

## Exploring Our Biblical Heritages

# The Beginning of the Babylonian Creation Story

In the previous email I introduced the first eight lines of the first tablet of *Enuma Elish* – the Babylonian Creation Story. This creation story was performed by the kingdom's greatest actors every year at the New Year celebration. Today, I am going to give you more information about what those lines mean.

*“When on high heaven was not named,  
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name”*

The opening words in the ancient language are “*enuma elish*,” which are translated, “*When on high*.” The two underlined phrases “*was not named*” and “*did not yet bear a name*” simply meant something “*did not exist*.” In this context, it reveals that *heaven and earth did not exist*

So, the first thing listeners heard were that two things that did not exist before the process of creation began.

*And the primeval Apsû, who begat them,  
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both.”*

Next they heard about two things that did exist before the creation process began.

- **Apsu** -- a **primeval sweet-water ocean** that is **a male**.
- **Tiamat** -- a **primordial salt-water ocean** that is **a female**.

So before the creation process began, nothing existed but two bodies of water with names and specific genders.

*Their waters were mingled together,  
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;*

The “*commingling of their waters*” is a sexual term. Apsu and Tiamat represent respectively the male and female powers -- Apsu and Tiamat had sex. Therefore, the element of sex existed before anything came into being.

In polytheistic mythologies creation is always expressed in terms of procreation. Apparently, paganism was unable to conceive of any primal creative force other than sexual reproduction. However, the author(s) of this story make something very clear in the next three lines.

*And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen.  
When of the gods none had been called into being,  
And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained].*

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No field, marsh or gods existed yet. Only one thing has changed so far.

*Tiamat is pregnant.*

What will Tiamat give birth to? The next two lines answer that question.

*Then were created the gods in the midst of . . .  
Lahmu and Lahamu were called into being.*

From the commingling of the waters of Apsu and Tiamat were born the first two gods – Lahmu and Lahamu. Usually, *Lahmu* and *Lahamu* represent silt, but in some texts, they seem to take the form of serpents. Their significance in *Enuma Elish* is that they are progenitors of the second generation of gods -- Anshar and Kishar.

The exiles from Judah and their descendants living in Babylon would have been very familiar with the words from *Enuma Elish*. Therefore, as you will see in my next email, against this background, the opening words of the first story in Genesis are literally revolutionary and profound!

Shalom,  
Jim Myers

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### **SOURCES**

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