

Doublets and Contradictions, Seams and Sources: Genesis 5-11 and the Historical-Critical Method

Lecture 4 Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rkst-145/lecture-4>

Overview

This lecture continues the discussion on Genesis, including the familiar accounts of Cain and Abel, the Flood and Noahide covenant. The story of Cain and Abel expresses the notion of the God-endowed sanctity of human life and a “universal moral law” governing the world. Examination of the contradictions and doublets in the flood story leads to a discussion of the complex composition and authorship of the Pentateuch. These features as well as anachronisms challenge traditional religious convictions of Moses as the author of the first five books of the Bible.

1. *The Taming of Enkidu in The Epic of Gilgamesh*

- [1] *Professor Christine Hayes:* So, last time I gave a reading of the creation accounts that are in Genesis 1 to 3. These are two very different stories but their placement side by side suggests the possibility of a joint reading. Nevertheless they are very different in character, and today I want to focus in on the second creation story. This is a story that is predominantly in Genesis 2 and trickles into Genesis 3, and I’m going to look at it mostly in isolation from the first account. I’m going to be looking at it in light of an important parallel. This parallel is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* — I get to point this way now, to the boards, okay? *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and I’ll be drawing on the work of many scholars, Nahum Sarna probably most prominently among them, but others also who have devoted themselves to the study of these textual parallels, and developing an interpretation of these stories. I’d like you to carry that with you into your discussion sections as you look at some of the other interpretations from antiquity and on into the modern period.
- [2] Now *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is a magnificent Mesopotamian epic that relates the exploits of a Sumerian king, King Gilgamesh of Uruk. That’s the name of the city-state over which he is king. And the epic as we now have it was probably composed between 2000 and 1800 BCE. Gilgamesh was apparently a historical character,

an actual king of Uruk, but the story of course has fantastic and legendary qualities to it. We have a full text of the epic that was located in the library of Assurbanipal, an Assyrian king. It’s a seventh century copy of the story. But we have fragments that are much, much older (that date back to the eighteenth century) that were found in Iraq. So clearly it’s an old story and we have even older prototypes for elements of the story as well.

- [3] The story opens with a description of Gilgamesh. He’s an extremely unpopular king. He’s tyrannical, he’s rapacious, he’s undisciplined, he’s over-sexed. The people in the city cry out to the gods. They want relief from him. They particularly cite his abuses towards the young women of the city. And the god Aruru is told that she must deal with Gilgamesh. Aruru is on the board.
- [4] So Aruru fashions this noble savage named Enkidu. Enkidu is designed to be a match for Gilgamesh, and he’s very much like the biblical human in Genesis 2. He’s sort of an innocent primitive, he appears unclothed, he lives a free, peaceful life in harmony with the animals, with nature and the beasts, he races across the steppes with the gazelles. But before he can enter the city and meet Gilgamesh he has to be tamed.
- [5] So a woman is sent to Enkidu and her job is to provide the sexual initiation that will tame and civilize Enkidu. I’m reading now from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Pritchard 1958, 40-75):

[6] For six days and seven nights Enkidu comes forth,
 mating with the lass.
 After he had had (his) fill of her charms,
 He set his face toward his wild beasts.
 On seeing him, Enkidu, the gazelles ran off,
 The wild beasts of the steppe drew away
 from his body.
 Startled was Enkidu, as his body became
 taut.
 His knees were motionless — for his wild
 beasts had gone.
 Enkidu had to slacken his pace — it was not
 as before;
 But he now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader
 understanding.
 Returning, he sits at the feet of the harlot.

[7] I'm not sure why that translation [harlot]. I've been told by those who know Akkadian that the word could mean "harlot/prostitute," it could mean some sacred prostitute... I'm not an expert in Akkadian. But:

[8] He looks up at the face of the harlot,
 His ears attentive, as the harlot speaks;
 [The harlot] says to him, to Enkidu:
 "Thou art [wi]se, Enkidu, art become like a
 god!
 Why with the wild creatures dost thou
 roam over the steppe?
 Come, let me lead thee [to] ramparted Uruk,
 To the holy Temple, abode of Anu and
 Ishtar,
 Where lives Gilgamesh, accomplished in
 strength
 And like a wild ox lords it over the folk."
 As she speaks to him, her words find favor,
 His heart enlightened, he yearns for a
 friend.
 Enkidu says to her, to the harlot:
 "Up lass, escort thou me (to Gilgamesh)...
 I will challenge him [and will bo]ldly
 address him."

[9] So that's tablet I from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

[10] So through this sexual experience Enkidu has become wise, growing in mental and spiritual stature, and he is said to have become like a god. At the same time there's been a concomitant loss of innocence. His harmonious unity with nature is broken, he clothes himself, and his old friends the gazelles run from him now. He will never again roam free with the animals. He cannot run as quickly. His pace slackens, he can't even keep

up with them. So as one reads the epic one senses this very deep ambivalence regarding the relative virtues and evils of civilized life, and many of the features that make us human. On the one hand it's clearly good that humans rise above the animals and build cities and wear clothes and pursue the arts of civilization and develop bonds of love and duty and friendship the way that animals do not; these are the things that make humans like the gods in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. But on the other hand these advances have also come at a cost. And in this story there's also a sense of longing for the freedom of life in the wild — the innocent, simple, uncomplicated life lived day to day without plans, without toil, in harmony with nature, a somewhat Edenic existence.

[11] Chapter 2. The Story of Enkidu as Parallel to the Second Story of Creation in Genesis [00:05:44]

2. *The Story of Enkidu as Parallel to the Second Story of Creation in Genesis*

[12] So there are very obvious parallels between this part of the epic that I've just read to you and our second creation story. Enkidu like Adam is fashioned from clay. He's a noble savage, he's a kind of innocent primitive, and he lives in a peaceful co-existence with animals. Nature yields its fruits to him without hard labor. He's unaware of — he's unattracted by — the benefits of civilization: clothing, cities and all their labor. Just as Enkidu gains wisdom and becomes like a god, and loses his oneness with nature, so Adam and Eve after eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil are said to have become like gods, and they also lose their harmonious relationship with nature. In Genesis 3:15, God says to the snake:

[13] "I will put enmity
 Between you and the woman,
 And between your offspring and hers;
 They shall strike at your head,
 And you shall strike at their heel."

[14] Presumably there had been a peaceful relationship between creatures like snakes and humans to that point. They [humans] are banished now from the Garden. It used to yield its fruits to them without any labor, but now humans have to toil for food and the earth yields

its fruits only stintingly. So in Genesis 3:18, God says to Adam:

[15]“Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it
All the days of your life:
Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
But your food shall be the grasses of the
field;
By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat”

[16]So knowledge or wisdom or perhaps moral freedom, seem to come at a very high price.

[17]But there are important differences between these stories too. And the most important has to do with the nature of the act that leads to the transformation of the human characters. It's Enkidu's sexual experience, his seven-day encounter with the woman that makes him wise and godlike at the cost of his life with the beasts. There has been a long tradition of interpreting the deed or the sin of Adam and Eve as sexual, and there are some hints in the story that would support such an interpretation. I was just reading recently a scholarly introduction to Genesis that very much argues and develops this interpretation. Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in violation of God's command. Now eating can perhaps be a metaphor for sex, some have argued. Knowledge of good and evil — perhaps that could be understood in sexual terms. In biblical Hebrew the word “to know” can mean “to know” in the biblical sense. It can mean sexual intercourse. Snakes are symbols of renewed life and fertility in the East because they shed their skins so they seem to be eternally young; and they're also phallic symbols. Eve says that the snake seduced her. [She] uses a term that has some sexual overtones.

[18]So do all of these hints suggest that, in the biblical view, the change in Adam and Eve came about through sex? If so, is sex a negative thing forbidden by God? It would depend if you view the change as a negative thing. That seems unlikely in my view. You will certainly hear it argued, but it seems unlikely in my view. God's first command to the first couple was to be fruitful and multiply. Now admittedly that comes from the first creation story in Genesis 1; nevertheless in the second creation story when the writer is recounting the creation of woman, the writer refers to the fact that man and woman

will become one flesh. So it seems that sex was part of the plan for humans even at creation.

[19]Also, it's only after their defiance of God's command that Adam and Eve first become aware of, and ashamed by, their nakedness, putting the sort of sexual awakening after the act of disobedience rather than at the same time or prior to. So maybe what we have here is another polemic, another adaptation of familiar stories and motifs to express something new. Perhaps for the biblical writer, Adam and Eve's transformation occurs after an act of disobedience, not after a seven-day sexual encounter.

[20]The disobedience happens in a rather backhanded way. It's kind of interesting. God tells Adam before the creation of Eve that he's not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that's in Genesis 2:16, on pain of death. Eve doesn't hear this command directly. She has not yet been created. In Genesis 3 we meet the cunning serpent, and although many later Hellenistic Jewish texts and the New Testament will identify the snake as a Satan, an enticer, a tempter, some sort of evil creature, he doesn't seem to be so in this fable. There's no real devil or Satan character — we'll talk about Job later — in the Hebrew Bible, the snake in Eden is simply a talking animal. He's a standard literary device that you see in fables of this period, and later — the kind that you find for example in the fables of Aesop. And the woman responds to the serpent's queries by saying that eating and even touching the tree is forbidden on pain of death.

[21]One wonders whence the addition of touching. Did Adam convey God's command to Eve with an emphasis all his own? “Don't even touch that tree, Eve. It's curtains for us if you do.” She didn't hear the original command. Or did she just mishear in some very tragic version of the telephone game. And the serpent tells her, No, “you are not going to die” if you touch or eat the fruit. In fact, he adds, the fruit will bring you wisdom making humans like gods who know good and bad. And in fact that's certainly true. He tells her the truth.

[22]Genesis 3:7 is a very critical verse and it's rarely properly translated. Most translations read like this: “She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband and he ate.” The implication is that Eve acts alone and then she goes and finds Adam and gives him some of the

apple and convinces him to eat it. But in fact the Hebrew literally reads, “She took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband *with her*, and he ate.” “With her” is a very teeny-tiny little word in Hebrew, so I guess a lot of translations figure they can leave it out. But the “with her” is there in the Hebrew. At that fateful moment, Adam and Eve are standing together at the tree, and although only the woman and the serpent speak, Adam was present, and it seems he accepted the fruit that his wife handed him. He was fully complicitous, and indeed God holds him responsible. He reproaches Adam. Adam says: Well, Eve handed it to me. She gave it to me. Eve explains, the serpent tricked me. God vents his fury on all three, and he does so in ascending order: first the snake for his trickery and then the woman, and finally the man.

[23] So just as the harlot tells Enkidu after his sexual awakening that he has become like a god, so Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit are said to be like divine beings. Why? Perhaps because they have become wise in that they have learned they have moral choice. They have free will, they can defy God and God’s plans for them in a way that animals and natural phenomena cannot. But now that means there is a serious danger here, and in Genesis 3:22, God says, “Now that man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil [bad], what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever?” So it’s the threat of an immortal antagonist that is so disturbing and must be avoided. And so God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden and he stations these *kerubim*, these cherubim — not puffy cute little babies like Raphael painted, but these fierce monstrous creatures — and a fiery, ever-turning sword to guard the way back to the tree of life. It is now inaccessible.

[24] So the acceptance of mortality as an inescapable part of the human condition: it’s a part of this story. It’s also one of the themes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As the story continues Enkidu enters the city and Enkidu earns Gilgamesh’s respect and deep love. This is the first time that this rapacious tyrant has ever actually loved anyone and his character is reformed as a result. And then the rest of the epic contains the adventures of these two close friends, all of the things that they do together. And when Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh is absolutely devastated. He’s for the first time confronted with his own mortality. He’s obsessed with grief over Enkidu, and he’s

obsessed with the whole issue of mortality. He begins a quest for immortality, and that takes up most of the rest of the epic. He leaves the city, he travels far and wide, he crosses these primeval seas and endures all sorts of hardships. And finally exhausted and battered he reaches Utnapishtim, also there on the board, Utnapishtim, who is the only mortal ever to have been granted immortality by the gods, and he comes to him and asks for his secret. It turns out that Utnapishtim can’t help him, and we’ll come back to Utnapishtim later in the flood story, and Gilgamesh is devastated. He then learns the whereabouts of a plant of eternal youth. And he says: Well that’s better than nothing. That at least will keep him young. And so he goes after the plant of eternal youth, but he’s negligent for a moment and a thieving snake or serpent manages to steal it and that explains why snakes are always shedding their skins and are forever young. Gilgamesh is exhausted, he feels defeated, he returns to Uruk, and as he stands looking at the city from a distance, gazing at it, he takes comfort in the thought that although humans are finite and frail and doomed to die, their accomplishments and their great works give them some foothold in human memory.

[25] Now Nahum Sarna is one of the people who has pointed out that the quest for immortality, which is so central in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, is really deflected in the biblical story. The tree of life is mentioned, and it’s mentioned with a definite article. Genesis 2:9 says, “with *the* tree of life in the middle of the garden,” as if this is a motif we’re familiar with, as if this is something we all know about. But then it’s really not mentioned again as the story proceeds. The snake, which in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is associated with the plant of eternal youth, in Genesis is associated instead with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That’s the focus of our attention in Genesis, and it’s only at the end of the story that the tree of life appears again in the passage that is emphasizing its permanent inaccessibility.

[26] And we could perhaps draw two conclusions from this. First it may be that Adam and Eve had access to this tree up to that point. As long as their will conformed to the will of God, there was no danger to their going on eternally, being immortal. Once they discovered their moral freedom, once they discovered that they could thwart God and work evil in the world, and abuse and corrupt all that God had created, then God could not afford to allow them access to the

tree of life. That would be tantamount to creating divine enemies, immortal enemies. So God must maintain the upper hand in his struggle with these humans who have learned to defy him. And he maintains the upper hand in this, the fact that they eventually must die. Second of all the motif of guards who block access to the tree of life suggests that no humans have access to immortality and the pursuit of immortality is futile. So it might be then that God really spoke the truth after all. The fruit did bring death to humankind.

[27] Before we leave this story and move onto Cain and Abel, I just want to make a couple of quick observations. First of all the opening chapters of Genesis, Genesis 1 through 3, have been subjected to centuries of theological interpretation, and I hope that you're in the midst of reading some of them now. They have generated for example the doctrine of original sin, which is the idea that humans after Adam are born into a state of sin, by definition. As many ancient interpreters already have observed, the actions of Adam and Eve bring death to the human race. They don't bring a state of utter and unredeemed sinfulness. In fact what they tell us is that humans have moral choice in each and every age. The story is primarily etiological rather than prescriptive or normative. We've talked about this: these etiological tales are tales that are trying to explain how or why something is the way it is. This is why serpents shed their skin, for example. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* they were the ones who got the plant of eternal youth. It's etiological. The writer observes that humans emerge from innocent childhood to self-conscious adulthood. The writer observes that survival is a difficult endeavor and that the world can sometimes seem harshly hostile. The writer observes that women are desirous of and emotionally bonded to the very persons who establish the conditions of their subordination. The story is explaining how these odd conditions of life came to be as they are, which is not to say that it's the ideal situation, or even that it's God's will for humankind; these are etiological fables, and they're best read as such.

[28] Second of all in this story we see something that we'll see repeatedly in the Pentateuch, and that is that God has to punt a bit. He has to modify his plans for the first couple, by barring access to the tree of life. That was not something presumably he planned to do. This is in response

to, perhaps, their unforeseen disobedience: certainly the way the story unfolds that's how it seems to us. So despite their newfound mortality, humans are going to be a force to be reckoned with. They're unpredictable to the very god who created them.

[29] Finally I'll just draw your attention to some interesting details that you can think about and maybe talk about in section. God ruminates that the humans have become like "one of *us*" in the plural. That echoes his words in Genesis 1 where he proposes, "Let *us* make humans," or humankind, "in our image." Again in the plural. Who is he talking to? And what precisely are these cherubim that are stationed in front of the tree of life barring access? What do we make of these allusions to divine colleagues or subordinates in light of Kaufman's claims regarding biblical monotheism? You should be bringing some of the things we talked about when discussing his work, into dialogue with and in conflict with some of the evidence you'll be finding in the text itself. So think about these things, don't pass over these details lightly, and don't take them for granted.

3. Major Themes in the Story of Cain and Abel

[30] The Cain and Abel story which is in Genesis 4:1 through 16: this is the story of the first murder, and it's a murder that happens despite God's warning to Cain that it's possible to master the urge to violence by an act of will. He says, "Sin couches at the door;/Its urge is toward you/Yet you can be its master," Genesis 4:7. Nahum Sarna and others have noted that the word "brother" occurs throughout this story repeatedly, and it climaxes in God's question, "Where is your *brother*, Abel?" And Cain responds, "I don't know; am I my *brother's* keeper?" And ironically you sense, when you read this that, even though Cain intends this as a rhetorical question — "Am I my brother's keeper?" — in fact, he's right on the money. Yes. We are all of us our brothers' keepers, and the strong implication of the story is as Sarna puts it, that all homicide is in fact fratricide. That seems to be the message of this story.

[31] Note also that Cain is culpable, and for someone to be culpable of something we have to assume some principle that they have violated. And therefore this story assumes the existence of

what some writers, Sarna among them, have called “the universal moral law.” There seems to be in existence from the beginning of creation this universal moral law, and that is: the God-endowed sanctity of human life. We can connect it with the fact that God has created humans in his own image, but the God-endowed sanctity of human life is an assumption, and it’s the violation of that assumption which makes Cain culpable.

[32]The story of Cain and Abel is notable for another theme, and this is a theme that’s going to recur in the Bible, and that is the tension between settled areas and the unsettled desert areas and desert life of the nomads. Abel is a keeper of sheep. He represents the nomadic pastoralist, unlike Cain who is the tiller of soil, so he represents more settled urban life. God prefers the offering of Abel, and as a result Cain is distressed and jealous to the point of murder. God’s preference for the offering of Abel valorizes the free life of the nomadic pastoralist over urban existence. Even after the Israelites will settle in their own land, the life of the desert pastoralist remained a sort of romantic ideal for them. It’s a theme that we’ll see coming up in many of the stories. It’s a romantic ideal for this writer too.

4. Comparing Mesopotamian, Semitic and Israelite Flood Stories

[33]Now the murder of Abel by Cain is followed by some genealogical lists. They provide some continuity between the tales. They tell us folkloric traditions about the origins of various arts, the origins of building, of metalwork and music, but finally in Genesis 6:5 we read that, “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart,” the human heart, “was evil continuously” [Revised Standard Version translation]. And this sets the stage then for the story of a worldwide flood.

[34]Now here again the Bible is making use of older traditions and motifs and adapting them to their own purposes. I’ve hinted at this already and we’ll look at it in a bit more detail now. We know of a very ancient Sumerian flood story. The hero is Ziusudra, also on the board. We also know of a very early Semitic work, the *Epic of Atrahasis*, in which there’s a flood. But the most detailed flood story we have actually comes

from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, on the eleventh tablet of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. You’ll remember that in his search for immortality Gilgamesh sought out Utnapishtim, the one human who had been granted immortality. He wants to learn his secret. And when he begs for the secret of eternal life he gets Utnapishtim’s story, and it’s the flood story. He learns that Utnapishtim and his wife gained their immortality by a twist of circumstances: they were the sole survivors of this great flood, and as a kind of reward they were given immortality.

[35]The Sumerian story of Ziusudra is very similar to the Genesis account. In both you have the flood coming about as the deliberate result of a divine decision; you have one individual who’s chosen to be saved from the flood; that individual is given specific instructions on building an ark, and is given specific instructions on who to bring on-board the ark. The ark also comes to rest on a mountaintop, the hero sends out a bird to reconnoiter the land, to find out if it’s dry yet. When the hero emerges he builds an altar. He offers sacrifice to the deity and receives a blessing. Very similar, parallel stories, and yet there are significant contrasts between the Mesopotamian story and its Israelite adaptation.

[36]Let’s compare some of the elements from all three of the stories with the biblical story. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* we have no motive given for the divine destruction whatsoever. It just seems to be pure capriciousness. In the *Epic of Atrahasis* we do in fact read of a reason, and the text there states, “The land became wide and the people became numerous. The land bellowed like wild oxen. The god was disturbed by their uproar. Enlil heard the clamor and said to the gods, “Oppressive has become the clamor of [hu]mankind. By their uproar they prevent sleep” [Pritchard 1950, 1955, 104]. So it seems that humankind is to be destroyed because they irritate the gods with their tumult and noise. In the Gilgamesh epic, Ea, an earth-water god, does ask another god, Enlil, how he could have brought the flood on so senselessly. He says, “Lay upon the sinner the sin; Lay upon the transgressor his transgression” [Pritchard 1950, 1955, 95], which would indicate that in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* there is this element of capriciousness.

[37]The biblical writer in retelling the story seems to want to reject this idea by providing a moral

rationale for God's actions. The earth, the text says, is destroyed because of *hamas*. *Hamas* is a word that literally means violence, bloodshed, but also all kinds of injustice and oppression. Noah is saved specifically for his righteousness, he was righteous in his generation. He was chosen therefore for moral reasons. So the writer seems very determined to tell the story in a way that depicts God as acting not capriciously but according to certain clear standards of justice. This was deserved punishment and the person who was saved was righteous.

[38] Furthermore in the Mesopotamian accounts the gods do not appear to be in control. This is something that's been pointed out by many writers. Enlil wants to destroy humankind completely. He's thwarted by Ea who drops hints of the disaster to Utnapishtim so Utnapishtim knows what to do and therefore manages to escape the flood. But that's thwarting the design of the god who brought the flood. He wanted everything destroyed. When the flood comes the gods themselves seem to have lost control. They're terrified, they cower. The text says they "cowered like dogs crouched against the outer wall. Ishtar," the goddess Ishtar, "cried out like a woman in labor [travail] [Pritchard 1958, 69]. And moreover during the period of the flood they don't have food, they don't have sustenance. At the end when Utnapishtim offers the sacrifice, the gods are famished and they crowd around the sacrifice like flies, the text says [Pritchard 1958, 70].

[39] The biblical writer wants to tell a different story. In the biblical flood story, God is represented as being unthreatened by the forces of nature that he unleashes, and being completely in control. He makes the decision to punish humans because the world has corrupted itself through *hamas*, through bloodshed and violence. He selects Noah due to his righteousness and he issues a direct command to build an ark. He has a clear purpose and he retains control throughout the story. At the end, the writer doesn't depict him as needing the sacrifice for food or sustenance.

[40] We might say that this story, like the story of Cain and Abel before it, and like the story we will read later of Sodom and Gomorrah, this story presupposes this universal moral law that Sarna and Kaufman and others have talked about, this universal moral law that seems to govern the world, and if God sees infractions of

it, then as supreme judge he brings humans to account. If morality is the will of God, morality then becomes an absolute value, and these infractions will be punished, in the biblical writer's view.

[41] The message of the flood story also seems to be that when humans destroy the moral basis of society, when they are violent or cruel or unkind, they endanger the very existence of that society. The world dissolves. So corruption and injustice and lawlessness and violence inevitably bring about destruction.

[42] Some writers have pointed out that it's interesting that these humans are not being punished for religious sins, for idolatry, for worshipping the wrong god or anything of that nature, and this is important. The view of the first books of the Bible is that each nation worships its own gods, its own way, perhaps. At this point in the story, perhaps the view is that all know of God even if they ignore him. But the view eventually will be that only Israel is obligated to the God of Israel, other nations aren't held accountable for their idolatry in the books of the Torah. We'll see this as we continue along. And yet everyone, all humans, Israelites or non-Israelites alike, by virtue of having been created by God in the image of God — even though they may not know that God, or may ignore that God — they are bound to a basic moral law that precludes murder and, perhaps from this story, we could argue other forms of oppression and violence.

[43] What better way to drive home the point that inhumanity and violence undermine the very foundations of society than to describe a situation in which a cosmic catastrophe results from human corruption and violence. It's an idea that runs throughout the Bible, it also appears in later Jewish thought and some Christian thought, some Islamic thought. The Psalmist is going to use this motif when he denounces social injustice, exploitation of the poor and so on. He says through wicked deeds like this "all the foundations of the earth," are moved, "are shaken" [Psalm 82:5, RSV].

[44] The Noah story, the flood story, ends with the ushering in of a new era, and it is in many ways a second creation that mirrors the first creation in some important ways. But this time God realizes — and again this is where God's got to punt all the time. This is what I love about the

first part of Genesis — God is trying to figure out what he has made and what he has done, and he's got to shift modes all the time — and God realizes that he's going to have to make a concession. He's going to have to make a concession to human weakness and the human desire to kill. And he's going to have to rectify the circumstances that made his destruction of the earth necessary in the first place.

[45] So he establishes a covenant with Noah: covenant. And humankind receives its first set of explicit laws, no more implicit, "Murder is bad." "Oh I wish I had known!" Now we're getting our first explicit set of laws and they're universal in scope on the biblical writer's view. They apply to all humanity not just Israel. So these are often referred to as the terms of the Noahide covenant. They apply to all humanity.

[46] This covenant explicitly prohibits murder in Genesis 9, that is, the spilling of human blood. Blood is the symbol of life: that's a connection that's made elsewhere in the Bible. Leviticus 17[:11], "The life... is in the blood." So blood is the biblical symbol for life, but God is going to make a concession to the human appetite for power and violence. Previously humans were to be vegetarian: Genesis 1, the portrait was one in which humans and animals did not compete for food, or consume one another. Humans were vegetarian. Now God is saying humans may kill animals to eat them. But even so, he says, the animal's life is to be treated with reverence, and the blood which is the life essence must be poured out on the ground, returned to God, not consumed. So the animal may be eaten to satisfy the human hunger for flesh, but the life essence itself belongs to God. It must not be taken even if it's for the purposes of nourishment. Genesis 9:4-6, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of humans... So if you are killed by a beast or a human, there will have to be a reckoning, an accounting. "...of every person's brother I will require the life of the person. Whoever sheds the blood of a person, in exchange for that person shall his blood be shed, for God made humans in his image [Hayes translation]. All life, human and animal, is sacred to God. The covenant also entails God's promise to restore the rhythm of life and nature and never again to destroy the earth. The rainbow is set up as a symbol of the eternal covenant, a token of the eternal

reconciliation between the divine and human realms.

[47] We should note that this notion, or this idea of a god who can even make and keep an eternal covenant is only possible on the view that God's word and will are absolute, insusceptible to nullification by some superior power or some divine antagonist.

5. Contradictions and Doublets in the Flood Story in Genesis 6-9

[48] Now, I handed out, or there was handed out to you a sheet of paper. You might want to get that out in front of you because we're going to talk a little bit about the flood story in Genesis 6 through 9. When we read the flood story in Genesis 6 through 9, we're often struck by the very odd literary style. I hope you were struck by the odd literary style, and the repetitiveness and the contradictions. So I want to ask you now, and be brave and speak out, in your reading of the story did anything of that nature strike you? Was the story hard to follow? Was it self-contradictory, and in what ways? Anything? Just don't even be polite, just throw it right out there. Yes?

[49] *Student:* [inaudible]

[50] *Professor Christine Hayes:* Okay, we seem to have two sets of instructions. Someone's pointing out here, we seem to have two sets of instructions about what to bring on-board: either to bring two of each sort of living thing, animals and birds and creeping things, or in another passage God tells Moses to bring on seven pairs of pure animals and one pair of impure animals and seven pairs of birds. Right? Different sets of instructions. Anything else strike you as odd when you were reading this story?

[51] *Student:* [inaudible]

[52] *Professor Christine Hayes:* Okay, rain seems to be there for different amounts of time, doesn't it? There are some passages in which the flood is said to have lasted for 40 days, or be on the earth for 40 days. We find that in Genesis 7:17, but in Genesis 7:24, 150 days is given as the time of the flood. Anything else? Any other sorts of doublets or contradictions, because there are a few more?

[53]Who's giving the instructions? That's not hard; you have it right in front of you. Who's giving the instructions?

[54]*Student*: [inaudible]

[55]*Professor Christine Hayes*: Okay, God. We have the word "God" being used I guess in that translation, right, with a capital G. What else is used?

[56]*Student*: [inaudible]

[57]*Professor Christine Hayes*: Lord. Those are actually different Hebrew words underneath there, okay? Those two terms are different names of the deity that's giving the instruction. Okay, so there are two designations used for God. *Yahweh*, which is the sacred Tetragrammaton, it's written with four letters in Hebrew, they don't include vowels. We don't really know how it's pronounced; I'm guessing at *Yahweh*, and that is a proper name for God, and in your translation that would be translated as "LORD" in small caps. So wherever you see "LORD" in small caps, that's actually the English translation for *Yahweh*, the proper name, like almost a personal name for God. And then in other places we have this word *Elohim*, which actually is the word for "gods," a sort of generic term for deities in the plural. However, when it's used to refer to the God of Israel it's clearly singular, it always has a singular verb. So that will be appearing in your text as "God" with a capital G. So whenever you see "Lord" or "God" those are actually pointing to different words that are being used in the underlying Hebrew text.

[58]Twice God is said to look down on creation. Twice it is said that he is displeased. Twice he decides to destroy all living things. Twice he issues instructions and as we've seen they're contradictory. We seem to also have a different account of how long the flood lasted; there are more subtle contradictions throughout as well. Sometimes the flood seems to be the result of very heavy rain, but in other descriptions it seems to be a real cosmic upheaval. You'll remember the description of the world from Genesis 1 as an air bubble essentially that's formed by separating waters above and waters below. They're held back or pressed back by the firmament above. And it's the windows in the firmament that are opened — those waters are allowed to rush in and dissolve that air bubble.

It's as if we're back to square one with the deep, right? Just this watery mass again. So it's creation undoing itself in some of the descriptions, as opposed to just heavy rain.

[59]And in keeping with that idea of a kind of a return to chaos, Noah is represented in a way as the beginning of a new creation. Because like Adam and Eve in the first creation story, Noah is told to be fruitful and multiply. He's also given rule over everything, and that's now extended to the taking of human life [correction: Professor Hayes actually meant to say animal life here].

[60]The Bible contains a lot of repetition and contradiction. And sometimes it occurs in one passage, as in the flood story here, and sometimes it occurs in stories or passages that are separate from one another, for example, the two creation stories. There are many significant differences between the two creation stories. They differ greatly in style. Genesis 1 is formalized, it's highly structured, it has the seven days and everything's paired up. It's beautifully structured, it's very abstract. Genesis 2 is much more dramatic, much more earthy. The first creation story doesn't really contain puns and wordplays, it's a little bit serious. The second creation story is full of them: there are all sorts of little ironies and puns in the Hebrew. *Adam*, the earthling made from the earth. *Adam* is made from *adamah*. Adam and Eve are naked, *arum*, which is the same word for clever or shrewd, and the snake is *arum*, he's clever and shrewd: there are lots of little puns of this kind.

[61]There are also differences in terminology between the two stories. Genesis 1 speaks of male and female, one set of Hebrew terms, but Genesis 2 uses man and woman, a different set of Hebrew terms to describe the genders. So the terms for gender are different in the two stories.

[62]Genesis 1 refers to God, as in your translation "God," *Elohim*, the word that's translated as "God." He's remote, he's transcendent. He creates effortlessly through his word and through his will. But Genesis 2 refers to the deity as a name that's really a combination, it's *Yahweh Elohim*, so you'll see "Lord God" right? You see that a lot in the Bible as well, Lord God. That tells you both of those words were side by side in the original Hebrew. So in Genesis 2 the deity is *Yahweh Elohim*. He's much more down to earth. He forms the human

like a potter working with clay. He talks to himself, he plants a garden, he takes a stroll in the garden in the cool of the evening. He makes clothes for Adam and Eve. He's spoken of in much more anthropomorphic terms than the God that we encounter in Genesis 1.

[63] So what we have in the first few chapters of Genesis are two creation stories that have distinctive styles, distinctive themes, distinctive vocabularies and they're placed side by side. In Genesis 6 through 9 we seem to have two flood stories with distinctive styles, and themes, and vocabularies, and substantive details, but they're interwoven instead of being placed side by side. And there are many such doublets in the Bible.

[64] At times we have whole books that repeat or go over the same material. In fact the whole historical saga that's recorded from Genesis through the end of 2 Kings is rehearsed again in the books of First and Second Chronicles. What are we to make of the repetitions and the contradictions here and throughout the Bible? What are the implications?

6. Implications of the Repetitions and Contradictions throughout the Bible

[65] Suppose you came across a piece of writing that you knew nothing about just lying there on the table. You didn't know who wrote it, where, when, how, why, and someone says to you, "I want you to draw some conclusions about that piece of writing. I want you to draw some conclusions about its authorship and the way it was compiled or composed." And so you pick it up and you start reading and you notice features like this. What might you conclude? Throw it out, what might you conclude? No presuppositions. You pick up the work and you find these features. What might you conclude about its authorship or manner of composition?

[66] *Student:* There are multiple authors.

[67] *Professor Christine Hayes:* You might conclude that there are multiple authors. Right? Multiple authorship. Yeah?

[68] *Student:* There are revisions.

[69] *Professor Christine Hayes:* That revisions may have been made, so that you might have

different sources that have been revised or put together in different ways. Right? Revisions implying that you've got something and then it's worked over again, additions might be made so now that's a new source. You might conclude that these features are evidence of multiple authorship; a good deal of revision which points itself to a kind of composite structure, different layers maybe, different sources.

[70] Well as early as the Middle Ages there were some scholars who noticed these things in the biblical texts. They noticed that there are contradictions and repetitions and there are anachronisms too, other features that were evidence of multiple authorship, revisions and composite structure. So what? Why would that be a big deal?

[71] *Student:* [inaudible]

[72] *Professor Christine Hayes:* Okay, it could be a bit of a problem if this text has become the basis for a system of religious faith or belief, and your assumptions about it are that its telling a truth that is singular in nature. And also what about the traditional beliefs on the origin of this text? Right, who wrote this text according to traditional beliefs? [inaudible comments from audience] I'm hearing Moses, I'm hearing God, I'm hearing a bunch of different things, but there are traditional ideas about generally the Mosaic authorship of the Bible, certainly the first five books of the Bible.

[73] And so these features of the text which were noticed were a challenge to traditional religious convictions regarding the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible, and in many ways the perfection of the Bible, as speaking with a unified voice on matters of doctrine or religious theology. So medieval commentators for example began to speak a little bit more openly about some of these features. One of the first things they noticed is that Deuteronomy 34 describes the death and burial of Moses. So they decided it was possible that Moses didn't write at least that chapter.

[74] Similarly there are some anachronisms that they had to explain. One of the most famous is in Genesis 13:7. It's in the midst of a story about dividing the land between Lot and — at that time his name was Abram, it later becomes Abraham — but between Lot and Abram. And the narrator in telling this story sort of interjects and turns to

us, the readers, and says, “The Canaanites and Perrizites were then dwelling in the land.” Now what’s weird about that sentence? The narrator is speaking to us from a time in which the Canaanites and Perrizites don’t live in the land, right? “That’s back when the Native Americans lived in Connecticut.” Is that writer living at a time when Native Americans are still living in Connecticut or owning Connecticut? No. They’re writing from a later point of view. So the narrator breaks and talks to the audience in Genesis 13:7 and says, “That was back in the time when the Canaanites were in the land.” When did Moses live? Who lived in the land in the time of Moses? The Canaanites. I know you haven’t gotten there yet, but when you get to Deuteronomy you’re going to find out he doesn’t make it into the land. So he never makes it in there, he never gets in before the Israelites conquer. He dies — the Canaanites are still in possession. So that line was certainly written not by Moses; it was written by someone at a much later time who’s looking back and referring to the time when the Canaanites were in the land.

[75] So these are the kinds of things that people began to notice. And with the rise of rationalism in the modern period, traditional notions of the divine and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the Torah, the first five books of Moses, were called into question. The modern critical study of the Bible begins really with Spinoza who in the early seventeenth century suggested that the Bible should be studied and examined like any book: without presuppositions about its divine origin or any other dogmatic claims about its composition or authorship. But it was a Catholic priest, Richard Simon, who first argued that Moses didn’t write the Torah, and that it contained many anachronisms and errors.

[76] Well we’ve run out of time, but I’ll pick up this fascinating story on Wednesday and we’ll learn a little bit more about critical ideas about the composition of the Bible. Please be on the look out for emails from section leaders with study guides for sections which will be meeting this week; you’ll have a lot of fun with the creation stories.

[77] [end of transcript]

[78] References

[79] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from “Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text.” Copyright (c) 1985 by [The Jewish Publication Society](#). Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

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