

The flood accounts in the epic of gilgamesh and the genesis essay sample



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1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a debates existing as to which of the Flood Accounts in the Epic of Gilgamesh and the book of Genesis is the older text. This issue came out when the flood stories were found and happen to be similar. What makes the issue on the hot spot is the claim of other scholars that the Genesis was based on the Flood account in the Epic of Gilgamesh. However, the claim has not yet been proven. In this paper, the researcher aims to establish the reliability and the credibility of the Bible as a historical event, and that it was not based on any existing literary work.

In this paper, the researcher has made an analysis of the different elements of the flood accounts in order to prove which of the accounts has the nearest resemblance to reality.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS IN THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH AND THE GENESIS

1. SOURCES OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS

The Babylonian tablets containing the flood story of the Epic of Gilgamesh have been date circa 650 BCE ¹ , carved in Tablet XI of the twelve stone tablets (R. Deem). These were however assumed to have been not the originals since they have been fragments of the flood story found and were dated as early as 2000 BC. The materials were written in Sumerian. On the other hand, the Genesis was found in papyri materials which were estimated to have been dated 1500 and 500 BC. There were claims that there were earlier versions of the Epic of Gilgamesh and the flood story. Likewise, the flood account in the book of Genesis is believed to have been actually

happened long before they were written by Moses in the papyri; that the flood account has been passed orally from generation to generation. It is also important for this writer to note the “standard version” of the Gilgamesh Epic’s flood account was believed to have been composed by Sin-leqe-unninni, a poet editor who lived around the thirteenth century BC. Also, there were studies which said that the flood story was not originally part of the Epic, and that it was just added by the editor for the reason that he may have esteem for the knowledge of the days before the flood (Moran).

1. COMPARISON OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS

In order to establish the similarities and differences of the flood accounts, it will be helpful to extract the elements contained in the two stories. First, let us look into the common elements as identified by Merrill F. Unger:

- The flood was divinely planned;
- The upcoming catastrophe was revealed to the hero;
- The reason for the flood was because of the defect in the human race;
- There was deliverance of a hero and his family;
- There was an instruction to build a boat to preserve life;
- Indicated the source of the flood and its duration;
- Specified where the boats landed after the flood;
- There were birds sent out to check whether it was then safe to get out of the boat;
- There were offerings of sacrifices to the gods/God as thanksgiving;
- The heroes were blessed.

The elements were said to be the bases of the scholars to believe and conclude that the accounts were based on whichever of the two came first. The scholars' views were divided as to which is the older and the original account. However, the identified differences on the accounts made the issue more debatable since the reliability of the flood accounts have to be questioned as to their resemblance to reality. The following characteristics were found to be different on the two flood accounts:

- Clarity of the reason for the flood;
- Character of the gods/God and the heroes;
- The specifics of the gender and number of the survivor animals and humans;
- Duration and source of the flood;
- Structure of the ship;
- Kind and number of the birds sent out for the test flights;
- Landing place of the ship;
- References to the repopulation after the flood.

The purpose of identifying these elements is to be able to extract facts that will support or deny the borrowing and or copying of the flood stories. Since this research aims to establish the reliability of the Bible, discussions of the gathered data are focused more on proving that Noah's Flood Account is a historical event. Thus, it is older, original and factual. Noah's flood is not based on any literary work or tradition, and that it is neither a myth nor a legend. To be able to prove this, the researcher has put together the studies, researches and discussions made by some scholars relative to the accounts of the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Genesis.

As mentioned earlier, proving which of the accounts is older cannot be based on the aging of the tablets and the papyri on which the accounts were written. Remember that there exists a so-called “ oral tradition”. Thus, there are stories, whether they are legends, myth or historical, that was older than the time when men have not yet learned to write. These stories have been passed orally from generation to generation before they were carved onto stones or written on the papyri.

Guaranteed that the claims of some scholars that Gilgamesh is a historical figure and the flood in the Epic actually happened, it is important to conduct tests on the events as contained therein. The writer will have to compare the findings of the experts on the fields of science relative to the main elements of the two accounts, using three tests: Feasibility Test, Ethical Reasonableness and Historical Reliability Tests. Whichever of the two accounts is found feasible, ethically reasonable and historically reliable will be judged the original and the older text. These tests aim to prove that “ it is common to make legends out of historical events, but not history from legends.” (Sarfati)

- THE FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS- A TEST OF SCIENTIFIC RELIABILITY

1. THE EXTENT AND THE ORIGIN OF THE FLOOD- as seen in table 1.

1., both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Genesis speak of a global flood. As the Epic reflects, “ the days of old have turned to stone” (Tablet XI, 118); “ no man was to survive the annihilation” (Tablet XI, 173). However, it mentioned only of a heavy rain as

the source of the flood. Furthermore, the rain only lasted for six

days and nights. “ This time frame seems to be too short for water to cover the earth (N. Osanai). Records of local floods caused by rainstorm will prove this statement correct. A six-day rainstorm in Japan on September 7, 1976 has precipitation of about nine feet ² . In 1889, Conemaugh Lake flooded Johnstown, Pennsylvania with 20, 000, 000 tons of water. ³ These local flood records will prove the Gilgamesh flood account illogical, rendering the flood story mythical.

On the other hand, the Genesis spoke of a heavy rain and ground water as sources of the flood. “ All the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of heaven were opened” (Genesis 7: 11). Based on chapters seven and eight of the book of Genesis, the rainfall lasted for forty days, which is 6. 67 times longer than that of the Epic flood. Having the waters prevailed for 150 days (Genesis 7: 24), it could have been possible for the whole world to be under water for this reason. “ The breaking up of the fountains implies the release of water possibly through fissures in the ground or in the sea floor (N. Osanai). Furthermore,

Whitcomb said, “ although Genesis does not purpose to be a textbook of science, it is accurate when it touches scientific subejcts.” ⁴

1. THE SPECIFICS OF THE ARK- Noting the specifics of the boat to be built by Uthnapishtim, the story seemed to be really obscure. Seven days of building a 12 decked-boat out of a torn down reed hut is somewhat magical and unrealistic. Considering that instructions that all kinds of animals have to be contained in the boat, the absence of technology in

his time will not make it in seven days. Let us look into the dimensions of Uthnapishtim's ark. "It is harder to this of a more ridiculous design for a ship" (J. Sarfati). With a 200x200x200 feet dimensions, nautical experts say it would roll over in all directions at event the slightest disturbance. As Nozomi Osanai has translated from the Parpola's Version of Tablet Xi, "her proportions shall correspond to each other, her width and length shall be equal," the ship was an exact cube. "It is therefore questionable how the occupants in the Epic could survive in the flood in such a ship (Whitcomb). It is therefore clear that the flood account in the Epic is purely mythical. To the least, it is but a serious distorted version of an actual, historical event.

In contrast, the specific of Noah's ark in the book of Genesis is proven to be feasible. Noah's ark took 120 years to complete. Considering the absence of technology and the number of workers, it would seem reasonable to assume that the construction time frame will take that long. As to its shape and size, nautical experts confirmed that "the ark was built to be tremendously stable."⁵ In Genesis 6: 15, Noah was instructed by God to build the ark with a 300x50x30 cubits dimensions (140x23x13.5 meters or 459x75x44 feet). "Such boat will displace 20,000 tons and have a gross tonnage of 14,000 tons (L. Dolphin). The capacity of the ark, according to the study made by Dr. Mace Baker, M. A., was about 522 railroad cars (1.4 million cubit feet), far enough to contain all the species of the animals that has to be kept inside the ark. "Only 188 railroad cars are required to hold a pair of each of the 17,600 species of animals presents and known to man."⁶ Based on these facts, Noah's ark has served its purpose, which is to save the animal species for

repopulation. Therefore, the researcher can conclude that Noah's ark has the nearest resemblance to reality.

C. THE TEST FLIGHTS- one of the main differences noted on the flood accounts is the test flights made by both heroes. In the Gilgamesh Epic, there are three kinds of birds sent out by Uthnapishtim to determine whether the flood has receded. The birds include a dove, a swallow and a raven. If the habits of the birds are to be considered, the order of the birds sent out by Uthnapishtim seems illogical. " The raven is not only an unclean bird but also a scavenger, able to feed on floating corpses (M. Baker). Based on this, it could have been irrational for Uthnapishtim to conclude that the flood already receded when the raven did not return. It is because the raven could survive eating the floating corpses without the flood completely receded. With this therefore, we can say that the author of the Epic lacked good logic, therefore making it more obvious that the flood account is unrealistic.

Noah, on the other hand, sent out birds on seven days interval. The raven was sent out first, which returned and a dove for the second time, which also returned. The next dove returned with an olive leaf, and yet Noah did not yet conclude that the flood completely receded. Another dove was sent out which did not return. It was then when Noah let the animals out of the ark. Using this logic, it is obvious that the account is realistic.

1. ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS- A TEST OF REASONABLENESS

The council of gods in the Epic of Gilgamesh agreed to destroy the earth by means of a flood. The Epic is clear in stating that the gods Anu, Ninurta,

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Ennigi and Ea were not actually in favor of the pan but were forced to agree because of their fear. With this scenario alone, we can say that the story is highly superficial. Because of the lack of unity and reasonableness of the gods, their characters resemble a human-like behavior. If they are truly gods, why can't they decide on their own? Another thing is that Ea betrayed the council by revealing the secret to Uthnapishtim, which is unfair for those who were not forewarned. "If the flood was brought for ethical reasons, and all the people deserved punishment, Ea is unrighteous to preserve Uthnapishtim's life" (N. Osanai). In the book of Genesis, God's character as just, sovereign and His dignified character are clear. There was no deception and all the people were forewarned during the 120 years of the ark's construction. Noah, being righteous and blameless is the sight of God is reasonable to escape the flood.

- ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORDS OF THE FLOOD ACCOUNTS- A TEST OF HISTORICAL RELIABILITY

1. RECORDS OF THE SURVIVORS- the Epic of Gilgamesh mentioned of Uthnapishmtim's family, his kin and the craftsmen as survivors of the flood. However, there were no clear references as to the descendants of the hero. If the flood account is historically true, there should be records of the survivors' descendants. As with the Genesis, the descendants of Noah are genealogically supported. Thus, it is hard for the other scholars to prove that Genesis was based on the Epic of Gilgamesh.

1. THE KINDS AND NUMBERS OF ANIMALS- there was an absence of specifications as to the number and kind of creatures in the Epic of

Gilgamesh. Uthnapishtim was commanded to “ bring into the ship the seeds of all living creatures” and the hero obeyed, “ whatever I had of the seed of all living creatures, I loaded unto her.” The epic is not clear whether the seeds were loaded in pairs of male and female in order to reproduce after the flood. In Genesis 6: 19-20, the instruction is clear as to the number and kinds of animals. Repopulation therefore is possible after the flood.

2. REPORTS ON THE SEARCH FOR THE ARK- in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the ship was said to have landed on Mt. Nisir. However, there have been no attempts to search for the remains of the said ship. If the Epic has been historically true, there should have been at least evidences of its existence. Unfortunately, there were even no attempts for the search of the ship on Mt. Nisir. The writer therefore assumes that the Epic lacks historical credibility. On the other hand, many references as to the existence of Noah’s ark which landed on Mt. Ararat. One of these references was written by Tim F. Lahaye and John Morris, stating that, “ we have enumerated the various traditions found in the history of the Armenian people indicating that throughout the centuries since the Ark landed on Mt. Ararat. Many of those races actually had pilgrimages to the remains and nearly all the leaders knew generally where they were to be found.” Fernand Navarra reported that he has found wooden fragments among the ice of the top of the mountain on July 6, 1955. The fragment was tested and was found to be aged 5, 000 years. There were still other references found recently and the search still continues. The point is, there were a lot of people who are more

interested in Noah's ark and its historical credibility. It is therefore no doubt original and older than the Epic of Gilgamesh.

CONCLUSION

After extracting the main elements of the flood accounts from both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the book of Genesis, and comparing their similarities and differences, this writer has the confidence that the reliability and credibility of Noah's flood has been established over the Epic of Gilgamesh. Based on the scientific reliability and ethical reasonableness, including its historical credibility, Noah's flood clearly stands out. Throughout the discussions, the writer has taken the effort to establish the fact that "it is common to make legends out of historical events, but not history from legends" (J. Sarfati). Because Genesis' account of Noah's flood was proven to be logical and credible both historically and scientifically, the writer then concludes that it is the older text. This is in the absence of well defined sources of the original sources of the Epic. "Even though the Genesis was written in Hebrew which was used later than the Akkadian, of which the Epic of Gilgamesh was written, the historical event of the flood was much earlier than the publication of the Epic" (Nozomi Osanai).

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