

The Babylonian Story of the Creation of the Heavens and Earth

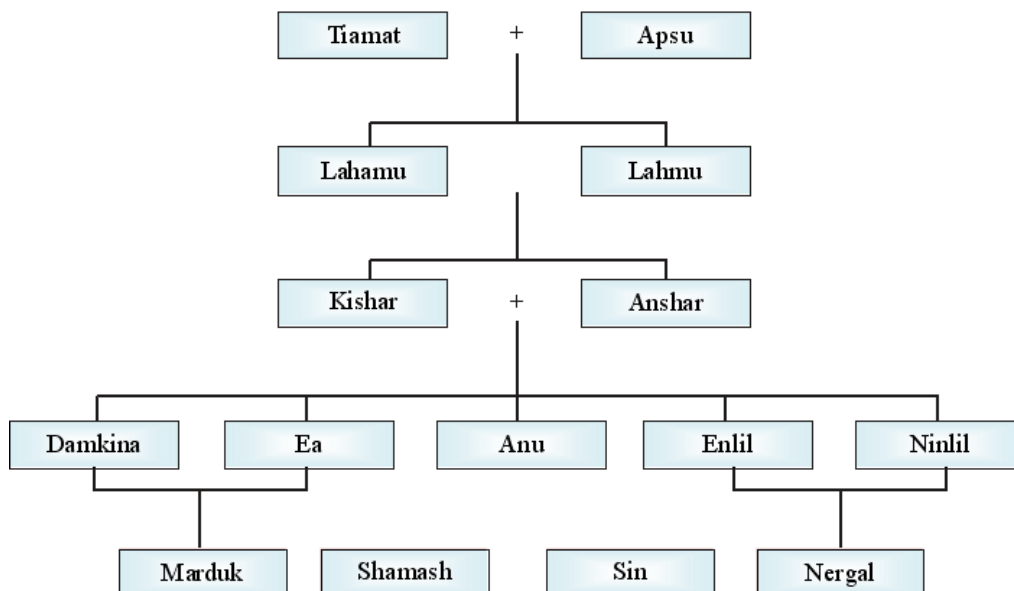
This is the fifth article in my “*Three Stories of the Beginnings*” series. [Click here to view previous articles](#). Today I am going to provide you with a quick overview of the creation of the heavens and the earth in *Enuma Elish*, the ancient Mesopotamian (Babylonian) Creation Story.

It must be remembered that the Mesopotamian and the Torah creation stories, each in its own way, express through their symbolism **the worldviews and values that animated the civilization each represents**. The opening chapters of *Genesis* unveil the main pillars upon which the Israelite outlook rests. However, many centuries before those words were written in Hebrew, clay tablets were inscribed in Akkadian with the *Enuma Elish* story. And, as I pointed out in previous articles, the scribes who wrote the Hebrew words of *Genesis* were familiar with the Babylonian story - *and we can see this in the words of the Bible*.

Enuma Elish

When the story begins nothing exists except two bodies of water. The first is named *Apsu*, and it is identified as a male. He is a primeval sweet-water ocean. The second is identified as a female named Tiamat. She is a primordial salt-water ocean.

The two oceans commingle their waters and Tiamat gave birth to the first two gods – *Lahmu* and *Lahamu*. They gave birth to *Kishar* and *Anshar*, who gave birth to *Damkina*, *Ea*, *Anu*, *Enlil* and *Ninlil*. *Damkina* and *Ea* gave birth to *Marduk* and he will create the heavens and the earth.



EXPLORING OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

The young gods, through their unremitting and noisy revelry, disturbed the peace of *Tiamat* and *Apsu*. Finally, *Apsu* has enough and decides to destroy the gods. But his plan is thwarted by the quick action of the all-wise god named *Ea*, the earth-water god. The gods fought and killed *Apsu*. *Tiamat* became enraged when she awakened from her sleep and discovered that *Apsu* was dead. *Tiamat* decides to destroy the gods as punishment for what they had done.

The story now presents *Tiamat* as a **ferocious monster** as she plans revenge and organized her forces for the attack on the gods. The gods recognize what she is doing and asks *Marduk* to lead them in battle. He agrees on one condition -- *that he be granted sovereignty over the universe*. The gods agree to his request. *Marduk* leads the gods into the battle against *Tiamat* and her helpers. After a fierce battle, the gods win and Marduk slices Tiamat's carcass into two pieces:

*The upper half of Tiamat's dead body becomes the firmament of heaven
and the lower half becomes the foundation of the earth.*

Marduk then decided where the heavenly luminaries will be placed in the upper half of her dead body. Each luminary is linked to a god. The gods complain to *Marduk* that being assigned to his or her fixed place with defined functions in the cosmos, is making their workloads unbearable. *They demand relief from the unending work that Marduk has caused them.*

I began this email by pointing out that creation stories express, through their symbolism, reveal the worldviews and values of the civilizations in which they were told. Take a few minutes to consider the questions below about *Enuma Elish*. Identify *worldviews* and *values* linked to the answers:

- *What role does sex play in the story?*
- *What role does violence play?*
- *What role does death play?*
- *How do parents view their offspring?*
- *How do offspring view their parents?*
- *How is power distributed and used in the story?*
- *What role does labor play?*
- *What role does "complaining" play?*

In the next article we will discuss how the heavens and earth are created in *Genesis*.