

Ix6 – Gilgamesh and the Flood

Dear: I hope you enjoyed *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (even if you only enjoyed it a small fraction of how much I did!), and I hope you won't mind if I use some space, here, to show you some of the substantial number of ideas and amount of information it contains. I appreciate that you may have encountered much of the following on the internet by yourself (because essentially everything in this chapter was just copied from the internet!), but please bear with your old grandfather, while he has some fun reviewing what he learned. Previously, I hadn't read about Gilgamesh – I expect because, when I went to grade school, the Christian clerics were sufficiently powerful to censure the education of children in public schools.

But before I get into details, I should comment on “the big picture” – and the prime reason why I wanted you to read *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (i.e., of Gilga, “the hero”). Thus, from the story within *The Epic* about how Utnapishtim (or Uta-napishtam) survived the flood, surely no one (save a blithering idiot) – not even a Christian fundamentalist! – can come to any other conclusion than that the Biblical myth about Noah and the flood is simply a retelling of a “pagan” myth, concocted thousands of years before the Bible was written. That conclusion is so obvious and so fundamental that, were I in charge of public education, I would require that before any student is awarded a high-school diploma in this country (or in any country polluted by the Bible or the Koran), he or she would need to demonstrate comprehension of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*!

To be sure, there's much to learn within *The Epic* – and even within the story about Utnapishtim (aka Noah). In this chapter (and in later chapters in the excursion **Yx**), I'll dig into some of the details about the Utnapishtim story, including how the Hebrew priests so badly mangled the moral of the myth (when they plagiarized the story) and about various confounding questions, such as when and where “the flood” occurred and dealing with the many different names used to identify “the survivor”. To illustrate the complications dealing with his name, let me quote the following [to which I've added the notes in “square brackets”, such as these!]:¹

¹ Taken from the internet, in turn from William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History*, Harcourt Brace: Orlando, 1998, p. 32.

In the earliest Sumerian version, he appears as Ubar-Tutu, “friend of the god Tutu”, or as Ziusudra [or Zisudra or Zi-ud-sura], “life of long days”. Later he is simply (and perhaps erroneously) called after his city, Shuruppak [or Curuppag or son of Shuruppak, now the city of Tall Fa’rah in Iraq]. The earliest Akkadian sources call him Atar-hasis, “exceeding wise”, while the later ones, incorporated in the canonical Gilgamesh epic, refer to him as Uta-napishtam, “he has found (everlasting) life.” In the Bible his name is Noah.

But setting aside all such details for now, please at least be impressed with the overwhelming evidence that the myth about Noah, the flood, and “God’s involvement” – as depicted in the Bible – is pure bunk!

Not only is the Noah flood story bunk, it’s plagiarized bunk! To see what I mean, compare “the Noah myth” (in the Bible, probably put together by Ezra and co-authors in the 5th Century BCE while they were living in Babylon) with the following three versions of the “original” myth, written approximately during the dates shown, in some cases approximately 1200 years earlier, which in turn were recording a story that probably originated about 1,000 years still earlier!²

NIPPUR TABLET

(Sumerian clay tablet, late 17th century BCE)

... a flood will sweep over the cult centers;
To destroy the seed of mankind...
Is the decision, the word of the assembly of the gods.
By the word commanded by An and Enlil...

All the windstorms, exceedingly powerful, attacked as one,
At the same time, the flood sweeps over the cult centers.

After, for seven days and seven nights,
The flood had swept over the land,
And the huge boat had been tossed about by the windstorms on the great waters,
Utu came forth, who sheds light on heaven and earth,
Ziusudra opened a window on the huge boat,
The hero Utu brought his rays into the giant boat.

² Copied from the webpage of the Frank H. McClung Museum of the University of Tennessee at <http://mcclungmuseum.utk.edu/specex/ur/ur-flood.htm>, which I encourage you to visit!

THE STORY OF ATRAHASIS

(Akkadian, ca. 1640 BCE)

Enki made his voice heard...
 Dismantle the house, build a boat
 Reject possessions, and save living things.
 The boat that you build...
 Make upper and lower decks.
 The tackle must be very strong,
 The bitumen strong, to give it strength
 I shall make rain fall on you here.

The Flood roared like a bull,
 Like a wild ass screaming the winds
 The darkness was total, there was no sun...
 For seven days and seven nights
 The torrent, storm and flood came on..

THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

(Assyrian version, 7th century BCE)

For six days and seven nights
 The wind blew, flood and tempest overwhelmed the land;
 When the seventh day arrived the tempest, flood and onslaught
 Which had struggled like a woman in labor, blew themselves out.
 The sea became calm, the imhullu-wind grew quiet, the flood held back.
 I looked at the weather; silence reigned,
 For all mankind had returned to clay...

I opened a porthole and light fell upon my cheeks...
 Areas of land were emerging everywhere;
 The boat had come to rest on Mount Nimush.

In fact, there is substantially more evidence that, to create the flood myth in the Bible, the authors plagiarized early myths about river-valley floods. Illustrative is the following, written by Robert M. Best, the author of the book *Noah's Ark and the Ziusudra Epic* (Enlil Press, 1999).³

Noah's flood was a river flood

Of the six surviving versions of the Ancient Near East flood story, the Epic of Atrahasis is the most explicit about the nature of the flood. According to Atrahasis III, iv,6-9: "Like dragonflies they [dead bodies] have filled the river. Like a raft they have moved to the edge [of the boat]. Like a raft they have moved to the riverbank."

³ Quotation taken from <http://www.flood-myth.com/flood.htm>.

Centuries later, an editor of the Epic of Gilgamesh XI [i.e., Clay Tablet XI] replaced the word ‘river’ with the word ‘sea’, thus turning the river flood into an ocean deluge. We can see the mythmaker’s hand at work here. The editor copied the Atrahasis flood story word-for-word into the Epic of Gilgamesh, but the editor made several changes. He changed the line in Atrahasis “Like dragonflies they have filled the river” and substituted “Like the spawn of fish they fill the sea” in Gilgamesh XI.

The author(s) of Genesis did not describe Noah’s flood as an ocean deluge. The words “sea” or “ocean” do not appear in Genesis 6-8. Genesis 7:20 has the water rising only 15 cubits (22 feet): “Fifteen cubits upward rose the waters and covered the hills.” If, after the ark grounded, Noah surveyed the flood damage and concluded that the flood was more than ten thousand cubits deep, why would he and the story tellers forget to mention such an impressive number while remembering to mention an insignificant number like 15 cubits? Fifteen cubits defines the magnitude of the flood. It was not a deluge, but it was deep enough to breach the levees and cover the lowlands and some hills with water for many miles in all directions.

There is no word meaning “deep” or “depth” or “draft” in the Hebrew text or the Greek text of Genesis 7:20. A literal translation from Hebrew is “Five ten cubits up-from-there rose the waters and they covered the hills.” The word mi-la-ma’al-ah meaning ‘up from there’ modifies ‘rose’ in the 15 cubits clause and is not in the same clause as hills/mountains. It is a mistranslation to say the waters rose 15 cubits above the mountains. The 15 cubits refers to how much the water rose, not how deep the water was. Depths would be different at different locations. As a modern news reporter might say, the water rose 22 feet above flood stage.

Sumer was very flat. If the river rose 15 cubits (22 feet) and overflowed the levees, the river water would submerge the flood plain for many miles in all directions. If this covered all of the hills that Noah could see, then all these hills were less than 15 cubits high. They were not mountains; they were hills...

That said (at least in summary form and at least for now!), I now want to turn to “the good stuff”, i.e., to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, itself.

It’s a massive tale – with enormous themes – perhaps the greatest story ever told – Homer’s and Shakespeare’s stories notwithstanding! As maybe you saw for yourself, Dear, and certainly as you can find on the internet, there are huge themes in *The Epic*, including, the meaning of life, conquering the fear of death, heroism, what it means to be civilized, friendship, the overthrow of one religion (maternal based) by another (paternal based), the corresponding conflict for dominance between right-brain (emotional) and left-brain (analytical) thinking, as well as many other themes – with all themes perhaps described in an astronomical setting (with the Bull of Heaven, Orion’s belt, and so on). Although I wouldn’t encourage you to try,

nonetheless I'll add the comment that, if you could obtain funding for the undertaking, I'd bet you could spend a lifetime trying to understand all the themes in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*!

Let me put it another way. While wandering around the internet trying to learn about *The Epic*, I soon began to appreciate what Bob Trubshaw wrote on his home page:⁴

The Epic of Gilgamesh is alive and wriggling. You might as well try and catch hold of an eel in the water as imagine you can get hold of The Epic.

Trubshaw was quoting Robert Temple, who in turn was describing his attempt to restore *The Epic*, but I think that this quotation is an apt description even for the task that I expect that you experienced: trying to gain an impression of “the true story” of Gilgamesh from the many translations and interpretations available on the internet. Furthermore, I'd say that it's not just like trying to catch an eel with your hands; it's like trying to grab hold of a whale by the tail!

In later chapters (both in this “excursion”, **Ix**, and in the “excursion” **Yx**), I'll return to some of the following themes found in *The Epic*:

- When sketching the astronomical observations and speculations of the Egyptians, I'll comment on similar observations and speculations of the Mesopotamians, as suggested in *The Epic*;
- When sketching the overthrow of the Hebrew's old religion (as outlined in the Old Testament and attributed to Moses) by the current Jewish religion (the Zoroastrian religion of the Persians, as specified in the Old Testament by Ezra and co-authors), I'll compare the similar overthrow of the old religion (based on “the loving Earth Mother”) by a new religion (based on “the powerful Sky Father”) as suggested in *The Epic*; and
- When sketching the construction of Christianity from the remnants of earlier religions, I'll try to show you some parallels from *The Epic*. In particular, I'll sketch how the new paternal-based religions (such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism), in which men dominate, nonetheless retained some aspects of the old maternal-based religions (in

⁴ At <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/gilgamsh.htm>.

which Nature's rejuvenation, best represented in women, was the central theme).

Meanwhile, in this chapter, "all" I want to try to do is comment on some of the "obvious" ideas and information in *The Epic*, especially those dealing with the flood.

First, though, let me show you a little about what I learned about answers to some obvious questions, such as: Who was Gilgamesh? Who wrote this *Epic*? When was it written? When did "the events" allegedly happen? What really happened? Where? Where was the story found? And so on. In this chapter, I won't show you all that I learned: I'll leave some for later chapters – and leave much for you to find by yourself! But maybe what follows will be enough to get this chapter underway – and stimulate you to find more on your own!

To start, I'll quote from "The Epic of Gilgamesh: A Spiritual Biography" by W. T. S. Thackara.⁵

Modern generations came to know about Gilgamesh only after the first cuneiform fragments of his story were excavated in 1853 at Nineveh from the library of the last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, who reigned in the 7th Century BCE. Almost twenty years elapsed, however, before the clay tablets were deciphered by George Smith at the British Museum. On December 3, 1872, he announced to the newly-formed Society of Biblical Archaeology that he had "discovered among the Assyrian tablets... an account of the Flood" in one of the story's later episodes. This stirred up considerable interest and, before long, more fragments of Gilgamesh were unearthed, both at Nineveh and in the ruins of other ancient cities.

Next, consider some "bare facts" about The Epic, as given at <http://fajardo-acosta.com/worldlit/gilgamesh/>:

Author: Anonymous. Story was crafted and reworked by various Mesopotamian cultures including the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians; original story likely dates back to around the time of King Gilgamesh of Uruk (c. 2700 BCE); 1600 BCE recension by Babylonian priest-exorcist, Sîn-leqi-unninni [which is a spelling for this author's name different from what's found elsewhere on the web, e.g., Sin-leqe-unnini and Shin-eqi-unninni; also, the date of his recension is earlier than is suggested elsewhere on the web].

⁵ Available at <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/world/mideast/mi-wtst.htm>.

Time & Place: Mesopotamian epic poem originally written down by the Sumerians around 2000 BCE.

Language & Form: Epic poem. Original in the Sumerian language, written down with cuneiform characters on clay tablets found at Nippúr in Mesopotamia and dating back to around 2000 BCE; *Synthetic Standard Version* based on the 12-tablet Akkadian version of the poem found in the 25,000-tablet library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) at Niniveh.

Now, I'll quote a little about the author and “the bare bones” of *The Epic*.⁶

Sin-leqe-unnini was a master scribe of the Kassite period in Mesopotamia, living perhaps some time around 1600 BCE. We know very little about him other than that he was probably an incantation priest of the temple and also the author of what is accepted as the Standard Babylonian Version of the story of Gilgamesh. As parts of this version are still missing, it is usually supplemented by earlier or later versions. The epic appeared in the Sumerian oral tradition of the third millennium BCE. The earliest written copies in Akkadian date from about 2000 BCE.

The epic involves two heroes. One, Gilgamesh, may have been a king of that name recorded in the Sumerian King List as the fifth in line of the First Dynasty of the kingship of Uruk, following the great flood that devastated the area of the Tigris and Euphrates. This would put him somewhere in the time between 2800 and 2500 BCE. The other [hero], Enkidu, enters the story as a strong man born in the wild, drinking and sleeping with animals, and freeing them from traps.

A temple priestess from the city of Uruk is sent to seduce Enkidu and persuade him to come to the city. There, the people are impressed by his physical stature and prowess. This leads to a violent fight with the king, which ends in mutual respect and love. Gilgamesh, in search of fame and sure they can brave any danger, prevails on Enkidu to join him in a perilous journey and battle to seize trees in a foreign land from their guardian, [the god] Humbaba. After they succeed in this, they fight and slay the Bull of Heaven, in what sounds like a ritual bull fight.

Enkidu dies shortly afterwards. This may have resulted from the fight with Humbaba, but the symptoms also suggest a disease, which is very often the fate of hunter-gatherers who do not have the immunities developed by city dwellers. Gilgamesh is so stricken with grief that he journeys throughout the world seeking a cure for death. Finally, after talking with a wise man who survived a flood, Ut-napishtim, Gilgamesh realizes the irrevocable nature of his actions. The theme of the rashness of one beloved companion's pursuit of fame and honor leading to the death of the other, and the subsequent agony of remorse, echoes from this early epic down through literature, notably in the grief of Achilles over the death of Patroclus [in Homer's *Iliad*].

⁶ From <http://www.humanistictexts.org/gilgamesh.htm>.

There are fragments from many versions of the Gilgamesh epic, perhaps the work of millennia of story tellers in cities or along trade routes between Europe and India. This is suggested by similarities between the Gilgamesh story and the stories of Odysseus [also by Homer] and of Sinbad. The fragments are translated from cuneiform writing inscribed in clay tablets discovered at various sites in or near Mesopotamia. As the tablets have been scattered and broken, there are still many gaps in the narrative...

Next, consider what Christopher Siren put on his web page entitled Sumerian Mythology FAQ.⁷ His summary provided me with an easy-to-follow overview of the period and where King Gilgamesh might have fit into it. To the following quotation, I've added the notes in brackets in hopes of helping you better understand some points that Siren is making.

The Uruk period stretched from 3800 BCE to 3200 BCE. It is to this era that *the Sumerian King Lists* ascribe the reigns of Dumuzi the shepherd and the other antediluvian [i.e., post-flood] kings. After his reign Dumuzi was worshiped as the god of the spring grains.

[For example, in the Bible's Old Testament, describing a time period 2,000 – 3,000 years later (!), *Ezekiel 8*, 14 states: "Then he {God} brought me to that gateway of the Lord's house that faces north, and there I saw women sitting and wailing for Tammuz {i.e., Dumuzi}." That is, thousands of years after the rein of King Dumuzi, some Hebrews (as well as many other people, including the Egyptians, whose god Osiris is similar to Dumuzi) worshiped him – and worshipped him not only as the god of the spring grains but also as one of the lovers of the goddess Ishtar (or in the case of the Egyptians, Isis), many myths about whom you can find on the internet.]

This time [the Uruk period] saw an enormous growth in urbanization such that Uruk probably had a population around 45,000 at the period's end. It was easily the largest city in the area, although the older cities of Eridu to the south and Kish to the north may have rivaled it. Irrigation improvements as well as a supply of raw materials for craftsmen provided an impetus for this growth. In fact, the city of An [the Sumerian word for Heaven] and Inanna also seems to have been at the heart of a trade network that stretched from what is now southern Turkey to what is now eastern Iran. In addition people were drawn to the city by the great temples there...

Meanwhile, in the south, the Dynasty of Erech was founded by Meskiaggasher, who, along with his successors, was termed the "son of Utu", the sun-god. [Although in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the sun god is called Shamash (at least in some versions of the *Epic*), which was the sun god's Babylonian name.] Following three other kings, including another Dumuzi, the famous Gilgamesh took the throne of Erech around

⁷ Available at <http://home.comcast.net/~chris.s/sumer-faq.html>.

2600 BCE and became involved in a power struggle for the region with the Kish Dynasts [i.e., kings] and with Mesannepadda, the founder of the Dynasty of Ur. While Gilgamesh became a demi-god, remembered in epic tales, it was Mesannepadda who was eventually victorious in this three-way power struggle, taking the by-then-traditional title of “King of Kish”...

Although the dynasties of Kish and Erech fell by the wayside, Ur could not retain a stronghold over all of Sumer. The entire region was weakened by the struggle, and individual city-states continued more or less independent rule. The rulers of Lagash declared themselves “Kings of Kish” around 2450 BCE, but failed to seriously control the region, facing several military challenges by the nearby Umma. Lugalzagesi, *ensi* or priest-king of Umma from around 2360-2335 BC, razed Lagash and conquered Sumer, declaring himself “king of Erech and the Land”. Unfortunately for him, all of this strife made Sumer ripe for conquest by an outsider and Sargon of Agade [“Sargon the Great”] seized that opportunity.

Sargon united both Sumer and the northern region of Akkad – from which Babylon would arise about four hundred years later, not very far from Kish. Evidence is sketchy, but he may have extended his realm from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River. This unity would survive its founder by less than 40 years. He built the city of Agade, established an enormous court there, and had a new temple erected in Nippur. Trade from across his new empire and beyond swelled the city, making it the center of world culture for a brief time...

The religion of the ancient Sumerians has left its mark on the entire middle east. Not only are its temples and ziggurats [i.e., towers, such as the later Tower of Babylon] scattered about the region, but the literature, cosmogony, and rituals influenced their neighbors to such an extent that we can see echoes of Sumer in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition today. From these ancient temples, and to a greater extent through cuneiform writings of hymns, myths, lamentations, and incantations, archaeologists and mythographers afford the modern reader a glimpse into the religious world of the Sumerians.

Each city housed a temple that was the seat of a major god in the Sumerian pantheon, as the gods controlled the powerful forces which often dictated a human’s fate. The city leaders had a duty to please the town’s patron deity, not only for the good will of that god or goddess, but also for the good will of the other deities in the council of gods. The priesthood initially held this role, and even after secular kings ascended to power, the clergy still held great authority through the interpretation of omens and dreams. Many of the secular kings claimed divine right; Sargon of Agade, for example, claimed to have been chosen by [the fertility goddess] Ishtar/Inanna...

When it came to more private matters, a Sumerian remained devout. Although the gods preferred justice and mercy, they had also created evil and misfortune. A Sumerian had little that he could do about it. Judging from Lamentation records, the best one could do in times of duress would be to “plead, lament, and wail, tearfully

confessing his sins and failings.” Their family god or city god might intervene on their behalf, but that would not necessarily happen. After all, man was created as a broken, labor-saving tool for the use of the gods [as you saw, Dear, in *The Enuma Elish*] and at the end of everyone’s life, lay the underworld, a generally dreary place.

From verses scattered throughout hymns and myths, one can compile a picture of the universe’s (anki’s) creation according to the Sumerians. The primeval sea (abzu) existed before anything else [just as in the Bible’s first Genesis myth] and within that, the heaven (an) and the earth (ki) were formed [again as in the Bible’s first Genesis myth, whose origin probably was a mixture of Sumerian, Egyptian, and Persian myths]. The boundary between heaven and earth was a solid (perhaps tin) vault, and the earth was a flat disk. Within the vault lay the gas-like ‘lil’, or atmosphere, the brighter portions therein formed the stars, planets, sun, and moon [all of which is essentially identical to the picture of the universe portrayed in the Bible].

Each of the four major Sumerian deities is associated with one of these regions. An, god of heaven [called Anu in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*], may have been the main god of the pantheon prior to 2500 BCE, although his importance gradually waned. Ki is likely to be the original name of the earth goddess, whose name more often appears as Ninhursag (queen of the mountains), Ninmah (the exalted lady), or Nintu (the lady who gave birth). [I assume that she is who is called Aruru in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.] It seems likely that these two were the progenitors of most of the gods.

According to [another myth] *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, in the first days all needed things were created. Heaven and earth were separated. An took Heaven, Enlil took the earth, Ereshkigal was carried off to the netherworld as a prize, and Enki sailed off after her.

Now, Dear, turning to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* itself, let me start with the obvious. First, this myth is a good illustration of how “tall stories grow taller in the telling”! Thus, apparently there was a Gilgamesh, king of the city of Uruk (or Erech), somewhere in the time period of 2800–2600 BCE. If the myth of Gilgamesh has any historical bases, then possibly King Gilgamesh at least oversaw the building (or rebuilding) of the walls of the city of Uruk (but, as stated on one web page, the walls could not of been built of burnt brick, for apparently this was a later technological advance). Also, apparently Gilgamesh had a role in construction of the city’s (central?) cedar gate. In addition, possibly the city suffered from at least one severe earthquake, with several aftershocks. But as for Gilgamesh killing a god to get the cedar for the gate or fighting with the Bull of Heaven causing the earthquakes, well: tall stories grow taller in the telling – and apparently can violate even the fundamental rule that gods are immortal, i.e., gods can’t be killed, even by other gods (or part gods) such as Gilgamesh!

Relative to the Bible's flood myth, the general consensus seems to be that, in the Bible, Gilgamesh's city of Urek is spelled Erech. In particular *Genesis 10*, 10 states: "His [Nimrod's] kingdom in the beginning consisted of Babel, Erech, and Accad [possibly Agade], all of them in the land of Shinar." But because these first stories in the Bible are about "past times" ("In the beginning") and because the city of Babel (i.e., Babylon) didn't exist before about 2000 BCE, the first stories in the Bible couldn't have been concocted until about 1,000 years after King Gilgamesh died – that is, after about 1,000 years of the tall stories of Gilgamesh growing taller.

As you probably saw on the internet, when these stories about Gilgamesh were first "cast in clay" is unclear. On his home page, referenced earlier, Bob Trubshaw states:

Gilgamesh – the name means 'Gilga the hero' – seems to have been a historical king and priest of Urek, although direct confirmation is lacking...⁸ What has come down to us are various clay tablet fragments written around 1800-1600 BCE onwards in the Akkadian cuneiform script, from which academics argumentatively put together a more-or-less coherent whole. How far back the tales stretch into oral tradition we can only speculate, but the enormities of time are overwhelming. Undoubtedly, this is the world's oldest surviving story... Arguably it is the world's best selling story, too, as *The Epic* remained in circulation for at least 1,500 years. Judging from the numbers of fragments of tablets in different places, it seems to have been the standard text for training pupils in the Akkadian scriptoria.

As you probably also saw on the internet, Dear, some of the clay tablets containing fragments of the stories of Gilgamesh are from as early as 2000 BCE (4,000 years ago!), but as stated by Robert Hooker on his home page:

The fullest surviving version... [on which all translations seem to depend] is from twelve stone tablets, in the Akkadian language, found in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, 669–633 B.C., at Nineveh.

And let me add, Dear, that although I haven't seen the following anywhere on the web, I wouldn't be surprised if the origin of this "fullest surviving version" of *The Epic* was roughly as follows.

⁸ Dear: Let me add the following, taken from "The Epic of Gilgamesh: A Spiritual Biography," by W.T.S. Thackara (at <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/world/mideast/mi-wtst.htm>): "From the Sumerian King List, we do know there was an historical Gilgamesh – in Sumerian spelled gis-bil-ga-mes, conjectured to mean 'the (divine) old one is youthful'."

I expect that there were four old myths “lying around”, which Sin-leqe-unnini “just” stuck together, into a four-part Epic – similar to the way Shakespeare put his plays together (from older stories) and similar to the way Ezra and co-authors put together the Old Testament, by patching together old stories. In the case of Sin-leqe-unnini, I wouldn’t be surprised if the four original stories were the following.

1. A ~1000 year-old story (probably with many versions) about how King Gilgamesh (possibly with his friend Enkidu) obtained the wood and built the gate for his city of Uruk,
2. Many flood stories (some possibly carrying the memory for ~4,000 years of the inundation of what is now the Black Sea), but especially the story of the river flood experienced by Ubar-Tutu, “friend of the god Tutu” (or Ziusudra, “life of long days”),
3. Many myths about life-after-death (stretching back for thousands of years), but with the particular version contained in *The Epic* being relatively recent (even an addition or a revision after Sin-leqe-unnini died – because, as I’ll show you later, the ideas in *The Epic* about life after death are inconsistent with such ideas from earlier time periods), and
4. Astrological tales about the gods, concocted during Sin-leqe-unnini’s time by the astrologer-priests.

If there’s any validity to the above, then Sin-leqe-unnini’s main contribution (similar to Shakespeare’s) would seem to have been “just” to weave the parts into a compelling whole.

But enough of such “background stuff”! Let me now get on to the fun part: examining some of the ideas and information contained in the story, itself. A huge list of information contained in the myth could be constructed. But because the myth’s most complete version is relatively recent (being only about 2,650 years old (i.e., about the time when Homer wrote his Epics and about 200 years before Ezra and co-authors put the Old Testament together), one doesn’t know how much of the information (e.g., about customs) current in the author’s time were incorporated into the myth. Yet, because the author of this most complete version, namely, Sin-leqe-unnini, clearly ranks among the greatest storytellers who ever lived, I wouldn’t be surprised if he tried to write his story so that it faithfully represented early customs (similar,

* Go to other chapters *via*

for example, to how Shakespeare wrote stories about Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, and Hamlet).

With that caveat, then, I'll just list some of the obvious information contained in *The Epic*, a list that you could no doubt extend and that I created while I re-read the myth:

- The people built cities with walls and temples
- They believed in many gods, including Anu and Aruru (the father and mother gods of the sky) and Ishtar (the goddess of love and fertility)
- One among the people, apparently the one who was physically strongest, was their leader
- They dug wells and experienced floods
- They had boats and traveled in them far enough to see the sun rising in the East over the oceans (probably meaning that they traveled by boat at least into the Persian Gulf)
- They domesticated cattle
- Some among the people were warriors
- People married, but apparently their leader, “a goring wild bull”, “like a wild bull...with head raised” or (in another translation) “as if he were a loose bull, nose up in open field” mated with whomever he desired, similar to most animals
- The people had their own idea of justice and were prepared to present their judicial cases to their gods
- The people wanted “peace” even from a tyrant who was one of their own
- They thought that the goddess Aruru created humans, either from clay (as in the second Genesis myth in the Bible) or from stones (as believed by the Ancient Greeks)
- Women wore their hair long
- The people drank more than “mere water” (including beer)
- Some people trapped animals
- Some women served in the temple of Ishtar (the goddess of love) in a manner described as “sacred temple girls”, “nuns”, “harlots”, or “prostitutes” – depending on various religious biases
- Women normally were fully clothed
- The city of Uruk was what we'd call a party town:

...where the people show off in skirted finery, where every day is a day for some festival, where the lyre (?) and drum play continually, where harlots [showing the translator's bias, for this could also be translated as 'sacred temple girls'] stand

about prettily, exuding voluptuousness, full of laughter and on the couch of night the sheets are spread...

or, according to another translation,

...where costumes bright are worn, where it is always time to party, where merry music never fades, where graceful girls do ever play with toys and boys and men; for in the night these revelers do their best to rule the town.

- The people believed that dreams – properly interpreted – foretold the future
- Even the leader of the people (Gilgamesh) would love, live with, and respect the advice of his mother
- Shepherds lived in huts, ate bread, drank beer (and got drunk!), and used weapons to protect their sheep from “[mountain?] lions and wolves”
- The king of Uruk (Gilgamesh), similar to royalty ~4,000 years later in Britain, claimed the right to be the first to have sex with a new bride
- Rituals were established to “communicate” with the gods:

The Great One [Gilgamesh’s mother] rose within and robed herself, appropriately covering herself, ringing her curls beneath her crown to ascend the altar, where she stood lighting the first signals of charcoal for the incense and preparing sacred cups that hold the precious liquids which will be spilled.

- The people believed that some people had neither father nor mother (i.e., were created by the goddess Aruru)
- Axes, hatches, and swords were forged...

And so on it could continue, Dear, but I’m becoming weary of the list, especially because I question how much value it will be to you. Instead, consider, now, some of the amazing ideas in *The Epic*. Yet, at the outset, I repeat the caveat that the time when these ideas originated is unknown, except sometime within the ~2,000 years (between about 2700 and 700 BCE), between the time of Gilgamesh and the time of the Homeric/Shakespearian author Sin-leqe-unnini. In what follows, rather than quote from the translation of *The Epic* that you can find by typing “Maureen Gallery Kovacs” into an internet search engine, I plan generally to quote the version of *The Epic* that you can find by typing “The Epic of Gilgamesh.html”, because whoever wrote the latter version has obviously made a major effort to make it “flow more smoothly”, e.g., the alliteration in “walls where weep the weary widows of dead soldiers”.

Here, then, are some obvious ideas in *The Epic*:

- “Open up the special box that’s hidden in the wall and read aloud the story of Gilgamesh’s life. Learn what sorrow taught him...” That, Dear, is a powerful idea: not only do we learn from our mistakes, but also that we learn (much!) from our sorrows. The wisdom in this line reminds me of what Euripides wrote ~2400 years ago (perhaps he had read *The Epic!*): “You were a stranger to sorrow; therefore, Fate has cursed you.”
- “[Gilgamesh] acted nobly in the way one should to lead, and acted wisely, too, as one who sought no fame.” That doesn’t really jibe with the stories told about Gilgamesh (for he even claims that he seeks fame), but the idea contains wisdom.
- It’s a powerful idea that “a woman’s charms” can civilize even a “wild man” such as Enkidu.
- Yet, with all the “womanizing” in which Gilgamesh engaged, and though he was king of the city, he continued to be “like a wild bull”, that is, uncivilized.
- What both Enkidu and Gilgamesh wanted most was a friend.
- In contrast to ridiculous ideas from the Bible (which I’ll get to in later chapters), these earlier people had a healthy idea of nakedness: “tearing her garment right in two to hide their *native beauty*.”
- The people wanted both justice and someone to protect them: “Enkidu was hailed as one who might be sent to rival any king who might treat gentle folk unfairly.” Usually, though, justice isn’t obtained that easily.
- After these two men (Enkidu and Gilgamesh) had become civilized, and each had gained the other as a friend, yet they both needed more: goals. That idea is as powerful today as it was more than 4,000 years ago!
- And similarly powerful, for anyone who perceives life to be an heroic struggle (as the Ancient Greeks generally perceived it to be), is Gilgamesh’s proclamation:

Only gods live forever... my friend; for even our longest days are numbered. Why worry over being like dust in the wind? [According to Kovacs, the Old Babylonian Version of those lines is: “(Only) the gods can dwell forever... As for human beings, their days are numbered, and whatever they keep trying to achieve is but wind!”] Leap up for this great threat. Fear not. *Even if I were to fail and fall in combat, all future clans would say I did the job.* [italics added]

- And, too, there is continuing wisdom in what the elders said to Gilgamesh:

Fear the force that you control, hot-headed boy...

- Not knowing how to translate from the original tablets, I don't know if one should accept Kovacs' translation “Come on, my friend [Gilgamesh said to Enkidu] let us go to the Egalmah Temple” or the translation (author unknown) from which I'm taking most of these quotations: “Arise, *my other self*, and speed your way to Egalmah”. But if the second is more nearly correct, then Aristotle's definition of a friend, “A single soul dwelling in two bodies”, was surpassed by Sin-leqe-unnini's definition – or some earlier storyteller, perhaps 2,000 years before Aristotle! Similarly, Zeno (335-263 BCE), Cicero (106-43 BCE), and Horace (65-8 BCE) merely echoed earlier definitions, for their respective definitions of ‘friend’ are: “Another I”, “A second self”, and “The half of my own soul.”

But putting those “pieces of wisdom” aside, what I want to do, now, is turn toward five major themes in the *Epic*. These five themes are:

1. Gilga's search for immortality and the story about “the flood”,
2. Ideas about “the purpose of life” contained within *the Epic*,
3. The story about Gilga and Enkidu killing “the Bull of Heaven” and the astrological references contained therein,
4. Changing ideas about “gods”, and
5. Changing ideas about “the afterlife”, i.e., the “fate” of people's “souls.”

In the rest of this chapter, I plan to address at least part of the first three of the above five themes – and the third only briefly.

From the first theme (dealing with the flood and the search for immortality), I trust you'll become convinced not only that the Biblical story about Noah and the flood was plagiarized from earlier Mesopotamian myths but also that the Jewish clerics responsible for the plagiarizing badly mangled the moral of the original story. From the second theme (dealing with the purpose of life), I hope that you'll see why I consider Sin-leqe-unnini to be not only the world's first identified author but also the world's first identified "humanist author".⁹ In this chapter, I plan only to introduce the third theme (dealing with "astrological tales" or "stories written in the stars") – because it's a massive theme that will require much explanation (which I'll begin to show you in the next chapter). And let me add, here, that I want to devote so much space to this "astrological theme", because I want to show you that the Bible similarly contains many such astrological tales. I'll address the final two themes in the above list in later chapters in this "excursion".

So, then, let me start examining the two principal themes of the second half of *The Epic*, starting with Gilga's quest for immortality and the story of "the flood" contained therein. I want to spend some time on this myth not only to try to make it abundantly clear that, when the Bible was written, obviously the clerics who wrote it just copied the Sumerian story of the flood but also to prepare to show you how horribly the Hebrews "mangled" the original myth, with the version in the Old Testament being a disgrace both to humanity and to the Hebrew god Yahweh (or Jehovah or "just plain" God).

According to the *Epic*, when Gilga finally met the survivor of the flood (not Noah, Utnapishtim), whom the gods made immortal, he was apparently neither very helpful nor particularly sympathetic to Gilga's quest for certainty and for immortality:

Utnapishtim replied: "Why cry over your fate and nature? Chance fathered you. Your conception was an accidental combination of the divine and mortal. I do not presume to know how to help the likes of you."

⁹ Subsequently, Dear, I've seen the suggestion that Sin-leqe-unnini wasn't the world's first identified author. At a website describing "The Schoyen Collection", there is the following commentary: "Enhedu'anna was daughter of King Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 BC), founder of the first documented empire in Asia. Enhedu'anna emerges as a genuine creative talent, a poetess as well as a princess, a priestess and a prophetess. She is, in fact, the first named and non-legendary author in history. As such she has found her way into contemporary anthologies, especially of women's literature." To see more, Dear, go to <http://www.nb.no/baser/schoyen/4/4.3/431.html#3026>.

Utnapishtim continued: “No man has ever seen Death. No one ever heard Death’s voice, but Death is real and Death is loud. How many times must a home be restored or a contract revised and approved? How many times must two brothers agree not to dispute what is theirs? How many wars and how many floods must there be with plague and exile in their wake? Shamash is the one who can say. But there is no one else who can see what Shamash only can see within the sun.”

“Behold the cold, cold corpse from a distance, and then regard the body of one who sleeps. There seems no difference. How can we say which is good and which is bad?” [I added the italics, Dear, because as I’ll show you later, that last statement was echoed more than a thousand years later by the Greek philosopher Socrates.] *And it is also like that with other things as well. Somewhere above us, where the goddess Mammetum [another name for the mother goddess Aruru] decides all things, Mother Chance sits with the Anunnaki [spirit gods of the underworld] and there she settles all decrees of fable and of fortune.* [And I added those italics, Dear, because, as I’ll show you later, that statement is echoed by the Greek poet Homer.] *There they issue lengths of lives; then they issue times of death. But the last, last matter is always veiled from human beings. The length of lives can only be guessed.”* Thus spoke Utnapishtim.

Gilga found Utnapishtim more responsive to the request for information about how and why he was granted immortality. You can find details about his story on the internet. I would only add that, in every translation of *The Epic* that I found on the internet, similar and amazingly complete descriptions of the flood are given, from which (as I already stated) surely no one could conclude other than that the Hebrews simply “borrowed” such descriptions to write their myth about Noah and his flood. Yet, I want to go into some of the details of Utnapishtim’s story to support my statement that, when the Hebrews “borrowed” this myth, they mangled it horribly.

To start, notice that when Ea (“the god of water and wisdom, protector of human beings”, the one whose “breath-born words encourage hope”, the one who “watches over precious infants”) informed Utnapishtim of the forthcoming flood (by talking to “wall-like reeds” so that Utnapishtim could overhear him – since Ea had promised the other gods he wouldn’t warn humans of the flood), Ea gave Utnapishtim (or the reeds!) the following advice:

Reject the corpse-like stench of wealth. Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches. [italics added]

In contrast (as I'll later ask you to review), when the Hebrews wrote their flood myth, their God provided Noah with no wisdom similar to: *“Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given.”*

Next in *The Epic*, we find the following astounding statement by Ea [the protector of humans] against the god who caused the flood, Enlil [“god of earth, wind, and air associated with the savage arts of soldiers”]. I've added some italics for emphasis.

Then with these words Ea himself said to Enlil: “Sly god, sky darkener, and tough fighter, how dare you drown so many little people without consulting me? *Why not just kill the one who offended you; drown only the sinner?* Keep hold of his life cord; harness his destiny. Rather than killing rains, set cats at people's throats. Rather than killing rains, set starvation on dry, parched throats. Rather than killing rains, set sickness on the minds and hearts of people.”

Ea opened his mouth to speak, saying to valiant Enlil: “Thou wisest of the gods, thou hero, how couldst thou, unreasoning, bring on the deluge? *On the sinner impose his sin. On the transgressor impose his transgression!* (Yet) be lenient, lest he be cut off. Be patient, lest he be dislodged. Instead of thy bringing on the deluge, would that a lion had risen up to diminish mankind! Instead of thy bringing on the deluge, would that a wolf had risen up to diminish mankind! Instead of thy bringing on the deluge, would that a famine had risen up to lay low mankind! Instead of thy bringing on the deluge, would that pestilence had risen up to smite down mankind!”

What a difference between the above “reason” for the flood myth and the reason given in the Bible! The Bible has Yahweh [Enlil? “god of the savage arts of soldiers”?!] say (*Genesis 6, 13*):

“The loathsomeness of all mankind has become plain to me, for through them the earth is full of violence. I intend to destroy them, and the earth with them.”

In contrast, in the “original” of the Bible's flood myth, Ea, the god of wisdom (rather than of war) asks: *“Why not just kill the one who offended you? ... On the sinner impose his sin. On the transgressor impose his transgression!”*

It's amazing to me that the Hebrews could have copied so many details about this flood myth [including details of the construction of the boat, how much it rained, the boat's lodging on a mountain top (or hill!), sending birds out to determine when the flood subsided, placating the gods with an animal sacrifice, and so on] and yet the Hebrews entirely missed the moral of the

myth: *“On the transgressor impose his transgression!”* Later, too, all Christians (and Mormons) missed this same moral, not only of the flood myth but the similarly mistaken moral about Adam and Eve’s “transgression” in the Garden of Eden. And what horrors have been caused in subsequent centuries by such stupid mistakes!

And actually, Dear, there’s much more, here, but I’m reluctant to show you details – because they can easily overwhelm. I’ll show you a little more in the “excursion” Yx (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”), but if you’d now like to dig deeper into this topic, on your own, I’d encourage you to start by reading an on-line article by Tikva Frymer-Kensky.¹⁰ Below, I’ve quoted the beginning of her article [with a few notes added in brackets], from which maybe you’ll conclude either “Wow – I wanna know more!” or “Sheesh – do I really wanna know all this stuff!”

THE ATRAHASIS EPIC AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GENESIS 1-9

Dedicated to the memory of J. J. Finkelstein whose unique genius is sorely missed.

by TIKVA FRYMER-KENSKY

The Babylonian Epic of Atrahasis, written no later than 1700 BCE, is an ancient Primeval History of Man which relates the story of man from the events that resulted in his creation until after the flood. The recent recovery of this epic has enormous importance for understanding the great cosmological cycle of Genesis 1-9, for it enables us to appreciate the major themes of this cycle from a new perspective.

The Babylonian Flood Stories

Three different Babylonian stories of the flood have survived: the Sumerian Flood Story, the ninth tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, and the Atrahasis Epic. Details in these stories, such as the placing of animals in the ark, the landing of the ark on a mountain, and the sending forth of birds to see whether the waters had receded, indicate clearly that these stories are intimately related to the biblical flood story and, indeed, that the Babylonian and biblical accounts of the flood represent different retellings of an essentially identical flood tradition. Until the recovery of the Atrahasis Epic, however, the usefulness of these tales toward an understanding of Genesis was limited by the lack of a cohesive context for the flood story comparable to that of Genesis. The Sumerian Flood Story has survived in a very fragmentary state, and even its most recent edition (by Miguel Civil in Lambert and Millard, *Atrahasis: The*

¹⁰ The article is available at <http://home.apu.edu/~geraldwilson/atrahasis.html> and was published in *Biblical Archeologist*, December 1977, pp. 147-55.

Babylonian Story of the Flood, Oxford, 1969) can only be understood with the aid of the other known flood stories.

The Gilgamesh Epic presents a different problem for comparative analysis. Here the flood story is clearly in a secondary context, and, more importantly, this context is so different from the biblical as to cause serious differences in content. In the Gilgamesh Epic the story of the flood is related as part of the tale of Gilgamesh's quest for immortality. Utnapishtim tells his descendant Gilgamesh the story of the flood in order to tell him why he became immortal and, in so doing, to show Gilgamesh that he cannot become immortal in the same way. This purpose is explicitly stated, for the story is introduced by Gilgamesh's question, "As I look upon you, Utnapishtim, your features are not strange; you are just as I... how did you join the Assembly of the gods in your quest for life?" (Gilgamesh XI:2-7) Utnapishtim concludes his recitation with the admonition, "But now who will call the gods to Assembly for your sake so that you may find the life that you are seeking?" (Gilgamesh XI:197-98)

The nature of the story as "Utnapishtim's tale" colors the recitation of the flood episode and makes it fundamentally different from the biblical flood story. The "first person narrative" format means that Utnapishtim can only tell those parts of the story that he knows, and that he may leave out those aspects that do not concern him or fit his purpose. For example, even though Babylonian gods are not portrayed as capricious and are considered as having reasons for their actions, Utnapishtim tells us nothing about the reasons that the gods brought the flood. This lapse is dictated by the literary format: Utnapishtim may not know the reason for the flood, or he may not record it because it is irrelevant to his purpose, which is to recount how he became immortal. Similarly, the only event after the flood that Utnapishtim relates to Gilgamesh is the subsequent convocation of the gods that granted him immortality. The result of the "personalization" of the flood story in the Gilgamesh Epic is that the scope of the story is restricted to the adventures of one individual and its significance to its effects upon him, with the flood itself emptied of any cosmic or anthropological significance. The flood stories in Genesis and in Gilgamesh are so far removed from each other in focus and intent that one cannot compare the ideas in the two versions of the flood without setting up spurious dichotomies.

The Atrahasis Epic

The recovery of the Atrahasis Epic provides new perspectives on Genesis because, unlike the other two Babylonian versions of the flood, the Atrahasis Epic presents the flood story in a context comparable to that of Genesis, that of a Primeval History. The flood episode of the Atrahasis Epic has been known for a long time, but the literary structure of the epic, and therefore the context of the flood story, was not understood until Laessoe reconstructed the work (Q. Laessoe, *The Atrahasis Epic, A Babylonian History of Mankind*, *Biblioteca Orientalis 13* [1956] 90-102). In 1965, Lambert and Millard (Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, London) published many additional texts from the epic, including an Old Babylonian copy (written around 1650 BCE), which is our most complete surviving

recension of the tale. These new texts greatly increased our knowledge of the epic and served as the foundation for the English edition of the Epic by Lambert and Millard (*Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford, 1969).

The Atrahasis epic starts with a depiction of the world as it existed before man was created: “When the gods worked like Man” (the first line and ancient title of the composition). At this time the universe was divided among the great gods, with An taking the heavens, Enlil the earth, and Enki the great deep. Seven (called the Anunnaki in this text) established themselves as the ruling class, while the rest of the gods provided the work force. These gods, whose “work was heavy, (whose) distress was much”, dug the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and then rebelled, refusing to continue their labors. On the advice of Enki, the gods decided to create a substitute to do the work of the gods, and Enki and the mother goddess created man from clay and from the flesh and blood of a slain god, “We-ilu, a god who has sense”, from whom man was to gain rationality. The various themes and motifs out of which this part of the epic is composed can all be documented elsewhere and do not seem to have originated with this text...

This epic, ancient though it is, is already the product of considerable development, and the author of the composition has utilized old motifs and has united them into a coherent account of Man’s beginnings in which he presents a picture of the purpose of Man’s creation, his *raison d’être*, as doing the work of the gods and thus relieving them of the need to labor. In the same way, he seems to have taken the previously known story of the flood and juxtaposed it to his creation story to continue the tale of primeval man and indicate the prerequisites of human life upon earth.

In the Atrahasis Epic the creation of man causes new problems. In the words of the Epic (I 352f. restored from 11, 1-8):

Twelve hundred years [had not yet passed] (when the land extended) and the peoples multiplied. The [land] was bellowing [like a bull]. The gods were disturbed with [their uproar]. [Enlil heard] their noise [and addressed] the great gods. “The noise of mankind [has become too intense for me] [with their uproar] I am deprived of sleep.”

To solve this problem, the gods decided to bring a plague, which ends when Enki advises man to bring offerings to Namtar, god of the plague, and thus induce him to lift the plague. This plague does not solve the problem permanently, for twelve hundred years later the same problem arises again (Tablet 11, 1-8) and the gods bring a drought, which ends when men (upon Enki’s advice) bribe Adad to bring rain. Despite the fragmentary state of Tablet 11, it is easy to see that the same problem recurs, and the gods bring famine (and saline soil), which again do not end the difficulties. At last Enlil persuades the gods to adopt a “final solution” (II viii 34) to the human problem, and they resolve to bring a flood to destroy mankind.

Their plan is thwarted by Enki, who has Atrahasis build an ark and so escape the flood. After the rest of mankind have been destroyed, and after the gods have had occasion to regret their actions and to realize (by their thirst and hunger) that they need man, Atrahasis brings a sacrifice and the gods come to eat. Enki then presents a permanent solution to the problem. The new world after the flood is to be different from the old, for Enki summons Nintu, the birth goddess, and has her create new creatures, who will ensure that the old problem does not arise again. In the words of the Epic (111 vii 1):

“In addition, let there be a third category among the peoples, Among the peoples women who bear and women who do not bear. Let there be among the peoples the Pashittu-demon to snatch the baby from the lap of her who bore it. Establish Ugbabtu-women, Entu-women, and Igisitu-women and let them be taboo and so stop childbirth.”

Other post-flood provisions may have followed, but the text now becomes too fragmentary to read. Despite the lacunae, the structure presented by the Atrahasis Epic is clear. Man is created... there is a problem in creation... remedies are attempted but the problem remains... the decision is made to destroy man... this attempt is thwarted by the wisdom of Enki... a new remedy is instituted to ensure that the problem does not arise again. Several years ago Anne Kilmer [“The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and its Solution as Represented in the Mythology,” *Orientalia* 41 (1972) 160-77] and William J. Moran [“The Babylonian Story of the Flood (review article),” *Biblica* 40 (1971) 51-61], working independently, demonstrated that the problem that arose and that necessitated these various remedies was that of over-population. Mankind increased uncontrollably, and the methods of population control that were first attempted (drought, pestilence, famine) only solved the problem temporarily. This overpopulation led to destruction (the flood) and permanent counter-measures were introduced by Enki to keep the size of the population down. The myth tells us that such social phenomena as non-marrying women, and personal tragedies as barrenness and stillbirth (and perhaps miscarriage and infant mortality) are in fact essential to the very continuation of man’s existence, for humanity was almost destroyed when the population got out of control.

Genesis and Atrahasis

This Babylonian tale, composed no later than 1700 BCE, is very attractive to us today and can almost be called a “myth for our times”, for we share with the Babylonians a consciousness of a limited ecology and a concern about controlling the human population. In addition to this inherent relevance, however, it is very important for biblical studies, for it points out what (by the clear logic of hindsight) should have been obvious to us all along: there is an organic unity to the first section of Genesis. The importance of the Atrahasis Epic is that it focuses our attention away from the deluge itself and onto the events immediately after the rains subside. In Genesis, as in Atrahasis, the flood came in response to a serious problem in creation, a problem which was rectified immediately after the flood. A study of the changes that God

made in the world after the flood gives a clearer picture of the conditions prevailing in the world before the flood, of the ultimate reason that necessitated the flood which almost caused the destruction of man, of the essential differences between the world before the flood and the world after it, and thus of the essential prerequisites for the continued existence of man on the earth.

Unlike Atrahasis, the flood story in Genesis is emphatically not about overpopulation. On the contrary, God's first action after the flood was to command Noah and his sons to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." (Gen 9:1) This echoes the original command to Adam (1:28) and seems to be an explicit rejection of the idea that the flood came as a result of attempts to decrease man's population. The repetition of this commandment in emphatic terms in Gen 9:7, "and you be fruitful and multiply, swarm over the earth and multiply in it", makes it probable that the Bible consciously rejected the underlying theme of the Atrahasis Epic, that the fertility of man before the flood was the reason for his near destruction.

It is not surprising that Genesis rejects the idea of overpopulation as the reason for the flood, for the Bible does not share the belief of Atrahasis and some other ancient texts that overpopulation is a serious issue. Barrenness and stillbirth (or miscarriage) are not considered social necessities, nor are they justified as important for population control. On the contrary, when God promises the land to Israel he promises that "in your land women will neither miscarry nor be barren." (Exod 23:26) The continuation of this verse, "I will fill the number of your days", seems to be a repudiation of yet another of the "natural" methods of population control, that of premature death. In the ideal world which is to be established in the land of Israel there will be no need for such methods, for overpopulation is not a major concern.

Genesis states explicitly that God decided to destroy the world because of the wickedness of man. (Gen 6:5) Although this traditionally has been understood to mean that God destroyed the world as a punishment for man's sins, this understanding of the passage entails serious theological problems, such as the propriety of God's destroying all life on earth because of the sins of man. Such an interpretation also causes great problems in understanding the text of Genesis itself and creates what seems to be a paradox, for the "wickedness of man" is also given as the reason that God decides never again to bring a flood. (Gen 8:21) Since the evil nature of man is presented after the flood as the reason for God's vow never again to bring a flood, we should not infer that God brought the flood as a punishment because man was evil. Genesis also states that God brought the flood because the world was full of *hamas*. The term *hamas* is very complex... The wide range of meanings for the term *hamas* means that a lexical analysis of the word is not sufficient to allow us to determine what particular evil is here called *hamas* and what it was about this particular evil that necessitated a flood. The nature of the evil and the cause of the flood must be found in the story of Genesis.

The Atrahasis Epic is so important to biblical studies because it enables us to determine the [presumed!] cause of the flood [besides inadequate flood control!] by

focusing our attention away from the deluge itself and onto the events immediately after the flood, i.e., to Genesis 9. In this chapter God offers Noah and his sons a covenant, in which he promises never again to bring a flood to destroy the world, and gives the rainbow as the token of this promise. At this time God gives Noah and his sons several laws, and the difference between the ante- and post-diluvium [i.e., post-flood] worlds can be found in these laws. These laws are thus the structural equivalent of the new solutions proposed by Enki in the Atrahasis Epic. In Atrahasis the problem in man's creation was overpopulation, and the solutions proposed by Enki are designed to rectify this problem by controlling and limiting the population. In the Bible the problem is not overpopulation, but "since the devisings of man's heart are evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21), God must do something if he does not want to destroy the earth repeatedly. This something is to create laws for mankind, laws to ensure that matters do not again reach such a state that the world must be destroyed.

The idea that man's nature is basically evil and that laws are therefore necessary to control his evil is a rather Hobbesian view of mankind, and it should be mentioned that this was not always the philosophy of Israel. The Bible also affords support for the idea that man is intrinsically good, and even Gen 8:21 can be reinterpreted to agree with this philosophy, as in the *Midrash Tanhuma*, where this verse is interpreted to mean that the evil inclination does not come to a man until he becomes a youth, i.e., 10 years old, and that it is man who raises himself to be evil (*Midrash Tanhuma Bereshit 1.7*). The simple meaning of the statement in Gen 8:21, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth", however, indicates clearly that Genesis comes down on the Leviathan [or Hobbesian] side of what is obviously a very old controversy about the nature of man. Such perceptions of an inherently evil aspect of man's nature, one which is naturally prone to violent and unrighteous acts, logically entails a recognition that man cannot be allowed to live by his instincts alone, that he must be directed and controlled by laws, that in fact, laws are the *sine qua non* of human existence. It is for this reason that God's first [presumed!] act after the flood is to give man laws.

The Flood in Genesis

The realization that the granting of laws after the flood was a direct response by God to the problem posed by man's evil nature resolves the apparent paradox between the statement that the wickedness of man somehow caused the flood and the statement that the wickedness of man caused God to take steps to ensure that he will never again have to bring a flood. However, it does not answer the question of why the flood was necessary, why God could not simply have announced a new order and introduced laws to mankind without first destroying almost all of humanity. [Although there's the obvious answer: because it's all a bunch of silly myths!] This problem does not arise in the Babylonian flood stories, where there is a clear distinction between the gods who decide to bring a flood (Enlil and the council of the gods) and the god who realized the error of this decision, saved man, and introduced the new order (Enki). The problem, however, is quite serious in the monotheistic conception of the flood in which the same God decides to bring the flood, saves man, and resolves never to bring a flood again. If God is rational and consistent in his

actions, there must have been a compelling reason that necessitated the flood. “Punishment” is not enough of a reason, for it not only raises the question of God’s right to punish all the animals for the sins of man, but also raises the serious issue of God’s right to punish man in this instance at all: if man has evil tendencies, and if he has not been checked and directed by laws, how can he be punished for simply following his own instincts?

The author of the above (Tikva Frymer-Kensky) then suggests an answer to her question (a speculation dealing with the special emphasis, by the authors of Genesis, on the evil of murder), but I’ll leave it to you to explore the rest of the article on your own, instead closing my comments on the “flood aspect” of *The Epic* with the following comment.

I hope, Dear, that you’ll stop for a moment to consider the stupidity of it all: what amazing contortions the clerics go through, “explaining the unknown” and using their “explanations” to con the people into carrying the clerics’ useless carcasses! Rather than speculate about why the gods (or God) caused the flood, why some women can’t have babies, what’s the meaning of a rainbow, why people speak different languages, etcetera, etcetera, why didn’t (and still, why don’t!) the stupid clerics dig into the data, propose hypotheses that can be tested, and then develop experiments capable of testing the predictions of their hypotheses? How about the possibility that the river flooded because adequate flood-control measures weren’t established? How about the possibility that some women can’t have babies because health care is inadequate? How about the possibility that overpopulation is caused by too many babies? How about the possibility that society benefits if the people (or their representatives) enact laws? Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera! And to think that possibly more than 50% of the people in the world (and more than 90% of the people in “the Islamic World”!) still “believe” the clerics’ nonexplanations leaves the rest of us just shaking our heads, both in sadness for them and for ourselves – thinking that the prospects for humanity sometimes do indeed seem dim.

But let me try to push off my sadness and move on to the second major theme in the second half of *The Epic*, dealing with “the purpose of life.” And as an introduction, let me state that I think it’s fortunate for humanity that *The Epic* was found in the ruins of Mesopotamia only recently, well after Shakespeare’s time. For otherwise, if Shakespeare had read the second half of the story, I doubt if he could have driven himself so hard to create the masterpieces that he did. My thought is that, if he had read such brilliance, created 2,000 or 3,000 or maybe even 4,000 years earlier, he likely would

have shaken his head dejectedly and muttered: “What more need be written?” For in this second half of Gilgamesh, the author (Sin-leqe-unnini) addresses and I think brilliantly answers the question: “What’s the purpose of life?”

With Enkidu’s death, the heroic Gilga is first devastated by the death of his “other self”. But hero that he is portrayed to be, Gilgamesh then embarks on his greatest conquest, to conquer his own death. He seeks and eventually finds the one human who never died (the man who survived the flood) to learn the secret of immortality. Along the way, though, he meets the bar maid (and goddess) Siduri, who along with the many other wise women of *The Epic*, advises him of her views on the purpose of life and “the secret of happiness” [to which I’ve added the italics and bold type].

Remember always, mighty king [Gilgamesh], that gods decreed the fates of all many years ago. They alone are let to be eternal, while we frail humans die as you yourself must someday do. *What is best for us to do is now to sing and dance; relish warm food and cool drinks; cherish children to whom your love gives life; bathe easily in sweet, refreshing waters; [and] play joyfully with your chosen wife.¹¹ It is the will of the gods for you **to smile on simple pleasures in the leisure time of your short days.***

As wise as that statement is, however, it wasn’t enough for Gilgamesh.

What Gilga finally saw about the purpose of life (besides “to smile on simple pleasures in the leisure time of your short days”) is found near the end of the entire story, after a snake had taken the plant that (like the fountain of youth) would have rejuvenated him (just as the snake in the later story of the Hebrews, recorded in Genesis, supposedly tricked Adam and Eve and therefore all humans out of eternal life):

Gilgamesh began to weep and, between sobs, said to the sailor-god who held his hand: “Why do I bother working for nothing? Who even notices what I do? I don’t value what I did, and now only the snake has won eternal life. In minutes, swift currents will lose forever that special sign that god had left for me.”

But then, in the final paragraph of *The Epic*, Gilgamesh finally sees all that there is to see:

¹¹ This concept was copied into the Bible at **Ecclesiastes 10, 9**: “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest...”, as are many of these ideas from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* apparently copied into **Ecclesiastes**, which I think is the best book in the Bible – although that’s not saying much!

Then they [Gilgamesh and the boatman] set out again, this time upon the land. After 10 miles they stopped to eat. After 30 miles they set up camp. Next day they came to Uruk, full of shepherds. Then Gilgamesh said this to the boatman: “Rise up now, Urshanabi [the boatman] and examine Uruk’s wall. Study the base, the brick, the old design. Is it permanent as can be? *Does it look like wisdom designed it?*”

That is, Dear, according to Sin-leqe-unnini – a humanist if ever there was one! – the purpose of life (or the secret of happiness) is not only as he had Ea (“the god of water and wisdom, protector of human beings”, the one whose “breath-born words encourage hope”, the one who “watches over precious infants”) inform Utnapishtim

“Choose to live and choose to love; choose to rise above and give back what you yourself were given. Be moderate as you flee for survival in a boat that has no place for riches ,

and not only as he had the barmaid-goddess Siduri say,

“smile on simple pleasures in the leisure time of your short days” ,

but as he described for Gilgamesh: to have and to accomplish some goals, such as finding a friend and building some wall as “permanent as can be”, a wall for which the designer and builder can ask with pride “does it look like wisdom designed it?” and can state with confidence

“even if I were to fail... all future clans would say I did the job.”

In my opinion, that’s an astoundingly powerful message, not only still, but especially because it was conveyed at least 2700 years ago and possibly 4700 years ago!

And now, Dear, finally for this chapter, I’ll at least introduce the third of the five themes that I said that I wanted to address. To start this examination, let me again express my hope that you read *The Epic*. In fact, if you didn’t, maybe you’d do it now, just to placate an old grandfather. But if you did (or if you now do), I bet you didn’t (or won’t) understand it all! And I make that bet, because I read *The Epic* many times and yet missed something major. Thus, I didn’t see that a part of *The Epic* has nothing to do with the real Gilga; instead, in part, it’s a story that Ancient Mesopotamians told about the group of stars (i.e., the “constellation”) that the Ancient Greeks called (and we still call!) *Orion the hunter*, that the Ancient Egyptians called

Osiris (pronounced O-sir-s), and which the Ancient Mesopotamians apparently called Gilgamesh (i.e., Gilga the hero)!

To begin to show you this, let me just quote what Bob Trubshaw wrote [to which I've added a few notes in brackets and in which I've omitted his references].¹²

At one level, all the events described in the Epic of Gilgamesh have astronomical connotations. "One could go so far as to say that the Epic is cosmic and celestial at its most esoteric and meaningful level, and that its other aspects are relatively superficial." A German scholar, Werner Papke, has published a translation (into German) of the Epic which interprets in great detail this "astro-poem".

If his arguments are correct, then the Babylonians knew sufficient about astronomy to have been able to record such niceties as the precession of the equinoxes – the very long cosmic cycle which causes the sun to rise in a different zodiacal sign after two thousand years or so. [Dear, in case you don't know what "precession of the equinoxes" means, don't worry about it: I'll try to show you what it means, in the next chapter.] This has, of course, entered "New-Age-speak" by saying that we're now entering the "Age of Aquarius" [i.e., the age of the zodiac sign of Aquarius, the water carrier], as we leave (or have already left) the "Age of Pisces" [i.e., the age of the zodiac sign Pisces, the fishes]...

One strikingly cosmological section in the Epic describes the sacrifice of a bull:

Enkidu chased him and the Bull of Heaven.
 [That is, Dear, the constellation known as "Taurus the bull".]
 He seized him by the thick hairy tip of his tail.
 He thrust his sword between the nape of his neck
 And the horns of his head.
 When they had killed the bull, they tore out his heart,
 And placed it before Shamash the Sun.

Ishtar then curses Gilgamesh and Enkidu for slaying the Bull of Heaven.

When Enkidu heard the curse of Ishtar,
 He tore loose the right thigh of the Bull of Heaven,
 flung it skywards up into her face:
 "If I could reach you,
 I would do the same to you as to him!
 I would hang his entrails by your side!"

¹² Copied from <http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/gilgamsh.htm>.

This section leaps into focus when it is explained that the constellation that we know as the Plough, Great Bear, or Big Dipper was to the ancient Egyptians [and the ancient Mesopotamians, e.g., the Sumerians] “The Thigh”, specifically a bull’s thigh. “The Thigh” makes a complete circuit about the Pole Star every 24 hours, a motion resembling being flung.

A recurring formulaic phrase describes Gilgamesh as holding an axe and a dagger or sword. But if we see Gilgamesh as the constellation Orion, then the sword or dagger in his belt is plain for all to see. [In the next chapter, Dear, I’ll be asking you to check out some “star charts”, so that you’ll become familiar with Orion’s famous “belt” – in case you’ve forgotten what I already tried to show you when you last visited!]

And why (my dear grandchild may be asking) did I quote all that? My answer, Dear, is that, first, I wanted you to see what I (and I bet you) had previously overlooked: we read a fanciful story about the ancient King Gilgamesh, and (in my case, for sure, and in your case, I bet) we didn’t have the faintest idea that the story was “written in the stars”!

So, too, for most of the stories that you’ve been told (since you were a baby) about the clerics’ Jesus. As I’ll try to show you in subsequent chapters, there was no “son of God, Jesus, fisher of men”, just as there were never any of the other famous “father gods” and their sons (or, in some cases, grandsons), such as Saturn & Jupiter of the Romans, Cronus & Zeus of the Greeks, Yahweh & Jesus of the Jews, Osiris & Horus of the Egyptians, Enki & Marduk of the Mesopotamians, Ahura Mazda and Mithra of the Persians, Vishnu and Krishna of the Indians, and even Tane and Tahaki of the Polynesians. As I’ll be showing you, probably there was “a teacher” and “a healer” named Jesus (possibly his full name was Jesus ben Pandera), just as there probably was a King Gilgamesh, but the majority of the stories that are told in the Bible about this Jesus are simply adaptations of stories written in the stars. Therefore, Dear, in some places in what follows, I’ll refer to this “Jesus” as “the clerics’ astrological Jesus”.

And my second reason for introducing you to this “astrological Gilgamesh”, Dear, is the following. Just as you and I can see in the clouds only those “pictures” that are familiar to us on Earth (of an airplane, a school bus, a Volkswagen “beetle”...), ancient people could similarly read in the stars only those stories that had analogies on Earth. Thus, when we read of Gilgamesh (as Orion the hunter) being disrespectful to Ishtar (Venus), ripping off the thigh of Taurus the bull and throwing it (the Big Dipper) at her, we are probably reading about the end of the Age of Gemini

(predominantly matriarchal societies, with a goddess of fertility and a symbol of male fertility such as the bull) and the start of the Age of Taurus (predominantly patriarchal societies, with authority claimed by the men, symbolized by the “bull on earth”, Gilgamesh). Yet, because this “astrological poem” was constructed over thousands of years, it may also contain elements of change from the Age of Taurus to the Age of Aires (~2000 BCE), with its reference to Gilgamesh’s killing of “the bull of heaven”. Similarly, 2,000 years later, the death of the cleric’s astrological Jesus (the lamb) on the cross had nothing to do with what happened on Earth but refers to the end of the Age of Aires (the lamb) and the start of the Age of Pisces (the fish, which as you probably know, is a symbol for the cleric’s astrological Jesus), which also generally corresponded to the end of patriarchal societies, allowing sons to establish their own families, independent from dominance by their fathers.

And if you’re wondering “What the devil is grampa talking about?”, then guess how I’m gonna respond: Dear, be patient. Unfortunately, there’s quite a bit of background information that I need to show you (about astronomy and about societal changes), before (I expect) you’ll be able to understand the previous paragraph. And yes, I do think it’s important. For example, if you’ll have the patience to read the following chapters, then I expect you’ll see that it’s obvious that Jesus didn’t “die on the cross for your sins”; it’s all just an “astrological tale” about the end of the Age of Aries. But that’s enough for this chapter – although there’s still much more in the Epic of Gilgamesh! Meanwhile, Dear, why don’t you get some exercise?!