

A couple years ago, I had the pleasure of attending a pastors' conference where the keynote speaker was Dr. David Adams. Dr. Adams is a preeminent Old Testament scholar and one of my former seminary professors. He knows pretty much everything there is to know about the books of Genesis and Exodus. He is an accomplished archeologist. And he is one of the toughest professors I ever had.

And one of the topics that he discussed was the gods of the ancient Middle East. Understanding the gods of ancient Canaan or Egypt or Babylon is important, as it turns out. Because a good portion of the Old Testament is written specifically to contrast the God of Israel against the false gods of the region. In essence, God says to his people, "You understand me like this false god, because that's all you've ever known. But I'm really nothing like this false god, and here's why."

The account of the Creation and Fall of man is a perfect example. You see, stories about the creation of the earth were common in the ancient world. And they all looked a little something like this:

In the beginning, there was a whole bunch of uncreated, chaotic, stuff. They usually called it water, because in their minds, water was the most chaotic, disorganized substance in the world. And this uncreated, chaotic, stuff would spontaneously gain consciousness and become a god.

And this first god would begin taking pieces of himself and forming them into some major aspect of creation. The sun or the moon or the wind. And that element of creation would gain consciousness and become another god.

And those major gods would take more uncreated, chaotic, stuff and form them into minor aspects of creation. A tree or an animal or an insect. And those would become conscious and become more gods.

And slowly but surely, you'd end up with a complete creation. Made of all these individual components, who were all individual gods. Each one formed out of the chaos that preceded them into something less chaotic.

And somewhere in the midst of all this creation, man would appear. And the creation of man was usually just a side note in all this. "And, oh yeah, one of these gods needed slaves. So he created men to be his slaves. And then he forgot about them."

That's how it often goes. Without exception, the story of creation in the ancient world was about the creation of the gods. They were the focal point. They were all that really mattered.

But Genesis 1 and 2 are nothing like that. Despite the fact that the Israelites lived in Canaan and Egypt and Babylon for thousands of years. The story of creation in the Bible looks nothing like the creation stories of Canaan or Egypt or Babylon.

For one thing, it starts with, "In the beginning, God..." God was there in the beginning. Before creation. He wasn't ever part of the uncreated, chaotic, stuff. He was separate from it. Hovering over it, the Bible says.

And yes, He does then set to work creating a new orderly creation from this chaotic stuff. But they do not become gods. They are just part of creation. Once again, God is over creation. Separate from creation. He does not lose anything by creating the world. He does not share credit for creating the world with anyone else.

Until finally, He creates man. And it is in the creation of man that God finally creates something in His own image. To other ancient religions, all of creation is in god's image. Because every part of creation is a god.

But not in the Bible. Only humanity has the image of god. Because we are the whole point of creation. Man is not an afterthought in Genesis. He is not a side note in the story. He is not a forgotten slave in God's workforce.

He is the goal of all God's work. When God sees Adam and Eve standing upon the earth, he says, "That's it. I'm done. It's perfect. There's nothing else that I need to make. This creature standing here in front of me was the goal all along. Now I can stop. Now I can rest."

It should give us pause when we consider the stories of creation in our world today. The theory of evolution doesn't just bother me because it disagrees with a couple chapters of the Bible. It bothers me because it changes our entire view of our existence. The theory of evolution is really quite similar to the mythology of ancient Canaan or Egypt or Babylon.

There was a big "BANG!" and suddenly there was a whole bunch of uncreated, chaotic, stuff. And it spontaneously formed into more orderly stuff. And that formed into even more orderly stuff. And finally, we had a creation. And, oh yeah... along the way, man appeared. But he doesn't really matter.

Do you see the similarity? We've come full circle. We've gone from worshipping Isis and Ashur and Baal to worshipping matter and physics and evolution. But the results are the same. A world in which there is no god who loves you, and you are meaningless afterthought in creation.

And that's sad. Because we have so much more to live for than to be the forgotten slaves of gods or the pointless by-products of evolution. We have a God who created everything for us. Who considered our needs at every step of creation. Who looked at us and said, "Because they exist, my creation is now very, very good."

And yet we fell for a lie. Not just the lie of evolution. Not just the lie of idolatry. We fell for the lie that God held something back from us.

That's what the devil told to Adam and Eve. This tree will make you like God, knowing good and evil. This tree will give you something that God didn't. This tree will make you better than God made you to be.

That's the supreme irony of mankind's fall into sin. We ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But we already knew good. We already knew every goodness that God could give us. We could only learn evil from that tree. And in doing so, it didn't make us more. It didn't make us better. It made us less – far less – than what God created us to be.

Every step of creation is the story of God holding nothing back from us. Of pouring every good thing into our lives. Because that's who God is. That's His personality. That's His nature. He is the giver of every good thing. He considers it His supreme glory to give us good things.

Which is why He made the promise that He did on the day that we fell into sin. The very same day that we disobeyed Him. That we felt shame in His presence. That we hid from Him, crushed with guilt. He made a promise to us.

A promise that a savior would come. A descendant of Adam and Eve. Who would crush the serpent's head. Even if it meant being struck by the serpent on His heel. Even if it meant being bitten by the sting of death.

The God who throughout the days of creation had held nothing back from us would once again hold nothing back from us. Even if it meant suffering pain and abuse. Even if it meant being nailed to a cross. Even if it meant sacrificing His very life.

That's what we read over and over again in God's Word. The Bible is a history of the world, not focused on how we are ignored, forgotten, or meaningless. But how we are sought after, saved, and redeemed by Him who loved us from before time began.

Because that is the glory of God. To give us every good thing. No matter the cost. To hold nothing back, just so that we can know His goodness in our lives once again.

So that we can one day look around at a new heavens and a new earth and a new Tree of Life and say, "Now we can rest. For this is as good as God's creation will ever be. He didn't do this for some other god. He didn't do this by random accident. He did this for me. Because, by the blood of the Lamb, I am in His image. And I will never feel shame again." Amen.