

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 7, Podcast Audio

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Welcome back, everybody, to another Deep Dive. Yeah. Today, we're tackling a topic that has sparked debate for centuries.

Centuries. Yeah. The Genesis creation story.

Absolutely. We're going to explore its literary framework. Yeah.

And some intriguing connections to ancient Mesopotamian creation myths. Absolutely. And to guide us through this Deep Dive, we've got a lecture by Old Testament scholar Robert Vannoy.

Oh, very cool. He brings up some really fascinating points. Okay.

So before we jump in, let's make sure we're all on the same page. Sure. When people talk about interpreting the Genesis creation story, they often debate whether the days mentioned are meant to be taken literally as 24-hour periods or if they're symbolic, representing longer epochs of time.

Right. And that's where the framework hypothesis comes in. Okay.

It's a theory that suggests the six days of creation are more of a literary structure than a strict timeline. Gotcha. But our friend Vannoy isn't buying it.

Is he not buying it? No. Why is that? What are his main arguments against this symbolic interpretation? Vannoy's first point is that there's no hint within the text of Genesis itself to suggest the days are anything other than literal. Okay.

He worries that if we start interpreting them symbolically, it could cast doubt on the historical accuracy of other biblical narratives. So he's saying if we question the literal days of creation, where do we draw the line? What else in the Bible might we start interpreting symbolically? Exactly. But his second objection gets even more interesting.

Okay. He points to Exodus 20, where the Sabbath is linked to God's rest on the seventh day. You mean the commandment to rest on the seventh day? That's the one.

Okay. Vannoy argues that this connection suggests the six days of creation were also real, actual periods of time. Gotcha.

He believes humans are meant to be imitating God's actual actions, not just following a symbolic literary construct. So if God literally rested on the seventh day, then the previous six days must have also been literal for us to be mirroring that divine pattern. Precisely.

And Vannoy believes that the symbolic interpretation undermines the very basis for the Sabbath, which is a pretty significant concern from a theological standpoint. It definitely

raises some interesting questions about how we interpret these ancient texts. But this brings up another question.

How did Moses even know about creation in the first place? Obviously, he wasn't there to witness it firsthand. That's a great question. And it gets to the heart of how scriptural knowledge was understood.

The traditional view is that this knowledge was imparted in various ways: direct communication from God, visions, even through meticulous research. So there are multiple possibilities, but the key point is that divine inspiration ensures the truthfulness of the text. That's the traditional understanding.

Yes. Okay. Now, here's where things get really fascinating.

Could Moses have adapted an existing Babylonian creation account, stripping away the polytheistic elements, the belief in multiple gods, and presenting it within a monotheistic framework? That's a mind-blowing thought. Yeah. It suggests there might be connections between the biblical creation story and earlier Mesopotamian myths.

Right. So let's talk about these Babylonian creation myths. What's the most famous one? The most famous is the Enuma Elish, a Babylonian creation epic.

It was discovered in 1875 by George Adam Smith. Oh, wow. And this discovery sparked enormous interest in biblical archaeology and comparisons between these ancient texts.

It makes sense that people would start looking for connections. If you have two creation stories from roughly the same region, it's natural to wonder if they influenced each other. Absolutely.

And what makes this even more intriguing is that the Enuma Elish predates Genesis by at least a few hundred years. Scholars estimate it was composed around 1700 to 2000 BC, whereas Moses likely lived around 1400 to 1200 BC. So there's definitely a possibility that Moses could have been aware of these Babylonian creation myths.

Did scholars at the time think Genesis was directly influenced by the Enuma Elish? Oh, absolutely. This discovery created quite a stir in the scholarly world. Oh, I bet.

And there were definitely contrasting viewpoints. You had some scholars who were deeply devoted to the idea that the Bible was genuinely inspired and completely unique. So they would have resisted the idea that Genesis borrowed from other sources.

Exactly. A well-respected Old Testament scholar at the time, Franz Delitzsch, held a very high view of Scripture. But then his son, Friedrich Tillich, took a much more radical stance.

Oh, wow. So a father and son were on opposite sides of this debate. It really is.

That's fascinating. And Friedrich Tillich didn't hold back. He called the Old Testament a great deception, claiming it was filled with errors and propaganda.

He became a key figure in what's known as the Pan-Babylonian school. They argue that the biblical worldview was heavily dependent on Babylonian ideas and beliefs. So he was basically saying that the Old Testament ripped off Babylonian myths.

Essentially, yes. Especially when it came to the creation and flood stories. He saw them as just adaptations of earlier Babylonian tales.

But let's be clear, his views were quite extreme, even among scholars who acknowledged some level of influence. I can see why that would be controversial. So just how similar are the Enuma Elish and Genesis? Are we talking about minor variations or completely different narratives? That's where another scholar, Alexander Heidel, comes in.

He wrote a book called *The Babylonian Genesis*, which takes a deep dive into the Enuma, Elish, and highlights key differences from the biblical account. Okay, so hit me with some of these key differences. What makes the Babylonian story distinct? Well, for starters, Heidel points out that the Enuma Elish isn't primarily a creation story at all.

Only a small portion of it deals with the creation of the world. Wait, what? If it's not about creation, then what's it about? It's more focused on the Babylonian god Marduk. It's a story about his birth, his rise to power, and his battles against other deities.

Imagine a grand epic poem glorifying Marduk and solidifying his position as the chief god of Babylon. Ah, so it's more about establishing a particular god's dominance than explaining the origins of the universe. Exactly.

It has a completely different focus and purpose than the Genesis creation story, which is all about God's creative act and the establishment of order from chaos. Okay, I'm starting to see how these two stories, while both dealing with creation, have very different aims, but I'm still curious about the actual process of creation. How does the world come into being in each story? That's where the contrasts become even more stark.

The Enuma Elish is steeped in violence and chaos. It describes this epic cosmic battle between the gods, with Marduk eventually slaying this monstrous goddess named Tiamat, and guess what? What? He creates the world from her dismembered body. Whoa.

That's a pretty intense origin story, a world born out of a divine battle. It definitely paints a different picture than the peaceful and orderly creation we see in Genesis. Right.

In Genesis, it's all about God speaking creation into being, let there be light, and boom, there's light. No bloodshed, no power struggle. It's a vision of deliberate design and divine power.

So we have these two contrasting visions, one rooted in conflict and chaos and the other in harmony and divine command. It makes you wonder if these differences reflect deeper, contrasting worldviews. Exactly, and they do.

The Babylonians saw the world as an inherently chaotic and unpredictable place ruled by these often capricious gods. In contrast, the Hebrew worldview, as expressed in Genesis, centers on a single, all-powerful God who creates the world with purpose and order. So

even if there are some surface-level similarities, the underlying messages about the nature of the universe are fundamentally different.

Precisely. And here's another key difference that really highlights those contrasting worldviews: the creation of humans. In the Enuma Elish, humans are created almost as an afterthought, basically, to serve the gods.

They're kind of like divine servants. But in Genesis, it's a completely different story, right? Humans are created in God's image. Exactly, and that's huge.

It speaks volumes about how each worldview understands the value and purpose of humanity in Genesis. Humans are given dominion over the earth. They're given this special role and responsibility in creation.

Whereas in the Enuma Elish, humans are just kind of pawns in the cosmic drama. Right. So even if we entertain the idea that Moses might have been exposed to Babylonian creation myths, it seems clear that he transformed them significantly, imbuing them with a completely different theological perspective.

That makes sense. It seems like we're talking about more than just borrowing elements. It's about reworking those elements to fit a completely different set of beliefs.

That's the crucial point. And it brings us back to the whole question of divine inspiration. Even if there were borrowed elements, the ultimate message of Genesis- the theology, the worldview- it's all uniquely and powerfully Hebrew.

Okay, so exploring these ancient creation myths isn't about proving one right or wrong. It's about gaining a deeper understanding of each tradition within its own context and appreciating the distinctive features of the Genesis account. You got it.

It's about understanding the cultural and religious influences that shaped these narratives and recognizing how they reflect different ways of understanding the universe and humanity's place in it. It's a much more nuanced and enriching approach than simply dismissing one as a copycat of the other. Absolutely.

And it highlights the value of engaging with diverse perspectives, even if they challenge our assumptions. Critical thinking and intellectual humility are essential tools for navigating the world, especially when dealing with ancient texts and beliefs. I'm definitely feeling a lot more enlightened about the Genesis creation story now.

But honestly, I'm still wrestling with this whole question of whether Moses could have adapted existing traditions, even if he did so under divine inspiration. That's a valid question. And it's one that scholars have been debating for centuries.

There's no easy answer, no smoking gun. It ultimately comes down to how you interpret the nature of divine inspiration and the role human authors played in shaping the biblical texts. So we're left with a bit of a mystery.

In a way, yes, and that's okay. Sometimes the most fruitful intellectual exercises involve wrestling with these big questions. It forces us to think critically about our own beliefs and assumptions.

I like that it's not always about finding the right answer, but about the journey of exploration. Exactly. And sometimes embracing the mystery can lead to a deeper understanding, not just of the text, but of ourselves.

That's a great point. So as we wrap up this part of our deep dive, what's the one big takeaway you'd like our listeners to ponder? Here's something to chew on. Even if we acknowledge the possibility of literary and cultural influences on the Genesis creation story, does that somehow diminish its truth or its authority? Or could it actually enhance it by revealing how God might work through human history and culture in complex and fascinating ways? That's a really thought-provoking question.

It definitely gives us a lot to consider as we move into the final part of our exploration. That question of influence and inspiration is really at the heart of it all, isn't it? It makes us think about how we approach ancient texts. Yeah, it's so easy to get caught up in trying to find the right answer, like the definitive proof.

Yeah. But maybe that's not the point. Maybe not.

Maybe it's more about wrestling with the complexities and engaging with different perspectives and ultimately coming to a deeper understanding of the texts and the traditions they represent. Okay. So for someone who's grappling with these questions, what would you say is the biggest takeaway from our deep dive into Genesis and the Enuma Elish? Well, I think comparing and contrasting these creation stories can help us appreciate the uniqueness of the Genesis account while also recognizing that it exists within a broader cultural and literary context.

It's not about diminishing the significance of Genesis, but about understanding it more fully. So it's about adding layers of meaning and understanding, not taking anything away. By exploring the connections and differences between Genesis and other ancient creation myths, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the theological depth and the literary artistry of the biblical texts.

It's like we're adding to it. Yeah. Instead of fighting over it.

Totally. And it's about embracing the mystery and complexity of these ancient stories instead of trying to force them into neat and tidy boxes. This whole deep dive has been so eye-opening, honestly.

I feel like I've learned so much, not just about Genesis, but about how to approach ancient texts in general. Like it's given me a whole new way of thinking about things. I'm glad to hear that.

Yeah. The quest for knowledge is a lifelong adventure, and there's always more to explore and discover. Keep asking questions, keep seeking answers, and keep diving deep.

Keep diving deep. I love it. Into the fascinating world of ideas.

Well, on that note, we'll wrap up this deep dive. Sounds good. I hope you've enjoyed exploring these ancient creation stories with us.

Until next time, keep those minds curious and keep searching for those hidden connections.