

בְּרֵאשִׁית
In the Beginning,
God!

Some Theological Considerations of the
Creation Story
Christ Presbyterian Church

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1

How We Study - One Model - The onion

ספרד"ס = PaRDeS = (Paradise!) The Garden

פשיטא = P'shitah - The Simple meaning, read slowly
and attentively

רמז = Remez - The allusion

דרש = Drash - The interpretation (s) or explanation(s)

סוד = Sod - The Secret or Foundation

Midrash is "not the last word, but the next
word of Revelation."

2

From Sifre to Deuteronomy:

Those who look for Scripture's **inherent meaning** say: if you wish to know God, by whose word the world came into being, study [Scripture's homiletical interpretations in the] **Aggadot***; you will thereby come to know the Holy One, blessed be God, and hold fast to God's ways.

*Aggadot (Aggadah) = Rabbinic stories and narratives.

3

Shir HaShirim Rabbah – Midrash on *Song of Songs*

Do not let the **parable** appear of little worth to you. Through a **parable a man can fathom words of Torah**. Consider a king who has lost a gold coin or a precious pearl in his house. May he not find it through the light of a wick worth only a *issar*? Likewise, do not let the parable appear of little value to you. By its light a man may fathom words of Torah.

4

דרש = Drash - The interpretation(s) or explanation(s)

מדרש

Midrash - a genre of Rabbinic literature, first committed to writing in the 2nd century CE, which seeks to delve into the meaning of the text through the use of analogic discourse and hermeneutic laws.

5

Midrash as Analogic Discourse

Jacob Neusner distinguishes three midrash processes:

Paraphrase: recounting the content of the biblical text in different language that may change the sense;

Prophecy: reading the text as an account of something happening or about to happen in the interpreter's time;

Parable or Allegory: indicating deeper meanings of the words of the text as speaking of something other than the superficial meaning of the words or of everyday reality, as when the love of man and woman in the Song of Songs is interpreted as referring to the love between God and Israel (or the Church as in [Isaiah 5:1-6](#) and in the [New Testament](#)).

6

Hermeneutic Rules of Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael
No, you can't do whatever you want to!

Detailed rules (afew examples)

Kal va-chomer (קל וחומר)

The first rule of Hillel and of Rabbi Ishmael is "kal va-chomer" ([Hebrew](#): קל וחומר), called also "din" (conclusion). This is the argument "a minori ad majus" or "a majori ad minus."

Gezerah shavah (גזירה שווה)

The *gezerah shavah* ("Similar laws, similar verdicts). This may be described as argument by [analogy](#), which infers from the similarity of two cases that the legal decision given for the one holds good for the other also.

Binyan av mi-katuv echad (בנין אב מכתוב אחד)

In "binyan av mi-katub echad" ("A standard from a passage of Scripture") a certain passage serves as a basis for the interpretation of many others, so that the decision given in the case of one is valid for all the rest.¹⁴¹

And so forth...

7

What the Scholars will tell you

Another ancient creation myths
Emanu Elish is the [Babylonian creation myth](#). This epic is one of the most important sources for understanding the [Babylonian](#) world view. Over seven clay tablets it describes the creation of the world, a battle between gods focused on supremacy of [Marduk](#), the creation of man destined for the service of the [Mesopotamian deities](#), and ends with a long passage praising Marduk.

8

Tiamat is a primordial [goddess of the salt sea](#), mating with [Abzû](#), the god of [fresh water](#), to produce younger gods. She is the symbol of the chaos of primordial creation. She is referred to as a woman,^[4] and described as the glistening one. Tiamat is considered the monstrous embodiment of [primordial chaos](#). Some sources identify her with images of a sea serpent or dragon. In the [Enûma Elish](#), she gives birth to the first generation of deities; her husband, Apsu, correctly assuming they are planning to kill him and usurp his throne, later makes war upon them and is killed. Enraged, she, too, wars upon her husband's murderers, taking on the form of a massive sea dragon. She is then slain by [Enki](#)'s son, the storm-god [Marduk](#), but not before she had brought forth the monsters of the Mesopotamian pantheon, including the first dragons, whose bodies she filled with "poison instead of blood". Marduk then forms the heavens and the Earth from her divided body.

9



A Bit About 7's

- Seven Days
- Seven times it says "And God saw that it was good."
- The word "God" occurs 35 times in the story (7x5).
- The seventh day (Shabbat, Gen. 2:1-3) is described in 35 words (5x7)

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Observations and Suggestions

- There are other creation scenarios in Hebrew Bible which don't relate the Seven Days.
- The Children of Israel don't learn about Shabbat until the giving of the tablets (Ex. 20).
- Great similarity in the seven day creation story to the story of the creation of the *Mishkan* (Tent in the Wilderness) and by extension the *Beit Hamikdash* (Solomon's Temple) in Jerusalem.

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- God blesses, creates boundaries and precincts, is concerned about order and laws; scholars believe that the seven-day creation story is probably a late composition, a P or Priestly document.

But now, let's look at the story through the eyes of the Rabbis.

12

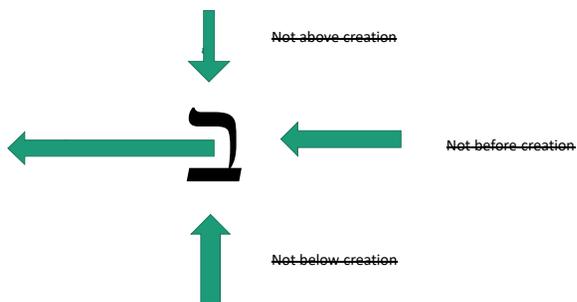
Our first bit of Theology
 “In the beginning, God”

- God is a given.
- God is posited, not proven, not deduced, not logical...
 - God Is.
 - God is Creator

13

What can we learn from the first letter of Torah?

14



15

JOB 38:4-13

4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?

6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—

7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

8 “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb,

9 when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness,

10 when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place,

11 when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?

12 “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place,

13 that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?”

16

A story...

The letter Aleph (א) (the first letter of the alphabet) seeing that God created the world with the letter Bet (ב) (the second letter of the alphabet) felt slighted. The Aleph convened a *Din Torah* (Rabbinic Court) to bring its complaint to the Holy One.

"Sovereign of the world," the Aleph pleaded, "am I not the first letter of the Aleph Bet, and yet when you came to create the world you passed by me and created with the Bet (בראשית - B'reishit)!"

The Holy One, Blessed be God, contemplated the justice of the Aleph's complaint and responded, "You have spoken rightly. Therefore, when I come to deliver Torah on Sinai I will begin with you." (אנכי - Anochi Adonai... I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt...)

What is this story about?

17

When was Creation finished?

- >On the sixth day? (God created the human being)
- >On the Seventh Day? (The heavens and the earth were finished and all their array...)
- >The re-creation following the flood?
- >Covenant with Abraham?
- >Nope! Not until the Revelation at Sinai!<

18

There is a famous midrash about the creation of human beings. When God was about to create the first human beings, the angels split up into contending groups. Some said, "Let humanity be created!" And others said, "Do not let humanity be created!"

The angels divided into smaller camps to press their case. One camp, representing the attribute of Compassion said, "Create human beings, because they will perform deeds of kindness." An opposing camp representing Shalom said, "Do not create human beings, because they will be violent."

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At which point the group representing Righteousness, tzedek said, "Let human beings be created, because they will pursue justice." And then the group representing truth stepped forward and said, "Do not create human beings, because they will be liars."

At which point God took truth and cast it into the ground, as the Proverbs teach, "Truth will sprout from the earth," and so the path was clear for humanity to appear.

(Some say God cast Justice to the ground...)

What do we learn from this Midrash?

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Another expression of the creation of Adam

When creation was all but ended, the world with all its grandeur and splendor stood out in its glorious beauty. There was but one thing wanting to consummate the marvelous work called into existence by the mere "let there be," and that was a creature with thought and understanding able to behold, reflect, and marvel on this great handiwork of God, who now sat on his divine throne surrounded by hosts of angels and seraphim singing hymns before him. Then God said, "Let us make man in our likeness, and let there be a creature not only the product of earth, but also gifted with heavenly, spiritual elements, which will bestow on him reason, intellect, and understanding

21

Whilst they were pleading against the creation of man, there was heard, arising from another part of the heavens, the soft voice of **Charity**: "Sovereign of the universe." the voice exclaimed, in all its mildness, "vouchsafe thou to create a being in thy likeness, for it will be a noble creature striving to imitate thy attributes by its actions. I see man now in spirit, that being with God's breath in his nostrils, seeking to perform his great mission, to do his noble work. I see him now in spirit, approaching the humble hut, seeking out those who are distressed and wretched to comfort them, drying the tears of the afflicted and despondent, raising up them that are bowed down in spirit, reaching his helping hand to those who are in need of help, speaking peace to the heart of the widow, and giving shelter to the fatherless. Such a creature cannot fail to be a glory to his Maker."

22

The Creator approved of the pleadings of Charity, called man into being, and cast Truth down to the earth to flourish there; as the Psalmist says (Ps. lxxxv. 12): "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven to abide with man."

23

*D'var Acher (Another interpretation)
"And God said, 'Let us make man'" (Gen.1:26)
...Rabbi Berechiah said: When the Holy One was about to create Adam, he saw both the righteous and the wicked who would issue forth from him. So, He said: If I create him wicked men will issue from him; if I do not create him, how are righteous men to be born? What did the Holy One do? He diverted the way of the wicked from before his sight, and partnered with the attribute of mercy, saying to it, Let **us** make man...*

24

Gen. 2:7

וַיִּצְרֵן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר
 מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי
 הָאָדָם לְגַפְשׁ חַיָּה:

And Adonai-God formed the man of dust of the earth,
 and He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and
 the man became a living being.

25

But, on close reading we realize וַיִּצְרֵן is spelled wrong!

It should be ויצר

What we have here is a
Hapaxlegomenon!*
 (a term of which only one instance of use is recorded)

Why two “yuds”?

*I digress...a story about Rabbi Joe Rosenblum

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וַיִּצְרֵן

יי to teach that God, whose name is
 abbreviated יי is within us.

יי to teach us that we are formed with two
 יצרות or inclinations.

The יצר הרע or animal inclination
 and the יצר טוב or good inclination.

27

*Ten things were created on the eve of Shabbat at twilight.
 These are: the mouth of the earth (where it swallowed
 Korach); the mouth of the well (of Miriam, that provided
 water for the Israelites in the desert); the mouth of the
 donkey (Balaam's); the rainbow; the manna; the staff
 (Moses'); the shamir (that cut the stones of the Altar in
 the Holy Temple); and the writing, the inscription and the
 tablets [of the Ten Commandments].*

Ethics of the Fathers 5:6

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The Mishnah, Avot 5:8, reads: Ten things were created at twilight:
 the mouth of the earth [that swallowed Korah]
 the mouth of the well [that provided water for the Israelites in the wilderness]
 the mouth of the donkey [that spoke to Balaam]
 and the rainbow
 and the manna
 and the staff
 and the *shamir*
 and the writing
 and the inscription
 and the tablets.

29

Some say, also (11) the destructive spirits, and (12) Moses' burial place, and (13) Abraham's ram. And some say, (14) tongs are made with tongs. The mishnah, in reliable manuscripts, does not actually say which twilight is intended here. A parallel text, cited in the Bavli (see Pesahim 54a), makes it explicit that this means twilight on the sixth day of creation. On this understanding, these ten – or up to fourteen – things were the last items created within the narrative of Genesis 1. Once the week of creation ended, the world was set, unchangeable. The reality that existed when Sabbath began would have to persist for eternity.

30