

Genesis 1-11

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Some of the most hair splitting, nonsensical, controversial passages the Bible most likely come from Genesis, specifically, Genesis 1-11. If most Christians, pastors, and theologians are honest with themselves, they would inevitably say Genesis 1-11 contains some of the strangest stories they have ever read- talking snakes, a flat earth, people being created from dust and ribs, sons of God sleeping with women and having giant babies, a massive flood wiping out the entire earth, the dispersion of languages. From a modern understanding, the opening pages of the Bible make no sense. But maybe the modern reader is reading it all wrong. Maybe they are getting confusing answers because they are asking the wrong questions. To better understand the Genesis narrative, one must undergo a cross-cultural experience and read the text like an ancient Israelite. This paper will assist in the journey as it examines the structure and content of Genesis 1-11 through an Ancient Near Eastern lens, giving key points of comparison and contrast with other Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. As well as evaluate the usefulness of other Ancient Near Eastern texts in understanding Genesis 1-11.

Genesis 1-11:26, the introduction unit to the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and the entire Bible, is best understood in light of the bigger context. While this paper does not offer sufficient enough time or space to accomplish that, it is worth noting that Genesis 1-11:26 is the first of two major units of the book, chapters 1-11:26 and chapter 11:27-50. These two major units are then divided into twelve (a very symbolic number for an Israelite) smaller literary units, represented by the תולדות (*tôlḏôṭ*) formula (with the exception to the introduction in Genesis 1:1, which uses another word. See below). *Tôlḏôṭ* means “These are the generations” (or, “This is the story”) and appears eleven times, with minor variants, throughout the Book of Genesis and acts as titles for the sections that follow: 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.¹ In

¹ Richard Averbeck, “The Lost World of Adam and Eve: A Review Essay,” *Themelios* 40, no. 2 (August 2, 2015): 226–39.

every case the formula introduces major narrative sections and indicates a new stage in the development of the plot. It can pick up on something from the previous section and links it to the genealogy or narrative account that follows, thereby binding the sections together, while also allowing the reader to read each section in its own accord.²

In Genesis 1-11:26, *tôlqôṭ* is found four times within the five sections, with רָאשִׁית (*rē'sîṭ*) beginning the book. Because nothing comes before Genesis 1:1, the *tôlqôṭ* formula does not work. Consequently, *rē'sîṭ*, is used to denote the introduction to the first section. The *tôlqôṭ* formula aids the reader to identify the rhetorical strategy of Genesis 1-11:26, which is best summarized as order and disorder. Following the *tôlqôṭ* formula, we see that the first section of Genesis, Genesis 1:1-2:3 (represented by *rē'sîṭ*), is about Yahweh's success in ordering the cosmos as He commissioned humans to continue bringing order in the world through their continued relationship and presence with Him. This transitions to the second section, Genesis 2:4-4:26 (represented by the first *tôlqôṭ*), where humans inadequately sought order in civilization through their own wisdom. Still, Yahweh established human fecundity and society (family) to help human's prevail in their roles as order bringers.

Genesis 5:1-6:8, the third section, reveals how humans sought fecundity and society as a means of itself, and it too, failed to bring order. Thus, a Divine reset through human annihilation occurred. Genesis 6:9-9:29, the fourth section, shows how human annihilation was inadequate. Thus, Yahweh gave an increase in human administration and government to aid the people in the order of the land as they seek wisdom and relationship with Yahweh. The fifth section, Genesis 10:1-11:26, unveils the inadequacies of the human heart to seek order through the manipulation of Yahweh. The first main unit of the Book of Genesis ends with no option remaining for humans

² T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (Baker Books, 2012), 7.

to continue as order bringers. So, in Genesis 11:27-50:26 Yahweh provides the ultimate solution, by way of a personal, intimate covenant relationship with His people.³

The literary structure of Genesis 1-11:26 also tracks the *tôldôt* formula and follows a nonlinear, parallel scheme of a-b-c // a-b-c (1.1).⁴ These literary arrangements are common in the Hebrew Bible, especially as it was remembered and passed down orally. Genesis' 1-11:26 literary parallel scheme is used to compare, contrast, reiterate, emphasize and illustrate it's points.⁵ Specifically, it compares how everything Yahweh gave humans, as means to be used to draw people to relationship with Him, were to assist in bringing order. The literary structure emphasizes how humans manipulated and sought these things as the life source itself, instead of Yahweh, leaving them disorder and chaos instead of order. Yet, it also captures the details in each story, reiterating the common thread that holds the entire book (and Bible) together: how Yahweh never abandons humanity. In the low point of each story there remains a hint of hope that confirms Yahweh is still there with His people, pursuing and seeking relationship.

1.1 The Literary Structure of the Old Testament a Creation: God Creates the World and Humankind—A Beginning (1:1-2:3) • <u>dry land appears</u> out of the watery chaos • animals: <u>every living thing, birds</u>, every animal that <u>creeps</u> (<i>remes</i>) on the ground; <u>male and female</u> (<i>zakar ūneqeba</i>); after their kind (<i>lemina</i>) • divine <u>blessing on animals</u>: "be fruitful and multiply upon the earth" • Yahweh <u>blesses the first people</u>: "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth" • instructions regarding <u>food</u> that humans may eat (plants) b Humankind's Degeneration: Sin and Scattering of First People (Adam, Eve, Cain); Nonchosen Line of Adam Through Cain (2:4-4:26) • stories about humankind's <u>sins</u> • God deliberates in <u>first-person plural</u> over human sin (3:22) • punishment by <u>banishing, scattering</u> sinner c Ten generations from Adam to Noah (5:1-6:8) a Flood: God Destroys the World and Humankind—A New Beginning (6:9-9:29) • <u>dry land appears</u> out of the watery chaos • animals: <u>every living thing, birds</u>, every animal that <u>creeps</u> (<i>remes</i>) on the ground; male and female (<i>zakar uneqeba</i>); after their kind (<i>lemina</i>) • divine <u>blessing on animals</u>: "be fruitful and multiply upon the earth" • Yahweh <u>blesses the new first people</u>: "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth" • instructions regarding <u>food</u> that humans may eat (now they may eat animals) b Humankind's Degeneration: Sin and Scattering of New First People (Noah's descendants); Nonchosen Lines of Noah's Sons (10:1-11:9) • story about humankind's <u>sin</u> • God deliberates in <u>first-person plural</u> over human sin (11:7) • punishment by <u>banishing, scattering</u> sinners c Ten Generations from Shem to Abram (11:10-26)
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³ John Walton, "Genesis 1-11" (Presented at the Didasko Seminar, Mount Angel Abbey, July 28-Aug 2, 2025).

⁴ David A Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament : A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Academic, 2005)., T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (Baker Books, 2012), 55.

⁵ Ibid., 29.

Section One: Genesis 1:1-2:3

Genesis 1 invites the reader to see the biblical creation account not as a material manufacturing story, but rather, a story of how Yahweh took non order, chaos, and gave it purpose, meaning, and function within an ordered system. It climaxes as humans are given priestly roles to continue bringing order to the world as Yahweh takes up His reign and rule, in relationship to humanity, on His cosmic temple. Genesis 1:1 introduces the book saying , “¹In the beginning (*rēšît*) God created sky and land.” This opening line serves as a literary introduction to the rest of the chapter, preparing the reader for how Yahweh is going to order the cosmos in the ensuing verses. *Rēšît* is the adverb used and typically refers to an initial period of time, rather than a specific point in time.⁶ It is most notably used in Job 8:7, which speaks of the early part, the *rēšît*, of Job’s life and is contrasted by the end years of his life. This also fits other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation accounts. The Akkadian word comparable to *rēšît* refers to the early part of installments. In the Egyptian creation texts, they refer to the “first occasion,” implying the initial occurrences of events that are repeated and continued over and over again.⁷

It is important to note the usefulness of knowing and studying other ANE societies. The Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Babylonians, Sumerians, Hittites, for example, all share the same “cultural river” as the Israelites. A cultural river is the lens by which one thinks, processes information, and views reality. A twenty first century, westerner approaches life through a very difference lens than someone in the ANE. For example, if someone were to show a picture of the world taken from outer space, a twenty first century, westerner would most likely describe it as ‘earth,’ or ‘planet.’ On the other hand, an Israelite from first millennium B.C. would have no idea

⁶ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative : A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 83.

⁷ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One : Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 43.

what that picture would be of. If they were to describe the “planet” they lived on, they would use words like ‘trees,’ ‘desert,’ or ‘the abyss.’ Another example would be marriage. In a modern, western context, the first thing that usually comes to mind when one hears the word, “marriage” is ‘love,’ and ‘happiness,’ but for an Ancient Near Easterner, marriages were all about alliances, and survival. The benefit of studying other ANE societies is so that one can better understand the cultural river of the biblical authors insofar as they lived in the same cultural as the other nations. By having a better understanding of the cultural river of the biblical authors, one can be able to ask the appropriate questions and look for the appropriate meanings that the author’s audience would have been asking and looking for.

As stated, Genesis 1:1 serves as an introduction to what Yahweh will be doing, which is creating. The modern, western use of the word “create” generally means to materially make something. For example, a baker creates a cake, a carpenter creates a chair, and a seamstress creates a blanket. All of these are examples of material origin. But does this concept fit the cultural river of what a Hebrew living in the ANE would have meant and thought when they deployed the word create? The Hebrew word for create used in verse one is בָּרָא (*bârâ*). There are about fifty occurrences of this word in the Hebrew Bible and in all of them, Yahweh is always the subject or actor. In other words, this word denotes Divine activity.⁸ The objects, the things that Yahweh is *bârâ*’ing, have been studied extensively throughout academia and has proven vital in indicating if *bârâ*’ is used in a material or functional sense, which will aid in determining the focus of the creation story.⁹ While there is some ambiguity in its uses, there is an overwhelming amount of Scripture that reveal *bârâ*’ to be about function, not material creation.

⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁹ John Stek, “What Says the Scripture?” in *Portraits of Creation : Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World’s Formation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1990), 203–65.

For example, after David was confronted by the prophet Nathan after having an affair with a women and then killing her husband, he cries out in anguish to Yahweh, saying, “*Bârâ’* in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). David’s heart was materially created when he was weeks old in his mother’s womb, obviously he is not asking God to create a new heart (in the material sense) as a grown man. Instead, David was begging Yahweh to repurpose his life, not for his own selfish plans, but to serve Yahweh for His purposes and desires. Similarly, the prophet Isiaih speaks of Israel’s redemption in terms of renaming Jacob to Isreal, thus giving a new identity to him, saying “But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine” (Isa. 43:1). Even modern westerners have categories of creating in a nonmaterial sense. For example, when a pastor who plants a church has to create an elder board for his church, he or she does not materially create it. Rather, they collect existing people and give them a new function or role within the organization as they work together to govern and lead a community. By examining the word *bârâ’*, one does not need to assume the Genesis 1 creation story is material in nature.

Genesis 1:2 continues, “²It was chaotic and waste (בְּהוּ וְתוֹהוּ, *tôhûw bôhû*), darkness was over the abyss (תְּהוֹם, *t’hôm*), and the Spirit of God moved upon the waters (מַיִם, *mahyim*).” Verse two depicts the universe in a state of waste and desolation, represented by the Hebrew word, *tôhûw bôhû* and *t’hôm*. Old Testament scholar, John Walton, notes that *tôhûw bôhû* is a negative word in all twenty occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰ Almost all of the 35 occurrences of *t’hôm* refer to an abyss, a place of danger and unruliness (non-order). But the Yahweh’s Spirit was amidst the non-order and chaos, and as He moved about the *t’hôm* became *mahyim*. The theme of

¹⁰ John H Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 47.

water is prominent throughout Genesis (along with the Pentateuch, and Jesus' own words in John 4:14) and represents life, for water was the people's life source. The subtle change of Hebrew words, from *t'hôm* to *mayhim*, is significant and represents a change, the bringing of order, credited by Yahweh's presence. The second verse of Genesis reveals Yahweh's Spirit at work in and among creation. In this context, Yahweh (His Spirit) is recognized as the Creator, order bringer, identity giver, and sustainer of life. The Psalter surely had this in mind as he proclaimed, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the spirit of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6). A compelling feature to support a functional creation account over a material creation account is the fact that there is already water and chaos, including all the molecules, cells, and actors that display chaos, before God has begun His *bârâ*'ing.

The remaining verses in Genesis 1 show God carrying out creation activity by separating, naming, and purposing the cosmos. "Made" (עָשָׂה, 'âsâh) is another word used throughout the Genesis 1 creation account that denotes function. 'Âsâh is a little more complicated than *bârâ*', as it has twenty-eight different meanings in over 2,600 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. At times, it means celebrated, did, made, acted upon, provided, and prepared, to name a few. While there are certainly instances 'âsâh means material creation, there are many other (fourty-six) examples where it means "prepared for a purpose", as in a functional sense (Gen. 18:7). Therefore, one should not have any more reason to assume Genesis is referring to a material creation over a functional one. Again, Dr. John Walton offers great insight, defending that 'âsâh refers "to any step in the causation process—including non-material ones. Consequently, one cannot deduce what level of causation God is engaged in" throughout Genesis 1.¹¹

¹¹ John Walton, "Response to Richard Averbeck," *Themelios* 40, no. 2 (August 2, 2015): 240–42.

Furthermore, in ANE thought, to distinguish something from other things is to create it. To name something is to create it. For example, for someone to turn the dining room into a “den”, they have it function as a “den” by putting new furniture in it and using it for its new purpose. By giving it a new name and new purpose, a “den” is created. This serves as a good illustration of the role that naming separating and determining a function have in the creation story of Genesis 1. Separating and naming are also prime activities in other ANE cultures. The Babylonian cosmology story, *Enuma Elish*, opens by saying “When on high no name was given to heaven, nor below was the netherworld called by name...when no gods at all had been brought forth, non-called by name, no destinies ordained.”¹² While this is helpful to see the importance and value naming has in the creation accounts for the ANE societies, the biblical creation story differs unimaginably as Yahweh, the Creator of the Israelites, is not among the creation, but Author of it. What other ANE creation stories lack in their beginnings, divine agency, is exactly what Genesis has, Yahweh’s Spirit moving amongst the unnamed and unordered.¹³ This is exactly what we see Yahweh do in the rest of Genesis 1.

The seven-day creation story in Genesis 1 is highly structured and part of a literary-artistic design: Yahweh brings order and symmetry out of chaos. It is broken into seven parts, each exhibiting the same structural design, beginning with the clause “and God said,” followed by a jussive verb, “let there be...” and ending with the conclusion “And it was evening, and it was morning, the [first, second, etc.] day.” This is true of all seven parts, except day seven, which has been intentionally done to contrast that day from the others (see below). It has a linear, parallel structure of: a-b-c // a-b-c // d (1.2). On the first three days Yahweh created the three spheres of life: (a) time (b) weather (c) the world. On the next three days he returns to each of

¹² William W Hallo and K Lawson Younger, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003), 1:111.

¹³ John H Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, 29.

these respective spheres and fills them with living/moving things: (a) luminaries (b) fish and birds (c) land creatures, including humans. On the seventh, unmatched day (reveals significance), Yahweh rested.¹⁴

1.2

Cosmic Domains	Inhabitants
a Day 1: Time (vv. 3-5)	a Day 4: Luminaries (vv. 14-19)
b Day 2: Weather (vv. 6-8) – Sky (vv. 6-7a) – Seas (v. 7b) – Dome Ceiling (vv. 6,8)	b Day 5: Inhabitants (vv.20-23) – Fish in the Seas – Birds in the Sky
c Day 3: Our World (vv. 9-12) – Dry Land (vv. 9-10) – Vegetation (vv. 11-12)	c Day 6: Land Animals (vv. 24-25) – Humans (vv. 26-31)
d Day 7: God’s “Rest” = ‘Beginning to Rule’	

Day one begins by Yahweh calling the light “day” and darkness “night.” This reveals that the focus is about day and night, rather than light and darkness. Day and night both name a period of time. On the first day, then, the text does not recount anything material coming into existence, rather, the alternating period of day and night constitute the origins of time. Day two is characterized by the separating of waters around the existence of a solid sky dome (רָקִיעַ, *râqîya’*), as Yahweh establishes a weather system (regulating of the upper waters). On day three, Yahweh prepared the world, gathering seas, dry land, and plants. While these activities do involve components of material world (water, dry land, plants), the verb (refer to previous section), ‘âsâh, does not need Yahweh to be making any of these objects. This is the work of organization and order, not manufacturing. On days one through three, the discussion centers on the ordering of the world in terms of major functions of human existence: time, weather, and

¹⁴ David A Dorsey, 49.

food.¹⁵ This is affirmed in Genesis 8:22, after order was eliminated via the flood and Yahweh began a new creation, reestablishing order. He promised, “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest [food], cold and heat, summer and winter [weather], day and night [time] will never cease” (Gen. 8:22).

The Genesis 1 narrative continues on day four through six as Yahweh now assigns roles to the functionaries that are to carry out the functions in their respective domains. Similar to how furniture fills a room, beautifies it, and carries out the functions of the room, so Yahweh fills the three domains He has ordered. Specifically, on day four, five and six (in part), Yahweh gives identity to the luminaries in the sky, and the inhabitants of the sky, sea, and land. respectively. It is important to note that Yahweh does not indicate the functions of land animals, as He does with the sea, sky, and humans, telling them to “be fruitful and multiply.” Instead, He is going to give humans the task of discerning the animals function and assigning names as they fulfill their purpose as, image bearers, which is discussed in further details below.

Day six serves as the climax of the creation days. Humanity has finally been given function. Like the other functionaries, humans function is to populate the world. But humans also have function in relation to Yahweh’s creation, to “subdue” and “rule” it (Gen. 1:28). But what is most fascinating is that Genesis 1 depicts humanity having function relative to the Creator, Yahweh Himself, as they are made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Being created in the “image of God” is primarily a corporate concept, not an individual or physical attribute. Human identity is found only through His image and is indicative of a relationship with Yahweh.¹⁶

¹⁵ John H Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve : Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 35-38.

¹⁶ John Walton, Didasko Seminar.

Specifically, image bearing is about humanity's collective role as order-bringers, working alongside God, functioning as God's representatives. It's not about individual mental or physical capacities, but about a shared task. Being in Yahweh's image means standing as Yahweh's substitutes (not replacements), endowed with His essence. While other NAE nations used similar concepts and language as the Genesis account, such as kings being represented in the image and statues of their gods, to apply this concept to all humanity as Genesis does, diverges quite dramatically from its counterparts. Not only that, but ANE people and creation were set up to serve the gods. The fact that the Genesis creation story is not set up to serve Yahweh, but His people, would make a radical, contrasting statement in the ANE.

In most of the creation days, the accounts end with “and God saw that it was good (טוב, *tôwb*).” Day six, though, is different. The creation of mankind, made in Yahweh's image, was not just called *tôwb*, like all others. Rather, it was deemed “very good” (מְאֹד טוֹב, *tôwb m'e'ôd*). A literary repetitional change signifies to the reader that day six is the climax, the focus point, of creation. Contrary to popular belief, the world was not created perfect. *Tôwb* does not mean perfect. If one believes that Yahweh created the world perfect based off of the word *tôwb*, then they must also conclude that people can still be perfect today, which is not humanly possible (Ecc. 9:2). Exodus 14:7 also identifies that the Promised Land was deemed to be *tôwb m'e'ôd* for the Israelites to live in, though, it was filled with enemies and wicked inhabitants.¹⁷ In the context of the Genesis 1 functional creation story, for something not to be *tôwb*, it would not be ordered, serve a purpose, or have an identity. Genesis 2:18 helps understand how to define *tôwb*. In that verse, Yahweh saw that it was not *tôwb* for man to be alone. His ordered cosmos was not yet complete or functioning how it needed to, and so He had to create something else. *Tôwb*,

¹⁷ Ronald E Osborn, *Death Before the Fall : Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Ivp Academic, An Imprint Of Intervarsity Press, 2014), 29.

then, is better understood as “a condition in which something is functioning optimally as it was designed to in an ordered system- it is working the way God intended.”¹⁸

If the purposing of mankind is the climax of the six days of creation, then day seven is the climax of the entire Genesis 1 story. While the day number of each of the first six days of the creation week is mentioned only once, the text reaches its climax with the seventh day, emphatically mentioning it three times in three consecutive sentences.¹⁹ On day seven, Yahweh rests (שָׁבַת, *shâbath*). Yahweh resting should not be thought of as going on vacation or laying down to take a nap. Rather, in the ANE thought, when gods rest, they rest in temples. One of the earliest Sumerian literary pieces is a hymn from the Temple of Kes. It reads, “House of the Auna gods possessing great power, which gives wisdom to the people; house reposeful dwelling of the great gods! House, which was planned together with the plans of heaven and earth...”²⁰ This temple hymn praises the gods for the fact that they made that temple their dwelling place, their house to sleep, rule, and plan. In the famous Babylonian creation story, *Enuma Elish*, Marduk finishes creating by building himself temple, saying “A house I should build, let I be the abode of my pleasure. Within it I shall establish my holy place...we shall find rest therein.”²¹ These are just a few examples of among many in the ANE that depict temples a place of divine presence.

These insights into how the ANE viewed temples are helpful to better understand what the audience (remember their shared cultural river) of Genesis would have thought of when they heard the Creator, Yahweh, resting over the cosmos. *Shâbath*, and its synonym, נִיּוּחַ, *nûwach*,

¹⁸ John H Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 55.

¹⁹ L Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured : Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* (Leuven ; Paris ; Walpole (Mass.): Peeters, , Cop, 2012), 92.

²⁰ Temple Hymn of Kes 4.80.2, D.58A-F <etcs1.oringst.ox.ac.uk>.

²¹ William W Hallo and K Lawson Younger, 1.111.

depict Yahweh, on day seven, taking up his throne as ruler of the cosmos. In Psalms 132: 7-8 and 13-14, the Psalter puts divine rest, temple, and enthronement all together.

“Let us go into His dwelling place;
Let us worship at His footstool.
Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place,
You and the ark of Your strength.”

“For the Lord has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.
This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.”

Yet, contrary to the ANE polytheistic societies where multiple temples were needed for their multiple gods to fill, Genesis 1 makes the bold claim that the cosmos is Yahweh’s (singular) temple. Also, instead of statues that neighboring ANE used to embody the gods, Yahweh chose humans. Any ANE society would see Israel’s audacious assertion of the cosmos (where humans live) as Yahweh’s temple, as opposed to their god’s building where statues resided. Old Testament theologian, W.A. Gage, points out the Hebrew Bible is saturated with descriptions of creation as a tabernacle which Yahweh has pitched, and a house that Yahweh has established. Even Zion, the sanctuary that Yahweh establishes, becomes a microcosmic metaphor for creation itself.²²

As if it is not clear enough that Genesis 1 is depicting the cosmos as God’s temple, when compared to one another, the literary structure of the tabernacle and the Israelite temple both echo the seven day creation story of Genesis 1. All three stories share a repetition of seven speeches/acts (Gen. 1-2:3/ Ex. 25-31, Ex. 39-40/ 1 Kings 6-8), followed by an equivalent culmination of sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3/ Ex. 31:12-17, Ex. 40:32-35/ 1 Kings 8: 46-53), immediately

²² Warren Austin Gage and Bruce K Waltke, *The Gospel of Genesis : Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Eugene, Or: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 2001).

paralleled by a temptation and fall narrative (Gen. 3/ Ex. 32, Lev. 10/ 1 Kings 9:1-9,11:1-13).²³

Even the Garden of Eden, which will be talked about shortly, connect with the three-tiered design pattern of the tabernacle and temple. First, the skies of Genesis One serve as the throne room of Yahweh as seen as the Holy of Holies with the ark of the covenant as Yahweh's throne. Second, the land with trees, animals, humans in the garden of Eden are depicted as the Holy place where the Menorah (tree), Cherubim (animal), and priest (Adam) are located. Lastly, the seas outside Eden are portrayed by the courtyard and its bronze sea from 1 Kings 7:23.²⁴ All of these intentional parallels illustrated by the biblical authors are meant to display the incredible reality that creation is Yahweh's temple, where He reigns and rules.

Important to note, is that when Yahweh did create the material cosmos, He did it *ex-nihilo* (from nothing). Ex nihilo doctrine comes from multiple passages from the New Testament, where the biblical authors were a lot more interested in material origin, than their ancestors, such as John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16. While Genesis 1 surely indicates a role in causations, it does not specify what level of causation. It could have been done instantaneously, over time, through a process, Scripture does not say. Genesis 1 is about cosmic identity and Yahweh bringing order into the midst of disorder, not cosmic origins, scientific data, or chronological timelines.

Section Two: Genesis 2:4-4:26

Genesis 2:4 begins the second narrative section, noted by the first *tôlḏôṭ* statement and goes until Genesis 4:26. This section offers another creation story, detailed in the world of humanity. It also introduces the a cycle that will be played out on repeat of humans inadequately seeking order in the blessings Yahweh provides rather than in and through a relationship with

²³ Mackie, TIm. n.d. "Temple: Study Notes." Portland, Oregon: Bible Project.

²⁴ L Michael Morales, *Cult and Cosmos : Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Theology* (Leuven ; Walpole, Ma: Peeters, 2014).

Him. While many people think the Genesis 2 creation story is a recapitulation, or zoom in, of day six of the Genesis 1 creation account, there are many indicators that say otherwise. One of which is that all but one of the eleven uses of *tôlqôl* throughout Genesis act as a sequel or recursive. Meaning, the narrative returns to the same story but from another perspective.²⁵ Another indicator to view them as different stories is the fact that the ordering of things is in a completely different order. In Genesis 1, it went land, plants, animals, then humanity. In Genesis 2, it goes man, plants, animals, then women. Furthermore, the main difference between the Genesis 2 creation account and the Genesis 1 creation account is that Genesis 2 is telling the story of the creation of the terrestrial realm, and Genesis 1 is telling the creation story of the cosmic realm. The most obvious example of this is given through the description of the four rivers in Genesis 2:10–14. Historians are not sure about the geographical location of the first two, but the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, related to Assyria and Mesopotamia, connect the reader to purpose of the Genesis 2 creation account, that God entered human history in time and space in the real historical world of ancient Israel.²⁶

Like Genesis 1, Genesis 2 starts in a state of chaos non-order, stating “Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground” (Gen. 2:5). So, Yahweh creates mankind to order it. Throughout the rest of Genesis 2, the man (Adam, which means “humanity” and the women (Eve, means “life”) are viewed as archetypes. An archetype is a universal, representative model that embodies characteristic qualities shared by all members of a group. This does not mean that they were not literal, historical people, rather, the biblical author is more interested in having his audience (everyone) see themselves in the characters. Their very

²⁵ John Walton, Didasko Seminar.

²⁶ Richard Averbeck, 226–39.

names, "Human" and "Life," signal this archetypal nature. This motif fits in well with most all ANE human origin stories. For example, in the Mesopotamia creation story, *Enuma Elish*, the people were created from the blood of a slain god. This archetypically portrayed human identity a people with rebellion flows in their veins. An Egyptian creation story tells of a god's (*Heliopolis*) tears forming humans, archetypically revealing how divinity is all their essences.²⁷ The Genesis 2 creation account of humanity similar.

While every English translation reads something like, “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being,” the actual Hebrew reads quite different. The Hebrew reads, “The Lord God formed humanity, dust from the ground...” (Gen. 2:7).

וַיִּצְרֵה		יְהוָה		אֱלֹהִים	
		The LORD God		He formed	
אֶת־הָאָדָם		עָפָר		מִן־הָאֲדָמָה	
humanity		dust		from the ground	

The problem with the English translations is that they add a preposition between humanity and dust when there is not one. Secondly, the cantillation mark above the *dalet* (second letter to the left in the Hebrew word for humanity) signifies a pause, similar to a fermata in music. Creating humanity dust is not a biology statement, but one of identity. It is stating that we are created mortal.

To the biblical authors, dust is equated with mortality. The Psalter writes, “He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. Man, days are like grass; Like a flower of the field, he flourishes. When the wind has passed over him, him is no more, And its place

²⁷ John Walton, Didasko Seminar.

acknowledges it no longer” (Ps. 103:14-16). Even in Genesis 3:19, as Yahweh tells Adam and Eve of the consequences for their actions, He says “By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.” Dust is a metaphor for human mortality, not a literal chemical composition. It represents our fundamental human condition- finite, fragile, and subject to death. This is not a negative description, but an archetypal understanding that applies to all humans. When the text says humanity is "dust," it is highlighting the shared human experience of limitation and vulnerability- mortality pervades our flesh.

Being created mortal is also supported by the concept of the tree of life. The tree of life served as the antidote for mortality (See below for tree of life analysis). When human inclination to seek order apart from Yahweh was realized, Yahweh banished them from the garden, from the tree of life because otherwise “he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). Why would immortal people need a tree of life? They would not, unless they were, in fact, created mortal beings subject to death. The tree of life served as the antidote for mortality, but because Yahweh banished humanity from the garden, and set a cherubim and flaming sword to guard the tree (not the garden!) they no longer had access to the antidote. Consequently, death became a reality for all (1 Cor. 5:12-21).

Yahweh then commissioned humanity with a very special role- to work (*‘ābad*) and keep (*šāmar*) the garden. *‘Ābad* and *šāmar* are Hebrew verbs that denote priestly work. They are used of Levitical priests who were tasked with preserving sacred space, the tabernacle and temple (Num. 3:7; Neh. 13:22). The notion that all of creation is depicted as Yahweh’s temple (see above) means that Adam, and all humanity, have a continuing role as Yahweh’ priestly representatives in caring for, preserving, and extending His order through all the world. But, no

animal was found as suitable helper for this task. So, in Genesis 2:18-25, Yahweh puts Adam into a deep sleep and creates women out of the side of him.

To ensure no one uses these verses to prove why women are subordinate to men, it is imperative to explain the details. Putting Adam into a deep sleep (תַּרְדֵּמָה, *tardêmâh*) is another way of saying that Yahweh put Adam in a visionary state, and he had a vision. *Tardêmâh* is used seven other times in the Hebrew Bible and is most always used to refer to someone who was given a vision from Yahweh (Gen. 15; Job 33:15-18; Isa. 29:10-12). In this vision, Adam sees a woman, Eve, being given an identity, her purpose. When Genesis 2:22 says that she was taken out of Adam's side (*šēlā*'), it is nonreferring to an anatomical body part. In almost all of its uses in the Hebrew Bible, it refers to the equal or other side of a building/structure, mainly the tabernacle. The fact biblical author seems to intentionally evoke tabernacle language is significant as it reinforces humanity's priestly purpose and function from the beginning.

Eve is then called forth as a helper ('ēzer). Contrary to popular belief, this does not annotate a subordinate position. Of the twenty-four times 'ēzer is used in the Hebrew Bible, almost all of them are in reference to Yahweh as the helper of Israel (Ps. 115:11). Surely no one would claim Yahweh is lesser than Israel. 'Ēzer more appropriate is used in order to view women as man's equal, as a humanoid and co-ruler, in contrast to the beasts of the land, air, and sea in which they were not suitable for Adam (Gen. 2:20). Consequently, it cannot be concluded that Adam is in need of a reproductive partner (Eve's role as subject), but rather, Yahweh is stating that Adam needed an ally, another half, to help and join him in accomplishing the task of caring for and expanding Yahweh ordered presence and sacred space.²⁸

²⁸ John H Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 81.

The Genesis 2 creation account closes with, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and join (דָּבַק, *dâbaq*) to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (בָּשָׂר, *bâsâr*). And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:24). In the ANE, marriage was not about finding love. In fact, when a man and women got married, they did not leave their family, rather, they moved to a different floor or room in their parents’ house. In light of this, when it says the man and wife *dâbaq*, it is referring to them joining social alliances with each other. *Bâsâr* has more to do with kinship, becoming one body through community, than anything else (Gen. 37:27). Marriage, then, becomes about alliances and is done to find order in community, in unity of a common purpose. Power and safety through social solidarity becomes a motif in the way that Adam and Eve seek to try to find order. The Genesis 2 creation account ends with God providing community to humanity to help humanity advance His order, but the section still continues.

Genesis 3 continues the garden scene from Genesis 2, and unveils the crux of the human problem. God created humanity with the capacity to choose, and therefore, the possibility to choose wrongly. Their intrinsic identity to bring order amongst chaos can turn into self-preservation, which can easily leads to selfishness, which is typically the underlying motivation for most evils in the world. This theme is first introduced through a talking snake (נָחָשׁ, *nâchâsh*). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, *nâchâsh* (and other serpent-like creatures) are personified as a creature of non-order that disrupts the ordered world (Isa. 27). Serpent symbolism is rich in ANE literature. For example, in the Mesopotamian creation story, *Tale of Adapa*, the god, Anu (see Hymn dedicated to this god in the previous section above), invites a human, Adapa, to meet with him and one of his guardians, named “The Lord of the Productive Tree”, who is shaped like a

serpent.²⁹ In Egyptian life, serpents were associated with wisdom and death. One of their prominent characters, Apophis, was a serpent of chaos who tried to eat the sun as it rose every morning.³⁰ To the original audience of Genesis, a serpent figure would have not been thought of as evil, necessarily, but as a member of non-order and chaos. In fact, the garden serpent is never identified as Satan in the Hebrew Bible.

The *nāchāsh* is described as crafty (עָרִים, *‘ârûwm*). *‘Ârûwm* is not a descriptor for evil, but for wisdom and calculated decision making. Ones who are *‘ârûwm* use their situational awareness to their advantage that can be used for good or ill, to bring order or disorder. In the narrative setting, the *‘ârûwm* is literarily placed along the tree of knowledge of good (טֹב, *tôwb*) and bad (רָע, *ra*).³¹ The tree represents human’s tendency to seek autonomy on how to fulfill their purpose, instead of cooperating with Yahweh’s order. It is not about moral knowledge in a simplistic sense, but the fundamental human impulse to be self-determining order-bringers, prioritizing their own interests over Yahweh’s. Back in Genesis 2:17, Yahweh warned of the consequences of eating from it- death that follows choosing one’s own way to bring order.³² The serpent’s role in this narrative was to insinuate and provoke, to bring chaos, to the humans order bringing, priestly tasks, but it is the humans who are solely responsible for their own actions.

²⁹ Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons, in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 24.

³⁰ Nicole B. Hansen, "Snakes," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3:297.

³¹ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative : A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 104.

³² The best translation for Genesis 2:17 is, "When you eat from it you will be doomed to die (מִוּת מִוּת, *mûwth mûwth*)." *Mûwth mûwth* is an absolute infinite which would be directly translated as "dying you will die." In Jeremiah 38, Jeremiah offends the king and is thrown into a dungeon. He is told he will "*mûwth mûwth*". Meaning, the destiny Jeremiah brought upon himself will inevitably lead to his death.

The humans failed to live into their identity, listened to the snake, and chose death. The Genesis 3 story is not about a perfect state of grace being lost, a historical "fall from perfection," as many assume. Rather, it is about humanity's recurring choice and tendency to prioritize self-interest and order for themselves. Humans were designed to be order-bringers alongside Yahweh; to uphold Yahweh's interest in bringing order. Instead, the "seeing what looked good in her own eyes" event of Genesis 3 is an archetypal moment that reveals a universal human characteristic, desiring to be autonomous, establish one own way of order, rather than trusting, and cooperating with Yahweh and his perspective of order bringing. It is less about sin and more about the persistent tendency to say "my will be done" instead of "Yahweh's will be done." An easy analogy that most people can relate to that hits at the heart of this theme takes place on an airplane. Everyone knows there is little room in economy class. So, when a person sitting in the seat in front reclines their seat all the way back, one is hardly even able to open the tray table. That passenger has the right to recline their chair all the way back, but by doing so, they are taking away from the person behind them. The Genesis 3 scene personifies this. Every self-interested decision has the chance to take away from others, fails to advance order.

Genesis 3:14-19 has typically been thought of as a curse, but the text does not actually use "curse" in a prescriptive sense for humans. The serpent is "banished" or "disenfranchised," and the ground is affected, but humans are not cursed. Instead, the text describes the new circumstances and consequences humans will face after choosing autonomy. It's a descriptive explanation of the challenges humanity will encounter outside of relationship with Yahweh, not a punitive punishment. The focus is on how humans will now have to deal with chaos and order on their own, rather than a divine punishment. Its tone is parental in nature.

The narrative continues as Yahweh focuses his attention to each character. To the *nâchâsh*, Yahweh says, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all wild animals! You crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:14). What Yahweh is doing here is banishing, relegating the *nâchâsh* to liminal realm. A snake going on their belly is not in contrast to having legs, but rather, it is in contrast to rising up and striking. Yahweh is pronouncing the *nâchâsh*’s docileness (inability to overcome Yahweh’s order). Eating dust is consigned to the liminal realm of death. The serpent symbolizes non-order and here, non-order is restrained by Yahweh, the very thing humans were tasked to do but failed.

Yahweh continues, “I will put enmity, between you and the women, and between you seed (זֶרַע, *zera* ‘) and hers; he will crush (שָׁחַד, *shûwph*) your head, and you will (שָׁחַד, *shûwph*) his heel” (Gen. 3:15). *Zera* ‘ in Hebrew is a collective term, even as it takes on singular pronouns. The *nâchâsh* will be defeated by man and man will be deceived by non-order (the seed of the *nâchâsh*). This story shows that when humans choose the “tree” (symbolically), they take on the fight against non-order on their own. There are consequences for choosing autonomy. Similar to Isreal asking for a king and Yahweh giving them their desires and the consequences of those desires. The New Testament authors redeploy this prominent theme and in imagery. The serpent got the first Adam, but he could not get the second, Jesus. (Matt. 4:1–11). Specifically, Jesus was the only human to thwart the power of death and sin (disorder) through His completed work on the cross.

Genesis 3:16 focuses on another character, the woman. Yahweh says to the women, “I will greatly multiply Your pain (עֲצָבוֹן, *‘itstsâbôwn*) in childbirth (הֵרֹון, *hêrôwn*), In pain (עֲצָבוֹן, *‘itstsâbôwn*) you will bring forth children” (Gen 3:16a). The Hebrew words here for pain is *‘itstsâbôwn* and *‘etseb*. The majority of their uses throughout the Hebrew Bible reflect grief,

sorrow, and anxiety (2 Sam. 29:2; Isa 63:10). The Hebrew word for childbirth is *hêrôwn* and means conception. In other words, God is telling Eve that the disorder they chose will result in anxiety over conceiving children, a theme that takes over the rest of the Genesis stories. In an ANE context, it was a death sentence for women who could not bear children. In a patristic society, women were ostracized, not cared for, and put to death for not being able to bear children. This reality is the epicenter of disorder for an ANE woman.

Again, Yahweh is not cursing Eve, but instructing her that the results of their decision to seek order apart Him will only bring disorder. Yahweh is being descriptive here, not prescriptive. It is as if He is giving them instruction, parental guidance, regarding their new station. It is like a parents telling one of their children who just crashed the car that their insurance will increase, and they have to walk to work. They are not punishing the child but describing the consequence of his or her action.

Still, Yahweh offers another way, a glimpse of hope, telling her “Yet your desire (תְּשׁוּקָה, *tʿshûwqâh*) will be for your husband, And he will rule (מָשַׁל, *mâshal*) over you” (Gen 3:16b). Contrary to modern, popular belief and abuse of this section that has resulted in a demeaning and oppression of women, this is a positive beat to the story. *Tʿshûwqâh* is a basic instinct for humans and is not intrinsically negative (Gen. 4:7; Song 7:11). In this context, Eve’s desire is for the order that a community social system can bring in the context of childbearing. Similarly, the Hebrew verb *mâshal* almost always a positive thing in all 256 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (like anything, though, it can be abused).³³

Genesis 3:16b is not about conflict or control, but about seeking order. In the context of overwhelming anxiety around childbearing and survival, a woman's desire is directed towards

³³ John Walton, Didasko Seminar.

her husband and community as a means of finding support and maintaining social order. It reflects the ancient Israelite social structure where community and family were crucial for survival. The profound point here is that Yahweh provides hope amidst human chaos. He provides a desire for her, which is fundamentally about seeking stability and protection in a threatening environment, not about power dynamics or domination. These verses show implementation of social institutions to govern and structure social interactions. The rule of the husband describes what was the fundamental organizing principle of their society, and therefore, serves as the acknowledge structure to bring order in ancient Israel.

In Genesis 3:17-19, Yahweh directs His attention to the man. This is another example of descriptive consequence for humanity choosing autonomy. It represents the struggle humans will now face in maintaining order. Just as the woman experiences anxiety in childbearing, the man will experience difficulty in providing and sustaining life through agricultural labor. Again, this is not a punishment, but a description of the challenges humans will encounter when they choose to manage order and chaos independently of Yahweh. The phrase “by the sweat of your brow” illustrates the hard work and struggle that comes with taking responsibility for one's own survival and order (Gen 3:19). Just as Adam represents humanity trying to produce food in a liminal world, Eve represents humanity desiring to sustain order through community in the struggle to secure the next generation.³⁴

Continuing this literary section, Genesis 4 provides more narratives of human attempts to find order in family, the arts, or civilization that end up being inadequate. On the backend of Yahweh giving family structure and societal protection as hope and way for humans to bring order amidst the chaos, they abuse it. While community and family were ways humans could

³⁴ Ibid.

bring order in Genesis 3, the Cain and Able narrative of Genesis 4:1-16 unveil how family relationships, when sought after for selfish gain, actually generate more disorder. These text demonstrate how human attempts to establish order through family and individual actions are fundamentally inadequate, highlighting the deeper themes of the human struggle to maintain social harmony. Even Able's name (הֶבֶל, *hebel*) in Hebrew is significance to the story. It means "meaninglessness," the same word used in Ecclesiastes to describe life's transience or futility. It contributes to the broader literary and theological themes of this section.

When Yahweh asked Cain about Abel, Cain's responded with "Am I my brother's keeper?" This response represents a rejection of familial and community obligations. For ANE person, the answer would absolutely be "Yes." Protecting and watching over the family unit was the role of family and community in that society. The consequence of Cain's actions caused him to forfeit the favor and protection of the ground. The parallel between Adam and Eve is remarkable, and intentional. While Adam and Eve expelled from God's presence, Cain from His protection. The "mark" Cain received is paralleled to skin garments Adam and Eve received. Both serve as sign of Yahweh's grace amidst vulnerability and human brought chaos.

Genesis 4:17-24 showcases more human attempts to create order. Despite their efforts, they always ended up corrupted and disordered. Lamech's polygamy demonstrates the corruption of family structures. The development of arts and technology did not automatically lead to higher levels of order. Even technological and cultural advancements did not resolve disorder (Gen. 4:20-22). The narrative portrays them as insufficient in addressing human desire for autonomy. Genesis' second section records how Adam and Eve took wisdom on their own accord and brought disorder instead of order. The banishment from God's "temple" garden and barrment from the tree of life reverted humans to face the consequences alone. The text then moved from

unrepentant Cain to defiant Lamech. Violence was glorified and the mark of Cain no longer stood as a stigma of exile, but a badge of honor. The inadequacies of family and community, as well as the arts of tentmaking, farming, blacksmithing, did not simply describing civilization's progress, but critically examined humanity's repeated failures to establish true order through their own means. Yet, sprinkled throughout were points of relief, where God intervened and made a way for humans to find order amongst their chaos.

Section Three: Genesis 5:1-6:8

This third section of Genesis begins with a long genealogy (all of chapter five). What is important about the genealogies in the Genesis 1-11 narrative is that they represent continuity and relationship. These people have the same inclination and desire as the archetypal Adam and Eve. Which means, without relationship and wisdom from Yahweh, the source of life, anything and everything they seek brings chaos and disorder. Genealogies in the ancient world were used for a variety of purposes. For example, genealogies denoted power and prestige, they suited a literary purpose of the author (choosing ten members from family lines each with the last one having three sons), and reflect blessing (this is not meant to serve as an all-inclusive list).³⁵

Genesis 6:1-4, still one of hardest passages to interpret, reveals the pervasiveness of humanity and is an intro into the flood narrative in the following section. The phrases “the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose” and “the sons of God came in to the daughters of men” speak into the atrocities of society (Gen. 6:2, 4). In the most convincing interpretation of the text that most aligns with both the ANE culture, as well as the biblical context, the “sons of God” are representative of the earthly kings and leaders of societies, and the daughters of men are thought

³⁵ Ibid.

of as the women in that society. The Genesis NIV Application Commentary describes this narrative as a portrayal of local authority (whether king, governor, or lord of the manor) who imposes his will on his people by demanding and exercising the right to spend the first night (“right of the first night”) with any women who is being married.³⁶

Many ANE literature help support this interpretation. In the Mesopotamian story, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the main character, Gilgamesh is portrayed as two-thirds god and one-third man, called “flesh of the gods” and practices the right of the first night.³⁷ Many other ANE literary provide examples that illustrate kings and officials as deified beings. From the Sumerian culture (*Eannatum*, *Gudea*), through Old Babylonian culture (*Hammurabi*), into Middle Assyrian culture (*Tukulti-Ninurta*) and Neo-Assyrian culture (*Ashurbanipal*), it was part of the royal prerogative to claim divine heritage.³⁸ Their children, the Nephilim (נְפִילִים, n°phîyl) are only talked to one other time in the Hebrew Bible, referring to descendants of Anak, an enemy nation to Isreal (Num. 13:33). In general, it is safe to conclude that this is a motif prominent in the ANE culture, and the author is using the rhetoric of the ancient world. It is important to note that while the Bible is immersed in the cultural river of its time, it contrasts the other cultures by never promoting a human to royalty or divinity. While the third section in mainly a genealogy (Genesis 5), it preserves a short narrative of how humans sought fecundity (Genesis 6:1-4) and society (Genesis 6:5-6) as a means of itself, and it too failed to bring order. Thus, a Divine reset was introduced through the Noah and his family.

Section Four: Genesis 6:9-9:29

³⁶ John Walton, *The Genesis NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2001), 293.

³⁷ A. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), 160.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 294.

Genesis 6:9-9:29 begins the fourth section as it sets the reader up to see that humanity has gotten so terrible that there is no hope outside a Divine intervention, a flood. ANE flood stories were common. Many cultures that had their own, such as the Egyptians, Ugariticians, Phoenicians, and Akkadians. But none is more similar to the biblical account than the Babylonian's, recorded in the *Gilgamesh Epic*.³⁹ This does not mean or assume that the biblical authors copied and borrowed from other cultures; it just meant that certain themes or events were seen to have had a large impact in their time period.

For example, if person A asks person B to describe the solar system, person B might respond by list the eight planets in the Milky Way. They might even begin describing the composition, temperature, and atmosphere of various planets and stars within the solar system. Would it be right for person A to accuse person B of copying the National Geographic because person B used similar words and descriptions as National Geographic? Certainly not. Their descriptions would sound similar, (like most of the modern wester world would) because they live in the same cultural river, with the same understanding of facts, ideas and knowledge that is readily known and available. Likewise, the biblical authors and other ANE cultures have similar language and shared understanding of things. Rather, than focusing on the similarities, it is most helpful to identify the differences, because the differences (in whatever topic) really separate the Israelite nation apart from other ANE nations.

In section three, the biblical authors portrayed how humanity had completely abandoned their role as priestly, order bringers. Not only that, but humans were the primary cause of disorder and chaos in the world.⁴⁰ As a result, Yahweh was left with no other possibility but to reset the terrestrial realm and start over. In Genesis 7:22 it says, "All flesh that moved on the

³⁹ John Walton, *The Genesis NIV Application Commentary*, 311-327.

⁴⁰ John H Walton, *Wisdom for Faithful Reading* (InterVarsity Press, 2023), 46.

earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died.” While the narrative, at first glance, may lead readers to assume this was worldwide catastrophe, there is evidence to support otherwise. What is employed in this verse is known as rhetoric of cosmic cataclysm. Essentially, “all” may not mean all. Here are some examples of this rhetoric being used throughout the Bible.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul says he “completely destroyed” the Amalekites, yet a couple chapters later the Amalekites are back again, stronger than before (1 Samuel 30). And in Joshua 10:20 it says, “When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out, and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns.” If Saul or Joshua had completely wiped out their enemy, how were their enemies still around? How were there still survivors? To know how to interpret the example text, one would first have to find out what the author meant by “completely destroyed” or “wiped out all.”

In the previous examples, the author uses drastic language as hyperbole, rhetoric of cosmic cataclysm, that was very common in the ANE cultures. In the fifteenth century B.C. Egypt claimed to have “annihilated totally” their enemy, the Mitanni’s. But in actuality, the Mitanni’s continued to live (and fight) on, causing Egypt trouble for more than a century to come. In eighth century B.C. the Moabites defeated Israel in a battle, claiming outrageous genocide saying, “Israel has utterly perished for always.” But to this day, Israel is a thriving sovereign nation.⁴¹

This rhetoric should be taken more like a victory cry. It would be similar to a basketball team, after winning a game, going back to the locker room claiming they “destroyed the other

⁴¹ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2011), 176.

team.” But when one actually looks up at the scoreboard, the team only won by four points. Renown Old Testament theologian, Christopher J.H. Wright, says that ANE cultures, which included Isreal, had a “conventional rhetoric that liked to make absolute and universal claims about total victory and completely wiping out the enemy. Such rhetoric often exceeded reality on the ground...This is not to accuse the Biblical writers of falsehood, but to recognize the literary convection of writing about warfare.”⁴² By employing a rhetoric of cosmic cataclysm to portray the impact and significance of the flood, the biblical authors did not have to consider the physical scope of the flood or its geographical range to be universal. It seems, then, that the reason for this language was to show that Yahweh wanted a renewed people, willing to work and live in relationship with Yahweh and bring order to the terrestrial world.

This possibility also nests perfectly into the fact that the flood story is set on direct parallel to the Genesis 1-2 creation stories. This narrative is meant to be read as a new creation story. Both stories in literary progression: begin with chaos waters (Gen.1:2; Gen. 7:17); have the *ruakh* (same word for spirit and wind) act upon the water (Gen. 1:2; Gen. 8:1); have dry land appear (Gen. 1:9; Gen. 8:4); have Yahweh brings forth people and animals (Gen 1:24-27; Gen. 8:17-18); receive a reiteration of blessing (Gen. 1:28; Gen. 9:1); Yahweh plant a garden, Noah plant a vineyard (Gen. 2; Gen. 9:20); Adam and Ever be naked and unaware, Noah be naked and unaware (Gen. 2:25; Gen. 9:21-23); Adam and Eve’s eyes were open and they knew, Noah awoke and knew (Gen. 3:7; Gen. 9:24). These stories are rhetorically set side by side to let the reader know that order is reemerging. Yahweh makes this clear in Genesis 8:22, promising that “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest [food], cold and heat, summer and winter

⁴² Christopher J H Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 88.

[weather], day and night [time] will never cease.” Yahweh did a new act of ordering the terrestrial realm for humanity.

After the flood Yahweh made a covenant with Noah. Literarily, this covenant is still in the same *tôldôṭ* as the flood narrative, and therefore, must be read as one continued story with a shared message. The purpose of Yahweh’s covenant with Noah is to show that Yahweh is in the business of taking the initiative to restore and repurpose His creation. Even if they need a reset (flood), He is not finished. He is still adapting and making new ways (this time, creating governance) for earth to have order. Yahweh even knows that it will not work, yet He still provides a way for His people. Part of the covenant Yahweh makes with the people includes governance. In Genesis 9:5-6, He says, “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.” Image bearing means order bringer. Yet, bearing the image of Yahweh is not individual thing. All humanity is meant to bear Yahweh’s image. This passage becomes the example of a governing process. Yahweh establishes how people are to hold themselves and others accountable. Here, Yahweh puts the responsibility on humans for justice and governance on the shoulders, just like he did with the familial institution.

Section Five: Genesis 10:1-11:26

The first of the two major units in Genesis comes to a head in Genesis 10:1-11:26. After Yahweh’s reset and recreation of the terrestrial realm, humanity begins right back where they were before, inadequately seeking order from government and society, rather than from Yahweh. This fifth section begins with an entire chapter of names, heeding the call to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9:1). It is not until Genesis 11 that the narrative picks back up again. It says,

“Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words” (Gen. 11:1). The author is not giving the reader a fact about the ancient world speaking the same dialect at one point in time. Rather, the author is making a statement about the society. The Akkadian language of Israel's neighbor used a similar phrase, and it always referred to being in one accord in a political, social, and governmental sense.⁴³

As a result, “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). Genesis 11:1-4 is not about human pride or architectural achievement, but about gaining prosperity and divine favor through manipulative religious practices. This is revealed through the two aspects of the passage- “making a name” for themselves and building a “tower”. In the ANE context, "making a name" had to do with the relationship between the gods and people, known as the Great Symbiosis. The people believed they could force a god to meet their needs by meeting the god's needs through elaborate temple rituals, worships, and sacrifices. Their goal was to gain protection, prosperity, and success from the gods by "having a god in their pocket,” by controlling and obligating the divine through their religious efforts. In other words, the people wanted to establish success by manipulating a symbiotic relationship with Yahweh.

The most logical thing in an ANE culture that would make a name for themselves would be to build a tower, more specifically a ziggurat. A ziggurat was an ANE structure that the people would make as high as they could so the gods would come down. They were built next to a temple, and the *digunu*, a single room at the very top of the ziggurat, would serve as the “breakroom” for the gods as they made their way to the temple. Therefore, ziggurats serve as the

⁴³ John Walton, Didasko Seminar.

portal from heaven to earth. The names of the ziggurats revealed its function and significance to the gods. For example, the ziggurat found in ancient Babylon was called “Sacred Place of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth,” the one in Sippar was called, “Sacred Place of the Stairway to Pure Heaven,” and the of Larsa, “Sacred Space which Links Heaven and Earth.”⁴⁴

To no surprise Yahweh comes down the ziggurat (Gen. 11:5). But contrary to all the other gods of the ANE, Yahweh rejects this approach. He demonstrates to all that He cannot be manipulated and that relationship with Him must be on His terms and in His way. This story is about humanity reestablishing presence and relationship with Yahweh on their own terms. This is not the kind of relationship and presence that Yahweh desires. He does not rule via a symbiotic relationship with humanity, but with love, compassion, and through relationship with His image bearers. Consequently, Yahweh scattered (פָּרַץ, *pûwts*) them (Gen. 11:8). *Pûwting* them should not be thought of as a supernatural, geographic transportation event. Rather, still within the context of them being “one in language”, Yahweh *pûwts* them in their mindsets to no longer be one in accord and agreement in a political, social, and governmental sense.

The Tower of Babel narrative serves as a literary bridge to the second unit of Genesis. After humanity attempted to establish a relationship with God through manipulative religious practices, God rejected their approach and launches a "counter-initiative" - the covenant with Abraham. The Tower of Babel narrative demonstrates humanity's persistent tendency to pursue order and relationship on their own terms, which mirrors the original problem in Genesis 3. By rejecting the people's symbiotic approach, God shows that genuine relationship cannot be forced or controlled. This rejection sets the stage for God's covenant strategy, where He initiates relationship through blessing and promise, rather than human manipulation. The story transitions

⁴⁴ Ibid.

from humanity's failed attempt to control divine interaction, to God's deliberate plan of relationship through covenant, ultimately leading to the incarnation of Jesus, and the establishment of the church. It's a pivotal moment illustrating the ongoing theme of God seeking genuine relationship with humanity.

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