upon the sea. Without understanding gravity or tidal currents, they knew the water somehow stayed back from the land, barring some rare and unforeseen events when it might come inward. They deduced that there must be some way that the earth was separated from the salty sea. Furthermore, they knew that there was water in places under the land. This was seen in water wells and springs. Therefore, they reasoned, the land must rest on something over the subsurface water, holding the ground steady rather than it rocking like a boat on water.

In addition, the ancients were well aware of rain. They knew it came from above, so they reasoned that there must be some reservoir of water up in the heavens. The water didn't all fall at once, so something solid must be holding the water back. Clouds were always present when rain fell, so it made sense that the clouds were somehow windows through the solid firmament that could open up and allow the water to fall freely.

The solid firmament that separated the waters itself was held up above the earth somehow. Some believed the firmament was held up by mountains at the end of the earth. Others believed there must be massive poles holding up the edges. Some even thought there might be ropes tying down the firmament.

³ Walton, John H., *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Baker Academic 2006) at 166. Luis Stadelmann did groundbreaking work on similar analysis in *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1970).

They thought the stars were fixed onto the sky, and thought everything was rotating around the earth. The sun moved across the sky during the day and returned through the underworld at night to begin its journey again the next morning. Stars were on tracks that set their course and they would come out at night and move on course.

This is the ancient view of the cosmos's structure that infuses Genesis 1 with greater meaning. From it one understands the idea of God separating the waters above and below by the firmament (Day Two). It also makes sense of Day Three when God took the waters below the expanse (below heaven) and gathered them into one place so that dry land appeared.

God used the people's concepts of the universe's structure to explain his creation. He did not give Israel a revised lesson in astronomy, atmospheric sciences, the physics of light and gravity, nor the geography that would accompany a 21st understanding of the world. God's concern wasn't with rectifying Israel's science. His concern was rectifying Israel's understanding of God, humanity, and other important matters I will detail later. God gave humanity science and a charge to figure physics and the universe out, as discussed earlier. God revealed what he needed to in terms the Israelites would readily understand.

Hebrew Words and Language

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God's Messages, or

An alternate "inerrant" view of Genesis that isn't "literal"

The science/faith concern that reading Genesis one and two in a less than "literal" way diminishes the authority or authenticity of Scripture is not fair. Scripture uses many literature types and approaches to give the message precisely as God intended to give it, whether the passage is literal, poetic, allegorical, or simply historical narrative. Such comes into play with a historical contextual reading of the Genesis account.

If one were an Israelite, leaving Egypt and encountering pagan neighbors, the story given in Genesis would have had important meaning, but not as a science text book explaining scientific origins. Without a doubt, the Israelites were cognizant of the culture around them. They often strayed into the idol worship of their neighbors,

constantly fighting to return to worship of God (see 2 Kgs 11:18-28). Similarly, they sought a king because “all the nations” had one! (1 Sam. 8:5). It seems reasonable to expect that the Jews would be aware of the origins and creation stories of their neighbors. Many of those stories are still available to read today, thanks, in part, to King Ashurbanipal.

In 630BC, Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (668-627BC) ruled in his hot, dry capital city of Nineveh. The king had a tremendous library with thousands of clay tablets, the “books” of his day. These tablets covered most every subject, from the mundane to the fanciful (legal tablets, transactional tablets, *etc.*). In time, the king died, his empire crumbled, and time overcame his library, burying the building and its contents. Then, in the mid-1800’s, archaeologists discovered these tablets, and scholarship of the Old Testament has never been the same. They provide insight in a number of areas, including creation myths of Israel’s neighbors.

Two of the creation stories competing against Israel’s revealed narrative, found in the clay cuneiform tablets, are called the *Atrahasis* and the *Enuma Elish*. These stories originated thousands of years before Ashurbanipal. The stories tell a gripping account of creation. Not in the sense that the world was created out of nothing. But in the sense that the chaos of the world brought forth the gods and their creative work.

Contrary to a self-existent God outside of space and time creating the world, these stories explain how the gods were created. The gods first efforts were to fight chaos and bring order to the world. As the gods continue to multiply, they did all sorts of human things, though on a grander, more god-like scale. There were working gods who dug the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, piling up the dirt into mountains. There were warring gods, who fought against each other, hacking one dead goddess into two and hurling half of her body into the sky to form the dome of heaven.

In these stories of Israel’s neighbors, the gods each have possession over the aspects of creation they either made or came to own. So the god who owns the storms has jurisdiction and control over the weather. The god who owns the sea is the sea. The god who has possession of a certain area of the earth can be both in that earth and also presiding over that part of earth.

In these stories, man is made to take burdens off the gods because the toil involved in the gods’ hard work on earth started to wear on them! They were exhausted.

Radically, into a culture and community of this sort comes Israel’s creation story that is as opposite as possible. There is one God, not many. God is not made; he is the maker. God does not war against chaos in an effort to bring order; God creates the world in an orderly fashion, forming and filling in ways that are “very good.” God does not simply make one aspect of creation to inhabit and rule over. God makes all of creation. He makes everything. God is not relegated to a certain piece

of real estate; he presides over all there is. Creation is not a part of God, nor an aspect of his body. Creation is independent of God, something he spoke into being.

God did not grow weary of creating. He was not challenged in digging creeks and rivers or in building mountains. God made all with simple words. He rested not out of fatigue, but because his work was finished, and it was “very good”!

Man was not made to relieve God of burdens; man was made in God’s image to enjoy his fellowship and company. God made man and gave to man! In the words of John Collins,

God made the material world as a place for mankind to live: to love, to work, to enjoy, and to worship God. The exalted tone of the passage allows the reader to ponder this with a sense of awe, adoring the goodness, power, and creativity of the One who did all this.⁴

The historical context view sees the Genesis account as setting out the truth of God and his creation, not in the sense of science and history, but in the sense of story that teaches a competing truth to the stories surrounding the Jews.

This hones in a focus on the Genesis 1:1-2:4 text beyond a simple literal reading. The key to understanding how that passage is written is found in the first two verses.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

After creating heavens and earth, the earth was both “without form” and “void.” The rest of the creation story becomes an account of God resolving that situation by “forming” things and then “filling” them. The forming occurs in three days, and the filling occurs in the next three days. These two sets of three days correspond to each other as if in a mirror. On days 1, 2, and 3, God forms while he fills those forms on days 4, 5, and 6.

A chart readily shows this relationship and alignment:

⁴ Collins, C. John, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (P&R Publishing 2006), at 78-79.

	<u>Forming</u>	<u>Filling</u>
Day 1:	God forms “light” (“day”) and darkness “night”)	Day 4: God fills “light/day” with the sun and “darkness/night” with the moon and stars
Day 2:	God forms “heavens” and “waters”	Day 5: God fills “heavens” with birds and “waters” with fish
Day 3:	God forms “earth” and “vegetation”	Day 6: God fills “earth” with animals and mankind eating vegetation

Again, as with the absence of “evening” and “morning,” day seven is different. It is neither a “forming” nor a “filling.” It is a holy day of rest. Reading these days in this structure shows God’s carefully planned provisions for his people. He first builds good habitats and then fills them.

In John Walton’s book, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, Walton sets out the worldviews, the cultural mores, and the competing belief systems in an effort to give original sense to the Genesis stories. He notes that God is communicating in the stories, but,

Effective communication requires a body of agreed-upon words, terms, and ideas... For the speaker [God] this often requires accommodation to the audience. One uses words (representing ideas) that the audience will understand, thus, by definition, accommodating to the target audience... As interpreters, then, we must adapt to the language/culture matrix of the ancient world as we study the Old Testament.⁵

Put in the context of creation, Walton asserts that comparative studies (comparing Genesis to other stories like the *Enuma Elish* or *Atrahasis*) are important for three reasons. First, comparative studies give more data to help one understand the text. Second, comparing the stories defend the authenticity of the text as it fits into its age in Scripture. Third, comparative studies give insight into the exegesis of the passage.

⁵ Walton, John H., *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Baker Academic 2006), at 19-20.

The stark theological differences between Israel and her neighbors⁶ begin in the Genesis texts. They are the differences between revelation and human imagination. Israel has a different view of God, nature, and man. Old Testament scholar Bill Arnold writes,

The worldview expressed in Genesis 1-4 is not just *different* from its counterpart in the literature of the ancient world; it is *opposed* to it.⁷

These differences are important points of revelation where God was informing Israel both who he is and isn't, how humanity fit into God's picture and creation, and what the human responsibility is. Here are several standout messages from comparing the Genesis creation account to that of Israel's neighbors.

1. One God versus many.

The first glaringly obvious difference in God's revelation and the creation stories of Israel's neighbors is the number of gods. Rather than believing in many deities (some systems had hundreds of gods), God revealed to Israel there is only one God. One God creates everything in Genesis: heavens, earth, sky seas, land, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, animals, and man. There are not gods for each item or area. There is no competition between gods. There is no need. The one God as revealed is over all of nature. He controls everything.

The famous 19th century Jewish Rabbi Samson Hirsch wrote in his commentary on Genesis that the full creation of everything by God signifies a God who:

⁶ As I reference Israel's neighbors, I am covering a number of different cultures and civilizations. North and east of Israel were Mesopotamia and the cultures of the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Amorites, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians. The Hittites were principally north as well. These people existed at the dawn of civilization when writing was first taking form. These cultures produced variations of the creation stories related in the main text above. To the south of Israel, the Egyptians were the principle people I reference as "neighbors." Along the western edge of Israel were the coastal neighbors. This region was a melting pot of people bridging the larger national developments of Mesopotamia in the north and Egypt in the south. These people, collectively referred to as people of "Syria-Palestine," included the Philistines, the Arameans, Canaanites, and some Amorite people. A number of the city-states in this area have produced ancient texts for study, notably those at Ugarit and Ebla. Scholars speak of these cultures in this time as the "Ancient Near East" or "ANE" for short.

⁷ Arnold, Bill T., *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, (Baker Academic 1998) at 49.

rules completely freely over the material and form of all creatures, over the forces that work in matter, over the laws that govern the working, and over the resulting forms.⁸

Hirsch contrasts the polytheistic neighbors of Israel who believed that there were pre-existing forces in nature to which even the gods were subject. Toward that end, many gods must have existed to deal with the many aspects of nature. No one God was over nature.⁹

2. God above creation, not a part of creation.

An extension of Rabbi Hirsch's point made earlier is the transcendence of God. As a God who existed before any creation, and as the God who does the actual creating, this sets God apart from the things created. In relation to the terms I used in earlier chapters, God is rightly seen as the "Super Nature," the one beyond and outside of the natural order.

The aspect of Genesis where God creates all things, is remarkably different from Israel's neighbors. For many of the neighbors like Egypt, the gods themselves *were* the sky, the moon, the sun, *etc.* (or at least they were inextricably linked to those elements of nature).

If you were to go to Egypt and look at the ceiling of a monument built by or for Pharaoh Seti I (ruled from ca. 1291-1279 BCE) called the Osirion, then you would see the engraved story of a goddess called "Nut." Nut was the goddess that was stretched out above the atmosphere as the sky. Another god named Shu (who *was* the atmosphere) held up Nut. Shu in turn was standing on Geb, the god who was the earth. Other gods, including the sun, moon, and stars, would come forth from various parts of Nut and then return at their appropriate times.¹⁰ Shu was not only holding up Nut, but with the help of another four to eight gods, Shu also held back the waters in the heavens.

⁸ Hirsch, S.R., *Commentary on the Torah* (Judaica Press 1966), transl'd by Isaac Levy, Vol.1 at 2.

⁹ Genesis 1 uses a word for God found throughout the Old Testament—*elohim*. This word is plural in form, even though it is used as a singular noun when used of God. Hirsch believes that the plural form is used because in the "One Unique God" are found the "whole plenitude of power of these supposedly numerous *elohims*." *Ibid.* at 4.

¹⁰ An easy to read translation of "*The Book of Nut*" by James P. Allen, is found in Hallo, William, ed., *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Brill 1996) Vol. 1 at 5. Other Egyptian records teach that Shu (the atmosphere) was sneezed out by Atum Scarab! See the pyramid text spells (1.4) in Hallo at 7. Coffin texts teach the origins of Nut, Shu and Geb. (Hallo at 10ff).

Not so with God as revealed to Israel. He was not found in the sun, nor was he a nearby storm. God was beyond creation and controlled creation.

3. God is outside space/time, not captive to space/time.

When I speak of “space and time,” I am using modern scientific ideas and words. However, the gist of those concepts are valid ways to verbalize a difference in understanding that came from Israel’s revelation apart from the imaginings of their neighbors.

Creation’s First Day in Genesis, frames God as the author of time. Those who try to read it as God making “light” and “darkness” in the sense that physics teaches light waves are missing what was being formed in the ancient mindset. It is where God first indicates “day and night,” although no sun is yet present to make for day or night. God is actually forming time. Hence, the passage concludes with God first terming a “First Day.” This was God’s advent of time. God is not captive to time; God created time.

A singular God who reigns over all nature, whether in space or time, is a God who is not subject to the laws of nature. This is a miracle-working God who can bend, suspend, or alter things at the mere word of his mouth. This is a miracle-working God who can weave nature through its own laws to create the situation he chooses. An over-age couple can have a baby, dreams can have meaning, famine can be foreseen, bushes can burn without getting burned up, seas can be parted and people can be delivered, prayers can be answered, people can change their minds unexpectedly—all of which one reads as the books of Moses continue.

In contrast, in the *Enuma Elish*, one reads one of the main god (Apsu) being put to sleep by a magical spell cast by his offspring, a god named Ea. While asleep, Apsu is tied up and killed.¹¹ This can happen when gods are not over the laws of nature (or its magical spells, as those laws were deemed to include in that era). Israel’s revelation showed that God was not so vulnerable. God was above creation, neither a part of it (point 2 above) nor subject to it.

Another aspect of God’s existence beyond space and time is the genesis of God himself. Over and over in the writings of Israel’s neighbors, we read ideas and proclamations of how the gods were made. In the *Enuma Elish*, Apsu and Tiamet “were mingling their waters together” when “the gods were formed between them.” In commenting upon it, the translator Benjamin Foster adds:

¹¹ Hallo, William, ed., “Epic of Creation (Enuma Elish)” *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Brill 1996), Vol. 1 at 391, transl’d by Benjamin R. Foster.

This elaborate theogony [creation of gods], or genealogy of the gods, builds on Sumerian precedent. It finds a parallel in Hesiod's version of Greek mythology, and is perhaps its ultimate source, but is absent in the Bible.¹²

The "Sumerian precedent" Foster references includes the Sumerian creation stories. These stories gave birth to the Babylonian Enuma Elish, but date back to over a thousand years before. The Sumerian empire included the area of Abraham's birth ("Ur of the Chaldees" – Gen. 11:31), and dates generally from 4500BC to 1900BC. Sumeria has the world's oldest writing, and not only is much of the Sumerian creation plot line found in the Enuma Elish, but the Babylonian epic also contains many Sumerian loan words, words that predate the epic by over a thousand years.

While the Sumerian creation story affect civilizations around it long after the Sumerian empire was replaced, the story couldn't be different than that given to Israel. Unlike the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others, God revealed himself to Israel as beyond the material world and its time. God made time ("morning and evening, day one, *etc.*); he was not subject to time. Scripture would later reveal that God's eternal nature included no beginning and no end.

4. God gives humanity the right to name the animals.

In the Genesis story, one thing that stands out to modern readers, almost as a misfit, is the first thing that God gives Adam as a chore.

Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field (Gen. 2:19-20).

This first task has the obvious implication of giving humanity something to do that indicates Adam was made in God's image. After all, God was naming the creation in Genesis 1. (E.g., "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" Gen. 1:5.) Yet there is a greater significance to Adam naming the animals than simply a manifestation of Adam being in God's image.

¹² *Ibid.*

A common feature of the ancient creation stories of Israel's neighbors is that of the God's naming things. In writing about the *Enuma Elish*, translator Benjamin Foster explains,

The poet evidently considers naming both an act of creation and an explanation of something already brought into being. For the poet, the name, properly understood, discloses the significance of the created thing. Semantic and phonological analysis of names could lead to understanding of the things named. Names, for this poet, are a text to be read by the informed, and bear the same intimate and revealing relationship to what they signify as this text does to the events it narrates. In a remarkable passage at the end, the poet presents his text as the capstone of creation in that it was bearer of creation's significance to mankind.¹³

In fact, the *Enuma Elish* poem begins *and* ends with naming, but it is always the gods who are naming and giving explanation to what is present, never humanity.

To Israel, God placed humanity front and center to the created world. As God's regents, people are placed to name the created animals, with all that ancient "naming" conveyed. It is the human responsibility to explain these beings brought into being. Humans are to observe and learn the significance of the created universe and to put it to use. This is linked closely to the charge discussed earlier to not only "work" the earth but to "observe it carefully and intelligently" in order to work it properly (the concept of Hebrew *shamar*, typically translated in Genesis 2:15 as "keep" the earth.)

5. God is not a sexual being.

As Israel's neighbors went about constructing images of the gods, they conceived of the gods as they did all other beings—male and female. Not like the unique view Israel got from revelation.

A reading of the Hittite legends includes sordid tales of physical and sexual conquest among the gods that impact their interactions with creation. In *Elkunirsa and Asertu*, one reads of the god El (creator of earth) and his goddess wife Asertu. Without El's knowledge, Asertu attempts to seduce the god Ba'al, who refuses her advances. Asertu then complains to her husband and the story details the gods

¹³ Foster, Benjamin, *Before the Muses, an Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, (Capital Decisions 1996), at 351-352.

plotting and scheming behind each one's back in a divine saga that reads like a lurid soap opera.¹⁴

This is typical of man's construction of gods in man's image rather than a revelation of God beyond human thought. Genesis carefully teaches that God made man in his image, both male and female (Gen. 1:27). As such, God is neither male nor female, but both sexes find themselves expressing some aspects of God.

6. God does not have man's limitations.

God is not man in a super-sized form. God does not have limitations of strength, drive, or emotions. This sets apart the God of revelation from the gods of man's imagination.

Contrast the gods in the *Enuma Elish*. A point was reached where the younger gods were bothersome to the older gods because of their "offensive behavior" and their "noisome actions." The older god Apsu yelled at his wife (mother of the younger gods):

Their behavior is noisome to me! By day I have no rest, at night I do not sleep! I wish to put an end to their behavior, to do away with it! Let silence reign that we may sleep!¹⁵

With that, the gods started plotting to kill each other. After the killing starts, war is brought on for some time until a peaceful accord is reached.

As the story unfolds, there are constant human limitations seen as part of the gods. The principle victor in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* was the god Marduk (Babylon's patron God – figure that!). Marduk was also the god who made the decision to create man. His reason? The gods were tired from their hard work. Man was made to:

bear the gods' burden that those [the gods] may rest.¹⁶

Similarly in the *Atrahasis*, man was made because the gods:

did forced labor...digging watercourses...They heaped up all the mountains...Forced labor they bore night and day. [They were com]plaining, denouncing, [mut]tering down in the ditch... [the gods then

¹⁴ "Elkunirsa and Asertu", Hallo at 149, transl'd by Gary Beckman.

¹⁵ Hallo, at 391.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* at 400.

say], “Let the midwife create a human being, Let man assume the drudgery of god.”¹⁷

The gods of men were also subject to human pouting. In a Hittite story, one god named Telipinu gets angry, leaves his job post and goes to sleep in a meadow. To understand the significance of this to the people, we must realize that,

In the Hittite view, the operation of the universe required that each deity and human conscientiously perform his or her proper function within the whole. Calamity manifested in some sector of the cosmos was an indication that the god or goddess responsible for it had become angry and had abandoned his or her post.¹⁸

Once Telipinu leaves, the world falls apart! Breeding of livestock stopped, the weather went haywire, crops would not grow as famine hit the land, and even the gods themselves could not eat a satisfying meal! The Storm-god (Telipinu’s father) does not know where his son is and refuses to go look for him in spite of his wife’s (the “Mother-goddess”) vehement demands. So, the Mother-goddess sends a bee to find her son, the god Telipinu.

The bee finds the god, stings him a few times to wake him up, which only increases his anger. At that point, everyone (human and divine) went to work to get Telipinu in a better mood and restore order to the world!

Into these cultures and these mindsets comes the unique revelation of God as Creator given in Genesis. God is not a larger version of a human. He has none of the human foibles. In fact, humanity itself has none of those foibles until sin enters the picture.

Creation was not hard work for God. He spoke and it came to be, over and over again. At the end of six days of creation, there was a day of rest, but the text gives no indication that God was resting on the seventh day out of fatigue. Instead, we need to see that the “rest” of the Sabbath was at its core the simple “stopping” of the creative activity.

Sabbath is the anglicized version of the Hebrew word formed from the root *sbt*. The verb in its root means, “to cease.”¹⁹ On the seventh day, God quit working, but not out of fatigue. God had made a world that was very good. He quit because his work was finished. My friend Edward Fudge reminded me that “the author of Hebrews notes that God’s ‘rest’ is ongoing, that the believer joins him in it when the believer

¹⁷ “Atra-Hasis”, Hallo at 450-451, transl’d by Benjamin Foster.

¹⁸ “The wrath of Telipinu”, Hallo at 151, transl’d by Gary Beckman.

¹⁹ Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Hendrickson 1997) Vol. 3 at 1297.

puts one's trust in Jesus' finished work as Savior, and that believers enjoy it fully in the world to come (Heb. 4:9-11; see also Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 14:13)."

As used in Genesis and elsewhere referencing God, the word "rest" is not a respite from weary toil; it is, rather, a cessation of activity because work is finished. One might think of it, in a sense, like a musician thinks of "rest." It is not tiresome respite; it is simply stopping.

On a similar note of tiresome work, the gods in neighboring cultures had a lot of work in making humans. They had to kill gods for the necessary blood to mix with clay.²⁰ Needless to say, the process of figuring out which god to kill and then killing that god was no simple matter! In Genesis, one sees the contrast of God simply speaking and things coming to be. Man was fashioned out of the dust of the field, but no gods died for animation. God simply breathed life into man.

God stands out as the authority over all there is. All of Scripture begins with the declaration, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Gen 1:1). When the earth was formless and void, God spoke and it was both formed and filled. God does not fight with his counsel in his creation, he speaks his plans, "Let us..." and the plans come to fruition. God had no human limitations.

7. The Role and Place of Nature

In Genesis 1, God speaks his function into the cosmos language of the Israelites. God gathers the lower waters together into one place so that dry land appeared (Gen. 1:9-10). God also filled the expanse of heaven with the sun, moon and stars (Gen. 1:14-18). God's functions continue throughout early Genesis as Genesis 7:11 and 8:2 speak of the windows of heaven opening, bringing rain, and closing, stopping the rain.

Where the Genesis creation account stands out from the secular versions is in this makeup and the function of this cosmic geography. For most of Israel's neighbors, these celestial features were actually associated with individual gods. Genesis 1 revealed to Israel that creation was simply that—creation. God was not the elements, God made the elements. This is true regardless of the "geographical language" or cosmology used to explain it.

Additionally, there is uniqueness to the function of the created cosmic elements in Genesis compared to neighboring accounts. For Israel's neighbors, the cosmos contained elements tamed by the gods and then used for the gods' purposes.

²⁰ *Atrahasis* at 208ff; *Enuma Elish* at Tab VI.30ff.

Humanity was made to work the cosmos to the benefit of the gods. In stark contrast, Genesis sets the story upside down.

In Genesis, God makes the cosmos for man. God sets the forms of heaven, earth, sky, and seas filling them with fish, birds, and animals. Each is set to produce more after its own kind. These are made with the view that people would have stewardship and dominion over them and they would serve people, not God (Gen. 1:26). God makes plants as food for beasts, but ultimately for people (Gen. 1:29). God sets the sun and stars, but does so not for his purposes, but to set out seasons for people (Gen. 1:14).

This adds greater significance to the Romans 1:20 passage referenced in prior chapters.

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

God gives humanity a glimpse into his character and nature through the creation.

South African scholar Izak Cornelius discussed and compared ancient Israel's contemporaries' visual representations of the world with the concepts in the Old Testament in a 1994 issue of the *Journal for Northwest Semitic Languages* concluding:

The Hebrew Bible reflects the cosmology of ancient times, but most modern visual representations of the so-called 'biblical world' err in representing natural phenomena as they are understood in modern terms. These should be reconstructed from the ancient Near Eastern sources themselves.

Cornelius concluded that:

the ancient Near Eastern mentality perceived phenomena such as the sea, heaven and sun not as natural entities, but as numinous powers. The idea of the tripartite world (heaven, earth and underworld or subterrestrial water) persists in all ancient Near Eastern cultures. The Hebrew Bible contains some of these ideas, e.g. the winged sun, the pillars of the earth and the chaotic ocean, but gave an *interpretatio Israelitica* (an interpretation unique to Israel) to them. YHWH is the one who created with wisdom and controls the powers of nature.²¹

²¹ Cornelius, Izak, "The Visual Representation of the World in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible," *JNSL* 20/2 (1994).

Cornelius points out that in the Scriptures, heaven and the primeval waters are not divine powers, but simply God's creation. In Scripture, God upholds the pillars of the earth; God exercises dominion over the stars, the sun, and even the underworld; and it was God who established the world through wisdom. ("The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens" Pro. 3:19).

8. The Purpose of Humanity

Like the conception of God, the revelation of man/woman and their purpose and role is as different from that of Israel's neighbors as night is from day. Only Genesis speaks clearly of two people as the progenitors of the entire human race; the neighbors have the gods making people in groups.²² Also unlike Genesis, a number of other ancient accounts have the creating deities providing necessary physical elements in making humans (tears, flesh, blood, *etc.*) often mixed with clay. This shows the connection between humans and deities by shared physical material. In Genesis, however, the connection is by the breath (Spirit) that God provides to humanity as God makes people in his image. This sets people in a connection that is a familiar relationship with the Creator (walking and talking in the Garden of Eden), not simply some lesser extension.

Also notable is the proclamation in Genesis that humanity (male and female) was made in God's "image" (Gen. 1:26-27). Among ancient Israel's contemporary cultures, it was usually the king who represented the image of God, not everyone else. Image was not physical likeness, but rather a responsibility and identity of role and function.²³ In other words, people had the responsibilities God assigned as well as the abilities necessary to accomplish the tasks. Scholars have recognized various inherent ways God made man in his image in this sense.

People have the ability to create, to think, to choose, to plan, to accomplish, to appreciate, to discern, to process, and to communicate. These abilities are those that God possesses and dispensed to everyone. In the revelation of Scripture, humans are embodied with the necessary qualities of God to do his work as his representatives and on his behalf. The rest of Scripture will teach that mankind fell from this created state, but with the presence of the Holy Spirit and through prayer, mankind still works to fulfill the will of God on earth.

One net result of this teaching on man is the recognition that people were made for a purpose. Like creation in general, humanity is no accident. No new human life is

²² See the analysis and cites in Walton at 205.

²³ Walton at 212.

an accident. Creation is God's choice. Everyone exists because God chose to put each of us here.

The implications for human value are paramount. The value of each person lies in the imprint of God's image. One's value is not in looks, brains, social position, physical dexterity nor athletic talent. One's value is in his nature as an image bearer of Almighty Creator God.

Conclusions to the Comparison of Stories

The net effect of this is that to read Genesis 1 and 2 as literal renderings of how God made the world in six 24-hour days is a choice, but not one that is mandated by Scripture. Scripture is not a science text on origins, but rather a historical account that would have been read quite differently by its original intended audience. In fairness, one shouldn't see any direct correlation with the Genesis story speaking to evolution as fact or fiction. The issue of *how* God made the world is not the point of the Genesis account.

Still, that doesn't mean that the Genesis account isn't worthy of study on the issue of science and faith. It is. But the implications go beyond what most may think.

IMPLICATIONS

To be continued....