

## **Who Do You Think Wrote This?**

### Proxe Station Instructions

#### **Purpose**

The goal behind this proxe station is to engage people about the Bible, directly, and perhaps about other religions, indirectly. Two main conversations can happen here. First, we can invite people to consider how the Bible has an intelligence and character behind it that are hard to explain, starting from Genesis and the Pentateuch. Second, we can invite people to look deeper at Jesus in particular. Currently (July 2012), more slides might need to be added to include points about Jesus.

As participants move along the proxe station from left to right, each panel is intended to uncover connection points for communicating something about Jesus during the follow-up interview.

#### **Background: Example Questions Raised by a Skeptical Position**

Q: Wasn't the Bible just written by men?

A: I believe that men were involved, but I think you'd find that there is an intelligence and a goodness that goes far beyond men. Want to check it out?

Q: Weren't the Bible's human authors shaped by the culture they were from? Don't they show signs of just copying ideas from their neighbors? So the Bible wasn't all that original or unusual after all. And then we should also rewrite the Bible. If they had had positive experiences of polytheism, homosexuality, Gentiles, capitalism, etc. wouldn't they have written very differently? And since that's changed now, we should update their ethics.

A: It's unlikely. This paper explores the relationship between the biblical authors' positions and the prevailing cultures around them to show they were not easily bullied by their cultural context. Look at these case studies and see if you can explain how the human authors of the biblical text would have invented these ideas. They were consciously rejecting the cultural views of their own time, in favor of a consistent story that flowed from Genesis.

#### **Note**

Because of the more intellectual nature of this material, I have organized the background material in more depth, with additional thoughts in the appendices.

#### **'Who Do You Think Wrote This?' Proxe Station Introduction**

1. Invite people to participate: 'Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We're asking people what we desire and where those desires come from?'
2. Give them a set of 'dots' and a quick overview: 'Answer the questions with the dots. Go top to bottom, and left to right.'
3. Tell them that you'll 'When you're done, if you have time, I'd like to ask a few follow-up questions.'
4. Give them time to engage with the material.

# How Can You Tell if a Religion is Merely Man-Made?



It's too local



It's too easy



It resembles other neighboring ideas



It legitimates people in power



Unfulfilled promises



It legitimates the wealthy



It legitimates men's desire for sex (e.g. polygamy)



It has questionable historical evidence



It has places of internal incoherence



Other

God created man in his own image.  
And man, being a gentleman, returned the favor.

-- Rousseau

## Case Study #1: Monogamous Marriage – Invented by Men? Promoted by Men?

*What kind of society would create monogamous marriage?*

The courtesy of your reply is requested:

**a society ruled by men**

‘And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified. But if one or either of the ten virgins, after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed; for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given to my Father before the foundation of the world, and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified.’ (Mormon Doctrine and Covenants 132:62 – 63)

**a society ruled by women**

‘From a biological viewpoint, patriarchal religion denied women the natural rights of every other mammalian female: the right to choose her stud, to control the circumstances of her mating, to strip and govern her own nest, or to refuse all males when preoccupied with the important business of raising her young.’ – Barbara C. Walker (1990), American researcher, writer

‘I regard irreligious people as pioneers. If there had been no priesthood the world would have advanced ten thousand times better than it has today.’ – Anandabai Joshee (1865-1987), Indian physician, first Hindu woman and first Indian woman to receive medical degree.

**a society inspired by God**

Genesis 1:27 “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them... 22 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. 23 The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 24 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” 24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

**a society of very individualistic people**

‘They spoil every romance by trying to make it last forever’. – Oscar Wilde

Genesis 2:21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. <sup>22</sup> The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ <sup>24</sup> For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Compare:

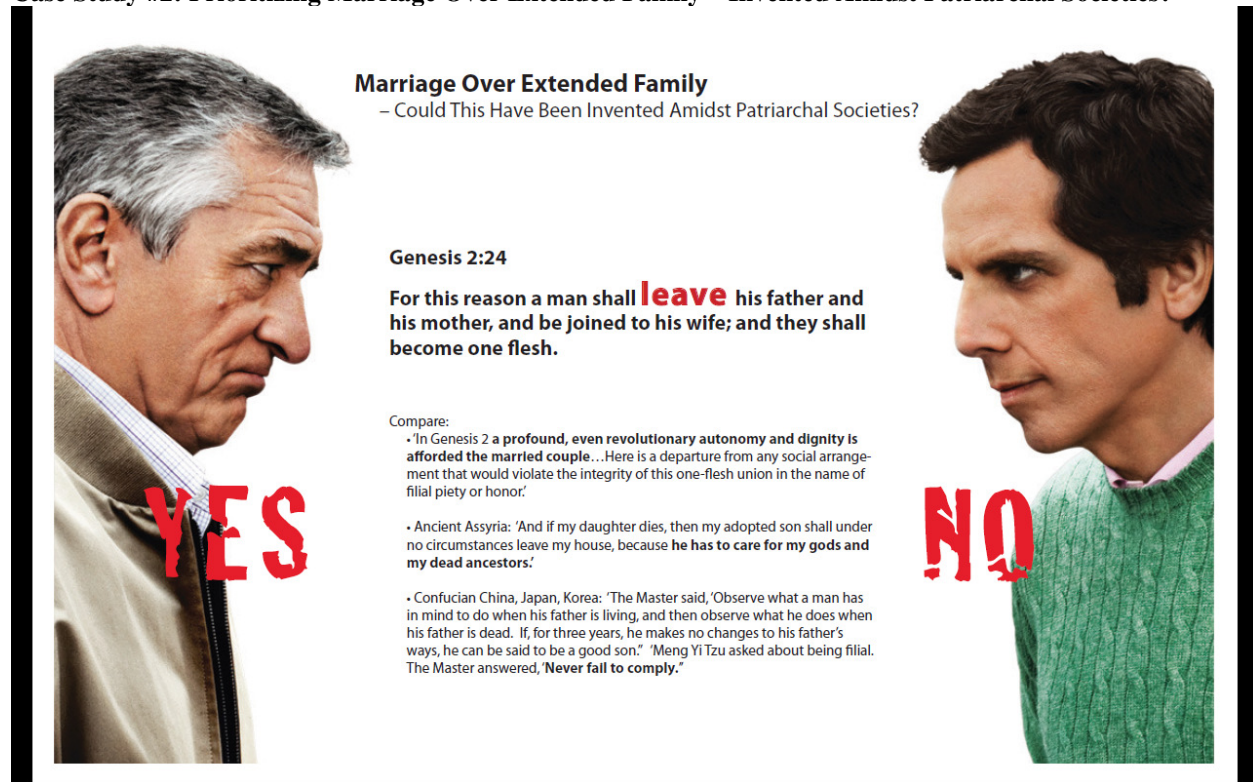
- ‘And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.’ (Qur’an 4:3) ‘Successful indeed are the believers...who guard their private parts [refrain from sex] except before their mates [wives] or those whom their right hand possess [concubines]’ (Qur’an 23:1, 5 – 6; cf. 33:50,52; 70:29 – 30)
- ‘And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified. But if one or either of the ten virgins, after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed; for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified.’ (Mormon Doctrine and Covenants 132:62 – 63)

If the Bible were written by men, wouldn't you expect the story of creation to start off with Adam and Eve, Eva, Evelyn, Evadne, and so on? Islam and Mormonism have polygamy; those religions seem the most manufactured by men because of their suitability for empire building. It's definitely in a man's interest to just spread his genes around with as many women as possible. And psychologically and economically, treating women and wives like commodities was just easier and made men feel more powerful. But no: The ideal of God is monogamy. Did any man have the reason to invent Genesis 2, with its elevation of monogamy? Not that I can tell.

What about polygamy? Though it did happen and was narrated by the Bible, it was never the ideal. Polygamy is found in one of two categories.

1. In the first category are men who married more than one woman and were radically criticized for it. Kings like David and Solomon were told by Deuteronomy 17:17 not to multiply wives – for lust or for diplomatic reasons, turning marriage into a relationship of power. So they were completely wrong, and the family of Cain the murderer of Abel was the first to start that pattern in Genesis 4:16 – 25, and because the originator is the murderer Cain, it is clearly understood to be wrong.
2. The second category is when one wife is barren and the husband takes a second wife for the purpose of childbearing. The only person who really falls into this category is Elkanah in 1 Samuel 1. There was a very high value on having children, more than we totally understand in the West today. The husband could not divorce his first wife, because that would often leave her in poverty and alone. But even with this, a second marriage was not seen as approved by God. Abraham and Sarah decided to have Abraham father a child through Hagar their maidservant as a surrogate mother, but that was Sarah's idea, she got it from the culture around her since it was commonplace, and it was not approved by God. Jacob married both Leah and Rachel but he was tricked into doing that by their father Laban, so you can't blame Jacob, and he honored the first marriage to Leah once he was in it. The Bible is against polygamy. When it happens, it's generally criticized or shown to be inappropriate. So, once again, I cannot imagine any man inventing Genesis 2 and the story that follows. I am left with the strong impression that there is a God who authored this material.

## Case Study #2: Prioritizing Marriage Over Extended Family – Invented Amidst Patriarchal Societies?



**Marriage Over Extended Family**  
– Could This Have Been Invented Amidst Patriarchal Societies?

**Genesis 2:24**  
**For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.**

Compare:

- 'In Genesis 2 a profound, even revolutionary autonomy and dignity is afforded the married couple...Here is a departure from any social arrangement that would violate the integrity of this one-flesh union in the name of filial piety or honor.'
- Ancient Assyria: 'And if my daughter dies, then my adopted son shall under no circumstances leave my house, because he has to care for my gods and my dead ancestors.'
- Confucian China, Japan, Korea: 'The Master said, 'Observe what a man has in mind to do when his father is living, and then observe what he does when his father is dead. If, for three years, he makes no changes to his father's ways, he can be said to be a good son.' 'Meng Yi Tzu asked about being filial. The Master answered, 'Never fail to comply.'

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Compare:

- 'In Genesis 2 a profound, even revolutionary autonomy and dignity is afforded the married couple...Here is a departure from any social arrangement that would violate the integrity of this one-flesh union in the name of filial piety or honor.'<sup>1</sup>
- Ancient Assyria: 'And if my daughter K. dies, then A. my adopted son shall under no circumstances leave my house, because he has to care for my gods and my dead ancestors.'<sup>2</sup>
- Confucian China, Japan, Korea: 'The Master said, 'Observe what a man has in mind to do when his father is living, and then observe what he does when his father is dead. If, for three years, he makes no changes to his father's ways, he can be said to be a good son.'<sup>3</sup> 'Meng Yi Tzu asked about being filial. The Master answered, 'Never fail to comply.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Erwin Fahlbusch, editor, 'Family', *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Volume Two, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) p.284

<sup>2</sup> K.R. Veenhof, 'Old Assyrian and Anatolian Evidence', Marten Stol and Sven Vleeming, editors, *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, The Netherlands, 1998), p.133. Beyond Assyria, in the Ancient Near East generally, 'The head of household or paterfamilias, whether the father (the eldest male) or the eldest son, had complete charge of the household's property, represented the household in court, and was responsible for maintaining its prosperity and credibility within the community...marriages served not only to produce children and a new generation to inherit property, but they also established social ties, economic connections and a network of association that was designed to benefit both parties [families].' Victor H. Matthews, 'Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East', Ken M. Campbell, editor, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) p.2 and 7

<sup>3</sup> Confucius, *Analects* I, 11

<sup>4</sup> Confucius, *Analects* II, 5. 'In serving his parents, a filial son reveres them in daily life; he makes them happy while he nourishes them; he takes anxious care of them in sickness; he shows great sorrow over their death; and he sacrifices to them with solemnity.' Confucius, *Classic of Filial Piety*, discussed by Charlotte Ikels, *Filial piety: Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 2-3. '...The three real obstacles to the spread of Christianity in

The issue here is that we need to understand how all ancient societies worked, as far as we can tell. Most traditional societies still do not treat a married couple as their own family. Usually the wife comes into the husband's family. For example, I am ethnically Japanese, and when my mom married my dad, she came to live in the house my dad grew up in. His mom – my grandmother – treated my mom like a slave. And my mom was frustrated that my dad didn't stick up for her. She hated it, and when I got older, my mom said, 'Mako, don't grow up to be a mama's boy – a man who listens to his mother over his wife.' She learned the hard way. That's why it's so radical that God said from the beginning that a man would leave his father and mother to be joined to his wife. It was taken for granted that a woman would leave her father and mother. But it wasn't the case that a man would leave his family. Instead, the new wife would become part of the husband's family, and be another 'daughter' to the family. Who had the power in the family? The oldest person alive, or the oldest male. That is true patriarchy. But God said that that must not happen. It's only in the family of Cain, the murderer, that this reverses. Cain makes it hard for his son Enoch to leave him. Cain was cursed to wander, but he said, 'Forget that. I'm going to settle anyway, and make my son work the land, defend me, justify me.'

Genesis 4:17 Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son.

So the son was made to serve the father for the rest of his life. That is the origin of human civilization. But would it be in the interest of a patriarchal society to promote Genesis 2? And to maintain it in your culture? No way. No one would invent this. It destroys all the power dynamics of one generation over the other.

---

China...are, first of all, the Confucian dogma that man is born good; secondly, the practice of ancestral worship, which, as has already been shown, is incompatible with Christian doctrine; and thirdly, the rules and practice of filial piety, due directly to the patriarchal system which still obtains in China. It has indeed been seriously urged that the unparalleled continuity of the Chinese nation is a reward for their faithful observance of the fifth commandment. In the face of this deeply implanted sentiment of reverence for parents, it is easy to see what a shock it must give to be told, as in Mark x. 7, 29, 30, that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; also, that if a man leaves his father and mother for Christ's sake and the gospel's, he will receive an hundredfold now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.' <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/cair/cair10.htm>.



### Case Study #3: The Value of All Human Life – Invented by Human Law-Makers?

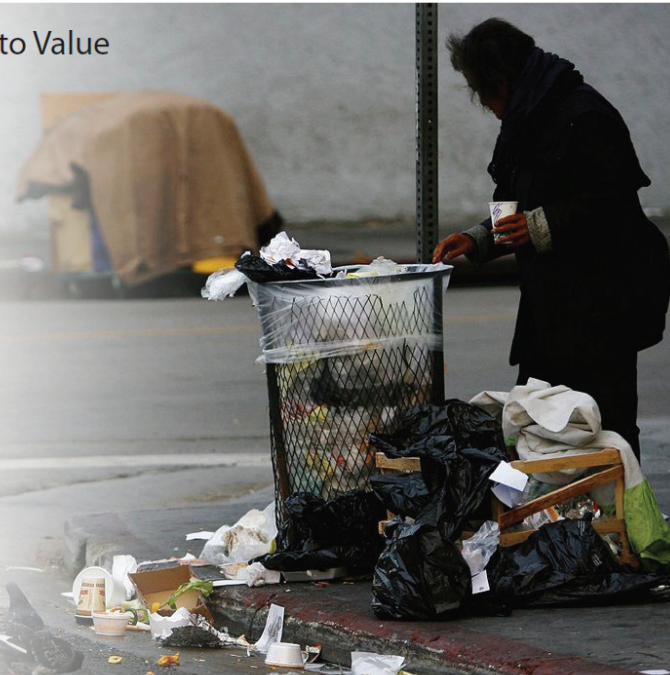
#### Which Code of Ethics Seems to Value Every Human Life?

##### Code of Hammurabi

197 If a man has broken another man's limb, his own shall be broken. 198 If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of a poor man, he shall pay one maneh of silver. 199 If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of the servant of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. 200 If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. 201 If the tooth be that of a poor man, he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.

##### Leviticus 24.

17 If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. 18 The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. 19 If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. 21 Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. 22 There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.



One of the most noteworthy and unusual patterns in the Pentateuch is God valuing human beings first, and then secondarily designing social institutions and laws to reflect that reality. This value came from God making humanity in His image. By contrast, in the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code that was contemporary with the Law of Moses, the punishment for a crime depended on whether the victim was rich or poor. The Law of Moses, however, specified equal punishments for crimes regardless of whether the victim was rich or poor, or an Israelite or a Gentile. Look at this comparison:

*Code of Hammurabi:* <sup>197</sup> If a man has broken another man's limb, his own shall be broken. <sup>198</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of a *poor man*, he shall pay one maneh of silver. <sup>199</sup> If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of *the servant* of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. <sup>200</sup> If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. <sup>201</sup> If the tooth be that of a *poor man*, he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.

*Leviticus 24* <sup>17</sup> If a man takes the life of *any human being*, he shall surely be put to death. <sup>18</sup> The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. <sup>19</sup> If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. <sup>21</sup> Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. <sup>22</sup> There shall be *one standard* for you; it shall be *for the stranger as well as the native*, for I am the LORD your God.

In the Code of Hammurabi, and in many other social codes up to today, a person's wealth determined their worth. People who were poor, enslaved, or foreign often did not – and do not – count as full human beings. But in the Law of Moses, it was the reverse; a person's worth determined their relatedness to others and their minimum level of wealth. This 'one standard...for the stranger as well as the native,' regardless of whether the victim was poor or rich, was a startling practice given Israel's historical context. Even recently, black slaves in the United States were treated as only 3/5 of a person under the U.S. Constitution, and then again, under Jim Crow segregation in the American South and less codified forms of racism in the North, still something less than a person.

Furthermore, look at how we have only had citizens' rights and not human rights. At one point in the U.S., 'citizen' was defined as being a white, landowning male; and everyone else who wasn't that had to fight to be included as a

‘citizen.’ We’ve moved more towards human rights, but despite all our talk about human rights, despite the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, we have never really had human rights, and will probably never have human rights. Why? Because no nation-state has much interest in using citizens’ tax-payer dollars to care about non-citizens. This is why we don’t really know what our responsibility is to illegal immigrants, children of illegal immigrants in some cases, people in other countries, and the unborn and future generations. They aren’t citizens of our country, so we don’t really feel a responsibility to them. But here in the Law of Moses, this value on human life is shown for citizens and foreigners. This principle was revolutionary for most time periods, including our own, not just the ancient world. Whose interest did it serve to uphold this law? It would have been much easier for Israelites to just take advantage of foreigners and treat them completely unfairly, like most other nations did.

Popular historian Thomas Cahill writes: ‘*A sojourner you are not to oppress...*This bias toward the underdog is unique not only in ancient law but in the whole history of law. However faint our sense of justice may be, insofar as it operates at all it is still a Jewish sense of justice.’<sup>5</sup>

Historian Paul Johnson writes, “All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews it might have been a much emptier place.”<sup>6</sup>

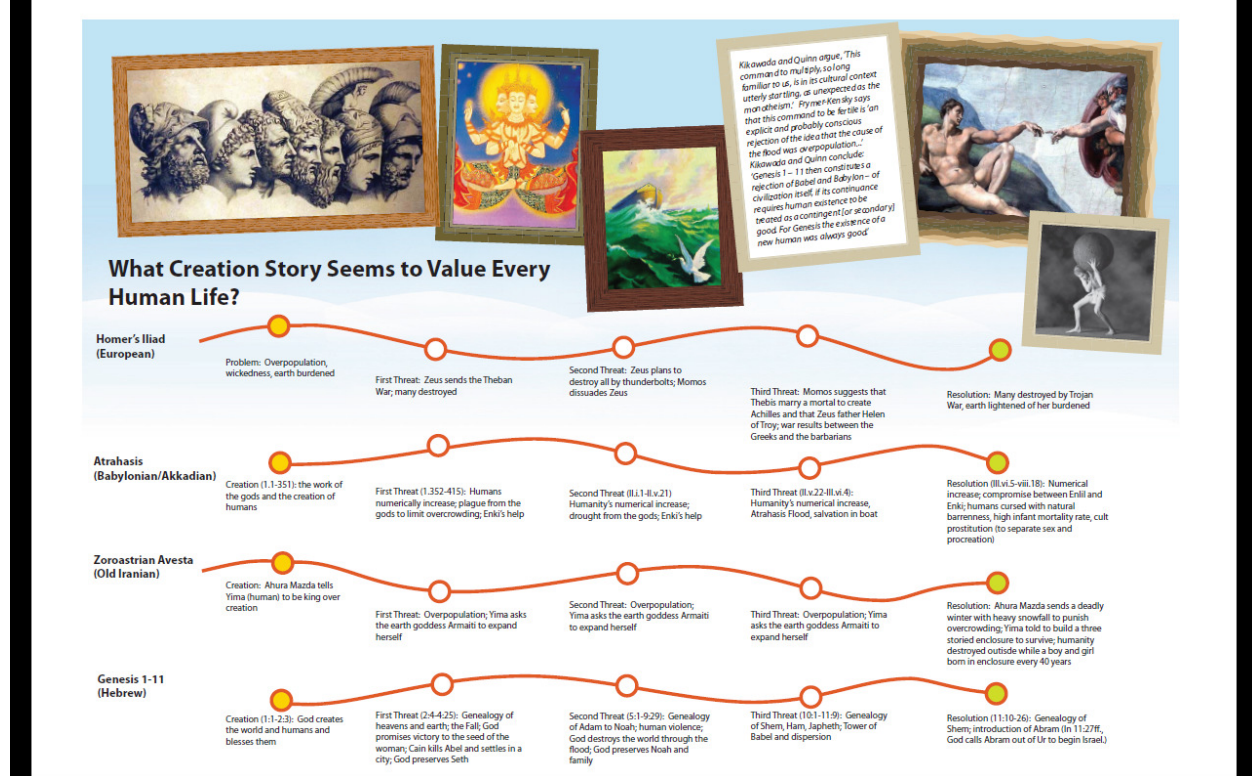
---

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.169

<sup>6</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), p.585. See also Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein, *Defending the Human Spirit: Jewish Law’s Vision of a Moral Society* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2006), especially ch.1, ‘The Vulnerability Principle’



## Case Study #4: Genesis 1 – 11 – The Value of Each Human Life Invented by Defenders of Social Order?



The U.N. tells us that we have enough food to feed everyone in the world. We could eliminate desperate hunger. Other sources show that global poverty could be alleviated by 1% of the world's income. So why do we not do so? Because we lack the moral and political will to solve these problems. We would rather not trade grocery aisles full of choices so that other people could simply eat. It's seen as an infringement of our choices. 'We will not apologize for our way of life,' said President George H.W. Bush first in response to environmental concerns at the Kyoto Conference during his presidency (and repeated by several others, including President Barack Obama). It is a mantra repeated by many Americans, even when our way of life shows a profound lack of compassion. We might as well say, 'We will not apologize for our lack of compassion.'

Genesis 1 – 11 is aware that other people and other nations said the same thing. It seems to follow the same five part structure that undergirds other ancient literature. However, Genesis 1 – 11 aggressively critiques them for that attitude. Here is a comparison of those stories. I have slightly modified the structure ascribed to Genesis 1 – 11 by Kikawada and Quinn and also Duane Garrett by placing a genealogy at the start of each subsection, which seems to me a more natural way to break up the text.

The other creation stories come from urban settings and argue for population control. Human beings get too numerous, so there are things that happen that eliminate human life. Whose interest does it serve to promote that kind of social ethic? The rich and powerful, who want to regulate the masses. We have that attitude today. That's why many Americans ask immigrant families (e.g. Latino Catholics), 'Why do you have so many kids?' That's why we abort so many babies. That's why we choose not to feed the world's poor even though we do have enough food. The rich and powerful always use the label 'our way of life' or 'human civilization' as a reason to destroy human life.

Genesis 1 – 11 is aware of the other surrounding creation stories, and argues with them. Genesis 1 – 11 follows a structure that undergirds other ancient literature. But Genesis reverses the themes. Human life is always good. God says, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' In Genesis 1 – 11, the flood happens not because of human overcrowding, but because of human sin and violence. And when human beings cluster together in cities, God disperses them. Human civilization elevates itself at the expense of human life. Genesis 1 – 11 elevates human life at the expense of human

civilization. Kikawada and Quinn argue, 'This command, so long familiar to us, is in its cultural context utterly startling, as unexpected as the monotheism.'<sup>7</sup>

Frymer-Kensky says that this command to be fertile is 'an explicit and probably conscious rejection of the idea that the cause of the flood was overpopulation and that overpopulation is a serious problem.'<sup>8</sup> Kikawada and Quinn conclude: 'Genesis 1 – 11 then constitutes a rejection of Babel and Babylon – of civilization itself, if its continuance requires human existence to be treated as a contingent [or secondary] good. For Genesis the existence of a new human was always good.'<sup>9</sup> To the prevailing myths and attitudes of its time, Genesis strongly says 'NO.' To the attitude, 'We will not apologize for our lack of compassion,' Genesis strongly says 'NO.' It is profoundly distinct from them on the ethical level, as well as the spiritual level. Why would any mere people group produce this type of foundational literature? What incentives would they have to do that? None that I can think of!!

---

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1989), p.38

<sup>8</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Understanding Genesis 1-9,' *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977):152. See also B.S. Yegerlehner, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (Dissertation, Boston University, 1975) and David Daube's *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982)

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, p.51

## Appendix A: The Pentateuch and the Failure of the Chosen People – Invented by a Chosen People?

The literature of the chosen people says that they will fail, and need non-chosen people to tell them about their God. This is absolutely surprising. What ‘chosen people’ story predicts the failure of the chosen people? God will make Israel jealous by others who are not ‘a people’ (Dt.32:21)? Yes, and this is fulfilled by Jesus and the Gentile Christian mission reaching back to engage ethnic Israel (Rom.11). Here is the literary structure of the founding document, the Pentateuch:

1. Heaven and earth; origin of all nations, starting with God’s true humanity in garden land: Gen.1 – 11
2. Covenant inaugurated with Abraham, Blessings and Curses: Gen.12:1 – 8
3. God’s Faithfulness to the Patriarchs: Gen.12:9 – 50:26
4. Enslavement and Deliverance from Egypt, Arrival at Sinai: Ex.1 – 18
  5. Covenant Inaugurated, Broken, Re-Asserted: Ex.19:1 – 24:11
    - a. *God calls Israel to meet Him on the mountain on the third day: Ex.19:1 – 15*
    - b. *Israel’s failure – to come up the mountain: Ex.19:16 – 23*
    - c. *God resumes with Moses and Aaron: Ex.19:24 – 25*
    - d. *God gives Israel the Ten Commandments: Ex.20:1 – 27*
    - e. *Israel’s failure – Israel afraid of God’s voice: Ex.20:18 – 20*
    - f. *God gives all Israel 49 laws (7x7): Ex.20:21 – 23:19*
    - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant, and Moses, Aaron, and 70 elders see God, and eat and drink in His presence: Ex.23:2 – 24:11*
  6. Tabernacle instructions given to house the **veiled** presence of God: Ex.24:12 – 31:11
  7. God commands Israel to observe the Sabbath and the Covenant is documented on stone tablets: Ex.31:12 – 18
    8. Covenant broken; Israel worships Aaron’s golden calves: Ex.32:1 – 29
    9. Moses mediates for Israel, restores the covenant: Ex.32:30 – 33:23
    - 8’. Covenant affirmed: Ex.34:1 – 17
  - 7’. God commands Israel to observe three annual feasts and the Covenant is documented on stone tablets again; Moses **veils** his face as a sign of judgment, hiding God’s glory from the nation: Ex.34:18 – 28
  - 6’. Tabernacle built to instructions; presence of God comes **veiled**: Ex.35 – 40
  - 5’. Covenant Mediation Inaugurated, Covenant Broken, Re-Asserted: Lev.1:1 – 27:34
    - a. *God calls Israel to approach Him, gives priests a Code for sacrifices: Lev.1:1 – 9:24*
    - b. *Priests’ failure – two of Aaron’s sons offer strange fire, are consumed: Lev.10:1 – 7*
    - c. *God resumes with Aaron’s two others sons: Lev.10:8 – 20*
    - d. *God gives Israel’s priests a Priestly Code for the community: Lev.11 – 16*
    - e. *Israel’s failure – God addresses worship of goat idols: Lev.17:1 – 9 (Acts 7:42 – 43)*
    - f. *God gives all Israel a Holiness Code: Lev.17:10 – 25:55*
    - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant: Lev.26:1 – 27:34*
  - 4’. Departure from Sinai, Punishment and Deliverance from Wilderness: Num.1 – 36
  - 3’. God’s Faithfulness forms the basis for Moses’ Exhortation: Dt.1 – 26
  2. Covenant offered to Israel, Blessings and Curses: Dt.27 – 30
  - 1’. ‘Heaven’ and ‘earth’ (Dt.32:1) witness destiny of Israel and nations; God’s Spirit ‘hovers’ (Dt.32:11) over Israel as they enter garden land: Dt.31 – 34

Israel fails to trust and obey God from Ex.19. In response to this, God gives Israel laws. John H. Sailhamer suggests that the number of laws is disproportionately larger in the latter half of the story because God responds to Israel’s progressive failures with more laws. This is ostensibly the apostle Paul’s own understanding: ‘The Law was added because of [Israel’s] transgressions.’ (Gal.3:19) In other words, laws were God’s response to Israel’s failure, to point out their sin to them until a future time when God would resolve the situation. Law-keeping was never meant to be used as a basis for self-justification (individual self-righteousness) or for ethnic distinctiveness (national self-righteousness). Hence the Pharisees – contemporaries of Jesus and opponents of him – were wrong on both counts.

In fact, the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) was not God's Plan A. It was Plan B. God wanted 'a Temple people', a people with whom He talked face to face. He did not want 'a people with a Temple.' God veiled His glory via the Tabernacle as a concession. And to also express this, Moses veiled his face because his face shone with the glory of God to communicate to Israel that God was also veiling Himself among them. This is significant when discussing with Jews whether the Messiah must restore the physical Temple in Jerusalem. This analysis says no. When I discussed this with the Hillel Rabbi at Tufts University, Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, and posed this question, he did not respond. I think this silence is telling. Moses' mediation allows for the presence of God to remain with Israel, but in a veiled way. They do not experience God 'face to face' as Moses did. See also 2 Corinthians 3, and Mark's use of the 'veil' motif. The Tabernacle structure is God's Plan B. Plan A was to meet Him on the mountain, as Moses did, in a manner of speaking, face to face.

## Appendix B: Israel's 'Happy Ending' Story

The following quotes are from Thomas Cahill, a historian who writes popular history.

'All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical. The assumptions that early man made about the world were, in all their essentials, little different from the assumptions that later and more sophisticated societies, like Greece and India, would make in a more elaborate manner. As Henri-Charles Puech says of Greek thought in his seminal *Man and Time*: 'No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once...; every event has been enacted, is enacted, and will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle.' The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.'<sup>10</sup>

'If we had lived in the second millennium B.C., the millennium of Avram, and could have canvassed all the nations of the earth, what would they have said of Avram's journey? In most of Africa and Europe, where prehistoric animism was the norm and artists were still carving and painting on stone the heavenly symbols of the Great Wheel of Life and Death, they would have laughed at Avram's madness and pointed to the heavens, where the life of earth had been plotted from all eternity. His wife is barren as winter, they would say; a man cannot escape his fate. The Egyptians would have shaken their heads and disbelief. 'There is none born wise,' they would say, repeating the advice of their most cherished wise men. 'Copy the forefathers. Teach him what has been said in the past; then he will set a good example.' The early Greeks might have told Avram the story of Prometheus, whose quest for the fire of the gods ended in personal disaster. Do not overreach, they would advise; come to resignation. In India, he would be told that time is black, irrational, and merciless. Do not set yourself the task of accomplishing something in time, which is only the dominion of suffering. In China, the now anonymous sages whose thoughts would eventually influence the *I Ching* would caution that there is no purpose in journeys or in any kind of earthly striving; the great thing is to abolish time by escaping from the law of change. The ancestors of the Maya in America would point to their circular calendars, which like those of the Chinese repeat the pattern of years in unvarying succession, and would explain that everything has been comes around again and that each man's fate is fixed. On every continent, in every society, Avram would have been given the same advice that wise men as diverse as Heraclitus, Lao-Tsu, and Siddhartha would one day give their followers: do not journey but sit; compose yourself by the river of life, meditate on its ceaseless and meaningless flow – on all that is past or passing or to come – until you have absorbed the pattern and have come to peace with the Great Wheel and with your own death and the death of all things in the corruptible sphere.'<sup>11</sup>

'Since time is no longer cyclical but one-way and irreversible, personal history is now possible and an individual life can have value. This new value is at first hardly understood; but already in the earliest accounts of Avraham and his family we come upon the carefully composed genealogies of ordinary people, something it would never have occurred to Sumerians to write down, because they accorded no importance to individual memories. For them only impersonal survival, like kingship, like the harvest, mattered; the individual, the unusual, the singular, the bizarre – persons or events that did not conform to an archetype – could have no meaning. And without the

---

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p.74 – 75

individual, neither time nor history is possible. But the God of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov – no longer your typical ancient divinity, no longer the archetypal gesturer – is a real personality who has intervened in real history, changing its course and robbing it of predictability.’ (p.106) ‘For the Jews, history will be...always something new: a process unfolding through time, whose direction and end we cannot know, except insofar as God gives us some hint of what is to come. The future will not be what has happened before; indeed, the only reality that the future has is that it has not happened yet. It is unknowable; and what it will be cannot be discovered by auguries – by reading the stars or examining entrails. We do not control the future; in a profound sense, even God does not control the future because it is the collective responsibility of those who are bringing about the future by their actions in the present. For this reason, the concept of the future – for the first time – holds out promise, rather than just the same old thing. We are not doomed, not bound to some predetermined fate; we are free.’<sup>12</sup>

‘In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh was god-on-earth, the visible manifestation of the presence of Ra, chief god of the Egyptians. But *ra*’a also means ‘evil’ in Hebrew; and if the pharaoh was Rameses II, his name – a combination of *ra* and *moses* – would have sounded to a Hebrew ear like ‘he who brings forth evil,’ the evil counterpart of Moses. In the parlance of the ancient world, moreover, the phrase ‘the hand of god X’ was virtually an idiom used to describe a plague, so that we may interpret the phrase ‘the hand of YHWH,’ which is repeated throughout the plague narrative, as belonging to this attributional tradition. If plagues were commonly considered divine in origin within Egyptian society, what we have here is an account of a cosmic rug-of-war between two gods – Ra and YHWH – played out on earth between their designated stand-ins – Pharaoh and Moshe. Within this interpretation, YHWH’s promise to Moshe ‘I will make you as a god to Pharaoh’ may have even deeper implications than at first appear.’<sup>13</sup>

‘Over many centuries of trauma and suffering they came to believe in one God, the Creator of the universe, whose meaning underlies all his creation and who enters human history to bring his purposes to pass. Because of their unique belief – monotheism – the Jews were able to give us the Great Whole, a unified universe that makes sense and that, because of its evident superiority as a worldview, completely overwhelms the warring and contradictory phenomena of polytheism. They gave us the Conscience of the West, the belief that this God who is One is not the God of outward show but the ‘still, small voice’ of conscience, the God of compassion, the God who ‘will be there,’ the God who cares about each of his creatures, especially the human beings he created ‘in his own image,’ and that he insists we do the same...We can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish. We dream Jewish dreams and hope Jewish hopes. Most of our best words, in fact – new, adventure, surprise; unique, individual, person, vocation; time, history, future; freedom, progress, spirit; faith, hope, justice – are the gifts of the Jews.’<sup>14</sup>

‘We can say that the Bible represents a revolution in which the original Earth goddess was supplanted by newly aggressive warrior males and their heavenly projections of themselves, but this hypothesis is itself a projection, a sort of feminist wish fulfillment without substantial confirmation in the archaeological record. Our best evidence suggests strongly that the aboriginal great god was always ‘in heaven’ – that is, as completely Other as human imagination could make him – and that, because he acted on earthly life as the seed-giver, he was imagined as male...All religions are cyclical, mythical, and without reference to history as we have come to understand it – all religions except the Judeo-Christian stream in which Western consciousness took life.’<sup>15</sup>

‘We can read the Bible (as do postmodernists) as a jumble of unrelated texts, given a false and superficial unity by redactors of the exilic period and later. But this is to ignore not only the powerful emotional and spiritual effect that much of the Bible has on readers, even on readers who would rather not be so moved, but also its cumulative impact on whole societies. The Bible’s great moments – the thunderous ‘lekh-lekha’ spoken to Avram, the secret Name of God revealed to cowering Moshe, Miryam’s song on the far shore, God’s Ten Words, David’s Good Shepherd, Isaiah’s Holy Mountain – are hard to brush aside as merely human expressions with no relationship to the deepest meanings of our own individual lives. Nor can we imagine the great liberation movements of modern history without reference to the Bible. Without the Bible we would never have known the abolitionist movement, the prison-reform movement, the antiwar movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the movements of

---

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p.157 – 158

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.127 – 128

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p.256 – 257

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p.260 – 261

indigenous and dispossessed peoples for their human rights, the antiapartheid movement in South Africa, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the free-speech and pro-democracy movements in such Far Eastern countries as South Korea, the Philippines, and even China. These movements of modern times have all employed the language of the Bible; and it is even impossible to understand their great heroes and heroines – people like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mother Jones, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Helder Camara, Oscar Romero, Rigoberto Menchu, Corazon Aquino, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Charity Kaluki Ngilu, Harry Wu – without recourse to the Bible.

‘Beyond these movements, which have commonly taken the Book of Exodus as their blueprint, are other forces that have shaped our world, such as capitalism, communism, and democracy. Capitalism and communism are both bastard children of the Bible, for both are processive faiths, modeled on biblical faith and demanding of their adherents that they always hold in their hearts a belief in the future and keep before their eyes the vision of a better tomorrow, whether that tomorrow contains a larger gross domestic product or a workers’ paradise. Neither ideology could have risen in the cyclical East, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or Shinto. But because capitalism and communism are processive faiths without God, each is a form of madness – a fantasy without a guarantee. Democracy, in contrast, grows directly out of the Israelite vision of individuals, subjects of value because they are images of God, each with a unique and personal destiny. There is no way that it could have ever been ‘self-evident that all men are created equal’ without the intervention of the Jews.’<sup>16</sup>

‘In a cyclical world, there are neither beginnings nor ends. But for us, time had a beginning, whether it was the first words of God in the Book of Genesis, when ‘in the beginning God created heaven and earth,’ or the Big Bang of modern science, a concept that would not have been possible without the Jews. Time, which had a beginning, must also have an end. What will it be? In the Torah we learn that God is working his purposes in history and will effect its end, but in the Prophets we learn that our choices will also affect this end, that our inner disposition toward our fellow human beings will make an enormous difference in the way this end appears to us.

‘Unbelievers may wish to stop for a moment and consider how completely God – this Jewish God of justice and compassion – undergirds all our values and that it is just possible that human effort without this God is doomed to certain failure. Humanity’s most extravagant dreams are articulated by the Jewish prophets. In Isaiah’s vision, true faith is no longer confined to one nation, but ‘all the nations’ stream to the House of YHWH ‘that he may teach us his ways’ and that we may learn to ‘beat [our] swords into plowshares.’ All who share this outrageous dream of universal brotherhood, peace, and justice, who dream the dreams and see the visions of the great prophets, must bring themselves to contemplate the possibility that without God there is no justice.’<sup>17</sup>

‘The story of Jewish identity across the millennia against impossible odds is a unique miracle of cultural survival. Where are the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians today? And though we recognize Egypt and Greece as still belonging to our world, the cultures and stocks of those countries have little continuity with their ancient namesakes. But however miraculous Jewish survival may be, the greater miracle is surely that the Jews developed a whole new way of experiencing reality, the only alternative to all ancient worldviews and all religions. If one is ever to find the finger of God in human affairs, one must find it here.’<sup>18</sup>

### **Appendix C: Is There a Naturalistic Explanation for the Uniqueness of the Old Testament?**

When we consider the uniqueness of the Old Testament, we are left with questions about whether such a body of ideas and literature could have been made up. I argue no. Whose interest, after all, did it serve? Israel’s earliest understanding of its God was completely discontinuous with anything that came before it, judging by the Ancient Near Eastern civilizations which Israel found itself among. By contrast, there are clear economic, political, and military reasons for people to develop Athenian democracy, the Greek phalanx, the Roman republic, etc. There are clear indications that such innovations serve economic interests, or a ruling class, or the social order of the time. It is completely in line with everything we know about people’s self-interest or our group-centeredness. Not so with Israel’s God, story, or ethics. For these things, there has been no ‘naturalistic’ explanation.

The argument is commonly put forward that Israel believed in a god who favored them over against their enemies, the Egyptians. The argument suggests that Israel manufactured a tribal god just like the other tribal gods of the time,

---

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.256 – 257

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p.265 – 266

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.260



and then interpreted their political conflict with Egypt as a conflict between their respective gods. That was the typical interpretation given to conflict in the ancient and classical world. But what about the insight of Brazilian educator and social scientist Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for instance – that an oppressed people usually starts to behave like their oppressors because the model of the oppressor is that of the powerful. If one desires to be powerful, then one imitates another who already has power and wields it. We can see this in how the modern State of Israel, for example, treats the Palestinians, according to a concept of ‘ethnic purity’. After being ghettoized and persecuted, at least some Israelis find it easy to do the same to others. This is not at all what happened with the Israel of Old Testament times, and its excellent, kind treatment of aliens and strangers. Old Testament Israel did not harden its community along ‘ethnic purity’ lines but rather welcomed Egyptians, Canaanites, and probably others like the Hyksos to worship its God. I will discuss the special case of the Canaanite civilization, below. Also, in oppressed communities, men oppress women out of a sense of frustration and misdirected anger – though this is certainly sensitive, it is arguably the case in African-American, Korean, and Irish communities. But this is not what we see in the Old Testament, as I will point out below, too. These insights from social science are very helpful at pointing out the absolute uniqueness of the Old Testament text.

If the Old Testament originates from a conflict between Israel and Egypt, then why does the Abraham story preserve a vivid memory of Hagar the Egyptian and actually demonstrate God’s deep concern and love for Hagar? Why did Israel preserve the Joseph story where the God of Israel blessed the Egyptians agriculturally and politically? Why then was the Passover rite actually open to Egyptians? Why does a ‘mixed multitude’ - people of presumably Egyptian and perhaps Hyksos ethnic origins - actually join Israel and become Jewish in the Exodus (Ex.12)? Israel welcomed them to worship their God. Why was Judaism a faith and not an ethnicity? This fact is especially important. It points to the intention of this God to fashion a multi-ethnic community, not an ethnic one. For why then, if the God of Israel was a tribal god just like any other, simply and only fighting for his people, does Israel welcome those who were ethnically Egyptian, Canaanite, etc. as if their God wanted to be the God of those people as well? Why was one of Moses’ top two lieutenants a Canaanite (Caleb was a Kenizzite, a Canaanite). Israel acknowledged blood ties and genetic descent, but welcomed ethnically different strangers and aliens into the faith of Abraham, like the Canaanite Rahab and her entire household, which was so atypical of Ancient Near Eastern politics and would have disrupted standard ancient notions of political purity and sacral order. Why was Israel chastised and punished by its God for not caring for aliens and strangers, or for failing to treat them equally under the civic law? It would not be so if their God cared only for them. Finally, if Israel simply believed that their God was on their side at the expense of others, why then does the Pentateuch and every single narrative book of the Old Testament end with a prediction of Israel’s moral and spiritual failure, and need for a messianic savior? In fact, the Pentateuch ends with a warning that God will use the Gentiles to speak to Israel and bring her back to God. Yes, Israel believed they were a ‘chosen people’ just like some other people took that title to themselves. But in this case, the very nature of what it meant to be the ‘chosen people’ of this God was radically overturned and transformed. They were not going to be a victorious, triumphant ethnic group that was given a ‘manifest destiny’ to rule a land perpetually over their enemies. Instead, they were going to be a fumbling, faithless people who would be taught God’s lesson by the very people who existed outside their borders. Astounding. All of this data points to a God who seeks to reestablish His presence on earth to bless all peoples, whose ‘chosen people’ will stumble over this good intention because of their own self-centered or nation-centered mindset. This is radically unlike any other god.

The fact that the God of Israel was said to have brought an end to Canaanite civilization (but not Canaanite people) is a mark of His commitment to oppose human evil, especially when it is as destructive as Canaanite child sacrifice. Canaanite civilization and culture had several significant problems related to sex and violence. They had orgies to ask their gods to fertilize the earth with rain. The residents of Sodom and Gomorrah used rape as a way to express their dominance over conquered people or strangers (Gen.19:5), the very opposite of hospitality. Moses told Israel that the Canaanites practiced all kinds of activities for which the land was spewing them out (Lev.18:3, 24 – 30). Most of those activities were sexual activities: incest of all different types (Lev.18:4 – 14), sex with an in-law (Lev.18:15 – 19), adultery (Lev.18:20), homosexuality (Lev.18:22), bestiality (Lev.18:23). But my guess is that the more important issue was that they practiced child sacrifice (Lev.18:21). There is some debate among archaeologists about this, but that’s because some of them are not sure how to interpret the physical evidence (6,000 jars, filled with baby bones), because they’re unsure about the literary evidence. The literary evidence is significant, coming from biblical sources,<sup>19</sup> Jewish rabbinical sources outside the Bible,<sup>20</sup> and Greek literary sources,<sup>21</sup> which says that the

---

<sup>19</sup> The story of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is commonly understood to be a comment on the practice of child sacrifice more common at the time. The king of Moab sacrifices a child in 2 Kings 3:27. An Israelite adopted this practice, showing Canaanite influence, earlier in 1 Kings 16:34. Similarly, Micah records the question, ‘Shall I present my firstborn for my

Canaanites and cultures related to them practiced child sacrifice. What this represents is an evolution in the idolatry of children. All traditional, communal cultures that I know of – like Asian cultures – idolize children. Children represent status, security, prestige, success. So, parents always felt like they needed to control their children. But child sacrifice takes that to another level. It means that people literally and physically suck the life out of children to keep their civilization going. *If they suffered a setback, they would sacrifice more children; this is the pinnacle of self-destructive religious culture.* It was the development of something that began in Genesis 4, with the fairly villainous characters Cain and Lamech, who perverted both sexuality and justice. So God’s judgment on the Canaanites is not arbitrary.

However, I hasten to add two points. First, Joshua’s description of Israel defeating Canaanite ‘both man and woman, young and old,’ has been shown by comparison to other Ancient Near Eastern literature to be a standard hyperbolic language of victory, much like we say today, ‘We totally destroyed them.’<sup>22</sup> Clearly we allow ourselves to say that without literally meaning that we killed our opponents and then destroyed their dead bodies. Scholars believe that the language of ‘both man and woman, young and old’ is a hyperbolic way of talking about victory even when women and children were nowhere in sight and were never involved. In reality, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were all military compounds with only kings and military men, a fact that archaeology proves.<sup>23</sup> For more information, please see my paper *The Troubling Acts of God: The Destruction of the Canaanites* on my website. Second, God was not consigning the slain Canaanites to hell. In light of 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, God was hitting a pause button on their lives, to bring them to Jesus so they could make their final, most meaningful free choice. They had the opportunity to choose Jesus.

Hence, we can say firmly that this was not ‘ethnic cleansing.’ It was a kind of moral or cultural judgment, yes. But because Rahab the Canaanite defected from Jericho and came over to Israel, along with her household, and was welcomed, even to the point of marrying an Israelite man and becoming an ancestor of Jesus (Mt. 1), and Caleb the Kenizzite had also been welcomed in Israel as a major leader, we cannot call the destruction of the Canaanites ‘ethnic cleansing.’ The Canaanites had the chance to defect from their culture and morality once Israel got to their doorstep. In fact, they had decades to think about it, because they had heard about the God of Israel delivering Israel out of Egypt in a mighty act. Rahab and her household switched sides. The rest chose not to.

Any time we see human injustice and evil, we must ask, ‘What kind of god do we expect?’ What are the alternatives? There are three main options:

1. A god who does nothing and looks the other way
2. A god who is actually part of the mischief and evil, like Zeus stirring up the Trojan War

---

rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ and appears to be refuting child sacrifice in his response, ‘He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:7 – 8).

<sup>20</sup> The Jewish scholar Rashi (12<sup>th</sup> century), commented on Jeremiah 7:31, ‘Tophet is Moloch, which was made of brass; and they heated him from his lower parts; and his hands being stretched out, and made hot, they put the child between his hands, and it was burnt; when it vehemently cried out; but the priests beat a drum, that the father might not hear the voice of his son, and his heart might not be moved..’

<sup>21</sup> Carthaginians were related to the Canaanites. Plutarch (ca. 46–120 AD) mentions the practice in Carthage, as do Tertullian, Orosius and Diodorus Siculus. Some of these sources suggest that babies were roasted to death on a heated bronze statue. According to Diodorus Siculus, ‘There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire.’ Some modern historians and archaeologists dispute this evidence, but several large statues (‘Tophets’) have been identified, including a large one in Carthage. Archaeological sites within Carthage and other Phoenician centers have unearthed large numbers of infants and children.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p.172 quoting from K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), p.173 – 174. David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist, and Racist?* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), p.77 quoting from A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114 – 859 BC)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p.201 and William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture*, vol.2 (Leiden, U.K.: Brill, 2003), p.137 – 8.

<sup>23</sup> Richard S. Hess, ‘The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua’ in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), p.29 – 30.

### 3. A god who responds to human evil and injustice by stopping it and dealing with the root problem

Put simply, I would rather have a god who responds to human evil by judging it and stopping it in some way. That is ultimately consistent with the historical and theological presentation of God in the biblical story. In our therapeutic culture, we tend to identify goodness with being sympathetic, sweet, and not spanking. But earlier time periods saw goodness as fierce and powerful in addition to being loving. It was an earlier age in which C.S. Lewis wrote about Aslan the lion as the analogy for Jesus, and Tolkien portrayed Aragorn and Gandalf as aspects of Jesus. So we need to also question our culture about where it gets its notions of containing the spread of evil and dealing with what is its source.

Israel's literature might have a few poetic and semantic similarities with that of its neighbors, as we would expect of a literature that wanted to argue with its contemporaries, but the substance and deeper structure of their belief was a complete historical aberration that cannot be explained by purely naturalistic, materialistic hand-waving. Take Genesis 1 – 11 as an example of how Israel utterly subverted the creation epics from the Greeks, Iranians, and Babylonians: [What's More Important to God? The Individual or the Social Order?](#) In the other ancient myths, the social order of cities takes clear and higher value over the individual human person. But in Genesis 1 – 11, the individual human person is of higher value than the social order of cities, which is founded by murderers (Cain, Nimrod) and scattered by God (Babel). Or take Genesis 2 as a sweeping rejection of polygamy (monogamy with Adam and Eve) and the extended patriarchal family (a man will leave his father and mother) which was an absolute fixture in the ancient world, and even in most non-Western cultures today, like East Asian Confucian cultures. Or take Genesis 1 as an example of how Israel subverted the Egyptian view of the Creator, the cosmos, humanity, and humanity's relationship to the Creator: [Genesis: Making Sense of Genesis 1 by Rikk Watts](#). And so on. How does one explain the active attempt of Israel to repudiate the stories, ethics, and social order that came so naturally to human nature and to everyone around them? These beliefs would completely dismantle the very fabric of society as understood by the ancients. This again flies in the face of the quite human motivations and incentives we attribute to the political and technological inventions. Who would have the incentive to invent such ideas, such a story, such ethics, and such a God?

Then the Old Testament rejects male oppression of women. Israel's God had no female consort, unlike all the other gods like Baal and Ashtoreth. The fact that Israel's God had no gender meant that male and female were both derived equally from him, making male and female equal and equally valued; this is unlike other societies and their mythologies which saw the creation as the emanation of a female goddess (a defeated Tiamat in Babylon, or Gaia in Greek myth) which must then be defeated or otherwise controlled. This mythology privileges men at the expense of women, and becomes a psychological mechanism for men to control women. Orgies, which corresponded to that mythology and were thought to trigger weather, crop fertility, etc. were strictly forbidden in favor of a rigorous marital ethic. This has the marked effect of enhancing the status, freedoms, and views of women; note that Christian men were trained morally and spiritually into the statement, 'We share all things but our wives.' Israel's God had no physical image that corresponded to him, which was utterly unique. The correlate to this conviction was that each and every human being bore the living image of this living God, including and especially the female, who bore new human life. This was also another step in repudiating the idea that being the 'chosen people' of this God meant that they were of a different humanity than other human beings; they were not somehow 'above' or 'at the expense of' other people ultimately.

Is there a naturalistic explanation for Israel's actual beliefs about the core character of this unusual God and their radical perspective on good and evil? How is it that the Jews believed in a God who was 100% good, who would triumph over evil one day in a happy ending? Everyone else, from the ancient Greeks to the modern Hindu, believed that good and evil were co-eternal and embedded in a god or gods who visited good and evil upon humanity willy-nilly. This is the most natural conclusion if you just look at the world, because the world has good and evil, however you define it. So who would invent a God who was 100% good? The direct corollary was that this God would defeat evil, because evil and good cannot co-exist eternally in a framework where there is a good God who has no rival; God must eventually defeat the evil. Even the Islamic view of Allah falls back into a view of a god who is both good and evil, as the Sunni doctrine of Allah's omnicausality forces one to the verge of concluding that Allah is both good and evil; this statement is narrowly avoided by a tight-lipped concern among Muslims to not attribute human words to Allah, though in the eyes of some, including me, this maneuver is unconvincing.

The Jews wound up narrowing their analysis of evil to human nature. Their language targets the human heart as the source of evil, and the heart must be circumcised (Dt.30:6), or remade (Ps.51:9), or turned from stone to flesh and

indwelled by God's Spirit (Ezk.36:26), or inscribed with the law of God (Jer.31:33). All those words point to a central conviction adopted by Jesus that human nature must be radically changed by a God who is 100% good. This is the conclusion that Old Testament Israel came to. And this insight is the gift of Old Testament Israel to the world around it. For the messianic figure they take hope in would offer a new human nature not only to them, but to the whole world. Their 'chosen people' status were entirely rethought and restructured to be, not the recipient of material wealth and prosperity, but the human partner that bears and represents God's long suffering on behalf of the world He loves. How they came to this conclusion, and for what human reasons, are very difficult to say purely on a naturalistic basis. I would say it's impossible and defies all naturalistic logic. I would enjoy reading any attempt at reconstructing a scenario where all this can be explained on naturalistic terms.

I'll comment directly about historical reasoning, which is broader and wider than scientific reasoning per se, and in fact includes it. Those who believe that empirical, experimental science alone tells us reliable knowledge might say, 'Any supernatural explanations assume a kind of God, and we cannot prove the existence of God.' They show that they are still pursuing the answer to this question using the methodology of some repeatable experiments about the natural world. But if the God of the biblical story is to be separated from the world, which has both good and evil, then this God cannot be equated with the natural world, nor all of human history in some *carte blanche* fashion. That is the very premise and argument of the Jews to begin with. This is why Jews and Christians insist that we cannot look at the natural world or human history in total to determine the existence or character of God. Any attempt to include all of that data would wind up arriving at the god of Hinduism, who is both good and evil, or properly neither. The biblical argument is that the biblical God is only revealed in certain moments when He has intervened in history. Thus, history is His stage, but in a punctuated manner. The claim continues that this God supremely reveals himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So this God has actually submitted himself to historical evaluation and scrutiny. *He can be actually proven on the basis of these historical interventions.* But this is what some would-be scientists seem unable to recognize. Instead, they seem to be doing the equivalent of looking at the stars using a microscope, using tools that don't actually correspond with the object of their inquiry. Scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi, in his book *Personal Knowledge*, makes the convincing case that all scientists adjust themselves and their tools to the objects of their study. Dogmatic scientific naturalists do not do this. Whether this is the result of a genuine misunderstanding about the nature of historical reasoning or intellectual laziness on their part, I don't know. But I will say this: On Polanyi's terms, what they are doing is utterly *unscientific*.

One last skeptic ought to be mentioned. The chief opponent of biblical faith who has attempted to seriously account for the historical character of the biblical story is Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche recognized the absolutely unique character of the biblical God and the love and compassion that this God called His people to embody. Nietzsche, a professor of the pagan classics, knew that Christianity alone, out of all moral systems, completely changed the West. Nietzsche recognized that Judaism and its daughter, Christianity, were not simply disembodied ideas, but historical movements whose impact could not be denied. Judaism elevated compassion, and Christianity perfected it and triumphed over pagan power by advancing it still further. Nietzsche's attempt to subvert the biblical faith is seen in his *Genealogy of Morals*. In it, he argues that the Jews knew that they could not triumph militarily over the Egyptians, so they elevated the slave morality over the master morality. In an act of mental retaliation, Nietzsche thinks, they called themselves 'good' and their oppressors 'evil.' So while they might have lost something in the short term, they were victorious in the long term, because their morality eventually won out in history. Their so-called virtues of love, compassion, and mercy were really resentment in disguise.

An observation about Nietzsche's argument is in order. Nietzsche is making neither a scientific nor a historical assertion, but a psychological one. He claims to see deep into the hidden recesses of the hearts of men and women long dead. He asserts that before his powers of insight, the most central words and concepts of the Judeo-Christian tradition (love, compassion, and mercy) quail and become transparently clear to show the secret resentment and anger festering behind them. To this, I would simply say that his argument is ingenious, but selective and self-contradictory. As the Old Testament actually tells the story, the Jews were quite victorious over the Egyptians and then the Canaanites through great acts of power done by their God. Although they certainly did fall into slavery in Egypt, the Jews are portrayed as defiantly resistant and feisty at times, knowing that their God would be true to the promise He made to deliver them into a land of their own. Is this period of slavery, the crucible in which Israel formed its archetypal hopes and cry for vindication, culminating in the foundational event of the birth of their nation in a mighty act of power – is this period to be characterized as a time when resentful Jewish slaves passively accepted their humiliation and took mental revenge without an actual victory? Hardly. The Jews were not hapless weaklings who repeatedly fell prey to larger powers and made a virtue of it. They admired champions called judges and elevated a warrior-king, David, to the throne. These motifs are carried forward into Christian faith with the story

of David's heir Jesus undergoing humiliation, yes, but expecting and experiencing resurrection and vindication, offering that victory to not merely the Jews but the entire Gentile world. While Christianity did radically elevate humanity's call to express love, compassion, and mercy after the fashion of Jesus, at the same time, it took Jewish-style victory motifs and generously expanded them, both in depth and breadth, to embrace Israel's traditional enemies, the Gentiles. Resentment would exclude the former master from sharing the glory of the slave's vindication, but genuine love embraces even the enemy and offers the very same hope to him. This is what we find expressed here in both the Old Testament and the New. God's concern for the whole world in Genesis 1 is consistently maintained until Revelation 22. Why then does Nietzsche cast the Jews as merely 'the oppressed,' 'the resentful slave,' and so forth? Perhaps because he could not find any suggestion of actual resentment in the texts themselves. The evidence so decisively cuts Nietzsche off at the start that perhaps he could only read his own resentment into the Jews for not confirming the presuppositions he sought so desperately – and vainly – to uphold. To mount his attack, Nietzsche could only deploy a psychological caricature of the Jews. Nietzsche does not seem to pay much attention to the actual Old Testament literature itself, which is, at the very least, how Israel understood, told, and retold its own *history*. In the end, the scientific naturalist must also deploy a psychological caricature of the Jews: they were cultural copycats, or jealous mythologizers who wanted their own god, etc. even though none of those theories hold water when we look carefully at the evidence. His problem is that he wants so much for the Old Testament text to say something else, but the history stubbornly refuses to change.