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An Analysis of Ancient Near Eastern Flood Texts

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An Analysis of Ancient Near Eastern Flood Texts

A Senior Project

Jared C. Inman

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The Southern Scholars Honors Committee
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Running head: Flood texts

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Preface

I grew up thinking that the Israelites and God's people all the way back to Abraham lived primarily isolated. When I stumbled across an ancient Near Eastern text containing the name, "Yahweh" and discovered that Aesop, an 8th century B.C.E. man living in Greece, quoted the Old Testament, I realized that the Israelites may have belonged to a cultural milieu that was conducive to diffusion and propagation. As I researched further, I began to realize that there was plethora of ancient texts in the world from every culture that seemed to related to the Bible. Some of these texts even include the most ancient all stories--a primeval history.

I discovered that almost every culture in the world has origin stories that strike resounding parallels with the Word. But to me, one story appears even more dominating in ancient texts, portraying stark comparisons, and that is the story of a Flood. From Africa to China, the Near East to Native North and South America, man's destruction by an unprecedented flood is present in almost every account of early man.

As a Christian, I feel it is important to understand how these stories fit into God's message to the world. If unrelated, these stories simply help prove primeval myths; but if all these separate accounts stem from the same event, then the Biblical record of the Flood can remain justified in my mind¹.

¹For a comprehensive list of documents relating to the Old Testament, see *The Handbook for Bible Study* by Gugliotto. The flood texts dealt with in this paper by line references are primarily from Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, the standard text used in line-referencing "complete" flood stories.

Introduction

In the study of the Near Eastern world, it becomes apparent that the Israelites were only a small part of a much larger world (Gordon and Rendsburg 1997). With Mesopotamian writings dating back to before 2000 B.C.E. containing striking parallels with the Biblical Flood (Hill and Walton 1991) the question is begged: Is the Israel Flood account dependent on other texts? Did the Israelite authors simply borrow and adapt polytheistic primeval histories into their story? Or, did these stories originate from the same fountainhead, developing into slightly different literary accounts after centuries of oral transmissions? This paper will attempt to answer these questions by establishing the history of the ancient Near Eastern Flood accounts and the cultures involved while identifying some of the pertinent convergences and divergences of these accounts. A brief summary to familiarize the reader with the texts analyzed in this paper is included below in Table I.

Table 1: Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Name	Common/Alt. Name	"Complete" Earliest Record	First Published In ¹
Sumerian	Columns III-VI of Eridu Genesis	c. 16th C B.C. ¹	1914
Akkadian Text/Old Babylonian	Tablet III of Atrahasis Epic	c. 1635 B.C. ²	1969
Gilgamesh/Standard Babylonian	Tablet XI of Gilgamesh Epic	c. 12th C B.C. ³	1873
Genesis Account	Noah Account	c. 15th C B.C. ⁴	

¹ Simoons-Vermeer (small fragments with partial coherence dating back before 2000)
² Lambert & Millard
³ Heidel 1949
⁴ Holy Bible NIV

“It is unthinkable now that the Old Testament could really be understood without taking this [Near Eastern texts] comparative material into account. Nor should anyone suppose that the religious convictions expressed in the Old Testament texts could be grasped satisfactorily regardless of the religious evidence for the world of the ancient Near East (Beyerlin 1975).”

As Beyerlin asserts, the idea of Old Testament dependence on Near Eastern culture has, in contemporary religious circles, become an almost universal tenet. Academia seems to agree that understanding the archaeology and the history of the Near East will offer a wider historical, literary, and religious environment in religious study (Jones 1974). According to Pritchard, the connections between the Bible and ancient Near Eastern texts are most interesting because the Bible has played a pivotal role in the recovery of Near Eastern texts; while, conversely, the Near Eastern texts have proven invaluable in shedding light on the Old Testament (Pritchard 1958). At times, this reciprocal relationship seems to border dependence.

In premise, all sources used in this research seem to agree and even implore that cultural understanding must come before literary and theological understanding. In this regard, scholars seem to place almost equal importance on the Bible and ancient texts. However, even with the relatively newly discovered comparative texts, the culture of the Near East is still elusive in many respects. Even with the dramatic increase in ancient text location and analysis, it is estimated that only 10% of the tablets in Mesopotamia have been unearthed (Wenhan 1987). Thus, undoubtedly, until more of these tablets are recovered, our understanding of the ancient Near East can be only partial. For many, there is an urgency to find such texts. If these texts can eventually show a primeval

history, literarily and theologically reconciled with the Genesis 1-11 account, and if deemed unborrowed, then man's origin account becomes extra-Biblically supported!

Sumerian Flood Text

The earliest recorded Mesopotamian Flood account is a fragment dating back to around 2500 B.C.E. This fragment contains part of an inscription that links it to known texts in the Sumerian Flood account. However, this piece is rather small and a unified text cannot be created without using fragments that are predominantly dated around 1600 B.C.E. (Pritchard 1969; Pritchard 1954).

In the search of flood texts, local flooding events and imported accounts dominate many cultures, however, it is apparent that at least the Mesopotamian accounts all trace back to the same event recorded in this Sumerian account. By examining all Near Eastern flood texts it can be shown that this Flood wiped out at least the Indo-Europeans, Syro-Arabians, and the Kushites. The most complete Sumerian narrative, the Eridu Genesis, contains the account of this Flood. This account marks the oldest "complete" Mesopotamian "story", dated around 2000 B.C.E. (Pritchard 1958). The only complete accounts pre-dating this narrative are the Egyptian "Dispute over suicide" (c. 2280) and "Instruction for King Meri-ka-re" (c. 2150) (Thomas 1958).

The Eridu Genesis is a story of beginnings. It outlines the creation of man, the institution of kingship, the founding of the first cities, and the great Flood. The limited texts available (the Eridu is a compilation of fragments) do not show the external framework of the Flood narrative and there is no way to determine it from in-text

references. Thus, it is a stretch to determine the meaning of the Flood to the rest of the primeval account. However, the Flood story itself is preserved comparatively well and its themes are noticeable.

In this account, Ziusudra is a king, lustration priest, seer, and a pious man. One day, he overhears one of the god's saying, ". . . by our hand a flood will sweep over the cities and the country, the decision that mankind is to be destroyed, has been made..." (Jacobson 1981; Pritchard 1969). In Ziusudra's worry, he is met by the god Enki who advises him on how to build a boat so he can escape the flood. The text makes it quite clear that the reason for man's destruction is because the god's are upset at the "noise" man is making. There has been debate as to the exact connotations of this word. However, scholars agree that humanity was out of favor with the gods because of their own actions.

This Flood was not an action of simple boredom but a calculated decision by the gods to destroy man because his actions were not acceptable. Once judgment was passed, a Flood lasting seven days and seven nights destroyed the earth. After the Flood receded, Ziusudra butchered oxen and sheep in thanks. At this gesture, the gods called Ziusudra: "seed of mankind". After this blessing, Ziusudra honors the god that saved him by giving him the title: "preserver of the seed of humanity". In this ending, it becomes apparent that the ultimate goal of the Flood was the preservation of humanity (Westermann 1984). Because the bookend portions of the narrative are missing, it is impossible to tell what the results of man being saved will be.

With Ziusudra's salvation also comes the theme of destruction. When the whole Eridu is read, it is apparent that an important aspect of Mesopotamian primeval history is

the idea that destruction and creation are linked. But we should not get too discouraged, since according to Jacobsen, in the reading of this account the reader identifies with the saved, not the victims. Another important feature of this account, brought out by Jacobsen, is the idea that the Eridu is especially interested in chronology. It is not only arranged along a time line in the narrative but it also accounts for life spans and lengths of king's reigns (Jacobsen 1981).

In dating this account, it is important to realize that its composition was long before its actual recording (Thomas 1958). It was transmitted like most epic poetry and undoubtedly is not in its exact original form. Thus, despite it being the oldest of the Near Eastern Flood texts, it cannot be looked upon as a standard for evaluating all primeval texts because its composition and credibility cannot be guaranteed (Beyerlin 1975).

No complete Eridu account has been found in a single location as of yet and the known text of Eridu used today is a compilation from three main sources. The text consists of 6 columns totaling 300 lines; only 81 are completely preserved, 17 are not translatable, and the rest lie somewhere in-between (Simoons-Vermeer 1974). The main three texts are: a Sumerian tablet from Nippur dated at 1600 B.C.E., a Sumerian tablet fragment from Ur dated at 1600 B.C.E., and a bilingual (Sumerian and Akkadian) fragment from Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh dated at 600 B.C.E. (Jacobsen 1981; Heidel 1942).

Babylonian Flood Texts

Atrahasis Epic and Gilgamesh Epic

The Babylonian epics, Atrahasis and Gilgamesh, both show remarkably detailed accounts of a Deluge that wipes out mankind. The Gilgamesh text shows remarkable parallels with the Biblical account as well as certain similarities to the Sumerian rendering of the story (Heidel 1949). This evidence pointed to what many heralded as the dependence of the Bible on other older Near Eastern texts (Smith 1873). These are the same parallels that struck-up the reviled, “Babel versus Bible”, controversy. This controversy absorbed theological circles beginning around the turn of this century following a set of lectures given by Friedrich Delitzsch on the significance of the Old Testament borrowing from Babylon (Wenham 1987; Walton 1989). The debate continued to fester for decades. Finally, when Finkelstein published a paper on how ancient Israel had absorbed the primeval history of Babylon, a wedge was driven between Old Testament supporters and Ancient text supporters (Finkelstein 1958).

Many scholars have studied these parallels; forming many different views on dependence and origin. However, a majority of the comprehensive studies done on ancient Babylonian texts are ill representative of the current facts. The main problem is that many writers have attempted to show their theses without going back to original sources and nailing down dates, translations, and fragment misrepresentations.

For example, Thompson, when translating a newly found fragment in his 1930 book, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, mistakenly hooked tablets XII and XI of the current

Gilgamesh epic and claimed their dependence on each other. Thus, for the next 20 years, the study of this text went in wrong direction (Pritchard 1969). Instead of scrutinizing the claim of interrelatedness, scholars used this linkage to show other theses. Fortunately, Pritchard corrects Thompson, showing that Thompson had inserted a fragment to tablet XI that actually belonged to an older version of the epic (Pritchard 1969). Today, since Pritchard's discovery, and with other supporting evidence, it is widely believed that tablet XI was actually inserted into the Gilgamesh epic centuries after its inception. This thesis would have been impossible to prove had Thompson's translation been used. These facts that XI stands alone at the close of the epic now helps convincingly link the Gilgamesh epic to the Atrahasis epic. This idea will be covered in detail later.

Thompson's mistake is not unheard of. Many scholars of ancient texts have made similar mistakes by relying on faulty texts to validate their theses. Basically, many of the scholarly works on these epics before Pritchard and Heidel are erroneous because they didn't fully understand the linkages between the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics. The process of understanding these texts continues, as more fragments are uncovered in Mesopotamia. Today, Atrahasis is viewed as a combination of the earliest recordings of a Babylonian origins story, which would later develop over the centuries until parts of this ancient tradition became integrated by a master poet into what we know today as the Gilgamesh epic.

Fragment history

Since the discovery of nearly 30,000 tablets at Nippur by the University of Pennsylvania (led by George Smith 1889-1900) and other similar important findings

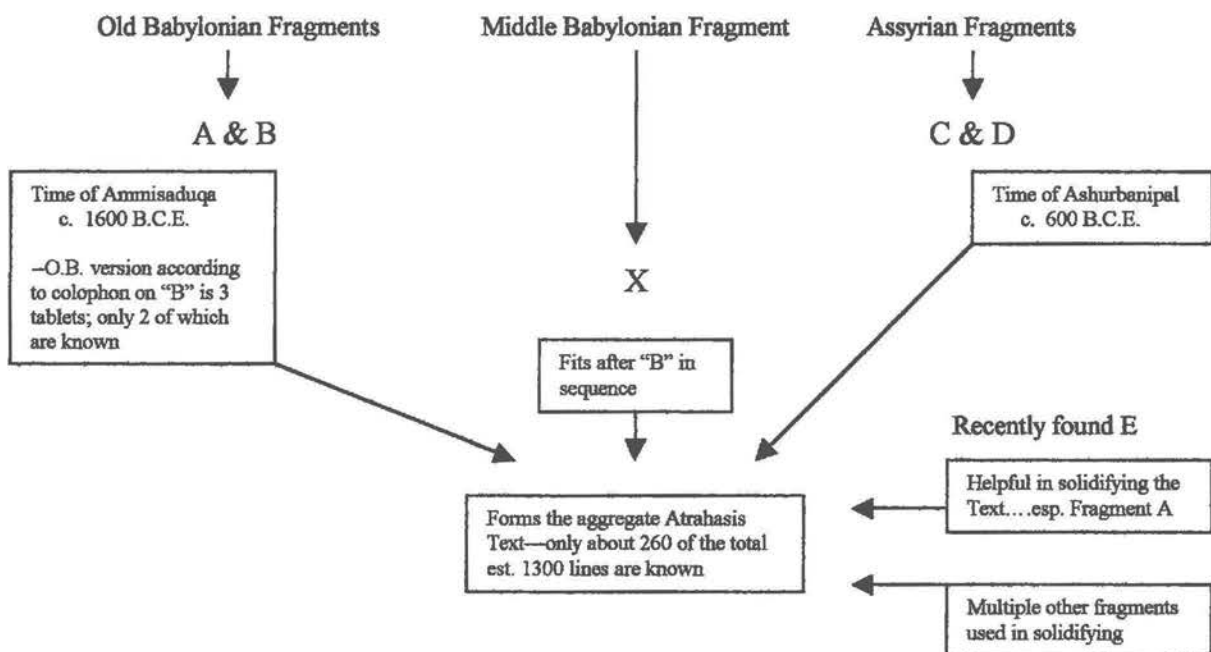
around the beginning of the century, the dating of Babylonian literature has become much more accurate (Pritchard 1958). However, the study of dating these epics is still quite problematic because the fragments can be accurately dated, but the origin of the story they record remains unknown.

The first discovery of a Babylonian Flood account occurred in the backrooms of the British Museum in London. George Smith was translating a tablet from a group of 20,000 fragments found in Ashurbanipal's Nineveh library by Hormuzd Rassam in 1853 (Jones 1974). Smith quizzically discovered the cuneiform (Akkadian) symbol for a resting ship and a dove (Pritchard 1958). According to Smith, he originally noticed some references to a creation on "Tablet K63" and then later saw the text of a ship coming to rest and subsequently sending out a dove which found no resting place (Smith 1880). It was then that Smith realized he might have translated an extra-Biblical creation account unparalleled in its comparison with to the Genesis account. This discovery, and subsequent scrambling for the rest of the tablets around the Tigris and Euphrates, led Smith to discover 49 more creation/Flood tablets. Unfortunately, his discoveries ended in his death from dysentery on his third excavation (Pritchard 1958).

In following excavations, a total of 24 more fragments were eventually found that related to the creation/Flood in Ashurbanipal's library alone (Pritchard 1958). The story formed from these fragments, dated around the 6th century B.C.E., is today considered the standard version of the Epic of Gilgamesh (Mack 1992). It is believed that Ashurbanipal's twelve tablets are the final form that the Gilgamesh epic took over the centuries (Tigay 1982).

The best-preserved edition found of the Atrahasis epic, which is believed to have been copied on three tablets by a scribe named Ku-Aya in the 12th year of king Ammisaduqa of Babylon (ca. 1635 B.C.), came to the British Museum from Sippar which was located in the vicinity of Babylon. The second tablet in this series, also dated to the same time and thought to have come from Sippar, is housed at an Istanbul museum. Three more fragments are known from other Old Babylonian pieces of approximately the same date. Two Middle Babylonian fragments, which include only portions of the Flood story, are known from Nippur and from Ras Shamra on the coast of Syria. Four Neo-Assyrian tablet fragments from this textual series have come from the excavations of Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh (Lambert & Millard 1969). For a simplified look at the main Atrahasis text sources see Table II located below.

Table II. Atrahasis main source tablets (Lambert & Millard 1909; Pritchard 1969)



These two specific renderings, one of Gilgamesh and one of Atrahasis, represent the seemingly only clear-cut differences between these two epics. Apparently, what is occurring is that Gilgamesh, a real king from around 2600 B.C.E. (according to Sumerian king lists), had feats and tales recorded from his life that continued to develop orally from the time of his death until the writing of the standard version of the text (Tigay 1982). The problem is that the Ashurbanibal version of Gilgamesh marries parts of the ancient tale from Ku-Aya with other “myths” and original additions of its own. Also, from the time that Ku-Aya wrote his texts, the “primeval myths” he recorded continued to develop as well (Beyerlin 1975). This makes correlating the texts and even telling the difference between certain fragments difficult. They seem to develop both independently and dependently! This will be dealt with again later in the, “Explanation of Gilgamesh and Atrahasis” and “Text development” sections of this paper.

Summary of Atrahasis

Atrahasis is believed to be the bridge text between the Sumerian and Gilgamesh accounts. Thus, it is important to notice the similarities and differences between the accounts as one reads. This idea will be dealt with later in detail after the major story line is understood.

Atrahasis begins similarly to the Sumerian primeval account with a description of man’s origins and his relation to the gods. This background provides the setting for the flood that takes place later in the dialogue. Basically, a group of gods have revolted against their toils in the heavens and humans were created to help ease their displeasure by sharing their load. As mankind begins to thrive on the earth he becomes displeasing

to these gods. Overpopulation and simply wicked behavior has driven the gods too far. Regardless, man is doing something that is out of favor with the gods (Finkelstein 1958). This sets up the gods' punishment of mankind which is in the form of drought and famine. However, when these punishments fail to bring humans back into check, the gods decide to send a Flood to wipe mankind out. It is this Flood that forms the climax of the story (Beyerlin 1975) providing a way for the gods to deal with man's sins, punishing him for his actions (Pritchard 1969). But, as in the Sumerian epic, someone lives. Atrahasis, heeding Enki's warning about the gods' action against mankind, builds a boat and saves himself and his family. Upon the Flood's abating, Atrahasis sacrificed to the gods and the gods (both the oppressed gods and the oppressing gods) were happy with the "new creation." This "new creation" is the goal of the entire account (Westermann 1984; Heidel 1963).

Summary of Gilgamesh

The Flood account of Utnapishtim is found on the XI tablet of a XII tablet series containing the accounts of the great Babylonian hero Gilgamesh. This Flood narrative is set within a framework like the Sumerian and Atrahasis accounts (Pritchard 1969) only this framework does not contain a primeval history of man. Instead, it shows a complex tale of a man through the struggles and happiness of love, nature, adventure, friendship, and combat all blended together against the backdrop of the reality of death. All of these great epic characteristics are used to relate Gilgamesh to the people of Babylonia and represent their civilization to the many cultures that they shared the world with (Pritchard 1958).

In looking at this epic, it is imperative to realize that Gilgamesh is the important character. The Flood story and Utnapishtim are simply vehicles used by the author/redactor to show a new dimension, adding to the adventures of Gilgamesh. This new dimension helps show the fascination that the epic has with death and life.

Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh account, without the rest of the tale, shows a flood narrative very similar to the Sumerian and Atrahasis accounts. Like the other two accounts, the god's relationship to man along with the idea of re-creation through the Flood is crucial. When only reading Tablet XI, focusing on Utnapishtim's story to Gilgamesh, one can receive relatively the same Flood story as recorded in Atrahasis.

One major note of difference is that Utnapishtim takes craftsmen and builders on his boat in order to help rebuild civilization after destruction. According to Westermann, this idea helps show the importance that Babylonians placed on their city and culture (Westermann 1984). Basically, this change is congruent with the changes occurring in Babylon's developing national pride. This idea can also be seen when dealing with the Flood narrative in context of Gilgamesh's adventures. In this case, the Flood narrative is used to help show that man cannot achieve eternal life, as Utnapishtim did. Instead each person, like Gilgamesh, must rely on the beauty and authority of his city/civilization to provide him with happiness and adventure (Gordon & Rendsburg 1997).

Genesis Flood Text

When dealing with this account it is first necessary to address the idea of the documentary hypothesis because this view of interpretation plays a major part in determining the dating of the account. Genesis is frequently divided into two major sections: the first, chapters 1-11 which contain a primeval history, the second, chapters 12-50, containing the history of the Nation of God (Nichol 1978). The first 11 chapters, primary to our concern because it contains the Flood account, are considered by source critics to be composed by a Yahwist and a Priestly writer. The Yahwist, the earliest of the writers, is considered to have recorded his story in the 10-9th century B.C.E. (Westermann 1984). At the earliest, the Priestly writer comes on the scene around the 6th century B.C.E. (Hill & Walton 1991).

This dating scheme of source critics is important because conservatives tend to label the Genesis story as having its roots around the 16-15th century B.C.E. Thus, if taking the later date of the Priestly writer, the Israelites would have had a much longer time to absorb and fit-in to their surroundings, which included Flood traditions from other nations.

The documentary hypothesis supporters and conservatives both have backing for their systems of structure and dating. The Flood story seems to throw a cog in the source critic's ideas which must be addressed. The Flood narrative just doesn't seem to follow the J/P division like the rest of Genesis (Heidel 1949). Instead, it seems they cannot be separated effectively into its "constituent" parts.

In looking at the J/P divisions of literary critics, who have divided the Biblical Flood story into some 20 fragments, it becomes apparent that Genesis 6-9 stands as one

unified, consecutive whole (Shea 1984). This portion of Genesis defies source criticism. Thus, the Flood account in Genesis will be dealt with as a whole in this paper, not separating for structural or dating purposes. See Table III below:

Table III: Biblical Creation-Flood Story, critical view, 10th-5th century B.C. (Shea1984)

Gen 1	Gen 2-4	Gen 5	Gen 6-9		
P	J	P	6:1-8, J	7:13-16, P	8:6-12, J
Creation Story	Creation, Antediluvian World	Antediluvian Genealogy	6:9-22, P	7:17, J	8:13a, P
			7:1-5, J	7:18-21, P	8:13b, J
			7:6, P	7:22-23, J	8:14-19, P
			7:7-10, J	7:24-8:2, P	8:20-22, J
			7:11, P	8:2b-3a, J	9:1-17, P
			7:12, J	8:3b-5, P	9:18-27, J

By looking at the documentary hypothesis splitting of the Flood account (Shea 1984; Westermann 1984) it is apparent that Shea's view, like that of many conservative Biblical scholars, is a more accurate representation than that of the source critics. Shea's reckoning is summarized below:

“Likewise, perhaps different historians from the late 17th century B.C. attempted simultaneously to record the Creation-Flood story in their presently available form. If parallels from the ancient world are relevant to understanding biblical materials of a similar nature (and they appear to have proved themselves useful in this regard in a number of instances), then the biblical Creation-Flood story should belong to the same era in which these Mesopotamian Creation-Flood stories were written. They should not be separated by a millennium as has been done by the documentary hypothesis. Thus from these parallels in form and content it is more likely that someone (i.e., Moses) recorded such a work in the 15th (or 13th) century B.C. rather than to attribute them to a collection of fragments that were distributed through the first half of the first millennium B.C. This does not prove, of course, that Moses wrote the biblical Creation-Flood story, but certainly someone from his age makes a much better candidate for the author of this work than does an obscure and anonymous priest in exile in Babylonia a millennium later. To modify an old saying, one might observe that if

Moses did not write these chapters of Genesis, then we would have to invent someone who lived in his times to have done so (Shea 1984).”

It is widely held that the Old Testament began to form around the 1500 B.C.E. (Hill & Walton 1991). However, the primeval accounts, such as creation, the Patriarchs, and the Flood formed in an oral tradition even before this date. Genesis, the first book of the Bible containing these traditions, is a book of genealogies, broken by narratives about how God works in man’s lives, of which Noah is a critical part (Wilson 1977). It is a history of faith as a way of life showing God’s divine purpose through less than perfect individuals. It starts with a primeval account arranged in a strict order (Westermann 1984) which shows a direct descendant pattern to Abraham through which a linkage is provided between the Beginnings and the Nation.

These early peoples of God lived in the Mesopotamian region, Abraham specifically living in Ur. This positioning of Abraham and his ancestors is important because it shows, from the Bible, that the early Bible peoples were from a land where Flood narratives are found extra-Biblically. However, these people did not stay in Mesopotamia, instead they migrated, by God’s command, to Palestine and eventually Egypt (Genesis 11.27-12.5). Descendants of Abraham would return to live near Mesopotamia, but not for a long period of time.

In dealing with Abraham’s migration and his descendants return to Sumeria, two theories are held. One put Abraham in Egypt around 1850 B.C.E., the other around 1600 B.C.E. These theories also show his descendants leaving, respectively, in approximately 1300 B.C.E. or 1440 B.C.E. (Hill & Walton 1991). Regardless of which view one holds, it still holds that Abraham, his ancestors, and his peoples were in or near Mesopotamia

from their beginnings to the mid-19th century B.C.E. and back near their “starting point” no later than 1300 B.C.E. This makes the history seem to support that all the Near Eastern Flood texts evaluated in this paper stem from the same location and appear dominant in the appropriate societies around the same times.

The Flood, in particular, shows the coherence of the Genesis account by displaying some of the major themes of the entire book when viewed in its entirety. According to the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, the major themes/theological points of the book of Genesis, which can all be seen in the Flood account are:

1. presence and activity of God in every sphere of life
2. continuity of the family
3. pervasive concern for kinship and family
4. concern for the nations/mankind
5. role of human in divine action
6. God’s blessings to the world

The Genesis account has many similarities with the other Near Eastern Flood texts with a noted increase in theological perspective to the narrative. The Flood account itself begins with God choosing Noah to be saved when the destruction comes. The Bible claims Noah is “righteous, blameless in his generation” (Genesis 6.9) and this is crucial to God’s choice of him (Lewis 1978). However, it is not Noah’s prior behavior that is important, it is his faithfulness to the message of God about the Flood that will save his life. The story continues with his following of the commands of God, his preparation, his experience of the Flood with his family, and his starting over when the Flood subsides. He begins his post-flood life by a sacrifice to God praising his salvation and God rewards his faithfulness by promising that He will never again destroy all mankind in the same manner. He makes a covenant with Noah that will stand forever with the sign of a

rainbow in the sky. The narrative has great theological implications and it helps form, not only the foundation of this peoples' relationship with Him, but also a motif of how man will relate to this God throughout the rest of the Bible. The form is as follows: message from God to man → man's following → God's remembrance → God's blessing. Although this Flood account shows definite crime and punishment (Heidel 1984), its primary focus is on the saved (like in the other Near Eastern accounts)—showing that salvation can come out of punishment.

The themes of this story are priorly mentioned; the stories major points are:

1. rational for God's Flood
2. judgment: destruction of mankind/cleansing/salvation
3. inner divine reaction to judgment vs. man's reaction to the judgment
4. beings relationship with God: his obedience
5. inner divine reaction to following and worship vs. man's reaction to salvation

Similarities/Differences between the texts in content

There are many similarities between these four texts. Especially obvious, are the story lines which all follow similar routes (Walton 1989). To simplify the similarities and differences they will be shown in Table III on the following page.

	Genesis Account NIV(not split into J/P ¹)	Sumerian Account	Akkadian Account	Babylonian Account
Intro				
Start of narrative	6.5	missing	missing	XI.9
Introduction of main character name	6.8-9	missing	?II.viii.438; D.54	XI.23
name	Noah	Ziusudra	Atrahasis	Utnaphistim
meaning of name ²	rest	he who laid hold on life of distant days	exceedingly wise	finder of life
role in society	10th prediluvian patriarch	legendary king living in Shuruppak	10th prediluvian king of Babylon (Berosus account)	citizen of Shuruppak
his sons	6.10	In question ³	missing	not present
Polytheism evident	never	throughout	throughout	throughout
Motive/Plan				
Announcement of the Flood	6.14	38	missing	XI.20-31
Motive for Flood	6.5	throughout	II.i.7-8	XI.182-188
Decision for Flood god's choice	6.6-7	158-160	II.vii.31-52, viii.32-37	XI.14-18
Warning				
Warning	6.13	150-155	III.i.20-24	XI.20-28
Command/instructions to build boat	6.14-21	145	III.i.25-33	XI.28-31
Command on what to take	6.18-22; 7.1-3	not present	not present	XI.27
Size of the boat	6.15	not present	missing	XI.29,30
Reaction of main character		not present		
understand/follow god's decision to citizens	6.22; 7.5		III.ii.42-50	XI.32-35
to citizens	not present		III.ii.42-50	XI.35-47
Building the boat	6.14-22	148, 147	III.ii.11-14	XI.48-79
coating the boat	6.14,22	not present	missing	XI.31
Loading the boat	7.7-9, 13-16	not present	III.ii.30-42	XI.76-86
The Flood				
Description of Flood	7.17-24	201-203	III.ii.53-55, iii.7-18	XI.96-112
Coming of Flood	7.10-11	200, 201, 204	III.ii.48-52	XI.89-93
Destruction of man	7.17-23	38, 157, 202	III.iii.44	XI.110-112, 133
Flood/rain duration	8.2-3	203	III.iv.24-27	XI.127-131
gods reaction to Flood	8.1	not present	III.iii.25-26,30-54; vi.4-22	XI.113-128
duration	7.12	seven days and nights	seven days and nights	six days, seven nights
Waters abate	8.3-5	not present	not present	XI.128-158
Opening of a window	8.6	207	not present	XI.135
Boat resting on mountain	8.4	not present	missing	XI.137-141
place of landing ⁴	Mt. Ararat	not present	Mt. Nisir	Mt. Nisir
Birds sent forth ⁵	8.6-12	not present	not present	145-158
Post-Flood				
Leaving boat	8.15-19	not present or missing	III.v.30	XI.155
Building of an altar/sacrifice	8.20	211	III.v.31-33	XI.156-158
Smell of sacrifice offered	8.21-22	250-254	III.v.34-36	XI.159-161
Covenant Promise	9.11	256-260	missing	XI.1-7, 189-196
Covenant symbol established	9.12-17	not present or missing	missing	XI.162-165
covenant implications	Flood never to destroy man again	?eternal life for Z. or promise to be seed of mankind	?becomes like gods	becomes like gods in terms of death

1 for J/P splits see Shea (1984) or Westermann (1984)

2 Heidel 1949 "no etymological connection between names... but they are very similar"

3 Lambert BWL 92-95 has translated new fragment that shows that Ziusudra was the son of Shuruppak...only one text shows this however

4 Westermann 1984 Nisir is mentioned in "Annals of Ashuraisirpal II of Assyria"; Ararat is a region (Ilkngs 19.37, Isa 37.38, Isa 51.27)

5 Finkelstein 1958 "action is incidental to main thrust of story...this detail shouldn't appear unless related..."

5 Heidel 1949 "...birds were frequently used in ancient seafaring..."

This textual comparison data helps to show that these texts are related. However, in order to evaluate the degree to which these texts are related, some considerations must be made. These considerations, contained in the next part of this paper, will attempt to show text development and the historical roots of the Flood account. These sections will show not only why these texts most likely developed from the same happening, but will also show some instances where simple text development and borrowing do not seem to explain the similarities. An outlined form of the considerations is shown below:

1. Common myth
2. History of Mesopotamia
3. Text development
4. Borrowing

Explanation of Similarities and Differences

Common Myth

First, the problem of how one views the flood traditions of the world must be resolved. Are the Near Eastern Flood texts histories of a Flood or are they just accounts of flooding? There is an *a priori* difference between viewing floods simply as floods and believing that there was an actual Flood that rendered the world, at least the Near East, lifeless for a time. This brief outline of the idea of myth will hopefully establish that the Near Eastern texts are referring to a Flood, and not floods.

According to Jacobsen, "What could be better [than a flood]... gods, water, catastrophe, and starting life all over (Jacobsen 1981)?" Man has always felt responsible/guilty for simply living (Simoons-Vermeer 1974). Being that water has always been a sign of cleansing, why wouldn't a great epic of destruction, recreation, and organization

dominate a culture based on the life-blood of the Tigris and the Euphrates? These questions ostensibly point to the origin of “myths” and are frequently used in forming the contemporarily popular idea that the Flood is simply a construct of man’s creativity and his drive for understanding. It is commonly accepted that the primeval flood motif is important to the history of all ancient civilization’s origin accounts. However, Frazer, in *Folklore in the Old Testament*, goes one-step further by defining this primeval “myth” as a natural outgrowth of each culture’s religious or philosophical ideas. He asserts that the flood template presence in all people’s history points to the commonality of mans’ psyche.

Using Frazer’s ideas as a starting point, Westermann continues to develop the primeval history of man as myth by establishing the common elements in all primeval accounts. Elements such as: snakes, floodwaters, chaos, creation, salvation, destruction, and gods with differing but permanent personalities are all identified. Then these rudiments are used to show that if an event actually occurred, there would be a celebration honoring that event in that particular culture. According to Westermann, the absence of Mesopotamian cultic commemorations of the Flood dictate that the Mesopotamians and Israelites created a “myth”—a literary construct telling a story and sharing a theological viewpoint—out of simple repeating local floods. Basically, since flooding occurs often no ritual is formed. Westermann also uses the commemorating cultures from around the world and attempts to establish that these cultures experienced floods that reshaped their lives in a single event forever. Thus, we see warranted commemoration. Because of this reasoning, Westermann (and the Flood as “myth”

supporters in general) asserts that the Flood texts of the ancient Near East are simple literary constructs (Westermann 1984).

By drawing differences between flood cultures and the Near Eastern Flood culture Westermann and Frazer may be mistaken. The Flood of ancient Near Eastern texts and the “cultural myth floods” are related. Their main themes are inexplicably linked. The Word Commentary identifies the major themes of the Flood as: destruction of mankind for punishment/cleansing, inner divine reaction, earthly beings’ obedience to the commands/wishes of God is important, and God’s pleasure in human obedience. These same themes are also tantamount in Westermann’s “flood myths”— or the ancient Near East. Westermann counters this linkage by showing that outline structure is also important in classifying flood stories. He does this by separating flood narratives into three different types.

In this tripartite typing Westermann and Near Eastern Flood supporters agree. Basically, flood narratives from all cultures show: coming of the flood, salvation from the flood, and an end to the flood (Wenham 1987; Jacobsen 1981). And it is these inclusions help classify a story as a flood narrative.

However, this linkage does not make the stories related—the simple idea of theme and basic structure are not specific enough to warrant dependence. This type of linkage, dependant linkage, can only be established in the next grouping of flood accounts.

This group contains the most widespread primitive flood narratives, despite the fact that more criteria were added. The texts in this group, however, are often fragmented and rarely can origin and specific comparisons be made. Only in the final grouping, which contains those texts that have a very similar structure and a certain

degree of dependence, can an in-depth study achieve credibility. The flood narratives of all high cultures, including the Near Eastern flood narratives evaluated in this paper, are classified as fitting into this group which contains a strict outline, mainly:

1. Decision of gods to destroy humanity
2. Contrary decision to preserve humanity
3. Execution of the decision to preserve—the announcement to man along with directions means of salvation
4. Execution of the decision to destroy—the flood
5. The effect of the flood
6. The ending of the flood
7. Leaving of the ship
8. Response of the one preserved
9. Decision of gods to preserve humanity (restoration)

Well, is this view of primeval history as myth accurate? Many would assert that it has to be in order to reconcile similar texts. However, this viewpoint makes the assumption that all peoples, of all times, have had relatively few ideas about origins. All recorded primeval stories use the gods as central players. Are we to believe that man came up with this idea but could not have just as simply left the gods out? This is what the supporters of primeval history, especially in regards to the Flood, as myth would have us believe.

Critiquing this myth view by relating it to certain texts is especially complicated because scope is not always identified in research on flood traditions. Books and research papers on this topic often make blanket references to flood stories in different cultures while rarely differentiating between the types of flood texts they are referring to. For the purposes of this paper, only those texts which meet the criteria of ancient Near Eastern composition following the “strict outline” stated earlier will be evaluated. By using these criteria, the attack of this Near Eastern Flood as “myth” is greatly weakened

because this particular event and these particular texts have deep historical roots in Mesopotamia, which, as this paper will show, point to relatedness of some kind.

History of Mesopotamia

The history of Mesopotamia, especially that of late Sumeria and early Babylonia, shows that text development of the Babylonian Flood texts most likely occurred. Scholars mark the beginning of Babylonian history with the rise of Hammurabi. However, their history goes a bit further back than this. At the end of 2000 B.C.E., the great kingdom of Sumer (the Sumerians) was disintegrating at the hands of external invaders. Sumer had been a powerful kingdom in the western part of Asia, and it had roughly occupied the land that was one day to become Babylonia. After the ruling dynasty of Sumer fell, the cities of Larsa and Isin moved in to fill the power vacuum. After hundreds of years, Larsa eventually defeated Isin.

Just as Larsa defeated Isin, Hammurabi came to power in the city of Babylon. Hammurabi went on to defeat a long-war-tired Larsa and establish a vast kingdom in the region which formerly had been occupied by Sumer. However, as Moscati explains in his book, *The Face of the Ancient Orient*,

"The relationship between the Akkadians [the Babylonians and Assyrians] and the Sumerians is growing more and more like that which exists between the Romans and the Greeks ... the newer people is permeated with the older and superior culture ... and makes a cultural capitulation at the very moment of its political victory."

Hammurabi, needless to say, was a very capable military and political leader.

Hammurabi's dynasty, otherwise referred to as the First Dynasty of Babylon ruled until about 1530 B.C.E. Under this reign, Babylonia entered a period of extreme prosperity

and relative peace, where it became the dominant nation of the region controlling recorded language and literature. As Saggs points out, however, in his book, *Everyday Life in Babylonia & Assyria*, "It would be a mistake to think of Babylon as the only city-state of significance at this period." Moscati actually points out, "Under Hammurabi the two cultures which compose Mesopotamian civilization [the Assyrians and the Babylonians] achieve complete and harmonious fusion."

Another important aspect in dating the history of these two accounts is discovered when looking at the importance of the god Marduk to Babylon. By using the idea of the power invested in Marduk by the Code of Hammurabi and its well-established dating, it is possible to date the oral origins of these stories of Gilgamesh beyond 2000 B.C.E. This, however, is a long process with many supports. It is difficult to explain without a thorough knowledge about ancient gods. For a complete explanation see Heidel's, *The Epic of Gilgamesh and Old Testament Parallels*.

By the 15th century B.C.E., the texts even begin to witness that Babylon had become the major culture in the Mesopotamian region (Pritchard 1958). Babylon had established itself and its language was used in the political/diplomatic circles throughout Mesopotamia, including Palestine, Syria, and Phoenicia. This language was also used in the correspondence with the overlords in Egypt (Heidel 1942).

In the meantime, however, a tribe known as the Cassites began to attack Babylonia possibly as early as when Hammurabi's son took control of the empire. Over the centuries, Babylonia was weakened by the Cassites. Finally, around the mid 1500's B.C.E., a Cassite Dynasty was set up in Babylonia.

Basically this history shows that Babylon ruled the Mesopotamian region at a time when it was possible for them to absorb Sumerian writing and culture. A map of ancient Mesopotamia has been included below (NAOS: 2000).



Text Development

A major difficulty presented when studying Near Eastern Flood texts is that none of the texts are completely translatable. Thus, comparison translating is commonly used. According to some scholars of ancient texts, the reason these texts are so easy to fill in is because they often repeat themselves (Kluger 1991). This however provides problems when attempting to understand a text's history because the individual texts have not always been viewed in the same light. When extra-Biblical Flood texts first became known, after Smith's discovery, the Babylonian accounts were considered separate tales, possibly even from separate cultures. However, today, it is widely held that the Atrahasis

epic was inserted into the Gilgamesh myths as they developed. This idea will be the focus of the next portion of this paper.

The Atrahasis epic is considered to be the work of a single author maintaining a single line of thought (Wolff 1969) attempting to show a single theme—mainly that of the relationship between the gods and man. A dominant view is that Sin-leqe-unninni inserted the Atrahasis Flood into a text about Gilgamesh and his exploits around the 12th century B.C.E. (Beyerlin 1975). However, others hold that the flood became an interwoven part of Gilgamesh's adventures much earlier, around 1600 B.C.E., in an oral form (Wenham 1987). There is no clear way to determine how early the Atrahasis story became married to Gilgamesh. It seems, though, at least by the time that Sin-leqe-unninni recorded the epic, Gilgamesh was a common hero/demi-god that was interwoven into many of the historical and mythological stories of Babylon. We can, however, be sure that the stories of Gilgamesh were recorded long before the conservative date of the 12th century B.C.E. by fragments found from the 14th century B.C.E. (Boghozko and Hittite fragments) which show an interwoven tale of Gilgamesh and his adventures in existence (Tigay 1944). Another important answer that these 14th century fragments can offer on the Gilgamesh Epic history is that these texts are in greatly abbreviated form (some even leaving out the whole Flood incident). This helps to establish the claim that the epic developed over time with pieces added as it passed down the generations.

Some scholars hold that every section of the Gilgamesh epic can be traced back to separate ideas in the older Sumerian tablets (Kramer 1944). However, this whole controversy is quite obtuse because the early history/culture/religion of the early Babylonian peoples is too poorly recorded to draw such conclusions. It is apparent

though, that the themes of Gilgamesh have been completely reworked and this Flood tradition, when taken in context, does not seem to belong to the same history that the Sumerian or Atrahasis account does (Thomas 1958).

In Atrahasis, we have a pure Old Babylonian tale of a Flood and its importance. In Gilgamesh, we have an Atrahasis event that has been reworked into a collection of legends about a now mythological character (Wenham 1987). However, noticeable differences can now be seen as the text itself evolved through the centuries.

For example, there are changes in the Epic of Gilgamesh when the Standard Babylonian text is compared to the Old Babylonian texts. Some scholars even hold that these changes are, “actual differences in the narrative that affect the sense of the composition” (Cooper 1944). In other words, major liberties were taken by authors/redactors. These scholars also hold that the changes make Gilgamesh more powerful by eliminating the Old style which tended toward repetition. It is also obvious when looking at Standard texts that their creators have added recapitulation, when, upon a further look at the Old texts these phrases appear to be simple foreshadowing. The development of the text can also be seen when viewing certain words in Old texts and realizing that there is no real translation for the symbol present. There are many theories surrounding these depictions (such as “uppu”) and authors/redactors apparently added text here because in the Standard texts these “unknown” words are not present. They have a clear meaning which should not have been derivable (Kilmer 1944).

In respect to the oral tradition changes, there is no hope in showing what additions or retractions were made in these accounts. The oral tradition factor plays a major role in text development studies because both peoples (Sumerians and pre-

Babylonians) inhabited areas close enough where stories and famous rulers like Gilgamesh and Ziusudra/Utnapishtim would be well known. Unfortunately, the only traceable evidence we have for evaluating these possible oral developments is what has been written down in the form of ancient texts. It is hard enough to prove textual development after 1600 B.C.E. much less oral deviations. Since the Sumerians have the oldest Near Eastern writings known, it will appear that borrowing was taking place not only of writing but of stories as well, especially those relating to primeval history. But, this was not necessarily the case. Oral development could have been simultaneous, while written records came staggered, but there is no way to prove this without historical textual references. Needless to say, these accounts do not exist.

When looking at Gilgamesh, it is obvious that some parts rely on prior texts. Along with the deletions and word changes covered earlier, Tablet XII of this account has been added in its entirety at a later date than the rest of the epic. In this tablet, addition is obvious because large portions of it agree almost verbatim with the Semitic version (Heidel 1949). At the beginning of XII, the story returns to showing primeval history again, a literary device frequently used to introduce a new story (Castellino 1957). This seems to start the whole story over again. Also, Enki is alive again without any explanation (Kramer 1944), although he should still be dead if the redactor is following the known Standardized Gilgamesh tradition. Another supporting fact of XII's addition is that all fragments containing the Gilgamesh Flood narrative tablets end with the doxological formula, repetition of the first lines of the account, bringing the epic full-circle (Tigay 1944). This feature is at the end of XI, not XII.

Remembering the absence of the Flood in 14th century B.C.E. renderings, there is debate as to whether or not Tablet XI is also an addition. It is widely observed that Tablets III and V (story of Humbaba) and XI are found also on Sumerian tablets pre-dating the earliest written Gilgamesh accounts (Heidel 1949). Thus, it appears that Tablet XI may have also been added later in the development of the Old accounts. The Old texts do have reference to Gilgamesh going to find Utnapishtim, but there is no indication that he ever gets there, or that a Flood story is ever told to him by Utnapishtim (Kramer 1944). A possible support for this theory is that it is an assumption, that the early Gilgamesh texts were a unified whole. To some, it appears that the stories in the early Gilgamesh conglomerations were simply a grouping together of six individual disconnected Sumerian tales (Kramer 1944). This argument becomes especially strong when the Old texts (including the Atrahasis epic) are evaluated against the Sumerian primeval history (Heidel 1949). The Babylonians could have adopted more of the Sumerian tales, like the Flood, and then applied these to their “tradition” as is seen in the XII addition (Kramer 1947). After all, Gilgamesh was a historical figure in Mesopotamia around 2500 B.C.E., long before the Babylonians began recording texts.

Borrowing

Although there are many similarities in these ancient texts in story, form, themes, and characters, it is still difficult to show literary dependence. As stated earlier, it is widely accepted that Gilgamesh is a product of the changing stories and myths that were common to the people of the Mesopotamian region for centuries. From the evidence, it appears that the Gilgamesh Flood account used the Atrahasis epic as a template. Thus,

the link between Utnapishtim and Atrahasis is quite substantiated. Also, there is the Sumerian account—the Eridu Genesis of which Gilgamesh's Tablet XII is a literal translation (Kramer 1947). It appears that the Babylonian accounts are tied in some way to the Sumerian account.

First, the Flood link between the Sumerians and the Babylonians is going to be assumed. Although not explicably provable from known texts, the fact of proximity, similar cultures, and that the Babylonians took over and absorbed the Sumerians, (including their writing by 2000 B.C.E.) at the latest, the evidence seems to indicate that both these cultures widely accepted the idea of the Flood.

Many scholars speak of myth and how floods are a particular sort of tradition where the Flood represents the many floods that continue to destroy/renew the land. There are other flood accounts which talk about the seasonal flooding and great floods. However, none of these floods lay claim to the destruction of all mankind and contain the marked similarities that the accounts of Flood in this paper have. These same scholars support the idea that the Israelites borrowed this Flood prototype and applied their own theological twists. However, this is not a practical answer for the similarities because the Israelites would have no reason to incorporate a Flood tradition into their primeval history. In the Sinai Peninsula and the land of Canaan flooding is a non-issue. It in no way defines life as it would of in Babylon. Thus, Israel had no reason to adopt this part of the primeval history and make it crucial to their Genesis account.

The Israelites were in Egypt and flooding is paramount to their culture as well. Egypt had a flood narrative tied to a primeval history. However, although vaguely similar, the account of the Egyptian Flood and the creation of man are much further

removed from the Near Eastern accounts. The “Israelites” either had Flood account when they went in, or they got it after they came out. They did not pick it up in Egypt.

If assumed that the Israelites were a group of loosely related slaves escaping from Egypt who, over the next few hundred years, formed a civilization. Why on earth would they adopt a Babylonian primeval history when all they know is what they had in Egypt? Even if the most extreme dates are taken, knowing that the Israelites had entered the Promised Land no later than the 13th century B.C.E. as proven by excavations of Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim (Finegan 1959), the Israelites were still out of contact with Mesopotamia for 400 years. The writer/writers of the Israelite theology would not need to take Babylonian traditions and apply their theological concerns, as many claim. If anything these writers would have taken on more Egyptian-like stories.

It is true that a greater society will influence the smaller in most cases and that Gilgamesh tablets have been found in Israelite cities (Gordon & Rendsburg 1997), but Babylon was not concerned with this post-exodus people at this time. This is a moot point because Babylon would have no concern with this people yet. Egypt was in charge of most of the Land of Canaan as shown by letters asking for Egyptian help in fighting off attackers to the Land. It is probably true, based on the history of the Near East, that the majority of people in Canaan subscribed to the Sumerian or Babylonian ideas of primeval history; but, by this time, the Israelites were already hooked on the “theology of Moses” and would not care to absorb these people’s ideas.

However, the children of Israel did seem to give in easily to the gods of the Mesopotamian’s accepting them into their worship throughout their history. It is claimed that a possible reason for such easy acceptance is that the Israelites were still a young

people, some even new in their monotheism (not all who left at the exodus were believers in Yahweh), possibly still carrying ideas of Egyptian/polytheistic gods. However, it becomes apparent as the Nation develops that the Israelites didn't care much for the Egyptian gods. Instead, after settling, their real affinity became for the Canaanite gods of the local area.

This idea brings to the forefront a pre-Egypt entrance tie between the people of Israel and Mesopotamia. Abraham left Mesopotamia, but he did live there. Throughout the Genesis account even up to Joseph's time, Mesopotamia was linked to God's people. Some sources claim that Flood literature can be found in lower Mesopotamia up to 1500 years before "Israel" re-established itself in the area (Pritchard 1958). Abraham, even his predecessors, had plenty of time before leaving Mesopotamia to learn of the Flood (Wenham 1987).

However, don't forget the crucial differences between the Sumerian/Babylonian accounts with the Genesis account. They are marked enough, along with the lack of reason for Israel to absorb the traditions after the exile, to warrant the belief that "Israel" never absorbed the Mesopotamian Flood traditions as recorded in the texts. They most likely knew of an earlier form of the account.

In analyzing these texts taking into account the history of the Near East and its crucial peoples, it seems as though those "Israelites" that entered Egypt already had a primeval history that included a Flood narrative. It may have been oral, but it did exist.

Heidel claims: the Hebrews were part of a giant drama battled in the Near East by the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians making their story [primeval account] part of a much larger body of literature not reliant on their special story. Pritchard claims: the

Hebrew writers were part of a system of cosmology truly authentic to the Near East which they added their own theological twists to. It seems from the analysis of these texts and the history of the peoples that "Israel" proper (post-Egypt) borrowed nothing of the primeval history of the Mesopotamian peoples.

It appears that the Flood narrative has come to Israel through their own history as the Bible claims--through Abraham's immediate ancestors, through Abraham, through Jacob, through the descendants in the land of Egypt, through those in the Exodus, and through Moses when the traditions were finally recorded. Both Babylon and Sumeria did record their versions of the Flood before Israel recorded their own, but that says nothing about the form of the story in oral tradition amongst a people who had left lower Mesopotamia centuries before. The Israelites did not adopt and adapt Babylonian literature, they knew of the ancient Near Eastern Flood tradition (they even of an Egyptian flood tradition) long before they knew of Babylon's Flood narratives.

Conclusion

In summary of the considerations leading to the common Flood happening hypothesis:

1. Common myth: Cannot effectively describe the Near Eastern Flood narratives as simple cultural myths. Instead, taking all the observations in to account, the Near Eastern Flood texts in this paper all seem to stem from the same oral story.
2. History of Mesopotamia: The history of this region points to historical and cultural factors being in place that would help support the idea that the Flood narratives all stem from the same oral story.

3. Text development: Shows that we can be certain that several of the texts evaluated did in fact develop from a prototype. Whether dependent on the same original text however cannot be proven because of the absence of “developing” fragments in most cases.
4. Borrowing: A certain amount of borrowing did take place in some text formations. The extent, however, cannot be accurately shown. It is all also noteworthy that borrowing can only be established from the written texts that remain. The early Flood tradition holders held an oral account and this makes exact narrative roots and pre-written borrowing indeterminable.

From this analysis it seems that the similarities of Sumerian, Babylonian, and Genesis Flood accounts (even of primeval history in general) point toward a common source that all the Near Eastern Flood traditions stemmed from. This source was a pre-Abraham oral tradition from the Mesopotamian region about a Flood and the gods. The similarities and even the theology are too closely related to be completely unconnected. But to assume borrowing is going one step to far. Oral traditions change, peoples adapt them, and they are by no means set in stone. Apparently, over the centuries from the “beginning” in Mesopotamia to the first “complete” recorded texts some changes in the narratives took place. It is interesting that even when taking the seemingly most distantly related texts (the Genesis account and the Gilgamesh account) some simple truths are still apparent. These truths include: there is a creator god who created everything, everything on the earth is subject to his control, he requires man to follow him, he eventually destroys those who do not but not without extended grace, he will preserve those that follow him, and he has man’s best interest at heart.

In the study of ancient cultures, there is a multi-level problem in that a lot of history fits together. This is easy to see; however, once the surface is scratched to organize and explain becomes a much more daunting task. These texts do not prove the

historical existence of Noah but they do provide extra-Biblical support that was completely unknown before the 1870's. Unfortunately, liberal scholars still continue to disclaim the Bible's authority; at least they provide us with some change now holding to a "common myth" rather than their previous view of the Flood as a simple construct of Hebrew religion. If nothing else, these texts help show that the idea of a 5th century composition of Genesis is not as likely as a 15th century one due to the unity of the Genesis account and the history of the Near Eastern peoples and texts in relation to a Flood.

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SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: Jared Inman Date: 3-28 Major: RELS/BIO


SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

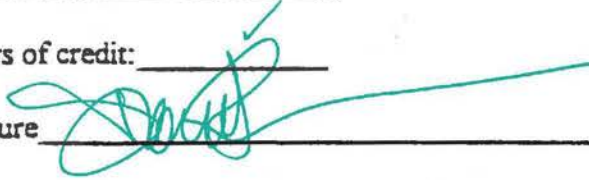
Signature of faculty advisor  Expected date of completion 4-7

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned:

This in an "A" project:

This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit:

Advisor's Final Signature 

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: _____

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.

Title:

Common Myth?: Analysis of Near Eastern Flood Texts and Their Relation to the Biblical Genesis Account

Purpose:

In this paper I will show the history of Near Eastern flood texts and evaluate them in relation to the Flood story of Genesis. Timelines, development, structures, themes, similarities, and differences will be used to relate the stories.

Texts:

1. Babylonian Flood epic (early Akkadian form and Gilgamesh)
2. Sumerian Flood epic
3. Egyptian Flood epic
4. Genesis Flood epic