

Beginning the divination, they said: "Get together, grasp each other! Speak, that we may hear." They said, "Say if it is well that the wood be got together and that it be carved by the Creator and the Maker, and if this [man of wood] is he who must nourish and sustain us when there is light when it is day!

"Thou, corn; thou, *tzité*; thou, fate; thou, creature; get together, take each other," they said to the corn, to the *tzité*, to fate, to the creature. "Come to sacrifice here, Heart of Heaven; do not punish Tepeu and Gucumatz!"

Then they talked and spoke the truth: "Your figures of wood shall come out well; they shall speak and talk on earth."

"So may it be," they answered when they spoke.

And instantly the figures were made of wood. They looked like men, talked like men, and populated the surface of the earth.

They existed and multiplied; they had daughters, they had sons, these wooden figures; but they did not have souls, nor minds, they did not remember their Creator, their Maker; they walked on all fours, aimlessly.

They no longer remembered the Heart of Heaven and therefore they fell out of favor. It was merely a trial, an attempt at man. At first they spoke, but their face was without expression; their feet and hands had no strength; they had no blood, nor substance, nor moisture, nor flesh; their cheeks were dry, their feet and hands were dry, and their flesh was yellow.

Therefore, they no longer thought of their Creator nor their Maker, nor of those who made them and cared for them.

These were the first men who existed in great numbers on the face of the earth.

1. What existed before the earth was created?
 2. Why were the animals punished?
 3. Did the creator and the maker achieve their goal when they created humans?
 4. What does this creation story tell us about Mayan conceptions of human nature?
 5. Can you compare this creation story to the one found in the Old Testament?
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• 2 •

The Creation Epic

(ca. 2000 B.C.E.)

Mesopotamian civilization emerged in a land that knew little continuity or order. Both climate and geography made life hazardous and unpredictable. In contrast to life in ancient Egypt, where the seasonal flooding of the Nile and the relative isolation of the country fostered a sense of regularity,

(Mesopotamians lived with uncertainty.) The religion of the people reflects these environmental conditions. Faced by a world in which change was often rapid and violent, Mesopotamians sought an explanation for their social reality through a belief in the capriciousness of the gods.

The Creation Epic describes a bitter conflict between the gods Marduk and Tiamat that led to the creation of the world that the Mesopotamians knew. Tiamat was the oldest of the gods, but she was also the patron of the primeval chaos. Marduk was the warrior god whose purpose was to institute order. The world that emerged from this battle maintained precarious stability—subject always to the whims of inexplicable divinity.

Tablet I

When on high, heaven was not named,
Below, dry land was not named.
Apsu, their first begetter,
Mummu (and) Tiamat, the mother of all of
 them.
Their waters combined together.
Field was not marked off, sprout had not come
 forth.
When none of the gods had yet come forth
Had not borne a name,
No destinies had been fixed;
Then gods were created in the midst of heaven.
Lakhamu and Lakhamu came forth
Ages increased . . .
Anshar and Kishar were created.
After many days had passed by there came forth
 . . .
Anu, their son . . .
Anshar and Anu . . .
Anu . . .
Nudimmud whom his father, his mother, . . .
Of large intelligence, knowing (wise),
Exceeding strong . . .
Without a rival . . .
Then were established. . . .
Then Apsu, the begetter of the great gods,
Cried out, to Mummu, to his messenger, he
 spoke:
"Oh Mummu, joy of my liver,
Come, unto Tiamat let us go."

para-void

They went, and before Tiamat they crouched,
Hatching a plan with regard to the gods . . .
Apsu opened his mouth and spoke,
Unto Tiamat, the splendid one addressed a
 word:
". . . their course against me
By day I have no rest, at night I cannot lie down,
 I wish to destroy their course,
So that clamor cease and we may again lie
 down to sleep."
When Tiamat (heard) this,
She raged and shrieked for (revenge?),
She herself became furiously enraged.
Evil she conceived in her heart.
"All that we have made let us destroy,
That their course may be full of misery so that
 we may have release."
Mummu answered and counselled Apsu,
Hostile was the counsel of Mummu.
"Come, their course is strong, destroy it!
Then by day thou wilt have rest,
At night thou wilt lie down."
Apsu (hearkened), and his face shone;
Evil he planned against the gods, his sons. . .
They uttered curses and at the side of Tiamat
 advanced.
In fury and rage they devised plans ceaselessly
 night and day.
They rushed to the conflict, raging and furious.
They grouped themselves and ranged the battle
 array.
Ummu-Khubur, creator of all things,

Gathering invincible weapons, she brought
 forth huge monsters,
 Sharp of tooth and merciless of fang.
 With poison instead of blood she filled their
 bodies.
 She clothed with terror the terrible dragons,
 Decking them with brilliancy, giving them a
 lofty stature,
 So that whoever beheld them would be over-
 come with terror.
 With their bodies reared up, none could with-
 stand their attack.
 She brought forth great serpents, dragons and
 the Lakhami,
 Hurricanes, raging dogs and scorpion men,
 Mighty tempests, fish men, and rams,
 Bearing cruel weapons, fearless in combat,
 Mighty in command, irresistible.
In all eleven monsters of this kind she made.
 Among the gods, the first born who formed the
 assembly,
 She exalted Kingu, giving him high rank in
 their midst;
 To march in advance and to direct the host;
 To be foremost in arming for the attack,
 To direct the fight in supreme control,
 To his hand she confided. She decked him out
 in costly garments:
 "I have uttered thy magic formula, in the assem-
 bly of the gods I have exalted thee."
The dominion over all the gods was entrusted
unto his hands:
 "Be thou exalted, my one and only husband;
 May the Anunnaki exalt thy name above all the
 gods!"
 She gave him the tablets of fate, to his breast
 she attached them.
 "Oh, thou, thy command will be irresistible!
 Firmly established be the utterance of thy
 mouth!
 Now Kingu is exalted, endowed with the power
 of Anu;
 Among the gods, his children, he fixes des-
 tinies.
 By the word of thy mouth fire will quenched;
 The strong in battle will be increased in
 strength."

Tablet II

Tiamat finished her work.
 (The evil that) she contrived against the gods
 her offspring,
 To avenge Apsu, Tiamat planned evil.
 When she had equipped her army, it was
 revealed to Ea;
 Ea heard the words,
 And was grievously afflicted, and overwhelmed
 with grief.
 Days passed by and his anger was appeased.
 To Anshar, his father, he took the way.
 To Father Anshar who begot him he went.
 All that Tiamat had planned he repeated to
 him.
 "Tiamat our mother has taken a dislike for us,
 She has assembled a host, she rages furiously.
 All the gods are gathered to her,
 Aye, even those whom thou hast created, march
 at her side."
 [Anshar asks his son Marduk to fight Tiamat]
 "Thou art my son of strong courage, . . . draw
 nigh to the battle!
 . . . at sight of thee there shall be peace."
 The Lord rejoiced at the word of his father.
 He drew nigh and stood in front of Anshar;
 Anshar saw him and his heart was full of joy.
 He kissed him on the mouth, and fear departed
 from him.
 "(Oh my father), may the words of thy lips not
 be taken back,
 May I go and accomplish the desire of thy
 heart!"
 "Oh, my son, full of all knowledge,
 Quiet Tiamat with thy supreme incantation;
 Quickly proceed (on thy way)!
 Thy blood will not be poured out, thou shalt
 surely return."
 The lord rejoiced at the word of his father,
 His heart exulted and he spoke to his father.
 "Oh Lord of the gods, (who fixes) the fate of
 the great gods,
 If I become thy avenger,
 Conquering Tiamat, and giving life to thee,
 Call an assembly and proclaim the preeminence
 of my lot!

That when in Upshukkinaku thou joyfully seat-
est thyself,
My command in place of thine should fix fates.
What I do should be unaltered,
The word of my lips be never changed or
annulled."

Tablet III

Then they gathered and went,
The great gods, all of them, who fix fates,
Came into the presence of Anshar, they filled
(the assembly hall),
Embracing one another in the assembly (hall),
They prepared themselves to feast at the ban-
quet.
They ate bread, they mixed the wine,
The sweet mead confused (their senses).
Drunk, their bodies filled with drink,
They shouted aloud, with their spirits exalted,
For Marduk, their avenger, they fixed the des-
tiny.

Tablet IV

They prepared for him a royal chamber,
In the presence of his fathers as ruler he stood
"Thou art the weightiest among the great gods.
Thy (power of decreeing) fate is unrivalled, thy
command is (like that of) Anu.
Oh Marduk, thou art mightiest among the great
gods!
Thy power of decreeing fate unrivalled, thy
word is like that of Anu!
From now on thy decree will not be altered,
Thine it shall be to raise up and to bring low;
Thy utterance be established, against they com-
mand no rebellion!
None among the gods will transgress the limit
(set by thee).
Abundance is pleasing to the shrines of the
gods,
The place of their worship will be established as
thy place.
Oh Marduk, thou art our avenger!
We give thee kingship over the entire universe,

Take they seat in the assembly, thy word be
exalted;
Thy weapon be not overcome, may it crush thy
enemies.
Oh lord, the life of him who trusts in thee will
be spared,
But pour out the life of the god who has
planned evil." . . .
He sent forth the winds which he had created,
the seven of them;
To trouble the spirit of Tiamat, they followed
behind him.
Then the lord raised on high the Deluge, his
mighty weapon.
He mounted the storm chariot, unequalled in
power.
He harnessed and attached to it four horses,
Merciless, overwhelming, swiftly flying.
(Sharp of) teeth, bearing poison. . . .
Then the lord drew nigh, piercing Tiamat with
his glance;
He saw the purpose of Kingu, her spouse,
As he (i.e., Marduk) gazed, he (i.e., Kingu) tot-
tered in his gait. His mind was destroyed,
his action upset,
And the gods, his helpers, marching at his side,
Saw (the terror of) the hero and leader.
But Tiamat (uttered a cry) and did not turn her
back
From her lips there gushed forth rebellious
words
. . . "coming to thee as lord of the gods,
As in their own sanctuaries they are gathered in
thy sanctuary."
Then the lord raised on high the Deluge, the
great weapon
And against Tiamat, who was foaming with
wrath, thus sent forth (his answer).
"Great art thou! Thou has exalted thyself greatly.
Thy heart hath prompted thee to arrange for
battle. . . .
Thou hast (exalted) Kingu to be thy husband,
(Thou hast given him power to issue) the
decrees of Anu.
(Against the gods, my fathers), thou hast
planned evil,

Against the gods, my fathers, thou hast planned
 evil.
 Let thy army be equipped, thy weapons be gird-
 ed on;
 Stand; I and thou, let us join in battle."
 When Tiamat heard this,
 She was beside herself, she lost her reason.
 Tiamat shouted in a paroxysm of fury,
 Trembling to the root, shaking in her founda-
 tions.
 She uttered an incantation, she pronounced a
 magic formula.
 The gods of battle, appeal to their weapons.
 Then stepped forth Tiamat and the leader of
 the gods, Marduk.
 To the fight they advanced, to the battle they
 drew nigh.
 The lord spread his net and encompassed her,
 The evil wind stationed behind him he drove
 into her face.
 Tiamat opened her mouth to its full extent.
 He drove in the evil wind before she could close
 her lips.
 The terrible winds filled her belly,
 Her heart was seized, and she held her mouth
 wide open.
 He drove in the spear and burst open her belly,
 Cutting into her entrails, he slit her heart.
 He overcame her and destroyed her life;
 He cast down her carcass and stood upon it.
 When he had thus subjected Tiamat, the leader,
 Her host was scattered, her assembly was dis-
 solved;
 And the gods, her helpers, who marched beside
 her,
 In fear and trembling turned about,
 Taking to flight to save their lives.
 But they were surrounded and could not
 escape.
 He captured them and smashed their weapons,
 They were cast into the net, and brought into
 the snare; . . .
 After he (i.e., Marduk) had bound and cast
 down his enemies,
 Had battered down the arrogant foe,
 Had completely gained the victory of Anshar

over the enemy,
 The hero Marduk had attained the aim of
 Nudimmud,
 He strengthened his hold over the captive gods.
 To Tiamat, whom he had bound, he came back,
 And the lord trampled under foot the founda-
 tion of Tiamat.
 With his merciless weapon he smashed her
 skull,
 He cut the channels of her blood,
 And made the north wind carry them to secret
 places.
 His fathers beheld and rejoiced exceeding
 glad,
 Presents and gifts they brought to him.
 Then the lord rested and looked at the carcass.
 He divided the flesh of the monster, and creat-
 ed marvellous things.
 He split her like a fish flattened into two halves;
 One half he took and made it a covering for
 heaven.
 He drew a bolt, he stationed a watchman,
 Enjoining that the waters be not permitted to
 flow out.
 He passed over the heavens, inspecting the
 regions (thereof),
 And over against the Apsu, he set the dwelling
 of Nudimmud.
 The lord measured the structure of the Deep.
 He established E-sharra as a palace correspond-
 ing to it.
 The palace E-sharra which he created as heav-
 en,
 He caused Anu, Enlil and Ea to inhabit their
 districts.

Tablet V

He made stations for the great gods,
 The stars, their counterparts, the twin stars he
 fixed.
 He fixed the year and divided it into divisions.
 For the twelve months he fixed three stars.
 Also for the days of the year (he had fashioned)
 pictures. . . .

Tablet VI

Upon (Marduk's) hearing the word of the gods,
 His heart led him to create (marvellous things)
 He opened his mouth and (spoke) to Ea
 (What) he had conceived in his heart he
 imparted to him;
 "My blood I will take and bone I will (form).
 I will set up man that man . . .

I will create man to inhabit (the earth),
 That the worship of the gods be fixed, that they
 may have shrines.
 But I will alter the ways of the gods, I will
 change . . .
 They shall be joined in concert, unto evil shall
 they". . .
 Ea answered him and spoke.

1. Conflict seems to be a major theme of this creation epic. What, in practical terms, does war among gods mean for mere mortals?
2. Mortals play little part in the struggles of the gods. Why? What assumptions about humanity and its relations to the gods are revealed in the epic?
3. Who won the battle between Marduk and Tiamat? What followed the end of that war?
4. Extreme violence marks much of the creation epic. What lessons might you draw from this about the nature of Mesopotamian society?

.3.

The Book of Genesis

(ca. 10th–6th century B.C.E.)

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament as well as the first book of the Hebrew Torah. It was probably composed between the tenth and sixth century B.C.E. Genesis tells the Judeo-Christian story of creation and the early history of the Hebrew people. The Judeo-Christian creation was the work of a single God who formed the environment for the life of humans. The story is anthropocentric, that is, it revolves around the deeds of men and women from their creation through the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to their corruption of the earth. God cleanses this corruption with a mighty flood of water which eliminates all but one human family, that of Noah.

The story told in Genesis is so well known that it is difficult to attempt to read it critically as a historical document. Because it is the best known of all the creation epics, there is a temptation to regard it as the unique story of the origins of humanity and the universe. It is most fruitfully read in comparison with other stories of creation.