

**THE BABYLONIAN  
CREATION STORY AND  
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## THE BABYLONIAN CREATION STORY AND THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION

The Babylonian creation story repeats many of the details of the Biblical account but clearly is not the source of that account. The striking parallels constitute a strong argument against the framework hypothesis defended by Meredith Kline and his adherents. The Babylonian story presents the creation in terms of a consecutive story, with striking details in the same order as the Biblical account, but clearly not with the same 'characters' or 'actors' and not in a "framework."<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the limited correspondences seen in the Egyptian creation stories, the parallels between the Bible and the Babylonian creation story recorded in early Mesopotamian writings are much more striking. Because of its parallels to the Bible the Babylonian creation story is, outside the Bible, perhaps the most amazing creation story from the Ancient Near East. It is recorded on seven tablets.

What follows is a SUMMARY of this ancient myth as it unfolds tablet by tablet:

### Creating world

Tablet 1: The entire creation started with two gods, a male god called Apsu (the lord of the sweet waters) and a female goddess called Tiamat (the goddess of the salt waters) – the waters of these two gods mingled as a single body. The lesser gods were created by an unexplained means—they were formed within the two primal gods. The older gods, the parents, retired to the top of a mountain to

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<sup>1</sup> K. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, (Chicago, Intervarsity Press, 1966) p. 89, remarks, "The common assumption that the Hebrew account is simply a purged and simplified version of the Babylonian legend (applied also to the Flood stories) is fallacious on methodological grounds. In the Ancient Near East, the rule is that simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not vice versa. In the Ancient Orient, legends were not simplified or turned into pseudo-history (historicized) as has been assumed for early Genesis."

rest peacefully, but the lesser gods became riotous and disturbed the tranquility of Apsu and Tiamat. Apsu went down to quiet the "the kids" and was killed by Ea (the lord/god of the heavens). Tiamat determined to take vengeance on the lesser gods. She created Kingu and other monsters to help her. In the middle of this tablet the birth of Marduk (the god of Babylon) is recorded and he is described at length as the most magnificent of all the gods.

Tablet 2: Various gods faced with this horrible adversary (Tiamat and her army) find themselves, because of their fear, unable to go up against her. Marduk decides to volunteer to fight Tiamat and her horde.

Tablet 3: This tablet describes how additional gods are afraid to face Tiamat.

Tablet 4: Marduk is enthroned as the king of the gods. The various gods confer on him their magical mighty powers and weapons. The battle with Tiamat and her horde ensues. First comes Tiamat's personal challenge to Marduk and she faces him alone. She opens her huge mouth to swallow him alive. But he sends against her the Evil Wind so that her mouth is held open. He shoots into her heart a magical arrow and she is slain. Then Marduk captures her army and places them in prison. Next, he splits Tiamat in two and makes the earth and heavens from her halved corpse. Marduk then begins to assign places in her corpse to the various gods.

Tablet 5: Marduk continues to assign places to the gods in the body of Tiamat. He causes the moon (the moon god) to shine and to regulate the days and months. (The rest of this tablet was lost.)

Tablet 6: Marduk announces his plan to create mankind. "Blood I will mass and cause bones to be, I will establish a savage, "man" shall be his name... He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease."<sup>2</sup> The gods are assembled and they find Kingu (Tiamat's chief warrior) responsible for the war and punish him by death saying, "It was Kingu who contrived the uprising, and made Tiamat rebel, and joined battle." Then man is made from Kingu's blood and he is assigned the service of the gods—he is made their

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<sup>2</sup> ANET, p. 68.

What a joy that God grants us the enjoyment of the work of our hands and a participation in His divine rest—in contrast to the purpose of man as taught by the Babylonian story.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, many ancient writings employ a 2-unit literary structure where the first unit sets forth a survey and the second unit further details one or more of the items of the survey.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a more thorough presentation and critique see Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, (1951).

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., 116f.

marks of **degeneration and alteration while the Bible shows the marks of origination and simplicity.** The Babylonian story with its co-mingling of the two originating deities provides us **some ground**, perhaps, for seeing the **three persons of the Trinity** in Genesis 1.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps, as suggested above, this pagan account also provides us a **dim reflection of the seven days of creation**—although it is **more likely** that it, the myth being on seven tablets, is incidental. The Babylonian account teaches us that the ancients reported the creation (and so do the Egyptian stories) in **a form of a sequential story.** This is of some importance in our day when many Christians are inclined to see something other than straightforward reporting in the Biblical account and think that the sequential order in Genesis is to be virtually disregarded,<sup>13</sup> or, at least, to be viewed as the secondary structure in the account. The **order of the creation of the heavens and earth from the body of Tiamat is somewhat parallel** (it omits some of the creative acts) **to the order of the creation** in Genesis, although it certainly lacks the integrity (it presents an internally contradictory account), crispness, and detail of the Biblical account. (We note again that in the ancient Near East “the rule is that simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not vice versa. In the Ancient Orient, legends were not simplified or turned into pseudo-history (historicized) as has been assumed for early Genesis.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Although contested by many, it seems to this writer that the Bible does speak of a plurality of persons in the godhead in the creation account. Not only does the Creator speak referring to Himself with the plural pronoun (cf., Gen. 1:26), not only is the third person of the Trinity evidenced by the mention of the Holy spirit (Gen. 1:2, cf., Isa. 40:12-14), but the New Testament clearly attests the presence and creating work of the second person of the Trinity (John 1: 1-3, Eph. 3:9, Heb. 1:10). It is important to note that the plural used in the Hebrew name of the Lord God is sometimes thought to be a plural of majesty. Significant to this argument is that the Bible speaks of the one god Baal in the plural, and of the one goddess Asherah in the plural (Asheroth).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Kline together with the other framework theorists and the analogical school of thought virtually disregard the sequential order of the creation account. To the analogical school the 7 days are intended to be understood as normal days in normal sequence but also not as true historically occurring days or as reflecting what God did in certain historical time periods.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., fnt. 10 above.

servant. The gods in thanksgiving to Marduk build Babylon to be his shrine. Then follows the installation of Marduk in Babylon. All the gods praise him at great length. The gods confer upon him the greatest of powers by reciting his fifty names.

Tablet 7: The great installation that begins in tablet 6 fills all of tablet 7.<sup>3</sup>

Having briefly summarized the salient points of the Babylonian creation story (in the Babylonian language it is called the *Enuma Elish*) we are prepared to COMPARE AND CONTRAST this story with the Biblical account. **In the Bible there are 7 days in the creation account while in the Babylonian story there are 7 tablets upon which the story was recorded.** Not too much should be made of this, but it is interesting. Perhaps the fact that there are 7 tablets reflects a memory of the seven days of creation. Maybe the correspondence is simply providential.

The parallels between the Babylonian creation myth and the Bible may be charted as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> This summary was comprised on the basis of *ANET*, 60-72.

Babylon	Bible
1. Primal watery mass—Tiamat and Apsu (two gods in one body)	1. Watery mass—primal waters // one God in three persons
2. Light already existed for the gods before the light producers	2. Light created—brought forth before the light producers
3. Tiamat split & waters above and below sealed in place.	3. Watery mass split. Waters above set
4. Primal heavens surveyed for habitations of the gods.	4. The firmament of the heavens was created
5. Apsu (deep) measured and habitation set.	5. Watery mass below. Seas/oceans set
6. Skies habited (by stars & Zodiac put in place)	6. Skies habited (by sun, moon and stars)
7. Moon shines & regulates days and months	7. Sun and moon regulating set
8. Mankind created to serve the gods	8. Mankind created by God with a soul

These “events” are located in the Babylonian account as follows<sup>4</sup>:

- 1 Tablet 1, line 5  
“Their waters commingling [sic.] as a single body.”
- 2 Tablet 1, lines 37-38, 68, 102  
Light existed before the light-producers.
- 3 Tablet IV: lines 136-146  
“Then the lord paused to view her dead body,  
That he might divide the monster and do artful works.  
**He split her like a shellfish into two parts:**

<sup>4</sup> ANET, p. 60ff.

Babylonians were taught that the moon was created to regulate the days and the months. Also, differing from the Bible, the myth states that the stars were created first, V. 1-4 and the moon and sun subsequently, V: 12ff.

The Biblical report makes the CREATION OF MAN THE FOCUS AND CROWN OF GOD’S CREATIVE WORK AND teaches that man was ontologically distinguished from God (man does not participate in the divine substance). In Babylon they heard that man had been created from the blood of a lesser but divine being (Kingu) and had been enslaved by the gods so as to provide them the food and drink they needed while they rested in the heavens—**man is not the crown of creation, the gods are**. Those who heard the Biblical account heard that man was to serve God by enriching his own environment, working for many of his own needs, and filling the earth with offspring—he is the crown of the creation. The Biblical account ends with God’s blessing upon man in the form of a consecrated Sabbath rest on one day out of seven. Man was to imitate God in His divine rest—there is **no rest for man envisioned in the Babylonian account**. In the Babylonian story man is sentenced to an unending work and service to the gods. In the Bible man is to enjoy the creation and the work of his labors. He is to worship and serve the Lord but not as a slave with no God-given privileges and rights. In Babylon the gods were to enjoy the creation and the work of man’s labors and man has no creation-rights.<sup>10</sup> How different the Biblical report is from the degraded<sup>11</sup> Babylonian myth. The Babylonian story is the CLOSEST STORY to the Biblical account of creation yet found. We can learn much from it to encourage us in believing what the Bible reports. It teaches us the antiquity and superiority of the Biblical record. The Babylonian account bears the

remarkable understanding of what man has held down through history, as well as how the whole of terrestrial time and seasons is truly regulated.

<sup>10</sup> Kitchen op. cit. p. 88-89; A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (1951), pp. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Kitchen, p. 89, remarks, “The common assumption that the Hebrew account is simply a purged and simplified version of the Babylonian legend (applied also to the Flood stories) is fallacious on methodological grounds. In the Ancient Near East, the rule is that simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not vice versa. In the Ancient Orient, legends were not simplified or turned into pseudo-history (historicized) as has been assumed for early Genesis.”

**DIFFERENCES** between the two accounts. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that while the Bible account is monotheistic and presents a God who is wholly different than the creation, the Babylonian story is polytheistic and presents gods who are limited in existence, powers, and morals. Indeed, the Babylonian story describes gods who are part of the creation even though the first god(s) were the creators. As the Bible puts it, the gods of the heathen are inventions of man's imagination (Ps. 115:4-8, Isa. 44:9-20). Moreover, the gods of the Babylonians, like all the pagan gods, have the sins of mankind. They hate, are jealous, they fight and kill and die, etc. The religions built around these gods, is immoral in many respects. These gods are ungodly in comparison to the God of the Bible. They are ungodly in their being and attributes.

The Bible teaches that from the outset the Lord God purposed to create the heavens and the earth as the HABITATION OF MAN. On the other hand, in the myth the creation of the heavens and the earth was not the intention of the original "creators" at all, but resulted rather as an afterthought by a secondary god, Marduk. Moreover, there is no divine design to create the universe as the habitation for man.

It is evident, also, that the Babylonian **creation story (the *Enuma Elish*) relates that the heavens and earth were made out of the body of Tiamat-Apsu (the primal salt watery mass)** and that the gods (the various forces and entities seen in the creation) were created by the two first gods and later were placed in the bifurcated body of Tiamat at the discretion of Marduk. This story tells us that the entire universe is composed of divine elements. It DESTROYS THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CREATOR (the one to be worshipped) and the creature (those responsible to worship God).

The Bible teaches us that **the Lord God created THE SUN AND MOON TO REGULATE THE TIMES AND SEASONS** (a strikingly modern view of how the times and seasons are regulated<sup>9</sup>) while the

<sup>9</sup> Today we all know that the sun regulates the times and seasons, however, in ancient times it was generally held that the moon performed this task. Hence, the Biblical report shows a

**Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards.**  
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape."

4/5 **"He crossed the heavens and surveyed** the regions. **He squared Apsu's quarter**, the abode of Nudimmud ("one of the names of Ea, the **earth- and water-god**"<sup>5</sup>), **As the lord** measured the dimensions of Apsu. ... Anu, Enlil, and Ea he made occupy their places."

6. Tablet V, lines 1-22  
"He constructed **stations for the great gods**, Fixing their astral likenesses as the Images. He determined the year by designating the zones: He set up three constellations for each of the twelve months. After defining the days of the year [by means] of (heavenly) figures, ...

7 The Moon he caused to shine, **the night (to him) entrusting.** He appointed him a creature of the night **to signify the days: "Monthly**, without cease, form designs with a crown. At the month's very start, rising over the land, Thou shalt have luminous horns to signify **six days**, On the seventh day reaching a [half]-crown. At full moon stand in opposition in mid-month. ... And [on the thirtieth **thou shalt again stand in opposition to the sun.**"

8 Tablet VI, 5-7  
"Blood I will mass and cause bones to be, Verily, **savage-man I will create.**"  
He shall be charged with the service of the gods, That they might be at ease!"

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 61, n. 7.

There are striking parallels between the Babylonian myth and the Biblical account both as to the order of the things appearing or being created and other matters.

FIRST, the Babylonian story opens with two gods Apsu (the god of the sweet waters) and Tiamat (the goddess of the bitter, or salt, waters) who created all the other gods. It is of interest to this writer that the Biblical account clearly rests upon the teaching that there is but one true God existing eternally in three persons. Some have made much of the similarity between the two words *Tiamat* and *tehom* (Hebrew, "deep"). Others have pointed out that the similarity is superficial and should be rejected insofar as the two words have distinctly different primary spellings.<sup>6</sup>

The Babylonians were taught that the salt water and sweet waters originally were ONE WATERY MASS. Interestingly, they identified two gods, the god of the sweet waters and the goddess of the salt (bitter) waters. This is somewhat parallel to the Bible's report that the *tehom/deep* was the primal waters and that these waters were later separated into the sweet waters (lakes and rivers) and the salt waters (oceans and seas), cf., Genesis 1 and 2 (note the confusion in the Babylonian record where the sweet water god was slain and the heavens and earth were made entirely of the salt bitter waters).<sup>7</sup> In addition, one should note that the two gods existed in one substance. Perhaps this is a dim recollection of God the Father and God the Spirit mentioned in the biblical account.

A very interesting parallel is that according to the Babylonians, LIGHT existed before the creation of the light sources (the moon and the sun).<sup>8</sup> Although the myth is generally garbled, this is a

<sup>6</sup> Kitchen, p. 89f, correctly argues that there is no linguistic affinity between Babylonian *Tiamat* and Hebrew *tehom* and that the Hebrew word is a common northwest Semitic root appearing in both Hebrew and Ugaritic.

<sup>7</sup> This is a confusion because the created earth still contains sweet waters and because the sweet water god continues to be worshipped, i.e., he continues to live!

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Young, op. cit., p. 87, points out that in I:37, 38, I:68 the *Enuma Elish* says there was light before it says the sun and moon were created, V:1-4, V:12ff. "And it is well to note that *Enuma Elish* has the same order. Here also light comes before the sun. Not until the fifth

remarkable confirmation of the Bible's report that there was light before the light-producers were created.

Another similarity with the Bible is that according to the Babylonian story one god MARDUK (the god of Babylon) creates all things within the creation by CALLING THEM FORTH (similar to the Egyptian memory).

The rest of the Babylonian creation story offers several additional parallels to the Biblical report. After Tiamat was slain Marduk HALVED HER TO FORM THE HEAVENS ABOVE AND THE EARTH BENEATH. So, somewhat similar to the Biblical account, this creation was formed from the halving and separation of a watery mass. One should notice that the fourth item in the above chart is the parallel between the firmament of the heavens being created and the surveying of the heavens above. Next comes the inhabitation of the waters below by Nudimmud. This is paralleled in the Bible by the formation of the waters below. The sixth parallel consists of the inhabitation of the skies in both accounts. The seventh parallel is the ordering of the times and seasons (days and nights) by heavenly bodies. And, finally, both accounts report the creation of man as the final creation.

Thus, the Babylonian myth sets forth THE SAME ORDER of "creative events" as the Bible does. Remarkably, it says that light existed before the light-producers.

Lest it be thought that the Babylonian account is the same as what appears in the Bible, one should also note the MARKED

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tablet do we meet with a statement of the making of the heavenly bodies. In this respect therefore, namely, relating the production of the heavenly bodies after the existence of light, the *Enuma Elish* is in agreement with Genesis. When Apsu wishes to revolt, light is already present, for he says: 'Their way has become grievous to me. By day I cannot rest, by night I cannot sleep' (1:37, 38). Heidel also points out that there was a radiance or dazzling aureole about Apsu (1:68), 'He carried off his splendor and put it on himself. And Marduk himself was a solar deity, 'Son of the sun-god, the sun god of the gods' (1:102). In *Enuma Elish* light is really an attribute of the gods; in Genesis it is the creation of God. That such an order should be present in *Enuma Elish* is what might be expected..."