

Research Paper

The Enuma Elish and the Genesis Creation Account

By David A. Ostrander

OT 504 The Hebrew Bible and the Eastern Mediterranean World

May 2, 2023

Professor R. Russell Mack, Ph.D.

The Enuma Elish means “when above” and is taken from the poems opening words.¹ (Heidel p1). This text helps scholars to better understand both the origin of the god’s “theogonic” and the creation of the universe, as it was understood by people in ancient Babylon.² The Enuma Elish and the first two chapters of Genesis have many similarities, some of which will be explored in this paper. The creation story in the Enuma Elish is believed to be older than the creation story in the Bible. This is difficult to prove. The tablets on which the Enuma Elish was discovered predate the Biblical record, but that is understandable since many of the Old Testament stories were passed verbally at first and later written down.

While the Enema Elisa and the first two chapters of Genesis have similarities this is to be expected because both creation stories are products of their environment. The people come from similar cultures and thoughts, But that is where the similarities stop. The Biblical record is about one God not many gods like the Enuma Elish. God made man in God’s image to be “fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth”. (Gen. 1:28 CSB).

The Enuma Elish was discovered during excavations of Ashurbanipal’s library of Nineveh. They were discovered by Layard, Hormuzd Rassam, and George Smith between the years 1848 and 1876.³ Ashurbanipal reigned over the Assyrian empire from (668-ca 630BC). Later in 1902 to 1914, The Germans discovered fragments of an Assyrian version of the Babylonian text at Ashur, the old capital of Assyria. In this version, Marduk who is the King of

1 Heidel p1

2 ibid p1

3 ibid p1

the Babylonian gods is changed to Ashur the King of the Assyrian gods.⁴ These changes are not uncommon. Middle Eastern people often borrowed gods and stories from neighboring civilizations. For example, the Romans were known to borrow gods from the Greek civilization and make them their own. Through these and later discoveries of the Enuma Elish, scholars have been able to piece together the text, Heidel states “Thanks to these discoveries and to purchases of fragments which have been made from dealers in antiquities (the provenance of most of these fragments being uncertain), the epic has been restored almost in its entirety; the only tablet of which a large portion is still wanting is tablet V.”⁵

According to the Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, “the text has been proposed by the followers of the pan-Babylonian school of critics as the true source of the biblical story of creation. A brief survey of the two narratives will show that they are only superficially related and that the biblical account is of a considerably higher order of thought”.⁶

Many bible scholars today believe that the biblical story of creation was written during the Babylonian captivity. The people of Judah who were carried away to Babylon in 598/7 and 587 BC by Nebuchadnezzar would have witnessed the Akitu festival that was celebrated to bring in the New Year. During this festival, the Enuma Elish was acted out. Wooden statues were used to act out the drama. “Some three days were dedicated to preparations, prayers, singing, and sacrifices. Special attention was given to the carving of two small wooden statues laid with gold and gems, which were used in the dramatization of the Enuma Elish story.

4 Heidel p1

5 ibid

6 Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible p340.

One may have represented Tiamat, the antagonist in the story, the other Kingu Tiamat's helper".

⁷ The festival began on the fourth day with the Enuma Elish acting out in front of a statue of Marduk.⁸ "With the episodes describing the divine assembly recognizing Marduk as the divine lawgiver in return for putting down the revolt of Tiamet".⁹ "Tiamat, who leads the revolt against the divine assembly in the story, is slain by Marduk in combat. Kingu commands the warriors of Tiamat during her revolt. He is executed by Marduk, who uses his blood to thin the clay from which the people's primeval are formed".

The two small statues prepared during the opening days of the festival were beheaded and burned before the statue of Nabu"¹⁰ The Hebrew word for deep in Genesis 1:2 is "tehom" and it is believed to be related to the name of the god Tiamat who Marduk defeated in battle".¹¹ Once defeated, "he splits here carcass (effectively "separating the waters from the waters") and from it establishes the heavens.

(EE6. 123-40)"¹² The splitting of Tiamat in two is similar to Genesis 1:6-8¹³ "Then God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water". So, God made the expanse and separated under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so, God called expanse "sky". Evening came and then morning: the second day" (CSB).

⁷ Mathew Benjamin, Social World of Ancient Israel p238

⁸ ibid p238

⁹ ibid p239

¹⁰ ibid p239

¹¹ Dost p55

¹² ibid p 55

¹³ Ibid p 55

The book of Genesis especially the creation account is considered by many to be a priestly document. It contains languages that are used in the book of Leviticus. Like when God separates the waters of the priest separates a sacrifice (Lev10”10). Resting on the Sabbath is also taught in both Genesis and Leviticus.¹⁴ The creation of the celestial bodies like the sun and moon and stars is thought to be connected to the calendar that regulated the times for the feasts of Israel.

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After Marduk wins the battle against Tiamat and uses her body to form heaven and earth, “he created stations in the sky for the great gods’ he organized the calendar by setting up stellar constellations to determine, by their rising and setting. The year, the months, and the days, he built gates in the east and in the west for the sun to enter and to depart; in the very center of the sky he fixed the zenith; he caused the moon to shine forth and entrusted the night to her. After some detailed orders to the moon, the tablet dealing with the creation and organization of the heavenly bodies breaks off”.¹⁶

The Enuma Elish begins when only the gods that existed were Tiamat and her husband Apsu. Tiamat represents fresh water. They create children by mixing their waters together.¹⁷ Dr. Dost sees an illusion in Genesis Chapter 1 “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. While the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters”¹⁸ The word “when God began to create”, instead of the traditional “In the beginning “is a reference to the opening lines of the Enuma Elish.

14 Dost p54

15 ibid p54

16 Heidel p9

17 Dost p55

18 Dost p55

In this writer's opinion, the traditional translation of the Hebrew is more accurate. The opening verses of the Enuma Elish are as follows," When skies above were not yet named, nor earth below pronounced by name. Apsu, the first one, their begetter and maker, Tiamat, who bore them all had mixed their waters together But had not formed pastures nor discovered reed-beds When yet no gods were manifest, Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed, Then gods were born within them. Lahmu and Lahamu emerged, their names pronounced".¹⁹

The most important difference between the two opening verses of the Enuma Elish and the opening verse of Genesis is no indication of theogony in Genesis 1:1.²⁰ According to Merriam-Webster, the word theogony is: an account of the origin and descent of gods. Elohim alone created everything with the help of the Holy Spirit and Jesus who is the spoken word. There is no pantheon of the gods as they have in all the other nations that existed at that time. The Bible is unique in its view of the creation of the universe. There are similarities between the Enuma Elish and Genesis, but the Bible stands alone among the nations in its belief in one God. According to Sailhamer, Genesis 1:1 "opens with a clear, concise statement about the creator and the creation. Its simplicity belies the depth of its content. These seven words are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible"²¹ Sailhamer gives their "purposes". Genesis 1:1 was written. Genesis 1:1 identifies the creator as Elohim. It explains the origin of the word and ties "the work of God in the past to the work of God in the future".²²

19 Enuma Elish quoted by Walton p50.

20 ibid

21Sailhamer p19

22 ibid

Elohim is the creator of the world, not Tiamat, Apsu or the King of Babylon deities, Manduk. There was no world before Elohim created it in six days. God planted the Garden of Eden and made man to take care of it. He created the nation of Israel and dwelt among His people. In a similar way after Manduk creates the heaven and the earth by splitting Tiamat in two, “the imprisoned gods he subsequently changes with the responsibility of building him a permanent home, Babylon.”²³ The difference is that Elohim nor His people have a permanent home on Earth.

God knew that man would sin in the garden by eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He provided for man’s sins by sending His only Son to die on the cross for their sin and rose again on the third day from the dead. One day Jesus will return for His people. God will create “a new heaven and a new earth” and live with His people forever. (Rev. 21). “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away”. (Rev 21:4 ESV).

23 Hamilton p56.

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