

# Good example of the epic of gilgamesh and the bible: a multi-cultural flood narra...

[Religion](#), [Bible](#)



There are many strange similarities between ancient texts of different cultures. Within these narratives, there are different trappings, but many of the stories remain eerily similar across cultural boundaries; within The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Old Testament of the Bible, for instance, there are a number of different stories that are remarkably similar. The story of Gilgamesh and the plant of eternal life is very similar to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. However, perhaps the most similar of the stories contained within the Gilgamesh epic and the Old Testament of the Bible are the shared stories of a Flood. Even the Qu'ran, another ancient text from the same region shares a great flood story with Gilgamesh and the Old Testament; however, this discussion will focus on Gilgamesh and the Old Testament, and the various similarities (and subtle differences) between the texts.

In The Epic of Gilgamesh, there is a similar flood mythology at play. The flood myth in The Epic of Gilgamesh is not concerned with Gilgamesh himself; rather, it is a side-story that the reader is expected to understand. In The Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the only survivors of the Great Flood is a character named Utnapishtim; he was granted immortality by God or the gods after the Great Flood that destroyed the entire world ("Epic of Gilgamesh").

Utnapishtim built a great ship upon which he collected all the species of creatures that he could. When the Great Flood ended, he released the birds from the ship to find land, and the birds lead him and his family to the land where he was tasked with the job of repopulating the earth ("Epic of Gilgamesh"). In The Epic of Gilgamesh, the command to build the vessel that will save the animals from the flood is remarkably similar to that of the Old

Testament: " O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu, tear down thy house, build a ship; abandon wealth, seek after life; scorn possessions, save thy life. Bring up the seed of all kinds of living things into the ship which thou shalt build. Let its dimensions be well measured" (" Epic of Gilgamesh"). Although not exactly the same, the gist of the two orders are remarkably similar.

Although there are certainly very real similarities between The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Old Testament story of the Great Flood, there are also significant differences between the two stories. Perhaps one of the most convincing arguments in favor of the two stories having a common root is the cause of the Great Flood. In both stories, the cause of the Great Flood or Great Deluge is the sin of mankind. In the Bible, God looks down upon the Earth and sees that man has become wicked, and is very displeased with the way that his creation is acting (Genesis 5-6). In both Gilgamesh and Genesis, the extent of the flood is global, and all the sins of mankind are washed away in the flood waters.

The Epic of Gilgamesh features a canon of gods, unlike the Christian Bible, which focuses on a single God. These Gods are the ones that sent the Great Deluge to Earth during the story; similarly, the Jewish God, Yahweh, is the one who sent forth the floodwaters in Genesis. Both Noah and Utnapishtim are described by their respective texts as being extremely righteous men at the time of the flood, and both are particularly long-lived. Noah is long-lived as a result of his birth before the flood, while Utnapishtim is granted longevity as a result of his actions during the flood (Njozi).

One particularly striking similarity between the two stories is a very human similarity: both of the heroes complained about the task they were given by

God or their assembly of gods. Although each of the characters is ordered to build a vessel to protect the future survival of their species, they complained heavily about it, and questioned the logic of completing a task given to them by God or an assembly of gods (Njozi). The boats themselves were similar as well, covered on the outside with pitch, several stories tall, with at least one window and one door (Njozi). The boats were also both rectangular in shape, although the boat in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is described also as a square-shaped boat (Njozi).

There are very real similarities between the stories of the flood and the Great Deluge in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Old Testament book of Genesis. Although there are differences, these differences can be attributed to different cultural interpretations of events, or even changes that occurred as the stories were passed down from generation to generation, before they were written down. It seems likely that the Abrahamic stories of the Great Flood were derived from the stories contained within *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, although definitive proof is certainly difficult to come by in the case of these ancient texts. There could well have been a very large flood that happened in Mesopotamia many, many centuries ago; a flood so large that it remained embedded into cultural memory and was passed down as legend in a variety of different cultural traditions (Njozi).

## **Works cited**

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