

CREATION STORIES AND THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

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In teaching the course titled “Introduction to the Old Testament” about thirty times over the past thirty-two years, the creation stories in Genesis 1-3 received special attention. But I never made any reference to the claims of creationists because I think they have failed to recognize the nature of the biblical creation accounts and have generally paid scant attention to biblical creation texts which appear outside of Genesis.

One of the great creation texts is in Proverbs 8:22ff., when Lady Wisdom¹ stated:

22 The LORD created² me [Lady Wisdom] at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; 26 before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. 27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might

¹ I use “Lady Wisdom” rather than just “wisdom” because the noun “wisdom” is a feminine noun in Hebrew.

² Some commentators translate the Hebrew verb *qanah* as “possess” and think this is a reference to God’s attribute of wisdom. In my opinion such an interpretation is erroneous.

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not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

There is a hint of the presence of Lady Wisdom in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image.” Many interpreters would read the “us” as an anomalous “plural of majesty” used here by God; others would give it a trinitarian meaning, “let the three of us make man in our [trinitarian] image (even though a simple plural never means exactly “three” without a modifier specifying three). But in Hebrew the dual form of the verb (“let the two of us make . . . , i.e., the Deity and Lady Wisdom) and the plural form (“let us [= more than one, possibly reflecting a polytheistic background] make. . . .”) would have been spelled the same way though they would have been pronounced differently.³

The idea that Wisdom was the first reality created by God is found also in the deuterocanonical book of Sirach (= Ecclesiasticus) 1:4 and 1:24. The deuterocanonical book of The Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-8:4 expands on this idea of Lady Wisdom being the first-born of creation and creatress of all. These theologically significant creation texts, which underlie the affirmation in John 1:1-3 that everything was made by the Word,⁴ are of little interest to

³ Early Hebrew spelling did not include vowels, just consonants.

⁴ The feminine “Wisdom” (Hebrew *hokmah* and Greek *sophia*) was replaced by the masculine “Word” (Greek *logos*) to accommodate the fact that male messiah who was believed

creationists.

The creation story in Genesis 1–3 was intended to address the question of the origin of evil and to make the affirmation that evil did not come from God.

Genesis 1–11, which deals with the period from creation to the time of Abraham, is not history, but theological literature, or what could be called “narrative theology.” Similarly, Genesis 12–50, the patriarchal narratives which deal with the period from Abraham to the Exodus, is not history, but theological literature or “narrative theology. Narrative theology was mostly legend, story, and biography. It was not history or scientific fact as understood in contemporary Western culture. It was poetic rather than scientific. (A modern analogy is that the place of the *heart* in love literature is quite different than the *heart* in cardiology textbooks. Valentine’s Day cards are not used as medical charts, and x-rays of the heart are not exchanged by lovers.)

Genesis 1–11 deals with the origins of evil using the creation story as but one of several stage settings. Genesis 1:1-2:4 uses a story about the origin of cosmos to make the point that evil did not come from God, because everything that God made was good. Using seven,⁵ as the number for

to be the incarnate Son of God could not be addressed by the feminine title of Hebrew *hokmah* and Greek *sophia*.

⁵The prominence of the number 7 in the quoted examples is evident. Many more examples are quoted by Hehn (1907) from Mesopotamian and other sources. The etymology of the Semitic word for “7” is unclear, and cannot be used to explain the popularity of this particular number. The correct explanation may be simply that 7 is a conveniently sized odd number. It is also the first “nonregular” number in the sense of Old Babylonian mathematics (it is not divisible exclusively by 2, 3, and 5). Hehn

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totality or perfection, the theologian asserts his truth that every God made was very good.

Genesis 2:4-3:22, the “Eden story” is a story in which the theologian asserts that evil has its origin here on earth. Earth’s highest creatures are (1) human beings who are in the image of God and (2) the serpent who is the “wisest of the beasts of the field,” the symbol of wisdom, immortality and healing. [It is important to note that in the biblical story the serpent is not Satan! Turning the serpent into Satan came about sometime after 300 B. C.] In the quest “to be like God” (God = power), earth’s creatures rebelled against the divine will and introduce sin/evil on earth.

The theological affirmation of Genesis 1–3 is that evil did not come from God, rather earthlings did it to themselves. Earthlings—Adam, Eve, Serpent—are not victims of evil coming from God or the heavens. Making human beings responsible for evil was not a popular theology. Not surprisingly, other theologians published

proposes that “7” may have, in many instances, the symbolic meaning “innumerable.” The ziggurat of Uruk, for example, had 7 stories. Some lexical or bilingual texts translate “7” (but also “40” and “50”) with *kisûsûatu*, a word meaning “totality.” The clearest example is probably the Babylonian-Assyrian ^d7-*bi* or ^{il}*si-bit-te*, the “Seven Gods,” often mentioned together with, or instead of, the “Great Gods” and all “Known and Unknown Gods.” The Seven Gods are associated with the enigmatic Anunnaku and Igigu (see *RLA* s.v. Igigu), which are sometimes responsible for all kinds of unfavorable events, sometimes representatie of all gods in the heavens or on the earth. Interesting cryptograms for Anunnaku and Igigu are 1 10 and 5 1 1. The first of these cryptograms may have the value $1(60) \times 10=600$, the other both $5(60) \times 2=600$ and $5 + 1 + 1=7$. (This footnote is a quotation from *Anchor Bible Dictionary CDROM*.)

alternative theologies. In Genesis 6:1–7 a different theologian told a different story making human beings victims of extra-terrestrial events and characters. The “sons of God” (angelic extra-terrestrials) saw that “the daughters of men” were fair” They left heaven, came to earth, had sex with earth’s women, and introduced violence on earth. As a consequence humans are limited to 120 years of life at the maximum. This is NOT history; it is NOT science. It is narrative theology by a theologian presenting the case for victimization. Humans are not responsible for evil; heaven’s creatures are responsible, but the victims get punished!

The flood was supposed to clean the earth of all evil. But Noah got drunk and accidentally introduced evil again on earth. It was accidental in that Noah, the first one to plant a vineyard didn’t know what stale grape juice could do to the mind. He became drunk and exposed himself to a son and thereby violate strict social mores about nudity. In his drunken stupor he projects responsibility onto his son and curses his innocent grandson into slavery. This evil is earthly in its origin, but the theologian behind this story asserts that earths sin was accidental, not rebellion.

Later theologians had other stories to make other assertions. Isa 45:7 states that God makes both good and evil. This was a prophet’s response to the inroads of Persian dualism. For this theologian there was no need for a dualism; as an absolute monotheist, this theologian would have his one God responsible for everything. But as you might expect, another theologian (building on Genesis 6:1–7) made God innocent of doing any evil. For this theologian the fallen angel, Satan, was responsible for evil. This theological option flourished in the intertestamental

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period and by the time of the New Testament it had become normative in many circles and still flourishes in certain Christian traditions. It's a theology of victimization for "the devil made me do it."