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PRECIS

The aim of this paper is to analyze two Mesopotamian flood myths - the Atra-hasis Epic and the Epic of Gilgamesh - as well as the biblical flood narrative of Genesis 6:5 - 9:17. The intention - first - is to study each flood story "on its own terms" and - second - to document and review the many parallels and disparities between the three accounts. The comparative analysis of the flood narratives is concerned with details of plot and language and strives to understand the texts "on their own terms" rather than through the eyes of commentary and interpretation. The paper concludes with a discussion of three essential issues: (1) the historicity of the biblical deluge; (2) the Bible's "dependence" on the Mesopotamian material; and (3) the possibility of describing the Noah story as a myth.

The paper contains six chapters and a brief concluding statement. The first two chapters: (1) define the term "myth;" (2) discuss the study of myth and the Bible; (3) analyze the function of myth according to the research of Yehezkel Kaufmann, Theodor Gaster, and Frank Moore Cross; and (4) summarize key events in ancient Near Eastern history from 2600 BCE to 587 BCE. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters are detailed linear analyses of, respectively, the Atra-hasis Epic, the Gilgamesh Epic, and the biblical flood narrative. These chapters focus on theme, style, plot, and language. The sixth chapter catalogues similarities and differences between the biblical flood story and the Mesopotamian material. The concluding statement characterizes the biblical flood account as "monotheising" myth and thereby identifies the significant difference between the Noah myth and its ancient Near Eastern predecessors.

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD NARRATIVE AND TWO MESOPOTAMIAN FLOOD MYTHS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NOAH, ATRA-HASIS, AND GILGAMESH

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To my teacher, mentor, and friend Dr. S. David Sperling I am extremely grateful. Dr. Sperling ignited my interest in studying the Bible and the cultural, historical, and literary phenomena of the ancient Near East. With patience and enthusiasm, he guided me through the scholarly literature relevant to the topics discussed herein and taught me how to understand texts critically and analytically on their own terms. He challenged me to realize my fullest intellectual potential and cultivated in me essential skills in the processes of academic writing and research.

In Dr. Sperling's honor - and with a profound sense of indebtedness to him - I offer this text in tribute:

"Said the Mezeritzer: 'A teacher must oftentimes imitate the man who pours liquid from bottle to bottle by means of a funnel. In the same way, the teacher must concentrate his wide knowledge into words, chosen for the understanding of his people. But if he is unwilling to narrow his own mind and attempts to convey his own broad comprehension of the subject, his pupils will learn nothing, for his instruction will be beyond their grasp.' " (*Torat Ha-Magid Mezeritz*)

I thank Dr. Sperling for sharing with me the breadth of his knowledge and insight on biblical and ancient Near Eastern mythology in a language that I could understand; with a style that motivated and inspired me; and with a characteristic sense of humor which ensured that the task at hand would be kept in proper perspective.

To my wife Rona whose love of Judaism and *Yiddische neshama* brought me to rabbinical school and encouraged me each step of the way, I say "Thank You." Rona has patience beyond measure and a selfless, giving heart. This paper reflects her efforts and thoughts as much as mine, as she is so much a part of my life and my work. *Ish v'isha zahu Shechinah binay'hen* (Sotah 17). It is my love for Rona and her's for me that makes us whole and brings God into our lives.

For

Leonard and Gilda Kessel

Torah is Acquired Through Loving Parents

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CHAPTER ONE:

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF MYTH AND INITIAL RESEARCH OF THE BIBLE AND MYTH

In its earliest usage, the Greek term *mythos* referred to something said or told.[1] Essentially, the term was used synonymously with "word," "tale-telling," "story," or "narration." Beginning in the age of Plato (fifth century BCE), *mythos* came to denote a "false story," "fabrication," or "entertaining tale." *Mythos* became synonymous with "fable" and stood opposite the term *logos* - the "rational" or "true" account.

In the realm of biblical scholarship, the study of myth has been historically problematic. The notion that the Bible conveyed accounts other than eye-witness testimony of actual historical events was impossible for those who understand the sacred text as the literal "truth." To suggest the possibility of myth - fable, legend - in the Bible was deemed blasphemous. Thus, through the early part of the twentieth century, biblical scholars accepted a narrow definition of myth that effectively eliminated the subject from their research. They agreed on a definition developed in the early 1800's by the folklorists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm which understood myth as "stories about the gods."[2] By using

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[1] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (1992), s.v. "Myth and Mythology," by Robert A. Oden, Jr., p. 948. The present section of this paper is drawn primarily from this article and from Oden's entry "Myth and Mythology (OT)" also found in *ABD*, vol.4 (1992), pp. 956-960. Oden's discussion is a comprehensive introduction to and overview of the study of mythology and the Bible.

[2] Ibid.

the plural "gods," it became untenable to speak of myth (with its polytheistic implications) in the same breath as the monotheism of the Bible. The Bible - at the center of which stands the one God - bore no relationship to the mythological stories of pagan deities.

Perhaps the first writer to discuss the relationship between mythology and the Bible was a New Testament scholar, David Friedrich Strauss. In his 1835 work *The Life of Jesus*, Strauss labeled various gospel stories as myths. He maintained that key events in Jesus' life (such as his birth and ability to perform miracles) were mythical (i.e., not historically "true"). Rather, stories about Jesus were transmitted orally through communal tales that were embellished and mythicized over the course of many generations. Strauss' work was considered sacrilege and resulted in his forced withdrawal from the community of biblical scholarship. This reaction silenced the discussion of mythology and the Bible for nearly one hundred years.[3]

But the archaeological evidence unearthed in the early 1900's (such as the Ras Shamra tablets of the ancient Canaanite culture) pointed convincingly to a relationship between the Bible and older Near Eastern mythologies. The striking similarities between the biblical text and the earlier Near Eastern mythological material (for example: in theme, literary style, and language) were undeniable; scholars could no longer ignore the mythical heritage and content of holy Scripture. Yet their strategy until very recently (within the past 40 years) was to allegorize seemingly mythical sections of the Bible in an effort to

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[3] Ibid., p. 947.

preserve essential differences between Israelite religion and pagan culture. For example, Hermann Gunkel acknowledged mythical "fragments" or "remnants" in the Bible arguing that once-complete myths are presented in Scripture "in comparatively faded colors."[4] Gunkel held that vestiges of pagan myths made their way into the Bible through cross-cultural contact, but the polytheistic mythology of the pagan world exerted no major influence on the religion of Israel. The Israelites "borrowed" mythical material from their Near Eastern neighbors but did not accept the polytheism upon which the mythology was based.

As long as mythology was associated with polytheism, biblical scholarship was hesitant to discuss the topic. In the 1940's, New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann suggested a new definition of myth which disassociated the term from the polytheism inherent in the widely-accepted definition of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. Bultmann understood myths as "ways in which a culture symbolizes and objectifies its entire world view."[5] In Bultmann's thought, "the whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament ... is mythological."[6] While Bultmann brings the term "mythology" to a discussion of the New Testament, he steers away from an analysis of the influence of pagan mythologies on (and their relationship to) the Bible. In understanding myth strictly as symbolic, Bultmann essentially "demythologizes" myth and perhaps underestimates its role in ancient societies (for example, its possible

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[4] Idem., "Myth and Mythology (OT)," p. 957.

[5] Idem., "Myth and Mythology," p. 947.

[6] Ibid.

connection to ritual).

In biblical scholarship, the definition of myth continued to evolve during the 1950's and 60's. In his 1956 article "An Approach to the Problem of Old Testament Mythology," G.H. Davies offered a new definition of myth which - unlike Bultmann who "explained away" and "de-mythologized" mythology - allowed for the possibility of myths in the Bible.[7] In stark contrast to the definition of the Grimm brothers, Davies understood myth as "a way of thinking and imagining about *the divine* rather than thinking and imagining about a number of *gods* [italics mine]."[8] Davies' definition frees myth from exclusively polytheistic contexts and invites the study of mythology and the Bible. Oden identifies this new definition of myth (which was long overdue) as a turning point that opened the field of scholarly inquiry to the study of biblical mythology (i.e., biblical myths would be analyzed by the same criteria and procedures as other myths).

The turning point in the study of the Bible and mythology brought about by Davies' definition of myth prompted others to conceptualize myth in new ways. Oden catalogues a number of definitions of myth that emerged from the scholarly community in the 1960's.[9] Of particular note are the definitions of Eliade (1963), Ricoeur (1969), and Fontenrose (1966). Eliade wrote that "myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of 'beginnings' ... The actors in myths

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[7] A full discussion of Davies' research may be found in Oden's "Myth and Mythology."

[8] Robert A. Oden, "Myth and Mythology," p. 947.

[9] See "Myth and Mythology," pp. 948-949.

are Supernatural Beings."[10] It is noteworthy that Eliade brings both *history* and *fable* to his definition in that he addresses the question of the literal, historical "truth" of myths and points to the sacredness of myth. But the notion that the personalities of myth are supernatural precludes the possibility that real human beings - for example, heroes or ancestors - play significant roles in mythological accounts. Ricoeur conceived of myths as "traditional narratives which tell of events which happened at the origin of time and which furnish the support of language to ritual actions."[11] Ricoeur establishes a connection between myth and ritual which has been developed extensively by T.H. Gaster and will be discussed below. The idea that myth and ritual are inextricably linked - for example, that myth is the narrative accompaniment to cultic or ritual activity - has found much support in the scholarly community. Fontenrose held that myths are "traditional tales of the deeds of *daimones*: gods, spirits, and all sorts of supernatural or superhuman beings."[12] The inclusion of superhuman beings here is a useful addition to the Eliade definition.

It is apparent that no single definition of the term "myth" is fully satisfactory, nor has any one definition achieved consensus or widespread acceptance among biblical scholars. A modern English dictionary defines myth in a manner appropriate for the purposes of this paper as follows: "A traditional story ... dealing with supernatural beings,

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[10] Robert A. Oden, "Myth and Mythology," p. 948.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 949.

ancestors, or heroes that serve as primordial types in a primitive view of the world."[13] In a secondary definition, the same dictionary describes myth as "a real or fictional story, recurring theme, or character type that appeals to the consciousness of a people by embodying its cultural ideals or by giving expression to deep, commonly felt emotions."[14] The primary definition accounts for the traditional communal process by which myths are told and re-told over generations and allows for both supernatural and super*human* characters (or archetypes). The secondary definition acknowledges the social function of myth as a means to establish within a community the bonds of shared ideals and emotional yearnings. The essential elements of the definition of myth that will be called upon in this paper include myth as a traditional story involving supernatural and superhuman (i.e., exceptional but not necessarily divine) characters that has been passed down within a community and serves a significant and meaningful communal function.

THE FUNCTION OF MYTH

The function of myth - what role it played in ancient societies, its utility - is debated by scholars. Understanding the role of myth lends insight to the definition of myth and ensures that mythical material will be viewed in its own terms within its own cultural context. The aim of this paper is to analyze two Mesopotamian flood myths - the Atra-hasis Epic and the Epic of Gilgamesh - as well as the biblical flood narrative of Gen.

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[13] *The American Heritage Dictionary - Second College Edition* (1985), s.v. "Myth," p. 827.

[14] Ibid.

6:5-9:17. The intention - initially - is to study each flood story "on its own terms;" then, parallels and disparities between the three accounts will be documented and studied. Finally, two issues will be discussed: the question of the Bible's "dependence" on the Mesopotamian material and the possibility of understanding the Noah story as myth.

Preliminary to such a discussion is a brief overview of a variety of theories that seek to explain the function of myth in the ancient Near East. Oden identifies six leading theories as follows:[15]

1. *Intellectualist Theory*: Myths serve an explanatory function by providing answers to questions about natural phenomena. In non-scientific (or pre-scientific) cultures, myths explained the causes of such events as the rising of the sun and the creation, evolution, and structure of the universe.

2. *The Mythopoeic ("Myth-Making") Mind*: The mirror image of the intellectualist theory, the mythopoeic model posits an anti-empirical (or expressive) manner of thinking that leans toward participation in the world rather than explanation of it. Myths are a vehicle for humans to join with natural phenomena as a partner in the processes that - for example - cause the sun to rise and the earth to bear fruit.

3. *Myth-Ritual Theory*: The "moderate" proponents of this theory argue that myth is linked to ritual and should be studied in relationship to it. One possibility - for example - is that myth served as the spoken narration that accompanied ritual. The "radical" myth-ritual theorists hold that myths were composed in order to validate cultic rituals or to infuse them with meaning. Their position is that all myths are rooted in ritual.

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[15] Robert A. Oden, "Myth and Mythology," p. 950 ff.

4. *Myth and Society*: Myths serve to bring people together in a sociological sense. The function of myth is to "cement social bonds, to bring together disparate people as a group, and ... to support these peoples' group identity."[16] Similarly, B. Malinowski wrote that myth "performs in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality."[17]

5. *Myth and the Unconscious*: Based primarily on the thought of Freud, this theory posits that mythology serves to satisfy the unconscious, psychological needs of sexuality and aggression. Myths are a form of sublimation; they allow people to express primitive "id" drives in a socially-appropriate manner.

6. *Structural Analysis*: This model is "holistic" in the sense that it studies each myth as an entire literary unit rather than dividing it into its component parts. For example, symbols within a myth are meaningless in isolation from the broader content and context of the whole myth. Each individual component of a myth exists in relationship to the myth as a whole and is thereby meaningful. Patterns and relationships within and between myths are at the heart of this theory; thus, structural analysts insist upon studying the mythology of a culture as an entire literary corpus.

MYTH AND THE BIBLE: THREE LEADING SCHOLARLY VIEWS

In order to understand the role of myth in the Bible, it is necessary to review the theories of three major biblical scholars: Yehezkel Kaufmann, Theodor Gaster, and Frank

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[16] Robert A. Oden, "Myth and Mythology," p. 952.

[17] Ibid.

Moore Cross. These scholars represent the diversity of thought that has emerged within the past sixty years in the field of Bible study and ancient Near Eastern mythology. Their work has framed the discussion on this topic to the present day.

YEHEZKEL KAUFMANN

Writing in 1937, Kaufmann maintains in his *magnum opus The Religion of Israel from its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* that within the Bible "not a trace remains of the rich store of popular myths associated with [paganism]."[18] Kaufmann asserts that the Bible was written at a time when Israelite religion had *exposure to* but no meaningful *understanding of* pagan mythology and religion. He thus acknowledges "fossil remains"[19] of pagan mythology preserved in the Bible but suggests that these mythological "remnants" represent nothing more than superficial borrowing of symbols and motifs. The meaning behind the myths - the role of myth in the ancient Near Eastern world view - was not understood and not significant to the Bible. Kaufmann writes that "the biblical age no longer knew pagan mythology."[20]

The foundation upon which Kaufmann's thesis is built is his definition of myth as "the histories and adventures of the gods."[21] Myths are the products of polytheistic societies that relate stories about living gods concerning - for example - their birth, death,

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[18] Kaufmann, Yehezkel, *The Religion of Israel from its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile*, translated by Moshe Greenberg, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 9.

[19] Ibid., p. 8.

[20] Ibid., p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 9.

sexual activities, sins, sorcery, divination, celebrations, and sacrifices. Because none of these characteristics apply to the Israelite God YHWH - because YHWH is not described in mythological terms - the Bible is non-mythological. Israel's God is unique and all-powerful; "there is no realm above or beside him to limit his absolute sovereignty."[22] Pagan gods - on the other hand - are limited in power and subject to the omnipotent forces of a transcendent, primordial realm. It is from this metadivine realm that pagan gods are born; and, to this realm they appeal (as human beings do) for beneficence and well-being. But Israelite religion is fundamentally different, for YHWH is a "divine will, sovereign and absolute, which governs all and is the cause of all being."[23] In Kaufmann's view, the Bible was not at all meaningfully influenced by pagan mythology; for if it were, the God of Israel would have taken on some of the characteristics of the pagan mythological gods.

The reason that (or, perhaps, the *fact* that) YHWH is not described in mythological terms is Kaufmann's notion that ancient Israel was not influenced by and did not understand pagan mythology. In the Israelite mind pagan gods were thought to be lifeless idols, and pagan religion was misunderstood as "fetishism."[24] Kaufmann rejects the popular thesis that biblical religion emerged from a clash or struggle with mythological polytheism. He denies pagan elements and influences in Israelite religion. Rather, he argues that Israel's religion was unique with "no antecedents in paganism."[25] Ancient

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[22] Ibid., p. 60.

[23] Ibid., p. 22.

[24] Ibid., p. 13.

[25] Ibid., p. 2.

Near Eastern mythology did not significantly impact the Bible, as Israel's one supreme God was unique and completely unlike the gods of pagan thought and myth.

Kaufmann conceives of Israelite religion as completely novel and disconnected from the pagan world of myth in which it was undoubtedly born. Though Israel maintained contact with cultures of a rich mythological heritage and belief system, the Bible shows no evidence of significant borrowing, re-working, or arguing against pagan myth. In fact, the Bible doesn't even *understand* pagan mythology; for if It did, pagan gods would be described as active, living beings rather than idols of wood and stone. YHWH - the only God of the Bible - is uniquely non-mythological. Kaufmann thus concludes that "the ... influence of foreign beliefs on Israelite religion did not involve mythological materials and ... the age-long battle of the Bible with idolatry did not involve mythological polytheism."[26]

THEODOR GASTER

In contrast to Kaufmann, Gaster holds that the Bible is replete with ancient Near Eastern mythological material. In his major work of 1969 *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, Gaster discusses the entire Tanach as it relates to Near Eastern mythology (for example: thematically, literarily, and stylistically). He argues that the Bible is "saturated with the popular lore of the Ancient Near East"[27] and maintains that Scripture is best understood and properly interpreted in light of these mythological texts.

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[26] Ibid., p. 20.

[27] Gaster, Thedor H., *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. xxvi.

For example, the term *resef* generally translated as "flame" is more meaningfully understood as a reference to the Canaanite plague-god Reshef. Similarly, the leviathan or *livyatan* of the Bible - the primordial dragon-beast slain by God at the beginning of time - recalls the leviathan beaten by the Canaanite god Baal in Ugaritic mythology.

As perhaps the most prominent member of the myth-ritual school, Gaster maintained that myth and ritual must be studied together as "two parts of a single phenomenon."[28] Myths served as the "script" or narrative component of ritual events performed in Ancient Near Eastern communal settings. Thus, myths are inseparable from their ritual contexts; myth and ritual "are not - as is often supposed - two things ... but one thing viewed from two different angles."[29] Myth is both the language of religious ritual and the source from which ritual derives its meaning and fulfills communal needs.

The communal needs addressed by myths are fears, anxieties, and uncertainties about the cycles of nature; according to John Gray, "Mesopotamian mythology expresses the essentially emotional relationship of man to his environment in what we ... would regard as both its natural and supernatural aspect."[30] Myths provided a structure for mourning at the on-set of winter and celebration at the first signs of spring. Gaster notes that a "standard pattern of seasonal rites was projected into myth ... [In fact], a number of Ancient Near Eastern ... texts ... go back to that basic ritual pattern and reflect, in mythic

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[28] Robert A. Oden, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Myth and Mythology," p. 951.

[29] Robert A. Oden, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Myth and Mythology (OT)," p. 958.

[30] John Gray, *Near Eastern Mythology*, (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1985), p. 26.

form, its several essential elements."[31] Myth elevated ritual from the realm of time by connecting it to the spectacular events of the primordial past. Thus, for example, the Babylonian creation epic Enuma Elish was an essential component of the spring new year festival. The ritual marking the springtime renewal of nature each year was dramatized by recounting the myth of Marduk's victory over Tiamat and the establishment of order in the primordial world. In Canaanite mythology, many of the same themes are represented in Baal's conflict with the primordial sea. The essential function of both myths is to suggest order in the universe thereby assuring that winter will indeed by followed by spring. Gaster concludes that "the function of Myth ... is to translate the real into terms of the ideal, the punctual into terms of the durative and transcendental."[32] The ritual event itself is "real" and "punctual," but the mythical component transforms the ritual from a series of actions to a transcendent experience both "ideal" and "durative." Myth infuses ritual with cosmic and divine meaning. It is this meaning brought by myth that ritual comes to represent and re-enact.

The mythological material preserved in the Bible is often re-cast or re-worked to reflect Israel's monotheism and various other political and social considerations of the ancient Israelite *zeitgeist*. The Bible adapts pagan folklore through a process that Gaster calls "transmutation." Certain details, plot lines, and images found in mythology are significantly altered in the Biblical text. For example, the separation of heaven and earth

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[31] Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), p. x.

[32] Ibid., p. 5.

came about in the Babylonian Enuma Elish myth by the god Marduk slicing the defeated goddess Tiamat into two parts. Though the creation account in Genesis draws heavily from this tradition; the Bible preserves only remnants of the mythological tale, for Scripture is guided by the world view that God alone parted heaven and earth by divine command. Similarly, the Esther story - which "originated as a tale told in the harems about the shrewdness of a woman in frustrating a jealous intrigue at the Persian court" - is transformed by Scripture to convey the "foiling of a plot against the Jews."[33]

Gaster would agree with Kaufmann's notion of "fossil remains" (or "remnants") of pagan myths in the Bible. Both would acknowledge - for example - mythological allusions and vocabulary throughout Scripture. However, whereas Kaufmann maintains definitively that at the time of the Bible pagan myths were not fully understood (and therefore not utilized) by ancient Israel, Gaster equivocates on this issue. He states the problem eloquently - "in the case of ancient texts it is often difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether ... the underlying myth is still a matter of popular belief or whether that original belief has evaporated into a mere verbal conceit."[34] - but does not further address the issue. He concludes indecisively that one must not suppose that "when ancient mythological stories are used in the Old Testament they were necessarily interpreted by the scriptural writers within their primal frame of reference."[35]

Perhaps the most significant component of Gaster's thesis is his conception of

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[33] Ibid., p. xxxi.

[34] Ibid., p. xxxvi.

[35] Ibid., p. xxxvi.

myths as "paradigms of the continuing human situation."[36] Myths address themselves to timeless, existential questions as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. Human fears and longings - the need to create order and meaning in the world and to explain natural phenomena - find expression in myth. For example, Gaster interprets Adam and Eve as archetypes meaningful to us in that "we are all expelled from our Edens and sacrifice our happiness to the ambitions of our intellects."[37] Myth is an archaic manner of expressing universal human issues and concerns. In modern times, the role of myth is superseded by the rational pursuits of philosophy and science.

FRANK MOORE CROSS

Unlike Gaster, Cross views the Exodus story - specifically, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds - as an actual historical event with mythological components. In his 1973 work *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, Cross notes of the biblical account of Israel's passage through the sea that "mythological themes shape its mode of presenting epic memories."[38] In many ways, crossing the Reed Sea reflects the Canaanite myth of the rain-god Baal who became head of the pantheon at Ugarit by defeating the sea-god/dragon Yamm. In fact, Isaiah 51 acknowledges that the God who "dried up the Sea" so that "the redeemed might walk" also "hacked Rahab in

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[36] Ibid., p. xxxiv.

[37] Ibid., p. xxxiv

[38] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 144.

pieces" and "pierced the dragon."[39] The notion that gods earn their power by battling with and conquering the sea is a classic motif in pagan mythology, and it lays beneath the Bible's depiction of God as sovereign over the Reed Sea.

Though the mythological theme of god-versus-sea/dragon is reflected in Exodus (and elsewhere throughout the Bible), Cross interprets the account primarily as history. His thesis rests on the premise that whereas Canaanite culture expressed itself through myth, Israelite religion favored history. He notes that "the historical impulse became powerful in the Mosaic faith"[40] and that "the expression of Israel's faith is ... firmly controlled by a historical framework."[41] The events of Israel's unique history - "recognized as crucially or ultimately meaningful"[42] - "displaced" or "superseded" pagan mythology. While the Bible reflects a tension between "history" and "myth," It is overwhelmingly historical. Myths are called upon to infuse certain historical passages of Scripture with transcendent or "cosmic" meaning. Cross thus notes the "secondary mythologizing of historical experiences to point to their cosmic or transcendent meaning."[43] Illustrative of this phenomenon is the historical account of the events at the Sea of Reeds which is "enhanced" by the mythological sub-text of God's supremacy over

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[39] Translation from: *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), p. 729. Note: Hereafter cited as *JPS Tanakh*.

[40] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, p. 89.

[41] Ibid., p. 90.

[42] Ibid., p. 87.

[43] Ibid., p. 87.

the sea and all the associated imagery and meaning suggested to the Israelite mind. Of the happenings at the Reed Sea, Cross concludes: "it is highly likely that the role of the sea ... was singled out and stressed primarily because of the ubiquitous motif of the cosmogonic battle between the creator god and Sea in West Semitic [Canaanite] mythology."[44]

Cross uses the term "epic" to label the amalgam of myth and history characteristic of the biblical text. He explains that epic relates (or interprets) history by combining both the mythological and the historical. The epic "cycle" is influenced by a "mythopoeic past under the impact of certain historical experiences."[45] Epic adds another dimension or "layer" to history by connecting certain events in time to "primordial" events which are beyond time. In the primitive mind, the world thus makes sense: the events of the recent past are intricately linked to the distant past when God (or *the gods*) created the universe. The far distant past - "primordial time" - is the subject and content of myth according to Cross. The mythical element of epic allows human historical figures to engage with their God (or gods) in the course of everyday, actual events. Often, God's role in biblical epic mirrors that of the mythological Baal in his battle with the sea. In fact, Cross identifies the classic pattern of the Canaanite cosmogonic myth throughout the Bible (though it is "subdued" and overshadowed by historical writing), thereby positing a significant Canaanite influence in the religion and culture of ancient Israel. The Bible infused mythology into its epic structure - preserving mythic patterns, ideas, and language - but maintained a primarily historical tone. This "peculiar religious concern with the

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[44] Ibid., p. 88.

[45] Ibid., p. viii.

'historical' "[46] set ancient Israel apart from her mythologically-oriented Near Eastern neighbors.

[46] Ibid., p. ix.

CHAPTER TWO:

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN HISTORY: AN OVERVIEW[47]

In studying the biblical text, it is essential to "frame" Scripture in its ancient Near Eastern context. As this study seeks to discuss the biblical flood account (Gen. 6:5-9:17) through a comparative analysis of ancient Mesopotamian mythology, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate the widespread cross-cultural interactions and contact between the major Near Eastern powers (i.e., Babylonia, Assyria, Anatolia, Egypt, Mitanni, and Syria) and ancient Israel. It is hypothesized that Near Eastern inter-cultural contact - primarily through wars, trade, and diplomatic and political relations - would allow for the sharing of literatures across many different cultures. It is appropriate to speak of an international Near Eastern "community" under the cultural sway of ancient Akkad (in central Mesopotamia) as early as 2600 BCE.[48] This section will briefly discuss the cultural and political ascendancy of Akkad but will focus in greater detail upon the rise of Babylonia and Assyria from the period of Hammurabi (ca. 1790 BCE) to the capture of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile (ca. 597-587 BCE).

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE OF THE MID-THIRD MILLENNIUM BCE

Lambert describes the period 2600-2200 BCE as one of "openness culturally from

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[47] Note: For the location of key cities and countries mentioned herein, see maps in Appendix I.

[48] W.G. Lambert, *Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context* in *Congress Volume: Supplement to Vetus Testamentum,* J.A. Emerton, ed. (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), pp. 125-143. This article is the principal source for the following sub-section, "The Akkadian Empire of the Mid-Third Millennium BCE."

the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean."[49] The Akkadians organized the many localized city-states of Mesopotamia under a national monarchal governance structure that sought international territorial expansion. At its height, the Akkadian empire under Sargon (ca. 2334-2279 BCE) included "the whole of Mesopotamia, much of Syria, and some of the mountainous areas to the north."[50] Archaeological discoveries have substantiated the far-reaching cultural influence of Akkad in the areas bordering the eastern Mediterranean (the Levant). Statuettes found in northeast Syria dating to 2500 BCE are virtually identical in craftsmanship and design to clay figures of the same period unearthed in Mesopotamia. Similarly, tablets written in Akkadian cuneiform script (a derivative of the Sumerian writing system) datable to approximately 2500 BCE were found in Ebla (Syria). Of the Ebla discoveries, Lambert notes the cultural significance of not only "Sumerian literary texts" found there, but also the relevance of "a Semitic translation of a Sumerian myth" uncovered at the site.[51] It is apparent that Mesopotamian literature - including mythological materials - spread westward toward the Levant. Lambert concludes that circa 2500 BCE "Syria (and probably Palestine to a lesser degree) was open to and received cultural influence from the east."[52]

HAMMURABI AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN "INTERNATIONALISM"

With the fall of the Akkadian empire (ca. 2100 BCE), Near Eastern cross-cultural

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[49] Ibid., p. 133.

[50] Ibid., p. 133.

[51] Ibid., p. 133.

[52] Ibid., p. 133.

interaction was essentially dormant until the age of the Babylonian king Hammurabi (ca. 1792 BCE). During his reign, the entire area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers was united under Babylonian rule. From a strong and politically cohesive Mesopotamia, Hammurabi initiated a campaign of military conquest throughout the Near East. He also ushered in an age of international diplomacy unforseen in the region. Documents discovered at Mari (north of Babylon in Mesopotamia) shed light on the "international intrigues and coalitions" which characterized Hammurabi's reign.[53] In fact, it is believed that Hammurabi employed a corps of ambassadors who negotiated treaties and fostered diplomatic relations with neighboring Near Eastern powers. Under Hammurabi, the Akkadian (Babylonian) language rose to prominence as the *lingua franca* "by which kings reigning all over the Near East were able to communicate."[54] Babylonian literature thrived in Hammurabi's day (so much so that modern scholars refer to the period as "classical Babylonian"[55]) and undoubtedly spread far beyond the borders of Mesopotamia.

INTERNATIONALISM CONTINUES: THE MITANNI EMPIRE AND THE AMARNA AGE

Circa 1500 BCE, the Mitanni empire (a confederation of Hurrian states in northern Mesopotamia and Syria) became a pre-eminent power in the Near East building a kingdom

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[53] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, (1992), s.v. "Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)," by A. Kirk Grayson, p. 760.

[54] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, (1992), s.v. "Languages (Akkadian)," p. 175.

[55] A. Kirk Grayson, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)," p. 760.

that spanned from Kurdistan to the Mediterranean Sea. It has been hypothesized that the Hurrians innovated the practice of diplomatic marriage through which kings would marry off their daughters to rulers of other countries as a means to ensure peaceful international relations. Extensive records of diplomatic marriages recovered through archaeological excavation demonstrate that Hurrian influence spread not only through Mesopotamia, Syria, and Turkey, but through Egypt as well. Documents indicate - for example - that the Hurrian king Artatarma I (ca. 1420 BCE) sent his daughter to Egypt to betroth Pharaoh Tutmosis IV.[56] Similar arrangements were made between Suttarna II and Amonhotep III and between Tusratta and Amonhotep IV. Because the culture of the Hurrians was essentially Babylonian, Lambert notes that "for ... 250 years this whole area [i.e., the Near East] continued to absorb both Babylonian texts and art ..."[57] Regarding the significance of the Mitanni empire as a conduit for cross-cultural sharing in the Near East, Morrison writes:

> "... Mittani's major contribution to the Near East is found in its role as the N. Mesopotamian - N. Syrian transmitter in the diffusion of culture in the late 2d millennium B.C. ... [I]ts military and political power ... enabled communication across a wide area in the Near East. Through its diplomacy with Egypt and its subsequent relations with Egypt, the Hittites, and Assyria, it was a cultural crossroads ... [T]he various cultures of the Near East mingled their religious, artistic, literary, and technical ideas and skills."[58]

Morrison also discusses the "syncretism of elements from Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and

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[56] *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 4, (1992), s.v. "Mitanni," by Martha A. Morrison, p. 875. This article includes an extensive discussion of the Hurrian practice of diplomatic marriage.

[57] W.G. Lambert, *Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, p. 135.

[58] Martha A. Morrison, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Mitanni," p. 876.

the Aegean" which describes Mitanni culture and attests to the "internationalism of the era."[59]

Cross-cultural sharing and international literary "cross-fertilization" continued throughout the Amarna age (ca. 1385-1355 BCE). A cache of letters found at Amarna in Egypt document diplomatic relations between various Pharaohs, their vassal states, and other Near Eastern powers such as Babylonia. It is noteworthy that the letters were written in Akkadian cuneiform, as it demonstrates that the Babylonian language and culture was well-known throughout the Near East. In describing the Amarna period, Lambert comments that "the whole Near East, from Egypt to Anatolia to the Persian Gulf, was busy with international exchanges using the Babylonian language and cuneiform script."[60] Among the Amarna documents was found an Egyptian-Akkadian dictionary in which Egyptian words were written syllabically by cuneiform signs.[61] In light of the pre-eminence of Babylonian language and culture in the Near East, archaeologists have discovered Babylonian literature (including a flood story) at Ras Shamra in Syria and a fragment of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic at Megiddo in ancient Israel.[62] Both texts date to the Amarna period during which one may speak of an ancient Near Eastern international "community" marked by ongoing contact (primarily through diplomacy,

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[59] Ibid., p. 876.

[60] W.G. Lambert, *Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, p. 135.

[61] *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 1, (1992), s.v. "Amarna Letters," by Nadav Na'aman, p. 174.

[62] W.G. Lambert, *Old Testament Mythology in its Ancient Near Eastern Context*, p. 135.

politics, warfare, and trading and commercial relations) between the various civilizations of western Asia. Of special relevance to this paper, Charpin notes that "from the end of the fifteenth century on ... Babylonian merchants traded with Canaan"[63] thereby providing opportunities for Babylonian mythology to permeate the ancient Israelite milieu.

THE RISE OF ASSYRIA

Concurrent with the Israelite settlement in Canaan (ca. 1200 BCE) was the rise of the Assyrian Empire under Tiglath-pileser I. The period of Assyrian ascendancy in the Near East (which spanned over 500 years until the emergence of the Neo-Babylonian Empire) was characterized by aggressive territorial expansion and military campaigning. Upon the death of Tiglath-pileser I, "Assyrian influence extended from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to Babylon in the southeast."[64]

Of particular interest to this study, it is noteworthy that Assyria reigned supreme in the Near East throughout the tenure of the United Monarchy in Palestine (ca. 1000-930 BCE) and during much of the era of the Divided Monarchy thereafter. By the mid-800's BCE, Palestine - strategically situated on lucrative trade routes - had become a vassal state of Assyria. Grayson notes that "various states in ... Palestine rebelled against Assyria, but they paid the penalty by being savagely attacked by the Assyrian army and incorporated as

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[63] Charpin, Dominique, *The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview* in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), p. 820.

[64] *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, (1992), s.v. "Mesopotamia, History of (Assyria)," by A. Kirk Grayson, p. 739.

vassal states into the Assyrian Empire. This was the fate of ... Israel."[65] At times, Israel formed military alliances with Syria or Egypt to fend off the Assyrian aggressor, but her efforts proved to be futile. Instead, Israel protected itself by paying tributes to Assyrian overlords. It is recorded in the Bible (Second Kings 15) - for example - that King Menachem of Israel acknowledged submission to the Assyrian throne by paying King Pul (Tiglath-pileser III) "a thousand talents of silver."[66] The Bible further explains that "every man of means had to pay fifty shekels of silver to the king of Assyria."[67]

Nonetheless, the Israelite Kingdom fell in 722 BCE to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V. Subsequent to the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom, much of the Israelite population was exiled to Mesopotamia. In their stead, people from other lands under Assyrian rule were settled in vanquished Israel (as recounted in Second Kings 17). In the aftermath of the fall of the Israelite Kingdom, "[t]he Assyrians rebuilt Samaria and made it the capital of one of their provinces. They absorbed the remnants of the Israelite army into their own. They also repopulated the territory of the former northern kingdom with foreigners after deporting ... the native population."[68] It is certain that cross-cultural interaction was a by-product of the widespread (forced) population shifts which were a standard feature of Assyrian military and political strategy.

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[65] Ibid., p. 744.

[66] *JPS Tanakh*, p. 592.

[67] Ibid., p. 592.

[68] *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, (1992), s.v. "Israel, History of (Monarchic Period)," by Leslie J. Hoppe, p. 565.

Whereas the northern kingdom lost its sovereignty to Assyria in 722 BCE, the southern kingdom of Judah (with its capital in Jerusalem) maintained the appearance of autonomy: King Hezekiah (726-697 BCE) and his son Manasseh (697-642 BCE) ruled essentially as puppets of the Assyrian monarchs Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib. Hoppe observes that "Judah retained its nominal independence ... [but] had little choice but to be a compliant vassal, for Assyria's power was at its height in the early part of the 7th century."[69] The Assyrian Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem circa 650 BCE - though he allowed Judah's kings to remain on the throne stripped of power - and the principal Judean cities were "captured, looted, and destroyed, chief among these being Lachish."[70] The Bible mentions the Assyrian presence in ancient Palestine throughout the Book of Second Kings (see, for example, 18:13-19:36). The interaction between Assyria and both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah - though primarily a relationship of overlord and vassal throughout the 7th and 8th centuries BCE - provided countless opportunities for cross-cultural sharing of written materials including literary works.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF BABYLONIA

Under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BCE), Babylonia re-emerged as the dominant power in the Near East. Very early in his reign (ca. 601 BCE),

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[69] Leslie J. Hoppe, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Israel, History of (Monarchic Period)," p. 565.

[70] A. Kirk Grayson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Mesopotamia, History of (Assyria)," p. 745.

Nebuchadnezzar solidified his power base in Palestine from which he launched fierce campaigns against Egypt and Syria. The Judean king Jehoiakim (609-598 BCE) was permitted to rule as a vassal; but when he renounced his allegiance to Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar attacked and captured Jerusalem in 597 BCE. The city ultimately fell to Nebuchadnezzar during Zedekiah's reign in 587 BCE. Grayson explains that Jerusalem "was plundered and destroyed, its leaders were executed, and most of the remaining population were carried off in exile to Babylonia."[71] Throughout the fifty years that the Israelites were in exile in Babylonia, they were exposed to a Mesopotamian culture which - because of the overwhelming presence of Babylonia and Assyria in ancient Israel - was (in large part) familiar to them. Moreover, only a fraction of the Israelite people - 42,360 according to Ezra 2:64 - actually returned to their homeland following the edict of the Persian ruler Cyrus in 538 BCE. Thus, a substantial community of Israelites remained in Mesopotamia[72] and played a significant role in absorbing and transmitting the literature of that culture.[73]

A NOTE ABOUT THE BIBLE AND THE HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The problems inherent in utilizing the Bible as a historical source are well known.[74]

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[71] A. Kirk Grayson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia)," p. 765.

[72] Note, for example, the Babylonian name Zerubbabel ("*z'roa bavel*," "seed of Babylon") in Haggai 1:1.

[73] I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight.

[74] For a summary of the most compelling arguments, see: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, (1992), s.v. "Israel, History of (Premonarchic Period) - The OT as a Historical Source," by Niels Peter Lemche, p. 527.

Specifically regarding ancient Israel's pre-monarchic or pre-national period (which began with David's ascension to the throne ca. 1000 BCE), the historical information recorded in the Bible is not considered accurate. Lemche comments that "the history of pre-national Israel must be written without the aid of the Old Testament narratives."[75] The principal difficulty with the historical data in the Torah and the Prophetic Books from Joshua to Samuel is its retrospective nature: "no part of this Old Testament narrative is contemporaneous with the events it depicts."[76] Thus, the period of particular concern to this study - ca. 2000 to 1600 BCE when the ancient Mesopotamian flood stories were written and circulated - may not be illuminated (historically) by the Bible. The biblical story of the flood (Gen. 6:5-9:17) - like its counterparts in Mesopotamian literature, the Epics of Gilgamesh and Atra-hasis - is deemed *a*historical (or *pre*-historical) by the modern scholarly community.[77]

The text of Gen. 11:31 demonstrates the problem of the Torah as history (and helps set a date of composition for one of the earliest "strata" of biblical writing). Though the biblical chronology would date Abraham to approximately 2300 BCE, it is written that "Terah took his son Abram ... and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan."[78] The city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia was settled by the Chaldeans

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[75] *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, (1992), s.v. "Israel, History of (Premonarchic Period)," by Niels Peter Lemche, p. 535.

[76] Ibid., p. 527.

[77] Ibid., p. 528 and 535.

[78] *JPS Tanakh*, p. 17.

no earlier than the 9th century BCE. Scholars thus conclude that the biblical text describing Abraham's life and activities was written approximately 1,500 years *after* the time during which Abraham actually lived. It is well known that by the 9th century BCE, cross-cultural and inter-cultural contact was already characteristic of the ancient Near East. Furthermore - in addition to demonstrating a critical point about the Bible and ancient Near Eastern history - Gen. 11:31 places Abraham in the city of Ur in the heart of the Mesopotamian world. Abraham's contact with this world is noteworthy, as it suggests that cross-cultural interaction between "Israel" and Mesopotamia likely dates to a very early period.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE ATRA-HASIS EPIC[1]

RECONSTRUCTING THE TEXT: TABLETS SPANNING OVER 1,000 YEARS

The text of the ancient Babylonian flood myth, Atra-hasis, was written in Akkadian cuneiform script and preserved on clay tablets recovered through archaeological excavation. The first Atra-hasis tablets were discovered in 1851 by French and British explorers digging in ancient Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik) at the palace of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BCE). Later Nineveh excavations by British archaeologists in 1853 uncovered "thousands upon thousands of broken pieces of cuneiform tablets"[2] at Ashurbanipal's (669-627 BCE) palace library telling the story of Atra-hasis. Most of the tablets were brought to the British Museum, deciphered, and published over the next one hundred years in English translation. Toward the close of the 19th century, excavations in the area of ancient Sippar (in Babylonia) produced a version of the Atra-hasis Epic dating to the Old Babylonian era kingship of Ammi-saduqa (1646-1626 BCE): nearly 1,000 years older than the previously discovered tablets. Though originally unearthed in broken clay fragments of various sizes, it is now known that the original myth (the oldest version of the story that has been discovered to date) was written on three tablets. The

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[1] For the leading scholarly discussion of the restoration of the Atra-hasis Epic and its translation, see: W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Much of this chapter draws from the work of Lambert and Millard. Note that in this chapter, the words "epic," "story," and "legend" will be used interchangeably with the term "myth."

[2] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 2.

third tablet contained the flood story and was initially published by V. Scheil in 1898. The first two tablets - which described the creation of humankind and the subsequent problem of overpopulation - were published by Lambert and Millard in 1965 (though they were discovered and sent to the British Museum in 1889).

The problems inherent in piecing together the Epic of Atra-hasis were more significant than the archaeological challenges of deciphering, dating, and organizing (or "sequencing") the array of cuneiform fragments which were brought to several different research centers in cities throughout Europe. The Atra-hasis story was written and re-written over a period of nearly a thousand years. Copies of the text have been found throughout Mesopotamia and as far west as Ras Shamra in Syria. While many recensions are concordant in language and detail, others are substantially variant. Lambert and Millard account for differences between versions of the story by noting that literature in "the ancient world had no proper titles, no sense of literary rights, and no aversion to ... plagiarism. Succeeding ages often rewrote old texts to suit new language forms and tastes."[3] Even tablets written in the same period of time often do not agree with one another.

The re-writing and editing of texts in ancient times was most likely related to the existence of an oral tradition in which stories were transmitted by word of mouth and thereby susceptible to far-reaching additions, deletions, and embellishments. Thus, Lambert and Millard note that the many different versions of the Atra-hasis story "may be accounted for as arising from oral tradition, which is much more fluid than the written."[4] It is now widely assumed that the Atra-hasis Epic was recited or sung publicly by professional narrators or story-tellers. The written

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[3] Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

versions of the story recorded on clay tablets may have served only as an outline indicating major developments or key points in the story line upon which the story-teller would build in the course of "live" performance. Dalley speaks to this point in observing that "we should probably understand some of the abrupt changes of theme as bare skeletons which were fleshed out in practice by skilled narrators ... leaving embellishments and flourishes to his own skills and to popular taste."[5] She further notes that "the primary purpose of recording stories in writing was not necessarily to supply ... readers with a coherent and connected account."[6]

Though the performer's creative license and the spontaneity of the dramatic moment would result in varying subtleties of the tale, the problem is exacerbated by the reality that most of the story-tellers were illiterate and recounted their legends from memory. Lambert and Millard comment that "the cumbrous system of cuneiform writing restricted literacy to a small elite of professional scribes."[7] Ancient Babylonian society was largely illiterate thereby creating the need for an oral tradition to develop "alongside" the written, literary one.

The Lambert and Millard reconstruction of the text is based on the Old Babylonian (2100-1595 BCE) version of the story. The three tablets that Lambert and Millard use as their main recension of the narrative - the oldest extant copy of the tale - date to ca. 1635 BCE[8] and were copied in Sippar by the scribe Ku-Aya. Four other Old Babylonian tablets recording various

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[5] Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. xvi.

[6] Ibid., p. xvi.

[7] Ibid., p. 8.

[8] Note that the story itself may have originally developed one or two centuries earlier.

pieces of the story (scribed by someone other than Ku-Aya) are called upon to fill gaps in the main Lambert and Millard recension. These tablets are believed to be somewhat later copies of the Ku-Aya "original," and they vary greatly from Ku-Aya's work. Thus, seven Old Babylonian tablets (with special emphasis on Ku-Aya's three) are at the heart of the Lambert and Millard reconstruction. Using the Ku-Aya tablets as the source to structure and outline the entire Atra-hasis Epic, details are introduced and lacunae are filled by citing a number of later tablets from the Middle Babylonian (1595-1000 BCE), Late Assyrian (700-650 BCE), and Neo-Late Babylonian (626-539 BCE) eras. Some of the many tablets (mentioned above) discovered at the palace library of Ashurbanipal have been pieced together to create a fairly complete, later version of the story (dating to ca. 660 BCE) known as the Assyrian Recension. Today, more than 700 lines of the Old Babylonian version of Atra-hasis - nearly 65% of the complete text - have been restored in the Lambert and Millard critical edition. Moran thus concludes that "we can now draw a fairly detailed outline of the Old Babylonian story."[9]

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS[10]

Adad/Ishkur: The storm god instructed by Enlil to withhold rain so that a famine would result and the human population would be reduced.

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[9] W.L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," *Biblica: Commentarii Periodici Pontificii Instituti Biblici*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1971), p. 52.

[10] When two names are listed for the same character and separated by a back-slash; the first name is Akkadian, the second is Sumerian. When two names are separated by the word "or," both names are Akkadian. A helpful glossary of Babylonian deities may be found in: Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Atra-hasis/Ziusudra: Literally, "exceedingly wise." In the Sumerian: "Ziusudra" - "life of long days." Human king on earth. Beseeches his personal god Enki for guidance in averting the plagues against humankind. The only survivor (with his family and a group of animals) of the great flood.

Ea/Enki: One of the three "senior" gods who controlled the realm of the Apsu - the body of fresh water beneath the earth that bubbled to the surface as springs. Also the god of wisdom and incantations. The personal god of Atra-hasis who - in response to the pleas and supplications of Atra-hasis - saved humankind from a series of divinely-sent plagues including the flood. Created human beings with the mother-goddess in primordial times.

Ellil/Enlil: One of the three "senior" gods who reigned on earth. Sent plagues to reduce human population when noise of humankind disturbed his sleep. Eventually conceded to continuance of human race.

Mami or Belet-ili: The mother-goddess who co-created humankind with Enki. Upon the birth of the first human beings, her name was changed to Belet-ili ("mistress of the gods"). She was deeply distressed (and angry at Enlil) in the aftermath of the flood.

Namtara: The decider of fate and demonic god of the underworld instructed by Enlil to bring a plague of sickness to humankind to reduce the population.

THE EPIC OF ATRA-HASIS: PLOT SUMMARY

The reconstruction of the myth presented herein is taken from Lambert and Millard's *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (1969). In consideration of length, portions of the Lambert and Millard recension of less relevance to this paper are omitted. Such omissions are

indicated by a series of pound signs (#) at various points in the story. Before each section of text is presented, a brief summary of the events to take place will be provided. When appropriate, comments relevant to each section will be included following the presentation of the ancient material.

PLOT SUMMARY - FIRST SECTION

The story begins in primordial time when only the gods lived. Three "senior" gods - Anu, Enlil, and Enki - ruled, respectively, the heavens, the earth, and the waters beneath the earth. The "junior" gods served as laborers on earth, primarily digging the canals upon which agriculture depended. After forty years of hard labor, the "junior" gods became frustrated and protested at Enlil's temple demanding an end to their toil. The other "senior" gods - Anu and Enki - agreed that the hard labor was severe and that the "junior" gods deserved relief. Enki suggested that human beings should be created to do the work of the gods.

When the gods like men
Bore the work and suffered the toil -

The toil of the gods was great,
The work was heavy, the distress was much -

The Seven great Anunnaki[11]
Were making the Igigi[12] suffer the work.

Anu, their father, was the king;

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[11] The seven pre-diluvian sages were considered to be immortal. They taught humankind the arts of civilization - how to regulate and organize society - which was thought to be a gift from the gods.

[12] The lesser or "junior" gods.

Their counsellor was the warrior Enlil;

Their chamberlain was Ninurta;
And their sheriff Ennugi.

The gods had clasped hands together,
Had cast lots and had divided.

Anu had gone up to heaven,
[..]... the earth to his subjects.

[The bolt], the bar of the sea,
[They had given] to Enki, the prince.

[After Anu] had gone up to heaven
[And Enki] had gone down to the Apsu,

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[They counted the years] of the toil.

...]. the great marsh,
[They] counted [the years] of the toil.

Excessive [.....] for 40 years
[..] they suffered the work night and day.

They [were complaining], backbiting,
Grumbling in the excavation:

'Let us confront our [..]., the chamberlain,
That he may relieve us of our heavy work.

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[Enlil], counsellor of the gods, the hero,
Come, let us unnerve him in his dwelling!'

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Now, proclaim war,
Let us mingle hostilities and battle.

The gods heeded his words:
They set fire to their tools,

Fire to their spades they put
And flame to their hods.

They held them as they went
To the gate of the shrine of the hero Enlil.

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[The "junior" gods surround Enlil's temple home. Enlil is apprised of the situation by his vizier. He calls upon his vizier to gather an assembly of the other "senior" gods, Anu and Enki, as well as the seven sages.]

Send that Anu be fetched down
And that Enki be brought to your presence.

He sent and Anu was fetched down,
Enki was brought also to his presence.

Anu, king of heaven, was present,
King of the Apsu, Enki, was in attendance.

With the great Anunnaki present
Enlil arose .[...]..

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[Enlil, under the counsel of Anu, sends his vizier to determine why the "junior" gods have rebelled. What follows is the vizier's speech to the angry crowd of "junior" gods and their response.]

Anu, your father,
[Your counsellor, the] warrior Enlil,

[Your chamberlain] Ninurta,
And [your sheriff] Ennugi, [have sent me (to say)],

Who is [the instigator of] battle?
Who is [the provoker of] hostilities?

Who [declared] war

[And .....] battle?

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[The junior gods respond:]

Every single [one of us gods has declared] war;
We have ... our [.]. in the [excavation].

[Excessive] toil [has killed us],
[Our] work was heavy, [the distress much].

[The vizier reports back to Enlil. Enlil decides that he will punish the gods by killing one of them as an example. He asks Anu to carry out his order; but Anu refuses, as he maintains that the actions of the "junior" gods are justified. Enki suggests that the problem may be solved by the creation of man to do the work of the "junior" gods. Enki addresses the "senior" gods by saying:]

What are we [accusing] them of?
Their work was heavy, [the distress was much]!

Every day ...[...
The lamentation was heavy [...

There is .[...
While [Belet-ili, the birth-goddess, is present],

Let her create *Lullu*-[man].
Let him bear the yoke [...

Let him bear the yoke [...
[Let man carry the] toil of the gods.

It is noteworthy that the mythical story begins by demonstrating a connection between the gods and humankind which is rooted in the work originally undertaken by the gods and later delegated to human beings. Thus, even the most mundane human activities are divine insofar as they once filled the time of the gods. Though the gods are anthropomorphized throughout the story, their humanness is particularly apparent in the response of fatigue and frustration to

strenuous work. The theme of human and divine work - located in the prominent position of the opening stanza - is obviously central to the story. According to Moran, the first stanza very quickly introduces the reader (or listener) into "an anomalous and unstable situation, divine humanity and toil and pain."[13] The story is presented in chronological sequence in its entirety except for the initial stanzas which bring the toil of the gods to immediate attention.

PLOT SUMMARY - SECOND SECTION

The "senior" gods agreed with Enki's suggestion that human beings should be created to alleviate the deities' work burden. The mother-goddess - Mami - was called upon to cooperate with Enki in the creation of humankind. Human beings were crafted from a mixture of clay compounded with the flesh and blood of a slain deity which was spat upon by the gods. Fourteen birth goddesses assisted Enki and Mami by molding fourteen pieces of clay into seven males and seven females. The sexes were separated by a brick structure on which Babylonian women gave birth. The text refers to a ten month gestation period after which Mami's womb is broken and humankind is born.

They summoned and asked the goddess,
The midwife of the gods, wise Mami,

You are the birth-goddess, creatress of mankind,
Create *Lullu* that he may bear the yoke.

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Enki opened his mouth
And addressed the great gods,

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[13] William L. Moran, *Some Considerations of Form and Interpretation in Atra-hasis* in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, Francesca Rochberg-Halton, ed. (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987), p. 247.

On the first, seventh, and fifteenth day of the month
I will make a purifying bath.

Let one god be slaughtered
So that all the gods may be cleansed in a dipping.

From his flesh and blood
Let Nintu mix clay,

That god and man
May be thoroughly mixed in the clay.

So that we may hear the drum for the rest of time
Let there be a spirit from the god's flesh.

Let it proclaim living (man) as its sign,
So that this be not forgotten let there be a spirit.

####

We-ila, who had personality,
They slaughtered in their assembly.

From his flesh and blood
Nintu mixed clay.

####

After she had mixed that clay
She summoned the Anunnaki, the great gods.

The Igigi, the great gods,
Spat upon the clay.

Mami opened her mouth
And addressed the great gods,

You commanded me a task, I have completed it;
You have slaughtered a god together with his personality.

I have removed your heavy work,
I have imposed your toil on man.

####

They entered the house of destiny
Did prince Ea and the wise Mami.

With the birth-goddesses assembled
He trod the clay in her presence.

She kept reciting the incantation,
Ea, seated before her, was prompting her.

After she had finished her incantation
She nipped off fourteen pieces of clay.

Seven she put on the right,
Seven on the left.

Between them she placed the brick
...].. The umbilical cord ...

####

The wise and learned
Twice seven birth-goddesses had assembled,
Seven produced males,
[Seven] produced females.
The birth-goddess, creatress of destiny -
They completed them in pairs,
They completed them in pairs in her presence.

####

[The next few lines describe the origin of the Babylonian "birthing brick" on which women went into labor. Lambert and Millard note that "by bringing in this object the author related the myth to actual births in contemporary society."[14]]

In the house of the pregnant woman in confinement
Let the brick be in place for seven days,
That Belet-ili, the wise Mami, may be honoured.

[Though it seems that humankind has already been created, the text now discusses Mami's ten

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[14] Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, p. 9.

month gestation period after which the first human beings are born.]

The birth-goddesses were assembled
And Nintu [sat] counting the months.

[At the] destined [moment] the tenth month was summoned.
The tenth month arrived
And the elapse of the period opened the womb.

With a beaming, joyful face
And covered head she performed the midwifery.

####

[After Mami gives birth, she explains several ancient Babylonian customs regarding procreation and marriage that undoubtedly resonated with the original readers and audiences of the epic.]

Where the pregnant woman gives birth
And the mother of the babe severs herself,

Let the brick be in place for nine days,
That Nintu, the birth-goddess, may be honoured.

Without ceasing proclaim Mami their [.].
Without ceasing praise the birth-goddess, praise Kesh!

When [....]. the bed is laid
Let the wife and her husband lie together.

When, to institute marriage,
They heed Istar in the house of [the father-in-law],

Let there be rejoicing for nine days,
Let them call Istar Ishara.

The Babylonian notion that mankind was created from a mixture of blood and clay is reflected in the Torah. In Gen. 3:19, God - furious with Adam for eating the forbidden fruit - proclaims, "By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, *until you return to the ground* -

for from it you were taken."[15] The tradition of clay or earth as the material from which humankind was fashioned likely originated in ancient Babylonia and borrowed by the Bible. Similarly, the concept of blood as the life-force may be found in Lev. 17:11 where God instructs Moses that "the life of the flesh is in the blood."[16] The Babylonian story of the creation of humankind as related in the Atra-hasis Epic is faintly echoed in the biblical text.

It is also noteworthy that the birth of each child in ancient Babylonian society was intricately linked with the birth of the very first human beings. Speaking to this point, Lambert and Millard observe that "by insisting on the view that what happened at the first creation of man is repeated with every human birth, the author brings home the relevance of his myth."[17] Interspersed with the mythical account of the primordial labor and delivery of the goddess Mami is practical advice for the Atra-hasis audience on obstetrics, marriage, and birthing procedures. Much of the Mami birthing myth is etiological; for example, the origin of the Babylonian labor and delivery "brick" is explained. Similarly, the role of the midwife in the birthing process - as well as rituals celebrating both marriage and birth - is explained and connected back to primordial time. In this way, the myth was meaningful to its contemporary audience, for within the myth the origins of treasured customs were to be found. Lambert and Millard thus note that "the epic concentrates on ... matters of local custom which might easily be forgotten: the need to have the birth 'brick' in place for nine days, the marriage celebration ... and the invoking of Istar (goddess

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[15] *JPS Tanakh*, p. 7.

[16] *JPS Tanakh*, p. 182.

[17] Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, p. 22.

of love) under the name Ishara ..."[18]

PLOT SUMMARY - THIRD SECTION

The second tablet of the Atra-hasis myth describes the extensive population growth of newly-created humankind. The rapid increase in the number of human beings populating the earth resulted in such a severe noise level that the god Enlil was unable to sleep. He therefore decided to reduce the population through a series of three plagues: sickness and two episodes of drought. When each plague is sent, King Atra-hasis beseeches his personal god Enki to intervene and to help humankind avert the calamity. In the case of sickness and the first episode of drought, Enki instructed Atra-hasis to mobilize the city elders and the people to make special offerings to Namtara - the god of sickness - and Adad - the god of rain. Both Namtara and Adad responded favorably to the extra attention from humankind, and the plagues ceased. It is unclear how the second episode of drought was averted, but (according to Lambert and Millard's reconstruction) it is posited that a struggle between Enki and a primeval sea monster released the primeval waters at the bottom of the universe onto earth. After three unsuccessful attempts to reduce overpopulation and noise, Enlil convened a council of the gods in which each deity pledged - though some did so reluctantly, against their wishes - that humankind would not be saved from a fourth and final plague: the great flood.

The third tablet of the Atra-hasis myth tells the story of the flood. King Atra-hasis asks the god Enki to interpret a dream. Enki - unable to respond to Atra-hasis directly because of the pledge he has taken to not help humankind - speaks to (or through) the reed hut in which Atra-hasis lives. Lambert and Millard shed light on this obscure incident by explaining that "no doubt

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[18] Ibid., p. 23.

the wind might whistle through the reed walls, and Enki seems to have whispered to his devotee in the same way, since it was no longer himself but the wall that transmitted the message."[19] Enki's advice is to tear down the hut and to construct a boat by binding together the reeds, fastening them to a wooden frame, and coating the seams with pitch. Atra-hasis is allowed seven days to construct the boat and prepare for the flood. He justifies his preparations to the city elders by explaining that his "patron" god Enki - the god of the sea - was at odds with the earth god, Enlil. This situation made it impossible for Atra-hasis to live on earth; he would therefore take up residence with Enki on the sea. Atra-hasis loaded the boat with his belongings, and onboard were his family and a variety of animals and birds. Before the flood came, Atra-hasis organized a banquet for the people. The grief and anguish connected with his fore-knowledge of the flood occupied Atra-hasis' thoughts and kept him from participating in the feast.

[The third tablet of the myth opens with Atra-hasis' dream and Enki's instruction to build the boat.]

Atra-hasis opened his mouth
And addressed his lord,

Teach me the meaning [of the dream],
[...].. that I may seek its outcome.

[Enki] opened his mouth
And addressed his slave,

You say, "What am I to seek?"
Observe the message that I will speak to you:

Wall, listen to me!
Reed wall, observe all my words!

Destroy your house, build a boat,

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[19] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, p. 12.

Spurn property and save life.

####

Roof it over like the Apsu.

So that the sun shall not see inside it.
Let it be roofed over above and below.

The tackle should be very strong,
Let the pitch be tough, and so give (the boat) strength.

I will rain down upon you here
An abundance of birds, a profusion of fishes.

[Atra-hasis explains to the city elders why he must build the boat. Thereafter, construction begins, the boat is loaded, and the banquet takes place.]

He [i.e., Enki] opened the water-clock and filled it.
He announced to him [i.e., Atra-hasis] the coming of the flood for the seventh night.

Atra-hasis received the command,
He assembled the elders to his gate.

Atra-hasis opened his mouth
And addressed the elders,

My god [does not agree] with your god,
Enki and [Enlil] are angry with one another.
They have expelled me from [my house (?)],

Since I reverence [Enki],
[He told me] of this matter.

I can[not] live in [your ...],
I cannot [set my feet on] the earth of Enlil.

With the gods ..[...
[This] is what he told me [...

The elders [...

The carpenter [carried his axe],

The reed-worker [carried his stone].

[The child carried] the pitch,
The poor man [brought what was needed].

####

Whatever he [had ...
Whatever he had [...
Clean (animals) .[.....].
Fat (animals) [.....].

He caught [and put on board]
The winged [birds of] the heavens.

The cattle (?) [.....]...
The wild [creatures (?) .....].

.[.....] he put on board
...] the moon disappeared.

...] he invited his people
...] to a banquet.

...]. he sent his family on board,
They ate and they drank.

But he was in and out: he could not sit, could not crouch,
For his heart was broken and he was vomiting gall.

[As the rainstorms begin, Atra-hasis seals himself, his family, and the animals in the boat.]

The appearance of the weather changed,
Adad roared in the clouds.

As soon as he heard Adad's voice
Pitch was brought for him to close his door.

After he had bolted his door
Adad was roaring in the clouds,

The winds became savage as he arose,
He severed the hawser and set the boat adrift.

PLOT SUMMARY - FOURTH SECTION

In the course of the flood, humankind was destroyed; only Atra-hasis and his family survived. The gods were displeased and directed their anger at Enlil. Mami and Enki - the progenitors of humankind - were troubled by the loss of their creation. The "junior" gods feared that they would resume the hard labor that had been assigned to human beings. The total duration of the flood - before the waters subsided and the boat came to rest - was seven days and nights.

[....] the flood [set out],
Its might came upon the peoples [like a battle array].

One person did [not] see another,
They were [not] recognizable in the destruction.

[The flood] bellowed like a bull,
[Like] a whinnying wild ass the winds [howled].

The darkness [was dense], there was no sun.

####

[The events of the flood are disturbing to the gods.]

[Enki] was beside himself,
[Seeing that] his sons were thrown down before him.

Nintu, the great lady,
Her lips were covered with feverishness.

The Annunaki, the great gods,
Were sitting in thirst and hunger.[20]

[The mother-goddess Mami laments the loss of humankind in an emotional monologue.]

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[20] The flood destroyed supplies of food and drink. Furthermore, the human labor that supplied the gods with food and drink had been wiped out in the flood. Note Lambert and Millard, page 15: "The idea that man was created to relieve the gods of hard labour by supplying them with food and drink was standard among both Sumerians and Babylonians."

The goddess saw it as she wept,
The midwife of the gods, the wise Mami.

(She spoke,) Let the day become dark,
Let it become gloom again.

In the assembly of the gods
How did I, with them, command total destruction?

Enlil has had enough of bringing about an evil command,
Like that Tiruru, he uttered abominable evil.

As a result of my own choice
And to my own hurt I have listened to their noise.

My offspring - cut off from me - have become like flies!
And as for me, like the occupant of a house of lamentation, my cry has died away.

Shall I go up to heaven
As if I were to live in a treasure house?

Where has Anu the president gone,
Whose divine sons obeyed his command?

He who did not consider but brought about a flood
And consigned the peoples to destruction?

Nintu[21] was wailing [...

What? Have they given birth to the [rolling (?)] sea?
They[22] have filled the river like dragon flies!

Like a raft they have put in to the edge,
Like a raft .... they have put in to the bank!

I have seen and wept over them;
I have ended my lamentation for them.

She wept and eased her feelings;

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[21] Another name for the mother-goddess, Mami.

[22] The corpses of the flood victims.

Nintu wailed and spent her emotion.

[Like Mami, the other gods bemoan the loss of humankind.]

The gods wept with her for the land,
She was surfeited with grief and thirsted for beer.

Where she sat, they sat weeping,
Like sheep, they filled the trough.

Their lips were feverishly athirst,
They were suffering cramp from hunger.

For seven days and seven nights
Came the deluge, the storm, [the flood].

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PLOT SUMMARY - FIFTH SECTION

The extant tablets do not preserve details about the end of the rainstorms and the running aground of the boat. Following the description of the gods' lament; the flood waters subside, and Atra-hasis emerges from the boat. Immediately, he makes an offering to the gods. The mother-goddess Mami - angry about the flood and distraught about the future of humankind - sought to prevent Anu and Enlil from enjoying Atra-hasis' sacrifice. As a sign of perpetual mourning, Mami insists that she will wear a necklace of lapis lazuli flies as "a reminder of the time when her offspring were floating on the surface of the waters like flies."[23] Despite Mami's grief, Enlil was frustrated at the failure of his fourth attempt to completely destroy humankind. He grudgingly accepts the perpetuation of humankind through Atra-hasis and his family under the condition that Mami and Enki create better order in human society and minimize human noise.

[The story continues as Atra-hasis makes an offering to the gods immediately after the flood.]

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[23] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, p. 13.

To the [four] winds [...
He put [...
Providing food [...

[The gods sniffed] the smell,
They gathered [like flies] over the offering.

[After] they had eaten the offering
Nintu arose to complain against all of them,
Where has Anu the president gone?
Has Enlil come to the incense?

They, who did not consider but brought about a flood
And consigned the peoples to destruction?

####

Then she approached the big flies
Which Anu had made (?) and was carrying.

####

Let [these] flies be the lapis lazuli around my neck
That I may remember it [every (?)] day [and for ever (?)].

[The warrior Enlil] saw the vessel,
And was filled with anger at the Igigi,

All we great Anunnaki
Decided together on an oath.[24]

Where did life escape?
How did man survive in the destruction?

[Anu and Enlil (accurately) blame Enki for helping humankind survive the flood.]

Anu opened his mouth
And addressed the warrior Enlil,

Who but Enki could do this?
[...] I did not (?) reveal the command.

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[24] I.e., that humankind would be destroyed.

[Enki] opened his mouth
[And addressed] the great gods,

I did it [indeed] in front of you!
[I am responsible] for saving life [.]...[..]

####

Impose your penalty [on the criminal]
[And] whoever disregards your command

####

[Enlil accepts the continuance of humankind. He instructs Enki and Mami to work together in organizing human society in such a way that noise is reduced (i.e., a strategy for population control.]

[Enlil] opened his mouth
And addressed Enki the prince,

[Come], summon Nintu, the birth-goddess,
[You] and she, confer in the assembly.

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[An obscure section follows in which society is re-ordered so as to ensure that rampant population growth will not be a recurrent problem in the future. Thus, the role of childless women (possibly priestesses) and demons who steal away infants are discussed. In the non-extant tablets, it is likely that more information concerning the social structure of Babylonian society was given.]

In addition let there be a third category among the peoples,
(Let there be) among the peoples women who bear and women who do not bear.

Let there be among the peoples the Pasittu-demon
To snatch the baby from the lap of her who bore it.

Establish Ugbabtu-women, Entu-women, and Igisitu women,
And let them be taboo and so stop childbirth.

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[The concluding epilogue follows.]

That we brought about [the flood],
But man survived [the destruction].

You, the counsellor of the [great] gods,
At [your] decree I set battle in motion.

For your praise let the Igigi hear
This song and extol your greatness to one another.

I have sung of the flood to all the peoples.
Hear it!

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the issue of greatest concern to those who seek to understand the Atra-hasis Epic is the rationale that justifies the flood. The evil act or acts committed by humankind that warrant their complete annihilation are not outlined in the story. On a literal level, the reader learns that humankind - growing explosively in the nearly 1,200 years since the first people were created - is guilty of "huburu" (uproar) and "rigmu" (noise) which disturb Enlil's sleep. It is common within the scholarly community to interpret the noise as the allegorical equivalent of moral depravity and wickedness.[25] J.J. Finkelstein - for example - explains that "there can be little doubt that the noise of mankind which disturbs Enlil's repose is only the metaphoric or mythological guise for what is clearly meant to be the wicked behavior of man."[26] Similarly, G. Pettinato suggests that "huburu"

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[25] Note, for example, the crime of Sodom and Gomorrah: "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the *outcry* that has reached Me ..." (Gen. 18:20-21).

[26] Cited in: John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 31.

and "rigmu" connote noisiness in the sense of protest or rebellion.[27] Pettinato's thesis holds that humankind shouts out against its lot as hard laborers and providers of food and drink for the gods. Just as the "junior" gods themselves found their toil unbearable at the outset of the myth, human beings are equally outraged by the burdens of their work. They raise a unified (and, obviously, loud and disturbing) voice to call Enlil's attention to their cause.

Another argument pointing to human culpability for the punishment of the flood builds upon the hypothesis that humankind obstinately protested against the injustices of its burdensome workload. After nearly 1,200 years on earth, humankind sought to improve or elevate itself - to evolve from the confines of its role as laborer to the gods. The crime committed may be described as over-ambitiousness or - perhaps - haughtiness. It is posited that the "displeasure of the gods must be explained ... by the nature of [mankind's] activities, suggesting that man had gone beyond the modest role assigned him of working for the gods and was aspiring *ad altiora*, [toward] things not properly man's."[28]

Though the interpretations mentioned above are intuitively appealing, they are distant from the literal text and read much into it. Lambert and Millard note at the outset of their work that the connection between "noise" and "evil" in the Atra-hasis story "is not well founded philologically and depends too much on preconceptions about that mythological being, *der orientalische Mensch.*"[29] Moran likewise notes that "if man's sinfulness were the issue [in the

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[27] Cited in: W.L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," *Biblica* 52, (1971), p. 53.

[28] W.L. Moran, "Form and Interpretation in Atra-hasis," p. 252.

[29] W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, p. vi.

story of Atra-hasis], then he should be charged with sin, but nowhere is man's responsibility expressed in terms of moral culpability. There is not a single mention of sin."[30] Furthermore, nowhere in the story does humankind engage in rebellion or protest against the gods. In fact, they tend to the needs of the gods until the flood is sent, for it is only after the flood - after humankind has been wiped out - that the gods complain of hunger and thirst. Moran notes that Enlil is never threatened by or afraid of humankind (as he was when the "junior" gods stormed his temple at the outset of the story); he is annoyed but not alarmed.[31]

The flood may be understood as a solution to the literal noisiness that resulted from exponential population growth over nearly 1,200 years. Commentators inclined to a literal approach to the text suggest that the Atra-hasis myth is not about evil or sin but rather addresses the problems of over-population and societal management. It is noteworthy that the text repeats a pattern in which noise is associated with population growth. The plagues are introduced by the refrain "When the land extended and the peoples multiplied, The land was bellowing like a bull."[32] It may be assumed that society became disorganized and chaotic, unable to effectively accommodate an overload of inhabitants. The societal chaos is perhaps an intentional parallel to the primeval chaos that existed in the cosmos before the gods established order. The notion of overpopulation as the real concern of the Atra-hasis story is supported by the changes that Enki and Mami instituted in the post-diluvian society: certain women would not bear children or marry

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[30] W.L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," p. 56.

[31] Ibid., p. 54.

[32] See Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, pp. 67 and 73.

and others would have their babies stolen away by demons. The practical effect of these measures is population control.

Certainly, though, the Atra-hasis myth must be read on a deeper level. The story is - at its most significant core - a cosmogonic tale that describes the creation of man and establishes both his place in the universe and his relationship with the gods. Moran understands the central theme of Atra-hasis as a study of "what we may call the most essential man: his very being, his origin, his function, and his experience ... of forces in a tension that allow him to be, but not without measure."[33] At the close of the Atra-hasis myth, the gods initiate a plan to regulate human society and - in doing so - a harmony is established between the gods and humankind. Moran observes that the societal order demanded by Enlil and crafted by Enki and Mami "represents a compromise agreeable to both parties of the struggle that had gone on at the highest level of the pantheon and had led to the Deluge, Enlil supported by Anu on one side, Enki and the mother-goddess on the other."[34] In the new order, humankind gains a stature of unforseen prominence. The gods acknowledge that their own well-being is intricately connected to the perpetuation of humankind.

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[33] W.L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," p. 58.

[34] Ibid., p. 59.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE GILGAMESH EPIC[1]

TWO VERSIONS: OLD BABYLONIAN AND NEO-ASSYRIAN/STANDARD

The Old Babylonian Version: The Gilgamesh Epic draws from a series of independent Sumerian tales dating to the third millennium Ur III Dynasty (ca. 2112-2004 BCE). Many of the ancient Sumerian tales - recorded on tablets discovered at Shuruppakh and Tell Abu Salabikh in modern-day southern Iraq - described the feats and heroic deeds of a semi-divine monarch named Gilgamesh. The tales were initially spread through an oral tradition and were first transcribed onto clay tablets ca. 2000 BCE. The oldest Sumerian tablets - those dating to the final centuries of the third millennium - have been recovered only in small number; the study of the oldest Gilgamesh tales thus relies upon seventeenth- and eighteenth-century BCE copies of the "original" tablets written perhaps six hundred years earlier. Tigay notes that the Sumerian tablets which first mentioned the adventures of the hero Gilgamesh - the "raw material" woven together later to create the Gilgamesh Epic - are extant today only as "transcriptions of older tablets of the outgoing third millennium."[2] Several of the tales reconstructed from the (seventeenth- and eighteenth-century copies of the) Sumerian tablets are reflected in the oldest version of the Gilgamesh Epic (the Old Babylonian version - ca. 1750-1600 BCE). The Old Babylonian

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[1] For a full discussion of the various Gilgamesh tablets and the development of the tale from its Sumerian origins (ca. 2100 BCE) to the Neo-Assyrian recensions (ca. 680 BCE), see: Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

[2] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 12.

Gilgamesh Epic draws most significantly from four of the older, independent Gilgamesh tales that circulated in Sumer: Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living; Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld; Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven; and The Death of Gilgamesh.

The Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic has been pieced together from fragments unearthed at sites throughout southern Mesopotamia. The oldest version of the Epic is the end result of a process dating to the early second millennium in which the Sumerian Gilgamesh traditions were organized, edited, and transformed into a single, unified literary work. The Old Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic was written in Akkadian, and - although it resembled the Sumerian tales in plot structure - the Epic is "clearly a work of great originality [written in] poetry of remarkable freshness and simplicity."[3] The Old Babylonian author(s) of the Epic re-cast the Sumerian adventures of Gilgamesh within the framework of one theme pervasive throughout the entire myth: the hero-king's pursuit of immortality.

The Neo-Assyrian/Standard Babylonian Version: The Gilgamesh Epic was immensely popular throughout the ancient Near East. Tigay observes that "by the Middle Babylonian Period (1600-1000 BCE), the epic was known internationally, both in Akkadian and in Hittite and Hurrian translations."[4] Likewise, Sasson comments that "by the Late Bronze Age, Gilgamesh's adventures had come into full vogue in the Near East."[5] Fragments of the Gilgamesh story have

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[3] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), p. 2328.

[4] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 243.

[5] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (1992), s.v. "Gilgamesh Epic," by Jack M. Sasson, p. 1025.

been found far from Mesopotamia in cities such as Megiddo (Canaan) and Emar (Syria).

The "standard" version of the Gilgamesh Epic dates to the first millennium, ca. 1000 BCE. This "late" form of the text is thought to be edited by Sin-leqe-unninni, a scribe from the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk. Although Sin-leqe-unninni crafted the "standard" edition of Gilgamesh ca. 1100 or 1000 BCE, the extant fragments of his work are seventh-century BCE copies found at Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh. The Gilgamesh fragments discovered at Ashurbanipal's library were unearthed during archaeological excavations which began in the mid-1800's. Various pieces of Gilgamesh tablets dating to the era of the Neo-Assyrian Empire were also found at other sites in ancient Assyria (Assur and Calah), Babylonia, and southern Turkey (Sultantepe). Though spread throughout the ancient Near East, the Neo-Assyrian Gilgamesh fragments extant today are essentially identical (perhaps near-verbatim copies) to those at Ashurbanipal's library. The remarkable consistency between the Neo-Assyrian Gilgamesh fragments found at different sites suggests that "with the late version, the epic achieved its maximal stability in content and wording, with only a small number of relatively insignificant variants separating its manuscripts."[6] Tigay hypothesizes that the Neo-Assyrian version of the Gilgamesh Epic - the "late" version vis-a-vis the Old Babylonian tablets - became standardized and "so widely accepted in the first millennium that scribes were no longer able or willing to modify it in any substantial way."[7]

The Neo-Assyrian/Standard version of Gilgamesh recounts the myth in twelve tablets artfully connected through structure and theme. Three-fifths of the Standard manuscript is extant

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[6] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 245.

[7] Ibid., p. 246.

today; the missing text is reconstructed based on the Old Babylonian tablets and well-attested patterns in ancient Mesopotamian literature. The process by which the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh text informs the Standard version is limited, however, for the two versions - though they share major characters and events - "differ appreciably ... in how they begin or end, and in the way they manipulate individual scenes. They also diverge in their perspectives on life, their controlling metaphors, and the themes which give integrity to the whole narrative."[8] A significant difference between the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh and the Standard version is the wholesale omission of the flood story in the former. For this reason, the Standard version (specifically, the Tablet XI flood story) is reviewed in this paper.

THE GILGAMESH EPIC: PLOT SUMMARY

The Epic relates the adventures and maturation of Gilgamesh, the semi-divine ruler of the southern Mesopotamian city-state Uruk. The tale begins with a hymn celebrating the strength and wisdom of its hero and recounting his mighty deeds; the description of Gilgamesh and his accomplishments are described in "legendary and mythological colors."[9] He is renowned in Uruk for building the city's walls and its Eanna temple to honor the goddess Ishtar. The king's superhuman strength and tireless ambition become oppressive to the people of Uruk; they pray for the gods to intervene. The man-beast Enkidu is created and sent to "distract" Gilgamesh, to

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[8] Jack M. Sasson, "Gilgamesh Epic," p. 1025.

[9] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 4.

"refocus his energies and ambitions."[10] After an initial struggle, Gilgamesh and Enkidu become friends.

Driven by an obsession to build an enduring reputation and thereby gain a measure of immortality, Gilgamesh urges Enkidu to assist him in slaying the Cedar Forest monster, Humbaba. Once the monster is killed and the cedars are captured as "booty," the goddess Ishtar seeks to marry Gilgamesh. The hero refuses her proposal, and a vengeful Ishtar sends the Bull of Heaven to attack Gilgamesh and his city. With characteristic hubris, Gilgamesh and Enkidu vanquish the Bull of Heaven and display its dissected organs before the gods. A furious Ishtar forewarned, "Woe to Gilgamesh who slandered me and killed the Bull of Heaven."[11] Nonetheless, Gilgamesh and Enkidu paraded through Uruk as courageous and valiant heroes.

The gods reacted with defiance to such mockery. Enkidu learns in a dream that he will die in retribution for the murders of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. After a severe illness that lingers for twelve days, Enkidu does indeed die. His death serves as the catalyst for a major transformation in Gilgamesh's life. Overcome with grief and keenly aware of the transience of human existence, Gilgamesh seeks immortality. He embarks upon a journey to visit with the lone human being who gained immortality - the survivor of the primordial flood - Utnapishtim. Cloistered in a fantastic, subterranean netherworld beyond the Waters of Death, Utnapishtim is rather ordinary. He speaks with Gilgamesh about the certainty of death mandated by the gods after the flood and his own status as the last human being to be granted immortality.

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[10] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2328.

[11] Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 55.

Utnapishtim - having dashed Gilgamesh's hopes of achieving immortality - recounts the story of the great flood. To illustrate the effect of immortality, Utnapishtim challenges Gilgamesh to stay awake for seven days, but the hero promptly falls asleep. He has grown to accept his ultimate fate as a human being. Before leaving Utnapishtim's netherworld, Gilgamesh is told of a plant that - if consumed - would restore his youth. He acquires the plant, but it is stolen away by a serpent. He returns to Uruk and marvels at his material, human accomplishments: the city's extraordinary walls and its majestic Ishtar temple. The return to Uruk brings the story "full circle" to the point at which it began. Though Gilgamesh journeyed through a mythological world - a supernatural realm of monsters and immortals - he returned "to a definable, measurable, human world, a world indeed made by man."[12]

TABLET XI: THE FLOOD STORY[13]

In the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, Utnapishtim recounts to Gilgamesh the story of the great flood. The lengthy tale (which exceeds 180 lines) is brought by Utnapishtim to explain how he attained immortality. In telling the flood tale, Utnapishtim promises to reveal "a thing that is hidden, a secret of the gods:"[14] the details of the great primeval cataclysm sent by the deities to obliterate humankind. Utnapishtim was saved from the flood by heeding the advice of his patron god Ea. After the deluge, the gods granted him immortality and a permanent home in

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[12] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2335.

[13] A photograph and hand-written copy of the Tablet may be found in Appendix II.

[14] Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 97.

the remote "Mouth of the Rivers." But eternal life was - thereafter - deemed inaccessible to human beings, for Utnapishtim shows Gilgamesh that "his own attainment of immortality was due to a set of unique, unrepeatable circumstances."[15]

Upon reading the Gilgamesh account of the flood, it is readily apparent that the story seems digressive and tangential to Utnapishtim's message emphasizing the certainty of death. Moran observes that the flood story "seriously interrupts not only the flow of dialogue between Utnapishtim and Gilgamesh but [also] the otherwise smooth and natural transition from the end of Tablet 10 ..."[16] Possibly, the flood story was intended to serve as a digression - perhaps to create or to minimize suspense.[17] As Utnapishtim begins the story, suspense is heightened. The hero - who has endured a journey to the netherworld to learn if immortality was possible - will not be granted an immediate answer to his query, but will learn about the flood instead. As the flood story itself develops; suspense is relaxed, as the reader's attention is distracted away from Gilgamesh's burning question about life and death. Though the flood story may serve a literary end, it was more likely a later addition to the original Epic "told for its own sake."[18] In support of this claim, it is noteworthy that the flood account is absent in the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh, but the hero's netherworld visit to Utnapishtim is not.

Undoubtedly, the surest evidence that the Gilgamesh flood story was a later addition to

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[15] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 239.

[16] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2333.

[17] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 240.

[18] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2333.

the epic is its close resemblance to the Epic of Atra-hasis. Within the scholarly community, it is agreed that "in the case of the flood story, there is no question but that Atra-hasis served as the source for Tablet XI of the late version [of Gilgamesh]."[19] The flood episode in the Gilgamesh Epic in large part reproduces the flood story as told in Atra-hasis, though the text is shortened and somewhat reworked. Four critical points demonstrate convincingly that the Gilgamesh flood narrative is dependent on the Atra-hasis Epic:[20]

(1): In certain instances, the wording in both epics is nearly identical. For example:

I cannot reside in your city (?),
Nor set foot on Enlil's earth.
Gilgamesh XI, lines 40-41

I can[not] live in [your ...],
I cannot [set my feet on] the earth of Enlil.
Atra-hasis III-i-lines 47-48

and:

All day long the South Wind blew ...,
Blowing fast, submerging the mountain in water,
overwhelming the people like an attack.
No one could see his fellow,
they could not recognize each other in the torrent.
Gilgamesh XI, lines 109-112

[....] the flood [set out],
Its might came upon the peoples [like a battle array].

One person did [not] see another,
They were [not] recognizable in the destruction.
Atra-hasis III-iii-lines 11-14

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[19] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 216.

[20] A full discussion on this topic may be found in Jeffrey H. Tigay's *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, Chapter 12: "The Flood Story," p. 214 ff.

Nearly fifty of the one-hundred-and-eighty-two lines of the Gilgamesh flood story are parallel in wording and structure to Tablet III of the Atra-hasis Epic as illustrated above.

(2): The flood story in Gilgamesh is "incidental to the main theme" and absent from the earliest (Old Babylonian) version of the epic; whereas the flood narrative in Atra-hasis is "an integral part of the plot ... already ... in the Old Babylonian period."[21]

(3): The list of gods mentioned at the beginning of the Gilgamesh flood story is identical in content and order to that of Atra-hasis:

Their Father Anu uttered the oath (of secrecy),
Valiant Enlil was their Adviser,
Ninurta was their Chamberlain,
Ennugi was their Minister of Canals.
Gilgamesh XI, lines 15-18

and:

Anu, their father, was the king;
Their counsellor was the warrior Enlil;

Their chamberlain was Ninurta;
And their sheriff Ennugi.
Atra-hasis I-i-lines 7-10

In the Atra-hasis Epic, the four gods mentioned in the opening stanzas of the first tablet - Anu, Enlil, Ninurta, and Ennugi - play essential roles in at least one of the two principal sub-plots of the myth: the stories of the flood and the creation of humankind. While Anu, Enlil, and Ninurta are important characters in both Atra-hasis sub-plots, Ennugi - the throne-bearer of Enlil - figures prominently only in the Atra-hasis account of human creation. Nonetheless, Ennugi is retained in the Gilgamesh flood story, though he is superfluous to the deluge myth in both of the Babylonian

[21] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 216.

epics under discussion. Similarly, the Gilgamesh Epic retains Anu, though his role is negligible in that myth (as compared with the Atra-hasis story in which Anu was blamed for bringing the flood). It therefore seems apparent that "the editor of the Gilgamesh flood story simply took the list [of gods] over bodily from Atra-hasis, rather than composing a new one of his own."[22] It is for this reason that Ninurta and Ennugi are listed (incorrectly) in the Gilgamesh Epic as key figures in bringing about the flood. In fact, they were "borrowed" from Atra-hasis where they were essential *not* in bringing about the flood *but rather* in the creation of humankind. This latter theme is not at all discussed in Gilgamesh.

(4): The Gilgamesh Epic consistently refers to the survivor of the flood (with whom Gilgamesh visits to learn the secret of immortality) as Utnapishtim. In one instance, however, Utnapishtim is "mistakenly" called Atra-hasis (Tablet XI, line 187).[23] Though Utnapishtim and Atra-hasis play the same role in the two flood stories, the "slip" where Utnapishtim is inadvertently called Atra-hasis points to Gilgamesh's borrowing from the Epic of Atra-hasis.

THE GILGAMESH FLOOD STORY: THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Ea: The Akkadian name of the Sumerian god Enki. Notifies Utnapishtim about the gods' decision to send a flood (and thereby saves humankind) and chastises Enlil after the flood for seeking to destroy humankind in such a manner.

Gilgamesh: Information gleaned from the Sumerian King List and from inscriptions on buildings

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[22] Ibid., p. 216.

[23] See: Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 103.

and monuments unearthed by archaeologists indicates that - as a historical figure - Gilgamesh was the fifth king of the First Dynasty of Uruk (in Sumer). He lived in the early or middle third millennium (ca. 2700-2500 BCE), and was known for building the walls of the city-state Uruk and a temple (called Eanna) to honor the goddess Ishtar. The earliest extant historical data that shed light on Gilgamesh's tenure on the throne - limited to a handful of sources - post-date the hero's rulership by at least five hundred years. The historical record supports Gilgamesh's "existence, his date, and therefore his association with certain historical figures, his reconstruction of a shrine [to Ishtar], and the epic's statement that he built the wall of Uruk."[24] The greatest source of information concerning the life and adventures of Gilgamesh is the Gilgamesh Epic itself which - in terms of historical reliability - is suspect in that the story is "so overlaid with legendary and mythical motifs that one can only speculate about their possible historical basis."[25]

Gilgamesh is the main character of the Epic. The son of the goddess Ninsun and Lugalbanda (the divinized ruler of Uruk), Gilgamesh is described as superhuman and partly divine. His name translates literally as "the old man is a young man."[26] The epic traces his search for eternal life and - ultimately - his coming to terms with his mortality.

Urshanabi: The boatman who guided Gilgamesh across the "Mouth of the Rivers" to Utnapishtim's remote netherworld home and accompanied the hero on his return to Uruk.

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[24] Ibid., p. 15.

[25] Ibid., p. 241.

[26] Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 322.

Utnapishtim: His name translates literally as "he found life."[27] The lone human granted immortality by the gods, he and his family were the only survivors of the great flood. He recounted the flood story to Gilgamesh as a means of explaining that human immortality was no longer possible. Dalley identifies Utnapishtim as the biblical Noah in noting, "it is just possible that an abbreviation of (Uta)-na'ish(tim) was pronounced 'Noah' in Palestine from very early times."[28]

THE GILGAMESH FLOOD STORY: THE PLOT[29]

The myth as presented herein is taken from Maureen Gallery Kovacs' *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1989).[30] In consideration of length, portions of the Eleventh Tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic as translated and reconstructed by Kovacs will be omitted based on relevance to the present study. Such omissions are indicated by a series of pound signs (#) at various points in the story. Before each section of text is presented, a brief summary of the events to take place will be provided. Comments on the text will appear in detailed footnotes.

PLOT SUMMARY - FIRST SECTION

Gilgamesh has journeyed to the remote "Mouth of the Rivers" to learn the secret of

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[27] Ibid., p. 330.

[28] Ibid., p. 2.

[29] For extensive commentary and line-by-line discussion of the Gilgamesh Epic, see: John Gardner and John Maier, *Gilgamesh*, (New York: A. Knopf, 1984).

[30] In the Kovacs translation, three ellipsis points indicates a missing word or line; italicized words indicate a gap in the text filled (with relative certainty) by context or conjecture; a question mark in parentheses indicates a gap in the text filled with less certainty; and words within parentheses have been added by the translator to clarify a passage.

eternal life from Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh is at first surprised that Utnapishtim is so ordinary, as he had expected to meet a figure of great size and stature. In answering Gilgamesh's question about the ability of human beings to attain immortality; Utnapishtim narrates the flood story, which he describes as "a secret of the gods." He tells Gilgamesh about: the gods' decision to send the flood; Ea's intervention to save Utnapishtim and his family; and the construction, loading, and launching of Utnapishtim's boat.

Gilgamesh spoke to Utnapishtim, the Faraway:
"I have been looking at you,
but your appearance is not strange - you are like me![31]
You yourself are not different - you are like me!
My mind was resolved to fight with you,[32]
(*but instead?*) my arm lies useless over you.
Tell me, how is it that you stand in the Assembly of the Gods, and have found life?"[33]

Utnapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,
a secret of the gods[34] I will tell you!
Shuruppak, a city that you surely know,
situated on the banks of the Euphrates,[35]

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[31] Gilgamesh is surprised that the appearance of the immortal Utnapishtim is not different than ordinary human beings.

[32] Gilgamesh presumed that the secret of immortality would only be revealed to him by coercing Utnapishtim through physical might.

[33] The Assembly of the Gods was convened in primordial, post-diluvian times to grant immortality to Utnapishtim. Such a meeting of the gods - common in the distant primordial past - is no longer possible in Gilgamesh's day; thus, the hero will never attain immortality.

[34] I.e., the story of the flood. Inherent therein is a glimpse into the ways of the gods and knowledge about the very earliest primeval days before the flood.

[35] The ancient city of Shuruppak is located in the southern Mesopotamian region of Sumer.

that city was very old, and there were gods inside it.
The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to inflict the Flood.[36]
Their father Anu uttered the oath (of secrecy),
Valiant Enlil was their Adviser,
Ninurta was their Chamberlain,
Ennugi was their Minister of Canals.
Ea, the Clever Prince (?), was under oath with them,
so he repeated their talk to the reed house:[37]
"Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
Hear, O reed house! Understand, O wall!
O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartu[38]:
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!
Make all living beings go up into the boat.[39]
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:
its length must correspond to its width.
Roof it over like the Apsu."

I understood and spoke to my lord, Ea:
My lord, thus is the command which you have uttered
I will heed and will do it.
But what shall I answer the city, the populace, and the Elders?[40]

Ea spoke, commanding me, his servant:

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[36] Note that no specific reason is given for the flood.

[37] As in the Atra-hasis Epic, Ea (=Enki) cannot directly warn Utnapishtim of the coming flood. He therefore speaks to Utnapishtim through the walls of his reed hut "so as not to violate the agreement of the gods [to bring the flood]" (Gardner and Meier, p. 229).

[38] I.e., Utnapishtim. Ea is clearly addressing his words *to* Utnapishtim *through* the reed wall.

[39] In addition to Utnapishtim and his family, the seed of all living things is also to be brought on board the boat. This instruction is *explicit* in the Gilgamesh Epic, but *implicit* in Atra-hasis where Enki's command is simply to "save life." In both myths, animals are brought on board to be saved from the flood.

[40] Utnapishtim acknowledges that he will need the community's help in building the boat, but he cannot inform the people of the forthcoming flood.

You, well then, this is what you must say to them:
It appears that Enlil is rejecting me
so I cannot reside in your *city* (?),
nor set foot on Enlil's earth.
I will go down to the Apsu to live with my lord, Ea,
and upon you he will rain down abundance,
a profusion of fowl, myriad (?) fishes.
He will bring to you a harvest of wealth,
in the morning he will let loaves of bread shower down,
and in the evening a rain of wheat![41]

Just as dawn began to glow[42]
the land assembled *around me* -
the carpenter carried his hatchet,
the reed worker carried his (flattening) stone,
... the men ...
...
The child carried the pitch,
the weak brought whatever else was needed.

On the fifth day I laid out her exterior.
It was a field in area,[43]
its walls were each 10 times 12 cubits in height,
the sides of its top were of equal length, 10 times 12 cubits each.
I laid out its (interior) structure and drew a picture of it (?).
I provided it with six decks,
thus dividing it into seven (levels).
The inside of it I divided into nine (compartments).
I drove plugs (to keep out) water in its middle part.
I saw to the punting poles and laid in what was necessary.

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[41] A play on words is evident in the use of "rain down" and "shower down." As in the Atra-hasis Epic, Utnapishtim offers the excuse that the boat will be used for him to travel to the subterranean seas to be with his patron god Ea (=Enki) who has had a falling out with Enlil. Punning on the real rain-showers that will soon fall on the people, Utnapishtim assures the townsfolk that Ea will send down a bounty of wealth and provisions.

[42] This formula, repeated throughout the Epic, introduces a new episode or a subtle shift in the plot line. Here, preparations for the flood begin.

[43] The boat is shaped as a cube, "probably a theological allusion to the dimensions of a ziggurat, the Mesopotamian stepped temple tower" (Kovacs, p. 99). The following passage describes the physical layout and construction of the boat.

Three times 3,600 (units) of raw bitumen I poured into the bitumen kiln,
three times 3,600 (units of) pitch ... into it,
there were three times 3,600 porters of casks who carried (vegetable) oil,
apart from the 3,600 (units of) oil which they consumed (?)
and two times 3,600 (units of) oil which the boatman stored away.

I butchered oxen for *the meat* (?),
and day upon day I slaughtered sheep.[44]
I gave the workmen (?) ale, beer, oil, and wine, as if it were river water,
so they could make a party like the New Year's Festival.
... and I set my hand to the oiling (?).
The boat was finished by sunset.

The launching was very difficult.[45]
They had to keep carrying a runway of poles front to back,
until two-thirds of it had gone into the water (?).
Whatever I had, I loaded on it:
whatever silver I had, I loaded on it,
whatever gold I had, I loaded on it.
All the living beings that I had, I loaded on it,[46]
I had all my kith and kin go up into the boat,
all the beasts and animals of the field[47] and the craftsmen I had go up.

Shamash[48] had set a stated time:
"In the morning I will let loaves of bread shower down,
and in the evening a rain of wheat!

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[44] It is unclear if the slaughtering was done for cultic and sacrificial purposes or simply to feed the shipbuilders.

[45] At this point in the Atra-hasis Epic, the flood hero invites the townspeople to a banquet. Possibly, such an act was deemed insensitive (and therefore omitted from Gilgamesh) in light of the fate that the people would suffer the next day.

[46] Utnapishtim loads the boat with all his possessions despite Ea's earlier instruction to "abandon wealth" and "spurn possessions." In the Atra-hasis Epic, the myth's namesake - though told to "spurn property" - similarly fills the boat with valuable personal belongings.

[47] Utnapishtim was instructed earlier to "make all living beings go up into the boat."

[48] The Akkadian sun god tells Utnapishtim when to board the boat. Tigay notes that Shamash "had played no real role in the Atra-hasis version. [Yet], [s]ince he is an important character in Gilgamesh, this change may be the work of an editor of the latter" (p. 231).

Go inside the boat, seal the entry!"
That stated time had arrived.
In the morning he let loaves of bread shower down,[49]
and in the evening a rain of wheat.
I watched the appearance of the weather -
the weather was frightful to behold![50]
I went into the boat and sealed the entry.
For the caulking of the boat, to Puzuramurri, the boatman,
I gave the palace together with its contents.

PLOT SUMMARY - SECOND SECTION

The rain and wind-storms that cause the flood are described in ominous tones. So severe is the weather that the gods themselves are terrified. They are grief-stricken by the widespread destruction and loss of human life. The flood raged for six days and seven nights, after which the boat came to rest on Mt. Nimush. Utnapishtim is moved to tears upon viewing the devastation left in the wake of the flood. He sends from the boat a dove, a swallow, and a raven to determine if the waters have subsided. When it is apparent that the flood has ended, Utnapishtim prepares a series of sacrifices and offerings for the gods.

Just as dawn began to glow
there arose from the horizon a black cloud.
Adad[51] rumbled inside of it,
before him went Shullat[52] and Hanish,[53]
heralds going over mountain and land.

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[49] This sign assures Utnapishtim that the coming disaster is imminent.

[50] Utnapishtim is terror-stricken both by the ominous rains and by his knowledge of the impending calamity.

[51] The storm god or thunder god who serves the same function in Atra-hasis.

[52] Literally, "despoilment."

[53] Literally, "submission." The servant of the weather-god.

Erragal[54] pulled out the mooring poles,
forth went Ninurta and made the dikes overflow.
The Anunnaki[55] lifted up the torches,
setting the land ablaze with their flare.[56]
Stunned shock over Adad's deeds overtook the heavens,
and turned to blackness all that had been light.
The ... land shattered like a ... pot.[57]

All day long the South Wind blew ...,
blowing fast, *submerging the* mountain *in water*,
overwhelming *the people* like an attack.
No one could see his fellow,
they could not recognize each other in the torrent.
The gods were frightened by the Flood,[58]
and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu.
The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching by the outer wall.

Ishtar[59] shrieked like a woman in childbirth,

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[54] I.e., Nergal, chief god of the underworld.

[55] "Sumerian group term for the old, chthonic deities of fertility and the Underworld, headed by Anu" (Dalley, p. 318).

[56] Oppenheim notes that "The pulling out of the *tarkullu*-beam [in opening the dikes], the giving of light signals to announce that the water is beginning to pour into the irrigation area characterize the beginning of the annual inundation. But instead of life and abundance, this heavenly water spelled death for mankind" ("Mesopotamian Mythology II" in *Orientalia* 17 (1948), p. 54).

[57] Identified by Gardner and Maier as a "traditional simile" (see p. 237).

[58] The gods themselves are terrified of the flood. It is noteworthy that the parallel text in the Atra-hasis Epic indicates that "the great gods were sitting in thirst and hunger" (see Lambert and Millard, p. 95). In Gilgamesh, all references to divine thirst and hunger are eliminated; though after the flood, the gods swarm to Utnapishtim's offerings "like flies" (see Tigay, pp. 224-229).

[59] The goddess of love and war. The parallel lament in Atra-hasis is spoken by the mother-goddess Mami. Here, Ishtar is described in maternal terms, but the verse "No sooner have I given birth to my dear people ..." is not to be understood literally. Ishtar's lament is far shorter than Mami's, "a fine example not of expansion [characteristic of late Babylonian texts] but of abridgment" (Gardner and Maier, p. 237).

the sweet-voiced Mistress of the Gods wailed:
"The olden days have alas turned to clay,
because I said evil[60] things in the Assembly of the Gods!
How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods,
ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people?!
No sooner have I given birth to my dear people
than they fill the sea like so many fish!"

The gods - those of the Anunnaki - were weeping with her,
the gods humbly sat weeping, sobbing with grief (?),
their lips burning, they have contracted fever.[61]

Six days and seven nights
came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land.
When the seventh day arrived, the storm was pounding,
the flood was a war - struggling with itself like a woman writhing (in labor).[62]

The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind (and) flood stopped up.
I looked around all day long - quiet had set in[63]
and all the human beings had turned to clay!
The terrain was as flat as a roof.
I opened a vent and fresh air (daylight?) fell upon the side of my nose.

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[60] Akk. *lemutta* (repeated in following line) = "evil." The parallel line of Mami's lament in Atra-hasis reads: "In the assembly of the gods How did I, with them, command total destruction" (see Lambert and Millard, p. 95). Mami blames herself for allowing "total destruction," whereas Ishtar blames herself for "evil." This change represents "a significant shift in keeping with the addition of the motif of 'evil' in the ... [late version of] Gilgamesh" (Gardner and Maier, p. 238).

[61] The Gilgamesh editor has omitted several lines from the parallel text in Atra-hasis. Each line that has been excised refers to the thirst and hunger of the gods; for example, Atra-hasis' claim that the gods during the flood "were suffering cramp from hunger" (see Lambert and Millard, p. 97) is left out of Gilgamesh. Tigay cites these revisions as "a deliberate editorial act" (p. 226) and notes that such "modifications add up to a systematic elimination of implications that the gods starved and thirsted during the flood" (p. 228). (Note: The translation of this line is taken from Tigay, p. 226).

[62] The Atra-hasis text that likely described the flood hero's actions in the immediate aftermath of the deluge (possibly, as in Gilgamesh, weeping and the sending out of three birds) is non-extant. A lengthy gap in the Atra-hasis text exists between the rain-storms and the sacrifices that Atra-hasis offers after the flood.

[63] A great sense of calm and tranquility sets in after the flood.

I fell to my knees[64] and sat weeping,
tears streaming down the side of my nose.

I looked around for coastlines in the expanse of the sea,
and at twelve leagues there emerged a region (of land).
On Mt. Nimush[65] the boat lodged firm,
Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.
One day and a second Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.
A third day, a fourth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.
A fifth day, a sixth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway.

When a seventh day arrived
I sent forth a dove and released it.
The dove went off, but came back to me;
no perch was visible so it circled back to me.

I sent forth a swallow and released it.
The swallow went off, but came back to me;
no perch was visible so it circled back to me.

I sent forth a raven and released it.
The raven went off, and saw the waters slither back.
It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me.[66]

Then I sent out everything in all directions and sacrificed (a sheep).[67]

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[64] A posture of mourning.

[65] "[M]odern Pir Omar Gudrun, south of the lower Zab in Turkey" (Gardner and Maier, p. 238).

[66] Utnapishtim's sending out the birds is a striking parallel to Noah's actions in Gen. 8:7-13.

[67] The comment of footnote #61 is relevant here. Gilgamesh eliminates or reworks Atra-hasis' references to divine hunger and thirst. The Atra-hasis notion that human beings provided food and drink for the gods (and, consequently, their hunger and thirst as humankind was wiped out in the flood) is absent in Gilgamesh. The Gilgamesh Epic nowhere suggests that the gods went hungry or were thirsty during the flood. Gardner and Maier remark: "Noteworthy is the absence of the starving gods eating and drinking [Utnapishtim's sacrifices]; here they only smell the savor of the offering" (p. 242). Such reworking of Atra-hasis by the Gilgamesh editor is, according to Tigay, "unprecedented and startling, for the dependence of the gods upon man for food is an axiom of Mesopotamian religious thought" (p. 229). In the footnotes that follow, the

I offered incense in front of the mountain-ziggurat.[68]
Seven and seven cult vessels I put in place,
and (into the fire) underneath (or: into their bowls) I poured reeds, cedar, and myrtle.
The gods smelled the savor,
the gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods, like flies, about the one who offered the sacrifice gathered.[69]

PLOT SUMMARY - THIRD SECTION

The mother-goddess, Belet-ili, laments the annihilation of humankind in the flood and accuses Enlil of wanton and irrational behavior in bringing the deluge. Initially, Enlil is unfazed. In fact, upon learning that not all human beings died in the flood waters, he reacts with fury. Ea condemns Enlil for the flood and delivers a long speech in which he suggests to Enlil a new standard for justice. Perhaps in response to Ea's speech (or, simply, on a whim), Enlil grants immortality and divine status to Utnapishtim and his wife.

Just then[70] Beletili[71] arrived
She lifted up the large flies (beads) which Anu had made for his enjoyment (?):
"You gods, as surely as I shall not forget this lapis lazuli around my neck,
may I be mindful of these days, and never forget them![72]

Atra-hasis text (Tablet III, column v) will be quoted for the purpose of comparison with parallel Gilgamesh text.

[68] Compare Atra-hasis: "Providing food [..." (Lambert and Millard, p. 99).

[69] Compare Atra-hasis: "They gathered [like flies] over the offering" (Lambert and Millard, p. 99). In Gilgamesh, the gods gather around Utnapishtim himself, *not* his sacrifices. (Note: The translation of this line is taken from Tigay, p. 227).

[70] Compare Atra-hasis: "[After] they had eaten the offering." (Lambert and Millard, p. 99).

[71] I.e., Mami, the mother-goddess.

[72] As in Atra-hasis, the mother-goddess wears a necklace of lapis lazuli flies in memory of the flood victims. The necklace symbolizes the time when "her offspring were floating on the surface of the waters like flies" (Lambert and Millard, p. 13).

The gods may come to the incense offering,
but Enlil may not come to the incense offering,
because without considering he brought about the Flood
and consigned my people to annihilation.[73]

Just then Enlil arrived.
He saw the boat and became furious,
he was filled with rage at the Igigi gods:[74]
"Where did a living being escape?
No man was to survive the annihilation."

Ninurta[75] spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:
"Who else but Ea could devise such a thing?
It is Ea who knows every machination!"

Ea spoke to Valiant Enlil, saying:
"It is *you*, O Valiant One, who is the Sage of the Gods.
How, how could *you* bring about a Flood without consideration?[76]
Charge the violation to the violator,
charge the offense to the offender,[77]

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[73] In Atra-hasis, Anu is also implicated in bringing about the flood. Compare Atra-hasis: "Where has Anu the president gone? Has Enlil come to the incense? They, who did not consider but brought about a flood And consigned the peoples to destruction?" (Lambert and Millard, p. 99). Tigay cites the change in Gilgamesh as a "theological modification" (p. 231).

[74] In contrast to the lament of the mother-goddess, Enlil is furious that a remnant of humankind actually survived the flood.

[75] In the Atra-hasis Epic, it is Anu who points to Enki (=Ea) as the culprit guilty of saving Atrahasis (=Utnapishtim).

[76] "Ea chides the angry Enlil for his irrational act [i.e., the flood]" (Gardner and Maier, p. 243). No reason for the flood is ever given.

[77] "In one line, Ea establishes an ethical norm that rids mankind of the burden of collective responsibility" (Gardner and Maier, p. 243). In Atra-hasis, Enki express the same idea in his reprimand to Enlil, "Impose your penalty [on the criminal]" (Lambert and Millard, p. 101). There is no evidence in Gilgamesh that humankind was - as a group - immoral, sinful, or criminal. In a fair system of justice, only the one who commits the transgression should be punished. Nonetheless, in Babylonian mythology, "the gods were not only inscrutable but held humanity to norms of behavior that they would not reveal and that humans could not discover" (Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2334).

but be compassionate lest (mankind) be cut off,
be patient lest *they be killed.*

Instead of your bringing on the Flood,
would that a lion had appeared to diminish the people!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood,
would that a wolf had appeared to diminish the people!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood,
would that famine had occurred to slay the land!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood,
would that (pestilent) Erra[78] had appeared to ravage the land![79]

It was not I who revealed the secret of the Great Gods,
I (only) made a dream appear to Atrahasis[80], and (thus) he heard the secret of the gods.

Now then! The deliberation should be about him!"

Enlil went up inside the boat
and, grasping my hand, made me go up.
He had my wife go up and kneel by my side.
He touched our forehead and, standing between us, he blessed us:
"Previously Utnapishtim was a human being.
But now let Utnapishtim and his wife become like us, the gods![81]

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[78] The god of war, hunting, and plague.

[79] Gardner and Maier note here the "four terrors of mankind - the lion, the wolf, famine, and plague" (p. 243).

[80] As noted above, the editor "slips" here and mistakenly writes "Atra-hasis" instead of "Utnapishtim."

[81] It is unclear why Enlil suddenly decides to grant immortality to Utnapishtim and his wife. On this point, Moran observes that "the gift of immortality strikes one as no less capricious or mysterious than the sending of the Flood. The god Enlil ... who only moments before, on arriving and finding a few survivors, had become quite enraged, now not only spares these survivors but makes them immortal. The conclusion of the story makes no more sense than the beginning. We start with an apparently arbitrary destruction of life and end with an equally arbitrary extension of life into eternity" (in "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2334.)

Let Utnapishtim reside far away, at the Mouth of the Rivers."[82]

They took us far away and settled us at the Mouth of the Rivers.

PLOT SUMMARY - FOURTH SECTION

After narrating the flood story and describing the unique (and unrepeatable) circumstances under which he attained immortality, Utnapishtim tests Gilgamesh's "immortality potential" by challenging him to stay awake for seven days. Gilgamesh accepts the challenge, but promptly falls asleep for seven days. Utnapishtim's wife symbolically marks the seven day period with decaying loaves of bread. Roused by Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh awakes and begins to acknowledge his mortality.

"Now then, who will convene the gods on your behalf,
that you may find the life that you are seeking?[83]
Wait! You must not lie down for six days and seven nights."

As soon as he sat down (with his head) between his legs
sleep, like a fog, blew upon him.[84]

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Utnapishtim said to his wife:
"Mankind is deceptive, and will deceive you.[85]

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[82] Though Utnapishtim and his wife were instantly changed into divine beings, they were relegated to the remote "Mouth of the Rivers" far away from the realm of the gods.

[83] Utnapishtim asks a rhetorical question. Convening an assembly of the gods is impossible.

[84] It is possible that Gilgamesh's long slumber is induced by the gods to teach the lesson that human immortality is not within the hero's reach.

[85] Utnapishtim's comment about human nature as inherently deceitful may suggest that the flood was not sent capriciously but as punishment for immoral deeds. The point is made here conjecturally, as the Gilgamesh Epic - at least explicitly - does not address itself to questions or standards of human morality.

Come, bake loaves for him and keep setting them by his head
and draw on the wall each day that he lay down."

She baked his loaves and placed them by his head
and marked on the wall the day that he lay down.
The first loaf was dessicated,
the second stale, the third moist (?), the fourth turned white, its ...,
the fifth sprouted gray (mold), the sixth is still fresh.[86]

[Gilgamesh sleeps for seven days, after which Utnapishtim wakes him.]

The seventh - suddenly he touched him and the man awoke.

####

Gilgamesh said to Utnapishtim the Faraway:
"O Woe! What shall I do, Utnapishtim, where shall I go?
The Snatcher has taken hold of my flesh,
in my bedroom Death dwells,
and wherever I set foot there too is Death!"[87]

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PLOT SUMMARY - FIFTH SECTION

Accompanied by Utnapishtim's boatman Urshanabi, Gilgamesh prepares to leave the "Mouth of the Rivers" en route to Uruk. Before he leaves, Utnapishtim shares with him the

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[86] Utnapishtim instructs his wife to mark the period of time during which Gilgamesh sleeps through loaves of bread. On this obscure procedure, Gardner and Maier note that "Utnapishtim figures a clever way to indicate the passage of time - through the natural process of decay. The decaying bread is the very image of mortality. The seven days are marked by the changing character of the bread" (p. 244). Oppenheim similarly comments that "the quick deterioration which time worked upon the primitively baked Mesopotamian bread-cakes was used by Utnapishtim to prove to Gilgamesh that he actually had slept through seven days" ("Mesopotamian Mythology II" in *Orientalia* 17 (1948), p. 58.)

[87] Upon learning that he has slept for seven days, Gilgamesh at last understands Utnapishtim's message that death is inevitable. Moran cites this passage as illustrative of an "inner transformation" within Gilgamesh and the "acceptance of his mortality" ("The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2329).

secret of the rejuvenating plant which grows at the bottom of the sea (the Apsu). Though Gilgamesh acquires the plant and its potential to restore his youth, he decides to bring it back with him to Uruk to test its powers on an old man there. On his journey, a snake carries away the plant. Gilgamesh is disheartened and ponders the futility of his search for eternal life.

[Gilgamesh sets out for the journey back to his native Uruk.]

Gilgamesh and Urshanabi boarded the boat,
they cast off the *magillu*-boat, and sailed away.

[Utnapishtim's wife is concerned about Gilgamesh returning to Uruk "empty-handed" and forlorn.]

The wife of Utnapishtim the Faraway said to him:
"Gilgamesh came here exhausted and worn out.
What can you give him so that he can return to his land (with honor)?"

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Utnapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
"Gilgamesh, you came here exhausted and worn out.
What can I give you so you can return to your land?
I will disclose a thing to you that is hidden,[88] Gilgamesh,
a ... I will tell you.
There is a plant ... like a boxthorn,
whose thorns will prick your hands like a rose.
If your hands reach that plant *you will become a young man again*."

[Gilgamesh retrieves the magical plant of rejuvenation.]

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[88] In the course of Gilgamesh's visit, Utnapishtim reveals two "secrets of the gods:" the flood story itself and the hidden powers of the rejuvenating plant. Thus, Gilgamesh leaves Utnapishtim armed with greater insight into himself and a special knowledge of the gods which sets him apart from other human beings. Ironically, Gilgamesh is forever remembered ("immortalized") for bringing back the gods' secrets to Uruk, as the opening stanzas of the epic foretell that the hero "saw the Secret ... [and] ... brought information of (the time) before the Flood" (Kovacs, p. 3). It is noteworthy that Babylonian tradition deemed the flood story as "secret" knowledge; obviously, it was not intended as a didactical tool for the masses.

Hearing this, Gilgamesh opened a conduit (?) (to the Apsu[89])
and attached heavy stones to his feet.
They dragged him down, to the Apsu they pulled him.
He took the plant, though it pricked his hand,
and cut the heavy stones from his feet,
letting the *waves* (?) throw him onto its shores.[90]

Gilgamesh spoke to Urshanabi, the ferryman, saying:
"Urshanabi, this plant is a plant against decay (?)
by which a man can attain his survival (?).
I will bring it to Uruk-Haven,
and have an old man eat the plant to test it.[91]
The plant's name is 'The Old Man Becomes a Young Man.'
Then I will eat it and return to the condition of my youth."

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Seeing a spring and how cool its waters were,
Gilgamesh went down and was bathing in the water.
A snake smelled the fragrance of the plant,
silently came up and carried off the plant.
While going back it sloughed off its casing.[92]

[Gilgamesh waxes reflective about his encounter with Utnapishtim and what he's learned about his own mortality.]

At that point Gilgamesh sat down, weeping,
his tears streaming over the side of his nose.

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[89] The fresh-water springs beneath the earth governed by Ea/Enki.

[90] On this seemingly archaic and obscure aquatic procedure, Gardner and Maier note that "[t]he technique Gilgamesh uses in his dive is used today by the pearl-divers of Bahrain" (p. 251).

[91] One would expect Gilgamesh to consume the plant immediately. Perhaps he questions its efficacy. Alternatively, Gardner and Maier suggest that Gilgamesh will carry the plant "back to Uruk, and like the good king, distribute it to the elders, who will find their youth restored. (The distribution of the plant suggests a kind of communion)" (p. 251).

[92] This may serve an aetiological function to explain why snakes shed skin. Oppenheim posits that the snake was sent by the gods to prevent Gilgamesh from regaining his youth - a power and privilege restricted exclusively to the divine realm ("Mesopotamian Mythology II" in *Orientalia* 17 (1948), p. 56).

"*Counsel me*, O ferryman Urshanabi!
For whom have my arms labored, Urshanabi?
For whom has my heart's blood roiled?
I have not secured any good deed for myself,
but done a good deed for the 'lion of the ground!'[93]

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What can I find (to serve) as a marker (?) for me?
I will turn back (from the journey by sea) and leave the boat by the shore!"[94]

PLOT SUMMARY - SIXTH SECTION

Gilgamesh and Urshanabi arrive in Uruk. Immediately and with an exuberant sense of pride, Gilgamesh shows Urshanabi the city wall and the Ishtar Temple - his two great building accomplishments. The Gilgamesh Epic thus ends where it began: in the city of Uruk paying tribute to the architectural feats of its hero. The closing scene of the Epic is real and tangible - a stark contrast to the mythological worlds through which Gilgamesh has traveled.

They arrived in Uruk-Haven.

Gilgamesh said to Urshanabi, the ferryman:
"Go up, Urshanabi, onto the wall of Uruk and walk around.
Examine its foundation, inspect its brickwork thoroughly -
is not (even the core of) the brick structure of kiln-fried brick,
and did not the Seven Sages themselves lay out its plan?

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[93] I.e., the snake.

[94] Gilgamesh possibly regrets his expedition (of futility) to meet Utnapishtim. By bathing in the cool spring waters, Gilgamesh is "betrayed ... by his humanity, its frailty and its limitations ... He sees now the radical impropriety of [his] whole enterprise: one should attempt neither to escape death nor even to cheat it" (Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2335). Kovacs offers an alternative translation here, "Would that I had turned back and left the boat by the shore" (p. 107).

One league city, one league palm gardens, one league lowlands,
the open area (?) of the Ishtar Temple,
three leagues and the open area (?) of Uruk it (the wall) encloses."[95]

DISCUSSION

Prerequisite to a balanced discussion of the Gilgamesh Epic is the mention of a significant bias that pervades biblical scholarship in the realm of the comparative study of the Bible and Mesopotamian mythology. Many biblical scholars - people of faith who adhere to the teachings of Scripture - often (but, perhaps, not intentionally) skew their writing in such a way that the Bible is cast in a more favorable ethical and moral light than the mythology to which It is often compared. Certain examples of biblical scholarship in this field are distorted to the point that they serve more as a polemic against the polytheistic mythological material than an objective analysis of the Mesopotamian literature on its own terms. Particularly in the case of the Gilgamesh Epic (which bears striking and obvious parallels to the biblical flood account), Finkelstein cautions that "the cultural background of the [biblical] scholars - many of them ... [with] a theological training ... committed to accepting the Biblical word as divine inspiration - ... inevitab[ly find] the Biblical stories superior in religious, ethical, and other qualities to their Babylonian counterparts. It may even be charged that this conclusion was a prior assumption ..."[96] The purpose of this discussion is not to assess the "superiority" of one literary corpus over another, but to critically explore the

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[95] Gilgamesh's pride in his material accomplishments indicates that the hero has accepted the limitations of his humanity. His immortality - the name he has made for himself through his achievements - is uniquely human. Gilgamesh learns that "the work proper to man and his destiny is to build, to create a world of his own, as well as to die" (Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2335).

[96] Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 356.

themes, problems, and points of interest concerning the Gilgamesh Epic *itself* without reference to the biblical parallels.

The Gilgamesh flood story is an addendum to the lengthy myth which recounts the hero's quest for immortality. The flood narrative is a digression brought by Utnapishtim to illustrate the impossibility of human immortality. Presented as an abbreviated tale that recalls the circumstances under which Utnapishtim became immortal like the gods, the flood story coheres with the Epic's central concern about death as the ultimate human fate and the principal condition that distinguishes human beings from the deities. The flood story is the climax of the Epic; for after he has heard the tale, Gilgamesh comes to terms with his own humanity and acknowledges the certainty of his death. His adventures in search of immortality have proved futile; "he sees ... the radical impropriety of the whole enterprise: one should attempt neither to escape death nor even to cheat it."[97] Gilgamesh grows to understand that human beings attain immortality through non-mythological means - through their accomplishments and contributions to society.[98] His realization at the Epic's climax - a message of universal and timeless relevance - is that "the work proper to man and his destiny is to build, to create a world of his own, as well as to die. This perception gives meaning to life ..."[99]

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[97] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), p. 2335.

[98] Note that the life affirmation to be content with one's deeds (and one's personal relationships) expressed here is also found in Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh in the Tenth Tablet of the Epic (see James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1958, p. 64). I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight.

[99] Ibid., p. 2335.

In its treatment of the issue of human mortality, the Gilgamesh flood account exemplifies an evolution away from a supernatural or mythological explanation of significant phenomena. Another example of the movement toward primitive "realism" or "rationalism" is the omission of all references to the gods' dependence on human beings for food. Whereas in Atra-hasis the diluvian annihilation of humankind results in the gods' "suffering cramp from hunger,"[100] Gilgamesh completely excises the notion that animal and grain offerings brought by human beings were actually consumed by the gods. Tigay observes that "every passage in ... *Atrahasis* ... which mentioned or implied divine hunger has been dropped or modified in GE XI [i.e., the 11th Tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic]."[101] In both Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh, the gods gather "like flies" around the sacrifice offered after the flood, but only in Atra-hasis do the deities *eat* the offering. The practice of sacrifice as presented in Gilgamesh becomes symbolic rather than real and is stripped of its mythological implications.

Nonetheless, the overwhelmingly mythological and polytheistic nature of the Gilgamesh Epic is the source of much concern to the modern reader. The absence of a single, supremely-powerful deity in the polytheistic system necessarily makes for in-fighting and struggle between the gods themselves. In the midst of the deluge - for example - Ishtar and the gods of the Anunnaki lament the loss of humankind, while Enlil is outraged that even a remnant of humankind (Utnapishtim and his family) has survived the cataclysm. The mother-goddess Beletili fashions a necklace as a perpetual reminder of the great destruction as she chides Enlil who "without

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[100] W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 97.

[101] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 226.

considering ... brought about the Flood and consigned [the] people to annihilation."[102] Feeling no remorse Enlil demands an explanation for Utnapishtim's survival; he has obviously been betrayed by a fellow god, and he yearns to know who has upstaged him. Ea readily steps forward as the protector of humankind and exposes to Enlil the inherent injustice of the flood. He demands that in the future, Enlil should "charge the violation to the violator, [and] charge the offense to the offender."[103] Ea insists that the sinner should be punished for his transgressions, and that the innocent should be spared.[104]

Caught in the crossfire between the gods are human beings without the luxury of a divine compass - a law or ethical code - to guide their own actions. Consequently, a great degree of randomness or capriciousness is evident in both the affairs of human beings and of the gods. For example, Utnapishtim is saved not because of his outstanding integrity or righteousness but because the mischievous god Ea is his patron. Perhaps most illustrative of divine caprice is Enlil's abrupt decision to grant Utnapishtim and his wife immortality. No criteria for the gift of eternal life are given. Enlil seems to act without forethought and in contradiction to his initial anger that a remnant of humankind escaped the flood. Moran thus concludes that the Babylonian "gods were not only inscrutable but held humanity to norms of behavior that they would not reveal and that humans could not discover. It even seemed that good was evil and evil good."[105]

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[102] Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *Gilgamesh*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 102.

[103] Ibid., p. 103.

[104] Cf. Ezekiel 19.

[105] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2334.

Most troubling to the modern reader is the absence of any stated rationale for the flood. Whereas in Atra-hasis the noise associated with population growth stands behind the divine decision to bring the flood, the Gilgamesh deluge is completely unfounded. Though scholars speculate that sinful human behavior prompted the flood,[106] this notion is nowhere explicit in the Epic. The reason for the flood may only be attributed with certainty to divine whim. The Epic as a whole therefore lacks a moral and didactic dimension; the gods destroy life randomly and save life without warrant. The modern reader observes that "the conclusion of the story makes no more sense than the beginning. We start with an apparently arbitrary destruction of life and end with an equally arbitrary extension of life into eternity."[107] The flood story assumes no greater significance than a long digression drawn upon by Utnapishtim to make a profoundly important point to Gilgamesh.

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[106] See, for example, J. J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," pp. 364-365. Note also Ea's comment to Enlil cited above ("... charge the offense to the offender" - Akk. "*be-el gil-la-ti e-mid gil-lat-su*") which suggests that "offense" - i.e., human sinfulness - was a factor in the divine decision to send the flood. The Akkadian "*gillatsu*" - "offense" is an exact semantic equivalent of the Hebrew "*pesha*" - "sin." (I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight).

[107] William Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," p. 2334.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD NARRATIVE (GEN. 6:5-9:17)

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD NARRATIVE AND THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Upon reading the biblical account of the great flood - even without careful scrutiny - the discrepancies and repetitions are immediately apparent. A contradiction is found, for example, in the number of animals that Noah is instructed to bring aboard the ark. Gen. 6:19 holds that Noah is to rescue one male and one female (i.e., a single "pair") "of all that lives, of all flesh."[1] A few verses later in 7:2, Noah is told to take aboard seven pairs of clean animals and a single pair of those deemed unclean. This latter instruction to Noah significantly changes the number of animals eligible for rescue and introduces the criteria of cleanliness (without the benefit of a definition or clarification of what this new standard might imply). Similar contradictions are found throughout the story, most notably in the data concerning the chronology and duration of the flood. For example, whereas Gen. 7:12 reports that "The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights," verse 24 indicates that "the waters ... swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days."[2]

Also noticeable without close study are repetitions throughout the narrative. Two verses describe Noah's entry into the ark in nearly identical detail. Gen. 7:7 observes that "Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark," while the same information is conveyed

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[1] *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 53.

[2] Ibid., pp. 55-56

a few verses later in 7:13 where "Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons."[3] A more striking example of redundancy in the Text occurs in the consecutive verses of Gen. 7:17b and 7:18. The former verse conveys that "the waters increased and raised the ark so that it rose above the earth;" the latter verse repeats that "The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark drifted upon the waters."[4]

The many repetitions and contradictions within the biblical flood narrative have pointed scholars to the conclusion that "what we now have in the Bible is a composite tradition, a weaving of two originally separate versions of the flood, one being supplemented by the other."[5] The two independent flood accounts conflated in the narrative preserved in Genesis are thought to be the "J" or "Yahwistic" source (distinguished by God as "YHWH") and the "P" or (post-exilic) "Priestly" source (distinguished by God as "Elohim"). The flood story draws most substantially from the "P" document, while "J" serves to supplement the priestly material.[6] The verses identified as emanating from the "J" source (Gen. 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 7-10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22-23; 8:2b, 3a, 6-12, 13b, and 20-22) essentially form a complete narrative on their own, as do the "P" verses

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[3] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

[4] Ibid., p. 55.

[5] Brian B. Schmidt, "Flood Narratives of Ancient Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), p. 2343. This article presents a concise and cogent discussion of the flood story as a conflate of J and P.

[6] Ibid., p. 2344.

(6:9-22; 7:6, 11, 13-16a, 17a, 18-21, 24; 8:1-2a, 3b-5, 13a, 14-19; and 9:1-17).[7] An analysis of the "J" and "P" sources isolated out from the Genesis narrative reveal characteristics unique to each. Marks observes that "The differences in style and literary power between the narratives of J and P are apparent. The J story is an imaginative, charming tale, containing the picturesque incident of sending out the raven and the dove, while the P narrative is formal, precise, and calculated."[8]

Though far-reaching scholarly consensus acknowledges the conflation of different sources in the biblical flood story, the "material cannot be resolved into its constituent elements with any degree of certainty."[9] Moreover, the documentary hypothesis is theoretical, subjective, and - ultimately - unprovable.[10] This paper thus seeks to study the flood story as a literary whole within the context of the primeval history described in the initial chapters of the Book of Genesis.

PRIMEVAL HISTORY[11] AND THE CREATION-DELUGE CYCLE

Within the context of Genesis the flood narrative serves to close the period of primeval

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[7] J. H. Marks, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) , p. 279.

[8] Ibid., p. 279.

[9] Ibid., p. 279.

[10] A full discussion outlining the limitations of the documentary hypothesis may be found in: Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 2 ff.

[11] Gen. 1-11 does not constitute "history" as the term is commonly understood. Though the events therein take place on earth; they are related in a mythological and contradictory fashion, and are more accurately described as a "historical form." (I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight).

history, as the Bible thereafter directs Its attention to the patriarchs. Kikawada places the Noah story "at the end of the mythological, primeval historical era, ushering in a new, more concretely historical era."[12] The primeval history recounted in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is a preface to the following thirty-nine chapters and "seeks to give a universal setting for what is to be the early history of one particular people."[13] In recording Its unique version of primeval history - with beauty and theological innovation - the Bible drew from Mesopotamian sources. This phenomenon is to be expected, though, as Abraham himself migrated to Canaan from the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:31).

In addition to framing the patriarchal history in cosmic terms, the inclusion of the primeval history in the Bible likely reflects the Mesopotamian influence, as "Mesopotamian literature was fond of taking its themes all the way back to Creation."[14] Thus, the initial eleven chapters of Genesis not only draw from the literature of Mesopotamia, but are perhaps included in the Bible as the result of a standard Mesopotamian literary convention.

A proper understanding of the Noah story must interpret the narrative contextually within the Genesis account of primeval history. The flood is integrally related to creation; in fact, many details of the story (i.e., imagery and word choice) are both explicit and subtle references to creation.[15] The cataclysmic waters that inundate the earth serve to "reverse" or "undo" creation,

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[12] *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, (1992) s.v. "Noah and the Ark," by Isaac M. Kikawada, p. 1124.

[13] E. A. Speiser, *Anchor Bible - Genesis*, (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. liii.

[14] Ibid., p. lvii.

[15] Examples (discussed below) include: the *ruah* of God that dries the flood waters (8:1) and hovers over the great deep (1:2); God's command to Noah (9:7) and Adam (1:28) to "be

while the aftermath of the flood represents creation renewed. Sarna notes the significance of the ten generations separating Adam from Noah and Noah from Abraham by positing "the notion of Noah as the second father of mankind ... and the idea of the immediate post-diluvial period as a new beginning to life on earth."[16]

The creation-deluge cycle is characteristic of the primeval histories preserved both in Genesis and in the mythical Mesopotamian cosmogonies. In this regard, the parallel structure of the Epic of Atra-hasis and the biblical flood story are particularly noteworthy.[17] Both accounts address the creation of humankind, the threat or reality of death, the flood, salvation of the hero, and regeneration. Kikawada observes that the Atra-hasis Epic "presents a narrative account of the Mesopotamian primeval history that parallels Genesis 1-11 inclusively."[18] The flood story is intricately interrelated with - and complementary to - primeval creation. Together, they constitute a mythologized, pre-historical account of primordial times that reaches its climax with the great deluge.

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD NARRATIVE: PLOT SUMMARY[19]

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fertile and increase;" and the coming together of the primordial waters (7:11) that were separated into ocean and sky (1:6).

[16] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 56.

[17] For this reason, Chapter 3 of this paper discusses the Atra-hasis account of human creation in detail.

[18] Isaac M. Kikawada, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Noah and the Ark," p. 1124.

[19] The Genesis text and commentary presented herein is drawn principally from: Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 45-63.

As a result of human wickedness - likely to be understood as moral depravity - God decided to punish humankind by sending a flood to wipe out all living beings. Noah - the son of Lamech - was identified by God as a righteous man and selected (with his family) to be saved from the great deluge. God informed Noah of the forthcoming cataclysm and instructed him to build an ark. In addition to his family (his wife, three sons, and daughters-in-law) and necessary provisions, Noah was told to bring aboard male and female pairs of all animal species including "birds," "cattle," and "every kind of creeping thing on earth (Gen. 6:20)."[20] Noah followed God's instructions, and - upon God's command - boarded the ark in preparation for the flood. The flood waters burst forth from the "fountains of the great deep" and through the "floodgates of the sky (7:11)"[21] inundating the earth and destroying all life. Water covered the highest mountains and leveled the earth such that "all in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life ... died (7:22)."[22] The only survivors were those aboard the ark.

After more than a year in the ark,[23] God remembered Noah and sent a wind over the earth to dry up the waters of the flood. Eventually the water subsided, and the ark came to rest atop the mountains of Ararat. Forty days later, Noah sent forth a raven which "went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth (8:7)."[24] To determine if the land was sufficiently dry, Noah sent a dove from the ark which promptly returned to him; for "there was water all over the

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[20] *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 53.

[21] Ibid., p. 55.

[22] Ibid., p. 56.

[23] See discussion below on Gen. 8:18.

[24] *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 57.

earth," and the bird was unable to "find a resting place for its foot (8:9)."[25] Seven days later, Noah again sent forth the dove which returned with an olive leaf in its beak. Thus assured that the waters had decreased, Noah sent out the dove a third time, and the bird did not return. Noah had full confidence that the waters had subsided completely and that disembarkation was safe.

Upon God's command, Noah emerged from the ark with his family and the animals. Immediately, Noah offered sacrifices to God; he "built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar (8:20)."[26] God promised never again to destroy the earth and its living beings, and the proper cycles of nature and the seasons were forever restored. God established a covenant with Noah - symbolized by the rainbow - promising that "never again shall life be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth (9:11)."[27] Noah was commanded to "be fertile and increase, and [to] fill the earth (9:1)."[28] God permitted him to consume animals for food under the condition that the "life-blood" (i.e., unslaughtered meat) is not eaten. Finally, God affirmed the sanctity of human life by issuing the moral imperative that "Whoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed; For in His image Did God make man (9:6)."[29] In the aftermath of the cataclysmic flood, God reminded Noah of the supreme value of human life and established a fundamental principle of justice.

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[25] Ibid., p. 58.

[26] Ibid., p. 59.

[27] Ibid., p. 62.

[28] Ibid., p. 60.

[29] Ibid., p. 61.

PLOT SUMMARY - FIRST SECTION[30]

The rampant evil perpetrated by humankind saddens God; the Creator regrets that human beings were created at all and determines that life on earth will perish in a great punitive flood. The righteous Noah is warned of the coming deluge and instructed to build an ark in which he, his wife, three sons, and daughters-in-law and pairs of every animal species will float safely during the cataclysm. The specifications of the ark are described in detail to Noah by God. Noah is also told to store away food on the ark and is informed of the widespread destruction that the coming flood will bring. Noah's obedience to God's commands is emphasized; he follows each instruction to the letter of the divine word.

(Gen. 6:5) The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time.[31] (6) And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened.[32] (7) The Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the men

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[30] Before each section of text is presented, a brief summary of the events to take place will be provided. Comments on the text will appear in detailed footnotes.

[31] The narrative of the flood begins by detailing the widespread human corruption. The story is immediately framed in moral terms, and the forthcoming flood is not only justified but much-deserved. The expression "*ra'at ha'adam*" - "man's wickedness" - probably connotes displeasing or disagreeable actions, as the term is used to describe poisonous foods (II Kings 4:41) and various illnesses (Deut. 28:35). The phrase rendered, "every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time" translates literally as, "the very form of the thoughts of his heart is evil." Sarna notes that within the Bible, "mental phenomena fall within the sphere of the heart, which is the organ of thought, understanding, and volition" (p. 47). Thus, humankind in thought and in deed exemplified evil. Later Rabbinic sources speculated as to the nature of man's wickedness. "Covetousness, licentiousness, whoredom, bestiality, and incest are all alleged. Robbery was thought to have been prevalent; justice was not done and mercy not shown" (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, New York: Doubleday, 1992, s.v. "Flood," by Jack P. Lewis, p. 801).

[32] Sarna notes the "anthropopathism" here and explains it as a necessary means of conveying God's immanence in the world and the divine concern with and involvement in human affairs (p. 47).

whom I created - men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them."[33] (8) But Noah found favor with the Lord.[34]

(9) This is the line of Noah. Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.[35] (10) Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

(11) The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness.[36] (12) When

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[33] Plaut (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981) suggests (following Rashi) that "animals are included in the impending destruction because ... they existed for the sake of man" (p. 53). Note alternatively God's comment to Jonah: "And should not I care about Nineveh ... in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, *and many beasts as well?*" (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 1040).

[34] As indicated below, Noah was "righteous" (6:9, 7:1) and "blameless" (6:9).

[35] Noah is described as "*tsadik*" - "righteous" - and "*tamim*" - "blameless." The adjective *tsadik* often implies "just" or "right" in describing one's actions as being in accord with moral or legalistic principles (see Deut. 4:8 and Ex. 23:7). *Tamim* in a ritual context refers to an unblemished sacrificial offering (see Lev. 22:17 and 23:15). Sarna notes that the term "acquired a moral dimension connoting 'unblemished' by moral fault - hence, a person of unimpeachable integrity" (p. 50). Rabbinic tradition comments on Noah's *relative* goodness: "Rabbi Judah insisted that it was only in comparison with the wicked of his generation that [Noah] was righteous" (in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, s.v. "Flood," by Jack P. Lewis, p. 801) and "Resh Lakish said: '[Noah] was righteous *even* in *his* age; how much more so would he have been righteous in other ages' (Plaut, p. 61). Note also: "[E]ven if these three men - Noah, Daniel, and Job - should be in it, they would by their righteousness save ... themselves - declares the Lord God" (Ezekiel 14:14).

While Noah "walked *with* God" ("*et ha'Elohim*"); the more common expression is to walk *before* ("*lif'nay*) God, as Abraham is commanded to do in Gen. 17:1.

[36] "*Va'tisha'chayt ha'aretz*" - "the earth became corrupt" - likely in a moral sense (Pr. 6:32 and Ezekiel 23:11). The root "*shi'chayt*" appears seven times in the flood narrative - (6:11, twice in 6:12, 6:13, 6:17, 9:11 and 9:15) - meaning both "to be corrupt" and "to destroy." There is an obvious connection between the flood (destruction) and human behavior (corruption). Sarna explains the idea that "humankind cannot undermine the moral basis of society without endangering the very existence of its civilization ... [T]hrough its corruption, society sets in motion the process of inevitable self-destruction" (p. 51).

"*Hamas*" - "lawlessness" - probably connotes physical violence (Ju. 9:24 and II Sam. 22:3). Plaut understands "*hamas*" as the "manifestation of a social disease and not its cause. The Midrash

God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, (13) God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them:[37] I am about to destroy them with the earth. (14) Make yourself an ark[38] of gopher wood;[39] make it an ark with compartments,[40] and cover it inside and out with pitch.[41] (15) This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits,[42] its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. (16) Make an opening for daylight in the ark,[43] and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

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speculates that it was unbounded affluence that caused men to become depraved, that wealth afforded them the leisure to discover new thrills and to commit sexual aberrations" (p. 61).

[37] Human culpability is reiterated.

[38] The rare word used here for ark - "*teva*" - is found elsewhere only in Ex. 2:3 and 2:5 referring to the basket in which Moses was placed by his mother in the reeds on the Nile riverbank. Sarna describes the ark as "a boxlike craft made to float on the water but without rudder or sail or any other navigational aid" (p. 52).

[39] "*Atzay gofer*" - "gopher wood" - is hapax legomenon. According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gopher wood was most likely "cypress ... cedar ... [or] oak, but there is no certainty on this point today" (vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, s.v. "Flood," by H. F. Vos, p. 316)

[40] "*Kinim*" - "compartments" - appears elsewhere in the singular (*kain*) meaning "[bird's]-nest" (Deut. 22:6). Sarna thus posits that "the plural is used here in the sense of cubicles for the animals" (p. 52).

[41] "*Kofer*" - "pitch" - is hapax legomenon. The term is a derivative of the Akkadian *kupru*, the substance "used by Utnapishtim and Atrahasis to caulk their ... ships" (Sarna, p. 52).

[42] "*Amah*" - "cubit." H. F. Vos observes that "it is impossible to be dogmatic about the length of the cubit and thus about the size of the ark ... [T]he Hebrews ... had two cubit measurements: a long cubit of 52 cm. (20.4") and a common cubit of about 44.5 or 46 cm. (17.5 or 18"). If the shorter Hebrew cubit is used ... then the ark was about 135 m. by 22.5 m. by 13.5 m. (450' x 75' x 45'), with a total volume of just over 41,000 cubic m. (150,000 cubic ft.)" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, s.v. "Flood," by H. F. Vos, p. 316).

[43] "*Tsohar*" - "an opening for daylight." In the singular, this term is hapax legomenon. The plural, "*tsohorayim*," denotes "midday" or "noontime" - the brightest time of day. The *tsohar* was likely a type of window. Vos notes that the term is often "interpreted to have been an open area a cubit high under the eaves and running around the entire structure [of the ark]. Such an aperture would have been divided into segments by the supporting timbers of the roof" (p. 316).

(17) For My part, I am about to bring the Flood[44]-waters upon the earth - to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. (18) But I will establish My covenant with you,[45] and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. (19) And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female.[46] (20) From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive. (21) For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food for you and for them." (22) Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did.[47]

PLOT SUMMARY - SECOND SECTION

Noah is again instructed by God to bring his family and male and female pairs of animals

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[44] "*Ha'mabbul*" - "the Flood." The term is used throughout the flood narrative (except in Gen. 9:11 and 9:15) with the definite article, "imply[ing] some well-known entity" (Sarna, p. 53). The term is found only in Genesis 6-11 with the lone exception of Psalm 29:10. J. H. Marks argues that *mabbul* indicates "deluge" only in the post-exilic P texts (i.e., Gen. 9:11, 15, 28; 10:1, 32; and 11:10). In the earlier J texts, however, *mabbul* referred to the primordial cosmic ocean, as in Ps. 29:10 where *mabbul* serves as "an ancient designation for the heavenly ocean which lies directly at Yahweh's feet" (Marks, p. 280). The news to Noah in this verse, therefore, is not the *mabbul* itself (which, with the definite article,is well-known to him) but rather that the *waters* of the *mabbul* will be unleashed on the earth. For this reason, the term *mabbul* often appears in *smichut* construction with *"may*" - "waters" (eg. 7:7, 10; 9:11). Thus, the waters of the Flood - i.e., the waters of the heavenly ocean - came upon the earth. Though initially (in J) *mabbul* referred to the primordial ocean (and, in Noah, the waters therefrom), the term later came to mean world-wide flood (in P). The thematic significance of *mabbul* as cosmic ocean is found in the idea that "just as God in Gen. 1 separated the waters of the primeval world, giving each its place above or beneath the firmament, so [H]e allowed them, according to P, to flow together again in the flood story to form a new chaos" (Marks, p. 280). (For a full discussion of the various meanings and implications of the term *mabbul*, see: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, New York: Abingdon Press, 1962, s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," by J. H. Marks, pp. 279-280).

[45] Perhaps foreshadowing the post-diluvian covenant that God made with Noah, his offspring, and all living creatures of the earth (Gen. 9:8 ff.).

[46] One pair of every type of animal - a male and a female - are to be brought aboard the ark. Note the discrepancy with 7:2 where Noah is instructed to take aboard seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals.

[47] "Noah's unquestioning obedience and unfaltering trust in God are stressed" (Sarna, p. 53).

representing all the living species aboard the ark, for the rains are set to begin in seven days. Noah obeyed God's commands and loaded the ark. As "the waters of the Flood came upon the earth"[48] (7:10); the ark and its passengers were prepared, and God closed the ark's door. The waters of the flood raged mightily; even the highest mountains were fully submerged. In the course of the deluge, "all in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died"[49] (7:22).

(7:1) Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, with all your household,[50] for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation.[51] (2) Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not clean, two, a male and its mate;[52] (3) of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth.

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[48] *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 55.

[49] Ibid., p. 56.

[50] I.e., Noah's wife, his three sons, and three daughters-in-law. Unlike Utnapishtim, Noah does not bring aboard his valuables and personal possessions.

[51] Noah's righteousness is mentioned again, though it has already been indicated in 6:9. The Text also emphasizes that Noah explicitly followed each of God's commands (6:22 and 7:5). The righteousness of Noah's wife, sons, and daughters-in-law is not discussed. "It is not clear whether Noah's family is saved solely through his merit or whether they were individually righteous as well" (p. 54).

[52] Rabbinic tradition surmises that "only the perfect young specimens of animals were accepted, and those which had been involved in sin were rejected" (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, New York: Doubleday, 1992, s.v. "Flood," by Jack P. Lewis, p. 802). Rashi argues that a greater number of clean animals was brought aboard the ark perhaps to serve as food, though Sarna (p. 54) maintains that the cleanliness of the animals "cannot be referring to criteria of human consumption" since humankind was not permitted by God to consume animal meat until after the flood in 9:3. "Clean" animals will also be needed for Noah's sacrifices after the flood (8:20).

On the discrepancy with 6:19, some explain that "6:19-20 refers to the minimum number [of animals] needed for the regeneration the species, whereas [the present verse] includes the additional clean animals to meet the needs of the sacrifices after the Flood" (Sarna, p. 54).

(4) For in seven days' time I will make it rain upon the earth,[53] forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created." (5) And Noah did just as the Lord commanded him.

(6) Noah was six hundred years old[54] when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. (7) Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. (8) Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, (9) two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. (10) And on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth.

(11) In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day All the fountains of the great deep burst apart, And the floodgates of the sky broke open.[55] (12) (The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights). (13) That same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons - (14) they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing. (15) They came to Noah into the ark, two each of all flesh in which there was breath of life. (16) Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.[56]

(17) The Flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and raised the ark so

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[53] "The phrase exemplifies the absolute, transcendent character of the one God, who is sovereign over all of nature" (Sarna, p. 54).

[54] "Six hundred constituted a basic unit of time in the Mesopotamian tradition" (Sarna, p. 54).

[55] "*Kol mayanot tihom rabah*" - "all the fountains of the great deep." The expression *mayanot tihom* is used only here and in 8:2 and likely refers to the subterranean springs that perhaps parallel the Mesopotamian Apsu. Drawing from Gen. 1:2 where *tihom* denotes the primeval ocean spoken of in the biblical cosmogony, Sarna posits that "the 'great deep' is the cosmic abyssal water [of creation]" (p. 55). "*Arubot ha'shamayim*" - "the floodgates of the sky" - reflects the notion of the *mabbul* as the heavenly sea which God unleashes upon the earth (see footnote #26). II Kings 7:2 and 7:19 explain heavenly *arubot* as "windows in the sky" - perhaps the openings through which the waters of the heavenly sea flowed. The concept of both "the fountains of the great deep" and "the floodgates of the sky" - the notion of a primeval or cosmic sea - is clearly mythological. Sarna notes that in this verse, "creation is being undone, and the world returned to chaos" (p. 55).

[56] As opposed to Atrahasis and Utnapishtim who sealed themselves into their boats, "the salvation of Noah is solely due to divine will, not to any independent measures of his own" (Sarna, p. 55).

that it rose above the earth. (18) The waters swelled[57] and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted upon the waters. (19) When the waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered. (20) Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered. (21) And all flesh that stirred on earth perished - birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind. (22) All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died. (23) All existence on earth was blotted out - man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

PLOT SUMMARY - THIRD SECTION

After a period of one hundred and fifty days during which the flood overwhelmed the earth, "God remembered Noah"[58] (8:1) and sent a wind to cause the waters to subside. The rain stopped, and the flood-waters began to recede. The ark ran aground atop the Ararat mountains. Noah sent out a raven from the ark and then - to test whether the waters had fully receded - he sent forth a dove. The dove returned to Noah and was sent out again seven days later. This time, the dove returned with an olive leaf in its bill indicating to Noah that "the waters had decreased on the earth"[59] (8:11). After another seven days, Noah sent forth the dove a third time, "and it did not return to him any more"[60] (8:12). The earth had completely dried.

(7:24) And when the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days, (8:1) God

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[57] "*Va'yig'biru*" - "swelled." Literally, "grew mighty" from the root "*gavar*" - "to be strong or mighty." (See E. A. Speiser, *Anchor Bible - Genesis*, (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 53).

[58] *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 56.

[59] Ibid., p. 58.

[60] Ibid., p. 58.

remembered Noah[61] and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth,[62] and the waters subsided. (2) The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; (3) the waters then receded steadily from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished, (4) so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest[63] on the mountains of Ararat.[64] (5) The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

(6) At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made (7) and sent out the raven;[65] it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. (8) Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. (9) But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him.[66] (10) He waited

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[61] "*Va'yizkor Elohim*" - "God remembered." This expression "reflects a belief in moral continuity. What happened yesterday is not forgotten. It is stored up in divine memory and has a bearing on God's judgment in the future. The remembering God thus makes justice possible ..." (Plaut, p. 62). *Va'yizkor Elohim* appears elsewhere; see, for example, Gen. 19:29 (Sodom and Gomorrah) and Ex. 2:24 (God's response to the Israelite slaves in Egypt).

[62] The divine wind here (*ruah*) recalls the creation in Gen. 1:1 where "a wind from God [swept] over the [primordial] water." Sarna observes that the "Hebrew *ruah* heralds the reimposition of order" (p. 56).

[63] "*Va'tanah ha'teva*" - "the ark came to rest." Both the name of the flood hero and the verb here are derived from the root "*nu'ach*" - "to rest."

[64] The Ararat mountains were most likely located in Armenia. The region is mentioned three other times in the Bible (Jer. 51:27, II Kings 19:37, and Isaiah 37:38) as a foreign and pagan land, possibly the enemy of Israel. Sarna notes that Ararat is "known as Urartu in Assyrian inscriptions" (p. 57). The name was thus already known in the mid-second millennium BCE.

[65] Regarding the sending out of the birds, Sarna explains that "in ancient times mariners would take birds aboard and use them in order to determine their proximity to land" (p. 57). Unlike the dove, the raven is not sent to determine the water level (Sarna, p. 57). Note alternatively J. H. Hertz's comment that Noah "sent the raven because, as a bird of prey, the raven would sustain itself by feeding on carrion which would abound if the earth were dry" (*The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (London: Soncino Press, 1965), p. 30). It is noteworthy that Utnapishtim also sends forth a raven after the flood, though he first sends out a dove and then a swallow.

[66] "When [the dove] returned [from the first time it was sent out], Noah took it in his hand to see if there was clay on its feet" (Sarna, p. 57).

another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. (11) The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf![67] Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. (12) He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.

(13) In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. (14) And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.[68]

PLOT SUMMARY - FOURTH SECTION

Noah - his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law - and the animals emerge from the ark at God's command. Immediately, Noah offers animal sacrifices to God, and is assured that (1) the earth will never be destroyed again and (2) the proper seasonal cycle of nature will be forever reinstated. God blesses Noah, instructing him to "be fertile and increase, and fill the earth"[69] (9:1). God permits the human consumption of animals provided that the "life-blood"[70] (9:4) is properly drained. To accentuate the sanctity of human life, those who commit murder (including animals) are accountable to God and subject to punishment. God establishes a covenant with Noah, his sons, and all the creatures of the earth promising that a cataclysmic flood will never recur. The covenant is represented by the rainbow.

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[67] "... a sure sign that plant life had begun to renew itself" (Sarna, p. 58).

[68] On the difference between the verb "*charayv*" - "to dry (up)" mentioned twice in v. 13 and "*yavaysh*" - "to be dried up" in the present verse, Hertz suggests that the latter verb "denotes that the ground had become hard, and could bear the weight of the inhabitants of the ark" (*The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, p. 31).

[69] *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 14.

[70] Ibid., p. 14.

(8:15) God spoke to Noah, saying, (16) "Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. (17) Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds, animals, and everything that creeps on earth; and let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and increase on earth."[71] (18) So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives.[72] (19) Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families.

(20) Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar.[73] (21) The Lord smelled the pleasing odor,[74] and the Lord said to Himself: "Never again will I doom the earth because of man,[75] since the devisings of

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[71] While the flood may be interpreted as the "undoing" of creation, the aftermath of the great deluge represents the "re-generation" of life on earth. Here, animal species are encouraged to reproduce as they were in Gen. 1:22 (Sarna, p. 59).

[72] "... a careful reading ... reveals that Noah, his family, and the animals were shut up in the ark for a total of 371 days" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 317). Note: for a full discussion calculating the 371 days, see: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p.317, and Sarna's Excursus 2 ("The Chronology of the Flood") in *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 376.

[73] Atrahasis and Utnapishtim also offer sacrifices immediately upon exiting the ark. In comparing Gilgamesh to Gen. 8:20-21, however, Sarna notes that Utnapishtim makes a libation (or liquid/drink) offering in addition to the animal sacrifices. [The Atrahasis text is fragmented here and therefore silent on this matter]. "The omission [of a libation offering in Gen.] points up the fact that sacrifice is not food for God ... [I]n ... Gilgamesh ..., the destruction of mankind deprived the gods of the food and drink offerings on which they depended to sustain their immortal existence" (Sarna, p. 59. This point is contested, though, as indicated in footnote #67 of Chapter 4 and in J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 228-229).

[74] Sarna explains the anthropomorphism here as a technical term not to be understood literally but rather to indicate "God's acceptance of the sacrifice" (p. 59). In later texts (see Amos 5:21), the verb "*ri'ach*" - "to smell," "to perceive an odor," is used metaphorically signifying "to delight in" or "to accept favorably."

In connecting Noah's sacrifice to God's commitment to never again disrupt the cycles of nature, Gen. 8:21-22 suggests that the sacrificial system is integral to maintaining order in the universe. (I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight).

[75] I.e., specifically by means of a flood (cf. Gen. 9:8-11). Hertz translates alternatively, "I will not again *curse* the ground" suggesting that "[t]here will be no repetition of the curse pronounced in the days of Adam (cf. Gen. 3:17-19)" (*The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, p. 31).

man's mind are evil[76] from his youth;[77] nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done.[78] (22) So long as the earth endures, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Summer and winter, Day and night Shall not cease."[79]

(9:1) God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth.[80] (2) The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky - everything with which the earth is astir - and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. (3) Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these.[81] (4) You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.[82] (5) But for

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[76] "The statement is not a judgment but an observation that a proclivity for evil is woven into the fabric of human nature" (Sarna, p. 59).

[77] "The key phrase is 'from his youth,' not from birth or conception, implying that the tendency to evil may be curbed and redirected through the discipline of laws" (Sarna, p. 59). Alternatively, Speiser comments that "this is ambiguous because we are not told whether what is involved is the early age of mankind as a whole, or that of each individual" (*Anchor Bible - Genesis*, (NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 53). Note the similarity to Utnapishtim's comment that "Mankind is deceptive, and will deceive you" (Kovacs, p. 104).

[78] I.e., the *modus operandi* of the new system of divine justice will be to punish *the criminal* rather than the collective whole.

[79] The yearly cycle of nature - disrupted by the 371-day flood - is eternally restored. God's sovereignty over the forces of nature is emphasized (and contrasts sharply with the Babylonian tales in which the natural world is divided into discrete realms governed by different gods).

[80] The blessing that God bestows upon Noah echoes Gen. 1:28 where the first human beings are instructed to procreate. Also noteworthy is the contrast with Atrahasis where, after the flood, "the gods ... inflict stillbirth, sterility, and spinsterhood on humanity to ensure that the problem [i.e., the noise of overpopulation] does not recur" (Sarna, p. 60).

[81] Though fruits and vegetables alone constituted the human diet in Gen. 1:29-30, animal meat is now permissible.

[82] "Partaking of the flesh of a living animal is prohibited. It must first be slaughtered ... Also implicit in the formulation is the additional prohibition on partaking of the blood that oozes out of the animal's dying body. This means that the flesh may not be eaten unless the life-blood has first been drained ... [P]recisely because blood is the symbol of life, it belongs to God alone, as does life itself" (Sarna, p. 60-61).

your own life-blood I will require a reckoning:[83] I will require it of every beast;[84] of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man![85] (6) Whoever sheds the blood of man, By man[86] shall his blood be shed; For in His image Did God make man.[87] (7) Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it."

(8) And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, (9) "I now establish My covenant with you[88] and your offspring to come, (10) and with every living thing that is with you - birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well - all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. (11) I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

(12) God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. (13) I have set My bow[89] in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. (14) When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, (15) I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (16) When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting

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[83] Those who commit murder are culpable and accountable to God for their actions. Also, "[t]he Rabbis understood these words literally, *i.e., your* life-blood, and based on them the prohibition of suicide" (Hertz, p. 32).

[84] I.e., every beast that kills a human being. "Animals, too, are held responsible for acts of violence against man (cf. Ex. 21:28)" (Plaut, p. 67).

[85] Sarna understands this verse as a "reaffirmation of the sanctity of human life and the inviolability of the human person" (p. 61).

[86] "*Ba'adam*" - "By man [shall his blood be shed]." "Human institutions, a judiciary, must be established ... [M]urder is no longer a private affair between the killer and the family of the victim; it is a crime against society" (Sarna, p. 62).

[87] "Capital punishment is here divinely sanctioned ... [But later rabbinic texts] explored and took advantage of every mitigating factor ... in order to avoid a death sentence" (cf. *Makkot* 1:10) (Sarna, p. 61).

[88] Cf. Gen. 6:18.

[89] "*Kashti*" - "My [rain]bow." The term "*keshet*" - "rainbow" - usually denotes a bow used with arrows as a weapon for hunting or battle (cf. Gen. 27:3, 48:22; as a divine weapon, cf. Habakkuk 3:9, Lam. 2:4). "*Keshet*" is understood as "rainbow" only here (as well as verses 14 and 16) and in Ezekiel 1:28. Thus, a symbol normally associated with war "has been transformed [here] into a token of reconciliation between God and man" (Sarna, p. 63).

covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. (17) That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth."

DISCUSSION

The most striking feature of the biblical flood narrative is the constant presence, involvement, and activity of God. The plot - in its entirety - is driven by the words and deeds of Israel's God to the extent that Noah is portrayed merely as a subject of divine will fully submissive to the dictates of God's commands. In fact, Noah remains silent throughout the story and acts upon his own initiative in two instances only: sending out the birds from the ark (Gen. 8:6-12) and offering the sacrifice of the animals (Gen. 8:20). Otherwise, Noah's actions conform to divine instruction - often expressed in painstaking detail.[90] Noah's obedience is twice noted in the Text, for "Noah did just as the Lord commanded him."[91] As the omnipotent Architect of the flood and of Noah's survival, God is the central Figure who both pre-determines the course of the deluge and its outcome and attends to the very finest details of the events to transpire (such as shutting Noah into the ark, Gen. 7:16).

God's centrality to the biblical flood account is meaningful and intentional. The depiction of God in the flood story accentuates - first and foremost - the "absolute, transcendent character" of the Deity who is "completely independent of nature" and whose "will is sovereign."[92] The notion of the one God, omnipotent and supreme, without rival or limit, is the unique conception

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[90] See, for example, God's specifications for the ark in Gen. 6:14-16.

[91] Gen. 7:5, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 11. See also Gen. 6:22.

[92] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 48.

of ancient Israel. Unlike the Mesopotamian flood accounts in which "the free expression of the will and personality of any one god is ... under constant threat of a clash with the will and personality of another god,"[93] the biblical God acts with resolution and certainty of outcome. Whereas the gods of Mesopotamia considered "the needs and welfare of man [to be] of secondary importance [to their own],[94] Israel's God is "free to give [H]is complete and unselfish attention to all that goes on in the universe."[95] The positioning of God at the center of the biblical flood story points to the all-powerful nature of the Israelite Deity and to God's active (and - necessarily - selfless) involvement in the lives of humankind.

But even more integral to the biblical flood story than divine omnipotence and purposeful involvement in human affairs is God's sense of ethical justice - "one of the dominant themes of Scripture [which] runs like a thread of scarlet throughout its literature."[96] The motif of human sinfulness and divine punishment is the foundation upon which the biblical flood narrative is built and based. The story begins with God's indictment of humankind expressed in distinctly moral terms: "The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time."[97] "Wickedness" and "evil" are not the only transgressions of humankind, for the Text also notes that "The earth became corrupt before God

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[93] J. J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 368.

[94] Ibid., p. 369.

[95] Ibid., p. 370.

[96] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 55.

[97] Gen. 6:5, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 10.

... [and] was filled with lawlessness."[98] The pervasiveness of human sin as described in these verses is palpable; the complete and universal erosion of standards of justice and morality is an eminent feature of the biblical flood narrative.

Though God's moral expectations of humankind are nowhere indicated in the chapters of Genesis preceding the flood account, Sarna posits that "the story of the Flood ... presupposes the existence of a universal moral law governing the world for the infraction of which God, the Supreme Judge, brings men to account. It asserts ... that man cannot undermine the moral basis of society without endangering the very existence of civilization."[99] Thus, the notion of a divinely-ordained ethical code of human conduct is implicit in the "charges" that God brings against humankind. The divinely-instituted standards of proper behavior - apparently disregarded by the generation of the flood - are enforced by none other than Israel's God, the "Supreme Judge." The image of God as "Judge" - in the sense of "Moral Arbiter" - is unique to the Bible and essential in the interpretation of the flood story. Moreover, the inherent nature of God the "Supreme Judge" is righteous; the God of the Bible is the Paragon and Exemplar *par excellence* of moral virtue.[100] Finkelstein notes accordingly that "the [G]od of Israel is 'ethical' precisely because [H]e is the sole [D]eity. It is this uniqueness of Yahweh that carries with it the

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[98] Gen. 6:11, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 11.

[99] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 52.

[100] Note Dwight Young's comment in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," p. 1357: "The biblical narrative emerges ... as a consistent moral indictment of the human race, designed to reveal the character of Israel's God and His ethical demands on man."

implication of absolute freedom which is basic to an organized and systematized ethic."[101] Israel's ethical God acts with justice in sparing the life of Noah, the single "righteous man ... blameless in his age."[102]

But God's sense of justice is tempered by the divine tendency toward mercy. Unlike the gods in Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh,[103] the God of Israel is steadfast in the decision to send the destructive flood-waters (for justice must be served); however, the aftermath of the great deluge manifests God's mercy. Firstly, God grants humankind the comforting assurance that a cataclysmic flood will never recur (Gen. 8:21; 9:11, 15). Secondly, God re-institutes the seasonal cycle of nature insuring that "So long as the earth endures, / Seedtime and harvest, / Cold and heat, / Summer and winter, / Day and night / Shall not cease."[104] Thirdly, God twice blesses Noah and his sons, urging them to "Be fertile and increase"[105] - to repopulate the earth and regenerate humankind. Fourthly, God permits human beings to consume animals for food.

In the context of this latter divine decree, God reiterates that human life - created *b'zelem*

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[101] Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 370.

[102] Gen. 6:9, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 11. Note Dwight Young's comment in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," p. 1357: "... there is no doubt that the reason for the Flood is divine punishment for human injustice, lawlessness, and social unrighteousness, and that the salvation of Noah is solely conditioned by his moral worthiness."

[103] Note especially the gods' reaction to the flood in Gilgamesh: "The gods ... were weeping with her [i.e., Ishtar], / the gods humbly sat weeping, sobbing with grief (?)" (Maureen Gallery Kovacs, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 101).

[104] Gen. 8:22, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 13.

[105] Gen. 9:1, 7. *JPS Tanakh*, p. 14.

Elohim - in God's image - is inherently precious and sacred. For this reason, a binding moral statute is mandated by God for all time: "But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning ... Whoever sheds the blood of man, / By man shall his blood be shed."[106] The murder of human beings - an affront to God and a disruption in the divine order of the universe - "cannot be perpetrated with impunity [for] God Himself calls the criminal to account."[107] In stark contrast to Mesopotamian polytheism - a system in which "the gods cannot consistently act in accordance with a ... moral or ethical ideal"[108] - is the fundamentally *ethical* monotheism of Israel and her God.

Finally of special note is God's promise to never again destroy humankind by means of a flood expressed in terms of a covenant.[109] The notion of the *brit*[110] is "one of the cardinal and pervasive concepts of biblical theology. It is employed for the relationship between God and man ..."[111] In the flood narrative, the *brit* represents divine mercy in that "God binds Himself unconditionally to maintain His pledge to all humanity."[112] God's promise to humankind - sealed

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[106] Gen. 9:5-6, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 14.

[107] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 61.

[108] Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," p. 368.

[109] Note that the notion of covenant with deity is not unique to the Bible. Further, the concept must be understood as "monolatrous" rather than monotheistic insofar as covenants with gods other than YHWH were possible (though prohibited) (cf. Exodus 23:2 and S. David Sperling, "Israel's Religion in the Ancient Near East," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible to the Middle Ages*, Arthur Green, ed. New York: Crossroad, 1986). I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight.

[110] The first mention of the term *brit* in Genesis is in the flood narrative, Gen. 6:18.

[111] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 53.

[112] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 57.

as a covenant - is certain, resolute, and timeless. Furthermore, the Text does not indicate that human beings merited such divine beneficence, nor - in the instance of this *brit* - are they called upon to bind *themselves* to the covenant; instead, the arrangement is unilateral and a "gift" from God.

CHAPTER SIX:

NOAH AND THE BABYLONIAN FLOOD MYTHS: PARALLELS AND DISPARITIES

The aim of the present chapter is to catalogue with relative comprehensiveness the similarities and differences between the biblical flood story and the flood accounts of Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh. The comparative analysis will be organized according to the plot line of the biblical material, and similarities will be studied first. The comparisons between the various flood narratives described herein are concerned primarily with details of plot and language and seek to understand the texts on their own terms rather than through the eyes of commentary and interpretation. For this reason, the original source material is frequently cited.[1] It is noteworthy that the dichotomization of the texts into two discrete categories of "parallels" and "discrepancies" is imprecise, as the categories overlap and intersect. For example, whereas a floating vessel is common to the three accounts, the details and dimensions of each vessel are unique. Speiser thus notes that "the more things are alike in some ways, the greater the differences between them on other counts."[2]

NOAH AND THE BABYLONIAN FLOOD MYTHS: PARALLELS

The Context of the Flood

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[1] The sources drawn upon in this chapter for the flood stories of the Bible, Atra-hasis, and Gilgamesh are, respectively: *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985, (Hereafter, *JPS Tanakh*); W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard. *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969, (Hereafter, *L & M*); Maureen Gallery Kovacs. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, (Hereafter, *Kovacs*).

[2] E. A. Speiser. *Anchor Bible - Genesis*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1964, p. lvi.

Genesis: As noted above in the previous chapter,[3] the biblical flood story is integrally connected to the Genesis creation account, and it echoes with particular resonance the birth of humankind (as a result of its destruction). The flood story is framed with the reminder that "This is the record of Adam's line. When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female He created them" (Gen 5:1-2, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 9). The fifth chapter of Genesis is - in its entirety - a genealogy of the generations from Adam to Noah. With the exception of the brief stories of the Garden of Eden and Cain and Abel, the flood narrative follows creation without interruption; and, moreover, the Garden episode and the slaying of Abel exemplify the human wickedness that warrants the flood.

Atra-hasis: The Atra-hasis Epic begins with the birth of human beings and traces the growth of the first generations of humankind. Atra-hasis is among the oldest surviving literary examples of the creation-deluge cycle, as the flood story therein serves as the climax to the account of human creation and the consequent problem of overpopulation. As in Genesis, the flood is sent "on the heels" of creation and effects a reversal in the creative process. However, unlike Genesis, the Atra-hasis flood is intended to annihilate humankind entirely. The complete undoing of human creation is not God's purpose in Genesis, for Noah will survive and procreate by divine decree.

Gilgamesh: The Epic of Gilgamesh does not discuss the creation of the world or of humankind.

The Flood as a Divine Decision

Genesis: Gen. 6:13, 17 - "God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to all flesh ...

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[3] See Chapter 5, sub-section "Primeval History and the Creation-Deluge Cycle."

For My part, I am about to bring the Flood ...' " (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11).

Atra-hasis: "The gods commanded total destruction." (*L & M*, p. 87).

Gilgamesh: "The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to inflict the Flood." (*Kovacs*, p. 97).

Divine Instruction to Build Vessel Followed Immediately and Willingly

Genesis: Gen. 6:22, 7:5 - God speaks to Noah with explicit instructions to build the ark; to take along his family, the animals, and food provisions; and to board at a specified time. "And Noah did just as the Lord commanded him." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11).

Atra-hasis: Enki's instruction to Atra-hasis to build a boat is followed by Atra-hasis' speech to the city elders justifying the construction of the boat and rallying together the craftsmen and laborers. (*L & M*, p. 91).

Gilgamesh: Upon hearing Ea's advice to build a boat, Utnapishtim "understood and spoke to [his] lord, Ea: 'My lord, thus is the command which you have uttered / I will heed and will do it.' " (*Kovacs*, p. 98).

Pitch Used to Caulk the Vessel

Genesis: Gen. 6:14 - "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood ... and cover it inside and out with pitch [Heb. *kofer*]." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11).

Atra-hasis: "Let the pitch [Akk. *ku-up-ru*] be tough, and so give (the boat) strength." (*L & M*, p. 89).

Gilgamesh: "I[4] poured ... three times 3,600 (units of) pitch." (*Kovacs*, p. 99).

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[4] I.e., Utnapishtim.

Note: "The unique Hebrew *kofer* ... is identical with Akkadian *kupru*, which was used by Utnapishtim ... Atrahasis [and Noah] to caulk their respective ships."[5] Also, whereas Noah and Atra-hasis are instructed to use pitch, Gilgamesh and his craftsmen do so based on their own knowledge of shipbuilding.

Animals Brought Aboard the Vessel

Genesis: Gen. 7:8-9 - "Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark ..." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12).

Atra-hasis: "Clean (animals) . [.....]. / Fat (animals) [.....]. / He[6] caught [and put on board] / The winged [birds of] the heavens. The cattle (?) [.....]... / The wild [creatures (?) .....]. / .[.....] he put on board." (*L & M*, p. 93).

Gilgamesh: "All the living beings that I[7] had I loaded on it ... all the beasts and animals of the field ..." (*Kovacs*, p. 99-100).

The Cataclysm is Universal; All Life is Destroyed Except the Passengers Aboard the Vessel

Genesis: Gen. 7:21 (ff.) - "And all flesh that stirred on earth perished - birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12).

Atra-hasis: The mother-goddess assesses the damage done by the flood and her own

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[5] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 52.

[6] I.e., Atra-hasis.

[7] I.e., Utnapishtim.

culpability in consenting to it. She laments, "How did I, with them[8], command total destruction?" (*L & M*, p. 95).

Gilgamesh: Utnapishtim looks out upon the post-diluvial earth and observes that "... all the human beings had turned to clay! The terrain was as flat as a roof." Heidel notes that "the impression which [the Gilgamesh Epic] is intended to make obviously is that the flood was universal ..."[9]

The Water Level Rose Above the Mountains

Genesis: Gen. 7:19 - "When the waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 95).

Gilgamesh: "All day long the south wind blew ..., blowing fast, *submerging the* mountain *in water*." (*Kovacs*, p. 100).

The Vessel Runs Aground upon a Mountain

Genesis: Gen. 8:4 - "The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat."[10] (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 99).

Gilgamesh: "On Mount Nimush[11] the boat lodged firm, Mount Nimush held the boat,

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[8] I.e., the other gods.

[9] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 249.

[10] Ancient Ararat is located in "present-day Armenia between the River Araxes and Lake Van" (Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 57).

[11] Southern Kurdistan.

allowing no sway." (*Kovacs*, p. 101).

An Aperture of the Vessel is Opened Following the Flood

Genesis: Gen. 8:6 - "At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark ..." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 99).

Gilgamesh: "The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind (and) flood stopped up ... I opened a vent and fresh air (daylight?) fell upon the side of my nose." (*Kovacs*, p. 101).

Birds are Sent to Test the Extent of the Waters' Subsidence

Genesis: Gen. 8:7-12 - Noah "sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground ... He waited another seven days, and again sent out the dove ... He waited still another seven days and [again] sent the dove forth ..." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 99).

Gilgamesh: "When a seventh day arrived[12] I sent forth a dove and released it ... I sent forth a swallow and released it ... I sent forth a raven and released it ..." (*Kovacs*, p. 102). Commentators compare Utnapishtim's dove-then-raven sequence with its reverse in the Noah story. Marks notes, for example, that "the biblical order ... is more sensible than the Babylonian, for the raven could alight on floating carrion and live, while the dove required growing trees in the valley. The raven's failure to return to the ship would have told Utnapishtim nothing, whereas the

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[12] Note the similarity to Noah who separated each (of the four) sendings of the birds by seven days.

dove's failure to return gave Noah the information he sought."[13]

Sacrifices of Propitiation and Thanksgiving are Offered

Genesis: Gen. 8:20 - "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: Though the text is poorly reconstructed here, it is obvious that "on disembarking, Atra-hasis promptly instituted an offering for the gods" (*L & M*, p. 12). The Lambert and Millard recension indicates that "To the [four] winds [... / He put [... / Providing food [... / ...].." (*L & M*, p. 99).

Gilgamesh: "I ... sacrificed (a sheep). I offered incense in front of the mountain-ziggurat. Seven and seven cult vessels I put in place,[14] and (into the fire) underneath (or: into their bowls) I poured reeds, cedar, and myrtle." (*Kovacs*, p. 102).

The Scent of the Sacrifice Pleases God/The Gods

Genesis: Gen. 8:21 - "The Lord smelled the pleasing odor ..." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: "[The gods sniffed] the smell, / They gathered [like flies] over the offering. [After] they had eaten the offering / Nintu arose ..."[15] (*L & M*, p. 99).

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[13] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (1962), s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," by J. H. Marks, p. 283.

[14] Utnapishtim makes a libation offering, whereas Noah does not.

[15] It is noteworthy that the gods actually consume Atra-hasis' offering. In Mesopotamian mythology, the sacrifices brought by humankind served as food and drink for the gods; they relied upon sacrifice to ensure their sustenance. Though Gilgamesh edits out the Atra-hasis reference to divine consumption of the sacrifice, this omission is "unprecedented and startling, for the dependence of the gods upon man for food is an axiom of Mesopotamian religious thought" (Tigay, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 229). In the religion of Israel, the sacrificial system was instituted solely for the benefit of humankind.

Gilgamesh: "The gods smelled the savor, / the gods smelled the sweet savor, / and collected like flies over a (sheep) sacrifice." (*Kovacs*, p. 102).

The Hero Receives a Divine Blessing

Genesis: Gen. 9:1 - "God blessed Noah and his sons ..." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 14).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 103).

Gilgamesh: "Enlil went up inside the boat ... He touched our[16] forehead and, standing between us, he blessed us." (*Kovacs*, p. 103).

NOAH AND THE BABYLONIAN FLOOD MYTHS: DISPARITIES

The Reason or Justification for the Flood

Genesis: Gen. 6:5, 11-13 - "The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time ... The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness ... God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth.' " (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 10-11). Though the misdeeds above - "wickedness," "evil," "corrupt[ion]," and "lawlessness" - are not elaborated in detail, it is apparent that human society abandoned moral and ethical behavior. Sarna suggests that in Noah's day, "human evil [had] reached the ultimate depths. The moral pollution [was] so great that the limits of divine tolerance [had] been breached."[17] Young similarly notes that "there is no doubt that the reason

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[16] I.e., Utnapishtim and his wife.

[17] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 47.

for the Flood is divine punishment for human injustice, lawlessness, and social unrighteousness."[18]

Atra-hasis: "When the land extended and the peoples multiplied. / The land was bellowing like a bull, / The god got disturbed with their uproar. ... / With their uproar, I[19] am deprived of sleep." (*L & M*, p. 73). Human noise[20] disturbs the earth-god Enlil's sleep and compels him to bring about the flood.

Gilgamesh: The gods' rationale for sending the flood is not indicated explicitly.

The Name of the Flood Hero

Genesis: Noah (Heb. *Noach*) means "rest."[21]

Atra-hasis: Atra-hasis (Akk. *at-ra-am-ha-si-is*) means "exceedingly wise."

Gilgamesh: Utnapishtim (Akk. *uta-napistim*) means "he found life."

Note that unlike Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh, "Genesis makes no attempt to establish a relation between the name and the experiences of the central human figure in the account of the flood."[22]

The "Surviving Remnant" of Humankind

Genesis: Gen. 6:17-18 - "I am about to bring the Flood ... to destroy all flesh under the sky ... But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your

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[18] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," by Dwight Young, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), p. 1357.

[19] I.e., the god Enlil.

[20] For various interpretations of what "human noise" might imply, see in this paper the Discussion section of Chapter 3, The Atra-hasis Epic.

[21] Note the connection between *Noach* and "*ni'choach*" - "pleasing" - the term used to describe the odor of Noah's sacrifice to God (cf. Gen. 8:21 and above: Chapter Five, footnote #74). I am indebted to Dr. S. David Sperling for this insight.

[22] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 227.

wife, and your sons' wives." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11). God pre-determines that Noah and his family will survive the flood.

Atra-hasis: "[The warrior Enlil] saw the vessel,[23] / And was filled with anger at the Igigi ... / 'Where did life escape? / How did man survive in the destruction?' ... / Who but Enki could do this?" (*L & M*, p. 101). Atra-hasis survives the flood through the craftiness of his patron god Enki. His survival is not anticipated by the architect of the flood, the god Enlil.

Gilgamesh: "Just then Enlil arrived. / He saw the boat and became furious, / he was filled with rage at the Igigi gods: / 'Where did a living being escape? / No man was to survive the annihilation.' / ... Who else but Ea could devise such a thing?" (*Kovacs*, p. 102-103). Utnapishtim's survival is - like that of Atra-hasis - a scheme perpetrated by Ea to foil Enlil's plan of the total annihilation of humankind.

Divine Selection of the Flood Hero

Genesis: Gen. 6:9 - "Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11). Gen 7:1 - "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation.' " (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11). Young concludes that "the salvation of Noah is solely conditioned by his moral worthiness."[24] Likewise, Sarna asserts that "there is not the slightest doubt that it is Noah's integrity that determines his fate."[25]

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[23] I.e., the boat in which Atra-hasis and his family survived the flood.

[24] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," by Dwight Young, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), p. 1357.

[25] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 49.

Atra-hasis and *Gilgamesh*: The criteria by which Atra-hasis and Utnapishtim are selected to survive the flood are not mentioned in the texts. It is only apparent that both figures enjoyed a special intimacy with the god Enki (or Ea) who intervened (against Enlil's wishes) to save their lives. Young argues that "the situation in [these] Mesopotamian narratives ... is not at all clear in respect to the motivation for ... the choice of the hero whose deliverance involved the deception of one God [i.e., Enlil] by another [i.e., Enki/Ea]."[26]

Divine Communication with the Flood Hero

Genesis: God speaks with Noah directly and gives him specific and explicit instructions to build the ark (in adherence to a detailed and divinely-ordained plan) and to bring aboard certain family members, animals, and provisions. The reason for the flood and for the survival of its hero are made known to Noah by God. Furthermore, the events of the flood as well as its outcome are described to Noah beforehand, and he is assured of the forthcoming covenant with God.

Atra-hasis and *Gilgamesh*: The flood heroes are instructed to construct their boats indirectly through Enki/Ea's voice reverberating in the "whispering walls" of their reed huts: "Wall, listen to me! / Reed wall, observe all my words! / Destroy your house, build a boat." (Atra-hasis in *L & M*, p. 89). Scant and vague details are given by Enki/Ea regarding the specifications of the boats. Whereas Atra-hasis is warned by Enki of the "coming of the flood for the seventh night" (*L & M*, p. 91), Utnapishtim is granted no foreknowledge of the coming disaster. Heidel notes that "Utnapishtim was not told expressly ... that a deluge would be sent in which all

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[26] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," by Dwight Young, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), p. 1357.

mankind was to perish."[27] Neither Mesopotamian flood hero is forewarned that the intent of the flood is the complete annihilation of humankind, and neither is afforded the certainty of their own survival. In fact, the gods were under oath to keep the flood secret from humankind.

The Vessel

Though the biblical flood story shares with the Mesopotamian accounts the notion of a boat as the means by which the hero is to be saved, the vessels themselves are not at all alike.

Genesis: Gen. 6:14-16 - "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch ... [T]he length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 11).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 89).

Gilgamesh: "It[28] was a field in area, / its walls were each 10 times 12 cubits in height, / the sides of its top were of equal length, 10 times 12 cubits each. / ... I provided it with six decks, / thus dividing it into seven (levels). / The inside of it I divided into nine (compartments). / I drove plugs (to keep out) water in its middle part." (*Kovacs*, p. 99).

The differences between the vessels of Utnapishtim and Noah are self-evident. Young calculates that "the craft of Utnapishtim [would have] a displacement about five times that of Noah's vessel."[29] Heidel observes that the Mesopotamian term for the vessel used in Gilgamesh - *elippu* -

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[27] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 229.

[28] I.e., Utnapishtim's boat.

[29] Dwight Young, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," p. 1357.

and in Atrahasis - *eleppu* - is not etymologically related to the Hebrew *teva* - ark - in Noah.[30]

Explaining the Need for the Vessel

Relevant to each of the three flood stories under consideration is the fact that - with the exception of the flood heroes - humankind is not informed about the coming flood. Though later Rabbinic exegesis suggests that God afforded the people one hundred and twenty days to repent,[31] this notion is nowhere explicit in the biblical text. Nonetheless, whereas Noah keeps his foreknowledge of the flood to himself;[32] Atra-hasis speaks deceptively to the city elders, and Utnapishtim plainly lies to the people of Shuruppak.

Atra-hasis: Atra-hasis - who depends upon the people to assist in the construction of his boat - justifies the project as his means of escape to the underworld seas to be with his god Enki who has fallen out with the earth god Enlil. He explains, "My god [does not agree] with your god, / Enki and [Enlil] are angry with one another. ... / Since I reverence [Enki], ... / I can[not] live in [your ...], / I cannot [set my feet on] the earth of Enlil." (*L & M*, p. 91). Atra-hasis is disingenuous and knowingly misleads the people. Though he is well aware that the boat is to be used in the coming flood, he deceives the elders with a concocted story about a divine struggle and a journey he must make to the Apsu.[33]

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[30] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 232. For a comprehensive discussion enumerating the differences between Noah's ark and Utnapishtim's boat, see Heidel pp. 232-237.

[31] Rabbinic exegesis - based on Gen. 6:3 - posits that Noah constructed the ark over a period of one hundred and twenty years to raise the curiosity of the people and to move them toward repentance. (See Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 46).

[32] Noah was not commanded by God to forewarn the people of the coming disaster.

[33] I.e., the subterranean seas.

Gilgamesh: Utnapishtim tells the townspeople the same concocted story found in Atra-hasis, but - following the advice of his god Ea - he adds to it a conspicuous lie: "I will go down to the Apsu to live with my lord, Ea, / and upon you he will rain down abundance, / a profusion of fowl, myriad (?) fishes. / He will bring to you a harvest of wealth, / in the morning he will let loaves of bread shower down, / and in the evening a rain of wheat." (*Kovacs*, p. 98). The imminent disaster is described in soothing images of coming prosperity and abundance - each image with a double-meaning (i.e., "rain" and "shower down"). Commenting on Utnapishtim's remarks to the townspeople, Finkelstein observes that "the context clearly indicates that the populace is expected to construe the message as a favorable one while Utnapishtim understands its true meaning."[34]

Human Beings On Board the Ark

Genesis: Gen. 7:13 - "That same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12). Eight people - all related to Noah - survive the flood and repopulate the earth. Sarna thus notes that "in Genesis ... the concept of a single family of man [is] possible; indeed, it is a major theme." (*JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 49).

Atra-hasis: Though the story records that Atra-hasis "...]. sent his family on board" (*L & M*, p. 93), the text is fragmented here. Based on Gilgamesh, it is likely that aboard Atra-hasis' boat were people outside of his own family.

Gilgamesh: "I had all my kith and kin go up into the boat, / all the beasts and animals of

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[34] Jacob J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel: A Comparative Study of the Hebrew and Babylonian Religious Spirit," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 361.

the field and the *craftsmen* I had go up." (Italics mine; *Kovacs*, p. 100).

Pre-Diluvial Festivity

In the period before the flood, Noah constructs and loads the ark, whereas Atra-hasis and Utnapishtim supplement these practical preparations with a party.

Atra-hasis: " ...] he invited his people / ...] to a banquet ... / They ate and they drank." (*L & M*, p. 93).

Gilgamesh: "I gave the workmen (?) ale, beer, oil, and wine, as if it were river water, / so they could make a party like the New Year's Festival." (*Kovacs*, p. 99).

Personal Possessions Brought On Board

Genesis: The Text does not indicate that Noah brought any personal possessions aboard the ark.

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 93).

Gilgamesh: "The boat was finished by sunset ... / Whatever I had I loaded on it: / whatever silver I had I loaded on it, / whatever gold I had I loaded on it." (*Kovacs*, p. 99).

Shutting the Flood Hero in the Vessel

Genesis: Gen. 7:16 - "And the Lord shut him in." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12). The door of the ark is closed by God.

Atra-hasis: "As soon as he[35] heard Adad's[36] voice / Pitch was brought for him to close his door. / After he had bolted his door / Adad was roaring in the clouds." (*L & M*, p. 93).

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[35] I.e., Atra-hasis.

[36] I.e., the god of rain and storm.

Gilgamesh: "I[37] watched the appearance of the weather - / the weather was frightful to behold! / I went into the boat and sealed the entry." (*Kovacs*, p. 100).

The Sources of the Flood Waters

Genesis: In addition to the meteorological phenomena that caused the flood (such as "*geshem*" - "rain"), the Bible records that "All the fountains of the great deep burst apart, / All the floodgates of the sky broke open." (Gen. 7:11, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 12). As discussed in the preceding chapter, the "fountains of the great deep" and the "floodgates of the sky" are mythical terms that recall the primeval cosmology of the first chapter of Genesis. Sarna suggests that "the 'great deep' is the cosmic abyssal waters ..." and that "the 'floodgates of the sky' are openings in the expanse of the heavens through which water from the ... cosmic ocean can escape onto the earth."[38] The flood thus represents the coming together of the primordial waters that God separated in the creation account (Gen. 1:6). The flood is thereby the "undoing" of creation.

Atra-hasis: The flood is caused by the storm-god Adad who sends "winds" (Akk. *sa-ru*) and "storm" (Akk. *me-hu-u*). The deluge is the result of natural meteorological forces. (*L & M*, p. 93).

Gilgamesh: The flood is caused by a host of meteorological phenomena including: "rainstorm" (*amaru*), "destructive rain" (*shamutu kibati*), "wind" (*sharu*), "downpour" (*radu*), and "storm" (*imhullu*). Heidel notes that unlike the biblical narrative which subtly portrays the flood as the reversal of the primordial creation, "the Babylonian versions very definitely attribute

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[37] I.e., Utnapishtim.

[38] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 55.

the deluge to a heavy storm;[39] the ... source of the flood was [simply] rain."[40]

The Duration of the Flood

Genesis: Gen. 7:12 (the supposed "J" source) - "The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12). Gen. 7:24 (the supposed "P" source) - "... the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 12).

Atra-hasis: "For seven days and seven nights / Came the deluge, the storm, [the flood]." (*L & M*, p. 97).

Gilgamesh: "Six days and seven nights / came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land." (*Kovacs*, p. 101).

It is noteworthy that the biblical account indicates the time at which the flood began and ended. Gen. 7:11 reports that the flood began "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month," and Gen 8:12-13 acknowledges that "in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry ..." The Mesopotamian stories do not record dates for the flood in this manner.

Divine Expression of Regret

The only regret expressed by God in the biblical narrative occurs before the flood in Gen. 6:6. There - coupled with sadness - God regrets having created human beings who have polluted the earth with wickedness and evil. God never doubts or questions the decision to send the flood; the cataclysm is a means of divine justice and, in the implementation of justice, God is certain and steadfast.

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[39] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 241.

[40] Ibid., p. 245.

In the Mesopotamian accounts, however, the gods regret that they consented to the flood, and they lament the loss of human life. Apparently, the gods could not foresee or imagine the scope of the flood, as they were overwhelmed by the severity of the storms and the devastating effects of the waters. The Gilgamesh Epic notes that the gods were terror-stricken by the dramatic changes in weather.

Atra-hasis: Note the lament of the mother-goddess during the flood: "Let the day become dark, / Let it become gloom again. ... / As a result of my own choice ... / My offspring - cut off from me - have become like flies![41] / And as for me, like the occupant of a house of lamentation / My cry has died away." (*L & M*, p. 95).

Gilgamesh: Ishtar's lament: "How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, / ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people?! / No sooner have I given birth to my dear people / than they fill the sea like so many fish! / The gods ... were weeping with her, / the gods humbly sat weeping, sobbing with grief (?)." (*L & M*, p. 101). Note also the gods' fear of the flood itself: "The gods were frightened by the Flood, / and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu. / The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching by the outer wall." (*L & M*, p. 100).

The Flood Hero and the Expression of Emotion

Genesis: Nowhere in the biblical account does Noah express an emotional reaction to the flood. Throughout the Genesis narrative, in fact, the reader learns of Noah's personality only that he was thoroughly obedient to God.

Atra-hasis: Before the flood, Atra-hasis is unable to participate in his own banquet due to the emotional strain of knowing what was to come: " ...] he invited his people / ...] to a banquet

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[41] "... her offspring were floating on the surface of the waters like flies." (*L & M*, p. 13).

... / They ate and they drank. / But he was in and out: he could not sit, could not crouch, / For his heart was broken and he was vomiting gall." (*L & M*, p. 93).

Gilgamesh: After the flood, Utnapishtim surveys the destruction: "I looked around all day long - quiet had set in ... / The terrain was as flat as a roof. ... / I fell to my knees and sat weeping, / tears streaming down the side of my nose." (*Kovacs*, p. 101).

Exiting the Vessel

Genesis: Noah disembarks at God's command: "God spoke to Noah saying, 'Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives." (Gen. 8:15-16, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 13).

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 99).

Gilgamesh: Utnapishtim disembarks on his own initiative after sending forth the dove, the swallow, and the raven. (See *Kovacs*, p. 102).

After the Flood: The Question of Divine Justice

Genesis: The biblical flood narrative is presented as an example of the manifestation of God's justice. Sarna comments that the Bible is "careful to stress that the universal cataclysm into which the world is ... plunged is ... the considered judgment of God made inevitable by human evil."[42]

In the Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh myths, Enki and Ea (respectively) criticize Enlil for sending the flood on the grounds that he did so with complete disregard for principles of justice. They urge that in the future, Enlil should not bring about widespread and wanton mass destruction unless such extreme measures are warranted and just. They beseech Enlil, "Impose

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[42] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 47.

your penalty [on the criminal]" (*L & M*, p. 101) and "Charge the violation to the violator, / charge the offense to the offender." (*Kovacs*, p. 103). From these verses spoken in the aftermath of the flood, Heidel determines that in the Mesopotamian flood stories "the destruction is intended for all alike, for the just as well as for the unjust, without any exception whatsoever ... [U]nmistakably ... not *all* [the victims] were sinners."[43]

In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enlil is accused by Ea of sending the flood capriciously and thoughtlessly. Ea questions Enlil's impulsive decision by asking "How, how could *you* bring about a Flood without consideration?" (*Kovacs*, p. 103). He urges that compassion and patience should guide divine action. In Atra-hasis, the mother-goddess similarly expresses her disdain with the god's insistence that the flood should be sent. She chides the principal god and addresses him as the one "who did not consider but brought about a flood." (*L & M*, p. 97).

The Fate of the Flood Hero

Genesis: Noah is blessed by God and told to "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth." (Gen. 9:1, 7). Noah is thus granted the same blessing as Adam (Gen. 1:28) and becomes - according to Sarna - a "second Adam, the second father of humanity."[44] (Note the dissimilarity with Atra-hasis in which measures of population control - e.g. barren women and demons that steal away babies - are instituted after the flood (See *L & M*, p. 103)).

Like all human beings, Noah eventually dies. Note Gen. 9:28-29: "Noah lived after the Flood 350 years. And all the days of Noah came to 950 years; then he died." (*JPS Tanakh*, p. 15).

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[43] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 226.

[44] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 49.

Atra-hasis: The text is fragmented here. (See *L & M*, p. 101).

Gilgamesh: In an apparently flagrant gesture of divine whim, Enlil - initially furious that human beings survived the flood - granted immortality and divine status to Utnapishtim and his wife soon after the great deluge. "Enlil went up inside the boat ... / He had my[45] wife go up and kneel by my side. / He touched our forehead and, standing between us, he blessed us: / 'Previously Utnapishtim was a human being. / But now let Utnapishtim and his wife become like us, the gods!' " (*Kovacs*, p. 103). Sarna comments that unlike God's covenant in the biblical story and the blessing that Noah should procreate, the bestowal of immortality upon Utnapishtim and his wife "is thoroughly devoid of any universal significance, completely empty of any didactic values. It contains no message of comfort, no promise for the future, no offering of security."[46]

The Biblical Account: The Aftermath of the Flood

The conclusion of the biblical flood narrative recounts the actions, words, and promises of God that bear no resemblance to the Mesopotamian stories. God assures Noah that: (1) a cataclysmic deluge will never recur (Gen. 8:21, 9:11, 15) and (2) that the cycles of nature will follow the standard seasonal pattern and will never again be disrupted (Gen. 8:22). God's guarantee that "never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (8:11) is cast as a covenant between God and Noah, his offspring, and all living creatures on earth. The rainbow serves as the sign of the covenant (9:13). This latter section of the biblical flood story is integral to the message of the Text and provides the comfort of divine protection from a future universal cataclysm; however, "no ... parallel has been discovered in any Babylonian diluvial tradition to the

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[45] I.e., Utnapishtim and his wife.

[46] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 57.

covenant which the Lord made ... or to the rainbow, the symbol of the covenant."[47]

Also alien to the Mesopotamian texts under consideration is God's permission to Noah to consume animals, provided that the "life-blood" has been properly drained. The sanctity of human life is made clear in the divine warning that anyone (or any beast) that "sheds the blood of man" will be accountable to God. Heidel interprets God's warning as a deterrent to prevent "man's degeneration to the level of barbarism and savagery," and to demonstrate the value of every human being who, "created in the image of God, may not be slain with impunity."[48]

THE QUESTION OF DEPENDENCE

It is apparent that the biblical flood narrative - in many instances - parallels the Mesopotamian material but also significantly diverges from it. In fact - as indicated above - certain episodes in the flood stories under consideration may be viewed simultaneously in light of both similarity and disparity. The sending out of the birds, for example, is a feature common to both Gilgamesh and the Noah story, but the details are substantially dissimilar. Whereas Young observes on one hand that "parallels between ... Atra-hasis and the biblical Flood narrative may be cited, [and] even greater similarities to the Genesis account are present in ... Gilgamesh,"[49] he notes on the other hand that "there are important and basic differences between the ... sources."[50] Because the Mesopotamian flood accounts pre-date Genesis by at least several hundred years,

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[47] Ibid., p. 258.

[48] Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, p. 258.

[49] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," by Dwight Young, p. 1354.

[50] Ibid., p. 1356.

scholars have developed a number of theories to explain (or refute) the dependence of the biblical deluge story on its Babylonian predecessors.

A leading theory - identified by Wenham[51] as "maximalist" - posits that the redactors of the Bible had direct access to the Mesopotamian flood stories "in something like their present form."[52] The hand that authored Scripture reworked or recast the Mesopotamian material and - in so doing - preserved certain components of plot structure and imagery but excised or radically altered others. "Maximalist" theory - rooted in the similarities shared by the various flood accounts - insists upon literary *dependence* of the biblical material on the Babylonian. Though the notion that "the Hebrew story is derived from the Babylonian cannot be doubted,"[53] "maximalist" scholarship holds that the biblical flood story represents a conscious and deliberate editing of the Mesopotamian "originals" in accord with the principles of Israelite monotheism. The biblical author: (1) had the Mesopotamian material "in hand," (2) fully understood the polytheistic system undergirding the material, and (3) created a new monotheistic version of the material palatable to Israel (which served - in part - as a polemic against polytheism).

Wenham contrasts "maximalism" with a second leading theory, "minimalism." He explains that "the minimalists argue that the differences between the Mesopotamian and biblical

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[51] G. J. Wenham cited in: David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 55-57.

[52] Ibid., p. 56.

[53] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," by J. H. Marks, p. 283.

accounts are too great to suppose dependence of the latter on the former."[54] "Minimalist" scholarship draws its strength from the overwhelming prevalence of flood stories among different peoples around the world living in distinct corners of the globe with no possibility of cross-cultural interaction. In addition to the ancient Near East, Gaster has observed flood traditions and literatures in Europe, India, Eastern Asia, Indonesia, New Guinea, Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia, and North, Central, and South America.[55] Schmidt comments that "although not every society preserves traditions about destructive waters in its myth and legend, peoples of every continent do perpetuate such lore. In fact, recent estimates of the total number of such accounts worldwide surpass three hundred."[56] Despite the cultural diversity represented by the many extant flood literatures around the world, the stories often bear similarities in theme, imagery, and plot. According to Sarna, the commonalities are "to be explained as common human psychological and religious reactions to a given set of circumstances finding expression in a literary stereotype."[57] Following Sarna's reasoning, the "minimalists" assert that the biblical flood story is *independent* of the Mesopotamian material; they attribute the similarities to inherent human nature or to a hypothetical, common tradition (no longer extant) from which both cultures drew.

Wenham concludes that "the truth lies somewhere between the minimalist and maximalist

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[54] Cited in: David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," p. 55.

[55] Theodor H. Gaster. *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 82-129.

[56] Brian B. Schmidt, "Flood Narratives of Ancient Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Jack M. Sasson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), p. 2337.

[57] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 38.

positions."[58] One possibility is that the Bible gained indirect exposure to the Mesopotamian flood accounts by means of Amorite or Aramean "middle-men" who transmitted to Israel reworked, second-hand (and currently non-extant) versions of the Mesopotamian lore. Though "the historical relation between the ... biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories cannot be determined precisely,"[59] it is certain that the Gilgamesh Epic circulated widely in the ancient Near East and that cross-cultural interaction in the region was common.

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[58] Cited in: David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," p. 56.

[59] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Flood (Genesis), by J. H. Marks, p. 283.

CONCLUSION:

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD ACCOUNT AS "MONOTHEISING MYTHOLOGY"

THE HISTORICITY OF THE FLOOD

The question of whether the great deluge occurred as a historical "fact" is of premier importance in assessing the potentially mythological nature of the biblical flood narrative. In the scholarly study of the historicity of the flood - aided by the tools of geology and archaeology - widespread consensus supports the notion that a flood in ancient Canaan or Israel would be "extremely unlikely"[1] or "impossible."[2] It is thus highly unlikely that Israel - a country with rugged terrain and dry climate - actually experienced a cataclysmic flood. Regarding the extensive geological inquiry to substantiate a flood in the region (the scientific search for alluvial deposits) Sarna notes that "no accumulation of clay deposits, the telltale evidence of extensive flooding, has been uncovered in excavations there. None, for instance, is present in Jericho, a town that dates back 9,000 years."[3]

Though ancient Israel was not susceptible to flooding, Mesopotamia - a civilization built on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the Persian Gulf - was liable to inundations on a yearly basis.[4] Sarna describes Mesopotamia as a "flat alluvial plain ... bounded on either side

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[1] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 39.

[2] Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 4.

[3] Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, p. 48.

[4] See W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 16.

by a mighty river" and identifies the area as "the natural locale for a flood tradition."[5] Sarna's conclusion concerning the flood-prone Mesopotamia is supported by the archaeological discovery of "relatively thick flood deposits"[6] throughout ancient sites in the Tigris-Euphrates region. The certainty of flooding in Mesopotamia is evident, and the possibility that the biblical flood account is rooted there - based on patterns of cross-cultural contact in the ancient Near East and the identification of Mesopotamia as Abraham's place of birth (Gen. 11:31) - is accepted as fact within the scholarly community.

Whereas careful analysis of the archaeological data supports the historicity of *local* flooding in Mesopotamia, the possibility of a *universal* deluge that could "destroy all flesh" and cause "everything on earth [to] perish"[7] cannot be substantiated. Though silt deposits were found at the sites of ancient Ur and Kish, "the two alluvial layers ... cannot be dated contemporaneously and must refer to two separate inundations."[8] Silt layers that indicate flooding in Nineveh, Shuruppak, Uruk, and Lagash are also "of differing dates and lack convincing connection with the biblical narrative."[9] The data disconfirm the possibility that "the earth's surface was at any time after the appearance of *homo sapiens* on earth submerged, wholly or in large part, by flood waters."[10] Local Mesopotamian floods are well-attested in archaeological research, but a

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[5] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 39.

[6] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, s.v. "Flood, The," by Dwight Young, p. 1357.

[7] Gen. 6:17, *JPS Tanakh*, p. 11.

[8] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," by J. H. Marks, p. 283.

[9] *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, s.v. "Flood," by Jack P. Lewis, p. 798.

[10] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 38.

universal cataclysm as described in the three accounts under consideration is not thought of as historical fact. Sarna thus notes that "whatever historical foundations may possibly underlie [the flood] traditions, it is clear that popular imagination has been at work magnifying local disastrous floods into catastrophes of universal proportions."[11] It is apparent that the biblical flood account and the flood stories of Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh are rooted in the actual occurrence of a severe local storm (or series of storms) that was recorded and understood through the prism of mythology.

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD AS MYTH

Even a cursory analysis of the biblical flood narrative reveals the mythological nature of the Text. The details of the story transgress the boundaries of rational possibility: "The ark could never have weathered a storm such as Genesis describes, nor could it possibly have contained a pair of every existing species of animal and creeping thing, to say nothing of providing proper subsistence conditions for such a menagerie. Neither would the eight members of Noah's family have been able to care for a zoo of such proportions, even assuming they really had been able to collect one pair of every species of life."[12] The flood story as preserved in Genesis is not historically believable; it addresses the events of primordial times that took place in a pre-historical era. As a climax in the creation-deluge cycle of Genesis 1-11, the flood narrative is an integral component of biblical cosmology which was - by definition - mythological in a pre-scientific era. The flood reverses creation, for the waters that inundate the earth are cast - mythologically - as the rejoining of the heavens and the subterranean abyss separated in Gen. 1:6.

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[11] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 38.

[12] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Flood (Genesis)," by J. H. Marks, p. 283.

The pattern of divine creation undone by divine destruction in primeval time sets the context in which the story of the patriarchs and the history of the people Israel unfold.

The essential difference between the biblical flood narrative on one hand and the accounts of Atra-hasis and Gilgamesh on the other is the cultural context in which the myths were crafted: a world-view that embraced monotheism or polytheistic paganism. Monotheism and polytheism shaped not only the mythology of Israel and Mesopotamia, respectively, but the entire outlook of the nations, for the distinct world-views "bear within themselves a series of cosmological implications which ... channel the religious and philosophical responses of the followers of each approach along certain limited and inevitable lines."[13] The "limited and inevitable lines" born of Israelite monotheism colored Israel's mythology in a shade distinct from that of her Near Eastern neighbors. The biblical flood account is, indeed, a myth, but it is a uniquely "monotheising" myth and thereby a radical departure from its Mesopotamian predecessors.

The biblical flood myth is a story about Israel's unique God. Unlike the Mesopotamian deities, the One Omnipotent God acts resolutely and decisively, guided by absolute standards of justice and morality. The biblical flood is primarily concerned with human sin and divine punishment. The misdeeds of humankind had become so pervasive in the generation of the flood that the divine Judge - the Moral Arbiter - was compelled to intervene. Only the righteous Noah was to survive and - in a display of divine beneficence - receive God's blessing and covenant. Sarna explains the significance and uniqueness of the biblical flood account by citing its "profound

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[13] J. J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed., (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 368.

importance as a landmark in the history of religion."[14] The biblical narrative stands apart from the Mesopotamian accounts in that the Bible's notion that "human sinfulness finds its expression in the state of society, and that God holds men and society accountable for their misdeeds, is revolutionary in the ancient world."[15] The ethical God of Israel - the necessary consequent of the monotheistic world-view[16] - is at the center of the Bible's unique mythological account of the great flood.

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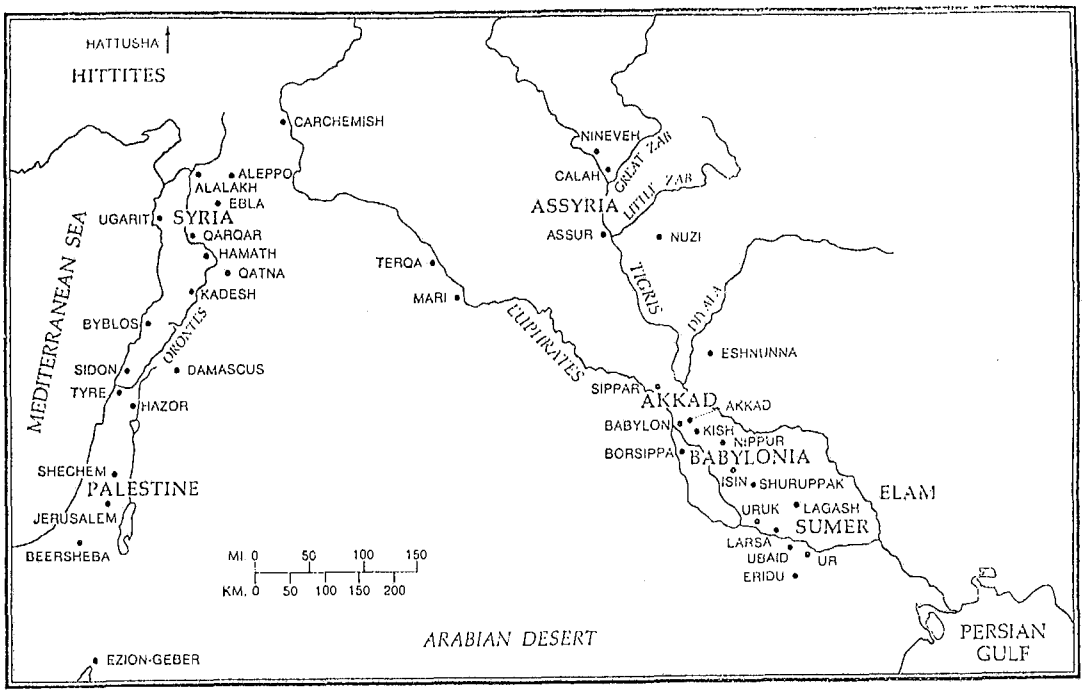
[14] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 53.

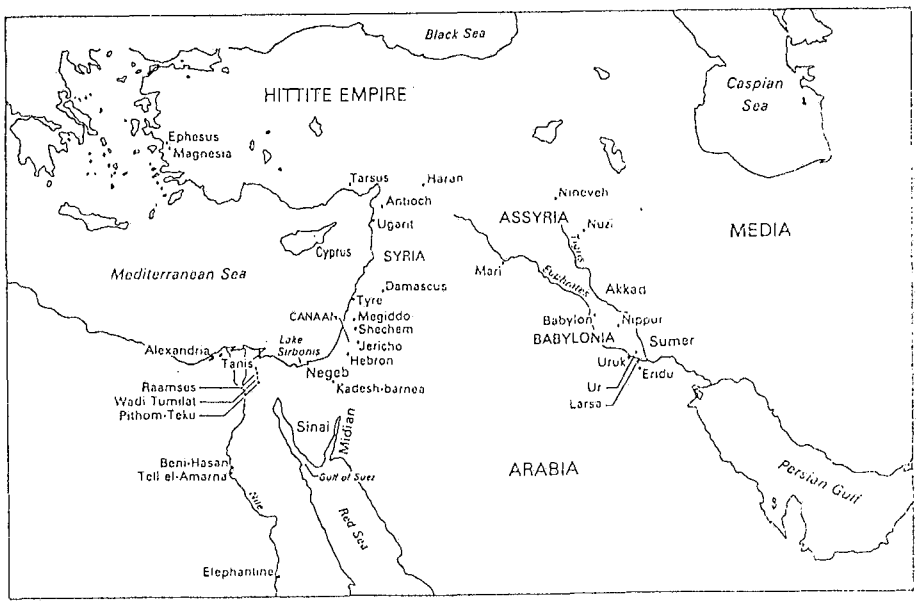
[15] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 53.

[16] See: J. J. Finkelstein, "Bible and Babel," p. 370.

APPENDIX I:

MAPS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

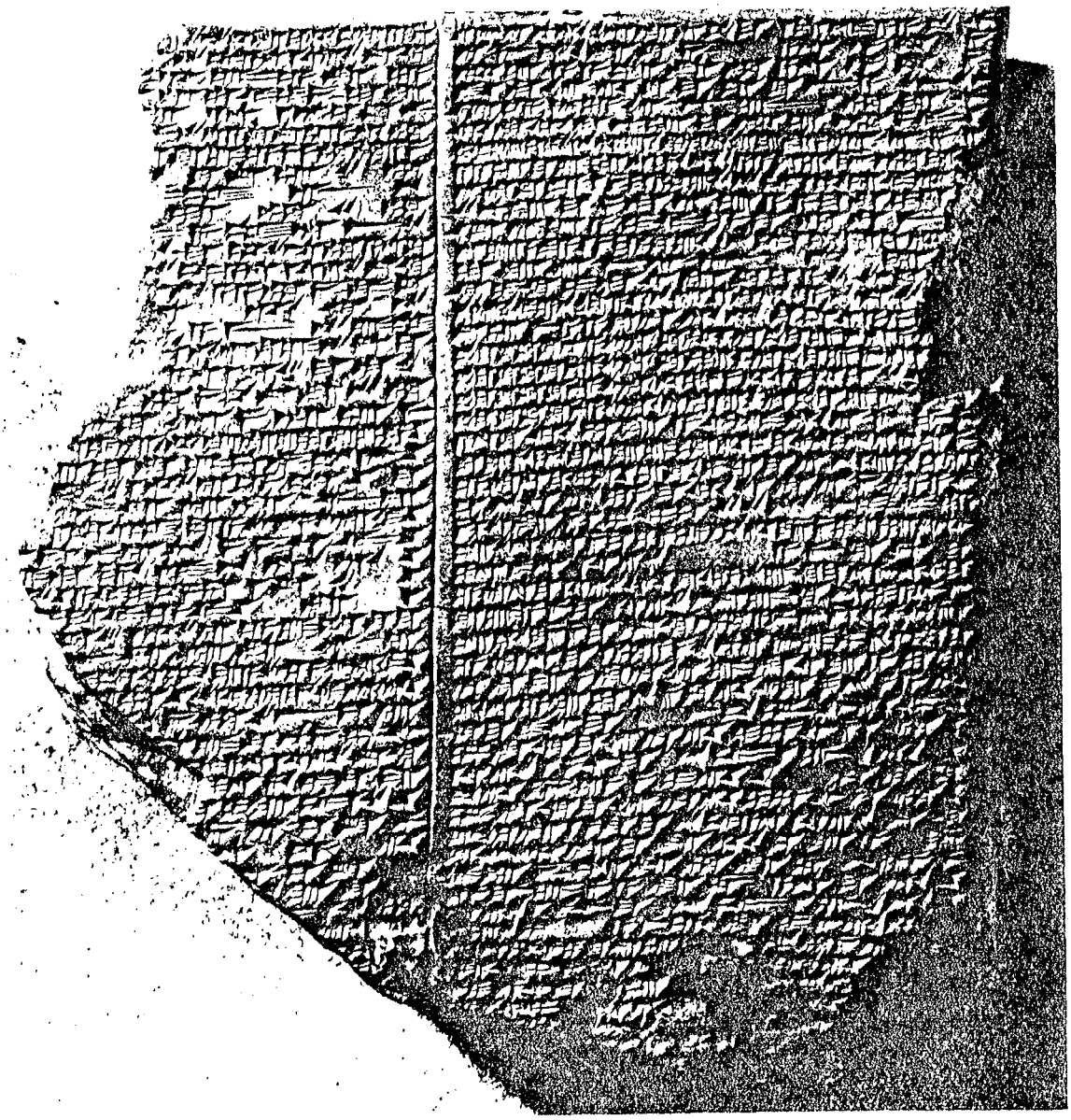




Taken from: Walton, John H. *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989 and Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *The Jewish Heritage*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

APPENDIX II:

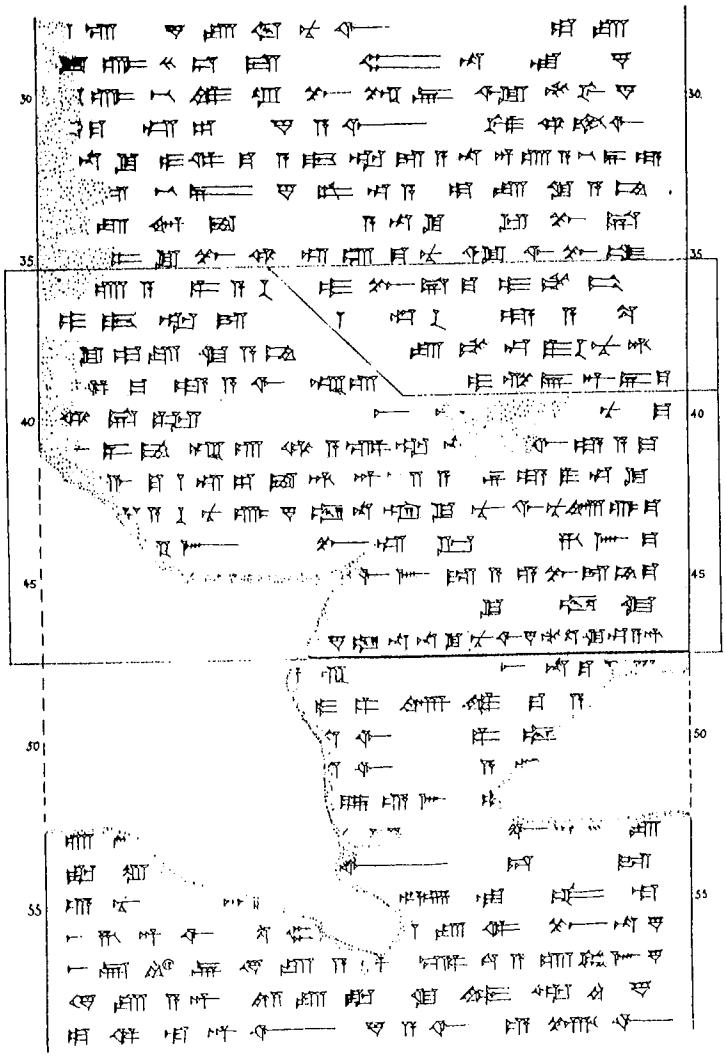
THE ELEVENTH TABLET OF THE GILGAMESH EPIC: A PHOTOGRAPH



Taken from: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, s.v. "Flood," Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982.

APPENDIX III:

THE ELEVENTH TABLET OF THE GILGAMESH EPIC: HANDCOPY



Taken from: Thompson, R. Campbell. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: Text, Transliteration, and Notes,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930.

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD NARRATIVE (GEN. 6:5-9:17)

ה וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל־יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבֹת
לִבּוֹ רַק רַע כָּל־הַיּוֹם: וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם ו
בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶמְחֶה אֶת־הָאָדָם ז
אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־
רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמָיִם כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עֲשִׂיתִם: וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן ח
בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־ ט
הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹחַ: וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־ י
חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת: וַתִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ יא
חָמָס: וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־ יב
בָּשָׂר אֶת־דַּרְכּוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ יג
קֵץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי
מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר קִנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה יד
אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבַּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר: וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר טו
תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אֹרֶךְ הַתֵּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה
רָחְבָּהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אַמָּה קוֹמָתָהּ: צֹהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֵּבָה וְאֶל־אַמָּה טז
תְּכַלֶּנָּה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפֶתַח הַתֵּבָה בְּצִדָּהּ תָּשִׂים תַּחְתִּיִּם שְׁנִים
וּשְׁלִשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהָ: וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל מַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ יז
לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־
בָּאָרֶץ יָגוְעַ: וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וּבָאתָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה יח
וּבָנֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ אִתָּךְ: וּמִכָּל־הָחַי מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם יט
מִכֹּל תָּבִיא אֶל־הַתֵּבָה לְהַחֲיֹת אִתָּךְ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יִהְיוּ: מֵהָעוֹף כ
לְמִינֵהוּ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכֹּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ שְׁנַיִם
מִכֹּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחֲיוֹת: וְאַתָּה קַח־לְךָ מִכָּל־מַאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר כא
יֵאָכֵל וְאָסַפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ וְלָהֶם לְאָכְלָה: וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל כב
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים כֵּן עָשָׂה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בֹּא־אַתָּה ז א
וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה כִּי־אֹתְךָ רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בַּדּוֹר
הַזֶּה: מִכֹּל ו הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה תִּקַּח־לְךָ שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעָה אִישׁ ב
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהֹרָה הִוא שְׁנַיִם אִישׁ
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ: גַּם מֵעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה לְחַיּוֹת ג
זֶרַע עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: כִּי לְיָמִים עוֹד שִׁבְעָה אָנֹכִי מַמְטִיר ד
עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לָיְלָה וּמָחִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־
הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־ ה
צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה: וְנֹחַ בֶּן־שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְהַמַּבּוּל הָיָה מַיִם עַל־ ו
הָאָרֶץ: וַיָּבֹא נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתּוֹ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה ז
מִפְּנֵי מֵי הַמַּבּוּל: מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר ח
אֵינֶנָּה טְהֹרָה וּמִן־הָעוֹף וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־רֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאֲדָמָה: שְׁנַיִם ט
שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־נֹחַ: וַיְהִי לִשְׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וּמֵי הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: י
בִּשְׁנַת שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי־נֹחַ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יא
יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעְיְנוֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וַאֲרֻבֹּת
הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחוּ: וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים יב
לָיְלָה: בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּא נֹחַ וְשֵׁם־וְחָם וְיֶפֶת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וְאֵשֶׁת יג
נֹחַ וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת נְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתָּם אֶל־הַתֵּבָה: הֵמָּה וְכָל־הַחַיָּה לְמִינָהּ
וְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ לְמִינֵהוּ
וְכָל־הָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ כֹּל צִפּוֹר כָּל־כָּנָף: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־ יד טו

הַתֵּבָה שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל־הַבָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים: וְהַבָּאִים ש
זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּאוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּסְגֹּר
יהוה בַּעֲדוֹ: וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּרְבּוּ הַמַּיִם ז
וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וַתָּרָם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּרְבּוּ ח
מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם: וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ ט
מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְכֻסּוּ כָּל־הֶהָרִים הַגְּבֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־תַּחַת
כָּל־הַשָּׁמָיִם: חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה מִלְמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמָּיִם וַיְכֻסּוּ כ
הֶהָרִים: וַיִּגְוַע כָּל־בָּשָׂר ו הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ בָּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה כא
וּבַחַיָּה וּבְכָל־הַשֶּׁרֶץ הַשֹּׁרֵץ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְכֹל הָאָדָם: כֹּל אֲשֶׁר כב
נִשְׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפָּיו מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בֶּחָרָבָה מֵתוּ: וַיִּמַח אֶת־ כג
כָּל־הַיְקוּם ו אֲשֶׁר ו עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־
רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּמָּחוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשָּׁאֶר אַךְ־נֹחַ וַאֲשֶׁר
אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה: וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַת יוֹם: כד
ח א וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֵת כָּל־הַחַיָּה וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר א ת
אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּשֹׁכּוּ הַמָּיִם:
וַיִּסָּכְרוּ מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם וַאֲרֻבֹּת הַשָּׁמָיִם וַיִּכָּלֵא הַגֶּשֶׁם מִן־ ב
הַשָּׁמָיִם: וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הָלוֹךְ וָשׁוֹב וַיַּחְסְרוּ הַמַּיִם ג
מִקְצֵה חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַת יוֹם: וַתָּנַח הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי ד
בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ עַל הָרֵי אֲרָרָט: וְהַמַּיִם הָיוֹ הָלוֹךְ ה
וְהָסוֹר עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בָּעֲשִׂירִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רָאשֵׁי
הֶהָרִים: וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת־חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה ו
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא יָצוֹא וָשׁוֹב עַד־יְבֹשֶׁת ז
הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מֵאִתּוֹ לִרְאוֹת הֲקַלּוּ ח
הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: וְלֹא־מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מָנוֹחַ לְכַף־רַגְלָהּ ט
וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה כִּי־מַיִם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ
וַיִּקָּחֶהָ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה: וַיָּחֶל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים י
אֲחֵרִים וַיֹּסֶף שַׁלַּח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מִן־הַתֵּבָה: וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה יא
לְעֵת עֶרֶב וְהִנֵּה עֲלֵה־זַיִת טָרָף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי־קַלּוּ הַמַּיִם
כב מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: וַיֶּחֱל עוֹר שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אֲחֵרִים וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה יג
וְלֹא־יָסְפָה שׁוּב־אֵלָיו עוֹד: וַיְהִי בְּאַחַת וְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
בָּרִאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ וַיָּסַר נֹחַ אֶת־ יד
מִכְסֵה הַתֵּבָה וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי ט
בְּשִׁבְעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יָבְשָׁה הָאָרֶץ: וַיְדַבֵּר
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ לֵאמֹר: צֵא מִן־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתֶּךָ וּבָנֶיךָ
וְנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ אִתָּךְ: כָּל־הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר־אִתְּךָ מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּעוֹף
וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הוֹצֵא אִתָּךְ וְשָׁרְצוּ
בָאָרֶץ וּפָרוּ וְרָבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֵּצֵא־נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־ יח
בָנָיו אִתּוֹ: כָּל־הַחַיָּה כָּל־הָרֶמֶשׂ וְכָל־הָעוֹף כֹּל רוֹמֵשׂ עַל־ יט
הָאָרֶץ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיהֶם יָצְאוּ מִן־הַתֵּבָה: וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוה כ
וַיִּקַּח מִכֹּל ו הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכֹּל הָעוֹף הַטָּהוֹר וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת
בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיָּרַח יהוה אֶת־רֵיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יהוה אֶל־לִבּוֹ לֹא כא
אֹסֵף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם
רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו וְלֹא־אֹסֵף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי:
כב עֹד כָּל־יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ זֶרַע וְקָצִיר וְקֹר וָחֹם וְקַיִץ וָחֹרֶף וְיוֹם וָלָיְלָה
ט א לֹא יִשְׁבֹּתוּ: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
ב פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: וּמוֹרַאֲכֶם וְחִתְכֶם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל־
חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמֹשׂ הָאֲדָמָה
ג וּבְכָל־דְּגֵי הַיָּם בְּיֶדְכֶם נִתָּנוּ: כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא־חַי לָכֶם
ד יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָה כְּיֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כֹּל: אַךְ־בָּשָׂר
ה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָמוֹ לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ: וְאַךְ אֶת־דִּמְכֶם לְנַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ
מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֶדְרְשֶׁנּוּ וּמִיַּד הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֶדְרֹשׁ
ו אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם: שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ כִּי בְצֶלֶם
ז אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם: וְאַתֶּם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ שִׁרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ
ח וּרְבוּ־בָהּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ

ט
לֵאמֹר: וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם ט
אַחֲרֵיכֶם: וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בָּעוֹף בַּבְּהֵמָה י
וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכֹּל יֹצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה לְכֹל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ:
וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי יא
הַמַּבּוּל וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל לְשַׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יב
זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם: אֶת־קַשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי בֶּעָנָן וְהָיְתָה יג
לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ: וְהָיָה בְּעַנְנִי עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ יד
וְנִרְאֲתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בֶּעָנָן: וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם טו
וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל
לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר: וְהָיְתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בֶּעָנָן וּרְאִיתִיהָ לִזְכֹּר בְּרִית טז
עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־
הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הֲקִמֹתִי יז
בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

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