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Listening to the Conversations of Biblical Text

By Jean Sheldon

From the early decades of their discipline, biblical theologians have tended to look at Bible texts deductively, from outside of them, instead of inductively, from within them. Consequently, most Old Testament theologies fail to be all inclusive of the texts. At the same time, biblical theologies often reflect an external myopia, and thus the lack of perception of Israel's unique theological contributions. These can better be seen if diligently compared and especially contrasted with contemporary or even chronologically prior literatures among those of nearby ancient cultures.

Furthermore, most biblical theologies do not appear to resolve the many theological tensions in the Old Testament, particularly those that face us squarely at this time of both widespread tolerance and increased tendencies toward violence and oppression. Because of these dissatisfactions, I propose a new method of biblical theology that is not systematic or highly structured but rather moves along the texts as they ebb and flow. The best way I can depict this is metaphorically, as conversation.

In my reading, I have come to view

the canonical Hebrew Bible as a multifaceted discussion, not a monologue or even a mere dialogue (between human and divine voices). The voices of the Bible are many: the prophetic voices that adapt to time and place; the legal voices of civil, moral, and cultic cases; the voice of wisdom that questions; the voices of "the others"—aliens, outsiders, enemies; the voices of oral tradition, the narrators, and final editors; and finally, most important of all, the reader's, whose voice dominates the text, pulling past, upbringing, education, and personal preferences into it.



As a result, the conversation is anything but an idealistic, carefully worded statement about God and his people. At times, the prophetic voice seems to reach a new height of idealism (“he has shown you, O human, what is good...”), but far more frequently it descends rapidly down to the murky reality of a world trapped in sin (“can a leopard change its spots?”). If we are truly to understand the Bible, and the God within it, we must allow the human and the divine their rightful places in the text—in real, difficult situations, not in utopia.

The purpose of this study is to engage readers with part of the Old Testament conversation, part of it—chiefly Genesis 1:1–11:9—because of time constraints. The guides in ferreting out the various voices include Robert Alter’s use of rhetorical analysis and the application of contrastive comparative method.¹

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The first highlights the authors’/editors’ carefully nuanced literary voices, whereas the second enlarges the conversation to include several of the many voices from the ancient Near East.²

Let the conversation begin.

The Conversation of Creation

The preamble to the canonical Hebrew Bible begins with a subtle literary allusion to cosmic uneasiness: *tohu wabohu* (willy-nilly), which typifies the darkness that covers the deep. Yet even there the divine interacts with these cosmic mythopoeic images, as a wind from God moves back and forth over the watery expanse.³

Into the restlessness, God speaks and nature responds by coming into existence. When humans are created, the speaking changes to conversation: “Let us make human in our image and according to our likeness.” The context suggests that God separates humans from the rest of the animals into his image and then splits that image into two separate parts—male and female.

Conversation is not, therefore, part of nonhuman life forms; rather, God’s conversation with himself governs only the creation of humans. Though God

commands all of these various types to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22, 28), the literary implication is that only one has the ability to converse in humble parity with the Creator: humankind.

This theme—of creation as speech—is the framework for Genesis 1:1–11:9. In the Tower of Babel story, the same kind of conversational wording is used for human invention: “Come, let us make bricks;...let us build ourselves a city, and a tower,...and let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:3, 4 NRSV). To put it another way, if a creator could speak life into existence, could humans speak and by their words shape new realities for themselves?

When God speaks things into existence, a relationship is already beginning between God and the world. Creation in and of itself, however, is not enough. God

looks at almost every element on earth and sees that it is good. This provides the start of the second theme: good (and evil).⁴ Carried through chapter 9, this theme may best be stated as a question: “Is it good?”

However, there is a difficulty: that of the absence of a divine pronouncement of “good” regarding the creation of humans.⁵ Two other elements of creation also do not receive this pronouncement: darkness and waters (firmament and seas). These two easily fit within the framework of chaos elements, but what would deprive humankind of the assessment that it was good? Unlike all other elements of creation, humans are created in the divine image. When Elohim (P) creates, he acts freely of his own choice.⁶

To speak and create, therefore, is to choose. God is not subject to some other power. The trajectory to monotheism provides the singular presence above which there is no other.⁷ Therefore, the Creator of the Hebrew Bible is free to choose. When he speaks, the natural elements respond to his choice. When it comes to the creation of humans, however, God does not speak to the earth as he does when creating animals, but says, “Let us make....”

Since humankind is created in God’s image, the foregone conclusion is that humans will, like God, choose to create. They will choose what they create, when they create it, and how they will create it. Furthermore, what they create will continue to change

them. Their existence defies closure; as creatures that choose their own realities, they are an unfinished aspect of creation.⁸ And so the question remains: are they good or evil?

This power of choice is reinforced by the role given to humanity. The human is made to rule over the rest of creation. He is not ordered into existence but is made to order.⁹ The dominion granted humans sets them apart from creation and puts them on par with one another. Neither was to rule over the other, nor were they to submit to the rest of creation.

The splitting of the divine image into male and female, then, is not a division between good and evil, but a suggested implication that good is dependant upon a balance of nondominant, nonhierarchical relationships between male and female partners with a dominant relationship between them both and the natural world. The theme is alluded to in a different way in the JE story. Yahweh decides that it is “not good” for man to be alone and makes “a helper for him like his counterpart.”¹⁰ The wording is decidedly one of equality.¹¹

This need for a relationship, the extension of conversation, with another like oneself is foundational to maintaining the image of God. The resulting union is described by two important terms—*cling to* (*dbq*) and *one flesh*. The former is used for the close attachment of one’s skin to the rest of one’s body (see Job 19:20). The theme, then, of JE is not separation, but intimacy. Anything that comes to split apart the union or lifts one higher than the other is the agonizing flaying of the “one fleshiness.”

When the two stories are put together, the resulting combination is that of chosen loyalty, intimacy, and complementation. Only domination by one over the other or chosen separation can change the picture. In the priestly creation, then, separation is good and not only sets boundaries between chaos and order, but also creates organization of a universe in which function and purpose do not suggest dominance that seeks to control.

In priestly texts, separation is the foundation of holiness. In terms of creation, this theme is unique, since the Babylonians preferred mixtures in their creation stories.¹² The combined traditions of Genesis suggest that humans are not mixtures but rather separate beings. Human and divine, humans “sculpted” in the image of God and made from clay are not living until Yahweh breathes into them the divine breath.

The denouement of separation, however, is not found here, but in Sabbath. The only aspect in the

priestly story clearly sanctified (“set apart for holiness”) is not an object of creation but rather a pause in time of the Creator upon completion of his artistry:

And the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were finished.

And God finished on the seventh day his work which he had made.

And he ceased the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

And God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy

because on it he ceased from all his work which God separated to make. (Gen. 2:1–3)¹³

In Sabbath, the themes of conversation come together: creation, the goodness of that creation, divine cessation from work, and separation-holiness. If, at this point, we listen to the voices of ancient Mesopotamia, the uniqueness of this conceptual arrangement is profound.

In one of the Babylonian traditions, in an effort to pacify the rebel gods, humans are created to be a substitute workforce to relieve the overworked gods of their load. Indeed, the conception prevailed throughout most periods that humans were destined to be slaves of the gods. By contrast, the priestly creation portrays the divine work, not as hard labor (*sb'*) or servitude (*'bd*), but as creative handiwork (*ml'kh*).¹⁴

This indicates a kind of work that conveys meaning. Sabbath, then, stands for meaningful exchange—not merely Elohim’s words, but his creative actions as well. In this sense, human creation, in the image of God, ordained to rule over the natural world, would model the divine maker by pausing in its creation with meaningful conversation. A day of ceasing to work would provide the time for rest, reflection, discussion, and harmony.

In contrast to a substitute workforce, priestly humans quell no revolt, but are the crowning act of creation. In JE, humans—even their slaves and work animals—rest on Sabbath with God.¹⁵ The point is clear: in a relationship unmarked by domination, Yahweh has no slaves, for slaves never can rest, especially with their master.

In contrast, the Babylonians must build Marduk’s



temple so that he and the other gods can rest. Lullu-man will never join him in relief from the daily toil of taking care of his needs. Indeed, according to Bernard F. Batto, in Babylonian thought, sleep or rest was “a motif of divine sovereignty.”¹⁶ Yahweh, in comparison, invites all creation to Sabbath rest.¹⁷

In the priestly creation, therefore, the sanctification of the Sabbath is a crowning denouement of the most important creation message: all humans are to be “a kingdom of priests, a holy people” (Exod. 19:6), able to converse with God.

A Trickster Joins the Conversation

The JE creation story leads us gradually toward the first dialogue in Genesis with foreshadowings of its treacherous nature: humans are created from the ground to labor the soil, a suggestion of the curse in Genesis 3. In addition, Yahweh does not speak as Elohim does, but his first words to the man are a command: “You shall not...”

The command is explicit and firm. The man can eat of any tree in the Garden, but he is not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because if he does he will die. These words significantly change the outlook on the creation, for they shift the reader from the pronouncements of good only in the P creation to an inclusion of good and evil.

The context makes it clear just what “evil” is. If creation of life is “good” and eating of this tree will bring death, the knowledge of good and evil is the experience of life and death.

This command—given only to the man before the woman is created—foreshadows a trauma that will flay their fleshly oneness.¹⁸ The reader, however, is unprepared for the medium through which the conversation about good and evil will take place: a serpent.

In the ancient East, the serpent, or even the dragon, was not always viewed as evil.¹⁹ However, during the Akkadian periods, particularly in the latter part, the dragon, as a symbol of the storm god, came to belch fire and to represent kingly power.²⁰ In the encounter with the woman, the serpent is neither fully hostile nor conquered.

A creature of choice, the snake symbolizes royalty. His life in a tree forms a paradox with the eagle of

Etana, who lived with its young in the top of the poplar tree, whereas the serpent inhabited the base with its offspring. In Etana, the eagle is the wise one; in the Garden of Eden, the serpent is the wisest of all the creatures Yahweh has made. In the myth, the eagle devours the serpent’s progeny and, because of the serpent’s pleas to Shamash, is banished to a pit, to have its wings clipped by the serpent.

While there, after its wings grow back, the eagle becomes the deliverer of the childless human known as Etana. On the eagle’s back, Etana is borne to the heavens, where before the gods he is apparently (the text is broken off) granted his request for children.²¹ The irony, of course, is that the slayer of the serpent’s children becomes a savior of humanity.²² In the Eden story, the serpent is the destroyer of humanity, whereas the woman’s offspring becomes humanity’s savior.

The Epic of Gilgamesh also connects the royal serpent with a king’s request for immortality that leads him to seek Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, whom the gods have given immortality. Utnapishtim grants Gilgamesh a plant that, if he gets it home with him, will effectuate his immortality. Before he makes it back, the serpent robs him of the plant.²³

Whereas the Babylonian serpent keeps humans from immortality, the Edenic serpent robs them of it by claiming that they will have it if they will do opposite to God’s instructions. In this first of dialogues of Genesis 1–11, the serpent introduces the concept of immortality as the reversal of creation.

With his words, he tears down the basis of the first humans’ relationship with God: (1) the ability to know for certain God’s will (“Has God said...?”), a constant Babylonian uncertainty; (2) a deliberate ambiguity (has God said, you shall not eat of any or of all the trees?); (3) the ability to know for certain exactly what God has said; (4) the presentation of an incestuous, uninvited intrusion between the relationship by an outsider who has a “different viewpoint”; (5) a direct contradiction of what God has said (“you shall not surely die”); (6) a false promise of a new experience, a reality created solely by words without a basis in substance (“you shall be like god(s) knowing good and evil”).

Conversations change dramatically when one of the voices ceases to be forthright. In Genesis 3, the serpent uses crafty speech. The word *subtle* (RSV) is the first of the frame of this pericope because it suggests a mixture; the concluding thought is that God knows a mixture of good and evil.

To be sly, cunning, crafty, or tricky is to mix truth and nontruth in such a way as to lead someone to a different reality than the one they are in. Such a “mixing” of language and meaning, truth and nontruth is the opposite of the priestly creation order in which separation of chaos and order are a central feature.

By the time the first woman finishes the conversation, she has come to perceive that (1) God does not say what he means; (2) he does not mean what he says; and (3) believing and obeying what the serpent says instead can create a whole new reality for her: she would become like God knowing good and evil.

Without asking questions of her enchanting conversationalist, Eve accepts the gift of fruit from his hands. This fruit, she believes, is magical: it has supernatural qualities to change her internally from the outside in, to give her the wisdom of the gods and to enable her to

This nakedness is not merely the result of eating “forbidden fruit,” but of listening to false wisdom.

Depending on their intent (the speaker), their meaning (the listener), and their genuine basis in reality (the truth), words have the ability to create either wholeness and peace (verily, the image of God: human beings...shall live by every word that proceeds by Lord’s mouth [Deut. 8:3]) or nakedness and shame. Words based on actions of human harmony have power to create enduring bonds of trust among people.

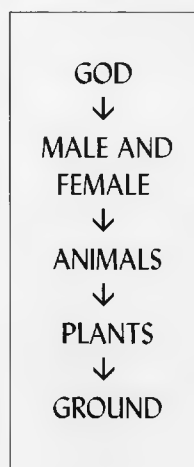
However, words without substance, such as lies and deception, strip people of their dignity and self-respect while promising eternal life of unending personal fulfillment. Such words completely leave the woman vulnerably naked of a true reality: the serpent, with the most artful cunning, assumes that she has not yet become “like God knowing good and evil.” Thus,

As a result of listening to the serpent’s “wisdom,” the woman has entered a new reality, in which the promise of reaching divinity is shattered by the realization of nakedness.

know good and evil. This construct is reminiscent of the kings of “cosmic rebellion”: the King of Babylon in First Isaiah and the Prince of Tyre (Ezek. 28).

The first king seeks ascendancy to the ancient Near Eastern assembly of the great gods (Isa. 14:13–14); the second corrupts “his wisdom for the sake of his beauty” (Ezek. 28:17)—the exchange of the internal for the external. The heart of the human-to-god complex is that in their attempt to become divine, humans seek power and economic prosperity instead of true wisdom, and in turn they devalue their true internal worth, as made in the divine image.

The woman’s belief in the serpent’s words leads her to take the fruit, and then the original creation plan is



reversed. The original layout was of human equality under God and over animals, with plants being maintained as food for both animals and humans. Now the woman has listened to (that is, obeyed) an animal (over whom she was to rule), and as a result she has eaten a plant divinely commanded not to be eaten or death would ensue. As a result of listening to the serpent’s “wisdom,” the woman has entered a new reality, in which the promise of reaching divinity is shattered by the realization of nakedness.

with a word, she who with the man was created in the image of God has been stripped of that image.

As a result, reality has completely changed for the fruit eaters. A top-to-bottom unraveling of relationships takes place in creation. The woman gives to the man; who can refuse a gift when that is all humans have known up to this time (when creation economy is that of giving and receiving and giving again)? But the gift is destined to split apart the one-fleshliness of the couple’s union.

The absence of the male voice from the dialogue at the tree of knowledge suggests an unfair conversation. According to the Hebrew text, the man was “with her,” yet he does not speak. Voiceless individuals in the Hebrew Bible are seen as victims of abuse.²⁴ Just as it is deemed “not good” by God in the JE creation story that man should be alone, so it is “not good” by inference that woman should have to deal with a trickster alone.

Nevertheless, this situation highlights the equally uneven absence of the woman in the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Has the man failed to tell her? Was this his role to do so? The text does not answer this problem, yet it purports that such an unequal dialogue not only puts the woman at a severe disadvantage, it also creates an even greater opportunity for dia-



logue to end and two monologues to take place instead. Between the serpent and the woman, however, there seems to be a free-flowing exchange. What could possibly go wrong?

The answer is very simple: one voice dominates and controls. It asks questions that trip the listener; it spews out contradictions. Conversation is not taking place at all because the intent of the serpent is not to communicate honest opinions or truth with words understood readily to his audience, but rather to persuade the woman to do something that her creator has stated will lead to death.

Persuasion with empty words creates new realities for people in which they become the victims of the persuader's control. When control is the object, all conversation ceases. When words are used chiefly to control the listener, the words are deprived of their truest meaning. The resulting manipulation, lies, and deception form the heart of verbal violence.

This reversal of creation is further established when, in the Taggeist, their Creator calls to them, "Where are you?"²⁵ Embarrassed over their transition from a simple reality of innocence (naked but not ashamed) to that of denudedness, they attempt to hide. The sexual connotations cannot be overlooked: to be simple in innocence is to be able to enjoy the demands of a physical union without loss of personhood; to be denuded is to be stripped by another of one's sense of wholeness and personal control. Once this takes place, real conversation has ended and manipulation has become dominant.

By receiving the serpent's words and ingesting them like food into their minds, the first humans shift their perceptions of themselves and of God from a relationship devoid of violence to one soon to be characterized by terms that denote managerial force. A new reality has dawned.

A Foursome Conversation

The next conversation involves four voices: God, the man, the woman, and the serpent. God calls to the man and the woman, "Where are you?" When the truth finally comes out—they hid because they were naked—the divine response to the man's excuses for hiding reveals that some part of the conversation between the woman and the serpent was left out: "Who told you you were naked?" (Gen. 3:11).

The term *told* (*ngd*), or *reported*, belongs to the sphere of divination, prophecy, and the like. Did the magical fruit they ate give them this information? Or did the serpent? The narrator has already stated that they were naked from the day of their creation, but, he adds, "they were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). These words highlight the possibility that the serpent's voice has stripped them of their lack of shame; otherwise they would not feel the need to hide.

In the ancient Near East, nakedness was a symbol of death. The body that came out of the womb—wrinkled red, covered with blood, and decidedly devoid of clothing—often returned to the dust (earth womb) the same way (see Job 1:21). Furthermore, the ancient Near Eastern peoples were familiar with the sight of many bodies strung naked along the desert floor between Palestine and Assyria/Babylon.

After a war, prisoners were handcuffed naked to the prisoner ahead and behind. They would be dragged and goaded along across miles of hot dirt, deprived of adequate food, water, and rest, only to perish, their bodies kicked out of line and left to lie on the dust. The bodies would darken in the hot sun beside the bleached bones of prior victims, whose families could not afford the trek to recover them.²⁶ The concept of *dust-to-dust* was very real in that context.

The metaphoric setting, then, may be that of prisoners of war who were seized to serve as slaves for the conquering nation. Since the image of war is present in the third chapter of Genesis, we can suppose that the JE writer saw the interchange between the serpent and the woman as the stripping of human autonomy and dignity and the transference from P's creation order to its reverse, ultimately leading to death.²⁷ This is outlined in the divine responses to each conversant.

The once-silent man blames the woman and infers that she was not a "good gift" from God, but a pawned object who led him into his current state of mind. Yahweh does not judge him immediately, but turns instead to the woman, who rightfully but also irresponsibly blames the serpent for tricking her. The first curse falls, without allowing the perpetrator room for speech—not on the woman or the man, but on the serpent.

Yahweh does not curse those who fall into deception and trickery. Nor is he eager to pronounce a curse on people. One of the outstanding features of curses in the Hebrew Bible is that, unlike those of the ancient Near East in general, the biblical curse is never accomplished by God, but rather by some other mysterious

force. Although the curse shall not come without cause, its cause was never admitted to be God.²⁸

In ancient Near Eastern thought, a curse or a blessing was understood to create new realities on whom the blessing or curse was placed. A person's words were considered to possess power to do what was said. The first curse in this segment of "firsts" is placed on the serpent.

Because you have done/made this,
you are cursed
more than all the beasts and creatures of the field.
On your belly you shall go
And dust you shall eat
All the days of your life.
Long-standing enmity I will put
Between you and the woman,
Between your progeny and her progeny.
He shall crush you, the [cunning] head
While you shall crush him [at] the heel.²⁹

The play on the words—*cunning* (*'arūm*), *cursed* (*'ārūr*), and *naked* (*ārôm*)—suggests an emphasis on the concept that the nakedness of the first man and woman left them vulnerable to cunning; their surrender to that cunning brought a curse and left them open to death, which nakedness in the ancient Near East represented.

Just as the serpent is demoted from supremely wise to utterly degraded, so the woman continues the rest of the reversal of creation order: she will find herself a victim of pain in childbirth. The very role for which women have been esteemed (or undervalued, if nonproducing) will cause her intense pain

Furthermore, she will find man dominating her. The image evoked by *mšl* may be that of comparing two halves with each other rather than allowing them equal complementation as a whole unit. No motive clause is established for this loss of equality; its absence is unique to the woman but not to the man. She therefore is suffering the inherent consequences of succumbing to the serpent's cunning.

Because the man listened to the voice of the woman and disobeyed God's command, he is now to complete the reversal of creation order. Because of him, the other curses rest upon the ground or soil and only indirectly on him who was made from it. From now on, he will do the work for which men the world over have been valued—through hard toil, which will bring sweat to his brow. The thorns and thistles will multiply and threaten his sustenance, and thus human

life, until finally he succumbs to the ground.

The ultimate dominating factor, then, will be his origin, the *'adēmâ*. The *'adēmâ* plays a major role from Genesis 2 onward, as if to underline the emphasis on the effects on the earth from sin. As the womb of humanity, it also serves as its grave.

Thus, the reverse order of creation turns the ground into the force that dominates due to the surrender of human dignity and will to a plant, which is imagined to possess magical powers to create wisdom, and the woman will be subjugated to the man because she listened to an animal.³⁰

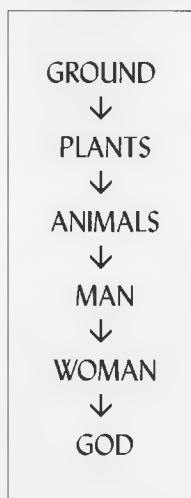
The narrator does not inform us of God's role in all of this except in one place: God promises to put enmity between the woman and the serpent in an ultimate battle in which the woman's progeny will crush the cunning head of the serpent with its

only her Achilles' heel, perhaps a symbol of her having walked toward false wisdom. False wisdom is the desire for supremacy. Such a desire changes the way we use words, and the way we use words, in turn, changes the way we see reality. All of this ultimately affects our choices for or against eternal life. The woman was promised to be like god knowing good and evil. Yet in that promise lurked a problem—that godlikeness involved both good and evil. Does God really know evil? And from which end—the perpetrator or the victim?

Conclusion

For this reason, the conversation of biblical theology cannot afford to stop with Genesis 3, or even Genesis 11. Perhaps this question, more than any other, can serve as one of the greater theological themes of the Old Testament. Its answer cannot be found in any one part, but rather in the whole and in the persistent reading and study of it.

The Old Testament conversation continues into one of the most unique features of the Hebrew Bible:



humans are allowed to question God and even to demand answers from the Almighty, and God responds without fearing their outspokenness. Indeed, the longest dialogue in the Old Testament is the argument between God and Moses at the burning bush. Yet the prophetic testimony increasingly becomes a monologue with only occasional requests for or incorporation of dialogue from the people in Micah or Jeremiah.

Nevertheless, hidden in the prophetic narratives, the priestly laws, and the prophetic speeches lies conversation. Actions respond to words, words to actions, words to words, and actions to actions. The result is a symphony with recurring fugal themes suggesting that Yahweh is always adapting to meet the responses of the people and, at the same time, especially when in conversation (comparison) with the ancient Near East, attempting to draw them to a slightly different, more truthful, and particularly meaningful way to do things.

The P story of creation begins with positive voices of joy and hope; the JE stories of creation and the serpent descend downward toward doom, interfaced with one note of joy to the woman regarding her offspring's victory. Both voices, the pessimistic and the optimistic, are found in almost any genuine conversation.

Thus, biblical theology as conversation is not a mere ideological chat or open-ended interchange; rather, the actions and statements, counteractions and counterstatements that make up the Hebrew Bible engage the reader in the pursuit of understanding and meaning. To recover the meaning of the text, one must hear its voices, pursue their truths—negative and positive—and then attempt to understand them. The entire conversation is truth.

We must keep listening to the voices of those who contribute to the conversation to understand the sending of the first couple from the Garden toward death lest they live forever with the knowledge of good and evil. We must follow the conversation through the entire Bible before we can determine to what extent God knows both good and evil.

Notes and References

1. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
2. Due to the limitations of a single article, this study should be considered a work in progress.
3. The Hebrew term *rūah* can mean "wind," "breath," or "spir-

it." For an understanding of what is meant by the word *mythopoesis*, see Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 12–17.

4. The theme of creation spanned Genesis 1:1–11:9, whereas the theme of good and evil seems to stop with chapter 9.
5. This was suggested by Prof. Jacob Milgrom of the University of California, Berkeley, in his seminar in Leviticus, fall 1987.
6. The priestly creation story (P) is thought to be Genesis 1:1–2a, whereas the Yahwist-Elohist (JE) creation is Genesis 2:4b–25. I have used these designations primarily for convenience in comparing the two very different creation stories.
7. For an overview of Hebrew monotheism, see Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
8. A point that Milgrom's seminar on Leviticus touched.
9. One of the verbs (*kbš*) used to depict this reflects a major voice in the Old Testament: it is violent and is applied to forcing someone into slavery and rape; the other (*rdh*) is milder and suggests the roaming of a shepherd with a flock. This verb means essentially "to rule."
10. For this choice for *kēnegdō*, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "Man and Woman in Genesis 1–3," in *The Role of Women in the Church* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984; repub. Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995), 16. Ludwig Hoehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–), 2:666 suggests either "that which is opposite, or that which corresponds."
11. Note that *ēzer* is used of God and his relationship with Israel (see Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29). This point is made well by Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 175–76.
12. In Babylonian tradition, Tīamat (salt water) and Apsū (fresh water) commingle to create progeny (*En El* 1:1–10). Human beings are created from a mixture of clay and the divine blood of a slain god (*Atr* I:iv.223–v.243).
13. "Separated to make" is more sensible than the tautologous "created to make" for *bārā' 'elohim la'āsōt*.
14. This word is from the same root as *ml'k*.
15. By JE here, I refer to the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1–21).
16. "The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty," *Biblica* 68 (1987): 153–77; cited in Batto, *Slaying*, 30n.
17. This is distinctly a concept of JE; see Exodus 20:8–11.
18. Flaying was a punishment executed on rebel vassal governors or kings by the Assyrians. H. W. Saggs, *Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1965), 109; Barbara Nevling Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography* (OBO 197; Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 87.
19. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near*

East (BJS 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 28–30.

20. Ibid., 81–87; and 116–20.

21. For a translation and notes on this story, see J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Legend of Etana: A New Edition* (Warminster, Eng. Aris and Phillips, 1985). For the cuneiform text, see Jamie R. Novotny with Simo Parpola, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic* (SAACT 2; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001).

22. The ancient mind had little concept of eternal life. One lived on in one's descendants; consequently, barrenness was considered a terrible calamity.

23. There are several translations of this myth. For example, see Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

24. See Jean Sheldon, "The Exaltation of Hagar and Manoah's Wife: God Challenges Society," presented at Women of the Word, Berrien Springs, Mich., Oct. 14, 2004; and idem, "Reading the Bad in Our Story: A Prerequisite to Redemption (A Study of Judges 19–21)," paper presented Nov. 21, 1997, at the annual Adventist Society for Religious Studies Meeting, San Francisco.

25. It may be possible that the *ruah hayyom* connotes the cool time of day (perhaps either morning or evening), when the western breeze can turn the tide in the toils in vineyard, orchard, or field. This time of day provides the appropriate ambience for conversation;

in the morning, this often took place in terms of cases at the city gate; in the evening, it is possible that parties and family gatherings were found. See the book of Ruth as an example of speaking of Taggeist.

26. The ultimate disgrace in ancient cultures was to remain unburied. For example, see 1 Sam. 31:8–13; and 2 Kings 9:25–37.

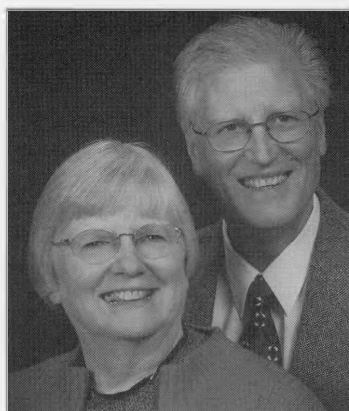
27. In regard to the image of war, the word *šup* in Gen. 3:15 is certainly a war term.

28. An excellent example of this contrast is found in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 129n. See also S. Gevirtz, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, 750, cited in *ibid.*

29. For help on this difficult poetry, I have relied on U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis; Part I: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1961), 161.

30. In support of this perception is Paul's perception of the results of divine wrath in Rom. 1:18–32.

Jean Sheldon is associate professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California. This article is taken from the first half of her presidential address for the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, November 17, 2005, Philadelphia.



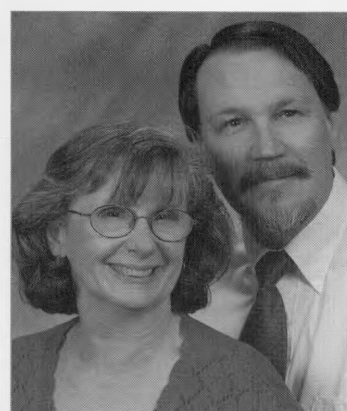
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