

## **The Origin of Biblical Beliefs about God, Humans, Good and Evil**

Four of the most powerful beliefs are *gods, humans, good (right) and evil (wrong)*. The reason we came to that conclusion is that they have been and still are major factors in human conflicts. Simply look at the issues dividing Americans today and you will find disagreements over beliefs about *god, humans, what's good (right) and what's evil (wrong)*.

*Instead of digging into the earth like archaeologists, we dig into stories beginning with the stories in the Bible to understand how our beliefs originated and changed over time.* We use a linguistic approach of exploring the words of the Bible. The first two stories in *Genesis* lay the foundation for understanding *God, humans, good (right) and evil (wrong)*.

Our first challenge is identifying the sources of words in biblical texts. We do this in order to understand what the words meant to them first. In the ancient world the people that wrote words were scribes. Often, they received those words orally from others, but scribes wrote for other scribes, who would share them with others orally. The first group of scribes related to the stories in *Genesis* were captives or descendants of captives who were taken from the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They received their scribal training in Babylon, most likely in the temples of Babylonian gods.

As we progressed through the text of *Genesis* it was clear that these stories built on previous stories. For example, in order to understand the story of Cain and Able, we must be familiar with the Story of the Garden of Eden. In order to understand the story of Noah, we must be familiar with the story of Lamech a descendant of Cain.

But, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, no one knew about another group of stories that those ancient scribes knew very well. They were the stories of the Babylonians and Persians. They were written on cuneiform tablets and they had been buried beneath desert sands and forgotten. One of the most important stories related to Babylon is *Enuma Elish – the Babylonian Creation Story*. It begins with these words:

*“When on high heaven was not named,  
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,  
And the primeval Apsû, who begat them,  
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both,—  
Their waters were mingled together,  
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;  
When of the gods none had been called into being,  
And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained] . . . .”*

## ***Exploring Our Biblical Heritages***

Mesopotamians were hearing that story long before Abraham was born (19<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and it was still being told when the scribes from Judah wrote the words below on their scroll:

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
The earth was without form and void;  
Darkness was on the face of the deep.  
The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.”*

The words above are from *Genesis 1:1-2* and they are directly related to the words of *Enuma Elish*. However, in order to lay the foundation for understanding *god, humans, good (right) and evil (wrong)*, another story was required. This is how it begins:

*“In the day that Yahweh the God made the earth and the heavens,  
before any plant of the field was in the earth  
and before any herb of the field had grown.  
For Yahweh the God had not caused it to rain on the earth,  
And there was no man to till the ground.”*

The words above are from *Genesis 2:4b-5*. The first story in Genesis is linked to *Enuma Elish* and the second story is linked to the first story, as well as other Mesopotamian stories. But, the foundational biblical beliefs about *god, humans, good (right) and evil (wrong)* are revealed in the Bible's first two stories and they existed over a thousand years before the founding of *Rabbinic Judaism*, *Roman Catholicism* and *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* – and two-thousand years before *Protestantism*.

*Many conflicts today are linked to beliefs about god, humans, good (right) and evil (wrong) created by those Christian and Jewish institutions.*

By creating transparency in belief systems through our linguistic approach, we are able to understand how beliefs originated and changed after the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as well as identify who changed them and why.

This is the first in a series of *Exploring Our Biblical Heritages Educational Emails* designed to help people understand the relationships of the stories above.

Shalom,  
Jim Myers

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