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Cosmic Conflict and Divine Kingship in Babylonian Religion and Biblical Apocalypses

Roy and Constance Gane

Introduction

Richard M. Davidson has highlighted the important and neglected fact that the Bible presents God's end-time judgment, an eschatological Day of Atonement (Dan 7:10; 8:14; Rev 14:6, 7, etc.; cf. Lev 16; 23:26–32), as good news. He elucidated several encouraging aspects of this judgment, including vindication of God's character:

God is shown to be just and yes, merciful, in bringing the Great Controversy to an end...

The redeemed will sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb:

Great and wonderful are thy deeds,

O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are thy ways,

O King of the ages! (Rev. 15:3, RSV).¹

¹ Richard M. Davidson, "The Good News of Yom Kippur," *JATS* 2.2 (1991): 22.

In this essay dedicated to Richard, our dear friend and colleague, we will explore some aspects of the way God brings the Great Controversy, i.e., the cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil, to an end and restores his eternal kingship over Planet Earth. We will focus on striking parallels between this combination of themes—cosmic conflict and divine kingship—in ancient Babylonian myth, ritual, and iconography and in the biblical apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, which illuminate the biblical message through contextual analysis of comparisons and contrasts between them.²

Babylonian Backgrounds to Biblical Apocalypses

It is well known that ancient Near Eastern materials, including from Mesopotamia, provide useful cultural backgrounds to enhance our understanding of biblical apocalypses.³ The parallels that we will investigate here do not simply involve individual elements, i.e., “punctiliar parallels (which could prove anything),”⁴ but equivalences among complex clusters of components with strikingly similar (but not identical) dynamic relationships among them. In fact, it appears that these affinities operate within a shared conceptual framework. Despite the vast differences between the world-views of the Babylonians (polytheistic) and the biblical writers (monotheistic adherents of YHWH), they were addressing the same basic problem, which was fraught with comprehensive implications for the lives of their people: How can destructive forces of cosmic chaos be overcome so that humans can experience security and well-being? The Babylonian and biblical answers are similar: *A deity defeats cosmic evil forces, which are too strong for humans*

² On methodology of such contextual study, see, e.g., William W. Hallo, “Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach,” in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White, PTMS 34 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 1:1–12; idem, “Compare and Contrast: the Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature,” in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature. Scripture in Context III*, ed. W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly, ANETS 8 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990), 3:1–30; idem, “The Contextual Approach,” in *The Book of the People*, BJS 225 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991); K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “The ‘Contextual Method’: Some West Semitic Reflections,” in *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, vol. 3 of *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxxv–xlii.

³ E.g. on Daniel 7, see Jürg Egger, *Influences and Traditions Underlying the Vision of Daniel 7:2–14: The Research History from the End of the 19th Century to the Present*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 177 (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, *Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 280–94.

⁴ Arthur Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel Seven*, AUSDDS 6 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), 47.

to resist, and provides the positive benefits of his rule for those who are judged loyal to him.

The trajectory of themes just described is central to the Babylonian cosmic conflict and creation myth *Enuma Elish*,⁵ which both reflected and shaped proud Babylonian self-perception during the first millennium BCE. This myth asserts the exaltation of Marduk, city god of Babylon, to divine kingship following his victory over chaos. In the Hebrew Bible, the thematic progression appears in the book of Daniel, the earliest full-fledged biblical apocalypse.⁶ Here YHWH overcomes evil powers, establishes his dominion, and shares it with his faithful people.

For more than a century, scholars have recognized that Mesopotamian religious culture, attested by extrabiblical texts and material remains, forms part of the background to Daniel.⁷ This fits the internal setting of the book, according to which the prophetic wise man Daniel lived in Babylon from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BCE) into the beginning of the Persian period (shortly after 539 BCE). He is described as educated in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, who were ruling the Neo-Babylonian empire

⁵ Perhaps composed at Babylon during the Kassite period (c. 1570–1157 B.C.), but it may reflect earlier tradition (e.g., Julie Bidmead, *The Akitu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia*, Gorgias Dissertations 2, Near Eastern Studies 2, [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004], 63 and refs. cited there). However, W. G. Lambert has argued that *Enuma Elish* was composed later during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104 BCE) (“The Reign of Nebuchadnezzar I: A Turning Point in the History of Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T. J. Meek*, ed. W. S. McCullough [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1964], 3–13). For a recent publication of the Akkadian cuneiform text (with transliteration and French translation) of this myth, see Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma Eliš*, SAACT 4 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005). An English translation by Benjamin R. Foster is included in *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, vol. 1 of *The Context of Scripture* (hereafter *COS*), ed. W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 390–402.

⁶ On the genre of Daniel in relation to its ancient Near Eastern background, see Roy Gane, “Genre Awareness and Interpretation of the Book of Daniel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum; 1997), 137–48 and sources cited there.

⁷ See Egger’s review of research history on possible Mesopotamian backgrounds to Daniel 7 (*Influences and Traditions*, 3–7, 16–17, 20–26, 42–8, 55–7, 78–9, 84–6, 107–8), beginning with Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney, Jr.; with contributions by Heinrich Zimmern (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); *trans. of Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen. 1 und Ap. Jon 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). But while Gunkel proposed that *Enuma Elish* formed part of the background to Daniel 7, he did not carry out thorough or precise analysis of parallels between these texts (see *Creation and Chaos*, 205–14, 239–40). Nathaniel Schmidt (“The Son of Man’ in the Book of Daniel,” *JBL* 19 [1900]: 26–7) was the first to name Marduk, the hero of *Enuma Elish*, as a prototype of Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; cf. Rev 12:7), whom he equated with the “one like a son of man” (Dan 7:13).

(Dan 1:4), and he lived and worked in a cultural environment saturated with Babylonian religion. For example, the theophoric name “Nebuchadnezzar” begins with Nabû, the name of Marduk’s divine son (cf. Nebuzaradan in 2 Ki 25:8, 11, 20; Nebushazban in Jer 39:13). Belshazzar (Dan 5) and even the Babylonian name of Daniel himself—Belteshazzar (1:7; 2:26, etc.)—begin with Bēl, “Lord,” the title of Marduk. Thus Nebuchadnezzar II spoke of Daniel as “he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god” (4:8).

Anyone (including any Jew) who lived in Babylonia would likely have known about the exaltation of Marduk, which was ritually reenacted during the spectacular Babylonian New Year (*Akītu*) Festival (see further below). This celebration to renew the world order dominated the capital city each spring and was especially glorious during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II at the apex of Babylonian power.⁸ It is almost unthinkable that an elite scholar trained in Babylonian language and literature, as Daniel is depicted in his book, would not be acquainted with *Enuma Elish*, the quintessential literary legitimization of Babylonian dominance. No doubt the propagandistic myth would have been deemed especially suitable for persuading young foreign captives, such as Daniel and his friends, to accept the superiority of Babylon and the honor of assimilation into its culture (cf. chap. 1).

Nevertheless, John J. Collins observed: “Despite the Babylonian setting of Daniel 1–6 and Gunkel’s appeal to the *Enuma Elish* as the ultimate background of Daniel 7, Babylonian backgrounds have not figured prominently in the discussion of Daniel 7.”⁹ This is largely because recent scholars have generally favored other backgrounds, especially fourteenth century B.C. parallels in Canaanite mythology from Ugarit.¹⁰

For example, John Day strongly maintained that Canaanite mythology, rather than *Enuma Elish*, lay behind Old Testament references to divine conflict against sea monsters representing chaos (e.g., Job 26:12; Isa 27:1), including in Daniel 7.¹¹ Because texts from Ugarit were first discovered in 1929, Hermann Gunkel had no access to them in 1895 when he published his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*.

⁸ Bidmead, *The Akītu Festival*, 4, 33, 130. On the relationship between the Festival and *Enuma Elish*, which was recited on its fourth day, see 63–70.

⁹ Collins, *Daniel*, 283.

¹⁰ For an overview of this research, see Egger, *Influences and Traditions*, 9–14, 58–70.

¹¹ John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–12, 160–67, following J. A. Emerton, “The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery,” *JTS* 9.2 (1958), 225–42. Collins agrees that the Canaanite/Ugaritic imagery is closer (*Daniel*, 283–91).

Scholars have proposed a number of other possible ancient backgrounds to Daniel 7, including Israelite prophecy.¹² No set of materials from a single ancient culture completely fits the biblical chapter. As Collins recognized, cultural backgrounds to a given literary work can be complex and varied, so it is not necessary to choose one to the exclusion of others. Thus he concluded that Daniel 7 draws on different sources, including Canaanite mythology “mediated through Israelite tradition,” biblical precedents (e.g., Hos 13), and “hybrid creatures in Near Eastern art and literature.”¹³ John Goldingay recognized links between Daniel 7 and *Enuma Elish* that are likely not coincidental, but he added: “They are themselves paralleled, however, in the equivalent Ugaritic combat myth *Baal*, which has more links with Dan 7 and is likely the less indirect background to it.”¹⁴

Scholars have not forgotten the Babylonian materials, but it appears that these deserve further assessment, given the explicit Babylonian setting of Daniel and ongoing advances in our understanding of it.¹⁵ Anne Gardner has argued that “Gunkel’s thesis in 1895 of a correspondence between the *Enuma Elish* and Daniel has been undervalued,”¹⁶ and she pointed out weaknesses of the Canaanite connection:

not only is the main theme of the Baal myth one of rivalry, provoked by jealousy between two gods, there are few details in the myth which find a reflection in Dan 7,2–14: there is no mention of the winds of heaven bringing about the ensuing situation nor of beasts of any kind emerging from, or being part of, the sea. Neither

¹² See especially Egger’s survey; cf. Roy Gane, “Hurrian Ullikummi and Daniel’s ‘Little Horn,’” in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Avi Hurvitz, Yochanan Muffs, Baruch J. Schwartz, and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 485–98. Some possible allusions to biblical classical prophecy in Daniel 7 include a lion, leopard, and bear opposed to God’s people (cf. Hos 13:7–8), horns as powers of destructive nations (cf. Zech 1:18–21), and a superhuman/divine individual having the appearance of a human being (cf. Ezek 1:26). Paul Mosca listed sixteen elements with a “biblical pedigree” in Daniel 7 (“Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link,” *Bib* 67 [1986]: 500–501).

¹³ Collins, *Daniel*, 296.

¹⁴ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 151.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Karel van der Toorn, “Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, VTSup 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:37–54; Shalom Paul, “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1–6,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 1:55–68; William Shea, “The Neo-Babylonian Historical Setting for Daniel 7,” *AUSS* 24 (1986): 31–6.

¹⁶ Anne Gardner, “Daniel 7,2–14: Another Look at its Mythic Pattern,” *Bib* 82 (2001): 246–7.

is there mention of such beasts being allowed to survive although their dominion is taken away, nor is Yam, Baal's adversary killed by fire.¹⁷

In addition, while it is easy to see how a first millennium BCE Jewish author of Daniel could encounter Neo-Babylonian cultural phenomena (see above), scholars who favor the Canaanite connection have not convincingly explained how such an author could have had sufficiently direct access to Canaanite Baal mythology dating to the fourteenth century BCE.¹⁸

Gardner has compiled an impressive series of correspondences between Daniel 7 and *Enuma Elish*, including "four winds" stirring up the sea, beasts/monsters coming from a disturbed sea, exceptional lack of physical identification of the last and greatest enemy (fourth beast/Qingu), enthronement of a divine king, "fire" associated with the presence of a deity, captivity of beasts/monsters (except for one in Daniel, which is burned; cf. the burning of Qingu in some Babylonian New Year Festival texts), "approach" of one being ("one like a "Son of Man"/Marduk) to another ("Ancient of Days"/Anshar) for the former to receive eternal dominion, and movement of the one receiving dominion associated with storm/clouds.¹⁹

John H. Walton too has compared Daniel 7 with *Enuma Elish*, and also with the earlier Mesopotamian chaos combat myth of Anzu and the Ugaritic myth of Baal. He finds a number of common elements/motifs, such as the appearance of a monster, emergence from the sea, revolt, usurpation of a tablet of destinies (or prerogatives associated with it), boastful words, the number eleven (monsters of Tiamat/10 horns + "little horn"), split roles of antagonists (fourth beast + little horn/Tiamat + Qingu), ancient deities, a champion, victory, and honor.²⁰ Walton concludes that Daniel 7 is "an informed and articulate literary mosaic whose author has assimilated and mastered a wide spectrum of literary traditions in order to transform them to his own theological will and purpose."²¹

With similarities to Daniel come differences, which are also instructive.²² Although Gardner found the combination of parallels that she

¹⁷ Gardner, "Daniel 7," 245.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 245–6, 251–2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 247–51.

²⁰ John H. Walton, "The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?" in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 1:69–89, with table on 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² See Egger, *Influences and Traditions*. For criticisms of Babylonian backgrounds to Daniel 7 based on such differences, see 7–8n24, 57–8n204.

has identified to “strongly suggest that the author of Daniel was aware of the *Enuma Elish*,”²³ Daniel lacks the polytheism of the Babylonian myth: The sea is not divine, enemies are human powers rather than deities, and the heavenly assembly consists of the “Ancient of Days” and his attendants, rather than a group of gods. Furthermore, in *Enuma Elish*,

Marduk is summoned to the divine court and enthroned *prior* to judgement being passed upon Qingu and his fellow monsters whereas “One like a Son of Man’ enters the tale only *after* the punishment of the four beasts. It may be, though, that his prior appearance is implied in Dan 7,9 which says, ‘thrones [in the plural] were placed’.²⁴

Walton has referred to some additional differences:

1. The first three animals in Daniel 7, which are likened to existing creatures, do not correspond to the monsters in *Enuma Elish* or other Akkadian literary works (although winged lions appear in Mesopotamian iconography). Rather, Daniel’s beasts show more affinity to the descriptions of animal abnormalities in the *Shumma Izbu* series of omens.²⁵
2. While Daniel 7 resembles the Anzu myth in that the chief enemy is a ferocious beast, Daniel’s fourth beast is unique (unlike in *Enuma Elish*) in that it belongs to a sequence of beasts that emerge from the sea.²⁶
3. Unlike *Enuma Elish* and other chaos combat myths, Daniel presents a champion (the “one like a Son of Man”) who does not do battle with the enemy.²⁷
4. *Enuma Elish* and other chaos combat myths describe gods challenged by monsters as afraid, but the heavenly beings of Daniel 7 are serene.²⁸

²³ Gardner, 249; cf. 250.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

²⁵ Walton, “The Anzu Myth,” 69–70, 73, following Paul A. Porter, *Metaphors and Monsters: A Literary-Critical Study of Daniel 7 and 8*, ConBOT 20 (Lund: Gleerup, 1983), 17–22. On this view, cf. Egger, *Influences and Traditions*, 20–22.

²⁶ Walton, *ibid.*, 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80–82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78–9.

Identifying such similarities and differences between biblical and antecedent extrabiblical views aids interpretation of a biblical composition by shedding light on what its author had in common with other ancient Near Easterners and what he wished to present as unique to the religion of his deity. This comparative process directs attention to aspects of the biblical text that we could otherwise overlook and shows how a servant of YHWH can relate to concepts and people outside his faith tradition and community.²⁹

If Babylonian backgrounds inform our understanding of Daniel, which provides crucial background to the New Testament apocalyptic book of Revelation (e.g., Dan 7:2–7 and Rev 13:1–2; Dan 7:25 and Rev 12:14),³⁰ it seems likely that the Babylonian materials could be secondarily relevant to Revelation. Strengthening this possibility is the fact that the author of Revelation repeatedly uses the name “Babylon” with symbolic reference to a future political-religious power (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21; cf. “Babylon” in 1 Pet 5:13, likely referring to the city of Rome). Choice of this geographic designation is not coincidental: The future power shares traits of the earlier, literal Babylon as depicted in the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 13–14; Jer 50–52; Dan 5; Hab 1–2).

Now we turn to systematic comparative consideration of cosmic conflict and divine kingship in Babylonian religion, Daniel, and Revelation. Of the vast Babylonian corpus, we will focus on *Enuma Elish*, the New Year Festival, and iconographic depictions of superhuman beings, all of which were prominent during the Neo-Babylonian (or Chaldean Dynasty) period (625–539 BCE), when Daniel is said to have lived. We will begin with brief descriptions of the Babylonian materials, then compare aspects of them (indicated by clusters of elements), with analogous features of Daniel and Revelation.³¹ We will conclude by drawing implications of this comparison for our understanding of cosmic conflict and divine kingship.

²⁹ Cf. AU Sung Ik Kim, “Proclamation in Cross-Cultural Context: Missiological Implications of the Book of Daniel,” PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005. For other comparisons between biblical and ancient Mesopotamian religious elements, see, e.g., Roy Gane, “Yearly Accountability in Mesopotamian Cult,” chap. 17 of *Cult and Character* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

³⁰ Cf. Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

³¹ Previous scholarship has already recognized many of the parallel elements (see above and especially Egger’s survey of possible Mesopotamian backgrounds to Daniel 7 (*Influences and Traditions*, 3–7, 16–17, 20–26, 42–8, 55–7, 78–9, 84–6, 107–8)).

Cosmic Conflict and Divine Kingship in Babylonian Religion

Enuma Elish

Enuma Elish (named after its first Akkadian words, translated “When on high...”) is known today as a myth of Creation. However, “its real focus is on the elevation of Marduk to the top of the pantheon in return for taking up the cause of the embattled gods, who build his great temple of Esagila in Babylon in recognition of his leadership. The composition could therefore be as readily called “The Exaltation of Marduk.”³² *Enuma Elish* is a complex epic presenting a theological system that should be understood as a whole. The following summary of its contents traces the development of cosmic conflict and divine kingship.

Tablet I begins by recounting primordial theogony from an original pair of watery gods: the male Apsu (fresh water) and the female Tiamat (chaotic salty sea; lines 1–20). They produced children; then Anshar and Kishar were formed and “grew lengthy of days, added years to years,” and produced their firstborn Anu, who begot Nudimmud = Ea (lines 10–20). Boisterous behavior of their divine children disturbed Apsu, who plotted with his vizier to destroy them, but the wise god Ea killed Apsu and bound his vizier (lines 21–72). Then Ea fathered Marduk, a huge, splendid son, tallest and greatest of the gods, “a hero at birth...a mighty one from the beginning,” endowed with special powers and glory (lines 73–104).

More trouble brewed when Anu, Marduk’s grandfather, created “the four winds” as playthings for his grandson, along with a duststorm and waves that churned up the watery Tiamat (lines 105–109). Unable to rest, a group of gods plotted with their mother Tiamat to destroy Anu and his family, including Ea (lines 110–132). To prepare, Tiamat created eleven ferocious monsters, including composite creatures: “...serpents, dragons, and hairy hero-men, lion monsters, lion men, scorpion men, mighty demons, fish men, bull men” (lines 133–146). Tiamat elevated Qingu to be her husband, command her army, rule the assembly of gods, and possess “the tablet of destinies,” which gave authority to make unalterable commands and determine the destinies of his divine children (lines 147–162).

Tablet II describes how the divine objects of Tiamat’s wrath—including Anshar, whom Ea addressed as “My father, inscrutable, ordainer of destinies, who has power to create and destroy...”—were horrified and afraid to engage

³² Note by William W. Hallo introducing Benjamin R. Foster’s translation in *COS* 1:390–91.

her forces (lines 1–126). But then Marduk (called “the Lord”) approached his great-grandfather Anshar to volunteer, and Anshar readily granted him the commission to go “with the storm chariot” in order to subdue Tiamat with his “sacred spell” (lines 127–153). Delighted, Marduk set the condition that the divine assembly should appoint for him a supreme destiny, namely, that henceforth he would be the one to fix unalterable destinies (lines 154–163).³³

In Tablets III and IV, Anshar invited “all the great gods, ordainers of [destinies],” to a feast, at which they got drunk and ordained Marduk’s destiny as their champion and king, whose word would be supreme (III, lines 1–138; IV, lines 1–34).³⁴ Although Marduk awesomely displayed the power of his word by successfully commanding the destruction and renewed creation of a constellation (IV, lines 22–26), he did not take any chances by relying on his word alone against Tiamat. Rather, he readied his weapons, including destructive winds, and mounted his four-steed storm chariot, “garbed in a ghastly armored garment,” with his head “covered with terrifying auras” (lines 35–58).

When Marduk and his allies saw Tiamat’s forces, they initially faltered, and she cast her spell and uttered lies (lines 59–74). But Marduk responded by accusing her of wrongdoing, including deception, spurning natural feeling for her children, appointing Qingu as chief god when he had no right to be, and perpetrating evil against the gods, including “Anshar, sovereign of the gods” (lines 75–84).

Then Marduk challenged Tiamat to a duel, and she went hysterical as he recited an incantation and cast his spell (lines 85–92). Then Marduk encircled her with his net, released wind into her mouth so that it bloated her belly, and shot his arrow so that it broke open her belly and pierced her heart (lines 93–104). Having slain Tiamat, he scattered her army, imprisoned her divine allies, bound and trampled her eleven monstrous creatures and demons, captured Qingu and “took away from him the tablet of destinies that he had no right to” (lines 105–127). Turning back to Tiamat’s carcass, Marduk trampled it, crushed her skull, cut her open, split her in two, and from her parts he made the cosmos, with places for the high gods Ea, Enlil, and Anu to dwell (lines 128–146).

Tablet V continues with Marduk’s creation from Tiamat of elements such as stars, the moon, underground springs, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, mountains, and the netherworld (lines 1–64; cf. Gen 1–2). Notice that

³³ COS 1:395.

³⁴ Cf. proclamation of YHWH’s kingship in Ps 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 1 Chr 16:31.

it was Marduk's victory that enabled him to impose order through creation. Then Marduk returned in triumph to his divine allies, bringing trophies such as the tablet of destinies, which he presented to Anu (lines 67–76). The gods rejoiced and did homage to him as their king (lines 77–88). Marduk cleaned up from battle, anointed his body and arrayed himself as king, held court in his throne room, and announced his intention to establish his royal temple in Babylon (lines 89–156).

Tablet VI recounts the creation of human beings, which Marduk proposed and Ea planned (lines 1–16). Marduk convened a divine assembly, which identified Qingu as guilty for his leadership of Tiamat's army, shed Qingu's blood, and from it Ea made mankind to bear the burden of work in place of the gods (lines 17–38). Then Marduk divided heaven and the netherworld among the gods (lines 39–44).

Grateful for liberation from work, the gods built Marduk's Esagila temple in Babylon with its high ziggurat, and Marduk majestically took his seat there before them (lines 45–68). He convened the gods for a banquet at Esagila, after which "The fifty great gods took their thrones, the seven gods of destinies were confirmed forever for rendering judgment" (lines 69–81, quoting lines 80–81).

After giving Marduk's bow (with which he had defeated Tiamat) a special position, Anu installed Marduk in the divine assembly on the highest throne as eternal lord of heaven and earth, king of the gods, and their provider through his rule over human beings: humans would serve him, their "shepherd," by building and maintaining temples and supplying the gods with food offerings (lines 82–120). In establishing order, "He shall make on earth the counterpart of what he brought to pass in heaven" (line 112).³⁵

In the rest of Tablet VI and the first part of Tablet VII, the gods glorified Marduk by proclaiming fifty names (expressing his supreme attributes) for him, which humans were to ponder and teach so that by paying attention to him they would be safe and enjoy prosperity of their land (lines 138–150). The concluding lines extol Marduk, whose "word is truth"... "He before whom crime and sin must appear for judgment."... "Let them sound abroad the song of Marduk, How he defeated Tiamat and took kingship" (lines 151–162).³⁶

Babylonian New Year (Akītu) Festival

³⁵ COS 1:402; Cf. Matt 16:19 ("whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven..."; NASB 1995 update); cf. 18:18.

³⁶ COS 1:402.

The Babylonians viewed Marduk's victory and establishment of order, dramatically portrayed in *Enuma Elish*, as having occurred in the primordial past. But they believed that a struggle to maintain order continued. So the victory had to be refreshed through the annual New Year Festival so that they could maintain security and prosperity.³⁷ This festival was celebrated at the city of Babylon during the first eleven or twelve days of Nisannu, the first month, in the spring.³⁸ It was the "spring council" of the gods of Babylonia, when they (represented by statues or cult symbols) gathered in assembly at the Esagila temple of Marduk, the city god of Babylon. The officiating priest read *Enuma Elish* at the festival (on Nisannu 4), during which rituals reenacted some elements of the myth, such as determination of Marduk's destiny to divine kingship. The festival also included components not represented in *Enuma Elish*, such as purification of sacred precincts from demonic impurity, re-confirmation of the human king of Babylon, and the triumph of Nabû, Marduk's son.

On the fifth day of the festival (Nisannu 5), some special preparations were made for the climactic events of subsequent days. Special rituals purified (from demonic impurity) the sacred precincts of Marduk and Nabû and reaffirmed the human king's status before Marduk.³⁹ Nabû (i.e., his statue or symbol) arrived in Babylon on day five and went the next day to the temple of Ninurta, where he symbolically slew two rival deities.

Then he proceeded to Marduk's temple, where his triumph was celebrated, and there he lodged in his guest chapel.

The climax of the festival commenced on day 8, when the city gods of the Babylonian kingdom (represented by their idols or cult symbols) determined a supreme destiny for Marduk, whom they hailed as their king in

³⁷ On the ongoing war between order and chaos, and the nature of evil in *Enuma Elish* and other cosmic conflict myths, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 75–9.

³⁸ Partially preserved Akkadian tablets prescribe rituals of this festival. An English translation by A. Sachs of a text covering Nisannu 2–5 is in *ANET*, 331–334. Mark Cohen included translation and discussion of extant texts relevant to at least part of each festival day in *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 437–51. Bidmead presented translation of some portions, along with reconstruction of ritual events and analysis of their social functions. While written evidence for these rituals dates from the first millennium BCE, the procedures are rooted in much earlier Mesopotamian practice, with the oldest references to such festivals in other cities dating to the third millennium BCE (Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 401, cf. 406–18).

³⁹ For analysis of these rituals of Nisannu 5 and comparison with the Israelite Day of Atonement, see Roy Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure*, Gorgias Dissertations 14, Religion 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 199–243, 319–23; idem, *Cult and Character*, 362–78.

the presence of the people at the courtyard of his temple. Obviously priests attending the gods functioned on their behalf.

Just as the gods paid tribute to Marduk, so the servants of the human king pledged allegiance to him when the divine assembly proclaimed a happy destiny for him.⁴⁰ Then (probably on Nisannu 9) the human king led the gods (i.e., their idols) in a grand parade along the Processional Way and through the Ishtar Gate to a chapel outside the city, called an “*akītu* house,” where they stayed several nights before parading back to Marduk’s temple on day 11.⁴¹

The meaning of parading idols to and from a shrine outside a city is not entirely clear.⁴² In any case, at the conclusion of the Babylonian festival, the gods again convened in the courtyard of Marduk’s temple complex and proclaimed destinies for the coming year, no doubt affecting the prosperity of the kingdom and its people.⁴³

Babylonian Iconography

In the polytheistic, occult religion of Mesopotamia, the cosmos was controlled by an array of deities and subdivine beings, including demons. These inhabited different locations, were organized by hierarchical social structures affected by their respective origins, and possessed a variety of powers, functions, and dispositions toward each other and human beings. Some were malevolent, but others were beneficent and apotropaic, countering evil forces.⁴⁴

Humans could be profoundly affected by superhuman conflict, and they depended on gods and “good” demons to preserve, prosper, and protect them

⁴⁰ Karel van der Toorn, “Form and Function of the New Year Festival in Babylonia and Israel,” in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989*, ed. J. A. Emerton, VTSup 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 3; cf. 5.

⁴¹ Karel van der Toorn, “The Babylonian New Year Festival: New Insights from the Cuneiform Texts and their Bearing on Old Testament Study,” in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989*, 335–6; idem, “Form and Function,” 3–4.

⁴² Mark Cohen has suggested that in the Babylonian celebration and other *akītu* festivals elsewhere, escorting the god’s idol into a city from an *akītu* house was the essential ritual to enact “the basic theme of the festival, i.e., the god has just entered his city and been declared chief god of the city” (*Cultic Calendars*, 404, cf. 440). But see Bidmead, *The Akītu Festival*, 118.

⁴³ Van der Toorn, “Form and Function,” 4; cf. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948), 331–33. This emphasis on destiny somewhat parallels biblical judgment on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; 23:26–32) and the rabbinic idea of judgment at the New Year (*Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2; *Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah* 16a–b; *Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashanah* 1:3); cf. Frankfort, *ibid.*, 332.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Westenholz, ed., *Dragons, Monsters and Fabulous Beasts* (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 2004).

and the fertility of the natural environment (especially the land) on which their well-being depended.

Like other Mesopotamians, the Babylonians believed that two- or three-dimensional artistic depictions of their patron gods not only honored them, but were also imbued with magical powers by representing their presence and connecting with their essence. Such symbolism was ubiquitous in Babylon, from magnificent and colorful glazed brick reliefs representing beings of the divine realm on the massive Ishtar Gate and Processional Way to small figurines shaped as friendly demons and tiny etchings of divine symbols on seals.

Iconography of the Neo-Babylonian period rarely portrayed supernatural beings as having the appearance of natural humans. More frequently they appeared as powerful natural animals, such as the lions (associated with the goddess Ishtar) and bulls (associated with the god Adad) at the Ishtar Gate and Processional Way. But deities and subdivine beings were most often shown as hybrids of two or more kinds of creatures, or as composites of human and animal components.⁴⁵ A wide variety of such fantastic composite creatures/beings is attested for this period, with non-human physical parts including those of quadruped wild and domestic carnivores (e.g., lions, dogs) and herbivores (e.g., ibex, bulls), reptiles (snakes) and scorpions, birds, and fish. Such representations of supernatural beings are attested throughout the ancient Near East from earliest times.⁴⁶

Traditional choice of one or more creatures to represent a particular supernatural being was based on the desire to emphasize correlating attributes that surpass those of humans, with the understanding that gods and subdivine beings are much more powerful than natural animals. Thus, because lions and bulls are physically stronger than humans, they represent formidable gods. Antelopes are faster than humans, snakes and scorpions deploy the non-human weapon of venom, and birds and fish have access to realms inaccessible to humans unassisted by modern technology. So visual depictions of supernatural beings as such creatures reflected the belief that they possess heightened degrees of corresponding powers.

⁴⁵ Constance Gane, "Composite Beings in Neo-Babylonian Art" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

⁴⁶ Ibid.; Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, illus. Tessa Rickards (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), especially 64–5; Frans A. M. Wiggermann, "Mischwesen. A," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993–1997), 8:222–46; A. Green, "Mischwesen. B," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 8:246–64.

Portrayals of hybrid creatures most effectively evoked beings of the awesome supernatural realm because their combinations of capabilities, which further enhanced their superhuman powers, do not exist in creatures belonging to our natural world. If you thought a powerful terrestrial predator was dangerous to you or your enemies, add wings and escape is impossible. If you presumed to believe that the bite of a snake could be avoided, what about a snake-dragon with legs and feet of a lion and bird of prey (as on the Ishtar Gate, associated with Marduk)? If you supposed you could outwit a bull or scorpion, what about a bull-man or scorpion-man?

Obviously, a person who believed in such terrifying beings would fear them, attempt to get on their good side and benefit from their power if possible, or seek protection from them if they persisted in threatening harm. This kind of force could only be defeated by a more powerful supernatural being, as illustrated in *Enuma Elish*, where it takes mighty Marduk to overcome Tiamat and her brood of monsters (see above). Ultimately, the only safe way out of cosmic conflict is to trust in the divine king. If even the high gods believed this, according to *Enuma Elish* and as enacted at the New Year Festival, should not the Babylonian people also put their faith in Marduk, the king and protector of their city, whose snake-dragons adorned its main entrance?

We have found that Babylonian myth, ritual, and iconography triangulated to assert the authority of Marduk, who had gained kingship by winning a cosmic battle. The idea that Marduk was regarded as appointing the human king of Babylon, who was accountable for cooperating with the god to maintain order, was so effective in reinforcing hierarchical social order under a monarchy that Persian and Seleucid kings, who successively ruled the city after the collapse of its Neo-Babylonian empire, continued to exploit this ideology through their propagandistic self-identification as kings of Babylon legitimated by Marduk.⁴⁷

Comparison Between Babylonian Religion and Biblical Apocalypses in Terms of Cosmic Conflict and Divine Kingship

Following are some key aspects relevant to cosmic conflict and divine kingship that are shared by Babylonian religion and the biblical apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, with similarities and differences between their respective views. Throughout this analysis, we should keep in mind two overall distinctions between the materials in view here. First, Babylonians

⁴⁷ Bidmead, *The Akītu Festival*, 129–130, 139–45, 163–4.

were polytheists, but the biblical authors were monotheists. Second, the relative time frames of conflict and kingship in these materials differ. *Enuma Elish* presents protology, with creation providing a new cosmic order after conflict. The Babylonian New Year Festival includes cyclical ritual reenactment of some aspects of the myth in order to renew and thereby maintain the creation order. Daniel and Revelation allude to creation (beasts from sea in Dan 7; Rev 13), but the focus is on eschatological renewal.

1. Cosmic conflict with wind and water. In *Enuma Elish*, conflict erupts when older gods are disturbed by boisterous behavior of energetic younger gods, and later by the “four winds” that Anu creates as toys for Marduk, along with a dust storm and waves. On both occasions, the senior gods unsuccessfully seek to eliminate those who annoy them. The second time, Marduk employs his destructive winds to kill the watery Tiamat, who has spawned lethal monsters.

Also in Daniel 7, large predators arise from chaotic aquatic conditions.⁴⁸ Here these conditions are caused by “the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea” (v. 2), a situation similar to that which resulted from Marduk’s “four wind” toys. Although Daniel’s God is “Ancient of Days” (7:9, 13), in this sense like the older gods in *Enuma Elish*, it is not irritation from winds churning sea that provokes him to retaliate.⁴⁹ Rather, it is the beastly behavior of the predators, especially the “little horn” on the fourth monster, which personally challenges the Lord’s authority, persecutes his loyal people, and presumes to change his (sacred) times and law (Dan 7:25) until it is condemned by his judgment and destroyed (vv. 11, 26). Revelation speaks of the same power as a “beast” that opposes God (13:1–8), but is defeated by Christ and annihilated (19:20).

Enuma Elish and Revelation 12 share several features in their accounts of cosmic conflict: women with children, non-human armies with dragons (serpentine monsters), kings, and a large amount of water. But these features function quite differently. In the Babylonian myth, the woman is the watery Tiamat, whose evil army includes her divine children and other creatures, including dragons. She is vanquished by Marduk, the divine king. In

⁴⁸ Cf. Isa 17:12–14, where the noise of enemy nations is likened to that of the sea, and Rev 17:15, where waters represents peoples.

⁴⁹ Cf. Daniel 8, where “the four winds of heaven” (v. 8) are simply the directions of the compass (cf. Zech 2:6) toward which the Hellenistic empire (of Alexander the Great) divides (cf. Dan 8:21–22). In Rev 7:1–3, “the four winds of the earth” are destructive forces, but they are controlled by God’s angels (compare the way Marduk controls destructive winds, which he hurls against Tiamat).

Revelation 12, a woman gives birth to a son, whom an evil dragon wants immediately to devour.⁵⁰ But the son, who is destined to rule all nations, is snatched away to safety with God. The dragon and his angels are (or had already been) defeated by Michael and his angels in heaven and cast down to the earth,⁵¹ and the dragon unsuccessfully uses water as a weapon against the woman.⁵²

2. Enemy creatures, including hybrids. Enemy forces overcome by the hero of *Enuma Elish* include the chaotic, destructive sea (Tiamat), other gods, and a mighty motley crew of eleven creatures, of which some are composite and some are demons, which originate from Tiamat. In Daniel 7, some unusual (including composite) beasts arise from the sea, of which the last one has eleven horns (ten horns + “little horn”),⁵³ although not all at one time.⁵⁴ In Revelation 12–13, a succession of evil opponents of God and his people include a dragon (representing Satan); a blasphemous beast from the sea that is a composite of Daniel’s animals; and a two-horned animal coming up from the earth.

Earlier we found that in Mesopotamian religion, hybrid creatures/beings represent gods and subdivine beings. Also in the Bible, composite creatures generally belong to the supernatural realm (Ezek 1:5–11; 10:7–8, 14, 21; Rev 4:6–8). In Daniel 7, four animals are opposed to God, of which at least two are hybrids: a lion with eagle’s wings, a natural (non-

⁵⁰ Compare behavior of the feared Mesopotamian Lamashtu goddess-demoness, pictured as a hybrid monster (head and mane of a lioness, teeth and ears of a donkey, furry but human-shaped body and legs, heavy breasts, humanoid hands, and clawed feet of a bird-of-prey). She was thought to slip into the home of a pregnant woman to kill her unborn child, or wait for a baby to be born and then attempt to kidnap, kill, and devour it (Green, 253; Frans A. M. Wiggermann, “Lamaštu, Daughter of Anu, a Profile,” in *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*, ed. M. Stol [Groningen: Styx, 2000], 217–53).

⁵¹ Cf. Isa 14:12–15, taunting a “king of Babylon” (cf. v. 4) called “Shining One, Son of Dawn” (v. 12; KJV and NKJV—“Lucifer”), who has fallen from heaven to earth and is condemned to go down to Sheol (the Hebrew place of the dead) because of his hubris in challenging the Most High God. Compare the Mesopotamian belief that Lamashtu was the daughter of the high god Anu, who expelled her from heaven because of her malevolent will expressed by her request to feast on human flesh, i.e., that of babies (e.g., Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* [Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993], 59; W. Farber, “Lamaštu,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 6:444–5).

⁵² Compare a Mesopotamian lion-dragon probably representing a demon that typically lowers its head to the ground and spews out torrents of water from its gaping mouth (Wiggermann, “Mischwesen. A,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 8:223, 244; idem, Frans A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, CM 1 [Groningen: STYX & PP, 1992], 185).

⁵³ Cf. Walton, “The Anzu Myth,” 78.

⁵⁴ Three of the first ten horns are uprooted to make way for the “little horn” (7:8), leaving a final total of eight horns.

hybrid) but lopsided bear, a four-headed leopard with four wings, and an unidentified monster that initially has ten horns.⁵⁵ In this context where there are hybrids, we would expect all of these beasts, including the natural bear, to represent supernatural beings. But surprisingly, they are interpreted as human kings, i.e., kingdoms (v. 17; cf. 2:36–45; 8:20–25).

This exceptional usage of composite creature symbolism may at least partly explain the fact that none of Daniel's four animals, with exactly the same physical components, represent gods or subdivine beings in extant Neo-Babylonian iconography or literature.⁵⁶ The lack of direct correlation to specific Neo-Babylonian supernatural personalities could serve to avoid referential confusion.

Why would such symbolism, which to an ancient audience would evoke the superhuman realm, be used at all in this context? One or a combination of the three following possibilities could answer this question:

1. In the book of Daniel, arrogant human rulers claim powers and prerogatives like those of supernatural beings, and their hubris can even vaunt itself up to the God of heaven (3:15; 5:2–3; 7:8, 11, 17–25; 8:11–12, 23–25; 11:36–37).

2. Supernatural beings influence human kingdoms (Dan 10:13, 20–21; cf. Eph 6:12).

3. The creatures of Daniel 7 that oppose God and his people are frightening and formidable, as in Hos 13:7–8, where the Lord visits judgments on rebellious Israel as if he were a destructive lion, leopard, or bear (cf. Amos 5:19).⁵⁷ Addition of some composite features in Daniel 7

⁵⁵ From the middle of the second millennium BCE on, non-avian creatures are often depicted with wings, feathers, and talons. Whether or not the wings enable these hybrids to fly, they transform beasts that are otherwise land-bound into supernatural monsters (Westenholz, *Dragons*, 32).

⁵⁶ Cf. Walton, "The Anzu Myth," 69–70, 73. A number of winged lions do appear on earlier Kassite period (c. 1570–1157 BCE) boundary stones (*kudurrus*; Ursula Seidl, *Die Babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs: Symbole Mesopotamischer Gottheiten*, OBO 87 [Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1989], 27, Abb. 3; 39, Abb. 9, no. 63; 40, Abb. 9, no. 63). Neo-Babylonia has a well-attested winged human-headed lion (A. Moortgat, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Steinschneidekunst* [Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag., 1988], nos. 611, 685, 686; B. Wittmann, "Babylonische Rollsiegel des 11.7– Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 23 [1992]: 247, no. 109), which could be viewed as partly relating to the transformation of Daniel's winged lion into a kind of lion-human: "...its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it" (7:4; NRSV). Also found in Neo-Babylonian iconography is an unwinged lion-humanoid (Akkadian *urdimmu/uridimmu*, "mad lion" (*CAD*, vol. 20 ["U and W"]: 214; Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 50–51).

⁵⁷ Cf. Anatolian "animals of the gods": leopard, lion, boar, bear, gazelle (Billie Jean Collins, "Animals in the Religions of Ancient Anatolia," in *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient*

conveys the impression that the great beasts are larger than life. This implies that their threat cannot be overcome by ordinary human means; only the divine sovereign is capable of saving his people from aggression by these rebels against himself. Because of God's solid commitment to deliver them, the event that determines their destiny has dimensions of cosmic conflict. This conflict is somewhat reminiscent of that described in *Enuma Elish*, but closer to that celebrated at the New Year Festival, when the divine king who vanquishes cosmic evil forces presides over a favorable fate for the humans under his protection.

Revelation 13 revisits the biblical saga of cosmic conflict with the rise of a hybrid monster from the sea that assumes the dragon's role as the enemy of God and his people. Like the dragon, it has seven heads, ten horns, and diadems signifying kingly power (13:1; cf. 12:3). Its body "was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth" (v. 2). So the great beast is an ultimate amalgam of the animals coming from the sea in Daniel 7.

3. Role of speech. Tiamat of *Enuma Elish*, the "little horn" of Daniel 7, and the beast from the sea in Revelation 13:1–8 all employ evil speech against deities who possess superior powers of speech and ultimately prevail. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk can create and destroy by simple fiat. "His word is truth" (Tablet VII, line 151) and cannot be altered. However, although he wields speech against his enemy (by condemning her and casting a magic spell), his primary weapons for overcoming her and her allies are portrayed as physical in nature. Daniel and Revelation do not describe physical instruments or magic for overcoming blasphemous human powers; they are simply condemned by God's tribunal and meet their demise (Dan 7:9–12, 26; cf. Rev 14:7, 9–11; 19:20).

Revelation 19 describes the conquering Christ as possessing only one weapon: a sword from his mouth (v. 15; cf. fire caused by Marduk's lips in *Enuma Elish*, Tablet I, line 96), representing the awesome power of his word (cf. v. 13—"his name is called The Word of God"), with which he slays enemy

Near East, ed. Billie Jean Collins (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 328. Day interpreted the concluding "wild animal" (literally "beast of the field/open country") at the end of Hosea 13:8 as an additional unnamed animal, equivalent in this respect to the fourth beast in Daniel 7 (157). If Daniel 7 alludes to Hosea 13, we gain the impression that God allows the succession of empires, represented by similar animals, to dominate his people because of their disloyalty (cf. Daniel's confession of his people's sins in 9:3–19). However, because these empires arrogantly oppose the Lord, failing to recognize that they are his instruments and carrying their domination too far, he ultimately judges and destroys them (cf. the narratives regarding Babylon in Dan 3–5, and Isa 10:5–27 regarding Assyria as God's rebellious instrument).

armies (v. 21). Like Marduk, he can destroy by simple fiat. In the Bible, God's "word is truth" (Jn 17:17) and others cannot alter his commands (Num 23:19–20).

4. Assembly and determination of destiny. *Enuma Elish* mentions or describes a number of assemblies of gods at various stages, and on both sides of the cosmic conflict. At these gatherings, gods confer to make plans, agree on a course of action, and/or to celebrate. During the Babylonian New Year Festival, divine assemblies were ritually reenacted, with idols from Babylon and surrounding cities representing the gods. Babylonian deities did not involve created beings in their decisions. It is true that human priests necessarily assisted idols/symbols of the gods at their assemblies during the New Year Festival, but according to the interpreted meaning of these rituals, only gods participated in determination of fates.

In Daniel 7 an obviously divine "Ancient of Days" is enthroned to preside over an assembly with innumerable attendants, who are privy to books recording evidence used for reaching verdicts in a judgment (vv. 9–10). But there is no indication that these attendants are divine, and within this monotheistic context they could not be gods. So they must be created beings. In Revelation 20:4, enthroned beings/persons are given authority to participate in judgment during the millennium (cf. vv. 11–13 of judgment using books), again with no mention of their divinity. By contrast with Babylonian deities, the Lord of the Bible grants his created beings a remarkable level of access to the processes and bases of his decisions.

In *Enuma Elish*, gods who possess a written "tablet of destinies" have authority to determine destinies, which goes with power to create and destroy. When their assembly ordains an exalted destiny for Marduk by installing him as the supreme, eternal fixer of destinies, he gains awesome power to judge and destroy enemies, and also to create and determine the destinies (including roles/functions and locations) of the things and people that he creates. Similarly, divine assemblies at the Babylonian New Year Festival were believed to determine destinies, including Marduk's supreme position as king of the gods and the fate of the Babylonian people for the coming year.

When Daniel's God presides over an assembly that judges destinies on the basis of written data (7:10), he appoints an exalted destiny for "one like a son of man," i.e., one who appears like a human being, who receives authority over all loyal peoples on earth (vv. 9–14). These human "holy ones of the Most High" enjoy the dominion of earth under his rule after the judgment

and removal of their evil oppressors (vv. 18, 22, 27). So the negative and positive destinies fixed for the enemies, on the one hand, and the “one like a son of man” on the other, benefit God’s loyal people.

In Revelation 5, after an awkward moment when it appears that no one can open a scroll (vv. 3–4; cf. the frustrated silence of the gods before Marduk volunteers in *Enuma Elish*, Tablet II, lines 119–122), God gives the scroll to the “Lamb,” likely indicating that he controls destinies. Daniel 7 and Revelation 5 contain parallel elements: thrones, written records (books/scroll), an approach to God, and bestowal of authority. So the settings are similar, but they do not necessarily portray the same point in time. In Daniel the books are opened before an assembly as evidence in an investigative phase of judgment. But in Revelation 5 a scroll is given to the Lamb (Christ), with no mention of or allusion to judgment, and the scroll is not yet open. Rather, its disclosure must await a series of events, following which it is announced at a time of judgment that the kingdom of the world now belongs to the Lord and his Christ (Rev 11:15–19).

The emphasis in Revelation 5 is on what Christ has the authority to do in the future, just as *Enuma Elish* has Marduk initially receiving authority to determine destinies before he carries out judgment on Tiamat and her allies. The difference is that in Revelation 5, Christ has already conquered (in the sense of redemption through his death) when he receives the scroll, but Marduk only later conquers and captures the “tablet of destinies.” Nevertheless, Christ also has a later stage of conquest, when he will destroy his enemies (Rev 14, 19; cf. Dan 8:25).

Once a hero has the authority to determine destinies, he may exercise it whenever he wishes. So after Marduk’s victory, he creates humans and determines their destinies, and after Christ’s final victory, he recreates Planet Earth, for which a happy destiny is announced (Rev 21:3–4).

5. Divine kingship: usurpation of it and exaltation to it. When conflict is already brewing in *Enuma Elish*, Qingu becomes Tiamat’s supreme commander. According to Marduk, her elevation of him usurps leadership of the gods, which had rightfully belonged to Anshar (Tablet IV, lines 82–3). In Daniel, the arrogant “little horn” picks a fight against the “Most High” by blasphemously exalting itself against him and attacking what belongs to him, including his people, law, and temple (Dan 7:25; 8:11–13; cf. 11:31–39). In Revelation, Satan himself is a usurper, working through human agents (dragon and beast with diadems; Rev 12–13).

Anshar, who had grown “lengthy of days,” was initially king of the gods and therefore possessed the right to determine destinies. However, he was also burdened with the responsibility of any ancient Near Eastern monarch to lead against every threat. Marduk, his glorious great-grandson, approached him with the offer to defeat Tiamat and her allies, on condition that Marduk would become king. So Anshar convened the divine assembly to transfer his royal position and authority to Marduk, who assumed the title of “Lord.” The magnitude of the reward was commensurate with that of the peril. Maintenance of Marduk’s new status was conditioned on his success against the enemy army. After riding to battle on his storm chariot and achieving magnificent victory, his eternal kingship over the new order was confirmed and celebrated.⁵⁸

In Daniel 7, it is the divine “Ancient of Days” who is supreme over the assembly (vv. 9–10). “One like a son of man” approaches him “with the clouds of heaven” (v. 13; compare Marduk’s storm chariot).⁵⁹ The fact that this individual, who receives eternal kingship over earth (v. 14) is only “like” (preposition *k*) a son of man (v. 13) indicates that he is not simply a human being (cf. Ezek 1:26–28 of the Lord—“like the appearance of a man”).⁶⁰ But there is no indication that this “son” is descended from the “Ancient of Days” (no theogony in Daniel) or that the “son’s” kingship replaces his rule. Rather, this looks like a co-regency. Nor does Daniel indicate that the “son” earns or confirms his exalted royal status by his prowess as a warrior, as Marduk does. But later Christ, who is called the “Son of Man” (e.g., Matt 9:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14), defeats his enemies (Rev 14:14–20; 19:11–21).

In Revelation 5 the “Lamb,” who has special sight (seven eyes; compare Marduk’s special power of sight in *Enuma Elish*, Tablet I, line 98), is worthy of authority and glory because he has conquered. But paradoxically, his conquest is through his death to redeem humans by his blood. In *Enuma Elish*, the leader of the enemy gods (Qingu) is slain so that his blood can be

⁵⁸ Cf. 1 Sam 11:12–15—renewal of Saul’s kingship after his victory over the Ammonites.

⁵⁹ André Lacocque, “Allusions to Creation in Daniel 7,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, 1:130.

⁶⁰ Emil Kraeling (“Some Babylonian and Iranian Mythology in the Seventh Chapter of Daniel,” in *Oriental Studies in Honour of Cursetji Erachji Pavry*, ed. Jal Dastur Cursetji Pavry [London: Oxford University Press, 1933]) recognized the similarity between determination of fates in the Babylonian New Year Festival and in Daniel 7 (228–9) and suggested a parallel between the human king of Babylon receiving his authority from Marduk at the festival and the “one like a son of man” receiving kingship from the “Ancient of Days” (229–30). However, the fact that the “one like a son of man” is superhuman makes him analogous to Marduk, not the human king.

used to carry out the plan of the hero (Marduk) to create humans, but in Revelation it is the hero (Christ) himself who is slain to renew humanity.

Just as Daniel 7 depicts the coronation of the “one like a son of man” as co-regent at the time of judgment, Revelation 11 has Christ proclaimed as co-regent when the judgment begins and God’s heavenly temple is opened to show the ark (vv. 15–19). Later, Christ as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16; compare Marduk as “Lord”) takes possession of his dominion, riding a white horse to lead the armies of heaven into battle against “the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies” (vv. 11–21; compare Marduk riding to battle in *Enuma Elish*).

6. Temple. According to *Enuma Elish*, the gods build Marduk a temple in Babylon to reward him for defeating their enemies, and he is responsible for seeing that humans under his rule build and maintain temples for the gods. The Babylonian people did build and maintain many temples, whose gods (idols) visited Marduk at his temple during the New Year Festival.

There is no explicit reference to a temple in Daniel 7, but the judgment assembly at which God is enthroned seems to take place at his headquarters, i.e., temple. However, the imagery in Daniel 7:9–10 appears heavenly (“his throne was fiery flames...”) and no earthly structure could contain the vast number of attendants mentioned here (“ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him”). So unlike Marduk’s temple on earth in Babylon, the divine headquarters in Daniel 7 must be located in heaven (cf. Ps 11:4).

In the parallel prophecy of Daniel 8, the functional equivalent of the judgment is the justifying of God’s temple (v. 14) after attacks against it by the “little horn” power (vv. 11–13). Compare Revelation 11:19, where “God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple” at the beginning of the divine judgment. Daniel 8:14 and Revelation 11:19 allude to vindication (legal “cleansing”) of God’s sanctuary/temple administration on the Day of Atonement, Israel’s judgment day, the only occasion on which the high priest could open the holy of holies to go before the ark of the covenant (Lev 16), over which God’s presence was enthroned (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4).⁶¹ Unlike *Enuma Elish*, Daniel does not explain the origin of a temple, but its eschatological renewal.

⁶¹ On purgation of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement enacting vindication of God, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 318–23. On vindication of God in Daniel 8:14, see idem, *Who’s Afraid of the Judgment: The Good News About Christ’s Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006), 40–42.

7. Role of human beings. In *Enuma Elish*, after Marduk's victory over an enemy force of gods and demons, he initiates creation of human beings and determination of their destiny to bear the burden of the gods, in order to free the latter from work.⁶² Consequently, the gods prostrate themselves before him and proclaim him the people's "shepherd" (Tablet VI, line 107). As the master of humans, he judges "crime and sin" (Tablet VII, line 156). It is true that the Babylonian people were free from work during some days of their New Year Festival, which reenacted the myth.⁶³ But this did not alter the basic role of humans as workers for the gods.

In Daniel 7, enemy powers are composed of human beings, whose creation has previously occurred. After God subdues them, those humans who are loyal to him rule the dominion of earth under the higher rule of the "one like a son of man" (Dan 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27; cf. Rev 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5, where humans reign). While they "serve" their divine king (Dan 7:14), there is no indication that their role is to free him or any other deity from work.

The role of Christ in relation to humanity presents the most striking contrast between biblical and Babylonian theology. Like Marduk (with Ea), Christ (with the other members of the Trinity) is the Creator (Jn 1:3–4; Heb 1:2). But rather than creating people to enslave them, as Marduk does, Christ as their shepherd (Rev 7:17; 14:4) has died as a "Lamb" to ransom them by his blood and re-create them (Rev 5:6, 9–10, 12; cf. chaps. 21–22). Consequently, created beings in the heavenly throne room prostrate themselves before him (5:8, 14).

Conclusion: Implications

The fact that major expressions of Babylonian religion—*Enuma Elish*, the New Year Festival, and iconography—share with biblical apocalypses clusters of elements involved in resolution of cosmic conflict by divine kingship, and even some similar expressions, suggests that the relationship between them is more than coincidental. It appears that Daniel's eschatological visions concerning conflict with human oppressors, including Babylon, and restoration under YHWH, Israel's deity, at least partly respond to aspects of the proud Babylonian worldview expressed in the protological myth that elevates Marduk, god of Babylon, to divine supremacy. This

⁶² Cf. creation of humans for the same reason in the first tablet of the Old Babylonian epic *Atra-ḫasis* (W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 42–67; cf. *COS* 1:450–51).

⁶³ Van der Toorn, "Form and Function," 3.

conflict is central to the book of Daniel, which begins with defeat of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who took some vessels from God's temple and deposited them in the treasury of his gods (Dan 1:1–2).

When Babylon was victorious over YHWH's people, exiled them, and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple there (2 Ki 25; 2 Chron 36; Jer 52), it appeared that Marduk had prevailed over YHWH. The supremacy of Marduk would be reinforced by his prominence in Babylonian culture, in which Jewish captives were unwillingly immersed. The situation called for redress and re-affirmation "that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals; he gives it to whom he will" (Dan 4:17). This message of God's sovereignty is the primary theme of Daniel, which the book emphasizes by repetition (cf. vv. 25–26, 32; 5:21).⁶⁴

Both the narratives and visions of Daniel reveal that not even the exalted Marduk, divine sovereign of Nebuchadnezzar's golden kingdom (cf. 2:37–38) and lord of a sophisticated theological system, can successfully challenge YHWH's ultimate divine kingship. This implies *a fortiori* that no other power stands a chance.

In the process of demonstrating YHWH's supremacy, Daniel shows that Marduk and the other Babylonian gods are powerless to control the future by maintaining the Babylonian kingdom on earth to serve them (Dan 2, 4–5, 7), which means that they do not really control destinies and therefore lack divine rule. In fact, these deities do not even reveal the future to their human representatives, as YHWH does to Daniel (chaps. 2, 4–5). The Babylonian gods are losers, as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah:

Bel [Lord = Marduk] bows down, Nebo [=Nabû] stoops,
 their idols are on beasts and cattle;
 these things you carry are loaded
 They stoop, they bow down together;
 they cannot save the burden,
 but themselves go into captivity.
 as burdens on weary animals. (Isa 46:1–2).

Babylon is taken,
 Bel is put to shame,
 Merodach [= Marduk] is dismayed.

⁶⁴ "Even though there is a dramatic contrast in genre between the two halves of the book, however, the overall message of the book is uniform: *In spite of present appearances, God is in control*" (Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999], 19).

Her images are put to shame,
her idols are dismayed. (Jer 50:2).

I will punish Bel in Babylon,
and make him disgorge what he has swallowed.
The nations shall no longer stream to him;
the wall of Babylon has fallen. (Jer. 51:44).

Daniel 7 dramatically demonstrates that while human empires, including Babylon, seem to be invincible as if they were superhuman, they are accountable to YHWH and he easily removes their domination. God's loyal people will receive the benefit of his judgment, which condemns their oppressors and establishes the beneficent co-regency of the "one like a son of man."

In Daniel 7, evocation of a complex of elements from the Babylonian religious environment powerfully reinforces YHWH's counter-message. Thus "the Bible undermines the false religion of its idolatrous neighbors through the use of their imagery."⁶⁵ This does not mean that we should look for *origins* of Daniel 7 in ancient Near Eastern culture, as many scholars have attempted to do.⁶⁶ Daniel's visionary scene does not appear to be basically dependent on mythology or other literature, rituals, or iconography from Babylon, Canaan, Anatolia, Egypt, Greece, or anywhere else. But the apocalyptic revelation does relate to existing ancient Near Eastern backgrounds, of which Babylonian ones have been the focus of this essay.

The book of Revelation expands on the message of Daniel to show the ultimate sovereignty and benevolence of the true God. The "one like the son of man" (cf. Dan 7:13) is Christ (Rev 1:13; 14:14), whose attitude toward human beings radically contrasts with that of Marduk. Rather than creating humans to toil in place of the gods, Christ dies to redeem them by his blood as "the Lamb" (Rev 5). This self-sacrifice does not mean that he is weak. Whereas Marduk required several weapons to conquer his enemies, Christ needs no weapon but his word (Rev 19:13, 15).

In Revelation, "Babylon" represents a proud, corrupt, human power that enjoys fabulous wealth and persecutes God's people, but is doomed to

⁶⁵ Longman, *Daniel*, 181. Cf. Collins's observation that "the use of imagery associated with Marduk or with Ba'al may serve to make the claim that Yahweh, not the pagan deities, is the true deliverer" (*Daniel*, 282).

⁶⁶ See the scholarly literature on alleged origins and parallels with the "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7 that is reviewed by Ferch, 40–107; cf. Day, 151–67.

destruction (Rev 17–18). Christ, the divine King, rescues the oppressed ones who are loyal to God and restores to them the dominion over a perfect earth originally given to Adam and Eve (Rev 19–21; cf. Gen 1:26–28). So the end of eschatology is a renewed protology. But this is not cyclical, like the yearly Babylonian New Year Festival; it only happens once. When the cosmic conflict ends, the security of Paradise is permanent.