

## THE COHERENCE OF THE FLOOD NARRATIVE <sup>1)</sup>

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For more than a century the account of the flood in Genesis vi-ix has been regarded as one of the prime examples of composite narrative in the Pentateuch <sup>2)</sup>. Occasional dissenting voices <sup>3)</sup> have failed to disturb the general consensus of scholarship that these chapters are composed of two sources J and P. When Genesis vi-ix is dissected into its constituent sources, two new versions of the flood story are produced, which differ both from each other and from the version we now find in Genesis <sup>4)</sup>. It is a tribute to the skill of the final redactor of Genesis that he has been able to knit together his sources in such a way that the ordinary reader is often unaware of the composite nature of the present story.

In a recent study of Hebrew syntax <sup>5)</sup> F. I. Andersen has questioned the value of the documentary analysis of Genesis at certain points. He argues that in the flood story the division of material into J and P leads to one part of a grammatical construction being assigned to one source and the rest of the construction being ascribed to a different source. For example, Gen. vii 6-17, describing the onset of the flood and the entry into the ark, is a single grammatical unit (pp. 124-6), making elaborate use of chiasmus (pp. 119 ff.) and epic repetition (pp. 39 ff.). Yet verses 7-10, 12, 16b are traditionally assigned to J, and the rest to P.

Andersen comments: "The significance of this kind of construction has generally escaped literary critics. Either they assign parallel passages to different 'sources' as 'doublets', thus destroying the fabric of the composition; or else they speak disparagingly of its

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<sup>1)</sup> Revised version of a paper read to the Society for OT Study in Oxford, July 1975.

<sup>2)</sup> H. Gunkel, *Genesis*<sup>7</sup> (Göttingen, 1966), p. 137.

<sup>3)</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* II (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 34 ff.

A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and OT parallels*<sup>2</sup> (Chicago, 1963), pp. 245 ff.

E. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition* (London, 1954), pp. 93 ff.

<sup>4)</sup> See C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Neukirchen, 1974), pp. 532 ff.

<sup>5)</sup> F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague, 1974).

tedious redundancy. But if the text is left as it is, and its grammatical structure is taken seriously as serving artistic purposes, more positive conclusions about the integrity of a passage and the solemnity of its style are possible. Sentences from the Flood Epic . . . cut across passages generally assigned to the 'J' and 'P' documents. . . This means that if the documentary hypothesis is valid, some editor has put together scraps of parallel versions of the same story with scissors and paste, and yet has achieved a result which, from the point of view of discourse grammar, looks as if it has been made out of whole cloth" (p. 40).

These observations do not rule out the possibility that a redactor of Genesis could have used two independent sources to create the present form of the flood narrative, but they underline the fact that, if he did work this way, he has knit the sources together very thoroughly. The purpose of this study is to present three fresh arguments for supposing that Genesis vi-ix is a carefully composed piece of literature, which is more coherent than usually admitted.

### *The Structure of the Flood Narrative*

One mark of the coherence of the flood narrative is to be found in its literary structure. The tale is cast in the form of an extended palistrophe, that is a structure that turns back on itself. In a palistrophe the first item matches the final item, the second item matches the penultimate item, and so on. The second half of the story is thus a mirror image of the first. This kind of literary structure has been discovered in other parts of Genesis <sup>6)</sup>, but nowhere else is it developed on such a large scale. This may be partly due to the fact that a flood narrative is peculiarly suited to this literary form.

Gen. vi 10 to ix 19 appears to be a palistrophe containing 31 items. It begins and ends with a reference to Noah. Then Noah's sons are named and so on. Particularly striking are the references to days (lines H, I, L, O) <sup>7)</sup>. The periods of time form a symmetrical pattern, 7, 7, 40, 150, 150, 40, 7, 7. The turning point of the narrative is found in viii: 1 "God remembered Noah".

This is a palistrophe on a grand scale. Up to a point it is not sur-

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<sup>6)</sup> In Gen. i see P. Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation* (Paris, 1969), pp. 68 ff. In Gen. xvii see S. E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (Rome, 1971), pp. 157 ff.. In Gen. xxii see R. Lack, *Biblica*, 56 (1975), p. 6.

<sup>7)</sup> Only the references to days form part of the palistrophe; the 40 days *and nights* (vii 4, 12) and the dates do not.

*Genesis vi 10-ix 19*

- A Noah (vi 10a)
- B Shem, Ham and Japheth (10b)
- C Ark to be built (14-16)
- D Flood announced (17)
- E Covenant with Noah (18-20)
- F Food in the ark (21)
- G Command to enter ark (vii 1-3)
- H 7 days waiting for flood (4-5)
- I 7 days waiting for flood (7-10)
- J Entry to ark (11-15)
- K Yahweh shuts Noah in (16)
- L 40 days flood (17a)
- M Waters increase (17b-18)
- N Mountains covered (19-20)
- O 150 days waters prevail ((21)-24)
- P GOD REMEMBERS NOAH (viii 1)
- O' 150 days waters abate (3)
- N' Mountain tops visible (4-5)
- M' Waters abate (5)
- L' 40 days (end of) (6a)
- K' Noah opens window of ark (6b)
- J' Raven and dove leave ark (7-9)
- I' 7 days waiting for waters to subside (10-11)
- H' 7 days waiting for waters to subside (12-13)
- G' Command to leave ark (15-17(22))
- F' Food outside ark (ix 1-4)
- E' Covenant with all flesh (8-10)
- D' No flood in future (11-17)
- C' Ark (18a)
- B' Shem, Ham and Japheth (18b)
- A' Noah (19)

prising to find one in the flood story. After all, a palistropic literary structure closely resembles the real-life situation. Noah enters the ark with the animals, and then later they leave it. The waters rise and then fall. In other words the story naturally falls into two halves which ought to resemble each other to some extent. The surface structure of the narrative mirrors the deep structure of the event being described.

Though a palistrophe is an appropriate form for describing the flood, there are certain features in the story which reflect the large element of contrivance in casting the whole tale into this form. First, though the central section (from the command to enter the ark (G) to the command to leave it (G')) intrinsically fits a palistropic

structure, this is not true of the section dealing with the situation before the flood (vi 10-21) and the closing scene (ix 1-19). Yet both passages continue the palistrophe outwards. In the closing scene, "Shem, Ham and Japheth", "the ark", "the flood", "the covenant" and "food", are mentioned in precisely the reverse order to that found in the opening scene. There is clearly an element of artificiality here.

The second unnatural feature of this narrative is to be found in the duration of different phases of the flood, though this is not immediately apparent. The 7 days of waiting for the flood is mentioned twice, and matches the 14 days of waiting for the water to subside. The 150 days of water prevailing correspond to the 150 days of water abating. In other words, the rise of the flood seems to take exactly the same time as its decline, namely 204 days, and these time spans are fitted very neatly into the palistrophe.

But closer examination suggests that some of these time spans are mentioned purely in order to achieve symmetry in the palistrophe. This is most clear in the pair of 7 days at the beginning and end of the sequence. The 7 days waiting for embarkation is mentioned twice (vii 4 and vii 10), although only one week of 7 days is involved. I suggest that this week is mentioned twice partly to keep the literary balance <sup>8</sup>) with the two weeks of waiting in the ark at the end of the flood (viii 10, 12). Here in fact three weeks have been compressed into two, for viii 10 says; "He waited another seven days", which implies an additional 7 days, probably between the raven's departure and the dove's first reconnaissance flight. Another contrived feature of the chronology is found in the central section. For example, the 40 days of flood mentioned in vii 17 seems to form part of the 150 days that the waters prevailed on the earth (vii 24). The 40 days in vii 17 balances the 40 days in viii 6, before Noah opened the window of the ark. In short, some of the references to time in the flood appear to have as much a literary as a chronological function. They underline the symmetry of the flood's rise and fall, thereby enhancing the structure of the palistrophe.

What then is the function of the palistrophe? Firstly, it gives literary expression to the character of the flood event. The rise and fall of the waters is mirrored in the rise and fall of the key words in its description. Secondly, it draws attention to the real turning point

<sup>8</sup>) Another reason is to draw attention to the exact fulfilment of God's warning (cf. vii 4 with 10, 12, 23).

in the saga: viii 1, "And God remembered Noah". From that moment the waters start to decline and the earth to dry out. It was God's intervention that was decisive in saving Noah, and the literary structure highlights this fact. This large-scale palistrophe co-exists alongside the smaller literary and syntactic patterns in these chapters noted by other scholars<sup>9</sup>). Similar phenomena are observable in Genesis i and xvii<sup>10</sup>). Artists must necessarily be concerned as much with the details of a work as with the overall effect.

It should also be pointed out that certain items in the story do not fit the palistrophe exactly. For example, Noah's sacrifice (viii 20 ff.) does not form part of the pattern. This is inevitable to some extent if the writer was to be faithful to the traditions he had received. He managed to mention the initial 7-day period of waiting twice, and to reduce the final 21 days to 14 for the sake of the palistrophic structure. But there are limits to this process if he was not to alter the contents of his sources as well as their form. Further, if he had achieved total and perfect symmetry, the story might have lost some of its interest. In most works of art perfect repetition and symmetry are not desirable. It is the variations of shape and form against the background of an established pattern that give the viewer or listener such pleasure. Total formlessness is incomprehensible. Absolute repetitiveness is dull. Our writer avoids both extremes. While the palistrophic structure provides him with a framework which draws attention to the main point of the story, he does not allow it to override his concern to reproduce the contents of his sources faithfully.

The introductory paragraphs are not incorporated into the main palistrophe, but are linked to it in other ways. The first paragraph (vi 5-7) tells of God's displeasure at the corruption of the earth. The second (vi 8-9) tells how Noah was the one exception who found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

The first paragraph displays a loose form of panel writing<sup>11</sup>), that is, certain key words are repeated in a fixed order.

*Genesis vi 5-7*

A	The LORD	The LORD	The LORD
B	saw	was sorry	said
C	that	that	
D	man	man	man
E	in the earth ( <sup>ʿereṣ</sup> )	in the earth ( <sup>ʿereṣ</sup> )	on the earth ( <sup>ʿāḏāmāh</sup> )
F	his heart	his heart	

<sup>9</sup>) cf. Andersen, pp. 124-6; McEvenue, pp. 37 ff.

<sup>10</sup>) cf. Beauchamp, pp. 43 ff.; McEvenue, pp. 145 ff.

<sup>11</sup>) For a discussion of this technique see McEvenue, pp. 13 ff., 158 ff.

The important words here are “Yahweh”, a verb describing his action, “that”, “man”, “on the earth”, “his heart”. The threefold repetition serves to show the intensity of God’s reaction to human sin, and prepares the reader for the drastic solution to the problem first hinted at in verse 7.

The first paragraph finds a close parallel in one of the scenes after the flood (Gen. viii 21). They are written in two parallel panels.

*Genesis vi 5-7 and viii 21*

A	The LORD (vi 5)	The LORD (viii 21)
B	saw	smelled
C	man	man
D	every imagination	imagination
C	his heart	man’s heart
D	only evil	evil
E	continually	from his youth
F	blot out (vi 7)	destroy
G	man	every creature
H	made (‘āśāb)	done (‘āśāb)

Here the literary structure does two things. It binds the opening paragraph into the main narrative, and it puts God’s change of mind into high relief. Though man is just as sinful as he was before the flood, God has decided never to destroy the world again.

vi 8 should probably be viewed as opening the second paragraph, not closing the first (so Andersen, pp. 80 ff.). Certainly verses 8 and 9 form a tightly knit chain of clauses in chiasmic apposition, with Noah<sup>12</sup>) alternately subject and predicate. Or these verses may be viewed as a short palistrophe, a pre-echo of the main structure which it immediately prefaces.

*Genesis vi 8-9*

A	Noah
B	found favour
C	in the eyes of the LORD
D	These are the generations (tôlā dōt) of Noah
E	Noah was righteous
E'	perfect he was
D'	in his generations (dōrôt)
C'	with God
B'	walked
A'	Noah

<sup>12</sup>) Noah is sometimes referred to by a pronominal suffix.

The centre of the pattern this time is: "Noah was righteous. He was perfect". Once again a literary form is being used to underline a theological point.

There are other cross-links between these opening paragraphs and the main section. For example, vi 8-9, "Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD . . . Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations", is echoed in vii 1, "And the LORD said to Noah . . . I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation". Similarly vi 7, "I will blot out man", is fulfilled in vii 23. Thus, both introductory paragraphs are carefully bound into the main body of the narrative.

### *Narrative Coherence and Chronology*

If the writer demonstrated his literary skill in producing the complex structures we have discussed, did he neglect to produce a coherent tale that is self-consistent when read as a straightforward narrative? It seems unlikely. But, since he has sometimes been charged with failing to combine his sources carefully enough to avoid contradictions within the narrative, let us consider the question afresh.

The first paragraph of the main story (vi 11-22) tells how God informed Noah of his intention to destroy the earth. Therefore, Noah is commanded (in the imperative) to build an ark and stock it with food (vi 14, 21). In passing he is told (in the indicative) that, when the flood comes, he and his family will board the ark, and he will bring pairs of animals with him to preserve life on the earth (vi 18-20).

The second paragraph (vii 1-5) deals with the situation after the ark is built. In seven days the flood will come; therefore Noah must now enter the ark, and bring in the animals. Whereas in the previous paragraph this was simply a statement about the distant future after the ark had been built, now a precise command is given: he must bring in seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of each kind of unclean animals. That there was only one pair of unclean animals but several pairs of clean animals explains why certain points are made later in the story. The purpose of the animals' voyage was to preserve life on earth: this is stated three times (vi 19, 20, vii 3). Thus, if any of the unclean animals in the ark died, that species would have died out. When the raven, an unclean bird (Lev. xi 15), went out to see if there was any dry land, he never returned to the ark. Had the story

of the raven ended there, one might have supposed that the raven drowned and became extinct. To explain why ravens are still extant, the narrative goes on to mention that the raven went on flying around till the earth dried out. Conversely Noah's sacrifice of every kind of clean animal and bird would have led to their extinction, had there been only one pair of each in the ark.

A striking feature of the flood narrative is the number of references to time within it. The rise and fall of the flood is exactly chronicled. How many days a particular phase lasted, or the date on which a new phase began, is noted. Yet it is here that some have found difficulty in maintaining the narrative's self-consistency. The data are set out in the diagram below.

The left-hand column lists the events dated by reference to the 600th year of Noah's life. For example, on the 17th day of the 7th month the ark rested on Ararat (viii 4). The middle column lists the periods of time mentioned in the story. With the exception of the forty days and nights mentioned in vii 4, 12 they form part of the palistrophic pattern.

*THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FLOOD*

<i>DATE</i> (in Noah's life)	<i>PERIOD</i>	<i>DAY OF THE WEEK</i>
	After 7 <i>days</i> flood came (vii 10)	(10.2 Sunday flood announced)
17.2.600	Rain and floods began (vii 11)	Sunday
	40 days and nights rain (vii 12)	(26?27.3 Thursday? Friday rain ended)
	40 <i>days</i> flood was on earth (vii 17)	
	150 <i>days</i> waters strong (vii 24)	
	After 150 <i>days</i> water abate (viii 3)	(15.7 Wednesday)
17.7.600	Ark rests on Ararat (viii 4)	Friday
1.10.600	Mountain tops seen (viii 5)	Wednesday
	End of 40 <i>days</i> Noah sends out raven (viii 6-7)	(10.11 Sunday)
	Another 7 <i>days</i> dove's second flight (viii 10)	(24.11 Sunday)
	Another 7 <i>days</i> dove's third flight (viii 12)	(1.12 Sunday)
1.1.601	Waters dried up (viii 13)	Wednesday
27.2.601	The earth dry: Noah emerges (viii 14)	Wednesday

If the periods in the middle column are added up, they do not tally with the dates given in the first column. For example, according to the first column there were three months between the appearance of the mountain tops on the 1st of the 10th month and the water drying up on the 1st of the 1st month. But in the middle column only fifty-four days are explicitly mentioned<sup>13</sup>). There is a discrepancy of at

<sup>13</sup>) As argued above (p. 339) viii 10 probably implies a total of 61 days.

least a month <sup>14</sup>). Nothing is told of what happened in the ark during the 12th month. However, the same may be said about the longer periods between the ark resting on Ararat (viii 4) and the mountain tops appearing (viii 5), and between the waters drying up (viii 13) and the earth drying out (viii 14).

This indicates that the writer was not concerned to tell how Noah spent all the time in the ark, so it would be unfair to accuse him of inconsistency simply for failing to mention what happened in the 12th month.

The arrival of the flood presents a quite different problem. There are too many days to fit in between the beginning of the flood on the 17th of the 2nd month (vii 11) and the ark resting on Ararat exactly five months later (viii 4). That is presumably about 150 days <sup>15</sup>). However, the total number of days mentioned in the middle column comes to 380.

There is no difficulty in halving this figure. The chiasmic structure (cf. Andersen, pp. 124 ff.) of Gen. vii 6-17 shows that the 40 days and nights in vii 12 are the same as the 40 days that the flood was on the earth in vii 17. Similarly the natural way to take the references to the 150 days in vii 24 and viii 3 is that they refer to the same period. vii 24 says: "the waters prevailed for 150 days". viii 3 states that "at the end of 150 days the waters abated". If we assume that the 40 days preceded the 150 days, we have a total of 190 days for the first phase of the flood.

However, it is clear that the author of P <sup>16</sup>), the redactor of Genesis and the translators of the ancient versions <sup>17</sup>) understood the 40 days to be included in the 150 days. For example, though the Septuagint adjusts some of the dates to make the flood last exactly a year <sup>18</sup>), it still only allows five months for this phase of the flood. I see nothing in the text to preclude this old understanding of the chronology. McEvenue suggests the 40 days was the time it took for the ark to become seaborne (p. 63). It then floated on the waters for about

<sup>14</sup>) This discrepancy is eliminated in LXX by changing the date in viii 5 to 1.11.600.

<sup>15</sup>) If the lunisolar year is presupposed, only 147 or 148 days; if the Jubilees calendar, 152 days.

<sup>16</sup>) If the "40 days" is included in P (McEvenue, p. 24), rather than assigned to a redactor (Westermann, p. 527).

<sup>17</sup>) With the exception of the Vulgate, the versions all agree with MT in allowing five months between vii 11 and viii 4. The Vulgate allows 5 months 10 days.

<sup>18</sup>) Flood begins 27.2.600 (vii 11). Waters abate 27.7.600 (viii 4). Earth dry 27.2.601 (viii 14).

110 days before grounding on Mount Ararat. Interpreted in this way there is no self-contradiction within the time-table of the flood narrative.

This interpretation of the chronology of the flood receives independent support from the observations of Jaubert and Beauchamp. The latter plausibly argues that Genesis i intends New Year's Day and other important festivals to fall on Wednesday (pp. 113 f.). Working on the hypothesis that Genesis uses a calendar akin to that found in the book of Jubilees, Jaubert<sup>19</sup>) had already pointed out that certain events in the flood story fall on appropriate days of the week. The flood, like the work of creation which it reversed, began on Sunday. The ark came to rest on a Friday, in order to keep the Sabbath the following day. The other dated events fall on Wednesdays.

Jaubert did not however consider the timing of the events which can be worked out using the number of days each phase of the flood lasted. These other events tend to fall on appropriate days of the week. The flood was announced on a Sunday (vii 4, 10). Righteous Noah also kept the Sabbath, and began work again on Sundays. He therefore sent out the birds on Sundays (viii 7, 10, 12)<sup>20</sup>). Finally, the first 40 days and nights of rain ended on Thursday or Friday. If the latter is intended<sup>21</sup>), it would seem to be another deliberate contrast with the creation story. As the work of creation was begun on a Sunday and was completed on Friday, so the work of de-creation began on a Sunday and ended on a Friday. In these ways even the chronology of the flood story becomes a vehicle for expressing theological ideas. Further, it is a chronology that embraces the whole story, not just parts of it. Thus, the evidence of chronology corroborates that of syntax and literary structure, that the Genesis flood story is a coherent unity.

### *Mesopotamian Parallels*

Finally, the question of the coherence of the flood story may be looked at from a different angle. As is well-known, some of the closest parallels to the biblical flood story are to be found in Mesopo-

<sup>19</sup>) A. Jaubert, *La Date de la Cène* (Paris, 1957), p. 33; cf. E. Vogt, *Biblica* 43 (1962), pp. 212-16.

<sup>20</sup>) This presupposes the 40 days (viii 6) are reckoned inclusively.

<sup>21</sup>) In Gen. i night ("evening") precedes day ("morning"). In vii 12 "days" precede "nights", which could suggest that the 40 days are reckoned exclusively and end on a Friday.

tamian literature. Exactly how the relationship between the accounts is to be explained is difficult to determine <sup>22</sup>). But that is not the issue here. It is simply that by comparing the biblical account of the flood with the Mesopotamian, we should be in a better position to appreciate the conventions of Near Eastern flood stories. In particular, the Mesopotamian flood story may be compared with the J and P versions, as well as with the combined version in Genesis, with a view to determining which conforms most closely to oriental tradition.

When the Genesis account is set alongside the fullest Mesopotamian account of the flood, that found in the Epic of Gilgamesh tablet 11, the stories are seen to have a great deal in common. The other Near Eastern accounts of the flood are too fragmentary for a full-scale comparison, but where there are points in common they are noted too. This is not to overlook the many differences between the accounts. These fall into two main categories: major theological differences, e.g. polytheism versus monotheism, or the reason for the flood; and minor details, such as the names of the gods, the names of the flood heroes, the duration of the flood, the size of the ark and so on. The broad outline of the plot is similar in both cultures. At least seventeen features appear in both stories, usually in the same order <sup>23</sup>).

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Divine decision to destroy mankind | Gen. vi 6 f. (J); G 14-19; A 2:7:38 ff.; 2:8:34; RS 1, 3; S 140 ff. |
| 2. Warning to flood hero              | Gen. vi 13 (P); G 20-23; A 3:1:13-21; RS 12, 14; S 152-160.         |
| 3. Command to build ark               | Gen. vi 14-21 (P); G 24-31; A 3:1:22-33.                            |
| 4. Hero's obedience                   | Gen. vi 22; vii 5 (P/J); G 33-85; A 3:2:10 ff.                      |
| 5. Command to enter                   | Gen. vii 1-3 (J); G 86-88.  |
| 6. Entry                              | Gen. vii 7-16 (P/J); G 89-93; A 3:2:30-51.                          |
| 7. Closing door                       | Gen. vii 16 (J); G 93; A 3:2:52.                                    |
| 8. Description of flood               | Gen. vii 17-24 (P/J); G 96-128; A 3:2:53 ff.; S 201 ff.             |
| 9. Destruction of life                | Gen. vii 21-23 (P/J); G 133; A 3:3:44, 54.                          |
| 10. End of rain, etc.                 | Gen. viii 2-3 (P/J); G 129-31.                                      |

<sup>22</sup>) See the discussion in Cassuto, pp. 4 ff., and Heidel, pp. 260 ff.

<sup>23</sup>) Epic of Gilgamesh (G) quoted from Heidel; Atrahasis Epic (A), Ras Shamra (RS), and Sumerian (S) flood story quoted from W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis* (Oxford, 1969).

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| 11. Ark grounding on mountain    | Gen. viii 4 (P); G 140-4.                            |
| 12. Hero opens window            | Gen. viii 6 (J); G 135; S 207.                       |
| 13. Birds' reconnaissance        | Gen. viii 6-12 (J); G 145-154.                       |
| 14. Exit                         | Gen. viii 15-19 (P); G 155; A 3:5:30.                |
| 15. Sacrifice                    | Gen. viii 20 (J); G 155-158;<br>A 3:5:31 ff.; S 211. |
| 16. Divine smelling of sacrifice | Gen. viii 21-22 (J); G 159-161;<br>A 3:5:34 f.       |
| 17. Blessing on flood hero       | Gen. ix 1 ff. (P); G 189-96; S 255-60;<br>RS r. 1-4. |

These lists underline the very close parallels between the Mesopotamian and biblical accounts of the flood. This is particularly striking in the case of the combined (J + P) version of the flood in Genesis. Whereas the combined account in Genesis vi-ix has seventeen points in common with the Epic of Gilgamesh version, J by itself has twelve points in common with Gilgamesh, and P by itself only ten. The most notable omissions from the J account are the warning to Noah about the flood, the command to build the ark, the grounding of the ark on a mountain, and the disembarkation. The P version also has some notable gaps; there is no divine decision to destroy mankind recorded, no command to enter the ark, no reconnaissance by the birds, no sacrifice and attendant divine approval.

It is strange that two accounts of the flood so different as J and P, circulating in ancient Israel, should have been combined to give our present story which has many more resemblances to the Gilgamesh version than the postulated sources. Perhaps it could be explained by assuming that the J and P versions of the flood story were in their original form much closer to each other than the relics of these sources now suggest. Alternatively, one might suppose that only one source was used by the writer of Genesis, a source presumably similar to the Mesopotamian flood story. Whichever solution is preferred, it underlines our previous argument that the Genesis flood story is a coherent narrative within the conventions of Hebrew story-telling.

### *Conclusions*

The syntax, literary structure, chronology and Mesopotamian parallels all point to the unity and coherence of the account of the flood found in Genesis vi-ix. None of these observations is absolutely incompatible with the notion that Genesis vi-ix is compiled from two independent sources. The documentary hypothesis may yet be

defended, if one is prepared to posit a most ingenious and thorough redactor who blended J and P into a marvellous and coherent unity.

Yet a simpler and more economical hypothesis would have much to commend it. Three recent studies<sup>24</sup>) of other parts of Genesis have suggested that it is better to think in terms of one epic source which has been reworked by a later priestly editor. This type of hypothesis would cover the evidence considered here. It would explain both why the Genesis flood story has so many narrative elements in common with the Mesopotamian, and why it contains literary and syntactic features in common with the rest of Genesis.

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<sup>24</sup>) F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 293 ff.; D. B. Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph, SVT 20* (1970), pp. 251 ff.; L. R. Fisher, "The Patriarchal Cycles", in H. A. Hoffner (ed.), *Orient and Occident: Essays presented to C. H. Gordon* (Neukirchen, 1973), pp. 59-65.



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