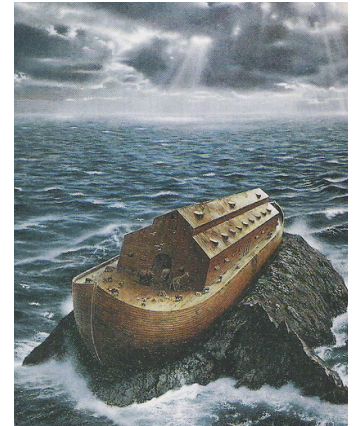


The Flood of Noah and the Flood of Gilgamesh

Source: Frank Lorey, M.A. *Institute for Creation Research, 1997*

Background

The Epic of Gilgamesh has been of interest to Christians ever since its discovery in the mid-nineteenth century in the ruins of the great library at Nineveh, with its account of a universal flood with significant **parallels** to the Flood of Noah's day. The rest of the Epic, which dates back to possibly third millennium B.C., contains little of value for Christians, since it concerns typical polytheistic myths associated with the pagan peoples of the time. However, some Christians have studied the ideas of creation and the afterlife presented in the Epic. Even secular scholars have recognized the parallels between the Babylonian, Phoenician, and Hebrew accounts, although not all are willing to label the connections as anything more than shared mythology.



There have been numerous flood stories identified from ancient sources scattered around the world. The stories that were discovered on cuneiform tablets, which comprise some of the earliest surviving writing, have obvious similarities. Cuneiform writing was invented by the Sumerians and carried on by the Akkadians. Babylonian and Assyrian are two dialects of the Akkadian, and both contain a flood account. While there are differences between the original Sumerian and later Babylonian and Assyrian flood accounts, many of the similarities are strikingly close to the Genesis flood account. The Babylonian account is the most intact, with only seven of 205 lines missing. It was also the first discovered, making it the most studied of the early flood accounts.

The Story

The Epic of Gilgamesh is contained on twelve large tablets, and since the original discovery, it has been found on others, as well as having been translated into other early languages. The actual tablets date back to around 650 B.C. and are obviously not originals since fragments of the flood story have been found on tablets dated around 2,000 B.C. Linguistic experts believe that the story was composed well before 2,000 B.C. compiled from material that was much older than that date. The Sumerian cuneiform writing has been estimated to go as far back as 3,300 B.C.

The story starts by introducing the deeds of the hero Gilgamesh. He was one who had great knowledge and wisdom, and preserved information of the days before the flood. Gilgamesh wrote on tablets of stone all that he had done, including building the city walls of Uruk and its temple for Eanna. He was an oppressive ruler, however, which caused his subjects to cry out to the "gods" to create a nemesis to cause Gilgamesh **strife**.

After one fight, this nemesis—Enkidu—became best friends with Gilgamesh. The two set off to win fame by going on many dangerous adventures in which Enkidu is eventually killed. Gilgamesh then determines to find immortality since he now fears death. It is upon this search that he meets Utnapishtim, the character most like the Biblical Noah.

Parallels – to follow in the same direction or tendency; is similar to
Strife – difficulty or hardships

In brief, Utnapishtim had become immortal after building a ship to weather the Great **Deluge** that destroyed mankind. He brought all of his relatives and all species of creatures aboard the vessel. Utnapishtim released birds to find land, and the ship landed upon a mountain after the flood. The story then ends with tales of Enkidu's visit to the underworld. Even though many similarities exist between the two accounts, there still are serious differences.

The table below presents a comparison of the main aspects of the two accounts of the flood as presented in the Book of Genesis and in the Epic of Gilgamesh:

COMPARISON OF GENESIS AND GILGAMESH		
	GENESIS	GILGAMESH
Extent of flood	Global	Global
Cause	Man's wickedness	Man's sins
Intended for whom?	All mankind	One city & all mankind
Sender	Yahweh	Assembly of "gods"
Name of hero	Noah	Utnapishtim
Hero's character	Righteous	Righteous
Means of announcement	Direct from God	In a dream
Ordered to build boat?	Yes	Yes
Did hero complain?	Yes	Yes
Height of boat	Several stories (3)	Several stories (6)
Compartments inside?	Many	Many
Doors	One	One
Windows	At least one	At least one
Outside coating	Pitch	Pitch
Shape of boat	Rectangular	Square
Human passengers	Family members only	Family & few others
Other passengers	All species of animals	All species of animals
Means of flood	Ground water & heavy rain	Heavy rain
Duration of flood	Long (40 days & nights plus)	Short (6 days & nights)
Test to find land	Release of birds	Release of birds
Types of birds	Raven & three doves	Dove, swallow, raven
Ark landing spot	Mountain -- Mt. Ararat	Mountain -- Mt. Nisir
Sacrificed after flood?	Yes, by Noah	Yes, by Utnapishtim
Blessed after flood?	Yes	Yes

The meanings of the names of the heroes, however, have absolutely no common root or connection. Noah means "rest," while Utnapishtim means "finder of life." Neither was perfect, but both were considered righteous and relatively faultless compared to those around them.

Utnapishtim also took a pilot for the boat, and some craftsmen, not just his family in the ark. It is also interesting that both accounts trace the landing spot to the same general region of the Middle East; however, Mt. Ararat and Mt. Nisir are about 300 miles apart. The blessing that each hero received after the flood was also quite different. Utnapishtim was granted eternal life while Noah was to multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over the animals.

Conclusions

From the early days of the comparative study of these two flood accounts, it has been generally agreed that there is an obvious relationship. The widespread nature of flood traditions throughout the entire human race is excellent evidence for the existence of a great flood from a legal/historical point of view. Dating of the oldest fragments of the Gilgamesh account originally indicated that it was older than the assumed dating of Genesis. However, the probability exists that the Biblical account had been preserved either as an oral tradition, or in written form handed down from Noah, through the patriarchs and eventually to Moses, thereby making it actually older than the Sumerian accounts which were restatements (with alterations) to the original.

A popular theory, proposed by liberal "scholars," said that the Hebrews "borrowed" from the Babylonians, but no conclusive proof has ever been offered. The differences, including religious, ethical, and sheer quantity of details, make it unlikely that the Biblical account was dependent on any extant source from the Sumerian traditions. This still does not stop these liberal and secular scholars from advocating such a theory. The most accepted theory among evangelicals is that both have one common source, predating all the Sumerian forms. The divine inspiration of the Bible would demand that the Genesis account is the correct version. Indeed the Hebrews were known for handing down their records and tradition. The Book of Genesis is viewed for the most part as an historical work, even by many liberal scholars, while the Epic of Gilgamesh is viewed as mythological. The One-source Theory must, therefore, lead back to the historical event of the Flood and Noah's Ark.

----- QUESTIONS -----

1. _____ What is **STRIFE**?
A. striking it rich B. a white stripe C. difficulty or hardship
2. _____ Based on context clues, what would be a good synonym for the word **DELUGE**?
A. snowstorm B. flood C. earthquake D. tornado
3. _____ How many miles apart are Mt. Ararat and Mt. Nisir?
A. 205 B. 3300 C. 650 D. 300
4. What does the name 'NOAH' translate to mean? _____
5. What does the name 'UTNAPISHTIM' translate to mean? _____
6. Why does Gilgamesh want to find immortality and fear death?
7. What bias do you pick out in the Author's Point of View?
8. What is the Author's Purpose in writing this article?

