



The Caller

A Weekly Newsletter of the Elizabethtown church of Christ
Vol. XXXV February 10, 2019 No. 5

Confidence Corner John F. Board

In the week's *Confidence Corner* we want to examine the drastic difference between YHWH the God of the Hebrew Bible and the various gods of the Ancient Near East. While the Hebrews viewed their

Deity as Holy, such cannot really be said of the way multiple cultures of the ANE saw their deities.

In the ANE gods were not eternal. Most of the deities have legends about how they came to be. The gods of the ANE were considered fallible.

Though they were somewhat above humans, they were not far removed from humans. If you can believe it, the gods of the ANE were thought to make mistakes and even commit crimes. They are often indecisive and confused. The gods of the ANE were also at times surprised (which indicates they were not omniscient).

The gods experience the whole range of human emotions, whether negative or positive. Those familiar with the Bible would find it easy to imagine the gods having joy, pride, sorrow, or anger. In the ancient Near East, however, the gods also experience emotions such as shame and fear. The gods of the ANE are depicted as eating and sleeping.

This is such a contrast to the God of the Hebrew Bible, YHWH. God is Holy and above man (Lev 19:1ff). One OT scholar refers to the Deity of the Hebrew Bible as the "wholly other" because His holiness so separated Him from His creation, mankind. A reading of the texts considered Scripture would in no way suggest that God is on any level near a man.

Read Psalm 139 for just one example as to how the Hebrew Deity, YHWH possesses traits far above mortal man. He has full knowledge of man. Though man sleeps, when man awakes, God is there (an implication that God never rests). Rather than being something that was created or brought into existence, God is the creator of man. He is eternal.

The many ways that the God of Scripture is different from other false and powerless gods should not be surprising. The very document that reveals such could only be produced by such a being as our God.

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The Holy Trinity is a phrase used to describe the wholeness of God in the three different forms that we see God. We know God the Son, God the Spirit, and God the Father.

Thinking about God in this way can sometimes be confusing. We see Jesus as both God and the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is also God and the Spirit of God. God is God and the Father. Confusing right—especially if you don't know anything about God.

One way to explain the unity of God, and the beings that make up God as a whole, is the analogy of an egg. An egg is made up of three parts: the yolk, the white, and the shell. Each part is representative of the individual parts of the Godhead. The egg itself is the entire make-up of God, but the yolk of the egg, which is in the center, represents God the Father. The shell is the medium between the outside elements and the inside of the egg. Jesus is the outer shell that we see. We see Him in scripture and He even took on flesh so that we could see Him as we see each other. He is the Father's connection to the rest of the world. In between the yolk and the shell is the white, which surrounds the yolk. It represents the Holy Spirit. All of the parts of the egg are one egg, even while separated, but known by their individual characteristics.

If you want to come in contact with God you have to be willing to open His Word and search the Scriptures for His Son. Doing that can lead to Salvation from God and the gift of the Holy Spirit, if we follow the instructions prescribed to us. Human illustrations rarely express the divine.

*Mitchell's
Weekly
Manna*
Mitchell Lockhart

Sunday's Sermons:

**A.M. — One Step at a Time: Hear
Romans 10:14-17**

**P.M. — 12 Ordinary Men: Bartholomew
Matthew 10:1-4**

The God of the Hebrews: A Superior Deity

Assyriologists have proposed that in the ancient world one's identity was found in exterior relationships, rather than in an interior sense of one's being. One's soul or essence, one's "self," was defined in exterior terms. We may also assume that the perceptions of self as applied to the gods, as in every other area, mimicked humanity.

When we read the praise and prayer literature from the ancient Near East, we discover that the gods are praised for their majesty, glory, beauty, and splendor on the one hand, and for their power, authority, and deeds on the other. These are qualities manifested in exterior ways, rather than interior attributes. It is no surprise then that we find little evidence in the ancient Near Eastern literature that the ancients consider their gods to be just, wise, good, faithful, gracious, and so on, though they often express a hope that the gods will act in those ways.

Yet, the gods can occasionally be incompetent judges. Most notable in this regard is the implicit accusation against Enlil when Enki chastens him about sending the flood. This exchange calls into question whether justice was best served by the course of action taken by Enlil. It should be noted that Enlil was attempting to act justly. Enki is suggesting that his decision was not in the best interests of justice. Like a human judge, then, the gods are doing their best to administer justice, but they do so imperfectly.

Contrast the God of the Hebrew Bible with the ANE gods. In Israel, much of the prophetic literature is taken up with oracles of judgment, and both in the covenant curses and in the historical literature we see YHWH as proactive in punishing his wayward people. In Mesopotamia, it is more common for the judgment of the gods to be seen in their abandonment of subjects. Loss of the care and protection of the deity would expose the city, king, or individual to evil forces, whose activities would constitute punishment.

Consider the trait of goodness. It is very rare for the gods of the ancient Near East to be described as good, though the hope is commonly expressed that the god will do good to the worshiper, that is, act favorably or for their benefit. This is an expression of favor rather than a sense of intrinsic goodness. More than any other attribute, goodness, in the abstract sense, implies correspondence to an independent standard of goodness. Such a standard does not exist in the ancient Near East. What is important here is to see the difference between how Israel and its neighbors thought about the goodness of deity.

Consider the trait of faithfulness. Faithfulness is one of the most frequently noted attributes of the God of the Hebrew Bible. It is often noted because of His covenant relationship with Israel. In contrast, it is difficult to find any such affirmation for the gods of the ancient Near East. Words that convey loyalty are never used of the gods in that way. The gods have no agreements or promise to be faithful to and no obligations or commitments to fulfill.

For many years, I have been reading and writing regarding the God of the Hebrew Bible and the gods of the ANE. Among many other observations is the thought that the Deity of the Hebrew Bible is a mighty God who cares and is with His people. The promise of Deity to be with His people is suggested often in Scripture. There is no such promise from the deities of the ANE to be with their people. Such seems understandable given just a brief examination of how the various texts of the ANE depict the type of gods the people worshipped and their attributes.

*John F. Board
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