

Modern West	Ancient Near East
Status is achieved	Status is ascribed
Achieving and competing are motivational necessities and the norm	Achieving and competing are disruptive to the group
Assert one's own rights	Submit personal rights to the group
Equality is a key value	Hierarchy is the key value
Friendships are functional	Friendships involve long-term loyalties or obligational commitments
Any group is viewed only as a collection of individuals	Any group is viewed as an organismic unit, inextricably interlocked
The individual self is viewed as an entity separate from the physical world and from other persons	The individual self is viewed as organically connected with the physical world and with other persons
Any personal decision is made by the self alone, even if it is not in the group's best interests	Any personal decision is made in consultation with the group and often in obedience or deference to its will
Private autonomy	Corporate solidarity
Strong personal identity	Strong familial identity
Self-reliant achievement	Interdependent collaboration
Strong desire to be personally satisfied	Strong desire to be interpersonally satisfying or satisfactory

* Walton, John. *The NIV Application Commentary ~ Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, 25-26, from John Pilch, *Introducing the Cultural Context of the Old Testament* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1991), 97.

There are so many varied resources available for deeper study of Genesis, it is difficult to categorize or recommend one over the others... I will attempt to provide you with several resources over several weeks, in the hope that you will study and read God's Word for all it is worth with as many resources on which you can reasonably get your hands. These are available in my office if you would like to preview any of them.

- Copan, Paul & William Lane Craig. *Creation Out Of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*.
- Craig, William Lane. *The KALAM Cosmological Argument*.
- Walton, John H. *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary.

The Story Of God

Long Beach Alliance Church • March 5th, 2006 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED
THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.
~GENESIS 1:1 (NASB)**

1) The Bible Is Written About God

- The Bible is God's story (narrative) about Himself. His story is written to all of mankind. It is appropriate to say that God's story is written to us (mankind), however, God's story is not about us -- it's actually about Him.
- God's story is not exhaustive about Himself. In other words, God has only shared what we (mankind) need to know. God is not as interested in answering all the questions as He is in answering the most important questions.
- Most people who go to church, Christians and the curious, have a much better idea of the end of the story (the newer testament) than the beginning of the story (the older testament). This is a deeply problematic issue.
- The beginning of God's story, His grand story of loving His chosen people (Israel & the church), has its beginnings in Genesis. Genesis is the book of beginnings.

2) In The Beginning, God Created...

- A) Unlike many of the cosmologies of the Ancient Near East (ANE)*, creation in the Bible is a serene and peaceful event which is initiated by God as the creator of all things.

- B) The focus of the first verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) is that God is the sole and unchallenged creator. Creation flows from God, and creation is exclusively His act. There is a limitless depth to this simple truth, "God is the creator."

- C) The scope of God's creation is "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This is a Hebrew example of the merging of extremes (merism) to express the totality of the cosmic phenomena. Simply, God created everything.

- D) We will "unpack" some of the implications of God's creation in the weeks ahead, but for starters, it would do us well to consider that since our lives are created, it is of paramount importance to understand "why?"

* Cosmology is the science of origins. A cosmology is an explanation of the development of all things. In the Ancient Near East (ANE), there were many cosmological explanations for the origins of the universe. Some of these cosmologies bear a striking resemblance to the creation of the Bible (e.g. in *Enuma Elish*, the primary Babylonian creation account, creation occurs in phases. In the Egyptian *Memphite Theology*, Ptah (a god) brings things to life by the word of his mouth (by giving them names). In the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis Epic* mankind is created by the gods (for less than pure motives) and is controlled by a flood in which Atrahasis is saved by building an ark and populating it with animals). Despite these similarities, the differences are far greater. Chaos and the comfort of the gods (who are many, and are always fighting for supremacy) are always the driving forces behind ANE cosmologies, completely unlike the Bible. An excellent recommended resource for deeper study of these and other related creation issues is *Creation Out Of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* by Paul Copan & William Lane Craig.

3) The Differences Between The West & ANE

- A) As we approach the Bible, it is not only important to recognize God authorship (by Him, about Him), but also recognize that the Bible has been inspired (the message and the authors) by God (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

- B) In order to enhance the transfer of Scripture's timeless truths, it is helpful to have an understanding of the differences between the behavior, beliefs, culture, values, and worldview of the Ancient Near East (the biblical context) and the Modern West (our own context). The following chart, created by John Pilch*, provides a helpful list in identifying some of these critical differences.

Comparative Study Between Modern West & Ancient Near East Culture & Worldview

Modern West	Ancient Near East
Egocentric identity	Group-centric identity
Promote independence	Promote interdependence
See the parts	See the whole
Urge uniqueness	Urge conformity
See autonomy from social solidarity	Seek integration into social reality
Primary responsibility to self and individual potential	Primary obligation to others and the development of the group
Group membership results from a renewable contract	Group membership results from one's inherited social and familiar place in society
Behavior is governed by rights and duties specified by one's personal goals	Behavior is dictated by the group's mores and sanctions of the leader's authority
Individual worth is based on individual achievements or individual possessions	Individual worth is rooted in familial status, social position, class, or caste