

# Babylonian Creation Mythology and the Hebrew Bible

## Chronological Primacy and Intertextual Dynamics: Babylonian Creation Mythology and the Hebrew Bible

### Executive Summary

This report addresses the question of whether Babylonian mythology on creation existed prior to the Hebrew Bible. Based on modern critical scholarship, the *Enuma Elish*, the principal Babylonian creation myth, significantly predates the composition of the creation accounts found in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis. While traditional religious attributions place Genesis's authorship with Moses around 1400 BCE, academic consensus dates its earliest components, the Jahwist (J) source, to the 10th or 9th centuries BCE, and later components, the Priestly (P) source, to the 6th century BCE, with final redaction occurring even later, potentially around 400 BCE or as late as the 3rd century BCE.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the *Enuma Elish* is firmly dated to the late 2nd millennium BCE, with extant copies from approximately 1200 BCE, and evidence suggesting its origins are much older, predating the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE).<sup>3</sup> The relationship between these narratives is complex, characterized by notable parallels alongside profound theological divergences, indicating a dynamic interplay of influence, adaptation, and polemical intent rather than simple borrowing.

### 1. Introduction: The Question of Primacy in Ancient Creation Narratives

Creation myths serve as foundational narratives for ancient cultures, offering insights into their worldviews, cosmic understanding, and societal values. These stories explain the origins of the universe, the gods, humanity, and the established order. Within the vast tapestry of ancient Near Eastern thought, the *Enuma Elish* stands as a cornerstone of Mesopotamian cosmology, deeply embedded in Babylonian religious and political life. Concurrently, the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis are central to Judeo-Christian tradition, providing a theological framework for the origins of the world and humanity.

The inquiry into the chronological precedence of Babylonian creation mythology over the Hebrew Bible's accounts, and the nature of their relationship—whether through direct influence, shared cultural milieu, or deliberate counter-narrative—constitutes a significant area of academic inquiry within ancient Near Eastern studies and biblical criticism. Modern academic approaches, which analyze texts through historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence, frequently diverge from traditional religious interpretations concerning authorship and dating. This report will leverage such critical scholarship to provide a nuanced understanding of the temporal and thematic connections between these two pivotal creation narratives.

### 2. Dating the *Enuma Elish*: The Babylonian Epic of Creation

The *Enuma Elish*, meaning "When on High" from its opening words in Akkadian, is recognized as the definitive Babylonian creation myth and the only complete surviving account of ancient Near Eastern cosmology.<sup>3</sup> Its narrative describes a primordial battle among deities that culminates in the creation of the world and the establishment of cosmic order.

#### Scholarly Consensus on Composition and Extant Copies

Scholarly consensus firmly places the composition of the *Enuma Elish* in the late 2nd millennium BCE.<sup>3</sup> This dating positions it significantly earlier than the earliest components of the Hebrew Bible. While the precise date of its original composition remains uncertain, numerous tablets containing the myth have been discovered at various excavated sites, including Ashur, Kish, Nineveh, and Sultantepe, with these extant copies dating to approximately 1200 BCE.<sup>4</sup>

A crucial aspect of its dating lies in the colophons found on these tablets, which indicate that they are copies of a much older version of the myth. This earlier iteration predates the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon, who ruled from 1792 to 1750 BCE.<sup>4</sup> This evidence suggests that the

*Enuma Elish* had been in circulation and undergoing development for a considerable period before the extant copies were made. Furthermore, the poem in its present form, which prominently features Marduk as

the champion deity, is widely considered a revision of an even older Sumerian work.<sup>4</sup> This multi-layered history indicates that the *Enuma Elish* was not a singular, isolated composition but rather the culmination of centuries of mythological development. This dynamic nature of ancient mythological traditions implies that creation narratives were living traditions, subject to adaptation and reinterpretation over time to reflect evolving political and religious landscapes, such as the elevation of Marduk's status alongside the rise of Babylon.

### Key Narratives, Deities, and Themes of the *Enuma Elish*

The *Enuma Elish* narrative is meticulously inscribed across seven clay tablets, each elaborating on a segment of the creation story and the intricate conflicts among the gods.<sup>6</sup>

The myth commences by describing a primordial state where the fresh waters of Apsu (god of fresh water and male fertility) mingled with the salty waters of Tiamat (goddess of the sea, chaos, and threat), giving birth to a pantheon of younger gods, including Lahmu, Lahamu, Anshar, Kishar, Anu, and Ea.<sup>6</sup> The boisterous activities of these younger deities disturb Apsu, leading him to conspire with his minister Mummu to destroy them. However, Ea, a god of wisdom and strength, learns of the plot and preemptively slays Apsu, establishing his dwelling upon Apsu's body with his wife Damkina.<sup>6</sup>

From this union, Marduk is born, a powerful deity associated with spring, light, and lightning, who eventually becomes the patron god of Babylon.<sup>6</sup> Enraged by Apsu's murder, Tiamat vows vengeance against the other gods. She creates eleven monstrous creatures and appoints Kingu as her new consort and commander of her formidable army.<sup>6</sup> The gods, fearful of Tiamat's wrath, seek a champion. Marduk steps forward, agreeing to confront Tiamat on the condition that he is proclaimed supreme among them and his decrees become unalterable.<sup>3</sup>

After proving his immense power, Marduk is enthroned as high king. He arms himself with winds and a storm-chariot, engaging Tiamat in a violent cosmic battle. Marduk ultimately defeats Tiamat, ensnaring and killing her with an arrow through her heart. He then dismembers her corpse, using half to form the heavens and the other half to create the earth, complete with bars to contain the chaotic waters.<sup>3</sup> Following this act of creation, Marduk organizes the celestial bodies, establishes the days, months, and seasons, and founds the city of Babylon as his sacred dwelling.<sup>6</sup>

A pivotal moment in the narrative is Marduk's decision to create human beings. This act is intended to relieve the gods of their menial tasks. Ea, upon Marduk's instruction, uses the blood of Kingu (who is identified as the instigator of Tiamat's rebellion and subsequently killed) to fashion mankind.<sup>6</sup> The myth concludes with the gods constructing a house for Marduk in Babylon and reciting his fifty throne names, celebrating his dominion and the new cosmic order he established.<sup>6</sup>

The central themes of the *Enuma Elish* are multifaceted. It primarily depicts a fundamental conflict between **cosmic order and chaos**, with Marduk's victory over Tiamat symbolizing the triumph of structure over primordial disorder.<sup>6</sup> This narrative underscores **creation through conflict**, where the world and humanity emerge from a violent struggle and dismemberment rather than a peaceful, deliberate act.<sup>6</sup> The myth also serves to justify **divine hierarchy and kingship**, particularly Marduk's supremacy within the Babylonian pantheon and, by extension, Babylon's political dominance over rival city-states.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of humanity within this framework is explicitly defined: humans are created to **serve the gods**, alleviating their labor.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the narrative highlights the **power of the word/decreed**, as Marduk's authority is demonstrated through his ability to create and destroy by his command.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on Marduk's elevation and the establishment of Babylon reveals a clear political and religious function of the myth, extending beyond a mere origin story to serve as a foundational narrative for an empire and its cultic practices.

### 3. Dating the Hebrew Bible's Creation Accounts: Genesis 1-2

The creation narratives found in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis within the Hebrew Bible present a distinct account of the world's origins and humanity's place within it.

### Modern Scholarly Views on Composition (Documentary Hypothesis)

Modern biblical criticism, particularly through the lens of the Documentary Hypothesis, identifies the Genesis creation narrative not as a singular, unified story, but as a composite of two distinct accounts: the Priestly (P) source and the Jahwist (J) source.<sup>2</sup> These two sources exhibit different literary styles, divine names, and theological perspectives on the nature of God and creation.<sup>2</sup>

The Jahwist (J) source, which largely comprises Genesis 2:4b-2:25, is generally dated by scholars to the **10th or 9th century BCE**.<sup>2</sup> Some academic perspectives suggest that the first major comprehensive draft of the Pentateuch, which includes the J source, might have been composed slightly later, in the late 7th or 6th century BCE.<sup>2</sup>

The Priestly (P) source, encompassing Genesis 1:1-2:3, is largely understood to have been composed during the **6th century BCE**.<sup>2</sup> This period coincides with the Babylonian Exile, suggesting that this account was likely composed or finalized in a context where Israelite scribes were directly exposed to and potentially responding to Babylonian theology, including the *Enuma Elish*. This chronological overlap implies that the differences observed in the Genesis account, such as its monotheistic emphasis, God's absolute power, and the inherent dignity of humanity, could be seen as deliberate theological statements in contrast to the dominant Babylonian worldview.

Genesis as a whole is widely accepted as a redacted literary work, meaning it was compiled and edited from various sources over time. Its final version is believed to have reached its present form as late as post-exilic Israel, around **400 BCE**.<sup>1</sup> A significant minority of scholars propose that the primeval history (Genesis 1-11) could even be dated to the 3rd century BCE, based on discontinuities with other parts of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> There is currently no universal scholarly consensus on the precise date when the narrative achieved its final canonical form.<sup>2</sup> The scholarly understanding of Genesis as a composite work is fundamental to both its dating and to analyzing its relationship with earlier myths. This approach accounts for the internal variations in narrative style, divine names, and theological emphasis within Genesis itself, enabling a more nuanced comparison with external narratives.

### Traditional vs. Academic Dating of Genesis

A notable divergence exists between traditional religious attribution and modern academic consensus regarding the authorship and dating of Genesis. Traditionally, the authorship of Genesis is attributed to **Moses**, following the exodus of Israel from Egypt, around **1400 BCE**.<sup>1</sup> This view posits that Moses wrote Genesis between 1440 and 1400 BCE, during the 40-year period after the exodus and before Israel entered the Promised Land.<sup>9</sup> This perspective is supported by traditional Jewish and Christian views, with biblical figures from Joshua to Jesus and the Apostle Paul referring to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch.<sup>9</sup>

However, the hypothesis of Mosaic authorship has been questioned since the 11th century and has been largely **rejected in modern scholarship since the 17th century**.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of biblical criticism conclude that Genesis, along with the other books of the Pentateuch, is "a composite work, the product of many hands and periods".<sup>2</sup> While proponents of Mosaic authorship argue that academic rejections often lack evidence and expose "anti-supernatural presuppositions"<sup>9</sup>, the academic consensus relies on internal textual evidence, such as variations in divine names, literary styles, and anachronisms, as well as external historical and archaeological context. This stark contrast between traditional and academic dating highlights a fundamental difference in interpretive methodologies, one rooted in faith and tradition, the other in critical-historical analysis.

### Key Narratives, Divine Actions, and Themes in Genesis 1 (Priestly) and Genesis 2 (Jahwist)

The two distinct creation accounts in Genesis offer complementary yet distinct perspectives on the origins of the world and humanity.

### Genesis 1:1-2:3 (Priestly Source)

This account is characterized by its structured, methodical, and formal style, depicting creation as an orderly process driven by divine command. God is referred to as "Elohim".<sup>2</sup> Creation unfolds over six days, with each day setting the stage for subsequent creations, culminating in God's sanctified rest on the seventh day, establishing the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup>

- **Day 1:** God creates light and separates it from darkness, defining day and night.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 2:** God creates the firmament (*rāqîa*), or sky, to divide the waters above from the waters below.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 3:** God gathers the waters to reveal dry land, which he calls Earth, and then commands the earth to produce vegetation.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 4:** God creates the sun, moon, and stars, placing them in the firmament to govern time and seasons.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 5:** God creates sea creatures and flying creatures, blessing them to multiply.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 6:** God creates land animals and then humanity—male and female—in His own image and likeness (*Imago Dei*). Humanity is blessed and given dominion over all living things, with all green plants provided as food.<sup>2</sup>
- **Day 7:** God rests from His work, blessing and sanctifying the seventh day.<sup>2</sup>

The pre-creation state in Genesis 1:1-2 describes the earth as "formless and void" (*tohu wa-bohu*), covered in darkness, with a "wind from God" sweeping over the waters.<sup>2</sup> Scholars debate whether this implies *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) or the ordering of pre-existing chaotic material, with the NRSV Updated Edition suggesting the latter, interpreting the initial Hebrew as indicating the beginning of God's creative acts rather than an absolute starting point in time.<sup>2</sup> The primary themes of this narrative include God's absolute power and sovereignty, the inherent order and goodness of creation (repeatedly affirmed with "God saw that it was good"), and the presentation of the cosmos as a cosmic temple. Humanity's role is depicted as worshipping God and exercising responsible dominion over creation.<sup>2</sup>

### Genesis 2:4-2:25 (Jahwist Source)

This account is more narrowly focused, reading like a folktale with a greater emphasis on humanity's origins and moral agency. God is referred to by the personal name "Yahweh" (LORD God).<sup>2</sup> The narrative begins with a barren earth, watered by a spring.<sup>2</sup>

- **Origin of Humanity:** God "fashioned" Adam, the first man, from the dust (*adamah*) of the ground and breathed His own breath into him, making him a living being.<sup>2</sup>
- **The Garden of Eden:** God then plants a garden in Eden and places Adam there to cultivate and care for it, providing him with all trees for food except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning of death if he disobeys.<sup>2</sup>
- **Creation of Woman:** Observing that "it is not good that man should be alone," God creates animals for Adam to name, but none are found to be a suitable helper. God then causes Adam to sleep and creates Eve, the first woman, from one of Adam's ribs (*tsela*), as his *ezer kenegdo* (a counterpart or active helper).<sup>2</sup> Adam rejoices, recognizing her as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh".<sup>2</sup>

The themes in this narrative center on humanity as a moral agent and cultivator of the environment, exploring the intimate relationship between humanity and God, the origin of sin, and the consequences of disobedience.<sup>2</sup> The creation of Eve from Adam's rib underscores their shared essence and equal dignity. God is portrayed as more immanent and relational, akin to a "divine farmer".<sup>10</sup>

The later dating of the Priestly source (6th century BC) coincides with the Babylonian Exile, suggesting that this account was likely composed or finalized in a context where Israelite scribes were directly exposed to and potentially responding to Babylonian theology, including the *Enuma Elish*.<sup>1</sup> This provides a compelling context for understanding the unique theological statements made in Genesis.

## 4. Comparative Analysis: Parallels and Divergences

Understanding the chronological relationship between the *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis creation accounts is fundamental to analyzing their thematic connections. The following table provides a clear temporal comparison of their composition dates according to modern scholarship:

Narrative/Source	Traditional Dating	Modern Scholarly Dating
<b>Enuma Elish</b>	N/A	Late 2nd Millennium BCE <sup>3</sup>
		Extant Copies: c. 1200 BCE <sup>4</sup>
		Older Versions: Pre-Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE) <sup>4</sup>
		Revision of older Sumerian work <sup>4</sup>
<b>Genesis (Jahwist Source)</b>	Moses, 1440-1400 BCE <sup>1</sup>	10th or 9th Century BCE <sup>2</sup>
		First major draft: Late 7th or 6th Century BCE <sup>2</sup>
<b>Genesis (Priestly Source)</b>	Moses, 1440-1400 BCE <sup>1</sup>	6th Century BCE <sup>2</sup>
<b>Genesis (Final Redaction)</b>	N/A	Post-exilic, c. 400 BCE <sup>1</sup> or 3rd Century BCE <sup>2</sup>

As the table illustrates, the *Enuma Elish* clearly predates the earliest components of Genesis by several centuries, and its development spans a period long before the final redaction of the Hebrew Bible's creation narratives. This chronological precedence sets the stage for exploring the nature of their relationship.

### Shared Motifs and Similarities

Despite their distinct origins and theological frameworks, the *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis creation accounts share several structural and thematic parallels, suggesting either a common ancient Near Eastern cosmological understanding or direct Israelite engagement with Mesopotamian narratives.

Both narratives commence with a description of creation emerging from a **primordial watery chaos**.<sup>2</sup> In Genesis 1, the earth is described as "formless and void" (*tohu wa-bohu*), covered by darkness, with a "wind from God" sweeping over the deep waters.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the *Enuma Elish* begins with the mingling of the primordial waters personified as Apsu and Tiamat.<sup>6</sup>

A notable structural parallel is the **establishment of a firmament**. Both accounts feature the creation of a dome-shaped expanse to separate and hold back waters, thereby making the Earth habitable.<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1 describes God creating the *rāqîa* to divide the waters above from the waters below.<sup>2</sup>

There are also discernible similarities in the **sequence of creation**. Both the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 exhibit a general progression that includes a divine presence over primordial matter, darkness, the emergence of light, followed by the firmament, dry land, celestial luminaries, and the creation of humanity, culminating in a period of rest or celebration by the divine.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the **creation of humanity**, both traditions describe humankind being fashioned from earthly matter.<sup>8</sup> In the *Enuma Elish*, humans are created from clay mixed with the blood of a defeated god, Kingu, to

serve the other deities.<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2, conversely, describes Adam being formed from the dust of the ground (*adamah*).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, both narratives conclude with the creation of humanity and the establishment of a "temple" for the deity. In Genesis 1, the cosmos itself is presented as God's cosmic temple.<sup>2</sup> The *Enuma Elish* concludes with the gods constructing a specific temple for Marduk in Babylon.<sup>6</sup> The *Enuma Elish* also shows traces of influence on Genesis 2, with both narratives beginning by stating what did not exist at creation's start, featuring a spring as a starting point, and depicting the deity first creating man to serve them, followed by animals and vegetation.<sup>2</sup> Parallels also exist between Genesis 2-11 and the Mesopotamian *Atra-Hasis* epic, including a divine garden and the first man's role.<sup>2</sup>

**Theological and Narrative Differences**

Despite these structural and thematic similarities, the theological and narrative differences between the *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis accounts are profound, highlighting distinct worldviews.

The most significant distinction lies in the concept of divinity: Genesis presents a **singular, supreme, transcendent God** (monotheism), whereas the *Enuma Elish* features a complex pantheon of numerous gods (polytheism).<sup>2</sup> Genesis lacks any account of God's origins (theogony) or internal divine conflict (theomachy), which are central to the Babylonian myth.<sup>2</sup>

The **method of creation** also differs dramatically. Genesis 1 describes creation through **divine fiat**—God speaks things into existence—a calm and orderly process devoid of struggle.<sup>1</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the *Enuma Elish*, where the world and humanity emerge from the **violent conflict and dismemberment** of the primordial goddess Tiamat by Marduk.<sup>3</sup>

The **nature and purpose of humanity** are also fundamentally different. In Genesis, humans are created in the **divine image** (*Imago Dei*), blessed, and given **dominion** over creation, implying a role as God's representatives and cultivators.<sup>2</sup> This contrasts sharply with the *Enuma Elish*, where humans are created from the blood of a defeated god to serve the other deities and perform menial labor, thus relieving the gods of their toil.<sup>6</sup> Genesis emphasizes God's care for humanity's well-being.<sup>2</sup>

The **nature of the deity** itself is distinct. The God of Genesis is depicted as omnipotent, transcendent, and inherently good, creating a world that is repeatedly affirmed as "good" and "very good".<sup>2</sup> The gods in the *Enuma Elish*, conversely, are often portrayed as amoral, limited, and prone to internal conflicts and struggles.<sup>2</sup> The absence of theomachy in Genesis is a deliberate theological choice; the sea monsters (*tannin*) mentioned in Genesis 1 are presented as mere creatures of God, not primordial chaotic deities to be battled, explicitly polemicizing against the combat myths of the ancient world.<sup>2</sup>

The following table summarizes these comparative themes and narrative elements:

Category	<i>Enuma Elish</i>	Genesis (Combined P & J Sources)
<b>Primordial State</b>	Mingling of primordial waters (Apsu & Tiamat)	Formless void ( <i>tohu wa-bohu</i> ) with darkness over waters
<b>Divine Nature</b>	Polytheistic; gods with human-like flaws/conflicts	Monotheistic; singular, transcendent, omnipotent God
<b>Method of Creation</b>	Violent conflict, dismemberment of Tiamat	Divine fiat (speaking) in Gen 1; fashioning from dust in Gen 2

Category	<i>Enuma Elish</i>	Genesis (Combined P & J Sources)
<b>Role of Conflict</b>	Central to creation (theomachy)	Absent (no theomachy); God is sovereign over chaos
<b>Purpose of Humanity</b>	To serve gods, perform menial tasks	Created in God's image, given dominion, to work and care for creation
<b>Creation of Cosmic Order</b>	Through Marduk's victory and organization of Tiamat's body	Through God's orderly commands and separations
<b>Final Act</b>	Gods build Marduk's temple, celebrate	God rests on the Sabbath, sanctifies it
<b>Cosmic Temple Concept</b>	Specific temple for Marduk	Cosmos itself is God's temple

The striking similarities in structure and motifs, coupled with these profound theological differences, strongly suggest that the Genesis narratives, particularly the Priestly account, are not merely coincidental or direct borrowings. Instead, they appear to represent a deliberate "polemic" or counter-narrative against Mesopotamian creation myths.<sup>2</sup> This approach involves a conscious re-writing of existing motifs to assert a radically different worldview. For instance, the deliberate inversion of key elements—such as Marduk's violent creation versus God's peaceful creation by speech, or humans as divine laborers versus humans created in God's image—implies an active theological refutation. This indicates a sophisticated level of intertextual engagement.

By stripping away the polytheistic conflict and affirming a singular, all-powerful God who creates by speech, the Genesis account fundamentally redefines divinity. It establishes a unique theological foundation for Israel, presenting God as pre-existent, unchallenged, and creating through simple command. This establishes an absolute, non-contingent divine sovereignty that stands in direct opposition to the limited, warring deities of Babylon. Similarly, the concept of *Imago Dei* in Genesis elevates humanity to a unique status as God's representatives, contrasting sharply with the servile role of humans in the *Enuma Elish*. This is a radical re-evaluation of human worth and purpose, shifting humanity from being divine labor to divine likeness, with profound implications for human dignity and responsibility.

## 5. Scholarly Perspectives on Influence and Intertextuality

The academic discourse surrounding the relationship between Babylonian creation myths and the Hebrew Bible's Genesis narratives is nuanced and complex, reflecting various theories of influence, adaptation, and intertextuality.

### Exploring Theories of Direct Influence, Adaptation, and Polemical Intent

Most scholars generally accept "some degree of dependence" of Genesis 1 on the *Enuma Elish*, though the precise nature and extent of this dependence remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate.<sup>11</sup> Given Babylon's significant power and cultural influence in the ancient Near East, it is considered plausible that some biblical writers were familiar with the *Enuma Elish*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the *Enuma Elish* is viewed by some as an "inspiration for the Hebrew scribes".<sup>4</sup> The critical question then becomes whether these scribes were merely adapting the Babylonian poem to tell their own stories of creation, or if they purposefully reworked the *Enuma Elish* to assert the supremacy of Israel's God over Marduk.<sup>3</sup>

One perspective suggests that the Genesis narratives freely utilized metaphors and symbolism drawn from a "common cultural pool" of ancient Near Eastern cosmological ideas, reinterpreting them to assert

their unique theology.<sup>6</sup> This implies a shared cultural reservoir from which various traditions drew, rather than a direct copy.

A prominent and widely discussed theory posits that the Genesis 1 creation account functions as a literary "polemic".<sup>2</sup> In this view, the biblical narrative was intentionally crafted to refute or argue against the prevailing ancient Near Eastern mythologies, thereby affirming monotheism and explicitly denying polytheism.<sup>2</sup> For example, the depiction of "great sea-monsters" (*tannin*) in Genesis 1 as mere creatures of God, without any combat involved, stands in stark contrast to Tiamat, the primordial chaotic goddess battled by Marduk in the *Enuma Elish*.<sup>2</sup> This suggests a deliberate theological critique embedded within the narrative.

Arguments favoring a more direct dependence often highlight the "virtually identical" order of creation in both texts.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, arguments against direct borrowing or in favor of fundamental distinction point to differences in the method of creation (divine speech versus physical shaping and conflict) and the formulaic structure of Genesis 1 compared to the less structured *Enuma Elish*.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars even contend that the Genesis 1 account is "radically different" and that any observed similarities are "simply coincidental".<sup>8</sup> A more expansive theory suggests that Babylonian creation accounts might have influenced not only Genesis but also later biblical texts, such as the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and even Paul's account of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians.<sup>8</sup>

### **Discussion of Nuance and Ongoing Debate**

The scholarly debate surrounding the relationship between these ancient narratives is complex, and no single theory has achieved universal acceptance.<sup>8</sup> The discovery of Ugaritic material, while not directly revealing a West Semitic creation tradition, may have influenced scholarly opinion towards a greater degree of direct dependence, by demonstrating a relative absence of alternative indigenous creation traditions that could explain the parallels.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence for polemical adaptation suggests that the biblical authors were not isolated from the intellectual currents of their time but were deeply engaged with the dominant cultural narratives. They consciously crafted their creation accounts to offer a distinct theological vision, demonstrating a sophisticated level of intertextual engagement and theological critique.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the biblical authors were not passive recorders of tradition but active theologians and literary artists who deliberately engaged with and, in many cases, subverted prevailing cultural narratives to articulate a unique monotheistic worldview.

Furthermore, the act of reinterpreting and polemicizing against the dominant Babylonian creation myth, particularly during or after the Babylonian Exile (which aligns with the dating of the Priestly source in the 6th century BCE), represents a crucial moment in the formation of Israelite identity.<sup>1</sup> During this period, Israel was a subjugated people immersed in Babylonian culture and religion, including the *Enuma Elish*. The creation of a counter-narrative, one that asserts the absolute supremacy of Yahweh and the inherent dignity of humanity, can be understood as a profound theological act of resistance and identity preservation. This highlights the socio-religious context of the biblical text's formation and its significant role in shaping a distinct Israelite identity in the face of powerful external influences.

### **6. Conclusion: Establishing Chronological and Thematic Relationships**

The evidence from modern critical scholarship firmly establishes the chronological precedence of Babylonian creation mythology, as exemplified by the *Enuma Elish*, over the creation accounts in the Hebrew Bible. The *Enuma Elish* is dated to the late 2nd millennium BCE, with extant copies from approximately 1200 BCE and clear indications of much older origins, predating the reign of Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the earliest components of Genesis (the Jahwist source) are dated to the 10th or 9th centuries BCE, while the later Priestly source was composed in the 6th century BCE, with the final redaction of the narrative occurring around 400 BCE or even later.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is definitively concluded



that Babylonian creation mythology was in existence long before the Hebrew Bible's creation accounts were composed and finalized.

The relationship between these two traditions is not one of simple copying but a complex interplay of influence, adaptation, and theological reinterpretation. While the *Enuma Elish* predates Genesis, the Hebrew Bible's creation narratives exhibit significant structural and thematic parallels with Mesopotamian myths, suggesting either a shared ancient Near Eastern cosmological understanding or direct Israelite engagement with these narratives.<sup>2</sup> However, the profound theological divergences are equally striking. The Hebrew Bible introduces radical monotheism, creation by divine speech, and an elevated status for humanity, which serve as a deliberate critique or "polemic" against the polytheistic, conflict-driven Mesopotamian worldview.<sup>2</sup>

This comparison reveals that religious and cosmological ideas are not static but evolve, adapt, and respond to historical, cultural, and theological contexts. Both the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis themselves show signs of evolution; the *Enuma Elish* developed from older Sumerian myths, and Genesis is a composite text with different layers composed centuries apart.<sup>2</sup> This pattern across both traditions indicates a broader trend: religious narratives are dynamic, reflecting and shaping the understanding of the divine and the cosmos over generations. The Hebrew Bible's creation accounts thus represent a sophisticated theological evolution from earlier ancient Near Eastern models.

Ultimately, both the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis served as foundational narratives for their respective cultures, shaping identity, legitimizing authority, and defining humanity's place in the cosmos. The *Enuma Elish* explicitly served a political purpose by promoting Marduk and legitimizing Babylon's supremacy.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Genesis, particularly the Priestly source, provided a theological framework for post-exilic Israel's identity and worship, asserting the unique nature of their God and their role in creation.<sup>1</sup> This common function, despite vastly different content, underscores the fundamental human need for origin stories and their enduring power in shaping cultural, political, and religious identity. The Hebrew Bible's creation narratives, while drawing on a common cultural reservoir, represent a distinctive theological statement, reinterpreting universal creation motifs through the lens of Israel's unique understanding of God and humanity.