

This is What Makes the Hebrew Culture Different

Dr. John Walton's book, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, provides a great overview of this subject. Much of the information below is from his book (p. 157).

The cultures of the Arabs, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Babylonians, and Assyrians shared the following:

- An ordered cosmos focused on **the world of the gods**.
- Organization had been brought to the divine realm through **the birth of deities and assignment of roles in the ordered world**.
- The gods **lived in society with hierarchical structures** by which **they related and operated**. The equivalent of civilization existed at the divine level.
- When people were created by the gods, **the people were a nameless mass that shared in the established order of the gods**, and benefited or suffered by it.

The culture of the Hebrews, which can be seen in the Torah and the Prophets, reveals how different they were from the nations above.

- Elohim, the unnamed Creator, was not born or created.
- Elohim did not create any gods.
- There are no divine social or hierarchical structures in the heavens.
- **Elohim created humans to perform functions that gods performed in other cultures**.
- Elohim created humans to be caretakers over all life on earth, including each other's lives.
- Elohim did this by making an Alliance, an everlasting covenant, with all humans.

The Alliance of Elohim (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a)

1. Relationship of Elohim and Humans

- A. Elohim is the father.
- B. The two humans are collectively His "son."

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- C. Through the “creation,” Elohim provide all of the basic requirements for all living things in the “creation.”
- D. Humans are to be fruitful and multiply (creating their own kind). They are to function as parents (father and mother) who teach and mentor their children on how to walk with Elohim.
- E. Humans are collectively Elohim’s Representatives over life on the earth, in the seas, and in the open area above the earth and the seas.
- F. Humans shall collectively exercise power over living things like a shepherd over Elohim’s creation.
- G. Humans shall collectively and individually measure their actions by Elohim’s *Tov Standard*: actions must protect, preserve, and make lives more functional, while increasing the quality of life.
- H. The Seventh Day is set apart from the other six days for humans to gather and retell *Elohim’s Wisdom*.

2. Relationships of Humans

- A. Humans are to cooperate and act together to fulfill the collective obligations above.
- B. Male and female are “equals” in the eyes of Elohim.
- C. Individual humans have earthly appetites, desires, and longings, just like all creatures with an earth soul. But humans have the power to exercise impulse control, self-discipline, and also help each other do this.
- D. All humans are collectively “**the image of Elohim**.” They have the Presence of Elohim with them. Male and female are attributes of Elohim that empower humans to speak, create, and make things.

The information above contains the “**Lives 1st Standard and Values**.” Interpretations of *the Torah and the Prophets* (Jewish Scriptures) will provide a deeper understanding of them, as well as instructions for how to do them.

Jesus taught over 300 years before the Roman Catholic Church began; over 400 years before Rabbinic Judaism began, and about 600 years before Islam. The teachings of Jesus that we have are much closer to that Semitic origin, than Rabbinic Judaism or Islam.

Shalom,
Jim Myers, President
Biblical Heritage Center, Inc.

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