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### Nature of the Crescent: Humans and the Natural World in Genesis 1-11 and Mesopotamian Mythology

Bryton A. Smith  
*Oberlin College*

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Nature of the Crescent: Humans and the Natural World in Genesis 1-11 and Mesopotamian  
Mythology  
Bryton A. Smith

Capstone Essay  
Professor Cynthia Chapman  
Department of Religion, Oberlin College  
April 10, 2019

### Abstract

This capstone thesis examines the human-nature relationship in the Genesis primeval history (Gen. 1-11) and compares it to the human-nature relationship in the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis*, and *Epic of Gilgamesh* myths. Despite common threads running in the two sources of mythology, I argue that Genesis is the only text that portrays humans in a religiously and royally authoritative position that includes responsibility for nature. To clarify, modern Jewish or Christian thought on Genesis in relation to the environment is not the focus of this study. Instead, this study examines Gen. 1-11 in the context of the ancient Near East, millennia before modern anthropogenic environmental issues existed. The primary sources in each section are incorporated by first focusing on the biblical episode in question and then considering the episode in relation to the Mesopotamian myths. This comparative approach reveals that although Gen. 1-11 has strong Mesopotamian parallels, it fundamentally differs from its Mesopotamian counterparts because it gives humans a degree of environmental responsibility.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Professor Cynthia Chapman, for her insightful feedback throughout my process of writing this capstone and for suggesting invaluable sources for my research. Perhaps just as importantly, I wish to acknowledge Professor Chapman for her role in initiating and supporting my passion for the ancient Near East. My love for the ancient Near East ignited in her Hebrew Bible course has led me to embark on such endeavors as excavating Philistine Tell es-Safi/Gath and devoting much of my senior year to this present work. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Sam Berrin-Shonkoff for his role as a secondary reader for me, particularly for the thoughts he shared with me in February. My capstone classmates, Shannon, Sarah, Katherine, and Jackson, have been very supportive, and I have appreciated hearing their constructive thoughts on my drafts. Last but not least, I wish to thank my mother, Vicki Y. Hong-Smith, who has devoted the time to providing me with in-depth suggestions to improve my writing.

## Introduction

Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.-Lynn White<sup>1</sup>

Lynn White's quote follows his overview of the two creation accounts at the beginning of Genesis.<sup>2</sup> In this capstone, I will argue that there is indeed a contrast between the human-nature relationship in Genesis and the human-nature relationship in the "ancient paganism" of Mesopotamia. However, differing from White, I will argue that the contrast is that of humans' environmental responsibility in the former and a lack of such responsibility in the latter.<sup>3</sup>

More often than not, it is easy to focus on the Hebrew Bible as simply an essential text in Judaism and Christianity while failing to acknowledge its pre-Christian and even, in part, pre-Judaic origins. In other words, in popular discourse, the Hebrew Bible is commonly divorced from its context of origin in the ancient Near East. Moreover, today, there are intense points of disagreement over how to properly understand the Bible on numerous daily pressing issues including whether the Bible encourages humans to be hostile toward or care for the environment. For instance, what is one to make of the commandment in Genesis 1:28 to "rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living / things that creep on earth"?<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, my intention is to focus on the issue of the human-nature relationship prescribed in the Bible. To examine this area of inquiry I will use a comparative ancient Near Eastern Studies perspective to closely examine the Hebrew Bible as an ancient Near Eastern compilation of texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this capstone paper, I use the terms 'environment,' 'nature,' and 'natural world' interchangeably to refer to the non-human realm of animals, the land, and plants.

<sup>4</sup> Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotes and paraphrases are from *The Jewish Study Bible*.

My thesis engages the Genesis primeval history by putting it into conversation with three Mesopotamian myths: *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The Genesis primeval history is the first eleven chapters of Genesis with the exception of the Table of Nations.<sup>5</sup> In these first eleven chapters, the extent is worldwide, and the primeval history covers history as far back as when the cosmos was created, thus providing a worldwide backdrop for explaining the origins and beginnings of a specific community.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, the primeval history precedes the ancestral narratives that revolve around Abraham and those descended from him.<sup>7</sup> Of the three Mesopotamian myths, *Atrahasis* most closely parallels the primeval history, while *Enuma Elish* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* provide comparative content on creation and a major flood, respectively. It is fascinating that the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis* parallels the Genesis primeval history because it covers an early mythological time span that describes the creation of humans and ends after a devastating, divinely-caused flood.<sup>8</sup> Further, while *Enuma Elish* also has the common thematic episode of the creation of humans, the myth is primarily concerned with providing a heroic depiction of the god Marduk, as it explains the events leading up to and including his attainment of the highest place in the Mesopotamian hierarchy of deities.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, *Gilgamesh*, though it shares certain commonalities such as a flood, is mainly about a semi-god, semi-human king of Uruk who tries to acquire eternal life but does not succeed.<sup>10</sup>

As part of comparing and contrasting the human-nature relationship among the two sources of mythology, I will address an intriguing fundamental difference between Genesis 1-11

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<sup>5</sup> E.A. Speiser, "Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes," in *The Anchor Bible: Volume 1*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), LIII.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford, U.K. and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9-35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 233-274.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew George, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble Books), 1-99.

and Mesopotamian mythology. With regard to positions of authority, the Genesis primeval history and Mesopotamian mythology place humans in very different places. While Genesis 1-11 is not necessarily or obviously a pro-environment text, the creation of humans as supervisors as opposed to mere laborers gives humans a greater degree of responsibility over the natural world than humans have in the Mesopotamian mythology that influenced the writing of the Genesis primeval history. In my thesis, I will closely examine themes relating to the human-nature relationship present in *Atrahasis*, *Enuma Elish*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Genesis 1-11, arguing that such a greater degree of environmental responsibility in Genesis is manifested through certain themes. These themes include divinely-granted human rule over nature and a human duty to care for the soil, which contrast Genesis 1-11 from the two creation narratives to the aftermath of the flood.

### **Creation Part I:**

#### **The Priestly Creation Account and the Environmental Responsibility of *rdh***

In the Priestly (P) creation account that begins Genesis, the implied human-nature relationship is controversial because of its language concerning humans' dominion or rule over animals. Some interpret the account as pro-environment, while others see it as anti-environment. I will take a middle path between these two different types of readings of the P creation account. In this section, I will argue that it puts forth humans' environmental responsibility not present in Mesopotamian mythology, although it does not espouse an environmentalist ideology. As for the author(s), among other characteristics in his writing, P is concerned with genealogy and purity.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the historical context, the P creation account was probably written in the 500s B.C.E. with Judahites living in exile as its audience.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the P creation account was likely directed

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<sup>11</sup> Speiser, "Genesis," xxiv-xxv.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, ed. James L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller, and Paul J.

to those Judahites living outside of the conquered Judah and instead in the land from which the Mesopotamian myths I will examine originated.

Before I analyze the significance of the first Genesis creation account in relation to my argument, I must first provide an overview of the account. The account depicts a multi-day creation process, culminating in the important creation of humans toward the end. The account states precisely what Yahweh created on each day. On the first day, Yahweh “began to create heaven and earth” (Gen. 1:1) and proceeds to establish day and night (Gen. 1:3-5). On the second day, Yahweh creates the sky (Gen. 1:6-8). Having created land on the third day, Yahweh also creates vegetation and, for the first time, “saw that this was good” (Gen. 1:9-12). Yahweh, on day four, creates the sun, the moon, and stars, again seeing the goodness of his creation (Gen. 1:14-18). On day five, Yahweh creates marine life and birds, recognizing his creation as good and instructing the new animals to proliferate (Gen. 1:20-23). Yahweh makes terrestrial animals and humans on the sixth day (Gen. 1:24-27). The enormous significance of Yahweh’s creation of humans is made clear by the divine image associated with such creation and the particular instructions Yahweh issues to humans, neither of which is present in the creation of other organisms. According to the text, “God created man / in His image” (Gen. 1:27). Yahweh, giving a special place to humans, provides instructions to the newly-created people:

be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;  
/ and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living  
thing / that moves upon the earth.<sup>13</sup>

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Achtemeier, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> Michael D. Coogan, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Oxford Biblical Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/book/obso-9780195288803/obso-9780195288803-div1-6> (accessed 18-Oct-2018).

Normally, I would not include line breaks in block quotes, but in this case, I do so out of necessity given the lengths of the lines.



After granting humans such dominion, Yahweh empowers them to consume “seed-bearing” plants and fruits (Gen. 1:29). Yahweh also tells the people that the terrestrial animals and birds may consume “green plants” (Gen. 1:30). The fact that Yahweh addresses the humans about the diet of non-human animals seems to highlight the special place of humans as the part of creation that can understand divine instructions. After his making of humans, Yahweh sees that his creation is finally “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

As stated earlier, biblical scholars and other readers of the text differ in their interpretations of Genesis 1:28 in which Yahweh endows humans with dominion over non-human animals. In one translation of the original Hebrew, *rdh* means “to have dominion.”<sup>14</sup> Another translation of the Hebrew word is “rule,” as demonstrated by the JPS’ use of “rule” as opposed to “dominion” in its translation of Gen. 1:28. Regarding the realm of Genesis in the modern world, James Limburg points out in his “The Responsibility of Royalty: Genesis 1-11 and the Care of the Earth,” that various people commonly perceive “the Judeo-Christian tradition” as standing in opposition to the environment. These people, moreover, typically cite Gen. 1:28 for their negative view of Judaism and Christianity concerning the natural world.<sup>15</sup>

To understand the true, ancient Near Eastern meaning of *rdh*, however, one must first understand that the P creation account is about kingdom formation. Bruce R. Reichenbach, in his “Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment,” provides an excellent argument for understanding Genesis 1 as constituting a narrative about the divine creation of a kingdom. In his abstract, Reichenbach writes that Genesis 1 is a justification of

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce R. Reichenbach, “Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13, no. 1 (2003): 62.

<sup>15</sup> James Limburg, “The Responsibility of Royalty: Genesis 1-11 and the Care of the Earth,” *Word and World* 11, no. 2 (1991): 125.

Yahweh's "claim to whatever exists."<sup>16</sup> In Reichenbach's view, Yahweh acts in the capacity of an absolute monarch.<sup>17</sup> Shedding light on the ancient Near Eastern context of such an understanding of a deity, Jon Levenson states that "there is today wide agreement among scholars that the theology of the Pentateuch is deeply imbued with the idiom of the Near Eastern suzerainty treaty."<sup>18</sup> In this regional suzerainty system projected onto the divine realm, Yahweh is a monarch, while Israel is a vassal.<sup>19</sup> Notably, Yahweh, the king, needs "permanent administrators" to supervise quotidian matters in his kingdom.<sup>20</sup> To quote Reichenbach's paraphrase of Gerhard von Rad on the fulfillment of such a need, Yahweh "entrusts his lands to stewards, but these he also has to create."<sup>21</sup> An important part of the P creation account that Reichenbach touches on is the grant of rule in Genesis 1:28, which is a major focus in my thesis. Considering Genesis 1:26-28, Reichenbach explains that people have the duty granted by Yahweh of tending to the commonwealth's animals.<sup>22</sup> The tending of animals is rooted in the creation in the image of the divine.<sup>23</sup> However, there is still the question of whether humans' rule over animals is to be harsh, benevolent, or neither. At least on the surface, the Hebrew

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<sup>16</sup> Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "Creation and Covenant," in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, ed. B. C. Ollenburger, E. A. Martens, and G. F. Hasel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 433 as cited in Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 49.

<sup>19</sup> Levenson, "Creation and Covenant," 433 as cited in Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 49.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, Bernhard W. Anderson, John Bright, and James L. Mays, Revised ed., The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1972), 57 as cited in Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 60.

According to an unnumbered page immediately preceding the table of contents in von Rad's commentary, the "original translation [is] by John H. Marks from the German *Das erste Buch Mose, Genesis* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch 2-4) published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen. Text revised on the basis of the ninth German edition, 1972."

<sup>22</sup> Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 61-62.

I include p. 61 in this footnote because it is the page on which Reichenbach quotes the verses in question.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

terminology for humans' rule over animals is troubling for the idea of divinely-prescribed environmental responsibility. Loren Wilkinson writes that "radah comes from a word meaning to trample or to prevail against and conveys the image of one treading grapes in a winepress."<sup>24</sup> Basically, in Reichenbach's argument that draws from previous scholarship, humans have a place of authority within a divinely-established royal system, and this place of authority includes a potentially harsh relationship with the natural world.

The work Yahweh prescribes to humankind is that of assisting with running a monarchy instead of work falling under the category of manual labor. Human beings in the P creation account are invested with responsibility over the natural world handed to them by a godly monarch. Although humans are created by Yahweh with the expectation of carrying out a form(s) of work, Yahweh grants humans an extraordinarily privileged place in the realm he establishes. I will contextualize such a privileged place for humans in Genesis when I analyze *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* later in this section. Part of this operation of a monarchy is ruling over animals, and I will demonstrate how Wilkinson via Reichenbach suggests that the rule over animals is more harsh than the text actually intends.

Although it is true that many modern readers interpret the first Genesis creation account as anti-environment, one cannot deem the account as anti-environment in virtue of the fact that one can interpret *rdh* as having limitations conducive to benevolent management of non-human life. Jeremy Cohen affirms that the biblical authors understood Yahweh's creation of the universe in the framework of the Yahweh-Israel relationship and covenant and that Israelite theology viewed Israel as a people uniquely selected by Yahweh, who rules over everything.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Loren Wilkinson, *Earth Keeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 209 as cited in Reichenbach, "Genesis 1 as a Theological-Political Narrative of Kingdom Establishment," 62.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Cohen, "*Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*": *The Ancient and*

Cohen further explores the portion of the P creation account in which Yahweh tells the earliest humans they may consume fruits as well as seed-bearing vegetables.<sup>26</sup> The textual context of *rdh* in Gen. 1 suggests the term may not be meant as a boundless divine grant of dominion. For instance, one scholar who views this diet as a restriction on *rdh* is Claus Westermann, who understands *rdh* in this context as “a hierarchical relationship and not as the unlimited power to destroy and exploit.”<sup>27</sup> Essentially, the larger context of the use of *rdh* within the P creation account may clarify that Yahweh does not intend for humans to be hostile toward the natural world. In other words, one should not conclude that because *rdh* has a violent linguistic origin, its usage in Gen. 1:28 is hostile.

At the same time, one should not classify the rule over the environment in Gen. 1:28 as pro-environment, especially given later developments in Gen. 1-11. Interpreters drawing from Westermann’s insight can certainly use the meat-free diet in the P creation account in support of a pro-environment understanding of the account. However, such an argument fails to consider *rdh* in the even broader context of the primeval history. This is because the primeval history does not consistently promote a meat-free diet.<sup>28</sup> As a final analysis, one cannot generalize *rdh* as a benevolent term given its textual context. In the case of Gen. 1:28, *rdh* is not anti-environment in that it puts forth human responsibility for nature, but *rdh* is not pro-environment because it does not establish a state of altruistic care that lasts throughout the primeval history.

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*Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: SPCK [Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge], 1984), 159 as cited in Cohen, “*Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*”: *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text*, 17-18. The quote is Cohen’s paraphrase of Westermann.

<sup>28</sup> In particular, I am alluding to the aftermath of the flood narrative (see Gen. 9:2-4).

In its thematic element of creation, the primeval history has textual parallels from other regions of the ancient Near East. As in the P creation account in Genesis, the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* is a narrative of kingdom formation. The general plot is as follows. In the narrative, the marine goddess Tiamat is the chief antagonist.<sup>29</sup> Tiamat gets ready for warfare, and the god Ea tells his father, Anshar, that Tiamat and her collaborators are in the process of commencing hostilities:

working up to war, growling and raging,  
they have convened a council and created  
conflict.<sup>30</sup>

The gods make their fellow god Marduk their king and send him on a mission to kill Tiamat.<sup>31</sup> Marduk succeeds in defeating Tiamat in a scene that involves wind and an arrow.<sup>32</sup> Later, “lord Lugal-dimmer-ankia, counsellor of / gods” declares that another god, Qingu, was ultimately responsible for the conflict and for motivating Tiamat to take aggressive actions.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there is a strong connection between violence among the gods and their creations. Notably, Ea uses Qingu’s blood to make humankind.<sup>34</sup> Unlike in the P creation account, humans are a substitute for labor for the gods instead of administrators in a kingdom. This is because, through his creation of humankind, Ea “imposed the toil of the gods (on man) and released / the gods from it.”<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the first Genesis creation account that devotes special attention to the position of humans, the narrative in *Enuma Elish* promptly returns to the divine realm, for Marduk as monarch directs gods to assume their proper places.<sup>36</sup> The kingdom formation aspect

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<sup>29</sup> Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 233-274.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

with Marduk in the central role is emphasized, for instance, by the fifty titles the other gods give to Marduk.<sup>37</sup> Overall, *Enuma Elish* is a more obvious kingdom formation myth than the beginning of Genesis in that it makes it clear that Marduk is a divine king and describes his deeds leading to the gods' laudations.

Whereas the first creation account in Genesis gives humans environmental responsibility that one cannot characterize as altruistic toward nature, *Enuma Elish* shows no interest or concern in prescribing the relationship the newly-created humans are to have with the environment. To elaborate, although *Enuma Elish* is a kingdom formation myth like the P creation account in Genesis, it differs from the Genesis account in that it does not give humans royal responsibilities, including responsibility for the environment. The myth further stands in contrast to Genesis in that none of the gods describes any of the aspects of creation, even human beings, as "good."<sup>38</sup> Humans have an extraordinarily minor place in *Enuma Elish*, since the focus in the myth is Marduk and his rise to monarchic power. The one clear purpose of humans is that they have the function to perform labor previously performed by gods. All evidence makes it clear that in *Enuma Elish*, the divine-human relationship is very different from the divine-human relationship in Genesis 1:1-2:4a. The differing divine-human relationships also imply that there are different human-nature relationships in the two myths. In *Enuma Elish*, there is no scene in which Ea, Marduk, or any other deity gives instructions to humans, and the absence of instructions is likely reflective of the place of humans as mere laborers in the narrative. Perhaps inadvertently, *Enuma Elish* highlights the relatively low status of humans by giving little attention to the creation of humans but thorough attention to Marduk's receiving fifty titles. The absence of commandments contrasts with the creation of humans in the P creation account in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 264-273.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 233-274.

which humans are given authority over non-human animals by the Israelite god, regardless of the nature of such rule. In *Enuma Elish*, it is precisely this lack of commandments giving humans responsibilities that illustrates why Genesis 1-11, in comparison, gives humans more responsibility over nature.

Another Mesopotamian narrative, *Atrahasis*, devotes more attention to the creation of humans than *Enuma Elish*. However, *Atrahasis* follows the same pattern of depicting gods creating humans as laborers without royal responsibilities such as dominion over the natural world that Yahweh gives to humans in the P creation account. Moreover, *Atrahasis*, although much older than the P creation account, falls under the same mythological category as Genesis 1-11: *Atrahasis* is a primeval history like the early part of Genesis, but it dates to 1700 B.C.E. or earlier.<sup>39</sup> Of the Mesopotamian myths I cover, *Atrahasis* is the only one that devotes appreciable attention to the initial physical labors of the gods. The very beginning of *Atrahasis* addresses the gods' workload prior to the creation of humans and characterizes the work as overwhelming.<sup>40</sup> The narrative moves on to specifically describe some of the laborious tasks of the gods, which include constructing canals as well as the natural Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.<sup>41</sup> After 3,600 years of constant labor, the gods rebel and go to the god Ellil's home.<sup>42</sup> There, they complain to Ellil that their responsibilities are beyond what they can handle, and Ellil, who is sympathetic to them, decides to alleviate their situation.<sup>43</sup> As in *Enuma Elish*, the god Ea has a role in the creation of humans: he instructs "Belet-ili the womb goddess" to create humans to "bear the load

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<sup>39</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 40, no. 4 (1977): 147-148.

<sup>40</sup> Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

of the gods.”<sup>44</sup> Another parallel to *Enuma Elish* is that violence among the gods is directly linked to the creation of humans. Starting the process of creating people, the divine council kills the intelligent god Geshtu-e, and the god Nintu combines clay “with his [Geshtu-e’s] flesh and blood.”<sup>45</sup> Later, “the Igigi, the great gods, / Spat spittle upon the clay,” and the goddess Mami (under Enki’s direction) recites “an incantation,” making seven males and seven females from clay fragments.<sup>46</sup> Mami, who does not declare the creation of humans as “good,” proceeds to establish laws for humankind.<sup>47</sup> The lack of a Genesis-like divine declaration about the goodness of creation resonates with *Enuma Elish*, but the divine issuing of instructions is a feature *Atrahasis* has in common with the first Genesis creation account. However, the content differs in that Mami’s laws do not address the environment but instead address such issues as childbirth, including the veneration of her in connection to childbirth.<sup>48</sup> The created humans proceed to fulfill their purpose of living lives of labor. Amidst missing portions of the text, we are told that someone “made big canals / to feed people and sustain the gods.”<sup>49</sup>

The absence of commandments in *Atrahasis* related to the big picture such as the role of humans in managing the environment is consistent with the low, non-monarchic place of humans in Mesopotamian mythology. Moreover, the commandments regarding childbirth and marriage, especially in relation to venerating Mami, reinforces the creation of humans as reproducing workers, who do not have royal responsibilities such as environmental responsibility found in Genesis. A substantial detail about the place of humans in *Atrahasis* is that the theme of

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 18.



perpetuating the workforce is combined with the worship of the goddess responsible for creating the workforce.

Unlike in Gen. 1:1-2:4a and *Enuma Elish*, *Atrahasis* is not a narrative of kingdom formation. There is already a well-established divine power system in *Atrahasis*, and as is also shown in *Enuma Elish*, humans are created solely to perform manual labor once performed by gods. Consistent with *Enuma Elish*, power lies exclusively among the gods without a place for humans in the power system, whereas in the kingdom established in Genesis 1, Yahweh authorizes humans to rule over the environment. Perhaps ironically, the newly-created people in *Atrahasis* perform work such as canal-building that necessarily brings them intimately into contact with the environment, but it is clear they are not instructed by their gods on how to treat the natural world beyond their labor.

A comparative analysis of Gen. 1:1-2:4a in relation to *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Elish* illustrates that the former biblical myth gives humans more responsibility with regard to the natural world than do the latter Mesopotamian myths while they are chronologically older. In the P creation account of Genesis, humans have the duty to tend to quotidian affairs of the kingdom established by Yahweh, including a mandate to rule over the natural world. However, one must critically recognize that when contextualizing this rule, *rdh*, in the larger context of the Bible, one cannot deem it to be environmentally-friendly. The specific reasons why *rdh* in this instance is not pro-environment include the later change in the human-animal relationship, which I will address in the third section of my thesis.

An overall analysis of the human-nature relationship in the P creation account, *Enuma Elish*, and *Atrahasis* shows a significant difference between the former Israelite narrative and the latter two Mesopotamian myths. First, in contrast to Gen. 1:1-2:4a, in *Atrahasis* and *Enuma*

*Elish*, the Mesopotamian gods create humans purely to work for them and consequently, the gods do not endow the people with authority of any sort over nature. Another marked difference is that in the P creation account, creation is a “good” kingdom within which humans help to operate. In Mesopotamian mythology, humans exist and work for gods in a world distinct from the divine political system. Unlike in the Bible, there is separation of humans and the divine power structure in *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Elish*. In the final analysis, the greater environmental responsibility present in the first Genesis creation account may be consistent with Israelite religion: a non-polytheistic theology in which humans, especially when some become the people Israel, have more importance in the absence of other gods collaborating with Yahweh.

### **Creation Part II:**

#### **The Garden of Eden as Judah and the Early Human-Soil Relationship**

The second Genesis creation account, the Garden of Eden narrative, portrays the natural world as a garden unlike the P creation account. Despite this difference, there is a shared theme of monarchic responsibility, which includes responsibility for the natural world. Commentator E.A. Speiser notes that the Hebrew *adama* means “soil, ground,” and *adam* means “man.”<sup>50</sup> He further writes that the Eden narrative is devoted to the beginning of earthly life as opposed to the beginning of the cosmos. Whereas life has a minor place in the P creation account within the cosmos relative to the Eden account, the Eden account focuses on the earth and the first humans.<sup>51</sup> Speiser illustrates this difference by noting that the P creation myth begins “with the creation of ‘heaven and earth’ (i 1),” while the Eden account starts “with the making of ‘earth and heaven’ (ii 4b).”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Speiser, “Genesis,” 16.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Biblical scholarship has historically assigned the Eden narrative to a non-P source, but there is now serious doubt about such source criticism in this instance. Writing in the Twentieth Century, Speiser judges that there is good reason for assigning the Eden narrative to the J source.<sup>53</sup> In general, according to Speiser, J is focused on the earth, unlike P, and features “natural and candid” characters who have human-like relationships with Yahweh.<sup>54</sup> J also, as Catherine McDowell recognizes, uses ‘Yahweh’ when referring to the Israelite god.<sup>55</sup> On the Eden narrative and J, she notes that biblical scholars categorized the Eden narrative as J source material for such reasons as its use of “Yahweh Elohim” and its human-like portrayal of Yahweh “as one who molds, breathes, plants, waters, builds, and walks.”<sup>56</sup> However, McDowell questions the judgment of labeling the Eden narrative as the work of J. For instance, McDowell recognizes that the P creation account uses “Elohim,” but notes that the author of the Eden narrative uses “Yahweh *Elohim*” instead of just “Yahweh.”<sup>57</sup> She concludes that the writer was highly learned and familiar with ideas about creation, monarchy, laws, and iconography in his context of the ancient Near East. McDowell further reasons that the author or editor was probably “an Israelite scribe, a member of the royal court, and/or a priest.”<sup>58</sup> What is important for my thesis is that a non-P source with fundamentally non-P characteristics wrote the Eden narrative.

The Eden account begins with creation and ends with an exile of the earliest humans, while devoting attention to natural features such as the soil and trees as well as to the relationship

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., XXVII.

<sup>55</sup> Catherine McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in Light of the *mis pi* and *wpt-r* Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 199, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

humans are to have with nature. The beginning of the narrative provides the context of the episode: Yahweh is carrying out the process of creating “earth and heaven” (Gen. 2:4b). Notably, at this stage, there is an absence of vegetation in virtue of there not yet being any rain and a human being to cultivate the ground (Gen. 2:5). We are told that “the LORD God formed man from the dust of the / earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man be- / came a living being” (Gen. 2:7). After creating the man, Yahweh establishes “a garden in Eden, in the east, and” puts the man in it (Gen. 2:8). Yahweh, moreover, allows the growth of “every tree that was / pleasing to the sight and good for food,” and two of these trees are “the tree of life” in the garden’s central region “and the tree of knowledge of good / and bad” (Gen. 2:9). As for inanimate parts of the natural world, Eden is the origin of a river that provides water for the garden and subsequently splits into four rivers: the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates (Gen. 2:11-14). The man, moreover, is “to till it [the soil] and tend it.” Regarding the trees, there is a degree of danger associated with one of them: Yahweh permits the man to consume fruit from all of the garden’s trees except the tree of knowledge of good and bad, for doing so would result in the man’s death (Gen. 2:16-17).

The man and the woman whom Yahweh creates disobey the commandment on the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, which leads to their forced exit from Eden. After making his statement about the tree, Yahweh states that it is undesirable for the man to be without companionship, so he decides to create a suitable assistant (Gen. 2:18). Consequently, Yahweh makes animals “out of the earth,” and the man names them (Gen. 2:19-20). However, these are not suitable (Gen. 2:20). While the man is sleeping, Yahweh removes a rib from the man and makes a woman, and the man approves (Gen. 2:21-23). The state of affairs declines dramatically for the two humans: the serpent convinces the woman to consume fruit from the tree of

knowledge of good and bad, and the woman hands the fruit to the man, who follows suit (Gen. 3:1-6). As consequences, Yahweh issues punishments to those involved. The serpent will be wretched to a greater extent than any other type of animal and will have to travel via slithering, and the woman will endure intense suffering in childbirth and will have inferior authority relative to the man. Yahweh says the following to the man in Gen. 3:17:

cursed be the ground because of you;  
By toil shall you eat of it  
All the days of your life.

At the end of this creation story, Yahweh exiles the man away from Eden “to till the soil from which he was taken” (Gen. 3:23), and “cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword” protect “the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24).

The Garden of Eden is a representation of a royal garden representative of the Judahite kingdom. In his “A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden,” Nicolas Wyatt puts forth a strong argument for understanding the second Genesis creation account as an exilic narrative about Judah. Consequently, the Eden narrative has a royal motif in its depiction of the creation of humans, which is a motif that it shares with the P creation account. As part of building his argument for Jerusalem as the Garden of Eden’s location, Wyatt focuses on the rivers. According to Wyatt, the rivers are consistent with the motif of four rivers originating from a single origin in the carved and engraved art of the ancient Near East.<sup>59</sup> The Gihon was a source of water for Jerusalem that had a role in monarchic ceremonies such as the crowning of Solomon in 1 Kings.<sup>60</sup> In Wyatt’s view, the connection between the Gihon River and Jerusalem must be given serious attention, and “he [the writer] was intentionally evoking Jerusalem, even if not wishing to

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<sup>59</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, “A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 28, no. 1 (2014): 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

name it.”<sup>61</sup> The goal of incorporating the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers into a written work focused on Jerusalem is to enlarge the sacredness of Jerusalem to Babylonia, which is where the exiles were living.<sup>62</sup> In the past, Wyatt reasoned that the Garden of Eden is the *gan hammelek* (“King’s Garden”) that was located in Jerusalem, and although the exact place in Jerusalem where the garden was is uncertain, it was most likely next to the palace-temple complex.<sup>63</sup> “Eden” also refers to all of the Judahite monarchy.<sup>64</sup> To support this claim, Wyatt quotes Isaiah 51:3 in which there is an image of Jerusalem reestablished, and Eden and Zion are synonymous with each other:<sup>65</sup>

Truly the LORD has comforted Zion,  
Comforted all her ruins;  
He has made her wilderness like Eden,  
Her desert like the Garden of the LORD.<sup>66</sup>

Making a royal connection, Wyatt writes, “the theme of the garden is very widespread as a symbol of cosmic order, and as we shall see, above all of royal management of the cosmos.”<sup>67</sup> Hence, the monarch is the main garden figure.<sup>68</sup> It follows that the man’s garden responsibilities are actually royal duties in its broad scope as well as religious responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Regarding the exile from Eden, it refers to the end of the man’s tending to the garden with its religious activities.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, the Eden creation account is an interpretation and commentary on the fall

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>65</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, “*There’s Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King.*” *Selected Essays of Nicolas Wyatt on Royal Ideology in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature (SOTS Monograph Series)* (London: Ashgate, 2005), 67 as cited in Ibid., 17.

<sup>66</sup> Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 868-869.

<sup>67</sup> Wyatt, “A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden,” 22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 25.

of Judah.<sup>71</sup> In other words, in Wyatt's view, the second creation narrative in Genesis metaphorically conveys the story of a kingdom that met its end violently with a subsequent exile.

According to Catherine McDowell, it is possible Yahweh put the man in the Garden of Eden "in the office of royal caretaker and watchman" in an analogous manner to the Mesopotamian placing of an icon in a place of worship.<sup>72</sup> The Garden of Eden narrative appears to have Mesopotamian precedent consistent with a royal and religious place of significance for the first humans. Catherine McDowell argues that Mesopotamian religious rituals pertaining to icons of deities, the *mis pi* and *pit pi*, influenced the second creation account in Genesis.

According to McDowell, the making, bringing to life, and placing of godly icons in Mesopotamian places of worship was intricate and involved experienced clerics and craftsmen.<sup>73</sup> Following the completion of the icon, it was made animate "through the appropriate incantations and rituals, dressed, adorned with the proper insignia, installed in its temple, and fed its first meal before it could be effective."<sup>74</sup> Such rituals are categorized as *mis pi* ("washing of the mouth") and *pit pi* ("opening of the mouth").<sup>75</sup> One account of these rituals is known as the Nineveh version. McDowell writes that in a garden in the version "the priest sets up thrones for Ea, Samas, and Asalluhi, on which he places a clean, red cloth, perhaps a garment, for each god."<sup>76</sup> Later, "the priest offers a censer of juniper for seven craft and purification deities and presents them with food and drink."<sup>77</sup> The priest carries out *mis pi* and *pit pi* on the icon and then makes the icon pure via "censer, torch, and holy water," and the hands of the craftsmen are cut off in a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>72</sup> McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 158.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 63.

symbolic sense, denying the role of the people who physically made the statue in the context of the ceremony.<sup>78</sup> The rationale for such a denial is that it underscores the craft gods' role as the ones who are truly responsible for the icon.<sup>79</sup> As for the relevance to the Eden account, there is a common theme of a holy place as the location of the narrative.<sup>80</sup> The man's being brought to life is not given a step-by-step breakdown in the text, but seems to be summed up by Gen. 2:7.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the writer may have meant Eden to have been perceived as Yahweh's Temple or the Temple's garden,<sup>82</sup> and Yahweh places the man in Eden after he is made animate and fully capable of experiencing sense perceptions.<sup>83</sup>

As both a royal garden narrative and a creation narrative that involves the creation of humans as more than manual workers, the second creation account in Genesis puts forth environmental responsibility on the part of humans not seen in its Mesopotamian counterparts. On the surface, Genesis 2:4-3:24 may seem to prescribe simple physical labor like that prescribed for humans in Mesopotamian mythology in that the man is tasked with cultivating the soil. However, there are two important reasons why the Eden narrative differs from Mesopotamian mythology in this regard. First, as Wyatt demonstrates, the Garden of Eden is metaphorically about a kingdom, which Wyatt identifies specifically as the Kingdom of Judah, in which the man executes the royal and religious functions of the monarchy. This means that there is a deeper, monarchic level to the story beyond the literal interpretation of the tending of a garden. Second, I would like to build on Wyatt's work by adding that the creation of the natural

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Walker and Michael Brennan Dick, "The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mis Pi Ritual," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth the Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Brennan Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 140-141, 152 as cited in Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 149.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 157.



world and a human go hand-in-hand with each other in a way not seen, for instance, in *Atrahasis*. An *Atrahasis*-like account of creation would have Yahweh laboring on the land, perhaps within the garden, and decide to create humans as a response to his becoming overwhelmed by the work. Instead, Yahweh creates the Garden of Eden after creating a human being and has the human care for the garden. In fact, the narrative even entails that humans are necessary for the functioning of the natural world. The initial absence of vegetation is largely a result of there not being a human to cultivate the ground. Hence, the first human helps nature to flourish as part of his responsibility of cultivating soil.

The religious function of the creation of the man, as highlighted by McDowell, both illustrates the creation of humans to fulfill responsibilities extending beyond daily utilitarian matters and complements the royal depiction of humans. The man is created in a manner remarkably comparable to the creation of icons for Mesopotamian worship spaces. As a result, the man's creation reflects a privileged place with a major role in the worship of the god who created him. The religious function of the creation of humans overlaps with the monarchic function of the creation of humans. Wyatt recognizes that the Jerusalem garden was most likely proximate to the complex consisting of both the temple and the palace. Naturally, Yahweh created the man to neither have exclusively religious nor exclusively royal tasks but rather to carry out both. In light of the understanding of the Garden of Eden as a royal garden representing the Judahite monarchy, one may object to the idea that the narrative puts forth environmental responsibility for humankind on the grounds that the biblical episode is not fundamentally about the creation of humans but rather about Judah. Similarly to how the royal and religious functions of the story are complementary, the Judahite and human creation dimensions of the story are also complementary. This is because the motif of the Judahite monarchy is a lens for this myth about

creation. As Speiser recognizes, Israel was made up of multiple people with common ancestors from the beginning of time onwards, and the narrative evokes the beginning of humanity.<sup>84</sup> Hence, the Eden narrative explains the origins of humankind, which is also part of explaining the origins of Israel. It depicts the beginning of humanity through its royal and religious depiction of Judahite monarchic history. The narrative further gives its monarchic and priestly figure, the first human, the responsibility of tending to nature and enabling it to blossom.

As discussed in my previous section focusing on the P creation account, humans have an insignificant place as laborers in both *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* that contrasts with the royal and religious place of humans in Genesis. The minor part of *Enuma Elish* touching on the creation of humans has Ea use the god Qingu's blood to create humanity and transfer the gods' workload to human beings. Although *Atrahasis* gives the creation of humans more attention than *Enuma Elish*, humans are still created partially from a god's blood to take on the gods' work. One may attempt to argue that there is an element of divine maternal-like care in *Atrahasis* that does give humans some degree of a special place in the myth. More specifically, the creation and early days of humans involves womb-goddesses.<sup>85</sup> For instance, after humans have been created, the womb-goddess Nintu assists with human childbirth and proceeds to be "glad and joyful" and says "a blessing."<sup>86</sup> Although it is true that there is maternal-like care in this instance, one cannot use this observation to conclude that humans have a place comparable to that of humans in Genesis. The reason is that one must consider the broader context. The rationale for the creation of humans is made clear when Ea, earlier in the myth, says, "let her [the womb-goddess Belet-ili] create a mortal man / So that he may bear the yoke."<sup>87</sup> Essentially, the care on the part of womb-

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<sup>84</sup> Speiser, "Genesis," 25.

<sup>85</sup> Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 16-17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

goddesses in light of Ea's preceding command is to ensure that a created workforce exists and is capable of effectively functioning.

The different materials and rituals by which humans are created in Mesopotamian mythology and Genesis 2:4-3:24 reflects the non-monarchic place of humans lacking environmental responsibility in the former and the monarchic place of humans incorporating environmental responsibility in the latter. In context and compared to Genesis, the divine blood from slain gods in the two Mesopotamian myths in question is aligned with the place of humans as workers. In other words, the sacrifice of a god in each of the myths and the use of the god's blood fits within the motif of humans lacking a purpose above the utilitarian. In particular, the creation of humans from the blood of an antagonistic god, Qingu, in *Enuma Elish*, suggests a lack of genuine divine care for human beings. Among Mesopotamians, Qingu was ritually treated with violence. Alasdair Livingstone quotes a neo-Assyrian cultic commentary that portrays burnt offerings as deities' triumphs over adversaries. One of the activities described in the commentary is the burning of Qingu.<sup>88</sup> This portrayal of violence against Qingu suggests that the depiction of the creation of humans in *Enuma Elish* is not positive: humans are imagining the burning of the god from whom Ea created them. At best, in *Atrahasis*, the use of the blood of the non-antagonistic god Geshtu-e seems to be utilitarian.

The Eden narrative, in contrast, has Yahweh convert the man into a living organism via "the breath of life." The "breath of life" is aligned with the religious and royal functions of humanity. Religiously, it evokes the Mesopotamian rituals involved in crafting religious icons,

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<sup>88</sup> A. Livingstone, "Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea," *SAA* 3, (1989) as cited in JoAnn Scurlock, "THE TECHNIQUES OF THE SACRIFICE OF ANIMALS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: NEW INSIGHTS THROUGH COMPARISON, PART 1." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 42-43.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2958&context=auss>

so it suggests that the man has a significant place in the worship of Yahweh. Royally, the “breath of life” conveys an element of divine intention in creating a proper human monarchy. In the Eden account, the sole god, a protagonistic deity who will continue to have a role in how human and Judahite history unfolds, contributes a special substance from himself to initiate the beginning of humanity and the Judahite monarchy. Consequently, the second creation account in Genesis, through its use of the “breath of life” instead of a slain god’s blood, portrays the creation of humans in a way that gives them responsibilities such as care for the soil and other aspects of nature.

The importance of the soil in relation to the man’s life and death in the Eden narrative is also a point of contrast to Mesopotamian mythology. Shortly before Yahweh exiles the man and the woman and after condemning the man to hard agricultural labor, he says the following to the man:

For from it [the ground] you were taken.  
For dust you are,  
And to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:19b).

Here, the man has a new relationship with the soil, as the conditions for work become unfavorable to him, unlike in the garden. Although in *Atrahasis*, Belet-ili creates humans partially from clay in addition to the blood and flesh of Qingu, there is a lack of a sense of an ideal human-soil relationship present in the Eden narrative. This is because contextually, the use of clay appears to have the purely practical purpose of serving as a construction material in the absence of a royal and religious motif associated with caring for the land. Moreover, Ea accomplishes the creation of humans without clay in *Enuma Elish*. In Eden, in contrast, Yahweh puts forth a harmonious relationship between the man and the soil. The man took care of the soil, and the soil did not pose challenges to his tilling. After the exile, the man is punished through the

soil's harshness toward him. The most important theme in this regard is that there is still divinely-established human responsibility for nature, even if humans make choices for which they suffer divinely-inflicted consequences. In other words, the man had a responsibility to oversee the natural world contained within Eden, but he made a decision that led to his banishment from the realm where he could exercise such responsibility. Such a change is perfectly in accordance with a Judahite understanding of Eden. In the same way the Davidic lineage had a responsibility for Judah that was terminated by Yahweh's allowance of the Babylonian Exile, the man had a responsibility for the soil in Eden that was terminated by Yahweh's exile of him to the non-Eden world.<sup>89</sup>

Both *Atrahasis* and Gen. 2:4-3:24 put humans into contact with nature, but the former is concerned with the work humans are performing instead of the gods, while the latter is concerned with the cultivation of a garden with its political and religious symbolism. As I noted in my previous section, a fragmentary portion of *Atrahasis* touches on canal construction for the sake of other humans and deities, which is representative of the work humans perform on the land. As I have touched on in this section, the Eden account gives humans the responsibility of managing soil in the context of a narrative with royal and religious themes. The focus on the relationship between gods and their laborers in *Atrahasis* is demonstrated by the irritation Ellil experiences because of humans. The narrative states that "the country was as noisy as a bellowing bull. / The God grew restless at their racket, / Ellil had to listen to their noise."<sup>90</sup> Ellil then proceeds to tell "the great gods" that he has become overwhelmed by "the noise of mankind" and instructs the gods to start an epidemic.<sup>91</sup> Here, the emphasis is on the god-human

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<sup>89</sup> See Ezekiel 8 for an excellent written account reflective of the view that Yahweh allowed the Babylonians to take offensive action against Jerusalem, including the Temple.

<sup>90</sup> Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 18.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

relationship: the workforce is becoming a nuisance to its superiors. Like *Atrahasis* in this regard, Genesis 2:4-3:24 focuses on the divine-human relationship. Unlike *Atrahasis*, the divine-human relationship is that of one god with a symbolic monarch and religious figure along with his consort. A further point of distinction in the second Genesis creation account is that it adds concern for the natural context of the two humans: again, through the duty to cultivate the soil without which vegetation was previously unable to establish itself.<sup>92</sup>

Like the first Genesis creation account, the second Genesis creation account gives humans monarchic responsibility over the environment absent in *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*. The Eden account serves as both a kingdom formation narrative with a religious element consistent with the lack of separation of temple and state in ancient Israel (in a broad, non-specifically northern sense) and as a creation narrative depicting the Israelite god's creation of the earliest humans. Perhaps especially through the responsibility of the man to cultivate the soil and the statement near the beginning of the narrative that vegetation did not exist without such cultivation, the Eden account puts forth a benevolent early human relationship with the natural world on the level of a creation story. It also symbolically depicts royal and religious functions in ancient Israel prior to the Babylonian Exile. Contrasting with the second Genesis creation account, *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* have humans created as a workforce, at least partially from a slain god's blood instead of via a "breath of life." Furthermore, in the case of *Atrahasis*, the gods exhibit a concern for the perpetuation of the workforce and the god-human relationship without room for human responsibility for the environment with a royal and religious motif.

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<sup>92</sup> The Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* with its semi-human protagonist can be seen as putting forth a more harsh relationship between humans and nature than either *Atrahasis* or *Enuma Elish*. Notably, in tablet five, Gilgamesh and Enkidu enter into a cedar forest and kill its guardian, Humbaba; Gilgamesh proceeds to kill multiple cedar trees. For my brief summary of tablet five here, I am drawing from the following source: George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 39-47.

Likely in exile in Mesopotamia, the Judahites imagined the creation of their (and necessarily other peoples') ancestors as the work of their god, who gave humans a place of royal, religious, and environmental responsibility in an earthly kingdom.

The Cain and Abel narrative after the exile further illustrates Yahweh's concern for the ideal environmental responsibility put forth in Eden. Adam and Eve, post-exile, have two sons, Cain and then Abel (Gen. 4:1-2a). The two sons adopt different lines of work: "Abel be- / came a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil" (Gen. 4:2b). Cain offers Yahweh something unspecified "from the fruit of the soil" (Gen. 4:3), but "Abel, for his part, brought the / choicest of the firstlings of his flock" (Gen. 4:4a). Yahweh recognizes Abel and what Abel offered but does not recognize Cain and what Cain offered, which agonizes Cain (Gen. 4:4b-5). In response, Cain kills Abel (Gen. 4:8). Aware of Cain's actions, Yahweh exclaims, "your brother's blood cries out to Me from the / ground!" (Gen. 4:10). Yahweh further states that Cain "shall be more cursed than the ground," which took in Abel's blood (Gen. 4:11a). The soil will cease to be conducive to Cain's agricultural activities, and Cain will forever wander (Gen. 4:12).

Cain's curse involves a change in the human-soil relationship. In his commentary on Genesis, Bill T. Arnold recognizes that the ground is at the center of Cain's work, transgression, and retribution against him: "that by which Cain sustained his life also bore witness against him."<sup>93</sup> In contrast to Yahweh's having cursed the soil to punish the man (Gen. 3:17), the soil is the origin of Cain's curse (Gen. 4:11).<sup>94</sup> In other words, to paraphrase and quote Edwin M. Good, Cain now has the punishment of being parted "from the ground." In this instance, the author uses the verb employed earlier for the exile of the man and the woman from the garden in

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<sup>93</sup> Bill T. Arnold, "Genesis," in *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, ed. Ben Witherington III and Bill T. Arnold (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 80.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Gen. 3:24. Cain is free from Adam's punishment "as servant of the ground" but still has to experience pain.<sup>95</sup> In the end, Cain is even more distant from Eden.<sup>96</sup>

The Cain and Abel narrative shows Yahweh's concern for a proper human relationship with the natural world consistent with the royal place for which humankind was created. In response to transgressions Adam and Eve and then Cain are increasingly removed from the original monarchic and priestly duty of taking care of the garden representative of Judah. In the case of Cain's murder of Abel, Yahweh expresses a concern for the soil that necessarily acted as the recipient of Abel's blood. First, the man failed to adhere to Yahweh's commandments for tending to the garden, specifically by breaking the ban on consuming fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. As a result, the man, Adam, still has to labor on the land but outside of the Garden of Eden with its royal and religious motifs and with agricultural obstacles. Second, Cain desecrates the soil by murdering Abel. To punish Cain, Yahweh curses him to a greater degree than the soil that Yahweh had cursed against Adam and that was forcefully put into contact with Abel's blood. The fundamental point here is that there is a gap between Yahweh's intentions for the human-nature relationship and the reality of the human-nature relationship. Cain, like the man, shows to Yahweh that post-creation, humans are imperfect with regard to executing the original priestly and royal duties of Eden, including taking care of the soil in the Edenic context.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Edwin M. Good, *Genesis 1-11: Tales of the Earliest World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 52.

<sup>96</sup> Arnold, "Genesis," 80.

<sup>97</sup> For an excellent, brief discussion of the human-soil relationship in traditionally-designated J material, see Michael D. Coogan and Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 55-56.



The Eden and subsequent Cain and Abel narratives depict the original royal and priestly responsibilities for humankind, including environmental responsibility, but also show that humans were ultimately unsuccessful in carrying out such duties. The theme of a monarchy with its internal responsibilities meeting its demise is perfectly aligned with the understanding of Eden as the Kingdom of Judah. Yahweh's creation of humans for the Garden of Eden seems to have been for an indefinite period of time, and his objectives of the creation include a role for the man of maintaining the soil. The initial apparent absence of a finite duration for the man's reign in Eden resonates with Yahweh's covenant with David in 2 Samuel:

Your house and your kingship shall  
ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established  
forever (2 Sam. 7:16).

However, the writer of the Eden narrative had to reflect the reality of what happened to the Davidic dynasty, the Jerusalem Temple, and the Kingdom of Judah itself in the early Sixth Century B.C.E. The exile and punishments of the earliest humans in and outside of Eden echo the reality of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile in virtue of which the Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem priesthood could no longer function. For the writer(s) of the Eden and Cain and Abel narratives, humans originally had a royal and priestly position incorporating environmental responsibility in the garden depiction of Judah. Such a place for humans contrasts the Genesis primeval history with its Mesopotamian counterparts. This being said, since the real-life kingdom Eden represents came to a violent end, the writer(s) had to depict the Babylonian conquest and exile metaphorically.

**Part III:**  
**The Flood and the Shifting Relationships between Humans and Animals**  
**and between Humans and the Soil**

Yahweh sends an extremely destructive flood, striving to reestablish the kingdom he had created. He does so because of the lack of the ideal human-nature relationship causing environmental pollution to which I referenced in Section II, using the narrative of the murdered Abel's blood entering into the soil. Although a large-scale primeval flood is present in both Genesis and Mesopotamian mythology, what makes the biblical flood unique is a deity's motive based on ethics in his decision-making. As Speiser affirms, there is a moral motivation in the biblical flood absent from Mesopotamian flood accounts.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Yahweh's moral motivation is largely driven by the environmental degradation resulting from humans' violence against one another. Frymer-Kensky notes that biblical pollution is not metaphorical and that the pollution to which Yahweh responds is literal pollution from pre-flood murders that the flood was intended to and did eliminate.<sup>99</sup> In this section of my thesis, I will contrast Yahweh's actions in Noah's flood and its aftermath with the actions of the gods in the Mesopotamian flood narratives to argue that Yahweh's actions reflect a divine concern for pragmatic environmental responsibility.

The contrast between the biblical and Mesopotamian environmental worldviews that I have discussed in my previous sections persists beyond the creation narratives. A commonality among the Genesis primeval history, *Atrahasis*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is that they contain flood narratives in which a deity instructs a human being to construct an ark or boat and to save

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<sup>98</sup> Speiser, "Genesis," 46.

<sup>99</sup> Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," 154.

himself, his family, and animals. Despite such a common episode, Genesis and Mesopotamian mythology markedly differ from each other regarding the points of emphasis and human responsibilities in the aftermath of the flood. On the one hand, Genesis continues to emphasize the responsibility that humans have had, including for the environment, in the context of an administrative hierarchy put forth earlier in the two creation accounts. On the other hand, the Mesopotamian myths ultimately never or minimally touch on the responsibility of humans in the management of the natural world. This lack of human responsibility for nature in Mesopotamian mythology is consistent with the continued absence of a monarchic role for humans in the mythological framework.

Yahweh's moral motivation is reflected in his choice of an upright individual to survive the flood. As shown by Gen. 6:9, Yahweh selects Noah as the central figure to survive the flood: "Noah was a righteous man; he was / blameless in his age; Noah walked with God." Noah's righteousness, however, makes him the exception in the context of Yahweh's creation at this point in the primeval history. That is, unlike Noah, the earth has become depraved, and Yahweh holds all life responsible (Gen. 6:12). For the worldwide depravity, Yahweh tells Noah, in their first explicitly-depicted correspondence with each other, of his divine plans to eliminate life: He is "about to destroy them with the earth" (Gen. 6:13). Caring for Noah and tending to his survival as the special exception for his rectitude, Yahweh provides instructions to Noah to build an ark (Gen. 6:14-16). Similarly to the god-protagonist interactions in the Mesopotamian myths I will examine, Yahweh further commands Noah to ensure the survival of a portion of the animal world. Yet, unlike the gods in the Mesopotamian myths who have no directions regarding the animals after the flood, Yahweh later incorporates animals in his post-flood covenant with Noah

and his sons. This is noteworthy because it suggests that the biblical writers saw more than simply utilitarian value in animals.

Yahweh's animal-related instructions to Noah are specific. This being said, in the current form of the flood narrative, there are two different commands concerning the saving of animals in the flood account. The first is in Gen. 6:19:

and of all that lives, of  
all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with  
you; they shall be male and female.

The second is in Gen. 7:2, which has an even more explicit, category-oriented emphasis on animals:

of every clean animal you shall take  
seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that  
is not clean, two, a male and its mate.

The forty-day flood (Gen 7:17) takes place when Noah is 600 years-old (Gen. 7:11b). The narrative, moreover, tells the reader that the flood was extensive and comprehensive in its destruction. The flood kills all life forms from human beings to birds; Noah and the other occupants of the ark are the sole survivors (Gen. 7:23). After the flood, Yahweh instructs Noah and his spouse, sons, daughters-in-law, and the non-human animals to exit the ark (Gen. 8:15-18). They enter into Yahweh's now-cleansed kingdom.

Whereas the command to save animals seems benevolent toward the animals, later in the aftermath of the flood, there is a seemingly-unexpected and fundamentally harsh shift in the human-animal relationship. This shift takes place after Yahweh blesses "Noah and his sons" and instructs them to grow the human population (Gen. 9:1). But he then commands them that they will instill "fear and dread" in both terrestrial and aquatic animals (Gen. 9:2). The new mention

of fear and dread seems to suggest that the *rdh* humans exercised up to this point was not a source of distress to animals.

Perfectly in accordance with the humans' new harshness toward animals, the human diet is no longer meat-free in contrast to the earlier diet specified in the P creation account. To establish the new diet, Yahweh declares that "every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the / green grasses, I give you all these" (Gen. 9:3). Yahweh does not, however, give every part of individual animals to humans. This is because even though there is a broad scope of types of animals humans can eat, a certain component of animals is impermissible for human consumption. Specifically, consuming meat containing "life-blood" is unacceptable (Gen. 9:4). Clearly, there is a concern for the ethical treatment of animals. With the new diet sanctified by Yahweh, animals will no longer be at ease with the human supervisors in Yahweh's kingdom. This is in sharp contrast to the way they may have felt regarding humans in the past when humans had a meat-free diet. With this dietary expansion, humans go beyond merely having dominion over animals and become a source of anxiety for animals who are now food for people.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time, it must be noted that Yahweh has a pragmatic motivation behind his granting of meat consumption to humans. The revised human-animal relationship is obviously harsh. However, animal consumption is a practical alternative to prevent environmental degradation previously resulting from the murder of humans such as Cain's murder of Abel. In his Torah commentary, Robert Alter interprets that it is possible that the new diet is "intended as an outlet for his [humankind's] violent impulses."<sup>101</sup> I would like to build on Alter's point by

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<sup>100</sup> Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 38.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Alter, "The Five Books of Moses," in *The Hebrew Bible: Vol. 1* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2019), 32.

adding that if animals are to be subjected to human violence as a substitute for human violence against fellow human beings, then Yahweh is making a realistic amendment to the human-nature relationship to prevent a worse form of violence: murderous impulses in humans. In light of the understanding that murders such as Cain's murder of Abel pollute nature, Yahweh is broadening the human relationship with animals to prevent the degradation of nature through human-on-human violence. In this drastic broadening of the human-animal relationship, there is a change in the human-animal relationship. This change is not ideal but ensures that humans will not continue to cause the pollution that led Yahweh to send a flood to devastate all life (except Noah and those whom Noah saves) with a flood.

Here, attention should be paid that to some extent, Yahweh's language and desires for humanity seem to stand in opposition to each other. The shift in the human-animal relationship after the flood combines violent language with a clearly-expressed divine wish for restraint. The brutal language is found in the later Pentateuchal narratives that set the stage for Joshua's conquests. Mark G. Brett recognizes that the terminology used in Gen. 9:2 is like that of warfare. Specifically, the linguistic element of "dread" echoes the conquest depicted in Deuteronomy 11:23-25, which puts forth Israelite control in the land bound by the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the phrase "into your hands they are given" characterizes conquest narratives, referring to victory over adversaries.<sup>102</sup> In light of such militaristic language, it may seem that the new post-flood order gives humans unrestricted power to abuse animals. To the contrary, in closer examination, the language and context suggest that to some extent, there is an element of a continuum of shared responsibility and restraint between humans and animals. As part of explaining the element of human self-control, Brett acknowledges that in Gen. 9:3-5,

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<sup>102</sup> Mark G. Brett, "Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity," in *Old Testament Readings*, ed. Keith Whitlam (London: Routledge, 2000), 44.

humans and animals have a common requirement to explain bloodshed. Furthermore, restricted violence is an ethical standard that has a foundation with a larger scope than Israelite law, as Brett cites Gen. 9:6:<sup>103</sup>

Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
By man shall his blood be shed;  
For in His image  
Did God make man.

Such a “blood for blood” rule has the goal to decrease violence as opposed to encourage violence, and the divine image reference expresses a contrast between humans and animals in terms of value.<sup>104</sup> Brett further points to the significant observation that the redactors organized the chapter to lessen the unreasonable conquest language. The prohibition on blood consumption, in particular, is rooted in the view that casual destruction of life is undesirable, which applies to both humans and animals. Ultimately, what makes human blood unique in Gen. 9:6 is the element of the divine image associated with humans.<sup>105</sup>

An important factor in the human restraint regarding animal consumption is the fact that the restraint is intertwined in specifying the place of animals in Yahweh’s covenant. The structure of Gen. 9:6 suggests, to quote Brett, that “it may have been an existing element that the editors have placed between the two texts which emphasize the unity of humankind and animals.” Brett notes that prior to Gen. 9:6, in Gen. 9:4-5, blood is associated with the life of all organisms. In thematic continuity, following v. 6, the covenant theology of the subsequent verses “emphasizes precisely the unity of humankind and animals,” as Yahweh’s promise is for all life.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 44.

In v. 9, Yahweh addresses Noah and his lineage, but vv. 10-17 express divine care that extends beyond humankind.<sup>106</sup> For instance, in Gen. 9:15, Yahweh states,

I will remember My covenant between  
Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that  
the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Ultimately, there is a redaction pattern in Genesis that certain worldviews such as human dominance remain in the text, while differing views are also inserted in ways that weaken such worldviews.<sup>107</sup> Similarly to the initial prohibition on meat consumption as a restriction on *rdh*, the new meat consumption rescinds the original prohibition but with an accompanying new restriction that is respectful toward animals.

An intriguing cultural aspect related to animal blood is that in ancient Israel and ancient Mesopotamia, the practices involving animal sacrifices and blood were similar, but ideas about animal blood put forth in the religious text of Gen. 9 appear to be specific to Israel. In her comparison of animal sacrifices in the two regions of the ancient Near East, JoAnn Scurlock writes that consuming animal blood is a form of murder in the biblical worldview. In the subsequent Book of Exodus, doing so violates the commandment “thou shalt not kill,” and consuming animal blood also breaks Moses’ covenant in which he formed a connection between the Israelites and Yahweh via sacrificial blood (Ex. 24:5-8).<sup>108</sup> In practice, Israelite animal sacrifices would have been understandable to a person from Mesopotamia. Notably, Mesopotamians carrying out animal sacrifices discarded the blood.<sup>109</sup> Although Scurlock does not know of a religious basis for why they discarded the blood, she adds that “great care also

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>108</sup> Scurlock, “THE TECHNIQUES OF THE SACRIFICE OF ANIMALS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA,” 29.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



seems to have been taken in ancient Mesopotamia to get every last bit of blood out of butchered animals before cooking them.”<sup>110</sup> However, seemingly alien concepts to Mesopotamians would have been the role of blood in a covenant and the classification of consuming animal blood as murder.<sup>111</sup> To recap, there was a common foundation between ancient Israel and ancient Mesopotamia regarding the manners in which people conducted sacrifices, but the practices had religious significance only in ancient Israel.

Israelites’ thoughts on blood is one of the factors that explains the environmental responsibility uniquely present in the Genesis primeval history. That is, even though humans are entitled to utilize animals for nutrition, the Genesis flood narrative implies that animals still have a place in the Noahide covenant that humans must honor. In other words, the Genesis flood narrative uniquely intertwines the flood with views on animal blood. In the Israelite writings of the Bible, the permission after the flood for humans to consume animal meat is the natural place in the primeval history to introduce the ban on consuming animal blood. As the text and an understanding of Israelites’ beliefs makes clear, the only acceptable way for humans to consume animals is as a non-murderous act. Since animals’ core nature is in their blood, people have the obligation under Yahweh’s ban to avoid disrespectfully mistreating animals by murdering them. Such an obligation of respect fits within the larger picture of Yahweh’s inclusion of animals in his post-flood covenantal statement. Basically, in his cleansed earth, Yahweh provides both animals and human beings a place in the covenant. Humans’ dominion over their animal peers is expanded, but humans are required to conduct themselves responsibly in their newly-established meat-consuming role.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 29.

On another notable point, the manner in which Yahweh expects humans to carry out meat consumption is rooted in the *rdh* he grants to humans while forming a monarchy in the P creation account. Although humans may consume animals from this point of the Bible onward, Yahweh still expects them to carry out meat consumption conscientiously and in a way that does not involve ingesting the fundamental nature of animals. Hence, the new relationship between humans and animals reflects a new level of authority with responsibility within the royal place of humans put forth in the P creation account. In other words, the *rdh* over the natural world granted as part of the kingdom formation described in Genesis 1 has been explicitly expanded in a deleterious way to animals but still in a restricted manner intended to eliminate the soil-polluting shedding of human blood. It is not so much that there is a greater level of environmental duty for humans at this point of the primeval history but rather that there was a source of environmental degradation that humans can now effectively avoid. Humans were contaminating the soil via murder, and Yahweh pragmatically rectifies the problem by presenting animals as another object of lethal action but not not of murder because the eating of animals is without blood consumption.

The Mesopotamian flood narratives of *Atrahasis* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* fundamentally contrast from Genesis in their lack of concern for the natural world. These two Mesopotamian flood narratives differ from the Genesis flood narrative in that they do not focus on human duties such as care for the environment within a royal motif. Overall, the *Atrahasis* flood narrative is similar to its Genesis counterpart, but the main difference lies in that *Atrahasis*' focus is ultimately on maintaining the human population at a level that is manageable for the gods. Tikva Frymer-Kensky credits Anne Kilmer and William J. Moran for recognizing

excessive population growth as the fundamental issue to which the gods respond.<sup>112</sup> The gods' response is depicted when Ellil becomes overwhelmed by humans' loud sounds. At a point, the myth introduces the reader to its namesake and human protagonist, Atrahasis. It tells us he formed a personal connection with "his god Enki" and that they communicate with each other.<sup>113</sup> This personal connection helps to set the stage for the role of Enki in ensuring that Atrahasis survives the flood. Ellil eventually decides he wants to start a flood, but because this is a fragmentary portion of the text, some details are unclear while it seems Enki is hesitant about the flood plan and even disapproves of the plan.<sup>114</sup> When Ellil determines he is going to proceed with his flood plan, Enki moves to tend to the survival of Atrahasis, as did Yahweh with Noah.<sup>115</sup> Additional similarities to the Genesis primeval history include Enki's concern for Atrahasis to save animals. As did Yahweh with Noah, Enki also instructs Atrahasis to construct a boat "and save living things."<sup>116</sup> Later, a fragmentary portion of the text tells us that Atrahasis placed animals in his ark.<sup>117</sup> However, the similarities between the *Atrahasis* flood and the Genesis flood end here. Some degree of attention is devoted to animals in the narrative leading up to the flood, and Atrahasis performs an animal sacrifice to the gods after the flood.<sup>118</sup> This being said, the focus in *Atrahasis* after the flood is on population control in accordance with the gods' need to prevent the human population from becoming excessively large. To accomplish the goal, Ellil

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<sup>112</sup> Anne Kilmer, "The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and its Solution as Represented in the Mythology," *Orientalia* 41 (1972): 160-177 and William J. Moran, "The Babylonian Story of the Flood [review article]," *Biblica* (1971): 51-61 as cited in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 40, no. 4 (1977): 149.

<sup>113</sup> Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 18.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," 149. The portion of the Dalley translation that touches on the animal sacrifice is fragmentary, but Frymer-Kensky makes it clear that Atrahasis performed a sacrifice.

has Enki provide directions “to the womb-goddess Nintu.”<sup>119</sup> Enki commands Nintu to make “new creatures” in a manner that will prevent overpopulation.<sup>120</sup> Specific examples of population control measures for the new people include the theft of newborns by a demon and unsuccessful births.<sup>121</sup> The stark difference between *Atrahasis* and Genesis lies in that in the case of *Atrahasis*, Ellil is concerned about preventing humans from again becoming a cause of disturbance, while Yahweh prescribes a new code for how humans are to administer the natural world and conduct themselves.

As shown in the above, the gods of the two narratives start the two floods with widely differing intentions. Yahweh, in Genesis, starts the flood out of concern for the execution of human responsibilities in his kingdom, as humans’ depravity had polluted the earth. Ellil, in contrast, starts the flood out of concern for his comfort, and after the flood, he ensures humans remain in a simple position of labor that is satisfactory and not a source of irritation in his perspective. It is true that both Yahweh and Ellil are dissatisfied with humans, but for different reasons. The first two Genesis creation accounts show that Yahweh starts a kingdom, granting humans a position of power in the royal system. When humans fail to conduct themselves responsibly and corrupt nature in the process, Yahweh decides to destroy his kingdom to pave the way for a new order. Consequently, the flood shows Yahweh’s concern for maintaining his kingdom in a more or less pristine state, which involves minimizing future human sin and preventing humans from continuing to taint the soil. Unlike Yahweh, Ellil is concerned with the utilitarian value of humans in the context of the world in which humans live. For Ellil, humans exist not to oversee a kingdom but rather to ease life for him and the other gods. The role of

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<sup>119</sup> Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia*, 34.

<sup>120</sup> Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9,” 149. I am citing Frymer-Kensky again because the Dalley translation is too fragmentary.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

humans in easing life for the gods is illustrated by the canal-building example in *Atrahasis*, as the canals serve the purpose of providing nutrition to people and sustenance for the people's deities. As demonstrated by the above, Ellil wants humans solely to benefit him and his divine peers but does not want too many of them, for the humans would counter the benefits of human labor through the cost of human annoyance.

Although not a myth focused on creation and its immediate aftermath, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* also includes a flood narrative. It does not fit within the framework underlying *Atrahasis* and Genesis of a mythological narrative about the distant past, but the *Gilgamesh* flood narrative ultimately fits within the framework of its overall story centering on Gilgamesh, the semi-divine king, searching for immortality. In an effort to achieve his ambition, Gilgamesh eventually decides to seek the human, or at least originally-human, Uta-napishti. This is because Uta-napishti was present at the council of the gods and had obtained immortality, and Gilgamesh desires to learn how Uta-napishti became immortal.<sup>122</sup> Gilgamesh locates and asks Uta-napishti how he became immortal to which Uta-napishti replies, "let me disclose, O Gilgamesh, a matter most secret, / to you I will tell a mystery of gods."<sup>123</sup> Uta-napishti explains that the gods made the choice of starting a flood and that Ea instructed him to construct a boat and "save life."<sup>124</sup> This is parallel to the divine instructions to Noah and *Atrahasis*. Interestingly, unlike Yahweh with Noah, the god Enlil seems to remove Uta-napishti from the human world. After the flood, Enlil grants Uta-napishti and his spouse a god-like place and resettles them "where the rivers flow / forth."<sup>125</sup> The flood narrative then comes to a close, as Uta-napishti returns to addressing

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<sup>122</sup> George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 72.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Gilgamesh's wish to become immortal and challenges Gilgamesh to spend approximately a week without sleeping.<sup>126</sup>

The significance of *Gilgamesh* is that it helps to highlight the Mesopotamian lack of a royal motif endowing humankind with responsibility for nature. Uta-napishti is a privileged flood survivor, not a monarchic figure who will care for creation, including the natural world in the context of a newly-issued covenant. Gilgamesh, not Uta-napishti, is a monarch, but he is the king of the specific city of Uruk as opposed to the monarch of the gods' primeval creation.<sup>127</sup> In this sense, he is analogous to the kings of Israel and Judah in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible: Gilgamesh rules over a human political entity, not a divinely-established kingdom in the immediate aftermath of creation. Also, Uta-napishti stands in contrast to Noah in that he never existed in the context of a kingdom analogous to the metaphorical kingdom of the Genesis primeval history. As someone who never had a pre-flood duty to exercise rule over animals or to cultivate soil, his post-flood life simply involves living in a context seemingly removed from other people and responsibilities.

As demonstrated above, there is strong thematic continuity from the biblical and Mesopotamian creation myths onward regarding the place of humans within a power system and the implications those positions have for the human-nature relationship. Although there is a lack of overt environmentalism in the Genesis primeval history, its attention to humans' responsibility for nature makes it stand out from the other flood narratives: Yahweh consistently shows a concern for the human-nature relationship beyond a human's task to simply save animals during the flood. Such concern distinguishes the post-flood major developments in Genesis from the post-flood developments in the other two narratives.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> See Tablet I in Ibid., 1-11. It introduces Gilgamesh in his position of King of Uruk.

The thematic continuity after the Genesis flood extends beyond Yahweh's covenant. After Yahweh puts forth the covenant, there is a uniquely biblical episode of the protagonist's planting of a vineyard, which illustrates the continued environmental theme of caring for the soil. We are told that "Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard" (Gen. 9:20). However, the results of Noah's tilling activities in relation to the vineyard are not exclusively positive. The Alcohol produced has adverse effects on Noah: Noah enters into a drunken state after imbibing wine, and he went into his tent and removed his clothing (Gen. 9:21). One of Noah's sons, Ham, "saw his / father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside" (Gen. 9:22). Without looking at Noah, Shem and Japheth place a cloth on their father (Gen. 9:23). When awake, Noah invokes Yahweh to bring about different fates for the lineages generated through his descendants. Noah, no longer drunk, proceeds to curse Ham's son, Canaan (Gen. 9:24-25). He blesses Yahweh and invokes Yahweh to wish for the best for Shem and Japheth and for the condemnation of Canaan to serve as a slave to Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:26-27). All the same, this tension-filled narrative does not seem to warn against wine made from vineyard grapes. According to Arnold, it is highly improbable Gen. 9 denounces Noah's wine consumption; there is a lack of critical commentary on his becoming drunk.<sup>128</sup> Noah goes on to live an additional 350 years for a total lifespan of 950 years (Gen. 9:28-29).

The vineyard episode shows the continued environmental concern in the Genesis primeval history not seen in Mesopotamian mythology. Moreover, Noah's environmental mission is made clear from the time of his birth: earlier humans caused Yahweh to alienate them from the soil, and Noah will correct such an ill. Again, pre-flood murders caused the pollution Yahweh wished to eliminate. Brett notes that descendants of Cain do not perform land-based

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<sup>128</sup> Arnold, "Genesis," 112.

labor and that Noah contrasts with Cain in some ways.<sup>129</sup> In support of Noah's exceptional connection to the soil and nature-related mission, Brett cites the earlier statements by Lamech on the birth of Noah, his son:

This one will provide us relief  
from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very  
Soil which the LORD placed under a curse (Gen. 5:29).

In Brett's view, the above foreshadows "the fresh relationship with the land" and is an allusion to the punishments in Gen. 3:17.<sup>130</sup> Notably, the vineyard overturns Cain's exclusion from the soil.<sup>131</sup>

All of the analyses and discussions in this section support the existence of a fundamental distinction between the biblical flood and the Mesopotamian flood(s), including the aftermath. The distinction is that Yahweh starts the flood largely to make conditions suitable for humans to again exercise their original responsibility for the natural world. While Ellil is agitated over the sounds overpopulated humans make and decides to drown them in a flood, Yahweh desires to purify his creation of the damage caused to it by people and even blesses the survivors to multiply in abundance. Noah, with his environmental mission put forth at the beginning of his life and as the patriarch of the few survivors of the flood, is essentially a new king of Yahweh's kingdom that was contaminated but purified through a flood. He is invested with the *rdh* established in the P creation account, and he is also invested with the responsibility for caring for the soil put forth in the Eden creation account. This being said, to enable Noah to exercise such *rdh* and, even more so, a responsibility for the soil, Yahweh has to make the kingdom fit for him to do so. The ultimate significance of the Noah's flood narrative is that the writers of the Genesis

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<sup>129</sup> Brett, "Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity," 38.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 39.



primeval history portrayed the flood as a necessary evil to enable a new monarchic figure to exercise his duties, including for the natural world.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, Genesis 1-11 is not a compilation of texts that puts forth an environmentalist stance. This being said, it does depict the creation of the cosmos and humans in two distinct narratives as Yahweh's creation of a kingdom(s) in which humans are endowed with a sacred and authoritative duty to manage and care for the earth and its inhabitants. It is from this authoritative place that human responsibility for nature absent in *Atrahasis*, *Enuma Elish*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* stems and has a presence in the narratives up to and after the flood. Unlike in Genesis, the gods in Mesopotamian mythology create humans in the non-royal capacity of laborers, who perform the work that once overwhelmed the gods. In accordance with this place for humans, they do not have environmental responsibility.

The Priestly creation account includes responsibility for nature that humans lack in Mesopotamian mythology, while not promoting a pro-environment ideology. As a kingdom formation myth, the P creation account has Yahweh grant humans rule (*rdh*) over nature. When one looks at the first creation account in Genesis and compares it to the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* myths, one of the most significant issues is how *rdh* in the former is supposed to be understood. The truth is that *rdh* is challenging to classify with certainty as either pro-environment or anti-environment. On the one hand, *rdh* as a word has a harsh root that relates to squashing or crushing some entity. On the other hand, *rdh* can be interpreted in non-harsh manners in the context of the P creation account such as by noting the fruit and vegetable-based diet Yahweh prescribes to humans and interpreting such a diet as a restriction. In *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*, the gods create humans to perform terrestrial work, but do not instruct

humans about how they are to treat the land on which they execute their practical tasks.

Although the first creation account in Genesis was not written by environmentalists, it is mindful to touch on an aspect of duty humans are to have with regard to the natural world.

The Eden narrative also depicts the creation of humans in the context of kingdom formation and gives humans environmental responsibility but with a specifically Judahite motif. The man has dual priestly and royal roles in a garden that symbolically represents Jerusalem with its King's Garden that was next to the temple-palace complex in all likelihood. In the garden, he cultivates the soil, and it is largely thanks to his cultivation that plants can grow. When the royal and creation layers of the narrative are integrated, one sees that the man cares for his environment in royal and religious places of authority. Later, Yahweh punishes Cain for his murder of Abel, which desecrated the soil. Here, Yahweh expresses and acts out of his concern for humans failing to fulfill their original duty of caring for the soil. Again, this contrasts with the unprivileged position of humans in Mesopotamian mythology.

Although the flood accounts in Genesis, *Atrahasis*, and *Gilgamesh* all state that the human protagonist saves animals, Genesis is the only one that exhibits a divine interest in the relationship post-flood humans are to have with animals and the earth. Despite the fact that Yahweh allows humans to incorporate animals into their diets, Yahweh also makes it clear that humans cannot permissibly consume animal blood, which is where animals' spirits exist in the biblical framework. The shift after the flood in Genesis is undoubtedly toward a harsh relationship on the part of humans as they relate to animals, but the restriction incorporated into this shift reflects a sense of responsibility that the flood narratives in *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh* do not incorporate. Later in the chapter in question, ch. 9, Noah reasserts the human responsibility of taking care of the soil, which has been made possible through Yahweh's purifying flood.

Noah plants the first vineyard, perhaps suggesting that the necessary state of tranquility for such agriculture has been enabled via the flood's purification.

A comparative reading of the two sources of mythology with a focus on humans' responsibility for nature enables one to see fundamental points of distinction in the Genesis primeval history in relation to its Mesopotamian parallels. Even though Genesis 1-11 has strong parallels to Mesopotamian mythology, the concern the Israelite god has for his kingdom's supervisors' responsibility for the natural world is distinct compared to the lack of concern of the Mesopotamian gods for their human workers' relationship with the natural world.

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I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.

Bryton A. Smith