

An overlooked message: the critique of kings and affirmation of equality in the primeval history

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Abstract

The Primeval History in Genesis 2-11 contains symbolic polyvalent narratives with diverse levels of interpretive possibility. One meaningful level of interpretation is to see how the accounts contain a strident critique of kingship, especially the social economic abuses perpetrated by kings. Kings who receive the strident barbs of the author include not only Mesopotamian rulers, but also, by implication, the rulers of Israel and Judah, who likewise abused their powers. This exilic critique of kings is also, in turn, part of the great biblical message affirming human equality and dignity, and it speaks a powerful egalitarian word to any age.

World history textbooks often allude to John Ball as one of the key leaders in the famous English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, but too often the rest of the rather dramatic story is not told. John Ball had been trained in Hebrew at Oxford University; so as he read the sacred text in the original tongue, he observed meanings and messages in the Bible that other preachers, theologians, and great leaders of the church did not see or ignored. In Genesis I he discerned that God had made "man" in his image, and then made "man" into male and female, which implied for him that men and women were equal, for both were made equally in the image of God. What further impressed him was that this "image of God" elsewhere was attributed to kings. If the man and the woman were portrayed as royal personages in this biblical text, and they were the ancestors of all humanity, perhaps that meant all people were equal and should have equal economic opportunity in a society in which there were no kings or nobility. For twenty years John Ball proclaimed his message in rural villages of northern England, and he eventually went to London to preach. A historian or chronicler of this age reported that he said the following:

My good friends, things cannot go well in England, nor ever will until everything shall be in common; when there shall be neither vassal nor Lord and all distinctions leveled, when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. How ill have they used us? And for what reason do they thus hold us in bondage? Are we not all descended from the same parents,

Adam and Eve? And what can they show or what reasons give, why they should be more masters than ourselves? ... But it is from us and our labor that everything comes with which they maintain their pomp [Bobrick: 60; N. Cohn: 199].

Eventually the country priest inspired the peasants to a revolution against his oppressive government. The peasants followed political leaders like Jack Straw and Wat Tyler, who forced king Richard II to negotiate with them. The king promised to end serfdom and the oppressive taxes which inspired many to revolt. But when the peasants, satisfied that their demands were met, dispersed to their homes, the king reneged on his promises and declared, "serfs you were, and serfs you will remain." The leaders of the uprising, including the young priest, were executed eventually, and the revolution failed (Bobrick: 59-62; Dunn: 59-62, 140). Had Ball lived four hundred years later and a continent away, he would be remembered as one of our great founding fathers, for his message was no different than that of the spokespersons for the American Revolution.

John Ball in 1381 read and perceived the implications of Genesis 1 concerning the man and the woman being made in the image of God. Why did not more clergy discover this message in the Bible, and why did it take almost two thousand years for democracy to emerge in a Christian culture that supposedly used the Bible as its primary source for theology, ethics, worship, and Christian faith? Why do not all Christians today see this message of universal human equality and the concomitant concept of the equality of men and women? Is it because we quote the Bible, but do not really read it? Though scholars comment upon it in learned commentaries and scholarly articles, this message has not yet infiltrated half of the churches in Christendom.

Throughout the Bible one can find an overall message of human dignity and equality before God. Though there be passages which admit the existence of the institutions of slavery and kingship, that acknowledge that in life there are distinctions between people on the basis of class, wealth, and sex, one senses that the texts speak of these matters in a mode of discourse which is concessive, that is, they are part of a world order that may someday be no more. For too long the institutional Church has allowed the concessive mode of discourse to become the normative mode of discourse for human society, and social realities which were to be changed by the people of God were ironically reinforced by the institutional churches.

We could review the entire biblical tradition to explicate those passages which speak of human dignity and equality or the imperative to move in such directions, but that would be an expansive work, hopefully to be undertaken by

this author in the future. This brief essay seeks to focus upon the Primeval History in Genesis 1-11, for seldom do biblical scholars and theologians turn to these texts for inspiration for social reform. These contain passages that too often have been used consciously and unconsciously over the years to legitimate oppression and subordination of certain people, especially women. I would maintain that within these passages there are clarion statements of human equality and that a subtle critique of the institution of kingship pervades many of the themes in these narrative accounts. Biblical scholars have focused upon these themes in scholarly discussion, though often in a tangential way, as they sought to elucidate other topics. Feminist scholars have been especially adroit at unveiling the egalitarian images as they pertain to women. But I believe there are more pervasive egalitarian themes, and anti-royal themes, which by implication are also egalitarian, to be found within these texts.

Kings and the Bible

In his rather thorough and recent analysis of the ideology and social world of kingship in Amorite Babylon, Homeric Greece (whenever that really existed), and ancient Israel, Dale Launderville demonstrates rather well that the institution of kingship was a cultural, social, economic, political, and religious symbol by which societies were unified. Kings held their world together, in part, because of the rhetoric they generated and the economic and political success they could accomplish. They portrayed their rule as sanctioned by the king of the gods, and they helped to mediate the will of the gods to their people, as well as direct the economy, administer the law, and defend the country or city from foreign enemies. Nonetheless, critique of kingship would occur when kings failed to bring order, basic justice, and prosperity to their society (Launderville). The critique of kings, especially by the prophets and the Deuteronomistic Historians in ancient Israel, was the most strident we can find in the ancient world, and modern biblical scholars and theologians would recognize that. What we might not sense is how pervasive that critique could be throughout the biblical text. Even the portrayal of the ideal king or messiah who would come someday is still a criticism of the existing institution of kingship in that age. For it bespeaks a king who will accomplish what living kings do not chose to achieve or simply cannot achieve. Ultimately, Christians connect the image of the messiah with Jesus, who clearly stands in opposition to the institutional kings of this world. The Bible as a whole contains much anti-kingship rhetoric and is concomitantly egalitarian in its overall message. It is from this biblical text, in part, that democratic ideals arose. And, it is no coincidence that when the English cut off the head of a ruling monarch in the 17th century, they did so while quoting biblical texts (Bobrick: 278-84).

In the Primeval History of Genesis 1-11 there are hints of anti-royal fervor and the radical equality of people. Biblical scholars have noted these passages, and theologians have observed some of these themes in theologies of liberation and related theologies, but I believe we have not given these themes the prominence they deserve, especially in light of how often these texts have been used in the history of Christendom to justify the oppression of people and to legitimate the structures of society.

The Yahwist and the Priestly Editors

Genesis 1-11 exemplifies dramatically the symbolic and theological mode by which the biblical authors express themselves. A majority of the narratives in Genesis 2-11 have been isolated and characterized as the "Primeval History" of the First Testament by biblical scholars, where they are perceived as a cycle of tales which arose in either oral or written form from an anonymous author called the Yahwist. However, some recent critical scholars prefer to limit the so-called "Primeval History" to Genesis 1-9, while maintaining that Genesis 10-11 more properly belongs to the Patriarchal Narratives as a pre-history (Batto: 69; Hiebert: 80-82; Loning & Zenger: 100). For the past two centuries these so-called Yahwistic accounts have been isolated from the larger narrative context in Genesis 1-11 by differences in vocabulary, narrative style, and theology. These Yahwistic narratives include the following accounts: the creation of the Adam (generic man), the man and the woman in the garden, Cain and Abel, the flood, Noah and his sons, and the tower of Babel. The non-Yahwistic traditions (usually ascribed to Priestly authors or editors) include accounts of the cosmic creation (Gen 1:1-2:4a), the genealogy of Seth (Gen 5:1-32), portions of the flood narrative that envision the flood as a cosmic event (parts of Gen 6-8), the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:1-15), and minor genealogical information.

The priority of the Yahwist tradition (or J) is generally assumed by critical scholars, who subsequently propose that the Priestly Tradition (or P) was either a supplemental addition to J by a post-exilic Priestly editor or perhaps a once separate oral or written tradition ("Die Priesterschrift") woven into J by an editor or author sometimes called R (the redactor or the "Rabbenu" "our master," as some Jewish scholars prefer it). R may be yet another priestly author or editor, and he has been identified on occasion with Ezra. However, in the past generation, some scholars have suggested the priority of P, and they seek to demonstrate how J material was woven into P (Blenkinsopp).

Other recent scholars have cast doubt upon the existence of the entire J tradition as a unified source that arose in the pre-exilic era (Van Seters 1975; Schmid; Rendtorff; Rose; Whybray: 43-131). They attribute it to an exilic historian whose efforts later became the prologue to the pre-existing Deuteronomistic History. John Van Seters and

Martin Rose still suggest J arose prior to the work of P Editors (Van Seters 1983, 1992, 1994, 1998: 3-49; Rose), but Joseph Blenkinsopp locates this J history after the P redaction (Blenkinsopp), and Erhard Blum believes that J arose in a complex relationship with Deuteronomic material (1984, 1990). But when all is said and done, most contemporary authors and biblical theologians still tend to refer to these texts as J (Hiebert), or at least they call these texts "non-P." Thus, David Carr (1996) believes that the "non-P" author wove loose Yahwistic and Elohist oral fragments together into a unified work, and no separate organized Yahwist or Elohist existed in a self-contained form.

Most biblical theologians distinguish the theology of these respective J and P texts, and they see value in comparing the two theological traditions. A few have argued, however, that the material eventually arose as a unity, even though the author might have used various pre-existing fragments. They say it is best for us to stress the unity of the final text before us when doing biblical theology, rather than the hypothetical sources reconstructed by scholars (Lira). Ultimately, no consensus has emerged about the division or the dating of the J and P materials. Commentators still treat the J texts as related texts which function as the core narrative, and P texts are viewed in a dialectical relationship. For an overall theological assessment, however, it may be best to consider Genesis 1-11 as a unity when possible in order to capture the message that the final redactor wished to communicate.

Patterns in the Primeval History

Once commentators move beyond the intense discussion of the source and tradition history of the texts, they often provide us with excellent theological interpretations. Commentators have observed the powerful interplay between human sin and divine forgiveness.

Two generations ago some scholars delineated a pattern of divine grace, human sin, punishment, intended or received, and divine forgiveness. The pattern would be: Grace--creation of the man and woman and their placement in the garden (Gen 2:4b-24), the birth of sons (Gen 4:1-2), increase of population prior to the flood (Gen 6:1), land fertility after the flood (Gen 9:20-21), and increase of population after the flood (Gen 11:1-2); Sin--rebellion and desire to be like God or the gods (Gen 3:1-19), envy and murder by Cain (Gen 4:3-8), intermarriage with gods and social violence on the earth (Gen 6:2-4), Ham "sees" his father (Gen 9:22), and rebellion and pride of the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:3-4); Punishment--expulsion from the garden (Gen 3:22-24), exile from farmable land (Gen 4:9-14), flood (Gen 6:5-8:19), curse on Canaan (Gen 9:24-25), and dispersal over the

earth (Gen 11:5-9); and Forgiveness--clothing, names, and children for the man and the woman (Gen 3:20-21, 4:1-2), mark of Cain (Gen 4:15-16), survival of one family during the flood (Gen 8:1-9:17), blessings for Shem and Japhet (Gen 9:26-27), and the call of Abram after the Babel incident (Gen 12:1-3) (von Rad: 1:136-65; Fretheim; Gros Louis: 51). Though perhaps not all would agree with this breakdown of the text, most would recognize the dialectical relation of human sin and divine forgiveness in the narratives.

More recently in the past generation a number of authors have highlighted the literary and theological parallels between various stories within Genesis 2-11. Often such scholars see the numerous similarities between the narratives about Adam and his descendants over against Noah and his descendants. Some have seen three-way parallels between Adam, Cain, and Noah and their respective descendants. Such motifs include the following.

- * Both Adam and Noah were primeval ancestors of humanity (Gen 2:7, 9:20).
- * Adam was created from the ground (Gen 2:7-8), Cain worked the ground (Gen 4:2), and Noah brought relief from the curse on the ground (Gen 5:29) and was removed from the ground by flood.
- * Animals were in Eden and in the ark "according to their kind."
- * Animals and people were safe first in a garden and later in an ark.
- * Adam lived with the animals, Noah was permitted to eat them (Gen 9:2).
- * Adam ate fruit in the garden (Gen 2:17), Cain produced grain (Gen 4:2), and Noah drank wine from his vineyard (Gen 9:20-21).
- * Consumption of fruit by Adam and wine by Noah led to trouble for both.
- * "Eyes were opened" for both Adam and Noah (Gen 3:7, 9:22) and nakedness seen (Gen 3:7, 9:22).
- * Adam and Eve gained knowledge (Gen 3:7), Cain denied knowledge of his brother (Gen 4:9), and Noah lost knowledge while drunk (Gen 9:21).
- * After the human sin, God "came down" in Eden and at Babel (Gen 3:8, 11:5). * In Eden (Gen 3:14-19), with the first brothers (Gen 4:11-12), and at Babel there came curses (Gen 9:25-27).

* Although Adam and Cain were cursed by God, Canaan was cursed by a human, Noah, which implies the rise of human autonomy and the withdrawal of God.

* Adam and Noah were told to increase in population as they respectively left the garden and the ark.

* Both ancestors had eponymous children (Gen 4:1-2, 9:18).

* Both ancestors had three children, one of whom was cursed.

* Their children farmed. (Gen 4:3, 9:20).

* Children were divided or fought each other (Gen 4:4-8, 9:21-23).

* A curse fell upon one child, a brother (Gen 4:11-12, 9:25-26).

* The one cursed was expelled (Gen 4:16, 9:27).

* Adam's family gave rise to city culture (through Cain) (Gen 4:17-24), and Noah's family gave rise to national groups (Gen 10).

* The first world was destroyed by a flood, the second world was permitted to exist after Babel's sin because God saw that people were naturally sinful (Gen 8:21-22). And finally,

* God feared the distinction between human and divine would be blurred (Gen 3:22-24, 11:6).

In fact, this divine concern arose three times: God feared "they will be like us" in knowledge and immortality (Gen 3:22), God feared the semi-divine beings (Gen 6:1-4), and God feared "nothing will be impossible for them" (Gen 11:6). So God exiled people from the garden (setting a boundary) (Gen 3:23-24), limited their age to 120 years (setting a temporal limit) (Gen 6:3), and confused their tongues (preventing a united uprising) (Gen 11:7-9).

Whereas the second time God destroyed them all with a flood, the third time God tolerated them and allowed them to build separate civilizations. Throughout these accounts God appears to become more distant and people become morally autonomous. Adam and Eve denied their sin before God, Cain accepted that he sinned, and finally Noah took the place of God in the confrontation with Ham and Canaan and uttered the curse in God's place (Gros Louis: 37-52; Sasson: 211-19; R. Cohn: 4-6; Niditch: 11-69; Carr: 234-40). Devora Steinmetz sees a tri-partite division

of Adam, Cain, and Noah (Steinmetz), while Richard Elliott Friedman sees the theme of the gradual disappearance of God from these narratives throughout the Pentateuch (7-140).

A third approach to understanding the progression of narrative in Genesis 2-11 has been to compare it with the narrative material in the Babylonian account, the Atrahasis Myth, for the plot sequence is quite similar and divergences appear to be an attempt on the part of the biblical author to critique Mesopotamian understandings from the perspective of the biblical worldview. In general, the Atrahasis Myth and Genesis 2-11 share a number of common features, including the following motifs.

- * People are created from the ground (Gen 2:7).
- * People are created to till the ground (Gen 2:7-8).
- * A chance exists for human immortality (Gen 2:9, 3:22-24).
- * Sexuality and marriage are created (Gen 2:24).
- * A goddess for a woman is named "mother of life" (Gen 3:20).
- * People reproduce rapidly.
- * People rebel against the god(s).
- * People are killed in Atrahasis or exiled eastward in the Bible (Gen 2:24, 4:10-16).
- * A flood kills most of humanity.
- * A hero and his family survives.
- * Sacrifice pleases the god(s) (Gen 8:20-22). (12) The god(s) accepts the nature of humanity (Gen 8:21). And finally,
- * People repopulate the world (Gen 9:18-27, 10:1-11:19) (Frymer-Kensky: 147-55, Oden: 210-15; Batto: 51-52).

All of these are fine ways to assess the Primeval History, but there are other modes of analysis which may interpret the text in an equally meaningful fashion, for these particular biblical texts are rich with meaning. I would propose that a theme that permeates the narratives is one which critiques the assumptions of kingship and affirms the basic equality of human beings before God and in society.

Genesis 1-2

The most significant text that speaks of human equality, especially in reaction to the so-called superior status of kings is found in Genesis 1:26-28. In this text God is said to have made both the man and the woman (not just the man, as some people seem to think) in the divine "image" and "likeness" and given them the power to "rule" and have "dominion" over the world.

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

In the ancient Near East terminology such as the "image" of the god or the "likeness" of the god were metaphors used to characterize the king, especially in Mesopotamia, where the king was the representative of the gods upon the earth. Literally, the terms meant statues, and the implication was that the king was the visible "likeness" of the deity upon the earth. Likewise, the king was said to "rule" or have "dominion" over both the world and his people, as it was given to him by the gods or by the leader of the gods. The powerful implication of this biblical language is that now the man and the woman, who symbolize all of humanity, are said to be kings (and queens). The old concepts are radically democratized by the biblical text, for now all human beings are said to be in the image of God. This is a major shift in ideology, for it moves away from old traditional royal ideologies to a new egalitarian

one in which the common people are elevated to the status of the king and given not only royal status but perhaps even the old mythic semi-divine status once accorded to kings. (Such appears to be the implication of Psalm 8, a text related to Genesis 1, which speaks of people being only a little less than God or the gods.) Perhaps such a new reconfiguration became possible in the exilic and post-exilic era for Jewish intellectuals, particularly the priests, once their own institution of kingship had disappeared (Smith 2001: 169-71). This gives tremendous dignity and responsibility to all human beings regardless of social distinction. Their responsibilities entail protection of the land. They are not to struggle with the created order, but they are to struggle to protect the created order. Previously, such was seen to be the task of kings. Now such dignity and responsibility are attributed to all human beings (Vawter: 55-60; Westermann: 151-61; Loning & Zenger: 108-11). Accordingly, the special position of power and privilege held by kings is undercut.

This theme is furthered in Genesis 2, where the man and the woman are placed into the garden. The creation of garden was another prerogative of Mesopotamian kings who brought plants and animals from all over their empires and placed them into special royal gardens. The metaphor of the king's garden is applied also to the king's rule over his empire, for the king turns the entire land into his garden by wise rule. In Genesis 2 Yahweh is clearly the king who creates such a garden for divine pleasure, but then Genesis 2 also attributes some ruling function to the man and the woman as representatives of all humanity (Brueggemann; Wyatt: 10-21).

The man names the animals and thus engages in an important creative function, even though scholars debate as to the degree to which this makes the man a co-creator with God (Vawter: . 74). His naming of the animals, however, at least signifies his importance in ordering the garden, which makes him appear to perform a function similar to the role of kings as gardeners for the gods. If we take the image from Mesopotamian political mythology, we may metaphor Yahweh as the king, or we may view Yahweh as the high god and the man (and woman) as representing the king on earth.

Critical scholarship assumes that the account in Genesis 2 is older than that of Genesis 1. In its original form Genesis 2 may have had the idea of portraying the man, not as a king, but rather as a being who lives in harmonious relationship to Yahweh and works with Yahweh. However, when the later text in Genesis 1 was added by Priestly writers in the Babylonian Exile or beyond, the democratizing of royal epithets in Genesis 1 makes the reader more likely to see the image of the garden in Genesis 2 as a royal park, Yahweh as the king who creates the garden, and the man (and woman) as sharing in those royal attributes of creation and rule, especially in the animal

naming process. If the suggestion in the previous paragraph is correct, then Genesis I may lead the reader to view the Scene in Genesis 2 as follows: Eden is the royal garden or the world, Yahweh represents the pantheon of Mesopotamian gods, and the man and the women rule the garden on Yahweh's behalf, functioning like the Mesopotamian king.

These are all powerful statements to make in the ancient world where the assumption of the great cultures is that the king (or pharaoh) is either divine, as in Egypt where pharaoh was Horus and the son of Osiris, or a representative of the gods who could be adopted as divine, as in Mesopotamia. Now the biblical text declares that everyman and everywoman are equal to the king, and obviously equal to each other.

Genesis 4-11

In Genesis 4 Cain goes to the land of Nod, in the east, after killing his brother and receives the mark of protection from God. Often commentators assume that Cain went to the east, that is, the land of the Transjordan, which is east of Israel. But the biblical author may be pointing even further east, to the land of Mesopotamia, where the ancients lived (including those who built the tower of Babel). Mesopotamia would be a good candidate, because there were indeed cities there in the river valley, and the text later speaks of how Cain founded a city. Our biblical author elsewhere hints that the earliest cities were in Mesopotamia or Shinar.

If the reference to the east does hint at Mesopotamia and the land of cities, we may observe the sarcasm of the biblical author. The first murderer goes to Mesopotamia, the land that sent forth murderous armies from Assyria and Chaldean Babylon to destroy the people of Israel. Cain "invents" cities, cities which are the source of human pride, greed, and oppression. Perhaps we also sense the biblical author's antipathy toward cities, with their kings and their priests, who rule people in tyrannical fashion. The tyranny of the cities in Mesopotamia is a theme that will return in the story about the tower of Babel.

In the ancient Sumerian King List there are a number of heroes who lived before the flood, who lived for thousands of years, and who functioned as kings over the ante-diluvian peoples (Oppenheim: 265-66). The biblical text responds with its own list and ante-diluvian figures, the two lists of the descendents of Cain (Gen 4:17-25) and Seth (Gen 5:1-32). (Interestingly enough both lists contain the same names, perhaps implying that we are the descendents of both the bad Cainites and the good Sethites, which means we are a combination of good and evil.) But for our purposes it should be noted that none of the biblical personages lived more than a 1000 years; only

Methuselah came close with 969 years. The point of the biblical author is that these personages died "young" because they were not divine or semi-divine kings, as the Mesopotamians claimed. The youngest of the Mesopotamian heroes died at 36,000 years. Mesopotamian heroes, who were kings, lived so long because they were semi-divine. The subtle undercurrent in the text is that later Mesopotamian kings shared at least in the semi-divine status, even if the longevity were lost. In response, the biblical text declares that the ante-diluvian personages were mortal and died "young." Furthermore, the biblical personages were not kings, but apparently pastoralists. From this perspective the biblical text is undermining the ideology of kingship by denying the royal and semi-divine status of the so-called earliest kings.

It appears that the biblical author is making a political and religious statement over against Mesopotamian traditions about the ante-diluvian kings. The Mesopotamians claim that these great personages were kings of semi-divine origin. The ancients often claimed their kings were semi-divine or sons of the high god. This, of course, gave added authority to the power of the king. The biblical author responds by calling this nonsense. Instead, the biblical author maintains that the pre-flood personages were not kings, but simple shepherds. Furthermore, the biblical author gives life spans to these people to show that they were not divine or semi-divine; they were simply humans who lived a long time. None of the biblical figures lived more than 1000 years; Methuselah tried his best, but even he fell short of the magic number. That means none of them were divine. So the biblical author gives the biblical personages "short" life spans to deny their divinity and thereby attacks the concept of divine or semi-divine kings. Hence, when modern readers of the Bible ask why did these people live so long, the answer is that they really lived "short" lives because they were simply mortal, not divine.

A person of interest in the list is Enoch, the seventh patriarchal figure, who was said to have walked with God and was taken by God, or translated to heaven. This reminds us of Elijah, who also was taken to heaven alive in a fiery chariot. The usual interpretation is that Enoch was taken alive into the heavenly realm without dying, though there are some references to his death. This assumption into heaven, of course, gave rise to great speculation in the later Jewish tradition, so that by the 2nd century BCE Enoch was envisioned as a great seer and wise sage who was drawn up into the heavenly realm and permitted to see the future. His visions of the future emerge in several writings most of which were drawn together in the book of Enoch (we call it 1 Enoch). Other literature that bears his name also has developed out of a complex set of traditions about this heavenly seer. Enoch is mentioned in documents from Qumran from the 2nd century BCE, including some fragments of 1 Enoch. In the Apocryphal or Deutero-canonical book of Sirach, Enoch's perfection is mentioned (Sir 44:16), and in the Apocryphal or Deutero-

canonical Wisdom of Solomon, Enoch is the example of a righteous man in whom the wisdom of the age came to fruition during his youth (even though he died). In the Second Testament Enoch is seen as a man of faith who did not die (Heb 11:5-6).

Enoch lived for 365 years before God took him according to Genesis 5:22-24, and that is the number of days in a year. This has prompted modern scholars to compare him to Enmeduranna or Enmeduranki who was listed above in the Sumerian King List. Both personages were seventh in their succession of ante-diluvian heroes.

Enmeduranna, the Sumerian, taught divinatory rites by the sun god, and his adviser, Utuabzu (who was seventh on a list of antediluvian sages) was said to have ascended to heaven (Hess: 2:508). This is too much similarity to be a coincidence. Enoch seems to combine characteristics of both Mesopotamia figures.

The figure of Enoch spoofs the Mesopotamian king Enmeduranna somehow and for some specific reason.

Enmeduranna was a sage king with great wisdom obtained from the sun God; Enoch was a wise sage (at least according to later Jewish literature), who had a prominent place in heaven (also according to later Jewish tradition), but he was not a king. Perhaps this is another critique of kingship. It is likely that there is more biblical critique of Mesopotamian belief involved here, but we have to guess at what it is. (Perhaps, because Israelites had been prone to worship the sun as a deity, and both Israelites and even later Judeans were tempted to equate Yahweh with the sun [Smith, 1990: 115-34; Taylor], this story is meant to criticize sun veneration in some way.)

The ending to the biblical account of the flood contains critiques of Mesopotamian kingship. This is true of both the Yahwist ending in Gen 8:21-22, which promises that Yahweh will never destroy the world again, and the Priestly conclusion to the expanded flood narrative in Gen 9:1-17, which reiterates intensely God's promise not to flood the world. The entire biblical account of the flood appears to be a parody on Mesopotamian beliefs in many ways, especially the narratives about Ziusudra, Atrahasis, and Utnapishtim--the various Babylonian Noahs. But these endings critique Mesopotamian kingship in particular ways.

First, Mesopotamians engaged in complex religious rites at the New Year Akiti or Akitu festival, led by their priests and the king, to avoid another flood. By these rituals they gave strength to Marduk, the god of Babylon, to defeat the power of chaos, the evil goddess of water, Tiamat, every year and thus avert the destruction of Babylon by floods. The possible re-enactment of this drama, which may have featured the king annually in the role of Marduk, gave tremendous psychological legitimation to the king as the representative of the divine realm. When the biblical

narrative declares that a flood will never happen again, it makes the Babylonians and their king look foolish with this superfluous ritual.

In the second place, the hero of the flood in one account, Ziusudra, is a king. His reception of the gift of immortality for surviving the flood further adds credibility to the divine status of the king. (Atrahasis and Utnapishtim also receive immortality in their versions of the account.) In the biblical account, however, Noah is not a king, and he receives no immortality after the flood; rather, the blessing of God is for all people--the curse on the ground is removed (Gen 8:21) and people are enabled to eat meat (Gen 9:2-4), as well as promised no more flood. This further debunks the status of primordial heroes who could be seen as ancient kings.

The symbolic story of the building of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is another anti-royal account. The sin of the tower builders is their desire to storm the heavens and make a name for themselves, which symbolically means that they seek to invade the divine realm and become immortal like the gods. Thus, they would avert the destruction of another flood sent by the gods, or they can avoid being scattered by Yahweh, as the text declares in v 4. Put in other terms, the sin of the builders is tremendous pride, the desire to be like the gods, which in the opinion of biblical authors is the sin of the Mesopotamian kings.

Mesopotamian kings considered it one of their chief duties to build temple ziggurats in their cities. Especially great ziggurats were built by Ur-Nammu in Ur (2000 BCE), Hammurabi in Babylon (1750 BCE), and Nebuchadnezzar I in Babylon (1100 BCE). Nabonidus engaged in numerous temple and shrine rebuilding projects in Ur, Babylon, and Harran (550 BCE). Of special interest is the temple ziggurat, the Entemenanki, in Babylon, which was built by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in the mid-7th century BCE, rebuilt by the Chaldean Babylonian king Nabopolassar in the late 7th century BCE, and refurbished by two Chaldean Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus, in the early and mid-6th century BCE. Mesopotamian ziggurats were cosmic mountains that reached to the heavens, and the worshipping individuals--the king and priests--who could build and ascend such mountains--had their authority on this world legitimated by such activity. Of special interest is the activity of Nebuchadnezzar in building a great temple in Babylon, the Etemenanki, for in his royal inscriptions he bragged of how he brought people from all over his empire to work on that building construction (Van Seters 1994: 182-84; Smith-Christopher: 67). Those peoples obviously would have included Judeans exiled after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

In response to such Mesopotamian imagery and obvious architectural propaganda, the biblical author painted a story of human pride and divine punishment to ridicule such Babylonian pretensions to power and self-proclaimed

divinity. Yahweh comes down to the tower, the ziggurat, the cosmic mountain, and scatters the builders by confusing their language. Yahweh comes down to view the tower, not because he lost his bifocals, but because the tower was too small to be seen from the heavens. This is humorous satire by the biblical author on how truly insignificant the so-called great works of the Babylonian kings really were. Nabonidus, in particular, may have been the target of criticism, because at the end of his reign Jews returned home. In later years Nabonidus would be the inspiration for the insane king (Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon) in Daniel 4. In Genesis 11 people scatter to the ends of the earth. In general, the Genesis 11 motif may symbolize the release of captive peoples after the collapse of empires and the end of forced labor at building projects.

Thus, the Primeval History contains powerful symbolic narratives that function with many levels of meaning. One of the several important motifs, which run through the narratives, is the critique of kings, and especially the arrogant claims of kings in Mesopotamia.

Conclusions

I do not seek to reject other interpretations and approaches to Genesis 1-11, but I do believe these texts are polyvalent; that is, they carry many levels of meaning and religious truth. We have plumbed the depths of these texts for years, and we still may find poignant meanings within them. I believe we have not focused sufficiently upon the egalitarian themes: the proclamation of human equality and the repudiation of kingship with all the ideational and social values connection to that institution in the ancient world.

The consistent critique of kings throughout these stories may have emerged from the hands of a Yahwist author and/ or Priestly Editor during the Babylonian Exile of the 6th century BCE, when Jews found themselves under the heel of imperial Babylonian rule. John Ball saw that message clearly over 600 years ago; may we see it so clearly today.

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