

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD STORY IN THE LIGHT OF THE GILGAMESH FLOOD ACCOUNT*

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The thesis of this article is strikingly simple. It builds on a thought that I have carried with me for a quarter-century of teaching 'Introduction to the Bible' courses, but which I have never presented in public, neither in lecture format nor in print. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to present my ideas to the assembly of scholars who gathered at the University of Sydney for the conference devoted to the Gilgamesh Epic, that is to say, in a land reached by my having crossed "one after another, all the seas."

The point is this, plain and simple. According to the usual source division of the biblical flood story in Genesis 6-8, the canonical version is the result of the redaction of two pre-existing versions, each of which told the flood story in its own way. These two versions are the Yahwist account, generally thought to be the earlier, and the Priestly account, generally thought to be the later, though the dating of these two sources, relative or actual, is of relatively little consequence for the present enterprise.

If one reads the two stories as separate entities, one will find that elements of a whole story are missing from either the J or the P version. Only when read as a whole does Genesis 6-8 read as a complete story, and — here is the most important point I wish to make — not only as a complete story, but as a narrative paralleling perfectly the Babylonian flood story tradition recorded in Gilgamesh Tablet XI, point by point, and in the same order. Perfectly, that is, after taking into account elements found in the biblical narrative but lacking in the Babylonian story, indicated by a minus sign in the right hand column of the accompanying chart — features which can be explained

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given the distinctively Israelite theological position inherent to Genesis 6–8 — more on this below.

That is to say, according to the dominant view of biblical scholars, we are supposed to believe that two separate authors wrote two separate accounts of Noah and the flood, and that neither of them included all the elements found in the Gilgameš Epic, but that when the two were interwoven by the redactor, *voilà*, the story paralleled the Gilgameš flood story point-by-point, feature-by-feature, element-by-element. For example, J has the birds being sent forth and the sacrifices at the end of the account, while P has the building materials, dimensions, and decks of the ark, along with the mountain top landing and everyone being set free, with neither version having the missing elements present in the other version, but that through some inexplicable means the final product present in the book of Genesis has all of these features, paralleling, I emphasize once more, the same features in the Gilgameš Epic. And not only that, but in the same order as the features appear in Gilgameš Tablet XI. All of this is presented schematically in the chart.

I now must admit the following, and I am sure what I will describe has happened to many if not most of the readers of this article. You hit upon an idea which you think is original, and you believe this because you think you know the secondary literature well enough to know what everyone has said about the particular topic. But then at some later stage in your research you learn that someone else said the same thing 25 years ago. Such is the case with my main insight herein. In fact, only while putting the finishing touches on my talk for the Gilgameš conference, indeed while already in Sydney, did I track down one last reference, at which point I learned that my approach was anticipated by Gordon Wenham in an article entitled “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative” published in *Vetus Testamentum* in 1978.¹

While to some extent Wenham’s fine study took the wind out of my sails (after I had crossed all the seas?), it nevertheless remained clear to me that there were several good reasons to present my research, even if no longer totally original. The most important reason was that Wenham’s article apparently has not made an impact on the field of biblical studies — which is why I had assumed that no one had expounded the argument before. I am relatively well versed in biblical commentaries, especially those on Genesis. As anyone with similar familiarity with such volumes can aver, the division of the flood story into J and P remains one of the hallmarks of biblical scholarship. So, notwithstanding the lack of total originality in my approach, I believe there still is some value to presenting my remarks. Moreover, some of what follows has not been noted before, even if Wenham deserves credit for being the first to present the argument in main outline.

¹ Wenham 1978, especially pp. 345–47.

To repeat the main point: the biblical flood story follows the Gilgamesh Epic flood account, point-by-point, and in the same order. Now of course, in most cases, there is no option for variant order, after all, Noah must build the ark before the rains begin, the flood must occur before the ark can land on the mountain top, and so on. But there is one place, I would submit, where variation is possible, and perhaps a second as well. I refer especially to the end of the story, where both Noah and Utnapištim could have performed the sacrifices first, while all were still on the ark, and only later set everyone free. But in both cases, the order is first to set everyone free and then to perform the sacrifices. In Noah's case, in fact, the order is counterintuitive. If he first set all the animals free and then performed the sacrifices, as the story now reads, one might ask, what happened? Did he call the pure animals back in order to sacrifice them? Obviously, the implication is clear: Noah set all the animals free, except for the handful which he intended to sacrifice. But my point is this: if the redactor had before him two stories, the supposed J account and the supposed P account, the former including the sacrifices and the latter including the hero's setting everyone free, I would imagine that the redactor would have woven his story with these two elements in that order, the sacrifices first, while the animals were still present, and then the setting of everyone free. But such is not the case. At the end of Genesis 8, Noah first sets the animals free and then performs the sacrifices.

This point, to my mind, implies a unified story borrowed directly from the Gilgamesh Epic, in which this is precisely the order. As we shall see, following the majority opinion, there is no doubt that the source of the biblical story is the Mesopotamian flood story tradition, whether it be Gilgamesh specifically or Atrahasis or some other version not yet discovered. And in this manner, I submit, we should explain why the last two features of the biblical story occur in the order in which they do, for such is the order of both Gilgamesh XI and Atrahasis tablet III, column v (the latter recommences at just this point, enough so that we can read the words *ana šāri* 'to the winds', referring to releasing the ship's passengers, human and animal presumably, to the four winds, after which follows the description of the sacrifices, albeit also in fragmentary state).

The second place in the biblical flood story where variation is possible is the case of the mountain top landing and the sending forth of the birds. One could argue, in theory at least, that Noah might have sent forth the birds upon the cessation of the rain, and afterwards the ark could have landed on the mountain top. I agree that such an order of events is far less likely than the order which appears in the biblical narrative, but it is possible nonetheless. It is therefore pertinent to point out that Genesis 8 parallels the Babylonian flood story, with the mountain top landing preceding the sending forth of the birds. Note that according to the source theory, these two elements derive from separate sources, with the mountain top landing assigned to P and the sending forth of the birds assigned to J. And yet once again, the order of these two elements — purportedly from different sources — is in the same order as in Gilgamesh XI.

Now proponents of the documentary hypothesis are not totally unaware of the points that I have just made. Many, it is true, simply ignore or sidestep some of these issues, while others attempt to deal with them. The most commonly proffered solution is that when the two texts were redacted together, parts of the J text were omitted. That is to say, J once had the larger narrative as well, but the redactor saw no need to include all of the Yahwist material, especially when the Priestly source included the same information. Thus, for example, one finds the following comments by A. F. Campbell and M. A. O'Brien. At Genesis 6:8, they wrote: "The section of J omitted here would have contained an announcement of the flood and the order to build the ark,"² corresponding to approximately items 2-5 on the chart; and at 8:13b they wrote: "The section of J omitted here would have been an account of the departure from the ark,"³ corresponding to approximately items 10-11 on the chart.

That is to say, not only are scholars certain about the existence of the Yahwist source, although one must admit that it remains a totally hypothetical construct, they even are willing to reconstruct what was theoretically present in said text and then later omitted by the redactor responsible for the final product. This is simply too much to bear, and the whole enterprise begins to look like a very flimsy house of cards. Can we really countenance such a theory? Would anyone working in cuneiform studies suggest such a development, piling on non-existent evidence upon non-existent evidence? One need only compare Jeffrey Tigay's masterful work reconstructing the evolution of the *Gilgameš Epic* to see the contrast very plainly.⁴ Of course, one must admit that in the case of the *Gilgameš Epic*, we have ample empirical evidence with which to work, covering several millennia in fact, and that we lack such raw data when considering the biblical text, for all we possess is the final canonical narrative. But the lack of such data, I submit, is no reason to allow ourselves to run helter-skelter through texts, real or imagined.

Furthermore, if scholars wish to argue that the Yahwist account was fuller at one stage, but that the redactor omitted material which was paralleled in the Priestly account, then they fall into a bit of a trap, because in three instances it appears that the redactor included parallel material from both sources. I refer to item 1, the morality factor, items 5 and 6 concerning the population to be brought onto the ark, and item 7, the flood itself. Let us consider but one of these in further detail, the issue of the population of the ark. One of these I have incorporated into item 5, labeled "covenant/population" in the P column, and the other I have included as item 6, labeled simply "population" in the J column. As is well known, the two statements

² Campbell and O'Brien 1993, p. 96, n. 8. Note that I use this work throughout this article simply as one example among many, without wishing to criticize its conclusions any more or any less than other such works.

³ Campbell and O'Brien 1993, p. 97, n. 16.

⁴ Tigay 1982.

provide different details. The former reference states that Noah is to bring on board one pair of every creature on earth, while the latter reference distinguishes between the pure and impure creatures, with seven pairs of the pure creatures to be brought aboard, and one pair of the impure creatures. So now the source critics must explain why in several places (according to their view) the redactor omitted material from his Yahwist source so as not to repeat material taken from the Priestly account, while in several other places, such as the number of animals to be brought onto the ark, the redactor incorporated material from both versions. As far as I know, this question is never asked nor addressed.

Let us now turn our attention to the priestly narrative, where we encounter a different explanation for missing material offered by those biblical scholars who adhere to the source theory. The P account, as one can see from the chart, is the fuller version according to the devotees of the source theory. Only two items are missing. The first blank at item 6 on the chart is not really missing, for the population of the ark is presented in the previous section, item 5, which also includes the covenant concept. Thus we are left with only two real omissions, the sending forth of birds and the sacrifices at the end. For the first omission, there are two possible solutions. One is simply to read from 8:5 with its mention that the tops of the mountains appeared on such and such a date, to 8:13a, with its mention that the waters were dried up from the earth on such and such a later date, thereby avoiding any need for Noah to utilize birds to determine that the earth was dry.

A second solution, which I have not indicated on the chart, because I believe it is the minority view among devotees of the documentary hypothesis, is to take 8:7, in which Noah sends forth a raven, and to ascribe this passage to P.⁵ This, however, presents yet another problem, namely, the lack of an expressed subject for the verb *wayšallah* 'and he sent forth'. The form is fine in its present position, because it follows upon the explicit mention of *nôah* 'Noah' in the previous v. 6. But if v. 7 were to follow upon v. 5, as per those who ascribe 8:7 to the P source, then the present state of the Hebrew text in v. 7 is problematic. Once more the source critics are not to be stopped, as witnessed by the following comment, again by Campbell and O'Brien: "The Hebrew pronoun is included in the verb form; in P, originally, Noah would probably have been explicitly mentioned here."⁶ *Res ipsa loquitur*. Since I do not subscribe to the source division of biblical narratives, however, I will not proceed down this path further — I simply mention the two options.

For the second omission, however, one can say something further. Noah does not sacrifice at the very end of the flood in the P account, because the priestly source does not permit any sacrifices to Yahweh before Aaron the first high priest, appointed by

⁵ Thus, e.g., Campbell and O'Brien 1993, p. 26.

⁶ Campbell and O'Brien 1993, p. 26, n. 11.

Moses in the book of Exodus and invested to serve in the book of Leviticus — all this, of course, according to the reconstruction of the Torah's sources in the hands of the JEDP theorists, dating back to the time of Wellhausen in the 1870s, if not earlier.

Incidentally, this also explains why the J source distinguishes between the pure and impure animals, for only J's Noah will sacrifice. P has no need for such a distinction among the members of the animal kingdom for his Noah will not offer sacrifices to Yahweh at story's end. Even here, however, the source critics run into a sticky wicket, for typically it is P who worries about pure and impure matters, and not J. In this one instance, we are supposed to believe, it is J who has this concern, and not P. Once again, this is an issue not addressed by adherents of the documentary approach.

To return to the matter at hand, from an objective point-of-view, I trust that the reader will concur that this is all too convenient for those who wish to divide the flood story into separate sources and thereby have the Yahwist's Noah offer sacrifices, but not the Priestly author's Noah. Should we not rather accept the story at face value, with an ending which includes *both* of the final two items in our chart, Noah's setting everyone free and then sacrificing to Yahweh his God — exactly in accordance with the way that Utnapištim sets everyone free and then sacrifices to the gods. Could anything be plainer?

My main point thus far is clear. The biblical flood story works perfectly in comparison to the Babylonian flood story only when it is read as a unitary whole. It parallels Gilgameš Epic tablet XI — and the Atrahasis Epic flood story, as best as we have it in its fragmentary state — point-by-point, in the correct order, even where a variant order is possible, from beginning to end.

At this point I wish to include a comment on *Forschungsgeschichte*. It is not irrelevant to note that Wellhausen's classical formulation of the JEDP Theory and George Smith's discovery of Gilgameš tablet XI occurred within a few years of each other in the decade of the 1870s. But as is well known, Wellhausen turned a blind eye to archaeological discoveries and plodded forward with the source theory, building on the work of his predecessors, mainly de Wette and Graf. Had he had even the slightest interest in the great discoveries being made mainly in England, where the great treasure trove of cuneiform documents were stored and were being studied with great excitement, perhaps he would have noticed the point that I am making today. Though perhaps I should not single out Wellhausen too harshly, for as I noted earlier, even with the Gilgameš flood story so well known, 130 years after the 1870s, biblical scholars by and large still adhere to the J-P division of Genesis 6-8.

To this point, I have focused on Gilgameš Epic tablet XI in relation to Genesis 6-8, with only an occasional aside to the Atrahasis Epic. New evidence concerning the latter, however, demands that we now broaden our investigation of both the cuneiform and biblical material and mention an important detail from Atrahasis that correlates with Genesis 9. In an (as yet) unpublished Late Babylonian fragment of Atrahasis (housed in

the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, to be published by W. G. Lambert), one encounters the following couplet presenting Ea's promise (MMA 86.11.378A rev. v 13'-14'):⁷

From this day no Deluge shall take place,
and the human race [shall] endure for ever!

The connection between this passage and Genesis 9:11 is immediately apparent:

And I will establish my covenant with you,
and never again shall all flesh be cut-off by the waters of the flood,
and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

To continue the approach presented above vis-à-vis Gilgameš XI and Genesis 6-8, it is important to note here that the Atrahasis Epic⁸ includes both the sacrifices offered to the gods (III v 34-35) and the statement that no deluge shall ever occur again. According to the JEDP Theory, however, the mention of the sacrifices in the Bible (Genesis 8:20-22) is assigned to J (as noted above; see also the chart once more), while the promise that the earth shall not be destroyed again (Genesis 9:11) is assigned to P. Our conclusions vis-à-vis Gilgameš XI and Genesis 6-8, accordingly, are equally valid when we compare Atrahasis with the biblical material, now expanded to include Genesis 9.

At this point I would like to turn our attention to those elements which are present in the biblical story but which are lacking in Gilgameš XI and in Atrahasis, at least as preserved in our documentation. As noted above, these features are indicated on the chart with the minus sign. My treatment of these items needs to be part of a larger discussion, to which I now turn.

In my presentation thus far, I have assumed, in line with the dominant view in biblical scholarship, that the Gilgameš Epic flood story serves as the source for the Genesis flood story. This has become such a commonplace in the field of biblical studies that hardly anyone anymore considers the reasons behind this conclusion. I would like to present those arguments now, and note my major indebtedness to Nahum Sarna, who more than anyone else, I believe, put forward the salient arguments in his volume *Understanding Genesis* (1966), published forty years ago.⁹ In all, I shall present six arguments which together solidify the conclusion.¹⁰ Many of these points are rather obvious, but sometimes the obvious requires presentation as well. One obvious point

⁷ Reported by George 2003, p. 527. I am indebted to Andrew George for calling my attention to this new Atrahasis fragment and for further discussion about it.

⁸ Even if the flood portion (including the aftermath of the flood) needs to be pieced together from the main British Museum witness (manuscript C of Lambert and Millard 1969) and the new MMA fragment quoted above.

⁹ Sarna 1966, pp. 37-55.

¹⁰ See already Gordon and Rendsburg 1997, p. 50, though with much less detail.

is the fact that the Mesopotamian tradition is attested at a much, much earlier date, reaching back to the 3rd millennium BCE, while our biblical story is known only from its 1st millennium version. But I will not count this point among my six arguments, since in theory it is possible that West Semitic versions of the flood existed as early as the 3rd millennium BCE, even though we naturally lack any such documentation.

Now to my specific lines of reasoning: first, all things being equal, a greater society influences a lesser society, and not vice versa. America sends its movies and fast-food restaurants around the world, to places such as Peru, Latvia, and Tanzania, but rarely do these countries export their products to the U.S. In antiquity, there can be no doubt that Mesopotamia was the dominant society (whether we think of the Sumerians, the Assyrians, or the Babylonians), while Israel was a backwater, a third-world country as it were, without the great political, economic, and military clout of the peoples of Mesopotamia, and without the cultural influence that parallels that clout. Accordingly, if one finds the same story attested in the two regions, one can assume *prima facie* that the Mesopotamian version served as the basis for the Israelite one.¹¹

Second, in the present case, we may mention the obvious fact that the Gilgameš Epic was the literary classic of the ancient world, known beyond the bounds of the Mesopotamian homeland. Indeed, the discovery of two cuneiform documents in the heart of the West Semitic world speaks volumes in support of our conclusion. The first is the discovery of a fragment of the Gilgameš Epic at Megiddo dated to the 14th century.¹² True, this fragment is not of the flood story, but rather comes from Enkidu's deathbed scene. Nevertheless, we learn from this fragment that at least some individuals in Late Bronze Age Canaan, at specifically a place that would become a major Israelite center during the Iron Age, could read the Gilgameš Epic in its cuneiform original.

The second discovery is perhaps even more significant: I refer to the inclusion of a fragment of the Atrahasis Epic flood account in the Late Bronze Age archives of ancient Ugarit.¹³ If ever we needed absolute proof that West Semites were familiar

¹¹ At the same time, I feel compelled to add the following, picking up the thread from the discussion of the Late Babylonian MMA Atrahasis fragment, with emphasis on the fact that we are dealing with a very late text. In this case, one must hold to the slight possibility that Ea's promise not to destroy the world again reflects Jewish influence on the Akkadian text, for by Late Babylonian times there was a significant Jewish presence in Mesopotamia. Of course, we have no way of testing this proposal, since we do not possess earlier witnesses to this portion of the Atrahasis Epic (the end of tablet III being extremely fragmentary; see Lambert and Millard 2003, pp. 102–05). Should a future discovery raise the level of this suggestion from slightly possible to probable or demonstrable, then the discussion above about Atrahasis and Genesis 8–9 would be far less germane. For a parallel proposal, note that D. B. Redford posited Jewish influence on a particular aspect of the Horus and Seth myth attested only in Ptolemaic times (Redford 1967, pp. 221–24; expanding on Redford 1963), though his position has found few if any adherents (see Helck 1965; Rendsburg forthcoming).

¹² Tigay 1982, pp. 123–29, 185–86; George 2003, pp. 339–47.

¹³ Lambert and Millard 1969, pp. 131–33.

with the Mesopotamian flood tradition, this is it. And while Late Bronze Age Ugarit and Iron Age Israel are not one and the same entity, given the remarkable similarities in the literatures of the two, the transitive law allows us to countenance the very real possibility that the ancient Israelites had direct knowledge of the Gilgameš/Atrahasis flood motif. In addition, a complete tablet of a Gilgameš text was found at Ugarit in 1994, which, while still unpublished and apparently not part of the epic *per se*, adds to the general picture presented here nonetheless.¹⁴

In short, the Gilgameš Epic in general and the Mesopotamian flood tradition in particular were known in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age. Through such discoveries we can envision how an Early Iron Age Israelite would have gained knowledge of this great literary classic from the Tigris-Euphrates region to the east.

Third, the very nature of divine punishment present in the biblical flood story is foreign to the natural conditions of ancient Israel, but very real in a Mesopotamian setting. While Israel is not quite as arid as most people think — in the winter there can be some major rainstorms — the notion of a catastrophic flood as described in the book of Genesis finds a more secure home in Mesopotamia. Great drought would be a much more realistic manner of destruction in the land of Israel, as indeed the admonitions at the ends of the book of Leviticus (26:19) and the book of Deuteronomy (28:23-24) describe. In contrast, the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is well attested, both in the archaeological record at certain sites, including Uruk, and in more recent times. One can understand how the memory of one of these historic attestations developed into the epic tradition present in the Mesopotamian literary record. Thus, if the author of Genesis has Yahweh utilizing a flood of cosmic proportions to punish humanity, one must assume that he borrowed this motif from a Mesopotamian source.

Fourth, the one geographical locale mentioned in the book of Genesis is Ararat, is the phrase *hārê ʾārārāt* 'mountains of Ararat' in 8:4. This toponym is the Hebrew equivalent of Urartu, the mountainous region north of Assyria, at the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Fifth, the biblical flood story includes a detail which is unique in the biblical corpus, but which parallels the Mesopotamian flood tradition quite remarkably. At the very end of the biblical account, in Genesis 8:21, we read that 'God smelled the savory smell' of Noah's sacrifices. Nowhere else in the biblical corpus is God portrayed in such a manner. Quite the contrary, humans offer sacrifices, which typically are accepted by God, though not at all times (witness the case of Cain in Genesis 4:5), but that is all we learn.

In fact, one of the features that distinguishes the Bible from other ancient Near Eastern literature is the following crucial point. The Bible is the record of God and

¹⁴ George 1999, pp. 139–40.

man, specifically one subset of mankind, namely Israel, but the focus remains tenaciously on man — we get very few glimpses of heaven. Which is to say, the mythology that dominates ancient Near Eastern literature, with numerous scenes played out among the gods, is lacking from the literature of ancient Israel. Part of the reason, of course, is the oneness of God in Israel, there being no other deities for Yahweh to interact with, at least according to the official position of ancient Israelite theologians. But in addition to this point, we may marvel at the manner in which ancient Israelite literati never strayed from their goal of contemplating the human condition with all its complexities. Accordingly, a scene in which the deity smells the savory sacrifices offered by man is strikingly singular in the biblical record. If we find this detail included in the flood story, we have reason to attribute its presence to an author who followed rather strictly the Mesopotamian flood tradition that served as the source of his composition.

Finally, we come to the question of those elements which appear in the biblical story but which are lacking in the *Gilgameš* Epic or the *Atrahasis* Epic. From a totally objective view, I believe, it would be natural to conclude that a story with additional material builds on a parallel story lacking such material. That is to say, it is far more likely that the Israelite writer added material to the Babylonian source which lay before him than the other way around, that a Babylonian author deleted material from a West Semitic source at his disposal. Moreover, this line of reasoning receives support from considering specifically which features were added in the biblical story. These items all stem from the specific theology of ancient Israel. I refer not to the oneness of God mentioned before, which is a mere quantitative issue, but rather to ancient Israel's understanding of its deity, what I would call the qualitative factor.¹⁵

In the Mesopotamian tradition, it appears that the flood was the result of a capricious decision of the gods. Only in the *Atrahasis* Epic do we have a hint of a reason for the flood, but even there it appears to result solely from the gods' being upset that human noise is disturbing their sleep. True, noise is usually a bad thing, so one might see here a nod towards a morality-immorality issue, but such is not explicitly stated in any of the Mesopotamian versions of the flood, including that of Berossus from a much later period. And to be sure, the reason that the survivor of the flood was selected by his protector deity is never attributed to that individual's moral rectitude. In the Bible by contrast, the morality factor is prominent. The world is to be destroyed because of its depravity, and Noah is selected because he was righteous. A generation or two ago it was a commonplace among scholars — the name of W. F. Albright comes easily to mind here¹⁶ — to claim that there were major differences between the religion of ancient Israel and the religions of the ancient Near East in

¹⁵ See further Rendsburg 1995, especially p. 6.

¹⁶ See, *e.g.*, Albright 1957.

general. One such distinction is that in ancient Israel morality was tied to religion. This is not to claim that Israelites were more moral than others, for there are good people and bad people in every society. And this is not to claim that morality did not exist elsewhere; one need only consider the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* to realize that morality played a prominent role in ancient Egypt.

The issue, however, is that morality was tied to religion, cult, worship, the deity, etc., in ancient Israel, and far less so in other ancient Near Eastern religions, the protestations of recent scholars notwithstanding. So while we have learned much from the recent upheaval in biblical studies, much of which has turned Yahweh into nothing more than a Canaanite deity, I for one still hold that the distinction is present, certainly so in the official religious view of ancient Israelite theologians as embodied in the Bible. The inclusion of the morality factor at the outset of the biblical story, in contrast to its absence in Gilgameš XI and in the various other flood traditions from Mesopotamia, is a major point to be noted and to be placed into a larger context.

Similarly with the issue of covenant, item no. 5 on the chart. This too is a uniquely Israelite theological concept; so much so that the point hardly requires further elaboration. I would, however, call attention to the fact that Genesis 9, which follows the actual flood account, elucidates the covenant concept in much greater detail. In fact, to drive home this point, one need only look once more at the passages cited above from the new MMA Atrahasis fragment and from Genesis 9:11. Note how the latter clearly correlates God's promise not to destroy the world again with the establishment of the covenant, whereas the former makes no mention of covenant.

Finally we may note item no. 10, the statement that the earth was dry. When I first created the chart, I simply included the two verses of Genesis 8:13-14 within the episode of the birds — after all it is through the sending forth of the birds that Noah, like Utnapištim, determines that the earth was dry. But upon closer inspection, I realized that there is no specific statement in the Gilgameš Epic, nor does one appear in the other Mesopotamian accounts. I decided, therefore, to include these two verses as a separate element, with the necessary minus sign in the right-hand column. Can we explain it? I would claim that the biblical author wanted to emphasize this point more so than his Mesopotamian predecessors, because it demonstrated for his readership in very explicit language that God was restoring the world to the condition which was ripe for mankind to begin afresh. In the Gilgameš Epic, this point naturally is implied, but it is striking how one goes very quickly from Utnapištim's sending forth of the birds to his releasing everyone from the ship. The biblical author, by contrast, takes the time to describe the drying up of the earth explicitly. I admit that this point is not as theologically crucial as the morality and covenant issues, but its presence in the biblical story is telling nonetheless.

These three features, then, when taken together, support our earlier conclusion, based on the other arguments presented, that the ancient Israelite author had before

him a version of the Mesopotamian flood tradition, to which he added those elements which gave expression to Israelite theology. As to which specific version lay before him, I would argue, given the remarkable closeness between elements in the two stories — and here one thinks of Yahweh smelling the sweet savor in particular — that the biblical author knew specifically the Gilgameš Epic flood account, or call it the Gilgameš/Atrahasis account, if you will.

In light of Wenham's anticipation of the approach taken in the first part of this article, and in light of my expressed indebtedness to Sarna for the second part of this article, there is very little brilliantly new and flashing herein. But I hope that this review of the material has been useful nevertheless. To my mind, the simplest understanding of the literary development of Genesis 6-8 is to assume a single text created by a single writer, based on the Gilgameš flood story. And as long as most biblical scholars believe otherwise, it is good to rehearse the arguments from time to time. I am happy to have had the opportunity to present my remarks in Sydney on an island continent, where I for one could enjoy the epithet the Distant One. Australia is indeed a fitting place to ponder the Gilgameš Epic and its far-flung connections.

The Biblical Flood Story according to the Source Theory
and in Comparison to the Gilgameš Epic Tablet XI

	Yahwist (J)	Priestly (P)	Story Element	Gilgameš Epic XI
1.	6:5-8	6:9-13	morality factor	—
2.		6:14	materials	+
3.		6:15	dimensions	+
4.		6:16	decks	+
5.		6:17-22	covenant / population	—
6.	7:1-5		population	+
7.	7:7-10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22-23	7:6, 11, 13-16a, 17a, 18-21	flood	+
8.		7:24 — 8:5	mountaintop landing	+
9.	8:6-12		birds sent forth	+
10.		8:13-14	dry land	—
11.		8:15-19	all set free	+
12.	8:20-22		sacrifices	+

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SUPPLEMENT 21

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