The Beauty of Japheth and the Tents of Shem

A Comparative Cultural Study of Biblical/Rabbinic Stories and Parallels in Greek Mythology

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Preface

The idea of this book first presented itself to me while I was in high school, when I read Plato’s *Symposium* for the first time. I was surprised to find in Aristophanes’ speech an account of the creation of the first man and woman that was very similar to the story from rabbinic literature with which I was familiar. Both described the creation of man and woman as the bifurcation of a primeval binary being into two parts, male and female. Along with the similarities, I perceived differences that represented to me the fundamental dissimilarity in the way Judaism and Greek culture perceive the connection between man and God. From that time, I repeatedly encountered stories from Greek mythology in which I discerned a similarity, large or small, to biblical or rabbinic stories, and I hoped that one day I would have the opportunity to analyze and formulate these ideas into a coherent thesis. This opportunity arrived when I was asked by the School of Communication at the Netanya Academy College to prepare a course on the interface between Judaism and Western culture. This book, inspired by the course, which I taught for several years, has now been completed, with the help of God, after a decade of study and research on the subject.

I would like to thank all those who supported and assisted me in this effort: my wife Chasida, for whom every letter of the “Woman of Valor” could have been written, and the song and the melody of my life, my dear children, Rivki and Yoni, Hadas, Shlomi and Rotem, Reut, and Rafael, and my grandchildren, Shira and Ro’i. They were the first people to whom I presented these ideas, when we gathered on Sabbaths and holidays, during the time that I was writing this book. I would also like to thank my dear parents, Baruch and Aviva Pinchuk, who bestow upon us endless spiritual and material blessings, and Dr. Guy Darshan, whose comments on the first section significantly sharpened the book’s focus.

Introduction

At an early stage in its history, Judaism was exposed to the culture of ancient Greece. In the early biblical books, Judges,[[1]](#footnote-1) Samuel, and Kings (the end of the second millennium BCE), the people of Israel struggle against the Philistines, members of the Sea Peoples, who were strongly connected to the Minoan-Mycenaean culture,[[2]](#footnote-2) from which Greek civilization emerged, and thus had much in common with Greek culture.[[3]](#footnote-3) Afterwards, early rabbinic culture and its literature (the Zugot, the Tannaim, and the Amoraim, from the second century BCE until the fifth century CE) flourished alongside and within classical Greek culture, which first appeared in the land of Israel with the conquests of Alexander the Great at the end of the fourth century BCE and continued after the Roman conquest. It cannot be supposed that Judaism existed alongside Greek culture without engaging it or reacting to it. Inevitably, both cultures responded, each in its own way, to historical events and significant intellectual developments. Early rabbinic literature reveals that the sages’ approach to Greek culture was complex and different from their approach to any other culture.[[4]](#footnote-4) This complex and unique approach is expressed beautifully in the aphorisms of Rabbi Yohanan, “’May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem’ (Gen. 9:27) – the words of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem”, and of Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba, “’May God enlarge Japheth’ – the beauty of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem” (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 9b). The title of this book, *The Beauty of Japheth and the Tents of Shem,* is derived from these statements. In this study, I will examine and compare stories from the Bible and early rabbinic literature for which there are parallels or similarities in the literature of Greek mythology.

The book has two sections. In the first section, I will compare and contrast biblical and rabbinic stories with parallel or similar stories in Greek mythology and classical Greek literature, while attempting to identify those characteristics unique to Judaism and those unique to Greek culture. I will further clarify my objectives below.

The second section is an interpretative comparison in which I will use the insights and perceptions emerging from the stories of Greek mythology to interpret and elucidate early rabbinic midrashim and statements. In a way, the aims of the two sections of the book are antithetical: the purpose of the first section is to clarify the distinction between Judaism and Greek culture, while the purpose of the second part is to use Greek culture to understand rabbinic literature.

Comparison (in the binary meaning of comparison-contrast) is a valuable tool, providing us with external points of reference with which to discover, measure and assess characteristics of the subjects under comparison that internal analysis alone, however profound, will not always be able to reveal. I will illustrate this with an example from within the Bible itself, from the story of Cain and Abel: “In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell” (Gen. 4:3-5).

The order of the verses seems illogical. If Cain brought his offering first and Abel second, why does the Bible first relate God’s response to Abel and only afterwards his response to Cain? A possible interpretation is that when Cain brought his offering to God, he did not know what to expect. He had no point of reference. Only after he saw the response to Abel’s offering was Cain able to compare it to what had happened to him and to understand that “but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed”, and therefore, “Cain was much distressed, and his face fell”. This comparison enabled Cain to comprehend that in his case God’s silence indicated scorn. Therefore, although Cain made his offering first, God’s response to Abel was placed before his response to Cain to teach us that God’s silence to Cain can be understood only comparing it to his response to Abel.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The first part of the book, as indicated above, is a comparison-contrast of biblical and rabbinic stories with parallels and similar stories from Greek mythology and classic Greek literature. My aim is both anthropological and theological -- to identify similarities and differences in the cultural and religious values of Judaism and classical Greek culture.[[6]](#footnote-6) From these differences we can discover the unique content and nature of each culture. For example, both Hercules and Samson are men of great physical strength who choose to take their own lives. However, their reasons and objectives in committing suicide are very different, and this dissimilarity reveals the contrasts between perceptions of human character and emotional strength in Jewish and Greek culture.[[7]](#footnote-7) Job and Prometheus both endure great suffering and tribulation by divine command, without just cause, and both rail against the injustice of their plight. However, the radically different nature of their protests reveals the contrast between man’s approach to God in Jewish and Greek culture.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In delineating the objectives of the comparison presented here, it is important to emphasize and specify those aims to which this study is not directed and that lie outside its scope. Many scholars have studied the question of the influence of Greek culture on the East in general and on rabbinic Judaism in particular.[[9]](#footnote-9) On the other hand, the publication of Gordon’s *Homer and the Bible*[[10]](#footnote-10)renewed appreciation of the considerable influence in the opposite direction -- the absorption of Eastern culture in the West and its impact on ancient Greek culture.[[11]](#footnote-11) Currently, scholars are intensively researching the possible origins of Greek mythology in recently discovered ancient Near Eastern myths.[[12]](#footnote-12)

I have made extensive use of the research literature that uses inter-cultural influence and borrowing to discover inter-cultural parallels. However, as my aim is to discover the significance of the similarities and differences, I only rarely[[13]](#footnote-13) discuss the inter-cultural influences and borrowings themselves.

It is also important to emphasize that comparison does not denote equality. The comparisons presented here do not imply equality in status between the two sides of the comparison, especially with reference to the Jewish belief in the sanctity of the texts, their veracity, or their divine origin. This comparison relates exclusively to the content of the stories and the values and principles emerging and emanating from them.

A comparison between these two specific cultures -- biblical/rabbinic stories and Greek mythology -- is necessary for two reasons. First, as I noted in my opening remarks, Judaism was exposed to Greek culture over a long period of time, very early in its history, from the time of the Judges, throughout the early rabbinic period and continuing after the Roman conquest. I will examine the similarities and differences in the beliefs, values and ideas of these two concurrently developing cultures.

Second, it is often said that modern Western culture, and especially philosophy, are the product of Greek philosophy. For example, the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead commented that the Western philosophical tradition as a whole is nothing more than a series of footnotes to Plato.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the same vein, Jaan Puhvel wrote that “in many respects the Greeks founded Western culture.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Nonetheless, the second cornerstone of modern Western culture and philosophy is the Bible, and the culture and values emanating from it.[[16]](#footnote-16) As Eliezer Schweid has noted, “the memory recorded within it [the Bible], transmitted from generation to generation as an obligatory legacy, has seminal importance for the knowledge and understanding of Western culture in its creation, development and decline until the modern period.”[[17]](#footnote-17) We must therefore compare these two cornerstones of Western culture in order to understand the fundamental contribution of each.

The total number of possible comparisons and parallels between biblical/rabbinic literature and Greek mythology is vast. This study encompasses only a small fraction of the material both qualitatively and quantitatively.[[18]](#footnote-18) I hope that this work will encourage further study on this fascinating subject and that others will contribute to this field and delve deeper in the understanding and analysis of the nature of Judaism by comparing it to Greek culture.

**The Nature of the Sources and Methodological Problems**

The primary sources used in this study in the examination of Jewish religion and culture are, for the most part, the Bible and Tannaitic and Amoraic literature. This literature was written in a period in which the Jewish people were unified politically and concentrated in one geographic area (the land of Israel), and later in two geographic areas (the land of Israel and Iraq), while maintaining constant and continuous communication with each other. The unity of the Jewish people was reflected in its literature. The Bible has reached us in one canonical version accepted by the entire Jewish people. The Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Talmuds and the early midrashim, despite the myriad and evolving opinions expressed within them, have reached us as complete, integral works, accepted by all Jews.

The Greek sources are different. The geography and topography of Greece engendered its division into separate political and cultural units.[[19]](#footnote-19) The Greek peninsula is bisected in its length and width by mountain ranges. Only the valleys that lie between them were inhabitable and capable of sustaining the various tribes that lived there. Under these conditions the various areas and tribes were only loosely connected, allowing myths to develop in different ways within each tribe. Equally important geographical factors were the sea and the many isolated islands surrounding the Greek peninsula, each of which developed separately. With the invention of writing in the eighth century BCE, an effort was made to gather and integrate these various and diverse traditions. However, their considerable dissimilarity prevented the creation of a uniform, universally accepted version. As a result, there are no Greek texts with a level of cultural authority similar to that of the Bible and the early rabbinic literature within Judaism.[[20]](#footnote-20) Rather there are many and diverse Greek and Roman collections and sources.[[21]](#footnote-21) Among many examples, there are numerous traditions about the creation of man,[[22]](#footnote-22) two different versions of Antigone’s fate,[[23]](#footnote-23) two traditions about the end of Narcissus,[[24]](#footnote-24) uncertainty regarding the fate of Hercules,[[25]](#footnote-25) and various traditions on the subject of whether the eagle ate Prometheus’s heart or his liver.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Diversity and uncertainty regarding story details in Jewish sources, and even more so in Greek sources, constitute a methodological challenge in comparing the Jewish and Greek stories. In most cases, I refer in some measure to all versions of each story and attempt in the course of the comparison to explain the significance of each variation. The wide time frame of the sources poses an even greater methodological challenge, because it is inevitable that in the course of time significant cultural and ideological changes occurred within both rabbinic literature and mythology. For example, the images of both Zeus[[27]](#footnote-27) and Hercules[[28]](#footnote-28) underwent significant changes. My research is based on the earliest possible sources and was conducted with full awareness of this methodological problem.

If this research were historical or literary and its aim was to examine the mutual influence of these cultures and the cultural borrowing or transfer of ideas and concepts, the aforementioned methodological difficulties would indeed be formidable. However, as I have explained, my interest and the focus of this research is cultural, and its purpose is to examine the values and ideals of each group. In this field of research, these methodological difficulties are less acute because regarding values and ideas, the accumulated total of all the layers is more significant than the distinctions between each individual layer.

The following is a brief description of the principal[[29]](#footnote-29) Greek and Roman works that I have used as sources for the Greek myths.[[30]](#footnote-30)

1. **Homer,**[[31]](#footnote-31) the legendary author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, lived from the end of the eighth to the beginning of the ninth century BCE, according to general opinion. He wrote his poems orally and they were committed to writing no earlier than the second half of the sixth century, under the tyranny of Peisistratos in Athens. The *Iliad* recounts the tenth year of the Trojan War; embedded within it are many legends and descriptions that shaped the way that the Greeks perceived the gods. The *Odyssey* recounts the Greek hero Odysseus’s journey home from the Trojan War.
2. **Hesiod** was a Greek writer who lived at the end of the eighth century (perhaps the beginning of the seventh century). His work, *Theogony,* is a crucial source for understanding the relationship between the gods, their predecessors, the Titans, and the earlier gods, as well as the rise of Zeus to the head of the Olympian pantheon. His *Works and Days* also includes a substantial number of myths.
3. **Aeschylus** (died 456 BCE), **Sophocles** (died 406 BCE) and **Euripides** (died 406 BCE) were the great writers of tragedies in the fifth century. Their plays are based on adaptions of stories from Greek mythology.[[32]](#footnote-32)
4. **Herodotus** of Halicarnassus (Southwest Asia Minor, modern Turkey; 425 -- 484 BCE). His work *The Histories* describes the Greco-Persian Wars, but myths and their interpretations are embedded within it. Herodotus is considered the founder of Western historical literature.
5. **Hyginus** (64 BCE – 17 CE), a Latin writer, composed the *Fabulae,* a collection of about three hundred myths, some of which do not appear in other sources, written in a rather crude manner.
6. **Ovid** (43 BCE – 17 CE) was a Roman poet who lived and worked in the time of Caesar Augustus. Despite its late date, his poem *Metamorphoses* is one of the most important sources of Greek mythology.
7. **Apollodorus** of Athens (approx. 120 CE) was believed to be the author of the *Bibliotheke.* As early as 1873 it was proven conclusively not to be his and is thus sometimes designated “Pseudo-Appolodorus”. However, because the original works of Appolodorus have been lost and the possibility of confusion is minimal, I refer to the author of the work as “Appolodorus”.[[33]](#footnote-33) A condensed collection of Greek myths and one of the most important sources of Greek mythology, *Bibliotheke* is the most comprehensive of the ancient mythographies, covering the entire Greek mythological corpus up to the death of Odysseus, after his return from the Trojan War.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Part One

**Chapter One – The Creation**

It is only natural that from its earliest days, humanity has grappled with the question of its inception and the origin of its world and all that is within it. Each culture propounded its own explanation for the genesis of the universe and its inhabitants. The creation of the world is described in both the Torah and Greek mythology. In this chapter I will compare the biblical narrative to the account in Hesiod’s *Theogony,*[[35]](#footnote-35)while attempting to identify the differences between Judaism and Greek culture. This discussion is divided into three parts: 1. The creation of the world. 2. The creation of man. 3. The creation of woman.

**The Nature of the Book and the Identity of Its Author**

Before we go into the details of the descriptions of creation, it is important to distinguish between the nature of the authors narrating the creation in each culture. The *Theogony* opens with a long lyric introduction in which Hesiod presents himself as the author of the book and explains that he received its content prophetically from the muses, in order to convey it to mortals, “and they breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforetime …”:

And once they taught Hesiod fine singing, as he tended his lambs below holy Helicon. This is what the goddesses said to me first, the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus the aegis-bearer: “Shepherds that camp in wild, disgraces, merest bellies: we know to tell many lies that sound like truth, but we know to sing reality, when we will.” So said mighty Zeus` daughters, the sure of utterance, and they gave me a branch of springing bay to pluck for a staff, a handsome one, and they breathed into me wondrous voice, so that I should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforetime. (*Theogony*, trans. M.L. West, pp. 3-4).

Tell me this from the beginning, Muses who dwell in Olympus, and say, what thing among them came first. (*Theogony*, trans. M.L. West, p. 6).

Similar, but shorter, introductions are familiar to us from the prophetic books of the Prophets and Writings. The prophet introduces himself and his appointment as a prophet, explains that God prophesied to him and commanded him to publicize the prophecy, and immediately afterward the prophecy begins. A striking example can be found in the book of Jeremiah (1:1-9):[[36]](#footnote-36)

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin…The word of the Lord came to me: Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; Before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations … And the Lord said to me: Do not say, “I am still a boy,” But go wherever I send you
And speak whatever I command you... The Lord put out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth.

In the Torah, in contrast, there is no introduction or opening in which the scribe-prophet introduces himself and his vocation. The Torah begins with the words “In the beginning God created”. The prophet/author does not reveal his identity. Nachmanides points out that even though we know that Moses was the author, the Torah itself contains no hint linking the Moses described in the Torah to the Moses who wrote the Torah:

It would have been proper for him to write at the beginning of the book of Genesis: "And G-d spoke to Moses all these words, saying". The reason it was written anonymously [without the above introductory phrase] is that Moses our teacher did not write the Torah in the first person like the prophets who did mention themselves. For example, it is often said of Ezekiel, "And the word of the Eternal came unto me saying: 'Son of man'”... Moses our teacher, however, wrote this history of all former generations and his own genealogy, history and experiences in the third person. Therefore, he says, "And G-d spoke to Moses, saying to him" as if he were speaking about another person. [[37]](#footnote-37)

Nachmanides goes on to explain that the reason for this difference is that the Torah preceded the creation of the world and was not composed by man. The Torah is presented and perceived as the actual word of God, independent of any human authorship or influence. In this its status is above that of the prophetic books:

The reason for the Torah being written in this form [namely the third person] is that it preceded the creation of the world, and needless to say, it preceded the birth of Moses our teacher. It has been transmitted to us by tradition that it [the Torah] was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire. Thus, Moses was like a scribe who copies from an ancient book, and therefore he wrote anonymously.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The description of the Creation in Genesis was perceived in Jewish tradition as the authentic utterance of the Creator himself, objective and exact. This leaves no room for alternative accounts, and even, to some extent, limits exegetical possibilities. It is therefore easy to accept this original and solitary narrative of Creation as one of the pillars of faith. In contrast, the account of the creation in the *Theogony* is not the word of the Creator himself, but rather testimony, related by one witness to another, from the muses to Hesiod, all of them created beings, who by the nature of things, could not have been present at the time of creation. This transmission was perceived in the Greek tradition as subjective, unauthentic, and not necessarily accurate. It leaves room for alternative accounts, and there are in fact many Greek creation stories, with varying degrees of differences between them.[[39]](#footnote-39) The greater the differences between the accounts, the more difficult it is to regard them as a consistent and trustworthy foundation of faith.

1. **The Creation of the World**

We will begin our discussion with the account of the Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3:

When God began to create heaven and earth— the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water— God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good…God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night…God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water” …  God called the expanse Sky…God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear” … God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it” … And God saw that this was good …God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And God saw that this was good…God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” And God saw that this was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth”…God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind”… And God saw that this was good. And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth” … God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth” … And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good…On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.

The crucial points in the creation story in the Torah are:

1. God existed before the Creation.
2. One God created everything directly and on his own initiative.
3. The act of creation was done consciously and purposely: “God created” rather than “it was created” -- an active rather than passive verb. “And God said” indicates will and purpose.
4. The Creation had a plan and a purpose, both in general and in particular: “And God saw that this was good”. An assessment of the situation is possible only in reference to an existing goal, plan or intent. “And he called” – God named the created beings.

The created beings have a purpose: “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times -- the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth”.

“And God blessed” -- a blessing has significance in relation to an existing goal, plan or intent.

1. There is an official conclusion to the act of creation, which we celebrate and sanctify:

“And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done”.

Let us now examine the creation of the world as described by Hesiod in the *Theogony*:

First came the chaos[[40]](#footnote-40); and then broad-breasted Earth, secure seat for ever of all the immortals who occupy the peak of snowy Olympus; the misty Tartara in a remote recess of the broad-pathed earth; and Eros... Out of the Chasm came Erebos and dark Night, and from Night in turn came Bright Air[[41]](#footnote-41) and Day, whom she bore in shared intimacy with Erebos. Earth bore first of all one equal to herself, Starry Heaven,[[42]](#footnote-42) so that he should cover her all about, to be a secure seat for ever for the blessed gods; and she bore the long Mountains, pleasant haunts of the goddesses, the Nymphs who dwell in mountain glens; and she bore also the undraining Sea and its furious swell, not in union of love... she bore deep swirling Oceanus, Koios and Kreios and Hyperion and Iapetus, Thea and Rhea and Themis and Memory, Phoebe... and Tethys. After them the youngest was born, crooked-schemer Kronos, most fearsome of children, who loathed his lusty father. (*Theogony*, trans. M.L. West, pp. 6-7).

Earth was tight-pressed inside, and groaned. She thought up a nasty trick... and made a great reaping-hook, and showed it to her dear children and spoke... Children of mine and of an evil father... we could get redress for your father`s cruelty... Kronos took courage, and soon replied to his good mother: Mother, I would undertake this task and accomplish it. (*Theogony*, trans. M.L. West, pp. 7-8).

Rhea, surrendering to Kronos, bore resplendent children... The others great Kronos swallowed as each of them reached their mother`s knees from her holy womb... But when she was about to give birth to Zeus... Mighty Earth accepted him from her to rear and nurture... Then she wrapped a large stone in babycloth and delivered it to the son of Heaven... he put it away in his belly... his son remained, secure and invincible, who before long was to defeat him... himself to be king among immortals. (*Theogony*, trans. M.L. West, pp. 16‑17).

{Chart: The Creation of the World in Greek Mythology. Chaos, Gaia (Earth), Tartarus, Eros (love), Erebos, Night, Uranus, Mountains, Pontus (the sea), Aether (air), Day, The Titans: Oceanus, Iapetus, Hyperion, Koios (Coeus), Kreios (Crius), Thea, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne (Memory), Phoebe, Tethys, Kronos (Cronos). The gods: Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite…}

The creation according to the *Theogony*, in contrast to the biblical story of Creation:

1. In the *Theogony* there is no pre-existing God who created all.[[43]](#footnote-43) On the contrary, the gods are themselves created beings,[[44]](#footnote-44) born at an advanced stage of the creation process. This point is emphasized in the title of the work, “theogony”, meaning the genealogy of the gods.

In the Bible, God is beyond and before creation and therefore an unbridgeable chasm separates the “Creator” from the “created”. In the *Theogony*, and in mythology literature in general, although the gods are older and stronger than men, they too are created beings. The difference between them is thus at most one of degree, on a spectrum of created beings.[[45]](#footnote-45) In Greek mythology the border between man and god is sometimes blurred. There are many instances in which the gods mate with mortal women and father children. At times, a man can even become a god, as in the case of the god Dionysus, born to Zeus and Semele,[[46]](#footnote-46) and the apotheosis of Hercules, the son of Zeus and Alcmene.[[47]](#footnote-47)

1. There is no one god who directly creates everything. Rather, one entity evolves from another: Chaos > Gaia> Uranus> the Titans > the gods. A purposeful or goal-oriented plan for creation cannot be discerned.[[48]](#footnote-48) At most, a deterministic process, to which even the gods are subject, can be detected. In which case, the incomprehensible evil in the world does not necessarily have an explanation or a deliberate cause. One cannot take comfort in the existence of benevolent divine design. In the Bible, God initiates the entire creation process, creates every detail himself with deliberate design, blesses his creations, places man in the Garden of Eden and assigns him a task. Because the divine purpose and aim in creation are apparent, there exist, in principle, a reason and an explanation for evil and incomprehensible occurrences. Man can take comfort in the thought that all has been preordained by God and that all is for the best, even if man, with his limited insight, is incapable of understanding or perceiving it.[[49]](#footnote-49)
2. The creation, in its initial stages, is not even a conscious act. Things simply happen spontaneously, from nothing: “First came Chaos”; “Earth...Tartara... and Eros. Out of Chaos came Erebos and dark Night”. In the biblical verse, “In the beginning God created…” (Gen.1:1), “God” is the subject of the sentence. In contrast, in the Greek creation story this verse must be read as if “In the beginning” is the subject of the sentence.[[50]](#footnote-50) The gods do not create “in the beginning”, but rather “in the beginning” creates the gods.
3. In the Greek narrative, the absence of both a clearly identified divine entity initiating the creation, and a goal or purpose for the creation, precludes the designation of a specific stage as the “completion of creation” and the gods’ cessation from work. In this case, there is nothing to commemorate and no one to thank for completing the creation process. Therefore, Greek culture lacks a concept comparable to the Sabbath as a reminder of the process of creation and the imitation of God by resting. In contrast, the biblical creation story has a clearly defined conclusion, indicated by God himself, and by us, in imitation of him: “On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done” (Gen. 2:2-3).

It is thus clear why the Greeks regarded the biblical-Jewish Sabbath as foreign and bizarre and harshly criticized the Jews for wasting a seventh of their lives in idleness[[51]](#footnote-51) and even refraining on the Sabbath from life-saving actions. Although Jewish apologetics endeavored to refute these arguments against the Sabbath[[52]](#footnote-52) and to explain its meaning, given the disparate perceptions of creation, their words fell on deaf ears.

1. The *Theogony* does not describe the creation of man,[[53]](#footnote-53) or of flora and fauna.[[54]](#footnote-54) The world of the gods is separate and secluded and totally disconnected from the human race.

**Summary**

The biblical creation story was narrated by the Creator himself and thus perceived as an authentic, objective and unique account. No room is left for alternate depictions and even the exegetical possibilities are relatively limited. In contrast, the Greek creation story is related as a testimony, from one witness to another. It is neither authentic nor objective; the multiple accounts differ from each other in varying degrees. These aspects limit the story’s capacity to function as the foundation of religious belief.

The biblical God pre-exists the world that He created on His own initiative, following a design, and sets an end point to the process of creation. In contrast, the Greek universe was created in an unconscious process by forces no longer relevant to our world. The Greek gods were themselves created in this process. In the Bible, God the Creator and man the created are separated by an unbridgeable chasm, whereas the difference between the Greek god and man, both created beings, is in degree not in kind, and thus sometimes blurred or bridged.

The biblical creation is deliberate and purposeful, allowing man to believe that “all is from Him, may He be blessed” and thus to more easily contend with the problem of evil. The Greek creation lacks purpose or goals, making it harder for man to find solace in his struggle against the evil in the world.

The biblical Creation has a clearly defined ending, which is commemorated by thanking God the Creator on the Sabbath. The Greek creation has neither a clearly defined ending nor a specific divine entity responsible for it. In which case, there is nothing to commemorate nor anyone to thank for concluding the act of creation.

1. **The Creation of Man**

The creation of man is described twice in the Bible:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:26-31)

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad … The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” (Gen. 2:7-17)

The creation of man appears within Greek mythology in various versions.[[55]](#footnote-55)It is often ascribed to Zeus alone, or the Zeus and other gods. Sometimes mortals and gods emerge from the same source. According to a prevalent tradition, man was created by Prometheus,[[56]](#footnote-56) while woman was created separately at a later stage by Hephaestus, at Zeus’ initiative, as a punishment to mankind.

Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, book one, lines 76-88)[[57]](#footnote-57) offers two accounts of the creation of man:

An animal more like the gods than these, more intellectually capable and able to control the other beasts, had not as yet appeared: now man was born, either because the framer of all things, the fabricator of this better world, created man out of his own divine substance – or else because the son of Iapetus[[58]](#footnote-58) took up a clod (so lately broken off from lofty aether[[59]](#footnote-59) that it still contained some elements in common with its kin), and mixing it with water, [[60]](#footnote-60)molded it into the shapes of gods, who govern all. And even though all other animals lean forward and look down toward the ground, he gave man a face that is uplifted and ordered him to stand erect and look directly into the vaulted heavens and turn his countenance to meet the stars; the earth that was so lately rude and formless, was changed by taking on the shapes of men.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Ovid presents two possibilities:

1. A primordial supreme god created man: “the framer of all things, the fabricator of this better world, created man out of his own divine substance”.
2. The Titian Prometheus, the son ofIapetus, created man out of a mixture of clay and rain water. [[62]](#footnote-62)

**Similarities and Differences between the Accounts:**

1. **Man was formed from the dust of the earth.** In the Bible this detailis mentioned only in the second story: “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth” (Gen. 2:7).[[63]](#footnote-63) Also in the *Metamorphoses*, man is formed from the dust of the earth, although here the additional use of water is mentioned:[[64]](#footnote-64) “the son of Iapetustook up a clod (so lately broken off from lofty aether that it still contained some elements in common with its kin), and mixing it with water, molded it into the shapes of gods”.

It is possible that the specific use of rain water is significant. Ovid’s words indicate that it was possible to form men out of the earth because “it still contained some elements in common with its kin”. If so, it is possible that this is also a requirement regarding the water – it must come from the sky, as rainwater, so that it will contain an element of celestial matter.

As we have seen, the biblical story does not mention a mixture containing water, but it does refer to a different activity, not mentioned in the *Metamorphoses*: “He blew into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). It is possible that the water in the *Metamorphoses* fills a function similar to, “he blew into his nostrils the breath of life” in the Bible. Water is the source of vitality and the soul of the supreme deity.[[65]](#footnote-65) However, there is a significant difference between the mixture of rainwater with a clod of earth that "contained some elements in common with its kin” and “he blew into his nostrils the breath of life”. On the words “he blew into his nostrils the breath of life”, Nachmanides (on Genesis 2:7) explained, “For he who breathes into the nostrils of another person gives into him something from his own soul”. In other words, God endowed man with part of his essence and identity and this is the source of man’s vital spirit and holiness.[[66]](#footnote-66) There is an expression here of a relationship and connection between the Creator and the created that is an almost intimate. This would appear to be the source of the imagery of the parent-child or master-servant relationship between God and his creatures. Man has within him a divine element from God Above.

In the Greek creation story this type of intimacy between God and man is missing. Man’s vital spirit comes from the “divine substance”, as does the vital spirit of the gods. However, a god did not breathe his own spirit into man.[[67]](#footnote-67) Therefore, a parent-child or master-servant relationship does not exist between the gods and man and they do not take responsibility for him. There is no expectation that the gods care about man and no justification for a person in distress to turn to them for help.

1. **Man was created in the image of God.** The first creation story in the Bible reads, “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”, and in the *Metamorphoses*, “molded it into the shapes of gods, who govern all”.
2. **In the *Metamorphoses* the difference between man and beast is emphasized.** “Even though all other animals lean forward and look down toward the ground, he gave man a face that is uplifted and ordered him to stand erect and look directly into the vaulted heavens and turn his countenance to meet the stars”. The account of the Creation in in the Torah however does not contrast man with other living creatures.[[68]](#footnote-68) A possible explanation for this difference is that the *Metamorphoses* regards man as an advanced animal, just as Hesiod in the *Theogony* sees a god as an advanced man. The Bible however views man as a creature inherently different from the animals, just as he is inherently different from God, thus precluding any need or basis for contrasting them.
3. **Man was created by the Supreme God.** In the Bible this is reflected in both stories. In the *Metamorphoses* this is true in the first account, but in the second account he is formed by Prometheus, the son of the Titan, Iapetus.
4. **Male and female.** In the Torah, in both stories, male and female are created. In the *Metamorphoses*, no mention is made of the sex of the created being. The assumption is that the male was created first,[[69]](#footnote-69) and the female only much later by Hephaestus, at the request of Zeus, as a punishment to mankind.
5. **Man was created to fulfill a purpose in the world.** In the first biblical story the goal is dominion over other living thing: “rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth” (Gen. 1:28). In the *Metamorphoses* (lines 76-77) we find a similar idea: “An animal more like the gods than these, more intellectually capable and able to control the other beasts, had not as yet appeared: now man was born”. In the second biblical story a more limited goal is mentioned, relating to the care and cultivation of the vegetation in the Garden of Eden: “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it” (Gen. 2:15). I have found nothing similar in the *Metamorphoses.*

Hesiod in *Works and Days* (lines 135-139) writes of the second generation, the silver generation, created by the gods, “And they would not serve the immortals or sacrifice on the sacred altars of the blessed ones, as is laid down for men in their various homelands. They were put away by Zeus son of Kronos, angry because they did not offer honor to the blessed gods”. This passage implies that the gods commanded, or at least expected, men to fulfill their duty of making sacrifices, that is gifts, to the gods. It should be noted that divine worship in the form of sacrifice is not included in the commandments given to mankind in the Bible. Man’s role is defined there in relation to the world which he inhabits.

1. **Communication and commandment between the Creator and the created being.** In the Bible, the Creator addresses man, blesses him and commands him. In the first story: “God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.’ God said, ‘See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food’” (Gen. 1:28-29). In the second story: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die”(Gen. 2:16-17). In the Metamorphoses (Book 1, lines 84-86) there is no personal address akin to “he said to them” but it is possible that there is a commandment: “even though all other animals lean forward and look down toward the ground, he gave man a face that is uplifted and ordered[[70]](#footnote-70) him to stand erect and look directly into the vaulted heavens and turn his countenance to meet the stars”. However, this could also be understood to mean than the upright (biped) posture that Hephaestus gave to man impels him to gaze into the heavens.[[71]](#footnote-71)

In Greek mythology, dialogue, or even monologue, between god and man is very rare.[[72]](#footnote-72) Communication between God and man allows for communication in the other direction as well, in other words, man’s appeal to God, in prayer, and with it the hope for a response, and salvation, from God.

1. **God’s attitude toward Man.** In the Bible**,** God initiates the entire process of creation and is directly and personally involved in its every aspect. At the end of the creation process God even expresses satisfaction with his work, “And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good” (Gen. 1:31). This also implies a type of “fatherly” connection between God and his creations,[[73]](#footnote-73) and the expectation that God will take responsibility for them. This gives man the right to turn to God in anticipation and hope that He will listen and answer, in other words the concept of prayer.

In the *Metamorphoses,* man was not created by the gods on Olympus,[[74]](#footnote-74) but by the supreme god, who then vanished after the creation, or by Prometheus. It is therefore difficult to perceive any type of “fatherly” connection between the gods and man, whom they did not in fact create.[[75]](#footnote-75) There is furthermore no reason for the gods to take responsibility for man and certainly no reason for man to turn to them in prayer. [[76]](#footnote-76)

**Summary**

The most significant differences between these accounts of the creation of man are that in the Bible, unlike the *Metamorphoses*, the creation of man is an almost intimate act between the Creator and creation -- “he blew into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7) -- and is followed by communication between God and man and the definition of man’s purpose. In the Bible, God turns to man, commands him and gives him a purpose and a blessing. In the Greek story, there is no direct communication between God and man, and although the gods direct men toward a specific purpose in the world, they never explicitly reveal this to them.

1. **The Creation of Woman**

Until this point, we have seen no reference in the stories of Greek mythology to the sex of the created human. However, at the end of the story of Prometheus, we discover that Zeus initiated the creation of woman as a punishment to mankind for Prometheus’ gift to them of fire. This story is related in the two works of Hesiod, with significant differences:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Works and Days* (lines 53-95)In anger Zeus the cloud gatherer spoke to him...To set against the fire I shall give them an affliction... and he told renowned Hephaestus at once to mix earth with water, to add in[[77]](#footnote-77) a human voice and strength, and to model upon the immortal goddesses` aspect the fair lovely form of a maiden... to put in a bitch`s mind and a knavish nature... So he ordered, and they all obeyed the lord Zeus son of Kronos. At once the renowned Ambidexter molded from Earth the likeness of a modest maiden by Kronos` son’s design.**The Description of her Beauty and External Radiance** He named this woman Pandora, Allgift, because all the dwellers on Olympus made her their gift – a calamity for men who live by bread...The father sent the renowned dog-killer to Epimetheus taking the gift... Epimetheus gave no thought to what Prometheus had told him, never to accept a gift from Olympian Zeus... lest some affliction befall mortals, and had the bane before he realized it... the woman unstopped the jar and let it all out, and brought grim cares upon mankind. | *Theogony* (lines 568-612) It stung high-thundering Zeus deep in spirit, and angered him in his heart, when he saw the far-beaconing flare of fire among mankind.At once he made an affliction for mankind to set against the fire.The renowned ambidexter molded from earth the likeness of a modest maiden, by Kronos` son`s design...**The Description of her Beauty and External Radiance**When he had made the pretty bane to set against a blessing, he led her out where the other gods and men were... Both immortal gods and mortal men were seized with wonder when they saw that precipitous trap, more than mankind can manage. For from her is descended the female sex, [[78]](#footnote-78) a great affliction to mortals as they dwell with their husbands – no fit partners for accursed Poverty, but only for Plenty...And he gave a second bane to set against a blessing for the man who, to avoid marriage and the trouble women cause, chooses not to wed, and arrives at grim old age lacking anyone to look after him. He is not short of livelihood while he lives, but when he dies, distant relatives share out his living. Then again the the man who does partake of marriage, and gets a good wife... spends his life with bad competing constantly against good; while the man who gets the awful kind lives with unrelenting pain in heart and spirit, and it is an ill without cure. |

There are several differences between these two accounts:

In *Works and Days*, the woman has a name, “Pandora”, the meaning of which is explained (“pan” means “all” and “dora” means “gift”). Although Zeus commands that she be given negative personal qualities, in the end the evil that she brings to mankind originates when she opens a box and releases disasters and diseases upon the world.[[79]](#footnote-79)

In the *Theogony,* the name of the woman is not given, but it is explicitly stated that she is the first woman to be created and from her came all other women; she is the mother of all living things. The evil that she brings in the end upon mankind derives from her wicked personality and there is no mention of her opening a box. [[80]](#footnote-80)

**A Comparison between the Creation of Woman in the Bible and in Mythology:**

1. In the account related by Hesiod, there is no connection between the creation of man and the creation of woman. They were created at different times and by different entities (the man was created by the supreme god or by Prometheus, the woman by Hephaestus at the command of Zeus). This differentiation confers to each of the sexes its own distinct rank and worth. In the first biblical story (Genesis 1), the one God creates both sexes simultaneously. In the second biblical story (Genesis 2), the woman is created chronologically a certain time after the man.[[81]](#footnote-81) However, the same God who created the man, created the woman and she was even created from man, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”. This limits the possibility of ranking the sexes and ascribing to each a different value.
2. In the account of Hesiod, the woman is created as punishment and vengeance on mankind, while in the Bible she is given as a benefit to man: “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him” (Gen. 2:18).
3. The two accounts of creation (the Bible and Hesiod) connect the creation of woman with the explanation of the existence of evil in the world.[[82]](#footnote-82) These points will be raised and discussed in depth in the next chapter in which I will compare the biblical story of the creation of man with the account in Plato’s *Symposium.*
1. On the identity of the Philistines at the time of the Patriarchs, see: Grintz, “The Immigration of the First Philistines in the Inscriptions”, 32-42, and “On ‘The Immigration of the First Philistines’”, 64; Gordon, “The Ideological Foe: The Philistines in the Old Testament”, 158. It should be noted that in I Samuel 21:11-15 he is referred to as “Achish” and in Psalms 34:1 he is called “Abimelech”. Rashi and Radak comment, “’In the presence of Abimelech” – so are called all kings of the Philistines”. They apparently identified the Philistines at the time of the Patriarchs with the Philistines mentioned in the Writings and Prophets. On the other hand, see *Midrash Tehillim* (Buber edition), Psalm 60, “The people of Israel came to enter the land of the Philistines. He said to them, ‘Are you not the children of Abraham?! Do you not honor the treaty that Abraham made with Abimelech?!’ They responded, ‘Yes we honor it, but you are not Philistines’, and they [the Philistines] left them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Chapter 10: “The Battle of David and Goliath in the Context of Single Combat in Greek Warfare” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Although the exact geographical origin of the Philistines is obscure, archeological and literary evidence demonstrates unequivocally that they emerged from the Mycenaean civilization. Upon their arrival on the shores of the Levant, they underwent a slow process of assimilation into local society and culture. See: Dothan and Dothan, *People of the Sea*; Shai, “Understanding Philistine Migration”, 15; Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration*; Killebrew and Lehmann, *The World of the Philistines and Other `Sea Peoples`*”; Silberman, “When the Past Was New”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lichtenstein, “Mikzat devarim”. On the Sages’ approach to secular culture in general see, Idem, “Tova chokhma im nachala”. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Pinchuk, *Kankanim*, 17-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Halevy, *Arkhei haaggadah*, I:21-25; Brown, *Israel and Hellas*, 1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Chapter 6: “Samson and Hercules” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Chapter 5: “Job, Prometheus and the Problem of Evil” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Lieberman, *Yevanit veyevanut*; Idem, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?”, in addition to many other studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On Gordon, see Bernal, *Black Athena*, I: 416-419. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a survey on the development of research in this field, see: Bernal, *Black Athena*, I: xii‑xviii; Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 1-8; West, *The Helicon,* vii‑xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For a recent example of this type of research see, Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 29-34, in which the author describes the methodology of searching for parallel creation stories in various cultures and determining the existence of connections and mutual influence among them. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See below, 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 39: “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, the story of the Exodus from Egypt was the inspiration and model for many political revolutions in the Western world. See Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Schweid, *Bikoret hatarbut hachilonit*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, Enslin, in “Cain and Prometheus” compares the sin of Cain to that of Prometheus; Lachs in “The Pandora-Eve Motif” compares Pandora to Eve; Brown in *Israel and Hellas,* I:227, points out a similarity between the massacre of the fifty sons of Aegyptus by the fifty daughters of Danaus to Simeon and Levi’s massacre of Shechem after the abduction of Dinah. (See below, page 83, note 8); See ibid, II:167-169 for a striking similarity between the birth and death of Moses and that of Oedipus. These are a but few of many examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Guthrie*, In the Beginning*, 24; Morford, et al., *Classical Mythology*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The closest things to a Greek canonical text are the works of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. To form an impression, see the wealth of sources used by Robert Graves in his collection, *The Greek Myths*. To these many more can be added. See, Herbert, “Review of *The Greek Myths* by Robert Graves”, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In Greek stories, man is created from, among other materials, the tooth of a dragon that was planted in the ground, trees, ants, and stones. In this list there is no distinction between the initial creation of man and his re-creation after the flood. See Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 98, and the literature cited there. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See below, page 51, note 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See below, page 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See below, page 98, note 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This difference is very significant to Freud’s analysis in *The Acquisition and Control of Fire.* See below, page 70, note 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Hamilton, *Mythology*, 13-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Morford, et al., *Classical Mythology*, 582-584, and the bibliography on page 588. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For a complete bibliography, see “Greek and Roman Source Documents”, below, page 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See the survey in Hamilton, *Mythology*, 15-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The questions concerning Homer can be summarized, briefly and partially, as: How authentic is the tradition incorporated in Homer’s *Iliad*?How ancient are those components of the Homeric corpus that can be dated with certainty? See below, pages 127-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. With the exception of Aeschylus’ play, *The Persians,* which features the Greco-Persian Wars (478-490 BCE). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Appolodorus, xxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, xxxii – xxxv. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The *Theogony* is the oldest and most coherent Greek account of the creation of the world. For other accounts in Greek culture, see Guthrie*, In the Beginning*, especially the first two chapters. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See also, Isaiah 1:1; Ezekiel 1:1-2; Hosea 1:1-2, *inter alia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Nachmanides’ introduction to his commentary on the Torah, Chavel edition, page 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Pinchuk, *Kankanim*, 178-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See The Accounts of the Creation in Homer; Aristophanes, *The Birds*, lines 690-700; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book One; See Graves, *Greek Myths*, 1-4, pages 27-35; Guthrie*, In The Beginning,* chapter 1; West, *The Helicon,* 276-277. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The word “chaos” in Greek means “gaping void and nothingness”. It is hard to know what exactly Hesiod meant by this word, but it clearly does not refer to a god or to a higher power, but rather to an initial creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ether [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Uranus [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See West, *The Helicon,* 525: “The idea of a divine creator is by no means peculiar to the Semites, but it is as normal among them as it is abnormal in early Greece”.

Graves in *The Greek Myths,* I:27, tells of a Pelasgian creation myth in which the goddess Eurynome created everything. Yet she too emerged from the chaos. However, this myth was invented by Graves. Also Ovid in the Metamorphoses mentions an ancient god who created the cosmos, ““Some god (or kinder nature) settled this dispute by separating earth from heaven, and then by separating sea from earth” (Book 1, lines 21-22); “Now when that god (whichever one it was) had given chaos form, dividing it in parts which he arranged” (Book 1, lines 32-33). However, this god did not create the universe but only organized it; likewise, it sounds as though this god was no more than the “initial force” which afterward effectively faded from human consciousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See the prescient comment of Murray, in *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 28: “The gods of most nations claim to have created the world. The Olympians make no such claim. The most they ever did was to conquer it”. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. In this sense the audacity of Job, the created being, in his protest against his Creator is infinitely more impressive and significant that the protest of Prometheus the Titan against the god Zeus, both of whom are created beings on about the same level. See below, chapter 5: “Job, Prometheus and the problem of Evil in the World.” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Apollodorus, book 3, paragraphs 26-27, page 48. See the list “Mortals who became Immortal” in Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. For a list of sources describing the apotheosis of Hercules, see Holt, “Apotheosis”, 38, note 2. There is a similar story in the Bible that appears to be the remnant of a mythical legend concerning the mating of a god with humans (Emanueli, “The Sons of Gods”, 151): “the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them … It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth -- when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown” (Gen. 6:2-4). These verses are among the most enigmatic in the Torah and the commentators categorized this section as among the most obscure. Cassutto, in “Maaseh bnei haelohim”, 103-107, argued that in this story the Torah expresses its rejection of the possibility of the mating of God or even a celestial angel with humans. The Torah explains here that the giants are not in any way descended from God, but rather the “bnei elohim” his lesser servants. See the recent research of Darshan, “Sipur bnei haelohim” (and the literature cited there in note 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hesiod declares that the earth was created as a dwelling for the gods, and the hills for the nymphs (lines 128-130). However, it appears that his explanation is after the fact. His intention is not that these were initially created for these purposes. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Compare to Soloveitchik’s distinction between fate and destiny (*Fate and Destiny*???). See below, chapter 5, -- “Job, Prometheus and the Problem of Evil”, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. According to this, the sages’ correction of the translation of the Bible for Ptolemy “God created in the beginning” is accurate. See Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 9a; Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 1,8, 751: 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Dio Cassius (Book 37, chapter 18.1) wrote that the seven-day week was established by the Egyptians and adopted relatively recently. In any case, to the best of his knowledge, the ancient Greeks did not understand this structure, although they did recognize the human need for days of rest and diversion from work. In his funeral oration, Pericles praises Athens for “establishing many days of rest to refresh themselves from toil” (Thucydides, book 2, paragraph 38). Plato wrote that it was the gods who established holidays for rest, “so the gods, in pity for the human race thus born to misery, have ordained the feasts of thanksgiving as periods of respite from their troubles” (*The Laws*, 653 d). Similar statements can be found in the works of other Greek philosophers. See Halevy, *Arkhei haagada*, 2:181-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. HaLevy, *Arkhei HaAgada*, 2:183-184; Gilat, “Hashabbat vehilkhotia bekitvei filon”, especially 87-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Except for the story of Hephaestus who created woman at the initiative of Zeus as punishment to humanity for Prometheus’ deceit regarding fire (*Theogony,* lines 570-612; *Works and Days*, lines 55-82). See the discussion below. In *Works and Days* (lines 106-201), Hesiod describes five consecutive generations of mortals created by the gods in a process of trial and error. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Hyginus, *Fabulae, (Theogony,* paragraph 5) relates that the fish came from Pontus and the sea. In *The Birds* (lines 690-700), Aristophanes describes how the birds were created from within Chaos with the help of Eros, but this was written as a comedy. There are also myths describing how the various plants came to be (the laurel, in Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 204; the hyacinth, in Graves, *Greek Myths*, 21m, pages 78-79; the narcissus, see below, chapter 8, “Narcissus and the Nazarite from the South”). However, these stories take place in the context of a world already created and cannot be regarded as part of the creation story. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Morford, et al., *Classical Mythology*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. There is an interesting curiosity in connection with the distinction under discussion: The numerical value (gematria) of the word Prometheus (in Hebrew, with plene spelling) is 813, which is equal to the gematria of the verse, “And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). See below 66, note 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. We must make use of Ovid, a later Roman (beginning of the first century of the common era), because Hesiod’s account of the five generations in *Works and Days* is too vague. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. West, *The Helicon*, 289-290, points out the similarity between the Greek name Iapetus and Noah’s son, Japheth. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Aether – the pure air that filled the space in which the Gods lived, parallel to the air breathed by mortals. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. “Pluvialibus undis” as far as I have been able to ascertain, should be translated as “rain water” or “sheets of rain”. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, book 1, lines 89-150) goes on to tell of four generations of humanity (gold, silver, copper and iron). These generations do not denote differences in the created beings themselves but rather in the livelihood of the humans who had already been created. In the parallel account of Hesiod in *Works and Days* (lines 106-201) there are five different consecutive generations created by the gods in a process of trial and error. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Apollodorus, book 1, paragraph 45, page 7, “"Prometheus fashioned humans from water and earth …”; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 142, “Prometheus son of Iapetus was the first to fashion men out of clay”. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. This motif is mentioned again in the Bible and is prevalent in Judaism, “Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19); “For He knows how we are formed; He is mindful that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 95, points out that in all the creation stories from the ancient Near East, the primary material used to create man is mortar mixed with water or another liquid. *In Works and Days* (line 61) the creation of woman also begins with mortar: “to mix earth with water, to add in a human voice”. On the ancient belief in the need for earth and water for creation, see Guthrie*, In the Beginning*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. According to the passage ascribed to Hesiod (below, note 30?) which states that Athena breathed into his nostrils the spirit of life, there is no need to ascribe this role to water. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This idea, originating in a midrash in the Zohar, “He who breathed, breathed from himself and from within himself”, is the basis of the Hasidic concept of “hishtalshelut” [the order of development of the spiritual worlds]. See the *Tanya*, section 1, chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The Greeks ascribed to the air and the wind the force of life. They believed that gusts of wind could give life. See Guthrie*,* *The Greeks and their Gods*, 138-141; Guthrie*, In the Beginning*, 48-50 and note 5. However, this did not refer to the breath that God breathed out from within himself, but to the wind and air in the earth’s atmosphere. In the passage attributed to Hesiod (Merkelbach and West, *Fragmenta Hesiodea*, passage 382) it is related that Athena infused him with life force: “Minerva spiritum infudit*”*. Even if the meaning here is “the spirit of life” and not merely a gust of wind, it must be noted that the passage under discussion is taken from the Latin composition of the Roman author Lactantius Placidus who lived at the end of the fourth century CE, that is, a short time after the Christianization of the empire in the time of Constantine. There is reason to suspect that this interpolation was influenced by the biblical account and by Christianity. Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 142, recounts that Athena gave life to Pandora, but does not state that she breathed life force into Prometheus’creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Comparisons appear in other places in the Bible, for example, “For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing “ (Eccles. 3:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 87 argues that these creation stories relate solely to the creation of man and that according to all opinions, woman was formed only later in the creation of Pandora. See Morford, et al., *Classical Mythology*, 94. See the more recent study of Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The original reads “iussis” meaning “he ordered”. It would appear then that Hephaestus ordered mankind to raise their heads and look toward the heavens. This verb appears in most, but not all, translations (to English) that I have seen. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. For example: “While other animals look downwards at the ground, he gave human beings an upturned aspect, commanding them to look towards the skies, and, upright, raise their face to the stars” (Translated by A.S. Kline, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. As of now, I have found similar dialogue only in Aeschylus’ play, *The Eumenides,* in which Orestes is put on trial before Athena and Apollo. See Kaufmann, *Expostulation with the Divine*, 66, and see below, page 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See West, *The Helicon*, end of page 433. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Hesiod, *Work and Days*, (lines 106-201) recounts that it was Zeus who created the five generations. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Prometheus, who according to the most prevalent legend created man, does in fact take responsibility for mankind and intervenes on their behalf in defiance of the gods by stealing fire for them (*Theogony*, line 535-567; *Works and Days*, lines 47-53); in *Prometheus* by Aeschylus (lines 442-506), Prometheus gives a speech about the comprehensive, basic assistance and the instruction in all fields of knowledge that he has given mankind. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. As I have mentioned, as far as I know, there is no reference in the literature of mythology to a mortal’s appeal to one of the gods with a request for help. Antigone in her distress kills herself without turning to the gods for salvation even though she risked her life for the sake of their laws. Hercules in his thirst does not appeal to Zeus, who is in fact his father. The notable exceptions are the *Choepori* plays and especially Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*,in which Orestes and the gods Apollo and Athena engage in a lively dialogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. According to the account in Hyginus, *Fabulae,* 142, Athena breathed vital spirit into woman. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Apollodorus, book 1, paragraph 46, page 7, “Pandora, whom the gods created as the first woman.” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Scholars have noted the similarity between Eve’s sin in Genesis and Pandora’s deed. See Lachs, “The Pandora-Eve Motif”, and the literature cited there; Saul Lieberman, *Yevanit veyevanut*, 251, note 84; Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 89, note 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. This has been noted by Hamilton, *Mythology,* 88. See Darshan, *Achar hamabul*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid, 90-91. Darshan has also commented that the separation in time between the creation of man and the creation of woman is a motif that does not appear in ancient Near Eastern literature, despite the numerous creation legends from the Mesopotamian world. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid, 91, and following. Darshan notes that the motif of the connection between the creation of woman and the existence of evil is unique to these two stories and does not appear in ancient Near Eastern literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)