

THE CREATION WARS

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CHAPTER 6: EVANGELICALS AND NEAR EASTERN IMAGERY

A. LUTHER AND COPERNICUS

Paul Seely argued that the best way to relate Genesis to the scientific evidence is to accept the fact that Genesis reflected the cosmology of the 2nd millennium BC. Seely suggested that the theological message of Genesis 1 should be stressed along with the radical differences between Genesis and ancient Near Eastern mythology. Seely argued that the theological message of Genesis 1 could be eternally valid even though it was packaged in a format that was a concession to the people of that age. Seely argued that even Jesus taught in Mark 10:5 that Scripture made concessions to hardened hearts. So why could it not make concessions to ancient science?

One common topic of debate has been the firmament of Genesis 1:6-8. This firmament was described as being above the earth. Many young earth authors depict it as an ice layer above the earth that produced the waters of Noah's flood. Evidence for this can be found in Ezekiel 1:22-26. The prophet saw God reigning on His heavenly throne. Below the throne stretched out a firmament that seemed to resemble solid ice. If Ezekiel's firmament is used to interpret Genesis 1, the firmament of creation could have been a layer of ice.¹

Seely wrote an interesting case for the nature of the "firmament" in the ancient Near East. He argued that both the Bible and the ancient Near East saw the firmament as a solid blue dome that covered the earth. Seely argued that all people everywhere in the world before 200 AD believed this to be true, and almost all peoples believed this all the way down to modern times. Seely argued that if this interpretation of the firmament was accepted everywhere in the ancient Near East, the burden of proof lies with those who claim that Israel rejected this perspective. Seely noted that Genesis 1:20 located the birds as flying in front of the face of the firmament. Seely argued that this demonstrated that the firmament was the solid dome of the sky. Seely noted that both Jewish and Christian authors before the Renaissance usually interpreted the "waters above the firmament" as a sea that existed above the sun and above the dome of the sky. Seely argued that everyone in Moses' day believed that the earth was a flat disc that was embedded in the sea. No one believed that the earth was a globe until 400 BC, and even after that most people thought the world was flat. Seely argued that this view of the earth can be seen in Psalm 24:2 and 136:6. Seely argued that the earth was never depicted as a globe in the Old Testament. Seely noted that Isaiah 40:22 referred to the Circle of the Earth. However, this only proved that the flat earth was thought to be a round disk.² Seely's explanation for Isaiah 40:22 may have been moving in the right direction. The Great Circle was a common Egyptian description for the whole world. The Great Circle was the whole land surface that was circled by the sun in its daily path both above and below the land. The Great Circle included heaven, earth, and underworld since all were

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The ancient Egyptians also visualized a clear but solid dome above the earth. They deified it. This could be used to argue either that the Egyptians remembered the world's original cosmology or that Moses used Egyptian imagery when he constructed the creation account. The second option would seem more likely.

² Paul H. Seely, "The First Four Days of Genesis in Concordist Theory and in Biblical Context," *PSCF* 49 (1997): 85-95. <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/PSCF6-97Seely.html>

within the region of the sun's travels.³ The Egyptian Great Circle motif developed into the idea that the world itself was a flat disk. Seely argued that the earth was depicted as a flat disk in Egyptian texts as early as 1400 BC.⁴ Siegfried Morenz noted a sarcophagus from the Late Period that bore a representation of the earth as a circle with the Egyptian Nomes (administrative districts) at the center of the circle.⁵ In 500 BC, the geographer Hecataeus pictured the world in the shape of a circle surrounded by Oceanus, the primal deep. This was how the world of Isaiah's day saw the earth's shape. When God communicated His Word to Israel through Isaiah, God employed expressions drawn from Isaiah's world instead of using descriptions which no one could have understood. The Great Circle motif may also have been reflected in Job 26:10 where Job noted that God had inscribed a circle on the primal deep to separate light and darkness.

How would supporters of the young earth position respond to this kind of approach? James Holding wrote,

Certainly Seely is correct to quote Warfield's dictum that it was not the purpose of the writer of Genesis to describe the nature of the sky; Seely is also correct (if a bit chauvinistic in tone) to say that *there is no reason to believe the Hebrews were any less scientifically naive than their neighbors.*

Where the line must be drawn is before the implication that inerrancy is not compromised by reading a solid sky into Genesis 1, and allowing no other interpretation. It does not do to say that *God has sometimes allowed his inspired penman to advert to the scientific concepts of their own day.* Seely confuses *adaptation to human finitude* with *accommodation to human error* - the former does *not* entail the latter.⁶

One of the fundamental questions in the debate is whether God chose to communicate to people in the language and motifs of their own day even though those motifs would be judged today to be incorrect. It may be helpful to remember that this is not a new question. It was already a very emotional controversy during the Reformation Age.

In Martin Luther's 8th sermon on

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E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Egypt*, 8 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1902), IV:54. James Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents*, 5 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962 reprint), II:31; 265; V:82. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), II:37; 41.

Paul H. Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of "Earth" and "Seas" in Genesis 1:10," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997): 234.

⁵ Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 45.

⁶ Holding, "Is the *raqiya'* ('firmament') a solid dome? Equivocal Language in the Cosmology of Genesis 1 and the Old Testament: a Response to Paul H. Seely," 45.

1st Corinthians, Luther made the following observation about the shape of the earth and its rel

relationship to the sun:

Those who assert that 'the earth moves and turns'...[are] motivated by 'a spirit of bitterness, contradiction, and fault finding;' possessed by the devil, they aimed 'to pervert the order of nature.'

In the Table Talks, Luther was credited by his students with adding:

People gave ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the hea

vens or the firmament, the sun and the moon. Whoever wishes to appear clever must devise some new system, which of all systems is of course t

he very best. This fool [or 'man'] wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy;

but Sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.

Luther and so many Christians of his century were convinced that Scripture required belief in a geocentric earth. Luther and his generation had a point. If the shape of the solar system was determined only on Biblical grounds, the only reasonable position was the one that which Luther defended. The problem with Luther's view of the solar system was that the scientific evidence refused to allow it. So today, Christians just assume that Copernicus was correct and assume that the geocentric Bible passages should be understood as ancient Near Eastern imagery. For the most part, Christians just read these passages superficially without being aware of the implications of their claims.

To understand the Old Testament's cosmological imagery, it is important to understand the historical context within which the Bible was written. Moses wrote the Pentateuch to meet the needs of a generation that had just come out of Egypt and that accepted a generally Egyptian view the world. The Egyptians believed that the earth was a flat disk. They believed that the earth floated on the primal sea and that it was covered by the dome of the heavens. The Egyptians believed that the sun went around the earth. As it did so, the sun traveled through 12 chambers of the daytime sky and 12 chambers of the underworld at night. These chambers were divided by gates that were guarded by dangerous creatures. The Egyptians believed that both gods and men lived in the chambers of the sky, on the earth, and in the chambers of the underworld. Luis Stadelmann noted that this could be seen in a hymn to the Nile that referred to the earth's three levels. This hymn read in part, "... every god, be he in the underworld, in heaven, or upon the earth."⁷ This broad scheme of heavens above, earth beneath, and waters under the earth was developed in the ancient Near East in a surprising number of ways. This basic view of the world was present both in the Levant and in Mesopotamia although it was not the only cosmology in either area. A somewhat similar cosmology from Mesopotamia can be seen in an incantation against Samana. This spell read in part,

Bound the gods of Heaven in Heaven,
Bound the gods of the Underworld in the
Underworld, Bound Utu at the horizon,
Bound Nanna in the red (evening) sky (?).⁸

When God taught men about Himself, He came to them in their sin and foolishness. In grace and mercy, God revealed to men His Word and His truth. However, when He did so, God revealed Himself to people who were at first very poorly equipped to understand Him. So God condescended to their level of understanding. He revealed Himself to them

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Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 10. Stadelmann was quoting from James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 372-73.

I. L. Finkel, "A Study in Scarlet Incantations against Samana," in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65 Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*, (Groningen: STYX, 1998), 83.

in words and actions that they could understand. He started where they were, and He taught them what they were able to understand.

This can be seen rather clearly in the book of Job. Throughout the book, Job had asked constantly for a covenant lawsuit hearing before El Shaddai. Finally in Job 38, God brought Job into the ranks of His Messengers. God appeared to Job in a world wind. God asked Job if he could understand the ways of God. Then God used a series of mythical images that had each been used earlier in the book either by Job himself or by one of his friends. God used these mythical motifs to challenge Job because they were his thought world. Job and his friends assumed that the ancient Near Eastern cosmology was correct. They believed that the dead lived in the dim underworld chambers that were at the same time below the ground and below the sea.⁹ In Job 10:20-22, Job noted that he would go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night where even the light was as darkness. Then in Job 26:5, Job declared that the dead were in anguish beneath the sea and within it. God encountered Job in the midst of this distorted view of reality. In Job 38:16-17, God asked Job,

Did you go to the springs of the sea?
Or searching, did you walk the deep?
Were the gates of death split open for you?
Or did you see the gates of the shadow of death?

These verses depicted God walking through the primal deep sea underworld and passing through its gates. God proved to Job in language that he could understand that God's ways were far beyond his understanding. A similar pattern can be seen in other passages from Job. A common feature of ancient cosmology was the belief that the firmament's dome had pillars, and that these pillars were mountains with their bases on the underside of the earth. Job 26:11 claimed that the pillars of heaven quaked at God's rebuke. In Job 38:4-6, God asked Job,

Where were you when I established of the earth?
Declare if you know understanding!
Who set its measurements, since you know?
Or who stretched a (measuring) line on it?

God's words to Job drew heavily an ancient Near Eastern imagery throughout Job 38.¹⁰ In verses 31-33, God asked Job,

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One of the first magic spells that Egyptians would purchase to aid them in the underworld was the spell that allowed them to breathe water as air in the underworld. Without it, they would immediately die the second death. Luyster argued that ancient Israel saw Sheol as a wasteland beneath the sea. Robert Luyster, "Myth and History in the Book of Exodus," *Religion* 8 (1978): 161.

¹⁰ God personified the sea in Job 38:8-11, and in Job 38:19, God asked Job if he knew the dwelling places of light and darkness. Egyptian solar cycle theology stressed the importance of the sun god's dwelling place.

Can you bind in bonds the Pleiades,
Or the cords of Osiris (*i.e.* Orion) loosen?¹¹
Do you bring forth a constellation in its time,
Or do you console the Great Bear with her sons?
Do you know the laws of heaven,
Or do you set its authority on the earth?

These verses almost sound like an affirmation of astrology, although they were intended as no such thing. They simply draw on imagery that was common in Job's day. In Job 9:9, Job had claimed that God had made the Bear, the Pleiades, Orion, and the chambers of the south. God used similar imagery in a number of Old Testament passages because He came to men in the context of their limited understanding.

Stadelmann argued that the Israelites believed that their world was composed of three levels: the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. Stadelmann argued that this distinction was based partly on human experience and partly on the influence of mythological traditions around Israel. Stadelmann suggested that this three level world can be seen in a variety of passages. In Psalm 135:6, the Psalmist declared his faith that if he were to ascend to heaven, God would be there. If he made his bed in Sheol, God would be there as well. Israel's three level world view can even be seen in the Ten Commandments. The Israelites were forbidden to worship anything in the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth. In the ancient Near East as a whole, all three areas were domains of the gods.

David used similar imagery in Psalm 18:13-17. David claimed that the Lord thundered from heaven. At God's rebuke, the valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth were laid bare. Then God reached down from on high and took hold of David, drawing him out of the deep waters. As he did this, God rescued David from the enemies who threatened his life. So the sea imagery in Psalm 18 was a symbolic description of death and the underworld. David may have used similar imagery in Psalm 23 when he claimed that God would walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death. A largely Egyptian worldview might also be suggested by Psalm 24:2. This verse claimed that God had founded the earth upon the seas and had established it upon the floods. This could be interpreted to mean that God had formed the earth's disk floating on the primal deep. Psalm 136:6 could be read the same way. This verse claimed that God stretched out the earth above the water.

B. GENESIS AS A POLEMICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE WILDERNESS COMMUNITY

The book of Genesis has traditionally been placed at the beginning of the Old Testament even though it may not have been the first book of the Old Testament

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The Egyptians saw this constellation as Osiris who was the god of the underworld and the spiritual, heavenly North. The Greeks would later reinterpret the same stars as Orion. However, that change only occurred over a thousand years after Job's time.

written.¹² Genesis has always been placed at the beginning of the Bible because it recorded the earth's creation, the origin of the human race, and Israel's origin. This content has led to a surprising neglect of the historical setting within which Genesis was written. The book's historical setting was properly that of the wilderness community. Genesis was written under the influence of the history, needs, and theological problems of the wilderness community. Because of this, Genesis should properly be studied after Exodus. Genesis can only be understood in the context of the wilderness community. The great questions in Genesis properly interact with Moses' perception of the needs of the wilderness community. Several accounts in Genesis should be analyzed in terms of the wilderness generation and its needs. A few basic questions should always be asked of these passages including the following. Why might Moses have included these accounts in the Genesis history? How could these accounts have provided a lesson for the wilderness generation? What problems in the wilderness might Moses have addressed by writing the book of Genesis the way that he wrote it?

These questions should be asked especially of the creation account in Genesis 1-3. How could these chapters have fit the needs of the wilderness community?¹³ It is important to note first that Moses faced a serious problem with idolatry in the wilderness. According to Ezekiel 20:7-8, Israel had fallen into idolatry in Egypt. To some degree, the nation had shared the worldview of Egypt and the ancient Near East. Seely argued that Israel expressed its knowledge of God within the religious and cultural forms of the age, and that Israel's basic world view had come to resemble that of Egypt in a number of ways.¹⁴

C. RIVAL CREATION ACCOUNTS

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It is not impossible that the book of Job may have been written during Israel's Egyptian sojourn. The story recorded in Job certainly occurred before the exodus, although various dates have been proposed for the composition of the book itself.

Evangelicals have been surprisingly resistant to asking this question. For the last 150 years, Christians have been struggling to integrate the Biblical and scientific evidence for human origins. This debate has often been heated and even bitter. The emotions expressed in this debate have so hardened positions that new options are often not seriously considered. One exception to this rule is Tremper Longman who wrote the following about Gen. 1-3. "From the time of the patriarchs down through the rest of the period of the Old Testament, the children of Abraham lived in the midst of a pagan world. Only Israel worshiped Yahweh, while the rest of the nations had their own gods and goddesses-and they also had their own creation accounts. Since God's people were constantly tempted to worship the deities of other nations, we shouldn't be surprised that the biblical accounts of creation were shaped in such a way as to provide a clear distinction from those of other nations. Even so, there are similarities. In any case, the most interesting and the richest reading of the biblical creation accounts takes place in the light of the rival accounts of the ancient Near East." Longman, *How to Read Genesis*, 72.

Paul H. Seely, "The Firmament and the Waters above Part I: The Meaning of *Raquia*' in Gen 1:6-8," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 235. Seely, "The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Genesis 1:10," 246.

Moses may have included the creation and flood accounts in Genesis because they provided a point by point refutation of key ideas that were at the heart of Egyptian theology.¹⁵ Egypt contained many temples. The theology of each temple was different from the theology of its neighbors. The theology of each temple also developed over time. This resulted in an enormous theological diversity. The Egyptians delighted in affirming a vast number of contradictory ideas at the same time. A tradition of creation accounts stood beneath the glorious diversity of their theology. Egypt contained three very important creation accounts drawn from the temple theologies at Memphis, Hermopolis, and Heliopolis. All three creation traditions were addressed by the Genesis creation account. Egypt also knew a number of minor creation traditions drawn from the theology of lesser temples.¹⁶ While Egypt contained a number of creation accounts, the narratives all tended to be based on similar principles, and these principles were at the heart of Egyptian theology. From temple to temple, nearly all of Egyptian theology was a direct outgrowth of its creation accounts.

with his own creation account.¹⁷ The wilderness community would have expected God's Word and proper theology to grow from just such a creation account.¹⁸ Like the Egyptians, the Israelites would have believed that the nature of reality was determined by the nature of its creation. Moses began Genesis with a creation account that made it impossible for the Israelites to worship both Yahweh and

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Mark Brett discussed the polemical purpose of Genesis 1. Brett wrote from a critical perspective, so he limited the polemical purpose in Genesis 1 to the material in Genesis that critical authors associate with the P, or "priestly," source. Brett argued that the author of the P material made claims about the past that were intended to give Israel a ground for hope about the future. Mark G. Brett, "Motives and Intentions in Genesis 1," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 42 (1991): 1-16. Evangelical authors commonly reject the division of Genesis into J, E, D, and P sources. Thomas Briscoe argued that the ancient Near East as a whole saw the world in the conceptual framework reflected in the Enuma Elish, the Adapa Myth, the Atrahasis Epic, and the Egyptian cosmologies. Briscoe argued that the authors of Scripture were aware of these myths. Briscoe noted that it is hard to know if the authors of the Old Testament intentionally used common Near Eastern ideas about pagan mythology. Thomas Briscoe, "The Creation Narratives: A View from the Tell," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 40 (1998): 49-64.

Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, "Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions," 1-15 in Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, eds. *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, (Washington DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 2-3.

Otto Helweg wrote, "To the Hebrews in the desert, God gave the reverberating creation account. It obliterated each of the Egyptian gods. Osiris did not create the universe, God did. Ra does not rule the Sun, God does. The narrative's purpose had much less to do with how God created all things and much more to do with declaring who created all things." Otto J. Helweg, "How Long an Evening and Morning?" *Creation ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 11 (1997): 299.

Clifford and Collins argued that cosmogonies were very meaningful in the ancient Near East. They argued that creation was the defining moment that determined the nature and purpose of reality. Clifford, and Collins, "Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions," 1.

the Egyptian gods at the same time. Moses' creation account formed a theological argument by mimicking key aspects of the Egyptian creation accounts.¹⁹

s can be seen in Genesis 1:1. In this verse, Moses claimed that Elohim had created the heavens and the earth. This contrasted sharply with the creation account at Heliopolis where the gods Geb (earth) and Nut (sky) were born from the gods Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture). Shu and Tefnut were in turn the children of the primal god Atum. In most Egyptian creation accounts, the earth was not really created. Instead, the earth developed through the successive births of various gods.²⁰ Moses insisted that Elohim created a physical earth that was only an object. For Moses, the earth was not in any way a god. It was simply Elohim's creation.

In Genesis 1:2, Moses described a time when the earth already existed but was formless and void. God's Spirit moved over the primal waters of creation. This mimicked and refuted the Egyptian claim at Hermopolis that the god Amun brooded over the face of the primal waters, stirred the waters, and caused the first land to rise from the water.²¹ Amun was identified with the wind just as the Hebrew word *ruah* in Genesis 1:2 meant both "wind" and "spirit." A variety of other Egyptian motifs were also attacked by Genesis 1:2. In Egyptian theology, Geb (or Seb) was the lord of the watery abyss. He lived in the watery mass of the sky. So in a sense, Geb hovered over the primal deep. Jan Zandee compared Genesis 1:2 to the creation account at Heliopolis as well. Zandee noted that the creation account at Heliopolis was Atum. He was associated with the *Bnw* bird that hovered over the primal deep. Zandee also compared the darkness over the face of the deep in Genesis 1:2 with the Egyptian concept of *kkw* which was the primal darkness.²² Moses argued that all of these motifs were incorrect. God's Spirit alone moved over the primal waters forming the earth.

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It is impossible to determine what the ultimate source may have been behind the Egyptian mythological parallels to Genesis. The Egyptian parallels could have reflected a remnant of truth preserved from an ancient knowledge of the truth that dated back to the flood. The parallels could also reflect Egyptian syncretism. Egypt had always been in contact with the West Semitic world and with the tradition of faith preserved within the West Semitic world.

²⁰ Rudolf Anthes, "Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1959): 172.

²¹ E. O. James, *The Tree of Life*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 131. A. H. Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis 1," 419-23 in *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith*, (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1932), 421.

²² Jan Zandee, "Egyptological Commentary on the Old Testament," 269-81 in M. A. Beek, ed., *Travels in the World of the Old Testament*, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 270.

In Genesis 1:3, Moses recorded Elohim's command, "Let there be light!"²³ Moses noted that this command produced light. All subsequent creation occurred by the Word of Elohim. In several Egyptian creation motifs, the gods Ptah and Atum created things by wishing in their hearts and speaking a word with their mouths.²⁴ The creation account at Hermopolis was based on a similar claim. At Hermopolis, Thoth created the world with a word from his mouth. Thoth was the Egyptian god of Wisdom.²⁵ To understand the importance of this, remember that Egypt's religious literature was claimed to be "the words of the god." This religious literature was, then, of the same character and authority as the creative word that had formed the earth. Moses wrote Genesis as the beginning of the greater Word of God. As such, Genesis shared the authority of Elohim's creative Word itself. Moses also stressed that Yahweh Elohim and He alone had the power and authority to speak such a creative word.²⁶

In Genesis 1:5, Moses stated that there was evening and morning, one "day." Subsequent creation occurred in a series of six "days," and Yahweh rested on the seventh "day." The evangelical world has understood these creation "days" in a great many ways.²⁷ Creation "days" were important in the ancient Near East. The whole ancient

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It is very unlikely that Gen. 1-11 recorded the exact words used by God during creation or the exact words spoken in Eden. Adam and Eve walked in the Garden anywhere from 2500 to 8500 years before Moses was born depending on the date assigned to Eden. Languages change rapidly over time. Moses expressed Adam's words in the language of his own day. The words that Moses recorded in the creation account were an accurate depiction of the content of Adam's words but probably not Adam's words per se. So it is appropriate to look for the 2nd millennium BC theological meaning of the vocabulary that Moses chose to use to describe creation.

James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, (New York: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988), 36-47. Gerhard Hasel argued that creation through a spoken word was unknown in Mesopotamia but it was an important motif in Egypt. Hasel suggested that the spoken word in Egyptian texts made things appear that had already existed as potentials in previously created matter. Hasel suggested that Genesis differed from the Egyptian creation accounts in this regard. In Genesis, the spoken word was a truly creative force. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 90.

Ragnhild B. Finnestad, "Ptah, Creator of the Gods," *Numen* 23 (1978): 81, 104-06. James, *The Tree of Life*, 131.

The motif of God's "Word" was also an ancient West Semitic idea. Dahood argued that Ebla contained a temple of the "Word," and Ugarit worshiped a minor deity called the "Voice." Mitchell Dahood, "The Minor Prophets and Ebla," 47-67 in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Conner, eds. *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 51. There has been some debate about whether *Dabir* should be understood as the Word or the plague. Many of Dahood's suggestions about the Ebla texts are no longer widely accepted.

The "24 Hour Day View" has argued that all of creation occurred within six 24 hour days. The "Day Age View" has argued that creation occurred in six very long time periods. The "Gap Theory" has held that there was a huge chronological gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2. The "old earth" was formed in that "gap." The "Re-creation View" has held that the old earth was destroyed in God's judgment. It was then re-created in six 24 hour periods. The Local Creation View has held that the

world structured time in 7 day weeks that were based on the four phases of the 28 day lunar month. Egypt also reflected rather loosely the idea of a week in its creation accounts. The "Eye of Horus" was formed in six days.²⁸ The theology of Heliopolis celebrated a festival on the seventh day in honor of its creation.²⁹ Another Egyptian motif depicted the god Ptah "resting" after he had created the world by the word of his mouth.³⁰ Moses grounded the seven day week in Elohim's creative activity instead of either the moon's phases or the Egyptian creation motifs.³¹

Perhaps the most useful Egyptian parallel to the Genesis creation "days" can be seen in the creation account from Hermopolis. This creation account was also structured in creation "days." The similarity between Genesis 1 and the Hermopolis cosmology was suggested as early as 1932 by A. H. Sayce.³² The first four creation days at Hermopolis echoed the first four creative days in Genesis. In the first creative day at Hermopolis, the chaotic deep was formed. In the second day, god's breath moved over the primal waters of the great deep. In the third creative day, light was created. Then in the fourth creative "day," the primeval hill rose above the waters of the great deep. While these similarities are quite striking, it is important not to oversimplify the relationship between the Egyptian motifs and the Genesis creation account. There were importance differences between them as well. Perhaps the most important fact was that the Israelites could not accept both Moses' creation accounts in Genesis 1-3 and the Egyptian creation accounts. At heart, they were not compatible.

claimed that Elohim had made man in His image.³³ In Egypt, the "image" motif was

represented in at least two ways. First, it appeared in a wisdom text called *The Instruction of Merikare*. This text claimed that every man had been formed from a god's body and was the image of a god. This wisdom text was written before Abraham was born. It was very ancient in Moses' day. It is hard to evaluate how well known and influential it still

earth was very old, but Palestine was created in six 24 hour periods. The Creation Revelation View has suggested that the creation of the old earth was revealed to Moses in six 24 hour periods. A wide variety of other perspectives have also been defended, including attempts to interpret the creation accounts as myth instead of history.

²⁹The Eye of Horus was a key Egyptian motif. It was used in several different ways.

Coffin Spell 674 described the deceased celebrating the 6th day and 7th day festivals in god's presence. The same festivals are described in Coffin Spells 61 and 1004. R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 3 vols. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), II: 243.

³¹Finnestad, "Ptah, Creator of the Gods," 84, 97.

The link between Gen. 1 and the Sabbath was recognized by critical authors like Brandon, Westerman, and Kapelrud. See the discussion in Brett, "Motives and Intentions in Genesis 1," 6-7.

³³Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis 1," 421.

The idea that man was God's image reflected rather common ancient Near Eastern motifs. For a later Assyrian example, see W. Randall Gar, "'Image' and 'Likeness' in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Israel Exploration Journal* 50 (2000): 227-234. For a survey of Biblical material related to the image of God motif, see Nathan Jastram, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 68:1 (2004): 5-96.

was, although the text clearly was still in use. The only surviving copy of *The Instruction of Merikare* was produced during the Egyptian 19th Dynasty.³⁴ By the 19th Dynasty, the image of god motif in Egypt was no longer used to describe common people. The great "image of god" was now Egypt's Pharaoh who claimed to be the god Horus incarnate and the living image of god.³⁵ Pharaoh's claim to god's image was a claim to personal divinity. It is less clear whether the Image of God motif was already being used as a claim to divinity in the Mosaic Age. Moses stressed that every man was created in Elohim's image and that no man was in any way divine.

D. YAHWEH OR KHNUM?

orded that Yahweh Elohim had formed Adam from the dust of the ground and had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Cyrus Gordon noted that the Hebrew verb *yatsar*, "formed," in Genesis 2:7 came from the same root as the Hebrew word for "potter." In the Egyptian texts, men were formed from clay on the wheel of the potter god Khnum who gave man's nostrils the breath of life.³⁶ Morschauser argued that this motif was also reflected in the Pentateuch in Exodus 1:16.³⁷ So Moses may have been arguing that Adam was formed from clay by Yahweh instead of the Egyptian potter god Khnum.

ed to the Hebrew word.....
for "ground" since Adam was taken from the ground.³⁸ The name Adam was also similar to the name of the Egyptian primordial god Atum.³⁹ The god Atum was the father of the gods. Rudolf Anthes noted that the god Atum completed in himself all of the other gods and was preserved in the form of a man. While Atum was a god, he resembled in some

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If an 18th Dynasty exodus is accepted, this was two centuries after the exodus. If a 19th Dynasty exodus is defended, this was roughly the Mosaic Age. This would make the text contemporary with Moses.

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³⁶Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:121, 181.

³⁷The god Khnum was depicted as extending the Ankh sign of life to the nostrils of the men who he had just formed on his potter's wheel. Cyrus Gordon, "Khnum and El," *Egyptological Studies* 28 (1982): 204-06.

³⁸Morschauser argued that the word translated as birth stool in Ex. 1:16 actually meant "potter's wheel" and that this was a term for pregnancy. Scott Morschauser, "Potter's Wheels and Pregnancies: A Note on Exodus 1:16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 731-33.

³⁹The name Adam is also closely related to the Old Testament name "Edom" which refers to the barren red land southeast of Palestine. Hans Goedicke noted that Eve was formed from Adam's rib. He argued that the Egyptian words for rib and clay were homophones that were sometimes confused in the Egyptian texts. He argued that Eve was actually formed from Adam's clay instead of his rib. Hans Goedicke, "Adam's Rib," 73-6 in *Biblical Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985).

In ancient Near Eastern languages, the letter *d* and *t* are very closely related. For example, the Hebrew letter *taw* can be pronounced as either a *d* or a *t* depending on the nature of the word in which it appears.

ways the first man ever to exist.⁴⁰ Moses argued that the first man was not in any way divine. He was simply a man created by Yahweh Elohim.

noted that Egyptologists have stressed the great differences between Genesis and.....
the Egyptian creation accounts. Egyptologists have noted that Genesis did not express the typical Egyptian fear of a return to chaos. Genesis saw creation as a linear event instead of a cyclical event. The Egyptian accounts saw creation as a primordial event that was constantly being repeated. Hasel noted that Egyptologists have also argued that the events in Genesis 1 were depicted in generally non-mythical ways while the Egyptian creation accounts were heavily mythological. Egyptian creation accounts often depicted the successive births of the most important Egyptian gods. Egyptologists have argued that when the primal deep and the sky were created in the Egyptian texts, the primal gods like Geb and Nun appeared. These in turn gave birth to high gods like Osiris and Horus. In the Genesis creation accounts, Yahweh simply formed earth, sky, and sea. Yahweh did not give birth to other deities. He alone was God. Yahweh just made things that He controlled and owned. Hasel noted that these differences suggest to many Egyptologists that the Genesis account should not be associated with the Egyptian creation accounts in any way.⁴¹ In reply, it could be noted that these differences are exactly what should be expected if the Genesis creation account was intended as a polemical argument against the Egyptian creation accounts.

Egyptian creation accounts for the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 has also been.....
supported in the academic community.⁴² As early as 1932, A. H. Sayce discussed the similarities between creation accounts in Egypt and Genesis 1-3.⁴³ His position was supported and amplified in 1983 by James Hoffmeier.⁴⁴ In 1989, Clark Pinnock argued that Genesis 1 was an anti-myth intended to counter errors contained in the creation myths of the ancient Near East.⁴⁵ In 1991, John Currid supported authors like A. S.

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⁴¹ Anthes, "Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C." 173-77, 209.

Hasel, "The Polemical Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," 84-5. The Genesis creation account was not unique in refuting ancient Near Eastern mythology this way. The book of Job also drew on ancient Near Eastern imagery to write a theological argument. This can be seen in Job 38:16-18; 38:31-33, and 38:37.

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Emmrich also suggested a possible polemical purpose behind Gen. 2:16. He noted that Palestine was often described with Eden imagery later in the Old Testament. He noted that Eden imagery appeared in Num. 24:5-7, Deut. 33:13-16, I Kngs. 5:5, Mic. 4:4, Ezek. 36:33f, Zech. 3:10, and other passages. Emmrich suggested that the Garden of Eden account may have taught Israel a valuable lesson. They may have learned that rebellion would drive them from the land, just as it had driven Adam from paradise. Martin Emmrich, "The Temptation Narrative of Genesis 3:1-6: A Prelude to the Pentateuch and the History of Israel," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 73 (2001): 4-5.

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⁴⁴ Sayce, "The Egyptian Background of Genesis 1," 419-23.

⁴⁵ James Hoffmeier, "Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 15 (1983): 39-49.

Clark H. Pinnock, "Climbing Out of a Swamp: The Evangelical Struggle to Understand the Creation Texts," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 149.

Yahuda who had seen an Egyptian influence in the Genesis creation accounts. Currid noted that this perspective has not gained wide acceptance in the academic world. He argued that there was a close relationship between the Genesis creation account and Egyptian cosmogony. Currid suggested that this similarity could be seen in thematic parallels, lexical parallels, and philological parallels. He argued that the parallels between Genesis and Egyptian thought are much closer than parallels between Genesis and Mesopotamian thought.⁴⁶

E. CREATION AND THE HYKSOS

If the Genesis creation account was fundamentally a polemical argument against Egyptian theology, it was not exclusively an attack on Egypt's religious system. Just as Israel's Red Sea crossing was in some ways a polemic against Hyksos religion, the Genesis creation account also confronted both East and West Semitic religious traditions. In the East Semitic tradition, creation began in a great battle with the *tehom* which was both a deity and the great primal abyss.⁴⁷ The later Canaanite conflicts between Baal and Yam have often been seen as a development from this earlier motif although the Canaanite texts at Ugarit did not contain a clear and detailed creation account. Creation was far less an issue for Baal worship than for traditional Egyptian theology. In Canaanite theology, Baal was involved in great conflicts including his battles with Yam, "the sea," and Mot, "death." Moses' statement in Genesis 1:2 has often been taken in this context. God's Spirit floated above the surface of the *tehom* which was the "deep." In Genesis 1:2, Moses argued that the *tehom* was simply a physical creation of God and that it was completely under His control. Moses' claim in Genesis 1:10 has also gained academic interest in this context. In Genesis 1:10, Elohim gathered the waters that He had created and called them *yameim*, "the seas." Moses' God did not have to fight a great battle against the sea God Yam. Instead, Moses' God created the sea and named it. By doing so, God determined its nature and declared it to be water instead of a deity.⁴⁸

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John D. Currid, "An Examination of the Egyptian Background of the Genesis Cosmogony," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 35 (1991): 18-40.

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The East Semitic culture was geographically rather distant from the wilderness generation. Its potential theological significance may be demonstrated by the fact that a cuneiform text of Adapa was found in Egypt from the 14th century BC. If Israel left Egypt during the 18th Dynasty, this would have been shortly after Joshua's conquest of Palestine. The presence of Adapa in Egypt suggested that East Semitic motifs may not have been beyond the cultural horizon of the wilderness community. For parallels between Adapa and Adam in the Genesis text, see William H. Shea, "Adam in Ancient Mesopotamian Traditions," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15 (1977): 27-8. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): 4-7.

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Hvidberg argued that Genesis 1 was undoubtedly connected in some way with Canaanite religion. Flemming Hvidberg, "The Canaanite Background of Gen. I-III," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960): 286. Cassuto argued that the "stones of fire" in Eden in Ezek. 28:14 were analogous to the "stones of lightning" associated with Baal at Ugarit. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 80.

.... The challenge for conservative exegetes of Genesis is to find a reading of the text that affirms the text's inherent authority and inerrancy while avoiding the defense of a flat earth. That has not proven to be an easy task. Quite a few old earth interpretations of Genesis 1-11 have been proposed, but most fail the tests of exegesis, history, and science. One struggle for the church in the next decade will be to find an interpretation of Genesis that is true both to the Word and to the hard evidence of the world as it is. The answer to this quandary may well arise through a more detailed study of theological beliefs in the wilderness community for which Genesis was originally written.