

# **Biblical Creations**

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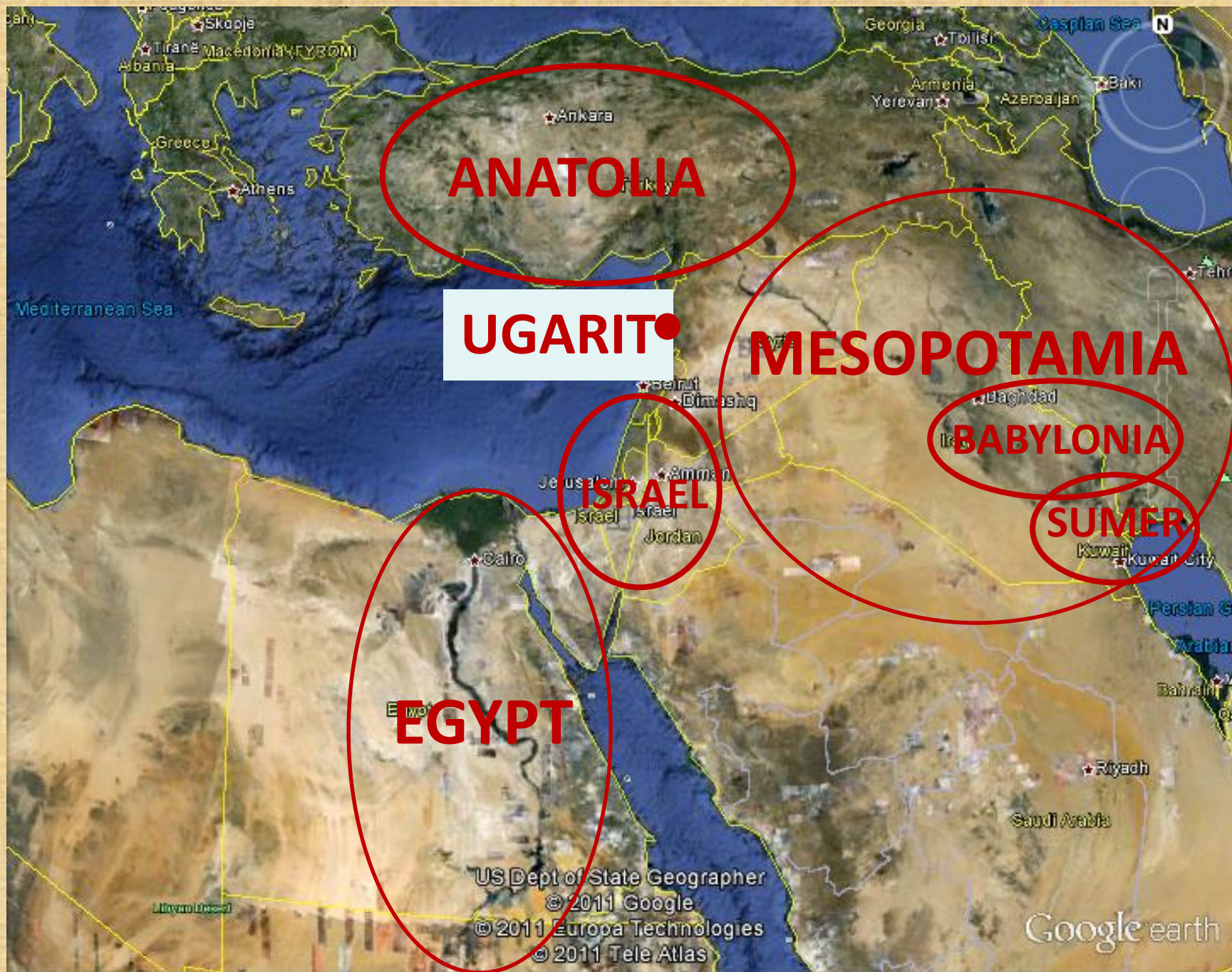
**For Astro 190  
2/26/2018**

# Text Discoveries: 1800's to early 1900's

- **Egyptian:** Full afterlife texts from late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE
- **Sumerian:** Hundreds of cuneiform compositions dating to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE
- **Babylonian:** Thousands of tablets from Mesopotamia from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE
- **Anatolian:** Thousands of tablets from early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE
- **Ugaritic:** Thousands of tablets from 14<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> c. BCE

With these discoveries, the world of the ancient Near East opened up to scholars who use these ancient texts in their study of ancient Israel, which lies at the crossroads of these major, and older, civilizations.

Of course, these texts serve a primary role in the scholarship of the ancient Near East more broadly.



**ANATOLIA**

**UGARIT**

**MESOPOTAMIA**

**BABYLONIA**

**SUMER**

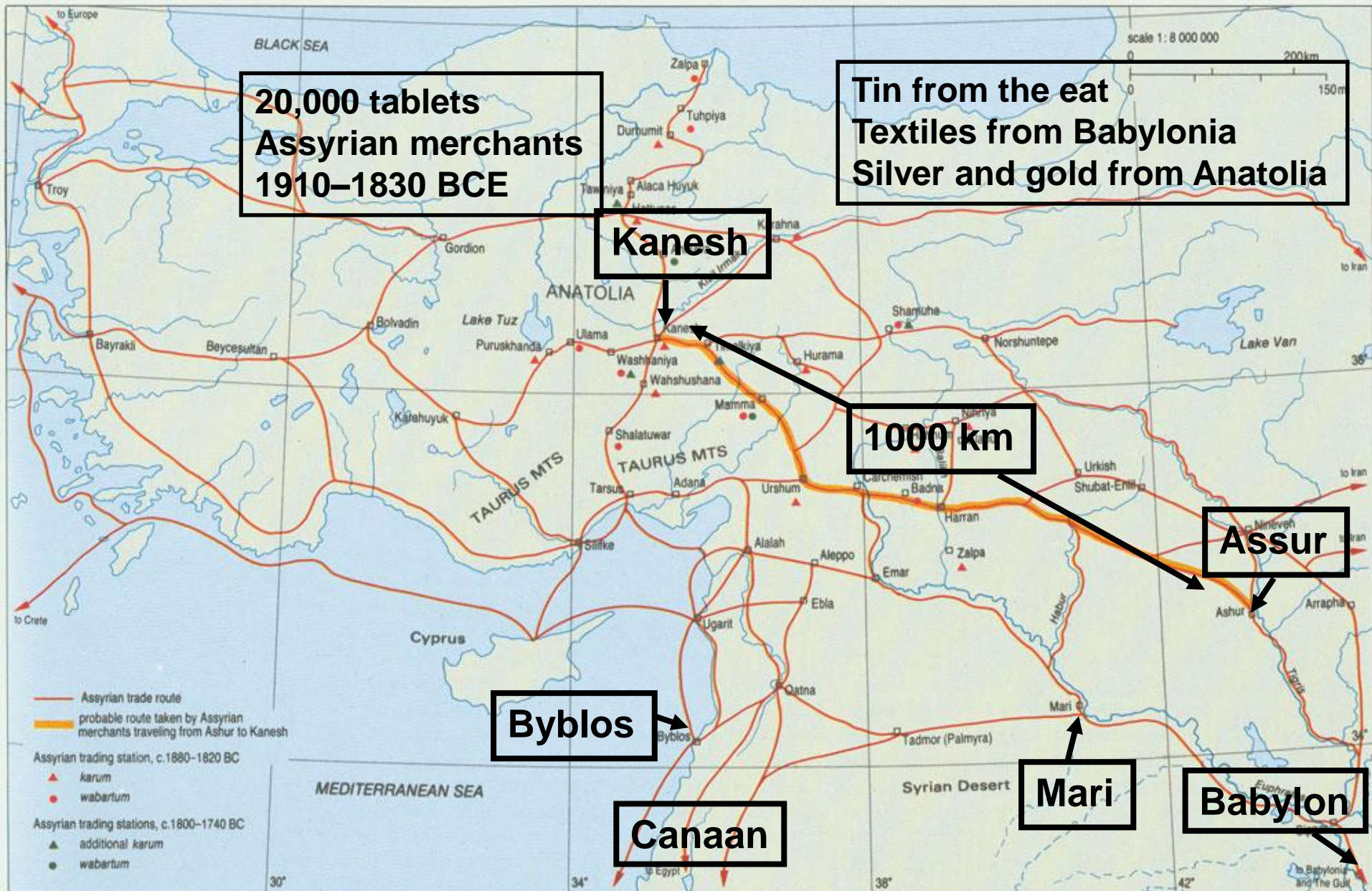
**ISRAEL**

**EGYPT**

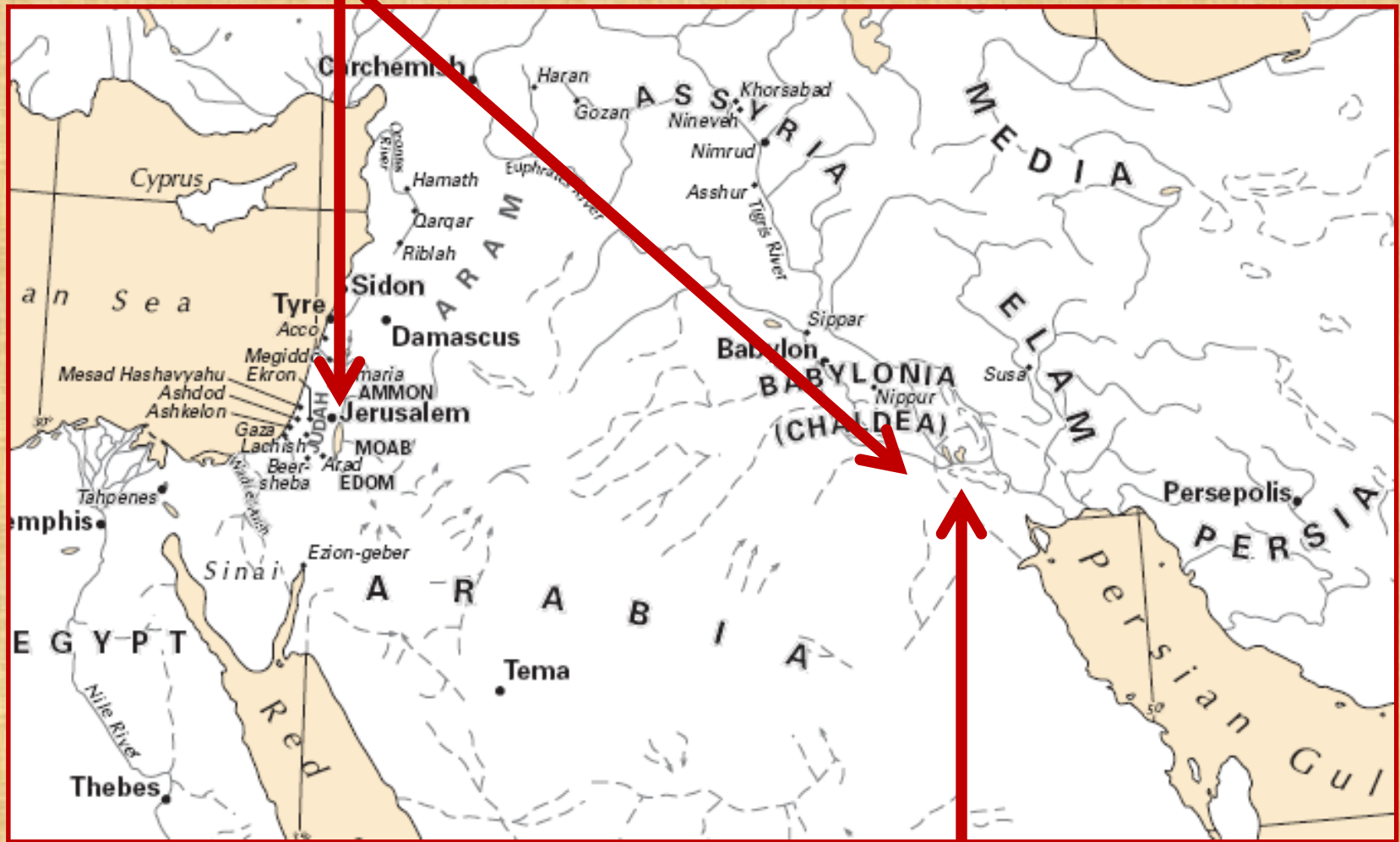
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Google earth

# Old Assyrian Trade with Anatolia, 20<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c. BCE



# GENESIS 1-3



ENUMA ELISH / GILGAMESH

# *Enuma Elish*

The ancient Mesopotamians had their own versions of Creation. One of the most well-known is the Babylonian “Epic of Creation” otherwise known as *Enuma Elish* for the first words of the text — “*When on high*” — referring to the heavenly realm, where all things began.

This lengthy composition (about 1,000 lines) is recorded on 7 clay tablets.

The Babylonian version that is the base text for most of our English translations of *Enuma Elish* comes from tablets that date to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They were found in the famous library of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, and first published in modern times in 1876.

The Epic itself probably originated much earlier, perhaps a thousand years earlier at the time of Hammurabi (18<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

*Enuma Elish* describes aspects of the Creation from a Babylonian worldview. Its primary purpose was the elevation of the Babylonian god Marduk above all other Mesopotamian gods.

For additional background on *Enuma Elish*, see this Wikipedia link:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En%C3%BBma\\_Eli%C5%A1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En%C3%BBma_Eli%C5%A1)

# Genesis 1 & *Enuma Elish*

## Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

Perhaps completed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE

Perhaps incorporates earlier material

Earliest datable manuscripts of Genesis: Dead Sea Scrolls  
(2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE to 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE)

## *Enuma Elish*

Perhaps originated between the 18<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE

Perhaps edited in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE

Early copies from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE

# Structure: Parallels

## Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

7 days

7<sup>th</sup> day highlighted as:

- > the day on which God's work was completed
- > the day on which God rested
- > the day God blessed and sanctified

## *Enuma Elish*

7 tablets

7<sup>th</sup> tablet highlights Marduk as:

- > the supreme Mesopotamian deity
- > the god whose 50 names are to be proclaimed



# Structure: Differences

## Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

Short sections for each day

Theme: Creation of the ordered cosmos

## *Enuma Elish*

Lengthy epic poetic sections for each tablet

Themes: Creation of the ordered cosmos & elevation of Marduk as chief god of Mesopotamia.

# Enuma Elish Outline

Tablet 1: The gods in battle

2: Tiamat (salt water sea goddess) is challenged

3. Marduk prepares to battle Tiamat

4. Marduk slays Tiamat,  
and forms sky and earth from her corpse

5. Celestial luminaries placed in sky for days, months, years

6. Humans formed from the blood of the god Kingu

7. Elevation of Marduk

# Genesis 1:1 & *Enuma Elish*

## Genesis 1:1 begins:

1 In the beginning God created the **heavens** and the **earth**.

## *Enuma Elish* begins:

When on high no name was given to **heaven**,  
Nor below was the **earth/netherworld** called by name.

**Naming** = Bringing into existence (see later for Genesis parallels)

**Heaven + Earth** = The entire cosmos (a “merism”, designating the whole by its parts)

**Netherworld**. The Hebrew word for “earth” can (and often does) include the subterranean regions where the dead are, just like the Babylonian word in *Enuma Elish*

***Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish begin in parallel fashion.***  
***They are similar here.***

# Genesis 1:2 & *Enuma Elish*

## Genesis 1:2

2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the **Deep**, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

### “Deep”

The Hebrew word is ***tehom***, and it has a linguistic connection to the Babylonian ***Tiamat***

The Hebrew text here ***demythologizes*** (from an Israelite perspective) ***Tiamat***. How?

In Genesis 1, the “deep” (***tehom***) is an inanimate substance, merely a watery abyss. In ***Enuma Elish***, Tiamat is a powerful goddess, who is a major character throughout hundreds of lines of the Babylonian Epic. Thus, the Genesis account appears here to turn the goddess and all her activity into an inert substance, which plays no further part in the Genesis creation account. [***Tehom*** occurs next in the Genesis Flood account.]

***How do Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish compare here?***

## Genesis 1:3–5 & *Enuma Elish*

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. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

“**Said, called**”: The creative power of the spoken word is a frequent theme in the Hebrew Bible.

This theme is also found widely in Egypt and Mesopotamia  
See *Enuma Elish* also at I,7–10 (p. 391):

When no gods at all had been brought forth,  
None **called by names**, none destinies ordained,  
Then were the gods formed within these two.  
Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, were **called by name**.

***How do Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish compare here?***

# Genesis 1:6–8 & *Enuma Elish*

## Genesis 1:6–8

6 Then God said, “Let there be an **expanse [firmament]** in the midst of the waters, and let it **separate the waters from the waters.**”

7 God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.

8 God **called the expanse heaven.** And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk kills Tiamat, and then:

He split her in two, like a fish for drying,  
Half of her he set up and made as a cover, **heaven.**  
He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen,  
And ordered them not to let her **waters** escape.  
He crossed **heaven** and inspected its **firmament.**

IV, 137–141 (p. 398)

***How do Genesis 1 and Enuma Elish compare here?***

# Assessment (Part 1)

“The first account of creation in Genesis both employs and alludes to mythical concepts and phrasing, but at the same time it also adapts, transforms, and rejects them. Thus, while in *Enuma Elish* and other ancient Near Eastern myths such realities as the sun, moon, constellations, and even the primeval sea are deities, in Genesis, there is only one god, who creates what for other cultures are divine.

...

“Thus, while alluding to older mythic traditions, the first account of creation in Genesis also partially demythologizes them. This account, as we will see, is probably to be dated to the time of the exile in Babylon in the sixth century BCE. Its authors [*i.e.* of *Genesis 1*] are in effect giving an alternative to the account found in *Enuma Elish*, which other Babylonian texts, also of the sixth century, inform us was recited annually during the spring new year festival in Babylon.”

[Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2011), p. 37]

**Note: Discuss the terms “demythologize” and “remythologize.”**

## Assessment (Part 2)

*[Continuing the quote from the first paragraph, previous slide]:*

“Thus, while in *Enuma Elish* and other ancient Near Eastern myths such realities as the sun, moon, constellations, and even the primeval sea are deities, in Genesis, there is only one god, who creates what for other cultures are divine.”]

“To avoid even the hint that these other deities are present, the authors of Genesis 1 use circumlocutions to designate the sun and moon — “the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night” (1:16), although “sun” and “moon” are common words elsewhere in the Bible.”

Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2011), p. 37



## Genesis 1:14–19

14 Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years;

15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so.

16 God made the two great lights, **the greater light** to govern the day, and **the lesser light** to govern the night; He made **the stars** also.

NOTE: Genesis 1 does not read:

“God made the sun, the moon, and the stars.”

# The Greater Light / The Lesser Light

“**The greater light**” (Hebrew: *ma’or gadol*).

This phrase occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible.

Otherwise, sun is Hebrew *shemesh* (used 135x in all parts of Hebrew Bible). Why does Genesis 1 not use the normal word *shemesh* here for sun, and instead uses a unique expression found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible?

“**The lesser light**” (Hebrew: *ma’or qaton*).

This phrase occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible.

Otherwise, moon is Hebrew *yareach* (used 27x in the Hebrew Bible). Again, why does Genesis 1 not use the normal word *yareach* here for moon, and instead uses a unique expression found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible?

## What if...?

What *if* Genesis 1 had used the words *shemesh* and *yareach* for sun and moon?

If the authors of Genesis 1 were really trying to differentiate the Hebrew worldview from the Mesopotamian worldview by partially “demythologizing” Mesopotamian traditions, using these regular Hebrew terms could have been entirely counterproductive to this aim. In Mesopotamian literature, **Shamash** (= Hebrew *shemesh*) is not just the “sun” but the “**Sun-god**.” In literature from the Levant (Ugaritic texts), **Yarich** (= Hebrew *yareach*) is not just the “moon” but the “**Moon-god**” (described in Ugaritic texts as “the luminary of the heavens” who sends messages and gets married!)

So, Genesis 1 *could* have been read and understood this way by, say, a Babylonian neighbor in the Exile:

“You Jews say there is only one god, but even your own Creation account says that one god, whom you call “Elohim,” made two other gods, the sun-god and the moon-god. So, we are all polytheists, we simply disagree on *which* god is the chief of the gods!”

# How we (I) read the Bible

These examples demonstrate that the way we read and understand the Bible can drastically shift if we read it with a view toward uncovering its “Sitz im Leben” (cultural setting).

Genesis 1 lies at the core of many debates involving “science vs. religion.” People often ask me if the Hebrew word for “day” in Genesis 1 means “24-hour day” or perhaps rather a “long period of time.”

My response: I don’t think that is a question the authors of Genesis 1 intended to answer. Genesis 1 is primarily a document that differentiates the Hebrew worldview from a Mesopotamian worldview. The 7-day ordering principle of Genesis 1 consciously mirrors the 7-tablet structure of *Enuma Elish*. In this way Genesis 1 both “alludes to mythical concepts and phrasing, but at the same time it also adapts, transforms, and rejects them.” (Coogan, quoted earlier). The way Genesis 1 uses the word “day”—coupled with “morning and evening”—sounds more like a “24-hour” idea. If so, it is probably used to further differentiate: In Genesis 1 the Hebrew God orders the cosmos quickly, efficiently, and without hindrance, whereas in *Enuma Elish* everything is a drawn out, very messy series of conflicts. At least that’s the way the authors of Genesis 1 wanted us to see it.

# A Second Biblical Creation: Backstory

A common feature of the Hebrew Bible is the inclusion of multiple narratives of the same or similar event(s).

**Large-scale example with 2 large narrative series in:**

- (1) **Genesis through 2 Kings:** Creation to Babylonian Exile  
Ends with Jews in the middle of Babylonian Exile  
= **mid-6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE**
- (2) **1 & 2 Chronicles:** Adam through Edict of Cyrus  
Ends with return of Jews from Babylonia to Jerusalem  
= **late 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE**
- (3) **1–2 Chronicles through Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
Ends in the middle of the Persian period  
= **mid 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE**

**Early presumed developments toward the Hebrew Bible canon:  
mid-6<sup>th</sup> to mid-5<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE**

# A Second Biblical Creation

## 2 Genesis Creation Accounts

- (1) Genesis 1:1–2:3
- (2) Genesis 2:4–3:24

Other Creation narratives and poetry scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Some views of Genesis 2:4–3:24 see this section as a detailed expansion of the 6<sup>th</sup> day in Genesis 1:1–2:3

But there are problems.

# Different Creations: Gen 1 / Gen 2–3

- 7-day orderly sequence
- “heavens & earth”
- watery abyss
- seas & land
- mankind = “male & female”
- created at same time
- “create” “see” “say” “separate”  
“call” “make” “place” “bless”
- “Let...be!”
- Creator deity = “God”  
(*Elohim*)
- God is more transcendent
  - creates by his word
- “Elevated” majestic language  
with parallelism & poetic  
elements

- 1 day, different sequence
- “earth & heavens” (2x only)
- rainless landscape
- mist from the ground
- “man & his wife/woman”
- order: man, animals, woman
- “send (rain)” “form” “breathe”  
“plant” “place” “make grow”  
“command” “say” “fashion”
- Creator deity = “LORD God”  
(*YHWH Elohim*)
- God is more anthropomorphic
  - shapes as a potter
  - plants a garden
  - walks in the garden
  - makes clothes
- Word plays; “earthy” language

# The Gilgamesh Epic

The Gilgamesh Epic, like *Enuma Elish*, also has points of contact with Hebrew Bible creation texts, especially the second account of creation in Genesis 2–3.

I note here just two examples. If you are not familiar with the Gilgamesh Epic (in 11 tablets), you should read it sometime soon!



# Genesis 3: Banned from Eternal Life

## Genesis 2–3

- “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
- Access to the **Tree of Life** denied, thus:  
Humans have no source for eternal life

## Parallel from Mesopotamia. *Gilgamesh Epic* (Tablet X)

- “The eternal life you are seeking you shall not find. When the gods created mankind, they established death for mankind, and withheld eternal life for themselves.”

***How do Genesis 2–3 and Gilgamesh compare here?***

# Genesis 3: Tricked by a Snake!

## Genesis 3:1

- “Now the **serpent** was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.”
- The serpent deceives the first humans and entices them to eat of a tree that God had forbidden. It was the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”
- Afterwards, the humans have no more access to the “tree of life.”

## Parallel from Mesopotamia. *Gilgamesh Epic* (Tablet XI)

- Gilgamesh is given a plant that will keep him forever young.
- But, before he can eat it, a **snake** steals the plant from Gilgamesh, and any hope of eternal youth (life) for him is gone.

***How do Genesis 3 and Gilgamesh compare here?***

# **Genealogies and Long Lifespans**

# Genealogy in Genesis 5

A common Bible trivia question: “Who was the oldest person in the Bible?”

Answer: “**Methuselah**! He lived for 969 years!”

Wow, that seems so fantastic! In Genesis 5, we have a genealogical list of 10 generations (Genesis likes the number 10, by the way.) This genealogy extends from the first man, Adam, to Noah and the Flood.

The lifespans are given as follows in Genesis 5:

1. Adam lived 930 years
2. Seth, 912 years
3. Enosh, 905 years
4. Kenan, 910 years
5. Mahalalel, 895 years
6. Jared, 962 years
7. Enoch, 365 years (but he didn't die, he was “taken” by “God”)
8. Methuselah, 969 years
9. Lamech, 777 years
10. Noah, 950 years (recorded later in Gen 9:28)

# Genealogy in Genesis 11

In Genesis 11 a genealogical list continues from Noah to Abraham, also through 10 generations. Compare the lifespans between Gen 5 and Gen 11. One needs to add two numbers in Gen 11 to get the total (except for Terah and Abraham).

## Genesis 5

1. Adam	930
2. Seth	912
3. Enosh	905
4. Kenan	910
5. Mahalalel	895
6. Jared	962
7. Enoch	365
8. Methuselah	969
9. Lamech	777
10. Noah	950

**FLOOD**

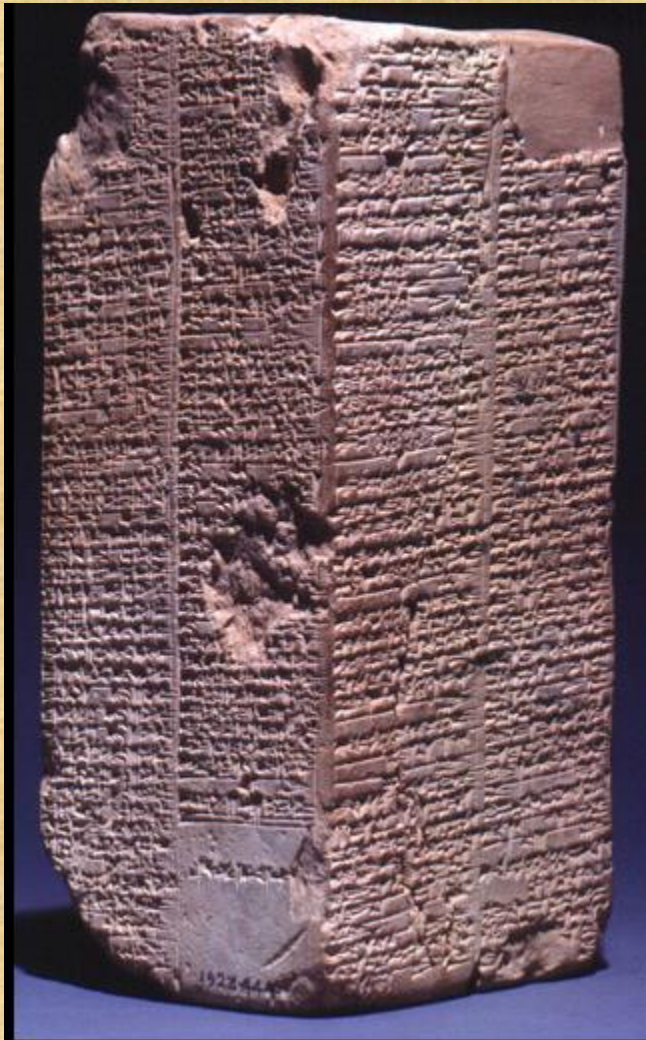
## Genesis 11

1. Shem	100+500	= 600
2. Arpachshad	35+403	= 438
3. Shelah	30+403	= 433
4. Eber	34+430	= 464
5. Peleg	30+209	= 239
6. Reu	32+207	= 239
7. Serug	30+200	= 230
8. Nahor	29+119	= 148
9. Terah		205
10. Abraham		175

(Abraham's age is given at Gen 25:7)

# Compare: The Weld-Blundell Prism of The Sumerian King-List

(Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; number: AN1923.444)



Cuneiform writing (from Face d)

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Interpretation of the above cuneiform symbols

# Sumerian King List

The Sumerian King List was composed around 1800 BCE, probably as a propagandistic tool to legitimize the line of kings that appear at the end of the document.

The list begins with the notion that “kingship” is a heavenly institution, brought to humans from the realm of the gods.

While many of the early Sumerian city-states had their own kings, the Sumerian King List advocates for hegemony: Only one city-state at a time can exercise real “kingship” over the entire region of Sumer and Akkad. Thus, “kingship” is often transferred from one city-state to another.

Near the end of the list are names of kings that were certainly historical. But at the beginning of the list? You decide (a summary of the text follows in the next slides).

For a good summary, see the Wikipedia page:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian\\_King\\_List](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_King_List)

For the full critical edition in English, see here:

<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.1.1#>

# Sumerian King List: Text & Notes

After the kingship descended from heaven,

The kingship was in Eridug [*the name of a Sumerian city*]

In Eridug, Alulim became king.

He ruled for **28,800 years**. [= 8 sar]

Alagar ruled for **36,000 years** [= 10 sar]

2 kings: They ruled for 64,800 years.

Then Eridug fell, and the kingship was taken to Bad-tibira.

In Bad-tibira, Enmenluana ruled for **43,200 years** [= 12 sar]

*[more kings are listed, then this section is summarized as follows:]*

**In 5 cities, 8 kings: They ruled for 241,200 years.**

**Then the flood swept over.**

*Notes:*

These are fantastic numbers! There is no “decimal” error in these numbers. The Sumerians had a “sexagesimal” system (based on 60), with a numerical “unit” called the “sar.” One sar = 3,600. The English translation that says Alagar ruled for 36,000 years is, in Sumerian, “10 sar.” Another unit was the “ner” = 600.

The reigns of these first kings are some 30 or more times longer than the lifespan of the Biblical Methuselah! Enmenluana reigned longer than any other Sumerian king: 43,200 years (almost 45x the lifespan of Methuselah). Add this to your favorite trivia question list!



# Sumerian King List, cont.

After the Flood had swept over,  
and the kingship had descended from heaven,  
The kingship was in Kish.

In Kish, Gushur became king.

He ruled for 1,200 years ...

Entarahana ruled 420 years, 3 months, 3-1/2 days (!!)

Etana, the shepherd, ascended to heaven ...

*[parallel to “God took him” said of Enoch in the genealogy of Genesis 5!]*

*[Here is a summary of the length of the reigns of some kings in this section]*

Babum, 300 / Puannum, 840 / Kalibum, 960 / Zuqaqip, 900 / etc.

*[This section of the King List also has a summary, as follows:]*

**23 kings: They ruled for 24,510 years, 3 months, and 3-1/2 days**

*Notes:*

What happened to the length of the reigns of kings after the Sumerian Flood?

Compare what happened to the lifespans of people before and after the Genesis Flood. What do you observe?

# Sumerian King List, cont.

*[Here is a summary of the next major section of the Sumerian King List:]*

Lugalbanda, the shepherd, ruled for 1,200 years.

Dumuzid, the fisherman, ruled for 100 years.

Gilgamesh ruled for 126 years.

Ur-Nungal, the son of Gilgamesh, ruled for 30 years.

Udul-kalama, the son of Ur-Nungal, ruled for 15 years.

Labashum ruled for 9 years.

En-nun-tarahana ruled for 8 years.

Mesh-he, the smith, ruled for 36 years.

**12 kings: They ruled for 2,310 years.**

*Notes:*

What happened to the lengths of reigns of kings after Lugalbanda?

# Sumerian King List Sections: Summary

## Section 1: Before the Flood

8 kings: 241,200 years

## Section 2: Right after the Flood

23 kings: 24,510 years, 3 months, and 3-1/2 days

## Section 3: (Later)

12 kings: 2,310 years

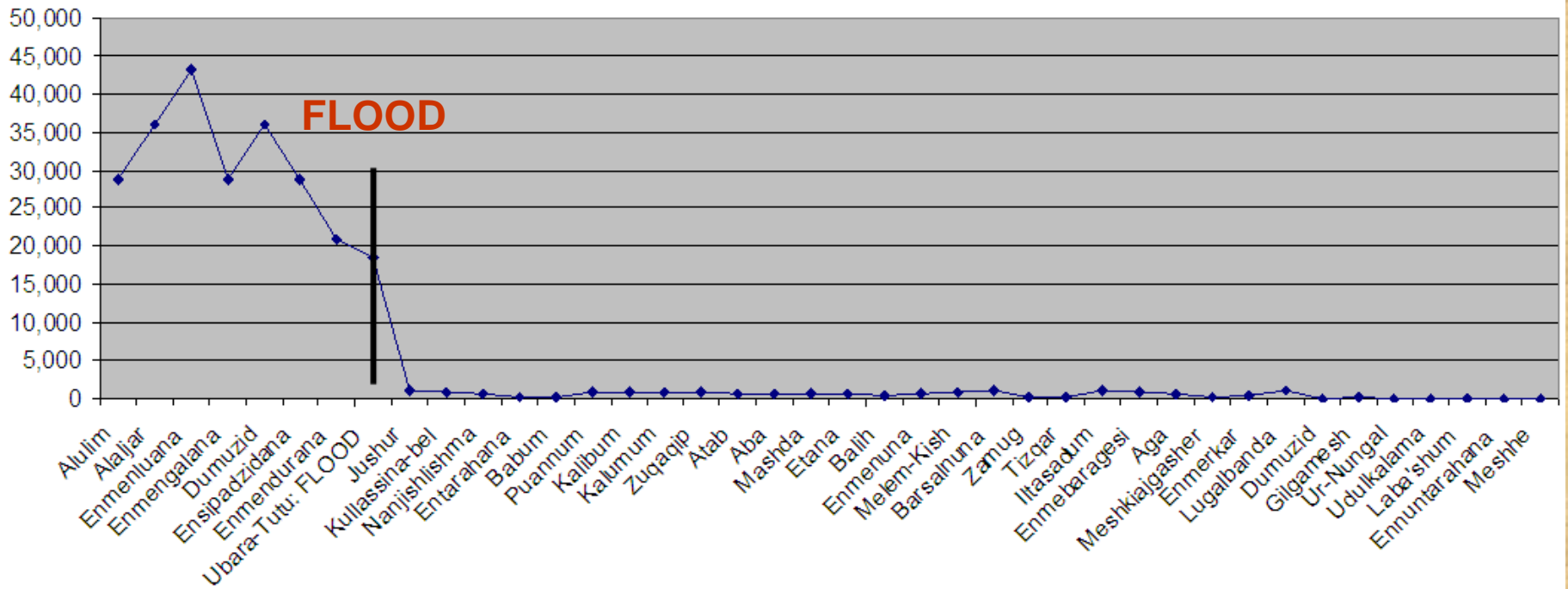
## Average Length of Reigns:

Section 1: 30,150

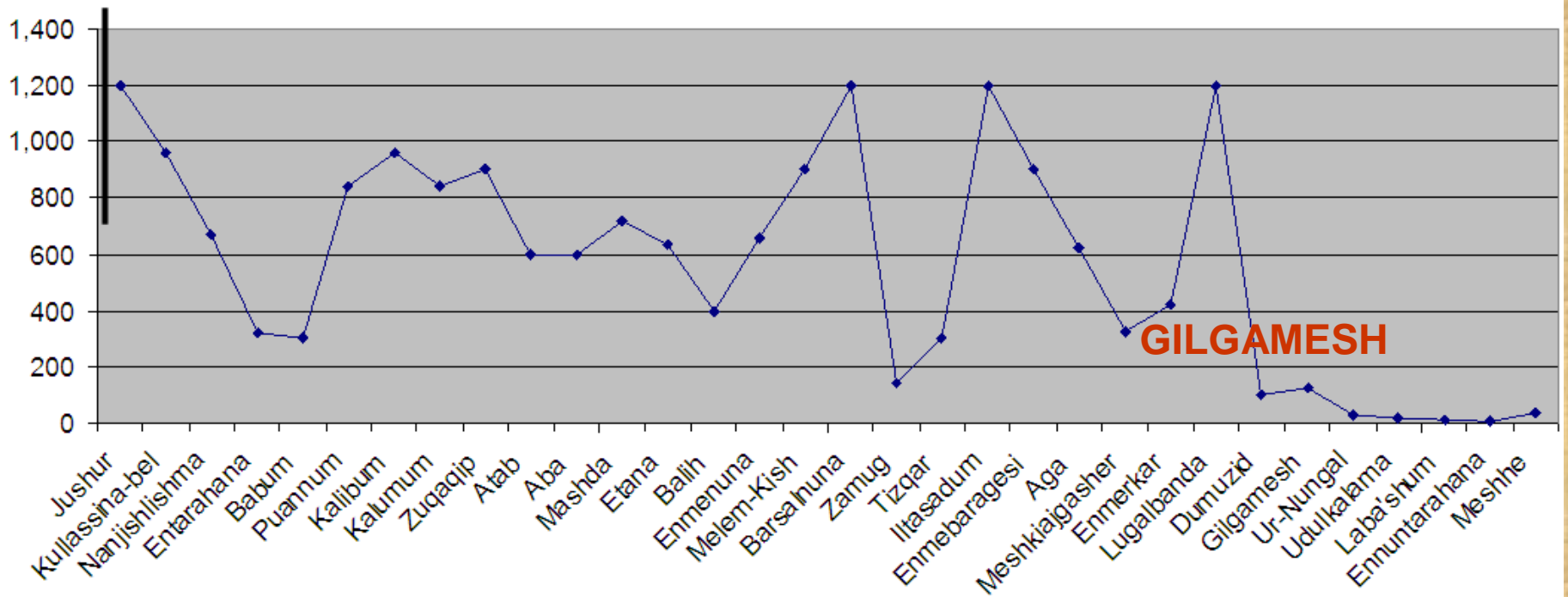
Section 2: 1,066

Section 3: 193

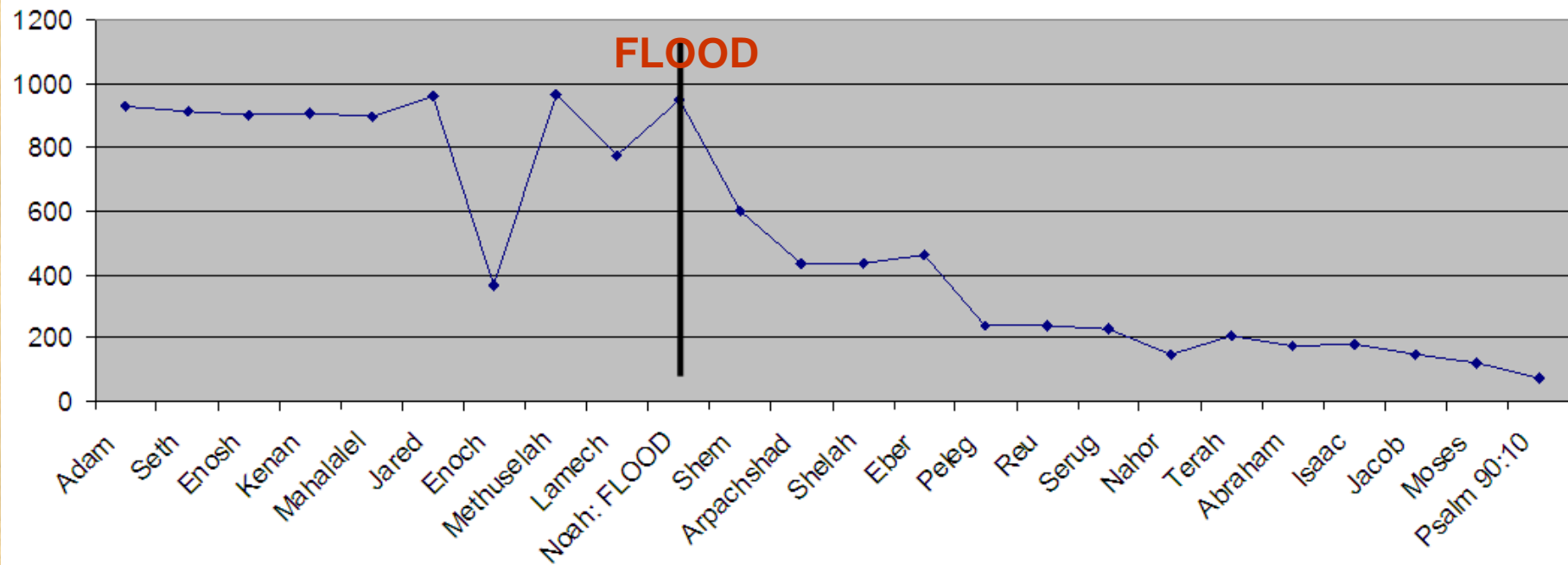
## Sumerian King Reigns



## Sumerian King Reigns After Flood



## Ages of Biblical Patriarchs: Gen 5 & 11



# Genesis 5 & 11 / Sumerian King List

From the worldview of ancient Mesopotamia, are the lifespans of Genesis 5 fantastically exaggerated? Or, would they have seemed fantastically reduced?!

Is Genesis 5 another example of a “demythologized” version of the first section of the Sumerian King List?

Both the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5 have long lifespans for people *before the Flood*. Lifespans are reduced *after the Flood*. In this aspect, the two are similar. But in other respects they are very different indeed, aside from the construction of one as a “King List” leading up to a “legitimate” line of Sumerian kings during the 19<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE, and the other as a list of venerable “Patriarchs” leading up to the “founder” of the nation of Israel, dated variously to around the 19<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE.