

COVENANT AT MOAB. *See* COVENANT.

COVENANT CODE. *See* BOOK OF THE COVENANT.

COVENANT OF WORKS. *See* COVENANT.

COVENANT RENEWAL. *See* COVENANT; DEUTERONOMY, BOOK OF.

CRAFTS. *See* ARTS AND CRAFTS.

CREATIO EX NIHILO. *See* COSMOLOGY; CREATION.

CREATION

Comparisons between the biblical and ancient Near Eastern views of creation can be made on several different levels. First, one could compare individual features such as creation by spoken word or the materials used to create people. Second, one might examine the conceptual worldview concerning the cosmos and its origins. Third, comparisons could be made regarding the nature of the literary preservation of creation traditions and the relationships between those traditions. After summarizing the source material available, the following article will attempt comparison on each of these three levels between the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel. While it must be recognized that none of these three cultures is represented by a monolithic creation tradition, one can attempt to identify elements that were or were not present in the traditions available from each culture without implying that such elements were acknowledged or affirmed throughout the culture. The importance for students of the Bible of engaging in such comparative study is that it provides the basis for understanding the cultural background of the Israelites. The theological message of the Bible was communicated to people who lived in the ancient

Near Eastern world. If we desire to understand the theological message of the text, we will benefit by positioning it within the worldview of the ancient world rather than simply applying our own cultural perspectives.

1. Sources
2. Individual Features
3. Conceptual Worldview of the Cosmos
4. Literary Features

1. Sources.

1.1. *Creation Reports.* A number of documents from the ancient Near East contain extensive treatments of creation. It is questionable whether any of them can be labeled as creation accounts, since the ancient thinkers did not typically think of creation as an end in itself. Instead, these reports are often embedded in other types of literature.

1.1.1. *Egypt.* Principal cosmogonic texts relate to three important cult centers and their gods: at Memphis (Ptah), Heliopolis (Atum) and Hermopolis (Amun). The latter two are preserved in texts such as the Papyrus Leiden I 350 (Hermopolis, thirteenth century, *COS* 1.16:23-26) and in a number of places in the Pyramid Texts (mid-third millennium, cf. *COS* 1.4:7-8), the Coffin Texts (late third millennium, cf. Heliopolis version in spells 75-81, *COS* 1.5:8-14) and the Book of the Dead (second millennium). The first is represented in the Memphite Theology. The single known copy (on the Shabaka stone, *COS* 1.15:21-23) dates to about 700 B.C., though the original is usually dated to the thirteenth century (with some still favoring an Old Kingdom date).

1.1.2. *Mesopotamia.* Though the Atrahasis Epic (seventeenth century) contains an account of the creation of humanity (*COS* 1.30:451), *Enuma Elish*, sometimes referred to as the Babylonian Epic of Creation (twelfth century at the latest, *COS* 1.111:390-402), remains the principal text from Mesopotamia regarding the cosmological aspects of creation.

1.1.3. *Other.* Creation traditions are preserved in the Hittite Kumarbi Cycle and perhaps even in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, but space limitations will not allow inclusion of these in the discussion.

1.2. Allusions to Creation. Old Testament passages from Job, Psalms and Proverbs refer to in passing, or even take as a theme, the subject of creation. Such allusions also occur throughout the literatures of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan. Whether dealing with cosmology or cosmogony, they can at times offer small bits of data that can contribute to the larger picture.

1.2.1. Egypt. Allusions to cosmology and thus, at least indirectly, to creation are frequent in Egypt in the many inscriptions and paintings that are found on the walls of pyramids, coffins and temples. Allusions also occur in wisdom pieces such as the Instruction of Merikare (*COS* 1.35:65-66). Cosmological depictions such as that found on the Cenotaph of Seti I (thirteenth century, *COS* 1.1:5-6) can also be instructive.

1.2.2. Mesopotamia. Numerous Sumerian texts contain cosmogonic or cosmological statements. Myths make statements in passing, and rituals at times contain mythological sections that are cosmogonic. Even genealogical lists of the gods are thought to give hints to the extent that cosmogony can be inferred from theogony. Narrative texts from Nippur place Enlil in a prominent role, while texts from Eridu favor Enki. Prominent also are the disputation texts (e.g., Tree and Reed), which often have cosmogonic introductions. Akkadian cosmological information is also found in incantation texts as well as in introductions to dedicatory inscriptions.

2. Individual Features.

2.1. Chaotic Beginning. Ancient traditions do not typically begin with nothing. Instead, they start with a condition devoid of order, function or purpose. Creation then takes place by giving things order, function and purpose, which is synonymous with giving them existence. In Egypt, “on the first occasion” the god Amun is by himself, the first of the gods (Hermopolis, Papyrus Leiden I 350 80.13; 100.2). Despite the fact that Amun is said to exist before everything, he emerged from the waters. Egypt starts with the “nonexistent,” which describes a state where everything is still a unified whole. Creation takes place through diversification. “Nonexistence” is made up of water and darkness, and in it nothing is named or distinct (Hornung, 176-77). In *Enuma Elish* the emphasis is on

the absence of names and gods and the lack of differentiation. In neither of these cases is the chaos element virulent, aggressive, combative or evil. In Genesis 1:2 the description used is *tōhû wābōhû* (“formless and empty”). With a moment of thought it becomes obvious that this expression does not concern matter. No one suggests that this verse indicates that matter had not been shaped or that the cosmos described here is empty of matter. By logic alone the words can be seen to concern functionality, and analysis of the Hebrew confirms the conclusion that these terms indicate that the cosmos was empty of purpose, meaning and function, a place that had no order or intelligibility. Tsumura concludes that *tōhû* “seems to refer to a situation which lacks something abstract that should be there, such as worth, purpose, truth, profit and integrity” (Tsumura, 31).

2.2. Primal condition. Ancient sources are unanimous that the primal chaotic condition included two characteristics: water and darkness. Egyptian creation texts feature the first hillock emerging from the primeval waters (Allen 10, 14) and generally portray Nun as representing unbounded primeval waters in every direction: “On the day that Atum developed out of the Flood, out of the Waters, out of the Darkness, out of the Chaos” (Coffin Texts 76.27-29; Allen, 18). “In the Egyptian view, all that now exists began as a unity, a primordial Monad—Atum—floating in the dark, lifeless infinity of pre-creation. Atum describes this pre-creation state as ‘when I was alone with the waters’ ” (Coffin Texts 80.47; Allen, 24). “In this primordial universe, the Monad exists in a lifeless state, ‘in inertness,’ with the life-forms that are to develop from it in a similar state of inertness. . . . Creation is the enlivening of this inert potentiality” (Allen, 24). Sumerian texts describe lack of functions, undifferentiated heaven and earth, darkness and water (Clifford, 28). *Enuma Elish* begins with Apsu and Tiamat, together representing the primeval waters.

In Israel, the precreation condition also is characterized by darkness on the face of the deep. In addition, the text describes the “spirit of God hovering over the waters.” There has long been discussion concerning whether the text speaks of a supernatural wind or the spirit of God. To some extent, it could be said that this problem exists because Hebrew uses the

same word (*rûaḥ*) for the meteorological phenomena (wind) and for the metaphysical entity (spirit). Technically, however, it is not that Hebrew uses the same word for both a spirit and a wind but rather that *rûaḥ* is sufficiently broad to cover the whole category from spirit to wind. We cannot ask whether the author intended “spirit” or “wind”—the author intended *rûaḥ*. Westermann, representing those who translate “wind,” has pointed out that the three phrases of Genesis 1:2 should all be considered descriptions of the chaotic state. This would be supported by the close parallelism of the second and third clauses.

On the other hand, it is rightly pointed out that all of the other OT uses of *rûaḥ ʾēlōhîm* are most naturally translated “spirit of God” rather than “supernatural wind.” The motif of the wind in chaos scenes is well-recognized both in the ancient Near East and in the Bible. In *Enuma Elish*, the sky god Anu creates the four winds that stir up the deep and its goddess, Tiamat (1.105-110). There it is a disruptive wind bringing unrest (*COS* 1.111.392). The same phenomena can be seen in Daniel’s vision of the four beasts, where “the four winds of heaven were churning up the great sea” (Dan 7:2), a situation that disturbs the beasts there. The motif of the wind used as an instrument of God to master the waters can be found in the exodus narrative (Ex 14:21; 15:8). In these cases the wind is closely connected with deity and can be seen as something that is disturbing the pattern by creating chaos in the realm of chaos. Thus *rûaḥ ʾēlōhîm* can retain a provocative ambivalence in meaning. It can at the same time be a wind of supernatural proportion and character that contributes to the chaotic landscape as well as a representative of the power of God that embodies the potential that is about to be realized.

This would share some similarity with the Egyptian concept of “nonexistence” (not yet differentiated or assigned function), which carries with it the idea of potentiality and a quality of being absolute. The difference is that in Egyptian thought the potentiality was inherent in the primal waters, whereas in Genesis the potentiality is provided by God from outside. Here the *rûaḥ* may be seen as disrupting the power of chaos by bringing chaos into the realm of chaos. No citizen of the ancient Near East

would miss the reference to the chaos motif, and no Israelite would fail to understand the potential for action inherent in the divine spirit. An additional close study of the Israelite conception of the Spirit of the Lord and the meaning of the word translated “hover” leads us to summarize the Genesis description of the primal condition in the following paraphrase: “The earth was nonfunctional; chaos reigned in primordial, watery darkness, and a supernatural wind that was endowed with the power of God circulated about the surface of the waters.”

2.3. *Sea.* In Babylonian, Canaanite and Egyptian literature, the sea represents an element of chaos. The Mesopotamian sea is personified in the Akkadian deity Tiamat (though the god determinative is not used with her name in the theogony of *Enuma Elish*). The Egyptian chaos-ocean is personified in Nun, who has neither cult nor temple, and the Canaanite sea is personified in Yam, the enemy of Baal. In the creation account in Genesis, the sea (*těhôm*) is a primordial element but is neither deified nor personified. The *těhôm* represents chaos only as disorder, not as a threatening, combative enemy (as Tiamat becomes in *Enuma Elish*), nor as the source from which creation emerges, as in Egypt.

2.4. *Light.* Light as providing a remedy to the darkness occurs in Papyrus Leiden I 350 90.16: “Light was his development on the first occasion” (Allen, 51). In the Sumerian Praise of the Pickaxe, the separation of heaven and earth is followed by making light shine in the cosmos (Clifford, 31). In Genesis, the light also relieves the darkness, but it serves its purpose in the context of time, which is seen as the alternation between periods of light and periods of darkness.

2.5. *Creation by Speech.* This element is missing altogether from Mesopotamian traditions but has often been identified as an important factor in Egyptian understanding. It is particularly evident in the Memphite Theology. More recent studies have observed that while the Memphite Theology gives close attention to divine speech in creation, it goes well beyond the concept of fiat to something more like the *logos* idea of John 1 (Allen, 46). The divine word is almost magical in Egyptian thinking as it activates something that is already inherent in the precreation unity-of-all.

In contrast, the creative spoken word of God in Genesis is not just activating a potentiality. It is an act of “making into” rather than of “bringing out of.”

2.6. Naming. Generally in the ancient world the assignment of functions is connected to the giving of names. Egyptian literature identified the creator god as the one who pronounced the name of everything (Memphite Theology, line 55). In this way of thinking, things did not exist unless they were named. “It was believed that the name of a living being or an object was not just a simple or practical designation to facilitate the exchange of ideas between persons but that it was the very essence of what was defined, and that the actual pronouncing of a name was to create what was spoken” (Plumley, 38). Likewise, *Enuma Elish* begins with the heavens and the earth not yet named and when the gods had not yet been given names. Then Lahmu and Lahamu emerge, and their names are pronounced (*COS* 1.111:391). In Genesis, God initiates the creative act with a spoken word and finalizes the act with the giving of a name. In this way the members of creation are brought into functional existence.

2.7. Separation of Waters. Egyptians thought of the universe as a limitless ocean (Nun) above the sky paralleled by waters under the earth (Allen, 4). These had been separated when the god of the air, Shu, came into being as the space between them. In one of the most familiar scenes of *Enuma Elish*, the victorious Marduk splits the corpse of the vanquished Tiamat, dividing her waters in half (above and below; 4.135-138). Israel had no need to divide a god or to interject a god but saw the waters as simply divided by an act of God. Nonetheless, it should be noticed that even as Genesis distances itself from the theology, it confirms the ancient perspective of the cosmology by retaining the view of waters above and below.

2.8. Firmament. Egyptian texts have the concept of a vault that prevents the waters from flooding the earth. This vault is less solid than in the Mesopotamian view (Allen, 4-5). If it is not the sky god Shu who is portrayed as holding up the sky, staves that resemble tent poles are depicted (Hoffmeier, 7). In Mesopotamia, *Enuma Elish* 4.139 reports a “skin/hide”

(Akk. *mašku*) that is established to hold back the waters of Tiamat, who has just been divided to be set up as the waters above and below. We also learn from Babylonian texts that they believed in three levels of heaven. Each one had a different type of stone for its pavement (Horowitz, 4-11), though these pavements were not understood as holding back the primal waters. In the Bible this pavement concept is represented in Exodus 24:10, where the elders have a vision of God in which he is walking on a sapphire (= lapis lazuli) pavement. The Babylonian texts say the middle heavens are paved with *saggilmud*-stone, which has the appearance of lapis lazuli. This was believed to give the sky its blue color. The lower heavens are said to have a platform of jasper, usually associated with a glassy, translucent or opaque appearance. This is paralleled in Ezekiel's vision in which the platform of the mobile chariot-throne is identified as being of the same quality (Ezek 1:22).

The platform in Ezekiel is called a *rāqîa'*, the same word used in Genesis 1:6-8 (NIV: "expanse"). Despite the NIV's attempt to mitigate the meaning of this word in Genesis 1 through an ambiguous translation such as "expanse" and the attempt of others to make it scientifically precise through the translation "atmosphere," Seely has amply demonstrated that, structurally speaking, the *rāqîa'* was perceived by the Israelite audience, as by nearly everyone else until modern times, as a solid dome (Seely 1991, 1992). This conclusion is not based on false etymologizing that extrapolates the meaning of the noun from its verbal forms (which have to do with beating something out) but on the comparison of the lexical data from OT usage of the noun with the cultural context of the ancient Near East. In Genesis 1:17 the heavenly bodies are set in the *rāqîa'*. In Mesopotamian understanding, the stars were engraved on the jasper surface of the heavens, and the entire surface moved. In astronomical texts (Mul-Apin series) the thirty-six principal stars were divided into three segments known as the paths of Anu, Enlil and Ea. These fixed stellar paths occupied the northern, southern and equatorial bands of the sky (Horowitz, 170). In the omen series known as *Enuma Anu Enlil*, the gods Anu, Enlil and Ea established the positions, locations and paths of the stars (Horowitz, 146-47). In *Enuma Elish* Marduk

sets up the stations of the stars (Horowitz, 114-15). Thus the idea of setting the heavenly bodies in a solid background is the common perception. Additionally, it must be observed that since the Israelites located the realm of both the birds and the stars in relation to the *rāqîa'*, there is no scientifically identifiable structure with which the *rāqîa'* can be identified. The text is using ancient conventional thinking about structure to communicate other, more important issues. Nevertheless, it is not accurate to say there is no such thing as a *rāqîa'*—there is a *rāqîa'*, and it is blue. But it is an observed reality with a function connected to it, not a structural reality.

2.9. Seasons/Calendar. A Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual astrological treatise provides the most detailed description of the creation of the heavenly bodies and their functions. The decrees are set up for the heavens, and the celestial bodies are brought forth for determination of days, months, omens and calendar (Clifford, 67-68). The Hebrew word used for “sign” has a cognate in Akkadian that is used for omens. The Hebrew word, however, has a more neutral sense, and again the author has emptied the elements of the cosmos of their more personal traits. Signs function theologically in the OT as indicators used by God to convey knowledge and through which he reveals himself. They can be used for warning, motivation and authentication. Eclipses would be one of the examples of the heavenly bodies being used for signs. This is not a mechanical function, but a theological one.

The second function in Genesis indicates that the celestial bodies serve for identifying *mô'ādîm*, which NIV, along with many others, translates “seasons.” Vogels has demonstrated, however, that throughout the Pentateuch as well as in most other contexts, the *mô'ādîm* are not seasons such as summer and winter but the festivals and religious feast days of the liturgical calendar (Vogels, 163-66). Again, this is not a mechanical function but a socioreligious one. The third and last function in the list indicates that the celestial bodies are “for days and years.” This is one function, not two, because the preposition is not repeated. The positions of the sun, moon and stars served as the foundation for calendrical calculations

in the ancient world. The idea is not that they simply marked the passage of time but that the calendar was established through celestial observations. The cycle of the moon was used to establish when months began and ended. The stars were used to help calculate the solar year and make periodic adjustments to the calendar to synchronize the lunar calendar with the solar calendar. This was essential because a strictly lunar calendar would eventually skew the agricultural seasons. The functional approach to the celestial bodies is therefore mirrored both in biblical and in Mesopotamian literature.

2.10. Sea Creatures. In the Instruction of Merikare 134-135, monsters of the waters are subdued prior to making heavens and earth. In *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat fashions eleven monsters to wreak havoc among the gods (1.133-146). Besides these ominous foes, Marduk must take on the ultimate sea monster, Tiamat. A cylinder seal that is thought to represent a scene from the Babylonian Epic of Creation may depict Tiamat in sea-serpent form (Collon, 180, no. 850). In the Bible the word translated “sea creatures” in Genesis 1:21 (*tannîn*) is used in parallel to names of chaos monsters such as Rahab and Leviathan (Ps 74:13; Is 27:1; 51:9). Even if it is taken in Genesis 1 as having mythological overtones, there is no hint of aggression or combat that would associate the Genesis account with its mythological cousins. In fact, the *tannîn* is simply another of the creatures that God created (note the use of *bārāʾ*). Hasel saw this as an inescapable indication that the author of Genesis was devising a conscious polemic against the mythological background of the day.

2.11. Animals. In an Akkadian disputation text Two Insects, the classes of animals are created by the gods. They are categorized by size (large and small) and as wild or domesticated (Clifford, 65). Otherwise animals do not figure prominently in the extant creation narratives.

2.12. Dust/Clay. Khnum forms people out of clay on the potter’s wheel (Pyramid Texts 445, 522). In the Sumerian Enki and Ninmah (*COS* 1.159:516-19), people are formed out of clay. In the Atrahasis Epic clay is mixed with the blood of the slain leader of the rebel gods. This concoction is believed to approximate the appearance of the placenta, which

Babylonians would have considered the leftover raw materials after a baby was made in the womb (Kilmer, 211-13). The Hebrew word *ʾāpār* is most frequently used to refer to that which is of a loose, granular consistency, thus “dust” or “soil.” Hebrew has other words for clay or mud, and *ʾāpār* occasionally overlaps with them (Job 10:9). Even when it refers to plaster or mortar, it is most likely referring to the dry, powdery form that it takes on after it sets (Lev 14:41-45). In Genesis 2 the significance of dust is not that it represents the raw materials found in the womb or because of any usefulness it has for sculpting but because it is what people return to when they die. This connection with the soil is even represented lexically in that humankind (*ʾādām*) returns to the ground (*ʾādāmā*, Gen 3:19).

2.13. *Breath of Life.* The most extensive statement regarding the nature of humankind is found in the Akkadian Atrahasis Epic. Deities Enki and Nintu mix pure clay with the blood and flesh of the slain deity but also include the spirit of the slain god in the final product. Egyptian texts, however, come much closer to the mark. The Coffin Texts’ deity claims, “My life is in their nostrils, I guide their breath into their throats” (Coffin Texts 2.43). In the Instruction of Merikare, the god Re “made the breath of life for their nostrils.” The next line in Merikare associates this with humans being in the divine image. As a result, the breathing into Adam of the breath of life may be the text’s description of the mechanism by which people were created in God’s image, though animals also have the breath of life. The term translated “breath” is used in the OT a total of twenty-four times, though the combination with life is not found elsewhere. Usually the term refers to all those who breathe. The usage makes it clear that all people have the breath of life, so God breathes it into every person who is born. It was not just a one-time thing with Adam. The point that people have been animated by the divine breath finds some parallel in the way that images of the deity in the ancient world were believed to be animated by the deity. This concept is represented in the “opening of the mouth” ritual that was performed on the newly carved idol to give it vitality (Dick).

2.14. *Image of God.* In the Memphite Theology all of creation is in the image of the creator (Allen, 45). In the ancient world an image was believed

in some ways to carry the essence of that which it represented. An idol image of deity would be used in the worship of that deity because it contained the essence of the deity. This would not suggest that the image could do what the deity could do nor that it looked the same as the deity (even though the idol was a physical object). Rather, the deity's work was thought to be accomplished through the idol. Generally, Egyptian usage refers to the king as being in the image of deity, not as a physical likeness but related to power and prerogative. In Mesopotamia one significance of the image can be seen in the practice of kings setting up images of themselves in places where they wanted to establish their authority. Other than that, it is only other gods who were made in the image of gods. So Mesopotamian traditions speak of sons being in the image of their fathers (*Enuma Elish* 1.15-16) but not of humans created in the *image of God. The Hebrew word *selem* is a representative in physical form, not a representation of the physical appearance. The image is a physical manifestation of divine (or royal) essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes and act on behalf of the one represented.

2.15. Rest. In the ancient Near East one of the major objectives of the gods as they become involved in creative activity is to create a resting place for themselves. Whether this is a rest achieved when the monstrous forces of chaos are defeated or when a sanctuary is completed, the gods constantly seek the repose that comes from achieving equilibrium in the world. In *Enuma Elish* the absence of rest leads to the confrontation between the gods. So Apsu complains to Tiamat concerning the disruptive behavior of the lower gods (1:35-40). Having successfully defeated Tiamat, Marduk reorganizes the gods and the cosmos under his control and concludes by building Babylon, the sacred city. He names the shrine "Chamber That Shall Be Our Stopping Place" and anticipates finding rest there (6:51-58). In the ancient Near East, as in the Bible, temples are for divine "rest," and divine rest is found in sanctuaries or sacred space. Just as Baal is portrayed as building a palace for himself to find rest in, so God is creating a resting place for himself both in the cosmos in Genesis as well as in the temple (Ps

132:13-14; cf. Levenson, 288). Consequently, the functional cosmos in Genesis is not set up with only people in mind. The cosmos is also intended to carry out a function related to God. On the seventh day we finally discover that God has been working to achieve a rest. This seventh day is not a theological appendix to the creation account, just to bring closure now that the main event of creating people has been reported. Rather, it intimates the purpose of creation and of the cosmos. God does not set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple in which he will find rest in the order and equilibrium that he has established.

3. Conceptual Worldview of the Cosmos.

The preceding survey of individual characteristics demonstrates that the creation account in Genesis parallels the framework of creation accounts in the ancient world, even while differing from them literarily. At the same time, Israel's account often distances itself theologically even while using similar constructs. Hasel, seeking to reveal the polemical nature of the Genesis account, speaks of the biblical narrative not as reflecting the contemporary worldview but of overcoming it (Hasel, 88). There are admittedly many points in the narrative where such an antimythical, polemical perspective can be plausibly supported. In the process, however, the numerous points of worldview continuity should not be ignored or neglected. The following analysis of worldview elements will demonstrate that even given a degree of polemic, the Israelites still thought about creation in terms much more similar to the ancient world than to our own post-Enlightenment perspective. Their departure from the traditional ancient worldview was theological, not cosmological.

3.1. *Order out of Chaos.* Nowhere in the ancient Near East did people think of creation primarily in terms of *making* things. It is only our post-Enlightenment, Western way of thinking that focuses so steadfastly and exclusively on physical structure and formational history. As can be seen from the analysis of individual elements above, creation in the ancient world constituted bringing order to the cosmos from an originally chaotic or

nonfunctional condition. Israel shared this view. The Hebrew verb *bārā'* (“created”) makes precisely that point, though it has not generally been recognized. The verb occurs fifty times in the OT and has some curious features worth noting. First, it takes only God as its subject or implied actor and therefore must be identified as a characteristically divine activity. Second, its objects are widely varied. Objects of the verb include people groups (Ps 102:18 [MT 102:19]; Ezek 21:30 [MT 21:35]); Jerusalem (Is 65:18); nonmaterial phenomena such as wind, fire, cloud, destruction, calamity or darkness (Ex 34:10; Num 16:30; Is 45:7; Amos 4:13); and abstractions such as righteousness, purity or praise (Ps 51:10 [MT 51:12]; Is 57:19). Even when the object is something more tangible (sea creatures in Gen 1:21), the point is not necessarily physical manufacturing as much as assigning roles. This direction is picked up nicely in Genesis 5:2, where God creates people male and female, that is, with established roles.

In all of these cases, something is brought into existence functionally, not materially; rarely would the statement concern the issue of matter. Indeed, the text never uses *bārā'* in a context in which materials are mentioned. Instead of suggesting manufacture of matter out of nothing (as many have inferred in the past), this suggests that manufacture is not the issue. The lexical analysis suggests, instead, that the essence of the word that the text has chosen, *bārā'*, concerns bringing heaven and earth into existence by focusing on operation through organization and assignment of roles and functions.

Even in English we use the verb *create* within a broad range of contexts but rarely apply it to material things (i.e., parallel in concept to “manufacture”). One can create a piece of art, but that expression does not suggest manufacture of the canvas or paint. Even more abstractly, one can create a situation (e.g., havoc) or a condition (an atmosphere). In these cases, the verb indicates a role or function. When someone creates a department, a committee, a curriculum or an advertising campaign, it is an organizational task. A person puts it together and makes it work. In this category, Hebrew use of *bārā'* is very similar. Perhaps an English verb that captures this idea less ambiguously is “to design” (though *bārā'* would

include both planning and implementing the design). The interpretation that the above analysis suggests is that the text asserts that in the seven-day initial period God brought the cosmos into operation (a condition that defines existence) by assigning roles and functions. Though theological belief based on all of Scripture would appropriately affirm that God made all of the matter of which the cosmos is composed (and that he made it out of nothing), lexical analysis does not lead to the conclusion that Genesis 1 is making such a statement by the use of *bārā*'. The origin of matter is what our society has taught us is important (indeed that matter is all there is), but we cannot afford to be so distracted by our cultural ideas. Matter was not the concern of the author of Genesis.

The author's concerns were much like those in the rest of the ancient Near East. There the greatest exercise of the power of the gods was not demonstrated in the manufacture of matter but in the fixing of destinies. In *Enuma Elish*, when Tiamat and Kingu rebelled against the gods, Tiamat procured the tablet of destinies and turned them over to Kingu. This element takes on even more significance in the older Myth of Anzu (Dalley, 203-27), from which *Enuma Elish* derived some of its material. In this tale the monster Anzu, impressed with the power wielded by Enlil using the tablet of destinies, steals it so that he can lord it over the gods. Each year at the all-important *akītu*, Babylon's New Year's enthronement festival, the gods fixed the destinies for the coming year, thus reasserting their power. Here in Genesis, Israel's God also demonstrates his power by the assigning of roles and functions. Genesis distances itself from the ancient Near East in portraying God's power as so much greater than the gods of Mesopotamia. But it conforms by evaluating his power in the categories typically addressed in the ancient Near Eastern worldview. This would be comparable to theologians today interpreting Genesis in light of something like the big-bang theory. The scientific framework would conform to views of today, but the theology would be distinct by virtue of its biblical foundations.

3.2. Theogony/Cosmogony. "Egyptians lived in a universe composed not of *things*, but of *beings*" (Allen, 8). In the beginning of the process, the

creator god created by means of his own bodily emissions (sperm, saliva or mucous; Allen 13-14). Then procreation proceeded to fill in the first rank of deities that represented the principal elements of the universe. This concept is represented not just in creation, but also in daily reenactment (e.g., the sky goddess Nut giving birth to the sun each day; Allen, 5). In Akkadian literature, the first twenty lines of the first tablet of *Enuma Elish* contain a theogony that brings the gods connected to the primal elements into existence. In the Late Babylonian manuscript known as the Dunnu Theogony (*COS* 1.112:402-3), a very different approach is found. Rather than featuring primal elements of nature in the theogony, individuals such as Plough, Furrows, Pasture, Poplar, Flocks and Cattle god are main characters. This is one area of worldview where the biblical text stands firmly against the common ancient worldview. Israelites had no other gods to bring into existence, and they did not identify deity with the primal elements or the natural phenomena. Their God was not self-developing, nor did he emerge from a primal element. There was therefore no place for a theogony and no theogonic element in Israelite cosmogony.

3.3. Theomachy. While the primal elements were generally brought into being through theogony, it was often a battle between the gods (theomachy) that eventuated in the full organization and setting of destinies for the cosmos. In Akkadian literature *Enuma Elish* provides the most familiar account of this in the battle between Marduk and Tiamat in tablets 4-6. These battles are often seen as driving back the forces of chaos in order to impose order on the cosmos. This combat myth motif is not always associated with creation. It can be observed in Ugaritic literature in Baal's conflict with Yam (though some continue to suggest that the Baal cycle does have cosmogonic elements) and in the Babylonian Myth of Anzu, one of the precursors to *Enuma Elish*. Egyptian literature features the battle of Re against the serpent Apophis (*COS* 1.21:32). In the Genesis creation narrative, the serenity and effortlessness of the creation process stand in stark contrast to the uproar and confusion that often characterizes the ancient Near Eastern myths. One has only to read the Psalms (e.g., Ps 65; 74; 89; 93), however, to discover a combat motif in the Israelite worldview

—both in the original creation and in sustaining creation. Even so, these scenarios pose no threat to Yahweh but only suggest that he has been and continues to be the force that holds chaos at bay. Unlike the other gods, he never had his authority taken from him, nor did he have to gain or regain a particular status.

3.4. *Role and Status of the Gods.* Egyptian creator gods are most often portrayed as self-developing and preexistent (Allen, 48). Most texts consider the creator as immanent in the forces of nature and initially as having all of creation inherent in him. Exceptions occur on both counts. Amun is portrayed in the Pyramid Texts in more transcendent terms, and Ptah is portrayed not so much as having all creation inherent in him but as having all the plans for creation in his thoughts (Allen, 48). Amun is said to have “created himself by himself” (Hermopolis tradition, Papyrus Leiden I 350 40.4; Allen, 49). In the history of Akkadian theology, the kingship of the gods is passed from one deity to another. Anu, then his son Enlil, then Marduk or Ashur, serve as king of the gods. Kingship is evidenced by reorganizing and by decreeing the destinies. All of the available mythological material illuminates the concept of deity that existed across the ancient Near East, and it differs considerably from the view attested in the Bible. Clifford synthesizes several important elements as he observes, “The sovereign freedom of the gods is limited by their need for the human race. Creation of humankind was necessary for peace in the divine world, and its restoration was necessary for the gods to live in the idleness that befits them” (Clifford, 81). In contrast, the creation narratives in Genesis are quite clear about God’s autonomy. He has no need of humans, nor is he under any compulsion to create them. In avoiding both theogony and theomachy, the text offers a view of God that enhances the concept of purposeful, sovereign control of the process of creation. Like its contemporary counterparts, however, the Bible insists (against some modern views) that there was no cause and effect process independent of deity.

3.5. *Function and Structure.* Egyptians were more interested in that which was metaphysical than in that which was physical. “They are

concerned primarily with what lies beyond physical reality” (Allen, 56). As the sky goddess, Nut is portrayed arching her body over the disk-shaped earth. She is often supported by the hands of the god of the air while the earth god, Geb, lies prone at her feet. This is not a structural representation. The Egyptians did not believe that one could step on Nut’s toes or throw a rock and hit her knees. Instead, the portrayal communicates important truths concerning what the Egyptians believed about authority and jurisdiction in the cosmos. These are functional truths, not structural truths. And though they may not represent structural truths, they represent what to them was reality. The cosmos functioned by means of the gods playing out their roles. Whatever the physical structure of the heavens, it was of little concern to them. To describe creation was to describe the establishment of the functioning cosmos, not the origins of the material structure of the cosmos. Structure was irrelevant.

In Akkadian literature the assigning of functions (fixing of destinies) was of central importance in the original creation as well as in the continual renewal of creation. In Genesis 1:3-5 it becomes clear that for the Israelites also, function, not structure, was the focus of creation. In Genesis 1:5a, the NIV translates, “God called the light [*ôr*] ‘day’ [*yôm*], and the darkness he called ‘night.’ ” If God called the light *yôm*, why does the text continue throughout the OT to call light *ôr*? It is a question anyone could answer with a little thought: It was not the element of light itself that God called *yôm* but the *period* of light. There is a term for the semantic phenomenon that is observed here, namely, metonymy. In metonymy the meaning of a word is extended to include things closely related to it. When the White House makes a statement, it is understood that the building is not talking. And so it is not the physicist’s light that is being named *yôm* but rather the period of light—obvious enough because that is what *yôm* is often used to refer to in the rest of Scripture. But if the word *ôr* refers to a period of light in Genesis 1:5, what about in 1:4? There God separates the light from the darkness. Again I find “period of light” much more plausible here. The physicist’s light cannot be separated from darkness, but alternating periods

of light and darkness can be set up. Still, we cannot stop there. If the text means for us to understand “period of light” in both Genesis 1:4 and 5, what about 1:3? Hermeneutical consistency, I think, would lead us to believe that when God said “Let there be *’ôr*,” we must then understand it as, “Let there be a period of light.” We could only conclude, then, that day one does not concern itself with the creation of the physicist’s light, that is, light as a physical element with physical properties. Day one concerns something much more significant, something much more elemental to the functioning of the cosmos and to our experience of the cosmos. On day one, God created *time*. This is the first of the functions that God is going to use to bring order to the chaos of the cosmos: the orderly and regular sequence of time.

As the functional approach continues, day two in Genesis demonstrates God’s setting up of weather. The *rāqîa’* is what regulates the weather. The third day, in its two parts, sets up agriculture. This is accomplished by providing for water sources, soil and the biological principle that seeds will continue to propagate each species. *Enuma Elish*, in a fragmentary section of tablet 5, contains a similar sequence of functions. Lines 39-40 make reference to the day and the year and are followed up in line 46 by a reference to the watches of the night. In lines 47-52 Marduk creates precipitation accompanied by clouds, winds and fog. Then in lines 53-58 water sources on earth are set up and dirt is piled up (Horowitz, 117-18). Thus we could see time, weather and agriculture addressed in order and in functional terms. This demonstrates the radical contrast between the terms in which the Israelites thought about cosmic origins and the terms in which we think about them. When we ask the question, “How does the cosmos work?” we seek an answer that discusses physical laws and structures. In our worldview, function is a consequence of structure, and a discussion of creation therefore must, *of course*, direct itself to the making of things. In contrast, when Israelites asked, “How does the cosmos work?” they were on a totally different wavelength, because in the ancient worldview *function was a consequence of purpose*. Thus the Israelites can be seen to have had

the same functional approach to creation as is evident in the ancient Near East.

3.6. *Cosmos as Temple.* The visualizing of the cosmos as a temple can be seen across the ancient Near East. Egyptian temple texts often portray the temple as related to the cosmic mountain or the first primeval hillock to emerge from the waters of chaos. The temple is portrayed as being in the center of the cosmos, with waters flowing forth from its midst (Lundquist, 208). In Ugaritic mythology the house Baal seeks for himself is a cosmic temple. A prayer to dedicate the foundation brick of a temple shows the close connection between cosmos and temple in Akkadian thinking:

When Anu, Enlil and Ea had a (first) idea of heaven and earth, they found a wise means of providing for the support of the gods: They prepared, in the land, a pleasant dwelling, and the gods were installed in this dwelling: their principal temple. Then they entrusted to the king the responsibility of assuring them regular choice offerings. And for the feast of the gods, they established the required food offering! The gods loved this dwelling! Thus did they institute their hold over what became the principal land of humans. (Clifford, 61-62)

Mesopotamian cosmological texts such as *Enuma Elish* (where Marduk organizes the universe and then has a shrine constructed), Mesopotamian temple building texts (Hurowitz) and especially the account of Gudea's temple project all contribute to this association.

In the extensive Sumerian texts recounting Gudea's construction of a temple for Ningirsu (*COS* 2.155:417-33), there are several items worthy of note. First is the statement that the sanctuary is being constructed in order to provide a resting place for Ningirsu and his consort, Bau. Second, the dedication ceremonies last seven days. A third item of significance is that the text touches on many of the pertinent elements that we recognize from Genesis 1, including the proclamation of functions and the installation of functionaries (cyl. B.6-12). Additionally, Hurowitz has noticed that the description of the temple construction is not architectural in nature. Despite the detail, the accounts "do not enable the reader to visualize the shape of the temple, even partially or schematically" (40 n. 5). This is in accord with

what was discussed above about the Genesis creation account being functional rather than structural. Just as Gudea's account established functions for the temple and then supplied functionaries to operate in it, the Genesis account set up functions (days one to three) and functionaries (days four to six) for the cosmic temple. Genesis 2:1 indicates this as it refers to the creation of heaven and earth (the cosmos with its functions) and *all their hosts* (the functionaries in the various realms of the cosmos). In a temple-construction project, the structure would be built, and the furniture and trappings would be made in preparation for the moment when all was ready for the dedication of the temple. On this occasion, normally a seven-day celebration, the functions of the temple would be declared, the furniture and hangings would be put in place, the priests would be installed, and the appropriate sacrifices would be made to initiate the temple's operation. Somewhere in the process the image of the deity would be brought into the temple to take up his repose in his new residence.

Isaiah 66:1 expresses clearly the temple-cosmos function in biblical theology as it identifies heaven as God's throne and earth as his footstool, providing a resting place for him. God likewise achieves rest on the seventh day of creation, just as he takes up rest in his temple. The sabbath element helps us to recognize the temple-cosmos equation in Genesis and to realize the contextual significance of the functions and functionaries in the creation narrative. As noted earlier, "rest" does not imply relaxation but more like achieving equilibrium and stability. The environment God creates is not intended to provide rest for the people he has created (though that becomes a significant piece of theology as time goes on). Rather, God is making a rest for himself, a rest provided for by the completed cosmos. Inhabiting his resting place is the equivalent to being enthroned; it is connected to taking control in his role as sovereign ruler of the cosmos. The temple in turn simply provides a symbolic reality for this concept. Psalm 104:2-4 captures this as the elements of the cosmos serve as functionaries for Yahweh's rule.

The connections that underline the temple-cosmos relationship in Genesis 1—2 are numerous. The celestial bodies are referred to using the unusual term "lights," which throughout the rest of the Pentateuch refers to

the lights of the lampstand that functions to give light in the tabernacle. It should also be noted that the idea of rivers flowing from the holy place is found both in Genesis 2 (which portrays Eden as the holy of holies) and in Ezekiel's temple (Ezek 47:1). A third element is that when people are assigned their function in Genesis 2:15, the priestly terms *'ābad* and *šāmar* are used. The main connection, however, is the rest motif, for rest is the principal function of a temple, and a temple is always where deity finds rest. Further contributing to this important concept is the fact that, just as the cosmos is portrayed in temple terms, the temple is configured as a microcosmos. Yahweh is said to find repose in the temple (e.g., Ps 132:13-14).

3.7. *Role and Status of People.* The idea that people were created to do the work that the gods had tired of is found in the Sumerian account Enki and Ninmah and in the Akkadian Atrahasis Epic. In the ancient worldview people were slaves to the gods with no dignity other than that which came from the knowledge that the gods could not get along without humans to meet their needs. Whereas the Mesopotamian literature is concerned about the jurisdiction of the various gods in the cosmos, with humankind at the bottom of the heap, the Genesis account is interested in the jurisdiction of humankind over the rest of creation as a result of the *image of God in which people were created. The concept of being in the image of God provides for human dignity and the sanctity of human life in the biblical view. It could be said, then, that human dignity derived in Mesopotamia from being needed by the gods, in Israel from being entrusted by God. Humans in divine service in Mesopotamia were viewed as laborers, in Israel as priests. Despite these important differences, both cultures saw people as having been created to serve deity.

3.8. *Depiction of Structural Cosmos.* When the philosophers of the ancient world did try to depict something of the structure of the cosmos, they usually divided it into three levels. In Mesopotamian models the cosmos in its most basic form was divided into heaven, earth and Apsu (under the earth; this information is thoroughly and conveniently gathered and discussed in Horowitz). Several documents divide the three levels still

further. Some Sumerian documents speak of seven heavens and seven earths, while Akkadian texts favor three of each. In this model, the upper heavens belong to Anu. Here is where Tiamat's waters are contained. The middle heavens are occupied by the Igigi gods and Marduk, and the lower heavens by the stars. In the three levels of earth, the upper level is that occupied by people; the middle level, where the underground waters are, by Ea; and the lower region, the netherworld, is the dwelling of the Anunnaki gods. These levels (both of heaven and earth) are considered to be disk-shaped and are either held up at the edges by pillars/mountains or bound together with ropes. The sky has gates through which the heavenly bodies, as well as the clouds and winds, pass. The dry land is surrounded by a boundless ocean of primordial waters. The Egyptian depictions portray the gods in the various roles. The sky god Shu stands or kneels on the earth god Geb (in prone position) and holds up Nut, who represents the heavens. Stars are depicted as covering Nut, and the boat of the sun god sails over the top of her arched body. Though the artistic representation differs, there is little that differentiates the cosmological models of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Furthermore, when we compare this general cosmological model to Israelite texts, we find striking similarities. Since Israel had no revelation that would alter their cosmological model, it is not surprising to find that they conformed to the consensus of the day. God did not use a revised cosmology to communicate all of the important differences in cosmogony.

3.9. *Worldview Conclusions.* Summarizing the data introduced above, it is evident that the Israelite worldview had a number of elements in common with the broader culture of the day. Continuity with the ancient Near East is evident in issues concerning the cosmos; discontinuity is evident in issues concerning deity. Thus, the Israelites shared with their neighbors the belief that creation concerns functions, not structures, and that it involved bringing order out of chaos. These are not perspectives that our modern culture typically holds. Israel also had no reason to deny the depiction of the cosmos common to the ancient world and believed that the cosmos should be perceived as a temple. Israel and her neighbors all believed that people had been created to serve God, though there is a significant variation

in the understanding of how people served God. The discontinuity then widens as the role and status of deity becomes involved and theogony and theomachy are rejected as theologically deficient views. These latter are areas where Israel enjoyed revelation that helped them rise above the common philosophies of the day.

4. Literary Features.

B. F. Batto's summary of the situation probably well represents critical conclusions concerning the creation account in Genesis:

In its present form the Israelite primeval myth (Genesis 1—9) is a combination of an original Yahwistic primeval myth and later Priestly supplementation. J and P both drew heavily upon Mesopotamian cosmogonic tradition, even while creating a new and distinctively Israelite myth based on Yahwistic beliefs. J, being the first and lacking prior Israelite models, patterned his myth to large extent upon the Akkadian cosmogonic myth Atrahasis, both with regard to structure and themes. P, attempting to maintain continuity with the tradition established by J even while reforming it, was more subtle in the manner in which he drew upon Mesopotamian myth, principally the Babylonian myth Enuma Elish. (quoted in Clifford and Collins, 36-37).

This sort of maximalist position would see the biblical authors as working directly from Mesopotamian exemplars as they carried out theological transformations. Though this sort of conclusion is common, the summary of comparative literary studies of Genesis 1—11 offered by R. S. Hess in the introduction to *"I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood"* demonstrates that Batto's conclusions are far from universally held. D. Tsumura's introduction in the same volume details the rejection of dependence on the Babylonian materials by such well-known Assyriologists as W. G. Lambert and A. Sjöberg.

At the other end of the spectrum, a minimalist position, typical of traditional evangelical interpretation, would deny any possibility of literary borrowing. For confessional scholars who consider it important to maintain the integrity of biblical inspiration, the idea that the author of Genesis made

use of material from the ancient Near East need occasion no more concern than the idea that Solomon incorporated into the book of Proverbs some of the wisdom material that he had encountered in the wisdom of his world. Inspiration can operate through editors, redactors and tradents as effectively as it operates through authors. Nevertheless, given the complexity of the transmission of tradition and culture in the ancient world, literary dependence is extremely difficult to prove. In the end, A. R. Millard's assessment several decades ago of the prospects of literary borrowing in the flood narratives is appropriate for the creation narratives as well: "All who suspect or suggest borrowing by the Hebrews are compelled to admit large-scale revision, alteration, and reinterpretation in a fashion that cannot be substantiated for any other composition from the ancient Near East or in any other Hebrew writing" (quoted in Hess and Tsumura, 127).

See also ADAM; COSMOLOGY; GENESIS, BOOK OF; IMAGE OF GOD; THEOLOGY OF THE PENTATEUCH.

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CREATOR. *See* THEOLOGY OF THE PENTATEUCH.

CROPS. *See* AGRICULTURE.

CURSES. *See* BLESSINGS AND CURSES.