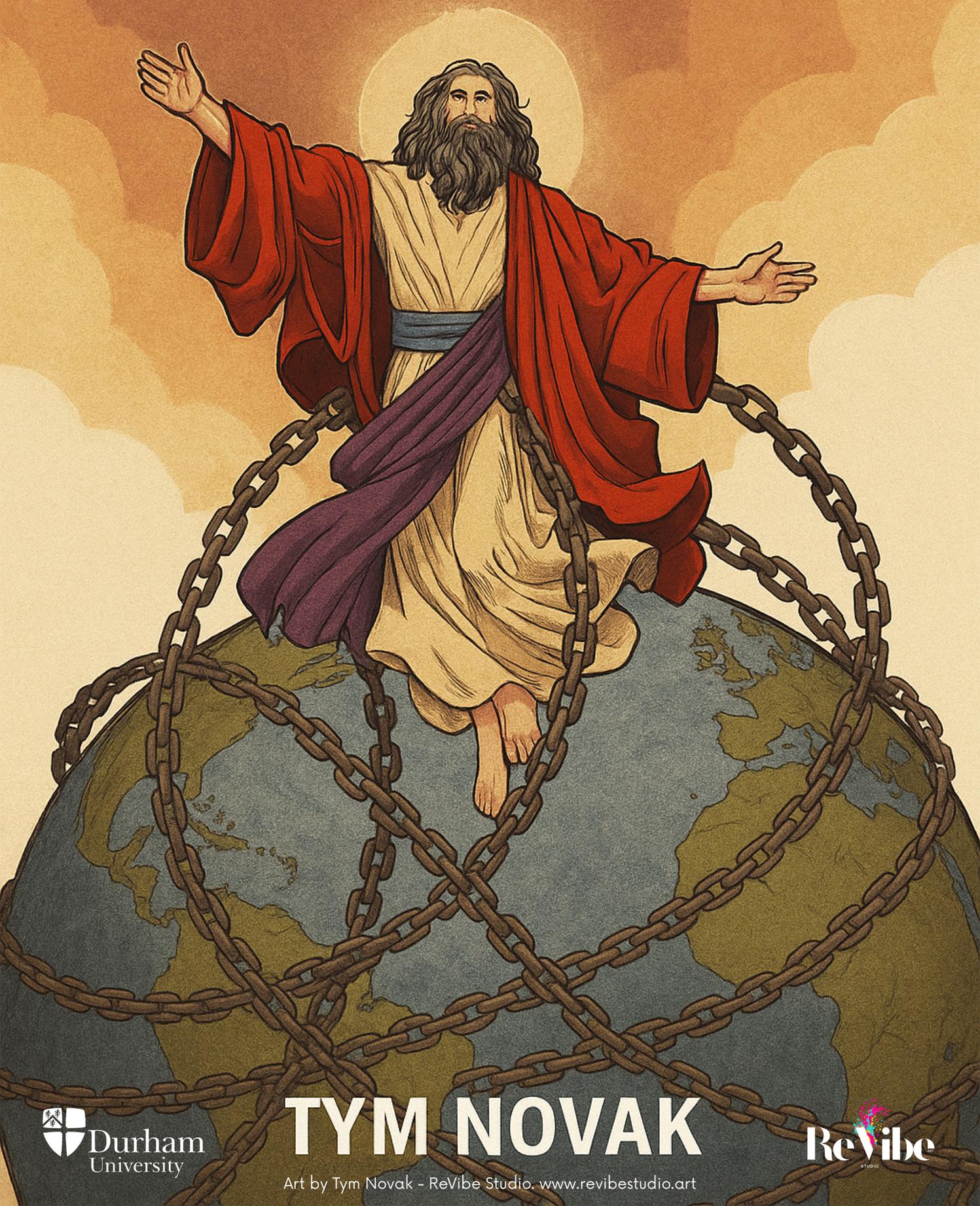


GENESIS

& ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN?



Genesis

& Ancient Near Eastern

Introduction to Genesis 1:1-2:4: The Biblical narrative of creation tells how God fashioned the universe over the span of six days. It all begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth, which were initially without shape and empty. Throughout these six days, God brings forth the light, separates the waters, shapes the land, and creates plants and animals. Finally, He forms humanity in His own image. On the seventh day, God takes a rest, signifying the culmination of His work. This account highlights God’s immense power and purpose in establishing order and life within the cosmos.¹

There are differences between the two creation stories in the Bible, which have led to varying opinions among theologians and historians. Some believe these stories are distinct and contradictory, while others see them as working together rather than opposing each other. They argue that Genesis 1 gives a broad view of creation, while Genesis 2 goes into more detail about human origins, as presented in the “Key Differences” table below. However, other scholars think these stories come from different traditions combined in the text.²

Key Differences

Feature	Genesis 1	Genesis 2
Name of God:	Elohim	Yahweh, Elohim
Style:	Poetic, formal	Narrative, personal
Focus:	Universal creation	Human experience
Order of humans:	Last, male & female together	First, male then female
Method:	Spoken word	Hands-on, forming and breathing life

¹ Gerhard von Rad, “Genesis” (London: Translation SCM Press Ltd, 1961, 1972), 45-53.

² Prof.Konrad Schmid, “Genesis’ Two Creation Accounts Compiled and Interpreted as One” TheTorah.com (October 11, 2023) 1-5. [\[PDF\]](#)

Significance of Ancient Near Eastern Context:

Understanding the context of the Ancient Near East (ANE) allows us to see that Genesis 1–2 was crafted in conversation with other creation myths from its era. Like many ANE narratives, it depicts the creation emerging from chaos and the formation of humans. However, it distinguishes itself by showcasing a single, sovereign God who creates through peaceful speech rather than through violence or conflict. Unlike other myths that portray humans as mere servants of the gods, Genesis assigns humanity dignity and purpose as bearers of God's image. This text reshapes common ancient concepts to reveal a God who is moral, relational, and deeply engaged with His creation.³

Interpreting Genesis 1:1-2:4 within the context of the Ancient Near East sheds light on crucial theological ideas, including God's sovereignty, humanity's role as bearers of His image, and the inherent goodness of creation. These concepts stand in stark contrast to ancient myths, offering a unique perspective on the world. They can significantly influence contemporary Christian thought regarding creation care, highlighting the importance of stewardship, responsibility, and a deep respect for the natural world as part of God's intentional and purposeful design.

I. The Ancient Near Eastern Context of Genesis 1:1-2:4:**Overview of Ancient Near Eastern Creation Myths**

1. Common Themes in ANE Myths: Many Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation myths share themes reflecting early cultures' understanding of the world's origins. Key examples include the Enuma Elish (Babylonian), The Memphite Theology (Egyptian), and The Epic of Atrahasis (Mesopotamian). In the Enuma Elish, the god Marduk defeats the chaos goddess Tiamat to form the world, emphasising creation through divine combat. The Memphite Theology shows creation via Ptah's thought and speech, highlighting an intellectual view. The Epic of Atrahasis depicts gods creating humans from clay and divine blood to serve them, illustrating humanity's role as servants of the gods.⁴ Common features of these myths include:

- Creation from chaos (often water)

³ Allan Dyssel, "Reading the Creation Narrative in Genesis 1–2:4a Against its Ancient Near Eastern Background," University of Stellenbosch (March 2007) Chapter Nine, Conclusion, 65-66. [\[PDF\]](#)

⁴ Mickael Muller, "A Short and Selective Study of Some Similarities and Differences Between the Biblical and Other Ancient Near Eastern Creation Accounts as a Proof of the Uniqueness and Divine Inspiration of Genesis." Brussels, Belgium (February 2107): "Enuma Elish", 25 [\[PDF\]](#)

- Polytheism with divine conflict or cooperation
- Humans were created to assist the gods
- A focus on temples and kingship.

These themes set the stage for interpreting Genesis 1:1-2:4, which offers a monotheistic, peaceful, and purpose-driven view of creation.

Key themes: creation from chaos, conflict between gods, the role of deities in creation, human creation for divine service.⁵

2. Creation from Chaos in ANE Contexts: Many Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation myths start with a chaotic watery mass, a theme that also appears in Genesis 1, where “the deep” (*tehom*) exists before God begins to shape creation. However, the Genesis narrative stands in stark contrast to myths like the *Enuma Elish*, in which gods such as Marduk must engage in a violent battle against a chaos monster (Tiamat) to bring forth the world. Similarly, Egyptian and Canaanite legends often depict creation arising from water, frequently through conflict or divine struggle.⁶

In Genesis, there is no struggle—God brings about order calmly through His word, rather than through violence. The waters are not seen as divine or threatening; instead, they are simply part of the created world. Unlike the polytheistic and combative views found in ANE myths, Genesis showcases a monotheistic, sovereign God who creates with purpose and declares His creation “very good.” This distinction underscores the unique theological message of Genesis: creation is not born out of divine conflict but is the intentional, orderly act of a just and mighty God. This offers a foundation for a worldview centred around peace, purpose, and human responsibility in the created order.

3. The Role of the Creator in ANE Myths: Genesis 1 offers a peaceful and orderly vision of creation, contrasting sharply with the violent origins found in many Ancient Near Eastern myths. God creates through calm and authoritative speech, as seen in Genesis 1:3 with “Let there be light,” where light appears without resistance or conflict. The repeated phrase “And God said...” emphasises a deliberate process, highlighting divine sovereignty. Unlike the *Enuma Elish*, where Marduk slays Tiamat, Genesis portrays creation as an

⁵ C.T. Fritsch, “*The Layman’s Bible Commentaries - Genesis*” (C.D Deans, SCM Press Ltd, 1959) 19.

⁶ Delano, Joan Heuer, “*The “Exegesis” of “Enuma Elish” and Genesis 1 — 1875 to 1975: A Study in Interpretation.*” Marquette University ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, (1985)5-6. [\[PDF\]](#)

intentional and non-violent act. Each part of creation is deemed “good,” culminating in humans made in God's image, tasked with stewardship rather than servitude. Overall, Genesis 1 reveals a wise and peaceful God who shapes the world with purpose and care.⁷

II. Developing a Theology of Creation Care Based on Genesis 1:1-2:4: Theological Implications for Creation Care

1. Creation as “Very Good” A Call to Stewardship: In Genesis 1:31, God surveys all that He has created and proclaims it “very good.” This statement goes beyond a simple aesthetic appreciation; it carries a theological weight, emphasising the inherent value, order, and purpose of the world around us. For Christians, this verse highlights that the world is neither disposable nor accidental but rather a precious, intentional creation that reflects God's essence. Since creation is deemed “very good,” believers are encouraged—and even required—to respond with care, respect, and stewardship. The earth is not just a backdrop for human endeavours; it's an integral part of God's sacred work. Thus, to harm creation is not only an environmental issue; it's a spiritual matter that disrupts what God has lovingly crafted and called good.

Stewardship is essential to a believer's relationship with God. In Genesis 1:26-28, humans are given dominion over creation, which should be understood as a call to nurture rather than exploit. This reflects God's caring nature and calls believers to protect and sustain the world as an expression of their faith.

Creation care is not optional; it is a fundamental aspect of the Christian vocation, honouring creation as a sacred trust. Genesis 1:31 affirms that creation is “very good,” prompting Christians to see it as valuable and worthy of protection. The goodness of creation inspires believers to care for and preserve the natural world in alignment with God's purposes.

2. The Relational Aspect of Creation in Genesis 1: Creation serves not just as a backdrop for human existence but as a vibrant reflection of God's goodness and purpose. This opening chapter of the Bible introduces a God who brings the universe into being through a deliberate and orderly process, affirming the intrinsic goodness of the world (Genesis 1:31). Within this framework, creation is far from neutral; it's interwoven with divine intention and

⁷ Grimsrud, Ted. “God's Creative Love—Genesis 1.” (Peace Theology, April 8, 2010). [\[PDF\]](#)

significance, highlighting God's care, creativity, and sovereignty.

A crucial relational aspect of Genesis 1 is the connection between humanity and creation. In verses 26–28, humans are created in God's image and given the responsibility to "have dominion" over the earth. Yet, this dominion does not signal a right to dominate or exploit; rather, it suggests a relationship grounded in responsibility and stewardship. This mandate calls us to tend to and safeguard the world, nurturing it as God does. Theologian Terence E. Fretheim emphasises that humans are co-creators with God, charged with upholding the goodness of creation. Creation is entrusted to humanity, not for misuse, but as a sacred trust to be cherished and protected.⁸

This understanding encourages Christians to view environmental care as a vital part of faithful living. Caring for and preserving the environment transcends being merely a social or political concern; it emerges as a theological calling rooted in humanity's duty to honour God's creation. As Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen explain, creation itself reflects God's goodness and purpose, and tending to it aligns believers with God's mission of reconciliation and order. Thus, environmental stewardship is not merely optional; it becomes a natural extension of a faithful Christian life, closely intertwined with how believers relate to both God and His creation.⁹

3. The Role of the Church in Creation Care: Rooted in the creation theology presented in Genesis 1:1–2:4, the Church's role in environmental stewardship is not merely optional—it is a profound and inherent extension of its divine calling to reflect God's image and to care for the aspects of creation that God declares as "very good." This sacred responsibility emphasises that the Earth is not just a resource to be exploited but a gift to be cherished and protected.

Through comprehensive education programs, active advocacy for ecological policies, and implementing sustainable practices, Christian communities can effectively fulfil their vocation as faithful stewards of the earth. Initiatives include promoting renewable energy sources, reducing waste, restoring local ecosystems, and supporting fair trade products that honour both people and

⁸ Fretheim, Terence E. "Genesis and Ecology." In *"The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation"*, edited by Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 733–735.

⁹ Evans, Craig A., Joel N. Lohr, and David L. *"The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation."* (Petersen, eds. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Leiden: Brill, 2012) 15.

the planet.

In this way, the Church cares for the environment and bears witness to the Creator in a world that so desperately needs healing and restoration. By embodying these values, congregations can serve as beacons of hope and action, inspiring others to take part in the global movement towards environmental sustainability and justice, ultimately reflecting the love and care of God for all creation.¹⁰

III. Conclusion

1. Summary of Key Points: Interpreting Genesis 1:1–2:4 within the context of the Ancient Near East (ANE) shows that, in contrast to the chaotic and violent creation myths of neighboring cultures, Genesis offers a vision of a calm and orderly creation brought forth by a sovereign God through the power of His word.¹¹ This creation is described as “very good,” underscoring its inherent value and purpose. Humanity is entrusted with the role of responsible stewardship rather than exploitation, reflecting God’s care for His creation. This interpretation lays a solid theological groundwork for contemporary creation care, encouraging Christians to view environmental responsibility as a vital expression of their faith and a way to honour God’s creation.

2. Final Reflection on Creation Care: The theology of creation care, deeply rooted in Genesis 1, calls on Christians to engage with the world not just as passive bystanders but as active stewards of God’s beautiful creation. From the very first verses of Scripture, we are introduced to a God who thoughtfully brings the universe into existence, filled with intentionality, beauty, and order, declaring it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). This divine affirmation highlights the inherent value of the earth and all it encompasses.

As image-bearers of the Creator, Christians hold the vital responsibility of caring for and nurturing the earth, reflecting God’s loving authority. This stewardship is not merely a suggestion or an afterthought; it is a fundamental aspect of our faithful obedience. In the face of a global environmental crisis, the Genesis narrative serves as a reminder to the Church that creation is not just a resource to exploit, but a precious gift to be safeguarded and cherished.

¹⁰ Moo, Douglas J., and Jonathan A. Moo. “Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World.” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018) Part 2, Chapter 3 “A Beautiful World.”

¹¹ Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap, “Does God Suffer?” (T&T Clark Ltd, 2000) Yahweh: God the Creator, 47.

Therefore, creation care transcends ethical duty—it is a spiritual practice, a form of worship that honours the Creator. By preserving the earth and utilising its resources wisely, believers embody God's intentions and participate in His ongoing work of sustaining life. Caring for creation is a reflection of our identity as God's people—doing so faithfully, gratefully, and responsibly.

3. A Call to Faithful Stewardship: As we contemplate the theology of Genesis 1:1–2:4, it's evident that caring for creation goes far beyond just environmental concerns—it's fundamentally a spiritual matter. The Christian community is called to recommit itself to the stewardship of the earth as an expression of faithfulness to the Creator and respect for His handiwork. The Scriptures begin with a powerful depiction of God, who brings the world into being not through struggle but through sovereign speech and divine order, declaring His creation to be "very good." This vision sharply contrasts with the chaotic and polytheistic creation myths from the Ancient Near East.

One way to understand the context of Genesis is to view Moses as drawing from the stories of Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, weaving them into a cohesive narrative that honours Yahweh as the one true Creator. In this process, Moses not only distinguished Israel theologically but also challenged the cultural norms of nearby nations. Alternatively, some believe that Moses preserved a divinely inspired oral tradition, which may have influenced other cultures either directly or indirectly. The differences between these worldviews are striking. While ANE myths revolve around multiple gods and conflict, Genesis introduces a singular God who creates in peace and purpose. Unlike pagan cultures that often revered creation itself, the Bible assigns humanity the role of caretakers, entrusted to care for creation on God's behalf. This significant shift elevates our role not as mere consumers but as stewards of God's world.

With this in mind, let us feel compelled to engage more intentionally in creation care—as an act of worship, obedience, and testimony. May the Church rise to fulfil God's initial calling, ensuring that our treatment of the earth reflects the same goodness, order, and reverence that characterised its creation.



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