

**Review of *Secret Origins of the Bible* by Tim Callahan (Millennium Press, 2002) for NCAS  
“Skeptical Eye” by Marvin Zelkowitz**

Skeptical groups, such as NCAS, often avoid discussing religion since the existence of God is not considered a testable event. However, the artifacts of religion are physical objects, thus their properties and origins are certainly open to investigation and critical thinking. One of the most important objects in western religions is the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). It has been thoroughly studied in trying to understand who wrote it, when they wrote it, and why they wrote it?

For over 200 year most Bible scholars have believed that the Bible did not originate with Moses, but instead, was written over 600 years later around the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 589 BCE. The “Five Books of Moses” is thought to be composed of at least four major sections – often called the J, E, P and D documents – which were combined by a redactor around 500 BCE. (See, *Who wrote the Bible* by Richard Elliott Friedman, Harper & Row, 1987.) In *Secret Origins of the Bible*, Tim Callahan goes beyond the question of when these books were written. He discusses the ancient Mesopotamian, Greek, Sumerian, or Egyptian myths that are the bases for many of the stories in the Bible.

Here is one example of the many found in this book – creation of man. The book of Genesis begins with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...” and proceeds to discuss the six days of creation, ending on day six with “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen 1:27). It is this passage that fundamentalists use to attempt to discredit evolution.

However, not everyone realizes there is a second creation story beginning with verse four in chapter two of Genesis: “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.” In this version in the Garden of Eden, “God formed man of the dust of the ground” *before* every beast was created and before Eve was created out of his ribs.

Even the early rabbis of 2000 years ago recognized this contradiction. How could God create the animals first and then create man and woman simultaneously in Genesis 1, yet create man first and then the beasts and Eve later, as stated in Genesis 2? They got out of this problem with a *Midrash*, a story to explain a missing or unclear statement in the Bible. According to this midrash, apparently the woman in Genesis 1 was not Eve, but another woman, Lilith. Lilith would not let Adam be dominant over her, so she left him and consorted with demons, preying on unsuspecting men at night ever since. That left Adam alone in Genesis 1, so God had to create Eve to alleviate his loneliness in Genesis 2.

We are then faced with three creation stories – the 6 days of creation, Adam and Eve, and the midrash of Lilith. This is where Callahan’s book is valuable. He traces each of these stories to earlier legends circulating in the Semitic Near East:

For the 6 days of creation he discusses the Mesopotamian *Enuma elish* legend, which became the god Marduk of Babylon around 1400 BCE. Callahan gives a detailed account of why these are all the same story; the following is only one example of an analogy between them:

<i>Enuma elish</i>	<i>Genesis 1</i>
Primeval chaos (Ti'amat)	Darkness over deep
Light emanates from gods	God creates light
Marduk defeats Ti'amat	Combat myth omitted in Genesis, but alluded to elsewhere (Leviathan)
Marduk creates firmament	God creates firmament
Marduk creates land	God creates land
Marduk and Aruru create humans from clay	God creates man
Gods rest and celebrate	God rests on seventh day

For the creation story in Genesis 2, the following analogy is offered:

<i>Other cultures</i>	<i>Genesis 2</i>
Ptah creates man on a potter's wheel (Egyptian)	God creates man out of clay
Prometheus molds people out of clay and then breathes life into them (Greek)	God breathes into man's nostrils to give him life

For the Lilith legend, he claims Lilith was most likely the Sumerian death goddess, Lilitu.

Callahan then goes on to discuss "the fall" (Adam, Eve and the serpent) as well as whom Eve actually represents. He believes she represents the goddess Asherah the consort of the Israelite God Yahweh. Judaism did not become truly monotheistic until the reigns of kings Hezekiah and Josiah during the seventh century BCE.

In summary, Callahan says that the various creation stories, as given in the Hebrew Bible, represent "a monotheistic distillation of myths in which finite gods and goddesses created a less than perfect world. ... [T]he creation and fall of Genesis is part of the greater family of mythic systems of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East."

In succeeding chapters Callahan goes to great lengths investigating other Bible events – Noah and the flood, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the 12 Israelite tribes, Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the walls of Jericho, the power of Sampson, and many others. The book is a valuable addition to any library if you are interested in tracing the evolution of old Near East legends. The book, however, is not a first book on the topic. The reader should probably read a book like the previously mentioned *Who wrote the Bible* by Friedman in order to understand the culture in which the Bible was written before reading this excellent book.