

SUMERIAN & AKKADIAN (ASSYRIO-BABYLONIAN) ACCOUNTS OF THE FLOOD

References and Sources

For Flood Traditions

1. Andree, Richard. *Die Flutsagen* (Brunswick, 1891).
2. Frazer, Sir James G. *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1918, Vol. 1, pp. 104-361). In these pages, Frazer describes over 100 flood traditions from Europe, Asia, Australia, the East Indies, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, South America, Central America, North America, and East Africa. Frazer's main source is the work of Richard Andree.
3. Nelson, Byron C. *The Deluge in Stone* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1931). On page 169, Nelson has a chart that represents the principal ideas of the Biblical record of the Deluge in non-biblical traditions.

For Sumerian and Akkadian Accounts of the Flood

1. Sumerian – see pp. 42-44 of *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, James B. Pritchard, editor (Princeton, New Jersey, 2nd edition, 1955).
2. Akkadian (Assyrio-Babylonian) – see tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, pp. 93-97 of Pritchard. The entire Gilgamesh Epic is covered in pages 72-99.
3. Unger, Merrill, *Archeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. Co., 1956). Unger has a very interesting discussion of the Flood in Sumerian and Babylonian traditions with an added chapter comparing and contrasting these with the Bible account, see pages 46-71, chapters IV and V.

OUTLINE OF COMPARISON BETWEEN BABYLONIAN & BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE FLOOD

(Adapted from *Archeology and the Old Testament*, by Merrill Unger, pp. 55-71)

The Resemblances

- Both accounts declare that the Deluge was of Divine origin.
- Both accounts agree that the impending catastrophe was Divinely revealed to the hero of the Deluge.
- Both accounts agree that human defection prompted the gods (God) to send the Deluge (in this respect, the Babylonian account presents many moral ambiguities: it is difficult to tell whether humans or the gods were responsible).
- Both accounts tell of the deliverance of the hero and his family.
- Both accounts show how the hero was Divinely instructed to build a large boat for the preservation of life.
- Both accounts indicate physical and natural causes, prompted by deity(s), for the Flood.
- Both accounts specify the duration of the Flood.
- Both accounts stipulate the area that the ark was grounded.
- Both accounts send out birds to ascertain the decrease of the waters.
- Both accounts describe acts of worship on the part of the hero after the waters abate.
- Both accounts allude to a special blessing upon the hero after the Deluge.

The Differences

- The theological concepts in these two accounts are completely divergent and cannot be reconciled.

The ideas of deity are poles apart. The Hebrew account is indued with a moral monotheism that refines and ennobles the story.

A very low concept of deities runs through the Babylonian accounts. The gods quarrel, blame-let, fasten guilt, accuse, crouch in fear, etc. Their capriciousness causes the scene to be repugnant and confusing.

- The moral concepts in these two accounts are in contrast.

Low estimates of deity produce low estimates of morality. There are mixed standards of conduct on the part of Babylonian deities, hazy views of sin, justice compromised, vacillation, etc.

The Bible, on the other hand, portrays the Flood as a distinctly moral and spiritual judgment.

- The underlying, basic philosophical concepts of both accounts are strikingly different.

Since the Babylonians were incapable of conceiving of an infinite, transcendental Deity who was self-existent and immutable, they hopelessly confused spirit and matter and made both eternal. The various gods get into the act, then afterwards argue as to who was responsible. Separate and unrelated causes stemming from the capricious gods emerge.

In striking contrast, the Bible states that God alone, the Creator and Sustainer of His creation, rules over and uses natural phenomena to accomplish His purposes.

Attempted Explanation of the Similarities

- ❖ The Babylonians borrowed from the Hebrew account.

This is not too likely since Sumerian and Babylonian traditions go back at least until the 3rd millennium B.C.; whereas the Genesis account was not written until ca. 1400 B.C. (Abraham was not called until ca. 2100 B.C.) This does not mean, however, that the Hebrew account could not have existed in one form or another centuries before its present form.

- ❖ The Hebrew account borrowed from the Babylonian account.

This is the most widely accepted “explanation” today, but for the conservative Bible student it has little attraction. For a very interesting discussion of this point, the student should read A.T. Clay, *The Origin of Biblical Traditions: Yale Oriental Series*, XII, 1923, pp. 150-160 or Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, 1946), pp. 261-264. If the Flood was world-wide in its extent as is plainly indicated in various Bible passages, then a Flood tradition to say the least would not be indigenous to Babylonia; which is to say, the Hebrews did not have to rely on the Babylonia account.

- ❖ Both the Hebrew and Babylonian accounts find their source in a common fact, an actual occurrence in history.

This view is by far the most reasonable. The common traditions among the Hebrews are reflected in the true and authentic facts given to them by Divine inspiration. It is possible that Moses had written source documents as well as oral tradition; regardless, the Spirit of God was able to give him revelation or guide him in the purging of non-factual errors. In either case, written or oral tradition, supernatural inspiration was necessary for the recording of truth.

Once again, we are thrown back on faith. But do not be timid about faith, for without it, it is

impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)

The liberals also rely on faith; the difference is the object of their faith. Our faith finds as its object the eternal, infinite God who has revealed Himself historically. Their faith is in man's ability to uncover the past and man's rationale to rightly interpret the past.