

2

Revolution and Evolution

Ancient Near Eastern Backgrounds to Creation

We are all trying to construct cosmologies of survival.

—Donna Moylan¹

Before embarking on our tour of biblical cosmologies, one thing more needs to be considered, namely, our specific point of departure. Would that be the biological theory of evolution or the astronomical account of the Big Bang? No. Scientific cosmology and Neo-Darwinian theory, for example, will provide fruitful avenues of dialogue, but not right now, not in the beginning. Why not? For the simple reason that modern science is not where the biblical cosmologists began. Instead of entering the biblical traditions through the “front door,” that is, through the threshold of *our* world—the world that we know through modern science and culture—we must find the text’s “backdoor” entrance, namely, the text’s own context. It is through this back entrance that we can detect traces of the path our biblical authors blazed in their own journey of theological discernment.

The framers of creation in the Bible inherited a treasure trove of venerable traditions from their cultural neighbors. Instead of creating their accounts *ex nihilo*, the composers of Scripture developed their traditions in dialogue with some of the great religious traditions of the surrounding cultures, particularly those originating from Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as those of their more immediate Canaanite neighbors. This should come as no surprise: geographically ancient Palestine was sandwiched between the

superpowers of the ancient Near East, serving as both their land bridge and buffer zone. Before Israel ever entered the historical scene, some of these kingdoms, both large and small, imperial and petty, had developed their own accounts of creation, which the biblical writers were at least nominally aware. Indeed, many of these traditions constituted what could be called the cultural “canon” of Near Eastern antiquity,² and it was in relation to them that ancient Israel developed its own.

An excursion into the creation traditions of ancient Israel’s neighbors is, therefore, required before embarking on our more ambitious trek through the Hebrew Scriptures. This “backdoor” approach takes seriously the Bible’s ancient context. We must, in other words, understand something of the genesis of the Bible’s Genesis accounts in order to understand more fully what these accounts say. A sampling will suffice.

War of the Gods: Mesopotamia and Canaan

First stop: Mesopotamia. One of Israel’s most formidable oppressors was Babylon, situated beside the river Euphrates. Babylon’s kings include the great Hammurabi (1848–1806 BCE) of law-code fame, and of imperial fame there is Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE), who conquered Judah and deported much of its populace. From Babylon, beginning in the late second millennium under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (ca. 1133–1116 BCE), comes an epic narrative of cosmic intrigue that includes a story of creation.³ Titled *Enūma elish* (“when on high”) for its first two words (in Akkadian), this epic was recited publicly, perhaps even dramatically, every year during the New Year’s Festival in April as part of a grand ritual designed to maintain hegemony throughout the land, to re-establish world order. The origin of this practice can plausibly be traced to the recovery of the statue of Marduk, Babylon’s patron deity, from Elam in the south, an appropriate occasion for Nebuchadnezzar to proclaim Marduk’s supremacy over the gods. The epic was likely written in honor of the occasion and served as a foundation story for the exaltation not only of Marduk but of the Babylonian king himself, renewing his mandate to rule the country and, thus, to assert Babylon’s dominion over Mesopotamia and beyond. As performed and witnessed annually by a host of governmental officials, the story did much more than entertain. Its purpose was to maintain loyalty throughout the vast extent of the burgeoning empire. *Enūma elish*, in short, presents an eminently imperial cosmogony.⁴

Enūma elish

The account begins not with a flash of blinding light or with the blaring of trumpets, but with the murky emergence of primordial powers, setting the

stage for a cosmic *War and Peace*, whose characters seem to proliferate from one episode to the next.

The epic begins not with a cosmogony (i.e., a creation of the cosmos) but with a theogony, an account of the gods' origins.

When on high neither the heavens had been named,
nor the earth below pronounced by name.
There was only primordial Apsu, their progenitor,
and creator Tiamat, who bore them all.
Because their waters were intermingling,
no pasture land was yet formed, no marshes yet found—
When none of the gods had yet appeared,
no names yet received, no destinies decreed,
the gods were created therein.⁵

The primordial condition depicted in these opening lines is a state of deficiency: no heavens (skies), no earth, no pastures, no marshes, even no gods to speak of. But pervading this temporary state of lack are two primordial powers. They bear names but remain inchoate; they are at this point more domains than discrete personalities: Apsu, the primordial power of fresh water, and Tiamat, the elemental power of sea or salt water. Together, they constitute a primordial soup from which all creation is ultimately derived, gods included. Geographically, Apsu and Tiamat constitute the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia, of the fresh waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates flowing into the Persian Gulf. And so it is in the co-mingling that divine life is conceived. Within Apsu and Tiamat the gods are born and the "begats" begin.

The first half of the tale is structured as a series of generations, six total. Two pairs of deities, representing the deposits of silt from the rivers (Lahmu and Lahamu) and the circular horizons of the heavens and the earth (Anshar and Kishar), emerge in successive generations. Next is the sky-god Anu, born to the last theogonic pair, who in turn sires one of the central characters of the plot, the god of wisdom, Ea or Nudimmud, who "was superior to his forefathers." Later in the narrative, Ea fathers Marduk, the hero of the epic. As generation follows generation, divine power develops in ever greater concentration.

The stage is set for conflict of the most elemental, indeed parental, sort. Like exuberant teenagers, the gods of Ea's generation are inclined to party ("dance") too much, stirring up Tiamat's belly and upsetting father Apsu to the point of insomnia: "By day I cannot rest, by night I cannot sleep!" complains the primordial progenitor. Because these most primordial of deities are also the most inert, they favor equilibrium over movement and change. But Apsu's

complaint is met with harsh rebuke. Tiamat's maternal instincts prevail; she would rather indulge the godlings. Undeterred, Apsu hatches a scheme for their destruction. But the young gods catch wind of it, and Ea casts a sacred spell, putting Apsu into a deep sleep (which, ironically, fulfills Apsu's wish!). Ea dons Apsu's "mantle of radiance," kills him, and builds his home "on top of Apsu." Giving a cry of triumph, Ea then rests quietly (!) inside his new home, named after the great-great grandfather he murdered.

Life continues apace: Ea and his consort Damkina dwell together "in splendor" and beget a son, Marduk, "the cleverest of the clever, sage of the gods." Anu, his grandfather, rejoices and creates for the child's amusement "four, fearful winds." This has the unfortunate consequence of causing a flood-wave that stirs up Tiamat. The older gods, "unable to rest," plead to Tiamat, appealing to her maternal instincts: "Are you not a mother? You heave restlessly. But what about us, who cannot rest? Don't you love us?" This time her instincts are aroused for destruction. They convince Tiamat to destroy this rowdy generation. She consents, and they whip themselves up into a frenetic rage and convene a council to make preparations for war. For weapons, monstrous dragons are created, bearing "mantles of radiance" as they assume divine status. Tiamat also appoints a military leader, her new "lover" Qingu, to lead this army of monsters into battle. To Qingu is given the "tablet of destinies," granting him unrivaled authority.

Meanwhile back at the Apsu, the all-knowing Ea once again catches wind of the preparations, but this time he is caught off guard. He appeals to Anshar, his grandfather, to do something, but "his roar . . . was quite weak." It is Ea's problem, Anshar bluntly states. Ea is the one who must declare war; after all, he was the one who slew Apsu.

The tablet becomes fragmentary at this point, but it is clear that Anu, Ea's father, attempts to confront Tiamat but makes a hasty retreat after seeing the extent of her preparations. Ea, too, suffers a failure of nerve. Their last resort is to choose the youngest among them, Marduk, Ea's son. Anshar warns Marduk, "My son, (don't you realize that) it is Tiamat, of womankind, who will advance against you with arms?" Possessing the brash courage of youth yet also a shrewdness beyond his years, Marduk accepts with one condition: if he is the one to defeat Tiamat, he must be granted absolute sovereignty so that any decree of his will automatically find fulfillment. With this offer, Anshar appeals to have a council convened to hear Marduk's case. Amid a lavish banquet and drunken revelry, the "great gods who fix the fates" confer upon Marduk the right of sovereign reign. Also included in the deal is a "princely shrine." "May your utterance be law, your word never be falsified," the gods proclaim. By way of confirmation, Marduk is invited to command the destruction of a constellation and then speak it back into existence. When Marduk does just that, proving

his word to be efficacious, the gods proclaim him king, bestowing upon him the enduring symbols of royalty. By unanimous consent, Marduk is made the one and only sovereign deity.

Within the history of religious thought, Marduk's assumption of supremacy marks a significant step toward monotheism, which would be fully reached with the elimination of all other deities. But not here; that is another story (cf. Ps 82). As for this story, the gods remain with Marduk. He receives from them "an unfaceable weapon to crush the foe," a "flood-weapon," and Marduk sets forth "on the path of obedience and peace" with the gods' command ringing in his ears: "Go, and cut off the life of Tiamat! Let the winds bear her blood to us as good news!"

The battle begins. At the start, Tiamat feigns friendliness. But Marduk sees through the ruse and accuses her of forsaking her maternal compassion by carrying through on her dead husband's plan, now with Qingu in charge. Amid the clash of arms, Marduk dispatches a fierce wind to force open Tiamat's mouth, into which he shoots an arrow "which pierced her belly." Marduk vanquishes the deity of watery chaos, and the North Wind carries her blood off as "good news" to Marduk's "fathers." Singing in the (bloody) rain, the council's gods celebrate victory. Having conquered chaos, Marduk rests.

Conflict, war, and victory, the essential ingredients of any ancient epic, prepare for the following scene: creation. The conflictive narrative of theogony, specifically theomachy, leads to cosmogony. As Marduk rests, a brilliant idea comes to him. He dismembers Tiamat's corpse:

(Marduk) divided the monstrous shape and created marvels (from it);
 he sliced her in half like a fish for drying;
 Half of her he put up to roof the sky;
 he drew a bolt across and made a guard hold it.
 Her waters he arranged so that they could not escape.⁶

From death comes life. In addition to fashioning the universe from Tiamat's body, Marduk establishes his own estate, Esharra, a great shrine constructed in the "image of Apsu," and sanctuaries for other gods, including his forebears Anu and Ea. Marduk fixes the constellations, including the planets and the moon, and with them the divisions of the calendar year. He pierces Tiamat's eyes to form the sources of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. Her tail is bent up into the sky to fashion the Milky Way, and her crotch is used to support the sky. As for Qingu, Tiamat's lover, Marduk divests him of the "tablet of destinies" and takes possession of it. Marduk then declares his intention to establish his own house in front of Esharra as his "cult center," whereby the gods can

find rest whenever they want. This is Babylon, the guest house of the gods and, thus, “the center of religion.”

But there is one other matter, one more ingenious idea to implement. Marduk consults Ea, his father, to create humankind. Such a plan is not without cause: imposed upon this earthly creature will be the “work of the gods,” thus making possible the “leisure of the gods.” Ea suggests that Qingu’s blood, the blood of the rebel, provide the raw material for humankind’s creation. And so it happens.

Grateful, the gods offer to make Marduk the sanctuary of his dreams, their night’s resting place, Babylon. In two years they build a magnificent ziggurat for the Apsu, complete with individual shrines for themselves. Merrymaking accompanies the completion by which the destinies are established, assignments made, and decrees fixed. The order of the universe has found its completion. In the final act, Marduk receives from Anu a miraculous bow, a symbol of Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. In the final act of obeisance, the gods swear an oath of absolute fealty to Marduk. The epic concludes with the conferral of fifty throne names, drawn from the fifty gods in attendance, highlighting different aspects of Marduk’s rule over heaven and earth. Marduk, in essence, absorbs the various powers of the gods.

In this epic account, creation begins when conflict ends. Creation is the corollary of conquest, the outcome of victory. A carcass is required for the cosmos, and the bloodshed of a rebel is deemed necessary for human creation. Apsu and Tiamat, the elemental powers of creation, are divested of their personas, including their divinity. They are demythologized with a vengeance, as it were, to serve as creation’s raw material. Construction follows destruction. The act of creation, moreover, is vivid testimony to the exercise of imperial power. Marduk’s exaltation and the world’s creation are bound together. The victor’s prowess on the battlefield is matched by his ingenuity on the construction site. Marduk’s credentials include conquest in addition to creativity. And so they must in this imperial drama. But munificence is also included. The creation of humankind in particular is testimony to Marduk’s sovereign generosity, which grants a measure of freedom to the gods. Their freedom from servitude, however, is the burden humankind must shoulder. Humankind, made in the image of gore, from the blood of a rebel god, is the quintessential servant of the gods. Humanity’s creation is humanity’s bondage.

Atrahasis

Humankind’s genesis is further detailed in the related Babylonian account of the flood, known from its central character, Atrahasis (“Extra-wise”), and dates to at least the early seventeenth century BCE, if not earlier.⁷ The Old Babylonian

Version opens with the gods, “instead of man,” laboring over the building of irrigation canals (an endemic feature of Mesopotamian agriculture). The severity of such servitude prompts the gods to revolt against their taskmaster, the high god Enlil. The ensuing rabble rouses Enlil from his blissful sleep. Violent conflict seems eminent. But a cooler head prevails, namely that of Ea, the god of wisdom. Consequently, the normally irascible Enlil listens intently to the rebels’ complaint. A plan is devised: instead of outright war, one of the gods, a leader of the revolt, will be selected “for destruction.” From his blood the womb-goddess Belet-ili, or Mami, will create “a mortal so that he may bear the yoke,” the “load of the gods.” A “god who had intelligence” is slaughtered, and the midwife of the gods mixes his blood with clay so that “a ghost [comes] into existence from the god’s flesh,” that is, something of the god’s spirit becomes preserved in humankind.⁸ Fourteen pieces of clay are used to fashion seven males and seven females; “two by two” they are created. Mami jubilantly proclaims that her creation experiment has succeeded: the gods are now relieved of their excessive work. As in *Enūma elish*, divine liberation is brought about by human bondage.

But there is more. Upon completing her genetics experiment, Mami makes an ominous pronouncement:

I have imposed your load on mortals,
You have bestowed noise on humankind.⁹

Along with the work that human beings must shoulder is “noise.” And it is such noise that causes trouble in the divine realm, the noise of proliferation. The narrative then proceeds with a series of dire episodes in which human beings multiply like rabbits, and their collective “noise” reaches such a volume that it is likened to a “bellowing bull.” Not surprisingly, Enlil loses sleep, and with each bout of insomnia he pronounces a disease or famine to decimate the population. Each time, his plan is ameliorated, if not outright thwarted, by Ea, who divulges it to one Atrahasis. The narrative reaches its climax in the divinely agreed-upon plan of a global flood to wipeout the human population altogether. Like the biblical character of Noah, Atrahasis is instructed to build a boat to ensure the survival of the human race. (Animals are not mentioned.) The flood comes, roaring like a bull with the storm-god Adad bellowing from the clouds, surpassing all other “noise,” including human. But Atrahasis and his family escape. When the waters recede, he offers sacrifice to the gods, who gather “like flies over the offering.” While Enlil is enraged that the human race has survived, the gods are remorseful over the swath of destruction they have wrought. The epic concludes with a resolution between Enlil and the gods by which the growth of the human race is checked by certain measures set in place, including

infant mortality inflicted by a demon that snatches babies during birth. This ancient epic would have made Thomas Malthus proud.¹⁰

Ba'al

Somewhat closer to Israel's cultural home is the so-called Ba'al Epic discovered in the ancient coastal city of Ugarit, now known by its Arabic name as Ras-Shamra. Located beside the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean Sea at roughly the northern latitude of Cyprus, Ugarit was a thriving city of Canaanite culture during the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BCE) until it was destroyed by the so-called Sea Peoples, invaders from Crete and other Greek islands. From the city's royal archives comes a six-tablets-long epic about its chief god Ba'lu/Haddu, a storm-god whose dual name apparently means "Lord/Thunderer." Ba'al is widely known in biblical tradition as well.¹¹ The Ugaritic narrative recounts the deity's various struggles to establish his cosmic kingship. Although creation per se is not a theme of this epic, striking parallels and differences can be observed between Ba'al's story and the creation stories of the ancient Near East, including Israel's. Unlike Marduk, Ba'al is a much more vulnerable deity. His struggles are fraught with greater suspense and mixed outcomes. Whereas Tiamat's fate is a foregone conclusion before Marduk's unflappable confidence, not to mention sovereign power, Ba'al's nemesis Mot, the god of the underworld, is a more even match. Ba'al's temporary defeat by Mot accounts for the seasonal cycle of fructifying rain and withering drought that is standard along the Mediterranean Seaboard, a perennial meteorological "struggle."

But the episode that is most pertinent for our purposes is the one recorded on the first two tablets, which present Ba'al's struggle against Yamm or "Sea." As in *Enūma elish*, the conflict between a warrior deity and a god of watery chaos is central. Here, Yamm, known also as "Judge River," poses no cosmic threat to the pantheon of deities; in fact, he is supported by the high god El, who pronounces Ba'al to be Yamm's slave. But this will not do for a god with royal aspirations. Ba'al, the "cloudrider," commissions the construction of two weapons from the divine craftsman Kothar wa-Hasis and with them engages in battle against Yamm. The first attack does not phase Yamm, but the second causes him to collapse. "Ba'al drags and dismembers (?) Yamm; he destroys Judge River."¹² A victory feast ensues. Ba'al's victory paves the way for the construction of his longed-for residence, a palace for his enthronement. The construction, not coincidentally, takes seven days to complete (cf. Gen 1:1–2:3).¹³

Ba'al's victory over watery chaos, however, is not limited to Yamm. A related creature is also defeated in the battle. Mot, Ba'al's greater nemesis, addresses Ba'al prior to their fateful engagement:

When you killed Litan, the Fleeing Serpent,
Annihilated the Twisting Serpent,
The Potentate with Seven Heas,
The Heavens grew hot, they withered. (*KTU* 1.5 I 1–4)¹⁴

Ba'al is credited by Mot for having defeated, along with Yamm, the sea monster Litan, whose biblical equivalent is Leviathan, as found in an apocalyptic text from Isaiah:

On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will
punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent,
and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea. (Isa 27:1)

The “twisting serpent” can also be found in a biblical psalm that looks back to the primordial past in order to motivate God to action in the present:

Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the earth.
You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
You cut openings for springs and torrents;
You dried up ever-flowing streams. (Ps 74:12–15)

Whereas the sea dragon in the Ugaritic narrative and in the psalm is DOA (see also Isa 51:9–10), Leviathan in Isaiah 27:1 remains alive and twisting, though slated for destruction at the end times. Etymologically related, Leviathan and Litan are virtually identical. By whatever name, this monster of the deep must be vanquished before something new can be created. For Marduk, that “something new” was all of creation, including his own residence. For Ba'al, it was the construction of his multiwindowed palace, all in seven days.

Creation's Self-Evolution: Egypt

On the other side of the Levant comes a series of creation accounts that differ significantly from the construction-from-conflict stories of Mesopotamia and Ugarit, and not just in terms of content. The genre, too, is different. No gripping epics of creation have been found in Egypt. In the land of the Nile, the origins

of creation are found mostly in funerary compositions, such as the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, as well as in magical spells and hymns for certain temple rituals. For Egyptians, death prompted near mystical reflection on a cosmic scale. The most significant creation accounts come from three separate religious centers, each of which was home to a different patron deity and to a distinctive creation account: Atum in Heliopolis, Ptah in Memphis, and Amun in Thebes.¹⁵

Heliopolis

Egyptians believed that death could be overcome by identifying with the source of all matter. According to the priests of Heliopolis, that source was Atum, and the way creation came about was through Atum's own "evolution,"¹⁶ a process of self-differentiation. Atum "evolved" into manifold creation from a primordial watery state: "I am the one who made me. I built myself as I wished, according to my heart."¹⁷ In a Pyramid Texts spell, Atum produces the atmospheres above and below the earth (Shu and Tefnut, respectively) through masturbation, one of the common metaphors used to explain the origin of the world from a single material source.¹⁸

In another text, Atum's son and daughter, Shu and Tefnut, are sneezed, spat out,¹⁹ or begotten.²⁰ Shu is first "created" in Atum's heart before being "exhaled" from his "nose."²¹ He is identified with Life. The identity of Tefnut, Atum's "daughter," is Order (Ma'at).²² Unlike the theogonic pairs in Mesopotamian creation, Atum is a single parent, like Israel's God YHWH. He is the self-evolver,²³ the god who differentiates himself into the physical world, developing from the one to the many, from simplicity to complexity. As Shu, his first progeny, claims, "I am one who is millions."²⁴ The sun is identified with Atum's Eye, whose dawning from the Lotus flower on the primeval hill marks the first sunrise, thereby establishing the very order of creation. Divinity, thus, adheres to creation in all of its diversity. Divine immanence pervades the elements of nature as order characterizes the cosmos. Indeed, creation's order is itself divine (Ma'at). The ordered cosmos is the differentiated body of divinity.

Memphis

An alternative account of creation comes from a dedicatory inscription composed for the temple of Ptah in Memphis, set up during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty under the reign of the Nubian pharaoh Shabaqo (or Shabaka, 716–702 BCE). The inscription purports to be a copy of an older document going back at least to the Nineteenth Dynasty (1293–1185 BCE). Here, the creator is Ptah, the

“lord of order,” originally a local craftsman deity. Instead of masturbating, Ptah employs speech. The process is precise: creation begins in the “heart” and is fulfilled in the “tongue” or command.²⁵ The “heart” is associated with (and evolves into) the scribal god Thoth; the “tongue” becomes developed into Horus, the god of kingship. It is in the conjunction of thought and word, of intentionality and instrumentality, that creation comes about. This is “intelligent design” at its most precise in the ancient world.

Ptah’s commands activate (literally “excite”) order in the cosmos for “life and dominion.”²⁶ As “He who made totality and caused the gods to evolve,” Ptah is also identified with Ta-tenen, “the land that becomes distinct” or the primeval hill.²⁷ The prototype of the pyramid, Ta-tenen designates the arable land that emerges from the waters when the Nile recedes.

Thebes

From Thebes, the god Amun is given the role of primordial creator. His description represents something of a synthesis of Atum and Ptah. Amun’s role in creation is delineated most clearly on a papyrus dated at the end of Ramesses II’s reign (1279–1212 BCE). Like Atum, Amun is a self-evolver: “You began evolution with nothing.”²⁸ But unlike Atum, Amun is “concealed from the gods, and his aspect is unknown.”²⁹ He remains separate from the created order, transcendent vis-à-vis the gods, “farther than the sky” and “deeper than the Duat” (the realm of watery darkness in the underworld). Light is “his evolution on the first occasion.”³⁰ Known also as the “Great Honker,” Amun “honked by voice” the first dawn.³¹ Creation began by Amun’s “speaking in the midst of stillness, opening every eye and causing them to look.”³²

Despite the variety of views represented in these traditions, Egyptians saw the world as governed by an inviolable rhythm of eternal repetition.³³ During its daily “cycle,” the sun makes its circuit across the sky to then traverse the Duat below, where it joins with the body of Osiris and receives the power to quell the chaos of night and be reborn for a new day. Order was considered a daily, recurring phenomenon. The sunrise reestablishes the cosmic order through the act of “separating,” itself an act of justice.³⁴

Conclusions

Though sharing some degree of commonality, Egyptian and Semitic versions of cosmogony essentially offer competing visions. Chaos plays a role in both, but to a much greater degree in Mesopotamia and Ugarit than in the land of the

Nile. The “evolutionary” model of Egyptian cosmology, particularly in its Heliopolitan and Thebian forms, contrasts sharply with the highly charged combat motif developed in Mesopotamia and Canaan. In both, however, the spoken word is crucial. As Ptah creates by word, so Marduk proves his power by speaking a constellation into existence. But it is in Egyptian, specifically Memphite, cosmology that creation by word takes center stage. For Marduk, the word is a matter of divine display. When it comes to creation, the victorious Marduk is more a “hands-on” deity. On the other hand, the self-differentiating Atum produces the most sacramentalized version of creation: creation is his own body. In all the accounts, however, both Egyptian and Mesopotamian, creation constitutes a divine stroke of genius, the product of careful thought, planning, and execution, whether by construction or by evolution.

Ancient Israel inherited the creation stories of its mighty and not-so-mighty neighbors and, consequently, mediated and transformed them. The biblical accounts were to some degree ancient Israel’s responses to the mythic accounts and traditions of its neighbors. In comparison to the elaborate epics and mystical poems of the ancient Near East, they seem straightforwardly simple. Nevertheless, the biblical accounts of creation, like the Egyptian cosmogonies, share a remarkable diversity of views, which taken together point to a complexity about the world unmatched by any one account. Beginning with the seven days of creation, the Bible speaks about creation in seven discrete ways.

57. Contra Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 206.

58. Wilson, *Consilience*, 230.

59. Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (The Library of Contemporary Thought; New York: Ballantine, 1999), 5, 178.

60. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

61. Such as the Babylonian “astronomical diaries,” reflecting a primitive science that is “empirical, predictive, and theoretical,” according to the Assyriologist Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xv (see also 28, 96).

Rochberg makes a convincing case that the roots of science can be traced prior to the rise of Greek cultural dominance in antiquity and that the sacred and the scientific in the ancient world comfortably coexisted (*ibid.*, 12, 244). For Babylonian astronomy, see James Evans, *The History and Practice of Ancient Astronomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. 5–17. For examples of how Mesopotamian science impacted biblical tradition, see Baruch Halpern, “Assyrian and Pre-Socratic Astronomies and the Location of the Book of Job,” in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Axel Knauf (OBO 186; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 2002), 255–64; and Halpern, “The Assyrian Astronomy of Genesis 1 and the Birth of Milesian Philosophy,” *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003): 74*–83*.

62. First coined by Wolfram von Soden in his study of Sumerian and Akkadian lists, which include matters of philology, deities, kings, geography, zoology, and botany, in “Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft,” in Benno Landsberger and Wolfram von Soden, *Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt. Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965 [1936]), esp. 29–74. The theory was developed in biblical studies by Albrecht Alt in “Die Weisheit Salomos,” *ThLZ* 76 (1951), cols. 139–44 (translated as “The Wisdom of Solomon,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James L. Crenshaw [New York: Ktav, 1976], 102–12). See the critique by Michael V. Fox, “Egyptian Onomastica and Biblical Wisdom,” *VT* 36 (1986): 302–10.

63. See chap. 5.

64. Cf. Gen 1:11–12, 21, 24–25; Prov 30:18–19, 24–28, 29–31.

65. See Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 150. For a survey of agricultural practices and techniques, see Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987).

66. Greene, *Fabric of the Cosmos*, 20.

67. Impey, *Living Cosmos*, vii.

68. Edward O. Wilson, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

CHAPTER 2

1. Paraphrased in Lee Smolin, *The Life of the Cosmos* (London: Phoenix Paperback, 1997), 368.

2. For example, see the collection of extrabiblical texts, in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

3. For an alternative dating, see Tzvi Abusch, “Marduk,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 547. Abusch proposes that *Enūma Elish* was composed later during a period of Babylonian weakness, not strength: sometime during the first millennium. Little evidence, however, is given for support.

4. The “canonical” status of *Enūma elish* is demonstrated in an Assyrian version of the Babylonian epic in which the patron deity Aššur replaces Marduk as the narrative’s protagonist. For an English translation, see Stephanie Dalley, “The Epic of Creation,” in Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (World’s Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 228–77, from which portions are featured below, unless otherwise noted. See also Benjamin R. Foster, “Epic of Creation (I.III),” in Hallo, *Context of Scripture*, 391–402.

5. For the latest critical edition and translation (in French), see Philippe Talon, *Enūma Eliš: The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth* (SAACT 4; University of Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005), esp. 79–108.

6. Tablet IV, lines 136–40; Dalley, “The Epic of Creation,” 255.

7. See Stephanie Dalley’s translation, “Atrahasis,” in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9–38. The story was also adapted and incorporated into the Standard Babylonian Version of the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the Noah figure was renamed Utnapishtim (“He Who Found Life”).

8. A nonviolent but comparable version of human “clay” creation is found in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the same mother goddess (here called “Aruru”) pinches off clay and shapes it into a man, specifically a man of the wild, Enkidu (Tablet I).

9. Tablet I.v.II–12.

10. The English cleric Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) contended that God ordained the population in America to increase faster than what the land could sustain and, thereby, provided means of restraining such growth.

11. See, e.g., Num 25:3–5; Judg 2:11–13; 6:25–32; 1 Kgs 16:32; 18:18–40; Jer 7:9; Hos 2:8, 13–16; 13:1; Zeph 1:4.

12. *KTU* 1.2 IV 27. All passages are drawn from Mark S. Smith’s translation of the “Ba’al Epic,” in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, ed. Simon B. Parker (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 81–180.

13. *KTU* 1.4 VI 24–38. See Smith, “Ba’al Epic,” 133–34.

14. See also the fuller text that ascribes the victory to Anat, Ba’al’s sister, in *KTU* 1.3 III 38–42, in which Yamm is included among the list of casualties.

15. The following translations of Egyptian sources are drawn from James P. Allen in Hallo, *Context of Scripture*, 5–27.

16. So Allen’s translation of Coffin Texts Spell 714 (1.2). “Evolution,” of course, is used differently from the Darwinian sense of “descent with modification.” In the Egyptian texts, it connotes the process of differentiation.

17. Coffin Texts Spell 714 (1.2).
18. Pyramid Texts Spell 527 (1.3).
19. Pyramid Texts Spell 600 (1.4).
20. Coffin Texts Spell 80 (1.8).
21. Coffin Texts Spell 75 (1.5).
22. Coffin Texts Spell 80 (1.8).
23. From the verbal root *hpr*. Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (1.9). See n. 16.
24. Coffin Texts Spell 75 (1.5).
25. “Memphite Theology” (1.15).
26. Coffin Texts Spell 647 (1.12).
27. “Memphite Theology” (1.15).
28. Papyrus Leiden I 350 (1.16).
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. The goose was sacred to Amun.
32. Papyrus Leiden I 350 (1.16).
33. See, e.g., The “Book of Nut” (1.1).
34. See Coffin Texts Spell 1130 (1.17). As Allen points out, the term “separate” derives from the language of jurisprudence. To “separate the matter” is to issue judgment.

CHAPTER 3

1. Quoted in Neil deGrasse Tyson and Donald Goldsmith, *Origins: Fourteen Billion Years of Cosmic Evolution* (New York: W. W. Norton), 247.
2. Introduction to the 1968 edition of the *Whole Earth Catalog*.
3. S. Dean McBride Jr., “Divine Protocol: Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*, ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 6.
4. Jon Levenson, “Translation Notes for Gen 1.1–2.3,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.
5. A play on Darwin’s oft-quoted definition of evolution: “descent with modification.” The text’s recurring cadences also suggest ancient liturgical usage. See Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor, AOAT 212 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1981), 501–12.
6. Literally, “In the beginning of God creating the heavens and the earth....” The Hebrew syntax conflicts with that of the KJV (“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”), whose precedent is found in the Septuagint (LXX or Old Greek) translation. But as pointed out by the Jewish commentator Rashi (d. 1105), the Hebrew of v. 1 is a dependent clause, not a complete sentence, because the first word *bērēšit* is likely in construct with the verbal clause that follows. Hence, an absolute beginning is not assumed in the first verse. For detailed discussion, see William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of*



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WILLIAM P. BROWN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2010

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Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.

198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brown, William P., 1958–

The seven pillars of Creation : the Bible, science,

and the ecology of wonder / William P. Brown.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-973079-7

1. Creation—Biblical teaching.

2. Bible. O.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

3. Bible and science. I. Title.

BS651.B7878 2010

231.7'65—dc22 2009023025

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper