

On the Significance of the Babylonian Creation Accounts

The innumerable creation accounts that emerged from the ancient Babylonian tradition hold an important significance—both religiously and literarily—in the understanding of the ancient mind and how/why these stories were written. Each city developed their own versions of a particular narrative, lending to a large array of gods and stories being composed.

In these “exceptionally diverse collection[s] of material,”¹ parallels found in sister traditions including the Akkadians and Sumerians, as well as Semitic and Anatolian traditions, all contribute to our understanding of these texts, how they may have influenced each other, and how they should be understood today.

Separation and Function

As a preliminary, we should note that in the Babylonian creation texts, there was no equivalent word to the Greek *cosmos*.² A distinction between the natural and supernatural world was not apparent in the mind of the ancient Babylonian scribe. As opposed to the metaphysics and forms of classical Greek philosophy, Mesopotamian traditions do not seek to explain the material universe. Instead, the “world” is conceived as a “separation” of heaven and earth. This is seen in the *Enuma Elish* with the slaying of the dragon-god Tiamat at the hands of the chief deity Marduk.³ Her body is split in two and integrated as the heavens and earth. The separation motif is also prominently featured in the Sumerian myth *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, in which “heaven” is separated from earth and “carried off” by the sky god An.⁴

Remarkably, we find a strong parallel to this story in north-Semitic literature from the same time period, specifically that of Ugarit in west Syria, where the storm-god Baal

¹ Jeremy Black and Anthony Green (eds.), *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), p. 14.

² Francesca Rochberg, “Mesopotamian Cosmology” in Daniel C. Still (ed.), *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* (2nd edition; Hoboken: Blackwell, 2020), p. 305.

³ Rochberg, “Mesopotamian Cosmology,” p. 307.

⁴ Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Vol. 26 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), p. 23.

engages in combat with the sea.⁵ Another parallel is found among the cosmogonic elements of the Hebrew Psalms where Yahweh battles the sea in a retelling of the Exodus crossing.⁶ This is an invocation of the “chaos” motif that we will discuss more later. Additionally, a Hittite version of a Hurrian myth visualizes the process of separating heaven and earth as being literally performed with a cutting tool.⁷ These parallels are remarkable and demonstrate a close familial connection between the ancient texts. The willingness to incorporate shared cosmological motifs undergirds their religious importance in how their adherents viewed the world.

Notice, however, that many of these stories do not appear to be concerned with explaining where material existence came from. These narratives often begin with water existing prior to the narrative and then earth emerging from a primordial battle or celestial conception. However, as Samuel Noah Kramer says, the Babylonians and their closely related traditions in Mesopotamia “never asked themselves what preceded the sea in time and space.”⁸ A good example of this kind of functional ontology is found in an ancient tablet designated *NBC 11108*, which contains an ancient creation account but does not mention anything about the beginning of time or matter: “An, (being) Bel, made heaven resplendent, earth was in darkness, the lower world was [invi]sible; the waters did not flow through the opening (in the earth), nothing was produced, on the vast earth the furrow had not been made.”⁹ Richard J. Clifford writes concerning the theology of this opening, “The text depicts the period before creation. Heaven and earth were undifferentiated; they had not yet separated so that they could come back together in marriage.”¹⁰ Similarly, the prologue to

⁵ Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle Volume II Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 19-21.

⁶ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 8.

⁷ Gerhard Hasel, ‘The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology’, *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April-June 1974), pp. 87-88.

⁸ Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 113.

⁹ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 28

the *Enuma Elish*, as described by Wayne Horowitz, details “the universe before the cosmos was shaped and relate the beginnings of the formation of the universe.”¹¹

If we intend to interpret these texts with the mindset of a modern scientific account of matter, this concept makes little sense; what period was there prior to creation? Simply put, these texts are not describing material manufacturing but rather the functions of earth and the universe, where the gods assign divine purpose to a decedent world. Even the description of the world prior to the creation separation as a “marriage” entails a metaphorical function of the cosmos as opposed to a literal beginning to all matter. The recurring theme of separation with the heavens and the earth demonstrate that the Babylonians and their neighbouring traditions were concerned with understanding how the earth, as they understood it, came to be ordered.

Out of the many creation accounts that have been recovered from the ancient Near East, many of them begin with either “when,” “after,” or “in the days” rather than “in the beginning.” *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* opens with “In ancient days when everything vital had been brought into existence.”¹² The *Atrahasis* epic opens with “When Anu created the heavens.”¹³ A dependent clause prologue is prevalent event with more obscure creation narratives such as the tablet titled *SPTU 367*, which begins with “Utu, in ancient days, in far away ancient days.”¹⁴ It is apparent, therefore, that time already existed prior to “creation.” This is an important initial consideration to make as it prevents us from misinterpreting the texts in light of our modern understanding of time and the world.

Intertextual Chaos

Returning to the motif of disorder mentioned earlier, this is an important recurring theme in the Babylonian texts. Chaotic primordial seas were depicted as something to be triumphed

¹¹ Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 108.

¹² Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 23

¹³ Alan Millard, “A New Babylonian “Genesis” Story” in Richard Hess & David Tsumura (eds.), *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), p. 118.

¹⁴ Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, p. 141.

over by the gods. This motif is known as “chaoskampf” or the “struggle against chaos.”¹⁵

Often the culmination of these chaos battles result in the enthronement of the god in a temple. The “temple” in question frequently refers to the cosmos itself: “The world as a whole was referred to in the descriptions of temples that filled the entirety of the cosmos from top to bottom.”¹⁶ These stories of temple inaugurations reflected the religious practices of their followers. For Marduk, the heavenly temple “[w]as the prototype for the earthly Babylonian temple.”¹⁷ As the narrative goes, Marduk was enthroned in the “cosmic temple,” and thus the earthly temple was commissioned along with the construction of Babylon.

These locations performed important roles as consecrated spaces. As Ronald Hendel says, “As a celestial archetype, the Temple and its sacred geography provide a link between heaven and earth, between the ideal and the real.”¹⁸ This reveals a fascination of sacred geography in the mind of ancient authors.

Once creation had been completed, what was it like? Ancient Babylonians conceived of earth as a flat disk mounted above a vast hollow space considered to be the underworld. Above them was a metal firmament placed overhead as the sky. This sky was considered to be a vault of some kind in which the pantheon of gods directed and dictated the events of the cosmos.¹⁹ As we have seen, the authors of these tales insisted on explaining the function of the cosmos as it was seen to them rather than its material origins.

Viewing the creation texts through an intertextual lens further elucidates the notion of a cosmic temple inauguration. In the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, the god Baal constructs his “house” with fire in seven days.²⁰ In one of the Gudea Cylinders, the appointment of temple staff took

¹⁵ David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 2005); see an alternative point of view with Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

¹⁶ Rochberg, “Mesopotamian Cosmology,” p. 306.

¹⁷ Sean M. McDonough and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, Library of New Testament Studies Vol. 355 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 1.

¹⁸ Ronald Hendel, ‘Other Edens’ in David Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), p. 186.

¹⁹ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 113.

²⁰ Smith and Pitard, *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, pp. 593-94.

place over a period of seven days.²¹ This does not necessarily mean that one text was stealing from the other, but a shared cultural milieu lent to the inevitable use of shared motifs between the Baal Cycle and the Gudean dedications. They each use these motifs to advocate that their particular deity is the one who is being enthroned.

The criterion of truth within these stories, as mentioned above, does not revolve around scientific accuracy, but the plausibility of the narrative. It is the drama of the narrative that bestowed a specific account credibility.²² In this way, the stories do not compete with each other, but stand together as a shared cultural artefact.

Divine Rest

In the ancient Near-East it was taken for granted that the gods were responsible for creating the world.²³ The light that the cosmic temple motif sheds upon ancient Mesopotamian texts is indispensable. It has further revealed a second common motif, as explained by J. Richard Middleton, who proposes that “the intended destiny of heaven and earth [is] as the cosmic temple, a place for God’s sacred dwelling.”²⁴ The religious connotations of this concept are explicit; creation is *intended* to serve as a place for the holy abode of a deity, and so adherents are expected to be “stewards” or “caretakers” of that creation. This ecological interpretation may not have been present in the original religious practices but can be derived from the text in much the same way as the Hebrew Genesis can be.

Literarily, there are also significant thematic parallels amongst this ancient literature. One such example of a recurring motif in ancient Near-Eastern creation texts is the act of sleep among the gods. The fragmented text entitled *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* speaks of the mother goddess Utu and that when she sleeps “the people go to sleep with

²¹ Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 44.

²² Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 10.

²³ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 1.

²⁴ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2014), p. 164.

you.”²⁵ In the literature of Ugarit, a similar theme is evoked when El, the chief of the Canaanite pantheon, announces: “Now I can sit and rest, Even my inmost being can rest.”²⁶

These texts demonstrate a recurring theme of ancient literature in which a form of rest or sleep is often referenced in conjunction with a deity's sovereignty over creation. As Bernard Batto explains, “The ability of the divine king to sleep undisturbed was accordingly a symbol of his unchallenged authority as the supreme deity. A corollary concept was also present: to interrupt or to disturb the sleep of the supreme deity was tantamount to rebellion against his dominion.”²⁷ This theme is also found in neighbouring Egyptian cosmology, such as that found in the *Theology of Memphis*: “And so Ptah rested after he had made everything, as well as all the divine order.”²⁸ It can also be explicitly identified in the Hebrew Bible,²⁹ the writings of Philo, and the New Testament.³⁰

What are we to make of this persistent theme? The term “rest” or “sleep” is often used in conjunction with affirming the sovereignty of a particular deity. A god is able sleep undisturbed whilst the functions of the cosmos go through the motions that they had set forth prior to their slumber. There can, however, also be negative connotations associated with the sleeping motif. Some in ancient Israel believed that Yahweh's divine sleep allowed for the wicked to oppress the faithful.³¹ Furthermore, when the other gods are sleeping, they are oblivious to the chaos reigns on earth. In *Enki and Ninmah*, the minor gods cry out for Enki to wake from his sleep as his absence had brought them misery. Enki is portrayed as a lazy deity who only wakes after his mother, Nammu, petitions him on behalf of the minor gods.³²

²⁵ Jeremy Black, *Reading Sumerian Poetry*, Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (GB: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 180.

²⁶ Bernard Batto, *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Ancient Near East and the Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns: 2013), pp. 142-43.

²⁷ Bernard Batto, ‘The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty’, *Biblica*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (1987), p. 159

²⁸ Batto, *In the Beginning*, p. 142.

²⁹ Deut 12:10; Josh 21:44, 23:1; Psalm 44:23, 132:7-9, 13-14; Micah 1:2; Zech 2:13

³⁰ See Jon Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest: The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3-4*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), pp. 199-122; cf. Mark 4:35-41 and Hebrews 4:1-13

³¹ Batto, ‘The Sleeping God’, p. 155.

³² Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, p. 138.

This potentially reveals a struggle in the minds of the ancient authors as to the divine prerogatives entrusted to the gods. If they sleep, how can order be upheld in the cosmos? This may serve as a kind of early theodicy as to explain the continued existence of disorder in the cosmos even after the triumph of the gods over chaos in the early creation narratives.

Holy Numbers

Continuing with the religious significance of these accounts, we should recall that the number seven appears pervasively in temple accounts throughout the ancient world. It is a “conventional number for a large and clearly defined group”³³ and is “[b]y far the most significant number for the ancient Mesopotamians.”³⁴ The ancient literature is heavily permeated with this numerical schema. The *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* once again comes to mind, where there are seventy children of Athirat and seventy gods in the Emar pantheon.³⁵ Mot returns after seven years to fight Baal³⁶ and Baal curses the land for seven years.

The numbers used in these temple dedications had more theological significance than simply being meaningless spans of time. What is meaningful about the creation period is not the time it took for certain events to occur, but the usage of the sacred number. The emphasis is not on how long an event took, but the utilisation of a holy number to emphasise a particular god's sovereignty over creation. In the case of the “competitors” against the Mesopotamian tradition, such as the Hebrew Genesis, these numbers appear to have been reappropriated and used against the narratives of the Babylonians.³⁷ This is therefore good evidence to suggest an intertextual polemic occurring in the background of these texts: each one is asserting its chief deity (be it Baal, Marduk, or Yahweh) to be *the* god that has the ultimate authority over creation.³⁸

³³ Smith & Pitard, *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, p. 48.

³⁴ Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols*, p. 144.

³⁵ Smith and Pitard, *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, p. 3.

³⁶ Smith and Pitard, *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, p. 15.

³⁷ Batto, *In the Beginning*, p. 82, 140.

³⁸ Hasel, ‘Polemic Nature’, p. 91.

Another example of special numbers in these creation texts are the unusual lifespans of heroic characters in Babylonian texts. Similar long ages are recorded in the Hebrew Bible and Egyptian texts. Notably, the ages early in the Genesis account are astronomically large, but pale in comparison to the lifespans of Mesopotamian heroes like Zuisudra.³⁹ As the background of the Genesis account shifted from a Mesopotamian background to an Egyptian one, the ages change to an Egyptian numerological system.⁴⁰ This comparison helps illustrate the close familial ties that various texts have with each other even among seemingly infinitesimal details like numbers. Such a comparison assists our understanding of the background of the authors writing these texts and how willing they were to pick up the literary proclivities of other traditions.

The Role of Humanity

The primordial setting of the world is taken from order to chaos via a “conflict between gods that results in an ordering of human society.”⁴¹ Following conflict and the establishment of order, humanity is created. In these texts, the human race is often created after the slaying of another divine being. Marduk dispenses with the lesser god Kingu after defeating his spouse Tiamat in the *Enuma Elish*. He commissions Enki (referred to as Ea in this particular text) to use Kingu’s blood to fashion humanity. The Sumerian *KAR 4* tablet also details a divine homicide as the culmination of the creation events and the formation of man: “We are going to slay two divine Alla, And from their blood give birth to human beings! The corvee of the gods will be their corvee: They will fix the boundaries of the fields once and for all, and take in their hands hoes and baskets”⁴²

³⁹ E. M. Plunket, *Ancient Calendars and Constellations* (London: John Murray, 1903), pp. 2-3; Jeremy Northcote ‘The Lifespans of the Patriarchs: Schematic Orderings in the Chrono-genealogy’, *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 57, Fasc. 2, (2007), pp. 256-57; Llyod Bailey, “Biblical Math as Heilsgeschichte?” in Richard Weis & David M. Carr (eds.), *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders*, (Sheffield: A&C Black, 1996), pp. 90-91.

⁴⁰ See Jacob Klein, ‘The ‘Bane’ of Humanity: A Lifespan of One Hundred and Twenty Years’, *Acta Sumerology* Vol. 12 (1990), p. 62.

⁴¹ Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, Biblical and Judaic Studies Vol. 8 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 186, n. 152.

⁴² Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, pp. 50-51.

What is the place of humanity amongst these gods in the narratives? Put bluntly, humanity is often an afterthought and are simply created to do the work of the gods for them. As Francesca Rochberg says, "The condition of man [is] as forever subject to the determinations of gods."⁴³ The gods of these narratives are highly anthropomorphised. They eat, sleep, fornicate, and engage in warfare against each other where they can both kill and be killed. The disparity between them and humanity is a vast chasm and one which the human authors struggle to comprehend. As Kramer says, "their motives are by no means clear, and man is often at a loss to understand them."⁴⁴ Immediately there is a sense of profound disconnect and otherworldliness when speaking about these gods and their relationship with humanity.

As already mentioned, humanity is created to bear the work of the gods so that they may rest. Atrahasis says "I have removed your heavy work, I have imposed your toil on man."⁴⁵ There are, however, exceptions to humanity's status as labour in these ancient stories. In the narrative of *Adapa and the South Wind*, the story details a god-fearing man who defies this trend. The occasionally exceptional mortal who rises to gain immortality is a trend that appears with characters such as Gilgamesh and Zuisudra in the flood tales. Adapa, however, fails to attain eternal life when it is offered to him by the god Anu. As Rochberg says, "Neither his purity nor his wisdom helped him and he remained mortal."⁴⁶

Despite the fact that humanity's purpose in these texts are for "toil[ing] on the god's behalf,"⁴⁷ much of the stories came to be appreciated in the same vein as ancient "wisdom literature." Adapa failed to achieve eternal life, something which was greatly coveted in the ancient world (as is seen by the lamentations of Gilgamesh in his Epic following the death of Enkidu).⁴⁸ Indeed, among the many parallels we have seen in these tales thus far, the

⁴³ Rochberg, "Mesopotamian Cosmology," p. 311.

⁴⁴ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 117.

⁴⁵ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Revised edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 261.

⁴⁶ Rochberg, "Mesopotamian Cosmology," p. 311.

⁴⁷ Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ See Bart D. Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (GB: Oneworld, 2020), pp. 19-26.

question of mortality is one of the most profoundly permeating theme that the myths wrestle with.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Adapa was revered as a wise figure and his name was evoked in later religious rituals.⁵⁰ Also invoked were the eleven monsters birthed by Tiamat to avenge herself after her defeat at the hands of Marduk.⁵¹ Magic and incantations were thus an essential religious extension of these creation stories. They served the function of mediating the worshipper with the primordial power.⁵²

Furthermore, Adapa's attempt to overcome the god's institution of death as the "normal end to human life"⁵³ was seen to be emulated. Transcending mortality and the present world were key features of these texts and, despite Adapa's failure to achieve that prestige, he was revered for his efforts. For the relevance of our study, Adapa epitomises the role that humanity has to play in these stories: subject to the gods and separate from their plain of existence in creation. There is a mindset of a "determining destiny" at work in the Mesopotamian cosmologies concerning the role of man.⁵⁴ Omens, prophecy, and fate all have important roles to play in the religious significance of these texts.

Divine Astronomy

In the Mesopotamian culture the sun, moon, and stars were seen and worshipped as gods, or at the very least, some form of celestial deities. Venus was identified as Ishtar, Jupiter as Marduk, and Mars as Nergal.⁵⁵ In Babylonian belief, the gods were simultaneously distinct from the world and also agents of change within the world, yet also beyond human comprehension. They "manifested" in reality as the luminaries.

⁴⁹ Philip Wilkinson and Neil Philip, *Eyewitness Companion to Mythology*, (DK, 2007), p. 138.

⁵⁰ Karel van der Toorn, "Why Wisdom Became a Secret" in Richard J. Clifford (ed.), *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series Vol. 36 (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), p. 25.

⁵¹ Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols*, p. 177.

⁵² Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, p. 2.

⁵³ Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Rochberg, "Mesopotamian Cosmology," p. 310.

⁵⁵ Rochberg, "Mesopotamian Cosmology," p. 308, 316.

These deities included the moon-god Nanna and the sun-god Utu. The Egyptians as well were keen on worshipping the luminaries, where the sun was a higher deity and the moon a lesser deity. The chief deity of the Hittites was the sun-goddess Arinna. And Ugaritic texts speak of the sun-goddess Saps as the “luminary of the gods.”⁵⁶ The fact that each pantheon has its own kind of luminary deities at least suggests a common cultural mindset, and at most, an intertextual polemic. When related accounts (such as the Hebrew Genesis) diverge with the cultural norms of the ancient world by insisting that the luminaries are created objects and not gods,⁵⁷ it suggests that the author intended to shame or call out the popular mythologies of the time by placing their gods at the same level as the creation which is under the authority of Yahweh. Werner Schmidt notes that the status of the heavenly bodies in the Hebrew Genesis would have been “degrading” to the other cultures in that the text of Genesis radically departs from the norms of the Babylonians and appears to be “calling them out” for their beliefs.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The numerous examples of similarities discussed above do not necessarily suggest literary dependence per se, especially given that the literary background of much of these texts have been lost to history. We cannot know or even infer that the individual who composed the Epic of Gilgamesh had the Atrahasis story at hand whilst they carved their tablets. What it does illuminate, however, is a shared cultural theme that was proliferated by the interactions between the ancient cities.

These comparisons help us understand the milieu of the authors writing these texts and how they were willing to pick up the literary proclivities of other traditions. It also once again sheds light on the interpretation of the ancient accounts in that our modern world is so

⁵⁶ Hasel, ‘Polemic Nature’, pp. 88-89.

⁵⁷ Batto, *In the Beginning*, pp. 50-51.

⁵⁸ Werner Schmidt, *The Creation Story of the Priestly Scriptures*, (2nd edition; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), p. 119.

far removed from theirs. They conceived of numbers and even time differently to us. We should thus exercise caution in our interpretations.

Additionally, we have seen that, in spite of the polemical underhand that some of the narratives have against each other (with particular emphasis on the Hebrew Genesis), there is a unity of many elements such as narrative themes, ritualistic purpose, and religious convictions about how and where the earth came into being. They considered the origins of matter to be largely insignificant and any discussion of the “beginning” served the author’s cultic and religious purposes. We can therefore say with confidence that these texts are massively divorced from our modern worldviews. By reading them in tandem with each other and taking into consideration other factors such as archaeology and ancient cultic practices, we can uncover their meanings and significance both as it was for the original readers and for us today.

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