

## **PEOPLE OF GOD THINK ABOUT GOD WHO IS GOD?**

**January 29, 2020**

### **Nature of the Tradition**

As we have noted the dominant theory is that the Pentateuch (first 5 books) is a composite work. Various major literary strands have been artistically combined during the course of transmission. Several traditions coexisted in ancient Israelite society and were eventually blended together. All were woven together in various stages until it reached its present form (400 BC). First formal binding was sometime around 600 BC during the Babylonian Exile. Some surmise that Ezra may have overseen the final redaction of the Pentateuch. Read Nehemiah 8:1-8

Inconsistencies, repetitions, and stylistic differences reflect ways stories were retold. Each one was reworked and reinterpreted in different historical periods and life situations. But it also demonstrates a degree of cohesiveness.

Behind the earliest written accounts was a long period during which it was handed down orally. Early period of the life of Israel became a creative time. Essential story of Israel was rehearsed and elaborated with contributions from various tribes. Skilled narrators recreated the tradition they had received and improvised on it in fresh ways. Sometimes the literary traditions stood out clearly as in the two creation stories. Very often they could not be disentangled because storytellers drew from same oral tradition.



### **Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6-8)**

In the story of the Flood God speaks several times but Noah has no recorded lines. Virtues of Noah are listed and emphasized for us.

He was righteous and blameless and obedient.

Event was terrifying but the story was told in a very restrained and matter-of-fact way.

Other authors described similar events in a more dramatic way –

Read Psalm 18:7-19 and Habakkuk 3:3-15

In contrast we are given only a few clues concerning the emotional impact of the great flood. Storyteller concentrated instead on some of the straightforward details:

- Construction of the ark
- List of animals that were saved
- Length of time that the earth was flooded

Story was told to emphasize that in the midst of judgment God intended to save his people.

Introduction of the word *doublets* – two versions of the same thing

In 6:14-21 Noah was instructed to make an ark and load it with animals and food.

In 6:22 we are informed (with emphasis) that Noah did just as God commanded him.

Very next section repeats the instructions with some variations.

Once more we are told that Noah obeyed.

Differences between the two accounts of boarding the ark provide clues for identifying source.

In 6:14-22 the word for God is *Elohim* and specifies only two of each kind of animal.

In 7:1-5 the word for God is *Yahweh* and speaks of seven pairs of clean animals and one unclean.

Another rationale for dividing the story into two sources is the chronology.

In 7:17 the flood lasted 40 days and in 7:24 it stated 150 days and 8:13 implied a full year.

And beyond the *doublet* they all entered the ark again in 7:7-9 and once more in 7:13-16.

Present form of the story has its own message that is the result of combining both sources.

	J	P
Decision by God	Genesis 6:5-8	Genesis 6:9-13
Construction of Ark		Genesis 6:14-22
Entry into the Ark	Genesis 7:1-5, 7-8, 10	Genesis 7:6 and 9
Flood	Genesis 7:12, 16b, 17 22-23	Genesis 7:11, 13-16a 18-21, 24
End of the Flood	8:2b, 3, 6-12	Genesis 8:1-2a, 3b-5, 13a
Exit from the Ark	Genesis 8:13b	Genesis 8:14-19
Sacrifice and Promise	Genesis 8:20-22	Genesis 9:1-17

J had before him a Flood tradition that spoke of the destruction of the whole world.

Noah and his family became the exception because he was righteous and blameless.

Given his understanding of God, J made the story into a righteous judgment.

All humanity (except for the one family) had to be found guilty.

Already in the stories of Eden and Cain and Abel J showed divine grace prevailed in judgment.

J set up the story with comments on the human heart and the emotions of God.

J justified the decision by Yahweh.

P started with Noah and found in the Flood tradition a way to explain corruption in a good world.

Consistent with P, his account allowed for the possibility of nonhuman evil.

Only P gives any information about the construction of the ark.

In the version by J Noah is just told to enter it.

Some scholars think that the construction of the ark from J was omitted by later editors.

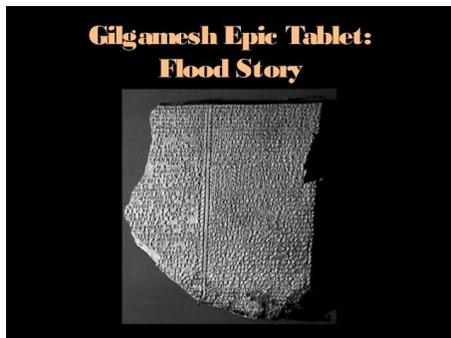
But editor did not seem to mind preserving duplicates in the rest of the story.  
Leads some to consider the possibility that the ark was a divine means of salvation in J.

Word *covenant* appears for the first time in 6:18 and is from P.  
God intended to save Noah and those who went with him (obedience was assumed).  
Creation account in Genesis 1 explained how God made a place for land creatures.  
God separated the waters above the earth from below the earth.  
God gathered the waters into the sea so that dry land might appear.  
Fundamental, creative acts were annulled temporarily according to P in 7:11.

Turning point of the story is found in 7:23b and 8:1.  
God can and may decide to destroy his created work but not for some arbitrary reason.  
If God allows chaos to appear again it is because humans have already descended into chaos.  
Even then God does not allow his purpose to be thwarted.  
God insists on finding someone to save and on providing a means of salvation.  
God insists on preserving a world in which the remnant may live.  
Chaos may prevail but only for a while.

Midpoint of the story is found in 8:1 – *But God remembered Noah*.  
In Hebrew, for God to *remember* does not suggest that God had forgotten anything.  
It was the signal that God determined the proper time for God to act.  
In the dark times God waits for the right moment to act once again with grace.

*Epic of Gilgamesh* is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia.  
It is regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature.  
Is it the second oldest religious text after the *Pyramid Texts*.



From Lines 131-154 (portion):

The olden days have alas turned to clay  
because I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods!  
How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods,  
ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people!!

No sooner have I given birth to my dear people  
than they fill the sea like so many fish!

Six days and seven nights came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land.  
When the seventh day arrived, the storm was pounding, the flood was a war.  
The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind and flood stopped up.  
I looked around all day long – quiet had set in and all the human beings had turned to clay.  
The terrain was as flat as a roof.  
I opened a vent and fresh air fell upon the side of my nose.

On Mt. Nimush the boat lodged firm.  
When a seventh day arrived, I sent forth a dove and released it.  
The dove went off but came back to me.  
No perch was visible, so it circled back to me.  
I sent forth a raven and released it.  
The raven went off and saw the waters slither back.  
It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me.  
Then I sent out everything in all directions and sacrificed a sheep.

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In Gilgamesh the sacrifice was food for the gods.  
Gods were so hungry after the flood that they swarmed like flies around it.  
Genesis provided no hint that Yahweh needed the sacrifice.  
J included it as a thanksgiving offering.  
Once more the detail of the story was magnified!  
According to J Noah saved seven pairs of clean animals.  
Offering could be made without the loss of any species.

J concludes the story in 8:21b-22.  
Flood cleansed the earth and a new start could be made with one righteous man and his family.  
But the Flood did nothing to change the human heart.  
In Hebrew thought the heart was the seat of rational will (not the seat of emotion).  
Our ability and will to do right was still missing!!!! Yikes!  
Flood story represents the threat of inbreaking chaos that we will experience from time to time.  
Gospel in the story is that the threat of chaos is always under the control of God.  
God will not use the threat of chaos as the means to accomplish his will.

### **Renewal of the Blessing at Creation (9:1-7)**

Section is the conclusion to the Flood story according to P.  
Most striking feature is the many references to Genesis 1.  
As the earth now becomes a wasteland, God reestablishes the order of creation.  
Special emphasis and prominence are placed on the human including one new privilege (9:3).  
Blessing of 1:28 is repeated in 9:1.  
God intended to restore the earth to its former abundance of life.  
Human rule over all other creatures (1:28) was reaffirmed with stronger words.  
In 9:2 it stated that humans will be the fear and terror of every living thing.  
Restoration was not a return to paradise.  
World after the Flood was still filled with violence and fear.

### **City of Babel (11:1-9)**

Chapter 10 is the version from P on how the earth was replenished after the Flood.  
In 11:1-9 we see a different explanation from J.  
Story of Babel is also the end of the Primeval history.  
It is the last event recorded before salvation history begins.  
In 11:1 we anticipate the story to move from unity to diversity.  
Please note: Diversity is not wrong!!!

In 11:4 we are finally given a reason for the activity that has been described in opening verses. People intended to build a city and a great tower.

Two motives are cited for this massive building project:

To make a name for themselves

Lest they be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth (moment of anxiety).

Scattering would lead to an inability to concentrate all their power and resources in one place.

In 11:2-4 human action and speech are recorded.

In 11:5 we have the turning point in the story.

*The Lord came down to see . . .*

In 11:6-8 God is the actor and speaker.

Not the only place where God is depicted as one conducting an investigation.

In this context, author got some enjoyment from God wanting to see for himself.

We could conclude that God saw this as a threat to himself.

But that interpretation violates everything said about God in the rest of the Bible.

We need to set 11:6 in the context of the rest of J's work.

Statement fits the theme of a fallen humanity still wanting to become like God.

They thought they could do marvelous things on their own (city and towers were examples).

But they still were unable to use the powers given to them without bringing pain into the world.

Prediction made by God in this verse was not a threat to God but to humanity.

More power they were able to concentrate, the more harm they would do to themselves / others.

Decision of God in 11:7-8 was not a punishment of sin.

Seen through the eyes of J it was a preventive act to avert a great potential evil.

No sin is ever identified explicitly, unlike the other stories in his series.

We have to remember that J concluded his stories with a divine act of judgment and grace.

Human beings tried to do more than would be good for humanity in general.

God intervened by confusing their language.

God also protected them from the worst that they could do to one another.

Babel story recalls in several ways the major concerns in Genesis 3.

Speaks of the mixture in human beings of godlikeness with the sinful tendency that corrupts.

**Who is God?**

## **Assignment for February 5**

How God Can Be Both Just and Loving

Read Jonah