

Canaanite Tradition

The ancestral traditions of Canaan are preserved in Genesis 1-11, the first of the three parts of Genesis. They are a series of origin stories, the oldest being replaced several times by something thought more appropriate.

(6) The Garden of Eden. This story of the origin of work is set in Paradise: the perfect garden that required no labor. The theme which runs through all these stories, the original sin in Canaanite tradition, is the wish to be like God.

(7) Cain and Abel. The peopling of the land. Cain, as the ancestor of all mankind, was later thought to be problematic in that role, and was replaced:

(8) Seth's Brief Moment. He was in turn soon replaced.

(9) Noah's Ark. This is an interwound pair of stories. The first is a widespread myth, borrowed from nearby Babylon. The second story updates it, to include the Hebrew concept of clean and unclean foods. Here is one of several places where we give a better reading than the 4DH does.

(10) The Creation. This story, borrowed from the Babylonian Enuma Elish, was placed before the Eden and other early ancestral traditions. It takes the old tradition to a new level, which is why it was placed at the head of the others. The Seven Days part gives cosmic sanction to the fallow year: the Sabbath.

Such are the surviving pieces of Canaanite tradition in this part of Genesis. In the next part, Gen 12-36, we will meet the first of the pastoral intruders who entered the Land – not from the south, as the Yahweh people would later do, but from Haran in the north. They are the Abram people and his descendants.