THE COMPLETED CREATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

by Noel K. Weeks

1. Genesis 1

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NARRATIVE of the creation week in Genesis 1 conveys a message. The creation of the environment precedes the creation of the creature for that particular environment. Thus each creature finds a world prepared. That message is conveyed by the parallelism and sequence of the first three days and the second three days, so that day 1 prepares for day 4 and so on. Everything is thus made ready. That message is reinforced by the treatment of the Sabbath day. By it God had finished everything he needed to do.

As I will explain later, that conclusion goes against anticipations of what "must" have happened at the beginning. So one can find many alternate interpretations both inside and outside of OT studies. However the text describes a completed creation.

Since man is the final step in the creation, the whole passage has a special message to man. Everything has been made ready for him. He may need to do things in the world but he enters a made world, not a world under construction.

2. Genesis 2

How is that reading impacted by the following passage? The relation of the two accounts has been a subject of continuing debate. Two observations are crucial for any interpretation. The latter passage speaks of a time before vegetation, and of processes involved in the creation of humans. Therefore it must overlap in time with the first account. The problem of the relationship of the two accounts is not solved by explanations which place the events of the second narrative later in time than the first or see the second as dealing with just a particular geographical area.

The second crucial fact is that the two narratives are placed in immediate conjunction. Traditional critical scholarship sees them as having different sources and contradictory content. That the repetition and contradiction was not obvious to the original editors is due to their being devoid of our superior perception. I suggest that it could be somebody else who lacks superior perception.

Placing two narratives in immediate juxtaposition, covering the same territory but in different ways, occurs a number of times in Hebrew Bible narrative. Either a number of different editors lacked our superior intellect or it was being done deliberately. Once might be an accident. Multiple occurrences are obviously deliberate.

There are two accounts of the preparation for the flood: in 6:18-21 the focus is on a pair of each animal; in 7:1-5 clean animals receive particular attention.[1] The two accounts of how David became associated with Saul are particularly informative.[2] If we assume that every biblical text preserves chronological order, then the fact that Saul in 1 Samuel 17:55 is ignorant of David's origins is a problem. If we note the deliberate juxtaposing of David and Saul in 16:13-14 and in 17:11-12, the author's purpose becomes clear. He has disentangled the chronology of complex events to convey that David in two different ways is superior to Saul and the answer to his problems. He can calm Saul by playing and he has the faith and courage that Saul lacks.

Returning to the creation narratives, we see that two details, which the sweeping text of chapter 1 could not treat, are elaborated in chapter 2: the need of the land creation for water and the interrelationships of the human pair.[3] Note also how the theme of completeness in chapter 1 is reinforced. Twice we are told that what is needed was not present. Thus there was no vegetation because the ways water is provided in normal human experience were not present (2:5). So a special means was provided to fill this need (2:6).[4] Then we are told that the man had a need because he was alone. The text proceeds to tell us how this need was met. Surely this repetition of something needed for the creation, and then the provision of that very need, reinforces the point of chapter 1 that the creation was complete.

There have been various alternate ways to interpret these features of the narrative. Meredith Kline's interpretation of the lack of water is a significant example.[5] Irrespective of the significance which Kline drew from his interpretation, the role of the crucial verses in the narrative is not explained. Are we being told random bits of information about what happened in creation? Given that the immediately following narrative of the creation of man has the same sequence of not-present-provided and that the clear point of chapter 1 is the completeness of creation, I suggest that my alternate way of taking the narrative is superior. It connects the two similar treatments of items needed rather than taking "because it had not rained" out of that context. It relates chapter one and chapter two.

3. Consequence For the Immediate Context

The biblical text goes on to the story of the temptation of the first pair. If I am correct and the intent is to present the creation as complete, how then do we read the temptation narrative? The tempter suggests that all that man needs is not there; actually

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1. For more detailed treatment see Noel K. Weeks, *Sources and Authors: Assumptions in the Study of Hebrew Bible Narrative*, PHSC 12 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 53-64.

2. Weeks, *Sources and Authors*, 168-80.

3. Weeks, *Sources and Authors*, 35-42.

4. What is described in verse 6 has been a subject of continuing debate. Might it be that our problem of understanding comes from the fact that an unusual and provisional means is being described?

5. Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20, no. 2 (1958): 146-57.

a potentially crucial provision has been denied. The tempter is thus portrayed as arguing against the logic of the narrative. Sin then becomes doubt in the goodness of God and his creation.

Two issues arise:

1. If one assumes that creation was not completed, perhaps is still in process, how will that impact the way we see the world, history and the Bible itself?

2. The fact that creation, with all the necessary provision, is complete should lead to obedience to the commandment of God. The logical response to God's goodness is obedience to God. Once this logic is seen, the parallel with the gospel logic of obedience becomes obvious (Rom. 6:1-7; 2 Peter 1:2-11).[6] Understanding this parallel between our response to creation and our response to redemption must impact our whole understanding of the relationship of God and man.

4. Completed Versus Incomplete Creation

What also becomes obvious is the contradiction with theories which see the process of creation as never finished. Such views have some plausibility because the biblical picture is of a perfectly formed world that is deformed as a result of human sin. A deformed world, which needs to be remade, has some similarity to a world still in the process of being made. The Bible itself makes connections between the later deformed world and the early stages of creation because judgement takes the world back to an earlier stage in which everything needed is not present. Jeremiah 4:23-26 views a world devastated by enemy armies in terms of the dark and unformed world before the days of creation. The repetition of the post-creation command of Genesis 1:22 after the flood (Gen. 9:1) reminds us that the flood had returned the earth to a time when the waters covered the land and there needed to be a new beginning. Drought is a return to a world before God provided water.

This discussion obviously has relevance to the various modern evolutionary theories but that is not my concern here. I am concerned with the way the biblical text is misread if a fundamental point of its logic is missed. That is not to deny that often the scientific and the exegetical interact. Interpreting the text so as to make room for evolutionary theories must lead to ignoring the completeness of the original creation. However the threat to an acceptance of a completed creation comes, not just externally from science, but also within Biblical Studies.

Genesis 1 is a description of creation. By Genesis 4, though there obviously has to be a world to be the backdrop to the narrated events, the story is focused on the doings of men. That focus will continue for chapter after chapter, book after book. It is easy therefore to see the first (and part of the second) chapter as a largely unrelated prelude added because somebody thought a prelude was needed. Yet if we appreciate

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6. For a creedal expression of the same logic see Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 2.

the point of the creation narrative then the change of focus is quite logical. Man was the climax and the recipient of the completed creation. The sin of man fatally disturbed the previous arrangement. The problem of man has to be addressed if the creation is to return to completion. The biblical text, which brings man into a prepared world, places the final restoration of that world after the problem of man has been resolved.

Suppose we assume that the creation was never finished. While the direction in which the whole cosmos, including its human part, is moving may be unclear, we generally accept that it is going somewhere. It seems plausible that the earlier stages of the history of the cosmos were less formed, or less complicated, than the later stages.[7] The biblical text is a relatively complicated document. Just as a higher animal early in history is not a problem with a completed creation, so an early existence of the biblical text, or even of the society it describes, is no problem with a completed creation. However the logic of the postulate of an incomplete and ongoing creation forces us to see the biblical text as late because it is sophisticated.[8] Paradoxically the same logic was not applied to monotheism and polytheism. That was because polytheism was seen as connected to "primitive" people, even though polytheistic schemes can exhibit extreme complexity.

It is obvious that biblical and extra-biblical texts touch on many of the same topics. Deciding which was the first to use a particular item or theme is virtually impossible given the huge gaps in our data. The relative dating is determined not by evidence but by the way of thinking described here. Other presuppositions, which I have dealt with elsewhere[9], make the biblical text derivative of "earlier" extra-biblical texts.

The biblical account has no description of the origin of idolatry but implies the parallel existence of an idolatrous and a non-idolatrous community from early times.[10] The existence of parallel communities implies the possibility of common objects of experience being treated differently in the two communities. Further, if the two communities lived in interaction or close proximity there was the possibility of sharing of language and idiom. Yet the discourses, within which those common features were treated, would be different.

The result is two separate models for understanding the existence of areas of commonness between biblical and extra-biblical texts. One sees a reflection of

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7. It is probably true that the acceptance of an idea of direction and a distinction between stages of world cultural history is a secularization of the biblical story, but that is not my concern at the moment. This essay is in terms of our contemporary academic context.

8. There is a complication at this point because the earliest record of a written biblical text is with Moses. In terms of the standard reconstruction of world cultural history Moses is late and sophisticated literate civilizations existed much earlier. However the nineteenth century biblical scholarship, which became so normative for later times, was not fully impacted by the discoveries in the Ancient Near East and saw the cultural level of Israelites as very low until impacted by Babylonian culture during the Exile.

9. See Noel K. Weeks, "The Ambiguity of Biblical 'Background'," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 219-36; idem., "The Isolation of the Bible and Its Denial" (forthcoming).

10. The fact that the Bible sees no need to explain monotheists outside of Israel, such as Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18); Abimelech (?) (Gen. 20); Jethro (Ex. 2ff) and Job, is significant.

contemporary and parallel existence in a common world. The other sees the biblical text as late and derivative. The second possibility dominates academic treatments of biblical and contemporary texts because the ruling, and often the unconsciously accepted, model is connected to evolutionary thinking. Parallel communities from early times are not even considered and therefore any feature common between the Bible and another literature must have been appropriated by the biblical writer from the other source.[11]

The academic debate is then complicated by the fact that our knowledge of communities outside of Israel is fragmentary and often based on incomplete evidence. Influential or even normative positions for interpreting the biblical text can be based on wrong or doubtful interpretations of the extra-biblical evidence.

Extra-biblical sources from a polytheistic context do not presuppose a completed creation. Often the gods themselves are appearing through a process. Further scholarship in the modern world tends to expect an incomplete creation. Suppose then the resulting picture of the biblical world is seen as the matrix, out of which the biblical story developed. At best the biblical account can be seen as a reaction to the polytheistic account but other presuppositions are against such biblical originality.

5. Creation Narratives

The issue of creation narratives is an excellent example of these complicated interactions. Probably the earliest discovered major source for understanding Mesopotamian literature and religion was the finding of the libraries of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal in the ruins of Nineveh. Early work on that library brought to light fragments of the Gilgamesh Epic with a flood story obviously akin to the biblical story.[12] Thus the environment was primed for the discovery of a "creation" story, what we now call The Babylonian Creation Epic or Enuma Eliš. In that story a battle takes place between Tiamat, whose name and description says that she is the personification of the sea, and the god of Babylon, Marduk. Marduk creates the heavens and the earth from the carcass of Tiamat. By that curious logic whereby scholarship is happy to assume all sorts of sources from different periods in the one biblical text, but yet to assume that the surrounding cultures were static, this account was taken as *the* Mesopotamian view of creation and the source of the biblical account.

The classic exposition of this position came from Hermann Gunkel.[13] Gunkel also imported the idea of "chaos" as the precursor to creation from Greek and Roman

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11. It is tangential to this topic but there is a fascinating implication. The model of human society suggested here has similarities to the Kuyperian model for the existence of the Christian in the contemporary world (Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931]). Does a change in the way we see believer and unbeliever in prehistory impact the way we see them in contemporary society? Or does the influence work the other way?

12. Lesley Adkins, *Empires of the Plain: Henry Rawlinson and the Lost Languages of Babylon* (London: Harper, 2003).

13 . Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895).

sources.[14] He brought these ideas together in the thesis that the common view of creation in the ANE was a "chaos monster" defeated by a god and used as the raw material for creation. He argued that this chaos was seen as threatening to reappear. Obviously this is a theory of incomplete creation.

Actually Gunkel's original thesis had an advantage over later forms of the thesis in that he did not see a simple borrowing by the biblical author(s). Rather, in line with his tendency to stress oral tradition, he saw a complex of traditions drawn upon in various ways by biblical traditions, which were later committed to writing.[15] A thesis of direct borrowing has difficulties because of the lateness of Enuma Eliš and the doubt that this highly synthetic story in very literary Akkadian would have made an impact in Israel.[16]

I mentioned above the problem of the first found or maybe first publicised discoveries becoming the norm for what Israel is thought to have taken from the surrounding cultures. Enuma Eliš is now known to be very atypical for Mesopotamia,[17] late[18] and synthetic.[19] That realisation may not threaten theories

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14. Karen Sonik, "From Hesiod's Abyss to Ovid's *rudis indigestaque moles*: Chaos and Cosmos in the Babylonian 'epic of Creation'" in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskamp Hypothesis*, ed. Jo Ann Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 1-25.

15. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 114-21.

16. See Noel K. Weeks, "The Isolation of the Bible and Its Denial" (forthcoming).

17. The early Mesopotamian approach was more concerned with theogony than cosmogony. Hence our information comes from god lists which set out the generations of the gods. See W.G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon" in *Ancient* Cosmologies, ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 50-55; idem., "Creation in the Bible and the Ancient Near East" in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskamp Hypothesis*, ed. Jo Ann Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 46. For the god lists see Richard L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God-Lists: AN: dA-NU-UM and AN: ANU ŠÁ AMĒLI*, Texts from the Babylonian Collection, 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale Babylonian Collection, 1998). For early Sumerian accounts where heaven and earth were originally a solid mass and their separation was peaceful see W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths,* Mesopotamian Civilizations 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 170-71.

18. W.G. Lambert ("A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 [1965]: 291) places it no earlier than 1100 B.C. See also W.G. Lambert, "The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar 1: A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamian Religion" in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T.J. Meek*, ed. W.S. McCullough (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 3-13; W. Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks*, AOAT 213 (Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 174ff; G. Komoroczy, "The Separation of Sky and Earth," *Acta Antiqua* 21 (1973): 30; Benjamin R. Foster, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period*, GMTR 2 (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 24,25.

19. Some of the stories, which probably contributed to the late text, can be traced. It is clear that the description of Marduk as a warrior in conflict with Tiamat and her helpers draws from the stories of the god Ninurta (Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 202-07). For this god see Amar Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAAS 14 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002). The account of the creation of man is based on Atrahasis (W.G. Lambert & A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of*

which see the biblical creation account as an even later direct borrowing, from the time of the Exile or later, but it does threaten Gunkel's idea of a complex of traditions upon which the biblical authors could have drawn. It also raises a perennial issue, which those who want to derive parts of the OT from the surrounding cultures refuse to acknowledge. We suspect literacy was fairly restricted in the ANE, especially where a non-alphabetic script was used. Was what we read in ANE literary texts an esoteric scholarly tradition or did it penetrate to the mass of the population? Gunkel was clearly writing in terms of the Romantic tradition of nineteenth century Europe in which a *Volk* oral tradition underlay all higher national literature. We have no way whatsoever of testing that belief for the ANE.[20] If the text was esoteric and restricted to a literate stratum the possibility of it being known, let alone having an impact, in Israel is much less. It makes no difference that Enuma Eliš has a clear propaganda purpose of exalting Babylon and its god. ANE societies were not democratic societies with government determined by popular vote. Propaganda could well have been directed to the literate elite.[21]

The difficulties of basing biblical creation accounts or allusions on Enuma Eliš appeared to be overcome with the discovery at Ugarit, a city on the Syrian coast, of stories of the god Baal in conflict with various enemies including Yam, "sea." Our copies of these stories are late second millennium B.C. but the earlier mention of the storm god of Aleppo fighting the sea shows that the theme could be much older.[22] It now seems more likely that in Enuma Eliš we see a Mesopotamian import of a theme from further west than that Mesopotamia was the source of the figure of Tiamat (Sea).

Thus the academic discussion became dominated by claims that this Syrian or Ugaritic tradition was the source of the biblical creation accounts or allusions.[23] There was additional plausibility to this because the language in which the texts were written was much closer to Hebrew than the Akkadian language of Enuma Eliš and is

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the Flood [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969]). The significant question is the origin of the key figure of Tiamat because she is very seldom mentioned in earlier Mesopotamian texts and her prominent role is strong evidence of the lack of dependence of this story on the earlier Mesopotamian tradition. The most plausible explanation is that she derives from a Syrian tradition of a conflict between the storm god and the sea. A text from Mari shows that that myth goes back to the Old Babylonian period, which is early second millennium on conventional dating (Jean-Marie Durand, "Le mythologème du combat entre le dieu de l'orage et la mer en Mésopotamie," *MARI* 7 [1993]: 41-61.). For a more general argument for the same conclusion see T. Jacobsen, "The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 1 (1968): 104-08.

20. For a prominent Assyriologist's doubts, see Foster, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period*, 49.

21. Note the irony: in insisting we interpret the Bible in its historical context we may fall into the trap of imposing a modern context on our interpretation. Proper historical interpretation is not just looking at the texts of the period. It is looking with the correct understanding of the contexts and dynamics of the period.

22. See footnote 20.

23. E.g. J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

commonly claimed to be Canaanite.[24] Since we have no religious texts from the Canaanites, who were in direct contact with Israel, and no way of knowing whether their religion of Baal was the same as that of Ugarit, the claim that Israel would have known the Ugaritic stories from neighbouring Canaanites remains as just a claim. However assumptions I have dealt with elsewhere make it plausible to biblical scholarship.[25]

The main difficulty with making the Ugaritic texts the source of the biblical creation narratives is that there is nothing about creation in the Ugaritic texts. At this point it is crucial to keep the history of scholarship in mind. Gunkel had made an influential argument that the origin of biblical creation was a widespread myth of a "chaos monster." The connections he could make between Enuma Eliš and Genesis 1 were very tenuous.[26] They were bolstered by appeals to passages in the psalms and the prophets – to which I shall return – that showed God in some sort of conflict with the sea or sea creatures. A possible way to deal with the new complexion of the evidence might have been to say that both the Bible and Mesopotamia had borrowed from Ugarit (or Canaanite), but in different ways: in Mesopotamia to create a story of Marduk's victory and subsequent creation but in Israel to place the conflict between God and the sea/sea creatures in a historical context.[27] However in the mind of scholars the "chaos monster" was not yet dead and consequently many chose to try to see some intrinsic connection between the Ugaritic stories and creation.

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24. For grammars of the language see Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965); Daniel Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language,* HdO (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

25. See footnote 10.

26. See the criticisms in D.T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, LHBOTS 83 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); JoAnn Scurlock and Richard H. Beal, eds., *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

27. There is a curious phenomenon in scholarship on the Old Testament, which I hope is due to the unconscious influence of earlier scholarly positions. If Mesopotamia could make creative use of western traditions of a storm god, why could Israel not be creative in its own distinctive way? The denial of originality to Israel was a key component of Pan-Babylonianism, with its links to Anti-Semitism. There were clear academic and personal links between Gunkel and some Anti-Semites but his effective depreciation of the Bible comes more from his theories of oral tradition and form criticism rather than from the overt racism of a Friedrich Delitzsch (see Klaus Johanning, *Der Bibel-Babel- Streit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie* [Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1988], 168-84). Yet it is curious how explanations of the data, which include originality in Israel, are rare. I suspect that Biblical Studies is more ruled by the hang-over of Enlightenment paradigms which depreciate the ignorant past, than the cognate disciplines such as Assyriology are, since these latter deal with more recently discovered evidence and have less a tradition of interpretation. Thus Babylonians can be original or creative but Israel is restricted to slavish copying.

The result is a huge variety of positions: Genesis 1 is dependent on Enuma Eliš[28]; there is no connection between the battles of Baal and creation at Ugarit[29]; a need to use annual rituals to preserve order against chaos links Enuma Eliš, Ugarit and Bible[30]; Ugaritic myths are "creation" stories but their idea of creation is different to ours[31]; a creation myth cannot be found in the Ugaritic texts[32]; Ugaritic myths were texts of cult dramas.[33]

We could add to these varying interpretations of the Ugaritic myths basic methodological questions as to whether our approach to myth is valid.[34] Part of the explanation of these different interpretations is an underlying methodological presupposition. Do we interpret Ugaritic myths in their own context and then ask whether there are connections to other societies or do we assume that there is a universal, underlying myth?[35] A consequence of the latter position, which has probably been the predominant position in scholarship though now weakening, is that the Bible must be part of this unity. Since the postulated battle between God and the monster precedes creation, and in many theories is renewed in annual rites, the Bible cannot teach a completed creation. If Genesis says something different, then that is dismissed as a late addition contradicting other parts of Scripture.

Once the creation account is reinterpreted to suit views of an incomplete creation, then the logic built within the text is lost. Even when the subsequent story is seen as a

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28. Bernard F. Batto, "Creation Theology in Genesis" in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, CBQMS 24 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 16-38. For a later version of his position see idem., "The Combat Myth in Israelite Tradition Revisited" in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskamp Hypothesis*, ed. Jo Ann Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 217-36.

29. Pierre Bordreuil & Dennis Pardee, "Le combat de *Ba'lu* avec *Yammu* d'après les textes ougaritiques," *MARI* 7 (1993): 69. For a different argument for the same point see Wayne T. Pitard, "The Combat Myth as a Succession Story at Ugarit" in *Creation and Chaos: A Reconsideration of Hermann Gunkel's Chaoskamp Hypothesis*, ed. Jo Ann Scurlock and Richard H. Beal (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 199-205.

30. J.H. Grønbæk, "Baal's Battle with Yam – A Canaanite Creation Fight," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 10, no. 33 (1985): 27-44. For another version of the theory that the battles in the Ugaritic texts were reenacted in rituals see M.C.A. Korpel and J.C. de Moor, review of *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea,* by John Day, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31, no. 2 (1986): 243-45.

31. R.J. Clifford, "Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible," *Orientalia* 53, no. 2 (1984): 183-201. A similar understanding of creation as the establishment of order over chaos appears in P.C. Craigie, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 19-25; and in L.R. Fisher, "Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament." *Vetus Testamentum* 15, no. 3 (1965): 313-24.

32. B. Margalit, "The Ugaritic Creation Myth: Fact or Fiction," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 13 (1981): 137-45.

33. Arvid S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1952).

34. Robert A. Oden, Jr., "Theoretical Assumptions in the Study of Ugaritic Myths," *Maarav* 2, no. 1 (1979-80): 43-63.

35. An extreme version of the latter position includes Greek, Egyptian, Hittite, Hurrian and Indian myths; see Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster* (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

story of redemption, the connection to the creation narrative becomes problematic. If the connection within the biblical text becomes incomprehensible then an explanation is sought outside the text. The creation narrative is seen as a reflection of, or in a more conservative version, as a rebuttal of, accounts of surrounding cultures. In doing that, scholarship attempts to solve the problem of a text, now seen without its inner logic, from the texts of cultures, which also have a problem, but a different one, in their understanding of prehistory.

A fact that is seldom appreciated is that the biblical text stands out from contemporary literature in having a coherent connection of the prehistory and history of a people.[36] If we ask the question "Where did the Sumerians (or Egyptians, or any other of the Ancient Near East peoples) come from?" the indigenous literary records are silent.[37] That silence of the historical tradition is paralleled by the rarity and lateness of the mythical tradition. The belief that all peoples have detailed creation accounts arose from reading back the biblical account – and the modern secular search stimulated by a need for an alternate account – into the ancient world. Allusions are present in ANE texts; in the Mesopotamian world with Atrahasis even the creation of man is there, but not until the late Enuma Eliš is there a coherent account that has detail for both man and world. The lack of traditions of prehistory then impacts on modern scholarly attempts to go back to the time before texts in the literate cultures. The pre-Abrahamic history in the biblical text may seem obscure but it is not nearly as obscure as the prehistory of the parallel cultures.

6. Putting the Accounts of Each Culture in Context

Arguing that the Old Testament is not dependent upon "Canaanite" texts might be dismissed as conservative apologetics, but blurring the distinctiveness of the Ugaritic accounts of the battles of the gods does not do justice to the stories in the Ugaritic texts. Unlike Enuma Eliš the victor does not become undisputed head of the gods. Baal may triumph over Yam but he succumbs, in some fashion or for a time, to Mot. Further

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36. It might be objected that the Sumerian and Egyptian King Lists fill this gap but the very fact that they are "king" lists tell us that they refuse to acknowledge the existence of a stage before the detailed political organisation of the respective societies. In the time before the creation of man in the Old Babylonian Atrahasis, the lesser gods work on an irrigation system modeled on the detailed system of developed Mesopotamia. I have not done a proper anthropological survey but my impression is that many more people groups attempt to assert that they are autochthonous than those who have some history of origins. Non-biblical ANE cultures may preserve some political history and may incidentally refer to the ethnic history of other people but for themselves they have no cultural and ethnic history. I suspect that implying one did not come from elsewhere and that culturally you have always been the same is a way of preserving present arrangements from threat. If I may use a modern counter example, it is the historical record that says that Europeans arrived in the Americas, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand after other peoples, which sets up the dilemma of the relationship of the original ethnic group to the newcomers.

37. Once again I have not done an anthropological survey but I wonder if the societies, which do have such a record, such as the Maori, have the record for their more recent history and not for their prehistory.

El remains as head of the gods. The view of Pitard and others that the real point of the myths is sorting out the position of the second tier of gods has much to commend it. It should not escape notice that, at the time when our copies of the Ugaritic myths were written, Ugarit was a secondary power. It had a king but was under the major Hittite power, as previously it was, in some sense, under Egyptian power. Conversely, if speculation about the date of composition of Enuma Eliš is correct, Babylon was then one of the major powers in the late second millennium BC when large imperial powers came to dominate the ANE. The Ugaritic texts show battles between secondary gods; Enuma Eliš shows a fight for imperial control. Was each culture writing its myths in terms of the structures of authority which appeared relevant to that particular culture? Assuming one basic myth and then interpreting the myths of each individual culture to conform to that assumption, risks missing the individuality of each.

In scholarship the assumption that there was one basic culture or one basic myth has combined with evolutionary theories of the priority of polytheism, so that biblical religion is taken as a late development of this uniform mythical structure.

If there were religious uniformity, Ugaritic religion itself would logically be typical of Canaanite religion. That it might diverge significantly from "Canaanite" religion cannot be considered. The impression we derive from biblical references to Canaanite religion in the first millennium is that Baal is the main god and is an extremely active and vigorous god. The biblical text depicts YHWH as a warrior and going on the premise that anything biblical comes from Canaanite, the expectation is that Baal must also be a warrior god.

We turn then to Ugarit and what do we find? Baal is not the main god. El is. Does that mean that it is El who is the real precursor of the God of Israel whose name can also be El or forms connected to El? Surely that then means that El should be a warrior, since YHWH is one. Attempts have been made to squeeze some military aspects of El out of the Ugaritic texts but they are fairly forced.[38] Did then the warrior character of YHWH come from Baal and YHWH's role as leading god from El? Yet is even Baal a warrior at Ugarit?

That question confronts us with the enigmatic character of the Ugaritic myths. We have a number of texts written in alphabetic cuneiform.[39] The general scholarly conclusion is that these texts may be put together to form one story but that has been questioned.[40] Certainty is not helped by the fact that the texts are extensively damaged.

The plot, taking the texts as part of one story, is that the sea god, Yam, is the king of the gods with the support of the supreme god, El. Naturally, since El seems definitely supreme, that raises the question of what "king" means in this context. Yam sends messengers to the assembly of the gods, presided over by El, demanding that

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38. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, HSM 24 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 29, 30.

39. See for translations N.Wyatt, ed., *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 2d ed. (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002); J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends,* 2d ed (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978).

40. For discussion see J.C.L. Gibson, "The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle," *Orientalia* 53, no. 2 (1984): 204-06.

Baal be handed over to him. The gods are cowered by the messengers, except for Baal. Though the text does not single him out for mention in this context, most scholars think El must be included among the frightened gods. Baal subsequently fights and defeats Yam. The significant fact is that the victory is completely dependent on magic weapons provided to him by the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Khasis.

The next major part of the story concerns a building of a palace[41] for Baal. Permission for this has to be granted by El. When he eventually does grant it, Kothar-wa-Khasis does the building. From this new palace the triumphant god Baal sends a message to the god of the underworld, Mot. Mot replies with the demand that Baal, with his entourage, come and submit to him. Baal does so and the gods are told that Baal is dead. Mourning follows and attempts to find a replacement for Baal. The sister of Baal, Anat, fights with and destroys Mot. Baal returns to life. He subsequently fights Mot, but the fight is ended not by a victory for "warrior" Baal. Rather a message, brought by the sun god, that El will be displeased, causes Mot to withdraw.

What do we make of this? Who is in charge: El or Baal? Is Baal really a warrior god if he is dependent on weapons supplied by another and the one clear victory description concerns Anat? It is commonly explained that Baal in this text conforms to the model of a dying-and-rising fertility god who is dead during the agricultural off-season but revived for the growing season.[42] Is that what we expect of a warrior god? What is the straight line of evolutionary development that we can draw from this to biblical religion or even to Canaanite religion as it is depicted in the Bible? In the Ugaritic myths Asherah is the consort El. In the Canaanite religion known from the Bible, she is the consort of Baal.[43] Anat is a major figure in Ugaritic mythology. She is not mentioned in the Bible.

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41. The word used derives from Mesopotamia and in Mesopotamia it means a palace and never a temple. However in the Bible it is the word used for God's temple. What then does it mean in Ugarit? When a god, now claiming to be king because he has defeated the previous king, wants a new form of architecture, "palace" would seem the most likely translation. We expect that the god, because he is a god, have a temple where he is worshipped. Does this "palace" have any connection to that temple? The text leaves such questions unanswered.

42. E.g. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, 34. For an alternate view Gibson, "The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle," 206, 207.

43. The situation is complicated by a myth known not from any Semitic source but from Hittite (H.A. Hoffner, "The Elkunirsa Myth reconsidered," *Revue hittite et asianique* 23 [1965]: 5-16). In this myth El encourages Baal to have sex with his wife. The end of the text is lost so once more we are reduced to conjecture as to where this fits in the whole picture. It could be that this text is an explanation of how Asherah transferred from El to Baal. Note however that there is no hint of this in the Ugaritic texts. Even if, and it is only if, this solves one problem of the difference between Ugaritic religion and later Canaanite religion, it also means that Ugarit was significantly different to later Canaanite religion. Further the Hittite text is not clearly later than the Ugaritic texts. It points not to different understandings of the gods developing but to contemporary different views. How valid is it then to use Ugarit as the resource for exegeting the Bible or Canaanite religion when there might be closer models?

7. A Theology of Tyre?

The way Ezekiel 28 has been commonly treated is an illustration of the problems that arise from the supposition of a uniform theology in the ANE. The prophecy is clearly identified as a message to the ruler of Tyre. Yet it says of that ruler that he was in Eden, the garden of God (v. 13). It describes him as being covered with precious stones, whose enumeration fits those on the ephod of the high priest of Israel (v. 13). Yet the description also includes references to the "stones of fire," which are hard to identify from elsewhere in the biblical text (v. 14). Other mysterious aspects of the description include accusing the ruler of thinking he was god (v. 2) and the mention of a cherub (vv. 14,16).

It is quite common to see this passage as further evidence of the presence of Canaanite myth in the biblical text.[44] Such interpretations avoid the question of how mythological elements persist into the text as late as Ezekiel and why there is a mixture of very specifically biblical themes, such as the stones of the high priestly garment, with outside myth.

Some interpretations can be grouped with Gordon Wenham's attempt to find a non-literal interpretation of the Garden of Eden story. He sees it as a symbolic narrative where Eden is an archetypal sanctuary.[45] If one takes a similar approach, without Wenham's idea that the Eden story is non-literal and sees Ezekiel 28 as a significant source about the nature of this sanctuary, the result is that Eden was a mountain sanctuary in which a prince was present dressed in the later priestly robes of Aaron.[46] Paradoxically such interpretations omit to explain how the naked Adam wore such robes. This contradiction does not trouble those who use the clear clash between the description in Genesis 2-3 and that in Ezekiel 28 as proof of the fluidity of biblical "traditions."[47]

However, taking the text seriously as concerning the ruler of the pagan city of Tyre, how can he be described as being in the garden of God and dressed as an Israelite high priest?[48] One theory is that a story, which concerned the fall of a high priest in Jerusalem, was diverted or re-applied to the ruler of Tyre.[49] This interpretation has an

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44. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament,* HSM 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1972), 168-73; Mullen, *The Divine Council*, 241-44.

45. Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story" in *Proceedings of the 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19-25. For A survey of similar interpretations see T. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*, CBET 25 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), 307-17.

46. Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 35-36, 49, n.72; idem., *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 2006), 48.

47. Norman C. Habel, "Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (1967): 523-24; John L. McKenzie, "Mythological Allusions in Ezek. 28: 12-16," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75, no. 4 (1956): 327.

48. Joseph Blenkinsopp "solves" the problem by dismissing the listing of precious stones as a later addition (*Ezekiel,* IBC [Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990], 123).

49. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 394-97.

affinity with those interpretations which see the author as willingly composing his picture of Eden out of mythological fragments.[50] It implies a very dim-witted author who could not see the inconsistency of the materials he was putting together.[51]

Authors who see Ezekiel as throwing together contrary traditions and random bits of foreign mythology have some excuse for ignoring the context of the material in the text. After all their image of the biblical text is a confused mess. However others have less excuse for ignoring that context. The passage is not a neutral description. It is a negative and polemical one. Though there are different details in the oracles of vv. 1-10 and 11-19 they belong together.[52]

Without going into details of genre - and, as commonly the case, this is a text which does not fit in a neat genre box[53] - the passage is clearly a satirical portrayal. Self-image and aspirations are contrasted with tragic consequences. Thus the text has aspects of a parody. In a parody the ridiculed elements may be drawn from the world of the target or the world of the attacker. Since it is the attacker's system of values, which is assumed to be valid, the target may be portrayed in terms of that system. The text does not have to say the obvious. It does not say: "If you were in my world, what you are saying would amount to X." That would be obvious to the receivers of the text, who have some consciousness of a difference of worlds. It becomes potentially complicated when aspects of the target's and of the attacker's world are mixed. There is a sense in which it is natural that they be mixed because the target is being assessed in terms of the attacker's value system and yet real aspects of the target's value system invite such attack.

I suggest that this is what has happened here. The text is not saying: "This is what ancient Eden was really like." It is saying: "You regard yourself as equivalent in importance to Adam in Eden." It is not saying Adam wore the later high priest's pectoral. It is saying: "You think you are a glorious high priest."

Interpretation has tended to focus on the references in the text we can connect to something we know from elsewhere in the Bible. Imaginative guesses are then used to explain elements such as the "stones of fire." I suggest that these enigmatic elements are part of the Tyrian contribution to the picture. Scholarship has not recognised them as such because the implicit assumption is that Tyre must be the same as Ugarit even though there is nothing like this in Ugarit.

One could find other examples of the same problem but I would like to use this piece of conjecture to highlight a problem. Assuming that creation is not finished leads

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50. H.J. van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy on Tyre (Ez. 26,1 – 28,19): A New Approach,* BibOr 20 (Rome; Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968); Herbert G. May, "The King in the Garden of Eden: A Study of Ezekiel 28: 21-19" in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honour of James Muilenburg,* ed. Bernard W. Andersen and Walter Harrelson (London: SCM, 1962), 166-76.

51. There is an interesting contrast in approaches. Those who assume a dim-witted author are very willing to stress the inconsistencies between the Ezekiel picture of Eden and the Genesis one. Those who want to read back later institutions, such as sanctuary and priesthood, into the Genesis story ignore the contradictions. For the importance of the thesis of the dim-witted author to prevailing theories of biblical composition see Weeks, *Sources and Authors*, 186-97.

52. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 87-90.

53. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 102.

to ruling out the biblical history in which worshippers of the true God live alongside polytheists and share language and idiom with them. The result has been a reduction of the expected diversity in the ANE and a failure to appreciate the realities of historical change in Gentile cultures. The assumption of one basic underlying myth is an example of the consequences. Political change can be acknowledged but not cultural and religious change and differences.[54] Thus we misinterpret the history of the people of God, and also the history of the surrounding cultures. The assumption that all "Canaanite" religion must be identical with the religion of Ugarit does not take the history of Ugarit seriously. The Ugaritic myths we have are written in an alphabetic cuneiform: that is an alphabet adapted for writing on clay. It was used alongside Mesopotamian cuneiform at Ugarit. This use of the Mesopotamian script outside of Mesopotamia was found in a wide strip of territory from Anatolia (Turkey), through Syria and Palestine down to Egypt. Cuneiform was used to write Hittite and Hurrian as well as a locally adapted Akkadian in many cities of Syria and for international correspondence, including the correspondence of the Egyptian Empire written in various forms of Akkadian. This spread and popularity of cuneiform was characteristic of mid to late second millennium BC. After the disturbances at the end of the millennium, except for the occasional text reflecting Assyrian and Babylonian imperial expansion into the west, cuneiform is no longer found there. The indigenous scripts of the area, Luwian hieroglyphs and the West Semitic alphabetic script, are present but not the Mesopotamian cuneiform script and its alphabetic variant that we call Ugaritic script.[55] Scholarship is ready to concede that there has been major change in the area: Hittites and Hurrians seem to disappear from visibility. Yet those same changes, even though they destroy the city of Ugarit itself, are assumed not to affect the enduring existence of Ugaritic religion.

8. Psalms and Prophets.

Since it is so hard to find evidence of a battle of the gods in the biblical creation account, the argument for biblical dependence upon a Babylonian or Canaanite myth has depended heavily on passages in psalms or prophets, which show God in opposition to or conflict with the sea or sea creatures. It is generally acknowledged that many of these have a historical reference and allude to the conflict with Egypt and Israel's escape and passage through the "Red" Sea. However that is commonly dismissed as a secondary application of the original myth to a historical circumstance. Once again the postulate of a universal myth rules interpretation. That postulate appears more plausible because sometimes the allusion is ambiguous or creation themes appear along with exodus themes. In Enuma Eliš Tiamat has a number of

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54. I am not denying that there will also be aspects of cultural continuity. Mesopotamia or Egypt had enduring characteristics for centuries. Yet they also change. Giving due recognition to continuity and change is the great challenge of cultural history.

55. See Noel K. Weeks, "The Disappearance of Cuneiform from the West and Elites in the Ancient Near East" in *Registers and Modes of Communication in the Ancient Near East: Getting the Message Across*, ed. Kyle H. Keimer and Gillan Davis (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, forthcoming).

monster forms as allies.[56] In the Ugaritic texts a number of creatures appear to have some connection with Yam, though their exact relationship is obscure. One such creature is written as *ltn* and its connection with the Leviathan of the Bible is confirmed by the use of the same adjectival descriptions in Isaiah 27:1. The term *tannîn*[57] also occurs in Ugaritic texts. Ugaritic poetry shares with Biblical poetry the use of parallel lines and, in both, "sea" and "river" form parallel pairs.

Thus in purely lexical and literary terms the biblical text is far closer to the Ugaritic texts than to Babylonian texts. The relationship is more than the lexical relationship of cognate languages and encompasses similarity in literary style and idiom. The tradition of scholarship, which sees monotheism as a late development out of polytheism, means that any similarity, let alone use of cognate names, must prove the biblical writer is dependent on the outside source.

Isaiah 27:1 raises the crucial issues. The surrounding text gives insufficient context to confidently identify the reference. As mentioned above, the terms descriptive of Leviathan coincide with the description of Ugaritic *ltn*. Hence the majority interpretation sees here a deliberate reference to a mythological creature. The difference in interpretation is then whether one expects the importation of the whole complex of stories and ideas, which surround a marine enemy of the god(s)[58], or one sees a literary metaphor, which does not include the importation of pagan notions, but alludes to the pagan ideas.[59]

There is another possibility. While the texts from the two different cultures are expressing their ideas though the image of the same creature, hence with the same descriptive terms, the way that creature is seen and the ideological context in which that creature is placed is peculiar to each culture. To use a more modern analogy, many countries have used the lion as a royal and national image and hence there would be a similarity in the visual depiction of that national icon. However the ideological and symbolic context into which the icon fits would be different.

Suppose we allow the possibility that the context in which the Bible places Leviathan is a particularly biblical one. Then Psalm 104:26 and Job 41 do not have to be explained away as a late domestication of an original enemy of God. Leviathan would then be a part of creation and that would fit with Genesis 1:21.[60]

Yet in Isaiah 27:1 Leviathan is clearly hostile to God. In Psalm 74:14 Leviathan occurs in a context that refers to a past victory of God where Leviathan was the enemy. That mention is placed between dividing the sea (v. 13) and opening springs (v. 15). If we introduce chaos monster ideas from outside, then the reference could be to a battle at the time of creation. If we use biblical data the context points to the events of the exodus with the crossing of the sea and the provision of water in the wilderness.

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56. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 224-36.

57. Variously translated as "dragon" or "monster" in English translations of passages such as Gen. 1:21, Is. 27:1 etc.

58. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster*, 62-68.

59. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 2:232-35.

60. The nature of Leviathan then becomes a secondary question. Assuming myth rather than creation tends to direct interpretation of the form.

Both Isaiah 27:1 and Psalm 74:13 refer to *tannîn,* another marine creature that occurs in similar contexts in the Bible and in Ugaritic. Using the wider variety of terms allows us to explore more passages. Isaiah 51:9 uses *tannîn* in a context, which, as the next verse shows, alludes to the crossing of the Red Sea. Rahab also occurs in that verse and in Isaiah 30:7, Psalm 87:4 and 89:10. In some cases Rahab clearly stands for Egypt and the combination with reference to the sea in Psalm 89:9 is similar to other passages where the combination of Egyptian enemies and the crossing of the sea occurs. Ezekiel 29:3 and 32:2 are other passages which connect Egypt or its ruler to a sea creature.

What is clear is that sea creatures occur as images of the human enemies of God, in a context that brings in the sea because the climax of the great battle between God and the Egyptian enemy was at the "Red" Sea. That fact is acknowledged by virtually all who comment on these passages. The crucial question is the interpretation and with it the model that rules our whole understanding of ancient Israel. Is biblical Israel a late evolution out of a polytheistic context carrying with it vestiges of that pagan past? Or is it a culture that existed alongside those other cultures, sharing their language and literary idioms but placing them in a different context? Israel and the others used the sea creatures as an image to express the idea of hostility but each placed that hostility in a different context.[61]

In some ways the answer one gives to this crucial question will depend upon presuppositions. However the model that assumes a parallel, rather than a derivative existence for Israel fits with other things. It fits with the importance of history that comes through the biblical narrative. A completed creation means that everything else is history, not partly history and partly mythology. I have argued above that the attempt to take all of the data, from all of the relevant cultures and to see one picture in it leads to confusion where we cannot see that the Ugaritic use of these images is distinctly Ugaritic, unable to be turned into a hybrid Babylonian-Ugaritic-Biblical (plus Egypt etc.) model. The models that grow out of denial of the uniqueness of the biblical text destroy the uniqueness of the other cultures as well. That is not to deny interconnection. It may be Syrian ideas contributed to the late synthesis that is Enuma Eliš, but to approach that issue historically we have to acknowledge that there is not just one myth through the whole area. When we stop imposing Enuma Eliš on everything we can see that it does not fit early Mesopotamia and can address its origins as a real historical question. Also this approach does not exclude the possibility that the biblical usage was sharpened by knowledge that others were using the same figures in quite different ways. Yet we must be careful how we use that possibility. As mentioned above we have no certainty that the "Canaanite" religion Israel might have encountered was identical to that of Ugarit.[62] Using conjectured background to say what the Bible "must" mean is just bad scholarship.

A different way to make the same point is to take some examples of where the Bible has been explained in terms of a "chaos monster" and to note the consequence. An instructive example is furnished by Robert Fyall's attempt to make sense of the book of Job assuming that the images there of the sea and Leviathan belong in the

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61. Once again the use of the lion is a useful analogy.

62. The absence of Anat from the biblical polemic is at least interesting, because one could argue that she is a greater warrior at Ugarit than Baal.

same world as the Ugaritic images.[63] The result is that, despite some very helpful exegesis of crucial passages, he comes to the conclusion that Behemoth must be a personification of death related to the Ugaritic god Mot and that Leviathan is Satan.[64] Sometimes unlikely interpretations are just that: unlikely interpretations. The issue is not whether there is a connection of some sort between this Leviathan and the probable same animal in the Ugaritic texts. It is how we see the connection. It is not a question of whether the Bible can personify death. Of course it can. It is whether we have to see that personification through the image of a mythological god. So much has been made of the overlaps between the Bible and surrounding cultures that we cannot see the Bible as its own conceptual world but rather we read it through the images of an alien world. Significantly in terms of the starting point of this essay, Fyall denies the biblical teaching on the completion of creation.[65]

I have previously objected to John Walton's use of ANE sources to interpret the Bible when the real world of the ANE is more complex than he claims and sometimes really different from what he claims.[66] In his treatment of Adam and Eve he invokes the chaos monster theory without telling his readers that the whole theory is a matter of debate amongst ANE scholars.[67] In this case there is a clear connection between the creation of an incomplete world and the thesis he presents because he sees humans as coming into a world where chaos has been only partly overcome.[68] N.T. Wright defends Walton's position in a fascinating contribution.[69] The positions of Walton and Wright come together in that both see Adam as called to work together with God in spreading order into the incomplete world. Through the failure of Adam, and subsequently of Israel, that task passes on to Christ and the church. It is instructive to see how denial of the completeness of creation can lead to a position in which man is completing what God had not completed. One can ask whether a consequence must be that redemption will also slide into being incomplete without human participation.[70]

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63. Robert Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

64. Fyall's thesis is partly directed by a useful question: why is it that the Satan who is such a crucial figure at the beginning, plays no apparent role in the resolution? He employs Ugaritic parallels in order to find Satan later in the text. What he does not consider is the possibility the absence is deliberate. Satan is real but man's basic struggle has to be with God.

65. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen*, 128.

66. Noel K. Weeks, "The Bible and the 'Universal' Ancient World: A Critique of John Walton*," Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 1 (2016): 1-28.

67. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 132-33;

68. "A legitimate option is that from the start people were mortal, and pain and suffering were already a part of a not yet fully ordered cosmos...." (Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve,* 144).

69. "Excursus on Paul's Use of Adam by N.T. Wright" in Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve,* 170-80.

70. There is another significant parallel between the methodologies of Walton and Wright in Wright's use of extra-biblical evidence. We are told that the apocryphal books *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* are background to understanding Paul's references to Adam (Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve,* 171). Once again there is no attempt to establish that Paul knew and was influenced by these particular extra-biblical sources. The reality is that we now have significant

9. Creation, Covenant and Redemption

I earlier argued that the completeness of creation created obligation and that this structure has an interesting parallel with the logic of redemption. The possibility of interconnection here is increased by the many positions, which would see the original created relationship of God and man as a covenant. My concern here is not to debate that position. It is rather to ask the question of whether, as in the issues discussed above, failure to see the parallel existence of the covenant people alongside others will lead to difficulty in understanding covenant relationships in the biblical text.

There is something about the account of the original sin that needs emphasis in this context. It was one sin, a point that Paul emphasises in Romans 5:16. I have suggested that there may be similarities between the obligation of the first pair and obligations in redemption but the singularity (in several senses) and the uniqueness of the original events must be preserved. We are going where the text does not go when we try to determine why judgement was so immediate in the garden, but might it have been because Adam in person and in situation was a unique individual?

I think the divine-human relationship in the beginning had the nature of a covenant but that is not crucial to my argument. My concern is that, whatever its formal name, it had similarities to those divine-human relationships that are called "covenants" later in the Bible. The relationship of the original arrangement to later covenants has become a matter of contention in the form of a debate over the "republication" of the Covenant of Works (the original created relationship) in the Sinai covenant.[71] The debate can be conducted in terms of the approach to this question in historical Reformed theology. Yet in recent times the debate has been revitalised by interpretations of extra-biblical evidence. Above I have expressed concern that ANE evidence may be interpreted from presuppositions, which see the biblical text as derivative. An accompanying phenomenon in such cases is that the cultural distinctiveness of the various ANE cultures – not just the biblical one – is obscured. The distinctive elements of particular cultures can no longer be seen clearly because of the assumption that they must be like elements of another culture. To somebody, who looks at the recent republication debate, not out of the perspective of historical Reformed theology, but out of the history of Biblical Studies, it seems that arguments using ANE data have obscured rather than helped.

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amounts of extra-biblical material. By choosing what you like and assuming it is the lens through which the biblical text must be read, all sorts of conclusions can be reached. Use of extra-biblical evidence threatens to become no more disciplined than allegory as an exegetical method. The point is not that we cannot use such evidence. The point is that the specific applicability of any bit of external evidence has to be argued.

71. For extensive discussion and bibliography see "Report to the 83rd (2016) Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the Committee to Study Republication."

10. A History of Treaty-Covenant Studies

I have published a much more detailed study of the evidence and its implications.[72] Here I want to emphasise the way assumptions about the relationship of Israel to the surrounding world influenced the discussion.

The crucial pioneering work came from George E. Mendenhall.[73] He based himself largely upon the extant Hittite and Assyrian suzerainty treaties. At that time the extant Hittite treaties were from the second millennium BC and the Assyrian ones largely from the first millennium. He observed correctly that the Hittite treaties made use of history to persuade the vassal to obedience and the Assyrian ones did not. The crucial next step was assuming uniformity across the ANE in any given period. On that basis, this formal difference could be used to date treaties/covenants. Biblical covenants that had this use of history would then have to be from second millennium and he thought the Ten Commandments and the treaty of Joshua 24 were in that class.

Using the same logic and premises Meredith Kline argued that Deuteronomy must be considered second millennium.[74] The initial purpose of these arguments was to defend the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy and therefore their intent is to be commended. However their logical cogency depended upon the original premises. Mendenhall saw the differences between the two sorts of treaties as a matter of time because of his premise of cultural uniformity. Subsequent discoveries showed it was more a matter of the distinction between Hittite and Assyrian culture.[75] In this context something else is more important.

When we compare the covenants that God made with Israel with ANE treaties made by imperial rulers something is obvious. The kindness, benevolence and graciousness of God are so different to human rulers. Formally there may be items in biblical covenants, which correspond to ANE treaties, but the atmosphere is very different. While the methods to induce obedience may differ between Hittite and Assyrian treaties, all want the vassal to do things, while the suzerain's commitment is very limited. That is, they are primarily impositions of stipulations. How does that relate to the connection that was being made between biblical covenants and ANE treaties?

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72. Noel K. Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-Cultural Relationships*, LHBOTS 407 (London: T & T Clark, 2004).

73. George E. Mendenhall*, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Pres, Board of Colportage of W. Penn., 1955).

74. Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) revised as *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). A similar argument was presented by Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1966), 102. An elaborate defence of the Kitchen position has appeared in Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J.N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012). Despite the great scholarship and industry of this work it suffers from ignoring the possibility of alternate explanations of the data in terms of individual cultures. See my "Treaty and Covenant Again: A Review Article" (forthcoming).

75. For a detailed elaboration see Weeks, *Admonition and Curse* and for briefer treatment Noel K. Weeks, "The Ambiguity of Biblical 'Background'," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 2 (2010): 221-25.

In an early article Meredith Kline made a distinction between "law" and "promise" covenants in the Bible.[76] He argued that in ANE treaties, if it was a parity treaty, that is a treaty between equal powers, both swore the oath, but in other treaties the oath was unilateral.[77] He then claimed that in biblical covenants the crucial thing was who swore the oath: if it was God then it was a promise covenant, but if it was man then it was a law covenant. It seems that Kline has made the deduction from the treaties that whoever takes an oath takes an obligation on himself. He has then transferred that to Biblical covenants. He is obviously thinking of Genesis 15 as the covenant where God takes an oath and it is true of this text that there is no mention of an obligation being placed upon Abram. Using the ANE suzerain-vassal treaty as the model to understand biblical covenants has the problem that the biblical God is not like an imperial suzerain, who was obviously concerned to impose service on the vassal while promising little.[78] In biblical covenants where men take the oath, God's commitments are as real as human ones. Kline used Exodus 24 and Deuteronomy 29 as examples of human oath taking.[79] That is true but both are in the context of God's own covenant keeping (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 29:2-8) and the wider context contains many covenantal commitments on God's part (Ex. 23:20-31; Deut. 11:13-15, 22-25; 28:1-14). Is the imposition of the model of pagan imperialism on the covenants of the Bible justified?

If the standard ANE treaty form was the source of the biblical covenants, then they have been significantly transformed in Israel because God is different from a human ruler. As I mentioned above, the scholarly tradition is against according originality to Israel. The contradiction of data and scholarly expectation needed to be reconciled and it was. I am not saying that somebody consciously went out to solve the contradiction. I suspect rather that the expectation of a discovery that would show the ANE background of the generosity of God helped the discovery. M. Weinfeld found the background in the Middle Babylonian *kudurru* inscriptions.[80]

Kudurru texts are records and guarantees of grants, largely of land, by some Middle Babylonian kings (late 2nd millennium BC). Though Babylonian kings of the time certainly employed treaties, this corpus of material is quite distinct from treaties. Whereas in treaties the curses are aimed against the vassal if he breaks the terms of the pact, in these texts the curses are directed against a third party who might attempt

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76. Meredith G. Kline, "Law Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (1964): 1-20.

77. On this point Kline's theory falls foul of the complexity of the data on ANE treaties. For examples that make clear that the suzerain also swore an oath see Gary N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 4 (1996): 670-96, esp. 694. This tendency to simplify the complex ANE data is even more problematic in Kline's later work.

78. Where promises were made they were generally as much in the suzerain's interest as the vassal's. The suzerain often promised to keep the vassal and his descendants on the throne. It was in the suzerain's interest to defend a compliant vassal and dynasty against rebellions, which would likely be anti-imperial.

79. Kline, "Law Covenant," 4, 5.

80. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184-203.

to take the granted land. The recipient of the land is not placed under obligations.[81] Some examples make explicit that the grant of land is a reward for service. This may be the case even when that fact is not stated.[82]

There are really no grounds for considering *kudurru* texts a sub-species of Mesopotamian treaties. We find here something analogous with what happened when Enuma Eliš or Ugaritic myths were made the model of creation texts in order to explain the biblical creation account. The assumption that there must be uniformity throughout the ANE and everything in the Bible must have a precursor leads to misinterpretation of extra-biblical texts. A very similar question arises of why we should take a text form, which is characteristic of a particular period of *Babylonian* history, as a crucial key for the interpretation of biblical texts. Nobody argues that the *kudurru* is a constant feature of Mesopotamia, let alone of Syria or Egypt.

However the consequences were even more serious. Since a form of text far removed from treaties has been classified as a "treaty," the genus "treaty" must then have two very distinct species: "covenants of grant" and normal treaties.[83] Normal extra-biblical treaties are characterised by imposition of heavy rules upon the vassal. We might say they are dominated by laws. It was perfectly natural therefore that these two species of treaty were then seen as analogous to the biblical concepts of law and grace. The consequence was that it seemed natural to separate biblical covenants into covenants of grant (or grace) and covenants of law.

In a later work Kline took up this separation between covenants of grant and covenants of law. To his credit he recognised that formally a *kudurru* differed from a treaty.[84] Nevertheless he brings treaty and *kudurru* together as explanations of biblical treaties with the *kudurru* the background of God's gracious grants. This contrast of the two types of biblical covenant continues in Kline's later work.[85]

The one clear biblical case of a commitment by God with no mention of human obligation is the covenant of Genesis 15. Can we make a distinction of such significance on the basis of one clear case? It is not as though Genesis 15 is the formal inauguration of the relationship between God and Abram. In the context of the whole story it is God's formal dramatization of his faithfulness to his side of the covenant in response to Abram's query. Do we have a good reason to separate it from the covenant of Genesis 17 where God both promises and places Abraham under commands?

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81. In saying this I have in mind what is emphasized in the Middle Babylonian texts. The scholarly discussion has spread beyond these texts and the attempt has been made to see the category of royal grants in a broader sense as the model for God's promises to David. In that context whether ANE royal grants were totally without obligations on the recipient has become important. It is highly probably that certain regular obligations of a royal subject continued unmentioned. See the data collected in Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants." That article is also useful for showing that often genres have fuzzy boundaries.

82. Thus there is something ironic in making these rewards for service the prototypes of biblical grace covenants.

83. This separation is very clear in Meredith Kline's early article "Law Covenant." He makes specific reference elsewhere to Weinfeld's distinction of "promissory covenants" and "obligatory covenants" (see Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, 31, n.13.

84. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, 31-38.

85. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue,* 5.

The sharp division into grace and law covenants leads to expecting similarities between covenants where man is under obligation. Thus the similarities of the original covenant with Adam (commonly called the "covenant of works") and the Sinai covenant are emphasised. Hence it seems plausible that the Sinai covenant was "in some sense" a republication of the Covenant of Works.

To be fair it should be recognised that there was a precedent for this division into grace covenants and law covenants in Paul's antithesis of works and grace. Yet I think it is a fair question whether Paul was thinking in terms of two distinct covenant forms and not rather two distinct workings of God corresponding to two distinct human reactions. Note the presence of both in the Sinai context where the opening in Exodus 20:2 places that covenant so clearly in the realm of response to already completed redemption.[86]

11. Some Tentative Theology

My major purpose in this article is to expose the way misuse of extra-biblical evidence and with that ignoring of historical considerations creates problems for biblical interpretation. Yet if I do not suggest an alternate theological framework, the structure I question might continue to stand for want of something better.

I have already noted that the implication of a completed creation is obedience in gratitude and obedience in gratitude has a parallel to the logic of Christian obedience in the wake of completed redemption. At any point after the original sin two factors are applying: the responsibility to God as creator that applies to all creatures and the responsibility to God as redeemer that applies to God's people. Let us take them separately. Adam in a state of original righteousness had a responsibility of perfect obedience. That his obedience was tested by the specific test of the tree would not have limited his larger responsibility. Hence any person "in Adam" would have a responsibility of perfect obedience. For such a person the way of life would be the way of complete obedience. Any failure must mean judgement. The situation of the redeemed person has some additional factors. He is still under obligation of obedience to his Creator but he is able to receive forgiveness for the sins against that obligation. The same applies to his sins against his additional obligations because of redemption. Though for clarity's sake I call it additional obligations I do not mean that the works he has to do to fulfil that obligation are necessarily different. The crucial difference between the two groups is not the expected actions but the possibility of forgiveness for failure. In other words justification by faith separates the two groups.

God, dealing with chosen Abraham, could act in terms of grace. What about the covenant with the assembly of Israel at Sinai? We know that not all who came from Israel were necessarily of the Israel of God. Hence the assembly to whom the covenant was addressed at Sinai would have consisted of redeemed and unredeemed individuals. Hence the covenant addressed to that mixed multitude expressed both the obligation of perfect obedience and the assurance of grace. The crying out for mercy

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86. Compare the emphasis on the context of the Sinai covenant as a context of grace and redemption in Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948): 124-29.

and the confidence of pardon, which comes through prophets and psalms, tells us that there were people who lived under the law but who recognised in the lawgiver the God of mercy. Those same texts tell us that there were people in Israel who, in spite of their manifold sinfulness, did not see themselves as in need of mercy.

We might ask why those two categories are not more clearly distinguished in the way the covenant is expressed. However that is equivalent to asking why the Bible is not written as a textbook in theology. We may profitably compare this mixture in the Sinai covenant with the mixture in the ministry of Jesus. The same Jesus, who holds out mercy to sinners, makes clear the exacting requirements of the law in the Sermon on the Mount. He sends the rich young ruler away discouraged by applying the law against coveting to him. People do not present themselves in clearly separate categories of redeemed and unredeemed. They are divided into those categories by their reactions to the Word of God that comes to them as a combination of demands and offers of mercy. There is another reflection of that same combination in Paul's different perspectives on the "law." It is "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12) and a "word of faith" (Rom. 10:8; Deut. 30:14). And yet reliance on it for salvation places a man under curse (Gal. 3:10).

Theological analysis is like separating the coloured strands in a multi-coloured knitted garment. There really are different strands there. However the beauty of the actual garment lies in the combination.

12. Return to the Issue

There is nothing like this combination of law and mercy in the extra-biblical treaties. As I have mentioned, the search for something equivalent led to an artificial comparison with an unrelated form. Assuming the biblical covenants came from these two quite disparate sources then meant that law and grace were expected to appear separately, whereas in biblical covenants they tend to come together because the suzerain is the God of both holiness and mercy and he addresses a mixed audience.

My point is that the "republication" controversy has been revived by an invalid comparison. If one expects grace and law to be clearly separated because they have clearly different precursors in extra-biblical texts, then one will look for that in biblical texts and put covenants, which can be classified as "law covenants," together. That then creates a theological problem because it clashes with the Reformed attempt to see the workings of God revealed in the Bible under the overarching rubric of his gracious purposes. People then try to resolve the conflict, as if it is basically a theological problem and try to devise an acceptable form of a "republication" thesis.[87]

However the roots of the recent formulation of the problem are not theological. They lie in the way a certain view of the Bible's relationship to the surrounding cultures changes our reading of the Bible. That the problem has been seen as a purely theological one is evidence of a dangerous drift apart of the broader theological

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87. That is what I see as happening in the church report mentioned in footnote 71.

disciplines so that theology is being done without full awareness of what has happened in Biblical Studies.

The situation has then become further complicated because Kline was such an innovative thinker. On the basis largely of his particular approaches to the creation and to covenants he proceeded to develop an elaborate structure, impacting other parts of the Bible and theology. Reading these later works it seems that he has not kept up with the later discoveries, which invalidated Mendenhall's thesis of unity in covenant form in any particular period. Thus on weak foundations an imposing structure has been built. Whereas Kline's original intent was to defend the authenticity of the Scriptures, others have then seen his methodology as a justification for denying the unique aspects of the OT within its own historical context. The resultant problems cannot be resolved without going back to crucial assumptions about the relationship of the biblical text to the surrounding cultures.