

Under the Sea:
The Song of the Sea and the Creation Stories of the Ancient Near East
Dr. Stu Halpern stu.halpern@gmail.com

1. שמות פרק טו

(א) אָז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה לֵימְרוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לַיהוָה לֵימְרוֹ כִּי גָאָה גָאָה סוֹס וְרָכָבוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם: (ב) עָזִי וְזַמְרָתִי יְהוָה וַיִּהְיֶה לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאַנְוָהוּ אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וְאַרְמְמָנָהוּ: (ג) יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי מַלְחָמָה יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ: (ד) מִרְכַּבַּת פְּרָעֹה וְחֵילוֹ יָרָה בָּיָם וּמִבְּחַר שְׁלֹשִׁי טָבְעוּ בַיָּם סוּף: (ה) תְּהַמַּת יַכְסִּימוּ יָרְדוּ בַמַּצּוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ אֶבֶן: (ו) יִמְיָנָה יְהוָה גְּאֹדְרֵי בִפְתַח יִמְיָנָה יְהוָה תִּרְעַץ אוֹיְבֵי: (ז) וּבָרַב גְּאוּנָה תִּהְרַס קַמְיָה תִּשְׁלַח חֲרָנָה יֵאָכְלֶמוּ כְּשֵׁשׁ: (ח) וּבְרוּחַ אַפְיָה נִעְרַמוּ מִיָּם נִצְבּוּ כְּמוֹ גִּד נִזְלִים קָפְאוּ תְהַמַּת בְּלֵב יָם: (ט) אָמַר אוֹיְבֵי אַרְדּוּף אֲשִׁיג אֲחַלֵּק נְשָׁלָל תִּמְלָאֲמוּ נִפְשֵׁי אַרְיִק חַרְבֵי תוֹרִישְׁמוּ יְדֵי: (י) נִשְׁפָּת בְּרוּחַהּ כָּסְמוּ יָם צָלְלוּ כַּעֲוַפְרַת בָּמִים אֲדִירִים: (יא) מִי כַמְכָה בְּאֵלֶם יְהוָה מִי כַמְכָה גְּאֹדְרֵי בְּקִדְשׁ נוֹרָא תְהַלֵּת עֲשֵׂה פְלָא: (יב) נְטִיטָה יִמְיָנָה תִּבְלַעְמוּ אַרְצֵי: (יג) נְחִיתָ בְּחַסְדְּךָ עִם זֶה גְּאֹלְתָּ נְהַלְתָּ בְּעֲזָתָּה אֵל גְּוָה קְדוֹשָׁה: (יד) שְׁמַעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגְּזוּן חֵיל אֲחִזוּ יִשְׁבִּי פְלִשְׁתִּי: (טו) אָז נִבְהָלוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲדוֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יִאֲחַזְמוּ רֵעַד נִמְגּוּ כָּל יִשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן: (טז) תִּפֹּל עַלֵיָהֶם אִימַתָּה נִפְחַד בְּגִדְלֵךְ זָרוּעָה יְדָמוּ כְּאֶבֶן עַד יַעֲבֹר עִמָּךְ יְהוָה עַד יַעֲבֹר עִם זֶה קְנִייתָ: (יז) תִּבְאֲמוּ וְתִטְעַמוּ בְּהַר נְחֹלְתָהּ מִכּוֹן לִשְׁבַתָּהּ פְּעֻלַּת יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדָנִי כּוֹנֵנוּ יְדִיָּה: (יח) יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעַד:

1 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. 2 The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name. 4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. 5 The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. 6 Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. 7 In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. 8 At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. 9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.' 10 You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. 11 "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? 12 You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. 13 "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. 14 The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. 15 Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. 16 Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased. 17 You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. 18 The LORD will reign forever and ever."

2. שמות פרק כה

- (א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבוֹתָם תִּקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמָתִי:
(ג) וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנְחֹשֶׁת:
(ד) וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים:
(ה) וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעִצֵּי שִׁטִּים:
(ו) שֶׁמֶן לְמָאֵר בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים:
(ז) אַבְנֵי שֹהַם וְאַבְנֵי מְלֵאִים לְאֹפֶד וְלַחֹשֶׁן:
(ח) וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכָם:

1. The LORD said to Moses, 2. "Tell the people of Israel that everyone who wants to may bring me an offering. 3. Here is a list of items you may accept on my behalf: gold, silver, and bronze; 4. blue, purple, and scarlet yarn; fine linen; goat hair for cloth; 5. tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather; acacia wood; 6. olive oil for the lamps; spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense; 7. onyx stones, and other stones to be set in the ephod and the chestpiece." 8. "I want the people of Israel to build me a sacred residence where I can live among them.

3. תהלים פרק צג

- (א) יְהוָה מִלְּךָ גֵּאוֹת לְבַשׁ לְבַשׁ יְהוָה עֵז הַתְּאֵזָר אֵף תִּכּוֹן תִּבְּל בִּל תִּמוּט:
(ב) נִכּוֹן כְּסֵאֵךְ מֵאֵז מְעוֹלָם אֶתָּה:
(ג) נִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת יְהוָה נִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת קוֹלָם יִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת דְּכָנָם:
(ד) מִקְלוֹת מִיָּם רַבִּים אֲדִירִים מִשְׁבְּרֵי יָם אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם יְהוָה:
(ה) עֲדוּתִיךָ נֶאֱמָנוּ מֵאֵד לְבֵיתְךָ נֶאֱנָה קִדְּשׁ יְהוָה לְאֶרֶץ יָמִים:

The Lord reigns. He is robed in glory.

The Lord is robed, girded with strength.

The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.

Your throne stands firm as of old; You are eternal.

Rivers lift up, Lord, rivers lift up their voice, rivers lift up their crashing waves.

Mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea is the Lord on high.

Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, Lord, for evermore.

4.

Psalm 93 – Hashem Malakh	Az Yashir – The Song of the Sea
<p>(א) יְקִיֵּן מֶלֶךְ גְּאוּת לְבַשׁ לְבַשׁ יְקִיֵּן עֹז הַתְּאֵזָר אֶף תִּפְוֹן תִּבְּל בִּל תִּמוּט:</p> <p>1. The Lord reigns. He is robed in <u>glory</u>. The Lord is robed, girded with strength.</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק טו</u> (א) אָז יָשִׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה כִּי אָמַר אֱשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה סוּס וְרֶכֶב רָמָה בַיָּם:</p> <p>1. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. They said: I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed <u>gloriously</u>; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.</p>
<p>(א) ... אֶף תִּפְוֹן תִּבְּל בִּל תִּמוּט: ...The world is firmly <u>established</u>; it cannot be moved.</p> <p>(ב) גְּבוּרַת כִּסְאוֹ מֵאֶז מְעוֹלָם אֶתָּה: Your throne <u>stands firm</u> as of old; You are eternal.</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק טו</u> (ז) תִּבְּאֵמוּ וְתִטְעֲמוּ בְּהַר נִחְלָתְךָ מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פְּעֻלַּת יְקִיֵּן מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי פּוֹנֵנוּ יְדִיד:</p> <p>17. You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, The place You made to dwell in, O Lord, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands <u>established</u>.</p>
<p>(ד) מְקַלּוֹת מַיִם רַבִּים אֲדִירִים מִשִּׁפְרֵי יָם אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם יְקִיֵּן: Mightier than the noise of many waters, than the <u>mighty waves</u> of the sea is the Lord on high.</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק טו</u> (י) נִשְׁפָּת בְּרוּחְךָ כִּסְמוּ יָם צָלְלוּ כַּעֲוֵפֶת בְּמַיִם אֲדִירִים: 10. You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the <u>mighty waters</u>.</p>
<p>(ה) עֲדוּתֶיךָ נֶאֱמְנוּ מְאֹד לְבֵיתְךָ נֶאֱוָה קִדְשׁ יְקִיֵּן לְאָרְצְךָ יָמִים: Your testimonies are very sure; <u>holiness adorns</u> Your house, Lord, for evermore.</p>	<p><u>שמות פרק טו</u> (יג) נְחִיתָ בְּחַסְדְּךָ עִם זֵי גְאֻלַּת נְהַלְתָּ בְּעֻזְךָ אֵל נִגְוָה קִדְשְׁךָ: 13. In Your love You lead the people You redeemed; In Your strength You guide them to Your <u>holy abode</u>.</p>

5. Traditional Commentators:

Rashi (France, 1040-1105)

תבאמו: Moses prophesied that he himself would not enter the land; he does not say "You will bring us."

מִכּוּן לְשִׁבְתָּהּ פְּעֻלָּתָהּ. Literally, "to sit in" - the Temple below is aligned (*mechuvan*) with the Throne on high. מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנֵנוּ יְדִידָהּ. The cantillation mark on mikdash makes clear that it is "the sanctuary, O Lord," not "the sanctuary of the Lord." Beloved is the sanctuary, for the whole world was made with a single hand - "My own hand founded the earth" (Isaiah 48:13) - but the sanctuary is made with both hands. And when will the sanctuary be made with God's two hands? When "the Lord will reign for ever and ever" (v. 18) - in the future, when the kingdom is entirely his.

Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1089-1164)

מִכּוּן לְשִׁבְתָּהּ פְּעֻלָּתָהּ. This phrase suggests that it alludes to Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount, where the Shekhinah would dwell.

Seforno (Italy, 1475-1559)

בְּהַר נְחֻלְתָּהּ. the mountain of the Temple, of which it is said "On the mountain where Hashem is seen" (Genesis 22:14).

מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנֵנוּ יְדִידָהּ, which your hands established. As it says "Let them make me a sanctuary, according to all that I show you" (25:8-9).

Modern Commentators:

Umberto Cassuto (Italy, 1883-1951)

מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנֵנוּ יְדִידָהּ. It cannot be deduced from here that the song (or these verses) was composed after the construction of the Temple, for without doubt the Israelites intended, even before entering the Land, to build therein a sanctuary to the Lord their God.

Nahum Sarna (US, 1923-2005)

בְּהַר נְחֻלְתָּהּ. Hebrew "*har nachalatkha*" is a unique phrase in the Bible. It occurs in Ugaritic literature in relation to the sacred mountain Tzafon, on which stood the sanctuary of the Canaanite deity Baal. Here, this standard religious phrase, prevalent in the ancient Near East, is employed by the poet in monotheized form, totally emptied of its pagan content.

6. Baal Epic

The Baal Epic is a cycle of stories about the Canaanite god Baal, also known as Hadad the god of rain, storm and fertility. These stories are written in Ugaritic. Ugarit had close connections to the Hittite Empire and was at its height from ca. 1450 BC until 1200 BC.

Ch. 1: Now Mighty Baal, son of Dagon, **desired the kingship of the gods.** He contended with Prince **Yam-Nahar**, the son of El. But kindly El, Father Shunem, decided the case in favor of His son; He gave the kingship to Prince Yam. He gave the power to Judge Nahar. Fearsome Yam came to rule the gods with an iron fist. He caused them to labor and toil under his reign. They cried unto their mother, Asherah, Lady of the Sea. They convinced her to confront Yam, to intercede in their behalf. Asherah went into the presence of Prince Yam. She came before Judge Nahar. She begged that he release his grip upon the gods her sons. But mighty Yam declined her request. She offered favors to the Tyrant. But powerful Nahar softened not His heart. Finally, kindly Asherah, who loves her children, offered herself to the god of the Sea. She offered her own body to the Lord of Rivers. Yam-Nahar agreed to this, and Asherah returned to the source of the Two Rivers. She went home to the court of El. She came before the Divine Council, and spoke of her plan to the gods her children. Baal was infuriated by her speech. ..He would not consent to surrendering Great Asherah to the Tyrant Yam-Nahar. He swore to the Gods that He would destroy Prince Yam. He would lay to rest the tyranny of Judge Nahar...

Ch. 3: And Kothar-u-Khasis [a god who is helping Baal in battle] declared: "Did I not tell you, O Prince Baal, nor declare, O Rider of Clouds? '**Lo, your enemies, O Baal, Lo, your enemies will you smite.** Lo, you will vanquish your foes. You will **take your eternal kingdom; your everlasting sovereignty!**' Kothar brings down two clubs and proclaims their names. "Your name is Yagrush! Yagrush, expel Yam, expel Yam from His throne, Nahar from the seat of His sovereignty! You shall swoop from the hands of Baal like an eagle from His fingers! Strike the shoulders of Prince Yam, between the hands of Judge Nahar!" ... And the club swoops from the hands of Baal Like an eagle from His fingers. It strikes the head of Prince Yam, between the eyes of Judge Nahar. Yam sinks, falls to the earth...Baal drags and hangs Yam, destroys Judge Nahar.

Ch. 6: Loudly Bull-El, [Asherah's] father, shouts... "Lo there is no house unto Baal like the gods. Not a court like the sons of Asherah... if the handmaid of Asherah will make the bricks, a house shall be built for Baal like the gods." [Later on, Baal

sends a message to his lover Anat:] "I have a word to tell you...come and I will reveal it, in the midst of my mountain, the divine Tzaphon **in the sanctuary, in the mountain of my inheritance.**"

7. שמות פרק יד

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹנֶק אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשׁוּבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירָת בֵּין מִגְדֹּל וּבֵין הַיָּם לִפְנֵי בַעַל צֶפֶן נִכְחוּ תַחְנוּ עַל הַיָּם: (ג) וְאָמַר פַּרְעֹה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ סֹגֵר עָלֵיהֶם הַמְדַבֵּר:

1. The Lord said to Moses: 2. Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. 3. Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them."

8. Enuma Elish

This epic is one of the most important sources for understanding the Babylonian worldview, centered on the supremacy of Marduk (Mordechai) and the creation of humankind for the service of the gods.

The composition of the text of *Enuma Elish* probably dates to the Bronze Age, to the time of Hammurabi or perhaps the early Kassite era (roughly 18th to 16th centuries BCE).

In the story, Marduk wages battle against Tiamat. Tiamat is a huge female dragon that personifies the saltwater ocean, the water of Chaos. Marduk defeats Tiamat and cuts her body in half. From the upper half he creates the sky and from the lower half he makes the earth. Her tears become the source of the great Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

[Description of preparation for, and then the battle between, Marduk and Tiamat]

[The gods say to Marduk:] "O Marduk, you are indeed our avenger, we have granted you kingship over the universe entire. **When in assembly you sit, your word shall be supreme.** Your weapons shall not fail, they shall smash your foes!....."

He released the arrow, it tore her belly. It cut through her insides, splitting the heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life. He cast down her carcass to stand upon it. After he had slain **Tiamat**, the leader, her band was shattered, her troupe broken up.....

He split her like a shellfish into two parts: Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to allow not her waters to escape....

The Annunaki [a group of lower gods] opened their mouths and said to Marduk their lord: "Now, O lord, you have caused our deliverance, what shall be our homage to you? **Let us build a shrine** whose name shall be called 'Lo, a chamber for our nightly rest' - let us repose in it! Let us build a throne, **a recess for his abode!**... When Marduk heard this, brightly glowed his features ... Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it "**The Sanctuary.**"

9. Marduk's victory and resultant kingship were enshrined in his temple Esagil, which expressed his newly attained supremacy in architectural form. The other gods built the temple for him, which was their way of acknowledging his sole kingship. (Richard J. Clifford, "Psalms of the Temple," *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*)

10. In Psalm 93, however, no combat comes into question. God rules forever (Ps. 93:2, 5). His name is in each line of the psalm, his presence ends any dispute, with his presence further manifest in 93:5 as well....Divine power is always contested power: the struggle for power must always be fought for the survival of the world. In Psalm 93, however, the question of power among the divinity's rivals is **already settled**. (Hermann Spieckermann, *Creation: God and World*)

11. Tiamat, who once protected the younger generation of gods, has her peace disturbed by their clamor. Consequently, she hatches a plot to wipe out the troublemakers, a maneuver she organizes with other divine or numinous helpers, especially her lover Qingu. Though one may dispute the legitimacy of an annihilation based on the mere disturbance of peace, ancient Near Eastern cultures deemed **divine rest the highest good**. This conceptual context proves essential for a proper theological assessment of God's magnanimous rest in the Genesis accounting

of creation. Divine repose in the ancient world was also proof of power, for gods who enjoy the luxury of rest belong to the highest class of divinity, obliging the inferior classes of gods to undertake sundry labors. (Hermann Spieckermann, *Creation: God and World*)

12. שמות פרק כ

(ח) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלֹאכְתֶּךָ:

(ט) וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל מְלֹאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ עֲבָדְךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ

וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

(י) כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה יְקִינֹךָ אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ אֶת הַיָּם וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל כֵּן

בָּרַךְ יְקִינֹךָ אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ:

(יא) כִּכְדֹּ אֶת אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּן יְמֶיךָ עַל הַדָּמָה אֲשֶׁר יְקִינֹךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

8. Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. 9. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10. but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. 11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.