

Genesis 1 – 3: Exploring Our Creation Story

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INTRODUCTION

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” How many times have we read or heard these words and simply continued on with the story we know so well? One of the most striking things I learned during this process was that there is so much more to our creation story than I ever realized. Marc Zvi Brettler writes that “no biblical story is more familiar in Western culture”¹ than that of the Garden of Eden. Yet, a careful analysis forces us to admit how little we really know about this seemingly simplistic story. For starters, our “creation story” is actually two stories. The first three chapters are most frequently divided between 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-3:24 and while they clearly have different origins, they have been codified in a way which allows for each to have its own space. The first chapter of this thesis consists of my own detailed translation of both stories, combined with commentary and notes from a variety of sources.

Although the rabbis were uncomfortable with several of the inconsistencies between the two stories, the fact that they were redacted in this way shows that our ancestors did not believe rigid consistency was required for effective transmission of the story.² We can not be sure of the specific means through which our creation narrative was transmitted over time, but we can be sure that popular themes floating around enabled similar stories to appear in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Therefore, we must consider “the original

¹ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 45

² Adele Berlin, et. al., The Jewish Study Bible – page 9

purposes of the biblical writings....and give priority to delivering the historical sense of the texts...[and] seek to recover the traditions and understandings of the communities in which they were produced.”³ The second chapter of this thesis will explore some of these other creation stories, specifically, *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh*. At first I felt a little sad that our account of creation was not entirely special and unique, but the more I explored the material, the more I realized that while the “big questions” being explored were similar, the version presented in the Torah is unique in a variety of ways.

For us, what sets this story apart as unique is the fact that nowhere else in the Torah are Adam and Eve explicitly mentioned. Unlike Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose names are frequently used as reminders of the “merits of our ancestors,” nowhere else in our story are we reminded of the actions of Adam and Eve. This seems odd, since the rabbis take full advantage of this story when it comes to defining our moral obligations in the Talmud and midrash.⁴ The isolation of this story, and its characters, speaks to a certain uniqueness – even though it does not fit into the rest of the storyline (beginning with Abraham), it is not only important enough to be included, it gets the prized position of being the first thing we read each year.

As Brettler puts it, the first words of the bible are not “This is a scientific treatment of the origin of the world.”⁵ The creation story is just that – it is a story and even if it is not “real” there can still be essential truths in it. With that in

³ Simon Parker in the New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Vol. 1 – page 229

⁴ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 19

⁵ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 38

mind, when I refer to this text, it is as a story and not an accurate, historical record. Moreover, while everyone agrees that something major happened in the Garden of Eden and that it impacted the course of humanity, “there is not any agreement as to what the catastrophe entailed. There is also disagreement concerning who is ultimately responsible.”⁶ The inconsistency of opinions is mainly concentrated in the realm of gender, which is something I address in the third chapter. Eve’s story became “the rationale for various Jewish practices and instructions”⁷ – many of which have been found to be unfavorable by feminist scholars. This text has defined what it means to be male and female and how we understand the relationship between these two groups. For many readers, their interpretation of this text is informed by their own understanding of gender, just as much as the text further shapes how they feel about gender. The third chapter of my thesis will focus on many of these issues and make an attempt to explore some of the answers and options.

Most people have strong reactions – either positive or negative – to the two creation stories. We see this frequently – no one wants to hear that maybe Ruth wasn’t as valiant as she may have appeared or that Noah was only the most righteous of a pretty bad lot. In my first few years at HUC, I hesitated to pick apart the text too much, because I did not want to “ruin” the stories. The more I studied the text within an academic framework, the more I learned that the essence of the story can still exist, even when other things have been uncovered.

⁶ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 44

⁷ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 3

This is something I reminded myself of frequently during this process. As a result, I feel like I have both protected and uncovered this fascinating introduction to our Jewish story of origins.

CHAPTER ONE – TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

Introduction to Translation and Commentary

The first chapter of my thesis focuses on a translation of Genesis 1:1-3:24. I began by doing a complete translation of the text on my own, using only dictionaries and a concordance. As I did this, I compiled a list of my own questions and ideas which arose during the translation process. It was only after I had completed my own translation that I read several philosophies on translation since I wanted to make sure mine was not skewed by one philosophy or the other. I then went back and revised my own translation based on some of the more convincing theories I had read. There were four main aspects I took into consideration when creating the translation: grammar and syntax, vocabulary choices, redaction or the editorial process and documentary hypothesis. Each of these linguistic issues raised important questions I was forced to think about when putting together my own translation.

Translating from one language to another has its challenges, regardless of language. One of the greatest challenges is the movement between two different sentence structures. The specific challenge in this situation is that biblical syntax is “more flexible than modern English syntax, and there are hundreds of instances in Genesis of significant syntactical inversions.”⁸ When reading the Hebrew text, the words may not seem to flow in the “correct order” when translated directly into English. Most translators completely rework the Hebrew to create something they believe the modern reader will understand. Robert Alter critically responds

⁸ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xxxii

to this by suggesting that many translators modify the “biblical syntax for an audience whose reading experience is assumed to be limited to *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*.”⁹ Nevertheless, a translation should be something which is comfortable for the reader. Therefore, while the earliest versions of the King James Bible made sense to the readers of that generation, it may not seem as pertinent to modern day readers. However, that does not mean our only option is to translate the text so that it sounds like modern speech. My philosophy when translating biblical text is to try and be as literal as possible while making small adjustments to allow for modern grammar. However, when translating texts which are clearly stories and were probably once shared only orally, I believe it is particularly important to make sure the stories are translated in a way which sounds appropriate when read aloud. In the preface to his translation, Everett Fox emphasizes this point strongly and gives credit to the translation by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, which does just this.¹⁰

The second issue is related to how I chose to translate certain words. There are two distinctive camps when it comes to this issue. The first is that we should translate words liberally, so they make the most sense within what we believe is the context of that particular passage. One piece of support for this is that the Torah has a very limited vocabulary and we can assume with great certainty that the spoken language had a larger vocabulary. Therefore, it would make sense to use our own jurisdiction when it comes to the message of the story we want to craft. On the other the argument is that words should be translated the

⁹ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* – page xvi-xvii

¹⁰ Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes* – page x

same way each time they appear. The reason for this is primarily based on consistency; that the repetition of the Hebrew should be represented in the English, both visually and audibly. I appreciate this model, because there is a rhythm to the text when read and spoken which should be preserved. This text was meant to be heard and vocabulary patterns, alliteration and consonance are important for the verbal transmission of the text. In fact, Fox suggests that by “using echoes, allusions, and powerful inner structures of sound, the text is often able to convey ideas in a manner that vocabulary alone cannot do.”¹¹ The greater challenge to all of this is making the same (or at least, similar) patterns appear in both the Hebrew and English! One specific issue I needed to decide was how to approach the many *vav*-consecutives found in the Torah. Some argue “that the primary function of the *waw* appended to a verb is not to signify ‘and’ but to indicate that the Hebrew prefix conjunction, which otherwise is used for actions yet to be completed, is responding to past events.”¹² While I understand this argument I have chosen to translate the *vav* as “and,” for the reasons I spoke about earlier regarding consistency and the oral rendering of the text. As Alter says, the “and” plays “an important role in creating the rhythm of the story, in phonetically punctuating the forward-moving movement of the prose.”¹³

One additional vocabulary-based issue is how to translate the name of God and pronouns related to God. I have chosen to translate the text in a gender neutral fashion. Personally, I do not believe God has an assigned or defined gender and

¹¹ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page xi

¹² Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xix

¹³ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xx

therefore, I felt uncomfortable choosing one for God. Moreover, Fox reminds us “that the ancient Hebrew viewed God as a divinity beyond sexuality.”¹⁴ Often, a gender-neutral translation has awkward points, where the translation is repetitive or grammatically obscure in order to avoid using a gendered pronoun. I have tried hard to avoid these situations, while still preserving the authenticity of the Hebrew. The only time a gendered pronoun will be used is when I am quoting from another text which uses one. In those situations, the text will be written exactly how it appears in the original document.

The final two issues are somewhat related – the redaction process and the theories related to documentary hypothesis. Most of the things I read were in alignment on these two issues, with most biblical scholars agreeing with the theory that the text is a compilation. I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapters in my thesis, but the overlapping nature of the content of the first two stories seems rather obvious. There are a variety of theories about who wrote different portions of the Torah. Despite the best of intentions, now most scholars believe that it is actually very difficult to definitively determine who wrote which sections. As Alter suggests, “whatever its general validity, it has begun to look as though it has reached a point of diminishing returns.”¹⁵ It is for that reason that I will not include a lengthy exploration on these topics, although they will be mentioned again in the second chapter.

Finally, I want to explain the process by which I organized the translation section. I created the commentary by beginning with the list of thoughts I had

¹⁴ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page xxx

¹⁵ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xli

compiled while translating the text. Obviously I could fill many pages with the commentary of others, as many books have already done, so I chose to focus only on commentary which answered or addressed the questions which arose during the translation. This was a natural way of making the quantity of commentary manageable and seemed to make more sense than arbitrarily adding commentary. I have also chosen to use mostly modern commentaries and essays, since while Rashi and Ibn Ezra have many brilliant things to say, other authors have already worked them into many, many books. I have read through the traditional commentaries before and I felt this was a good opportunity to explore modern “commentaries” which would provide a fresh take on the text.¹⁶ Lastly, there are several times where I choose not to comment on something in the translation, because it will be discussed in depth in either the second or third chapters. Occasionally, I make at least a brief comment, when I felt it would be remiss to completely avoid the topic.

Translation and Commentary

<p>1:1 At the beginning of God’s creating of the sky and the earth, 1:2 And the earth was unformed and empty and darkness was on the face of the deep waters and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.</p>
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1:1 I chose to translate the verse this way, as opposed to the traditional “In the beginning God created...” because I felt it made clear the idea that this story is specifically about the beginning of the creation of the sky and the earth.

¹⁶ While keeping in mind that many of the newer commentaries also base their writings on more traditional texts. Therefore, while Rashi is not completely ignored, he does take a backseat to more contemporary theologians.

Likewise, The Torah: A Women's Commentary translates "*b'reisheet bara elohiem*" as "When God was about to create." The justification for this is based on Rashi's comment that the opening verses do not suggest that creation came out of nothing.¹⁷ It also means that God is outside of what will be the new definition of time and, one could assume, space. Unlike many today, "Genesis exhibits no interest in the question of God's origins. His existence prior to the world is taken as axiomatic and does not even require assertion."¹⁸ It is also interesting that although this verse introduces the idea of creation, no actual creation takes place until the third verse – the first two verses simply describe what is already in place before God begins creating.

1:1 The word "*hashamayim*" can technically be translated as either "heavens" or "sky." I think the difference lends itself to some interesting and important theological issues pertinent to understanding this text. The sky is just that, the literal sky, just as the earth is the actual earth. The word "*hashamayim*" is paired with the word "*ha'aretz*" which suggests that this word should be translated as sky and that it is purely a geographical distinction. However, the relationship with the word "heavens" should not be dismissed entirely, since this story is told in a religious context. Some believe that when two opposite words are paired together the pairing of the words indicates both the extremes and everything in between.¹⁹ We see this concept later on when we read about the tree of good and

¹⁷ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women's Torah Commentary – page 5

¹⁸ Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 5

¹⁹ Claus Westermann, Genesis 1:11: A Commentary – page 101

evil. I have chosen to translate the word as “sky” in this verse, because I think the duality is more significant than the theological interpretation.

1:1 The word *bara* is used in the first creation story to imply that God brought forth material from what was previously nothing. In the second story, God is seen as fashioning new things from material which is already in existence. The word *bara* is used more than 50 times, always with God as the one doing the creating – never humans. “This verb appears to be a part of a small class of Hebrew words that are used in reference to God only, thereby suggesting that in certain respects, God is totally other.”²⁰

1:2 The phrase “deep waters” seems to suggest an abyss – not just a river or lake, but a truly vast body of water. A body of water whose size is almost inconceivable.

1:2 The word “*ruach*” can refer to God’s spirit as well as the breath of God. I have chosen to use the word “spirit” because I think the idea that the spirit of God permeated the pre-beginning material is important to the theological essence of the story. The word speaks to God’s “creative, life-giving, sustaining energy.”²¹ In other places, “*ruach*” describes “an eagle fluttering over its young and so might have a connotation of parturition or nurture.”²²

²⁰ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 41

²¹ Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 6

²² Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page 3

1:2 The phrase “*to’hu v’vohu*” is, as one fourth grader said to me, “fun to read.”

It is true that this phrase almost does not even need a translation because, as an onomonopiea it sounds a bit chaotic when spoken aloud. The phrase is thought to be a “poetic expression that goes back to an ancient Hebrew epic...and ultimately to ancient Canaanite poetry.”²³ Jeremiah’s use of the phrase “*to’hu v’vohu*” in 4:23 – 27 reaffirms the use in Genesis; there is “no doubt that the phrase designates the initial chaotic state of the earth.”²⁴ The Jewish Study Bible adds that while, “the modern people, the opposite of the created order is ‘nothing’...to the ancients, the opposite of the created order was something much worse...it was an active, malevolent force.”²⁵

**1:3 And God said, “Let there be light” and there was light.
1:4 And God saw that the light was good and God caused a division between the light and between the darkness.
1:5 And God called the light “day” and the darkness God called “night.”
There was evening and there was morning, day one.**

1:3 The phrase “*vay’ah or*” is in the jussive which allows for the option of the literal translation, “there will come to be light.” Since light is not actually created on this day, this translation of the text does seem to be more accurate. However, I have chosen to translate it as “Let there be” since it brings with it a familiarity which most people associate with the text. It is natural to assume the light would be coming from the sun or the moon or the stars, but none of these things were created until the fourth day of creation. In Genesis Rabbah 3:4 Rabbi Samuel bar

²³ Claus Westermann, Genesis 1:11: A Commentary – page 102

²⁴ Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 6

²⁵ Berlin and Brettler ed., The Jewish Study Bible – page 13

Nachman suggests that the light comes from the brilliance of God and that it was this light which shone upon the world in the first days of creation.

1:3-5 In the course of these three verses, God does four things: God said, God saw, God caused a division and God called. This is one example of the repetitive, forward movement of the story which more easily noticed when heard, rather than read.

1:4 The word “good” can also be translated as something which is a benefit. How might the light be a benefit to what is already in existence pre-creation? Fox adds that “the phrase is reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern descriptions of a craftsman being pleased with his work.”²⁶

1:4 Rashi suggests that light and darkness need to be separated, with definite boundaries for each, so that they would not work in conflict with each other.

1:5 When God names light and day, the literal translation is, “With regards to the light, God called it light.” This is obviously redundant, since the word “*or*” is used both times. Therefore, the item has been named even before it is technically named. Moreover, “*erev* and *boker* mean, strictly speaking, the ‘sunset’ and the ‘break of dawn,’ terms inappropriate before the creation of the sun on the fourth

²⁶ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page 13

day.”²⁷ In fact, the act of naming has been thought to parallel the act of creating, for in naming these things, God is working to create their place in the new order of the world.²⁸

1:5 All of the other days are ordinal numbers, but on the first day a cardinal number is used.

1:6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters and let there be a division between the waters.”

1:7 And God made the expanse and God caused a division between the waters so that some were under the expanse and some were above the expanse. And so it was.

1:8 And God called the expanse the “sky.” There was evening and there was morning, a second day.

1:9 And God said, “Let the waters be collected from under the sky in one place and let the dry ground be seen. And so it was.

1:10 And God called the dry ground “land” and the collection of the waters “sea.” And God saw that it was good.

1:11 And God said, “The land will cause the grass to sprout herbs that produce seeds and fruit trees whose seeds are inside of it and that will make fruit of its kind here on the land.” And so it was.

1:12 The land brought forth grass and herbs whose seeds are inside of them and fruit trees whose seeds are inside of it. And God saw that it was good.

1:13 There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

1:10 The phrase “*ul’meek-vah*” is translated as a “collection” of the waters. The same word is used in Exodus 7:19 when Moses turns the river to blood and also in Leviticus 11:36 in the descriptions of the purity laws. Unlike the description of the waters in 1:2, this body of water is more finite. This also supports a forward moving storyline as we move from that which is indescribable to something which is definitive.

²⁷ Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 8

²⁸ Claus Westermann, Genesis 1:11: A Commentary – page 114

1:11 “*Zaro bo*” has been translated “are inside of it” because I felt it lent itself to the reproductive theme. God is saying that the first version will be created for us, but that all further acts of creation will be done without God’s help. Each created item (including humans) will contain within itself at least a portion of the necessary items needed for re-creation. It is in this way that we continue to act as God with regards to creating the world.

1:11 The text spends a great deal of time describing the different categories of animals. This seems odd since the Torah generally does not go into detail unless it is absolutely necessary. Fretheim suggests that “despite claims to the contrary...such texts indicate that Israel’s thinkers were very interested in questions of the ‘how’ of creation, and not just the questions of ‘who’ and ‘why.’”²⁹

1:14 God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the sky and a division between the day and the night. And let there be a sign for the seasons and for the days and for the years.
1:15 Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light to the land. And thus, it was.
1:16 And God made two great lights. The larger light to rule the day and a smaller light and the stars to rule the night.
1:17 And God gave to the expanse of the sky the ability to give light to the land.
1:18 And rule over the day and the night and to divide between light and darkness. And God saw that it was good.
1:19 There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.
1:20 And God said, let the waters swarm with living creatures and flying creatures fly above the land and on the face of the expanse of the sky.
1:21 And God created large sea monsters and all living beings that creep,

²⁹ The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Vol. 1 – page 337

with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and all flying creatures after their kind. And God saw that it was good.

1:22 And God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the sea and the fowl will become many on the land.”

1:23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

1:17 – 18 Structurally it appears as if verses 17 and 18 should be connected, or at least that the phrase “and rule over the day” should be included with verse 17.

1:21 The word “creep” suggests that we are reading about the land, even the text is describing water animals. Perhaps God is referring to lobsters, crabs and other such sea life which are, ironically, not kosher? As I will discuss in chapter two, other creation stories often involve a sea monster. It is also odd that water animals and birds are created in the same “breath” although they do reinforce the separation of the waters from the sky.

1:21 My interpretation of “*et ha'ta-neeneem*” as “sea monsters” is based on the prevalence of these types of animals in other ancient Near Eastern creation stories. Although in the Genesis story they do not play the significant role they have in other stories, the use of them in this story does not seem to be merely a coincidence. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

1:22 Clearly “*et ha'mayim b'mayim*” creates a translation challenge, since “the waters of the waters” is not a definition which provides us very much information. I have chosen to translate it this way to indicate that the waters themselves will be

filled with animals and that they will all be contained in a container referred to as the sea.

1:24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures: cattle and creeping things and animals of the land. And thus, it was.

1:25 And God made the animals of the land and the cattle and the things that creep on the ground. And God saw that it was good.

1:26 And God said, let us make humanity in our image and according to our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the sky and the cattle on all of the land and all the creeping things that creep on the land.

1:27 And God created the human in God’s image. In the image of God the human was created: male and female, God created them.

1:24 Why are cattle, creeping things and animals of the land all mentioned, when those categories seem to overlap? Why not just say animals of the land? They all creep and cattle are definitely included. This seems like a strange place for the Torah to have extra words, since the extra categories do not provide us with any additional information. The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary adds that “creeping” denotes “a general term for creatures whose bodies appear to move close to the earth. Here it seems to encompass reptiles, creeping insects and very small animals.”³⁰

1:26 In this verse, the word “*na’aseh*” is in the plural, which would mean that it should be translated, “Let us.” But who is there with God before the creation of humans to turn the “me” to an “us?” The plural continues in this sentence, which makes me wonder whether we are created only in the likeness of God, or in the likeness of “us” and “our” as well. However, this appears to be unlikely, “since such usage is otherwise unattested with verbs in the Bible. More likely, the text is

³⁰ Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 11

implicitly portraying God in terms of a human king: God is talking to his royal counselors or cabinet. Such imagery appears clearly in other biblical texts, such as Job 1-2, Isaiah 6 and especially 1 Kings 22:10.”³¹

1:27 God creates “*et ha’adam*” – one human. It is not until the human is defined as being two – male and female – that they are referred to in the plural. It is possible that this word is meant to refer to all humans, as it does in Genesis 5:1. “Older translations render it as ‘man’ often meant in its gender-neutral sense – a usage that is sometimes misunderstood and thereby misleading. In fact, the noun *adam* is almost always a generic term, employed when gender is not germane.”³² The word *adam* is used over 500 times in the *tanach*. Aside from the few times it is used in the creation stories, it is never used to describe one particular person. In “The Book of Genesis: Introduction” in the New Interpreter’s Bible, Terence E Fretheim adds that there are five places where the word *adam* is used generically (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:5, 3:22-24, 5:1-2, 6:1-7), one section where it refers to the first man (Genesis 2:7-4:1) and one section where the word refers to the man named Adam (Genesis 4:25-5:5).³³ It would therefore seem that we should, in most situations, translate the word *adam* in the most generic sense.

<p>1:28 And God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the sky and all of the living things that creep on the land.”</p> <p>1:29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you all of the herbs that yield seed that are on the face of the land and each tree that has within it fruit and that</p>
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³¹ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 42

³² Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 7

³³ The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Vol. 1 – page 335

yields fruit and it will be for you food.

1:30 And for all of the animals of the land and all of the fowl of the sky and all that creep on the land and all that has life in it – all of the green herbs will be to you for food. And thus, it was.

1:31 And God saw that everything that had been made was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:1 They were completed, the sky and the land and all their array.

2:2 And God completed the work on the seventh day and God rested on the seventh day from the work that God had done.

2:3 God sanctified the day because on it God rested from the work of creation that God had done.

1:28 The mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” is considered the first commandment, even though it is not written in the traditional commandment language we see elsewhere in the text. Some add that this is also a blessing of fertility which adds a religious dimension to this statement. It is “only in its repetition in 9:7, following the depopulation of the earth by the Flood, it is clearly prescriptive.”³⁴

1:28 All of the verbs in this sentence are plural which suggests that God is speaking to both the male and the female.

1:28 With regards to the human’s mandate to “subdue it and rule over” we should consider that for early readers of this text, who did actually worry about safety from animals. Therefore “it is not a mandate to exploit nature.”³⁵ In Kohelet Rabbah 7:13, the rabbis take it one step further, suggesting that the humans have

³⁴ The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 13

³⁵ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 8

an additional responsibility in the garden, which is to protect it for future generations.

1:29 – 30 These verses seems to suggest that we are all supposed to be herbivores – including our animals. The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary suggests that “despite the power given to him, man still requires special, divine sanction to partake of the earth’s vegetation, and although he ‘rules’ the animals world, he is not permitted to eat flesh.”³⁶ Additionally, The Jewish Study Bible writes, “humankind, animals, and birds all seem originally meant to be neither vegetarians nor carnivores, frugivores, eating the seeds of plants and trees.”³⁷

1:31 Regarding “very good,” there are two thoughts. The first is that humans are extra special and after God created them, they deserved a “very good.” The second is that this may “serve as a summary to the whole.”³⁸

2:1 It seems very odd to have a break here in the story, since the first three verses are clearly part of the first creation story. In the JPS translation, there is a physical break in the middle of verse 4 which suggests that the translators believe that it should not be connected with 2:4b and onward.

³⁶ The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 13

³⁷ Berlin and Brettler ed., The Jewish Study Bible – page 14

³⁸ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page 17

2:2 When we read, “And God completed the work on the seventh day” are we to understand that God was working into the seventh day? The first verse in chapter two seems to verify that the work was indeed finished on the sixth day, since it was said to be “completed” before the seventh day was named. Eitz Chayim writes, “this phrase caused embarrassment to ancient translators and commentators, for it seems out of harmony with the context, implying some divine activity also on this day. However, the preposition can easily mean ‘by,’ and the verb can be taken as a pluperfect, ‘had finished,’ or as a declarative, ‘pronounced finished.’”³⁹ Lastly, Rashi suggests that there is something significant about the fact that the last day is declared “*yom ha’shishi*” as opposed to the other days which do not include the prefix *hay*. He puts forth the idea that “the sixth day” is related to the sixth day of Sivan, when the Jews accepted the Torah and that the act of creation was not actually complete until this moment. It is an interesting “bookend” concept, one which seems lovely, but also seems to be in conflict with the idea that we are constantly and continually engaged in the act of creation.

2:4 These are the generations of the sky and the land when they were created. On that day when God made land and sky.
2:5 And each bush of the field was not yet in the land and the herbs in the field had not yet sprouted because God had not yet caused it to rain upon the land and there was no human to work the land.
2:6 And a mist went up from the land and gave water to the face of the ground.
2:7 And then God formed the human from the dust of the ground and God breathed into the human’s nostrils a breath of life. And the human was a living thing.

³⁹ The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 15

2:4 The phrase “*eleh toldot*” is used frequently in the Torah before a genealogy, but it seems strange to see it here. Each time it is used – a total of ten times in Genesis – “it introduces what follows, invariably in close connection with the name of a person already mentioned in the narrative. Its use indicates that a new and significant development is at hand.”⁴⁰ Like the use of genealogy later in the text, it is a way of showing the passage of time. Therefore it is not entirely out of context here, since it does set up the basis for the second creation story.

2:4 In the first creation story, God is referred to as *Eloheim* whereas in the second creation story, God is referred to as *Adonai Eloheim*. This God “does not summon things into being from a lofty distance through the mere agency of divine speech, but works as a craftsman, fashioning...blowing life breath into nostrils, building a woman from a rib.”⁴¹

2:4 In the second version of the creation story, generally attributed to J, we see a much more detailed explanation of creation. “Instead of the verbs ‘to create’ and ‘to make’ that accompany God’s speaking the world into being in chapter 1, we are given the potter’s term ‘to fashion’ and the architectural term ‘to build.’”⁴²

2:5 The statement “each bush of the field was not yet in the land” seems to be the next clear sign that we have transitioned into what was originally, a separate

⁴⁰ The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 16

⁴¹ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page 7

⁴² Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xxvii

creation story. We just read about the bushes being created and yet here we are hearing that they had not yet been created.

2:7 This is an example of a challenge related to translation. The word *adamah* means “soil, and it continues to have that meaning as it recurs at crucial junctures in the story of the Garden and the primordial banishment. But alas, *adamah* also means ‘land,’ ‘farmland,’ ‘country,’ and even ‘earth,’ and to translate it invariably as ‘soil’ for the sake of terminological consistency...leads to local confusions and conspicuous peculiarities.”⁴³ I have chosen here to translate the word literally as “ground” because that is clearly what is being referred to in this verse.

2:8 God planted a garden in Eden in the East and planted the human there that God had created.

2:9 And God caused each tree that was pleasing to see and good to eat to grow from the ground. And the tree of life was inside the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

2:10 And a river went out from Eden to water the garden and from there it divided into four riverheads.

2:11 The name of the first is *Pishon* in that it surrounds all of the land of *Havilah* where there is gold.

2:12 The gold of the land is good and there is bdellium and onyx stone.

2:13 The name of the second river is *Gihon* and it surrounds all of the land of *Cush*.

2:14 The name of the third river is *Hidekel* and it goes towards the East of *Ashur*. And the fourth river is *Perat*.

2:9 There is a great deal of discussion about what “*v’etz ha’daat tov v’rah*,” specifically refers to. The Torah: A Women’s Commentary suggests, “‘good and bad’ could stand for ‘everything,’ but it also could imply intellectual comprehension (everything from A to Z, or from good to bad), moral judgment,

⁴³ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xxix

or – perhaps best – experience, meaning a direct encounter with good and bad.”⁴⁴

Ibn Ezra “understood carnal knowledge to be intended since the first human experience after eating the forbidden fruit is the consciousness of nudity accompanied by shame.”⁴⁵

2:9 There is a consistent emphasis on food, especially fruit, herbs and meat. The Hebrew words *maachal* and *achal* “together appear more than twenty times in the Eden narrative, evidence of an overriding concern among the text’s earliest audience with procuring food.”⁴⁶

2:11 When words are written in italics, that means the Hebrew is the same as the English.

2:12 There is some confusion with regards to the meaning of the word “bdellium.” Based on the context of the word, placed in between two other precious stones/metals, it would appear that this would fit into one of these categories. However, based on research and other uses it is similar to manna. The only other time it is used is in Number 11:17 and then it is clearly referring to manna.

2:12 The phrase “*even ha'sho-hahm*” is usually translated as either “onyx” or “lapis lazuli.” It definitely refers to a precious stone or gem, since it is used when

⁴⁴ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 11

⁴⁵ The Eitz Chayim Torah Commentary – page 19

⁴⁶ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 11

describing the stones on the *ephod* and breastplate in Exodus 35:27 and Exodus 39:6.

2:13 *Gihon* literally means “a bursting forth.” The fact that four rivers are mentioned “expresses the superabundance of the garden. In the land of Israel, water was a scare and precious commodity.”⁴⁷

2:13 In both 2:11 and 2:13 I have chosen to use the word “surrounds” even though it is slightly different in each place in the Hebrew.

2:14 In this verse, *Hidekel* is the Tigris and *Perat* is the Euphrates.

2:15 And God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.
2:16 God commanded the human saying, “From each tree of the garden you may eat.”
2:17 “But from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you may not eat from it because on the day you eat from it, you will surely die.”
2:18 God said, “It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make for him a helper who is complimentary to him.”
2:19 God formed from the ground each living thing of the field and all of the fowl of the sky and brought to the man to see what the man would call it. And all that the man called each living thing, that was its name.
2:20 The man named all cattle and fowl in the sky and all of the animals of the field but for the man, he did not find a helper to be opposite him.
2:21 God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he slept and God took one side from him and shut the flesh below it.
2:22 And from the rib that God had taken from the human, God built woman and brought her to man.
2:23 Said the man (?), “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh and I will call her woman because from man she was taken. And thus, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and they shall be one

⁴⁷ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 11

flesh.

2:24 And the two of them, man and his wife, were naked and they were not ashamed.

2:15 Grammatically, this sentence reads so that God is only putting one human into the garden. I will assume that God is speaking in the “royal” sense, even though the grammar does not support it, so that both Adam and Eve are being placed in the garden to look over it.

2:17 In this verse, God is only speaking to the second person, masculine, singular. This would suggest that God is only telling the man not to eat from the tree of good and evil. This will be discussed further in the third chapter of my thesis.

2:18 The phrase “*ezer k’negdo*” is very difficult to translate. The challenge comes from the fact that each word has various meanings and that what we would like the text to mean, may not be a literal translation of the words. “In the Bible, the word *ezer* (helper) typically refers to God and thus lacks any overtone of inferiority. And *negdo* (opposite him/it) suggests a spatial and metaphorical otherness, someone whom one confronts. Psalm 16:8 envisions God in this position, illustrating the positive sense of the word.”⁴⁸ The word “*k’negdo*” is a hapax legamana, which makes an exact translation of this idea even more difficult. Additionally, God points out that unlike everything else which has been

⁴⁸ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Women’s Commentary – page 12

declared “good” after creation, the creation of one person without a partner is “not good.”

2:22 According to Alter, the word “built” is particularly appropriate “because the Lord is now working with hard material, not soft clay. As Nahum Sarna has observed, the Hebrew for ‘rib’ is also used elsewhere to designate an architectural element.”⁴⁹ Genesis Rabbah uses the word built in a word play, suggesting that the root for build, *b-n-h* is similar to the word for “discern” (*b-y-n*) which would mean that women were built with more intelligence than man – very progressive for our midrashic ancestors! In “Together But Separate,” Dvora Weisberg adds that it is interesting how until Adam loses a rib, a physical piece of himself, he is not complete.⁵⁰ Along the same lines, “the word more accurately means ‘sides,’ meaning a more substantial part of the *adam*. Elsewhere in the Bible, the term typically designates a side of a building, a large section necessary for stability.”⁵¹ Lastly, Fox suggests that to translate the word as “sides” would parallel “other ancient peoples’ concept of an original being that was androgynous.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page 9

⁵⁰ From _____ weekly Torah commentaries – “Together But Separate”

⁵¹ Tamara Eskenazi, ed., The Torah: A Woman’s Commentary – page 12

⁵² Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page 20

2:23 Before this time, there is no speech other than what God says during the process of creation. The speech is important, since it is also the first verbal interaction between humans.⁵³

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the animals of the field which God had made. The snake said to the woman, “Did God say that you should not eat from any of the trees in the garden?”
3:2 The woman said to the snake, “The fruit of the trees in the garden you may eat.”
3:3 “But, the fruit of the tree that is inside the garden that God said not to eat from and not to touch is, lest we will die.”
3:4 The snake said to the woman, “Surely you will not die.”
3:5 “Because God knows that on the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing Good and evil.”

3:1 In addition to being translated as “crafty,” the word “*arum*” also means “shrewd” or “sensible.” It is certainly interesting that all of these are possible translations for the same word. Moreover, “in the kind of pun in which ancient Hebrew writers delighted, *arum*, ‘cunning’ plays against *arumim*, ‘naked,’ of the previous verse.”⁵⁴

3:3 Eve changes the original rule God gave to Adam – God only said that they were not allowed to eat from the tree, whereas Eve tells the serpent they are not allowed to eat from or touch the tree. The rabbis refer to this as creating a “fence” around the Torah – a buffer zone in order to make sure we do not get too close to breaking laws. This verse will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

3:6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasing to the eyes and desirable to look at. And she took fruit from it and she ate it.

⁵³ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page 9

⁵⁴ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page 11

And she gave some to the man and he ate it.

3:7 And their eyes were opened. And they knew that they were naked and they sewed together fig leaves and they made a loincloth."

3:8 And they heard the sound of God walking in the garden at the windy time of the day and the man and the woman hid themselves from the presence of God amongst the trees of the garden.

3:9 And God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

3:10 And the man said, "I heard your voice and I was afraid because of my nakedness and I hid myself."

3:11 God said, "Who told you about your nakedness? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you to refrain from eating?"

3:12 The man said, "The woman that you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree and I ate it."

3:13 God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The snake tricked me, and I ate it."

3:14 God said to the snake, "This is because of what you did. You are cursed among all the cattle and all the animals of the field. You will go on your belly and you will eat the dust of the earth all the days of your life."

3:15 "I will place enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and between her seed. He will bruise your head and you will bruise their heel."

3:16 To the woman, God said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in pregnancy and you will suffer in bearing children, but you will have a longing for your husband and he shall rule over you."

3:17 And to the man God said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and you ate from the tree that I had commanded you about saying 'Do not eat from it.' Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you will eat from it all of the days of your life."

3:18 "Thorns and thistles will grow for you. You will eat the herbs of the field."

3:19 "By the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground from which you were taken because you are dust and to dust you will return."

3:20 The man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all life.

3:21 God made for man and his wife a tunic of skins and God clothes them.

3:22 God said, "This man is like one of us because he knows good and evil, lest he put out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat it also and live forever."

3:23 God sent them out from the garden of Eden to work the ground that was taken from there.

3:24 The man was driven out and was placed to dwell in the East of the garden of Eden and the cherubim had a sword of flames which turned every which way to guard the way to the tree of life.

3:16 God says that Eve's pain will be "*har'bah arbeh*" – that it will be multiplied greatly. This would mean that Eve has already experienced the pain, otherwise how would she know that it had been multiplied. If she had not experienced a childbirth with less pain, than she would just assume that the post-exile pain was what she should expect, and it would not be a punishment. Yet, one could argue that it means she will go through life having a painful childbirth and longing for what it could have been like. These verses will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

3:16 The word "*v'heronech*" is translated as both "conception" and "pregnancy" which is problematic. Is the conception the painful part or is the pregnancy?

3:16 God tells Eve that she will have "a longing for her husband." This seems to be part of the punishment.

3:17 Is God punishing Adam for listening to his wife?

3:21 Even though God has just punished them, the relationship has not been completely severed, because in this verse God graciously clothes them. Although many believe the God of the Torah to be an angry and vengeful God, this section proves otherwise. As we see many times over, even when God becomes upset

with us, God does not abandon us. Fox reminds us that these two sides of God are “not exclusive of each other.”⁵⁵

3:22 Again we find the plural when God is speaking, “*ha’adam hayah k’echad mi’meynu.*” Who are the “us” God is referring to?

⁵⁵ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page 23

CHAPTER 2 – GENESIS IN RELATION OTHER ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CREATION STORIES

Introduction

I have heard, read and shared the first three chapters of Genesis many times. As I have grown older and studied the Bible in an academic, scholarly way, there have been many times when I thought to myself, “what an interesting story.” In fact, the more times I encountered this text, the less convinced I became that it was true. And yet, the more convinced I become that although it may not be true, it does contain many ideas which are essential to our lives. I should not have been surprised to learn how many other ancient Near Eastern creation stories there are, or how many similarities they have with Genesis 1-3. The main themes in Genesis 1-3 – questions about human origins, relationships, honesty, responsibility – are not uniquely Jewish. Terence Fretheim writes, “it is clear that Israel participated in a comprehensive ancient Near Eastern culture that had considerable impact on its ways of thinking and writing, both in detail and with larger themes.”⁵⁶ It is only natural that stories being passed around by those in close proximity would be woven into Israelite religion and culture. If we assume the writing of the story of Genesis took place in exile, then it is even more likely that early biblical writers and editors incorporated the language, symbols and theology of the places where they had lived, both in the past and the present. Most scholars agree that Genesis 1-3 is based on Babylonian creation myths, and not the other way around, since a majority of the cuneiform tablets which have been discovered and studied antedate the biblical accounts. Moreover, no older

⁵⁶ Terence Fretheim, New Interpreter's Bible. Vol.1 – page 323

document has been found which would serve as a basis for both of these creation stories.⁵⁷ Yet, that does not mean Genesis 1-3 is not unique and special; in fact Fretheim cautions us to “maintain a fine balance between recognizing such dependence...and Israel’s genuinely new and imaginative ideas and formulations.”⁵⁸ Additionally, Simon Parker writes that while the entire gamut of motifs is found in most ancient Near Eastern literature, “historiography, laws, hymns and prayers, love songs...proverbs and so on...there is nothing from the ancient Near East quite like most biblical books.”⁵⁹ Just as today, it appears our ancestors attempted to be both universal and unique!

In order to fairly represent both sides of the argument, I should note that some scholars believe that many of the similarities found in ancient Near Eastern texts are forced or exaggerated. It is true that relative origin and time of redaction should not be the defining reason for two things to be considered similar. Frederick Greenspan suggests how increased interest in finding commonalities between the Bible and other creation stories from the same time has been called by some “parallelomania.”⁶⁰ Fretheim agrees it is possible that some “parallels to patriarchal names, customs and modes of life have at times been overdrawn; yet they are not fully without historical value.”⁶¹ It is my belief that these stories legitimately share many things; however, it was less the secondary scholarship

⁵⁷ E.A. Speiser, The Anchor Bible: Genesis 1-11 – page 10

⁵⁸ Terence Fretheim, New Interpreter’s Bible. Vol.1 – page 323

⁵⁹ Simon Parker, “The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background of the Old Testament,” New Interpreters Bible: Vol.1 – page 234

⁶⁰ Frederick Greenspan, Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East – page 6

⁶¹ Terence Fretheim, New Interpreter’s Bible. Vol.1 – page 327

which convinced me of this and more the connections I found when reading the primary texts.

Throughout the course of this chapter I will use the phrase “creation story” and “creation myth” interchangeably. Marci Zvi Brettler argues for the use of the latter phrase, but is careful to remind us that we should not allow the term “myth” to carry the negative connotations we usually associate with it. He argues that the scholarly world understands the word myth to be “an essential and constructive element of all cultures.”⁶² The account of creation fits into this definition and perhaps it is an even more accurate title for the material. For those who feel like the word myth applies to something “simple,” they should be reminded that often times the most simple stories are actually the most complex when looked at more closely. This has most certainly been something I have learned while researching this thesis.

When comparing the different creation stories, there were several overarching topics which required analysis. The first of these are the literary and linguistic features found in many of these texts. An additional challenge in this area is that since these stories were originally told orally, there are many cases when we have more than one copy of a particular text. In these situations we can assume that “influence from the ever-changing oral tradition, developments internal to the scribal tradition and shifts in the political and cultural context produced changes in style, in ideology and in artistic and social goals.”⁶³ None of these changes are great enough to alter the central message of the text; rather, it

⁶² Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – pages 38-39

⁶³ Simon Parker, “The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background of the Old Testament,” New Interpreters Bible – page 231

most frequently refers to inconsistencies in vocabulary. Along the same lines, there was most likely a “strong differentiation in most periods between everyday language and the language of literature.”⁶⁴ As was discussed in the first chapter, this was most likely because of a significant difference between the number of words used in the spoken language, versus what was used in the written language.

These texts are thought to be similar because they treat the act of creation in a similar way. In many ancient Near Eastern texts, “the point of creation is not the production of matter out of nothing, but rather the emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life-sustaining order.”⁶⁵ As I discussed in the first chapter, there is an acceptance that even in the act of creation, something (and often, someone) was already present. It is natural for people to wonder where they came from (in the greater sense) and as a result many stories on this topic developed in the ancient Near East. It is apparent from the sheer number of ancient Near Eastern creation stories that culturally this was a question which was of great interest and, perhaps more importantly, something which was acceptable to ask and talk about. I should note that while many of the creation stories extend past the actual creation and involve a flood or some similar form of destruction, I have chosen to focus only on the creation accounts.

In all of the stories I will be focusing on, it is a god (in some form or another) who carries out the work of creating the new world. However, it is not only the creation of a new world which shows the power of this god, but the ability to change chaos into order. In the ancient Near East, this was perhaps the

⁶⁴ Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary – page xviii

⁶⁵ John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel – page 79

greatest task and resulted in the highest praise.⁶⁶ The difference between Genesis 1-3 and the other texts is that elsewhere gods create humanity so they can rest while humanity works for them. This may come from the idea that these gods do not involve themselves in the ongoing experiences of their creation, as we see God act in the other books of the Torah. Moreover, the Babylonian stories “speak not only of successive generations of gods and goddesses...but they also speak of different creators.”⁶⁷

As there are many other creation stories to choose from, I have narrowed it down and will be focusing on *Enuma Elish*, *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis*. In each section I will focus on a few of the points of connection and key differences. Since this chapter could obviously be an entire thesis itself, I have only touched upon the most striking similarities. In Appendix A I have also listed a number of additional similarities which I felt were important in making the case, but not necessarily crucial to the main argument.

Enuma Elish

Enuma Elish is a Babylonian creation story which originated around the 18th century BCE. Tablets containing the text have been discovered, translated and analyzed in the last several hundred years. The story is referred to as both *Enuma Elish* and its English translation, the *Epic of Creation*. *Enuma Elish* tells the story of the defeat of Tiamat, the primeval sea monster, by Marduk. Marduk goes on to use Tiamat’s corpse to create the remainder of the world, thus using

⁶⁶ Berlin and Brettler, The Jewish Study Bible – page 13

⁶⁷ Alexander Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation – page 96

chaos to create order. The notion of a sea monster is common in ancient Near Eastern texts and it is also referenced in Genesis 1-3, Psalm 74, Job 26 and 40 and Isaiah 27. Isaiah ironically uses a sea monster “to describe the frightening sea monster that the Lord will kill at the end of time.”⁶⁸ Unlike Genesis wherein the deep waters are a source of creation, in other texts, the waters contain animals which will lead to the end of humanity. Like Genesis 1-3, *Enuma Elish* tells a story about a god who works to create a world of humans. In addition to the theme of the story being similar, “the order of events is the same, which is enough to preclude any likelihood of coincidence.”⁶⁹ The major difference is that in Genesis 1-3 we are not given any indication of what it is which enables God to begin creation whereas in *Enuma Elish* it is only because of the struggle between Tiamat and Marduk (and death of Tiamat) that creation is able to occur.⁷⁰

Marduk’s ability to move the world from chaos to order is what makes the essence of this story similar to Genesis 1-3. However, in *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat represents all things which are dark and chaotic and Marduk attacks and kills her because there is a belief that the deep waters are a negative force. The word “*t’hom*” is “a rare and poetic word in Hebrew as in English, [and] resembles the name of Tiamat, the primeval saltwater deep in *Enuma Elish*,” since “-at” is merely a suffix which can be taken off.⁷¹ Moreover, *Enuma Elish* imagines the chaos to be “*living* matter and as being an integral part of the first two principles...while, according to Genesis, it is nothing but a mass of *inanimate*

⁶⁸ Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* – pages 13-14

⁶⁹ E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis 1-11* – page 9

⁷⁰ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* – page 92

⁷¹ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel* – page 81

matter.” So, while both gods are engaged in the same action, they have different starting points. Also, while light is created in Genesis 1-3, “light” – in the sense of bringing clarity – is created in *Enuma Elish*. One final connection which I found to be interesting was Alexander Heidel’s suggestion that *Enuma Elish* is not only a story about creation, but also about our relationship with nature. He suggests that the watery chaos “reflects the heavy winter rains, the overflow of the rivers and the disorder which they cause...while the parting of the water and the creation of heaven and earth represent the spring.”⁷² While a lovely idea, and one which relates nicely to our rain-based insertions in the *Amidah*, this may not be geographically accurate, since in the Middle East, the overflow of water tends to come in the Spring.

In translations of Genesis, we often read, “God spoke and the world came into being.” In Genesis 1-3 the ability of God to put things into motion and create is done through the use of words. Marduk had a similar power in that he was able to create and destroy, but we have no reason to suggest that he used the same sort of verbal command in order to do so. Speiser employs the following chart to show the similarities between the two stories:⁷³

GENESIS	ENUMA ELISH
Divine spirit created cosmic matter and exists independently of it.	Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal.
The earth is a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep.	Primeval chaos: Tiamat enveloped in darkness.
Light created.	Light emanating from the gods.
The creation of the firmament.	The creation of the firmament.
The creation of dry land.	The creation of dry land.
The creation of the luminaries.	The creation of the luminaries.

⁷² Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* – page 98

⁷³ E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis 1-11* – page 10

The creation of man.	The creation of man.
God rests and sanctifies the seventh day.	The gods rest and celebrate.

I should acknowledge that the stories are not laid out in exactly the same way.

This chart indicates that the same themes and events can be found in *Enuma Elish*, not that they necessarily happen in the same way, or in the same order. For example, “in the Babylonian poem the heavenly bodies are created immediately after the formation of the firmament, [whereas] in the Hebrew account their creation is postponed until after the earth and vegetation have been made.”⁷⁴

There is a nice similarity between the repetition of the number seven and some originally thought that the tablets might line up with the days of creation, but this is not the case.

After God and Marduk begin their transformation from chaos into order, light is created. Although light seems to be in existence at the time of the creation in *Enuma Elish*, we read about how “the stars were created and the year was ordained at the same time...[additionally] the twelve months were to be regulated by the stars; and the Moon-god was appointed to ‘determine the days.’”⁷⁵ This is similar to what we see in Genesis 1:6 when God creates a division between the expanses, creating an upper area and a lower area. In the Babylonian poem, Marduk uses Tiamat’s body to create the expanse – in fact, in fragment S.2 013 there is mention of an Upper Tiamat and a Lower Tiamat, which correlate to the waters above and below the expanse.⁷⁶

Of course the most significant thing which Marduk and God create are humans. It is interesting how many creation myths begin at a point when other

⁷⁴ L.W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation*– page xc

⁷⁵ L.W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation*– page lxxxv

⁷⁶ L.W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation*– page lxxxiii

things have already been created. Using “human creation as a starting point rather than a conclusion”⁷⁷ is an interesting way of approaching the text. Considering these texts were written by humans, it is not as surprising that our creation is the pivotal moment, although in all fairness, most of these stories go on to relate our fall from perfection and the destruction of the people by the gods. Just as in the second creation story, Marduk forms man by working with dust. There seems to be an important natural connection between the creation of man and the creation of everything else. We are not told what animals and plants are formed out of, or whether they simply appear, yet humans are formed out of one of the raw, natural elements on this planet – dirt. After humans have been created, in Genesis at least, they are charged with certain tasks. In *Enuma Elish* too, they have been created with the specific purpose of working so that the gods will not need to. Although we do not see anything in *Enuma Elish* which is as obvious as the directives given in Genesis 1-3, it is possible “that a missing portion of the Sixth Tablet did contain a short series of instructions by Marduk to man.”⁷⁸

Enuma Elish does not give the same amount of time to plants or animals as we see in Genesis 1-3. However, in the Seventh Tablet, we do find the following titles which clearly describe a relationship with and responsibility towards plants: “Bestower of planting,” “Founder of sowing” and “Creator of grain and plants.”⁷⁹ Moreover, there is nothing in *Enuma Elish* which relates directly to the creation of the animals and vegetation. There are references in other creation fragments which speak about the creation of beasts, specifically

⁷⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* – page 5

⁷⁸ L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* – page lxxxviii

⁷⁹ L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* – page lxxxiv-lxxxv

dolphins. It is interesting that in one tablet the animals are classified as “beasts of the field and the creatures of the city.”⁸⁰ This distinction also occurs in Genesis 1:24, when God distinguishes between the different animals as those which are domesticated and which are wild. Perhaps the greatest distinction between these two stories is related to the creation of what God or Marduk defines as holy, in that God specifically names things as being holy, whereas the qualities which make Marduk holy are purely speculative.

Gilgamesh

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is one of the earliest creation stories from Mesopotamia. It was not until 1850 that the first fragments of tablets were discovered, but the Akkadian text was not immediately translated and analyzed. Now, just over seventy fragments have been discovered, and around 2000 of what are thought to be 3000 lines of the original text have been translated. Although there are still gaps in the story, scholars have enough of the text in various forms to piece together a cohesive story.⁸¹ *Gilgamesh* is similar to Genesis 1-3 in a very different way than *Enuma Elish* was, since *Gilgamesh* focuses primarily on the relationship between the first humans as opposed to the acts of creation.

Gilgamesh is created after the flood, which is obviously an important difference between the two books. When Aruru creates him, he is said to be “the strongest/of men – huge, handsome, radiant, perfect.”⁸² Some question whether

⁸⁰ L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation*– page lxxxvi

⁸¹ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* – pages 3-6

⁸² *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Book 1

God created humans perfect initially and whether the curse at the end of Genesis 1-3 is a retraction of that perfection. The notion of perfection will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. Like Adam, Gilgamesh is formed from the dust of the ground and shaped and created into a human being. Moreover, like Adam, Gilgamesh is lonely and longs for a companion. Anu says to Aruru,

“You are the one
who created humans. Now go and create
a double for Gilgamesh, his second self,
a man who equals his strength and courage,
a man who equals his stormy heart.
Create a new hero, let them balance each other
Perfectly, so that Uruk has peace.”⁸³

Aruru goes on to form Enkidu in a way very similar to what we find in Genesis 2:7 where God “formed the human from the dust of the ground and God breathed into the human’s nostrils a breath of life.” She pinches off a piece of clay, kneads and shapes it until it matches the idea in her mind. This is very much in line with the notion of the God in the second story being a potter who “fashions” in order to create. Enkidu is to serve as Gilgamesh’s *ezer k’negdo*, someone who is a partner, but also someone who is an opposite for the sake of providing balance. Stephen Mitchell writes, “Enkidu is indeed Gilgamesh’s double, so huge and powerful that when people see him they are struck with awe. But he is also Gilgamesh’s opposite and mirror image: two-thirds animals to Gilgamesh’s two-thirds divine.”⁸⁴ Although this is a different understanding of the idea of a partner, the idea that each person needs someone to complement them is clearly similar to what is presented in Genesis.

⁸³ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Book 1

⁸⁴ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* – page 11

In *Gilgamesh*, the actions of Eve's character are divided between Enkidu and a woman named Shamhat. Enkidu assumes the responsibilities related to partnership and friendship, but Shamhat serves as the means by which sexuality is explored and understood. In *Gilgamesh* sexuality is not as negative as it appears to be in Genesis 1-3 (something which I will discuss further in chapter 3). Shamhat brings Enkidu "not into the knowledge of a polarized good and evil, but into the glories of sexuality, the intimate understanding of what a woman is, and self awareness as a human being."⁸⁵ In Genesis 1-3 we are led to believe that knowledge of sexuality can lead to trouble, whereas here, it is celebrated. In Shamhat's defense, we must understand her not as a conniving prostitute, but as part of a culture which celebrated intimacy as part of their belief. Mitchell notes that there is not an English word which accurately represents Shamhat's actions, but that she is "is priestess of Ishtar, the goddess of love, and , as a kind of reverse nun, has dedicated her life to what the Babylonians considered the sacred mystery of sexual union."⁸⁶ It is not unusual for *Gilgamesh* to be filled with such sexual encounters, since "such motifs as sexual awareness, wisdom and nature's paradise are of course familiar from various ancient sources."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the curse upon Shamhat by Enkidu in Book 7 has several similarities to the curses God bestows upon Eve. We read,

"Shamhat, I assign you an eternal fate,
I curse you with the ultimate curse, may it seize you
instantly, as it leaves my mouth.
Never may you have a home and family,
never caress a child of your own,

⁸⁵ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* – page 16

⁸⁶ Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version* – page 13

⁸⁷ E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis 1-11* – page 26

May your man prefer younger, prettier girls.”
While the logistics of the curse may be different, Enkidu is punishing Shamhat in her own domain. She is not being told she can not go off to war or fight with the men, she is being told that in the area in which she will be judged most greatly by society, she will face challenges.

In Genesis 1-3, the snake is part of the downfall of humanity, which is related to issues of sexual and moral misconduct. In *Gilgamesh* the snake is present in much the same way, although its interaction is solely with Gilgamesh and there is no specific connection to anything sexual. In many ancient Near Eastern stories, “the serpent symbolized life, death, wisdom, nature, chaos and fertility.”⁸⁸ Everett Fox adds that the snake is often found in stories where some sort of struggle takes place between death and immortality, either literally or figuratively.⁸⁹ In Genesis 1-3 the snake is crafty and seemed to be placed there as a potential foil for Adam and Eve whereas in *Gilgamesh*, the snake does not intend to do harm. As Gilgamesh is bringing home the plant which will protect him from death he stops to eat near a pool of water. As will happen with all beautiful and magical things, Gilgamesh was not the only one drawn to the plant:

“He left the plant on the ground and bathed.
A snake smelled its fragrance, stealthily
it crawled up and carried the plant away.
As it disappeared, it cast off its skin.
When Gilgamesh saw what the snake had done,
he sat down and wept.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Kristin, Kvam et.al., Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 33

⁸⁹ Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy – A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary and Notes – page 16

⁹⁰ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Book 11

Even though the snake acted unknowingly, its actions were the pivotal moment which emphasized the movement from immortality to mortality. Gilgamesh had “the antidote to the fear of death”⁹¹ and perhaps Adam and Eve had this too, even though they did not realize it until it was too late. Adam and Eve lost their chance to remain divine and immortal and like Gilgamesh, must face the part of them which is susceptible to death.

Atrahasis

Atrahasis is a Mesopotamian poem which has a similar structure to Genesis 1-3. The greatest challenge I had with *Atrahasis* (besides saying its name), was the large amount of debate concerning the many versions available and the inconsistencies in translation and meaning. The oldest fragments date to around 600 BCE and are thought to have been copied by a scribe several generations after Hammurabi. The text has also been found in other places and these fragments are able to fill in the gaps missing in the first fragments, although there are inconsistencies and often, contradicting passages. As I mentioned earlier, this is most likely a natural result of the shifting tendencies of an oral culture. Like *Enuma Elish*, humans in *Atrahasis* are created so that they can take over work the gods do not want to do (in this case, the digging of canals). *Atrahasis* places a high value on the abilities of the human and they are brought into the world with an enormous amount of responsibility. This is similar to both

⁹¹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Book 11

of the other ancient Near Eastern stories I have explored, and the same could certainly be said of Genesis 1-3.

However, unlike *Enuma Elish* or Genesis 1-3, *Atrahasis* “glorifies a god who is an adversary of the human race.”⁹² In fact, some suggest Mesopotamians believed “the original human beings were...too wild and barbarous to begin any kind of organized life on their own and were thus dependant on the gods to provide it for them.”⁹³ Therefore, unlike the God of Genesis who creates humans so that they can continue to do good work on their own, the relationship between the god in *Atrahasis* and the people he creates will always be filled with tension. In Genesis 1-3, Adam and Eve acknowledge God’s role in their lives and begin to understand the relationship between themselves and God. Moreover, throughout the Bible, we see evidence of the people being thankful for God’s intervention in order to continue to provide them with what they need to survive. Although the same sort of interventionist god is shown in *Atrahasis*, the relationship does not appear to be positive, as it is in the Torah.⁹⁴

As we have seen before, Nintu/Mami (the birth-goddess who is responsible for creating life) shapes the humans out of dust and clay. The notion that creation is similar to God practicing a craft is something which ties all four of these creations myths together. Moreover, the use of the most natural, primal materials – dust, clay, blood, spit – speaks to the rawness of this experience. This text goes beyond being created in God’s likeness and beyond Marduk using his own blood – here all of the gods deliberately spit into the mixture which would be

⁹² Tivka Frymer-Kensky, Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism – 8

⁹³ Tivka Frymer-Kensky, Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism – 8

⁹⁴ Tivka Frymer-Kensky, Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism – 9

made into the clay humans. They are literally giving a part of themselves to bring new beings into life. However, it is interesting that unlike *Gilgamesh*, the humans are not seen as being divine in any way, despite having the spit of the gods in their makeup. Perhaps this can also be a nod to Genesis 2:7, where “God breathed into the humans nostrils the breath of life.” Or, more literally, spit makes the clay wet, so that it can be formed. I would assume that when this story was being told, many people spit into their own clay in order to make it more malleable so they could better shape bowls and plates. But, in *Atrahasis* “even this elaborate procedure is not enough to finish human creation. The creatures must still stay in a womb for a normal period of human pregnancy before being born.”⁹⁵ This is the first mention of anything which we would recognize as the process required to create a human life. Perhaps they knew or cared more about medical issues than other people or perhaps they felt it was important to show the partnership in creation between us and the gods?

There is one key area in which the stories diverge. In *Atrahasis* the flesh from the slain god introduces a spirit which will live on after death. This notion is unique to this story, as it is not found elsewhere in Mesopotamian literature.⁹⁶ Yet, the slain god is able to be rational and this ability – to have rational thought – is passed on to humans when they are created. Many believe that one of the ways we are created in God’s image is that we are able to have rational thought. Certainly after we eat from the tree of good and evil, we are granted the ability

⁹⁵ Tivka Frymer-Kensky, Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism – 9

⁹⁶ Tivka Frymer-Kensky, Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism – 10

(for better or worse) to make our own choices and some would even suggest that we had this ability all along.

Conclusion

Like Genesis 1-3, these stories speak to some of our greatest challenges and questions as humans. In *Enuma Elish* we explore the movement from chaos into order and the idea that this process has been started by the gods and handed off to us to continue. *Gilgamesh* presents a different question, that is, what it means to long for a companion. The basic human need of companionship is presented here as Gilgamesh goes searching for the partner who will most complement him. What does it mean to have an ingrained sense of this need and how do we work to create a partnership with that person? *Gilgamesh* also puts forth the idea that, like Gilgamesh, Adam and Eve may have only been partly responsible for their mistake. Gilgamesh probably knew the plant would entice other people (or animals), but his intentions were pure when he placed it on the ground. So too is this an important lesson for us when reading the second creation story. Finally, *Atrahasis* mirrors the idea that humans were made from the earth, carefully molded and formed by a loving creator. Just as the gods place a bit of themselves in the clay, God makes us *b'tzelem elohim*. Each of these stories has something in common with Genesis 1-3 – both on the surface and in terms of the “big questions.” In many ways, it is almost reassuring to know that the questions asked by those living thousands of years ago are still relevant for us today.

However, even though these stories have components which are thematically similar to Genesis 1-3, the Jewish version of this story does have its own unique characteristics. Most obviously, that two very similar stories are placed next to each other in the biblical canon is highly unusual. While the two stories may focus on the same theme, there are enough differences to lead you to think that only one would be chosen. Although *Atrahahsis* had many different versions floating around, none of the material I read about either *Enuma Elish* or *Gilgamesh* suggested that there were two similar versions which were both codified. Most significantly, the grammatical structure of Genesis 1 (including the repetition of words, phrases, etc) is not seen in many of the other texts I studied. Moreover, the confirmation of things being “good” is unique in that it affirms God’s feelings towards the things which have been created. Lastly, Genesis 1-3 is full of blessings. In Genesis 1, God does a lot of blessing literally, in that we see the phrase “and God blessed” many times. Yet, I believe that even though the word “*baruch*” is not used liberally in the second story, the way in which God’s creation is described feels like a blessing. So, while we may share our “big questions” with many other people, we can be sure that our tradition has created a distinctive way of answering those questions.

CHAPTER 3 – EXPLORING GENDER

Introduction

In Genesis 3:13 we read God's first words to Eve, "What is this that you have done?" Although Eve has been addressed implicitly in the previous two and a half chapters of Genesis, this is the first time she is directly addressed. Many biblical scholars suggest that characters who are given speaking lines in the Torah are automatically elevated to a more "important" level. Yet despite being given an actual voice, Eve's role in Jewish text and tradition is somewhat less glorious. In this chapter, I will discuss the ramifications of societal influences, particularly the damage the rabbis did to Eve's image, but it should be noted that there are differing opinions on how the text has been treated. For some, it is about translating the document in a way which is comfortable for a variety of people and for others it is about understanding the text as a historical artifact from a specific time and place.

In the second story of creation, boundaries are used as a way of placing things into appropriate categories. Each item created by God is unique and special and is therefore given a different name and function. However, Rachael Adler suggests that the act of separation takes a nasty turn because "in the world of these texts, closeness can only be imagined as fusion and distance as estrangement. Rather than creating distinctions, boundaries set up oppositions."⁹⁷ Adler argues that these boundaries highlight the differences between Adam and Eve in a negative way, pitting them against each other from the very beginning.

⁹⁷ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 116

Instead of making them similar, yet unique, they are made to act as opposites, because this made it easier for the rabbis work through their discomfort with women, gender and sexuality. Yet we must be careful about brushing their writing off as simply “something written during a different time” and force ourselves to carefully examine the circumstances under which it was written. If we are going to assume that these creation stories were written in a patriarchal society, then we must answer a number of questions such as “In what ways was it a patriarchal society....under what circumstances were Israelite women subordinate to men...How did ancient Israelites construct gender?”⁹⁸ Kvan
cautions us against assuming that everything the rabbis believed and wrote about was reality, yet even she acknowledges it is possible that rabbinic commentary about women had a real impact on the way women were viewed. I will touch on this issue throughout this chapter, but I will preface that material by saying that our modern understandings of rabbinic society are probably very oversimplified.

We do know a few things for certain, based on statements in the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash. We can assume that the experiences of women are either obscured or omitted altogether in most biblical texts, since it is doubtful that men numerically outnumbered women to the extent that they are represented. Moreover, “women of power are downplayed or disparaged, and we are left wondering about the actual roles and teachings of numerous women who flit through biblical narratives.”⁹⁹ The women who are included often rely upon their beauty or sexuality in order to establish or gain some form of power. We can also

⁹⁸ Ronald Simkins in Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible – page 33

⁹⁹ Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai – page 43

be certain that many references to “male potency, dominance and generativity” combine to create the imbalance of power presented in the rabbinic understanding of gendered relationships.¹⁰⁰ Many feminist scholars suggest the most important part of their work is enabling “us to see that Judaism has almost always been more diverse than either normative sources or most branches of modern Judaism would admit.”¹⁰¹ Yet, we must not get too carried away with “finding” things in the text which may or may not actually be there. Judith Baskin admits that although we can work to render the “marginalization and/or invisibilization of women and gender intellectually impossible...such efforts cannot fully overcome literary constructions of gender embedded within ancient Jewish texts.”¹⁰² Even as we strive to create a new understanding of the text, in the back of our minds, we must remember the society in which they were written and the people who were part of the discourse and writing of the text.

Kvam puts forth two main categories to contain the many theories about Adam and Eve: those which suggest a hierarchal relationship between the sexes and those which suggest the relationship is egalitarian.¹⁰³ Most everyone accepts that these are the two options, yet not everyone agrees on which of the two options is actually presented. As recently as the late 1970s and 80s, feminist scholars began using less traditional methods of interpretation, which changed the way the text was interpreted by both scholars and the greater community.¹⁰⁴ This

¹⁰⁰ Judith Baskin in Judaism Since Gender – page 128

¹⁰¹ Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai – page 51

¹⁰² Judith Baskin in Judaism Since Gender – page 125

¹⁰³ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 5

¹⁰⁴ Carolyn Osiek in New Interpreter's Bible: Vol. 1 – page 182

new way of understanding and appreciating the text has broadened the base of supporters on the “egalitarian” side of the scale. In the remainder of this chapter, I will use some of this new scholarship to explore the place of gender in the first three chapters of Genesis.

How Can Gender Be Interpreted in the Bible?

In this section I will explore how gender is interpreted in the Bible by looking at several specific words and phrases in the creation stories. Although I will be using a combination of my own thoughts and modern scholarship to explore these phrases, I will be doing so within the context of the original text. With language comes meaning and since the text does not say very much explicitly with regards to gender (which is always dangerous) it was left to generations of male interpreters to determine what the text implies. As an example of the opposite extreme, Phyllis Tribble cautions us against assigning the terms masculine and feminine to *zachar* and *nekevah*, since that leads to assigning traditional (or even contemporary) ideas of how certain genders should behave or interact.

There are several key phrases in the two creation stories which have sparked a great deal of debate in this area, the first of which is the translation of the word *ha'adam*. As I indicated in the first section, the use of the word *ha'adam* in Genesis 1:27 is probably gender neutral and can refer to both “humankind” in general or a particular person of either gender. Moreover, the use of the word “them,” in the phrase “male and female, God created them,” indicates

that God is referring to both male and female. Therefore, it appears the Hebrew is far more gender neutral (and equal) than most translations would lead us to believe. Both Kvan and Adler suggest that this verse may also inadvertently comment upon the sexuality of God in that God must have some aspects of male and female in order for this to be replicated in Adam and Eve. This naturally leads to a greater question of the use of the word “likeness” and what sort of likeness this is referring to (emotionally, intellectually, physically, etc.). Most likely it refers to all of these things, even though thinking about the sexuality of God may be troubling for some people. Adler also comments on the names which are given in this verse: *zachar* and *nekevah*. Certainly naming Eve as “the one who is pierced” has to do with sexuality and defines one of the relationships between this new couple. Ironically, in the second creation story, Eve is not referred to in the generic *ha’adam*, but only as *isha*, Adam’s wife. This name is even more definitive in describing her role in the story, as *isha* is derived from *ish*.

Trible supports a widely held belief that in the first creation story there is a parallel in the text between “*ha’adam*” and “male and female.” She believes this “shows further that sexual differentiation does not mean hierarchy but rather equality. Created simultaneously, male and female are not superior or subordinate. Neither has power over the other; in fact, both are given equal power.”¹⁰⁵ This further solidifies the notion that the first creation story presents an Adam and Eve who are equal, while the second story sets up two characters with the potential for a power struggle. Adler takes this one step further and

¹⁰⁵ Phyllis Trible, The Rhetoric of Sexuality – page 19

suggests that in the second creation story, Adam and “*adam*” are clearly only male. Moreover, Adam’s “maleness represents the original human condition, rather than one variety of it. Hence there is no mention of the creation of maleness, as there is in Genesis 1.”¹⁰⁶ In contrast, the woman is brought into being in a way completely unique from all else which is created. Everything else is either created (as in the first story) or formed (as God does with Adam in the second story), whereas Eve is constructed from material which has just been created. There are many questions about the translation of the word “rib.” Kvam says, “if we understand *sela* as rib, then it could be argued that woman was created *after* man, *from* man. While some assume that this makes woman’s creation derivative and secondary, other suggest that the last can be first and argue for the superiority of woman’s creation.”¹⁰⁷ Although this does present the possibility for a more flattering interpretation of Eve being taken from Adam’s rib, it still leaves the door open for unfavorable interpretations and replaces one hierarchy with another.

There is one relationship which is named by God and built into the partnership between Adam and Eve, the one created by the phrase “*ezer k’negdo*” in 2:18. Kvam suggests that there are four possible ways in which the combination of these words can be translated: “(1) subordinating the woman to the man, (2) subordinating the man to the woman, (3) affirming the equality and mutuality between the sexes, or (4) indicating a relationship filled with inherent

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 121-122

¹⁰⁷ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 29

tension.”¹⁰⁸ Most frequently we see a combination of options one and four, but I have chosen to translate this as “a helper who is complimentary to him” for several reasons. I like the idea that Adam and Eve compliment each other – they are not defined as being the same, but there is nothing to suggest they are in conflict. Literally, the word “ezer” itself does not denote superiority or inferiority and the word “*k’negdo*” is a hapax legamenon which is part of the reason it is difficult to make a universal decision on how to translate this phrase. Kvam makes a point of not using the frequently used “helper” to translate “ezer,” since this word can suggest that one person is in the powerful position of helping the other and that the other person is powerless without their “helper.” Rather, she believes it should be translated as “companion” or “partner.”¹⁰⁹

One of the most uncomfortable presumptions of a gendered relationship has to do with who holds the power. The proof text for this philosophy is generally found in 1:28 when God tells them to “subdue it and rule over it.” The frequently made argument is that just as Adam is to subdue nature, so too is he to subdue Eve. This is simply incorrect, both grammatically and contextually. Since this directive is coupled with the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, Brettler puts forth the idea that “the context of this verse suggests that it means merely that men will determine when couples engage in sexual intercourse.”¹¹⁰ While this may be more acceptable than a complete patriarchy, it still suggests an uneven balance of power. Adler believes the rabbis achieved this interpretation

¹⁰⁸ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 29

¹⁰⁹ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 28

¹¹⁰ Mark Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 46

by taking advantage of a variation in the spelling between different texts. She writes that “the word *kibshuha*, ‘master it [lit. her],’ lacks the *vav* of the plural form, making it possible to read the word as a command in the masculine singular. This missing *vav* is perhaps the most influential spelling error in this history of theology.”¹¹¹ Rashi agrees, adding that the missing *vav* is there to teach that the male masters the female, so that she should not be a gadabout.”¹¹² We also see a bit of this in 2:15 when God puts Adam and Eve in the garden to “work it and to guard it.” Although it does not seem to have the same implications with regards to gender, Adler believes the entire second creation story is different from the first in that it is “not a description of the creation of the universe, but of the patriarchal perspective, in which the self relates to what is external by subjugating or devouring.”¹¹³ In order to wrap up this section on a slightly more positive note, it should be noted that Raymond Orland suggests, “Male headship and male-female equality are not mutually exclusive. ‘Headship,’ Orland insists, is not ‘domination.’ That is, men are divinely appointed leaders and protectors of women but they are not given a license to be tyrants or wife abusers.”¹¹⁴ While this is definitely a more sensitive reading of the text, it is unfortunately not the direction the rabbis go, as we will see in the following section.

Regardless of whose fault it is, Adam and Eve do indeed eat from the tree. Brettler makes an interesting connection based on the assumptions that the knowledge gained had something to do with an understanding of sexuality. He

¹¹¹ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 119

¹¹² Rashi – found in Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 119

¹¹³ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 123

¹¹⁴ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 18

writes that “the connection between (procreative) sexuality and morality is compelling and was well understood even in antiquity – if people were to be both sexually procreative and immortal, disastrous overpopulation would result.”¹¹⁵ This theory suggests that not only were mortality and knowledge a package deal, but that we needed Adam and Eve to eat from the tree in order for us to exist. Before Adam and Eve ate from the tree, they were clearly naked and yet, did not notice, care or understand that there was anything wrong with this. However, afterwards, their first thought is not “now I can make my own decisions!” but “now I am naked!” This could be seen as a positive thing, since they gained an awareness of their bodies which they did not have previously.. Even if feminist readers do not want to directly associate the tree with sexuality, Brettler says that the use of a merism – referring to the tree as bearing both “good and evil” – indicates that all is contained, including sexuality.¹¹⁶ Finally, when Eve is renamed (from *isha*) as *Chavah* – the mother of everything – her role goes from being Adam’s wife (which, until this point is an unspecified role) to being a mother (a definitively sexual role).¹¹⁷

In 3:14-15, God curses the snake for its role in this situation and does the same with Adam in 3:17. In 3:16 God speaks Eve in what is commonly thought of as a curse, even though the same language is not used. God simply tells Eve what to expect in the future, as it does not say that in the past women gave birth without any pain. It seems awfully ironic that the one person usually blamed for the entire situation is the only person not to receive a direct curse from God! In

¹¹⁵ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 45

¹¹⁶ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 45

¹¹⁷ Marc Zvi Brettler, How to Read the Bible – page 46

Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible, Ronald Simkins supports this, stating that “in only one case does Yahweh impose what could be interpreted as punishment on the humans – Yahweh curses the arable land on account of the man’s actions, leaving it unproductive for agriculture.”¹¹⁸ Simkins interprets this to mean that the new parameters God puts forth for Adam and Eve are simply the result of exchanging innocence for knowledge. In this situation, it is not necessarily Adam and Eve who are cursed, but that in their new lifestyle, they have traded some things for others. Many of the things I read supported an agricultural theme, in that just as Adam must now work harder to cultivate the land, Eve must work harder to cultivate human life.

In addition to the remarks God makes to Eve regarding pregnancy, God also tells Eve that “you will have a longing for your husband.”¹¹⁹ Adler writes that “woman’s sexual desire dooms her to be subjugated by man and to painful childbirths,”¹²⁰ therefore forcing her to live her life in a continuous cycle of anguish. This puts her below Adam and reframes the *ezer k’negdo* relationship outlined earlier. Adler reminds us about the boundaries which are created here and the power which has been placed in Adam’s hands. She believes that at this point in the story, “compulsive toil and unrelenting watchfulness replace freedom and trust, while hierarchy and caste obstruct fellowship and communion.”¹²¹ The story of Eve has often been compared to the Greek myth of Pandora’s Box.

¹¹⁸ Ronald Simkins in Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible – pages 48-49

¹¹⁹ Genesis 3:16

¹²⁰ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – pages 123-124

¹²¹ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – pages 124

both of them appear to be cautionary tales for men about the danger which can occur when women are not properly constrained.¹²²

Lastly, some believe the use of the phrase “I will greatly multiply your pain” suggests that Eve had already had sex and given birth, since in order to multiply something you have to have a standard against which the new amount can be measured. This seems contradictory, since it suggests that Adam and Eve were sexual beings, even though it does not seem like they were sexually aware before eating from the tree. Modern commentators suggest this means that while Adam and Eve were sexual, it was not something they were ashamed of. Seeing as they were commanded by God to *pru ur’vu*, at the very least they understood it to be sanctioned by God. Clearly the second creation story is more comfortable addressing sex and sexuality, whereas Genesis 1 paints a vague picture of what “be fruitful and multiply” might literally mean.

How Do the Rabbis Understand Gender?

Gender stereotyping is frequently used to create clear distinctions between groups of people. Since it is not the text itself but the rabbis who first begin to “explain” these distinctions to us Adler argues that whoever gets to make the distinctions has the power. She writes that “acts of distinction and acts of power are morally charged. They carry implications for how members of categories are to behave and how others are to behave toward them. Hence, acts of definition

¹²² William Phipps, Genesis and Gender: Biblical Myths of Sexuality and Their Cultural Impact – page 37

are vulnerable to abuse.”¹²³ I think it is safe to say, although there are obviously members of Judaism who would disagree with me, that the rabbis abused their power when it came to defining the differences between male and female. Tribble goes even further to dismiss the “rules” people take from this story “and apply to male-female relationships...[since] most of them are simply not present in the story itself.”¹²⁴ However others disagree, suggesting that,

“These social roles are not simply described, but, as the content of myth, they are prescribed. Moreover, the social roles personify the ancient Israelites’ understanding of gender. They represent the normative patterns of social behavior for Israelite men and women. In other words, the first man’s role as a farmer and the first woman’s role as a mother symbolizes the appropriate behavior for all Israelite men and women.”¹²⁵

Most believe the Israelites’ social and physical environment “remained largely unchanged for the duration of Israel’s existence.”¹²⁶ Despite even dramatic changes in their lives, such as exile or new rulers, Israelites continued to live a very basic, agrarian lifestyle. Yet we should exercise caution and remember Kvam’s mantra that “symbolism is not sociology.”¹²⁷ Not all biblical stories (or interpretations of those stories) have social implications and Carol Meyers is careful to note that even more worrisome than symbolic interpretation is assuming the texts have a “one-on-one correspondence with reality.”¹²⁸ Plaskow urges us to remember that the rabbis constructed their version of Jewish history in a way which was more midrashic than historical. Instead of finding historical evidence to answer the problems in the text which were troubling to

¹²³ Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism – page 115

¹²⁴ Phyllis Tribble, The Rhetoric of Sexuality – page 73

¹²⁵ Ronald Simkins in Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible – page 48

¹²⁶ Ronald Simkins in Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible – page 34

¹²⁷ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 9

¹²⁸ Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 20

them, they created stories to help them get to a place where they could be comfortable with the text. This method is not even necessarily intended to be historically accurate, so we can not place all of the blame upon people who were simply trying to make sense of complicated stories.¹²⁹

In all fairness, the rabbis thoroughly explore the two creation stories. For example, there is a Talmudic tale about burglars who break into a house and take a silver vase and replace it with a gold vase. The man who owned the house was thrilled and suggested that all burglars act in this way. The rabbis suggest that so too this is what God did with Adam – removed a rib but gave him Eve in its place.¹³⁰ Unfortunately the majority of Talmudic and midrashic writing regarding the “rib” does not paint Eve in such a favorable light. One story describes how woman was taken from a rib because when a man stands up, that part of his body is still concealed, which is how a woman should behave.¹³¹ The rabbis also discuss the use of the rib in Sanhedrin 39a, Niddah 31b, Berachot 61a, Yevamot 63a, Genesis Rabbah 17:2, 17:3, 17:7, 17:8 and 18:2, focusing mainly on the negative implications of Eve’s creation. For example, Genesis Rabbah 17:8 suggests that the reason women are so disgusting is because unlike men who are made from pure, natural earth, women are made from flesh and bone and we all know how disgusting meat gets when it sits out in the sun (i.e., when it is not properly taken care of). This is followed by a long passage about how women are not trustworthy because of a variety of reasons, all of which come back to Eve’s massive moral failings and how she should be perceived as a threat to men. This

¹²⁹ Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai – page 53

¹³⁰ Sanhedrin 39a

¹³¹ Bereshit Rabbah 18:2

is another popular theme amongst the rabbis, which they explore in Genesis Rabbah 19:5, 19:10, 20:11, 22:2 and Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:5.

So do we determine that the way Adam and Eve's characters are understood by the rabbis is fair or unfair? First, it is important to acknowledge that although we may see these as roles which imply subordination, Adam and Eve may not have considered them to be so. There is nothing in the prescription from God which seems like Eve is getting the bad end of a deal. It was the way in which society framed what each of these roles meant which made one "good" and the other "bad." Second, I believe this is one of the many things in our tradition that we need to just accept so that we can move forward. We can understand the text differently or illuminate it more clearly today, but that will not change the hundreds of years in which it was seen otherwise.

The final section of the second creation story provides a plethora of gender related issues, most notably the relationships between sin, knowledge, sex, punishments and the gender roles which were discussed earlier. Naturally, the rabbis spend a great deal of time discussing the implications of the "punishments" imposed on Adam and Eve, as shown in Taanit 15b, Genesis Rabbah 17:8, 20:6, 20:7, 20:9, Numbers Rabbah 10:2, 19:18, Deuteronomy Rabba 9:8, Eruvin 100b. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:14 and Sotah 12a. Many authors point out "the lack of consensus as to whether or not desire for knowledge (sexual or otherwise) was humankind's disobedience. Not all see the thirst for wisdom as the motivating factor behind Adam and Eve's disobedience."¹³² Nevertheless, it is the rabbinic

¹³² Kristin Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 43

interpretation of this story which paints Eve as a temptress who tricks Adam (using her sexuality and feminine wiles!) into eating from the tree which was put off limits by God. Tribble notes that “over the centuries this misogynous reading has acquired a status of canonicity so that those who deplore and those who applaud this story both agree upon its meaning.”¹³³ Even those who disagree with this interpretation continue to give it validity by presenting such a fevered argument against it. In *Avot d’Rabbi Natan*, we see several stories about how perhaps Adam is actually at fault because he puts a fence around the words of God by adding to the list of permitted activities. When Eve touches the tree without harm, she assumes the tree is nothing to be afraid of. Although this is not a popular reading of the text, it does show that the text can be seen in a variety of lights (and not just by contemporary scholars).

Conclusion

The most definite conclusion I can draw from this section is that this section is far more complicated than I had imagined. Even the rabbis struggled with these questions and despite the fact that they generally came down on Adam’s side, the number of midrashic and Talmudic passages devoted to this show an interest in figuring out what is really going on in Genesis 1-3. And yet we must wonder, “How did ancient women themselves hear and respond to the biblical message in their own context?”¹³⁴ We know how the texts make us feel and as a result of more recent waves of feminism and feminist scholarship we

¹³³ Phyllis Tribble, *The Rhetoric of Sexuality* – page 73

¹³⁴ Carolyn Osiek in *New Interpreter’s Bible: Vol. 1* – page 182

have even more literature to back up our emotional and intellectual responses to these challenging issues. But how did the first few generations of women who heard these stories relate to them? How did the first few generations of women react after these texts were codified? Unfortunately, the answer is that we really do not know, because as Kvam indicates,

“Few women during this period were literate and thus able to read these works. While later Jewish women, both orthodox and liberal, would appeal to the Kabbalah’s female imagery, and while the twentieth-century feminists would find in Lilith a role model, it is difficult to recover ...[how these texts] immediately affected medieval Jewish women. The absence of texts written for and by women during this period unfortunately limits our chances of hearing firsthand how women responded to these texts.”

Judith Plaskow succinctly summarizes the reason this topic is so

challenging. Regarding revelation she writes, “Were this passage simply the record of a historical event long in the past, the exclusion of women at this critical juncture would be troubling, but also comprehensible for its time. The Torah is not just history, however, but living memory.”¹³⁵ These are not stories we rarely hear: these are the very core of our Jewish tradition and we hear them year after year. These stories become cemented in our understanding of Judaism and whether or not they are “real” becomes irrelevant, for they hold essential truths (although whether or not we agree with these truths may be a different issue!).

¹³⁵ Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai – page 26

CONCLUSION

The reason I choose to explore Genesis 1-3 is because it was a story I thought I already knew a lot about. I say “thought” because even though I have read, heard and shared this story many times, I have always known there was more to explore, question and understand. This story is our most basic attempt to answer the big questions: where we came from, what else is out there, how we interact with the other things in our world. Genesis is very much a book about beginnings and as humans, we are naturally fascinated with how things come into being. Avram gets a new beginning as a Jew, Jacob and Esau get a second chance and Joseph begins a second life in Egypt. This does not mean the text is historical, but that the questions raised in Genesis reflect our desire to understand how things begin. Although I like Genesis 1-3 the way it is, I could not help but be intrigued by the partnership outlined in *Gilgamesh*. While God explains that Adam needs an *ezer k'negdo*, there is no further clarification about what this means. In *Gilgamesh*, the reader gets a real sense of the longing humans have to be in partnership with each other.

The fact that other ancient Near Eastern cultures have similar themes and stories shows how all people have a natural desire to learn about their origins. Although each of the stories explored the creation of humans in their own particular way, there is no way to deny that the essential questions are the similar. Moreover, evidence suggests the rabbis pored over every aspect of these stories, hoping to find answers to the questions we still continue to ask. Yet, while in some ways these stories provide the same things for us as it did for our early

ancestors (namely, a theological and philosophical framework), these stories may have had a greater similarity with the early lifestyle. Kvam suggests that this story is a wisdom tale in that its purpose is to “enhance the acceptance by both females and males of the often harsh realities of highland life and to provide ideological sanction for large families and for intense physical toil in subsistence activities.”¹³⁶ Yes, it is crucial for us to reexamine the text from our own vantage point, but it is also important to understand the way in which our ancestors over time have interacted with this story. This is part of the reason I wanted to use modern commentary in the first section, see how other ancient cultures understood this theme and compare traditional texts with modern feminist scholarship.

In the past, when I have explored texts from a feminist standpoint, I have often ended up feeling angry towards what I found. Earlier I wrote that there are some things which are simply part of our history, and that it would be best to acknowledge them and move forward. I acknowledge that there are gender-based components in Genesis 1-3 which are challenging. I acknowledge how the interpretation of this story has impacted the practice of Judaism. And yet, the more experience I have with explicating these texts, the more I am able to maintain a comfortable distance between the text and my anger to allow for a scholarly interpretation. As I mentioned before, despite our best intentions today, we can not ignore the years of challenging interpretations. And nor should we, because the process of exploring these challenges is part of our practice of

¹³⁶ Kvam, Eve and Adam: Jewish Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender – page 19

Judaism – both the way we respond to the text and what we do with that response.

This process has been fascinating and I know that I will never read, hear or tell
this story in the same way again.

APPENDIX

Appendix A – Additional Similarities Between Genesis 1-3 and Other Ancient Near Eastern Creation Stories

GENESIS	OTHER ANE CREATION STORIES
1:1 – In the beginning of God’s creating of the sky and the earth.	Both for us today and in our past, beginnings serve as an explanation for one’s origin, history and purpose. As a relatively new people, it is only natural that there would be a large number of creation stories from this part of the world. ¹³⁷
1:3 – And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.	According to <u>The Jewish Study Bible</u> , “other ancient Near Eastern myths similarly assume the existence of light before the creation of the luminaries.” ¹³⁸
1:23 – Said the man, “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.”	In the Sixth Tablet of <i>Enuma Elish</i> , we find an interesting parallel to this phrase. Marduk says, “My blood I will take and bone I will fashion,” which aligns with this particular verse and also the notion in the second creation story that God “fashions” creation, as opposed to “creating” creation. ¹³⁹ Some believe that the fact that Marduk uses his own blood could be a comparison to the human being created after God’s likeness.
	In <i>Enuma Elish</i> , a holy space is created, whereas in Genesis 1-3 a holy time is created. ¹⁴⁰ Considering that Genesis 1-3 was most likely written in exile, it is not surprising that the Jews preferred a holy time as opposed to one particular holy space.
2:17 – “But from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you may not eat from it because on the day you eat from it, you will surely die.”	Mitchell questions the role of <i>Gilgamesh</i> ’s plant from the Great Deep in relation to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He wonders, “if it doesn’t make you immortal like the fruit of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden – does it at least restore you to a protected youth in which

¹³⁷ Berlin and Brettler, The Jewish Study Bible – page 8

¹³⁸ Berlin and Brettler, The Jewish Study Bible – page 13

¹³⁹ L. W. King, The Seven Tablets of Creation – page xciii-xciv

¹⁴⁰ John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Gospel – page 128

¹⁴¹ Stephen Mitchell, Gilgamesh: A New English Version – [age 58

	you can't get sick or fatally injured?" ¹⁴¹
2:10 – "And a river went out from Eden to water the garden and from there it divided into four riverheads.	In the fragments of <i>Enuma Elish</i> (S.1704) there is a reference to a "River of Creation." ¹⁴²
3:1 – Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the animals of the field which God had made.	Judaism does not view the snake as being satanic, as Christianity will later do, yet we do acknowledge the definitive split this has caused between humans and animals. Robert Alter suggests that "behind it may stand, at a long distance of cultural mediation, Canaanite myths of a primordial sea serpent." ¹⁴³
3:24 – The man was driven out and was placed to dwell in the East of the garden of Eden and the cherubim had a sword of flames which turned every which way to guard the way to the tree of life.	According to Alter, "The cherubim, a common feature of ancient Near Eastern mythology, are not to be confused with the round-cheeked darlings of Renaissance iconography." ¹⁴⁴ In <i>Gilgamesh</i> , Humbaba is placed at the entrance to the Cedar Forest in order to protect what can not be touched.

¹⁴² L.W. King, The Seven Tablets of Creation– page xciv

¹⁴³ Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary – page 13

¹⁴⁴ Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary – page 28

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