



The Genesis Flood and the Gilgamesh Epic

The Genesis Flood



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This essay represents a comparison of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis Flood. The historical background of the Gilgamesh Epic is discussed in depth and a survey of both accounts is presented. The reason for the flood and God's purpose is looked at plus information on the survivors of both accounts is taken into consideration. The monotheistic versus the polytheistic beliefs is closely considered. Finally, the Epic as a fantasy and the Genesis Flood as a scientific account is covered in some detail. The Gilgamesh Epic comes from tablets found associated with the Akkadian and Sumer Empires. This epic is amongst many ancient flood stories that have been told by so many different people groups. That in itself is enough proof of the Biblical flood and what happened on the earth at that time.

Nozomi Osanai says that the Gilgamesh Epic is often used to deny the authority of the Bible because it is said to predate the Genesis account of the flood. Its compilation took place during the second millennium BC and is said to have passed down from an older Akkadian version. The writer is trying to ascertain the relationship between the two. Another purpose of this comparative study is to support the trustworthiness of the Bible and strengthen Christians' faith. This demonstrates that the Epic cannot be used to deny the authority of the Bible. The comparison is between tablet XI and Genesis 6-10. The expectation is that the Gilgamesh Epic has little reliability. The Gilgamesh Epic is the most complete out of two other ancient stories: the Sumerian story of Ziusudra and the Akkadian Epic. The Gilgamesh Epic consists of twelve tablets with the flood account being on the 11th tablet. Gilgamesh was a post diluvian legendary king of Uruk in the Sumerian king list. It's estimated that if Gilgamesh was a real person, he would have existed around 2700 BC. Hormuzd Rassam, an Assyrian Christian, an assistant of an Englishman named Henry Layard found the tablets within the palace of Assurbanipal, who ruled Assyria as the last king from 668 to 626 BC. Parts of the Epic have been found with the Hittites and Hurrians. A complete original text of the Gilgamesh Epic does not exist. The oldest version is written in the Babylonian dialect of Akkadian commonly referred to as Old Babylonian Version. An older version written in the 13th century BC consists of the 11 tablets already mentioned. The flood account was not part of the original epic as it is easily seen to interrupt the flow of dialogue between Utnapishtim and Gilgamesh. This account draws on the myth of Atrahasis, another flood account. Generally, the Atrahasis Epic on tablet III is regarded as the source of the Gilgamesh Epic tablet XI but this is debated. Thus, the date of the original text is not certain. The Sumerian tablets also have episodes of the Gilgamesh Epic in tablets III to V, VI, VII and XII.

The Gilgamesh Tradition traces its history from 2600 BC where he is lord of Uruk. In 2500 BC, Gilgamesh is related to the priest king embodying in the cult of the dying fertility god Dumuzi and also is a hero leading Uruk in war of independence against Kish. The story divides up into non-literary tradition and oral literary tradition. In 2400 BC Gilgamesh is mentioned in offerings to dead 'lords' on 'Bank of Gilgamesh.' In 2100 BC Gilgamesh is portrayed as judge in the netherworld in 'Death of Urnammu' and oral literary tradition, he becomes a subject of court poetry as ancestor of Third Dynasty of Ur. As a hero, he is a model of a 'divine deputy' in Uruk's war of independence against Gutium; famous ancestor of Shulgi and victor over Kish. In 2000 BC, Gilgamesh becomes a form of dead Dumuzi and Ningishzida. The oral literary tradition comments on the Death of Gilgamesh and is seen in the Old Babylonian Epic. Separate folktales relate to a Wild Man, Quest for a life story and the Flood story and then a Snake story.

Gilgamesh met Utnapishtim and asked him how he got eternal life. Utnapishtim told him about the flood and the god Ea had told Utnapishtim about the coming flood and that the gods were planning to destroy all humanity on earth. Utnapishtim turned his reed hut into a ship and made all of his kin and relatives, craftsmen, and animals embark to escape the coming flood. The ship eventually landed on Mt. Nisir. The raven that was sent out did not return and Utnapishtim then offered a sacrifice to the gods. Enlil became angry when he found the survivors; however at Ea's intervention, Enlil allowed Utnapishtim and his wife to become gods. The similarity between the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis Flood account can easily be seen. But the differences are the clarity of the reason for the flood on both accounts and the character of god and of the hero. Specifics as to the survivors and animals, the structure of the ship, duration and source of the flood, the kind and number of birds for test flights, the landing place of the ship are all different.

Interestingly, in a model produced from the Noahic flood, 52 generations could bring the population to the number it is today. In regards to the differences in races, it's already been determined that there is only a .2 percent difference in any two individuals on earth. Any changes in races could have been brought about by other factors that more suit factors of climate and environment. There is no reference in the Epic as to the repopulation of the earth after the flood. However, the Genesis provides us with a detailed genealogy of the sons of Noah. Josephus identifies the names of the descendants of Noah's three sons with mention of some nations. Many of the names mentioned have been discovered on certain monuments found. Finally, 95% of flood tales in history have common elements with Genesis and they say that the flood was global.

The 'kinds' of animals on the ark has been debated but the word, 'kinds' needs to be understood. For example, the zebra, donkey and horse are probably descended from an equine or horse like kind. Dogs, wolves, coyotes and jackals are probably from a canine or dog like kind; etc. According to these facts, Noah only needed to load 2,000 kinds on the ark but he had room for up to 16,000 different kinds.

In the Gilgamesh Epic, the flood is attributed with the coming of Shullat and Hanish which were the gods of destructive storms. The Epic indicates that all land was flattened and all people were destroyed except for those on the boat. In the Genesis flood the main source of water was not from just rain. The Flood was caused when 'all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.' The great deep usually refers to the oceans and subterranean sources of waters as indicated in Isaiah 51:10, Amos 7:4, Psalm 36:6, Ezek 31:4, 15 and also in Genesis, Job, Psalms and Isaiah. There are vast amounts of water stored underground. There's about 30 times more fresh water underground than it is above ground. A lot of this water is under great pressure. The Epic doesn't account for all of this water within the time frame given. It's too little. The flood as described by the Epic could not have covered very much at all. But the genesis flood accounts for the correct scientific numbers for such a world wide flood to occur. Interestingly, the present height of Mount Everest is 8,848 metres and found on top are a variety of marine fossils. Either the sea rose over these mountains or they have risen by a catastrophic movement during and after the event of the Genesis flood. There is also evidence that the amount of water in the oceans was much smaller than it is now. Most geologists have difficulties explaining the origin of submarine canyons but as the lands were uplifted in the Genesis flood, great currents of water flowing down into the ocean depths would quickly cause these great canyons. Today, 70 percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. The deepening of the ocean basin and the rising of the continents would have resulted in more water running off the land. So again, we see the timeframe of the Genesis Flood seems to be a reasonable time for such a flood. It was universal because more than thirty statements refer to its universal character, the purpose of the Flood was to destroy all of mankind and destroy the earth, it covered all the mountains, it lasted over a year, it had the capacity to hold all the animals, the Ark was built for a great flood, all people are said to have descended from Noah's three sons. Jesus Christ and the Apostle Peter referred to the Genesis Flood as being a universal one as a type of the final Judgment.

The ship in the Gilgamesh Epic was square. Such a ship would not have survived the storm and ocean. However, in the Genesis account, the ark was built with structural safety in mind, overturning stability and sea keeping quality. It was designed for capacity and floating

stability rather than for speed or navigability. Compared with the Gilgamesh Epic boat design, the Genesis' Ark was realistic and safe in contrast to the design of Utnapishtim's model.

The Book of Genesis deals with origins. Chapters 1 through 11 deal with universal origins such as the universe, plants, animals, human beings, sin, redemption, and the nations of the earth while chapters 12 through 50 deals with the origin of the Hebrew nation. The Genesis Flood account takes up three and a half chapters of the first 11 chapters. For more proof, the crust of the world shows rock layer upon rock layer with billions of dead things that have been buried in water which carried mud and sand and tells of rapid burial and fossilization. Most of earth's crust consists of sedimentary rocks originally formed in almost all cases under water by deposition after movement.

And finally, the Gilgamesh Epic has a polytheistic conception of god while the Genesis Flood is based on monotheistic theology. Archaeological evidence indicates that the history of civilization experienced a decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism and widespread belief in evil spirits. This same pattern is found in Egypt, India, China and Greece. The first departure was toward the worship of the sun, moon and stars.

It's obvious that the Epic was a fantasy but the Genesis Flood is not only historical but represents a scientific calculation and true measurement. It must more plausible that the Epic, along with many other flood accounts is based on an historical event. There are many ancient flood stories presented different people groups in the world. According to specifics, scientific reliability, internal consistency, secular records and common elements, the Genesis account seems more acceptable as an accurate historical record.

Nozomi Osanai also gives us a realistic comparison of the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis Flood and explains why the Genesis account of the flood could not have come from the Gilgamesh Epic. The Gilgamesh Epic like so many other accounts simply re-enforce the historical proof of the Genesis account. In itself, the Gilgamesh Epic is a fantasy not a historical account. This also shows that the Genesis account has a scientific workable basis to it where as the Gilgamesh Epic is one among the many flood stories. Nothing could have been borrowed from the Gilgamesh Epic. It would have been an advantage to have comparisons between the Gilgamesh Epic and other known accounts of the flood other than the Genesis Account. I think that would be profitable.

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