

# “Adam, Eve, and the Devil”

by Marjo C.A. Korpel & Johannes C. de Moor (Sheffield Phoenix Press 2014)

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## Ugarit: an ancient port

In 1928 an ancient tomb was discovered near the tell at the Ras Shamra headland on the Mediterranean coast in North Syria. This is near the modern town of Burj al-Qasab and about 11 km north of the modern port of Latakia. The tell was the site of the ancient port of Ugarit, important enough to have been fortified in neolithic times (c.6000BC) but in its heyday in the Late Bronze age. It was destroyed c.1190BC by the mysterious “Sea Peoples”.

The tomb was dated late 13<sup>th</sup> century and contained the only extant tablets in Ugaritic, these being the oldest exemplars of any language with an alphabetical script that we have. Moreover, Korpel & de Moor point out that “Ugaritic is a dialect of the family of languages commonly called Canaanite”, and Hebrew is also in this family. Therefore the decipherment and interpretation of these tablets is of very considerable interest; as they say, “the texts from Ugarit have helped scholars to better understand many words, expressions and ideas in the Bible”.

## Sketch of the Book: a primæval Ugaritic story in KTU 1.107/100

The book is based on the reconstruction (“restoration”) and translation of the text on two important tablets, KTU 1.107 and KTU 1.100, which were found close together and are by the same scribe’s

hand. They tell the same story, with 107 preceding 100; 107 starts abruptly leading to the conclusion that a third opening tablet is missing. 100 is relatively well preserved, but 107 is badly damaged. Nevertheless, taking these texts together with other Ugaritic texts we can be fairly confident that important parts of the story itself can be reliably reconstructed. The authors do this in two long appendices with many notes on the reconstruction choices made, and of course relying heavily on previous work by many different scholars. The book also has a comprehensive 30pp Bibliography and not only a 21pp Index of Subjects but also a 14pp Index of Texts (including 6pp referencing both Hebrew and Greek canonical Biblical texts).

KTU 1.107/100 tells the story of how Adammu comes to earth, is bitten by the serpent and dies; how his wife (a “good-natured woman”) appeals to the gods to bind the serpent and repair the damage (that is, give her issue). Adammu and his wife are divine: Ugaritic gods were not necessarily immortal. Or at least they are semi-divine. Perhaps they are our representatives, as ancient kings were considered both divine and representative of their people. The thesis of Korpel & de Moor is that the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, for which scholars have long and unsuccessfully sought appropriate antecedents, is here prefigured in some considerable detail in these Ugaritic texts. This is clearly of wide-ranging importance, and very interesting.

The story told by the tablets is far from straightforward, either in itself or as seen by us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Late Bronze Age Canaanites were at least as sophisticated in their thinking as we are, and of course their world was very different from ours. First I shall try to summarise the story, as Korpel & de Moor have reconstructed it and quoting extensively from the text of the tablets to give a flavour of its force in ancient Ugarit, and then I will try to summarise the similarities they list with the Biblical story. Then we will discuss the significance of the work.

### **The text of KTU 1.107**

The tablets KTU 1.107/100 start abruptly – an opening tablet is missing. Something is wrong on earth, the “*vineyard of the great gods*”. Ḥorrānu has turned the Tree of Life into a Tree of Death with serpents (Baṭnu or Bashan, and Lôtānu or Leviathan) coiled around it. The gods send their champion, Adammu, who is also called Šarraġāzizu (Korpel & de Moor here remark: “[Šarraġāzizu] is a proleptic nickname of Adammu who in that case bore two names, like many other Ugaritic deities: Šarraġāzizu means *The Prince [Devil] is generous*”). Adammu is unable to prevent the serpent biting him and in the throes of death he calls to Šapšu (the sun goddess of justice), whom he calls his “*creatress*”: “*Why am I on my way to death?*” Korpel and de Moor note that *creatress* “may simply be honorific”.

At this point the obverse side of tablet 107 is very damaged and the recoverable text is fragmentary, but it seems that Šapšu laments bitterly and appeals both to Lôtānu and to the Flood (Korpel & de Moor note that Lôtānu is Leviathan, the great sea serpent encircling the world; the Flood is the great freshwater ocean that formed the cold bottom of the Netherworld, dreaded as a demoniacal power). The reverse side of the tablet has a damaged opening that can confidently be reconstructed as referring to “*a good-natured woman*” who must be Adammu’s wife. Her name is missing, and is included neither in the rest of 107 nor in 100. Probably she was named in the lost opening tablet: stylistically it is credible that she was named only once.

However, it seems to be the woman who cries to all the gods to subdue the snake, ending with:

[Woman] Collect O Šapšu the fog from the mountains [a metaphor for the poison]  
 On the earth the poison lips  
 From the mouth of the biter the destruction  
 From the mouth of the Devourer the paralysis of the lame one [Adammu]

[Šapšu] May you be receptive, may you arouse the male breeding animal  
 May you be hot [aroused], exude blood [of defloration]!  
 [ ... ] exude life! [note Gen.9:4ff; Lev.17:11 etc: *the life is in the blood*]  
 [ ... ]  
 I will make lean the destroyer of healthy babies [“the demon destroying podgy,  
 healthy children will be punished by emaciation”]  
 [ ... ]  
 I myself will bow down [in thanks to the gods] on the day you bear  
 [ ... ] [ ... ]  
 By life the daughters of mankind will defeat Death [ ... ]

Death is defeated by procreation. This was clearly also broadly the Hebrew Biblical attitude, with striking but only very rare exceptions (Is.25 for example). An absolutely explicit doctrine of Resurrection is arguably not present in the canonical text and did not appear in Hebrew until the mid second century, as recorded in 2 Maccabees 7 (the story of the woman with her seven sons martyred in the persecution of Antiochus).

### The text of KTU 1.100

The second tablet, KTU 1.100, is rather well preserved; it consists of an opening, 12 “incantations” addressed to the 12 main gods of the pantheon, and a close in which Ḫorrānu drains the poison and enables conception to take place again. The gods are appealed to through Šapšu, the sun god who travels the length of the heavens by day and the lengths of the Netherworld by night and thus “*was able to deliver the message of the Mother of the primordial animated creatures to all deities wherever they dwelt*”, as Korpel & de Moor say.

Apparently, Ḫorrānu is the god of rebellious disorder and can be linked (looking back) to the Egyptian *Seth* and (looking forward) to the Arabic *Iblis* (the Devil). There are a number of ancient traditions of rebellion in heaven, and in particular Korpel & de Moor propose that the god Destiny (“Ωραν”, *Hōran*) whom the first century Philo of Byblos mentions as Ouranos’ ally in the battle against Kronos, can be identified with the Ugaritic god Ḫorrānu, noting that the credibility of Philo (who wrote a history of the Phœnicians) has been substantially bolstered by the discovery of the Ugaritic texts. We presume that the first (lost) tablet told the story of Ḫorrānu’s rebellion, where the serpent of death is unleashed; KTU 1.100 tells the story of Ḫorrānu’s repentance and his reversal of the death of Adammu. For, as Korpel & de Moor say, “*if all the gods summoned would have turned against the snakes, the serpentine offspring of Ḫorrānu would have been exterminated too*”. They point out, “*Ḫorrānu is a most ambiguous god whose revenge cost Adammu his immortality but whose turnabout let life proliferate*”.

We give the text of KTU 1.100 almost complete, leaving out only the repeated “incantations” (and the names of the gods), since it is full of interest and since the terms in which the story is told are entirely unfamiliar to us :-

The Mother of the male breeding animal, the female breeding animal  
the daughter of the Source, the daughter of the Stone  
the daughter of Heaven and Flood  
called to Šapšu her mother:

Šapšu my mother, carry my voice  
to Ilu at the fountainhead of the two Rivers  
at the confluence of the two Floods.

My incantation is:

A poisonous serpent has bitten  
a serpent that has sloughed off its skin!  
Let there be a charmer of the Destroyer for it  
let there be an expeller of poison for it!  
Let him hit, let him bind the serpent  
let him feed the serpent that has sloughed its skin  
let him place a chair and sit down!

... [11 repeats of the “incantation” for the pantheon]

Ḫorrānu’s face turned pale  
because his posterity would remain childless.

He left the city of the east  
Then he headed straight  
for Great Araših and for little Araših.

He removed the juniper from the trees  
yes, the Tree of Death from the shrubs.

The juniper – he shook it out  
the date cluster – he put it away  
the scab – he took it off  
the wart – he carried it off

Ḫorrānu went to his house  
and proceeded to his residence

The poison had become weak like a wadi  
it had flowed away like a ditch.

(Ritual:)

(Groom) “Behind her the mansion” is my incantation

(Officiant) Behind her the mansion she closed  
behind her she let down the bronze [bolt]

(Groom) “Open up the house” is my incantation

(Officiant) Open up the house, that I may enter  
the palace, that I may come in

(Bride) Give a serpent [a phallic symbol] as my bridal gift  
give a lizard as my bridal gift

yes, a son of the Dragon as a present for my love

(Groom) I give a serpent as your bridal gift  
a son of the Dragon as a present for your love

## Similarities of Ugaritic and Hebrew literature in the Creation accounts

### The first Creation account in Genesis 1

Korpel & de Moor give a list of parallels (“similarities”) between this Ugaritic story and the Genesis creation stories: 12 for the first Creation story (Gen.1) and 18 for the second (Gen.2-4, including the story of Cain). It is valuable to list these and comment on them since it seems to me that these similarities are (mostly) real and very informative.

1. The Hebrew Bible refers to God, the Creator of all, usually as [אלהים] (*Elohim*, first usage at Gen.1:1), many times as [אלוה] (*Eloah*, Deut.32:15) and frequently as [אל] (*El*, Gen.14:18). The Ugaritic form of *El* is *Ilu*. *Eloah* is the relative form of *El*, and *Elohim* is a reverent plural. All three designations also occur in Ugarit: this is a major difference from other ancient Near East religions where the various creator gods bear totally different names. It is worth pointing out that *Allah* is the precise Arabic equivalent of *Eloah*.
2. It is usual to think that the opening of Genesis (“*In the beginning ...*”) envisages *nothing* being there before God started creating things. However, one can, and almost certainly should, translate Gen.1:1,2 as: “*In the beginning when God created heaven and earth, the earth was void and emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the Flood.*” Korpel & de Moor comment that in this reading (which is now standard in modern translations) “*the Flood was there before God began his work of creation, in agreement with other near-Eastern creation myths, the Ugaritic one probably among them.*” They note that “beginning, primordial time does occur in Ugarit (KTU 1.119:25) but describes the beginning of kingship, not the beginning of creation.”

My view on this is that the Hebrew text is ambiguous, and the fact that we regularly ascribe a sophisticated abstract meaning to it (“creation *ex nihilo*”), quite possibly anachronistically, does not mean that the text cannot bear that meaning. The original authors probably had the standard meaning current in those times at the forefront of their minds, but they could easily have sensed further meanings that they were not able to grasp explicitly. Poets are often in this position, choosing wordings capable of bearing multiple meanings partly because they have not decided which one they want – perhaps they want to suggest all of them – and partly because they sense that nobody has yet clearly thought the meaning that they are reaching for. Neither does the poet constrain the text, nor does the text constrain the poet.

Augustine of Hippo, nearly a millennium after the Biblical canon was completed, was the first to explicitly give a modern meaning to this ancient Hebrew text, asserting clearly that God made time itself along with everything else. He does this (*Confessions* Book XI ¶30; *City of God* Book XI ch.6) with transparent clarity, pointing out that *time* denotes the *movement of things* (see Gen.1:14) and consequently that time cannot be where things are not. It is Augustine who says first that to speak of “before Creation” (in modern terms: “before the Big Bang”) is simply nonsense.

It is interesting to point out that modern physics actually caught up with Augustine only in 1948 with the famous Alpher, Bethe, Gamow paper (“The origin of chemical elements” *Physical Review* **73**, 803-804). It is amusing that Gamow persuaded Bethe to sign the paper, although he actually made very little real contribution to it, so

that he (Gamow) could make the  $\alpha\beta\gamma$  pun at the expense of the Greeks and their certainty in absolute, infinite time; a certainty that Newton and his successors shared but which is now abandoned by all physicists. Creation *ex nihilo* itself is first **explicit** at 2 Maccabees 7:28, which reports events of 167BC (the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes) and is probably close to them in time.

3. It can be demonstrated that creation by word alone (God spoke, and it was so; **implicitly** creation *ex nihilo*) was known in Egypt, Babylonia and Ugarit, as well as to the Hebrews.
4. “ ... *The seven-day scheme of Genesis 1 is a literary form that was popular in ancient oriental literature and especially in Ugaritic myths and epics.*”
5. Ugarit and Genesis have the same terminology for the division of the primordial Flood into waters above and below the firmament, and it is the same “most high god” responsible (*Elohim* in Hebrew and *Ilu* in Ugarit). The same division is attested in other ancient Near Eastern religions, but the accounts are not so close.
6. Genesis maintains the pair “Heaven and Earth”, perhaps unaware that this pair are themselves Canaanite deities.
7. Korpel & de Moor consider God ordering the earth to “bring forth” living things as a “*faint echo of the concept of the earth as the mother of all*” since they say that the same Hebrew “*verb is occasionally used to describe the bringing forth of offspring*”. If this is true then the echo is very faint indeed! For “bring forth” there are two notations used, [יצא] and [יציא]. These apparently are interchangeable: for example, the BHS text for Gen.8:17 has two variants, one with each verb. The former is invariably used to refer to place (not birthing), such as Gen.43:23 ([ויציא אלהם את־שמעון]: *he brought Simeon out to them*). The latter is usually used the same way (many times) but is also used at Gen.15:4 (referring to the future birth of Isaac), at Gen.25:25f (the birth of Esau & Jacob), and at Gen.38:29f (the birth of Pharez & Zarah: but note Gen.38:28 where the same verb is used for Zarah “putting his hand out”!). In any case, the Masoretic (BHS) text has [יצא] and not [יציא] for Gen.1:12,24. It may of course be that the ancient oral tradition did have such echoes, but that the editors of the canonical text selected variants that minimised (or, in this case, eliminated) them. We will return to the question of how the Hebrew editors handled their sources (see “**Digression on the conservatism of the ancient Hebrew editors**” below).
8. Gen.1:20-22 reports that Elohim created the sea monsters and the ritually unclean creatures (see e.g. Lev.10:10,46; 20:25), calling them “good”. “*In KTU 1.12:I.14-33 Ilu too creates horrible monsters by his word alone*”. We will return repeatedly in what follows to the issue of whether or not God is responsible for evil. In particular, the “clean/unclean” distinction is complex: it is not simply a moral judgement, as is shown by the debate in the second century of the Christian era on whether or not the *Song of Solomon* was to be considered a canonical book. This (Jewish) debate was couched (by Rabbi Akiba) in terms of whether or not one had to wash one’s hands after reading from the book, as one does when handling a canonical book. He concludes that one does (meaning that it is canonical) saying, “The whole world is not as worthy as the day the *Song* was given to Israel” (*Mishnah Yadayim* 3:5). The Word of God makes the reader “unclean” (necessitating hand-washing)! Is God’s word then “unclean”? Surely not! But its purity is such that it shows up the impurity in every man.

9. *“The idea that humankind reflected the physical appearance and spiritual excellence of the deity more than any other creature is definitely attested in the ancient Near East, also in Ugarit”* (see Gen.1:26).
10. *“In Ugarit immortality by sexual intercourse was granted earlier to animals than to the first humanoids. The same is the case in Gen.1[:22,28] ... The importance of this notion is underlined by its repetition in Gen.8:17 and 9:1 when humanity is allowed to make a fresh start.”*
11. I do not entirely understand Korpel & de Moor at this point. They say, very credibly, that Gen.1:26f retains the memory of the androgynous nature of the first humanoids before they were separated into male and female, as *“in Ugarit and elsewhere in the Near East”*. I think they also suggest that the canonical text considers man and woman to be equally created *“in the image of God”*. I would affirm this, glossing the point by saying that this is what the ancient Hebrew editors considered to be the acceptable part of the neighbouring Canaanite earth religions that emphasised the power of women as life givers (and see Paul’s nod in this direction at 1Cor.11:12). It seems to me that the canonical Hebrew text is completely and astonishingly free of misogyny, despite the low view of women current during the periods when the text was being finalised. In any case, they say that *“[the priestly writer of Genesis] adapted a poetic description of the first humanoid that concurs remarkably with what we found in Ugarit and elsewhere in the Near East.”*
12. The dominion that God gave Adam is (probably) paralleled in Ugarit by *“the great gods [exalting] Adammu and [giving] the earth in his hand”*, where it should be emphasised that this dominion is intended in both traditions as *“responsible stewardship”*. Korpel & de Moor think that there is good external evidence that in both traditions the *“divinity”* of royalty was derived from the gods (and not the other way round).

In this list, Korpel & de Moor are possibly mistaken only on point #7, and even this point has an interesting gloss. Clearly the Hebrew and surrounding Canaanite cultures had commensurate *weltanschauungen*. It seems to me that the exceptions only go to prove the rule. Both Hebrew and Ugaritic writers believed that God (*Elohim* or *Ilu*) created all things, including what they thought were monsters (Leviathan) or otherwise “bad” (ritually unclean). Of course, the Canaanites thought that creation involved a battle between good and evil, and the texts we are considering here (KTU 1.107/100) are explicit about the moral ambiguity of the Devil figure (Ḫorrānu, whom Korpel & de Moor show is equivalent to the Hebrew Leviathan). But the Hebrew writers were explicit about the *un*ambiguity of the Devil figure (the serpent), and also about the absolute authority and goodness of God. Nor is there any hint of struggle in the first creation account (Genesis 1). It is very clear that the Hebrew writer of the first Creation account was very aware of the surrounding culture: his text implicitly contends polemically with it! He carefully avoids naming the Sun and Moon – important deities for the surrounding peoples – so as to remove any temptation of idolatry; we can imagine that he just as carefully removed any hint of struggle. However, such a *weltanschauung* is very long lived, as Korpel & de Moor implicitly acknowledge when they devote large sections of their book to echoes of the mythology extant in the second millennium BC present in books right up to and including the Christian era. The mythological environment of post-exilic Israel (when the canonical text was completed) was not all that different from the mythological environment of

Moses. We will return to the question of whether indeed Moses could have written Genesis, as is traditionally claimed (see “*Digression on who wrote Genesis*” below).

Hebrew texts treat Leviathan (an equivalent to Ḥorrānu in Ugarit) as God’s creature, intrinsically good, thus directly contradicting the Ugaritic account. So the Psalmist says that God enjoys watching him “frolic” (Ps.104:26): I read this as an early text from David’s court (c.1000BC). Job, in a text probably exilic or post-exilic (c.500 BC) is explicit about Leviathan being solely for God’s pleasure (the whole of chapter 41), with God (YHWH, *Shaddai, Eloah*, 40:1; *El*, 41:9,19) saying finally, *He is a king over all the children of pride* (Job 41:34; note the emphatic pronoun). It is the *children of pride* for whom Leviathan is a malevolent god, but *unto the pure all things are pure* (Titus 1:15; and note Ps.18:26 with parallel 2 Sam.22:27, *With the pure wilt thou shew thyself pure*). The Christians read the attitude of Genesis with regard to all creatures being “good” as overriding the ritual law of Leviticus, where the creatures are divided into “clean” and “unclean”. See Acts 10:15; *What God hath cleansed call thou not common* (that is, unclean) [α ο θεος εκαθαρισεν συ μη κοινου]. They clearly thought that this attitude was really there in the first Creation account.

### The second Creation account in Genesis 2-4

On misogyny, and coming to the Second Creation account, Korpel & de Moor say, “*The prophets had often attributed idolatry – defined as whoring – to women and this may have been a reason why after the fall of Jerusalem [in 589BC] especially women were blamed for the downfall of the holy city*”, citing **Jer.44:15-30**; **Ezek.13:17-23**; **Amos 4:1**. This is certainly mistaken: they badly misread the texts. **Jer.44** carefully and deliberately speaks to and of both men and women: the men “*knew that their wives had burned incense to the [Queen of Heaven]*” and the women clearly asserted that their men approved their sacrifices: “*when we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven ... did we ... worship her ... without our men?*” The second half of **Ezek.13** should be read in the context of the first half: the one is indeed against the lies of the women who “*prophesy*” to make “*the heart of the righteous sad, whom Ḥ [the Lord God, Adonai YHWH] have not made sad*”, but the other is, symmetrically, against the (male) “*foolish prophets, that follow their own vanity and see nothing*”; the prophets who “*have seduced [that is, led them astray: the word used is a hapax legomenon] my people saying Peace and there was no peace*”. Indeed **Amos 4:1** is against the “*cows of Bashan [note the correspondence of the Hebrew Bashan with Baṭnu, the Ugaritic serpent god] who ... say to their husbands, bring and let’s carouse*”; but against whom is Amos 2:6ff: “*they have sold for silver those whose cause is just ... ah! you who trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the ground ... father and son go to the same girl and thereby profane my holy name, they recline by every altar on garments taken in pledge*”? The prophets are unanimous in giving responsibility for wickedness to both men and women equally. In the prophets whoring is used systematically as a metaphor for idolatry and is applied unambiguously to the men!

Equally, Korpel & de Moor are mistaken when they say that “*compared to other ancient Near Eastern parallels, the text of Genesis 2-3 seems to emphasise the negative role of Eve. The idea seems to be absent outside Israel [except the Greek story of Pandora]. Even in the rest of the canonical Bible there seems to be no remembrance of the first woman as the first sinner, but just Adam*”. Again, they misread the account. Adam clearly shares responsibility, as God’s response shows. Eve may have been deceived but Adam supported and joined her. Moreover, the text clearly puts Adam with Eve when she was deceived: note the *ummâh* [עממה] in Gen.3:6. They were

deceived *together* and this text does not let Eve escape responsibility, even if the rest of the canonical text makes “Adam” the first sinner.

Korpel & de Moor list 18 similarities between the Second Creation account and the Ugaritic literature. Many of these are very interesting, and we will comment them in turn.

1. “*The opening verse of the second creation account in the Bible is rather peculiar*”:

[אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יהוה אלהים ארץ ושמים]

“These the\_generations [תולדות] of\_the\_heavens and\_of\_the\_earth when\_they\_were\_created [בהבראם] in\_the\_day\_that LORD God made [עשות] earth [ארץ] and\_heavens [ושמים]”. Note that this verse should not be cut in two, considering the first half as belonging to the first creation account and the second half to the second creation account, as many translations do: it is a unity, as the Petuḥah [פ] at the end of v.3 emphasises. Korpel & de Moor consider it as a prose polemical interpolation of the final (fifth or sixth century) editors, designed as a transition from the vocabulary of the first account to that of the second (from “created” to “made”; from “heaven and earth” to “earth and heaven”): I think this suggestion is credible.

They also point to “Heaven and Earth” being a “pair of divine beings created by Ilu” in the Ugaritic narrative, and consider this verse as “an unsuccessful attempt to mask its Canaanite origin”. One does not have to consider it “unsuccessful” to recognise the similarity in terminology between the Ugaritic and Hebrew accounts.

2. The motif of the loss of immortality and its replacement by procreation is common across the Near East. (But note that the Genesis account does not explicitly make Adam originally immortal, and arguably does not intend to; many scholars think that its ambiguity on this point is intended.)
3. There are critical Trees in both Ugaritic and Hebrew accounts. The Ugaritic *Tree of Death* was almost certainly originally a *Tree of Life*: both the Hebrew *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* are in the middle of the garden ([בתוך הגן] Gen.2:9; 3:3) and can therefore be identified. Korpel & de Moor point out that in Gen.2:9 “the *waw* at the beginning of [ועץ הדעת טוב ורע] may be understood as a so-called exegetical *waw*: [and translated] *that is, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.*” They therefore believe that in the Hebrew account also there was only one tree.

They go on to make a very interesting point, which I think they oversimplify. They think that just as the Ugaritic deities are ambiguously good and evil, as usual in polytheism (and in this account Ḥorrānu explicitly – if only partially and reluctantly – puts right his previous evil) so the Hebrew god “*could regret an earlier decision and annul it*”. It is true that the Hebrew text says remarkably often that God “repents of the evil” he had in mind (Ex.32:14; 2Sam.24:16; 1Chron.21:15; Jer.18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10; 4:2; in other places it says that he is persuadable: Amos 7:6; Jer.26:13), but do we read these texts as a signal of moral ambiguity? Is God responsible for evil too? Of course, all Christian and Jewish theologians would answer these questions with an emphatic **No!**, but is this anachronistic wishful thinking, or are they *textually* justified in their readings? Let me explain the textual justification.

“*God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should change his mind*” (Num.23:19). But repentance is at the heart of our relationship with

God, and it seems that God sees it this way too, responding to our change of heart with a change of mind, as in Joel 2:13 (cited above) where God implores us (plural) to *rend your heart* (sic) *and not your garments*". It is another form of the anthropomorphism that is frequent in the way the Hebrew text speaks about God, even though we can demonstrate that the ancient composers of the text knew that this was only a manner of speaking: he "formed" Adam from the dust of the earth, like a potter; he "blew" into him his breath (spirit); he strolled leisurely ("walked") around in the garden with him; etc etc. Note that Ps.8:9 specifically speaks of "*the work of [God's] hands*" (as does also Pss.28:5; 92:4; 102:25; 111:7; 138:8; Is.5:12; 19:25; 29:23; 45:11; 60:21). Referring again to Numbers 23: God is not deceitful, God is not fickle; but he does interact with us and he does allow himself to be modified by hearkening to us. He responds to our heart response, as Hosea says in a passage it is impossible to read aloud without a catch in the throat (Hos.2:19-23). If a person is not responsive then he cannot know love: but God is loving, so he must be responsive! Christians are explicit about this, speaking of the "passion" of Christ: unlike the pagan gods, the god of the Hebrews is passionate, not aloof! This passion is also present very frequently in the Hebrew text: the quote from *Hosea* above and the whole *Song of Songs* are only two examples of many.

There is another consideration too. It is quite easy to show that ancient literature does not use analytical language (see for one worked example the ***Digression on allusiveness in ancient storytelling*** below). Simplified ("well defined") meanings are a feature of (in some ways) much more sophisticated, and later, literature. But ancient texts invariably use a very limited vocabulary in a very rich and allusive way. Poetry is simpler and earlier than prose. When the Hebrew texts speak of evil and God they may use language comparable to the Ugaritic texts speaking of their gods being ambiguously both good and evil, but the underlying worldview opens a very different range of connotation. One can use similar language but intend completely different meanings.

4. Hebrew and Ugaritic texts both speak about God or the gods in a distinctly anthropomorphic way, as mentioned above. God forms the first human from the dust of the earth like a potter forming a vessel – a common view in ancient creation stories. The Hebrew verb used here ([וייצר], *yahtsar*) is the very same as is used by the Ugaritic supreme creator Ilu (*yšr*).
5. Ugaritic and the second Hebrew Creation account agree that the human is made *before* the animals.
6. The Ugaritic myth in these tablets (KTU 1.107/100) demonstrate for the first time that there is a correspondence between the first divine rebel (Ḫorrānu) and Adam in the Hebrew account: both had the capacity to choose between good and evil; both in that respect were ambiguous.
7. Korpel & de Moor believe that "the story of Eden presupposes the possibility of eternal life in bliss for Adam & Eve" just as both Adammu himself and his divine patron Šapšu believed Adammu immortal; they deprecate opinions of other scholars who think that "the story ... nowhere says that Adam, before his disobedience, was immortal." However, I think (and said above) that the Hebrew story is not explicit about Adam's potential immortality, and I think it is deliberately ambiguous about it. I think that the ancient Hebrew editors valued brevity, and understood the danger of *saying too much*. I think they had voluminous sources to choose from and that they chose very carefully,

valuing the resulting ambiguities. They did not want to constrain the word of God to their people, having seen the unexpected changes in the expression of the *word of the LORD* from Moses to Ezekiel. In particular, I think they had at the forefront of their minds the astonishing prophecy of Jeremiah:

Behold, **I** am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me? Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, ... And the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it ... For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked **me** to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD. ... And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught **them**, rising up early and teaching, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. ...

And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God ...

Jer.32:26ff (note emphatic pronouns)

God asks here, “*is anything too hard for me?*” meaning that he can tear down as well as build up; he will build up as well as tear down. Walter Brueggemann, in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* **94** (1979) 615-634 (reprinted in English, 1995), put it like this, commenting on this passage of Jeremiah :-

YHWH can cause two kinds of impossibility that violate reason. YHWH can cause endings to what is valued, and YHWH can cause newness not to be imagined. In both ways the presumed world of Judah, like the presumed world of Abraham and Sarah, is shown to be much more provisional, and much more subject to radical unanticipated transformation, than had been thought either in groundless despair or in false security.

What is essential is an attitude of *openness* towards the “impossibilities” of God. This is the same openness that is taught by the Psalmists, who bare their hearts to God and expect him, in the most personal terms, to “*Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path*” (Ps.27:11; to take one example of many). And it is this attitude of *openness* that encouraged the ancient editors to avoid prescriptiveness and embrace ambiguity.

8. “The [Ugaritic] creator god Ilu was thought to live in what became the garden of Eden in the Hebrew tradition”
9. “The garden of God in Genesis and the vineyard of the great gods in the Ugarit story are close enough to assume a direct link between the two.”
10. “Both on textual and iconographic evidence we have had reason to postulate a Tree of Life in the Ugaritic version of Paradise.”
11. The evil serpent in Genesis is matched by the evil serpent that bit Adammu.
12. Adam’s wife is good: God calls her (literally) a “helper as his counterpart” [עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדוֹ] (where “help” here is a strong word, always elsewhere indicating help from God: see Ex.18:4; Deut33:7,26,29; Ps.20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9,10,11; 121:1,2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos.13:9. The only exceptions are Is.30:5; Ez.12:14; Dan.11:34). This matches Adammu’s wife: a “good-natured woman”.

13. The promise of the sun goddess Šapšu to Adammu's wife, "she will not die" (KTU 1.107:53) matches the promise of the serpent to Eve: in both cases half-truths.
14. There is a wordplay in Hebrew between "naked" [ערומים] (Gen.2:25) and "sly" [ערום] (Gen.3:1): it is possible to translate the latter verse, "Now the serpent was more naked than any other creature". In both KTU 1.100:5 [ʿqšr] and in the Gilgameš Epic the serpent is said to have sloughed its skin (hence "naked").
15. In accordance with Ugaritic and Babylonian terminology, Gen.2:22 uses "to build" [יִבְאֵה] for the creation of Eve.
16. In Ugarit Adammu appears to be paired with Kubaba, the primordial mother goddess. This is commensurate with Eve (Gen.3:20) being literally, "she-who-gives-life".
17. The identification of the serpent in Genesis with Satan is conventionally assumed to be a late development, but this must be mistaken since the Ugaritic serpent which brought death to Adammu is clearly a personification of evil.
18. Korpel & de Moor go to some length to show that the "Hebrew tradition seems to have transferred some traits of Ḥorrānu to Cain".

## Digressions

### Digression on the conservatism of the ancient Hebrew editors

Underlying much modern Biblical scholarship is the fixed attitude that the text we have is not original. It is assumed that we have a late version of the originals (if indeed the "originals" ever existed at all). In my opinion, Korpel & de Moor appear to share this attitude to some extent. To take at random one example from many, on p.127 they say, on the inconsistency of the two Creation accounts where Adam is created after the animals in the first, but in the second it is before: "[this] is definitely one of the inconsistencies that the final redactors were unable or unwilling to iron out". It seems to me that this is one of the interesting features of the Biblical text that is regularly overlooked: the overwhelming internal evidence that the ancient editors did their best *not to change their sources*, and of course it is widely observed that multiple Near East creation stories are regularly mutually inconsistent. This evidence can be seen everywhere, once you realise it is there. I take issue with the very word "redactor", which in this context now rather has the connotation of a *Daily Mail* journalist manipulating his material to get the story he wants. If this was the case, why is it that, for example, Psalms 14 and 53 are only *almost* identical? Why are Psalm 18 and 2Sam.22 only *almost* identical? Why are Is.2:1-4 and Mic.4:1-4 only *almost* identical? Are the editors incompetent, that they allow inconsistent accounts? Or perhaps they simply have not noticed?

Such suggestions are absurd. My favourite glaring inconsistency is the comparison between 1Kings 4:26 and 2Chron.9:25. How many stalls and horsemen did Solomon have? These texts agree that he had twelve thousand horsemen, but Kings says he had "forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots" where Chronicles says he had "four thousand stalls for horses and chariots". Of course, we don't much care how many horses and stalls Solomon had, and it has no theological significance, but details like this are of great historical interest, and they do have a bearing on the accuracy of the text. It is interesting that some LXX manuscripts make the Kings account *conform* to the Chronicles account, but it seems that the original texts are really inconsistent. I can't find any commentary

that believably reconciles these texts from two-and-a-half millennia ago and more. The fact that we can prove that examples can be found of harmonisation in later texts shows that the pure scribal practice was to maintain the received text, inconsistencies and all. There are (at least) *two* families of sources used by the ancient editors, *both* of which are faithfully maintained in the scribal tradition despite the full recognition by the scribes of their inconsistencies, and *both* of which the ancient editors themselves regarded as ancient.

An extraordinary example of the faithfulness of the ancient editors to their sources is in the incredible story of the sun standing still for Joshua (Jos.10:12f). Clearly, we cannot today conceive of any way in which the sun can actually stand still, relative to the earth. But note well that the Chronicler could not either, even though his understanding of the physics was not as well informed as is ours. Recall David's exclamation "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" (Ps.19) and that the heavens were everywhere understood as the keepers of divine time, as Gen.1:14 also makes clear. Recall too that God's word is reliable and irrevocable: *reliable* since God always stands by his word, notice Gen.22:16 and the gloss on this of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb.6:3, quoting Gen.22:17 but intending us to hear the whole passage); and *irrevocable* since there is no greater than God to oppose his word. *We* are not able to treat the story literally because we know too much physics, but it is important to realise that the Chronicler *also* found the story literally unbelievable since the heavens were the timepieces of the God whose word can never be broken; if the law of the King of Babylon "*can never be repealed*" (Esther 1:19; 8:8; Dan.6:8, 12, 15; see also Job 41:10; 2Sam.23:5), how much less the law of God?

So how does the Chronicler treat this unbelievable story? He cites his source *verbatim*! "*Is not this [emphatic pronoun] written in the book of Jasher?*" he says (v.13). Note that "Jasher" means '*the Upright one*', and being "upright" is one of the main characteristics of God (Deut.32:4); therefore, Jasher's text, however surprising, should be thought reliable. Even in the case of the sun standing still for Joshua, which if taken literally would be a glaring inconsistency with everything the Chronicler knows about the world and its Creator, the text is restrained and credible, even *citing the actual text of the source*, a very rare practice in the ancient world and, I think, unique here in the Hebrew Bible. So the Chronicler (who knows it is weird) carefully (and very unusually) gives us all the information he has, weird and anomalous as it is, and lets us interpret as we wish. As an experimental scientist, I think this is an exemplary treatment of data.

### **Digression on allusiveness in ancient storytelling**

Language is naturally complex, with analytical simplicity (using well-defined terms) actually a sophisticated overlay on natural language, and with ancient texts often maintaining multiple levels of allusion. We will use as an example of this the interesting word "*compass*" or "*circling about*" ([סָבַב] transliterated as *çâbab*). This root is used in over two dozen separate texts (I count 55 instances) in both literal and figurative ways, in a very wide variety of syntactical forms, and in both very ancient and in late texts. The range of its meaning and allusion is also very wide. Clearly there is a primary concrete (neutral) meaning of "encirclement", but it is rarely used only in this sense. The earliest use is in the second Creation account: this appears simple but it also carries a strong connotation of a *boundary*. I think the Creation accounts are ancient, derived from very old texts that solidify the (even older) oral tradition, even though it is clear that the text we have was probably only finalised – at the earliest – around the fall of Samaria (722BC) :-

The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth (הסבב) the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold ... And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth (הסובב) the whole land of Ethiopia. (Gen.2:11,13)

The word *çâbab* is interesting because it is central in Jeremiah's electric vision of restoration :-

How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass (תסובב) a man. (Jeremiah 31:22)

Of course, this is a late text, but Jeremiah is using every rhetorical trick he has, including the allusive (and archaic) use of ancient words, to try to express God's extraordinary, unaccountable, world-changing love – indeed, the love that turns the whole world upside down and that brings into being those things that are not, those things that are so unthinkable that we barely dare even whisper them to ourselves. In this verse he refers to God's covenant with Eve, alluding to the victory over death itself that Hosea glimpsed (Hos.13:14) and Isaiah saw more clearly (Is.25:6ff).

Perhaps the simplest uses are in God's speech to Job, and in the sermon of the Preacher: these are both late texts:

The shady trees cover him [Behemoth] (יִסְכְּהוּ) with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about (יִסְבֹּהוּ).

(Job 40:22)

The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about (וְסוּבָב) unto the north; it whirleth about continually (סוּבָב סָבַב), and the wind returneth (סָבִיבָתִּי) again according to his circuits. (Ecclesiastes 1:6)

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it (וְסָבַב), and built great bulwarks against it (Ecclesiastes 9:14)

## Digression on dating Genesis

It is traditionally believed that Moses first wrote this story down (the Torah is the "five books of Moses"): manifestly the story had an oral source who must ultimately have been Adam himself. It seems to me that "traditional" knowledge should not be simply disregarded, since the ancients had far more source material available to them: material that is now lost, with the consequence that any justification for the traditional view which the ancients had is also now lost.

In any case, a story of such great significance cannot have been treated as a subject for free invention: the oral tradition must have been a "controlled" one, using the terms of Richard Bauckham's "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses" (2006). The evidence for this is the recurrence all over the Middle East of (from some points of view) essentially the same stories, and even in the same terms, as Korpel & de Moor have shown. Stories in the controlled oral tradition are not changed very much (and only for very compelling reasons), and not very often, as they have also shown.

Moreover, I have shown above that the final editors of the canonical biblical text treated their sources with great respect, taking the attitude that their job was to transmit, not modify, their sources. They only selected and integrated their sources, they didn't materially modify them.

I currently conjecture that the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible (the *Tanakh*: *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, *Kethuvim*) represent the age of the canonical text, with the canonical text of the *Torah* being complete by the time of (say) Elisha, that of the *Nevi'im* essentially complete (except for Ezekiel) by the time of Jeremiah, and that of the *Kethuvim* completed shortly after 444BC (see Neh.8:18). The

obvious evidence for this is the chronological nature of the divisions: manifestly not arbitrary. In this conjecture Moses could easily have decisively shaped the oral tradition (and may even have produced some written material), and the final editor may not have done too much, except condense his material.

Why couldn't one of the editors of the Genesis Creation stories have been Moses himself? Certainly at the time of Moses many creation narratives were already elaborated in Canaan, Mesopotamia and Egypt: the Hebrews would certainly have had their own, elaborated to a similar extent. The material was certainly there for Moses. And the *Tetragrammaton* ("YHWH", [יהוה]) introduced in the second Creation narrative (Gen.2-4) was (implicitly) revealed to Moses himself in the crucial and central Ex.3:14 ("I AM THAT I AM", [אהיה אשר אהיה]).

I depart from the consensus view in putting the *composition* of the Torah early (although I agree with the consensus view that the canonical *text* is late, perhaps 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries): perhaps the Torah composition is earlier than the Ugaritic texts from the tell at Ras Shamra, perhaps indeed several centuries earlier? But then, why not use Occam's Razor and revert to the traditional view, that Moses was the originator? Obviously the *text* was compiled by a later hand than Moses since Moses' death is included, and there are a number of other obviously late interpolations, but what precludes Moses from having, as I said, "decisively shaped the oral tradition"? In particular, does the shape of Gen.1 go back to Moses? Does the shape of Gen.2-4 go back to Moses? If not, why not?

Occam's Razor deprecates complexity in speculation that cannot be explicitly justified. I prefer to hypothesise a three stage process: a prehistoric oral tradition that was itself very rich; an historic oral tradition in which recognised leaders authoritatively formalised previous tradition, probably with at least some written records; and a final creation of the canonical text, again involving authoritative editors. I have avoided using the word "redactors", which I consider too loaded. The progress from step 2 to step 3 must be fuzzy, since it presupposes the development of scribal expertise, and the Hebrew script clearly developed greatly over the millennium prior to the establishment of the canonical text: I think this progress is itself interesting. Nevertheless, keeping things simple, I think that this 3-stage process can be justified in detail and is worth consideration.

Korpel & de Moor say many times throughout their text that the Hebrew text is late, and they imply that the ancient Ugaritic and other stories are therefore "precursors". It seems clear to me that although the canonical text is certainly late, the stories solidified by these texts are themselves ancient – I guess at least as ancient as the Canaanite texts. I do not believe that the Canaanite stories are "sources" for the Hebrew text, and the (extensive and very interesting) evidence that Korpel & de Moor show of a family resemblance between the Ugaritic (and other) and Hebrew texts does not mean that either is derived from the other. It is simply not known what dependencies there are, if any. This strain running through Korpel & de Moor's book is a weakness, in my opinion.

The trouble is that Korpel & de Moor are in a scholarly tradition with its roots in the revolution introduced by so-called "Enlightenment free-thinking"; in particular H.S.Reimarus (whose *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* was published posthumously – the "*Fragmentenstreit*" – between 1774-8 by his friend the poet G.Lessing) and the subsequent scholars of the Tübingen school (F.C.Baur, D.F.Strauß and their followers). But these scholars were not



awesome voice over the whole world. Robert Alter (a co-author of *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 1987) explains this idea, but peremptorily dismisses it :-

Canaanite poetry was the literary tradition that constituted the most immediate background to biblical poetry. It would be surprising if the biblical poets did not make use of images, phrasing, and even mythological elements from the antecedent tradition with which they and their audience were acquainted. The relation of this psalm [29], and a good many others, to the Syro-Palestinian tradition is roughly like that of *Paradise Lost* [Milton, 1667], to the *Aeneid* [29BC-19BC: Virgil] and the *Iliad* [~700BC: Homer]. Virgil and Homer gave Milton a model, and a repertory of devices and *topoi* [a term of classical Greek rhetoric meaning, roughly, "commonplaces"], with which he could frame a cosmic epic from his own monotheistic perspective, but he was not merely "transposing" the pagan epic poets into English.  
Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (2007), Ps.29

Of course, the Hebrew and Canaanite poetry were much closer in time than Milton and Virgil (or Homer!). But the *weltanschauung* of the Hebrew poets was demonstrably quite different from that of the Canaanite ones: they were related certainly, but through a common ancestor; they were not derivative.

And they were related only at a literary level. Walter Brueggemann points out that, just as vague assertions of dependence of Biblical with prior pagan poetry cannot be supported on close examination, so the more generalised assertion of familial *philosophical* similarity between Israelite and Canaanite (and other) religions also falls down. He says, taking the issue considerably further with consequences right up to the Christian era (just as Korpel and de Moor do), and quoting Mircea Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Returns* (1955; pp.160-162), that "there is a decisive difference between the perennial religion and the claims of the gospel. And that contrast is to be found precisely in the recharacterisation of what is possible and impossible :-

Basically, the horizon of archetypes and repetition cannot be transcended with impunity unless we accept a philosophy of freedom that does not exclude God. And indeed this proved to be true when the horizon of archetypes and repetitions was transcended, for the first time, by Judeo-Christianism, which introduced a new category into religious experience, the category of *faith*. It must not be forgotten that, if Abraham's faith can be defined as *for God everything is possible* [Gen.18:14], the faith of Christianity implies that everything is also possible for men [Mk.10:27]."

W. Brueggemann (*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* **94**, 1979, 615-634; transl.1995)

## Conclusions

Korpel & de Moor's monograph is deeply interesting. They have reconstructed, translated and interpreted important Ugaritic texts from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century BC with impressive scholarship, and they have explained the links with and relevance to the Hebrew canonical text, a text that remains one of pivotal cultural significance, with equal conviction. This work is important!

At the same time, they have not pushed their conclusions too far. They explicitly emphasise the provisionality of the conclusions that of course they must draw. These include underlining that the Ugaritic "creation" account now appears to be much closer to the Hebrew one than other cognate literature would have led us to expect: this in itself has transformed our understanding in a small but fundamental way. They also show how the Ugaritic texts modify our understanding of the range of connotation of important concepts in the Hebrew accounts. Biblical scholarship will have to shift to accommodate this new work.