

Creation Accounts

Enuma Elish, *the Memphite Theology*, and Genesis 1–2

GENESIS 1–2

When: Sixth century BCE (?)

Where: Jerusalem

Language: Hebrew

ENUMA ELISH (“WHEN ABOVE . . .”)

What: Copies survive in 181 clay cuneiform tablets and fragments from various cities in Assyria and Babylon, attesting to a seven-tablet composition

When: Ca. 1100 BCE (?)

Where: Babylon

Language: Akkadian

Translation: W. G. Lambert¹

Tablet I

- When the heavens above did not exist,
 And earth beneath had not come into being—
 There was Apsu, the first in order, their begetter,
 And demiurge Tiamat, who gave birth to them all;
 5 They had mingled their waters together
 Before meadow-land had coalesced and reed-bed was to be found—
 When not one of the gods had been formed
 Or had come into being, when no destinies had been decreed,

1. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 45–133.

- The gods were created within them;
 10 Laḥmu and Laḥamu were formed and came into being.
 While they grew and increased in stature
 Anshar and Kishar, who excelled them, were created.
 They prolonged their days, they multiplied their years.
 Anu, their son, could rival his fathers.
 15 Anu, the son, equalled Anshar,
 And Anu begat Nudimmud, his own equal.
 Nudimmud was the champion among his fathers;
 Profoundly discerning, wise, of robust strength;
 Very much stronger than his father's begetter, Anshar
 20 He had no rival among the gods, his brothers,
 The divine brothers came together,
 Their clamour got loud, throwing Tiamat into a turmoil.
 They jarred the nerves of Tiamat,
 And by their dancing they spread alarm in Anduruna.
 25 Apsu did not diminish their clamour,
 And Tiamat was silent when confronted with them.
 Their conduct was displeasing to her,
 Yet though their behaviour was not good, she wished to spare them.

Apsu and Mummu plot the destruction of the gods

- Thereupon Apsu, the begetter of the great gods,
 30 Called Mummu, his vizier, and addressed him,
 "Vizier Mummu, who gratifies my pleasure,
 Come, let us go to Tiamat!"
 They went and sat, facing Tiamat,
 As they conferred about the gods, their sons.
 35 Apsu opened his mouth
 And addressed Tiamat . . .
 "Their behaviour has become displeasing to me
 And I cannot rest in the day-time or sleep at night.
 I will destroy and break up their way of life
 40 That silence may reign and we may sleep."
 When Tiamat heard this
 She raged and cried out to her spouse,
 She cried in distress, fuming within herself,
 She grieved over the (plotted) evil,
 45 "How can we destroy what we have given birth to?
 Though their behaviour causes distress, let us tighten discipline graciously."
 Mummu spoke up with counsel for Apsu—
 (As from) a rebellious vizier was the counsel of his Mummu—
 "Destroy, my father, that lawless way of life,
 50 That you may rest in the day-time and sleep by night!"

Apsu was pleased with him, his face beamed
 Because he had plotted evil against the gods, his sons.
 Mummu put his arms around Apsu's neck,
 He sat on his knees kissing him.

Ea kills Apsu and captures Mummu

55 What they plotted in their gathering
 Was reported to the gods, their sons.
 The gods heard it and were frantic.
 They were overcome with silence and sat quietly.
 The one who excels in knowledge, the skilled and learned,
 60 Ea, who knows everything, perceived their tricks.
 He fashioned it and made it to be all-embracing,
 He executed it skillfully as supreme—his pure incantation.
 He recited it and set it on the waters,
 He poured sleep upon him as he was slumbering deeply.
 65 He put Apsu to slumber as he poured out sleep,
 And Mummu, the counsellor, was breathless with agitation.
 He split (Apsu's) sinews, ripped off his crown,
 Carried away his aura and put it on himself.
 He bound Apsu and killed him;
 70 Mummu he confined and handled roughly.

Ea builds a house on Apsu's remains

He set his dwelling upon Apsu,
 And laid hold on Mummu, keeping the nose-rope in his hand.
 After Ea had bound and slain his enemies,
 Had achieved victory over his foes,
 75 He rested quietly in his chamber,
 He called it Apsu, whose shrines he appointed.
 Then he founded his living-quarters within it,
 And Ea and Damkina, his wife, sat in splendour.

The birth of Marduk

In the chamber of the destinies, the room of the archetypes,
 80 The wisest of the wise, the sage of the gods, Bēl was conceived.
 In Apsu was Marduk born,
 In pure Apsu was Marduk born.
 Ea his father begat him,
 Damkina his mother bore him.
 85 He sucked the breasts of goddesses,
 A nurse reared him and filled him with terror.
 His figure was well developed, the glance of his eyes was dazzling,
 His growth was manly, he was mighty from the beginning.

- Anu, his father's begetter, saw him,
 90 He exulted and smiled; his heart filled with joy.
 Anu rendered him perfect: his divinity was remarkable,
 And he became very lofty, excelling them in his attributes.
 His members were incomprehensibly wonderful,
 Incapable of being grasped with the mind, hard even to look on.
 95 Four were his eyes, four his ears,
 Flame shot forth as he moved his lips.
 His four ears grew large,
 And his eyes likewise took in everything.
 His figure was lofty and superior in comparison with the gods,
 100 His limbs were surpassing, his nature was superior:
 'Mari-utu, Mari-utu,
 The Son, the Sun-god, the Sun-god of the gods.'
 He was clothed with the aura of the Ten Gods, so exalted was his strength,
 The Fifty Dreads were loaded upon him.
 105 Anu formed and gave birth to the four winds,
 He delivered them to him, "My son, let them whirl!"
 He formed dust and set a hurricane to drive it,
 He made a wave to bring consternation on Tiamat.

Tiamat is moved to action

- Tiamat was confounded; day and night she was frantic.
 110 The gods took no rest, they
 In their minds they plotted evil,
 And addressed their mother Tiamat,
 "When Apsu, your spouse, was killed,
 You did not go at his side, but sat quietly.
 115 The four dreadful winds have been fashioned
 To throw you into confusion, and we cannot sleep.
 You gave no thought to Apsu, your spouse,
 Nor to Mummu, who is a prisoner. Now you sit alone.
 Henceforth you will be in frantic consternation!
 120 And as for us, who cannot rest, you do not love us!
 Consider our burden, our eyes are hollow.
 Break the immovable yoke that we may sleep.
 Make battle, avenge them!
 [. . .] . . . reduce to nothingness!"
 125 Tiamat heard, the speech pleased her,
 She said, "Let us do now all you have advised."
 The gods assembled within her.
 They conceived [evil] against the gods their begetters.
 They and took the side of Tiamat,
 130 Fiercely plotting, unresting by night and day,

- Lusting for battle, raging, storming,
 They set up a host to bring about conflict.
 Mother Hubur, who forms everything,
 Supplied irresistible weapons, and gave birth to giant serpents.
 135 They had sharp teeth, they were merciless
 With poison instead of blood she filled their bodies.
 She clothed the fearful monsters with dread,
 She loaded them with an aura and made them godlike.
 (She said,) "Let their onlooker feebly perish,
 140 May they constantly leap forward and never retire."
 She created the Hydra, the Dragon, the Hairy Hero,
 The Great Demon, the Savage Dog, and the Scorpion-man,
 Fierce demons, the Fish-man, and the Bull-man,
 Carriers of merciless weapons, fearless in the face of battle.
 145 Her commands were tremendous, not to be resisted.
 Altogether she made eleven of that kind.

Tiamat elevates Qingu

- Among the gods, her sons, whom she constituted her host,
 She exalted Qingu, and magnified him among them.
 The leadership of the army, the direction of the host,
 150 The bearing of weapons, campaigning, the mobilization of conflict,
 The chief executive power of battle, supreme command,
 She entrusted to him and set him on a throne,
 "I have cast the spell for you and exalted you in the host of the gods.
 I have delivered to you the rule of all the gods.
 155 You are indeed exalted, my spouse, you are renowned,
 Let your commands prevail over all the Anunnaki."
 She gave him the Tablet of Destinies and fastened it to his breast,
 (Saying) "Your order may not be changed; let the utterance of your mouth
 be firm."
 After Qingu was elevated and had acquired the power of Anuship,
 160 He decreed the destinies for the gods, her sons:
 "May the utterance of your mouths subdue the fire-god,
 May your poison by its accumulation put down aggression."

Tablet II

- Tiamat gathered together her creation
 And organized battle against the gods, her offspring.
 Henceforth Tiamat plotted evil because of Apsu.
 It became known to Ea that she had arranged the conflict.
 5 Ea heard this matter,
 He lapsed into silence in his chamber and sat motionless.

After he had reflected and his anger had subsided
 He directed his steps to Anshar his father.
 He entered the presence of the father of his begetter, Anshar,
 10 And related to him all of Tiamat's plotting.
 "My father, Tiamat our mother has conceived a hatred for us,
 She has established a host in her savage fury.
 All the gods have turned to her,
 Even those you² begat also take her side. . . .

[*Ea repeats the report of Tiamat's preparations from the previous tablet.*]

Anshar heard; the matter was profoundly disturbing.
 50 He cried "Woe!" and bit his lip.
 His heart was in fury, his mind could not be calmed.
 Over Ea his son his cry was faltering.
 "My son, you who provoked the war,
 Take responsibility for whatever you alone have done!
 55 You set out and killed Apsu,
 And as for Tiamat, whom you made furious, where is her equal?"

[*Anshar tries to send Ea to deal with Tiamat, but he returns from a scouting expedition saying that she is "too much" for him. Ea implores Anshar to send someone else, since "though a woman's strength is very great, it is not equal to a man's." Anshar next sends Anu, and the same thing happens.*]

Anshar and Ea send Marduk against Tiamat

Anshar lapsed into silence, staring at the ground,
 120 Nodding to Ea, shaking his head.
 The Igigi and all the Anunnaki had assembled,
 They sat in tight-lipped silence
 No god would go to face . . . [. .]
 Would go out against Tiamat . . . [. .]
 125 Yet the lord Anshar, the father of the great gods,
 Was angry in his heart, not summoning any one.
 A mighty son, the avenger of [his] father,
 He who hastens to war, the warrior Marduk,
 Ea summoned (him) to his private chamber
 130 To explain to him his plans.
 "Marduk, give counsel, listen to your father.
 You are my son, who gives me pleasure,
 Go reverently, before Anshar,
 Speak, take your stand, appease him with your glance."
 135 Bēl rejoiced at his father's words,

He drew near and stood in the presence of Anshar.
 Anshar saw him, his heart filled with satisfaction,
 He kissed his lips and removed his fear.
 “My father, do not hold your peace, but speak forth,
 140 I will go and fulfil your desires!
 Anshar, do not hold your peace, but speak forth,
 I will go and fulfil your desires!
 Which man has drawn up his battle array against you?
 And will Tiamat, who is a woman, attack you with (her) weapons?
 145 [“My father], begetter, rejoice and be glad,
 Soon you will tread on the neck of Tiamat!
 Anshar, begetter, rejoice and be glad,
 Soon you will tread on the neck of Tiamat!”
 “Go, my son, conversant with all knowledge,
 150 Appease Tiamat with your pure spell,
 Ride the storms, proceed without delay,
 And with an appearance which cannot be repelled turn her back.”
 Bēl rejoiced at his father’s words,
 With glad heart he addressed his father,
 155 “Lord of the gods, Destiny of the great gods,
 If I should become your avenger,
 If I should bind Tiamat and preserve you,
 Convene an assembly, and proclaim for me an exalted destiny.
 Sit, all of you, in Upshu’ukkinakku with gladness.
 160 And let me, with my utterance, decree destinies instead of you.
 Whatever I instigate must not be changed.
 Nor may my command be nullified or altered.”

Tablet III

Anshar opened his mouth
 And addressed Kaka, his vizier,
 “Vizier Kaka, who gratifies my pleasure,
 I will send you to Laḥmu and Laḥamu.
 5 You are skilled in making inquiry, learned in address.
 Have the gods, my fathers, brought to my presence.
 Let all the gods be brought,
 Let them confer as they sit at table.
 Let them eat grain, let them drink ale,
 10 Let them decree the destiny for Marduk their avenger.”
 [*Anshar repeats the story for Kaka to report.*]
 Kaka went. He directed his steps
 To Laḥmu and Laḥamu, the gods his fathers.

He prostrated himself, he kissed the ground before them,

70 He got up, saying to them as he stood,

“Anshar, your son, has sent me,

And I am to explain his plans. . . .”

[*Kaka repeats the story.*]

125 When Lahḥa and Laḥamu heard, they cried aloud.

All the Igigi moaned in distress,

“What has gone wrong that she took this decision about us?

We did not know what Tiamat was doing.”

The pre-battle feast of the gods

All the great gods who decree destinies

130 Gathered as they went,

They entered the presence of Anshar and became filled with [joy],

They kissed one another as they [. . .] in the assembly.

They conferred as they [sat] at table,

They ate grain, they drank ale.

135 They strained the sweet liquor through their straws,

As they drank beer and felt good,

They became quite carefree, their mood was merry,

And they decreed the fate for Marduk, their avenger.

Tablet IV

The gods delegate their power to Marduk and decree his destiny

They set a lordly dais for him

And he took his seat before his fathers to receive kingship.

(They said,) “You are the most honoured among the great gods,

Your destiny is unequalled, your command is like Anu’s.

5 Marduk, you are the most honoured among the great gods,

Your destiny is unequalled, your command is like Anu’s.

Henceforth your order will not be annulled,

It is in your power to exalt and abase.

Your utterance is sure, your command cannot be rebelled against,

10 None of the gods will transgress the line you draw.

Shrines for all the gods need provisioning,

That you may be established where their sanctuaries are.

You are Marduk, our avenger,

We have given you kingship over the sum of the whole universe.

15 Take your seat in the assembly, let your word be exalted,

Let your weapons not miss the mark, but may they slay your enemies.

Bēl, spare him who trusts in you,

But destroy the god who set his mind on evil.”

They set a constellation in the middle
 20 And addressed Marduk, their son,
 “Your destiny, Bēl, is superior to that of all the gods,
 Command and bring about annihilation and re-creation.
 Let the constellation disappear at your utterance,
 With a second command let the constellation reappear.”
 25 He gave the command and the constellation disappeared,
 With a second command the constellation came into being again.
 When the gods, his fathers, saw (the effect of) his utterance,
 They rejoiced and offered congratulation: “Marduk is the king!”
 They added to him a mace, a throne, and a rod,
 30 They gave him an irresistible weapon that overwhelms the foe.
 (They said,) “Go, cut Tiamat’s throat,
 And let the winds bear up her blood to give the news.”
 The gods, his fathers, decreed the destiny of Bēl,
 And set him on the road, the way of prosperity and success.
 35 He fashioned a bow and made it his weapon,
 He set an arrow in place, put the bow string on.
 He took up his club and held it in his right hand,
 His bow and quiver he hung at his side.
 He placed lightning before him,
 40 And filled his body with tongues of flame.
 He made a net to enmesh the entrails of Tiamat,
 And stationed the four winds that no part of her escape.
 The South Wind, the North Wind, the East Wind, the West Wind,
 He put beside his net, winds given by his father, Anu.
 45 He fashioned the Evil Wind, the Dust Storm, Tempest,
 The Four-fold Wind, the Seven-fold Wind, the Chaos-spreading Wind, the
 . . . Wind.
 He sent out the seven winds that he had fashioned,
 And they took their stand behind him to harass Tiamat’s entrails.

Marduk goes to battle

Bēl took up the Storm-flood, his great weapon,
 50 He rode the fearful chariot of the irresistible storm.
 Four steeds he yoked to it and harnessed them to it,
 The Destroyer, The Merciless, The Trampler, The Fleet.
 Their lips were parted, their teeth bore venom,
 They were strangers to weariness, trained to sweep forward.
 55 At his right hand he stationed raging battle and strife,
 On the left, conflict that overwhelms a united battle array.
 He was clad in a tunic, a fearful coat of mail,
 And on his head he wore an aura of terror.
 Bēl proceeded and set out on his way,

- 60 He set his face toward the raging Tiamat.
 In his lips he held a spell,
 He grasped a plant to counter poison in his hand,
 Thereupon they milled around him, the gods milled around him,
 The gods, his fathers, milled around him, the gods milled around him.
- 65 Bēl drew near, surveying the maw of Tiamat,
 He observed the tricks of Qingu, her spouse.
 As he looked, he lost his nerve,
 His determination went and he faltered.
 His divine aides, who were marching at his side,
- 70 Saw the warrior, the foremost, and their vision became dim.
 Tiamat cast her spell without turning her neck,
 In her lips she held untruth and lies,

[*Broken lines*]

- 75 Bēl [lifted up] the Storm-flood, his great weapon,
 And with these words threw it at the raging Tiamat,
 “Why are you aggressive and arrogant,
 And strive to provoke battle?
 The younger generation have shouted, outraging their elders,
- 80 But you, their mother, hold pity in contempt.
 Qingu you have named to be your spouse,
 And you have improperly appointed him to the rank of Anuship.
 Against Anshar, king of the gods, you have stirred up trouble,
 And against the gods, my fathers, your trouble is established.
- 85 Deploy your troops, gird on your weapons,
 You and I will take our stand and do battle.”

The defeat of Tiamat and her allies

- When Tiamat heard this
 She went insane and lost her reason.
 Tiamat cried aloud and fiercely,
- 90 All her lower members trembled beneath her.
 She was reciting an incantation, kept reciting her spell,
 While the (battle-)gods were sharpening their weapons of war.
 Tiamat and Marduk, the sage of the gods, came together,
 Joining in strife, drawing near to battle.
- 95 Bēl spread out his net and enmeshed her;
 He let loose the Evil Wind, the rear guard, in her face.
 Tiamat opened her mouth to swallow it,
 She let the Evil Wind in so that she could not close her lips.
 The fierce winds weighed down her belly,
- 100 Her inwards were distended and she opened her mouth wide.
 He let fly an arrow and pierced her belly,

- He tore open her entrails and slit her inwards,
 He bound her and extinguished her life,
 He threw down her corpse and stood on it.
 105 After he had killed Tiamat, the leader,
 Her assembly dispersed, her host scattered.
 Her divine aides, who went beside her,
 In trembling and fear beat a retreat.
 [. . .] to save their lives,
 110 But they were completely surrounded, unable to escape.
 He bound them and broke their weapons,
 And they lay enmeshed, sitting in a snare,
 Hiding in corners, filled with grief,
 Bearing his punishment, held in a prison.
 115 The eleven creatures who were laden with fearfulness,
 The throng of devils who went as grooms at her right hand,
 He put ropes upon them and bound their arms,
 Together with their warfare he trampled them beneath him.
 Now Qingu, who had risen to power among them,
 120 He bound and reckoned with the Dead Gods.
 He took from him the Tablet of Destinies, which was not properly his,
 Sealed it with a seal and fastened it to his own breast.
 After the warrior Marduk had bound and slain his enemies,
 Had [. . .] the arrogant enemy [. . .],
 125 Had established victory for Anshar over all his foes,
 Had fulfilled the desire of Nudimmud,
 He strengthened his hold on the Bound Gods,
 And returned to Tiamat, whom he had bound.

Marduk creates from Tiamat's carcass

- Bēl placed his feet on the lower parts of Tiamat
 130 And with his merciless club smashed her skull.
 He severed her arteries
 And let the North Wind bear up (her blood) to give the news.
 His fathers saw it and were glad and exulted;
 They brought gifts and presents to him.
 135 Bēl rested, surveying the corpse,
 In order to divide the lump by a clever scheme.
 He split her into two like a dried fish:
 One half of her he set up and stretched out as the heavens.
 He stretched the skin and appointed a watch
 140 With the instruction not to let her waters escape.
 He crossed over the heavens, surveyed the celestial parts,
 And adjusted them to match the Apsu, Nudimmud's abode.
 Bēl measured the shape of the Apsu

And set up Ešarra, a replica of Ešgalla.
 145 In Ešgalla, Ešarra which he had built, and the heavens,
 He settled in their shrines Anu, Enlil, and Ea.

Tablet V

He fashioned heavenly stations for the great gods,
 And set up constellations, the patterns of the stars.
 He appointed the year, marked off divisions,
 And set up three stars each for the twelve months.
 5 After he had organized the year,
 He established the heavenly station of Nēberu to fix the stars' intervals.
 That none should transgress or be slothful
 He fixed the heavenly stations of Enlil and Ea with it.
 Gates he opened on both sides,
 10 And put strong bolts at the left and the right.
 He placed the heights (of heaven) in her (Tiamat's) belly,
 He created Nannar, entrusting to him the night.
 He appointed him as the jewel of the night to fix the days,
 And month by month without ceasing he elevated him with a crown,
 15 (Saying,) "Shine over the land at the beginning of the month,
 Resplendent with horns to fix the calling of days.
 On the seventh day the crown will be half size,
 On the fifteenth day, halfway through each month, stand in opposition.
 When Šamaš [sees] you on the horizon,
 20 Diminish in all the proper stages and shine backwards.

[Intervening broken lines describe Marduk's formation of the heavenly bodies.]

The foam which Tiamat [. . .]
 Marduk fashioned [. . .]
 He gathered it together and made it into clouds.
 50 The raging of the winds, violent rainstorms,
 The billowing of mist—the accumulation of her spittle—
 He appointed for himself and took them in his hand.
 He put her head in position and poured out . . . [. . .]
 He opened the abyss and it was sated with water.
 55 From her two eyes he let the Euphrates and Tigris flow,
 He blocked her nostrils, but left . . .
 He heaped up the distant [mountains] on her breasts,
 He bored wells to channel the springs.
 He twisted her tail and wove it into the Durmaḥu,
 60 [. . .] . . . the Apsu beneath his feet.
 [He set up] her crotch—it wedged up the heavens—
 [(Thus) the half of her] he stretched out and made it firm as the earth.

- [After] he had finished his work inside Tiamat,
 [He spread] his net and let it right out.
 65 He surveyed the heavens and the earth . . [.].
 [. .] their bonds
- After he had formulated his regulations and composed [his] decrees,
 He attached guide-ropes and put them in Ea's hands.
 [The Tablet] of Destinies which Qingu had taken and carried,
 70 He took charge of it as a trophy (?) and presented it to Anu.
 [The . .] of battle, which he had tied on or had put on his head,
 [. .] he brought before his fathers.
 [Now] the eleven creatures to which Tiamat had given birth and . . . ,
 He broke their weapons and bound them (the creatures) to his feet.
 75 He made images of them and stationed them at the [Gate] of the Apsu,
 To be a sign never to be forgotten.

The gods rejoice and bless Marduk

- [The gods] saw it and were jubilantly happy,
 (That is,) Laḥmu, Laḥamu and all his fathers.
 Anshar [embraced] him and published abroad his title, "Victorious King."
 80 Anu, Enlil and Ea gave him gifts.
 Mother Damkina, who bore him, hailed him,
 With a clean festal robe she made his face shine.
 To Usmû, who held her present to give the news,
 [He entrusted] the vizierate of the Apsu and the care of the holy places.
 85 The Igigi assembled and all did obeisance to him,
 Every one of the Anunnaki was kissing his feet.
 They all [gathered] to show their submission,
 [. . .] they stood, they bowed down, "Behold the king!"
 His fathers [. . .] and took their fill of his beauty,
 90 Bêl listened to their utterance, being girded with the dust of battle.
 [. . .]
 Anointing his body with [. . .] cedar perfume.
 He clothed himself in [his] lordly robe,
 With a crown of terror as a royal aura.

[Broken lines]

- Opened their mouths and [addressed] the Igigi gods,
 "Previously Marduk was our beloved son,
 110 Now he is your king, heed his command!"
 Next, they all spoke up together,
 "His name is Lugaldimmerankia, trust in him!"
 When they had given kingship to Marduk,
 They addressed to him a benediction for prosperity and success,
 115 "Henceforth you are the caretaker of our shrine,

Whatever you command, we will do!"
 Marduk opened his mouth to speak
 And addressed the gods his fathers,
 "Above the Apsu, the emerald (?) abode,
 120 Opposite Ešarra, which I built for you,
 Beneath the celestial parts, whose floor I made firm,
 I will build a house to be my luxurious abode.
 Within it I will establish its shrine,
 I will found my chamber and establish my kingship.
 125 When you come up from the Apsu to make a decision,
 This will be your resting place before the assembly.
 When you descend from heaven to make a decision,
 This will be your resting place before the assembly.
 I shall call its name 'Babylon,' "The Homes of the Great Gods,"
 130 Within it we will hold a festival, that will be the evening festival,
 [The gods], his fathers, [heard] this speech of his,

[Broken lines]

(They said:) In Babylon, as you have named it,
 Put our [resting place] forever.

[About 20 broken lines]

Tablet VI

Marduk creates humankind from the blood of Qingu

When Marduk heard the gods' speech
 He conceived a desire to accomplish clever things.
 He opened his mouth addressing Ea,
 He counsels that which he had pondered in his heart,
 5 "I will bring together blood and form bone,
 I will bring into being Lullû,³ whose name shall be 'man,'
 I will create Lullû-man
 On whom the toil of the gods will be laid that they may rest.
 I will skillfully alter the organization of the gods:
 10 Though they are honoured as one, they shall be divided into two."
 Ea answered, as he addressed a word to him,
 Expressing his comments on the resting of the gods,
 "Let one brother of theirs be given up.
 Let him perish that people may be fashioned.
 15 Let the great gods assemble
 And let the guilty one be given up that they may be confirmed."
 Marduk assembled the great gods,

3. A Sumerian loan word into Akkadian, meaning "(primeval) man."

Using gracious direction as he gave his order,
 As he spoke the gods heeded him:
 20 The king addressed a word to the Anunnaki,
 “Your former oath was true indeed,
 (Now also) tell me the solemn truth:
 Who is the one who instigated warfare,
 Who made Tiamat rebel, and set battle in motion?
 25 Let him who instigated warfare be given up
 That I may lay his punishment on him; but you sit and rest.”
 The Igigi, the great gods, answered him,
 That is, Lugaldimmerankia, the counsellor of the gods, their lord,
 “Qingu is the one who instigated warfare,
 30 Who made Tiamat rebel and set battle in motion.”
 They bound him, holding him before Ea,
 They inflicted the penalty on him and severed his blood-vessels.
 From his blood he (Ea) created mankind,
 On whom he imposed the service of the gods, and set the gods free.
 35 After the wise Ea had created mankind
 And had imposed the service of the gods upon them—
 That task is beyond comprehension
 For Nudimmud performed the creation with the skills of Marduk—
 King Marduk divided the gods,
 40 All the Anunnaki into upper and lower groups.
 He assigned 300 in the heavens to guard the decrees of Anu,
 And appointed them as a guard.
 Next he arranged the organization of the netherworld.
 In heaven and netherworld he stationed 600 gods.

Marduk has the gods build Babylon and its temples

45 After he had arranged all the decrees,
 And had distributed incomes among the Anunnaki of heaven and netherworld,
 The Anunnaki opened their mouths
 And addressed their lord Marduk,
 “Now, lord, seeing you have established our freedom
 50 What favour can we do for you?
 Let us make a shrine of great renown:
 Your chamber will be our resting place wherein we may repose.
 Let us erect a shrine to house a pedestal
 Wherein we may repose when we finish (the work).”
 55 When Marduk heard this,
 He beamed as brightly as the light of day,
 “Build Babylon, the task you have sought.
 Let bricks for it be moulded, and raise the shrine!”
 The Anunnaki wielded the pick.

- 60 For one year they made the needed bricks.
 When the second year arrived,
 They raised the peak of Esagil, a replica of the Apsu.
 They built the lofty temple tower of the Apsu
 And for Anu, Enlil, Ea and him they established it as a dwelling.
- 65 He sat in splendour before them,
 Surveying its horns, which were level with the base of Ešarra.
 After they had completed the work on Esagil
 All the Anunnaki constructed their own shrines.
 {300 Igigi of heaven and 600 of the Apsu, all of them, had assembled.}
- 70 Bēl seated the gods, his fathers, at the banquet
 In the lofty shrine which they had built for his dwelling,
 (Saying,) "This is Babylon, your fixed dwelling,
 Take your pleasure here! Sit down in joy!"
 The great gods sat down,
- 75 Beer-mugs were set out and they sat at the banquet.
 After they had enjoyed themselves inside
 They held a service in awesome Esagil.
 The regulations and all the rules were confirmed:
 All the gods divided the stations of heaven and netherworld.
- 80 The college of the Fifty great gods took their seats,
 The Seven gods of destinies were appointed to give decisions.
 Bēl received his weapon, the bow, and laid it before them:
 His divine fathers saw the net which he had made.
 His fathers saw how skillfully wrought was the structure of the bow
- 85 As they praised what he had made.
 Anu lifted it up in the divine assembly,
 He kissed the bow, saying, "It is my daughter!"
 Thus he called the names of the bow:
 "Long Stick" was the first; the second was, "May it hit the mark."
- 90 With the third name, "Bow Star," he made it to shine in the sky,
 He fixed its heavenly position along with its divine brothers.
 After Anu had decreed the destiny of the bow,
 He set down a royal throne, a lofty one even for a god,
 Anu set it there in the assembly of the gods.
- 95 The great gods assembled,
 They exalted the destiny of Marduk and did obeisance.
 They invoked a curse on themselves
 And took an oath with water and oil, and put their hands on their throats.
 They granted him the right to exercise kingship over the gods,
- 100 They confirmed him as lord of the gods of heaven and netherworld.
 Anshar gave him his exalted name, Asalluḫi:
 "At the mention of his name, let us show submission!
 When he speaks, let the gods heed him,

- Let his command be superior in upper and lower regions.
 105 May the son, our avenger, be exalted,
 Let his lordship be superior and himself without rival.
 Let him shepherd the black-heads, his creatures,
 Let them tell of his character to future days without forgetting.
 Let him establish lavish food offerings for his fathers,
 110 Let him provide for their maintenance and be caretaker of their sanctuaries,
 Let him burn incense to rejoice their sanctums.
 Let him do on earth the same as he has done in heaven:
 Let him appoint the black-heads to worship him.
 The subject humans should take note and call on their gods,
 115 Since he commands they should heed their goddesses,
 Let food offerings be brought [for] (?) their gods and goddesses,
 May they (?) not be forgotten, may they remember their gods,
 May they . . . their . . . , may they . . . their shrines.
 Though the black-heads worship someone, some other god,
 120 He is the god of each and every one of us!
 Come, let us call the fifty names
 Of him whose character is resplendent, whose achievement is the same.”
 (1) Marduk as he was named by his father Anu from his birth,
 Who supplies pasturage and watering, making the stables flourish.
 125 Who bound the boastful with his weapon, the storm flood,
 And saved the gods, his fathers, from distress.
 He is the son, the sun-god of the gods, he is dazzling,
 Let them ever walk in his bright light.
 On the peoples that he created, the living beings,
 He imposed the service of the gods and they took rest.
 Creation and annihilation, forgiveness and exacting the penalty
 Occur at his command, so let them fix their eyes on him.
 (2) Marukka: he is the god who created them,
 Who put the Anunnaki at ease, the Igigi at rest.
 135 (3) Marutukku: he is the support of land, city, and its peoples,
 Henceforth let the peoples ever heed him.
 (4) Meršakušu: fierce yet deliberating, angry yet relenting,
 His mind is wide, his heart is all-embracing.
 (5) Lugal-dimmerankia is the name by which we all called him,
 140 Whose command we have exalted above that of the gods his fathers.
 He is the lord of all the gods of heaven and netherworld,
 The king at whose injunctions the gods in upper and lower regions shudder.
 (6) Narilugal-dimmerankia is the name we gave him, the mentor of every god,
 Who established our dwellings in heaven and netherworld in time of trouble,
 145 Who distributed the heavenly stations between Igigi and Anunnaki,
 Let the gods tremble at his name and quake on their seats.
 (7) Asalluhi is the name by which his father Anu called him,

- He is the light of the gods, a mighty hero,
 Who, as his name says, is a protecting angel for god and land,
 150 Who by a terrible combat saved our dwelling in time of trouble.
 (8) Asalluḫi-Namtilla they called him secondly, the life-giving god,
 Who, in accordance with the form (of) his (name), restored all the ruined gods,
 The lord, who brought to life the dead gods by his pure incantation,
 Let us praise him as the destroyer of the crooked enemies.
 155 (9) Asalluḫi-Namru, as his name is called thirdly,
 The pure god, who cleanses our character.
 Anshar, Laḫmu, and Laḫamu (each) called him by three of his names,
 Then they addressed the gods, their sons,
 “We have each called him by three of his names,
 160 Now you call his names, like us.”
 The gods rejoiced as they heard their speech,
 In Upšuuḫkinaki they held a conference,
 “Of the warrior son, our avenger,
 Of the provisioner, let us extol the name.”
 165 They sat down in their assembly, summoning the destinies,
 And with all due rites they called his name:

Tablet VII

[*The first 134 lines of Tablet VII continue with the ascription of names to Marduk, including names 10–49.*]

- 135 Since he created the heavens and fashioned the earth,
 Enlil, the father, called him by his own name, (50) ‘Lord of the Lands’.
 Ea heard the names which all the Igigi called
 And his spirit became radiant.
 “Why! He whose name was extolled by his fathers
 140 Let him, like me, be called (51) ‘Ea’.
 Let him control the sum of all my rites,
 Let him administer all my decrees.”
 With the word “Fifty” the great gods
 Called his fifty names and assigned him an outstanding position.
 145 They should be remembered; a leading figure should expound them,
 The wise and learned should confer about them,
 A father should repeat them and teach them to his son,
 One should explain them to shepherd and herdsman.
 If one is not negligent to Marduk, the Enlil of the gods,
 150 May one’s land flourish, and oneself prosper,
 (For) his word is reliable, his command unchanged,
 No god can alter the utterance of his mouth.
 When he looks in fury, he does not relent,

- When his anger is ablaze, no god can face him.
 155 His mind is deep, his spirit is all-embracing,
 Before whom sin and transgression are sought out.
 Instruction which a leading figure repeated before him (Marduk):
 He wrote it down and stored it so that generations to come might hear it.
 [. . .] Marduk, who created the Igigi gods,
 160 Though they diminish . . . let them call on his name.
 . . . the song of Marduk,
 Who defeated Tiamat and took kingship.

THE MEMPHITE THEOLOGY

What: Text on slab of black granite, 66 cm × 137 cm

When: Late eighth century BCE (but see below)

Where: Memphis

Language: Hieroglyphic Egyptian

Translation: Miriam Lichtheim, *AEL* 1.51–57.

The living Horus: Who prospers the Two Lands; the Two Ladies: Who prospers the Two Lands; the Golden Horus: Who prospers the Two Lands; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Neferkare; the Son of Re: Sha[baka], beloved of Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, who lives like Re forever.

This writing was copied out anew by his majesty in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, for his majesty found it to be a work of the ancestors which was worm-eaten, so that it could not be understood from beginning to end. His majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall throughout eternity, as a work done by the Son of Re [Shabaka] for his father Ptah-Tatenen, so that he might live forever.

[A lengthy section describing the unification of the lands under Horus, and identifying Horus with Ptah, is omitted here.]

The gods who came into being in Ptah:

Ptah-on-the-great-throne [. . .]

Ptah-Nun,⁴ the father who [made] Atum.

Ptah-Naunet,⁵ the mother who bore Atum.

Ptah-the-Great is heart and tongue of the Nine [Gods].⁶

[Ptah . . .] who bore the gods.

[Ptah . . .] who bore the gods.

4. Nun was the deified primeval waters of life, also called “father of the gods.” He is here identified with Ptah.

5. Naunet is the feminine counterpart or aspect of Nun.

6. The primary deities of the Heliopolitan pantheon.

[Ptah . . .]

[Ptah . . .] Nefertem⁷ at the nose of Re every day.

There took shape in the heart, there took shape on the tongue the form of Atum. For the very great one is Ptah, who gave [life] to all the gods and their *kas*⁸ through this heart and through this tongue, in which Horus⁹ had taken shape as Ptah, in which Thoth had taken shape as Ptah.¹⁰

Thus heart and tongue rule over all the limbs in accordance with the teaching that it (the heart, *or*: he, Ptah) is in every body and it (the tongue, *or*: he, Ptah) is in every mouth of all gods, all men, all cattle, all creeping things, whatever lives, thinking whatever it (*or*: he) wishes and commanding whatever it (*or*: he) wishes.

His (Ptah's) Ennead¹¹ is before him as teeth and lips. They are the semen and the hands of Atum. For the Ennead of Atum came into being through his semen and his fingers. But the Ennead is the teeth and lips in this mouth which pronounced the name of every thing, from which Shu and Tefnut¹² came forth, and which gave birth to the Ennead.

Sight, hearing, breathing—they report to the heart, and it makes every understanding come forth. As to the tongue, it repeats what the heart has devised. Thus all the gods were born and his Ennead was completed. For every word of the god came about through what the heart devised and the tongue commanded.

Thus all the faculties were made and all the qualities determined, they that make all foods and all provisions, through this word. [Thus justice is done] to him who does what is loved, [and punishment] to him who does what is hated. Thus life is given to the peaceful, death is given to the criminal. Thus all labor, all crafts are made, the action of the hands, the motion of the legs, the movements of all the limbs, according to this command which is devised by the heart and comes forth on the tongue and creates the performance of every thing.

Thus it is said of Ptah: "He who made all and created the gods." And he is Tatenen,¹³ who gave birth to the gods, and from whom every thing came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things. Thus it is recognized and understood that he is the mightiest of the gods. Thus Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words.

He gave birth to the gods,
He made the towns,

7. A youthful god associated with the lotus flower.

8. The *ka* is an aspect of the Egyptian soul.

9. A god associated with the sky and kingship, Horus was the son of Osiris. He is also identified with Ptah in this text.

10. *Alternative rendering*: "Heart took shape in the form of Atum, Tongue took shape in the form of Atum. It is Ptah, the very great, who has given [life] to all the gods and their *kas* through this heart and through this tongue, from which Horus had come forth as Ptah, from which Thoth had come forth as Ptah."

11. From the Greek *ennea*, "nine," this term refers to the group of nine gods (see above).

12. Shu and Tefnut were the first pair of deities born from Nun.

13. Ptah is here identified with Tatenen, the deified primeval mound from which life sprang, often associated with the fertile silt of Nile inundation.

He established the nomes,
 He placed the gods in their shrines,
 He settled their offerings,
 He established their shrines,
 He made their bodies according to their wishes.
 Thus the gods entered into their bodies,
 Of every wood, every stone, every clay,
 Every thing that grows upon him¹⁴
 In which they came to be.

Thus were gathered to him all the gods and their *kas*, content, united with the Lord of the Two Lands.¹⁵

The Great Throne that gives joy to the heart of the gods in the House of Ptah¹⁶ is the granary of Ta-tenen, the mistress of all life, through which the sustenance of the Two Lands is provided.

[The text closes with a brief version of the myth of Osiris, who is then incorporated into the Memphite theology.]

DISCUSSION

What better way could there be to compare cultures and religions than by analyzing their creation accounts? This is where it all begins: the origins of life, the universe, and everything. These stories are indeed foundational for some aspects of their religions, but the relationship between the biblical creation accounts and those of other ancient Near Eastern cultures is a complex and difficult topic, compared to some others. Indeed, the texts presented in this chapter are likely to look completely different from each other at first glance. However, close attention also yields striking points of similarity.

It is best to set aside certain preconceived notions at the outset. For example, many readers may expect that each civilization had one creation story—a *single* account of origins. Popular titles of translations probably contribute to this misconception; for example, some studies call *Enuma Elish* “*The Babylonian Epic of Creation*.” It proves untrue, however. Instead, wherever we have large bodies of preserved literature from the ancient Near East, we also find multiple accounts of origins. The best examples are Egypt and Mesopotamia. Each had various creation stories, each of which might have its home in a certain city or temple and might have been more or less influential in a given era.

The diversity within any individual civilization invites study of the internal conversation among texts in a single cultural stream, but the focus here is on comparison *between* cultures. The stories presented here are distinct, but they allow one to ask and answer a common set of questions: Who is the Creator, and what is the Creator like? Who, if anyone, was with the Creator in the beginning? What is the purpose of creation, particularly

14. I.e., Ptah-Tatenen, the mound.

15. The Two Lands are Upper and Lower Egypt. An earlier portion of the text describes their unification.

16. The temple of Ptah at Memphis.

the creation of humankind? And in the end, one must ask the question that has the most diverse answers: What *is* this story, and why was it told?

Babylon: *Enuma Elish*

In the case of Mesopotamia, W. G. Lambert notes that “other than *Enūma Eliš* there is no systematic treatment of cosmology in Sumero-Babylonian literature. . . . But this does not mean that *Enūma Eliš* presents all that is known of Babylonian cosmology. On the contrary, the Epic uses only a selection of the wealth of available material.”¹⁷ Seventeen other brief (and sometimes fragmentary) “creation tales” are collected in his *Babylonian Creation Myths*, and there are still more passing references to creation in other genres. Mesopotamians did not tell only one story about creation.

Enuma Elish is not systematic in the sense that Lambert’s comment might lead some readers (especially those in the Christian tradition) to anticipate. Indeed, there was no “systematic theology” in the ancient Near East in the sense of a rationalized system of religion. There were many ways for ancient Near Eastern authors to express theological ideas, from hymns to prayers to prophetic pronouncements to ritual prescriptions (all discussed elsewhere in this book), but philosophical argumentation in the manner of later Western thinkers was not operative. In the texts in this chapter, theology was expressed through stories. When stories focus on the gods, they can be classified as *myths*. The term “myth” has long carried the connotation of “fiction,” but it derives from the Greek *mythos*, a term that originally meant simply “story,” without reference to historical truth.

Enuma Elish is a remarkable work of storytelling and theology. The story begins with a *theogony*—a story about the origins of the gods themselves. (The best-known theogony is probably that of the Greek author Hesiod.) In *Enuma Elish*, the stuff of the universe itself preexists most of the gods; they are formed by the intermingling of Apsu, the primordial watery chaos who begets them, and Tiamat, the monstrous mother goddess who bears them. In time, the clamor of the younger deities begins to antagonize Tiamat and Apsu, and although Tiamat wants to spare them, Apsu plots their demise. The younger gods hear of this, and send Ea as their champion to kill Apsu and confine his vizier, Mummu. He fashions Apsu’s remains into his homeland, dwelling, and shrines, and there he begets his son: Marduk (aka Bel).

Tiamat, however, is enraged at the death of Apsu, and prepares for battle against the younger gods, elevating the terrifying Qingu as her general. Seeing her fearsome preparations for battle, all of the younger gods return dismayed from their scouting missions. Finally, however, Marduk is called forward to go against Tiamat and Qingu. He joyfully accepts the nomination, after which the gods outfit him and delegate their powers to him. He goes to battle claiming the righteousness of his cause, and he slays the raging Tiamat. As his father, Ea, did with Apsu, Marduk creates from the carcass of Tiamat. He splits it, and with part of it he makes the heavens and shrines for the gods, and with other parts he forms the earth—its weather, bodies of water, and geographical features.

17. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 169.

The gods celebrate Marduk's victory and hail him as their new king. In his first act as king, Marduk cleverly decides to create humankind in order to bear the burden of the gods' labor. Qingu is sacrificed, and from his lifeblood Ea creates humankind. But unlike other myths in which the creation of humankind plays a large role (e.g., Atrahasis), in *Enuma Elish* it is presented in a brief digression. Much more emphasis is placed on Marduk's establishment of Babylon as his holy city, and its temples as the locations at which humankind are to present offerings to the gods.

Enuma Elish closes with a lengthy section in which the gods continue to celebrate Marduk by ascribing to him fifty names in addition to his own. The names are in many cases those of other gods, culminating with his father Ea's giving him his own name; in effect, the text asserts that a wide array of divine names finally point to Marduk. This is a very strong theological claim; although it falls short of monotheism, since other gods continue to be recognized, it has been called "summodeism," in which "the deities are regarded as aspects or functions of a chief god, with political power often key to its expression"¹⁸ (for further discussion, see chap. 23). The same tendency can be seen even more explicitly in various Late Babylonian texts.¹⁹

How was this text, with its surprising theological claims, used in Babylon? There are many clues in *Enuma Elish* to its social and historical contexts. In its announcement of Babylon's founding, the text says, "within it we will hold a festival" (V:130), and indeed *Enuma Elish* features prominently in the Babylonian *akitu* festival (see chap. 8). The *akitu* festival as a whole seems to have revolved around vanquishing chaos and restoring order at the beginning of each new year,²⁰ so the story of Ea and Marduk's defeat of the chaos monsters and subsequent establishment of the heavens and earth would have been one of its central myths.

Because Marduk was the city god of Babylon, the claims about his exaltation also have specific political meaning in history: it was an assertion of Babylon's preeminence as well. Marduk had not always been king of the gods; in fact, "the god, his city Babylon, and its cult were utterly unimportant in Sumerian times."²¹ It was only with Hammurabi's reign in Babylon (1792–1750 BCE) that Marduk joined the ranks of major deities. And it appears that it was not until Nebuchadnezzar I (r. 1125–1104) reclaimed Marduk's cult statue from captivity with the Hittites that the god was celebrated through the composition of *Enuma Elish*. Even after rhetoric pointing to Marduk's sole supremacy became common in the first millennium, competition among the gods (and their worshipers) continued; Nabu and Šin in particular continued to inspire similar claims to lordship. In sum, the exaltation of Marduk took place after a period in which his worship had been adversely affected, and it continued to be in dispute within Mesopotamia.

If the creation account in Genesis 1 dates to the period around the Babylonian exile (see below), then the circumstances of its composition were somewhat similar: the Jerusalem

18. Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 57; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 169.

19. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 265.

20. Benjamin D. Sommer, "The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos?" *JANES* 27 (2000): 81–95.

21. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 248.

temple had been destroyed and its vessels stolen (2 Kgs. 25), and theology and worship continued to be disputed in the exilic and postexilic periods.²² Worshipers of both Marduk and Yhwh had to assert their theological visions anew.

There are also striking differences between the social and historical backgrounds of *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1, however. For one example, the texts' views of cities is very different: In *Enuma Elish*, Babylon is one of Marduk's most important creations, dominating large sections of the narrative, and it is the place where he rules in joy (VI.45–73). By contrast, cities are not mentioned at all in Genesis 1–2; the images of human authority focus exclusively on the pastoring of the natural world. This might be taken for an oversight or simply an effort at historical verisimilitude (there could not have been cities when there were only two humans!), but the rest of Genesis 1–11 strongly suggests it is an intentional omission. In Genesis 4:17, the founder of the first city is the disgraced Cain, and the Tower of Babel story strongly associates city-building with sin and hubris (Gen. 11:4–8).²³

Egypt: The Memphite Theology

Like *Enuma Elish*, the Egyptian Memphite Theology was linked to a specific locale—in this case the city of Memphis, just south of the Nile Delta. The only surviving copy of the text was made under the Twenty-fifth Egyptian dynasty, during the reign of the pharaoh Shabaka; it is found on a large slab of granite sometimes called the “Shabaka Stone.” Unfortunately, the slab was later reused as a millstone, which damaged some of the hieroglyphs, accounting for the gaps in the text above. The text opens with Shabaka's claim that he found it in the temple of Ptah on a worm-eaten scroll (compare 2 Kgs. 22) and had it copied. The date of the text's composition is not settled; if it was not composed in the time of the existing copy (the 8th century), then it may have been composed during the Nineteenth Dynasty (13th century).

Thus, like *Enuma Elish*, the Memphite Theology was composed at a relatively late date, in an environment where other myths had long been known. The oldest Egyptian creation accounts come from Heliopolis and Hermopolis. They are attested not as whole stories, but piecemeal within larger compositions—mostly funerary texts such as the Pyramid Texts (Old Kingdom) and the Coffin Texts (Middle Kingdom). The Hermopolitan and Heliopolitan myths describe, in different ways, the emergence of the gods out of primeval waters. (In that respect, they bear a basic similarity to *Enuma Elish*.) Since the yearly inundation brought fertility and life to the land of Egypt, it is natural that water would have seemed the wellspring of all life to the Egyptians. At Heliopolis, the primeval waters were called Nun, and the creator sun-god Re-Atum emerged from the waters and created the rest of the Ennead, the nine original gods.²⁴ Because, for the Egyptians, creation was

22. The date of the Priestly author's work is increasingly disputed, with some placing it in the preexilic period. Here as elsewhere, an exilic or postexilic date seems to make sense, but the comparisons are illuminating regardless of the period.

23. The Mesopotamian rulers who had been dominating the Judeans were also negatively associated with city-building (Isa. 14:21).

24. An extended citation may help to elucidate the underlying logic of the myth: “Before the creation, the Monad existed as a single, undifferentiated seed of potentiality, floating inert in the

naturally thought of in relation to procreation, Atum's act of creation was often portrayed as an act of self-insemination, in which the deity swallowed his own semen. The imagery of Atum's semen is partially adapted for Ptah in the Memphite Theology (e.g., "[Ptah's] Ennead is . . . the semen and the hands of Atum"). In Mesopotamia, similar imagery was attested in Sumerian texts,²⁵ but was not adopted by the authors of *Enuma Elish*.

As an example of the way in which Egyptian creation myths were most commonly expressed, a spell of the pharaoh Pepi I from the Pyramid Texts claims that he was born from Atum "when the sky had not yet come into being, when the earth had not yet come into being, when people had not yet come into being, when the gods had not yet been born, when death had not yet come into being" (Pyramid Texts, 1466). Since the pharaoh expected to be a god in his afterlife, this was no great theological stretch. But there is no further narrative; this is all that is reported about creation in this context. Other spells contain other fragmentary references to creation myths.

The different Egyptian creation traditions centered on different deities. The Heliopolitan tradition (from the city of Heliopolis) focused on the sun-god; the Hermopolitan tradition (from the city of Hermopolis) came to emphasize Thoth. Other cities also had myths that viewed their primary deities as creator: Min in Coptos, Khnum in Elephantine, Amun in Thebes. And when Akhenaten brought about the religious revolution of the Amarna period, he portrayed Aten as sole creator (see chap. 23).

The Memphite tradition, however, revolved around Ptah. Ptah was a major deity, particularly during the New Kingdom and thereafter. He was foremost a craftsman god (he was later identified with Hephaestus by the Greeks), which makes the association with creation natural. He was also associated with scribes through Imhotep, the Egyptian wise man who was accorded divine status and eventually described as Ptah's son. Ptah's most important shrine was in Memphis, but he had temples at all of the major Egyptian religious centers. (For another text about Ptah, see chap. 22.)

As with the other creation accounts in the chapter, the Memphite Theology can be better understood in its political context: Shabaka's Twenty-fifth Dynasty was from Nubia (Kush) in the far south—a major break from earlier dynasties that had been based farther north. Therefore the new dynasts invested heavily in archaism and tradition in order to assert themselves as the rightful heirs of Egypt's ancient royal traditions. However, they also needed to reshape and relocate Egyptian religion away from the earlier narratives to stake their own place in it. The Memphite Theology thus begins from the same place as

Primeval Waters. Creation is the process through which the One became the Many—through which the Monad developed into the Ennead, sum of all the diverse forces and elements that constitute the biosphere. The Egyptians described the process in generational terms, reflecting both the proximate and the material causality of the creation. The world developed from the Monad as a plant develops from a seed. Each of its numberless constituent parts derives both its substance and its energy from the one original source. The process is developmental, not historical. In creation the Monad is not disintegrated but realized." James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 57–58.

25. In stories from the city of Eridu, the deity Enki is said to create by ejaculating and filling the river Tigris with water, and other similarly sexualized water imagery. Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 26; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 32–49.

the Heliopolitan narrative (and to a certain extent depends upon it) but then takes it into a new direction. The text's claim to antiquity is generally thought to be a false appeal to the authority of tradition.

In the Memphite Theology, Ptah's primacy and centrality are even more strongly expressed than Marduk's in *Enuma Elisb*: Ptah is the ruler of the gods ("on his throne"), and he is identified with the Nun and as the source of (the one "who bore") all the gods. He is the "heart and tongue of the Nine [Gods]" of the Ennead; presumably this means that their thoughts and words emanate from him. His mastery extends also to earthly things, to "every body and . . . every mouth of all gods, all men, all cattle, all creeping things, whatever lives, thinking whatever he wishes and commanding whatever he wishes." Some interpreters perceive here a kind of *panentheism*: the idea that the god is in everything and everyone.

The most striking facet of the Memphite Theology in comparison with the biblical text is that Ptah, like Yhwh, is said to create by means of the spoken word: "according to this command which is devised by the heart and comes forth on the tongue and creates the performance of every thing." Egyptian creation accounts (like many other aspects of Egyptian religion) are founded on dualities: male-female, earth-sky, water-dry land, and so forth. Another duality might be perceived in the distinction between Ptah's conceptualization of all things in his mind (or "heart"), and their subsequent creation—i.e., between concept and reality. Something similar may be alluded to in the biblical affirmations that "God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)—presumably the creation is being judged good in light of the divine purposes.

The Egyptian text is distinguished by its repeated emphasis on the mouth of Ptah—specifically the teeth, lips, and tongue—whereas the biblical authors avoid anthropomorphisms. Still, the emphasis on creation through the word of a god has inspired comparisons not only with Genesis 1, but even with the "Logos theology" of the prologue to the Gospel of John in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1–3).²⁶

Finally, the Memphite Theology also shares with the biblical creation account the idea that the creator took satisfaction in the creation. At the end of his creating, "Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words." Similarly, Genesis 2:2–3 reads, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. . . . he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done." One key difference here is the link between God's rest and Sabbath rest in Genesis (made explicit in Exod. 20:8–11), which is not found in any other ancient Near Eastern creation text.

In light of these similarities between the biblical and Memphite creation accounts, it may be significant that Ptah was widely known in the southern Levant, near ancient Israel and Judah.²⁷ Egypt ruled most of Palestine throughout much of the Late Bronze Age (ca.

26. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 46. See also Col. 1:15–18.

27. Othmar Keel, "Reflections of Ptah and Memphite Theology from the Soil of Palestine: Iconographic and Epigraphic Evidence," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; Brown Judaic Studies 346; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006), 239–72.

1550–1200 BCE). Even when Egypt’s direct power over Palestine waned in the Iron Age I (ca. 1200–1000) and Israel appeared, there continued to be extensive contact between the neighboring regions because of trade and diplomacy. It is quite possible that the biblical authors had direct knowledge of the creation myths about Ptah.

Genesis 1–2 and the Backgrounds of the Bible

Not only were there ancient creation myths in neighboring regions, ancient Israel emerged in a region that had its own creation accounts already. Myths of divine combat with watery monsters had a long history in the Levant, and these were linked to the divine imposition of order in much the same way as Marduk’s victory over Tiamat was. In the Late Bronze Age, before Israel existed, authors at Ugarit composed myths in which their national god, Baal, slayed river and sea. It is no surprise that there were conflicting views about creation and other theological matters within the lands of Israel and Judah; stories about religious conflicts and diversity are told in the biblical histories and the prophetic books.

In fact, the Bible itself preserves multiple creation accounts. The differences between the terminology and theology in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and in Genesis 2:4b–25 are the first of many clues that multiple authors were involved in writing and editing the Pentateuch into the forms that we have today.²⁸

The first biblical creation account (Gen. 1:1–2:4a) describes how God spoke the universe into being, with humankind created *last*, as the crowning act. It avoids using the divine name Yhwh, presumably because it has not yet been revealed to Moses (Exod. 3). It also culminates in the phrase “these are the generations”; that is a formula found throughout the Pentateuch, usually to establish human lineages. The concern for ordering and lineage has been thought to be characteristic of the Priestly author, or P source, working in the exilic or postexilic period. There are also indications that this author was reacting in some way to Babylonian claims about creation that would have been encountered by Judeans most directly during the Babylonian exile (587–536 BCE).

This story is followed immediately by another (Gen. 2:4b–25), which uses the name “Yhwh” for God. Therefore, it has been dubbed the “Yahwistic” source, or J source.²⁹ It describes how God formed man from the dust, like a potter forming clay—and did so *first*, before creating all other life. Its embodied portrayal of God as one who forms as if with hands (and later walks around in Eden; Gen. 3:8) has been thought to be more characteristic of early theology, and so J is usually thought to derive from the tenth or ninth century BCE.

In both stories, God delegates the caretaking of the earth to humankind, but in other ways they differ in emphasis. The first is focused on the divine role in ordering the cosmos:

28. A somewhat more extensive discussion of the “sources” of the Pentateuch may be found in chap. 4, but in reality the reader must have other resources for more thorough discussions of the theory. If such a discussion is not readily at hand in an introductory textbook, the reader may consult, for example, Joel Baden’s *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

29. J is short for the German term *Jahwist*.

light and darkness; earth and sky; dry land and sea. The second emphasizes that Yhwh is the creator and caretaker of living things in all their diversity.

Nor are these two the only stories about creation in the Bible. In Proverbs 8, for example, one reads that personified Wisdom also played a role in creation, which is not mentioned in the other accounts. She says, “Yhwh created me, the beginning of his work,³⁰ the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth . . . then I was beside him, like a master worker” (vv. 22–23, 30). She says that she came before the depths, the dust, the heavens, and the establishment of the boundaries of the waters; all of these figure prominently in the Genesis accounts, which creates a dialogue among these texts. Proverbs 8 can be seen as a kind of innerbiblical midrash, a retelling and reinterpretation of the story. By calling Wisdom “the beginning of [God’s] work,” the author inserts her into Genesis 1:1, so that one can read, “With the beginning (one), God created,” that is, “With Wisdom at his side, God created. . . .” One can discuss whether Proverbs 8’s insertion is compatible with Genesis 1:1 when the latter is read on its own, but in any case the author of Proverbs 8 seemingly set out to transform and redefine the reader’s view of creation.

It is clear that biblical authors also knew stories in which Yhwh created the heavens and earth by means of a primordial conflict, just as in *Enuma Elish*. For example, Psalm 74:13–17:³¹

You shook the sea by your might;
 you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
 You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
 you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.
 You cut openings for springs and torrents;
 you dried up ever-flowing streams.
 Yours is the day, yours also the night;
 you established the luminaries and the sun.
 You have fixed all the bounds of the earth;
 you made summer and winter.

This account of slaying the watery chaos (here embodied by the sea monster Leviathan) followed by ordering the natural universe could not be much closer to *Enuma Elish*.

On the surface, there is a stark distinction between the Genesis 1–2 creation stories, which are abstract, and the violence of Psalm 74 and the Babylonian myth. However, it has sometimes been suggested that Yhwh’s acts of separating (light from darkness, sky from sea, day from night) are comparable to Marduk’s splitting of Tiamat’s corpse. But whereas *Enuma Elish* uses very physical verbs for Marduk (IV.102–31: tore open, slit, bound, threw down, smashed, severed), the Hebrew term for dividing in Genesis 1 is abstract; it is never used of physical cutting.³² Notably, nonviolent references to divine

30. Some translations read, “at the beginning of his work.” That translation is defensible, but there is no preposition in the Hebrew.

31. See also Ps. 89:10–11; Isa. 51:9–10; Job 9:13; 26:12–13. For a more extensive inventory of references to creation in the Bible in general, see Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 137–97.

32. In Egyptian cosmological traditions other than the Memphite one, there are references to the primordial division of the gods Nut (sky) and Geb (earth). Like *Enuma Elish*, this image

dividing at creation are also present in the Mesopotamian tradition, such as when Enlil hastens to separate heaven from earth in lines 4–5 of a text called “Praise of the Pickaxe.”³³

The use of wind in each story sets up a similar comparison and contrast. It has been suggested that the wind on the water in Genesis 1:2 is comparable to the wind that Marduk casts into the face of Tiamat to distend her innards and prepare her for slaughter. But again, what is striking is not the similarity, but the difference: Marduk’s fierce battle has been transposed into Yhwh’s lordly fiat.

Comparing and Contrasting

Given that these texts form a kind of conversation around certain issues and images, how should a reader think about the relationship between them? Palestine has sometimes been called “The Sacred Bridge.” This narrow, fertile strip was flanked by ocean to the west and desert to the east, and it stood between the major political powers of its day, so it became a crossing point for trade, travel, and cultures. This is apparent in the material remains that are discovered archaeologically, and in the texts as well.

Is Genesis 1 a direct response to “pagan” ideas about creation such as the myths presented above? It is a common conclusion that Genesis at least responds to Babylonian theology. Although it makes good sense to assume that the Priestly creation account was a Judean effort of theological self-definition in the context of the Babylonian exile, it is unlikely that a Yhwh-worshiper in Babylon had the luxury of sitting down with a copy of *Enuma Elish* (if he could even read it). Rather, it is likely that theological ideas were aired in less formal ways, so that the Priestly creation account as we know it was not a point-by-point rejoinder to a specific text, but rather a polemic response to the cultural pressure of the author’s imperial surroundings. That is to say, it is not a commentary on a specific composition.

Again, it is not only the biblical authors who simultaneously incorporated and reacted to elements of earlier texts. The examples of ways in which the ancient Near Eastern texts in this chapter also shared elements of their cultural precursors could be expanded significantly. For example, *Enuma Elish* “borrowed” especially from the Anzu myth, in which the youthful god Ninurta is summoned by the other gods to battle against the supernatural bird Anzu, and after his victory is acclaimed with many names. The fact that *Enuma Elish* borrows is marked by the somewhat random occurrences of the Tablet of Destinies (I:157; IV:121). It appears out of the blue in *Enuma Elish*, whereas in the Anzu myth, Anzu’s theft of the tablet is a major plot element.³⁴ Ancient authors did not view their reliance on earlier traditions as any sort of scandal; much of their creativity was in their interactions with earlier texts.

Ideally, reading these texts alongside each other allows us to perceive the uniqueness of each one. In the case of the biblical account, certain things stand out.

embraces the physicality of creation, but without the violence. There is a common motif in Egyptian art of Shu (the god of air) holding up Nut as Geb reclines below.

33. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 31.

34. *Ibid.*, 84–85.

First, both *Enuma Elish* and the Memphite Theology are focused on a certain locale, even as they ascribe universal dominion to their creator God: Marduk rules from his house in Babylon and Ptah from his house in Memphis. This is not to say that those deities' spheres of influence were limited to their primary host cities, since they were both worshiped elsewhere, but these literary works each portray the deity as ruling from a definite central location. By contrast, in Genesis 1, the vision for God's habitation seems less geographically limited. Unlike the others, Genesis 1 does not mention any place; there is no reference to Israel or Jerusalem (or Eden).

The lack of localization and temple accords well with the roughly contemporaneous claims of Isaiah: "Thus says Yhwh: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is my resting place?" (Isa. 66:1). The idea was that God's reign is too expansive to be contained in a house or a city. Indeed, the idea that God dwelled in a house seems to have sat uneasily with certain Yahwistic theologians in general (in 2 Sam. 7:5–7, Yhwh rejects David's plan to build a temple). It is true that if Genesis 1 was composed by an exilic or postexilic Priestly author, then there was no temple for Yhwh in Jerusalem, because it had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586. With the benefit of hindsight, one can see that the biblical authors' prodigious leap to universal monotheism was a response to the vast claims of imperial powers that they faced, but it was in no way a common or obvious leap when they took it. Genesis 1's gracious and peaceful vision for all the earth would have been a remarkable response to its authors' historical suffering.

Second: The question of *creatio ex nihilo* ("creation out of nothing") is a complicated one. The intention of Genesis 1:1–2 is disputed. Essentially: Is the "formless void" in 1:2 the stuff out of which God creates, or does God create the formless stuff before working with it? Because of complexities within the Hebrew of the verse, the question cannot be answered on the basis of close reading; it is also possible to translate, "In the beginning of God creating of the heavens and the earth . . ." It depends, finally, on the interpreter's sense of the whole.³⁵ At a minimum, one can contrast Genesis 1 with *Enuma Elish* in that the former contains no theogony, no story about the creation or birth of the creator. Marduk comes on to the scene in the midst of the story; he has a genealogy; there was a time when he was not. By contrast, the reader of Genesis never learns of any precursor to the God of Israel.³⁶

Insofar as the Memphite Theology identifies Ptah with the primordial elements of being (Nun and Atum), the Memphis theologians may have envisioned something like *creatio ex nihilo* as well. They offer no theogony of Ptah. One difference is that Ptah therefore creates from his own being, like a seed giving birth to a plant. As noted above, this lends an element of panentheism that differs from the biblical account. God does not inhabit all things in Genesis 1. Then again, the idea that "Ptah is in every living thing"

35. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 76–82, makes a strong case in favor of *creatio ex nihilo*, but the matter is by no means settled.

36. One can again hear resonances with the absolutist theology of Second Isaiah: "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me" (Isa. 43:10); "Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yhwh, am first, and will be with the last" (41:4).

might find an echo in Genesis's creation of humankind in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) or its image of God breathing life into humankind (2:7)—but in either biblical passage this divine gift is given only to humankind; its scope is much more circumscribed, and the hymnody of ancient Israel did not fail to note that remarkable confession (Ps. 8:4–5). As for the rest of creation, although God formed it and called it good, there is no indication that it is part of God's being.³⁷

This special connection in Genesis between God and humanity means that in both accounts there is the assumption that humankind is to function as a kind of surrogate for God within the created world, ruling and taking care of it (1:28; 2:15). Humans are even to imitate God in resting on the seventh day (2:3). In *Enuma Elish*, humankind is created to serve the gods—which pertains at least to temple service, but perhaps also alludes to other Mesopotamian myths such as Atrahasis (see chap. 4) in which humans are created to do work so that gods don't have to. (The same idea may lie in the background of the Genesis stories, but their sense of honoring and empowering humans—for example, in the emphasis on “dominion” or Adam's authority to give names—is not present in the Mesopotamian myths.) The only human being who serves as the gods' representative on earth in Mesopotamian theology is the king.³⁸ In the Memphite Theology, the close relationship between the creator and the creation means that all labor is somehow the work of Ptah; he “creates the performance of every thing.” Since the creation essentially has no independent being, it is not clear what that means for the freedom of will for created beings. Doesn't the created order sometimes function poorly or break down? Some have even perceived in the Memphite Theology a “doctrine of predestination,” but this is perhaps an overreading.³⁹ The text does not seem interested in answering that question.

The division between creator and creation in Genesis 1 is particularly pointed in the case of the heavenly bodies. It is remarkable that the author did not use the very common Hebrew terms for sun (*shemesh*) or moon (*yare'ach*), but rather the unusual circumlocutions “the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night” (Gen. 1:16). This may be because the Hebrew terms had close cognates in Semitic languages that were the names of the sun-god and moon-god—that is, to avoid giving the impression that divinities other than Yhwh ruled the day and night. This amounts to a demythologization of heavenly bodies and natural elements. Even the monsters of watery chaos—the *tehom*/Tiamat and the *tannin* (the word for “sea monsters” in Gen. 1:21, which is elsewhere a proper name)—are more than defeated; they are domesticated, no threat at all before their maker (much like Leviathan in Job 41). In *Enuma Elish* and the Memphite Theology, creators are glorified by being identified with other familiar deities. In Genesis 1,

37. This is another case in which a later text makes only selective use of earlier texts, and there are other Egyptian traditions that are even more similar to Gen. 1–2. For example, the Teaching for Merikare, a Tenth Dynasty text, says that humans “are [Re-Atum's] images who came forth from his body” (line 137), and that the creator god “created the winds so that their nostrils might live.” Similarly, in a fourteenth-century Egyptian hymn, the deity Aten is called “giver of breath.” (This hymn is presented in chap. 23; see lines 50–57.)

38. For example, Marduk delegates rule to Hammurabi in the prologue to his law code (chap. 7).

39. See, for example, George Hart, *Egyptian Myths* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 19.

Yhwh is glorified by the denial of other deities. In the text's ancient Near Eastern context, the refusal to acknowledge other gods creates a loud silence.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some similarities and differences among Apsu in *Enuma Elish*, Nun in the Memphite Theology, and the “deep” in Genesis 1?
2. How would you compare and contrast the portrayals of the creator deities in each text?
3. One scholar has written that “Genesis is about the Creation, while *Enuma Elish* is about the creator.”⁴⁰ What are some reasons to agree or disagree with this statement?
4. There is a long-running debate in the interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2 about whether the verse indicates creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) or out of preexisting matter. Engaging that problem requires reading the text in its original language, but *what is at stake* in the question? Why does it matter?
5. How close do you think the Memphite Theology's doctrine of creation by the word of Ptah is to the creation account in Genesis 1, or the Logos theology of John 1?
6. What problems and issues do you think the authors of each text were trying to address?
7. What is the relationship between science and the texts presented in this chapter?
8. What inferences might you draw from these texts about the religions in which they were composed?
9. S. R. Driver wrote in 1907 that “we have in the first chapter of Genesis the Hebrew version of an originally Babylonian legend.”⁴¹ What do you find in this statement to agree or disagree with?

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