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HUMAN IDENTITY AND PURPOSE REDEFINED: GEN 1:26–28 AND 2:5–25 IN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Ancient creation stories define humanity in relation to the gods. In the *Atraḥasīs* Epic, for example, humans were created as a labor force to relieve the lower caste of deities from their toil. In Gen 1–2 humanity was also created to serve God, but the commands to rule and subdue the earth, and to care and cultivate the garden of Eden, are framed by the preceding statement in Gen 1:26–27 that humanity was created in God’s image and likeness, that is, as his children. To appreciate Genesis’s claim, we must consider it in light of its ancient Near Eastern environment. For Gen 1–2 this includes a set of ritual texts from Mesopotamia, the “Washing and Opening of the Mouth,” which describe the process by which divine images, or statues of the gods, were created. Genesis 2 seems to draw from these rituals, or at least the ideas they represent, in order to elaborate on the meaning of *בצלם אלהים* in Gen 1:26–28. If our aim is to understand how Genesis 1–2 redefines human identity and purpose, we must consider the prevailing views on human creation and the birth of the gods (in their statues) with which it interacted.



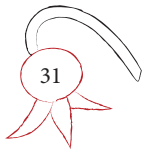
Les récits anciens de la création définissent l’humanité comme en lien avec les dieux. Par exemple, dans l’épopée de l’*Atraḥasīs*, les humains sont créés pour être une force de travail qui soulage les déités inférieures dans leur labeur. En Gn 1–2, l’humanité est également créée pour servir Dieu, mais les commandements de régner et de dominer sur la terre, et de prendre soin du jardin d’Éden, sont encadrés par l’affirmation précédente en Gn 1, 26–27 selon laquelle l’humanité a été créée à l’image et à la ressemblance de Dieu, c’est-à-dire comme ses enfants. Pour comprendre l’affirmation de Genèse, il faut la remettre dans le contexte du Proche-Orient Ancien. Pour Gn 1–2, cela signifie un ensemble de textes rituels de la Mésopotamie, « Ouverture et purification de la bouche » (*Mis-pî*), qui décrit le processus par lequel les images divines ou les statues de dieu sont créées. Genèse 2 semble s’inspirer de ces rituels, ou au moins des idées qu’ils représentent, pour construire le sens de en Gn 1, 26–28. Si nous voulons comprendre comment Genèse 1–2 redéfinit l’identité humaine et son but, nous devons prendre en compte les perspectives dominantes sur la création humaine et la naissance des dieux (dans leurs statues) avec lesquelles ce texte interagit.



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Introduction

Creation stories from ancient Mesopotamia consistently portray humanity as a workforce created to assume the burdensome task of building cities and temples, a miserable job that had been delegated to the lower gods, who eventually grew weary and unwilling.¹ The situation is described at length in the *Atraḥasīs* Epic, a seventeenth-century BCE Akkadian poem famous for its flood story because of its parallels to

¹ In the *Eridu Genesis*, the goddess Nintur urges that humans be used to construct cities and cult sites for the gods' refreshment: "May they (humans) come and build cities and cult places, that I may cool myself in their shade; may they lay the bricks for the cult cities in pure spots, and may they find places for divination in pure spots!" (COS 1.158: 513–15). The Babylonian creation account *Enūma Eliš* mentions the forced labor explicitly: "From his blood he (Ea) created mankind, on whom he imposed the service (misery, hardship) of the gods (*dullu ilāni-ma*), and set the gods free" (*Enūma Eliš*, Tablet VI lines 33–34; Talon 2005, 63).

the biblical flood account in Gen 6–9.² Our interest, however, is in its retelling of human creation. The greater Anunna gods had subjected the lesser Igigi gods to forced labor, including the particularly onerous task of digging canals. After enduring decades of drudgery, the Igigi rebelled. They burned their tools, set fire to their workplaces, and then marched on the gates of Enlil, the king of the gods, who was responsible for their enslavement. The insurrection ultimately failed, but the Igigi did succeed in replacing themselves as the lowest caste. Humanity was created as the new working class “to bear the yoke” and “to carry the toil of the gods” (Lambert and Millard 1999, 57, 59–60).³

Work plays a significant role in the biblical account of human creation, as well. However, rather than being enslaved, humans served Yahweh Elohim as his royal representatives. God created them in his image, commissioned them to rule over the earth and its creatures, and charged them with cultivating and protecting his sacred garden. Human value, however, was not purely functional. By describing humanity as created *בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים*, Gen 1 defines the divine–human relationship in a startling new way: humans are his *kin*! Human beings are the royal children of God, the creator of the cosmos.⁴ They are not designed for enslavement, as in *Atraḥasīs*, nor is their value defined by their function. As his collective “son” or “child,” humanity’s task is to represent God the Father faithfully as they rule at his behest, cultivating the earth’s gifts and resources for their benefit and serving as mediators of his presence and agents of his blessing in the world.



² Although initially the *Atraḥasīs* Epic was renowned because of its parallels to Genesis, it is a magnificent piece of literature on its own and does not derive its value simply from comparisons to biblical or other creation accounts.

³ After humanity is created, the birth goddess Mami declares to the Igigi: “I have removed your heavy work, I have imposed your toil on man. You raised a cry for mankind, I have loosed the yoke, I have established freedom” (Lambert and Millard 1999, 59–60).

⁴ Not only has Gen 1 democratized the idea to all of humanity that a royal statue or cult image was a representation of the divine, but by using the terms *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת*, Genesis depicts the divine–human relationship in *sonship* terms. Humans are God’s royal representatives, but this is because they are first God’s “children.” For ancient Israel, both ideas would have been novel (McDowell 2015, 131–42).

In what follows, we will consider the royal and priestly portrait of humanity presented in Genesis 1–2. After a brief study on image and likeness in Gen 1:26–28, we will discuss Adam’s royal and priestly functions as described in Genesis 2. We will then turn to a set of ritual texts from Mesopotamia, the *mīs pî pīt pî* (“Washing and Opening of the Mouth”) texts, which describe the ritual process by which divine images, or statues of the gods, were created. Genesis 2 seems to draw from these rituals, or at least the ideas they represent, in order to elaborate on the meaning of *בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים* in Gen 1:26–28. If we aim to understand how Genesis redefines humanity’s identity and purpose, we must consider the biblical creation accounts in light of their original contexts. The “conversation partners” for Genesis 1–2 included not only human creation stories from neighboring lands but also ritual texts that prescribed the making (birth) of a god.⁵



A Brief Word on Method

Biblical scholars widely agree that the Hebrew Bible cannot be understood apart from the cultural matrix in which it was written. The languages, history, archeology, literature, and traditions of the ancient Near East reveal the cognitive world that ancient Israel inhabited and the broader cultural ideas with which the biblical authors engaged. Comparative work is thus integral to biblical studies. However, we must be careful not to presume historical connections that may instead be typological.⁶ Nor should we treat texts synchronically without taking chronological differences into account. Although scholars dispute the

⁵ This article draws comparisons and contrasts between Genesis 1 and 2 and select primary sources from ancient Mesopotamia. For a similar discussion between Genesis 1 and 2 and ancient Egyptian texts, see McDowell 2015, 13–14, 85–116, 148–52, 157–77.

⁶ For a discussion of the difference between historical and typological relationships, see McDowell 2015, 5–10 and n. 13 and n. 22. We also must be careful neither to presume nor manufacture a historical or typological connection where there is none!

dates of composition for Genesis 1 and 2 (McDowell 2015, 178–202), it is appropriate to consider the biblical creation accounts in light of the *mīs pî pīt pî* texts. Not only do the latter describe the creation of an image, as does Genesis 1 and 2,⁷ but these texts lie within the same “historic stream”⁸—that is, the “Washing and Opening of the Mouth” rituals are geographically, chronologically, and culturally proximate to ancient Israel. Further, other biblical writers, particularly Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the authors of Psalms 115 and 135, show an awareness of these texts, or at least with the ideas they represent, and engage them in order to make their own poignant statements about divine images (McDowell 2015, 7–10, 152–57). Thus, is it not surprising that the author(s) of Genesis 1 and 2 might also engage these same ideas. For these reasons, we may legitimately compare the *mīs pî pīt pî* texts to biblical views about human creation (McDowell 2015, 5–10). אָדָם and דְמוּת in Genesis 1:26–28



וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים גַּעֲשׂוּהָ אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרַדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה
 וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הַרֹמֵשׂ הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:
 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:
 וַיִּבְרָךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִשְׁתֶּהּ וַיְרַדּוּ
 בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-תְּוֵה הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

God said, “Let us create humanity⁹ in our image, according to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over the beasts, and over all the earth, and over everything that creeps on the earth.”^{1:27} So God created humanity¹⁰ in his image. In the image

⁷ On Genesis 2:5–3:24 and image-making, see McDowell 2015, 138–42.

⁸ On the concept of “historic stream,” see Herskovitz 1958–1959, 1:129–48, esp. 1:141; Talmon 1991, esp. 386 and n. 13.

⁹ The Hebrew noun is אָדָם. In this context, it refers to humanity as a whole, as indicated by the plural verb וַיְרַדּוּ (“let them rule”) and the reference to male and female in the following verse.

¹⁰ This is likely an anaphoric use of the definite article, its antecedent being אָדָם in verse 26. Thus, the cohortative “Let us make אָדָם” is fulfilled in verse 27 by “So God created הָאָדָם (the humanity).” In English, however, “humanity” is an uncountable or mass noun, of which there is only one by definition. Adding a definite article would be superfluous. For clarity’s sake, both in terms of modern English usage and the author’s original intent, the best English equivalent of אָדָם

of God he created it. Male and female he created them.^{1:28} Then God blessed them and said to them: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the skies and over all living creatures that creep on the earth.”¹¹

That we should read *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* in Gen 1:26–27 in light of Babylonian and Egyptian titulary designating the king as the image of the god is argued convincingly in the scholarly literature going back at least to 1915 (Hehn 1915). The consensus, with which I agree, is that Gen 1 ascribes to humanity a royal status by defining the divine–human relationship in terms previously reserved for kings and their gods (Westermann 1994, 151–54). The discovery of a Neo-Assyrian statue from the ninth century BCE at Tell Fakhariyeh in the Upper Khabur region of Syria confirms that *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* in Gen 1:26–27 have royal and representative overtones.¹² The accompanying bilingual inscription on the statue’s skirt identifies it as the “image” (Aramaic *šlm*, Akkadian *šalmu*) and “likeness” (Aramaic *dmwt*, Akkadian *šalmu*) of its referent, Hadad-yithi, the governor of Guzana.



However, these terms are not exclusively royal. Aside from Genesis 1, the only other biblical text where *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* appear together is in Gen 5:3: “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his likeness (*בְּדְמוּתוֹ*), according to his image (*כְּצִלְמוֹ*) and named him Seth.” As Adam was created in the image and likeness of God, Seth was made in the image and likeness of his father. The implication is that just as *צֶלֶם* and *דְמוּת* identify Seth as Adam’s son, the same terms in Gen 1:26–27 identify humanity as God’s “son” (or child).

in this context is mankind, humanity, or humankind, not “the man” or “man.” Additional examples of the anaphoric use of the definite article include Gen. 18:7–8, “And he took a calf... and he took... the calf” (*וַיִּקַּח בָּן־הַבָּקָר... וַיִּקַּח בָּן־הַבָּקָר*); Ruth 1:1–2, “And a man went out ... and the name of the man was Elimelech” (*וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ... וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִמֶלֶךְ*); and Gen 1:3–4, “God said: ‘Let there be light.’ ... and God saw the light” (*וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר... וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר*). See Waltke and O’Connor 2018, 242.

¹¹ All translations are my own, unless stated otherwise.

¹² Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982; Millard and Bordreuil 1982; Greenfield and Shaffer 1983.

Similar terms in the opening lines of the Babylonian creation account, *Enūma Eliš*, describe the god Anshar and his descendants. Anu is the *muššulu*¹³ (“likeness”) of his father, Anshar, just as Nudimmud is the *tamšilu*¹⁴ (“image,” “likeness”) of his father, Anu. Although these terms are not cognates of Hebrew **צֶלֶם**, they demonstrate that within the broad cultural and cognitive environment of Genesis 1, the semantic range of image and likeness language included sonship.

The Akkadian cognate to Hebrew **צֶלֶם** does appear in a hymn to the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE), where it designates the king’s relationship to his patron deity in terms of sonship: “He (the king) alone is the eternal image (*šalmu*) of Enlil ... whom Enlil raised ... like a natural father, after his first-born son” (Machinist 2006, 162–63). The hymn further describes the king’s birth as “successfully engendered through/cast (*ši-pi-ik-šu*) into the channel of the womb of the gods” (Machinist 2006, 160–61). The imagery is striking. Influenced by the royal theology of the Sumero-Babylonian south,¹⁵ the author combined birthing and metallurgical imagery to present Tukulti-Ninurta I as both the son of Enlil and as his “statue,” that is, his physical representative on earth. Read in this light, and the larger context of Gen 1, **צֶלֶם** and **דְמוּת** function similarly to define humanity as both sons (children) and royal “living images” of Elohim.



Royal and Priestly Functions of One Created

בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים

A second account of humanity’s creation in the following chapter of Genesis presents a similar theological vision but from a different per-

¹³ See “*muššulu*,” *CAD M*, part 2, 281 and *Enūma Eliš* Tablet I line 15 in Talon 2005, 33.

¹⁴ See “*tamšilu*,” *CAD T*, part 2, 147–49.

¹⁵ These innovations were influenced by the royal theology of the Sumero-Babylonian south, where the idea of divine parentage and the king as the *šalmu* of the god is attested in Sumerian hymns, royal inscriptions, rituals, personal names, and legal texts (Machinist 1978, 180–208).

spective. The account of human creation according to the Eden story (Gen 2:5–3:24) differs significantly from Gen 1:1–2:3, yet surely the final redactor placed the two texts side by side intentionally. A study of the eleven *toledoth* in Genesis demonstrates that these genealogical notices, including Gen 2:4, function as a telescopic hinge (McDowell 2015, 26–35)—that is, they join two sections of material together, but they are also conduits through which the story’s focus narrows from the general to the particular (McDowell 2015, 26–35). In the case of Gen 1:1–2:3 and 2:5–3:24, the first account established humanity’s identity as children of God and their function as God’s appointed rulers over creation. The particular foci of the Eden story after Gen 2:4 include the royal and priestly functions that stem from being created in the *imago dei*.



Adam as Royal Gardener

In Gen 2:15, God places Adam in the garden “to cultivate it and to care for it” (לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ). Given that the previous chapter established Adam’s royal status and that the *toledoth* of Gen 2:4 function to narrow the story’s focus, we should understand his role as cultivator and keeper of the garden in Eden as a function of his kingship. This is consistent not only with the royal duties of Israel’s later kings¹⁶ but also with descriptions in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions of the kings as providers of agricultural abundance (Winter 2007) and, in some cases, as “farmers” or “cultivators” (*ikarru/LU₂.ENGAR*).¹⁷

Adam as Archetypal Priest

Genesis scholars have also noted that the pairing of עֲבַד and שָׁמַר (“to work and to keep”) in Gen 2:15 occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible but only in reference to the priests’ responsibilities to guard and min-

¹⁶ 1 Kgs 4:33; Eccl 2:4b–6.

¹⁷ Winter 2003, esp. 261 n. 3. Royal reliefs depicting Assyrian kings with the composite “trees of abundance” are likely a visual representation of this royal epithet.

ister at the Tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). This suggests that Adam’s duties involved more than farming. Like the Levites, he was to perform all the duties associated with serving Yahweh Elohim in the sacred Garden of Eden. In the words of Gordon Wenham, Adam was, thus, “an archetypal priest.”¹⁸ This dual role of king and priest is attested in Sumerian royal hymns and inscriptions from the twenty-first century BCE that describe the king as the high priest in service of the gods.¹⁹ Later Assyrian kings served as chief temple administrators (*šangû*)²⁰ responsible for presiding over religious rituals, supplying the temples with all their necessities and overseeing temple maintenance.²¹

By describing humans as created **בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים**, Gen 1:1–2:3 defines human identity in terms of kinship with God and expresses their function as his royal representatives, created to “subdue” (כבש) the earth and to “rule” (רדה) over its creatures. Gen 2:5–25 elaborates further on these two ideas. Humanity is to embody its identity as “son” (child) of God by “serving” him (שמר and עבד) in his temple. This involves cultivating the earth’s resources as a blessing to its human and animal inhabitants and spreading the presence and power of God as his royal representatives.²²



¹⁸ Wenham 1987, 67; Wenham 1994, 401.

¹⁹ McDowell 2015, 141 n. 130; Klein 2003, 1:552–53.

²⁰ See “*šangû*,” *CAD Š*, part 1, 377.

²¹ A late Neo-Assyrian inscription describes Sin-šar-iškun, the last king of Assyria (late seventh century BCE), as the one “whom the (gods) commanded to exercise provision for all the shrines, *šangûtu* for all the sanctuaries (and) shepherdship for” (Machinist 2006, 156).

²² Many commentators refer to Adam’s “priestly” role, but this is anachronistic. The duties later reserved for the Israelite priesthood were originally a human task—to serve God in his sacred space, to mediate the blessing and presence of God, and to cultivate his temple and the world.

Royal Representative: The *mīs pî pīt pî* and Genesis 2:5–3:24

In addition to the Mesopotamian royal texts already mentioned, the author of Gen 2:5–3:24 shows an awareness of divine statue manufacture and consecration. The best witnesses to these rituals comprise a set of texts from the ninth to the fifth centuries BCE that describe them as the “Washing and Opening of the Mouth” (*mīs pî pīt pî*).²³ They have survived in two forms—the Nineveh version and the Babylon version. Both versions describe how a team of artisans and priests created, consecrated, and animated a cult statue, making it fit for cultic use. Similarities between the “Washing and Opening of the Mouth” texts and Gen 2:5–3:24 suggest that the biblical author drew an implicit comparison between humanity and cult statues in order to emphasize that humans, not idols, are “living images” of God. We will consider three features of the Eden story that reflect the *mīs pî pīt pî*: the garden setting, the installation of Adam, and Gen 2:25 and the poetic reflection of Ps 8:6 on human creation.



The Garden Setting (Genesis 2:8–14)

In the *mīs pî pīt pî*, the opening of the statue’s eyes, nose, mouth, and ears and the full activation of its limbs took place in a well-watered, fruit-filled temple garden (McDowell 2015, 143–44, 145). We know from two Assyrian texts and one Babylonian text that the garden of the *Apsû*, in Ea’s riverside temple complex in Babylon, the *E-kar-zaginna*, hosted the *mīs pî pīt pî* on at least three occasions—once during the reign of Nabu-apla-iddina (888–855 BCE),²⁴ a second time during the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE),²⁵ and on a third occasion during

²³ For a list of primary sources for the *mīs pî pīt pî*, see McDowell 2015, 46–48.

²⁴ Woods 2004, esp. 85–86. Additionally, a late Babylonian gate list identifies the “Gate of the Garden of the *Apsû*” as “the gate at which the mouths of the gods are opened” (Borger 1956, 89 line 27 and 95 line 27).

²⁵ “I made them (the exiled gods) enter anew into Babylon, the city of their veneration, and they entered through the orchards, groves, canals and gardens of *E-kar-za-ginna*, the Pure Place, with the craft of the Sage, mouth-washing and

the reign of Ashurbanipal (669–631 BCE) (Streck 1916, 2:269 line 19). Clearly, the sacred garden setting, with its proximity to the gods, its access to cleansing and life-giving water, and its display of agricultural abundance and fertility, was an appropriate environment for the image’s “birth.” That the ritual was performed in Ea’s garden in particular is fitting, given that he was associated with purification, birth, creation, and craftsmanship. In fact, the *mīs pî pīt pî* texts identify him as the father of the image and the divine craftsman *par excellence*, who possesses the particular wisdom and skill necessary for fashioning a divine image (Walker and Dick 2001, 25).

Like Ea’s garden of the *Apsû*, beautiful fruit-bearing trees filled the Garden of Eden. Four rivers coursed through it, and Yahweh Elohim himself, who had planted the garden, dwelt within. However, the Garden of Eden was not simply a beautiful orchard. Based on the striking parallels between Eden, the Tabernacle, and the Solomonic Temple, scholars have concluded that Eden was an archetypal sanctuary (Wenham 1994). Given that the temple garden hosted the ritual for invoking the god into its statue, the creation of humanity within a sacred garden was surely intended to compare humans to royal and divine images.



The Installation of Adam (Genesis 2:15)

At the conclusion of the *mīs pî pīt pî* ceremony, the priests installed the newly animated image in its temple. Incantations invoking the deity to take up residence and establish himself in his “abode of rest” accompanied this climactic event.²⁶ In Gen 2:8, God “placed” (שׂים) Adam in the garden, but in Gen 2:15 the author used a different verb, the second hiphil of נוּחַ. Although the hiphil B of נוּחַ can mean “to place, set or lay,”²⁷ given the sacred garden context it is worth noting that this particular stem also refers to the installation of cult statues in 2 Kgs 17:29,²⁸ Isa

mouth-opening ceremonies, bathing and cleansing, into the presence of the Stars of Heaven, Ea, Šamaš, Asalluḫi, Bēlet-īli, Kusu, Ningirimma, Ninkurrra, Ninagal, Kusibanda, Ninildu and Ninzadim” (George 1992, 302).

²⁶ Walker and Dick 2001, 160–61, 184 line 11ab and 170, 185 lines 60ab–62ab.

²⁷ HAL, 679.

²⁸ וְיָהִיוּ עֲשִׂים גֹיִם גֹיִם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיִּנְחֲלוּ בְּבָיִת הַקְּדוֹת (“But every nation made its own gods and put/installed them in the shrines of the high places”).

46:7,²⁹ and Zech 5:5–11.³⁰ By using נָוָה instead of שָׂם, or its synonyms נָתַן (“to set, place, lay”) or שָׂיַת (“to set, stand, place”), perhaps the author is comparing Adam’s placement in the garden to the installation of cult images in their temples, underscoring in yet another way humanity’s function as God’s royal representatives.

Genesis 2:25 and the Poetic Reflection of Psalm 8:6 on Human Creation

Before installing the cult image, the priests would dress and adorn it with sumptuous garments, royal insignia suited to its identity, and a beautiful jewel-studded crown. From the Babylonian version, the “Majestic Crown” incantation describes the royal tiara as “endowed with awesome splendor,” “glistening,” “gleaming red,” “bright,” “whose radiance (*melammu*) touches the heavens” and as shining over the land like the rays of Shamash.³¹ While it was the primary emblem of divinity, the crown’s luminescence was not exclusive to the gods. They could award it to human kings in the form of a crown as a sign of divine appointment and legitimacy. They could also revoke it. The epilogue to the Laws of Hammurabi warns that if the king breaks the divine law, the royal *melammu* will be repossessed.³²

The Eden story says nothing of Adam and Eve donning royal garments. In fact, Gen 2:25 states that they were naked! For the clothing of humanity at creation, we must look to Ps 8:6: “You have made him/it a little lower than the heavenly beings and with glory and honor you have



²⁹ וְשָׂאוּ עַל-כַּתְּפֵי יִסְבְּלוּהוּ וְנִיחָהוּ תַחְתּוֹ (‘‘They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set/install it in its place’’).

³⁰ Verse 11b וְהוֹכֵן וְהַנִּיחָהּ שָׁם עַל-מִקְנָתָהּ ב (‘‘And when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base’’). Note that this form is a hophal, the passive of the hiphil. Cf. 2 Chr 4:8, where the hiphil of נָוָה is used for the placement or installation of ten gold tables in the Solomonic Temple.

³¹ The text and translation is published in Walker and Dick 2001, 193–95 and 203–04 lines 1ab–14ab.

³² The epilogue in the Law Code of Hammurabi states that if the king alters or breaks the divine law, the god, Anu, will revoke ‘‘the *melammu* of kingship’’ (*melam šarrūti*). See Roth 1995, Col. 49 lines 45–52; *Enūma Eliš* 1:67–68, in which Ea steals Apsū’s crown and its *melammu*, and thus steals Apsū’s kingship.

crowned him/it” (וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ).³³ The choice of עֹטֶר (“to crown”) suggests that the glory sits upon humanity’s head, precisely where the *melammu* was located on Mesopotamian deities and kings. Although Gen 2:25–3:24 does not mention a crown, it does report that Adam and Eve were suddenly aware of their nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit. Is it possible, as Ps 8:6 claims, that at creation God crowned Adam and Eve with divine glory, the radiance of which served as a covering for their bodies? This is how many early Jewish (McDowell 2015, 165–67) and later rabbinic (McDowell 2015, 167) interpreters understood it. The Samaritan tractate *Memar Marqah* (*The Teaching of Marqah*) (second to fourth century CE) even specifies that Adam and Eve wore “two crowns of great light.”³⁴ If the Jewish interpretation accurately reflects the psalmist’s view, Adam and Eve’s sudden nakedness would have been a consequence of their rebellion. Just as the gods revoked the *melammu* from kings who transgressed the divine law, disobedience would have cost Adam and Eve their crowns of glory.



Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate the importance of reading the Hebrew Bible, specifically its creation accounts in Gen 1–2, in light of its ancient Near Eastern environment. Because Gen 1–2 interacted with deeply entrenched views about the gods and humanity’s relationship to them, we cannot understand the profundity of the biblical response apart from a familiarity with Israel’s environment.

The picture that Gen 1–2 paints concerning human identity and purpose is a dignified one. Humans are members of God’s family; specifically, they are his royal children, whom he has appointed to rule over creation, to subdue it, and to represent him in the world. They

³³ וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ (“and with glory and honor you crowned him”) in Ps 8:6 (8:5 in English). Cf. Ps 8:6 in the LXX: δόξη καὶ τιμῆ ἐστεφάνωσας αὐτόν, where the verb στεφανώω means “to encircle someone’s head with ornamental foliage, wreath, crown” (*BDAG*, 944).

³⁴ McDowell 2015, 167–68; MacDonald 1963, 1:135–36, 221.

are “kings and queens” commissioned to be fruitful and to multiply by creating “images” of their own. Their purpose lies in serving God in his macro-temple, protecting the land, and cultivating its resources to provide for themselves and the blessing of others. In light of other human creation stories from Mesopotamia, and by comparing and contrasting humanity to statues of the gods, Genesis 1–2 redefines humanity in the noblest of terms, democratizing the idea once reserved for kings alone that all human beings are royal children of God.

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