

“MythBusters”
Genesis: The Foundations of Our Faith
Faith Reformed Church Sunday School
 March 3, 2024

1. Introduction

2. Opening Prayer

3. Genesis vs. Ancient Myths

Creation: Similarities between Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Myths

	Genesis	Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Myths
Means of Creation	Creation by God’s decree (Gen. 1:1-2:3)	Creation by divine decree (relatively rare in ANE) ¹
Separating Domains of Creation	God separates the water from the sky (Gen. 1:6-8) and the land from the water (Gen. 1:9-10)	The gods separate heaven from earth (Egyptian), the water from the sky, ² and/or the land from the water ³
Humanity’s Purpose	-God determines the purpose of humanity (Gen. 1:26-28) -Humans are created to work and till the ground (Gen. 2:7-8, 15)	-The gods determine the purpose of humanity ⁴ -Humans are created to bear the grunt work of the lower gods ⁵
Humanity’s Material Origins	Humans are formed partly out of clay (Gen. 2:7)	Humans are formed partly out of clay ⁶
Humanity’s Name	The first man is named “Adam” (“mankind”)	The first wise man is named “Adapa” (“mankind”) (<i>Adapa</i>)
Temple Imagery	Creation is likened to a temple that takes seven days to construct (Gen. 1:1-2:3)	Creation begins ⁷ or culminates ⁸ in the establishment of a temple or a palace that takes seven days to construct (<i>Baal Cycle</i>)
Divine Rest	God rests after completing the work of creation (Gen. 2:1-3)	Ptah rests after completing the work of creation (<i>Memphite Theology of Creation</i>)
Gardens	Yahweh plants a garden (Gen. 2:8); paradise is a garden	The lower gods are the first farmers; ⁹ paradise is a garden
Creation of Animals	Animals are created “out of the ground” (Gen. 2:19)	Animals are created “out of the earth” (<i>Eridu Genesis</i>)
Immortality Lost	Adam and Eve lose immortality because they are deceived by a crafty serpent (Gen. 3)	Adapa loses immortality because he is deceived by a crafty god (<i>Adapa</i>)

¹ E.g., *Memphite Theology of Creation*.

² E.g., *Enuma Elish*, *Egyptian Book of Nut*.

³ *Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk*.

⁴ E.g., *Enki and Ninmah*.

⁵ *Atrahasis* (David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 243).

⁶ E.g., *Atrahasis* (David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 243), *A Myth of the King’s Creation*.

⁷ *Bilingual Creation of the World by Marduk*, *Eridu Genesis*, *Enki and Ninmah*.

⁸ *Enuma Elish*, *Song of the Hoe*.

⁹ *Atrahasis* (David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 243).

Flood: Similarities between Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Myths

	Genesis	Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Myths
Divine Sorrow	God regrets creating humanity and is pained to the heart (Gen. 6:6-8)	A goddess weeps over the loss of her human creatures (<i>Eridu Genesis</i>)
Divine Warning	God warns Noah of a coming Flood and tells him to prepare an ark (Gen. 6:13-21)	A deity warns a human hero of a coming Flood and tells him to prepare a seafaring vessel ¹⁰
Ark Dimensions	God provides specific dimensions for the ark (Gen. 6:14-16)	A deity provides specific dimensions for the vessel ¹¹
Construction	Noah constructs an ark (Gen 6:22; 7:5)	The hero constructs a seafaring vessel ¹²
Tar	Noah covers the ark with tar (Gen. 6:14)	The hero covers the vessel with tar ¹³
All Aboard!	Noah brings animals (Gen. 6:19-20; 7:2-3, 8-9, 14-16), provisions (6:21), and his family aboard (6:18; 7:1, 7, 13, 23; 8:16, 18)	The hero brings animals, ¹⁴ provisions ("Ark Tablet"), and his family aboard ¹⁵
Door Shut	The Lord shuts the door (Gen. 7:16)	The door is shut ¹⁶
Humanity Destroyed	The rest of humanity is destroyed in the Flood (Gen 6:13, 17; 7:4, 21-23)	The rest of humanity is destroyed in the Flood ¹⁷
Ark Rests in Mountains	The ark rests on a high mountain (Gen. 8:4)	The ark rests on a high mountain (<i>Gilgamesh</i>)
Birds Released	Noah releases birds to see if dry land has emerged (Gen. 8:6-12)	The hero releases birds to see if dry land has emerged (<i>Gilgamesh</i>)
Sacrifice	Noah offers a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God (Gen. 8:20-22)	The hero offers a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the gods ¹⁸
Divine Remembrance	God places a rainbow in the sky to remember not to send a Flood ever again (Gen. 9:12-17)	A goddess wears a necklace to remember the Flood (<i>Gilgamesh</i>)

Secular Conclusions:

- A. Genesis as cultural artifact
- B. Genesis plagiarizes paganism
- C. Genesis as myth

**Working Definition of "Myth": Myth is a worldview story that explains the present state of affairs by narrating the ancient past.*

Christian Conclusions:

- A. Historicity of Flood Stories
- B. The Bible's Dual Nature as Human and Divine

¹⁰ *Gilgamesh, Eridu Genesis, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹¹ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹² *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹³ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹⁴ *Gilgamesh, Eridu Genesis, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet" ("two by two").

¹⁵ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹⁶ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

¹⁷ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*.

¹⁸ *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis*, "Ark Tablet."

Creation: Dissimilarities between Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Myths

	Genesis	Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Myths
Number of Gods	Monotheism: one Creator God	Polytheism: many gods
Nature of God	-God is preexistent (Gen. 1:1) -God has no ancestor or offspring -God is a-sexual	-The gods are created (“theogony”) ¹⁹ -The gods have ancestors and offspring -The gods are sexual ²⁰
Conflict	No conflict until the serpent appears (Gen. 3:1)	Often <i>begin</i> with conflict
Divine Kingship	God is king right from the start	The gods wage war to see who will <i>become</i> king; chaos ensues, and creation results ²¹
God(s) and Nature	God is transcendent over nature (monotheism): the great deep, sun, moon, stars, and sea monsters are all made by one Creator God (Gen. 1:1-2:3)	The gods are part of nature (pantheism): the great deep, sun, moon, stars, and sea monsters are all gods ²²
Process of Creation	God creates all things by his word (Gen. 1:1-2:3)	-Elements of creation are forged out of the bodies of slain demons/deities (e.g., <i>Enuma Elish</i>) -The sun deity Atum sneezes, spits, and/or masturbates the gods and the universe into being (Egyptian)
Humanity’s Material Origins	Part dust, part divine breath (Gen. 2:7)	-Part clay, part blood of slain rebel-gods ²³ -Part male deity’s wisdom, part mother deity’s womb (<i>Enki and Ninmah</i>) -Atum’s teardrops (Egyptian)
Humanity’s Purpose	To reflect the divine image as royal sons and daughters (Gen. 1:26-28)	To lighten the load of the lower gods ²⁴
Divine Image	All human beings are created in the “image” of God (Gen. 1:26-28; 5:1-3; 9:6)	Only kings were in the “image” of the gods
Humanity’s Significance	Humans are God’s “crowning achievement” and “creative masterpiece” ²⁵	Humans “are created almost as an afterthought” ²⁶
Humanity’s Common Descent	All humanity descends from a single couple (Gen. 5)	“Humans” are exclusively Egyptians; foreigners are sub-human (Egyptian) ²⁷
Attitude Towards Population Growth	God explicitly commands humanity to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28; 9:1, 7)	The gods view overpopulation as a major problem ²⁸
Dependence	Humanity depends on God for needs (e.g., food, rest)	The gods depend on humanity for needs (e.g., food, rest) ²⁹

¹⁹ E.g., Berlin “Hymn to Ptah,” “Book of Knowing the Creations of Re and of Overthrowing Apophis.”

²⁰ E.g., in *Enki and Ninhursag*, the creator god, Enki, creates through intercourse with the mother goddess and with his own daughter and great-granddaughter.

²¹ E.g., *Enuma Elish*, *Baal Cycle*.

²² E.g., *Enuma Elish*, *Enkidu and the Underworld*.

²³ *Atrahasis*, *Enuma Elish*, *Assur Bilingual Creation Story*.

²⁴ *Atrahasis* (“Let him bear the yoke...Let man assume the drudgery of god”); *Enuma Elish*; *Enki and Ninmah*; *A Myth of the King’s Creation*.

²⁵ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 49.

²⁶ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 49.

²⁷ André LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist*, 33.

²⁸ E.g., in *Atrahasis*, human overpopulation is the reason for the Flood. Afterwards, barrenness, infant mortality, and classes of nuns are introduced to crack down on overpopulation.

²⁹ E.g., *Song of the Hoe*. In *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Elish*, the gods are irritated when they cannot sleep.

Flood: Dissimilarities between Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Myths

	Genesis	Ancient Near Eastern Myths
Cause of the Flood	Divine grief over human sin	The god Enlil can't sleep because of human overpopulation (<i>Atrahasis</i>)
Divine Disagreement	The same Creator God decrees the Flood <i>and</i> rescues humanity	-One god (Enlil) decrees the Flood, but another god (Ea) rescues humanity (<i>Atrahasis</i>) -The gods criticize Enlil for decreeing the Flood for unjust reasons and failing to wipe out all humanity ³⁰
Shape/Viability of the Ark	The ark is capable of seafaring like modern vessels	The ark is round ³¹ or "an unstable cube" ³²
Duration/Extent of the Flood	The Flood lasts some 150 days (Gen. 7:24; 8:3); the ark rests in the high Ararat mountains (Gen. 8:4)	The Flood lasts seven days (<i>Atrahasis</i>); the ark rests in the lower Tauros mountains ³³
Response to Sacrifice	God receives Noah's sacrifice but does not feed upon it (Gen. 8:20-22)	The gods swarm to the post-Flood sacrifice like starving flies (<i>Gilgamesh Epic</i>)
Death vs. Eternal Life	Noah dies due to his sin (Gen. 9:28-29)	The hero is rewarded for his wisdom with eternal life ³⁴

Other Dissimilarities:

- A. Form: Poetry vs. Prose
- B. Stage: Heavenly vs. Earthly
- C. Actors: Gods vs. Human

Conclusions:

- A. Genesis is not just the word of *man*, but the Word of *God*
- B. Genesis is not *mythological*, but *historical*

4. Genesis vs. Modern Myths

- A. The Myth of Human Goodness
- B. The Myth of Human Progress
- C. The Myth of Darwinian Evolution
- D. The Myth of Overpopulation
- E. The Myth of Non-Binary Gender/Sexuality
- F. The Myth of Anti-Environmentalism

5. Closing Prayer

*For next time: Read Genesis 1:1-6:8

³⁰ *Atrahasis* (David Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, 244), *Gilgamesh*.

³¹ "Ark Tablet."

³² Other Mesopotamian traditions (Bruce Waltke, "Myth, History, and the Bible," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 567).

³³ Richard Averbeck, personal communication, 11/1/2021. Waltke adds, "Noah sensibly releases the raven, which braves the storm, can feed on carrion, and can remain in flight much longer than the dove. He then releases the gentle, timid, and low-flying dove. The hero in the Babylonian parallel, however, sends a dove, a sparrow, and then a raven" ("Myth, History, and the Bible," 567).

³⁴ *Eridu Genesis*, *Gilgamesh*.