The Universality of God in Amo’s Oracles and Creation: A Historical-Critical Approach within a Catholic Context

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THE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD IN AMOS'S ORACLES AND CREATION: A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL APPROACH WITHIN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT

by

Alexandra E. Bochte

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ABSTRACT

THE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD IN AMOS'S ORACLES AND CREATION: A HISTORICAL-CRITICAL APPROACH WITHIN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT

Alexandra E. Bochte
Marquette University, 2023

In the Old Testament, the Israelite nation is identified as a chosen people of God and in a covenantal relationship with him. This thesis will argue that the Noahide covenantal relationship extends to more than just the Israelites such that all creation is in a covenant with the universal God. This is supported through an exploration of Ancient Near Eastern literature and its similarities with biblical stories. Exegetical analyses of Psalms and prophetic biblical literature will further demonstrate God’s universality and will elucidate what it means to be in a covenantal relationship with God. When there is relationship there must be clarity on the roles and rules of relationship which will be explored here as well.
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Introduction

The opening chapter of the prophetic book of Amos, Amos unveils what is now called the oracles against the nations. In the oracles, Amos accuses and condemns seven nations, including Israel and Judah, for their actions. Scholars debate Amos’s position on the nations surrounding Israel but also how to describe the type of god that YHWH\(^1\) was to the Israelites. We also must then ask what kind of god is YHWH to the rest of humanity as well as to the rest of creation. If we conclude that YHWH is not only the God of Israel but also the rest of humanity and creation, then it is important that we know what our relationship is both to YHWH and the rest of creation.

Max Polley examines Amos’s oracles by summarizing five categories describing Amos in the literature: Amos was a monotheist, Amos was a universalist, Amos employed standards of international law, Amos employed the style of Egyptian Execration Texts, or Amos supported a reunited Davidic empire.\(^2\) Polley argues in support of the last suggestion: Amos supported a reunited Davidic empire, in order to understand the significance of the oracles against the nations and their relevance to Israelite history. He argues that Amos condemns the nations surrounding Israel because of their “violation[s] of the covenant association with David on which the empire was based.”\(^3\) For this paper, however, we will look at the universalist perspective. Polley describes this perspective as one where Amos was a “prophet who proclaimed Yahweh’s

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1 YHWH will be used throughout this paper to refer to the God of the Israelites. In the NABR the tetragrammaton is written in the English translation as LORD.
3 Polley, *Amos and the Davidic Empire*, 82.
universal activity within the histories of all nations.”\(^4\) If YHWH acts on a universal stage, this then brings gentiles and all of creation into his purview.

For our exploration of YHWH’s universal activity among the surrounding nations of the Ancient Near East (ANE) we will take a tradition-historical approach to the creation of the world. We will look at both biblical texts as well as creation texts from the ANE. This will show us the relationship between the Hebrew accounts and the ANE. We will then move to the Psalms to see how the Israelite understanding of the creator god is not so different from the descriptions of the gods of the ANE. The relationship between the biblical texts and the ANE texts is significant, in part, because it supports the idea that YHWH is a universal god and that his plan from the creation of the world has been a plan for all of creation.

According to the book of Amos, YHWH is a defender of the poor and YHWH involves the nations surrounding Israel and Judah in a relationship that extends beyond the Sinai covenant relationship. For Amos, YHWH governs the nations as well as expects certain types of interactions amongst these relationships. Lastly, we will examine other prophetic literature to see that YHWH’s love for humanity extends to love of his creation and informs his expectations of how humanity should respect the things which he has created.

This thesis will be divided into two chapters. The first details the creation accounts of the ANE using a tradition-historical approach. The second will be an exegetical analysis of Amos, Joel, Jeremiah and Hosea with a conclusion addressing the modern relevance of this material.

I: In the Beginning: Approaching the Creation Accounts of Genesis from a Tradition-Historical Perspective

The Biblical texts that seek to explain the beginning of the world are from thousands of years ago, written in Hebrew during an era where life was much different than we find today in the 21st century. The book of Genesis was written before the discovery of cells, vaccines, telescopes, and before modern science knew of theories such as evolution. Yet from these ancient texts, we have the word of God which has been preserved throughout the ages, through millennia and within different cultures. According to Dei Verbum, “[t]hose divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” To understand these writings and to grow in relationship with God, we must not only be able to read the writings, but we must also understand, as much as we can, the time period that these writings were made and the cultures that contributed to these texts.

A literal reading of the first chapter of the book of Genesis takes us through seven days of God working to create the creatures, plants, and other natural parts of the world such as the mountains and trees. We are told that on the seventh day, God rested and took time to enjoy what he had made. Thus, a literal reading of this would indicate that over the span of one week, or six days, God created all of the world, including humankind. In Chapter 2, we find another creation account, which focuses primarily on the creation of humankind. A literal reading of this chapter has God create humankind before any plants were on the earth. Then, following creation of humankind, God creates

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6 See Gen. 2:5.
vegetation.7 In Chapter 2, there is no reference to a number of days from which the world was created. These are only a couple examples of a literal reading of the creation accounts in Genesis, but they already necessitate exploration of other approaches to reading these stories.

If we are to understand more fully God’s love for us in creation, we must not limit ourselves to the Genesis stories. Rather, we must approach the story of creation as it unfolded for the Israelites of the Old Testament. We will do this with a tradition-historical approach examining Genesis 1 and 2 and ANEastern creation stories. This approach is essential for our purposes because the Old Testament is composed of literature that first came from oral traditions passed down through the generations. These traditions are subject to change over time, thus great care must be taken to develop a depth of understanding about the time and language from which these traditions came.8 The biblical material cannot be linked to one named author and publisher, unlike our modern literature. The nature of this reality necessitates a tradition-historical framework because this approach is one that “envisions and, in fact, is most concerned with extends back beyond the written stage of the Bible’s formation to embrace stages that can be discerned in the preliterary history of a textual unit.”9 This approach calls into relevance the larger world of the ANE. From this perspective we will then look to the teachings of the Catholic Church to see what aspects of the creation story we are to believe literally and other areas to which we are to understand theologically. And we are to ultimately

7 See Gen. 2:9.
9 McKenzie, To Each, 91-92.
remember that our exploration of the Bible should allow us to grow in our faith and understanding of our Creator.10

A. Creation Accounts of Genesis

In the first book of the Bible, in the first chapter we find the first story of creation, the beginning of God’s relationship with his creatures, including humans. The story begins with the words “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).11 In the subsequent chapter, we find another story of creation. This one begins with, “[t]his is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation” (Gen 2:4). On an initial reading of these two chapters, we may be inclined to read them as one story followed by another in sequence. But upon close examination, we can see that these two chapters detail two different accounts of creation. And as we will discuss later, these first two chapters are attributed to two different authors.

As we proceed through the first several chapters of Genesis, the authors elaborate on creation and the creatures therein, focusing on the development of humankind. In Genesis 3 we learn about the first humankind, Adam and Eve, their interactions with a serpent and their subsequent disobedience of God. In Genesis 4 we are told the story of the first children of Adam and Eve, which results in the elder killing the latter. And lastly, for purposes of this paper, in Genesis 5—9 we are told of Noah and the flood that wiped out most of humanity.

The story of Noah and the flood begins in Genesis 5 with a genealogy from Adam to Noah. In Genesis 6, we learn that the number of humans has increased greatly on the

11 All Bible quotations are taken from the New American Bible Revised Edition. (NABR).
earth and that they are taking liberties with their choices, “the sons of God saw how beautiful the daughters of human beings were, and so they took for their wives whomever they pleased” (Gen 6:2). God becomes displeased with this and shortens their lifespan (Gen 6:3).

God then sees how the wickedness of man has progressed and “how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil, the LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and his heart was grieved” (Gen 6:5-6). God then determines to destroy his creation, all creatures including man. But there is one man whom God decides to spare, Noah, and along with Noah, his family. God instructs Noah to make an ark. The rest of Genesis 6 details God’s instructions for constructing the ark and the preparations Noah takes for the flood. In Genesis 7, Noah boards the ark with his family and the animals and “[a]ll the fountains of the great abyss burst forth, and the floodgates of the sky were opened” (Gen 7:11). The story also says that once all the creatures were loaded into the ark, “[t]hen the LORD shut him in” (Gen 7:16). The etiology of these stories is one way that the Israelite authors sought to understand the world around them such as women’s pain in childbearing and the reason for a rainbow in the sky (from the flood story). As will become apparent these etiologies will use the language and culture of the time to explain creation phenomenon but also Israelite understanding of YHWH.

One possible approach for understanding Genesis 1 and 2 is that the stories are to be read together, and that they complement each other. This would help explain the order of the two chapters, and it would also allow that Genesis 2 simply takes a different focus than Genesis 1, and that focus is on the creation of humanity. But if we step back from this literal approach, we see a depth to the stories that cannot be found with a literal
reading. The approach that we will take here is a source critical approach,\textsuperscript{12} examining the authors of Genesis 1 and 2.

On the cover of any modern era book you will find the title of the book and the author. People want to know who wrote a book, partly for interest, but also because authorship can have a significant influence on one’s perspective of the book. Knowing authorship adds a depth to the material that one does not consider if one only is satisfied with the title of a book. For example, if someone has heard of \textit{Lord of the Rings} Trilogy, a popular fantasy series, they also likely know that it was written by J.R.R. Tolkien. The title and author are easily associated. But few people know the facts of his life other than his name. Tolkien was a convert to Catholicism, lost both of his parents as a child, was cared for by a priest, and served in World War I. Knowledge of the author can aid in our understanding of the author and his or her works. It also adds depth with each addition of information.

The Bible was not written down all at one time, and it has many different authors, even different authors within each book. In the “Introduction to the Pentateuch,” \textit{NABR Catholic Study Bible} notes regarding the author of the Pentateuch that “[u]pto the seventeenth century, the virtually unanimous answer [of authorship] was ‘Moses.’”\textsuperscript{13} This view still is maintained in some churches. The perspective of Mosaic authorship was maintained using a supernatural perspective that Moses transcribed what was revealed to him by an angel.\textsuperscript{14} This is found in the parabiblical work, Jubilees, found in the Dead Sea

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{12} This approach “analyzes the biblical text in order to determine what sources were used in its formation. Once sources are isolated, the source critic considers issues of authorship, date, style, setting, and intent of each source.” Pauline A. Viviano, “Source Criticism” in \textit{To Each Its Own Meaning}, eds. Seven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 35.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Donald Senior and John J. Collins, eds., \textit{NABR The Catholic Study Bible}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 8.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Id., 109-110.
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Scrolls at Qumran, “[And the angel of the presence told Moses at God’s command: Write all the words of the creation…”

The belief in Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is no longer as prevalent as it once was because evidence from “the biblical text, comparative linguistics, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology” supports the view of multiple authors and an transcription at a time later than Moses would have lived.

This one-author approach shifted “[w]ith the rise of historical criticism, scholars began to use the doublets and inconsistencies as clues to different authors and traditions.” In the first two chapters of Genesis, we can see some of these differences. For these chapters of Genesis we will look at the two authors attributed to these works, not just by name, but by style, tone, and other works.

The authors of Genesis 1:1-31—2:1-4a are known as “The Priestly Writers” (P). The Priestly Writers also contributed to Genesis 5:1-18; 30-32; 6:9-11; 7:6, 11, 13-16a, 17a, 18-21, 24; 8:1, 2a, 3b-5, 13a, 14-19; 9:1-17, 28-29. The Priestly Writers are thought to have written down these stories in the 6th century BCE, during the Babylonian exile.

The Priestly Writers are contrasted with the other authors of the Pentateuch (Yahwist, Elohist, and Deuteronomist), as the Priestly Writers took the narratives that they had heard and “more definitely selected or abbreviated…[and have] added material of [their] own.”

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16 NABR, RG 110.
17 Id.
19 Id.
Genesis 1:2 states “and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters.” Following this scene setup, the narrative continues with creation. The method of creation for the Priestly Writers is God’s use of words. God uses his words to give permission for things to be done. God spoke and creation was made. According to the Priestly Writer’s narrative in Genesis 1, creation is created over a span of seven days, with God resting on the seventh day. The focus on time is an important aspect of this narrative, as well as order and relationship as common themes among the Priestly narrations. God creates the heaven and the earth.

Then God methodically creates the rest of the world over the remainder of six days, finally resting from his work on the seventh day. During his work of creating, God recognized that his work was good. It is importance to note that to begin his works of creation, God makes the light and sees that it is good (Gen. 1:3-4). God separates the light from the dark but the darkness is not noted as good because for the Priestly Writers, “darkness is a negation.”

Finally, on the last day of creation, God creates the pinnacle of creatures, humanity, in vv. 26-31.

The Priestly Writers wrote their narration of creation “within a progressive cosmic order period.” This orderliness for the Priestly Writers is also seen in the flood story as well as the Writers’ focus on genealogies, which begins the flood story. The order within the days of creation and the structure therein further exemplifies the importance of order for the Priestly Writers.

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21 Morales, Jose, Creation Theology, (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2001), 19.
22 McEvenue, Interpreting the Pentateuch, 121.
23 Gen. 5:1-28 listing the genealogy of Adam to Noah; Gen 6:9-10 listing genealogy of Noah’s descendants.
24 Morales, Creation Theology, 17.
The Priestly Writers’ focus in writing this story was for teaching and reflection. The Writers’ intent was to establish God as the maker and that the writers “are not trying to convey or teach any sort of pre-scientific knowledge of the world or of man.” The imagery of the world as told by these writers depicts the earth as “vast area built on columns and standing on the waters of a sea that lies beneath it and on which it floats. The firmament, or roof of the earth, is imagined to be a huge glass-like surface on which stars are positioned. Above this firmament are the upper waters that would pour down on the earth if God chose to open the hatches or the bolts in the roof.”

The Priestly Writers do not distinguish between the creation of man and the creation of woman. They are both created in the same day and at the same time, both being made in the image of God. Men and women are created to “rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” And therefore, “man has a responsibility within creation, and the dominion he exercises over it is not meant to be sheer exploitation: his role is to protect and respect it [nature].” Adam and Eve are the “culmination of creative effort, as can be seen from the special divine deliberation.” Finally, for the Priestly Writers there is significance on the seventh day. God does no work on this day. Later, God’s rest will be associated with the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11).

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25 Id., 15.
26 Id.
27 Id. This imagery of the floodgates is important for the Flood story in Chapter 7:11, “All of the fountains of the great abyss burst forth, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.”
28 Genesis 1:26; McEvenue, Interpreting, 121.
29 Morales, Creation Theology, 20.
30 McEvenue, Interpreting, 121.
Starting in Genesis 2:4b, we meet the Yahwist (J)\textsuperscript{31} author. J is thought to have adhered closely to the narrative traditions that he received, unlike the Priestly Writers above.\textsuperscript{32} Like many ancient texts, the exact date of the origin of the story is unknown, although the Yahwist account is thought to have been written in the ninth century BCE, prior to the Priestly Writers’ account. One view is that the creation story from the Yahwist was written during the Solomonic empire or immediately subsequent to the Solomonic empire “when wealth and culture still flourished in Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{33}

The opening of the J story begins with: “[w]hen the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (Gen 2:4b) and the story continues through 3:24. Unlike the priestly narrative above, there is not a focus on order, and time does not factor into the story. Here God is detached from the reader. God does not dwell on his work in admiration.\textsuperscript{34} In Genesis 1, we found God using his words to create. The focus for the Yahwist, though, is on the work of God’s hands: “then the Lord God formed the man\textsuperscript{35} out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed” (Gen 2:7-8). The Yahwist “wants to convey that the human race received directly from God both its existence and its form, and make it clear that the parts of the human body all belong to this world of ours.”\textsuperscript{36} God is a craftsman in this chapter. These qualities of God are anthropomorphic, and these anthropomorphisms contribute to the

\textsuperscript{32} Noth, \textit{A History}, 229.
\textsuperscript{33} McEvenue, 64.
\textsuperscript{34} Id.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{\textit{adam}}.
\textsuperscript{36} Morales, \textit{Creation Theology}, 21.
theme of the orderliness of creation, similar to that found in the J stories. Yet, for the Yahwist, man and woman are “bodily and visible,” compared to the “image of God” language used by the Priestly Writers.

The Yahwist also gives a reason for the creation of man, unlike the Priestly Writers, where man is created for an unstated reason as are the other creations of earth (although perhaps man was created for relationship). For the Yahwist, man is created to be a garden caretaker. In verse 15, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The Yahwist also portrays God as a learner, as seen in verse 18, “[i]t is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable helper for him.” In Gen 3, we also see that God seems to learn more information as events unfold, such as after the fall into sin in Gen 3. In verse 8, he asks Adam, ‘Where are you?’ and in verse 11, ‘who told you that you were naked?’ For the Yahwist, after the fall into sin, God continues to use his hands to solve problems. In Gen 3:21, he also shows caretaking and kindness to Adam and Eve. God makes garments of skin and clothes Adam and Eve, despite their disobedience.

Another important contrast between the Priestly Writers and J is the name of God. For the Priestly Writer, God’s Hebrew name, YHWH, is not used until Exodus 6:2-3, which is when God’s name, YHWH, is revealed to the Israelites. But for J, YHWH, is used throughout Genesis.

**B. Creation Accounts of the Ancient Near East**

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37 Id., 66.
38 Id.
40 See also, Id., Limitations are placed on God. God also needs man to take care of his Garden. “Yahweh has to learn gradually from nature, as we do, through experience and reflection.”
The creation accounts in Genesis were not the only stories of creation circulating in ancient times. Just as today, the biblical creation stories are not only stories about the creation of the world. Today we talk about evolution and the big bang theory and look to quantum physics for answers about the origin of the world. So too, in the ancient world, the creation stories were part of a larger discussion about the origin of the world. Thus, if we are to have a better appreciation for the biblical creation stories we must look to other stories of the ancient world.

In the post Second Vatican Council document, *Dei Verbum* (1965), we hear “[t]he interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.”42 Additionally *Dei Verbum* states, “The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.”43 Similarly, in *Humani generis* (1950), Pope Pius XII acknowledged that writings of the Old Testament were influenced by the stories circulated at the time the Bible stories were composed.44

In the Bible we hear references to the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, and other nations of Canaan and its environs. The Bible stories were not written in isolation. They were part of a culture that also had stories about the world and the inhabitants of the world. Two examples of Ancient Near Eastern creation stories, *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Elish*, were written in the Akkadian language. The most common stories were preserved

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42 *Dei Verbum*, sec. 12.  
43 Id.  
throughout Mesopotamia by the work of scribes.\textsuperscript{45} The Akkadian language “was a diplomatic language in the late second and early first millennia….Given east-west commercial and diplomatic activity, it is not surprising to find Mesopotamian influence on Canaanite and biblical literature.”\textsuperscript{46} The Bible stories also incorporate language from the Ancient Near Eastern stories in their understanding of God.\textsuperscript{47} We will now explore four different stories from the Ancient Near East in light of \textit{Dei Verbum} and \textit{Humani Generis}.

The epic of \textit{Gilgamesh} is a story that unveils accounts of a flood. This epic is thought to be a Sumerian story. The tablets of this epic were discovered in Nineveh in 1872.\textsuperscript{48} The city of Uruk, in what is now southern Iraq, is thought to have been the first civilization built by the Sumerians in the fourth millennium BCE.\textsuperscript{49} Uruk was a city in the region of Sumer, where surrounding cities such as Ur, Nippur, and Babylon would arise. The rivers of importance which run laterally to these cities are the Tigris and Euphrates. The Sumerian gods, Enki, a water god, and Ennugi, the deity of dykes and canals, and Enlil the storm god, all play roles in the stories from this region.\textsuperscript{50} Around the third millennium BCE, Babylon came to power under Semitic kings. One of the rules of power was a god known as Marduk “the divine saviour celebrated in the \textit{Enuma Elish}.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} Id., 14.
\textsuperscript{47} See Matthews, Victor H. and Benjamin, Don C., \textit{Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East}, (NY: Paulist, 1991), 7. For the Israelites, YHWH was “The Divine Warrior” and “The Creator of the Universe,” and similar cosmological language was seen in Ancient Near Eastern stories.
\textsuperscript{49} Cotterell, Arthur, \textit{The Near East, A Cultural History}, (London: Hurst & Co., 2017), 45. The biblical story of Noah and the Flood was thought to be the original version of this story until these tablets were discovered.
\textsuperscript{50} Cotterell, \textit{The Near East}, 46.
\textsuperscript{51} Cotterell, \textit{The Near East},50.
One of the reasons the epic of *Gilgamesh* is an important Ancient Near Eastern story is because it closely resembles the account of “Noah and the Flood” in the Hebrew Bible. Gilgamesh ruled a city-state, Uruk, around the twenty-seventh century BCE. Later traditions about Gilgamesh depict him as a hero, warrior, and builder of his city. For the Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians, Gilgamesh was their god and a hero, having both divine traits and human traits.

In the epic of *Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh seeks immortality, and on his quest encounters Utnapishtim, a human who has achieved immortality. After Gilgamesh asks how Utnapishtim has achieved his immortal state, the latter tells the story of a flood, a “divine conspiracy, a secret plot which The Gods devised to exterminate humanity.” Utnapishtim is warned by the god, Ea, that the earth is about to be destroyed, and that Utnapishtim is to build a barge. He is ordered to “take specimens of every living thing on board.” He is also told of the dimensions to make the boat. The flood waters came “for six days and six nights…on the seventh day, the raging storm subsided and the sea grew quiet. I [Utnapishtim] felt the stillness and then realized that everyone else had drowned in the flood.” The ark lands on Mount Nisir and “[i]t remained grounded for six days and, then, on the seventh day I released a dove. It flew back and forth, but came back without finding a place to rest. Then I released a swallow, but it also returned without

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53 Id.
55 Id.
56 See Cotterell, *The Near East*, 46 noting that in other stories this character role is played by Ziudsura. Both Ziudsura and Utnapishtim are referred to in this text as “the Sumerian Noah”.
58 Id., 36
59 Id., 38.
finding a place to rest. Finally, I released a raven. Because the flood waters had begun to subside, the raven fed, circled, cawed and flew away.” After his safe departure from the ark, Utnapishtim prepares a sacrifice for the gods and they “smelled the aroma, [t]hey swarmed like flies around the sacrifice.”

It is unknown whether the authors of the Biblical flood story knew specifically of the epic of *Gilgamesh*, but the similarities between the Biblical story and this Sumerian flood story are noteworthy. Both God and Enlil decide to destroy the earth, each for different reasons; nonetheless, both of their actions result in flood waters that destroy all of mankind except for one man and his family. In the Bible, Noah is spared and in *Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim is spared. Through divine intervention, both men are instructed to build a boat (ark) to specifications given to them by their deities. The lives of the animals are spared because both Noah and Utnapishtim have been instructed by the deity to bring the animals into the ark. For many days, the earth is flooded. Both arks come to rest on a mountain, and both men send out birds to evaluate the land. Following the departure from the ark, both men offer sacrifices and the deities come down to the sacrifice and are pleased with it.

The story of *Atrahasis* is written in the Akkadian language. *Atrahasis* is a creation story that begins in time where entities called “gods” already existed. In this story there are two different levels of gods. The Igigu are considered the “lesser gods,” and these gods served the “senior” gods called the Anunnaki. Over time the lesser gods begin to refuse to serve the senior gods. A senior god called Enki and a mother goddess, decide

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60 Id., 39.
61 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 74.
62 Id.
to create human beings who will carry on the service of the senior gods. Human beings are created “from clay and the flesh and blood of an Igigu god.” Overtime, the number of human beings increased, and the story says that their “noise kept Enlil and the other gods from sleep” and the gods decided to destroy the human race which happened through plagues and ultimately a flood. A human named Atrahasis and his family, survives after being told by a senior God, Enki, to build a boat so that he could survive the flood. Following the destruction of human beings, the senior gods felt the impact of losing their slaves. And human beings were allowed to increase in number again.

We look now at this story in relationship to the two creation stories in Genesis. Atrahasis and Gilgamesh, like the creation stories in Genesis, presume the existence of a higher being or higher beings. In the biblical stories, this is God, and in the story of Atrahasis these are the Anunnaki and the Igigu. In Atrahasis, humanity is created because the gods need help. The gods are tired, so humanity is their solution to their fatigue. In Atrahasis, humanity is formed from clay and blood, whereas in Genesis, 'adam is formed from the dust of the earth and God breathes life into him. But in both cases, humanity is formed with the products of the earth. Like other Ancient Near Eastern stories, humanity is created for servitude. The gods need help, and so humanity is created. This is quite the

63 Id.  
64 Id.  
65 The Genesis account of Noah and the Flood in Genesis Chapters 6-9 has been compared and contrasted as well. For example, both Noah and Atrahasis are exemplary men in their time and both have a model relationship with their god. In both cases, these men are warned of impending destruction on the earth due to their gods displeasure of the state of man. And these men are saved through the building of a boat. Pastoral Essays in Honor of Lawrence Boadt, CSP: Reading the Old Testament. ed. Corrine L. Carvalho. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2013), 34-35.  
65 Id.  
66 Clifford, Creation Accounts, 74-75.  
67 Pastoral Essays, 34.  
67 Id.
contrast to YHWH, who creates humans out of love and to be in relationship with humanity. Never is it suggested in the creation accounts that God made humans to serve him.

The next story we will overview is Enuma Elish, a Babylonian epic of creation also written in the Akkadian language.\(^6^8\) Dating of this epic varies, ranging from the fourteenth century BCE to twelfth century BCE.\(^6^9\) The Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, contains traditions and stories from other stories during its time of composition as well.\(^7^0\) The importance of this epic is seen in how it was passed down through written copies as well as in oral recitation of the epic during the Babylonian New Year festival.\(^7^1\)

In this epic, the world exists in a primordial state without any gods or humans.

“When on high…No heaven had been named, No earth called, No Anunnaki…There was nothing….nothing but….Old Father Apsu and Mummu-Tiamat…”\(^7^2\) The makers of the gods are Apsu and Tiamat, which are “primordial waters.”\(^7^3\) The gods are then born from Apsu and Tiamat after they “had mixed their waters together.”\(^7^4\) The number of gods increases in number, “Lahmu and Lahamu were created, Their names were called. Before they increased in wisdom and stature, Anshar and Kishar were created…”\(^7^5\)

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\(^{69}\) Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 83.

\(^{70}\) Id., 84.

\(^{71}\) Id., 84.

\(^{72}\) Id., 84.

\(^{73}\) Id., 86.

\(^{74}\) Id. 88, citing Translation of Dalley, S. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University, 1989), 233.

The god Marduk is eventually born and he is the protagonist of the epic. “Marduk’s posture was erect, His glance inspiring. His stride commanding….Ea declared Marduk flawless, and endowed him with a double share of divinity.” Due to the increase in the number of gods and the noise that disturbed the primordial waters, a plot was formed to destroy the lesser gods. Marduk does battle with Tiamat and defeats her, cutting her body in half. With one half he makes the sky and with the other the earth. “He placed her head, heaped up [ ] Opened up springs: water gushed out. He opened the Euphrates and the Tigris from her eyes, Closed her nostrils, [ ] He piled up clear-cut mountains from her udder, Bored waterholes to drain off the catchwater.” He also places the other gods in the sky to be the constellations, and he also creates the moon and “entrusts the night to it.” Marduk gains power and respect from the gods and he builds a temple for himself. In order to maintain the temples of the gods, Marduk creates humankind. “Let me put blood together, and make bones too. Let me set up primeval man (lullû); Man shall be his name. Let me create a primeval man. The work of the gods shall be imposed (on him), and so they shall be at leisure.”

When we look at Enuma Elish and the creation accounts in Genesis, we can see both similarities and differences. While dating is not exact for either Enuma Elish or Genesis, scholars date the former as written earlier than the latter. The predating of Enuma Elish suggests the possibility that the Genesis authors knew about and perhaps

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76 Id., 9.
77 Id., 8.
79 Pastoral Essays, 32.
81 Id., citing translation of Dalley, MFM, 260-61.
82 Pastoral Essays, 32.
incorporated aspects of *Enuma Elish* in the Genesis accounts. Whether this is true or not, to further understand the Genesis story, we will look at comparisons.

The beginning of both *Enuma Elish* and Genesis opens with “watery chaos.” This language is “drawn from non-biblical world views. Words such as chaos (*tohu*), confusion (*bohu*), darkness (*hoshek*), abyss or primal ocean (*tehom*) are reminiscent to a greater or lesser degree of descriptions found in the religious writing of Mesopotamia.”

For *Enuma Elish*, the structures of earth are then formed by a god through violence, whereas in Genesis, God speaks. In *Enuma Elish*, the gods light up the sky, and in Genesis, God creates the lights; in both cases, the lights of the sky are “signs and seasons for days and years.” One of the contrasts that is relevant is the difference in reason behind the creation stories. In *Enuma Elish* (like many other creation stories at the time), the gods create humanity because they need servants so that they have to do less work. But for the authors of Genesis, humankind was created out of love and for humanity’s own enjoyment and companionship with God.

The Memphis Creation Story is a story that comes from Egypt from the time period known as the “Old Kingdom” (ca. 2686-2160 BCE). The capital of the Old Kingdom was Memphis and its deity was Ptah, who is the creator of focus in the Memphis Creation Story. The following synopsis is from an eighth century copy of the story.

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83 Id.
85 Id., 33
86 *Pastoral Essays*, 32.
87 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 99-100.
The Egyptian stories are relevant because of the interactions the Israelites had with the Egyptians as well as the influence that Egypt had at the time as a superpower. Many accounts in Genesis (and other biblical books) detail the interactions of Israel and Egypt, with particular emphasis on the Exodus from Egypt. For Egyptians, accounts of creation focused on exalting local deities such as Ptah. These gods were then represented on earth by pharaohs and the pharaohs were the image of the godhead. In the Bible, every human is made in the image of God.

In this account from Egypt, the gods are in existence, and the chief god “Geb,” who is “the earth” and is the head of all the other gods. Geb assigns the lands of Egypt to the gods. Another god, “Ptah,” “gives life” to the other gods “to their ka-souls.” They come into being through his heart and tongue. More is created through masturbation.

The Ennead (other gods) “pronounced the names of all things.” The story continues “sight, hearing, smell—report to the heart. The heart is thus the source of all knowledge, the tongue speaks what the heart desires.” Through the tongue, more is created including “all crafts” and “all activities of hands and feet.” At the end of his creating, Ptah rests “content with his work.”

In the “Memphis Creation Story,” we see differences and similarities to the creation accounts in Genesis. First, at the beginning of the story, the beginning of time, gods exist (in Genesis God, YHWH, exists). In the “Memphis Creation Story,” like

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89 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 99-100.
90 Morales, *Creation Theology*, 20.
92 Id., 32-33.
93 Id., 33.
95 Id.
Genesis, breath is breathed into the created beings.\(^{96}\) Additionally, for both the “Memphis Creation Story” and Genesis 1, creation happens through speech, but for the “Memphis Creation Story,” creation happens through action (masturbation). Likewise in Genesis 2, God forms creation through his action, by the work of his hands. At the end of the Memphis creation story, Ptah rests, just like in Genesis 1, when God rests on the seventh day. In both Genesis 1 and the “Memphis Creation Story,” the creators are pleased with the work which they have created.

Differences, however, between the Genesis stories and this Egyptian story also exist. In the Memphis Creation Story, “everything is contained within the inert monad, even the creator god.”\(^{97}\) So Ptah is contained within Geb, the inert monad. This contrasts with Genesis 1 because YHWH is not contained within his creation; he is distinct from it.\(^{98}\) This pantheistic view is prominent throughout the ANE. The act of masturbation is a common method of creation throughout Egyptian and other Ancient Near Eastern stories, but it is not a theme in the Genesis stories.

C. Catholic teaching on creation

When we move away from a literal interpretation of the creation stories, we then must ask what we are to believe about the stories, as they are written down in the Bible. Two encyclicals, *Humani Generis* and *Dei Verbum* give us insight into this matter. Pope Pius XII wrote *Humani Generis* in 1950 prior to the Second Vatican Council, and then *Dei Verbum* was written following the Council.

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\(^{96}\) See Gen. 2:7 “then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life.”

\(^{97}\) Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 114.

\(^{98}\) Id.
For Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* sought to deal, in part, with errors in people’s understanding of scripture. He reinforced the divine authorship of the Bible.\(^9\) Pope Pius XII explicitly acknowledges the approach of literal reading of scripture and cautions abandoning this approach for approaches that are purely “symbolic or spiritual.”\(^10\) He reinforces that we can know of God as creator through human reason and that the world did have a beginning.\(^10\) He also, in part, addressed the role of evolution and Catholicism. Catholicism does not exclude evolution. It is in fact an important means of explaining human life, but “the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.”\(^11\) In other words, our physical bodies are subject to the rules of science, but our souls are given to us from God and are not dust of the earth as are our physical bodies.

Moving to the creation accounts, Pope Pius XII opposes polygenism explaining that human beings originated from one man and one woman and that Adam and Eve did not represent a group of people.\(^12\) Additionally, absolute evolutionism, which argues that humans evolved from lesser creatures over time is incompatible with Church teaching.\(^14\) The Church does not deny evolution and leaves open two hypotheses: “1) One may posit that there is a physical line of descent linking the first human being to a lower animal, even though that link cannot be described as generation in the true sense; 2) one would have to think in terms of changes needing to be made in the new organism which would not make it in the proper sense a child or human progeny of the former living being.”

\(^9\) *Humani Generis*.
\(^10\) Id., sec, 23.
\(^11\) Id., sec, 25.
\(^12\) Id., sec. 36.
\(^13\) Id., sec. 37.
\(^14\) Morales, *Creation Theology*, 167.
Thus, while human beings have much in common with non-human animals and creatures, humanity is “radically distinct from the rest of observable creation.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church further distinguishes humanity from other creatures of the earth. The Catechism states that humanity is “someone” not “something,” that humanity is “capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.” Additionally, citing the New Testament book of Acts, the Catechism states that because humanity shares one common set of parents that humanity “forms a unity.” Another distinguishing feature of humanity, which the other creatures do not possess, is that men and women have a soul.

As science continues to develop, the Church continues to review and respond to discoveries that are made. *Humani Generis* reminds us in a statement that is of importance to this paper, is that the similarities that are found within the creation accounts in the Bible, if they are indeed borrowed, reused, or modified, were included by the biblical authors “with the help of divine inspiration, through which they were rendered immune from any error in selecting and evaluating those documents.” Thus, as science grows and develops, we must also look at scientific material with the Biblical material in mind, and remembering that the Bible is not a science book, but a book of divine inspiration which was never intended as scientific proof or scientific infallibility.

105 Id.
107 Id., sec. 360.
108 Id., sec. 364.
109 Id 38. Note that Pope Pius XII does not address transcription errors or differences in translation, but rather the original selection of the stories in the Bible.
Following the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* reinforces this stating, “those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” Scripture is one of the ways that God communicates with man and the Israelite composers and editors transmitted and documented these experiences as a means of describing their understanding and knowledge of God. He also tells us to “clearly investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended.”

Now, under the guidance of the above encyclicals, we will continue to elucidate meaning from the creation accounts. The literal reading of Genesis 1 and its presentation of the seven days of creation as a week is disputed by modern theories of evolution. But the Bible does not purport to be a science textbook, but rather “a religious book, and consequently one cannot obtain information about the natural sciences from it.” It is “religious experience” that we should strive for in our reading of the Bible in which the “aim is to make profound realities graspable to human beings.” And when we look at these ancient books of the Old Testament we have to remember that these ancient writers were using the stories of their time, like *Gilgamesh, Atrahasis, Enuma Elish,* and the Memphis Creation Story. These stories, or those like them, are images that the Israelite authors heard and worked with when they were writing the creation stories of the Bible. One purpose of these creation stories from Genesis is to tell us not about the biological processes of creation but that “God created the world.”

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110 *Dei Verbum* 11.  
111 Id., 12.  
112 Ratzinger, *‘In the Beginning...’*, 4.  
113 Id.  
114 Id., 5.
Also, when we look at the time of the writing of the creation story accounts in Genesis we have to take into consideration that they were written during the Babylonian Exile, during a time when Israel had been depleted and subjected to misery.\textsuperscript{115} This circumstance influenced the writers and their focus on creation because the situation meant that “the God of Israel was vanquished,” from the perspective of the Israelites.\textsuperscript{116} Because of the captivity in Babylon, the Israelite authors, who were looking for God, would have encountered the Babylonian stories such as \textit{Enuma Elish}.\textsuperscript{117} As strange and farfetched as “Enuma Elish” seems to us in modern times, “[s]uch views were not simply fairy tales. They expressed the discomfiting realities that human beings experienced in the world and among themselves.”\textsuperscript{118} As modern readers we must appreciate the Hebrew scriptures in light of the stories of the ANE that were told in these ancient days. The Holy Spirit worked through the biblical orators, composers, and editors to refine humanity’s understanding of God and his creation. This was done through the interaction with the stories and peoples of the ANE.\textsuperscript{119}

In 1981, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, delivered a series of homilies on the creation accounts in Munich, Germany. His first homily is used above. Here we will highlight key points from his second and third homilies as he goes through the specifics of the creation accounts in Genesis.

In his second homily, “The Meaning of the Biblical Creation Accounts,” Ratzinger addresses the debate of faith and reason that found the height of its debate

\textsuperscript{115} Id., 10-11.  
\textsuperscript{116} Id., 11.  
\textsuperscript{117} Id., 12.  
\textsuperscript{118} Id., 13.  
\textsuperscript{119} Ratzinger, ‘\textit{In the Beginning...}’, 13
during the Enlightenment Era of the 18th century. This argument is one of faith versus reason. Ratzinger opposes the idea that creation was a “haphazard stew” but that the world was created intelligently and orderly by the ultimate source of “Reason,” which is God.  

Ratzinger’s analysis of symbolism helps us to further understand that God explains himself through the Bible in ways that are reasonable and understandable to human beings. First, he looks at the use and patterns of numbers. Ratzinger notes that “God said” appears ten times in Genesis 1. For Ratzinger, “the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments” that were themselves an “echo of creation” because “they are a translation of the language of the universe, a translation of God’s logic, which constructed the universe.”

Next he explains the number seven. In Genesis 1, God creates the world in seven days. Rather than see this as fact that the world was created in seven calendar days, we can see the symbolism of seven. Ratzinger notes that the phase of the moon is seven days, thus “the rhythm of our heavenly neighbor [the moon] also sounds the rhythm of our human life.” Additionally, the number seven is directly related to the Sabbath. The obligation to attend mass on Sunday comes from God’s rest on the seventh day in Genesis 1. Creation centers around the Sabbath and the Sabbath is “the sign of the covenant between God and humankind.” Ratzinger goes on to say that “[t]he creation accounts of all civilizations point to the fact that the universe exists for worship and for

\[120\] Id., 23.
\[121\] Id., 26.
\[122\] Ratzinger, ‘In the Beginning... ’, 26
\[123\] Id., 27.
the glorification of God.”124 So when we look around at the created world, we should be reminded of God’s beauty, his logic, his orderliness, and his awesomeness. There are also connections with the number seven with the Greeks and ANE: “[t]he choice by the ancient Greeks of seven as the number of amazing sights, like so much else in their culture, came from the Near East. In the Akkadian language, seven or sebet meant totality, the number of the heavens, the number of spells that had to be recited for them to work, and the number of garments and ornaments that the great Sumerian goddess Inanna had to shed when she descended to the underworld to challenge her sister Ereshkigal’s deadly power.”125

In his third homily, Ratzinger discusses the creation of human beings. On a basic level, humanity is united under one fact: we are created from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:6).126 Ratzinger states “[i]n the face of all human division and human arrogance, whereby one person sets himself or herself over and against another, humanity is declared to be one creation of God from his one earth.”127 God has placed a special importance on human beings. We mean something special to God. God breathed his breath into our bodies; thus “[h]uman life stands under God’s special protection, because each human being, however wretched or exalted he or she may be, however sick of suffering, however good-for-nothing or important, whether born or unborn, whether incurably ill or radiant with health—each one bears God’s breath in himself or herself, each one is God’s image. This is the deepest reason for the inviolability of human dignity.”128 Unlike the

124 Id., 28.
125 Cottrell, Near East, 25.
126 See also, Id., 43.
127 Id., 44.
128 Id., 45.
ANEastern stories where we saw human beings created to serve the gods and do the work the gods were too lazy to undertake, the creation accounts in the Bible show that God created humanity out of love and for love. He created human beings out of a desire to have a special connection with humankind.

When a tradition-historical approach is used for the creation accounts in Genesis, we see that the stories are more complex than can be understood from a literal reading. Furthermore, we obtain much more meaning and information about how God revealed himself to the ancient world. After looking at the Priestly Writers’ account and the J account within the context of other creation accounts of the Ancient Near East, we see God using the imagery of the time of the ancient writers to communicate with the different cultures of those times. We see connections of the imagery and symbolism in our modern world today through creation itself, such as the moon, but also in our days of the week and worship on Sunday. We also see how God made himself manifest in the stories of Genesis as a loving God, which was in contrast to the spiteful, selfish gods of the Ancient Near East. We should appreciate how God took the time to make himself manifest and known to the Israelites of thousands of years ago in terms and language that they understood and that God continues to allow us in our day to understand him and to get to know him as well. Thus, one of the ways that we can learn to know God is through creation. Its beauty, its marvels, and its orderliness all speak of God.
Chapter II: Movement from God of the Davidic Kingdom to a Universal God

Now that we have laid a foundational understanding of creation, we will continue to elucidate two points. The first is a continued development of who the Israelites understood God to be. For this we will continue in using a tradition-historical framework viewing biblical literature in light of ANEastern literature. The second point of importance is that we understand that our modern understanding of God is dependent upon the Israelites’ understanding, but not limited to it. For example, in our discussion of Amos below, we will see that what the prophet Amos believed about the ANEastern nations is informative but should not limit us from seeing beyond his worldview to the reality that God is a universal God who cares about all of his creation and one who is in covenant with all creation. For this we will keep in mind what the Catechism tells us that humanity is “capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.”129 As we proceed with this second chapter, let us hold both of these points in mind as we move through the Psalms and prophetic material.

In the first nine chapters of the book of Genesis, we saw the Yahwist and Priestly Writers describe the creation of the world as well as detailing the account of the flood. We explored other ANEastern literature and saw how the ANEastern stories resembled the stories articulated in the Bible. In Genesis 3, the Yahwist wrote about the fall of humankind into sin. God then unveils a plan to save humanity from their sin. Adam and

Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden as a consequence for their disobedience (Gen 3:23). We also see God respond with kindness towards his human creations when he clothes them after they discover their nakedness (Gen 3: 21).

Both the Bible and the stories of the ANE seek to know the Creator or the creators of the world and they desire to further describe humanity’s origins and relationship to the Creator or creators. At the close of the creation stories and the flood story in Genesis 1—9, the Israelites knew YHWH as personable (walking with Adam and Eve and providing them clothing following their sin and shame) as well as a protector of those that are faithful to him (as seen in the story of Noah). YHWH is also known as the God of the covenant (as seen in the story of Abraham and then Moses).

As we look at the Psalms and some prophetic material, YHWH will continue to make himself manifest in creation as well as in the lives of the Israelites. As we look at the Psalms we will explore both the creation languages of the Psalms as well as the similarities with ANEastern literature. The Psalm authors will continue to use creation language that is similar to ANEastern imagery to express their understanding of YHWH as God. Following these Psalms, we will look at prophetic material where Israel’s image of YHWH will be challenged and refined through their experience of him during a time when YHWH seemed to have turned his back on them. This time was quite in contrast to the Israelites’ experience of YHWH depicted in the creation stories composed in the post-Solomonic era. This material will develop an image of YHWH that is more complete than the creation stories alone can describe, and with the prophetic material the image of a covenant with YHWH will become clearer. The Israelites not only will be reminded of their duties to YHWH but also be reminded that YHWH has set them apart
as his chosen people. The Israelites were reminded, as we are told, that being God’s people does not give permission to live according to their own desires. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that a close reading of the Hebrew Bible indicates that YHWH is presented, by the authors of the Hebrew Bible, as a universal god. The continued use of ANEastern literature in Biblical material supports, in part, the idea that the one Creator God was universal. The Psalms and prophetic material continue to show this with the use of ANEastern stories within the continues biblical material in the Hebrew Bible. YHWH is the Creator of all, and this necessitates a covenantal relationship with all. We will see in Amos that Amos makes ANEastern connections to the vassal relationship in the Davidic monarchy and that Amos also supports the argument of a universal God with whom the entirety of creation is in covenant.

A. God in the creation Psalms

First, we will undertake an exegetical analysis of two Psalms. Psalm 29 and Psalm 104 are hymns of praise to the Creator. We will look at the text of the Psalms and identify some creation language. We will also explore the connections of these Psalms to ANEastern literature and find the similarities between the Biblical texts and ANEastern texts. These Psalms will help us to further explore creation and the relationship of the works of creation to the Creator.

Psalm 29 begins with the words: “Give to the LORD, you sons of God, give to the LORD glory and might; Give to the LORD the glory due his name. Bow down before the LORD’s holy splendor. The voice of the LORD is over the water; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over the mighty waters” vv. 1-2.
Psalm 29 is a hymnal Psalm and is one of the oldest Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. This Psalm’s use of water language is reminiscent of the “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15:1-18, as well as other mythological stories of the time. The connection of this Psalm to Canaanite poetry is an ongoing discussion. Some scholars even suggest that Psalm 29 is a Canaanite hymn used in its entirety with only the gods name changed from Ba’al to YHWH. Scholars have also found that the “vocabulary and imagery, and the asymmetrical poetic metre” are similar between Psalm 29 and other Ugaritic poetry.

Just as we saw with the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, the Psalms also use ANEastern language to depict YHWH. Psalm 29 uses references to creation to describe YHWH’s mighty power. In verse 3, YHWH “thunders over the waters.” In verse 5 his voice “breaks the cedars,” and in verse 6, YHWH “makes Lebanon skip like a calf,” and in verse 7 the voice of YHWH “strikes with fiery flame.” The Psalmist uses elements of creation both to praise YHWH and also to conceptualize him.

Psalm 29 is unique because its addressees are divine beings and, indirectly, a human community. Another distinguishing feature of the Psalm relative to the other Psalms is the structure of the Psalm, which has a stepped, 4-4 lined structure, which is “more characteristic of Canaanite poetry.” The use of creation references, particularly

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130 In Ex. 15:1 Moses and the Israelites join in song: “I will sing to the LORD, for his is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.”
132 Id., 54.
133 Id., 53.
135 Goldingay, Baker Commentary, 413.
the storm language, was often used in Ugaritic myths to describe the fertility god, Ba’al.\textsuperscript{136} It is thought that Psalm 29 is an adapted Canaanite hymn, as everything in the Psalm except for the name are also descriptors used of Ba’al.\textsuperscript{137} In Canaanite theology, the supreme God, Ba’al, who ruled over other gods, was revealed in a storm and having been victor over Sea was then made supreme over all.\textsuperscript{138} Just as the author of Psalm 29 saw YHWH as controller of the forces of nature, so too was Ba’al seen by the Canaanites as controller of the forces of nature. Additionally, the geographical references (vv. 5-8) are “understood to relate to northern Canaan.”\textsuperscript{139} Another hypothesis is that Psalm 29 was written by an Israelite author who was familiar with the myths of Ba’al and who used the ANEastern language to “emphasize the superiority of YHWH.”\textsuperscript{140} The Psalm also emphasizes YHWH’s universality.\textsuperscript{141} In the Ba’al Cycle\textsuperscript{142} we see language such as: “Baal sits, like the throne is a mountain …Oh the mountain of victory: seven lightnings, eight bundles of thunder, a tree of lightning; his head is awesome, dew is between his eyes.”\textsuperscript{143}

The opening lines of the Psalm are “Give to the L\textsc{ord}, you sons of God, give to the L\textsc{ord} glory and might…” A literal translation from the Hebrew is “sons of El,”\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{136} John J. Collins, \textit{Introduction to the Hebrew Bible}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 509.
\textsuperscript{138} Goldingay, Baker Commentary, 414.
\textsuperscript{139} Id.
\textsuperscript{140} Dennis Pardee and Nancy Pardee, “YHWHs of Glory Ought to Thunder: The Canaanite Matrix of Psalm 29” in Psalm 29 through Time and Tradition (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 121.
\textsuperscript{141} Kselman, “Psalms,” 531.
\textsuperscript{143} Joanna Toyraanvuori, “Psalm 29 and Methodological Triangulation,” 14-52.
\textsuperscript{144} “El” is an ancient name for the deity. It is found throughout ANE literature, in particular in Ugarit-Canaanite literature. In the Ugarit literature, “El appears as the supreme YHWH; he is the father of the YHWHs and the lord of heaven.” El is used in other Psalms as a “archaizing element.” Murphy, R.T.A. "El (YHWH)." \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}, 2nd ed., vol. 5, Gale, 2003, p. 143. \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}. 
referring to divine beings. In the Psalm, verses 3-9a state: “The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over the mighty waters.” This language is “appropriate to the storm-god as the divine warrior, passing from the (Mediterranean) sea to land.” In verse 3, “the voice of the LORD,” in Hebrew, qôl YHWH, is repeated seven times in verses 3-9, suggesting “peals of thunder crashing in rapid succession over the waters.” Verse 5, “The voice of the LORD cracks the cedars; the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon,” shows YHWH’s grandeur and might.

The similarities between the Ba’al cycle episode and Psalm 29 are plainly evident. Ba’al and YHWH are powerful and mighty. They both control the waters and their words/voices are powerful and are exemplified in nature itself as thunder and lightning. Even the trees are under the command of Ba’al or YHWH.

Psalm 29 shows the power, might, and majesty of YHWH, who made the earth, and oversees it. The creations of the world respond to YHWH’s power, whom they recognize as the majestic creator of all things. For Israel, the response to the Creator is this hymn of praise, in admiration of his mighty works, clearly displayed in all of creation.

Psalm 104 begins with the words: “Bless the LORD, my soul! LORD, my God, you are great indeed! You are clothed with majesty and splendor, robed in light as with a cloak. You spread out the heavens like a tent; setting the beams of your chambers upon the waters” (1-3a).

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145 Kselman, “Psalms,” 531. This verse has some controversial positions over “El” and “Elohim” but also in how to interpret the translation of “sons of YHWH.”
146 Id.
147 Id.
148 Id., 531.
Psalm 104 is another hymn to the Creator. The opening verse sets the stage for the Psalm, “Bless the LORD, my soul! LORD, my God, you are great indeed! You are clothed with majesty and splendor.” This Psalm praises YHWH for his works and for maintaining what he has made.\textsuperscript{149} The language in this Psalm is reminiscent of the language of Genesis as YHWH crafts his creation with his hands: “You spread out the heavens like a tent; setting the beams of your chambers upon the waters. You make the clouds your chariot, traveling on the wings of the wind” (Ps 104:2). Like Psalm 29, Psalm 104 depicts YHWH as interactive with his creations and a deity who oversees his creations in a majestic way.

The verses of the Psalm give YHWH praise for the different parts of creation: springs, mountains, wild animals, birds, grass, cattle, etc, “celebrat[ing] the manifold nature of life.”\textsuperscript{150} Human beings are mentioned not as standing out above the rest of creation, but rather are only mentioned as a part of creation: “coinhabitants with the onagers and the coneys.”\textsuperscript{151} Everything in YHWH’s creation has its place, and YHWH sustains everything he has made. YHWH is the caretaker of all, great and small, animate and inanimate.

We see references to waters in Psalm 104 as well in verses 6-8, “The deeps covered it like a garment; above the mountains stood the waters. At your rebuke they took flight; at the sound of your thunder they fled. They rushed up the mountains, down the valleys to the place you had fixed for them.” In verses 10-13, YHWH’s caretaking nature is displayed in the watery language: “YHWH’s containment of the waters to

\textsuperscript{149} Id., 544.
\textsuperscript{151} Id., 158.


*protect* the earth, the earth becomes satiated with water to *provide* for the earth’s inhabitants…water is a sign of YHWH’s gratuitous care.”

YHWH’s care is both direct, giving drink to the thirsty animals, and indirect, giving water to the plants which give shelter to the birds of the air. As he cared for Adam and Eve after the fall into sin, so too does YHWH continue to care for what he has made.

Like Psalm 29, Psalm 104 contains language found in ANEastern literature. The language of majesty and radiance characterizes gods of the ANEastern cultures, such as seen in the Ba’al cycle. Commentators also reference the Egyptian Hymn to the sun God Aten, especially looking at verses 19-23 of Psalm 104: “You made the moon to mark the seasons, the sun that knows the hour of its setting. You bring darkness and night falls, then all the animals of the forest wander about. Young lions roar for prey; they seek their food from YHWH. When the sun rises, they steal away and settle down in their dens. People go out to their work, to their labor till evening falls.” In the Great Hymn to Aten we hear “How ‘passing over’ you are, Harakhty, completing your task of yesterday every day. The one who creates the years…the hours correspond to his stride. You are newer today than yesterday, while passing the night you are already set up on the day. Swift of stride with shooting rays, who circumnavigates the earth in a moment, all being accessible to him.”

Both Psalm 104 and the Great Hymn to Aten observe that the Creator has used creation to set up the passing of the days and that the works of creation ultimately look back to their Creator as their guide.

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152 Id., 125.
155 Id., 531.
Additionally, as we saw with *Enuma Elish* and the creation accounts in Genesis, Psalm 104 also contains similarities with this Babylonian story that “describes gods wearing ‘mantles of radiance.’”\(^{157}\) Psalm 104:1b-2 states, “You [YHWH] are clothed with splendor, robed in light as with a cloak.” These similarities appear throughout other literature in the ANE, “among the Assyrians and Akkadian, and from Susa and Phoenicia.”\(^{158}\) In these ways, we see that Israel’s view of the creation, world itself, and how to praise the Creator are similar to the way in which the surrounding ANE praised their gods.

These similarities lead us to an importance truth about YHWH. While he is the YHWH of Israel, his chosen people, YHWH has not closed himself off to the other nations. As Psalm 29 and 104 show, YHWH has made his glory known in all of creation, not only within humanity and not only within the Israelites. But it is creation itself that displays YHWH’s glory, and “YHWH is not so ungenerous as to provide no knowledge of himself to people who bother to look.”\(^{159}\) YHWH’s truth is in creation itself and it is there that his praises abound.

In the creation stories of Genesis, the Israelite authors found similarities with the creation stories of the ANE. Now in the Psalms, the similarities abound in hymns to the Creator. Next, we will turn to the prophetic literature, where we will again see YHWH bring together Israel with its neighbors in the ANE, in a way that binds them together much deeper than just a sharing of literature.

**B. Creation in the prophetic material**


\(^{158}\) Id.

In the prophetic material of the Old Testament, we see yet another shift in Israel’s understanding of their Creator. In the book of Amos, we again see similarities with ANE literature in the style of literature and its poetic form, and we also see the impact of a covenental relationship that Israel and Judah had with the surrounding ANE. As the prophet Isaiah said, “For I [YHWH] know their works and their thoughts. The time is coming to gather all nations and languages, and they will come and see My glory.”\(^\text{160}\) Israel’s unique relationship with YHWH remains, but “God controls the destinies of other nations as well.”\(^\text{161}\) YHWH is the universal God, and he will unite his people, his creation, not just a select few, not just Israel, but all the nations, including those in the ANE.

Chronologically, Amos is the first book of the minor prophets. In the superscript to Amos we are told that Amos is a sheep herder from Tekoa, a city in the northern kingdom of Israel.\(^\text{162}\) His prophetic calling occurred during the reign of Jeroboam, son of Joash.\(^\text{163}\) In the first chapter of Amos we are immediately introduced to the regions of the ANE and these regions find themselves in the same predicament as the Israelite kingdoms, Israel of the north and Judah of the south.

In the ANE, the northern kingdom of Israel was situated with its border on the Mediterranean Sea. Judah, the southern kingdom, was situated directly south of Israel, with the region of Philistia to its west. Philistia shares its border with the Mediterranean Sea. To Israel’s northwest lies Phoenicia with its cities of Tyre and Sidon. Aram lies to the East of Phoenicia and shares the northeast border with Israel. To Israel’s East lies

\(^{\text{160}}\) Isaiah 66:18.  
\(^{\text{161}}\) “Amos,” Barré, 212.  
\(^{\text{162}}\) Judah being the Southern Kingdom. Amos 1:1.  
\(^{\text{163}}\) Amos 1:1.
Ammon. South of Ammon lies Moab, with the Dead Sea separating Moab from Judah. Finally, to the south of Ammon lies Edom. The order of the oracles is as follows: Aram, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel. The order carries significance as the first two nations historically were Israel’s more powerful and problematic neighbors.\footnote{164} Amos then addresses Tyre to the northwest followed by Edom in the southeast, followed by the two countries, Ammon and Moab to the east.

The geographical proximity of these regions is relevant because it allowed for vassal relationships between the nations over time as kings sought power, land, control, and protection. Kings would agree to be vassal states with the more powerful nation to ensure protection of their land and people. For example, King David defeated Moab and “measured them with a line. Making them lie down on the ground, he measured two lengths of line for death, and a full length for life. Thus the Moabites became subject to David, paying tribute.”\footnote{165} Likewise, Ammon was defeated by King David: “[h]e took the crown of Milcom from the idol’s head, a talent of gold in weight, with precious stones; this crown David wore on his own head…He deported the people of the city and set them to work with saws, iron picks, and iron axes…He dealt thus with all the cities of the Ammonites.”\footnote{166} These eight regions have close relationships with each other throughout the Old Testament, during times of war and times of peace.

These eight regions are the subjects of Amos’s first prophecy, and the conclusion is bleak for all of the nations. Amos 1:3-4 are the opening verses to a series of eight oracles given against eight nations. The seventh and eighth oracles are against Judah and

\footnote{164}{Bruce C. Birch, \textit{Hosea, Joel, and Amos}, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 181.}
\footnote{165}{2 Sam. 8:2}
\footnote{166}{2 Sam. 12:30-31.}
Israel respectively. The first six oracles are against Aram, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. The structure of the eight oracles is the same, beginning with “For three crimes of _____, and now four…” This structure is also seen in Proverbs 6:16, “[t]here are six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination…” and again in Proverbs 30:18, “[t]hree things are too wonderful for me, yes, four I cannot understand.” This pattern is a device used more broadly in Hebrew poetry, but also more broadly in the ANE literature. In Amos, this patterned repetition has added significance in conveying the seriousness and wrath of YHWH.168

The number of crimes is also accumulating, which is shown using the number progression. The first seven oracles also end in the same judgment, “I will send fire upon ___ and it will devour the strongholds of ____.” Each individual oracle follows a specific formula: the messenger formula, the indictment, announcement of punishment and concluding messenger formula.”169

The first region to be condemned in Amos 1:3-4 is Damascus, the capital city of the region of Aram, directly to the northeast of Israel. These oracles proceed to the final two regions which are also condemned, Judah and Israel. The footnote to Amos 1:3-2:16 states “[a]ll nations mentioned here may have been part of the ideal empire of David-Solomon.” In support of this, 1 Kings 5:1 is referenced: “Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] to the land of the Philistines, down to the border of Egypt; they paid Solomon tribute and served him as long as he lived.” The region of Aram was a vassal state under King David’s rule, and then an independent state during

167 See also Wisdom of Ben Sira 23:16: “Two types of people multiple sins, and a third draws down wrath….”
169 Id., 23.
King Solomon’s rule, and thus Aram would have come under YHWH’s protection as members of his covenant with Israel. Aram is significant to the story of Israel not only because of its proximity to Israel and Judah and its history with the empire of David and Solomon, but also because of the alliance with Judah as well as the animosity with Israel that will be discussed below.

The patterned formula of the oracles creates a suspense and “unrelieved menace” that impels the reader to listen to what Amos is saying. Even within each oracle, the suspense and gravity of the situation is pronounced. In the indictment “I will not take it back…has no antecedent, and hangs suspended in mysterious and threatening ambiguity.” “It” perhaps refers to the punishment pronounced by YHWH for the stated crimes. Alternatively, the verb could be translated “to revoke,” making the punishment anticipatory.

The people of Aram are not YHWH worshipers, unlike the Israelites of Israel and Judah. We must ask what significance the areas surrounding Israel and Judah have with a relationship to YHWH that they would invoke his divine anger. One possibility for Amos is that he “sees YHWH as the sovereign of history who moves nations in their national careers and can remove them to their earlier spheres.” Aram was a vassal region under David but its crime against Gilead was ultimately a crime perpetrated against YHWH. The acts of violence “are not so many breaches of international ethics as treaty violations of one member of the ideal Davidic-Solomonic empire against another…Because of one

170 “Amos,” Barrè, 211.
171 Mays, Amos A Commentary, 22.
172 Id., 24.
173 Id.
175 Mays, Amos A Commentary, 27.
176 Paul, Amos, 45.
sin too many YHWH refuses to accept these nations back as ‘vassals’ in good standing.”

In other words, while YHWH has a covenant with Israel, he is ultimately the YHWH of all nations. Also, the surrounding nations’ story is entwined with that of Israel, and thus will their fate be as well.

Now we will move onto the indictment. The deed—“because they threshed Gilead with iron threshers,” is an offense the “general mores of the time would question.”

Gilead belonged to the kingdom of Israel, historically of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. The region of Gilead “was prized for its fertile land for farming and livestock” and was “a crucial trade route.”

Gilead was geographically important because it marked the border between Aram and Israel. Historically, Aram was the land of Laban, and Israel the land of Jacob, thus this territory was not originally in Jacob’s possession, nor was it always in possession of Israel.

Gilead was an area that endured much military conflict between Aram and Israel because of its geographic location between Aram and Israel. During the time that Amos prophesied these oracles, the land of Gilead was a contentious area between Israel and Aram and had been for the last century. More details are not revealed perhaps because “if the conflict with Aram did occur during the time of Amos, there would have been no need to provide details with

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177 “Amos,” Barré, 211.
178 Mays, Amos A Commentary 27.
179 One commentary noted that the LXX states “with iron saws they were sawing the pregnant women of Gilead.” ἔπριζον πρίοσι σιδηροῖς τὰς ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσας τῶν ἐν Γαλαάδ. M. Daniel Carroll, R. The Book of Amos, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2020), 138.
180 Mays, Amos A Commentary, 28.
181 M. Daniel Carroll, R. The Book of Amos, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2020), 139; Josh 22: 9 “so the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of…returned to Gilead, their own land, which they had received according to the Lord’s command through Moses.”
182 Carroll, R. The Book of Amos, 139.
183 Paul, Amos, 48.
184 Id.
185 Carroll R., The Book of Amos, 140.
which the audience was very familiar.” Geographically, Gilead was a border region between these two regions and was a land that was fertile due to its location on the Jordan River.

In this oracle, Aram “threshed Gilead.” In agricultural terms, threshing is the process that separated the grain heads from the stalk, which was done with a heavy wooden sledge made of iron or stones that would be dragged over the stalks. There is debate about what this expression means, but two suggestions are commonplace. One is that this was referring to “physical torture committed by Aram’s invading army.” A second explanation is that the thresher is a metaphor for the ruthlessness of Aram, which is common in ancient Near Eastern war annals. This language is seen in royal inscriptions about Tiglath-Pileser III, Bit-Amukkani, and Esarhaddon. This metaphor was used to describe the acts of Aram against Israel: “[s]o Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing” (2 Kings 13:7).

The specific date of this offense is unknown but there are three main options. The first is the attack on Israel in the tenth century at the end of the reign of King Solomon, the second in the second half of the ninth century “when Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad II attacked Gilead during the time when Jehu and Joahoahaz were kings of Israel,” and the third occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II.

186 Id. 142.
187 Id.
188 Id.
189 Id., 138; Isaiah 41:15, “I will make of you a threshing sledge, sharp, new, full of teeth, to thresh the mountains”; Mic. 4:13 “Arise and thresh, O daughter Zion…”
190 Paul, Amos, 47.
In the next phrase we see words like “send fire” and “devour the house.” Hazael and Ben-hadad are the targets of the fire. Hazael was an Aramean king who lived from approximately 843-796 BCE and started a new dynasty following his assassination of Ben-hadad.\textsuperscript{192} There are three Ben-hadads in 1 Kings and 2 Kings. Ben-hadad I ruled in the ninth century and is mentioned in 1 Kings 15:20, “Ben-hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the leaders of his troops against the cities of Israel.”\textsuperscript{193} Ben-hadad II is mentioned in 1 King 20 and is either the son or grandson of Ben-hadad I who was murdered by Hazael.\textsuperscript{194} A third Ben-hadad was the son of Hazael.\textsuperscript{195} Amos’s mention of the houses of Hazael and Ben-hadad seems to refer to the dynastic titles more so than to the individual kings.\textsuperscript{196}

The use of fire language was common in the ANE, for example in Canaanite stories of Ba’al.\textsuperscript{197} YHWH’s use of fire is “a significant element in the historical traditions, especially in motifs of holy war…[t]he image of the ‘devouring fire’ seems to be predominately expressive of the divine warrior’s wrath and destruction.”\textsuperscript{198} The language of fire is also seen in the prophecy of Isaiah 29:6, “you shall be visited by the LORD of hosts, [w]ith thunder, earthquake, and great noise, whirlwind, storm, and the flame of consuming fire.” For both ANEastern cultures and in Biblical stories, “fire is tantamount to declaring war.”\textsuperscript{199} Thus the destruction of Aram (as well as the 6 subsequent regions) is completed by divine warfare.

\textsuperscript{192} Paul, \textit{Amos}, 50.
\textsuperscript{193} Id.
\textsuperscript{194} Id.
\textsuperscript{195} Id.
\textsuperscript{196} Id.
\textsuperscript{197} Delbert Hillers, “Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel.” \textit{The Catholic Biblical Quarterly}, vol. 27 (1965), 259.
\textsuperscript{198} Id.
\textsuperscript{199} Carroll R., \textit{The Book of Amos}, 142.
The crimes listed by Damascus (a non-Israelite region) against Gilead (possibly an Israelite region), could be considered a crime against Israel, which would be a cause for YHWH’s judgment against Aram. However, in the fourth oracle against Moab, we see YHWH striking down a nation for its crimes against a non-Israelite region. “For three crimes of Moab, and now four—I will not take it back—Because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom’s kin. I will send fire upon Moab, and it will devour the strongholds of Kerioth.”

The land of Edom lay to the south of Moab. The crime listed against Moab “burned to ashes the bones of Edom’s kin,” “was an especially grievous act of desecration.” Furthermore, extending into ANEastern customs, “vassal nations were not permitted to engage in aggressive acts toward fellow vassals.” So for this crime against Moab, Israel was not directly offended, rather “this act was an affront to God.”

Amos’s final oracle is against the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom. He states, “Thus says the Lord: For three crimes of Israel, and now four—I will not take it back—Because they hand over the just for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; [t]hey trample the heads of the destitute into the dust of the earth and force the lowly out of the way. Son and father sleep with the same girl, profaning my holy name” (2:6-7). This final oracle is more detailed and elaborate than the previous seven oracles, “because Israel has benefited from the ongoing kindness of the Lord.” Israel is not condemned

201 “Amos,” Barré, 211.
202 Id., 211.
203 Id.
204 Id.
for military atrocities (like Aram and Moab), nor for idol worship (like Judah), but rather, Israel is condemned for social injustices.  

Amos’s oracle against Israel continues: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who live on the mount of Samaria: Who oppress the destitute and abuse the needy; Who say to your husbands, ‘Bring us a drink’” (4:1). This picturesque, metaphorical, and agricultural poetry from Amos the sheepherder, seeks to denounce the rich, arrogant women of Bashan for their reprehensible behaviors. Bashan was a fertile plane known at the time for its lush pastures and well nourished cattle. Amos’s metaphor to these “pedigreed ‘cows’ represent none other than the pampered leading ladies of Samaria, who main purpose in life is to tend to their own self-indulgence, irrespective of the cost—to others.” These are not issues that have just occurred only once; the people have persistently engaged in these repulsive acts over time, and now they find themselves in an adversarial relationship with YHWH.  

For all the eight nations mentioned in Amos, there has been a breach of covenant, whether in their vassal relationships with one another or in their covenant with YHWH. But even for the nations who have no formal covenant with YHWH, they are still bound in a covenantal relationship with YHWH because YHWH created all and is ultimately in control of all nations.  

Amos presents us with these oracles which focus on nations who have regional proximity, frequent military engagements, as well as connections to the David-Solomonic interconnections.

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205 Paul, *Amos*, 76.  
206 Id., 128.  
208 Id.  
209 “Amos,” Barré, 212.
empire. Max Polley presents five different viewpoints on Amos’s oracles. Two of which will be the focus of this work: Amos as a universalist and Amos as a supporter of a reunited Davidic empire.210

Polley argues that Amos supported a reunited Davidic empire. He finds that “the grounds for his condemnation of neighboring nations were their violation of the covenant association with David on which the empire was found.”211 This position is accurate but ultimately too limiting. Amos presents the oracles in a way that places the eight nations on level with one another, with one nation not proving more culpable than another.212 The consistent pattern of the oracles also suggests this leveling of the nations.213 Furthermore, if Amos is working to reunite the David empire nations, this points to YHWH being a God of history who is in control of the fate of nations.214

In further support of the position that Amos presents YHWH as a universal God, we must consider that Amos presents YHWH as the defender of the poor and those who are cast down. The nations spoken of in the oracles all played the role of a vassal state at one time or another. These contracts were asymmetrical relationships, with the vassal state being under the power of the sovereign state. Likewise, the Israelites were under a “vassal contract” with YHWH.215 In Amos, we see this vassal contract extend to the rest of the ANE, with the nations all violating the covenant that they had (or perhaps should have known they had) with YHWH.

210 Polley, Amos and the David Empire, 59.
211 Id., 82.
213 Eidevall, Anchor Yale Bible, 100.
214 Id. 105.
According to Amos, YHWH defends the poor and he seeks justice for wrongdoings. Amos seems YHWH as having universal authority and control. His vision extends beyond reunification of the former Davidic empire.

We also consider YHWH’s universality in the larger context of the Hebrew Bible, particularly within the creation literature. Israel understood itself as YHWH’s chosen people. As recent commentators have remarked, “Israelite society was centered on adherence to the collective obligations of kinship ties, a sense of honor and shame that governed behavior and speech, a social and economic strategy of reciprocity, and a firm recognition of divine presence in their lives. These social principles are common to other peoples in the ANE, and what set Israel apart from other nations was the covenant with YHWH and the intricate legal system that developed to quantify its meaning and obligations.”216 Israel was a people chosen by YHWH, but we can also see how Amos portrays YHWH as a universal God, the God of all creation. After all, YHWH is “the God of all history.”217

Psalms 29 and 104 beautifully depict YHWH’s creations glorifying him, fully displaying his majesty. Humanity’s inclusion as one of the many creations in Psalm 104 glorifying YHWH uniquely unites humanity with the other creations. The psalmists continue in their usage of ANEastern literature, just as we saw in the creation accounts and flood story in Genesis. In the prophetic material from Amos, we see see a shift that includes not just ANEastern literature, but an inclusion of ANEastern people within a covenant with YHWH.

217 Birch, Hosea, Joel, and Amos, 182.
Above, we argued that YHWH is a universal God who is intimately involved in the history of the nations. Now, we will look at additional prophetic material to further support YHWH’s universality by looking at the relationship of YHWH to the rest of creation. In Amos we saw that nations outside of Israelite culture were obligated to standards of behavior because they ultimately had a duty and relationship with YHWH. Alternatively, YHWH as a universal God cared about the actions of people who were not considered his own.

At the end of the narrative of Noah and the flood in Genesis, the Yawhist states, “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Gen. 9:16). The Israelite composer does not limit the Noahide covenant to a particular people, but to all living creatures. This universality in the creation covenant that Amos portrays extends not just to humanity, but to all of YHWH’s creatures.

YHWH is the caretaker of all creation. Humanity holds a special relationship with YHWH, but as members of creation, humanity participates in the suffering of this world along with the rest of creation. The prophetic book of Joel is the second book of the minor prophets. According to the introduction to Joel in the NABR, Joel is thought to have been composed after the Babylonian exile, around 450-400 BCE.218

The prophet Joel tells us of devastation to creation: “For a nation invaded my land, powerful and past counting, with teeth like a lion’s fangs like those of a lioness. It has stripped bare my vines, splintered my fig tree, shearing of its bark and throwing it

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218 There is much debate about the dating of the book of Joel.
away, until its branches turn white” (Joel 1:6-7). The prophet goes on to discuss a locust invasion that devastated the land and the people. Like the passage from Jeremiah, YHWH sees the devastation that befalls his creation, his land. The use of the possessive “my” shows that creation belongs to YHWH and makes even the inanimate objects of creation relevant and important to him. The prophet Joel “sees the fate of the people and of the land so intertwined.” For Joel, when the land suffers, so do the people. The converse is true as well, when the people suffer, so too does the land.

When the land suffers, it does so actively: “The field is devastated; the farmland mourns, [b]ecause the grain is devastated, the wine has dried up, the oil has failed” (Joel 1:10). Even the animals cry out: “How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are bewildered! Because they have no pasture, even the flocks of sheep are starving” (Joel 1:18). The locust invasion created great devastation of the land and the people of Israel. Joel personifies the land and the animals to convey the depth of suffering that was experienced.

Joel urges the people to cry out to YHWH to save them in their time of suffering: “Then the LORD grew jealous for his land and took pity on his people” (Joel 2:18). YWHW even addressed the land and animals in consolation: “Do not fear, O land! Delight and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things! Do not fear, you animals in the wild, for the wilderness pastures sprout green grass. The trees bear fruit, the fig tree and

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219 See also Jeremiah 2:7 where YHWH is concerned about the land: “I [YHWH] brought you into the garden land to eat its fruits, but you entered and defiled my land.”
220 Birch, Hosea, Joel, and Amos, 128.
221 See also Hosea 4:1-3 “Hear the word of the Lord, Israelites, for the LORD has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land: There is no fidelity, no loyalty, no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land dries up, and everything that dwells in it languishes: The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea perish.”
the vine produce their harvest.” Through these passages, “Joel indicates that God’s ardent, compassionate love enfolds land, animals and people in a single embrace.”

We also see that creation will be affected on the last days: “I [YHWH] will set signs in the heavens and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke; [t]he sun will darken, the moon turn blood-red, [b]efore the day of the Lord arrives, that great and terrible day.” (Joel 3:3-4). Both humanity and the cosmos will know when the “Day of the LORD” has come.

Like the analysis above, Val Bilingham takes an ecological approach to the prophetic book of Jeremiah. Billingham states, “Jeremiah is an ‘ecologically-aware’ person who presents Earth as a character to its own right.” From Jeremiah: “For thus says the LORD: The whole earth shall be waste, but I will not wholly destroy it. Because of this the earth shall mourn, the heavens above shall darken” (Jer. 4:27-28). The mourning of the earth portrays “the enormity of the tragedy of exile. The land, the people and YHWH belong together.” Furthermore, the earth’s voice reaches YHWH and it conveys meaning to YHWH. Not only this but for Jeremiah there is a direct relationship between the people’s actions and the land’s productivity, “when the people live in positive interaction with each other and with YHWH, the land prospers. However, when they are unfaithful in their social and religious duties, the land suffers especially through drought and infertility.”

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224 Id., 17.
225 Id., 18.
226 Id., 19. For Joel, it was the people’s hope in YHWH that would restore the land’s abundance and health.
YHWH conveys that “[e]arth is not to be understood or treated as a commodity or property but rather as kind and partner with its people and YHWH.”

The composers and editors of the creation stories in Genesis, the Psalms, and the prophetic material portray YHWH as the creator, not only present in his chosen people Israel, but also as the God who is bound and in relationship with the rest of humanity and the non-human creations. It is noteworthy that YHWH’s attributes and qualities are depicted in other ANEastern literature. Through the Holy Spirit, the Hebrew Bible’s authors and editors identified relevant material from the ANEastern stories and preserved these truths in the biblical texts.

Although Amos and Joel were prophets in the 8th and 5th centuries BCE, their messages are relevant for us today. The atrocities about which Amos spoke still exist today. There continues to be “widespread disregard for human welfare and basic morality” throughout the world. We still see tensions among nations and different religions. These tensions have creation and earth “shaken by wars, torn by growing tensions between rich and poor, and finally, threatened in its very foundations by the misuse of our technological mastery over the earth.” We see the suffering earth around us, just as the people did during the locust invasion spoken about in Joel.

We, too, are YHWH’s covenant people, and as such we are “chosen for responsibility in the world.” We have a responsibility not only to creation as a whole but also to human beings in particular because we are in a relationship with the entirety of creation. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, “we are a community who owes its life to

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227 Id., 20.
228 Birch, *Hosea, Joel, and Amos*, 182.
229 Ratzinger, *Many Religions*, 93.
God’s grace, and therefore, we are bound in care and compassion to one another.” As the chosen of YHWH, we are not selected for “exclusive benefits but for the sake of God’s mission to restore wholeness to a broken world.” This is a great responsibility and one that ought not to be taken lightly, but ought to be undertaken in participation with YHWH’s mercy and grace.

Finally, we should bear in mind another lesson from Amos. The people of Israel and Judah were invaded, displaced, and exiled just like the other nations because of their moral atrocities committed against each other and against YHWH. Even though the Israelites were YHWH’s chosen people, they were not exempt from punishment. The Israelites “should have known better.” They had the laws of Moses, the traditions of their ancestors, and YHWH’s chosen prophets. Furthermore, “they had the covenant tradition to guide them and a faith story through which to keep their distinctive calling in view.” But they abandoned their covenantal duties to YHWH. They chose the ways of the world around them.

As Christians today, we carry a similar responsibility with the Israelites of the Old Testament. We have YHWH’s word and the traditions of the Church. We know that we have a responsibility to our neighbor and to creation. Do we take our covenantal relationship with YHWH seriously or do we follow the ways of the nations in Amos’s time? As members of the Church, we have a wonderful relationship with our Creator, and a great responsibility to uphold our end of the covenant.

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231 Id., 190.
232 Id., 191.
233 Id., 192.
234 Id.


Val Billingham, Some Ecological Perspectives on Jeremiah and Exile, Colloquium 45/1, 2013.

