

Ix3 – Ideas & Information in Some Genesis & Flood Myths

Dear: Regardless of the origins of ideas about souls, spirits, and gods (as cursorily explored in the previous chapter), eventually our ancient ancestors identified various gods as the “causes” of various observed effects. Thereby, “beliefs” in many gods developed, because so many effects were observed: thunder, lightning, rain, drought, birth, death, and so on. Then, rather than investigate how each assumed cause was linked to its observed effect (which is the essence of all science) our ancient ancestors concocted (or imagined or speculated or “dreamt up”) various stories for how the various gods “caused” the various processes “under their control”. Such concocted stories, which form the bases of all organized religions, are called myths.

According to my copy of Webster’s dictionary, a myth is a

traditional story... serving usually to explain [what a misuse of the word ‘explain’!] some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people; myths usually involve the exploits of gods and heroes...

Actually, though, I think that the above is a poor definition for the word ‘myth’ – or if I were more “politically correct”, I should probably say that it’s a definition that caters to the sensitivity of those who believe in myths. Someday, maybe standard dictionaries will define the word ‘myth’ more accurately, something similar to:

traditional story... used as a pretense for explaining something, but at most, providing some information about the people who created the myth – and about the people who still believe such nonsense!

But in any case, what I want to do in this chapter is to begin to show you just a few of the enormous number of myths that our ancestors concocted and to explore what information the myths might contain about the people who concocted them.

There are two obvious reasons why so many myths were concocted. One reason is because communications among various groups of people were relatively poor to nonexistent (imagine if the internet had been available!); consequently, early in the myth-making era, different groups of people essentially independently concocted their own set of “explanations”.

Meanwhile, each group concocted so many myths, because there were so many unanswered questions: Why is the earth shaking? Why is the mountain fuming? What is thunder and lightning? What's rain? Why did the flood occur? Why do people die? What happens when people die? What are the stars? Why can't animals talk? Where did animals come from? Where did people come from? Who was the first person? And so on – even more endless than a four-year old's questions!

GODS GALORE!

To start toward showing you a few of the resulting myths, I'll first list a few of the many gods that just your easily-identified ancestors (in northern Europe) “recognized” – or better, “imagined”. I've taken essentially all the information in the following from my copy of Arthur Cotterell's book *A Dictionary of World Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

- *Danann* was imagined to be the mother of the ancient gods of Ireland (where my mother, your great grandmother, was born). Cotterell states that *Danann's* name may be related to the name of the Hindu goddess *Danu* (“the waters of heaven”) – as may be the names of many famous European rivers, including the Danube.¹ After the defeat of the early inhabitants of Ireland by the ancestors of the current inhabitants, the “ancient gods” were “driven underground”, but they still “appear” in “fairy tales” about the Leprechauns (literally, “little people”) of Ireland, legends with which my mother would entertain me when I was even younger than you.
- In contrast to Irish legends about “little people”, but similar to the myths of many cultures, legends in Britain (where my father's father was born) claim that it was originally inhabited by giants. And in contrast to the imagined gods (generally assumed to be benefactors of humans, except when humans did something that was assumed to offend the gods), the imagined giants were generally malefactors (allegedly responsible for most of the ills that befell humans). According to Cotterell's book, the imagined leader of “the giant killers” of Britain was *Brut*, after whom the island was called “Britain” (and possibly is the origin of the word “brute”).
- More relevant to your other grandparents, in Germanic (and Nordic) mythology the first god was *Buri* (literally “the born one”). His son *Bor* (literally, “born”) and *Bestla* (the daughter of a frost giant) had three sons (*Odin*, *Vili*, and *Ve*), who (at least according to this myth!) created the world by slaying the senior frost giant (*Ymir*).

¹ Maybe I should add, Dear, that probably this linkage with the Hindu goddess *Danu* shouldn't be used to suggest that the Irish and Germans were influenced by the Hindu religion, but instead, that there's a common Indo-European base word for ‘river’ or maybe ‘rain’ that's close to the word ‘danue’ – and about which I can find nothing in my dictionary! If so, then perhaps the first settlers in Ireland were impressed by all the rain and therefore chose the rain goddess as their “mother god”!

Later, according to legend, these three sons made humans, and in particular, *Odin*, gave humans their ‘souls’. *Odin* was also god of the wind, which was assumed to be caused by the rushing of souls through the sky. Also in Germanic mythology, *Thor* was the Thunder god, whose chariot was said to be drawn across the sky by two goats, called Toothgrinder and Toothnasher.

As you can find on the internet, Dear, the above are just a few of the literally hundreds of gods that your easily-identified ancestors imagined existed.

Now, Dear, if you’re wondering why I started this chapter by mentioning the gods listed above, it’s for the following reason: if ever you should decide that you want to “believe in gods”, then you should be reminded that the above-mentioned gods are some of the few that you “should” worship, if you would be “true to your heritage”. In contrast, the gods commonly worshiped in our culture are the gods of the most recent wave of invaders: after the Romans conquered our easily-identified ancestors, they were forced to abandon their own gods and to worship the invader’s gods (including Jesus). With these gods came the message to “love thy enemies” – which in view of the circumstances, was quite an understandable message, especially when the enemies would cut your throat if you didn’t believe in their (loving, Christian) god, Jesus!

A GOD A DAY KEPT CHRISTIAN CLERICS AT BAY!

Actually though, Dear, your easily-identified ancestors didn’t readily give up their gods – and (cherished child that you are) you haven’t entirely abandoned “the true gods” either! Thus, after the Romans conquered most of Europe about 2,000 years ago and after the Romans were forced to convert to Christianity (by the butcher-emperor “Saint” Constantine), the newly empowered clerics began to force the conversion of your easily-identified ancestors to Christianity; they, however, continued to “pay homage” to some of their own gods – and so do you, even if you don’t recognize it! In particular, Dear, when our northern European ancestors accepted the Roman conqueror’s calendar in about 300 CE, they adopted the conqueror’s names for the months, but continued to use the names for the days of the week that were named to honor their own gods:

- Sunday (the sun god’s day),
- Monday (the moon god’s day),

- Tuesday (named after *Tiw* or *Tiu*, the Germanic god of the sky, in turn possibly named after the Indo-European sky god *Tyr*),
- Wednesday (or *Woden's* day or *Odin's* day, i.e., the wind god's day),
- Thursday (or *Thor's* day, i.e., the thunder god's day),
- Friday (named after *Freya* or *Frigg* or *Frig*, who was *Odin's* wife and the mother of the Germanic gods),² and
- Saturday (named after the god Saturn) – the one day of the week with a name that your easily-identified ancestors adopted from the Romans!

In turn, the Romans apparently adopted the god Saturn from the Greeks, who called him Cronus (or Kronos or Chronus, i.e., Father Time). And actually, in Greek mythology, Cronus [one of the sons of Father Heaven (Uranus) and Mother Earth (Gaea or Gaia)] was banished to Italy. Further, as I'll be showing you, the Greeks almost certainly adopted essentially all their gods from the Egyptians.³

² Dear: I recently ran into the following comment, written by “Unbeliever” at <http://ethicalatheist.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=43&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=15&sid=f514e2f976db7c4be48b1cc729ab8ff8>: “Yeah, and I've also read that the number 13 was formerly considered to be a lucky number, the sacred number of a goddess named Freya; so, the ‘Church’ decided on a campaign to discredit it, and turned it into a symbol of bad luck. And Friday the 13th is supposed to be particularly unlucky, because Friday is ‘Freya's Day’.”

³ Actually, Dear, there's also an interesting story (well – at least it's “interesting” to me!) behind the names we use for the months. If you know the least bit of Latin, then you know that September, October, November, and December are, respectively, the names of the 7th (“sept...”), 8th (“oct...”), 9th (“nov...”) and 10th (“dec...”) months – which is what they were, in the 10-month early-Roman year (which started at the spring Equinox, in “March”). “March” was named after the Roman god of war and fertility, *Mars*. The next three months were named after *Aprilis*, the Roman goddess of love, *Maia*, the Roman goddess of the springtime, and *Juno*, the Roman great mother goddess (known as *Gaia* to the Greeks). The fifth through 10th months were just given numbers, ending with what we call December. Subsequently, Julius Caesar switched to the 12-month/year calendar (invented at least a thousand years earlier by the Egyptians), adding the two additional months where we now have January (named after the two-headed Roman “god of beginnings, guardian of gates and doors, custodian of the universe”, *Janus*) and February (named after the Roman festival *Februa*, remnants of which are now in our Valentine's day, basically a fertility festival “sanitized” by Christian “moralists”). Unfortunately, however, by adding the two months at the beginning of the year, then the numbered months 5 through 12 were “misnumbered”. Perhaps in part to solve that problem, but ostensibly to honor Julius Caesar for improving the calendar, the Roman Senate named the 5th month (which by then was the 7th month) after him; therefore, “July”. Later, Augustus Caesar made another improvement (spreading out the Egyptian's five “extra days” throughout the year and another day every “leap year”); so, the Senate renamed the 6th month (which by then was the 8th month) after him; therefore, “August”. But no one has yet got around to renaming the 7th (now 9th) through 10th (now 12th) months, so they still carry their original (now inappropriate) names!

AND A VERY MERRY SATURNALIA TO ALL!

In addition, Dear, so long as you continue to give and receive presents at Christmas, you persist in your “pagan ways”! Thus, according to Cotterell’s book, Saturn (of course represented by the planet Saturn) was the ancient Italian god of corn and other cereal crops. In his book, Cotterell states:

Saturn was said to have derived his name from sowing; *saturn* means sown. His festival, the Saturnalia, took place in December and lasted seven days: our Christmas revels are its dim survival.

That is, Dear, “Christmas” celebrations originally had nothing to do with the birth of Jesus (the alleged “son” of the Jewish god Jehovah or Yahweh) and everything to do with rituals associated with Saturn (or Cronus, the son of heaven and earth), with the winter solstice (when the sun starts to rise higher in the sky), with the birth of a new year, and with hopes for the new year’s crops. Such rituals were practiced by ‘heathens’ or ‘pagans’ (where ‘heathen’ means “heath dwellers” and ‘pagan’ means ‘peasant’, i.e., both ‘heathen’ and ‘pagan’ basically mean farmers), e.g., Egyptian farmers, at least 2,000 years before Jesus was reportedly born!

As for why the celebration for the “rebirth” of the Sun (not son!) is held on December 25th rather than on the day of the winter solstice, here is what David Mills wrote in Chapter 2 of his 2004 book *Atheist Universe: Why God Didn’t Have A Thing To Do With It*:⁴

Atheists celebrate the Winter Solstice, which has been recognized since ancient times as the shortest day of the year (December 25th by the Julian calendar). The ancients celebrated this day because they realized that they had ‘rounded the corner’ and, soon, the days would grow longer and longer, and their crops would once again provide sustenance... During the early days of Christianity, believers tried to persuade the ruling authorities to establish a legal holiday to commemorate Jesus’ birth, but the governing authorities refused. So the Christians decided that “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” and thereafter celebrated Jesus’ birth on an already-established holiday: the Winter Solstice (December 25th). Pope Gregory XIII later revised the ancient Julian calendar; and so the calendar we use today (the Gregorian calendar) moves the Winter Solstice back a few days to December 21st (for astronomical reasons), whereas Christmas continues to be celebrated on the 25th.

⁴ Chapter 2 is online at <http://www.abal.net/1413434819.html>; the 243 page book is published by Xlibris Corporation; it’s available at, e.g., Amazon.

THE SPECIAL NUMBER ‘SEVEN’

While I’m mentioning the names of the seven days of the week and the seven days of the Saturnalia (the “Christmas” festival), let me address the obvious question: why is the number *seven* apparently special in so many cultures? As illustrations, consider the following questions:

- In the Mesopotamian flood myth of Gilgamesh (which I’ll show you later and which is the flood myth that the Hebrews “borrowed” to create their flood myth of Noah), why was it assumed that it stopped raining on the *seventh* day?
- In the same myth, in his search for eternal life, why did Gilgamesh sleep for *seven* days?
- In one of the Bible’s creation myths, why did the authors assume that their God (who, originally, was either the Egyptian sun god, Ra, or the Persian “good god” Ahura-Mazda) created everything in *seven* days (counting his assumed day of rest)?
- And why did our easily-identified ancestors chose seven days in a week (rather than, for example, the number of fingers on one or two hands)?

Almost certainly, Dear, the number *seven* gained its special significance from the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians, who with clear skies and no television to watch at night (!), spent substantial time watching the stars. They could see seven astronomical bodies that moved relative to the other stars (namely, the Sun, Moon, and five planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), decided that these seven “heavenly bodies” were seven gods, and therefore, named a day after each of the seven.⁵ You can still easily see this “reverence” for these seven “gods” in the French names for some of the days of the week, starting on Monday: *lundi* [as in lunar, i.e., the Moon’s day], *mardi* [Mars’ day], *mercredi* [Mercury’s day], *jeudi* [Jupiter’s day], *vendredi* [Venus’ day], *samedi*, and *dimanche*.⁶

⁵ Actually, Dear, when I was wandering around the internet I found (at www.greenheart.com/bilh/) that both the early Egyptians and Greeks did divide their 30-day (moon-based) months into three 10-day weeks. When they changed to a 7-day week is unknown, but certainly the change occurred before about 500 BCE, because at about this time, the Greek historian Herodotus wrote: “Here are some other discoveries of the Egyptians. They find... each day [of the seven days of the week] belongs to a god...”

⁶ Dear: I should admit to being puzzled here. Maybe you would like to search on the internet (or elsewhere) to answer some questions: 1) With *vendre* meaning “to sell”, is *vendredi* derived from the planet (or god) Venus or was *vendredi* “market day” – but then was “market day” on Friday, and that was Venus’s day? 2) Similarly, was *samedi* derived from the planet (or god) Saturn, or was it “assembly day”? 3) From what is *dimanche* derived? If *manche* means “sleeve”, then is it “sleeve day” (i.e., the day to put on one’s best clothes!)? By the way, in case it helps, in Italian the days of the week are: *lunedì*, *martedì*,

Well, Dear, with those introductory comments finally out of the way, what I wish I could do, now, is show you how the myths of our ancestors evolved. But I can't: I don't know enough about mythology or anthropology, it's too late in my life to try to learn (even if enough is known!), and to tell you the truth, I'm really not that interested in learning about a bunch of silly stories that primitive people dreamt up! Therefore, what I plan for this and the next several chapters is something much more modest: 1) to give you a brief sketch of a few of the myths of primitive people, especially those myths concocted to "explain" the origin of humans, the Earth, and similar (these are called "genesis myths") and those concocted to "explain" the cause(s) of floods (i.e., "flood myths") and 2) to leave you with a few hints (possibly with errors!) of how the myths of our ancestors might have evolved. If you want to learn more, there is a huge amount of information about myths on the internet, some of which I'll reference later in this chapter.

VIEWING MYTHS FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

At the outset of this brief examination of some genesis and flood myths, it might be useful if I outlined some different perspectives for viewing myths. One is the perspective of people called 'literalists' or 'fundamentalists'. Whether they be Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons or whatever, such people accept the myths of their religion, the texts of their "holy books", etc., as "the absolute truth", "the unerring word of [their] god", "God's holy word", and similar silliness.

A prime example of such people are the "creationists", who seek to have the Bible's myths about how the world and humans were "created" taught as "creation science" (or "intelligent design") in our schools. Such (silly!) people don't seem to have the faintest idea about what science is, because three of the most fundamental concepts in science are:

- 1) No hypothesis is accepted in science if it can't be falsified; therefore, any hypothesis of the existence of any god is rejected, because it can't be falsified;

mercoledì, giovedì, venerdì, sabato, and domenica, i.e., it appears that the Italians demoted the sun god – unless of course the sun god is "the god"! Finally, Dear, as a footnote to this footnote (!), I should mention that, while I was wandering around the internet, I came across a site that does a much more thorough job of relating the names of the days to the seven "gods"; it's at www.greenheart.com/billh/origin/html .

- 2) Once hypotheses are found to be false (such as the “hypotheses” in the Bible about how humans were “created”!), then such hypotheses are tossed in the trash can of human mistakes; and
- 3) All hypotheses in science (from Newton’s idea about gravity to Darwin’s idea about evolution, and from Einstein’s idea about gravity to Dirac’s idea about positrons) are submitted, not with the claim that the ideas are “true”, but with the challenge to anyone to try to show that they’re wrong!

Of course, creationists aren’t worried about this last criterion, because as is far as is known, it’s impossible to demonstrate that the “hypothesis” of God’s existence is wrong – or similar hypotheses about Superman or the Roadrunner!

In contrast to ‘creationists’ or ‘literalists’ or ‘fundamentalists’, some people accept their culture’s myths as allegorical stories; that is, as stories not to be taken literally but containing what these people consider to be important concepts, especially concepts dealing with morality. Probably the majority of the people in this country who consider themselves to be religious are such “allegorists”. Those of us opposed to all organized religions generally have fewer complaints with the allegorists than the literalists – but for reasons that I’ll show you in later chapters, whereas I’m strongly opposed to the immoralities that are promoted in all organized religions of our culture, I’m therefore strongly opposed not only to literal but also to allegorical interpretation of the “holy books”.

Three other general views of myths that I want to mention are the con artist’s, the pragmatist’s, and the historian’s. One good example of how a con artist (who wants to sell you something) manipulates myths for his own advantage is the Mormon “prophet” (or, better, “profit”!) Joseph Smith. As I’ll show you later, along with many other tricks of the con-artist’s trade, he used what is known as “the liar’s paradox” to trap his ‘mark’ (that is, the person whose money or other belongings the con artist seeks, which in the case of Smith, included other men’s wives and daughters). As you’ve been taught, Smith’s statement about the Bible was basically that it’s all true – except for those passages that are false (because they were mistranslated). This is known as the “liar’s paradox”, because similar to the liar who states, “Everything I say is a lie”, the statement actually contains zero information (as I’ll show you in a later chapter, dealing with reasoning). Nonetheless, such statements can ensnare naïve listeners (the con artist’s marks) in a

* Go to other chapters *via*

logical trap, thereby making them vulnerable to a new set of myths that the con artist concocts for his own profit.

In contrast to the above three views (of the literalist, the allegorist, and the con artist), what I plan to do in what follows is mostly adopt the pragmatist's view, while trying to at least "take a peek" at the historian's view. The pragmatist's view of any myth is simply to ask: what if any ideas and information does the myth contain? In what follows, generally I'll adopt this "pragmatic approach". If I had another ten years (or so!) to live, and sufficient interest, I could at least try to do more justice to the historian's view, but in general, even that would be an astoundingly difficult task.

Given some myth or "holy book", historians try to answer such questions as: How did it get here? What is its origin? How (if at all) has it been modified during subsequent generations? As I'll at least partially indicate to you (especially in the excursion **Yx**), some brilliant historians have spent their entire professional lives diligently searching for answers to such questions (in our culture, especially answering such questions in the case of the Bible, although some historians have also looked into the origin of the Book of Mormon and are beginning to study the origin of the Koran). If you examine some of the results of their studies, Dear, I expect that you, too, will be astounded by their dedication, diligence, perseverance, and accomplishments. But I've found that, given my interests and the time available to me, there's "no way" that I can do justice to the historians' view. Instead, on occasion you'll find me saying, in effect, "hats off to the historians, but pragmatically, the ideas and information in this myth are..."

To illustrate these different general views of myths, consider the following myth that deals with one of the topics in the first **Ix** chapter, namely, how amazing it must have been when people first learned how to speak and then started naming things. In the following quotation, I've tried to improve the writing by adding the words in parentheses {such as these} and I've added some comments in brackets [such as these].⁷

Some Bushman clans along the middle reaches of the Orange River {in South Africa} have a... myth that explains [!] the origin of {humans} and animals, their early friendship, and how this was lost.

⁷ Dear: I copied this myth from www.geocities.com/Athens/Olympus/2208, but couldn't find the author's name. Upon searching again, I find that even the website has now disappeared! – and Google finds no matches with any of the phrases in the myth. Strange – but myths do seem to come and go!

These people say that their remote {ancestors} came out of a hole in the ground at the roots of an enormous tree, covering a wide extent of the country. [Yah, but where did all those ground animals and people come from?!] Immediately afterwards, all kinds of animals came swarming out... some in twos, threes, and fours, others singly or in great flocks and herds. They crushed, jostled, and pushed one another, so great were their numbers. Ever thicker, they swarmed until they {emerged} even from the branches as well as the roots. But when the sun went down, the animals ceased to appear. Those already there remained peacefully resting around the bottom of the tree. {Similar to the humans, the animals} were all endowed with the gift of speech.

As the night came on, the {humans...} grew cold and wished to make a fire to warm themselves, but a divine voice told them to make no fire, {and} to wait until the sun rose to warm them in the morning. They remained like this for many hours, with the animals sleeping around them. But the night grew darker and the cold more intense until the {humans} could stand it no longer. In spite of the warning that had been given to them {by “the divine voice”}, they succeeded in making a fire.

As soon as the flames began to flicker, the animals sprang up in terror and rushed off. The panic-stricken hordes escaped into the mountains and plains, losing in their fright their power of speech, and fleeing forever afterwards the presence of man. [It’s not mentioned why the animals would be afraid of fire, given that they wouldn’t have known what it was!] Only a very few animals remained behind with the firemakers and these the {humans} domesticated and kept for their own use. But the great family of men and beasts was broken up, never to be united again.

Now, Dear, consider how the above myth might be viewed from the different perspectives mentioned in the previous few pages:

- Literalists would take this myth to be “the divine truth”, which can be rather amusing – except when such “fundamentalists” or “creationists” start demanding that all children waste valuable time in school learning such nonsense!
- Allegorists would probably use this myth to illustrate the harm that befalls humanity when we don’t obey “the divine voice”.
- Con artists might use this myth to try to sell you something, e.g., wood from the “primeval tree” or a method to speak to animals!
- Historians would try to determine the origin of this myth (a task that I expect would be essentially impossible to accomplish!) and then, I expect, would attempt to see how this myth might be traced forward in time to Ancient Greece, to determine if it might have influenced the Ancient Greek myth about Prometheus giving fire to humans in spite of Zeus’ desire that humans not gain his power over fire.

- Finally, the pragmatist would simply examine the myth to see what information and ideas it might contain.

Thus, Dear, as a pragmatist (!) maybe you saw that this myth does contain some ideas and information – without which the myth couldn't have been created. For example, the myth describes people who: lived where there were trees, had fire, knew how to talk, realized that animals couldn't talk, realized that most animals were afraid of fire, had domesticated animals that weren't afraid of fire, knew that some animals lived underground – and didn't understand why or where they and all the animals had come from!

Similarly, Dear, in what follows I'll be inviting you (even prodding you!) to see what if any ideas and information are contained in myths from various cultures. In general, if you'll look for what the myth teller assumed of the listeners, then usually you can find information about the people from their myths. And I should add that, my general goal in this “exercise” is to try to get you to realize how primitive were the people who first dreamt up all ideas about all gods.

That is, Dear, in contrast to all the nonsense that you have been taught since you were a baby (about how you are to “revere” all the “wise men of old” who brought you “the word of God and all His glory”), what I hope you'll see is that, all ideas about all gods sum to a bunch of silly nonsense, dreamt up by people whose knowledge was generally less than that of a modern-day six-year old's! And to pay some cleric to preach to you about such myths, makes even less sense than paying a six-year old to tell you a story about how he slew a dragon or flew to the moon – because from a six-year old's story, you probably could at least get a few laughs!

Now, Dear, as I already wrote, I wish that I could do more justice to the historian's view, to show you how the myths of our ancestors evolved, but what an enormous task that would be – quite likely, impossible to accomplish. To demonstrate the evolution of myths would also require demonstrating both the evolution of languages and the evolution of human societies. Of these two “simpler tasks” (!), substantial progress has been made in demonstrating the evolution of societies (in studies of anthropology) and some progress has been made in demonstrating the evolution of languages (in studies of etymology). Here, before I return to focusing on myths, I want to at least mention some results in these two “simpler studies” and suggest how you could obtain additional information.

A LITTLE ANTHROPOLOGY & ETYMOLOGY

Substantial data suggest a common origin of all humans. For example, all humans have identical skeletons, internal organs, physiological functions, etc. Further, the DNA molecules of all humans are essentially identical, except for differences that define (truly!) superficial differences (such as facial features, skin colors, heights, weights, and so on). In fact, Dear, as you can find on the internet by searching with “anthropology +DNA +humans”, substantial progress has been made in identifying when and where the first “humans” appeared (i.e., an animal with our skeletal characteristics, distinct from apes and monkeys), currently suggested to be in Africa about 5 million years ago. Should you want to learn more about such studies, Dear, then proceed as you desire; for example, there are a substantial number of universities that are accredited to offer PhDs in anthropology!

Or maybe you want to work toward your PhD in etymology (the study of the origin of words and languages) – although I wouldn’t recommend it, for it must be an extremely difficult field of study. But if you want to learn a little more, you could start by reading articles on etymology, such as the one that’s probably at the front of your dictionary. Next, you could start checking your dictionary to see some of the many English words that have an Indo-European roots. For example, ‘etymology’, itself, contains the Greek word *logos* meaning ‘word’ (or logic) and the Greek word *etymos* meaning ‘true’, but in turn, the Greek word *etymos* is from the Indo-European base word *es* meaning “to be”. If you want to dig deeper into such matters, Dear, then search on the internet for “Indo-European”.

As you might expect, attempting to trace the origins of languages and words is extremely difficult. For example, even the relatively simple and well-documented case of the evolution of Latin into Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese requires a thorough knowledge of five languages! Imagine the task of finding common (Indo-European) roots of words in the Iranian, Armenian, Tocharian, Greek, Albanian, Italic, Celtic, Germanic (including English), and Balto-Slavic languages! About half the world’s people speak these languages, which have a common Indo-European base. Further, the article entitled *Etymology* in my dictionary states that there’s “fragmentary evidence of still older relationship between Indo-European and the [other languages],” again suggesting a common origin of all humans.

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But those were asides. The point I was trying to make was that, it would be extremely difficult to identify the evolution of myths. Nonetheless, surely one of the first type of myths that every group created was an attempt to “explain” how humans came into existence, because surely all people wanted to know how they, the world, and, for that matter, the universe “came to be”. These creation myths are commonly called “genesis myths”, where the source of the Latin word *genus* (meaning “birth, origin, race, species, kind”) and the Greek word *genos* (meaning “race”) seems to be from the Indo-European base word *gen*, meaning “to beget or produce”.

SOME GENESIS MYTHS

As I’ll try to begin to show you, there are many similarities among (the huge number of!) “genesis myths”. In part, such similarities undoubtedly reflect the nature of the problem: attempting to explain, with essentially zero knowledge, the existence of the same things and phenomena. In part, though, the similarities probably also reflect interactions among different groups of people. And in part, the similarities probably reflect the common origin of all humans, which almost certainly was in Africa. On the other hand, there are also many differences among creation myths, for it seems that, whoever first made up the stories tried to make them conform to what were no doubt unique experiences of each group, particularly for those groups who wandered out of Africa, 100,000-or-so years ago.

Maybe some helpful hints about some of the first of these genesis myths are available from the myths of people who lived in relatively remote locations. In particular, maybe there are hints of the first genesis myths from the following outlines of myths, which are described more completely in Cotterell’s book (referenced earlier). In what follows, I’ve added some editorial notes in parentheses {such as these} and some personal comments in brackets [such as these].

- 1) {The supreme god of the African Pygmies is *Khonvum*.} “In the beginning was god; today is god; tomorrow will be god”... After the creation of the world, [*Khonvum*] lowered from the sky to the earth the first men – the Pygmies... [It’s neat how the “chosen race” for each god just happened to be of the same stature or color or... of the people who concocted the myth! Of course, not that I’m suspicious about who chose the Pygmies or the Hebrews or... to be ‘god’s chosen people’! Sorry, Dear, sometimes I react sarcastically to such silliness.] *The nightly chore of Khonvum is the renewal of the sun; he collects broken pieces of stars in his sack and tosses armfuls of them at the sun, so it can rise again next morning in its original splendor.*

[Actually, Dear, I rather like this myth: at least the Pygmies identified something for their god to do; in contrast, the meddlesome god familiar in our culture (i.e., the Egyptian god Aton or Adonai or Adonis or El or Yahweh or Jehovah or “just plain God”) seems to have nothing to do except meddle in people’s affairs – the universal busybody!]

- 2) For the ‘Aborigines’ in Australia, specifically for the Arnada in central Australia, the supreme god is *Altjira... erina itja arbamanakala*, “him none made” [which is a critical feature of all such ‘gods’; that is, Dear, it seems to be a common characteristic of all such genesis myths that the first god was “self created” – thereby, the myth maker was probably preparing defense against the obvious question: ‘Yah, but who made your god?'] *who was alive even before alchera*, “dream time”. *Altjira gave the world its present form and then removed himself to the top of the sky, while the other “eternal ones of the dream” sank back into their earthly abode. During the “dream time”, the spirits sleeping beneath the ground arose and wandered the earth, shaping the landscape, making man, and teaching the arts of survival.* [Actually, Dear, I rather like this myth, too! At least its creators saw that the goal of humans is to survive! Also, I must admit to being intrigued by this reference to “dream time”; I wonder if it’s a reference to time when people relied more on pictures in their minds than on words.] *Their work done, {the sprits} subsided once more into sleep. The Aranda say that today Atjira is indifferent to mankind.* [Would that all people had myths as enlightened as the Australian Aborigines! Their God is now “indifferent to mankind”. That would make it so much easier for humans to become indifferent to the gods!]

- 3) {For the people on the South Pacific Island of Tahiti, who were impressed, no doubt, by how life ‘sprung’ from the eggs of turtles and birds, their “supreme god” is *Ta’arua*.} The Tahitian creation myth places *Ta’arua* within the darkness of the cosmic egg. He “developed himself in solitude; he was his own parent, having no father or mother.” [It’s neat how all creation myths “explain” the problem of how things started (doesn’t everything need a start?!), but then don’t bother to address the next obvious question: “Yah, but, where did the egg come from?"] *Ta’arua’s natures were beyond count* [numbers, too, were awe inspiring for these people, and “beyond count” (infinity) is really into the realm of the gods!]; “*he was above, below, and in stone; Ta’arua was a god’s house; his backbone was the ridgepole, his ribs were the supporters.*” Then the god cracked the shell, came out, and stood upon the broken pieces. Peering into the primeval darkness, he realized that he was alone; there was no land, nor sky, nor sea. Only a void existed. Weary of the silence and the emptiness [So, at least these Tahitians gave their god a reason for creating humans: he was “weary of the silence and emptiness”! In contrast, the dominant myths of our culture (as described in the Bible, the Koran, etc.) don’t “explain” their god’s inadequacies for creating humans!], *Ta’arua used one part of the shell as “the great foundation of the world, for the rocks and the soil”; another part became “the dome of the sky”; having himself assumed the form of a person, the god created everything that is now in the universe...*

Anyway, Dear, maybe the above myths at least hint at the first genesis myths. From a pragmatist's viewpoint, however, these myths contain very little information. They suggest that:

- Ancient Pygmies of Africa had some concept of time and carried things in sacks,
- Ancient Aborigines of Australia realized the need to struggle to survive, and that
- Ancient Tahitians realized that some life came from shells and that a social life was desirable.

More significantly, all these myths clearly illustrate that these early humans didn't have the faintest idea about how humans came into existence – which (I hope you'll see) is the same dominant theme and principal information in all genesis myths, regardless of their origin and age.

Meanwhile, Dear, because of your own age and origin, maybe some of the genesis myths of Native Americans who lived near where you were born would be of special interest. Below, I'll show you a little – again from Cotterell's book and again to which I've added a few notes and comments.

Wonomi, literally, “no death” {was the} sky father and supreme being of the Maidu Indians of California... Having made human beings and set the natural processes in motion, *Wonomi* ruled supreme until his adversary, *Coyote*, appeared. [Incidentally, Dear, the ‘trickster god’, *Coyote*, and his dog, Rattlesnake, just “came out of the ground”!] The trickster god, however, was able to displace the sky father because of one reason: men followed *Coyote* and not *Wonomi*.

According to the Nez Perce Indians of Washington, the beaver monster *Wishpoosh* refused to allow anyone to fish. Whenever a person came to the lake where he dwelt, he seized the fisherman with his giant claws and dragged him to the bottom. So it was that the Nez Perce asked the trickster god *Coyote* for help. *Coyote* fashioned a huge spear with a long, strong handle, and fastened it to his wrist with a flaxen cord. Then he went to the lake to catch some fish.

Wishpoosh seized the trickster god {*Coyote*} but received a lunge from the long spear. At the bottom of the lake, *Wishpoosh* and *Coyote* fought so fiercely that the surrounding mountains drew themselves back. When the beaver monster strove to escape downstream, *Coyote* speared him firmly enough to be borne along with him. Their titanic struggle widened rivers, tore through hillsides, and created immense gorges. [So, Dear, in case you thought the Columbia River Gorge, which maybe you remember, was caused by erosion, now you know that... ☺]

Having gained the Pacific shore, Wishpoosh plunged into the waves, seizing whales and eating them to renew his strength, while *Coyote* paused for a rest. Cunning and change assisted the tired champion. He turned himself into a branch of fir and floated out to Wishpoosh, who inadvertently swallowed him. [Why Wishpoosh liked eating branches of fir trees wasn't explained!] Inside the beaver monster's stomach, *Coyote* changed himself back into his animal shape and assaulted the heart with a sharp knife. He hacked and hacked till Wishpoosh was dead.

Out of the enormous corpse, *Coyote* created a new race of people. They were the [Native Americans] of the northwestern coast and forest: the Chinook, the Klickitat, the Yakima, and the Nez Perce. [Maybe you remember, Dear, driving through the town of Klickitat, through the Chinook pass, and to the city of Yakima!] What *Coyote* forgot to do in this flurry of creation was to give these tribes eyes and mouths. Later, he realized his error and put it right, but his knife had become so dull that he made some of the mouths crooked and some too large. This accounts, say the Nez Perce, for their ugly mouths. [But, Dear, if you ever meet a member of the Nez Perce tribe, you will notice that any such genetic deformity has subsequently vanished!]

From these examples, Dear, maybe you can already see the essence of all myths: some effect was observed, some cause was assumed, and then a bunch of guesses were made, to try to link the effects to the assumed causes. The effect was observed (thunder, lightning, birth, death, the stars, and so on, including the huge Columbia Gorge); the assumed cause was the thousands upon thousands of gods; and the guesses were the fanciful ideas that were passed on orally, generation after generation, in fairy tales, myths, and religions. And, of course, the mythmaker usually slipped in a few “moral messages”, e.g., in the above, 1) “cunning and change assisted the tired champion”, 2) in a “flurry”, don't overlook important details (such as adding mouths to people), and 3) use proper and properly maintained tools (e.g., sharp knives)!

Stated differently, Dear, and as I've written before, throughout history and throughout the world, all myths (and therefore all religions) are fanciful ways of saying “I dunno”:

- How come animals can't talk? “*After they came out of the tree, they were scared speechless by the fires that humans made.*” [Translation: “I dunno.”]
- How did we Pygmies come into existence? “*Khonvum lowered us from the sky.*” [Translation: “I dunno.”]
- Where did we Aborigines come from? “*Altjira made us.*” [Translation: “I dunno.”]
- Why are we Tahitians here? “*Ta'arua was lonely.*” [Translation: “I dunno.”]

- How was the Columbia Gorge formed? “[Beaver and Coyote were fighting in the water.](#)” [Translation: “I dunno.”]
- How did God make the world? “[In the beginning...](#)” [Translation: “I dunno.”]

In contrast, Dear, the essence of science is to say: “Those are good questions; I don’t know the answers; let’s see what the data say!”

SOME EXPLANATIONS

Now, Dear, I feel the need to provide you with some explanations. My first explanation is to point out where I’m trying to lead you. As you probably expect, my goal is to try to give you some perspective for where the myths in the Bible (and therefore in the Koran and the Book of Mormon) fit within the huge pile of bleached bones and skeletons of mistaken ideas contained in various myths. Therefore, to start, I wanted to show you some of the many genesis myths that have been concocted.

As for my second explanation, what I just now gave up trying to do (after a week-long attempt!) was to create a table of genesis myths, listing the name of the “creator god”, the group who created “him” (relatively few were assumed to be female, but some were), and an outline of each myth. But, Dear, even that seemingly simple task overwhelmed me. If you want to see why, I suggest you try it! If you do, you might want to start at the web page “Encyclopedia Mythica” at www.pantheon.org/mythica. At this site, there were 84 “hits” (in the site’s search engine) for myths containing the word “creation”! Then, if you have a few months to read myths (!), have a look at the enormous number of links at www.pubpage.unh.edu, a website at the University of New Hampshire.

And my third explanation is to defend my new plan! Thus, upon giving up trying to outline more of the huge number of genesis myths that have been concocted, I now plan to show you, instead, some of the many flood myths! Although your immediate reaction to my new plan may be to judge it silly, actually, I can defend it with several reasons:

- One reason is that, for me, it’s a much simpler task – courtesy the efforts of Mark Isaak, whose website I’ll quote extensively (and soon reference).

- A second reason is that, as you know, the Bible's first "book" (entitled *Genesis*) also contains the flood myth about Noah; therefore, I think it would be useful if you saw how the Noah flood myth fits within the huge number of flood myths that have been concocted.
- A third reason to focus on flood myths is because some of these flood myths are also genesis myths (i.e., as in the Noah myth, the Earth is assumed to be re-populated after some massive flood).
- Still another reason is my hope (and expectation) that you'll conclude that the probability is remote that Hebrew shepherders, wandering about the hills, ever experienced a significant flood; that is, I hope you'll see that the probability is high that the Hebrews just "borrowed" their flood myth from another culture – a possibility that, as I'll be showing you, is unmistakably supported by the data.
- And another important reason for my now turning to flood myths is that, although skepticism is appropriate, there's a chance that rough dates of origin of some of these flood myths can be estimated – and as I'll show you, some of them seem to be more than 10,000 years old!

In contrast to this possibility of dating some flood myths, it's difficult to discern even rough dates of origins of essentially all genesis myths.

SOME FLOOD MYTHS

Toward showing you some flood/genesis myths from various cultures, I'll again start with your easily-identified ancestors in Northern Europe. As my first example, here is an abbreviated form of one flood/genesis myth from Northern Europe,⁸ after which I'll show you a "more complete" version.

Before the world, there was a great gulf of twilight. North of this was the Home of Mist, full of ice, and to the South, the Home of Fire, guarded by a giant with a flaming sword. A day came when the twilight came to life [!] warmed by the fires but shaped by the ice, and became the Giant Ymir, with a living body and cruel, cold heart. When he looked for food, he saw a gigantic cow, from whose udders flowed streams of milk, licking the salt from the glacier until a head of hair pushed itself up through the ice and revealed a mighty man, Odin, with a heart warm and kind. The sons of Ymir became a race of giants who worked evil on the earth, and the family of Odin began a war against the Ymir and his sons.

⁸ Paraphrased from E.M Wilmot-Buxton, *How All Things Began*, The Junior Classics, Vol.3, p.197; copied from an article by Charles Hlavac entitled "CREATION SCIENCE" VS EVOLUTION THEORY, OR SCIENCE VS MYTHOLOGY, published in Issue 96 (13 December 2004) of *Philosophy Pathways*; available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ptpdlp/newsletter/issue96.html>.

As for a more complete version of this flood (and genesis) myth from Northern Europe, what follows is the version given in Cotterell's book (referenced earlier, and to which I've added some comments in brackets as well as the italics):

According to Germanic legend, the primeval cow, Audumla, 'the Nourisher', licked the icy rocks which were salty to her taste. By the evening of the first day there appeared from the ice, at the spot where she was licking, the hair of a man [although it might be more accurate to describe him as a god]; on the second day, a man's head; on the third day, an entire man. This was Buri, "the born one"... He begat a son called Bor who took to wife Bestla, the daughter of a frost giant: they had three famous sons – Odin, Vili, and Ve. These deities killed the old {frost} giant Ymir...

Odin, Vili, and Vi... fought Ymir, the senior frost giant. *They slew the mighty giant, and so much blood poured from his wound that all of the frost giants drowned except Bergelmir and his wife.* The sons of Bor then took Ymir's carcass to ginnunggap, the primordial abyss, and made the soil from his flesh, the mountain crags from his bones, and boulders from his toes. *Out of the excess of blood, they formed the lakes and seas...*

{O}ne day {these three sons} discovered on the seashore two logs of driftwood, which they picked up and whittled into mankind. Odin gave "the precious soul" [consistent with Odin's duties as the god of the wind, a leader of souls rushing through the air], Vili the understanding as well as the emotions [both left and right brain!] and Ve the faculties and form [i.e., body!].

Actually, Dear, there's a fair amount of information available in this otherwise-silly myth of your easily-identified ancestors. Below, I'll group this information in three categories.

First, this myth illustrates some "standard" features of all myths:

- Common to all such genesis myths is their superficiality. Thus, this myth fails to answer the obvious question: "Yah, but where did the cow come from?"
- In addition, the mythmaker used the common technique of extrapolating from something that most listeners knew from experience. Thus, it must have been common knowledge (then, but maybe not now!) that many (most?) mammalian mothers lick their newborn. For example, Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) wrote: "Bears when first born are shapeless masses of white flesh a little larger than mice, their claws alone being prominent. The mother then licks them gradually into proper shape" – although no doubt the bear's "proper shape" would emerge without the licking!

Second, there's information about the people and their environment.

- With its reference to “the primeval cow”, this myth suggests that your easily-identified ancestors herded cattle (in contrast to the Hebrews, who herded sheep, and whose creation myth has been beaten into your brain since you were a baby).
- These people apparently realized that cattle would seek salt.
- These people must have lived near the sea (or a large lake), where there was “driftwood”, and they had some type of knife. Further, I wouldn't be surprised if they were quite good carvers – for otherwise, how could the myth's listeners conceive of someone whittling out a human?
- And with its many references to ice, the myth strongly suggest that the people experienced quite a cold climate; in contrast, as far as I recall, there are no references to snow and ice in the Bible. (There are references to hail, but hail can occur anywhere on Earth).

And third, this myth contains some ideas that can be found in myths from many cultures.

- As in many other myths (including those in the Bible), there is the suggestion that, before humans, giants populated the Earth. Maybe this reflects the common experience of all people that, as children, we live in a land of giants! Maybe this idea of giants is our ancestors' reference to Neanderthal man. Or maybe it just reflects the common humans experience that “tall tales get taller in the telling.” But I suspect that it's just the extrapolation: if something is capable of controlling thunderstorms, volcanoes, glaciers, the wind, and so on, then “it” must be huge – a giant.
- Finally, and similar to myths from many other cultures (as I'll show you below), this myth hints about massive floods. Thus, this myth describes the “frost giant's blood” filling the lakes and seas – and what else would a frost giant's blood be but water?! Also, there's indirect reference to floods and drowning of humans, for even “all of the frost giants drowned...”

And what I want to do now, Dear, is explore further these ideas about floods and comment on the possibility of determining information in (and maybe even the source of) these flood myths.

First, the number of flood myths is astounding. Of course an example with which you're familiar is the story about Noah and the flood, described in the Bible in *Genesis*. Yet, if you think about it for a moment, this myth about Noah and the flood may seem to be rather strange for a people who herded sheep in what was at best grassland and at worst, essentially a desert!

Thereby, one might expect that the Noah flood myth was “borrowed” from similar myths from people who lived in the flood plains of rivers, such as the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia (now Iraq), and the Indus and Ganges in India. An example (details of which I’ll show you later in this chapter) is the flood myth from India about Manu (who is the “Noah” of an earlier Hindu flood myth). As a more pertinent example (for reasons that I’ll suggest later in this chapter), almost certainly the ancient Hebrews “borrowed” their Noah flood myth from the Mesopotamian story about Ziusudra (who is the “Noah” of an earlier Sumerian flood myth, known as the Gilgamesh flood myth, which I’ll be asking you to read).

But if you dig deeper, Dear, the ubiquity of these flood myths becomes “curiouser and curiouser”. For example, Mark Isaak has given brief descriptions of more than 150 flood myths!⁹ Below, I’ll quote his summaries of a few of these myths, but for now, I’ll omit details of his references; I’ll list his references near the end of this chapter. To start, here is Isaak’s summary of the flood myth of the Skagit tribe of Washington, near where you were born:

The Creator made the earth and gave four names for it – for the sun, waters, soil and forests. He said only a few people, with special preparation for the knowledge, should know all four names – or the world would change too suddenly. After a while, everyone learned the four names. When people started talking to the trees, the change came in the form of a flood. When the people saw the flood coming, they made a giant canoe and filled it with five people and a male and female of all plants and animals. [Dear: notice the number *five* and think how big that canoe must have been!] Water covered everything but the summit of Kobah and Takobah (Mt. Baker and Mt. Rainier). The canoe landed on the prairie. Doquebuth, the new Creator, was born of a couple from the canoe. He delayed getting his spirit powers, but finally did so after his family deserted him. At the direction of the Old Creator, he made people again from the soil and from the bones of the people who lived before the flood. (Clark, pp. 139-140)

In addition to this description of the flood and how humans were created, to me it’s interesting to see that: 1) the Skagit tribe chose the number *five* as having special significance (it rains so much in the Pacific Northwest, they probably didn’t know about the *seven* moving astronomical bodies – they rarely get to see even the sun!), and 2) the Skagit tribe saw the importance of naming things – that once it was done, things would change!

⁹ At www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flood-mths.html.

Now, Dear, I'll jump to the other "end of the Earth" and show you Isaak's summary of the flood myth from the Yamana tribe of Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America (about as far as you can get on Earth from the location of your ancestors in northern Europe).

Lexuwakipa, the rusty brown spectacled ibis ["any of several large wading birds... related to herons..."] felt offended by the people, so she let it snow so much that ice came to cover the entire Earth. When it melted, it rapidly flooded all the Earth except five mountaintops, on which a few people escaped. Signs of the floodwaters still show up on those mountains. (Wilbert, p. 27-28)

In this myth, Dear, notice again the mention of *five* (it's also very cloudy at the tip of South America!), and of more significance to the point I'm trying to make, notice the suggestion that it was the melting of snow and ice that led to the flood.

This myth from Tierra del Fuego (the "land of the fire", so named by early European explorers because of the fires that the natives lit along the shores) also displays what is probably the most unifying theme of all myths: using a story to convey some "moral message". In this case, and common to many such flood myths, the moral is that the flood occurred because some humans offended some god. Doesn't everything have a cause?! And what better way to "explain" why some people survived the flood than to assume that the survivors are the good people?! Thus, Dear "creationists" are actually "evolutionists" – but rather than accept the idea that the fittest survive, they prefer the idea that "god's favorites" survive! But I want to delay additional comments about "moral messages" in myths until later chapters (namely, those in **M**, dealing with morality). Further, I want to delay (until later in this chapter) showing you additional flood myths. Here, I want to address the obvious question: Why were so many flood myths concocted?!

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR SO MANY FLOOD MYTHS

The obvious answer to why there are so many flood myths is: because there were so many floods! From your own experience, Dear, perhaps that response is already a sufficient "explanation". Thus, maybe you recall the flood where you lived in Oregon, and I'm sure you recall the flood you experienced in Florida associated with a hurricane. If you extrapolated from those two floods (occurring within 5 years of one another and during times when our society has invested enormous resources on flood control), if you

* Go to other chapters *via*

took into account all the news reports about floods around the world, and if you reflected on the idea that people must always have sought to live near rivers and lakes because of the human need for fresh water, then probably it seems reasonable to you that people have experienced a huge number of massive floods during the past 10,000 years (or so), enough to have generated even more than 150+ myths! Besides, no doubt you have experienced “tall tales grow taller in the telling”; therefore, I wouldn’t be surprised if you were inclined not to seek any additional explanations for why there are so many flood myths.

There is, however, another possible explanation for so many flood myths, namely, climate change. Although you at first might doubt the idea, Dear, humans have actually experienced an amazingly stable climate during almost all of the past 10,000-or-so years. In contrast, as you can find on the internet, during the time period starting about 20,000 and ending about 10,000 BP (BP = Before the Present), the climates throughout the world changed dramatically, as the world emerged from the most recent ice age. In particular (as you can find by searching for “paleoclimatology” or “GISP” on the internet), ice core data show that average temperatures in Greenland rose during this period by $\sim 20^{\circ}\text{F}$.

Immediately, I should probably add some comments. First, deducing the average temperature of snow that formed in the atmosphere and was preserved in glaciers during a particular year, thousands of years ago, is by no means trivial or incontrovertible: the data are for the abundance of a particular isotope of oxygen in the frozen water; this abundance depends on temperatures where the water evaporated (mostly from the oceans), how far the water was transported in the atmosphere, and where it condensed (which depends on the altitude). The deduced temperatures are therefore rather crude averages. But the temperature trends are revealing, and the values are consistent with temperatures deduced from an enormous amount of data about the extent of glaciers in North America during the most recent ice age (e.g., with glaciers scraping off top soil in Connecticut to form Long Island); thus, the average temperature there during the most recent ice age must have been not the current $\sim 50^{\circ}\text{F}$ but closer to $\sim 30^{\circ}\text{F}$.

Second, I should mention the probable cause of ice ages and intervening “interglacial warm periods” (such as we are now experiencing). Almost certainly, these major climate changes were caused by changes in the Earth’s orbit (eccentricity, precession, and tilt) – details of which you can find on the

* Go to other chapters *via*

internet by searching for the “Milankovitch theory”. This theory has been able to explain prior ice ages and predicts the next one, which (if my memory serves me correctly) is scheduled to occur about 20,000 years from now – unless we humans do something about it, such as add even more “greenhouse gases” to the atmosphere!

Third, I should probably add that it’s doubtful if a slow increase in temperatures would result in a noticeable climate change: for example, a 10°F average temperature change in 10,000 years is only 0.001°F per year! But such temperature changes probably led to slow changes in distributions of precipitation and vegetation – and therefore in the migration of herders. For example, in northern Africa, rainfall probably decreased substantially, eventually turning good grassland into what is now the Sahara Desert. Thereby, any herders probably either migrated north to Europe or east to river valleys (such as the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, and the Ganges in India). As I’ll show you in a later chapter, first records of agricultural activity are from ~10,000 years ago, i.e., essentially at the time of the end of the most recent ice age.

Also, no doubt the migration routes of people and animals were modified. Thus, ~20,000 years ago, when the temperature was ~20°F cooler and glaciers covered most of Siberia, Northern Europe (including most of Britain), and essentially all of Canada, the sea level would have been ~200 m lower. Therefore, people and animals could have walked across parts of what are now the Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel, and the Bering Strait. Almost certainly this is the time period when Asiatic peoples walked to America – in contrast to the Mormon myth about how America was populated, a myth that you’ve been taught since you were a baby.

Meanwhile, for those African herders who migrated to Europe, they may have found “an Eden” of pastures in the general region of the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers – which is the Bible’s identification of the location of “Garden of Eden”. As the glaciers retreated, some of these people may have migrated farther north, past the Caucasus Mountains to the plains of southern Russia and the Ukraine – people later described as “Caucasian”. And although I claim little knowledge of these details, Dear, maybe some Caucasian “albinos” (with “sickly white skin and washed out blue and green eyes” – such as we have!) could survive at even more northern latitudes, where there is less direct, damaging ultra-violet (UV)

light and therefore less need for more protective brown skin. And maybe it was here that your easily identified ancestors “slew the frost giant”!

But again, Dear, these slow climate changes and associated migrations probably didn't stimulate the creation of myths about any major floods, save perhaps for people who lived near the oceans. I mention this exception because of the likely occurrence of specific events, similar to an event for which there is now substantial concern (associated with the current global warming caused by increasing “greenhouse gases” in the atmosphere), namely, glaciers slipping off the land and into the ocean.

You might think that, if a glacier slipped into the ocean (even a glacier that covered Newfoundland or the Ross Ice Sheet that currently covers a substantial portion of Antarctica), it wouldn't result in much sea-level rise (because the areas of even these huge glaciers is small compared to the area of ocean). But such glaciers can be enormously thick: it has been estimated that the glaciers that covered Canada during the most recent ice age were one or two miles thick! As a result, when specific portions of such huge glaciers slipped into the sea, the sea level could easily have risen 10 meters or so, which to people living in coastal areas surely would have seemed like a wall of water and led to massive drownings – and many flood myths.

Further, Dear, as you can find on the internet by searching for “Younger Dryas”, both ice-core records from Greenland and sediment cores from the North Atlantic show that the warming trend at the end of the most recent ice age didn't proceed as slowly as did the slow changes in the Earth's orbit, eccentricity, and inclination that caused the climate change. Instead, possibly because of changes in ocean circulation in the North Atlantic or possibly because of substantial volcanic activity (with material injected into the atmosphere) associated with the uplifting continents (relieved of the weight of glaciers), especially the Greenland ice-core data show spurts of cooling in just a few decades – followed by similarly brief periods of comparable warming. In particular, there was an abrupt cooling period of ~15°F (within the general warming trend) at ~12000 BP (i.e., ~10000 BCE), and then a smaller drop and then rise in temperature (of ~10°F) at ~8,000 BP (i.e., ~6000 BCE).¹⁰

¹⁰ Incidentally, Dear, recently I read something that I should have realized. I had wondered why there are earthquakes in “the Canadian Shield” area (under which there's no major slippage of tectonic plates). The suggested reason is that the Canadian Shield is still “rebounding” (extremely slowly, and unevenly) from the removal of its massive ice load, which melted ~10,000 years ago!

Although I haven't seen the results of climate models that could guide more informed opinions, I wouldn't be surprised if these rapid (decadal time-scale) changes in weather caused substantial changes in precipitation throughout the world, causing flooding at many locations. In addition, a new result has recently been reported in the scientific literature that may explain many of the flood myths of those groups of people who migrated from near the Caucasus Mountains (possibly including some Mesopotamians and your Northern Europeans ancestors).

To find additional information about this new result, Dear, search on the internet for the authors' names: "Ryan and Putman". In outline, these authors suggest (based on their data from sediment samples and associated traces of aquatic life from the Black Sea, near the Caucasus Mountains), that until ~5600 BCE, the Black Sea was a fresh-water lake, smaller than its current size and lying lower than its current elevation. Then, suddenly – within a year! – it became saline (as it is today), assumed to be caused by global warming, ocean-level rising (and therefore rising level of the Mediterranean Sea), and then salt water pouring in, through what was once a natural dam at the Bosphorus Strait, adjacent to present-day Istanbul.

If these data and their interpretations are correct (although, Dear, I'd recommend that you keep searching on the internet – to find some of the serious criticisms of their idea), then this flooding may be the cause of a number of flood myths, including the (mostly silly) myth about Noah and his ark with which you have been indoctrinated ever since you were a baby. Two very similar flood myths are contained in the folklore of two other groups of "Indo-European" people, who might have migrated from the region of the Black Sea after its flooding ~7600 years ago. These are the "Gilgamesh flood myth" (of people who lived in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys of Mesopotamia) and the "Manu flood myth" (of the people who lived in the Indus river valley in India). Of course, it may be that these flood myths (and the later flood myth about Noah) may be just child-like extrapolations from river-valley floods (tall tales do have a tendency to grow taller in the retelling), but perhaps the common experience of these Indo-Europeans represents a common memory of the Black Sea flood.

So now, Dear, let me try to “put the pieces together”, with the help of the summaries of flood myths given by Isaak.¹¹ I suspect that the flood myths from groups of people throughout the world simply contain the information that many floods occurred, that they had many causes, and that a general cause was the warming from the most recent ice age. Almost certainly, these myths also contain support for the idea that “tall tales growing taller in the telling”, especially for those myths derived from the flooding of different river valleys in which people probably congregated.

To support the above suggestions, here I’ll list just a few (~25!) of the (~150!) flood myths summarized by Isaak. I’ve grouped these into a number of categories to suggest the possible type of flooding or other “evidence” that the myth might be describing. Also, I’ve put some words and phrases in italics and added some comments in brackets. The references are to the sources of the myths that Isaak has summarized, and I’ve re-listed Isaak’s references at the end of these quotes.

POSSIBLE CATEGORIES OF FLOOD MYTHS

1. Black Sea Flood?

Assyrian [which I’ve been calling “the Gilgamesh flood myth”]

The gods, led by *Enlil*, agreed to cleanse the earth of an overpopulated humanity, but Utnapishtim was warned by the god *Ea* in a dream. He {Utnapishtim} and some craftsmen built a large boat (one acre in area, *seven* decks) in a week. [I challenge any group of workers to duplicate that feat!] He then loaded it with his family, the craftsmen, and “the seeds of all living creatures.” The waters of the abyss rose up, and it stormed for six days. Even the gods were frightened by the flood’s fury. Upon seeing all the people killed, the gods repented and wept. The waters covered everything but the top of the mountain Nisur, where the boat landed. *Seven* days later, Utnapishtim released a dove, but it returned finding nowhere else to land. He next returned a sparrow, which also returned, and then a raven, which did not return. Thus he knew the waters had receded enough for the people to emerge. Utnapishtim made a sacrifice to the gods. He and his wife were given immortality and lived at the end of the earth. [Sandars, chpt. 5]

Hindu:

Manu, the first human, found a small fish in his washwater. The fish begged protection from the larger fishes [in those days, apparently, fish had “voice boxes” and could talk!], in return for which it would save Manu. Manu kept the fish safe,

¹¹ Again, Isaak’s web page is at www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flood-mths.html.

transferring it to larger and larger reservoirs as it grew, and later the fish saved Manu from a deluge by warning him to build a boat and letting him tie the craft to the fish's horn. [That was some fish!] The fish led him to a mountain and told Manu to tie the ship's rope to a tree to prevent it from drifting. [Although it's a wonder Manu couldn't have figured that out by himself!] Manu, alone of all creatures, survived. He made offerings of clarified butter, sour milk, whey, and curds. From these, a woman arose, calling herself Manu's daughter. [So, Dear, enough of the talk about daughters being made of "sugar and spice"; in "reality", we're talking butter, sour milk, whey, and curds!] Through her, he generated this race. [Kelsen, p. 128; Brinton, pp. 227-228]

Hebrew:

[The Noah flood myth: essentially identical to the above Assyrian or "Gilgamesh Flood Myth", which was written more than 1,000 years before the Bible was written and told probably at least another 1,000 years before that!]

2. River Valley Floods?

Egypt:

People have become rebellious. Atum said he will destroy all he made [similar to Yahweh's or Jehovah's action when he learned he had made a mess of things!] and return the earth to the Primordial Water, which was its original state. Atum [or Adam] will remain, in the form of a serpent, with [the god] *Osiris*... [Faulkner, plate 30] (Unfortunately the version of the papyrus with the flood story is damaged and unclear. [I presume, Dear, that on the damaged papyrus, we would "learn" how Atum (or Adam) somehow worked out a deal with the snake and the god Osiris to create an Eve.] See also Budge, p. ccii.)

Pima (southwest Arizona):

Three times the great eagle told a seer to warn the people about a great flood that would soon come, but the seer ignored him. Scarcely had the bird gone for the third time when a tremendous clap of thunder was heard, the earth trembled, and a great green *wall of water roared down the valley* and destroyed everything in it. Szeukha, Earth maker's son, saved himself by floating on a ball of gum. He rescued a few people from the great eagle, who had kidnapped them earlier and kept them in his nest. [Erdoes & Ortiz, pp. 473-475; Gaster, p. 115]

Muysca (Colombia):

In olden times before the moon existed, the Muyscas lived as savages. A bearded old man with the names Botschika, Nemquetheba, Zuhe came and taught them agriculture, crafts, religion, and government. His wife, though, was malicious. [Guess who made up this myth, Dear, a man or a woman!] To destroy the good works of her husband, she magically caused the river Funza (Rio Bogota) to *flood the whole plateau*. Only a few people escaped to the mountain tops. Botschika banished

her from earth and changed her into the moon. Then he opened a pass, and the water poured down in the Tequendama waterfall. [Kelsen, p. 140]

Mamberao River (Australia?):

A rising river caused a flood which overwhelmed Mount Vanessa. Only a man and his wife, a pig, a cassowary, a kangaroo, and a pigeon escaped. These became the ancestors of humans and other species. The bones of the drowned animals can still be found on Mount Vanessa. [Gaster, pp. 105-106] [How one could determine, solely from bones, that the animals drowned is left unanswered!]

3. Valley flooding caused by glacier melts?

Kamchadale (northeast Siberia):

A flood covered the whole land in the early days of the world. A few people saved themselves on rafts made from bound-together tree trunks. They carried their property and provisions and used stones tied to straps as anchors to prevent being swept out to sea. They were left stranded on mountains when the waters receded. [Gaster, p. 100]

Yamana (Tierra del Fuego):

Lexuwakipa, the rusty brown spectacled ibis, felt offended by the people, so she let it snow so much that ice came to cover the entire earth. When it melted, it rapidly flooded all the earth except five mountaintops, on which a few people escaped. Signs of the floodwaters still show up on those mountains. [Wilbert, p. 27-28]

4. General Flooding Caused by Prolonged Rain?

Skokomish (Washington):

*The Great Spirit, angry with the wickedness of people and animals, decided to rid the earth of all but the good animals, one good man, and his family. At the Great Spirit's direction, the man shot an arrow into a cloud [and it apparently stuck in the cloud!], then another arrow into that arrow, and so on, making a rope of arrows from the cloud to the ground. [Talk about marksmanship! – but why didn't he just use rope?] The good animals and people climbed up; the man broke off the rope to keep the bad animals from climbing up after them. Then the Great Spirit caused *many days of rain*, flooding up to the snow line of Takhoma (Mount Rainier). After all the bad people and animals were drowned, the Great Spirit stopped the rain, the waters slowly dropped, and the good people and animals climbed down. [Clark, pp. 31-32]*

Warm Springs (Oregon):

*Twice, a great flood came. Afraid that another might come, the people made a giant canoe from a big cedar. When they saw a third flood coming, they put the bravest young men and fairest young women in the canoe, with plenty of food. Then the flood, bigger and deeper than the earlier ones, swallowed the land. *It rained for many days and nights*, but when the clouds finally parted for the third time, the people saw*

land (Mount Jefferson) and landed on it. When the water receded, they made their home at the base of the mountain. The canoe was turned to stone and can be seen on Mount Jefferson today. [Clark, pp. 14-15]

Maori (New Zealand):

Long ago, there were a great many different tribes, and they quarreled and made war on each other. The worship of *Tane*, the creator, was being neglected. Two prophets, Para-whenua-mea and Tupu-nui-a-uta, taught the true doctrine about the separation of heaven and earth, but others just mocked them, and they became angry. So they built a large raft at the source of the Tohinga River, built a house on it, and provisioned it with fern-root, sweet potatoes, and dogs. Then they prayed for *abundant rain* to convince men of the power of *Tane*. Two men named Tiu and Reti, a woman named Wai-puna-hau, and other women also boarded the raft. Tiu was the priest on the raft, and he recited the prayers and incantations for rain *It rained hard for four or five days*, until Tiu prayed for the rain to stop. But the waters still rose and bore up the raft. In the eighth month, the waters began to thin; Tiu knew this by the signs of his staff. At last they landed at Hawaiki. The earth had been much changed by the flood, and the people on the raft were the only survivors. They worshipped *Tane*, Rangi (Heaven), Rehua, and all the gods, each at a separate altar. Today, only the chief priest may go to those holy spots. [Gaster, pp. 110-112; Kelsen, p. 133]

Komililo Nandi:

Ilet, the spirit of lightning, came to live, in human form, in a cave high on the mountain named Tinderet. When he did so, it *rained incessantly* and killed most of the hunters living in the forest below. Some hunters, searching for the cause of the rain, found him, and wounded him with poison arrows. *Ilet* fled and died in a neighboring country. When he died, the rain stopped. [Kelsen, p. 137]

5. Rain Associated with Volcanic Activity?

Lower Congo:

The sun once met the moon and threw mud at it, *making it dimmer*. There was a flood when this happened. Men put their milk stick behind them and were turned into monkeys. The present race of men is a recent creation. [Fauconnet, p. 481]

Pamary, Abedery, and Kataushy (eastern Peru):

Once upon a time, people heard a rumbling above and below the ground; *the sun and moon turned red, blue, and yellow* [colors commonly caused by volcanic dust in the stratosphere] and wild beasts mingled fearlessly with man. A month later, they saw darkness ascending from the earth to the sky [possibly the volcanic ash had reached the troposphere], accompanied by a roar and by thunder and heavy rain. Some people lost themselves. Some died without knowing why. Everything was in dreadful confusion. The water rose to cover the earth, and people took refuge in trees. There they perished from cold and hunger, for it continued to be dark and rainy. Only Uassu and his wife survived. When they came down after the flood, they could not

find even a sign of a single corpse. Today, the Pamarys build their houses on the river, so that when the water rises, they may rise with it. [Gaster, pp. 125-126]

Mongolia:

Hailibu, a hunter, saved a white snake from a crane which attacked it. Next day, he met the same snake with a retinue of other snakes. The snake told him [snakes were great talkers in those days!] that she was the Dragon King's daughter, and the Dragon King wished to reward him. She advised Hailibu to ask for the precious stone that the Dragon King keeps in his mouth. With that stone, she told him, he could understand the language of animals, but he would turn to stone if he ever divulged its secret to anyone else. Hailibu went to the Dragon King, turned down his many other treasures, and was given the stone. Years later, Hailibu heard some birds saying that the next day the *mountains would erupt* and flood the land. He went back home to warn his neighbors, but they didn't believe him. To convince them, he told them how he had learned of the coming flood and told them the full story of the precious stone. When he finished his story, he turned to stone. The villagers, seeing this happen, fled. It rained all the next night, and *the mountains erupted*, belching forth a great flood of water. [Well, at least the resulting cooling could have led to rain!] When the people returned, they found the stone which Hailibu had turned into and placed it at the top of the mountain. For generations, they have offered sacrifices to the stone in honor of Hailibu's sacrifice. [Elder & Wong, pp. 75-77]

6. Sea Level Rise?

Andingari (Southern Australia):

Yaul was thirsty, but his brother Marlgaru refused to let him have any water from his own full kangaroo-skin waterbag. While Marlgaru was out hunting, Yaul sought and found the bag. He jabbed it with a club, tearing it. Water poured out, drowning both brothers and *forming the sea*. It was spreading inland, too, but Bird Women came from the east and restrained the waters with a barrier of roots of the ngalda kurrajong tree. [Berndt & Berndt, pp. 44-45]

Palau Islands (Micronesia):

The stars are the shining eyes of the gods. A man once went into the sky and stole one of the eyes. (The Pelew Islanders' money is made from it.) The gods were angry at this and came to earth to punish the theft. They disguised themselves as ordinary men and went door-to-door begging for food and lodging. Only one old woman received them kindly. They told her to make a bamboo raft ready and, on the night of the next full moon, to lie down on it and sleep. This she did. A great storm came; *the sea rose*, flooded the islands, and destroyed everyone else. The woman, fast asleep, drifted until her hair caught on a tree on the top of Mount Armlimui. The gods came looking for her again, but they found her dead. So, one of the women-folk from heaven entered the body and restored it to life. The gods begat five children by the old woman and then returned to heaven, as did the goddess who restored her to life.

The present inhabitants of the islands are descendants of those five children. [Gaster, pp. 112-113]

Haida (Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia):

A strange, funny-looking woman came to a village and sat by the water's edge at low tide. As the tide rose, she moved up a little and sat down again. The *tide kept rising*, following the woman, until it covered the whole island. The people saved themselves on rafts. The various rafts landed in different places, which is how the tribes became dispersed. [Erdoes & Ortiz, pp. 472-473]

7. A tsunami caused by an underwater earthquake or a glacier slipping into the sea?

Quillayute (Washington):

Thunderbird was once so angry that he sent the ocean over the land. When it reached the village of the Quillayute, they got into their canoes. The water rose for four days, covering the mountains. The boats were scattered by the wind and waves. Then the water receded for four days, and people settled in many areas. [Clark, p. 45]

Maung (Goulburn Islands, Arnhem Land):

People dividing fish always gave the man Crow the poor quality ones. Crow cut down a big paperbark tree, which fell across a creek. Crow sat on the tree crying out, "Waag. . . Waag!" As he did, the creek grew wider and wider, dividing the island into two islands. Crow turned into a bird and flew over the people. The *splash from the tree* caused the water to rise, and the people, who were all on the bank of the creek, all drowned. [Berndt & Berndt, p. 40]

Victoria (Australia):

Bunjil, the creator, was angry with people because of the evil they did, so he caused the *ocean to flood* by urinating into it. All people were destroyed except those whom *Bunjil* loved and *fixed as stars in the sky*, and a man and a woman who climbed a tall tree on a mountain, and from whom the present human race is descended. [Gaster, p. 114]

Valman (northern New Guinea):

The wife of a very good man saw a very big fish. She called her husband, but he couldn't see it until he hid behind a banana tree and peeked through its leaves. When he finally saw it, he was horribly afraid and forbade his family to catch and eat the fish. But other people caught the fish and, heedless of the man's warning, ate it. When the good man saw that, he hastily drove a pair of all kinds of animals into trees and climbed into a coconut tree with his family. As soon as the wicked men ate the fish, *water violently burst* from the ground and drowned everyone on it. As soon as the water reached the treetops, it sank rapidly, and the good man and his family came down and laid out new plantations. [Gaster, p. 105]

8. Other Reasons?

(e.g., is the flood myth just an “explanation” for something else, such as the origin of fish or monkeys or of finding fossilized seashells on mountains, in turn caused by mountain uplift?)

Toltec (Mexico):

One of the Tezcatlipocas (sons of the original dual god) transformed himself into the Sun and created the first humans to show up his brothers. The other gods, angry at his audacity, had Quetzalcoatl destroy the people, which he did with a flood. The people became fish. [Leon-Portilla, p. 450]

Mayan:

The wooden people, an early version of humanity, were imperfect, because there was nothing in their hearts and minds and they did not remember *Heart of Sky*. So *Heart of Sky* destroyed them with a flood. He sent down a black rain of resin; animals came into their houses and attacked them; and even pots and stones crushed them. Today’s monkeys are a sign of these people. [Tedlock, p. 83-86]

Greenlander:

When the world was flooded, some people were turned into fiery spirits; all the rest drowned but one. Afterwards, he smote the ground with his stick, a woman sprung out, and the two of them repopulated the world. Proof of the flood is found in the form of *sea fossils* on high mountains. [Gaster, p. 120]

Luiseno (Southern California):

A great flood covered high mountains and drowned most people. A few saved themselves on a knoll called Mora by the Spaniards and Katuta by the Indians. The hill still has stones, ashes, and heaps of *seashells* showing where the Indians cooked their food. [Gaster, pp. 115-116]

Toradja (central Celebes):

A flood once covered everything but the summit of Mount Wawom Pebato (*seashells on the hills* are evidence). Only a pregnant woman and a pregnant mouse escaped in a pig’s trough, paddling with a pot-ladle [although why any “paddling” was necessary is unclear!]. After the waters had descended, the woman saw a sheaf of rice hanging from an uprooted tree. The mouse got it down for her, but demanded in recompense that mice should thereafter have the right to eat part of the harvest. The woman gave birth to a son, took him for her husband, and by him had a son and daughter who became mankind’s ancestors. [Gaster, p. 102]

Well, Dear, is that enough genesis and flood myths for you? Have you seen enough “bleached bones and skeletons of dead ideas”? If not – and if you have even more time “to burn” – feel free to dig into some of Isaak’s references:

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But that's enough for me, at least for this chapter – except for a few comments and suggestions. My first comments deal with my amazement that there are so many flood myths and how much work Isaak has done, putting them all together – more than five times more than I've shown you! Also, I'm amazed, once again, at the wonderful internet, which makes all his work available to so many people and so easily!

My first suggestion concerns a possible response to all the crazy “creationists” who want the Bible's *Genesis* taught in our schools as an “alternative” to evolution. Rather than argue with them, maybe scientists should agree – provided, of course, that “equal time” is given to all creation myths, not just those of the a bunch of silly old Hebrew shepherders. Then, when the school kids learn about all myths (I don't know how many creation myths there are in total, but surely many hundreds of them), let the kids decide which myth they prefer! As for me, I think I'd choose *Coyote and the Beaver* as the best story – and then stick with the hypothesis of evolution as containing the only science.

My second suggestion is this. As part of any course for kids to learn about creation myths, an assignment should be for the kids to create their own! That is, Dear, whereas all myths are just made up – with none “better” than another (for they're all just stories), except in so far as how fanciful they are and how colorful are the images they might induce – then I suggest that kids would learn much about all myths and all religions if they were challenged to create their own creation myths – and maybe even their own religions!

For fun, Dear, maybe you'd like to create a story to “explain” creation! If you're so inclined, maybe you could have fun by transferring your story into the form of an “epic poem” – in a form that surely the first myths were remembered during the many generations before they were written. And if you do try making up some myths, I trust that you'll see the key to a good myth: use your mythical creation (e.g., your god) to “explain” facts that your audience knows (the earth and sun and stars exist, much life appears to start in various types of shells, the Columbia Gorge is huge, snakes slide on their bellies, childbirth is painful for women, etc.), because your audience

may then be duped into making the leap in illogic from agreeing with you about what they know to agreeing with you about what you concocted!

Actually, though, there's something here about which I should caution you. To introduce it, let me tell you what happened. More than 30 years ago, when I was coaching my daughter's (your aunt's) little-league baseball team (and she was the first female little-leaguer in our town!), apparently one of the kids on her team asked me something about gravity. I'm sorry, but I don't remember the details – in fact, I had forgotten about the whole incident, except years later, when my daughter reminded me about the consequences, which continued for years.

Anyway, I've been known, on rare occasions, to “kid around” (who, me?!), and I know that I've always tried to impress on kids how much we have yet to learn about nature: What really is an electron? What if anything is inside it? What really is light? How can light be formed by annihilation of electrons by positrons? And so on, including what, really, is gravity? Why do masses attract one another (according to Newton) or in terms of Einstein's general relativity, why does space-time become warped by the presence of mass? What is mass? How does mass turn into light?

In any event, when a kid asked me about gravity, I'm sure that I would have tried to stimulate the kids to think about such questions. But apparently I ended my response with some “kidding”, apparently similar to: “Personally, I think that the center of the Earth is made out of caramel pudding, and the real reason why everything falls toward the center of the Earth is because everybody and everything really likes caramel pudding; so, everything tries to get to it.”

My message to you, Dear, is: be careful with any myths created by you (or, for that matter, created by anyone). Recently, my daughter informed me that, for years and no matter how much she protested, some of the kids “believed” what I said about the Earth being made out of caramel pudding! So, Dear, be careful about any claim you may make about any myths you make up or repeat! Don't say something similar to “everything I have told you is true” – not only because, as with all myths and all stories, there's no way that anyone can ever “prove” that they're false, but also because, believe it or not, someone might believe you!

Meanwhile, Dear, if you're wondering something similar to: "What was the point in going through all these stupid myths?", then let me respond that there was relatively little point! I agree that there's relatively little information in any of the above myths. But then, what was the point in your being indoctrinated, ever since you were a baby, with only one such set of myths, i.e., those in the Bible? As I've already hinted and will show you in more detail in subsequent chapters, the Bible's genesis and flood myths were just copied from earlier Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths. So, "pray tell", why were you taught that the Bible's myths were "the true words of God" whereas all the other genesis and flood stories are just "myths of primitive people"? Could it possibly be that the clerics who teach myths from their particular "holy books" as "the true words of God" are running a con game?! I trust you have a fairly good idea of what my response to that question will be, but I'll delay my full response until later chapters – and until after you get some exercise!