



Creation Myths

Understanding the Genesis creation narrative highlights the importance of considering literary form in approaching any Bible text. The creation narrative is a *myth*, meaning that it is a symbolic story about reality that is beyond comprehension. Its purpose for its original pre-scientific audience was to give meaning to life and to the realities that surrounded them – the powers of life and death. The narrative's key message was that all creation exists through the hand/word/breath of God and this creation is not haphazard or chaotic, but reflects an ordered world.

The book of Genesis contains two creation myths in its opening chapters. Chapter One contains a narrative written during the Babylonian exile, when Jewish leaders, priests and scribes were taken from the kingdom of Judah and exiled in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Once there, they were impressed by the wealth and splendour of this kingdom. The Israelite religious leaders were concerned that people might abandon God and turn to the worship of the Babylonian deities and so they were determined to remind the exiles of the greatness of the Lord. The priestly author (P) set out to show the Lord as the source of all life and of everything that exists.

The second creation narrative in Chapter Two is in fact the older of the two, written by the Jahwist author (J), to explain the relationship of human beings to God, to the created world and to each other – why the world is as it is. It answers fundamental human questions about the meaning of life and the origins of sin and suffering.

It is important to approach the Genesis narrative as religious truth not scientific truth. Its purpose was to give philosophical meaning not provide objective measurement. The heart of the Catholic creed is a belief in 'God...maker of heaven and earth'. One approaches the text from a perspective of faith not science. This does not mean that faith and science should be divorced. New scientific discoveries can challenge us to deepen our understanding of a biblical text. Likewise the scientist's perspective can be broadened by embracing mystery and unbridled by the need for quantifiable answers to all the questions of life. As Albert Einstein asserted, 'Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind'.