

10. The Creation

Gen 1:1 - 2:4b

This story, with its cosmic account of the First Things, was quite logically placed before the older Canaanite traditions.

Gen 1¹ is the most conspicuous Biblical example of material not merely added *to* a text, but added *at the head* of it. It tells of creation in six days, with rest on the seventh. The idea of periodic rest has rural origins: in agriculturally marginal areas, the land must be allowed to recover, if it is to remain farmable.² So Gen 1 is Canaanite; what it adds to the Canaanite tradition of Gen 2-10 is to give cosmic sanction to the idea of a regular period of rest.

The labors of the six days are unevenly distributed:

Day 1: Division of Day and Night	(#1)
Day 2: Separation of Heaven from the waters below	(#2)
Day 3: Separation of dry land from the waters	(#3)
Beginning of plants and fruit trees	(#4)
Day 4: Division of day and Night	(#5)
Sun and Moon; Stars to mark the seasons	(#6)
Day 5: Fish and birds	(#7)
Day 6: Land animals	(#8)
Man	(#9)
[Gift of food to man and other creatures]	(#10)
Day 7: Rest	

Tidier arrangements might easily be proposed, which makes it all the likelier that the story is not original, but was derived from the Babylonian Enuma Elish. However it is arranged, the point is to give high cosmic status to the Sabbath, making it not a mere custom, but something ordained from the Very Beginning.

Though Gen 1 is a later addition, we cannot put it in the same group as the second version of the Flood Story (§10), whose first version was also borrowed from Babylon; in that case, the story of Gilgamesh. Gen 1 has its own rationale.

These repeated borrowings from the high culture of Babylon are interesting. Let us then briefly consider how Gen 1 was put together from that source.

The Enuma Elish

This poem of 1094 lines on 8 tablets was the national epic of Babylon. It was discovered in stages during the 19th century, and fully published in 1901. The parallels with the Gen 1 story were immediately noticed, and produced great excitement in scholarly circles.

¹Gen 1 is more exactly Gen 1:1 - 2:4b; so also below.

²It has no meaning for, and indeed is not practicable in, a pastoral society, as was wittily pointed out by Jesus in Lk 14:5. The animals and their needs *will not wait*.

Here are the clearest of the **parallels**, plus some military non-parallels:³

- I 1. When the heavens above **did not exist**,
2. And earth beneath had not come into being –
- II 19. Mother Hubur, who forms everything,
20. Supplied irresistible weapons, and gave birth to giant serpents.
34. She exalted Qingu and magnified him among them . . .
- IV 35. He fashioned a bow and made it his weapon.
36. He set an arrow in place, put the bowstring on.
- V 1. He fashioned heavenly stations for the great gods,
2. And set up constellations, the patterns of the **stars**.
3. He appointed the **year**, marked off divisions,
4. And set up three stars each, **for the twelve months**.
12. He created Nannar, entrusting to him the **night**,
13. He appointed him as the jewel of the night to fix the **days**.
16. Resplendent with horns to fix **six days**;
17. On the **seventh day**, the crown will be half size . . .
49. He gathered it together and made it into clouds,
50. The raging of the winds, violent rainstorms.
61. [He set up] her crotch – it wedged up the **heavens** –
62. (The half of her) he stretched out and made it firm as the **earth**.
- VI 33. From his blood he (Ea) created **mankind**,
34. On whom he imposed the service of the gods, and set the gods free.
57. “Build Babylon, the task you have sought,
58. Let bricks for it be moulded, and raise the shrine!”
123. Marduk, as he was named by his father Anu from his birth,
124. Who supplies pasturage and watering, making the stables flourish.
- VII 1. Asarre, the giver of **arable land**, who established plough-land,
2. The creator of **barley and flax**, who made **plant life** grow.
57. Enbilulu is he, the lord who supplies them abundantly,
58. Their great chosen one, who provides **cereal** offerings,
59. Who keeps **pasturage** and watering in good condition . . .
60. Who opened watercourses and distributed plentiful water.
62. Who establishes clean **arable land** in the open country,
63. Who directs irrigation-ditch and canal, and marks out the furrow.
78. Gil, who ever heaps up piles of **barley**, massive mounds,
79. The creator of grain and flocks, who gives **seed** for the land.

The parallel elements might have served as inspiration. Driver (1911) 31 says, “Naturally a direct borrowing . . . is not to be thought of.” But why not? It was performed each New Year in nearby Babylon; how could you miss it?

The still early date of this later Creation story is proved by the reference to it in the first of the Exodus Festival Codes (§25), which is itself pre-monarchic. The whole Canaanite ancestral tradition seems to have been frequently revised, to better meet the needs and agendas of later times.

³Translation from Lambert **Babylonian**.