

# ***Genesis Background***

***by Steve Page***

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# *Genesis Background*

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## Introduction

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When we start to read *Genesis* 1-11, it's easy to think that Moses, under God's inspiration or even at God's direction, simply wrote down a series of facts and historical events. When he presented this to the Israelites, we then assume the Israelites accepted what Moses wrote without question.

This seems reasonable enough until we reach chapter 2:4, where Moses told about the creation in a completely different way. As we go on, depending on how skeptical we are, numerous questions can arise. Whom did Cain fear would kill him? Why did people live so long? How could an olive tree have leaves immediately after a massive flood? This can lead to more questions. Why do scientists say something so different about the origins of the world? Did Moses base what he wrote on the stories of an older religion?

My early solution was to simply ignore the questions. I took that approach because that was what the believers around me did, and *Genesis* wasn't that important to me and my faith. However, after about fifteen years, I had learned enough about the Bible to start thinking about *Genesis*, especially the first eleven chapters. I'd realized that the rest of the Old Testament *doesn't make sense without them*, and I needed to stop ignoring them.

So, I started to rationalize. I came up with elaborate theories about a young Earth, and God not only restoring the planet after the Flood but also creating a complex fossil backstory that made everything appear ancient. I decided that God even made the universe appear to be very old. Then a person I respected said, "Why would God do that?" At that moment, God brought all my rationalizations crashing down. God *wouldn't* do that. I then chose to ignore the issues and focus on the clear lessons.

After 30 years, my curiosity led me to read a book written by a scientist about the Flood. The book was both gentle and blunt. Long story short, there was no Flood. I went into denial, and I became really angry, but I kept reading. Finally, I accepted that Moses' flood story not only didn't happen but that he had borrowed the imagery from a story from his ancestors in Mesopotamia.

I want to emphasize how hard that was. It wasn't just my understanding of *Genesis* 1-11 that was at stake, it was my faith in the Bible. I realized, however, that God hadn't made a mistake. The problem was that *I didn't understand what Moses intended* when he wrote those chapters. I decided to put aside everything that I thought or had been told, and I looked at Moses, the Israelites, and their circumstances to determine *why* he had written what he did.

As for the Israelites, now the modern Jews, no people in history have been so committed to preserving their ethnic identity. Abraham moved to Canaan with just his household; later, Jacob's household numbered only seventy people when they moved to Egypt. For four

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generations, this tiny clan had completely resisted the temptation to merge with the Canaanites. For almost 400 years, as they grew from seventy into perhaps two million people, they continued to maintain their unique identity. We'll look at them later, but for now, we need to understand that they were not people who changed their minds easily.

Furthermore, Moses wasn't writing to people who already believed what he was telling them.

**14** “Therefore, fear the Lord and worship him in sincerity and truth. **Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt**, and worship the Lord. **15** But if it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today: **Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living?** As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord.” (*Joshua 24:14-15, CSB*)

I had thought that Abraham had believed that Yahweh was the one true God and the Israelites believed that as well. Yet Joshua was speaking after the Israelites had completed the initial conquest of Canaan, and many of them were still practicing their ancestral religion and worshiping its gods.

Abraham and his household had brought their religion with them from Mesopotamia, and Abraham thought that Yahweh, one of many gods, had called him for a special purpose. Abraham viewed Yahweh as his *personal* god, and the Israelites continued to have the same view.

Also, we should note that the religion of the Israelites was, in their minds, different from the religion of the *Amorites*, one of the many tribes of Canaan. What was special about the Amorites that Joshua mentioned them by name?

So, we see that God called Moses to change not just the religion, but the fundamental religious ideas, of two million very strong-willed people. Moses faced an enormous challenge, and his approach to it in the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* was quite brilliant.

Moses had to *cancel the old beliefs* to make room for the new ones, and he had to make the new ideas relatable. He used what became a common approach through the ages. He presented the new ideas using the forms and imagery of the old ideas. This made the new ideas seem more familiar while also making the old ones seem redundant.

He only used this approach in *Genesis* 1-11. Starting in chapter 12, he began narrating actual events based on the family traditions, starting with God's calling of Abraham. He showed that the Israelites moving to Egypt had been part of God's plan all along, including their enslavement. He also showed that God had intended to call the Israelites out of Egypt and return them to Canaan, see *Genesis* 15:13-16.

Let me be clear. The Israelites' ancestors didn't have some special spiritual insight that Moses felt compelled to preserve. Instead, the Israelites, Moses' audience, still held onto what

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their ancestors believed. Moses, guided by God, knew that telling the Israelites to forget everything they believed wouldn't work. Instead, he called them to change their thinking as little as he could. He took ideas and imagery familiar to them as a starting point and built up his main point. Yahweh God, and Yahweh God alone, created the cosmos and humankind for a special purpose.

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We may be tempted to complain about this, thinking that God should have provided Moses with a more accurate understanding of the Universe. However, Moses also held to the same ideas as the rest of the Israelites for the first 80 years of his life. As God began to work through him, God also took ideas and imagery familiar to Moses and began reshaping his thinking.

This is an example of a fundamental principle. God takes people where they are and moves them toward Christ; however, no one completely arrives at the goal, at least not in this life.

Moses had no foundation to understand modern science, and God had little time to work with him. Even if God had managed to instruct Moses, that wouldn't have benefited him in his task with the Israelites. We need to see that God moved powerfully in Moses and content ourselves with the results.

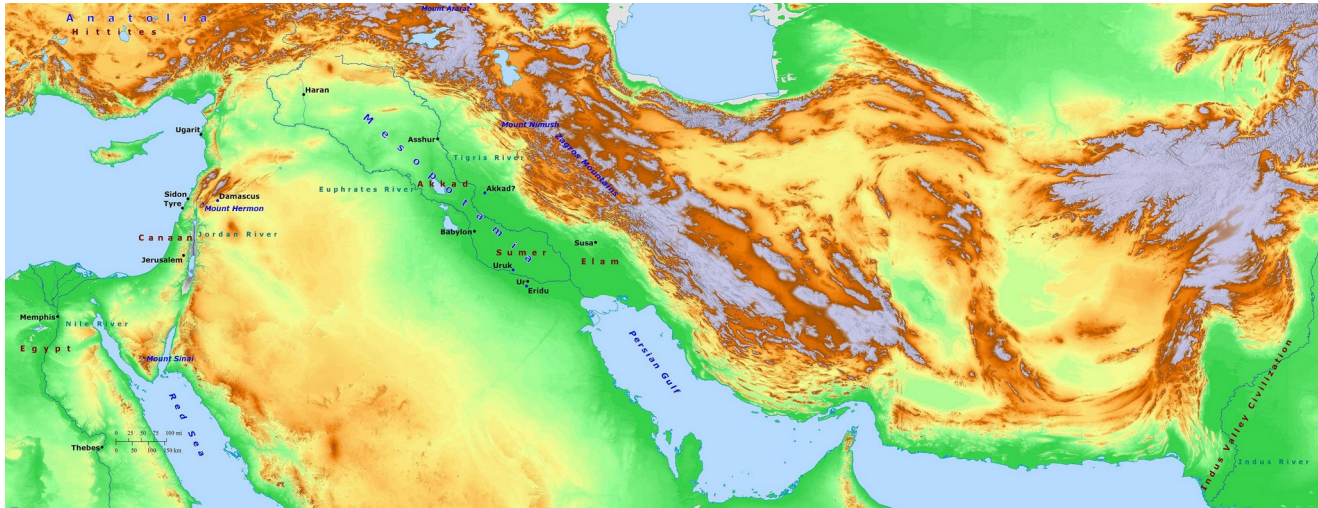
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However, our focus here isn't on what Moses wrote but on the historical and religious background that the Israelites had inherited. After we look at that, Moses' reasons for writing as he did become clear. It also helps us understand why the Israelites were unwilling to adopt the religion of the Canaanites and yet were tempted to do so.

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## Where Did Abraham Come From?

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The Ancient World

(see the site for the original image)

The ancient peoples conducted trade from Egypt to Mesopotamia to both sides of the Persian Gulf to the Indus Valley. The Egyptians imported Lapis Lazuli, a blue stone from the mountains northwest of the Indus Valley, as early as the fourth millennium BCE.

**31** Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Haran's son), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they set out together from **Ur of the Chaldeans** to go to the land of **Canaan**. But when they came to **Haran**, they settled there. (*Genesis* 11:31, CSB)

As I mentioned in the introduction, Abraham had brought his religion with him from “beyond the Euphrates River” in Mesopotamia, from “Ur of the Chaldeans.”

In the Hebrew Scriptures, “Chaldeans” translates the Hebrew word “kasdîm.” This word appears 80 times; three times in *Genesis* as “Ur of the Kasdîm” and 77 times referring to the actual Chaldeans who lived in southern Mesopotamia.

However, the Chaldeans were a branch of the Arameans who took control of southern Mesopotamia around 900 BCE.<sup>1</sup> They were influential in helping Babylon regain its independent from Assyria at the end of the seventh century BCE. Abraham lived 2144–1969 BCE, over 1,000 years before the Chaldeans appeared. So, who were the “Kasdîm” of *Genesis*?

The history of Mesopotamia going back as far as the time of Abraham wasn't known until the last 100 years. Before this, scholars thought that the Babylonians were the original

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<sup>1</sup> See Britannica, *Aramaean*, [www.britannica.com/topic/Aramaean](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Aramaean).

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civilization in Mesopotamia. Because the Chaldeans played an essential role in Babylon much later, scholars assumed that “Ur of the Chaldeans” was somehow connected to Babylon.

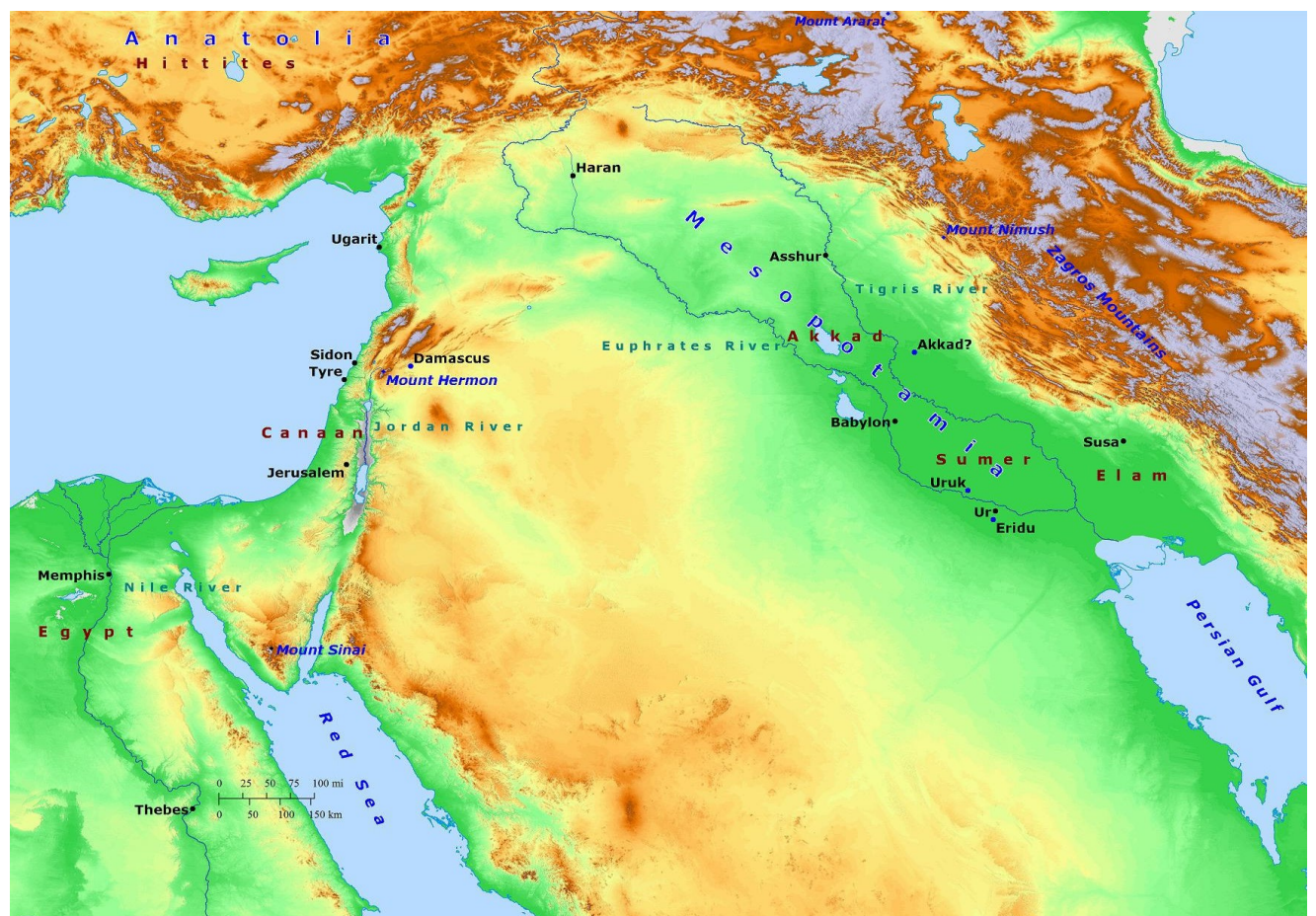
In 1922, the city of Ur was discovered, opening a new window into the history of Mesopotamia. In time, scholars realized that the Babylonians were Amorites who had inherited the technology and religion of the ancient civilization of Sumer. Abraham had come from Ur, the last capital before Sumer collapsed, giving way to the Amorites and the first Babylonian Empire. Sumer had existed from perhaps 4500 to 2000 BCE.

Thus, a better translation of *Genesis* 11:31 would be “Ur of the Sumerians.” Abraham was a Sumerian, and he and his household brought the Sumerian religion to Canaan with them. Thus, we need to look back to ancient Sumer to learn about this religion.



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## Sumer



The Ancient Middle East

Sumer was an ancient civilization in southeastern Mesopotamia—from the Greek word for “Between the Rivers.” Along with Egypt and the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) in modern Pakistan, it was among the world’s first civilizations. Where they came from is uncertain, but they arrived in southern Mesopotamia around 4500 BCE and took over the people who had lived there for thousands of years. They referred to themselves as the “Black-Headed People.”<sup>1</sup>

The Sumerians had a unique language. Their neighbors to the north in Akkad and Asshur spoke Akkadian, the tribes of Canaan Canaanite, and the Egyptians Egyptian. However, all three of these languages were related and belonged to the Semitic language family. This, along with their advanced technology, gave the Sumerians a sense of superiority, which

<sup>1</sup> See Wikipedia, *Sumer*, sections *Name*, *Origins*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer)



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played a crucial role in Abraham and his descendants refusing to assimilate with the Canaanites or Egyptians.

Middle and southern Mesopotamia lacked resources, even wood and stone, and the Sumerians depended heavily on both agriculture and trade. Agriculture required irrigation, and the Sumerians developed engineering skills. They traded extensively, as far as Egypt to the northwest and the Indus Valley to the east.

Trade required keeping track of transactions, and the Sumerians invented cuneiform writing for this purpose. At first, this form of writing used pictures representing words, but this evolved into a system with a script representing syllables. This allowed the representation of multi-syllable words and reduced the number of characters to around 600 by 2800 BCE. Scribes used a clay tablet and a stylus to make the characters; children made many of the surviving tablets as they learned to write.

The Sumerians also became skilled builders using bricks because stone wasn't available. This started around the sixth millennium BCE, and by the late third millennium, they had large ziggurats on top of which they built temples. These were typically part of a larger complex with other buildings.

The Sumerians were also astronomers. A tablet recorded an event in 3123 linked to a large meteorite impact in Austria.<sup>2</sup> Their observations led to advances in mathematics, the 360 degrees in a circle and 60 minutes in an hour originated with them. They also formed a lunar calendar with twelve months. Each month started on the new moon. They added a "leap month" periodically to keep the calendar in sync with the seasons. They also invented four weeks of seven days each that roughly corresponded to the phases of the moon. There are indications that they viewed the seventh day of each week as a bad day to conduct business and/or a day of relaxation.

The Sumerians, living between two rivers and close to the sea, also developed a very practical view of the cosmos. They viewed dry land as essentially a disc surrounded by water. Massive pillars supported the land on top of solid rock. Within the solid rock was a massive cavern, the underworld. Above the land and the surrounding waters was a dome, also called a



Rebuilt Great Ziggurat of Ur

Originally built in 2100 BCE, it was 210x150 feet at its base and 100 feet tall.

Image courtesy of: By Hardnfast, CC BY 3.0, [commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3544015](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3544015)

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<sup>2</sup> See Phys Org, *Cuneiform clay tablet translated for the first time*, [phys.org/news/2008-03-cuneiform-clay-tablet.html](https://phys.org/news/2008-03-cuneiform-clay-tablet.html)

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firmament; air filled the space between the land and waters and the firmament. Above the firmament was more water; gates in the firmament opened to allow rain to fall. The Sun, Moon, and stars moved around the inside of the firmament; the planets—“planet” comes from the Greek meaning “wander”—were particularly prominent stars. At the same time, they understood that some of the heavenly bodies were closer than the others. The Moon was closest, then Venus, Mercury, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn was the farthest.

## **Religion**

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The Sumerians passed on their religious beliefs through origin stories—my preferred term for ancient myths. Over time, these stories evolved and what follows is a summary of their main themes, not a detailed description.

The stories themselves tend to be wordy and repetitive; the priests seemed to design the stories to sound religious and mystical. They also repeat the same thought in different words, a characteristic of Hebrew poetry. The stories often contain clear lessons about the natural order or appropriate behavior.

The basis of Sumerian religion was its gods. Before I go on, I want to point out that the Sumerians had *many* gods, and I going to mention about a dozen of the ones that played prominent roles later on. As a help, I copied the list of gods below into a separate document that you can open in a new tab or print and use for a reference.

The following lists the major gods in roughly the order they appeared. The Sumerians thought that the gods personified the different parts of the cosmos, so the appearance of each god represented a step in the formation of the cosmos. I also provided alternative names for some of the gods. I bolded the names of the gods most important to us.

- Nammu—the primeval freshwaters; she always existed
- Anu—the firmament or heavens; this was thought to be solid, like the land
- Ki (Ninmah, Ninhursag)—the land
- **Enlil**—the sky; he became the greatest of the gods
- **Enki** (Ea)—the seas; he was also the god of knowledge and natural order, the creator of people
- Nanna (Sin)—the Moon; Enlil created him to light the firmament
- Utu (Shamash)—the Sun; he was the god of justice, morality, and truth
- Inanna (Ishtar)—Venus; she was the goddess of love, war, and political power

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- Ereshkigal—the Underworld; she was the queen of Irkalla and was sometimes called by that name
- **Marduk**—(eventually) Jupiter; he was a minor god in Sumer, but the Babylonians promoted him as their chief god, he became the type for Canaanite Baal

The list of gods goes on. The gods were divided into two groups.

- **The Anunnaki**, the great gods who ruled the cosmos
- **The Igigi**, the lesser gods who served the Anunnaki

The Sumerians also had legends and legendary figures.

- Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh seems to have been a king of Uruk sometime between 2900 and 2700 BCE. Somehow, he became the legendary hero of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a series of stories that lead the larger-than-life Gilgamesh to seek the secret to eternal life.

In one of the early stories, Gilgamesh rescued a tree for Inanna; she called him “brother.” Gilgamesh killed an enormous snake coiled around the tree, causing the demon Lilith and a monstrous bird to flee from the tree. Gilgamesh then uprooted the tree with his hands and handed it over to Inanna. Read the story in the section, “Inanna and the Huluppu Tree.”

Toward the end of the epic, Gilgamesh met a Noah-like figure who had survived a great flood and had received eternal life from Enlil. This person told Gilgamesh the story of the flood.

## The *Eridu Genesis*

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The so-called *Eridu Genesis* is an epic poem that describes the formation of the cosmos, the creation of people, the early kings, and the flood. The oldest version is from a damaged tablet created around 1600 BCE;<sup>3</sup> however, the text is Sumerian, indicating that the account itself is much older. The following is a reconstruction of its contents based on various sources.

The name “Eridu Genesis” comes from the city of Eridu, one of the oldest in Sumer and associated with the god Enki, and the vague similarity of the plot to the first chapter of *Genesis*.

Note that the *Eridu Genesis* is completely different from the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* that later replaced it. Many sources incorrectly treat them as the same. The section on Babylon and Hammurabi describes the *Enuma Elish*.

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, *Sumerian Creation Myth*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian\\_creation\\_myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_creation_myth).

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## Origins of the Gods

The challenge in describing this portion of the story is making the various names and events meaningful. For my purposes, I will point out significant imagery that Moses drew out of these stories and incorporated into his own. As I said above, Moses wanted to create new stories that sounded familiar to the Israelites while teaching new lessons.

The Enuma Elish assumed that Nammu, the primeval freshwaters, always existed.	Cosmos was originally all water
Nammu then brought forth the “An-ki,” the “firmament/earth” as one, solid ground surrounded by the waters.	Emergence of land in the midst of the waters
The An-ki brought forth Enlil, the sky, who separated Anu, the firmament, and Ki, the land. This left the firmament stretched out over the land like a dome with the sky in between. <sup>4</sup> The freshwaters surrounded all three of them.	A firmament lifts the waters up
The thought was that Enlil took away Ki, the land. In this way, Enlil became the chief god, putting Anu into a secondary position. Ki became the partner of Enlil under the name Ninmah or Ninhursag—“nin” meant “queen.” Nammu, the primeval freshwaters, still surrounded everything. <sup>5</sup>	The sky is preeminent
At this point, Nammu faded into the background, although she didn’t disappear. This was a common development in Sumerian religion and the religions descended from it. The newer gods tended to displace the older gods who brought them forth. Nammu eventually came to be viewed as the personification of disorder, chaos, and thus evil. The gods she brought forth represented increasing order and thus good, especially Enlil.	Water, especially the seas, represented disorder, chaos, and therefore evil
Enlil and Ki—or perhaps Anu and Nammu—brought forth Enki, the—saltwater—seas. Enlil put him in charge of shaping the land, and Enki took some of Nammu’s freshwaters and created the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.	Emergence of the seas

4 See Andrew Griffiths, *Sumerian Creation Myth*, [www.world-myth.com/mesopotamian/sumerian-creation-myth](http://www.world-myth.com/mesopotamian/sumerian-creation-myth)

5 See Samuel Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, chapter 2, plate X.

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Up to this point, there was no light. Enlil and his consort then brought forth Nanna, the Moon, to light the firmament and the land below. <sup>6</sup>	Emergence of light
Nanna and his consort brought forth twins, Utu, the Sun, and Inanna, Venus. Nanna also seems to have brought forth Ereshkigal, goddess of the Underworld.	(Moses minimized the Sun, Moon, and planets)

All the gods up to this point belonged to the Anunnaki, the great rulers. Together, they gave shape to the cosmos. There were many other gods among the Anunnaki.

Somehow, the Anunnaki also created a lower class of gods, the Igigi, to serve them. This followed the pattern of ancient civilizations with nobility and serfs.

Marduk was a minor god in Sumer, either a son of Utu or perhaps one of the Igigi. He and the Igigi became significant after Sumer collapsed and the Amorites became the lords of Mesopotamia.

## Origins of Humankind

Enlil was the god of storms and also fertility, but he gave the job of shaping the land to Enki. <sup>7</sup> Such labor was beneath the Anunnaki, and Enki told the Igigi to do it. However, the Igigi rebelled and refused to work, so Enlil had Enki set about creating new laborers.

Enki killed an Igigi, took its blood and mixed it with clay, and formed *genderless* humans. This all took place in a place called Eden—in the Sumerian language this meant “flat place.” In the stories, Eden was the home of the gods. Note that the Sumerian word had no connection with the Hebrew word that meant “pleasure” except that they sounded similar.

This is a good point to look at the relationship between the Anunnaki and the Igigi. While both groups were gods, the Igigi were subservient to the Anunnaki, to the extent that Enlil sacrificed one of them to create people. The Sumerians saw themselves as the Anunnaki and the peoples around them as Igigi.

Enki grew tired of creating more laborers, so he reshaped them as male and female so that they could reproduce. When Enlil found out, he realized that people would multiply and become annoying. He was angry with Enki and opposed people, forcing them to labor with much hardship and suffering. However, the gods depended on people to produce food for

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<sup>6</sup> Different stories go into more depth about Enlil and Ninlil, some portraying Enlil as something of a villain.

<sup>7</sup> My primary source for this account is AncientOrigins.net, The origins of human beings according to ancient Sumerian texts, [www.ancient-origins.net/news-human-origins-folklore/origins-human-beings-accordingancient-sumerian-texts-0065](http://www.ancient-origins.net/news-human-origins-folklore/origins-human-beings-accordingancient-sumerian-texts-0065). Note that this source describes the origins of the cosmos using the Amorite *Enuma Elish* rather than the *Eridu Genesis*.

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them, so Enlil tolerated them. A somewhat later version of the story says that Enlil barely tolerated people and sent floods every 1,200 years to reduce their population.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Sumerian King List**

Priests in Ur of Sumer created this list around the time of Abraham, although the ideas in the list seem to be older. The list was partly legendary and partly historical. The list starts with eight kings who reigned for absurdly long times, from 18,600 to 43,200 years.

After these kings, the list says, “Then the flood swept over.”

After the flood, the length of the reigns became much shorter, from 1,200 years for several kings down to 126 years for Gilgamesh, after whom the record appears to be historical.

## **Summary**

For those familiar with *Genesis* 1, much of the imagery from the origins of the cosmos portion of the Sumerian story is familiar. However, we can also see how completely different the worldview Moses promoted was from that of the Sumerians.

The biggest difference is that the Sumerian stories have one god bringing forth more gods who bring forth more gods, and each god personified a part of the cosmos. Moses depicted God as creating the cosmos and then shaping it, bringing order out of the initial chaos.

In the Hebrew text, Moses used “create” only three times: of the initial cosmos, the sea creatures, and man. The rest God shaped out of what he had created.

In addition, the Sumerian account had little sense of time and or purpose. Moses arranged the creation process into six days, and God had a clear purpose in creation, which was to prepare a place for the people he would create in his own image.

The following has the first 26 verses of *Genesis* 1 from the Christian Standard Bible along with the imagery Moses borrowed from the *Eridu Genesis* and some notes.

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Moses introduced a radical idea. God *created* the cosmos. The Sumerians thought that the cosmos had always existed in the form of Nammu, the freshwaters.

<sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Imagery: the cosmos was initially all water, water represented disorder

Moses portrayed the initial creation as all water and darkness. Both of these represented chaos that required refinement into something orderly and useful.

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<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia, *Atra-Hasis*, Tablet II, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis#Tablet\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis#Tablet_II)

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**3** Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

Imagery: emergence of light

However, Moses didn’t connect light with the Moon or Sun. God simply formed light, independent of any source.

**6** Then God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water.” **7** So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. **8** God called the expanse “sky.” Evening came and then morning: the second day.

Imagery: the firmament (CSB uses “expanse”) lifting and separating the waters

Moses portrays God shaping the firmament as a dome that lifted and separated the waters; however, this occurred before the appearance of land.

In verse 8, the CSB incorrectly calls the firmament “sky”; it should be “heavens.” In both Hebrew and Greek, one word, “heaven,” referred to the sky, the firmament—what we think of as outer space, and the place where the gods reside. Hebrew also had the idea of a “plural of majesty” that used the plural to depict the greatest of something; here, God clearly named the expanse “heavens.”

In his account, Moses deliberately avoided mentioning the sky. The Sumerians and the religions derived from theirs viewed the Sky god as preeminent: Enlil, Marduk of the Amorites, and Baal of the Canaanites. Moses was effectively canceling them.

**9** Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. **10** God called the dry land “earth,” and the gathering of the water he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Imagery: emergence of land, seas

Moses ignored the difference between fresh and salt water and treated the land as requiring no further refinement.

**11** Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.” And it was so. **12** The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. **13** Evening came and then morning: the third day.

God shaped vegetation on the land. Apparently, the ancients didn’t consider plants to be living in the same way as animals; that is, they didn’t have souls.



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The first three days dealt with light, the firmament, and the land. The next three days will also address light, the firmament, and the land. This parallelism was characteristic of Hebrew poetry and provides form to the account.

**14** Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for seasons and for days and years. **15** They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth.” And it was so. **16** God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night—as well as the stars. **17** God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, **18** to rule the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** Evening came and then morning: the fourth day.

Moses portrays God as shaping lights in firmament. Again, “sky” in verses 14 and 17 should be “heavens” as Moses continued to avoid mentioning the sky.

Moses also avoided calling the “lights” by their names, the Sun and Moon. These names were associated with major deities; by refusing to name them, Moses emphasized that they were simply objects that God created for a purpose.

**20** Then God said, “Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” **21** So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds. He also created every winged creature according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** God blessed them: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” **23** Evening came and then morning: the fifth day.

Moses depicted God creating the animals of the sea and the birds.

Once again, “sky” in verse 20 should be heavens; the birds fly across “the face of the firmament, the heavens.” Moses adamantly refused to acknowledge the sky.

**24** Then God said, “Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. **25** So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

God had already created animals, Moses has him shaping land animals. The focus is on land mammals, although reptiles and other land animals are included.

**26** Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

Finally, Moses revealed God’s purpose in creating and shaping all this. God created people in his own image and set them over the rest of the creation.

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Moses' sequence may not seem any more logical than the Sumerian one from a modern perspective. That's reasonable, as Moses had no particular reason to order things in a certain way, beyond creating parallels between the groups of days. However, a later section will show something quite remarkable about the order Moses ended up with.

The other major difference in the stories was the purpose behind creating people. The Sumerian stories viewed people as created to be laborers to do the work of the Igigi, the rebellious lesser gods. Although the gods made people using the blood of a lesser god, they were still only slightly better than domestic animals.

Moses portrayed people as the *reason* for the rest of creation and its crowning achievement. God made them in his spiritual image and set them up to rule over the rest of the creation.

Moses borrowed other bits of imagery from the *Eridu Genesis*. Enki originally created people using the blood of an Igigi and clay. God used dust and breathed life into the first man, creating him in his own image.

Enki later provided people with gender so that they could reproduce, God created the man first and then shaped the woman from the man.

Moses' genealogies in chapters 5 and 10 have parallels to the King's List, with the exceptionally long lives in chapter 5 and the lives becoming shorter in chapter 10.

There are some other stories from which Moses borrowed imagery, but first, we must address what the *Eridu Genesis* mentioned in passing, the Flood.

## The Flood

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The Sumerian flood story was ancient and very popular. Perhaps a massive flood from around 2800 BCE inspired it.<sup>9</sup> The Sumerian story likely influenced an Egyptian story, *The Book of the Heavenly Cow*, from around 2184–2040 BCE.<sup>10</sup>

By 2100 BCE, the priests had incorporated the flood story into the very popular *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Over time, variations of both stories emerged. Abraham and his household took the earlier versions to Canaan and passed them down to the Israelites.

The following summarizes the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* tablet XI version; this version should be very close to the one Abraham knew.<sup>11</sup> I'll summarize the story and note the imagery that Moses used in his story.

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9 David R. Montgomery, *THE ROCKS DON'T LIE A Geologist Investigates Noah's Flood*, page 154, notes that, "Excavations at Shuruppak revealed that a flood did indeed destroy the city around 2800 BC."

10 So WorldHistory.org *Eridu Genesis*, [www.worldhistory.org/Eridu\\_Genesis](http://www.worldhistory.org/Eridu_Genesis).

11 The full text is available at AncientTexts.org, *THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH, TABLET XI THE STORY OF THE FLOOD*, [www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab11.htm](http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab11.htm)

## *Genesis Background*

<p>Anu and Enlil decide to destroy humankind with a flood, and they bind the other gods with an oath not to interfere. (Other versions of the story indicate that people were too numerous and noisy. This fits with Enlil's general dislike of people and their ability to reproduce.)</p>	<p>A divine wrath against humankind, leading to a decision to wipe out all people</p>
<p>Enki, called Ea, sees that this is a mistake. Because of the oath, he pretends to speak to a thin wall knowing that a man named Utanapishtim was listening on the other side. Enki tells him to sell all his possessions in order to build himself an enormous cube-shaped boat 180 feet on each side. The boat is to have six decks divided into nine compartments. Enki also provides him with an excuse to give to the city leaders for his building the boat; Utanapishtim is to say that Enlil had tired of him, so he is going to live with Enki.</p>	<p>Divine intervention to save one man and his household</p> <p>The man is to build an enormous boat with multiple decks</p>
<p>Utanapishtim builds the boat and coats it with tar inside and out, finishing construction in one day. That night, he loads it with wealth, his family, animals, and craftsmen.</p>	<p>The boat is coated with tar inside and out</p>
<p>The next day, a terrible storm comes, so that even the gods cower at the flood it produces. The storm and flood last seven days, and all the people perish. The boat comes to rest on Mount Nimush—or Nisir, now called Jabal Birah Magrun—an 8,600-foot peak on the western edge of the Zagros Mountains.</p>	<p>A tremendous storm kills all people not in the boat</p> <p>The boat comes to rest on a tall mountain</p>
<p>After another seven days, Utanapishtim sends out a dove that returns, then a swallow that returns, and then a raven that doesn't. He unloads the boat and then offers a sheep.</p>	<p>The man releases birds three times; the third doesn't return</p> <p>The man offers a sacrifice</p>
<p>The gods smell the sacrifice and flock to it. Ki, called Ninmah, rejoices over the offering but bans Enlil from participating because his flood has destroyed the people who made offerings.</p> <p>When Enlil arrives, he is furious that some people have survived. One of the gods tattles on Enki, who then gently reprimands Enlil for his hasty action while denying his involvement. Enlil repents, and he grants Utanapishtim and his wife eternal life.</p>	<p>The gods smell the sacrifice</p> <p>Divine repentance over the flood</p> <p>Divine blessings on the man</p>

Moses' story was longer and more detailed, starting in *Genesis* 6 and ending midway through chapter 9. He retained all the key imagery from the Sumerian story, but the plot and the underlying themes are quite different. Some of the key differences follow.

## ***Genesis Background***

- Rather than the gods frustrated about noise or other annoyances, God was grieved over the corruption of the people he had made in his own image.
- Rather than gods undermining each other, God decided to spare Noah because he wasn't willing to give up on humankind. Instead, he attempted to start humankind over with a upright man.
- Rather than a giant cube, Noah's ark had a very reasonable design.
- Rather than the boat being built in a day and the flood lasting two weeks, Noah spent a considerable amount of time, perhaps 100 years, building the ark. The flood and recovery from it took over a year.
- Rather than the gods realizing that they had made a mistake, God simply chose not to repeat this attempt to restart humankind. He will live with people's sin and, by implication, find another solution.

## **Other Stories**

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In one story, Enki offends Ki, and she curses him, causing ailments in eight parts of his body that almost kill him. Finally, Ki relents and brings forth eight goddesses to heal Enki's afflicted body parts, including his rib and his side.

This has a loose connection to God producing the woman from the man's side.

When Inanna is about to choose a husband, her brother Utu encourages her to pick the shepherd-god; however, she prefers the farmer-god. The shepherd-god becomes angry and belligerent, but Inanna chooses the calm and gentle farmer-god.

This parallels the conflict between Cain and Abel, except that Cain, the farmer, was belligerent toward Abel, the shepherd. The Sumerians were farmers and the Israelites shepherds, which explains the role reversal.

A very ancient story tells how Enki battles the Kur, the Underworld. It seems that the Kur had abducted Ereshkigal, who later became its queen. The ending of the original story is missing.

This story evolved until the hero was Enlil's son and the Kur took the form of a sea monster associated with Nammu who represented chaos. In this form, the battle symbolized the victory of order over chaos. This story played an important role in the emergence of Baal as the chief god of the Canaanites, as we'll see below.

# *Genesis Background*

## **The Spread of Sumerian Religion**

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The origins of Sumer and its religion began before recorded history, but Sumerian culture seemed to reach its peak during the mid-third century BCE. However, Sumer didn't exist in isolation. The Sumerians dominated Elam to the southeast and a large region I'll call "Akkad"—it shared a common "Akkadian" language—to the north, and they traded as far as Egypt and the Indus Valley. This caused their learning and religion to spread, even before the fall of Sumer. After Sumer fell for good around 2004, about 40 years after Isaac was born, its learning and religion continued to spread, influencing the nations of Mesopotamia and beyond, including Canaan.

The following looks at how Sumerian religion over time spread, changed, and came to influence the surrounding nations until the Israelites came into contact with it again in Canaan.

## **Akkad**

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In 2334, a commoner named Sargon seized control of the city of Akkad and began to conquer Sumer, Elam to the southeast, Hittite country in Anatolia to the north, and the regions along the Mediterranean coast. While scholars debate whether the Akkadians actually formed an empire, they certainly imposed their will on a wide area. Sargon the Great reigned for 56 years. Possibly, he inspired Moses' Nimrod; the name probably means "Rebel" in Hebrew.

The Sumerians spoke a language, but the Akkadian spoke a Semitic dialect, a relative of the languages of Canaan and Egypt. While the Akkadians sought to absorb Sumerian religion and learning, they also forced the Sumerians to speak Akkadian. They pursued this policy along the Mediterranean coast as well, and Akkadian remained the language of diplomacy at least until the fourteenth century BCE.

This explains why Abraham, while he considered himself Sumerian, likely spoke Akkadian. When he moved to Canaan, he and his descendants would then have quickly learned to speak the Canaanite dialect. As a result, ancient Hebrew was very close to the Canaanite language.

While forcing the Sumerians to speak their language, the Akkadians seemed interested in identifying themselves as Sumerians rather than imposing their culture. Thus, the Sumerians retained their own identity, even though under Akkadian dominance.

The Akkadians retained the Sumerian language for religious purposes, but they also translated the origin stories into Akkadian. As they went about this, they seemed intent on maintaining the stories essentially unchanged. This allowed the Sumerian stories to spread as

# *Genesis Background*

far as the Hittites and Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast, and the stories traveled as far as Greece and into Canaan.

## **The Ur III Renaissance**

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The city of Ur, in the southwest corner of Sumer, seems to have survived the collapse of Akkad relatively intact. Around 2144, Terah fathered Abraham in the city. Whether the people of Ur still spoke Sumerian is uncertain, but Abraham grew up speaking Akkadian.

In 2112, Ur-Nammu of Ur established himself as “King of Sumer and Akkad.”<sup>1</sup> He and his son established an empire that included the Elamite city of Susa and reached as far north as Anatolia. They engaged in extensive construction, including a temple for Nanna the Moon god. His son also established a law code and brought about substantial administrative reforms.

During this time, a serious threat to agriculture worsened throughout Sumer. Salt in the groundwater had begun rising toward the surface before the time of Sargon. At first, Sumerian farmers switched from growing wheat to barley, but the problem continued to grow worse. This was part of what allowed Sargon to conquer Sumer.<sup>2</sup> As early as 2100, people began to leave Sumer and emigrate to the northwest. By 1700, the population of Sumer had declined by 60%.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime around 2075, Terah moved his family from Ur to Haran in northwestern Mesopotamia. A temple to Sin, or Nanna, appeared in Haran about this time. Possibly, priests from Ur had settled in Haran. In 2069, Abraham took his household, left Haran, and moved to Canaan. In 2044, Abraham fathered Isaac. When Isaac grew older, Abraham obtained a wife for him, but he showed his disdain for the Canaanites by sending his servant back to his brother’s family in Haran.

During this Sumerian revival, semi-nomadic tribesmen from Syria began to filter into Mesopotamia and Canaan. The Bible called them Amorites. The Sumerians viewed them as uncivilized and boorish. They spoke a dialect very close to that of Canaan, but the Amorites in Mesopotamia quickly adopted Akkadian. Amorites also settled in Sumer, assimilating into the Sumerian culture. However, they likely became an underclass to the Sumerians.

By 2004, Sumer had declined, and a failed attack upon Elam ended with the Elamites invading Sumer and sacking Ur. This left Sumer on the verge of extinction as a nation. For the next 100 years, Sumer and Mesopotamia experienced anarchy.

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1 See Wikipedia, *Third Dynasty of Ur*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_Dynasty\\_of\\_Ur#History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Dynasty_of_Ur#History)

2 Macrohistory WorldHistory, *Sargon the Great, Sumerians and Babylon to 1800 BCE*, [www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch03.htm](http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch03.htm)

3 Wikipedia, *Sumer*, Fall and Transmission, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer#Fall\\_and\\_transmission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer#Fall_and_transmission)

# Genesis Background

Meanwhile, in Canaan, Isaac fathered Esau and Jacob in 1984. *Genesis* says little about Isaac, but he seemed to lack the convictions of his father. In 1944, his son Esau took two “Hethite”—or, Hittite—women as wives. Possibly, these Hittites were part of a colony of traders living in Canaan. Both Isaac and his wife Rebekah found these foreign women to be a source of frustration, but it seems Rebekah more so. Around 1910, her defiant attitude led her to encourage Jacob to defraud his father and brother of the blessing. This soon led Jacob to flee to Haran and his uncle Laban, and he stayed there for 20 years. Joseph was the last son that Jacob fathered there; he was born in 1893. Jacob’s time in Haran seems to have hardened his attitude toward the Canaanites.

## The Amorites

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After 100 years of anarchy, Mesopotamia came under Amorite rule around 1900. As the Akkadians had done, the Amorites began to adopt Sumer’s learning and religion. At the same time, they created small kingdoms in place of the Sumerian city-states. This freed the land from the priests and put it in private hands, encouraging commerce and restructuring society.<sup>4</sup>

The Amorites continued to support the traditional religious centers in Uruk and Ur; they began to modify the “Eridu Genesis” of Sumerian religion, resulting in the *Enuma Elish*.

This story starts with two gods, Apsu—freshwaters—and Tiamat—salt waters—who play the role of Nammu. They bring forth other gods.

Apsu becomes irritated by the noise their offspring make, he wants to kill them, while Tiamat urges patience. However, the younger gods find out, and Ea, or Enki, murders Apsu. Tiamat is furious and plans to attack the gods, so they turn to Enki’s son Marduk for help. Marduk agrees, but he demands that the others make him the supreme god. The gods agree, and Marduk defeats and kills Tiamat and forms the firmament and the land from her body. Marduk then turns to Enki for assistance in shaping the land.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the Amorites replaced Anu and Enlil as the chief gods and promoted Marduk in their place. The religion of Sumer was becoming the religion of the Amorites.

In Canaan, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt in 1876, and the king promoted him in 1863. The drought Joseph foretold started in 1856, and Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt in 1854.

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4 Near East Kingdoms, *Amorites*, [www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsMiddEast/MesopotamiaAmorites.htm](http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsMiddEast/MesopotamiaAmorites.htm)

5 See Facts and Details, *ENUMA ELISH AND CREATION STORIES FROM MESOPOTAMIA—Outline of the Enuma Elish Story*. [factsanddetails.com/world/cat56/sub363/entry-6073.html#chapter-6](http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat56/sub363/entry-6073.html#chapter-6). The page also has a detailed version of the story.



# Genesis Background

## Babylon

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Babylon was one of many small Amorite city-states along the Euphrates River. In 1792, its king handed his rule down to his son. Hammurabi was perhaps 18 years old when he became king, and he was a man of tremendous vision and ambition. Through a series of wars, his tiny kingdom grew into the Babylonian Empire which covered most of Mesopotamia.

However, Hammurabi's greater ambition was to build the city of Babylon into the center of the Mesopotamian world. He greatly expanded the city, so that it was perhaps the largest in the world at the time with 200,000 people.<sup>6</sup> He also created a law code for which he is best known.

The name of the city *Bābilim* meant "Gate of the Gods," and this fit Hammurabi's ambitions. He wanted Babylon to become the new religious center of the Mesopotamian world, so he built the Etemenanki, whose name meant, "Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." This ziggurat was enormous; the base was a square 300 feet on each side, and ancient records indicate it was 300 feet tall.<sup>7</sup>

Hammurabi went a step further; his law code started as follows.

"When **Anu** the Sublime, King of the **Anunaki, and Bel**, the lord of Heaven and earth, who decreed the fate of the land, **assigned to Marduk, the over-ruling son of Ea**, God of righteousness, dominion over earthly man, and made him great among the **Igigi, they called Babylon by his illustrious name, made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it, whose foundations are laid so solidly as those of heaven and earth; then Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince**, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak; **so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash**, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind."<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)

(Hammurabi referred to Enlil as Bel which meant "Lord." Shamash was the Babylonian equivalent of Utu, the Sun.)

Thus, Hammurabi formally set aside the chief gods of Sumer, established Marduk, now the son of Enki, as the chief god, and proclaimed Babylon the city of Marduk. He also established himself as lord of the people of Sumer.

He associated the Anunnaki with the Sumerians and the Igigi with the Amorites. In the Sumerian religion, the Anunnaki were the lords and the Igigi the serfs. Now, the Igigi were the

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<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia, *Babylon*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon)

<sup>7</sup> So Livius, *Etemenanki (the "Tower of Babel")*, [www.livius.org/articles/place/babylon/etemenanki/](http://www.livius.org/articles/place/babylon/etemenanki/). However, other sources note objections to the height, saying that it couldn't have been that tall. Regardless, it was much larger than its Sumerian predecessors.

<sup>8</sup> The Avalon Project, The Code of Hammurabi, [avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp)

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lords and the Anunnaki set aside. In doing this, he put the final nail in the coffin of Sumer as a people and a religious center.

Hammurabi died in 1750 having accomplished everything he wanted except for one thing. His son wasn't able to maintain the Babylonian Empire. In the north, people from around the city of Asshur, the Assyrians, gained independence, as did the Elamites. In 1595, the Hittites invaded Mesopotamia and plundered Babylon itself.

The city rebuilt itself and remained a regional power under the Arameans and Assyrians until Nebuchadnezzar II restored it as an empire in 605. It continued to be an important religious and commercial center. However, Hammurabi's ambitions of making it the center of the Mesopotamian world ended quickly.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, Joseph died in 1783, about the time Hammurabi's law code declared Sumer's religion void and its people subject to the Amorites. The Israelites had lived in Egypt for around 50 years and had grown in number to perhaps 500. The Egyptian Middle Kingdom was failing, and foreigners, including Canaanites, were moving into the Nile delta region where the Israelites lived. Over time, the Israelites heard about how the Amorites had humiliated their homeland and religion, which seems to have led to bitterness towards Babylon. We can imagine that the Israelites rejoiced when haughty Babylon fell to the Hittites.

These attitudes seem to have led Moses to write about the tower of Babel. In Hebrew, "babel" means "confusion" and makes a nice wordplay on "Babilim."

## **Ugarit and Canaan**

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Ugarit was located on the Mediterranean coast at a point that provided access to Mesopotamia. The city became a major trade center even as it fell under the control of Akkad, the Hittites, Egypt, and Babylon. The city was destroyed in the early eleventh century, probably due to a widespread invasion that also ended the Hittite Empire. Cities to the south such as Tyre and Sidon survived and inherited the role of major trade centers, becoming the Phoenicians. Because of this, relatively little is known about Ugarit, and like Sumer and Babylon, their achievements tend to be attributed to the Phoenicians.

Ugarit adopted, with changes, the religion of Sumer brought to them originally by Akkad, and they then modified it under the influence of the Amorites and Babylon. The Ugaritic versions of these stories filtered into Canaan.

While Ugarit had many gods, the three most important to us were El, Ashtarte, and Baal-Hadad.

## *Genesis Background*

El was the chief god and father of many other gods. His name simply meant “God,” similar to the Hebrew “Elohim.”<sup>9</sup> El came from Anu; like Anu, he was mainly a peripheral figure.

Ashtarte was the mother goddess and the goddess of love and war. She came from Inanna, known as Ishtar in Akkadian.<sup>10</sup>

Hadad was the god of storms and fertility, a minor son of El in Ugaritic stories. In this sense, he was related to Enlil, but he was a relatively minor figure initially, much like Marduk.

However, probably under Amorite/Babylonian influence, Hadad, also known as Baal-Hadad, meaning “Lord Hadad” and eventually just Baal, replaced El as the chief god. He earned this role by defeating the sea serpent who served the sea goddess. Thus, Baal-Hadad developed strong parallels with Marduk.

Among the Canaanites, El simply disappeared and Baal and Ashtarte became the chief gods. The Israelites would have found all this familiar as a corrupted form of their ancestral religion. How they reacted probably varied, perhaps viewing it with contempt initially but then finding it inviting if their convictions weakened.

Note that the Israelites tended to deliberately mispronounce the names of the foreign gods, using the vowels from the Hebrew word “bosheth” which meant “shame.” In this way, “Melech,” meaning “King,” became “Molech.” “Ashtarte” became “Ashtoreth.” *2 Samuel* replaced “baal” with “bosheth” in the name of King Saul’s son Eshbaal, see *1 Chronicles* 8:33.

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9 Hebrew has two very similar words, “el” and “eloah”; both can mean “god,” “ruler,” “mighty one.” The plural form of “el” is “elim,” as compared to “eloah” and “elohim.” Hebrew also has the idea of a “plural of majesty”; this is why God is called “Elohim” in Hebrew. This is *not* the same as “El.”

10 See Britannica, *Astarte*, [www.britannica.com/topic/Astarte-ancient-deity](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Astarte-ancient-deity).

# *Genesis Background*

## **Genesis 1 and Science**

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As we saw above, Moses structured the first creation account to borrow imagery from “Eridu Genesis” with the goal of replacing it. He changed the focus from many gods being the cosmos to Yahweh purposefully creating it and then bringing order to it. He also changed the role of humankind from replacement laborers to the crowning achievement and rulers of the cosmos.

Moses also gave the story structure with the idea of six days. As God brought order to the creation, there are clear parallels between the first through third and fourth through sixth days.

Day 1: Light	Day 4: Sun, Moon, stars
Day 2: Sky, seas	Day 5: Birds, sealife
Day 3: Land, plants	Day 6: Land animals

Moses didn’t name the “greater and lesser lights” because the Sun and Moon were the names of gods.

However, this doesn’t sound right to us today. How could there be light without the Sun and Moon? In fact, the order Moses provided, from the perspective of an observer on the surface of Earth, is correct. This is a summary of the formation of the Earth and life on it.

- 13.8 billion years ago—Big Bang, Universe first exists
- 4.5 billion years ago—Earth forms
- 4 billion years ago
  - Earth covered by water
  - A dense atmosphere prevents sunlight from reaching the surface
  - Changes in the atmosphere allow sunlight to reach the surface
- 3.8 billion years ago—plate tectonics changes cause a depression at one end of Earth, causing the sea to flow into it and exposing dry land on the other side
- 3.7 billion years ago—first microbes
- 2.4 billion years ago—microbes produced enough oxygen to make the atmosphere transparent, allowing the Sun, Moon, and stars to be seen
- 570 million years ago—first marine animals, Cambrian Explosion
  - 370 million years ago—first amphibians
  - 230 million years ago—first dinosaurs, relatives of birds
  - 65 million years ago—Chicxulub Meteorite, extinction of dinosaurs, mammals fully emerge

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- 300 thousand years ago(?)—first humans

While Moses certainly didn't write a chapter from a science book, his order of events was essentially correct, given that he knew nothing of dinosaurs and he viewed land animals primarily as large mammals. This certainly wasn't his intention; however, his order suddenly looks much more reasonable. Clearly, God had a hand in guiding what Moses wrote.

# *Genesis Background*

## **Inanna and the Huluppu Tree**

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This is a sample of a Sumerian story from an early version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It involves the goddess Inanna and the hero Gilgamesh. The priests would typically start a story with a brief origin story, as we see here.

### **The Huluppu Tree**

In the first days, in the very first days,  
In the first nights, in the very first nights,  
In the first years, in the very first years,

In the first days when everything needed was brought into being,  
In the first days when everything needed was properly nourished,  
When bread was baked in the shrines of the land,  
And bread was tasted in the homes of the land,  
When heaven had moved away from earth,  
And the earth had separated from heaven,  
And the name of man was fixed;

When the Sky God, An, had carried off the heavens,  
And the Air God, Enlil, had carried off the earth,  
When the Queen of the Great Below, Ereshkigal, was given the underworld for her domain,

He set sail; the Father set sail,  
Enki, the God of Wisdom, set sail for the underworld.  
Small windstones were tossed up against him;  
Large hailstones were hurled up against him;  
Like onrushing turtles,  
They charged the keel of Enki's boat.  
The waters of the sea devoured the bow of his boat like wolves;  
The waters of the sea struck the stern of his boat like lions.

At that time, a tree, a single tree, a huluppu-tree  
Was planted by the banks of the Euphrates.  
The tree was nurtured by the waters of the Euphrates.  
The whirling South Wind arose, pulling at its roots  
And ripping at its branches  
Until the waters of the Euphrates carried it away.

A woman who walked in fear of the word of the Sky God, An,  
Who walked in fear of the Air God, Enlil,  
Plucked the tree from the river and spoke:

## *Genesis Background*

"I shall bring this tree to Uruk.  
I shall plant this tree in my holy garden."

Inanna cared for the tree with her hand  
She settled the earth around the tree with her foot  
She wondered:

"How long will it be until I have a shining throne to sit upon?  
How long will it be until I have a shining bed to lie upon?"

The years passed; five years, and then ten years.  
The tree grew thick,  
But its bark did not split.  
Then the serpent who could not be charmed  
Made its nest in the roots of the huluppu-tree.  
The Anzu-bird set its young in the branches of the tree.  
And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk.  
  
The young woman who loved to laugh wept.  
How Inanna wept!

(Yet they would not leave her tree.)

As the birds began to sing at the coming of the dawn,  
The sun God, Utu, left his royal bedchamber.  
Inanna called to her brother Utu, saying:

"O Utu, in the days when the fates were decreed,  
When abundance overflowed in the land,  
When the Sky God took the heavens and the Air God the earth,  
When Ereshkigal was given the Great Below for her domain,  
The God of Wisdom, Father Enki, set sail for the underworld,  
And the underworld rose up and attacked him....

"At that time, a tree, a single tree, the huluppa-tree  
Was planted by the banks of the Euphrates.  
The South Wind pulled at its roots and ripped its branches  
Until the water of the Euphrates carried it away.  
I plucked the tree from the river;

I brought it to my holy garden. I tended the tree, waiting for my shining throne and bed.

Then a serpent who could not be charmed  
Made its nest in the roots of the tree,  
The Anzu-bird set his young in the branches of the tree,



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And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk.

I wept.

How I wept!

(Yet they would not leave my tree.)”

Utu, the valiant warrior, Utu,

Would not help his sister, Inanna.

As the birds began to sing at the coming of the second dawn,

Inanna called to her brother Gilgamesh, saying:

“O Gilgamesh, in the days when the fates were decreed,

When abundance overflowed in Sumer,

When the Sky God had taken the heavens and the Air God the earth,

When Ereshkigal was given the Great Below for her domain,

The God of Wisdom, Father Enki, set sail for the underworld,

“And the underworld rose up and attacked him.

At that time, a tree, a single tree, a huluppu-tree

Was planted by the banks of the Euphrates.

The South Wind pulled at its roots and ripped at its branches

“Until the waters of the Euphrates carried it away.

I plucked the tree from the river;

I brought it to my holy garden.

I tended the tree, waiting for my shining throne and bed.

“Then a serpent who could not be charmed

Made its nest in the roots of the tree,

The Anzu-bird set his young in the branches of the tree,

And the dark maid Lilith built her home in the trunk.

“I wept.

How I wept!

(Yet they would not leave my tree.)”

Gilgamesh, the valiant warrior Gilgamesh,

The hero of Uruk, stood by Inanna.

Gilgamesh fastened his armor of fifty minas around his chest.

The fifty minas weighed as little to him as fifty feathers.

He lifted his bronze ax, the ax of the road,

Weighing seven talents and seven minas, to his shoulder.

He entered Inanna's holy garden.

## ***Genesis Background***

Gilgamesh struck the serpent who could not be charmed.  
The Anzu-bird flew with his young to the mountains;  
And Lilith smashed her home and fled to the wild, uninhabited places.  
Gilgamesh then loosened the roots of the huluppa-tree;  
And the sons of the city, who accompanied him, cut off the branches.  
From the trunk of the tree he carved a throne for his holy sister.  
From the trunk of the tree Gilgamesh carved a bed for Inanna.  
From the roots of the tree she fashioned a pukku[\[drum\]](#) for her brother.  
From the crown of the tree Inanna fashioned a mikku[\[drum stick\]](#) for Gilgamesh  
the hero of Uruk.