

Mythology of Creation Stories in Early Religions

Mythology is defined as a set of stories or symbols within a culture that have metaphorical meaning. The fact of whether or not the stories are true is not important, but rather the meaning behind them. In four basic mythological stories, two scriptures from the Mesopotamian society, one from the ancient Jewish and Christian holy scripture, and the last being from a Mayan Indian text, I will show the differences and similarities in these three groups' creation stories. By viewing the core components and details of each Mythological creation story, I will show how each is unique in certain aspects and similar in other aspects. Finally, I will use Lord Raglan's *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in heroes in the creation stories.

Each of the mythological stories: *Myths from Mesopotamia creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others (The Atrahasis), The Epic of Gilgamesh, Genesis, The Popol Vuh* have certain similarities. In each of these myths, humankind is made from some earth-type substance. The substances are different, and the story of how humans are made is different, but the core value of using earth type substances such as clay, spit, and corn are similar. In *The Popol Vuh* and *Genesis* we find males are made before female. In *Genesis*, a woman is made. "And the rib that the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.(pg 8)" Where as in *The Popol Vuh* "their wives and women came into being.(pg148)" This myth doesn't go into detail. In *The Atrahasis, The Popol Vuh and Genesis* the God(s) made the earth, day and night, rivers and oceans, plants and animals. Each has certain details about how this came about, but the core theme is the same. Next, similarities viewed in the texts are the great

flood that killed all living creatures on earth. The God(s) flooded the earth due to humans not doing what they were told by the God(s) to do. In each of the Great Floods, some humans survived, which in *Genesis* and *The Atrahasis* were due to divine intervention from a God. These two share similarities in their flood story for example each has one family chosen to be saved, both Arks crash into the side of a mountain, and the man sends out a bird to see if there is dry land. In both *Genesis* and *The Atrahasis* God(s) make humans in their image. This shows that humans are similar to God(s). *The Popol Vuh* doesn't say the God(s) made man in their image, but the God(s) possesses human like qualities. "They must come, the lords say to you. Would that they might come to play ball with us here. Then we could have some excitement with them. We are truly amazed at them. Therefore they should come, say the lords, and they should bring their playthings, their yokes and arm guards should come, along with their rubber ball, say the lords, you will say when you arrive, the messenger were told. (pg 93)" This shows that the Gods of Mayan myths like to play games just as humans do. Each myth has some serpent that plays an important role in the myths of the religion. Each serpent's significance is different, as seen later, but it seems that serpents played an important role in the ancient myths.

Finally, the last similarity is between *Genesis* and *The Popol Vuh*, Each has a woman that goes to a forbidden tree where something happens to her that changes her life and affects the overall myths of these religions. Although each religion has certain myths the core components of the myths are similar in a lot of way. When it comes to detail is when differences are seen like what humans are made out of, but the fact that humans come from earth substances is the same.

The differences seem to be more in the myths details rather than in the over all core components. Each myth has either one or more than one God. This is a difference in *Genesis*

compared to the others. Humans are made of earth substances, but the substance are different. For example in Genesis, man is made from dirt, whereas in The Popol Vuh, man is made of corn. The details are noticeably different in each society. Serpents play a key role in each of the myths. In Popol Vuh the serpent is a God. In The Epic of Gilgamesh and Genesis the serpent represents evil. In Genesis, it is what tricks Eve into eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge. In The Epic of Gilgamesh, the serpent steals the plant of immortality for Gilgamesh, causing him to remain mortal and accept the fact that he will die one day. In both The Popol Vuh and Genesis, woman causes a change in the myths by going to a forbidden tree. In The Popol Vuh, going to the tree causes Blood Moon to become impregnated with Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Blood Moon is also almost killed when her father finds out she is pregnant, but manages to escape death. Hunahpu and Xbalanque later defeat the death Gods and become higher up Gods. They are also able to bring back their father who was killed by the death Gods. In Genesis, Eve is tricked by a serpent, eats from the forbidden tree of knowledge, and gets Adam to eat from the tree as well. This causes God to become angry, and he banishes them from the Garden. Men, women, and serpents are then cursed by God. There are many other difference in the myths of these religions, but the details seem to play an important role in the differences of some of the core components, like what humans are made of.

Heroes are important to all myths in societies and religions. Lord Raglan pointed out twenty-two similarities myths of different societies and religions have in common. Using this system, I will evaluate and point out difference and similarities among the myths of these religions. First, each myths hero must be named. Atrahasis in *Myths from Mesopotamia creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and others*, Noah in *Genesis*, and Hunahpu and Xbalanque in *The Popol*

Vuh. First, we have the hero's mother is a virgin. We see this in The Popol Vuh, but not in *Genesis* or *Myths from Mesopotamia creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and others*. Father is a king is true for Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Also this is true for Noah, since he descends from Adam. There is no evidence in the text of Atrahasis' early life before the flood. For his hero story, the focus of similarities with the other heroes will come in later, but for now the focus will be on Hunahpu and Xbalanque and Noah. Neither the father nor mother in either of the three cases is related according to the text. Only in the case of Hunahpu and Xbalanque is the case of conception unusual as well as being the son of a God. An attempt to kill the hero at birth is made on Hunahpu and Xbalanque. One is made later in Atrahasis' life, just not at birth. Seven through eleven are true for Hunahpu and Xbalanque. They are spirited away, raised by foster parent, not much is known about their childhood, when they become adults the return to the underworld and defeat the death lords. As for Noah and Atrahasis little is known of their childhood and they do reach victory over a flood. None of our heroes according to the text marry a princess, reign uneventfully, prescribe laws and then lose favor with subjects, are driven from the throne, meet a strange death on top of a hill, children don't succeed them, or their bodies are never buried. Hunahpu and Xbalanque do become higher up Gods similar to that of a king. Atrahasis doesn't become a King, but a God instead. Noah becomes king, in a sense, and reigns. There are holy sepulchres of them, or in the case of Hunahpu and Xbalanque and Atrahasis, there were. Overall, the Heroes in the text may not follow all of the themes of a hero according to Lord Raglan, but they do follow some of these common themes.

Even though each religion has its own myths of a creation story there are still similarities each has to one another. There are many differences in each religion's myths. Each of the heroes

is different, but has some similarities according to Lord Raglan's hero patterns. In conclusion each myth has similarities in certain core aspects, but the details of these aspects tend to differ.

Work Cited