**Enuma Elish (When Fire on High)**

The *Enuma Elish* is a Babylonian or Mesopotamian myth of creation recounting the struggle between cosmic order and chaos. It is basically a myth of the cycle of seasons. It is named after its opening words and was recited on the fourth day of the ancient Babylonian New Year's festival. The basic story exists in various forms in the area. This version is written in Akkadian, an old Babylonian dialect, and features Marduk, the patron deity of the city of Babylon. A similar earlier version in ancient Sumerian has Anu, Enil and Ninurta as the heroes, suggesting that this version was adapted to justify the religious practices in the cult of Marduk in Babylon.

This version was written sometime in the 12th century BC in cuneiform on seven clay tablets. They were found in the middle 19th century in the ruins of the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. George Smith first published these texts in 1876 as *The Chaldean Genesis*. Because of many parallels with the Genesis account, some historians concluded that the Genesis account was simply a rewriting of the Babylonian story.

**Tablet I**

The stage is set for the story. The various gods represent aspects of the physical world. Apsu is the god of fresh water and thus male fertility. Tiamat, wife of Apsu, is the goddess of the sea and thus chaos and threat. Tiamat gives birth to Anshar and Kishar, gods who represented the boundary between the earth and sky (the horizon). To Anshar and Kishar is born Anu, god of sky, who in turn bears Ea. These "sons of the gods" make so much commotion and are so ill-behaved that Apsu decides to destroy them. When Ea learns of the plan, he kills Apsu and with his wife Damkina establishes their dwelling above his body. Damkina then gives birth to Marduk, the god of spring symbolized both by the light of the sun and the lightning in storm and rain. He was also the patron god of the city of Babylon. Meanwhile Tiamat is enraged at the murder of her husband Apsu, and vows revenge. She creates eleven monsters to help her carry out her vengeance. Tiamat takes a new husband, Kingu, in place of the slain Apsu and puts him in charge of her newly assembled army.

**Sample of Text***:*

*When on high the heaven had not been named,  
Firm ground below had not been called by name,  
When primordial Apsu, their begetter,  
And Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,  
Their waters mingled as a single body,  
No reed hut had sprung forth, no marshland had appeared,  
None of the gods had been brought into being,  
And none bore a name, and no destinies determined--  
Then it was that the gods were formed in the midst of heaven.  
Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called. (10)*

**Tablet II**

Tiamat represents the forces of disorder and chaos in the world. In the cycle of seasons, Tiamat is winter and barrenness. In the second tablet, to avenge the murder of her husband Tiamat prepares to unleash on the other gods the destructive forces that she has assembled. Ea learns of her plan and attempts to confront Tiamat. While the tablet is damaged, it is apparent that Ea fails to stop Tiamat. Then Anu attempts to challenge her but fails as well. The gods become afraid that no one will be able to stop Taimat’s vengeful rampage.

**Tablet IV**

The council of the gods tests Marduk’s powers by having him make a garment disappear and then reappear. After passing the test, the council enthrones Marduk as high king and commissions him to fight Tiamat. With the authority and power of the council, Marduk assembles his weapons, the four winds as well as the seven winds of destruction. He rides in his chariot of clouds with the weapons of the storm to confront Tiamat. After entangling her in a net, Marduk unleashes the Evil Wind to inflate Tiamat. When she is incapacitated by the wind, Marduk kills her with an arrow through her heart and takes captive the other gods and monsters who were her allies. He also captured her husband Kingu. After smashing Tiamat’s head with a club, Marduk divided her corpse, using half to create the earth and the other half to create the sky complete with bars to keep the chaotic waters from escaping. The tablet ends with Marduk establishing dwelling places for his allies.

**Tablet VI & VII**

Marduk decides to create human beings, but needs blood and bone from which to fashion them. Ea advises that only one of the gods should die to provide the materials for creation, the one who was guilty of plotting evil against the gods. Marduk inquires of the assembly of the gods about who incited Tiamat’s rebellion, and was told that it was her husband Kingu. Ea kills Kingu and uses his blood to fashion mankind so they can perform menial tasks for the gods. To honor Marduk, the gods construct a house for him in Babylon. After its completion, Marduk gives a great feast for the gods in his new house who all praise Marduk for his greatness in subduing Tiamat. The first group of the fifty throne names of Marduk are recited.

Continuation of praise of Marduk as chief of Babylon and head of the Babylonian pantheon because of his role in creation. The rest of Marduk’s fifty throne names declaring his dominion are recited. Final blessings on Marduk and instructions to the people to remember and recite Marduk’s deeds.

**Sample of Text**

*Asaru [Marduk], bestower of cultivation, who established water levels;  
Creator of grain and herbs, who causes vegetation to sprout.  
Asarualim, who is honored in the place of counsel, who excels in counsel;  
To whom the gods hope, not being possessed of fear.  
Asarualimnunna, the gracious, light of the father, his begetter,  
Who directs the decrees of Anu, Enlil, Ea and Ninigiku.  
He is their provider who assigns their portions,  
Whose horned cap is plenty, multiplying . . . .  
Tutu is he, who created then anew.  
Let him purify their shrines that they may have ease. (10)*

*Let him devise the spell that the gods may be at rest.  
Should they rise in anger, let them turn back.  
Truly, he is supreme in the Assembly of the gods;  
No one among the gods is his equal.  
Tutu is Ziukkinna, life of the host of the gods,  
Who established for the gods the holy heavens;  
Who keeps a hold on their ways, determines their courses;  
He shall not be forgotten by the beclouded. Let them  
Remember his deeds!  
Tutu they thirdly called Ziku, who brings purification,  
god of the favoring breeze, the Lord of hearing and mercy;" (20)*