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**THE UNIQUE
COSMOLOGY
OF GENESIS 1
AGAINST
ANCIENT
NEAR EASTERN
AND EGYPTIAN
PARALLELS**

INTRODUCTION

The opening chapters of the Bible (Gen. 1–11) contain the history of beginnings, focusing on natural and historical beginnings and the ensuing history of the world and humankind.¹ Nowhere else in Scripture do we again find such a comprehensive and detailed narration of the origin of the earth and humanity. While this is important in itself, it takes on greater significance when we recognize that the Genesis cosmology and the Genesis creation account come to us without rival. Nowhere in the ancient Near East or Egypt has anything similar been recorded. The unique words about Creator, creation, and creature—of God, world, and humanity in Genesis 1 and 2—set the entire tone for the wonderful and unique saving message of the Bible. We can say without hesitation that the world and humankind were in the beginning and remain now in the hands of the Creator. Scripture is able to speak about an end of the

1. This study was originally published as “Genesis Is Unique” by Gerhard F. Hasel, *Signs of the Times*, June 1975, 22–26 and July 1975, 22–25. © 1975 by Pacific Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission. The article was revised and expanded by Michael G. Hasel to include current sources and new information on ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian parallels. The language of the original study was retained where possible.

world and humanity only because God is the Creator of that world and humanity.²

THE GENESIS COSMOGONY OF TOTALITY

In this sublime and elevated presentation of creation we have the first conception of the world and humankind as totalities from their beginning. No one experiences and knows them in their totality. But in the biblical creation account, these realities are expressed in their totalities as originating from the Creator. The totalities of God's created world and what is in it depicts how the origin and continuing existence of the world and life are expressed in categories of time and space.

Against the widespread notion that it is unnecessary to engage in a dialogue between the biblical presentation of creation and creature and the scientific quest for understanding the world and humanity, it is our contention that dialogue and interaction are not only desirable but essentially necessary. The sciences can only deal with partial spheres of knowledge but not with totalities.

The aim of presenting and describing the world in its totality is already revealed in the first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).³ This compact sentence makes four basic affirmations that are completely new in humankind's quest for an understanding of the world's origin and of themselves.

The first affirmation claims that God made the heavens and the earth "in the beginning." There was, then, a time when this globe and its surrounding atmospheric heavens did not exist. Contrary to ancient Near Eastern mythologies,⁴ in which the earth had no beginning, and in contrast to Greek philosophical thought, in which the existence of the world from eternity is a basic presupposition,⁵ the

2. On the inextricable relationship between protology and eschatology, see Michael G. Hasel, "In the Beginning . . . The Relationship between Protology and Eschatology," in *The Cosmic Battle for Planet Earth: Essays in Honor of Norman R. Gulley*, ed. Ron du Preez and Jiří Moskala (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Old Testament Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 2003), 17-32.

3. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this chapter are taken from the King James Version.

4. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1962), 42; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1967), 2:104.

5. This is true of both Plato and Aristotle. Note the statement in David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992),

Genesis cosmology fixes by the use of the phrase “in the beginning” (*bĕrēʾšīt*) an absolute beginning for creation.⁶ The pregnant expression, “in the beginning,” separates the conception of the world once and for all from the cyclical rhythm of pagan mythology and the speculation of ancient metaphysics. This world, its life and history, is not dependent upon nature’s cyclical rhythm but is brought into existence as the act of creation by a transcendent God.

The second affirmation is that God is the Creator. As God, He is completely separate from and independent of nature. Indeed, God continues to act upon nature, but God and nature are separate and can never be equated in some form of emanationism or pantheism. This is in contrast to the Egyptian concepts where Atum himself is the primordial mound (*benben*) from which arose all life in the Heliopolis cosmology or where Ptah is combined with “the land that rises” (*Ta-taten*) in the Memphis theology.⁷ In Egyptian

54. “Aristotle adamantly denied the possibility of a beginning, insisting that the universe must be eternal.”

6. For the interpretation of *bĕrēʾšīt* as an independent clause, see Eric Charles Rust, *Nature and Man in Biblical Thought* (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 32–35; and especially Walther Eichrodt, “In the Beginning,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 1–10; Gerhard F. Hasel, “Recent Translations of Gen 1:1: A Critical Look,” *BT* 22 (1971): 154–68; id., “The Meaning of Genesis 1:1,” *Ministry*, January 1976, 21–24; Hershel Shanks, “How the Bible Begins,” *Judaism* 21 (1972): 51–58; Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Gen 1:1–3; Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory,” *BSac* 132 (1975): 222–25; E. J. Young, “The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three,” in *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 1–14; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 106–8; Richard M. Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *JATS* 14 (2003): 4–10; Jiří Moskala, “Interpretation of *bĕrēʾšīt* in the Context of Gen 1:1–3,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 33–44.

7. Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (CBQMS 26; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 105; On the Heliopolis cosmology, found in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, see James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (YES 2; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 13, 14; Robert O. Faulkner, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vol. 1 (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1973), 72–77; for translations, see “The Creation of Atum,” trans. John A. Wilson, *ANET*, 3–4; “From Pyramid Texts Spell 527,” trans. James P. Allen, *COS* 1, no. 3: 7; “From Coffin Texts Spell 75,” trans. James P. Allen, *COS* 1, no. 5: 8, 9; on the Memphis theology, see James Henry Breasted, “The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest,” *ZAS* 39 (1901): 39–54; Adolf Erman, *Ein Denkmal memphitischer Theologie* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1911); Kurt Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen* (Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens 10; Leipzig, Germany: Hinrichs, 1928), 1–80; H. Junker, *Die Götterlehre von Memphis* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1939); for translations, see “The Theology of Memphis,” trans. John A. Wilson, *ANET*, 4–6; “The Memphite Theology,” *AEL* 1: 51–57; “From the Memphite Theology,” trans. James P. Allen, *COS* 1, no. 15: 21–23. On Egyptian cosmology in general, see Leonard H. Lesko, “Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology,” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell

cosmologies, “everything is contained within the inert monad, even the creator God.”⁸

The third affirmation is that God has acted in fiat creation. The special verb *bārāʾ*, “create,” has in the Bible only the living God as its subject. It emphasizes that God alone is Creator and that no one else has a share in this special activity. Any analogy to the idea of creation in the spheres of human endeavor is totally removed from God’s activity of creation. Inasmuch as this verb is never employed with the accusative term *matter* (i.e., “stuff” from which God creates), this verb *bārāʾ*⁹ alone contains—with the emphasis of the phrase “in the beginning”—the idea of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).¹⁰ Since the earth is described in the next verse (v. 2) in its rude state of desolation and waste, “create” in the first verse of Genesis must signify the calling into existence of original matter in the formulation of the world.¹¹

The fourth affirmation deals with the object of creation, the material that is brought forth by divine creation, namely “the heaven and the earth.” In the Hebrew language, these two words are a surrogate for our term *cosmos*. A thorough investigation of the forty-one usages of the compound terms “heaven and the earth” reveals that these words do not mean that God created the entire universe with its thousands of galaxies at the time He created the world.¹² The

University Press, 1991), 88–122; John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1997), 53–73.

8. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 114.

9. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1962), 47, stated succinctly: “It is correct to say that the verb *bārāʾ*, ‘create,’ contains the idea both of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo*, since it is never connected with any statement of the material.”

10. Werner H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift*, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1967), 88: “*bārāʾ* designates God’s creative activity as effortless, free, and without analogy, as something which is not dependent upon pre-existing matter.” It is true that creation out of nothing is never explicitly expressed in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the omission of the accusative of matter (or material) along with emphasis on the uniqueness of the creation of the world reality cannot be easily brought into harmony with the fact of reshaping of pre-existent matter. See Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2: 103, 4; Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 41; Davidson, “Origins,” 29, 30.

11. G. Henton Davies, *Genesis*, Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1969), 1:125, suggests that “the intention of these opening sentences [Gen. 1:1–3] is almost certainly to show that creation *ex nihilo* is implied.” For a recent defense of this concept, see Paul Copan, “Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Analysis of Gerhard May’s Proposal,” *TJ* 17 (1996): 77–93.

12. B. Hartmann, “Himmel und Erde im Alten Testament,” *SThU* 30 (1960): 221–24; Siegfried H. Horn, “Heaven,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.:

focus remains on the planet Earth and its more or less immediate surroundings. The sublime ideas expressed in this first verse of the Bible set the tone for the entire Genesis cosmology.

MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF BIBLICAL COSMOLOGY

Let us turn now to some of the more critical issues relating to the Genesis cosmology specifically and to biblical cosmology generally. It is widely believed that the biblical cosmology, and thus that of Genesis, is mythological¹³ and maintains the ancient picture of a three-storied universe with a heaven above, a flat earth, and the netherworld underneath.¹⁴ If this understanding is coupled with the assumption that the Bible supports a geocentric universe,¹⁵ then it seems hopelessly dated. On the basis of these views, many modern scholars have become convinced that the biblical cosmology is historically conditioned, reflecting a primitive and outdated cosmology of the ancient world.¹⁶ Therefore, many say, the biblical cosmology should be abandoned and replaced by a modern, more appropriate scientific one.

New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann wrote some decades ago that, in the New Testament, “the world is viewed as a three-storied structure, with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath,”¹⁷ made up of hell, the place of torment. Visual

Review and Herald, 1960), 448; William Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), 420; see discussion by Davidson, “Origins,” 32–34.

13. Various views on mythology in the Old Testament are presented in Graham H. Davies, “An Approach to the Problem of OT Mythology,” *PEQ* 88 (1956): 83–91; John L. McKenzie, “Myth and the Old Testament,” *CBQ* 21 (1959): 265–82; James Barr, “The Meaning of ‘Mythology’ in Relation to the Old Testament,” *VT* 9 (1959): 1–10; Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos* (New York: Association, 1967); Childs, *Myth and Reality*; Schmidt, “Mythos im Alten Testament,” *EvT* 27 (1967): 237–54; Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *EvQ* 46 (1974): 81–104.

14. See J. P. Peters, “Hebrew Cosmogony and Cosmology,” *ERE* 4 (1908): 194.

15. This was the medieval view challenged by the Copernican Revolution, which gained its victory in the seventeenth century. See Jerome J. Langford, *Galileo, Science, and the Church* (New York: Desclee, 1966); Carl F. von Weizsäcker, “Kopernikus, Kepler, Galilei,” in *Einsichten, Gerhard Krüger zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1962), 376–94.

16. See, among many, Theodor C. Gaster, “Cosmogony,” *IDB* 1 (1962): 702, 3, who claims that the biblical accounts of creation “are based upon traditional ancient Near Eastern lore.” Most recently advocated by John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2009); id., *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), who largely overlooks the significant differences between these cosmologies and intentionally ignores the active polemic of the Genesis account, as pointed out by the studies cited in this article.

17. In the 1941 essay of Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, vol. 1 (London: Harper & Row, 1953), 1.

representations of the cosmology of the Old Testament, in the view of other writers, literally depict a similar picture of a three-storied universe with physical storehouses of water, snow chambers of winds, and windows. This is depicted in a vaulted canopy of the heavens above a flat earth, at the center of which is a navel, with waters under the earth and rivers in the netherworld.¹⁸ Such a mythological cosmology is now out of date, wrote Bultmann,¹⁹ and so, he inaugurated the famous program of “demythologization.”²⁰ Modern people cannot believe in such a mythological cosmology while simultaneously flying in jets, browsing the Internet, and using smartphones.²¹

In modern thinking, this leaves open only two alternatives: either (1) accept the assumed mythological picture of the world at the price of intellectual sacrifice (*sacrificium intellectus*), or (2) abandon the biblical cosmology and adopt whatever happens to be the latest scientific theory. We believe that these alternatives, which cut to the root of humanity’s understanding of God, are false. Do we find on close scrutiny any evidence anywhere in the Bible for a three-storied universe? Does the Bible support the notion of a geocentric universe? If anything, the Bible is human-centered, or more accurately, it is centered on the interrelationship between God and humans.²² In the Old Testament, God is the center of everything²³ but not at the physical center. The Bible does not support the idea of a physical center. According to the Bible, the solar system could be geocentric, heliocentric, or something else.

Where has the interpretation arisen that the Bible presents a geocentric picture? This arose in post-New Testament times when leading theologians adopted the Ptolemaic cosmology of the second century AD and interpreted the Bible on the basis of this nonbiblical

18. Compare, for example, the representation in Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970), 5; and also, Gaster, “Cosmogony,” 703.

19. Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 3, 4.

20. Among the many reactions, see Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolph Bultmann* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1960); John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (New York: Harper, 1960); Ernst Kinder, ed., *Ein Wort lutherischer Theologie zur Entmythologisierung: Beiträge zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem theologischen Programm Rudolf Bultmanns* (München: Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern, 1952).

21. See Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 5.

22. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 21.

23. On this issue, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Problem of the Center in the Old Testament Theology Debate,” *ZAW* 86 (1974): 65–82; id., *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 139–71.

cosmology.²⁴ The ignoble affairs associated with the famous trial of Galileo in the seventeenth century could have been avoided had the church's theological consultants recognized that their interpretation of certain Bible texts was conditioned by tradition based on the cosmology of the pagan mathematician-geographer Ptolemy.²⁵

Although we are freed today from the Ptolemaic cosmology, a vast number of biblical scholars still read the cosmology of the Bible through the glasses of the pagan cosmologies of the ancient Near East and Egypt. What is so widely claimed to be the meaning of texts relating to the biblical cosmology is in actuality nothing but a dubious interpretation based on a highly problematical hermeneutic. Moreover, the claim that the cosmology of the Bible is mythological is of fairly recent origin.²⁶ It is our contention that the Bible, properly and honestly interpreted on its own terms, is acceptable to the modern mind and does not present the kind of cosmology so widely attributed to it.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF COSMOLOGY

The widespread notion that the biblical cosmology reflects a pagan picture of the three-storied universe has cast its shadow broadly. But first, we must ask whether ancient mythological cosmologies had a clearly defined three-storied universe. The ancient Egyptian view in the Memphite theology was that the permanent place of the dead was the West.²⁷ In the Amduat of the New Kingdom, the deceased are swallowed with the sun by Nut in the West, travel through the twelve hours of the night, and emerge with the sun in paradise, experiencing daily regeneration and re-creation.²⁸ In

24. Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2–7, discusses the view of Basil and Augustine and their adoption of Greek philosophy and science in their theology. See also id., *Planets, Stars, & Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996), 335, 36.

25. Charles E. Hummel, *The Galileo Connection* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986), 35–56; Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science*, 250.

26. The systematic use of the term *myth* in biblical studies was introduced in 1779 by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. The “mythological school” of biblical interpretation has cast its shadow widely over the study of Scripture. See Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (München: Mohr, 1952), 20–90; cf. John W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974).

27. Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Harper, 1961), 108; Siegfried Morenz, *Ägyptische Religion* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 167–80, shows how such older notions were held alongside younger ones until later periods.

28. Erik Hornung and Theodor Abt, *The Egyptian Amduat: The Book of the Hidden Chamber* (Zürich: Living Human Heritage, 2007), 321–25; Andreas Schweizer, *The Sungod's*

Canaanite mythology, the supreme deity El had his throne near the “sources of the Two Rivers, in the midst of the Double-Deep,”²⁹ which means that the gods did not always dwell in the heavens or the upper story of a supposed three-storied universe.³⁰ The Canaanite god Baal, who, unfortunately, was also worshiped at times by some idolatrous Israelites,³¹ had his place of abode on the mountain of Zaphon³² in northern Syria, at the mouth of the Orontes River.³³ These examples make it clear that there was no uniform ancient mythical picture of a three-storied universe. The dead could dwell in the West, the gods in various parts of the earth rather than in a heavenly world. The most comprehensive study on Mesopotamian cosmic geography concludes that there was no belief in a three-storied universe with a solid metal vault, but rather, it posits that the Mesopotamians believed in six flat heavens, suspended one above the other by cables.³⁴ This concept is altogether absent in the biblical cosmology.

The term “deep” (*těhôm*) in Genesis 1:2 figures prominently in the argument of those scholars supporting the view that the Genesis cosmology is three-storied. There is heaven above and earth below (v. 1),

Journey through the Netherworld: Reading the Ancient Egyptian Amduat (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

29. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 48; cf. Albrecht Goetze, “El, Ashertu and the Storm-god,” *ANET* (1969): 519.

30. It was commonly understood that El’s dwelling was in the underworld as argued by Otto Kaiser, *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit, und Israel*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1962), 47–56; Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, VTSup (Leiden: Brill) 2 (1955): 92–104; Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 35–57, argues forcefully that El’s dwelling was localized in Syria by the inhabitants of Ugarit and had a mythological but nongeographic character.

31. See, for example, Judg. 2:11, 13; 3:7; 8:33; 1 Sam. 7:4; 12:10; 1 Kings 18:19–22; Jer. 2:8, 23; 7:9; 9:14; Hosea 2:8, 13, 17; 11:2; 13:1.

32. Andrée Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques, découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939* (Paris: Geuthner, 1963), 3:3.43–4.47; Charles Vrololeaud, *Le Palais royal d’Ugarit, vol. 2* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1957), 3:8–10; Claude F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica V* (Paris: Geuthner, 1968), no. 3.

33. For a discussion of Špn in Ugaritic texts and the Old Testament, see Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 57–59, 131–60. Compare also Nicholas Wyatt, “The Significance of Špn in West Semitic Thought: A Contribution to the History of a Mythological Motif,” in *Ugarit: Ein ost-mediterranes Kulturzentrum im Alten Orient: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, Ugarit und seine altorientalische Umwelt 1 (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995), 213–37.

34. Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 2nd corr. printing, MC 8 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011). But even this conclusion is derived from various sources that are pieced together. There was no single view of cosmic geography existing in the Mesopotamian world. Cf. Randall W. Younker and Richard M. Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome: Another Look at the Hebrew Term *rāqîa’*,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 127.

and underneath is the “deep,” interpreted as the “primeval ocean.” It has been claimed that the term *têhôm* is directly derived from the name Tiamat, the mythical Babylonian monster and goddess of the primeval ocean world in the national epic *Enuma Elish*.³⁵ *Têhôm* is said to contain an “echo of the old cosmogonic myth,”³⁶ in which the creator god Marduk engages Tiamat in combat and slays her.³⁷ The interpretation that the biblical term *têhôm* is philologically and morphologically dependent on Tiamat is known to be incorrect today on the basis of an advanced understanding of comparative Semitic philology³⁸—in fact, “it is phonologically impossible to conclude that *têhôm* ‘ocean’ was borrowed from *Tiamat*.”³⁹ The thirty-five usages of *têhôm* and its derivative forms in the Old Testament reveal that it is generally “a poetic term for a large body of water,”⁴⁰ which is completely “nonmythical.”⁴¹ To suggest that there is, in Genesis 1:2, the remnant of a conflict of the pagan battle myth is to read ancient mythology into the Genesis cosmology—something which the text actually combats.⁴² The description of the passive and powerless, undifferentiated and unorganized state of the “deep” in Genesis 1:2 reveals that this term is nonmythical in content and antimythical in purpose.

More recently, a Canaanite background has been suggested for this chaos-battle myth embedded in Genesis, marking a shift of origin

35. George A. Barton, “Tiamat,” *JAOS* 15 (1893): 1–27; Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895); Thorkild Jacobsen, “The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 104–8.

36. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos*, 39; Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 37; S. H. Hooke, “Genesis,” in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. H. H. Rowley and Matthew Black (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), 179. Compare also Rudolf Kilian, “Genesis 1.2 und die Urgötter von Hermopolis,” *VT* 16 (1966): 420.

37. On this battle myth, see Mary K. Wakeman, *God’s Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 16–22.

38. For a detailed discussion see Gerhard F. Hasel, “Polemic Nature,” 82–85, 92–96, and David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation* (JSOTSup 83; Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1989), 45–62; id., “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction,” in *I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; SBTS 4 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 31.

39. Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories,” 31.

40. Wakeman, *God’s Battle*, 86.

41. Kurt Galling, “Der Charakter der Chaosschilderung in Gen 1.2,” *ZTK* 47 (1950): 151.

42. Lambert states emphatically that “the case for a battle as prelude to God’s dividing of the cosmic waters is unproven.” W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” in *I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; SBTS 4; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 104; repr. from *JTS* 16 (1965).

from Babylon to the West.⁴³ But there is little evidence for this. The term *yammîm*, “seas,” does not appear until Genesis 1:10 when one would expect it in the initial few verses of the account. Any connection with the Canaanite deity *Yam* is, therefore, not present, making it “difficult to assume that an earlier Canaanite dragon myth existed in the background of Gen 1:2.”⁴⁴ Moreover, several scholars reject that there even was a creation myth in Ugarit altogether,⁴⁵ and others question whether Baal ever functioned as a creator-god.⁴⁶

What shall we say of “the fountains of the great deep” mentioned twice in the Genesis flood account (Gen. 7:11; 8:2)?⁴⁷ The “great deep” (*těhôm rabbâ*) refers undoubtedly to subterranean water. But there is no suggestion in these texts that this underground water is connected with the mythology of an underworld sea on which the earth floats.⁴⁸ During the flood, the springs of the subterranean waters, which have fed the springs and rivers, split open with such might and force that, together with the torrential downpour of waters stored in the atmospheric heavens, the worldwide flood comes about.

The subterranean features, such as *šě’ôl*—“the waters beneath the earth”⁴⁹—and the famous “pillars,” fail, on closer investigation, to uphold the supposed three-storied or triple-decked view of the world. *Šě’ôl* is invariably the place where dead people go.⁵⁰ It is a figurative expression of the grave⁵¹ and may be equated with the regular

43. Loren R. Fisher, “Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament,” *VT* 15 (1965): 316; Jacobsen, “Battle between Marduk and Tiamat,” 107; Richard J. Clifford, “Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible,” *Or* 53 (1984): 183–201; Åke W. Sjöberg, “Eve and the Chameleon,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer; JSOTSup 31; Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1984), 217; John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

44. Tsumura, *Earth and the Waters*, 62–65; id., “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories,” 32, 33.

45. Arvis S. Kapelrud, “Creation in the Ras Shamra Texts,” *ST* 34 (1980): 3, 9; Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 49; Baruch Margalit, “The Ugaritic Creation Myth: Fact or Fiction?” *UF* 13 (1981): 137–45. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 126, remains cautious: “As long as the relationship of El and Baal in the ugaritic texts is not fully known, a satisfactory understanding of cosmogony in the Baal cycle is not possible.”

46. Johannes C. de Moor, “El, the Creator,” in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. Gary Rendsburg et al. (New York: KTAV, 1980), 171–87.

47. See Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Fountains of the Great Deep,” *Origins* 1 (1974): 67–72.

48. R. Laird Harris, “The Bible and Cosmology,” *ETSB* 5 (1962): 14.

49. Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:18; 5:8; cf. Job 26:5; Ps. 136:6.

50. The term *šě’ôl* is translated as “grave” (thirty-one times), “hell” (thirty-one times), and “pit” (six times) in the KJV. The rendering “hell” is unfortunate, because the term has nothing to do with torture, torment, or consciousness.

51. See Gen. 37:35; 1 Sam. 2:6; Job 7:9; 14:13; Ps. 49:14.

Hebrew term for “grave” (*qeber*).⁵² In the Bible, *šə’ôl* never refers to an underworld of gloomy darkness or waters as the abode of the dead, as was conceived in pagan mythology among Babylonians and Greeks. As a designation of the grave, *šə’ôl*, of course, is subterranean, because it is in the ground.⁵³ The three usages of the phrase “the waters beneath the earth” (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:18, 5:8) refer to waters below the shoreline, because, in one of the texts (Deut. 4:18), it is, indeed, the place where fish dwell.

Some poetic passages describe the foundations of the earth as resting on “pillars” (*‘amûd* in Job 9:6 and Ps. 75:3; *māzûq* in 1 Sam. 2:8). We may note that these words are only used in poetry and are best understood metaphorically. They cannot be construed to refer to literal pillars. Even today we speak metaphorically of “pillars of the church” in referring to staunch supporters of the community of believers. So the “pillars” of the earth referred to in these passages are metaphors describing how God supports or moves the inner foundations, which hold the earth in place and together, because He is Creator.

Let us move now from what is “beneath” the earth to what is “above.” The act of fiat creation on the second day calls into existence the firmament (*rāqîa’* in Gen. 1:7). The firmament is frequently associated with firmness and solidity,⁵⁴ ideas derived from the Vulgate *firmamentum* and the Septuagint *steréōma* but not from the original term in the Hebrew. The firmament is widely thought to be a “vaulted solid body.”⁵⁵ The term *rāqîa’*, which is traditionally translated “firmament,” is better rendered with “expanse.”⁵⁶ Some

52. R. Laird Harris, “The Meaning of the Word *Sheol*,” *ETSB* 4 (1961): 129.

53. See now the definitive study by Erik Galenięks, “The Nature, Function, and Purpose of the Term *šə’ôl* in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005).

54. Cf. Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969).

55. Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1974), 160. The idea of a solid heavenly dome dates back to the eighteenth century and the views of Voltaire, in *The Philosophical Dictionary* under the entry “The Heavens” (new and correct ed. with notes; London: Wynne and Scholey and Wallis, 1802), 185–191.

56. *The Torah* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967) and the NASB (1971). This was already adopted by E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible Series, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 6, and was also the majority view of expositors working in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see John Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, Pa.: W. W. Woodward, 1818). They include Paul Fagius (1542), Pietro Martire Vermigli, Sebastian Münster (1534–35; 1546; 1551), Immanuel Tremellius (1575–1579), John Calvin (1554), Franciscus Junius (1579), Joannes Drusius, Benedictus Arias Montanus, Christoph Rothmann, Johannes Pena, Johannes Piscator (1605–1619), Sir Walter Raleigh (1614), Juan de Mariana (1624), Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1659),

have tried to document on the basis of non-biblical texts that *rāqîa'* is solid,⁵⁷ perhaps a strip of metal.⁵⁸ But these attempts at explaining the Hebrew term *rāqîa'*, “expanse,” fail to convince. Such interpretations are based on unsupported philological guesses and extrabiblical mythical notions but not on what the biblical texts actually demand.⁵⁹

In passages like Genesis 1:7, Psalm 19:1, and Daniel 12:3, *rāqîa'* has the meaning of the curved expanse of the heavens, which to an observer on the ground appears like a vast inverted vault. In Ezekiel (1:22, 23, 25, 26; 10:1) it has the sense of an “extended” platform or level surface.⁶⁰ No text of Scripture teaches that the firmament or, better, expanse of heaven, is firm, solid, or holds anything up.

Rain does not come through “windows of heaven” in a solid firmament. Of the five texts in the Bible which refer to the “windows of heaven,” only the flood story (Gen. 7:11 and 8:2) relates them to water, and here the waters do not come from the *rāqîa'* but from the *šamayim*, “heaven.” The remaining three texts clearly indicate that the expression “windows of heaven” is to be understood in a nonliteral sense; it is pictorial language in the same way that we speak today of the “windows of the mind” or the “vault of heaven” without implying that the mind has windows with sashes and glass or that heaven is a literal vault of solid bricks or concrete. In 2 Kings 7:2, barley comes through the “windows in heaven.” In Isaiah 24:18, it seems to be trouble and anguish that use this entrance; while in Malachi 3:10, blessings come through “the windows of

Thomas Burnet (1681), and Sebastian Schmidt (1696); from Younker and Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome,” 133n35.

57. S. R. Driver as referred to by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Literary Form of Genesis 1:11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Payne (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1970), 57; Schmidt, *Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 102n6. This is done by reference to Phoenicians; Zellig S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1936), 147; DISO, 168.

58. Gaster, *Cosmogony*, 704.

59. There are three major attempts to explain the root meaning of this difficult term: (1) Some seek a parallel in the Babylonian notion of the lowest register of heaven called the “celestial bulwark” (*šupuk šame*). Hugo Winckler followed by Gaster, *Cosmogony*, 704. (2) Most commentators use the Phoenician term *mrq'*, which refers to “tin dish” (“Blechschale”) as the key for understanding the meaning of the Hebrew term. (3) Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, “The Firmament and the Clouds, *rāqîa'* and *šehāqîm*,” *ST* 1 (1947): 188–96, translates the verb “to patch up” and the noun as the “great patch” (191).

60. John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1969), 57, 58.

heaven.”⁶¹ Such figurative language does not lend itself to the reconstruction of biblical cosmology. This is underlined by the fact that the Bible makes abundantly clear that rain comes from clouds (Judg. 5:4; 1 Kings 18:45),⁶² which are under and not above the firmament or expanse of heaven (Job 22:13, 14). In Psalm 78:23, this association of clouds with the “doors of heaven” is made explicit in a synonymous poetic parallelism: “Yet He commanded the clouds above and opened the doors of heaven” (NASB).⁶³ In the Old Testament, whenever it rains heavily, this is expressed figuratively by the expression that the windows or doors of heaven are opened.⁶⁴

The recognition of the nonliteral, metaphorical use of words—pictorial language—in the Bible is important. If the Bible is read and interpreted on its own terms, it is usually not difficult to recognize such language. One writer effectively expressed the idea as follows: “A critical reader a thousand years hence might well think that the twentieth century held the idea of a three-story solid mind, with doors and gates. We know how wrong he would be; but we would still maintain that these phrases are legitimate metaphors, and indeed almost essential metaphors, to translate non-spatial ideas into spatial and comprehensible language.”⁶⁵

On the basis of evidence within the Bible, the widespread assumption that the biblical cosmology is that of a three-storied universe cannot be maintained. The so-called primitive or primeval view turns out to be an “assigned interpretation and not one which was derived from the texts themselves.”⁶⁶ Even when there is a proximity in time and place between terms in the Bible and in non-biblical texts, it does not necessarily imply that every ancient writer, whether inspired or not, intended the same or even a similar meaning.

61. Note that in these passages the word *’arubbâ* is used for “window.” Its etymology is still uncertain (KBL, 82). Translations such as *The Torah*, NAB, and NASB render it in Gen. 7:11; 8:2 as “floodgates of the sky.” It is best to translate *’arubbâ* as “openings.”

62. On the cloud motif, see Annemarie Ohler, *Mythologische Elemente im Alten Testament: Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Düsseldorf, Germany: Patmos, 1969), 58.

63. Scripture quotations marked NASB in this chapter are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

64. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch: Three Volumes in One*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 54; Younker and Davidson, “The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome.”

65. J. Stafford Wright, “The Place of Myth in the Interpretation of the Bible,” *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 88 (1956): 23.

66. Kaiser, “Literary Form,” 57.

OTHER ASPECTS OF CONTRAST AND POLEMIC IN THE GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNT

A lengthy part of this study has been occupied with the subject of an alleged biblical cosmology, the supposed three-storied picture of the world, because this is the point with which all modern discussions of the biblical cosmology and mythology begin and on which so much else depends. We now turn to other aspects of contrast and polemic in relation to ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian accounts.

SEA MONSTER OR SEA CREATURES?

As part of the divine creative act on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20–23), God created the “great whales” (v. 21) or “great sea monsters” as more recent translations (RSV, NEB, NAB) render the Hebrew term *tannînim*.⁶⁷ In Ugaritic texts, the cognate term *tnn* appears as a personified monster, a dragon, who was overcome by the goddess Anath, the creator god. Is it justified to link the biblical term to mythology as an expression of mythological influence? The term *tannînim* in Genesis 1:21 appears in a clearly “nonmythological context.”⁶⁸ On the basis of other creation passages in the Bible, it appears to be a generic designation for large water creatures⁶⁹ in contrast to small water creatures created next (1:21; see Ps. 104:25, 26). God’s totally effortless creation of these large aquatic creatures, as expressed through the verb “create” (*bārā’*), which always emphasizes effortless creation, exhibits a deliberate polemic against the mythical idea of creation by battle and combat.⁷⁰

THE LACK OF COMBAT, FORCE, OR STRUGGLE

The red thread of opposition to pagan mythological notions is also visible in the fiat creation by raising the firmament or expanse (Gen. 1:6, 7) without any struggle whatsoever. Ancient Near Eastern

67. See Gerhard F. Hasel, “Polemic Nature,” 85, 86, 97–99.

68. Theodor C. Gaster, “Dragon,” *IDB* 1 (1962): 868.

69. In most of the Old Testament texts, *tannînim* refers to a serpent or snake (Exod. 7:9, 10, 12; cf. 4:3; 7:15; Deut. 32:33; Ps. 91:13; cf. 58:4; Prov. 23:32); crocodile; or another mighty river creature (Ezek. 29:3; 32:2; Jer. 51:34; cf. Ps. 148:7).

70. For the Canaanite myth, see H. L. Ginsberg, “Poems about Baal and Anath, f. V AB” (*ANET* [1969]: 135–38); “The Ba’lu Myth,” trans. Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1 [1997], no. 86: 241–74); for the Marduk-Tiamat myth of Babylonia, see E. A. Speiser, “The Creation Epic” (*ANET* [1969]: 66, 67); “Epic of Creation,” trans. Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1, no. 111: 390–402) and Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon*.

and Egyptian mythologies link this act of separation to combat and struggle. The ancient cosmologies are not absorbed or reflected in Genesis but overcome.⁷¹

CREATION BY WORD OF MOUTH

In the biblical creation story, a most striking feature is creation by the spoken word. The creation of light on the first day by word of mouth (Gen. 1:3–5) is without parallel in Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology.⁷² In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk does “not create the cosmos by utterance but by gruesomely splitting Tiamat.”⁷³ In the Atra-Ḫasis Epic, humans are created from the flesh and blood of a slaughtered god mixed with clay, but “no hint of the use of dead deity or any other material of a living one is found in Genesis.”⁷⁴

A number of scholars have claimed that creation by word of mouth is best paralleled in Egyptian cosmologies.⁷⁵ However, there are several different traditions that developed over time with significant variations.⁷⁶ In the Heliopolis cosmology or theogony, Atum generates the Ennead (nine gods) from himself by the act of masturbation or spitting, “and the two siblings were born—Shu and Tefnut.”⁷⁷ In the Coffin Texts, Atum is equated with the sun in the name Re-Atum. Sometimes the two are separated as in “Re in your

71. Westermann, *Genesis*, 180; Paul Humbert, *Études sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Secrétariat de l’Université, 1940), 166, 67.

72. In the Hermopolis cosmology light arises first (cf. Siegfried Herrmann, “Die Naturlehre des Schöpfungsberichtes: Erwägungen zur Vorgeschichte von Gen. 1,” *TLZ* 6 [1961]: 416), but Ohler, *Mythologische Elemente*, 135, is correct in emphasizing that light in this Egyptian myth is not a part of the world of creation but is the sun god Re who is the firstborn of the gods.

73. Gordon H. Johnston, “Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” *BSac* 165 (2008): 187.

74. A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian ‘Genesis’ Story,” *TynBul* 18 (1967): 3–18; reprinted in *I Studied Inscriptions before the Flood*, 114–28.

75. Klaus Koch, “Wort und Einheit des Schöpfungsbericht in Memphis und Jerusalem,” *ZTK* 62 (1965): 251–93; James K. Hoffmeier, “Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 and 2 in Light of Egyptian Cosmology,” *JANES* 15 (1983): 45; Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 396–400; Johnston, “Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” 187, 88; Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 61–63.

76. There are a variety of creator gods in the Egyptian pantheon: Atum, Ptah, Re, Khnum, and others; cf. Jan Assman, “Schöpfergott,” *LÄ* 5 (1984): 676–77. Khnum fashions the *ka* of a new person on the potter’s wheel as depicted, for example, on Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. See Edouard Naville, *The Temples of Deir el-Bahri*, vol. 2 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898), 14, plate XLVIII.

77. Allen, “From the ‘Memphite Theology,’” 1, no. 3: 7; Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 107, 8. In Coffin Text, 76:3–4 Atum spits out Shu and Tefnut. Compare to J. Zandee, “Sargtexte Spruch 76,” *ZÄS* 100 (1973): 60–71; Raymond O. Faulkner, “Some Notes on the God Shu,” *Jaarbericht: “Ex Oriente Lux”* 18 (1964): 266–70.

rising, Atum in your setting.”⁷⁸ In this sense, Atum, often equated with the sun god Re, is self-developing and is the originator of the gods and all things.⁷⁹ In the Memphite theology of Egypt, Ptah is compared and contrasted with Atum. Whereas Atum created by “that seed and those hands, (for) Atum’s Ennead evolve(ed) through his seed and his fingers, but the Ennead is teeth and lips in this mouth that pronounced the identity of everything and from which Shu and Tefnut emerged and gave birth to the Ennead.”⁸⁰ Here, the writer achieves his goal of merging the two accounts by saying “that the origin of ennead through the teeth and the lips (of Ptah) is the same as the origin through the semen and hands of Atum.”⁸¹ The mouth is, thus, equated with the penis “from which Shu and Tefnut emerged and gave birth to the Ennead.”⁸² It was through self-development that Atum or Ptah created the gods.⁸³ That the teeth and lips here are to be compared to the effortless speech found in the Genesis creation ignores the parallelism made with Atum.⁸⁴ Others suggest that the “speech” of Ptah is best described by mantic-magic utterances in the Memphite theology of Egypt.⁸⁵

In contrast, there is no hint at self-generation or procreation in the Genesis account. The recurring expression “God said . . . and there/it was” (e.g., Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11) speaks of the effortless, omnipotent, and unchangeable divine word of creation. God’s self-existent word highlights the vast unbridgeable gulf between the

78. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 10.

79. Pyramid Text 1587a–d states, “Hail, Atum—hail, Scarab, self-developing—as you become high, in this your identity of the Mound; as you develop, in this your identity of the Scarab” (Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 10). Some have suggested that these accounts are better described as theogonies. Cf. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, “Ptah, Creator of the Gods: Reconsideration of the Ptah Section of the *Denkmal*,” *Numen* 23 (1976): 89.

80. Allen, “From the ‘Memphite Theology,’” 1, no. 15–16: 22.

81. Finnestad, “Ptah, Creator of the Gods,” 89; cf. S. Sauneron and J. Yoyotte, “La naissance du monde selon l’Égypte ancienne,” in *La naissance du monde* (Sources orientales 1; Paris: Seuil, 1959), 40; Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 111.

82. Allen, “From the ‘Memphite Theology,’” 1, no. 15–16: 22.

83. Coffin Text 714 states, “It was through my effectiveness that I brought about my body. I am the one who made me. It was as I wished, according to my heart, that I built myself.” Compare Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 36.

84. Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 61, describes Ptah’s creative acts as “lordly speech,” but this meaning is absent in the text.

85. S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 51. A rather distorted picture is painted by D. J. Frame, “Creation by the Word” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1969), and Louis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study*, *Analecta Biblica*, no. 39 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970).

biblical picture of creation and pagan mythology. The Genesis cosmology stresses the essential difference among divine being, creation, and created being in order to exclude any idea of emanationism, pantheism, and dualism.

DESCRIPTIVE POLEMIC

In various crucial instances, the Genesis cosmology exhibits a sharply antimythical polemic in its description of created material. We have seen this evidenced in the description of the “deep,” *tēhôm* (Gen. 1:2); the creation of the large aquatic creatures, the *tannînim* (1:21); the creative separation of heaven and earth (1:6–8); and the creation by divine word (1:3ff.). To this impressive list should be added the description of the creation and function of the luminaries (1:14–18), whose names “sun” and “moon” were surely avoided precisely because these terms were used at the same time in the ancient Near East and Egypt as names for astral deities. The use of “greater light” and “lesser light” “breathes a strongly antimythical pathos”⁸⁶ or polemic, undermining pagan religions and mythology at fundamental points.

THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

The magnificent creation narrative of Genesis 1:26–28 speaks of humankind as “the pinnacle of creation.”⁸⁷ The term *bārā’* is employed three times in these verses to emphasize God’s fiat creation of humanity. The human being appears as the creature uniquely “blessed” by God (Gen. 1:28) to be “the ruler of the world,”⁸⁸ including the ruler of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. All seed-bearing plants and fruit trees are for humankind’s food (1:29). This lofty picture of the divine concern and care for humanity’s physical needs stands in such sharp contrast to the purpose of humanity’s creation in Sumero-Akkadian mythology. With an understanding of this contrast, one is led to conclude that the Bible writer described the purpose of humanity’s creation deliberately to combat pagan mythological notions, while at the same time emphasizing the human-centered orientation of creation.

86. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 9.

87. *Ibid.*, 14.

88. Otto Loretz, *Schöpfung und Mythos* (SBS 32; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 92–98.

The Sumero-Akkadian myths unanimously depict human creation as an afterthought resulting from an attempt to relieve the gods of hard labor and procuring food and drink.⁸⁹ This mythical notion is contradicted by the biblical idea that humankind is to rule the world as God's vice-regent. Obviously, this antimythical emphasis cannot be the result of adopted pagan mythical notions; rather, it is rooted in biblical anthropology and the biblical understanding of reality.

In Egyptian cosmologies, "so far no detailed account of the creation of man is known."⁹⁰ The primary focus of Egyptian cosmologies is the creation of the Egyptian pantheon; thus, they are better described as theogonies, although the gods themselves represent the natural elements.⁹¹ A few texts indicate that humankind came from the tears of Re. "They [Shu and Tefnut] brought to me [Re] my eye with them, after I joined my members together I wept over them. That is how men came into being from the tears that came forth from my eye."⁹² The primary emphasis is not on the creation of humans, which⁹³ is simply mentioned in passing, but in the restoration of the eye of Re, which had significant magical and protective powers in ancient Egyptian mythology.⁹⁴ In a Coffin Text (7.465, Spell 1130), "I created the gods by my sweat, and mankind from the

89. Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1961), 69, 70; Wilfried G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-Ḥasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 57; "Atraḥasis," trans. E. A. Speiser, *ANET* (1969): 104–6; "Atra-Ḥasis," trans. Benjamin R. Foster, *COS* 1 (1997), no. 130: 450–52; On *Enuma Elish*, see Wilfried G. Lambert and S. B. Parker, *Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966); "The Creation Epic," trans. E. A. Speiser, *ANET* (1969): 60–72; "Epic of Creation," trans. Benjamin R. Foster, *COS* 1 (1997), no. 111:390–402; on the Eridu Genesis, see Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981): 513–29; "The Deluge," trans. Samuel Noah Kramer, *ANET*: 42–44; "The Eridu Genesis," trans. Thorkild Jacobsen, *COS* 1 (1997), no. 158: 513–15; for details, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *AUSS* 10 (1972): 15–17; id., "Polemic Nature," 89, 90.

90. Jaroslav Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979), 48.

91. Finnestad, "Ptah, Creator of the Gods," 82; on theogony in Egypt, see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 148–51.

92. This late passage is from Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (BM 10188) dating to about 310 BC, but Wilson believes it derives from earlier material; "The Repulsing of the Dragon and Creation," trans. John A. Wilson, *ANET* (1969): 6.

93. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 128, 29.

94. Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129, 30, 199; Robert K. Ritner, "O. Gardiner 363: A Spell Against Night Terrors," *JARCE* 27 (1990): 39; Richard A. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 153–55, 177–83.

tears of my eye." It is pointed out that humans are "created like everything else and are called 'the cattle of the god' (Instruction to King Merikare) or 'cattle of Re,' but it is the gods who occupy the center state in the cosmogonies."⁹⁵ In the Memphite theology, the creation of humans is not mentioned at all.

THE SEVEN-DAY WEEK AND ORDER OF CREATION

The complete sequence of creation in Genesis 1 demonstrates a sublime order, where there was once formless void, that is formed into a complete ecosystem that will support life. The divine sequence of six literal, twenty-four-hour, consecutive, and contiguous days culminating in the Sabbath rest⁹⁶ is entirely absent in ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian accounts.

A comparison with *Enuma Elish* indicates some analogies in the order of creation: firmament, dry land, luminaries, and lastly, humans. But distinct differences are also apparent: (1) There is no explicit statement that light is created before the luminaries. (2) There is no explicit reference to the creation of the sun (to infer this from Marduk's character as a solar deity and from what is said about the creation of the moon in tablet V is too precarious).⁹⁷ (3) There is no description of the creation of vegetation. (4) Finally, *Enuma Elish* knows nothing of the creation of any animal life in the sea, sky, or earth. A comparison between Genesis and this account indicates that twice as many processes of creation are outlined in Genesis 1.⁹⁸ Only a general analogy between the order of creation in both accounts can be posited: "there is no close parallel in the sequence of the creation of elements common to both cosmogonies."⁹⁹ Concerning the time for creation, the only possible hint is provided in the Atra-Ḫasis account of the creation of humankind. Here, fourteen pieces of clay are mixed with the blood of the slain god and placed in the womb goddess. After ten months of gestation, the goddess gives

95. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 115, 116.

96. For a detailed study of the days of creation, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal 'Days' or Figurative 'Periods/EPOCHS' of Time," *Origins* 21 (1994): 5–38; id., in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (repr.; Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), 40–68.

97. With Charles Francis Whitley, "The Pattern of Creation in Genesis, Chapter 1," *JNES* 17 (1958): 34; J. Albertson, "Genesis 1 and the Babylonian Creation Myth," *Thought* 37 (1962): 231.

98. Gerhard F. Hasel, "Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1," 17, 18.

99. Whitley, "Pattern of Creation," 34, 35.

birth to seven male and seven female offspring.¹⁰⁰ The birth of humankind after a ten-month gestation is not found in Genesis; Adam and Eve are created on the sixth day. The link of the Sabbath to a Near Eastern background has also been futile.¹⁰¹

In Egyptian cosmologies, there is no finality of creation.¹⁰² Rather, there is a “one-day pattern of recurrent creation brought about each morning with the sunrise symbolizing the daily rebirth of Rê-Amun, the sun god creator as embodiment of Atum.”¹⁰³ The cycle of death and rebirth is so intrinsic to Egyptian ideology that death itself is seen as part of the normal order of creation. On a funerary papyrus of the Twenty-First Dynasty, a winged serpent is standing on two pairs of legs with the caption “death the great god, who made gods and men.”¹⁰⁴ This is “a personification of death as a creator god and an impressive visual idea that death is a necessary feature of the world of creation, that is, of the existence in general.”¹⁰⁵ A similar image can be seen in the burial chamber of Thutmose III, where, in the eleventh hour of the Amduat, Atum is shown holding the wings of a winged serpent, surrounded on either side by Udjet eyes—the eyes of Re and Horus.¹⁰⁶ The concept of a Sabbath and seven-day sequence is entirely absent.¹⁰⁷

The Genesis cosmology represents a “complete break”¹⁰⁸ with the pagan mythologies of the ancient Near East and Egypt by undermining prevailing mythical cosmologies and the basic essentials of pagan religions. The description of creation not only presents the true

100. Lambert and Millard, *Atra-Hasis*, 60–63.

101. See Ernst Kutsch, “Der Sabbat—ursprünglich Vollmondtag?” in *Kleine Schriften zum Alten Testament Zum 65. Geburtstag Ernst Kutsch*, ed. Ludwig Schmidt and Karl Eberlein (BZAW 168; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 71–77; Gerhard F. Hasel, “‘New Moon and Sabbath’ in Eighth Century Israelite Prophetic Writings (Isa 1:13; Hos 2:13; Amos 8:5),” in *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden: Collected Communications to the XIIth Congress of the International Organization of the Study of the Old Testament, Jerusalem, 1986*, ed. Matthias Augustin and Klaus-Dietrich Schunk (BEATAJ 13; Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1988), 37–64; id., “Sabbath,” *ABD* 5: 850, 51.

102. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 116.

103. Johnston, “Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” 192.

104. Papyrus of Henuttawy (BM 10018), Siegfried Schott, *Zum Weltbild der Jenseitsführer des Neues Reiches* (NAWG 11; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 195, plate 4; Karol Myśliwiec, *Studien zum Gott Atum HÄB 5* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1978), 103.

105. Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 81.

106. Hornung and Abt, *Egyptian Amduat*, 321–25. The caption reads, “When the god calls for him, the image of Atum comes from his back. Then he swallows his image again. He lives on in the shadows of the dead” (330).

107. Currid, *Ancient Egypt*, 73; Johnston, “Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” 192.

108. von Rad, *Genesis*, 53; similarly Schmidt, *Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 119.

account, but also employs many deliberate safeguards against mythology. The writer used certain terms and motifs, partly related to cosmologically, ideologically, and theologically incompatible pagan concepts and partly in deliberate contrast to ancient Near Eastern myths, and he employed them with a meaning and emphasis expressive of the worldview, understanding of reality, and cosmology of divine revelation.

CONCLUSION

The exalted and sublime conception of the Genesis account of creation presents, at its center, a transcendent God who, as supreme and unique Creator, speaks the world into existence. The centerpiece of all creation consists of humans as male and female. The Genesis cosmology, which most comprehensively unveils the main pillars upon which the biblical world reality and worldview rest, knows of no three-storied or triple-decked universe. It provides inspiration's answer to the intellectual question of the identity, the Who, of the Designer and Planner to which the book of nature points: God the Creator. It also provides answers to the related questions of how the world was made and what was made. Action verbs such as "separated" (Gen. 1:4, 7; NASB); "made" (1:7, 16, 25, 31); "placed" (1:17; NASB); "created" (1:1, 21, 27; 2:4); "formed" (2:7, 8, 19); "fashioned" (2:22; NASB); and "said" (1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26) reveal the how of divine creative activity is revealed. The third intellectual question asks what the transcendent Creator brought forth. The biblical writer himself sums it up in the words "the heavens and the earth . . . and all their hosts" (2:1; NASB).

The biblical creation account with the Genesis cosmology goes far beyond these intellectual questions by addressing the essential existential question, because it is also the report of the inauguration of the natural and historical processes. It answers what the divine Creator is able to do. Since the Creator, who is none other than Christ, the Father's creating Agent (John 1:1-4; Heb. 1:1-3), made the cosmos and all that belongs to it, since He is the Maker of the forces of nature and the Sustainer of creation, He can use these forces to bring about His will in the drama of ongoing time, through mighty acts and powerful deeds in nature and history.