YAHWEH THE CREATOR

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF CREATION MOTIF IN ISAIAH 40:12-31 IN THE LIGHT OF ENŪMA ELIŠ

This short research paper is a part (a summary of one of the exegetical passages) of the larger doctoral dissertation entitled "Yahweh the Creator: The Significance and Function of the Creation-Theme in Isaiah 40-48."

1. INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Isaiah 40-48 constantly accentuates the exclusivity of Yahweh by underscoring Him as the unique creator and king who is immeasurable/incomparable than the entire creation and the nations and rulers upon the earth. These distinctive attributes of Yahweh are finely illuminated in Isaiah 40:12-31 with the help of rhetorical questions and declarative statements. In order to understand the purpose and profound significance of this passage one has to attempt to read it in the light of the time and context during which this text possibly originated. Hence, this short research paper aims at exploring the nuances of Isaiah 40:12-31 with the research question – **why there is a systematic and strategic emphasis on the creatorship and kingship of Yahweh?** In order to deal with this question some preliminary observations are being made in the following paragraphs with regard to the larger textual block (i.e. Isaiah 40-48) and its presumed milieu.

The researcher subscribes to the accustomed scholarly consensus that major portions of Isaiah chapters 40-48 reflect the Babylonian context based on the following internal-textual and the available external-religious and political reasons: Firstly, observing from the textual evidences, it is essential to note that important themes and prophecies with regard to the foreign gods/cultic images,[1] Cyrus,[2] and

[1] Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:6; 44:9-20. Cf. KNUT HOLTER, *Second Isaiah's Idol-Fabrication Passages* (BBET 28; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 71-78; RICHARD J. CLIFFORD, "The Function of Idol Passages in Second Isaiah," *CBQ* 42 (1980), 450-464.

Babylon[3] appear only in Isaiah 40-48 and thus it is one of the clear indications that the major part of Isaiah 40-48 was originated (or written) between the rise of Persian rule (ca. 550 BCE) and their occupation of Babylon in 539 BCE or immediately thereafter.[4] Further, the placement of the Cyrus oracles in the middle of these chapters (44:24-45:7) also confirms this viewpoint.[5] Another important possibility for placing Isaiah 40-48 in the context of Babylonian exile is the occurrence of the words 'Jacob/Israel' and 'Zion/Jerusalem.'[6]

Secondly, from the religious and political point of view, it was the time when Cyrus was advancing his conquest in the ANE region, during which, Isaiah 40-48 was presumed to be composed.[7] The Cyrus Cylinder attests the historical background, where Nabonidus, the last Babylonian ruler (556-539 BCE)[8] was accused of attempting to restore the moon-good *Sin*[9] by means of untraditional and

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[2] Indication of Cyrus as Yahweh's messiah and his entry into Babylon in 539 BCE which was recognized and well appreciated by the Babylonian priests is an evidence for the setting of Isaiah 40-48 in Babylon. There are parallels between Isaiah 44:28-45:8 and Cyrus Cylinder. Added to that the famous Cyrus edict, which is evident from the Cyrus Cylinder affirms the provision given to the exiled nations to return back to their homelands and rebuild their temples, at the same time maintaining loyalty to Cyrus and Persian rule. Cf. *ANET,* 315-16.

[3] Isaiah 43:14; 44:24-25; 46:1f; 47:12-15; 48:14-20, which also includes the prophetic utterance of the fall of Babylon in Isaiah 47.

[4] According to BERGES, some passages give the impression that they were referring to situations in the reigns of the two successors, Cambyses II (530-520 BCE; Isa 43:3; 45:14) and Darius I (522-486). Cf. ULRICH BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 45.

[5] REINHARD ACHENBACH, "Das Kyros-Orakel in Jesaja 44, 24-45,7 im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen," *ZAR* 11 (2005): 155-194.

[6] According to the simple structure of Isaiah 40-55, it is a general consensus that Isaiah 40-55 has two main parts, i.e. the Jacob/Israel section (40-48) and the Zion/Jerusalem section (49-55). The 'Jacob/Israel' section aimed at the Judean exiles in Babylon, encouraging them to return to their homeland, while the 'Zion/Jerusalem' theme focused on the reassurance given to the people returned or on their journey to Jerusalem encouraging them to rebuild the temple and the city. Thus the absence of Israel/Jacob confirms the shift in geographical location of the text. JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, *Isaiah 40-55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 61; KLAUS KIESOW, *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch: Literarkritische und motivgeshichtliche Analysen,* Orbis et Biblicus Orientalis 24 (Fribourg and Göttingen: Universitätsverlag and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 165.

[7] Cyrus gained victory over nations such Ecbatana, Sardis, the Greek-speaking cities of the Ionian seaboard, Susa, and Babylon and Egypt were expected to be his next target (Isa 40:15-17, 23; 41:1-5, 2543:3, 14; 45:1-3; 48:14-16). Cf. JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP, "The Cosmological and Protological Language of Deutero-Isaiah," *CBQ* 73 (2011), 507.

[8] PAUL-ALIAN BEAULIEU, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556-539 B.C.* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 43-65

[9] "Nabonidus and His God," trans. ADOLF LEO OPPENHEIM (*ANET,* 562-563); "The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus," trans. PAUL ALIAN BEAULIEU (*COS* 2.123A:310-313); "Nabonidus' Rebuilding of E-Lugal-Galga-Sisa, the Ziggurat of Ur," trans. PAUL ALIAN BEAULIEU (*COS* 2.123A:313-314);

inappropriate rituals, which led to ignore the significance of *Marduk* who was the supreme god of the Babylon pantheon.[10] Furthermore, the celebration of *Akītu,*[11] the New Year festival, which ensured peace and fertility both to the nation and to the citizens, was completely ignored and eliminated by Nabonidus.[12] The priests and devotees of the Babylonian supreme god *Marduk* were annoyed and expecting a change in power in order to re-establish *Marduk* as the god of Babylon. Thus the Persian conquest of Babylon under the leadership of Cyrus dethroned Nabonidus and abolished his cultic practices against *Marduk*. Moreover, according to the desire of the Babylonian priests and supporters, *Marduk* was reinstated as the supreme deity and the cultic practices were resumed, and above all the celebration of *Akītu* festival was recommenced.[13]

2. ENŪMA ELIŠ – THE BABYLONIAN EPIC OF CREATION

The Israelites, who were exiled in Babylon, were plausibly aware of the religious and political conflicts of Babylon.[14] Especially, one can assume that they witnessed the cultural, religious and political significance given to the Babylonian supreme god *Marduk* through the celebration of the *Akītu* festival and the recitation of *Enūma Eliš* which canonized *Marduk* as the supreme god in the Mesopotamian

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"Nabonidus and the Clergy of Babylon," trans. ADOLF L. OPPENHEIM (*ANET,* 312-315); cf. TINA DYKESTEEN NILSEN, "Creation in Collision? Isaiah 40-48 and Zoroastrianism, Babylonian Religion and Genesis 1," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* Vol 13 (2013), 8.

[10] TAMMI J. SCHNEIDER, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Eerdmans, 2011), 104-108; HELMER RINGGREN, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (London: SPCK, 1973), 83-88; cf. CARROLL STUHLMUELLER, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (AnBib, 43; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 75-82.

[11] JEREMY BLACK, "The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon," *Religion* 11 (1981) 39-59; KAREL VAN DER TOORN, "The Babylonian New Year Festival," in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989* (ed. JOHN ADNEY EMERTON; VTSup 43; Leiden: Brill, 1991) 333-334; JACOB KLEIN, "Akitu," *ABD* 1: 38-40; BEATE PONGRATZ-LEISTEN, *Īna Šulmi Īrub: Die Kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akitu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Baghdader Forschungen 16; Mainz: Yabern, 1994) 110-136; BENJAMIN D. SOMMER, "The Babylonian Akitu Festival: Rectifying the King or Renewing the Cosmos?" *JANES* 27 (2000) 81-95.

[12] According to practice, during the 11 days celebration of the *akitu* (New Year) festival, on the 9th day, the Babylonian gods, *Marduk* and his son *Nebo* visited each other, i.e. the idols were carried to the temple of the other. However, this practice was stopped during the rule of Nabonidus and above all the New Year festival was completely avoided. Cf. NILSEN, "Creation in Collision?" 8.

[13] BLENKINSOPP, "Cosmological and Protological," 507. Cyrus cleverly utilized these cultural and religious reasons to gain power in Babylon.

[14] BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 44-45.

pantheon. *Enūma Eliš*[15] which is also called the Babylonian epic of creation goes back to the later part of the second millennium BCE.[16] It reports the story of how the entire cosmos came into being as a result of a great struggle among the gods and goddesses; and it also narrates the creation of humankind. The name *Enūma eliš* is derived from the first two words of the poem meaning – 'when on high' or 'when in the heights.' The epic is read as part of the ritual during the *Akītu* festival which marks the Babylonian New Year in order to renew the cosmic and social order in front of the statue of the Babylonian supreme god *Marduk*. From a larger perspective, the story of *Enūma eliš* has two basic parts; the first presents a cosmogony (the beginning of the universe) and a theogony (the birth of gods); the second part narrates the battle between the god *Marduk* and *Tiamat* and how *Marduk* attained his position as king of gods, warrior and the ultimate creator. The epic concludes with the construction of Babylon, the city of *Marduk*, and the temple called *Esaĝila*, the dwelling place of *Marduk*. Finally *Marduk* is elevated to the position of supreme god

[15] WILFRED G. LAMBERT, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 16; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 45–133; THOMAS R. KÄMMERER and KAI A. METZLER, *Das babylonische Weltschöpfungsepos Enūma eliš* (AOAT 375; Münster: 2012); GÖSTA GABRIEL, *enūma eliš – Weg zu einer globalen Weldordnung. Pragmatic, Struktur und Semantik des babylonischen "Lieds auf Marduk"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); BENJAMIN R. FOSTER, "Epic of Creation: Enûma Elish," in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (eds. WILLIAM W. HALLO and K. LAWSON YOUNGER JR.; Vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 390-402; idem, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (2nd ed: Vol. I; Maryland: CDL Press, 1995), 351-401; EPHRAIM A. SPEISER, "Akkadian Myths and Epics: The Creation Epic," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.; ed. JAMES B. PRITCHARD; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-72; THORKILD JACOBSEN, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 165-191.

[16] However, it has to be noted that the oldest exemplar of the text was discovered in the library of the Assyrian king Aššurbanipal (ca. 668-627 BCE) during the archaeological excavations in Nineveh conducted in various locations during 1848-1876 CE. It was recovered by AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD and published by GEORGE SMITH in 1876. SPEISER, "Akkadian Myths," 60; ALEXANDER HEIDEL, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), 1; MORRIS JASTROW, "The Hebrew and Babylonian Accounts of Creation," *JQR* 13.4 (1901): 620-54; cf. E. ODIN YINGLING, "Give Me Back My Idol: Investigating the Dating of Enuma Elish," *Studia Antiqua* 9/11 (2011): 33-38. The epic *Enūma eliš* is a prominent cosmological text written on seven tablets in the Akkadian language using a simple cuneiform script. It was constantly copied and commented until the end of the cuneiform tradition. Since it was regarded as a classic piece of work during the first half of the second millennium BCE several copies existed both in Assyria and Babylon. HEIDEL, *Babylonian Genesis*, 16-17; FOSTER, *Before the Muses,* 350-352.

in the Mesopotamian pantheon.[17] A brief outline has been presented below and the citations henceforth are from the English and German translations.[18]

1.	The first creation episode – origin of gods	I: 1-20
2.	The first conflict among the gods and the plot to kill the younger gods	I: 21-70
3.	Demise of Apsû and the birth of Marduk, the supreme deity	I: 71-106
4.	The second conflict among the gods and its consequence	I: 105-108; 134-162
5.	The battle between Marduk and Tiamat and the final destiny of Tiamat	III: 138 – IV: 18; 29-30; 35-54; 93-134
6.	The second creation episode – Marduk as the creator of the universe	IV: 123-131; 134-139; 141-142; 144-146; V: 50-59; 64-69; 73-75
7.	The coronation of Marduk as king	V: 77-102; 109
8.	The conceptualization of Building of Babylon	V: 129; 151-152
9.	The creation of humankind	VI: 30-38
10.	The construction of the city of Babylon and the temple of Esaĝila	VI: 39-63
11.	The assembly of gods and the third coronation	VI: 73; 86-92; 99-100
12.	Listing the fifty names to Marduk	VI: 101-120; VII: 144

The content of *Enūma Eliš* is significant for the exegetical study of Isaiah 40:12-31 because the researcher perceives that the different themes which have been discussed in both the texts may have some commonalities, however, it cannot be at the outset determined that there were some intertextual exchanges between these texts. On the one hand it has to be noted that *Enūma eliš* was read only in the temple during the festival in Babylon; and the common people including Babylonians, Israelites and even the prophet possibly had no access to the complete Akkadian text. On the other, one cannot completely reject the fact that gist of the story of *Enūma eliš* was familiar or orally present in the public domain. In addition, a plain reading of both the texts disclose some embedded common strategies used to uphold

[17] Due to the elevation of Marduk emphasized many scholars prefer to name this so-called creation epic as the epic narrating the 'Exaltation of Marduk,' FOSTER, "Epic of Creation," 391.

[18] KÄMMERER and METZLER, *Weltschöpfungsepos*, 9-13.

the protagonists: *Enūma eliš* canonizes *Marduk's* divine kingship and depicts him as the king and ultimate creator, on the other hand Isaiah 40:12-31 rhetorically present Yahweh as the incomparable creator and king who gives hope and strength to His exiled people in Babylon. Therefore, the following brief study of Isaiah 40:12-31 would enable to compare and contrast the similarities and the dissimilarities in both the texts (Isaiah 40:12-31 and *Enūma eliš*) to draw reasonable conclusions.

3. SPECIAL FEATURES OF ISAIAH 40:12-31

A remarkable feature of Isaiah 40:12-31 is the usage of rhetorical questions, which are introduced by the interrogative pronoun מִי – 'who' (vv.12, 13, 14, 18 (מַה – what), 25 and 26), interrogative particle הֲ expressed as הֲלוֹא – 'do you not know' (v.21a, b, c, 28).[19] The rhetorical questions[20] here formulate some of the important themes such as who Yahweh is (or what sort of incomparable God and creator is He), how He views the nations, the rulers and the human-made idols.[21] Along with the above stated textual signals this passage also uses some of the literary tools such as repetition of similar words and phrases at the beginning and end of each strophe, parallelism and the use of particles as pointers of thought progression. Therefore, one can observe that in Isaiah 40:12-31 the rhetorical questions are used in each strophe followed by some affirmative or declarative statements which ultimately lead to develop further topics again through rhetorical questions.[22]

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[19] WESTERMANN observes that except v.27, all other verses are rhetorical in nature. CLAUS WESTERMANN, *Sprache und Struktur der Prophetie Deuterojesajas* (CTM 11; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981), 45; NAIDOFF argues that the questions in verses 18, 25 and 27 are 'argumentative' which reflects genuine dispute. BRUCE D. NAIDOFF, "The Rhetoric of Encouragement in Isaiah 40:12-31," *ZAW* 93 (1981) 67; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 124-125.

[20] Rhetorical questions are literary devices which are used to persuade or subtly influence the audience; however, occasionally some kind of reply can be observed in the poetic texts. WATSON defines rhetorical question as "…a question which requires no answer since either the speaker or the listener (or even both of them) already knows the answer;" rhetorical questions are often used emphasize a point to make the audience think or rethink what they know. WILFRED E. G. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTSup, 26: Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 338-42.

[21] GARY V. SMITH, *Isaiah 40-66* (NAC 15B: America: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 106-107; KNUT HOLTER, *Second Isaiah's Idol-Fabrication Passages* (BBET 28; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 61.

[22] HOLTER, *Idol-Fabrication,* 63.

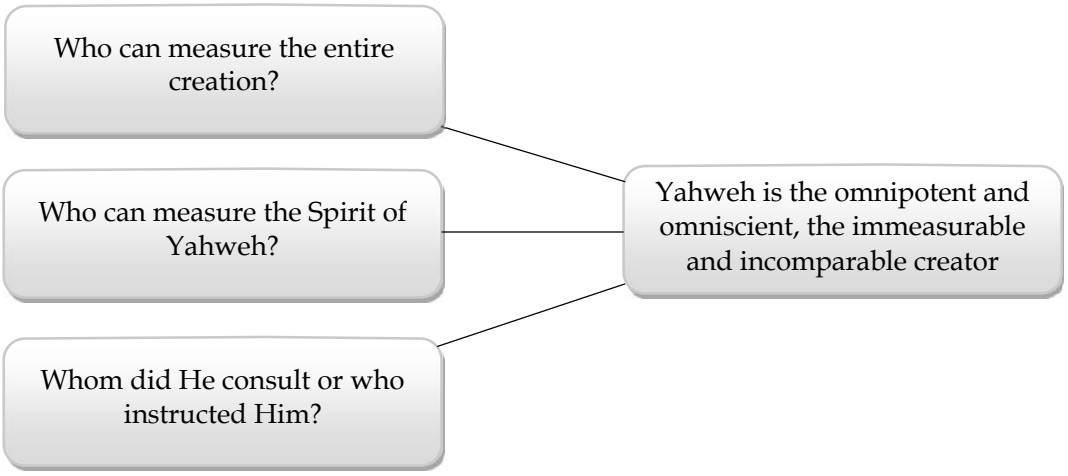
Rhetorical questions	**vv.12-14**	**v.18**	**v.21**	**vv.25-26**	**v.27-28**
[Self-evident answer-unexpressed]	-	-	-	-	-
Replies	vv.15-17	vv.19-20	vv.22-24	vv.26	vv.28-31

4. A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH 40:12-31

The rhetorical questions posed in Isaiah 40:12-31 emphatically affirm Yahweh as the creator and king. With this outlook a brief analysis of the above mentioned verses are done in the following paragraphs. Before analyzing the text, the rhetorical questions with the implicit answers along with the thought progression has been presented below in order to have a broader view of the passage:

Strophe I

Verses 12-14: The immeasurability of Yahweh's creation and His wisdom

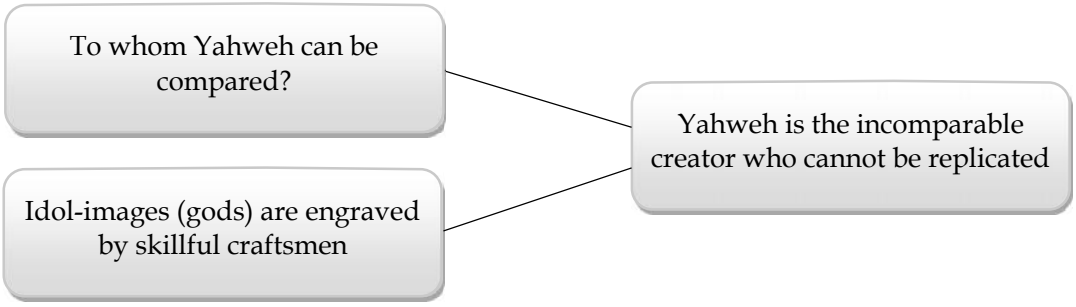


Verses 15-17: Nations are nothing before Yahweh



Strophe II

Verses 18-20: Yahweh placed in contrast to idol-images and idol-fabricators



Strophe III

Verses 21-22: Creator and His creative acts from the foundations of the earth

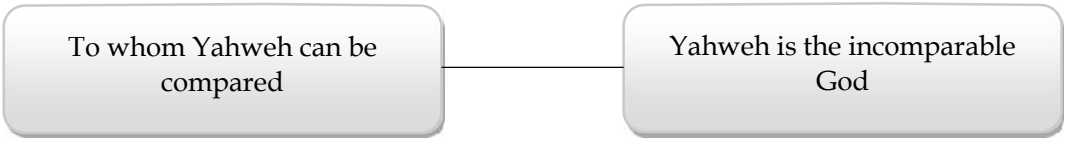


Verses 23-24: Yahweh's control over the rulers of the nations



Strophe IV

Verse 25: Yahweh – the incomparable God



Verse 26: Yahweh – Creator of the celestial bodies



Strophe V

Verse 27-31: Creator's hope and strength to His people



Verse 12: Can anyone measure Yahweh's entire creation?

The classification of the elements of nature (water, heaven, dust of the earth and mountains and hills) in v. 12 denote the totality of creation.[23] Using these elements of nature and the terminologies of measurement [מָדַד (to measure, to measure out or to verify the measurement), תָּכַן (to mark, to gauge), כּוּל (to measure), שָׁקַל (to weigh), שֹׁעַל (hollow hand), זֶרֶת (a span), שָׁלִישׁ (a measure), פֶּלֶס, (scale), and מֹאזְנַיִם (balance)] the prophet places the rhetorical question here: 'who can either with the natural measurement or with the measuring devices in all its proportions measure the physical quantity of the elements of the nature?' The implicit answer is either "no one" or "only Yahweh."[24] Therefore, the prophet here strongly affirms through his rhetorical questions that Yahweh – the God of Israel is the incomparable creator and He cannot be equated with anyone.[25]

Verses 13-14: Can anyone measure the Spirit of Yahweh or serve as His advisor?

The rhetorical questions continue even in v.13 and v.14 with the shift from Yahweh's supremacy/omnipotence over the entire creation to His infinite wisdom.

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[23] Representation of the same elements can be observed in the book of Psalms: 96:11; 135:6; 136:5-6; 146:6; 148:4-5). BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 131.

[24] NORTH opines that the answer to the question in v.12 is "Yahweh" and the answer to vv.13-14 would be "no one." CHRISTOPHER R. NORTH, *Second Isaiah – Introduction Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 83-84; WESTERMANN prefers 'no one' all cases. CLAUS WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 44: The rhetorical question can be answered either by saying 'no one' or 'only Yahweh can do this. KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 88; KARL ELLIGER, *Deuterojesaja in seinem Verhältnis zu Tritojesaja,* Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 63 (Stuttgart; Kohlhammer, 1933), 47; JÜRGEN WERLITZ, *Redaktion und Komposition: Zur Rückfrage hinter die Endgestalt von Jesaja 40-55* (BBB 12; Berlin: Philo, 1999), 214; BREVARD S. CHILDS, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 308; SHALOM M. PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66. Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 138-139.

[25] MATTHIAS ALBANI opines that the affirmation of the incomparability of Yahweh mentioned here (12-17) should also be observed in the light of Yahweh in implicit contrast with the Babylonian imperial deity *Marduk* who, in creating the world, needed the advice of the wise god *Ea*. MATTHIAS ALBANI, *Der eine Gott und die himmlischen Heerscharen. Zur Begründung des Monotheismus bei Deuterojesaja im Horizant der Astralisierung des Gottesverständnisses im Alten Orient* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 130-132. The same view is expressed by other scholars too; CHRISTIAN STREIBERT, *Schöpfung bei Deuterojesaja und in der Priesterschrift: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zu Inhalt und Funktion schöpfungstheologischer Aussagen in exilisch-nachexilischer Zeit* (BEAT 8; Frankfurt: Peterlang, 1993); cf. KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 90; ELLIGER, *Deuterojesaja,* 47. The reference of v.12 to creation is denied by MCKENZIE and STUHLMUELLER. JOHN L. MCKENZIE, *Second Isaiah* (Anchor Bible: New York: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 23; CARROLL STUHLMUELLER, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (AnBib, 43; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 146.

Just as no one is able to measure Yahweh's creation, similarly no one can ponder (measure or estimate) the Spirit of God or act as His counselor/advisor.[26] If one cannot measure the physical world, how he/she can measure God (i.e. measure the mind of Yahweh)?[27] Further, if no one can measure the mind of Yahweh, similarly it is also not possible for someone to instruct and counsel[28] the unique creator and the ruler of the entire universe.[29]

Verses 15-17: Nations are micro-particles before the creator and king 'Yahweh'

Vv.15-17 disclose supplementary disputations in relation to the nations with the introductory particle הֵן (behold) which describes the status of the nations before Yahweh.[30] Using the comparative particle כְּ the nations are reckoned as less than nothing and emptiness (in comparison to Yahweh; cf. 15.a, b, c and in v.17a)[31] and they are counted as the dust on the scales.[32] If the waters, heavens, mountains, hills, etc. are tiny-particles in the sight of Yahweh, surely the so-called great nations in the ANE are no greater than a tiny drop from a bucket.[33] The entire creation and the nations are negligible in quantity and quality in the sight of Yahweh,[34] which again underscore the kingship of Yahweh over the nations.

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[26] Indeed, only Yahweh Himself has the measure of all hearts/spirits (Prov 16:2). PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 141; CHILDS, *Isaiah,* 309.

[27] OSWALT does not view the spirit as the Holy Spirit but the mind of God. JOHN N. OSWALT, *The Book of Isaiah Chapter 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 91; BRUEGGEMANN observes this as the attack on Babylonian gods, claiming that "the gods of Babylon had too long impressed and intimidated the exiles." This appropriately reads into the verse material about other gods from vv.18-20, implies these gods are Babylonian gods, and inserts the idea that Israelites were intimidated. WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *Isaiah 40-66* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: WJK, 1998), 23.

[28] The term עֵצָה (counsel/plan) is strongly mentioned in First Isaiah in the context of God's plan against the nations and the unfaithful in Israel (Isa 5:11; 11:2; 14:26; 19:17; 25:1; 28:29). But in DI it is used to emphasize Yahweh's plan with regard to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Judah (Isa 44:26; 46:10, 11) and also His plan against the enemies of Israel. BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 133-134; cf. *BDB,* 420.

[29] WOLFGANG WERNER, *Studien zur alttestamentlichen Vorstellung vom Plan Jahwehs* (BZAW 173; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1988), 107.

[30] KLAUS SEYBOLD, "Akrostichie bei Deuterojesaja?" in *Die Sprache der Propheten: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte der Prophetie* (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 1999), 200.

[31] RICHARD CLIFFORD, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 80-81; CHILDS, *Isaiah,* 309.

[32] DAVID W. THOMAS, "A Drop of a Bucket – Some Observations on the Hebrew Text of Isaiah 40, 15" *BZAW* (1969) 221.

[33] SMITH, *Isaiah 40-66,* 111; KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 95-96.

[34] The powerful nations in the ANE context were considered always as threat to the existence of Israel and therefore here the author possibly emphasizes in the context of exile that Yahweh, the

Verses 18-20: Created humankind cannot craft the creator God – Yahweh

This section begins with the interrogative particle וְאֶל־מִי 'to whom will you liken (compare).' This rhetorical question emphasizes that Yahweh cannot be compared (דָּמָה) with any carved image (דְּמוּת).[35] The prophet rejects or dismisses not only the comparableness of Yahweh in general, but he also conveys a strong objection especially against the visualization of Yahweh in any form of cultic images.[36] This is followed by a satirical presentation idol-fabrication in verses 19-20. Yahweh, whose creative actions and wisdom *(as the unique creator)* are immeasurable, who is incomparable cannot be engraved or crafted into a form of idol-image in the way how the other gods were crafted.[37]

Verses 21-24: Yahweh – the creator and king from the foundations of the earth

Verses 21-24 begin with the rhetorical questions (הֲלוֹא – introduced by the interrogative particle – הֲ and negative particle – לוֹא). One aspect is the repetition of the key word אֶרֶץ in v.21 with diverse meanings: foundations of the *earth*; above the circle of the *earth*; rulers of the *earth*; and taken root in the *earth*.[38] All these expressions depict Yahweh as the incomparable creator who exists from the foundations of the earth. Moreover, the succeeding verses emphasize Yahweh's sovereignty not only as creator but also as supreme king over the earthly princes. Yahweh is enthroned above the circle of the earth;[39] the inhabitants appear like a grasshopper;[40] and Yahweh stretches out the heaven like a curtain and brings the

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unique creator controls not only the history of Israel, but the history of the other nations too. KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 96; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 137.

[35] CASPER J. LABUSCHAGNE, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 142-153.

[36] ELLIGER, *Deuterojesaja,* 71; cf. BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 142; KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 100-101.

[37] ELLIGER, *Deuterojesaja,* 42-43, 74; cf. BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 142; KOOLE, *Isaiah III*, 100-101.

[38] The repeated negative particle with the interrogative particle הֲלוֹא (v.21a, b, c) unites v.21 intact in a poetic style. KOOLE, *Isaiah III,* 106-112; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 145; PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 148-151.

[39] God is referred here as a monarch who sits on the horizon of the sky, which forms a circle around the earth. The Mesopotamians also thought that the heavens were circular and referred to them as *kippat šamê/burūmê*, 'the circle of heaven/sky. ADOLF L. OPPENHEIM et. al., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago (CAD),* Vol. 8: K (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1971) 397-399; WAYNE HOROWITZ, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 264-265; cf. PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 149; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 149.

[40] According to the tradition of Psalms Yahweh's enthronement is in heavens (Ps. 2:4; 123:1).

princes to nothing.[41] After affirming Yahweh as creator, the prophet describes Him in v.23 as the one who has power to control the earthly kings who are also like grasshoppers (tiny-particles in the sight of Yahweh).

Verses 25-26: Yahweh – the incomparable creator of the celestial bodies

The initial expression of the fourth strophe וְאֶל־מִי תְדַמְּיוּנִי – 'to whom then will you compare/liken me?' (v.25a) again emphasizes that Yahweh cannot be replicated through an image or idol.[42] Further, the celestial bodies are described as things that were created by Yahweh and they fulfill the duties assigned to them by the creator.[43] It has to be noted that these verses (v.25 and v.26) never state directly that Yahweh is the creator of all the celestial bodies, however the implicit meaning and the strong implication is that, these wonders which one witnesses are the creative works of the Holy one, i.e. Yahweh.

Verses 27-31: Yahweh – the everlasting creator renews (recreates) His people

The final strophe (vv.27-31) of the entire pericope (vv.12-31) leads the disputation to its peak, where the subject matter is no more with regard to the immeasurability and incomparability of Yahweh rather it deals with Israel's particular complaint[44] against Yahweh in her disastrous-exilic situation.[45] Unlike the previous strophes the addressee 'Jacob/Israel' is mentioned here for the first time to

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[41] PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 148.

[42] The usage of this expression 'Holy one' is stressed throughout DI as the 'Holy one' of Israel too. BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 151; PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 151; KOOLE, *Isaiah III,* 112-113.

[43] JOHN GOLDINGAY and DAVID PAYNE, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55, Vol. 1* (ICC; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 124; JOHN GOLDINGAY, *Message of Isaiah 40-55 – A Literary Theological Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 58.

[44] MELUGIN compares the complaint in v.27 with the lament psalms. These lament begin with protest and conclude with the assurance of salvation. This can be observed in vv.28-31. ROY F. MELUGIN, "Deutero-Isaiah and Form Criticism," *VT* 21 (1971), 35 & 92; NAIDOFF, "Rhetoric of Encouragement," 73; GOLDINGAY, *Message of Isaiah 40-55,* 64.

[45] Israelites plight in Babylon is reflected here. They felt as if they were abandoned by Yahweh and there is no hope of salvation. PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 148; GOLDINGAY and PAYNE opine that the name Jacob/Israel empirically denotes the Judean refugees in Babylon. GOLDINGAY and PAYNE, *Isaiah 40-55,* 125. WATTS links these words to a group of people who feel that their life in Babylon in insignificant and they are no more important in the sight of God. WATTS, *Isaiah 34-66,* 94; WESTERMANN observes that the complaint presented here (v.27) is the crux of the entire argument in this pericope. WESTERMANN, *Isaiah 40-66,* 169; SMITH feels that, since there is no reference to exilic life in the passage, the historical setting of Isaiah 40:12-31 refer to the brief period when God allowed Assyrian army to attack and defeat all Judah except Jerusalem. SMITH, *Isaiah 40-66,* 116.

whom the entire pericope was addressed.[46] This reveals Yahweh's intimate relationship with His people – Israel. The everlasting God who is the creator of the ends of the earth does not faint, rather He renews (recreates) His people. This functional strophe of the entire pericope encourages the exiles and gives them the message of hope with regard to returning back to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile who had lost their strength and hope.[47] Even in the context of giving hope to the people of Israel, the author emphasizes once again 'Yahweh as the creator of the ends of the earth.'

3. OBSERVATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF ENŪMA ELIŠ

Isaiah chapter 40 verses 12-31 were skillfully knitted by the prophet with the help of various literary devices which unite and keep the different strophes intact. The constructive development of the content in the successive strophes were well placed with the rhetorical questions by using the interrogative particles מִי (vv.12, 13, 14, 18, 25) and הֲ (vv. 21, 28). A sort of consistency can be observed in the presentation, where the prophet constructively develops his argument and declaration gradually not only through the rhetorical nuances, but also with the usage of chiastic patterns, lexeme, inclusio, assonance, acrostic style etc. One of the peculiarities of this entire unit is the 'thought progression' in the rhetorical questions which cover a few themes. These different themes were well focused cautiously to make sure that each disputation claims for faith in Yahweh on the basis of identifying Him as the 'incomparable creator and king' and for me this is the epitome of the Isaiah 40-48 which has been consistently emphasized even in the rest of the book.[48] The following is a skeletal structure of these attributes of Yahweh (creator and king) which are implicitly or explicitly underlined in each strophe:

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[46] CHILDS, *Isaiah,* 310. During the prophetic utterances, the prophets quote individuals or a group of peoples' grievances and then condemn, refute or console/comfort them, depending on the context. In this particular section, the prophet addresses the people's disappointment and insecurity and offers them solace. PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 153.

[47] KOOLE, *Isaiah III,* 128, ØYSTEIN LUND, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (Tübingen: Mehr Siebeck, 2007), 119; WESTERMANN, "Sprache und Struktur," 53; ELLIGER, *Deuterojesaja,* 102.

[48] Isa. 41:21; 43:10, 11, 15; 44:6, 8; 45: 6, 7, 12, 18, 21; 46:9; 47: 8, 10.

The function of this passage (Isaiah 40:12-31) is to give hope and to strengthen the exiled Israelites (vv.29-31), however, in order to reach to this point the author through the rhetorical questions describes and reminds who Yahweh is – "He is an incomparable God, Creator and King." The last strophe (vv.27-31) is the functional unit and the culminating point because this is clearly indicated by the addressee of this section 'Jacob/Israel.' Yahweh, who through the rhetorical questions was presented as the incomparable creator of the universe and the king of the nations, is addressing here personally to His beloved people (Jacob/Israel). This specifies the intimate relationship between Yahweh and His people; especially, with the people who were exiled in Babylon and who had lost hope in their incomparable creator and ultimate king (i.e. Yahweh).

3.1. Motifs of the Two Narratives: Isaiah 40:12-31 and Enūma eliš

Isaiah 40 vv.12-31 were not intended to chronologically record how the world came into existence, but it describes how greater the creator (Yahweh) is – whose creation cannot be measured, whose mind cannot be read, who does not need counsel/advice, the nations and rulers are nothing before Him – all these statements specify the role of Yahweh as the everlasting creator and the eternal king. However, the obvious questions are – why there is a systematic and strategic emphasis on the creatorship and kingship of Yahweh and why only these attributes and not the other attributes of Yahweh were highlighted? These questions lead to the possible thesis that in the Babylonian context where the prophet stated these attributes of Yahweh have distinctive significance when we juxtapose Isaiah 40:12-31 and the Babylonian creation epic *Enūma Eliš*. Some scholars perceive that this passage (Isaiah 40:12-31) has some influence from the Babylonian creation epic *Enūma Eliš*.[49] However, I hesitate to subscribe to those views and say that there was textual dependency or polemical exchanges. Simultaneously, I would not certainly reject the strategic and systematic progression that has been skillfully maintained in both the texts to elevate

[49] MATTHIAS ALBANI, *Der eine Gott und die himmlischen Heerscharen. Zur Begründung des Monotheismus bei Deuterojesaja im Horizant der Astralisierung des Gottesverständnisses im Alten Orient* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 130-132; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 132-134; PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 138-139.

either *Marduk* as the warrior, king of gods and creator of the universe in *Enūma Eliš* or Yahweh as the incomparable creator and eternal king in Isaiah 40:12-31. A careful reading of *Enūma Eliš* would reveal the systematic presentation of the elevation of *Marduk* to the preeminent status in the divine hierarchy which is consistently emphasized. *Marduk's* elevation as supreme god/king and creator will be specifically mentioned below from selected verses:

3.1.1. *Marduk's* supremacy over gods and his kingship

Marduk offered to battle against *Tiamat* (II: 127-162) with the condition, that he will do so if he is given power to confer destinies (II: 155-162). *Marduk* was crowned as king (IV: 1-28). In addition, *Enūma Eliš* promotes a divine hierarchy in which *Marduk* was elevated among the other deities and became the king of gods (V: 109, 116). The gods authorized his kingship and agreed to follow all his decrees (V: 113-139). *Marduk's* authority over gods attained its peak specifically when he defeated goddess *Tiamat*. At the same time, when he placed the images of the defeated enemies in the temple in Babylon (V: 67-76), the gods rejoiced, brought gifts and praised him in unison "this is the king" (V: 77-88). In another instance, other gods stated, 'before, he (*Marduk*) was our son and now he is our king (V: 117-156).' Further, *Marduk's* kingship was confirmed by pronouncement of his names through which he was exalted above everything (VI: 92-116, VII). *Marduk's* divine kingship was portrayed as legitimate and preferable to an alternative power structure represented by *Qingu* and *Tiamat*.[50]

3.1.2. *Marduk* – the creator of the universe and humankind

Enūma eliš describes *Marduk* as the ultimate creator – the architect of the heavens and the earth and the one who had created humanity. After his victory over *Tiamat*, *Marduk* separated *Tiamat's* body into two parts and fashioned heaven (IV: 134-139). *Marduk* made abodes for the gods namely, *Ea*, *Enlil* and *Anu* (IV: 141-146) and he organized the cosmos by positioning the stars, planets, calendar, weather,

[50] DEBRA S. BALLENTINE, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), 30-34.

and waters (V: 1-66).[51] *Marduk* wanted to create humankind so that gods can rest. Thus, *Ea* asked for one of their brothers to be fashioned as people and then *Ea* formed humankind form the blood of *Qingu* (VI: 11-36).[52] The creation of humankind was planned by *Marduk* and was executed by his father *Ea* (VI: 38). Thus *Marduk* was as acclaimed as the creator of the universe and humankind.

3.2. Similarities and Dissimilarities between Isaiah 40:12-31 and Enūma Eliš

A close reading of *Enūma eliš* and Isaiah 40:12-31 exposes the similarities and the dissimilarities that these texts contain. In order to examine the textual parallels and differences it is noteworthy to site the extracts from a few verses from both the texts: **(1)** For, *Enūma Eliš*, it was *Marduk* who created the heavenly hosts (V: 1ff), whereas Isaiah 40:21-22, 26 (cf.45:12, 18) underscores that Yahweh is the creator of the heavenly hosts; **(2)** In *Enûma Elîš* there is a strong belief that the gods had personal advisors in order to deal with various things. *Mummu* was referred as *tamlāku* (counselor) and god *Ea* counseled *Marduk* (I: 47ff; VI: 11ff), but Yahweh does not require advice or assistance from humankind and moreover nobody can teach/counsel Him or instruct Him, how to act and what to do (40: 13-14).[53] **(3)** *Enûma Elîš* elevates *Marduk* to the level of divine kingship (IV: 28; V: 85ff), however Isaiah 40: 15-17 and 23-24 (cf. 41:21; 43:15; 44:6) which consider the nations and the earthly rulers as nothing and stubble implicitly affirm the divine kingship of Yahweh who is the king of Israel among the greater nations in the ANE context; **(4)** *Enûma Elîš* depicts *Marduk* as the greatest of all gods and none can be compared to him. At the same time, *Marduk* who is considered as the victor over other gods, and over all the social and cosmic chaos, was applauded as the savior god, who can only save the cosmos and the people. (VI: 95ff) Whereas, Isaiah emphasizes repeatedly that Yahweh alone is God and He cannot be crafted or replicated through the idols-images (40:18-20, 21-23; cf. 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:6, 21; 46:9); **(5)** One of the

[51] FOSTER, "Epic of Creation," 399.

[52] FOSTER, "Epic of Creation," 400. In the Mesopotamian context it is believed that male and female gods serve as advisors. ERICA REINER et. al., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago (CAD),* Vol. 18: M1 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1977), 164.

[53] cf. ALBANI, *Der eine Gott,* 131-133; BERGES, *Jesaja 40-48,* 134, 136; PAUL, *Isaiah 40-66,* 140-141; WOLFGANG WERNER, *Studien zur alttestamentlichen Vorstellung vom Plans Jahwes* (BZAW 173; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 114.

important concepts that has been repeated constantly is the acclamation of *Marduk* as the unique god in *Enûma Elîš*. He is praised by the other deities and given fifty names in the assembly of gods and above all, he was exalted as the one who has not equal among the gods (VII: 14f; VI: 96). The same tone can be noticed in Isaiah 40, where the author frequently emphasizes on the theme – 'incomparability of Yahweh (40: 18-20; 25-26; cf. 47:8, 10).'

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Based on the observations made from the brief analysis of Isaiah 40:12-31 and the selected sections from *Enûma Elîš,* I would like to conclude that Isaiah 40 vv.12-31 emphatically describe through the rhetorical questions and the declarative statements that Yahweh is the incomparable creator and the everlasting/eternal king. Similarly, the concepts such as king and creator can also be observed in the Babylonian creation epic *Enûma Elîš.* Although the elements of kingship and creatorship have been handled in both the texts, one cannot directly assume the possibility of total intertextual dependence. According to my opinion, although these texts have used the common themes (creator and king) and they have been completely treated in different perspectives with ultimately different intentions and functions. *Enûma Eliš's* emphasis of *Marduk's* supremacy among the gods and his divine kingship and his creative power – all these concepts were designed in such a way to elevate the position of *Marduk* in the Mesopotamian pantheon, which ultimately has its own religious, political and cultural reasons in its milieu. Similarly, Isaiah's emphasis on Yahweh as the unique creator and the supreme king has its own purpose and function. This is more evident from the functional unit of the text (40:27-31) which picturizes the exilic condition – a life without any hope and future and a complete distrust in their God – Yahweh. Therefore, the prophet inculcates hope in the context of hopelessness by emphasizing Yahweh as the incomparable creator and the eternal king who can save them from any situation and moreover, they were asked to wait for this creator and king so that they will be renewed. Renewal can also be considered here as Yahweh's activity of creation, i.e. recreating or rejuvenating His people – Israel. In addition, there is a great difference between

the narrations of the creation themes in Isaiah 40:12-31 and Genesis 1. The description of creation in the primeval history is more or less a chronological presentation of the origin of the universe and all that in it. It also carries a sort of polemical presentation according to the traditional biblical scholarship in the light of *Enûma Eliš*.[54] Nevertheless, Isaiah (40:12-31) was not intended to give a chronological description about creation, rather, these verses elevate the position of Yahweh as creator and king through the rhetorical questions without being polemic in their rendering. In addition, one can specifically note the concepts of creatorship and kingship were strongly underscored both in Isaiah 40:12-31 and Enûma Eliš, which is not so obvious in rest of the OT. Therefore, the depiction of Yahweh as creator and king in Isaiah 40:12-31 is more remarkable and this strategic usage of creation in particular terminates the age-old understanding and emphasis of creation as an ancillary concept and only has a functionary role to the concept of salvation history.

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[54] ALEXANDER HEIDEL, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), 1; David Tsumura, "The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation" *JSOT*, 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 42-43.