

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MAN'S TRADITIONS OF CREATION AND GENESIS

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INTRODUCTION

For several generations practitioners of the historical-critical methodologies have maintained that the other near eastern creation texts, such as the Babylonian and the Sumerian, provided the basis or at least the inspiration for the Israelite account of creation in Genesis. Historical critics date the Babylonian and Sumerian traditions as much older than the supposed J or P sources which they presuppose provided the basis for Genesis creation account. As a result, critics conclude that the biblical material in Genesis is not a historical account of actual events which took place, but merely represents a stage in the evolutionary development of Israelite religion. Most critics conclude that the first eleven chapters of Genesis contain no meaningful recounting of historical events in the modern sense, and as a consequence, that the Bible offers no contradictions to evolutionist histories of the universe and man, including the billions of years that the universe has been in existence according to the evolutionary scenario and the corresponding proposed millions of years of human development.

If, however, we broaden the base of the data concerning creation traditions beyond the Babylonian, Sumerian and other ancient near eastern traditions to include a world wide sampling of creation traditions, the results are very different. A broader sampling includes many traditions which are not only supportive of the traditional view of the first eleven chapters of Genesis as a historically accurate account of man's early history, but can be used to support the thesis that Genesis offers the earliest and most authoritative account of man's origin and early history. This being the case, the Genesis account of creation must be considered to be the most accurate history of origins that man, among all of his traditions possesses, and the genealogies of the first eleven chapters of Genesis must be seen as historical records which recount a youthful creation and humanity on the order of some 6,000 years.

There are far too many creation traditions to recount, one by one, in this short paper. However, the world's creation traditions can be categorized into two distinct families, based on their internal details and the criteria established by sociological descriptions of the history of religions. By far, the great majority of creation traditions are monotheistic, featuring a Creator Who is a spiritual being and does not possess the failings and foibles of human beings. Sociological studies of the history of religions provides the rationale for grouping traditions with this feature together since a monotheistic religion in which the deity is a spiritual being, superior to man, are considered older than religions in which the deity or deities fashioned more with the personality of man.

On this basis alone the Genesis description of the Creator must be considered one of the oldest creation traditions. Consequently, for the purposes of testing the thesis that the Genesis account is among the oldest, if not the oldest of the creation traditions, we establish a second criterion for inclusion into this family. That second criterion is that a tradition has to offer a minimum of two details, essential to the bulk of the monotheistic accounts, which are also found in the Genesis account. This strategy is further justified since few creation traditions share details with each other which are not also found in the Genesis account. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the details of the Genesis account of creation.

THE BABYLONIAN ACCOUNTS

A number of Babylonian creation traditions have been discovered. While they share much in common with one another, including similar expressions and characters, they have little in

common with the vast majority of creation traditions found around the world. Yet biblical critics have linked the development of the Genesis creation account to these traditions. The best known of these stories is the Enuma Elish.

In essence, the Enuma Elish says that before creation there were only deeps from which the salt and fresh waters on Earth would come. These deeps were personified by Apsu and Tiamat. This pair of gods produced several other gods by sexual means. The younger gods, after some time, revolted against their parents, who represented static chaos, and established world order. Apsu was killed by the younger victorious forces who were led by Marduk. Tiamat was cut in two during the battle, half of the god becoming the Earth and the other half becoming the heavens. Tiamat's blood was used to create man to tend the Earth.(1)

A number of additional Sumerian and Assyrian texts and fragments recount similar events involving similarly anthropomorphic gods. It is not unusual for gods to have the same name from text to text, Marduk being the most common character in these stories. Very often the city in which the text is found is named in the text as the Earthly seat of Marduk, and varies from city to city.

Another common feature of the Babylonian family of texts is process. There is no god who creates all things, just as there is no supreme, transcendent god. Instead, gods give rise to other gods, and after varying generations of gods and their wars of passion, the survivors give rise to basic elements of the creation. Eventually these elements create other details. Only after a long process of subsequently created features is the creation as we know it completed.

The following passage from an Assyrian medical text, which attempts to explain the origin of worms, thought to cause toothaches, is typical: "After Anu had created the heaven, (And) the heaven had created the earth, (And) the earth had created the rivers, (And) the rivers had created the canals, (And) the canals had created the morass, (And) the morass had created the worm"(2)

The creation myths which critics relate most closely to the Genesis account of creation, besides featuring process rather than fiat creation, present a polytheistic, anthropomorphic theology. The gods have the same passions as men and are guilty of the same conduct as man. Man's place in these traditions is as an after thought - man is essentially chattel of these capricious beings. Their work of creation is from pre-existing matter. The Babylonian myths seem unconcerned with a general explanation of the created world for, with minor exceptions like worms, the creation of plants and animals are not mentioned.(3)

THE PLACE OF BABYLONIAN MYTHS IN OBSERVED RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of the Babylonian creation myths would be incomplete without an examination of these traditions in light of the observed religious development of a culture. The stress here is on the observed because observed trends provide more reliable information in historical research than do the now traditional, and more philosophical evolutionary views of historians like Spengler and Toynbee. Rather, the positivistic school, exemplified by von Ranke, Mommsen and Meyer seeks to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, what happened in the past.(4) In modern application, this approach to history, while not completely avoiding the interpretation of historical events, tries to clearly differentiate between fact and interpretation.

Despite the current popularity of the view that religions develop from a crude animism through polytheism to monotheism, this progression has never actually been documented in a matured culture. However, historians have repeatedly noted that cultures tend to degenerate from monotheism to polytheism. Interestingly, the historical example of this progression from monotheism to polytheism which is typically found in the literature is the ancient Near Eastern cultures. No less than Friedrich Delitzsch was the first to suggest this in 1903.

After becoming bewildered over a huge and confusing pantheon of Babylonian deities, scholars began to uncover evidences that the Babylonians had indeed originally been monotheistic. A number of papers published in the 1930's by the likes of Stephen Langdon of Oxford and Henry Frankfort, who wrote the official report on excavations at Tell Asmar, documented the conclusion that the Babylonians had originally been monotheistic. The same progression - the very opposite of that postulated by evolutionary historians - was also found among other ancient cultures, including the Egyptian.(5) Langdon specifically concluded that theories that Semitic monotheism had developed from totemism had been conclusively disproven by the study of Sumerian religious development.(6)

Thus there is good basis for rejecting the conclusion that the monotheistic creation account of Genesis was a later development in response to Babylonian creation stories. In fact, it would appear that the Genesis account predates the Babylonian stories - the very opposite of

claims by biblical critics.

A SAMPLING OF NON-NEAR EASTERN CREATION TRADITIONS

There are far too many ancient creation traditions catalogued from the world's cultures to summarize within this paper. However, representative samples from widely varying cultures can serve to summarize the majority, or Genesis-like, traditions.

Kang and Nelson have offered extensive documentation showing the points of correspondence between certain characters of the Chinese language and the elements of the Genesis creation account. Among the elements they document which allow us to include this as an example of an ancient witness of a Genesis-type origins record is the character for "create." This figure is composed of the characters representing dust or mud, plus "mouth," plus movement or life, plus the character for walk. Those characters which convey the most ancient of Chinese beliefs about God are monotheistic and refer to Him as "ShangTi," the Heavenly Emperor. Many more correlations with Genesis, some of them quite startling, are documented by Kang and Nelson.(7)

Emil Pearson worked as a missionary among the VaNgangela people of Zambia for nearly half a century, learning their stories and the sand writings which communicate these stories. Like the characters of China, the sand writings of these people, who call themselves the people of the aurora, incorporate multiple ideas into one diagram. Their sand writing for "God" conveys the image of God in eternity as "pregnant with creation." The sand writing also includes the Creator's attributes which include omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and love. In the center most figure of the heart of the diagram are three dots, meaning "the Godhead." According to the people of the aurora the Creator brought all things into being through His spoken Word, Who is characterized as the Son of the Creator. A figure representing the Trinity is also found within the sand writing for "creation." The first man and woman were created with access to God, but after following one they call the bad "God substitute," man lost his access to God. As a result, the blood offering of animals for sin was substituted. Most interesting is that the current religion of the people of the aurora is no longer faithful to the history which they still remember through their pictographs.(8) This argues for its authenticity.

Moving on to North America we sample the Hopi tribal story of creation. Passed down from generation to generation by the elders, the Hopi people believe that their history of creation has been accurately preserved from the beginning. The Hopi story of creation begins with everything as empty, endless space except for the Creator. The Creator then created Sotuknang who was instructed to be the instrument through which the unseen would be made into the seen. The human race was formed of the dust of the earth and the first humans were given the duty of caring for the creation and honoring the Creator. At first the world was perfect, but some forgot the commands of the Creator and evil became a permanent part of the world.(9)

In surveying, world wide, the range of creation legends available, we find that they can generally be grouped into two families. The largest group, like those just discussed, have a general character and at least two essential details which closely parallel the Genesis creation account. Most of these have many more than two parallel details. In all of these the Creator is supreme, and a few hint at the Trinitarian nature of the Creator, even though none of the cultures who are the stewards of these traditions any longer understand the significance of the trinitarian hints. This in itself is an argument for the ancient origin of these traditions.

A smaller group, typified by the Babylonian traditions, share virtually nothing with the Genesis account of creation, and little with each other except that they are polytheistic, being inhabited by gods who are more man-like than God-like. The polytheistic nature of these stories, as we have seen, strongly suggests that they are developmentally later than monotheistic stories, including Genesis. In addition, the geographically isolated pockets within which these myths are found and their general lack of correspondence with one another support the conclusion that these polytheistic stories represent merely unrelated incidences of the principle that monotheism degenerates to polytheism as religion itself degenerates.

If we assume that Semitic monotheism developed from a totemistic religion, both the isolated and unrelated natures of the polytheistic traditions remain unexplained, as do the vast parallels world wide with the Genesis account. If the Genesis account of creation is most closely related to the Babylonian myths, as the critics claim, we are left with no explanation for the existence of the vast majority of creation traditions which share so many details with Genesis. This, in addition to the observed progression of religious development, strengthens the conclusion that critical Bible scholarship has reversed the relationship between Genesis and the other ancient Near Eastern creation stories.

AN INHERENT MODEL TO EXPLAIN PARALLELS

How are we to explain the many cases in which widely separated and seemingly unrelated cultures carry monotheistic creation traditions with details which are startlingly similar to each other and Genesis?

A review of over a dozen culturally unrelated but representative creation traditions allows the development of a chart of similarities. For example, if creation story A has three essential details in common with Genesis (the requirement for inclusion in this group being two, remember), and creation story B has four essential details in common with Genesis, it would not be unusual if they had no details in common with one another. While some details may be found in common between a few among the sampling of a dozen stories, the nexus of their common attributes is clearly represented in the Genesis account of creation.

This correlation strongly suggests that Genesis represents, most closely, the original accounting of creation which all the Genesis-like stories have in common. There is no other model which adequately explains these correlations.

Interestingly, Genesis presents a history which, if understood as accurate, explains these unusual correlations. Genesis relates how all cultures today are descended from eight people after a world wide Flood. It further relates that for some time after the Flood, much of the growing, new population remained in one location for some generations before being dispersed by a confusion of languages. Thus each language group could easily have dispersed with a common account of creation, which in each case may have suffered degeneration through the weaknesses of oral tradition and tendencies toward degeneration to polytheism. This model is further supported by the fact that many widely-separated language traditions also preserve traditions about a world wide Flood and even a confusion of languages.

CONCLUSION

It is thus concluded that the scholarship of higher biblical criticism suffers from a terminally narrow perspective which fatally compromises its ability to correctly understand the Genesis history within the context of ancient Near Eastern history. This narrowness in failing to consider the world wide range of creation traditions leads, unavoidably, to non-valid conclusions, especially in light of the lines of evidence which suggest the need for a much wider perspective. Furthermore, continued insistence by historical critics on their traditional methodology undermines their claims to a scientific scholarship since critical presuppositions are undermined by other historical disciplines.

Comparative study of the Babylonian creation text families and world wide accounts demonstrates that the Babylonian myths are late, corrupt representations. The Genesis account of creation is shown, by form and content to be, by secular historical methodology, the most ancient, and by inference, the most accurate of the world's creation records. The most obvious inference from this conclusion is that the age of the creation and the history of man are both quite young - on the order of 6,000 years. The history recounted in the first eleven chapters of Genesis explains why this is the case.

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