
Stories of Creation in the Old and New Testament: Where Do They Come From?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Dr. Bolchazy, we've discussed the idea of myths in the Old and the New Testament, but I still question where these myths come from.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Perhaps what we should do, Nancy, is take one specific myth. For example, let's talk about the myths of creation in the Old and also the New Testament.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Okay, that sounds very good to me, but immediately, the implication of the title is, "There is more than one story of creation."

DR. BOLCHAZY: As a matter of fact, there are many different creation stories in the Bible. For example, Genesis 1:1 tells one story. Genesis 2:4 contains still another story of creation. At the beginning of John's Gospel we find a third story of creation, quite different from the stories in Genesis. Throughout the Old Testament, we find a dozen or so other stories of creation. They're all different.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: But, these stories originated in Hebrew culture, didn't they?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Not really.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: You mean these stories aren't Hebrew stories? They're not unique to the Bible?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Actually, they're all borrowed.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Borrowed? Then you're saying that there are some stories of creation in non-Hebrew cultures which are similar to those in the Bible?

DR. BOLCHAZY: There are quite a number of them, yes.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I don't mean to be a skeptic, but give me an example, please.

DR. BOLCHAZY: There's an Egyptian myth which goes back to 2500 B.C. The myth says: In the beginning there was god. His name was Ptah. Ptah was all alone. Ptah in his heart thought. Then he verbalized his thoughts, and the result was nine gods. Through these nine gods the universe and all that's in it was created. Now, does this myth remind you of a similar story of creation in the New Testament?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: No, not really.

DR. BOLCHAZY: How about the beginning of St. John's Gospel?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: All right. It reads, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him." Is that the passage you're referring to?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes. And that's one of the many different stories of creation in the Bible.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I'm sorry; I just don't see the genetic relationship between John's account and the Egyptian myth.

DR. BOLCHAZY: All right, Nancy, the Word, or, the Logos in the original Greek, is the Father's thinking. God the Father, according to John, thought about himself, contemplated himself, was aware of himself. This self-awareness, this contemplation of himself, this thinking is the Word, the Logos, which is the second person of the blessed Trinity, according to John. The Father's contemplation of himself becomes the Son. Through this Son or through this Logos the universe comes into existence.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I still don't see the connection.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Let's go back to Ptah. How did he create his sons?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: By means of thought.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Right! He conceptualized them in his heart. Then he verbalized or expressed his thought. Ptah's thought became his nine sons through whom everything was made. Now, compare that to St. John's passage where Christ is the Word or the Logos of the Father.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: But, in what way is Christ the Word of the Father? In what way does the son of God proceed from the Father?

DR. BOLCHAZY: God's Word, or the expression of his "self-contemplation," is the Logos, the Word, the Son. Through this Logos/Word all things were made.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I'm still not sure I understand. Can you give me some more examples?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Several of them. One of the best examples is found in ancient Greek mythology. Athena or Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, sprung from the head of Zeus. In other words, Athena/Minerva came into existence when Zeus conceptualized her in his head.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: The idea becomes a reality, is that what we're talking about?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes. It's called the "Logos doctrine"; the Word, thought, the idea becomes incarnate. During the Renaissance, there was a group of scholars called Ciceronians. And I bring this up because this is a very interesting side note. These Ciceronians limited themselves to Cicero's vocabulary.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Now, there's a new word for my vocabulary.

DR. BOLCHAZY: And, how would you imagine that you would say Christ in Cicero's vocabulary?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I have absolutely no idea.

DR. BOLCHAZY: "Minerva sprung from the head of Zeus."

PROFESSOR BOYLE: You're kidding!

DR. BOLCHAZY: No! That was the name of Christ. Scripturally, rather correct: "Minerva sprung from the head of Zeus." Christ, like Minerva, was the wisdom of the Father. Christ, in other words, was the Father's self-contemplation from all eternity.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I think I'm beginning to see a glimmer of light on this subject. Are there any other stories of creation similar to these?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes. One of the most widespread stories reflected in Genesis is the myth of Eurynome.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Now, that one I'm going to have to write down. Who was Eurynome?

DR. BOLCHAZY: A goddess. Her name means "mother of all." Now, in the beginning, according to the myth, Eurynome danced, and with her dancing Eurynome created a wind. Eurynome took this wind into her hands and molded it into a serpent. This serpent lusted after Eurynome. Eurynome and the serpent made love. The offspring was a huge cosmic egg. Eurynome brooded over this egg in the form of a dove. In time, the cosmic egg broke, and from it the universe was hatched.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: As soon as you mentioned serpent, I knew I recognized something in the story.

DR. BOLCHAZY: It's a very ancient myth, going back to matriarchal society. It's also widespread, found in Greek culture, Hindu tradition, and Polynesian and Nordic mythologies. In Phoenician mythology, her name is Boahu, or Bahu. The myth of Eurynome or Bahu existed also in Mesopotamian and Semitic cultures.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: And this is especially referred to in the first story of creation in Genesis?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes. Now, there's also an interesting Babylonian story of creation that's echoed in Genesis. It's the story of Apsu and Tiamat.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Let me guess, Adam and Eve?

DR. BOLCHAZY: No. In this story, Apsu is the male waters; Tiamat is the female waters. They mingle in love and create other beings, who become a threat to a new set of male gods, invented by a patriarchal society. Apsu is killed first. Then Marduk, the newly elected king of the male gods, attacks Tiamat and eventually kills her. Marduk takes the carcass of Tiamat and cuts it in half. From the upper half of her carcass he creates the sky. With the other half he creates the earth and the seas.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: The sky, the earth, and the seas, that's a marvelous story for women. So much nicer story than Adam's rib.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes, and there's more than that. How do these myths of Eurynome and Tiamat relate to the first story found in Genesis?

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Well, the first two verses of Genesis read:

In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; the earth was waste and void; darkness covered the abyss, and the spirit of God was stirring above the waters.

DR. BOLCHAZY: All right, the significant words in this passage are God, waste, void, the abyss, and "the spirit of God stirring."

PROFESSOR BOYLE: So, what does all that mean?

DR. BOLCHAZY: To begin with, take the word "God." The original Hebrew word for God is Elohim and the name Elohim is related etymologically to the Phoenician chief god El represented as Bull El.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: What does that mean to us?

DR. BOLCHAZY: It's an example of "borrowing" for in 1 Kings 22:11 the Hebrew God is called "iron-horned bull."

PROFESSOR BOYLE: I'm not sure I understand what you mean by "borrowing." Can you give me another example?

DR. BOLCHAZY: All right. Let's continue with the same passage and the words "waste," "void" and "abyss." The original Hebrew words are Tohu, Bohu, Ternan. Ternan, the abyss, is none other than Tiamat, the female waters of the Babylonian myth of creation. Bohu is the Phoenician counterpart of Eurynome who created the universe by laying the cosmic egg and brooding over it in the form of a dove. There is another translation of this passage which reads, "And a great wind arose over the abyss. "

PROFESSOR BOYLE: And so, we have the spirit of God brooding over the waters, which certainly contains echoes of Bahu/Eurynome brooding over the cosmic egg in the form of a dove.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Exactly, and this wind recalls the wind that Eurynome stirred up with her dancing which she molded into a serpent with whom she conceived the cosmic egg.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Okay, now I'm going to ask you to go into the Genesis story of creation because it has always baffled me. According to this story, God created light on the first day. But, it wasn't till the fourth day that God created the source of light—the stars, the moon, and the sun. Also, pastures were created before the sun was created. You've got to agree that this order of creation confuses the scientific mind.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Yes, it does, because the order of creation in this story is the result of misinterpreting icons or pictures or reading them in the wrong sequence.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Now are you telling me that Genesis is based on icons or pictures?

DR. BOLCHAZY: As a matter of fact, the first story is and it's based partially on the Hebron icons. When these Hebron icons are compared to the order of creation in Genesis, it becomes obvious that the monotheistic editor of Genesis 1 is interpreting these Hebron icons and reading them out of sequence. Thus, according to Genesis, light is created before the stars, the moon, and the sun are created.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: If these Biblical stories are all "borrowed" as you say, and if all these stories are different to a certain degree, then how can we consider them inspired? Or true?

DR. BOLCHAZY: In the scientific sense, none of them is true. Yet in a certain sense they're all true in spite of the fact that they are all different, if not contradictory.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: But, how could they be all true and at the same time contradictory of each other?

DR. BOLCHAZY: Think of it this way—what do all these stories tell us? Simply that God is the creator. This is the message that the authors of the Old and the New Testament try to give us. They use mythopoetic language to express their faith—mythopoetic language which they borrow. These myths are not to be taken for reality. Myths are only symbols of reality. Therefore these myths must be demythologized.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Then there is a basic difference between the biblical stories of creation and other stories of creation found in the Mediterranean cultures.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Of course; the big difference is in theology. In the biblical myths, God is absolutely supreme over the forces of nature. He is a distinct personality. He does not emerge from nature; he is not part of a natural process. In the Bible, God is supreme and creates by his will. So, the theology is different, though the modes of expression are borrowed.

PROFESSOR BOYLE: Thank you, Dr. Bolchazy.

DR. BOLCHAZY: Thank you, Nancy.

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