Chapter Nine

A Darker Wisdom

The Opening of Tablet 11

At the heart of Tablet 11 is the Flood story, but the tablet does not open with the Flood, and the tablet ends—many think *Gilgamesh* itself should end with Tablet 11—with a series of short, unexpected pieces that eventually take Gilgamesh back home to Uruk.

The opening is very brief, only seven lines, but it contains a number of interesting features. It is as if Gilgamesh were seeing Utnapishtim for the first time, although, as we have seen, he has had a long conversation with him at the end of Tablet 10. I rather prefer to think that Gilgamesh can see Utnapishtim in a way he could not see him earlier. In some ways the Door of Sorrow has closed, and Gilgamesh is not the frantic figure who smashed the Things of Stone. He expected a different answer to the great questions of “life” than Utnapishtim gave him, but his grief and anger have given way, temporarily, to another emotional state.

Gilgamesh tells Utnapishtim that he looks at him now and his “form” (*minītu*) is no different from Gilgamesh’s. The word has a range of meanings, from the shape and size of a body to an indication of “normal” proportions of time, objects and the like. Gilgamesh is larger than others, and he seems to have expected that Utnapishtim would be even larger. Instead of attacking Utnapishtim, he tells the sage that he had fully intended fighting him. Benjamin R. Foster translates the lines, “Yet your heart is drained of battle spirit,/ You lie flat on your back, your arm [idle]” (10.4-5). How could such a man stand up in the Assembly of the Gods? How could such a man have found eternal life?

Utnapishtim answers with a story, a “secret of the gods.” The fighting man gives way to one who must listen carefully to a story.

The reader of *Gilgamesh* is never quite sure about the measure of time and space. The whole story could cover a few weeks, but time is extended to fit heroic if not mythic duration, and space, too, is extended. It is not clear how long the “double hours” are when Gilgamesh walks in darkness or how far Utnapishtim’s dwelling is from the lip of the sea. The Flood may have been thought to have occurred not long before kings like Gilgamesh appeared on the scene, but the story of the Flood takes the reader—and Gilgamesh—back to archaic times. At any rate, Utnapishtim as a storyteller challenges Gilgamesh to listen closely to a story that carries a darker wisdom than we have seen earlier in *Gilgamesh.* His is a story of deceptive practices and ambiguous speech.

Utnapishtim is the guide to his master, the lord of the abyss, Ea.

The extraordinary proliferation of Flood stories and commentaries on Flood stories from the ancient world to the present shows an interest in some motifs more than others, and they will be treated below. Before that, though, it is worth emphasizing that having the
story told by a human—rather than told from the usual absolute perspective, rather like
the Voice of God—is a very striking innovation in Gilgamesh. Having a kind of
participant-observer tell the story gives it great force and provides a major clue to the
puzzle commentators on Gilgamesh have often struggled with: the Flood does not appear
in earlier versions of the Gilgamesh stories. How does it fit this version—if at all?

A brief survey of the reception of the Flood story over time will, I hope, clarify this
important question.

Having Utnapishtim tell the story provides a tight focus on his experience. In Gilgamesh
it is not an old myth but an insider’s view. There is no explanation for the Flood, such as
one finds in the much-expanded version in the Old Babylonian Atrahasis. Utnapishtim
knows what he knows of the gods from his contact with Enki/Ea. He tells Gilgamesh what
he has learned from the crafty god and from his own experience. And he emphasizes the
way the very humanlike deities learn from their experience.

The literary fiction of having one character tell another character a story suggests that
Gilgamesh is supposed to learn something from the story. The Gilgamesh poet could have
had the Flood story told by Siduri the Brewer, Utnapishtim or another “wise” figure.
Ironically, Utnapishtim will have to learn something from his wife, the other great
character developed by the Gilgamesh poet. By analogy, the Gilgamesh poet is telling the
story of Gilgamesh to an audience, presumably testing the reader’s ability to unpack
mysteries.

The sequence of episodes in Tablet 11 is interesting. After the Flood itself, The Sleep Test,
the cleansing of Gilgamesh and the banishing of Urshanabi, the Wife’s suggestion, the
Plant of Rejuvenation and the Return to Uruk are clear but very terse, reduced to
essentials. Even the Flood is a much-reduced version of the earlier, Old Babylonian
version.

Where the earlier episodes in Gilgamesh are allowed to developed to the point where
explanations are given or at least clear from context, the second half of the poem is filled
with strange figures, exotic locations, and stories whose point has to be puzzled out—
altogether darker, tragic, and mysterious.

While the early adventures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu—the fights with Humbaba and The
Bull of Heaven—were popular in ancient Mesopotamia, Gilgamesh’s quest for “life” and
the story of the Flood would turn out to be far more influential in different times and on
different societies than the earlier tales. And Utnapishtim’s wife will turn out to be the
most surprising development in later retellings of the episodes in Tablet 11.

**Floods and The Flood**

Archaeologists have found evidence of a major flood in the Uruk region in the early 2nd
millennium BCE. The time of the flood roughly corresponds to a social and economic
crisis in the Sumerian south. Nippur and the entire south with it rose up against the king
of Babylon, Samsuliluna. The uprising of 1741-1739 BCE was put down by force, and it
led to the abandonment of at least part of all major cities in the area. After a decline, which in Uruk may have owed as much to the flood as to the protest against the northern king, the area once again grew and prospered.

Elizabeth Carter discovered evidence for a sequence that ended with the flood. In both the Uruk region and in the northeast (Diyala) region, plague was followed by two periods of drought, and then the flood. Carter interprets the Old Babylonian story of the great Flood, *Atrahasis*, in light of the archaeological evidence, since a similar sequence of plague, drought and flood is found in that important work. She associates the ending of *Atrahasis* to the problem that would probably have been most pronounced in Uruk, overpopulation of the cities, a problem identified by Anne Draffkorn Kilmer. Further, Elizabeth C. Stone discovered some four hundred and fifty legal contracts from the period that reflected the devastation that followed the uprising against Samsuiluna. Nippur was not reoccupied for at least three centuries. The walls of Uruk and Ur were destroyed. Stone noted that the power of temples were on the wane.

The age of powerful kings had reached a point when Uruk lost its independence forever. From this point on foreign elements would dominate the city, either from within the city or—in the case of Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Parthians—from remote sites.

While there is no evidence in Mesopotamia of a Flood so catastrophic that it overwhelmed the whole world, conditions in the south during the Old Babylonian period prepared the ground for that most popular of ancient stories, the Flood. In spite of the great care the cities of the floodplain had taken to protect at least the public buildings from such an event, the dreaded Flood—or something like it—must have occurred, and it stirred the imagination of storytellers like nothing else in the ancient world.

**The Flood in *Gilgamesh***

When George Smith—the Englishman who found the most important *Gilgamesh* tablets in the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh—came across the lines that described the great Flood, a witness reported that Smith was so excited that he started pulling off his clothes. In the hallowed British Museum, of all places. And Smith subsequently published his translation of *Gilgamesh* with a title that tells us what made the ancient story a sensation in his time: *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (1875). By “Chaldean” Smith meant Mesopotamia generally, at least the southern part from Babylon down to the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf. The reference to “Genesis” would have been even clearer to his readers in the 1870s than it is today, the first book of the Bible, which, of course, contains the biblical story of the Flood (Genesis 6–9). Smith devoted six chapters of *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* to the story of Gilgamesh. But he saw, or thought he saw, from the Flood story in *Gilgamesh* that the heroic tale was itself only a part of a large literature in Mesopotamia that described Creation, the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and the times of the Patriarchs.
Biblical scholars have pointed out the many parallels between stories in Genesis from Creation through the Flood. Most translations of the Bible today designate these stories of the earliest days of the universe and of humankind as a Primal History, since as a group the stories deal with humanity as a whole, in contrast to what follows, the history of the Chosen People that begins with the patriarch, Abraham. Many of the parallels between Mesopotamian literature and biblical history were not yet known in Smith’s time, but he knew that he had found in the *Gilgamesh* Flood the single most riveting episode that would astonish the Western world.

Certain details of the Flood in *Gilgamesh* (as well as the larger shape of the story) still today provide the closest parallel between Mesopotamian literature and the Bible.

Here is a sample.

And the LORD saw that the evil of the human creature was great on the earth and that every scheme of his heart’s devising was only perpetually evil. And the LORD regretted having made the human on earth and was grieved to the heart. And the LORD said, “I will wipe out the human race I created from the face of the earth, from human to cattle to crawling thing to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. This is the lineage of Noah—Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his time, Noah walked with God—and Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with outrage. And God saw the earth and, look, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on the earth. And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with outrage by them, and I am now about to destroy them, with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood, with cells you shall make the ark, and caulk it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: three hundred cubits, the ark’s length; fifty cubits, its width; thirty cubits, its height. Make a skylight in the ark, within a cubit of the top you shall finish it, and put an entrance in the ark on one side. With lower and middle and upper decks you shall make it. As for me, I am about to bring the Flood, water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh that has within it the breath of life from under the heavens, everything on the earth shall perish. And I will set up my covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons, with you. And from all that lives, from all flesh, two of each thing you shall bring to the ark to keep alive with you, male and female they shall be. From the fowl of each kind and from the cattle of each kind and from all that crawls on the earth of each kind, two of each thing shall come to you to be kept alive. As for you, take you from every food that is eaten and store it by you, to serve for you and for them as food.” And this Noah did; as all that God commanded him, so he did. (Genesis 6:5-22)

If this translation, by Robert Alter, differs from the King James Version of the 17th century or from the many 20th century translations, it is that Alter attempted to capture the rhythms and style of the original Hebrew. (The frequent use of “and” at the beginning of a clause is the most obvious feature.)
Ea Reveals a Secret

Compare the biblical text with *Gilgamesh*.

Twice in Tablet 11 Utnapishtim offers Gilgamesh a “secret” (*nisirtu*) of the gods (11.9 and 280). Twice before we have read about Gilgamesh’s “secrets,” the only other times this special term appears in *Gilgamesh* (Tablet 1.7 and 26). We read about them earlier in the First Prologue. Upon his return, Gilgamesh is said to have seen what was secret and discovered what had been hidden. A few lines later we the readers of *Gilgamesh* are advised to open the box containing the story of Gilgamesh’s difficult travails. The First Prologue, of course, anticipates this scene in Tablet 11, for the secrets Gilgamesh learn are related to the Flood.

An important part of the secret disclosed by Utnapishtim in this passage is that it involves a secret Ea had revealed to him. Without letting Utnapishtim in on a matter Ea had sworn to secrecy, humankind would never have survived the Flood. The high gods were coerced by their “counselor, warrior Enlil” into accepting what we find out later was Enlil’s plan. *Gilgamesh* does not provide a clear reason why the gods “stirred their hearts” to bring about the Flood. The task for Ea is to craftily avoid breaking the oath while at the same time he reveals the secret to Utnapishtim. We will see that his deception here also requires Ea to provide a deceptive cover story that will enable Utnapishtim to persuade the very community that will be destroyed to help him build the great boat.

The clever Ea reveals the secret not by telling Utnapishtim directly but by repeating the words of the gods to a fence made of reeds and a wall made of bricks. Utnapishtim hears the words, then, through a medium; and the instructions Ea gives to build a boat are themselves rather ambiguous. Later Ea will exploit the ambiguity in language to have Utnapishtim con his people. In both instances a truth is told, but darkly.

The Mandaeans, an ethnic group with a religion that has prompted a modern scholar to call them “the last Gnostics,” derives much of their lore from traditions of southern Mesopotamia, their ancestral home. The *manda* of their name may refer to the secret knowledge (*gnosis*) they claim to possess; or it may refer to a structure built within a reed fence like *Gilgamesh* describes. It is the most sacred place of the Mandaeans, and the little building is surrounded by a reed fence. Water from a river or canal—“living water” is directed through the compound near the building. Here and elsewhere Ea is the god of waters, and the Mandaeans, whose religion is centered in the purification practices involving waters, may be carrying on a very ancient tradition. The Mandaeans themselves believe they follow the most famous of Christian water rituals, baptism, and they honor John the Baptist above all others, including Jesus.

[Fig. 52: See “Illustrations,” “The Manda and Enclosure,” after Lupieri]

Utnapishtim says to him, to Gilgamesh,

“I will uncover for you, Gilgamesh, a hidden thing; I’ll let you in on a secret of the gods.
In Shurippak—you know the city—
Set on the banks of the Euphrates—
A city ancient and close to the gods,
The great gods stirred their hearts to make the Flood.
Father Anu swore an oath,
Their counselor, warrior Enlil,
Their throne-bearer Ninurta,
Their sheriff, Ennugi,
And the great god Ea swore it with them as well.

Their words he repeats to a reed fence:
‘Reed fence, reed fence! Wall of brick, wall of brick!
Listen to this, reed fence! Wall, pay attention!
You man of Shurippak, son of Ubara-tutu,
Tear down the house. Build a boat!
Abandon riches. Seek life.
Scorn possessions. Hold onto life.
Load the seed of every living thing into your boat.

‘The boat you will build,
let her measure be measured:
Make her breadth and length the same.
Cover it with a roof the way the Apsû is covered.’” (11.8-31)

There are far more parallels between the two texts than these brief excerpts show. Each text provides different details, but the larger shape of the story is remarkably similar. For some reason (clear in the Bible, not so clear in Gilgamesh) the gods decide to destroy all “life,” that is, humans and animals that contain the breath of life. (The Bible emphasizes the blood, which was thought to carry life in it.) A single human is given the secret plan and is able to save a remnant of humanity and animal life. The Bible emphasizes the sons of Noah, while Gilgamesh emphasizes the man’s wife. The Noah-figure builds a boat according to specific details. The floodwaters rise, destroying all life outside the boat, and then recede. Birds are sent out to detect dry land. The boat holds fast on a mountain. The Noah-figure makes an offering. Humans survive.

While many readers who believe that the Bible is the word of God are nervous about parallels between the biblical text, especially when, like Gilgamesh, the non-biblical text is considerably older than the Bible, even the opening of the two accounts reveal important differences.

Most obvious is the conception of divine beings. We think that as the Bible was being formed there developed a greater and greater emphasis on monotheism: that is, that God is one; references even in the Bible to other “gods” must be reinterpreted to mean angels or other supernatural beings. There is no divine rival to God.

Note, though, that two different words are used for God in the biblical passage: “Lord,” usually printed in capital letters, and “God” (sometimes “G-d” but not “god”). For years
biblical scholars have been debating the meaning of these (and some other) names for the deity. Some even find remnants of a very old polytheism that was largely removed from the Bible over time. Or that different names reveal different attributes or aspects of the deity. More usually, scholars see in the different names the way the biblical texts were stitched together over as many as five centuries. With the different names of the deity comes different terminology. Other scholars think that that the differences are merely stylistic variations, a common feature of Semitic writing (including the Akkadian Gilgamesh, as we shall see).

However the differences are explained, all biblical scholars agree that the two most common names preserve some significant difference in meaning. “LORD” is a most curious translation. It actually covers the Hebrew word “Adonai,” a common term for “lord” or “master.” (You may recall that the Greeks and Romans knew of a Semitic god Adonis, actually mentioned in the biblical Book of Ezekiel.) What is surprising is that the Hebrew text does not read “Adonai.” The consonants in the text, YHWH, yield “Yahweh.” When the Hebrew text came to be “pointed,” with vowels marked above and below the consonants, the vowels were those of Adonai. (The reading “Jehovah” comes from a combination of the consonants YHWH and the vowels of Adonai.) What this unusual way of reading the text points out is that YHWH was considered the most sacred name of God. For many even articulating the word approached blasphemy. Hence a substitute word was articulated to avoid using the term “Yahweh.”

The point for most biblical scholars is that there may be two names for God in the passage, but they do not point to two gods. There is no dialogue going on between two divine beings. In sharp contrast, Gilgamesh, as usual, reflects a polytheistic worldview. While Sumero-Akkadian society knew thousands of gods, only the highest gods usually show up in literature. Here we have the gods Anu, Enlil, Ninurta, Ennugi, and Ea. Of these, only Enlil and Ea are really important to the story. Quite unlike the biblical Flood story, the Flood in Gilgamesh reveals a conflict at the very heart of the cosmos: the conflict between Enlil and Ea.

The conflict in this story is one found in other Mesopotamian literature, especially in other versions of the Flood. In all cases Enlil brings upon the Flood and Ea (or Enki, his Sumerian name) is the one who saves humankind. The premier example is the Akkadian story, Atrahasis, where the Flood is the third attempt by Enlil to destroy human life. The first two attempts, using famine and plague, fail when Ea finds a clever way to subvert Enlil’s plans. The reason given for the three attempts to destroy humanity is the “noise” the humans make. Possibly this is a metaphor for chaos or rebellion. Probably it refers to the rapid build up of population in cities, especially in places like Uruk. Famine, plague, and flood were perennial threats to cities in Mesopotamia, not to the people living outside the cities. Watch for the way the Flood stories end. Atrahasis ends with humanity saved from complete destruction but then saddled with restrictions on the ability to produce children: barren women, women who choose for religious reasons not to have children, and demons who snatch infants from their mothers. Gilgamesh, as we shall see, ends with a somewhat different way to curb population growth: nature itself. The lion, the
wolf, famine and plague are preferable to the destruction of humanity itself. (We might note that the phrase *atra-hasīs*, which in Akkadian means something like “excessively wise” or “overly clever” is used of Utnapishtim in *Gilgamesh*. In both *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis* the name or epithet refers to the Noah-figure. Where in the biblical text Noah is renowned for his piety and obedience to God, in Mesopotamian literature the Noah-figure is known for his service to the god Ea, the god always seen as the wisest and craftiest of the gods.)

From the start, then, the biblical Flood and the *Gilgamesh* Flood diverge. In the Bible it is the tendency of human to devise evil. Only Noah is found righteous. Since he will need a wife and sons (and their wives) to repopulate the world, Noah’s family is saved as well. The wife, note, virtually disappears from the biblical story. The emphasis is, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, is the patriarchal and patrilineal order of society. The sons are named; the women remain anonymous. The men act; the women are largely background figures. We will see that *Gilgamesh* moves in a different direction.

The reason for the Flood in *Gilgamesh* is not given. A tendency in Mesopotamian literature is to plunge into action and explain the reasons later, usually at the end of the story. See if in your reading of *Gilgamesh* the reason for the Flood is ever made clear.

The opening of the story simply presents as fact that the great gods, including Ea, swear an oath to bring about the Flood. Ea immediately acts to subvert the decision. We might note in passing that gods mentioned in the decision form a sort of hierarchy. Even though “warrior” Enlil was considered the most powerful of the gods (and one who in Mesopotamian mythology often rages out of control), the first god in the list if “father” Anu, the eldest of the gods (and the god whose earthly home is Uruk). If Enlil is a god rather like Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter, Anu is a rather passive figure, much like the fathers of Zeus and Jupiter. For most of Uruk’s long history Anu is mentioned with honor along with Inanna/Ishhtar, thought usually to be his daughter; but until quite late in Uruk’s history there was very little practical concern for Anu. Even in the 4th millennium BCE, when Uruk was at its height, we know a great deal about the offerings given to the great goddess but nothing of offerings to An/Anu.

Besides the powerful Enlil, who has bullied the gods into bringing about the Flood, two other gods are mentioned, Ninurta and Ennugi. The epithets they bear in this passage indicate that they are powerful figures in the employ of the great Enlil.

The monotheistic character of the biblical Flood narrative raises an obvious issue, which may be theological, but is at least narratological. If only God is involved, he speaks at first only to himself; regrets his decision to create humans; at the height of the Flood “remembers” Noah; and, as we shall see, appears to accept the very premise that had led to the Flood in the first place. If “the devisings of the human heart are evil” from the start, the Flood has not changed that. God’s decision not to destroy humanity ever again with a Flood is narrated as if God has himself learned something in the process. For theologians who assume a Greco-Roman view of God as all-knowing and all-powerful, this narrative may pose a number of philosophical questions. If we see, though, that
earlier parallels in Mesopotamian literature see the Flood as caused by the irrational rage of Enlil—and that Enlil learns something important in the process—the theological questions may be resolved by the need to tell a story where God has neither rival nor anyone else to hear his deliberations.

We should mention an important addition to the Flood story in *Gilgamesh*. The divine figure who “remembers” humanity in Mesopotamian literature is, as in this version, the Mother Goddess. When the great gods become terrified with the extent of the damage—they have, after all, destroyed, literally, their meal ticket, for Mesopotamian thought is pretty consistent in seeing humanity as created in the first place to work, mainly to maintain the gods so that the gods may live a life of leisure—it is the Mother who repents her complicity in the Flood. We will see that she challenges Enlil at the end of the story. What is surprising—even shocking—about the *Gilgamesh* version is the identification of the Mother Goddess with Ishtar. The move reemphasizes Ishtar’s (and Uruk’s) importance to the story. It is, though, unprecedented: for all of her many attributes, Ishtar is nowhere else a Mother Goddess.

The biblical Flood story is told in a relatively straightforward way, with the one God speaking to the pious Noah and telling him the reason for destroying life on earth—even pointing out that at the end of the Flood God will make a covenant with the humans who have survived. Because the storyline is straightforward, there is no conflict among the gods and no problem with the optimistic ending of the story. There is only a lingering question about that storytelling device of anthropomorphism. Depicting God as if the divine were like humans, thinking, seeing, regretting, grieving, remembering, even walking with the righteous Noah could raise the question: if God had known every aspect of human history before it occurred, why would God have allowed something to happen which brought Him grief? The Western tradition will later wrestle with this question under the larger question, why is there evil in the world? But even those who raise such a question rarely consider what the story could be pointing out: that even God can learn from experience.

The storytelling technique in *Gilgamesh* does indeed raise that question. No sooner have the high gods sworn an oath to bring about the Flood (for reasons never explained), but they begin to quarrel among themselves. The story turns on the clever god Ea and his clever assistant, Utnapishtim. How can humanity be saved without Ea simply breaking his oath? Ea’s solution has its subtleties, and as we shall see, Ea wins out in the end and the powerful Enlil is finally persuaded that what he had done was wrong. In learning from the experience Enlil blesses Utnapishtim and his wife, translating them into something like the life of the gods. He does not announce a covenant with surviving humanity.

Ea’s first move is to inform Utnapishtim of the coming Flood. If he had done this directly, he would have violated his oath. So he speaks to the reed fence, knowing that Utnapishtim would hear him and will be clever enough to figure out what to do. At this point Ea does not reveal directly that the Flood is coming. He uses indirection, including what looks like large ethical precepts to allow Utnapishtim to understand him. His advice includes
proverbs that may or may not have been traditional wise sayings in Mesopotamia. They follow a formula approaching paradox: tear down what is most valuable (the house), and use the materials to leave (build a boat); prefer “life” to riches and possessions. (Ea will tell Utnapishtim to take the possessions with him anyway.)

Students of Akkadian have long recognized that one of Ea’s speeches to Utnapishtim is particularly crafty in the use of metaphors to conceal the truth without actually lying about the Flood. The passage deals with an issue that is never raised in the Bible. Although most children’s versions of the story depict an old man (and usually his sons) struggling to build a massive wooden boat, the Bible says nothing about the actual work involved. Noah is instructed in what he is to do; the next verse has the LORD telling Noah to enter the boat. In Gilgamesh Utnapishtim recognizes a problem. What is he to tell the people about the boat? Ea gives him a solution so clever that the unsuspecting people are even co-opted into building the boat for Utnapishtim. When the work is completed, Utnapishtim even throws a party for workmen, a feast like the greatest of annual festivals, the New Year’s Festival. Then the narrative turns to depict the terrible destructiveness of the Flood, which, of course, destroys all the workmen.

How are the people co-opted? Here is Ea’s solution to Utnapishtim’s dilemma.

**Ea’s Advice to Utnapishtim**

Ea shaped his mouth, saying,
Saying to me, his slave,
“You—you may say this to them:
‘Enlil hates me—me!
I cannot live in your city
Or set my feet on Enlil’s ground.
I will go down to the Apsû, to live with Ea, my bēlu.
He will rain down on you plenty!
An abundance of birds, the rarest fish.
The land will have its fill of harvest riches.
At dawn, bread
He will pour down on you—showers of wheat.’” (11.36-47)

Even in translation the audience can enjoy the bitter ironies in this speech. Utnapishtim is to twist the simple message that Enlil, lord of the earth, will make the land invisible. The storm will tumble bird and fish together. (Bird and fish symbolize the water air above and the water below the earth.) The people will indeed find “abundance,” but it will not be what they will be expecting. The last lines of the speech complicate what on the surface seems very straightforward. Ea, as lord of the waters—rather like the Greek god Poseidon (and Roman Neptune)—will indeed provide the waters of the Flood. He dwells in the abyss thought to be below the earth’s surface. (Our English “abyss” is one of the few loanwords that can be traced to Akkadian ăpsû—and even earlier to Sumerian ăbzu.) The Flood will bring the world to chaos, a pretty good approximation of the abyss that will happen when the cosmic waters break through the barriers that normally hold them in place.
To Utnapishtim’s fellow citizens this would be good news. He designs the boat, assists the others in the building of it—presented in some detail—and stows away oil, silver, gold, all living creatures, and all his “kith and kin.” The people rejoice in their good fortune.

**Gilgamesh on the Boat**

The construction the ark or boat is described in more detailed in *Gilgamesh* than in other extant versions, including the Old Babylonian account in *Atrahasis*, which may be older but is very close in its handling of the construction of the ark.

We are more interested here in the details that will be picked up in later traditions, but here are the essential lines. Ea tells Utnapishtim to build a boat whose length and breadth will be the same, and it should be covered with a roof “the way the Apsû is covered” (11.30-31). The Apsû, as we have seen before, is the watery dwelling of Ea himself.

Ea provides Utnapishtim with the clever speech to gull the people into building the boat, as in *Atrahasis*. Broken lines point to the carpenter, the reed-worker, the child and even the pauper helping out. They build the boat to Utnapishtim’s instructions and then, as in *Atrahasis*, the community enjoys a great festival like the New Year’s feast itself. When the storm begins, however, there is no equivalent of the poignant message in *Atrahasis* where the sage feels terrible for the destruction he knows will soon occur.

According to *Gilgamesh* 11, the hull of the boat was to be an acre in area. Ten rods were the height of the sides and the sides of her roof. There were six decks, divided into seven. The interior was divided into nine compartments. Bilge plugs, punting-poles, and the tackle are prepared. Pitch, tar, and oil are used, and “two myriad” of oil stowed away on board. One can only guess how such a boat would act in a flood.

There are apparently two glancing references to the “door” that will feature in so much commentary later. When the weather looks foreboding, Utnapishtim enters the boat and has his “hatch” (*babu*, “gate” or doorway, rather than *daltu*, “door”) sealed by the boatman, a certain Puzur-Enlil, who is given Utnapishtim’s palace and its riches for his troubles (11.93-95). Does this mean that, ironically, he too shall be destroyed along with the palace?

Later, when the storm has calmed down, Utnapishtim opens a “vent” (*nappashu*, 11.135). Sunlight falls upon his cheek and he kneels, weeping. (An alternative translation has fresh air touching the side of his nose.) The “vent” is not the same as the gate earlier. It is an air vent or small window.

It is possible that Utnapishtim’s markedly emotional response to what he sees, with all the people “turned to clay” and the flood plain “flat like the roof of the house,” he now responds as *Atrahasis* had him responding when the storm had just begun.

Certainly the Akkadian versions of the flood emphasize the terrible loss of life. *Gilgamesh* gives even less reason for the flood than *Atrahasis*, where the “noise” of the rising population of humankind led the high god, Enlil, to demand the destruction of humanity. In *Gilgamesh* Enlil’s decision is strikingly capricious and unreasonable. There is little in
the careful description of the boat and the flood that would lend itself to the allegorical readings later generations would find in the story.

**Destruction**

The destruction that follows is described vividly. Andrew George has analyzed the poetic devices used in identifying the gods who actually carry out Enlil’s orders (11.101-106). A god whose role it is to take care of the irrigation system upon which the floodplain depended, Errakal, is seen “uprooting” moorings. One of the gods is Ninurta, often identified as a son of Enlil and whose most prominent characteristic is as a fierce warrior. The Anunnaki gods were a group that came to be identified with the lower world, including the underworld. Adad is a major Storm God. Before the storm hits, Errakal, Ninurta and the Annunaki gods are forcing water from below to flood the earth and torching the ground. Then as Adad passes by there is stillness—then darkness. George provides the stages taken in transliterating and translating the lines and marks the careful use of pauses and stresses in the lines. He notes the sequence of consonants r-k-l in the first line of the passage and the “heavy alliteration of the consonant m in ll. 104 and 106, a device which evokes the thunder rumbling on the horizon and also heightens the tension like a slow drum-roll.” As in other places in *Gilgamesh* the poet employs chiasm in l. 102: verb, noun; noun, verb.

The gods themselves weep at the destruction. At the height of the devastation, at the midpoint of the story, *Gilgamesh* presents a rather different scene than we find in the biblical account. Where in the Bible, at the midpoint, God “remembers” Noah and all the animals in the boat (Genesis 8:1). In *Gilgamesh* a goddess cries out “like a woman giving birth.” It is Ishtar. The next line identifies the goddess as bēlet ili, Lady of the Gods, the Great Mother. (Again, note, only in this text is Ishtar identified with the Mother.)

The great gods are “curled up like dogs” in their fear when Ishtar speaks up.

**The Great Goddess Repents**

The gods themselves were terrified by the Flood:
They shrank back, fled upward to the heaven of Anu.
Curléd up like dogs, the gods lay in the open.

Ishtar cried out like a woman giving birth,
the sweet-voiced bēltu of the gods cried out,

‘The old days are turned to clay
since I spoke evil in the Assembly of the Gods.
How could I speak evil in the Assembly of the Gods?
And declare war for the destruction of my people?
I myself gave birth to my people!
Now like the children of fish they fill the sea!’

Even the Anunnaki wept with her;
The gods, wet with sorrow, were weeping,
Their lips parched and feverish.” (11.113-26)

The hurricane continues for “six days and seven nights.” On the seventh day the Flood ends. Utnapishtim kneels and weeps when the weather grows calm. The boat runs aground on the mountain nisir (now read Nimush). Utnapishtim sends out a dove, but then it returns to the boat. He sends out a swallow, and that, too, returns. Finally he sends out a raven, and the raven does not return.

Clearly the larger shape of the story and many of the details are shared by both Gilgamesh and the Bible. But as soon as the parallels are noted, the differences in emphasis are made evident. This comparative method provides even more pronounced differences when the conclusions are placed together.

In both cases, after the boat has survived the Flood and the Noah-figure has sent out birds to determine if the floodwaters have receded, the Noah-figures disembark and provide sacrifices to the divine beings.

And Noah went out, his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every crawling thing, and every fowl, everything that stirs on the earth, by families, came out of the ark. And Noah built an altar to the LORD and he took from every clean cattle and every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled the fragrant odor and the LORD said in His heart, “I will not again damn the soil on humankind’s score. For the devisings of the human heart are evil from youth. And I will not again strike down all living things as I did. As long as the days of the earth—

seedtime and harvest
and cold and heat
and summer and winter
and day and night
shall not cease.”

And God blessed Noah and his sons and He said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And the dread and fear of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the heavens, in all that crawls on the ground and in all the fish of the sea. In your hand they are given. All stirring things that are alive, yours shall be for food, like the green plants, I have given all to you. But flesh with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat. And just so, your lifeblood I will requite, from every beast I will requite it, and from humankind, from every man’s brother, I will requite human life.

He who sheds human blood
by humans his blood shall be shed,
for in the image of God
He made humankind.
as for you, be fruitful and multiply,
swarm through the earth, and hold sway over it.”

(Genesis 8:18-9:7)
God then establishes a covenant with Noah and his descendents—all of humanity—and sets up a bow, the rainbow, in the heavens as a sign of the covenant and a reminder to him of the covenant and that he will never again destroy the earth with water.

The conclusion to the biblical account of the Flood is so packed with new principles that societies exist even today that follow the ethical norms given to all humanity after the Flood. (Note that biblical text assumes, as the Sumerians did, that humans were vegetarians before they became carnivores.) The revival today of the Noahide Laws (the “Seven Laws of Noah” discussed in the Talmud) that are considered binding on all humankind, may be related to the very condensed principles Ea articulates in *Gilgamesh* (and in *Atrahasis*).1866

It is, of course, this renewal of the earth, the covenant-treaty with humanity, and the happy injunction to be fruitful and multiply (again) that makes the story so sunny and appropriate, especially, for children. The violent destruction of humans and animals is downplayed, where in the *Gilgamesh* the slaughter is so terrible that even the gods are frightened. The major change created by the Flood is in the education of the high god who demanded the destruction of humanity.

Here Utnapishtim leaves the boat and offers sacrifice. Already there is a difference. In *Gilgamesh* the offering consists not of meat but only of vegetation, mainly aromatic plants and seeds. In the Bible, the sacrifice is of animals, *clean* animals only of course, as in the later Temple sacrifices; but the emphasis on the shedding of blood is tied to important commandment that the taking of human and animal life must be requited—and the new principle that animals may now be killed for food.

**The Great Goddess Remembers**

Again Utnapishtim is speaking to Gilgamesh.

“I sent out an offering to the four winds,
set up an incense offering at the top of the ziqqurat.
Seven and seven cult-vessels I set up.
Beneath them I poured reeds, cedar and myrtle.
The gods smelled the sweet fragrance—
the gods smelled the sweet fragrance—
and the gods gathered like flies over the bēlu of sacrifices.

From afar the bēltu of the gods came down.
She lifted up the flies of lapis lazuli Anu had made for their courtship:
‘Gods, let me never forget this, by the power of the lapis on my neck.
Make me remember these days and never forget.
Gods, come near the incense—
but do not let Enlil near the incense,
for without thinking it through he brought on the Flood,
and numbered my people for slaughter.’

As soon as Enlil arrived
he spotted the boat. Enlil was furious. He was filled with rage at the gods, the Igigi. ‘Has the breath of life escaped? No human was meant to live through the devastation!’

Ninurta shaped his mouth to speak, saying to warrior Enlil: ‘Who but Ea could do such a thing? Only Ea knows how to do everything.’” (11.156-79)

At the Heart of the Flood
George Smith’s discovery of a Flood story in *Gilgamesh* was an instant sensation not only in England but wherever biblical stories counted. The Prime Minister himself, William Gladstone, attended the lecture when Smith announced his find. Smith’s major study of Akkadian literature bears the title, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*. Since one passage from Tablet 11 has been called the closest parallel of any Mesopotamian text to the Hebrew Bible, the Flood has generated countless studies since the 1870s.

It is generally agreed that the Flood was not part of the collection of Gilgamesh tales made in the Old Babylonian period, i.e., the early part of the 2nd millennium BCE. The Old Babylonian stories certainly had Gilgamesh searching for “life” after the death of Enkidu, but if Gilgamesh was trying to reach Siduri or Utnapishtim, it appears that the Flood was not a part of the story then. It is one of the most striking additions to *Gilgamesh*, and it has given rise to much speculation about how it fits into the larger narrative.

Besides the inevitable comparison with the Flood story in Genesis, the account in *Gilgamesh* looks back to the Old Babylonian *Atrahasis*, where the Flood takes up the third of a three tablet story of conflict between the gods and humans—and more importantly, a conflict among the high gods themselves. There are some similarities between *Gilgamesh* and a Sumerian version that is only partly reconstructed, and between *Gilgamesh* and the Greek summary of the story by Berossus. Berossus and *The Sumerian Flood Story* are closer to each other than either is to *Gilgamesh*.

Comparing Flood Accounts

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<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Supposed Author &amp; Title</th>
<th>Noah-Figure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td><em>The Sumerian Flood Story</em></td>
<td>Ziusudra</td>
<td>ca. 1600 BCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Nur-Aya, <em>Atrahasis</em></td>
<td>Atrahasis</td>
<td>1702-1682 BCE</td>
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Our interest in Berossus is prompted by significant contrasts between his Babylon-centered story and *Gilgamesh*, which, though it does not mention Uruk, is set in the Sumerian south. Berossus sees the northern cities of Sippar and Babylon as the key elements in the story. The collective knowledge of humankind is hidden away in Sippar before the Flood, and dug up after the Flood, when it is transferred to Babylon. Quite unlike the Old Babylonian *Atrahasis*, which is known mainly from a text probably composed in Sippar and is identified as having been composed during the reign of a Babylonian king, Berossus’s account is very much a product of northern Mesopotamia.

Comparison of the Noah-figures in Mesopotamian accounts of the Flood reveals a contrast between traditions in which the Noah-figure is a king and traditions in which he is a priest. In his survey of Flood stories and king lists, James R. Davila concludes that the earliest king lists do not include the Noah-figure as king of Shuruppak. Even the proverb collection, “Instructions of Shuruppak,” does not mention the name. The name appears only in king lists after the Flood narrative had become widely disseminated.

Rather than as king of Shuruppak, the Noah-figure appears in early texts as a “priest.” He is identified as a *gudu* or a *gudapsû*. (The latter title includes the underwater home of Enki, the *abzu* or *apsû.*) The *gudu* was “anointed” and a very high ranking official of the temple, though his exact duties are not known. He may also have been an *ensi* or *shāʾīlu*, a dream interpreter. The dream interpreter frequently appears in lists with the diviner (*bārū*) and the *āshipu*. He is a purifier as well as a dream interpreter. The secret Enki provides is sometimes considered a dream, and sometimes not a dream. However the secret is transmitted to Utnapishtim, *Gilgamesh* presents him as a loyal servant of his god, a role appropriate to a temple officiant. His role in *Gilgamesh* is much like his counterpart in the older *Atrahasis*, where he is clearly a priest and not a king. Davila leaves open the possibility that Utnapishtim, though he is not called a king in *Gilgamesh* and kingship is not mentioned in the narrative, may nonetheless have been
perceived as a king,\textsuperscript{1871} since the city is mentioned and his father, Ubara-Tutu, is named—suggesting the dynastic principle we have seen in king lists.

The Flood in \textit{Atrahasis} has many points in common with \textit{Gilgamesh}, but it the Flood is only part of a work that may be seen as beginning with Creation and ending with the Flood, and the creation of humankind is very important to that story. One of the structural elements that ties \textit{Atrahasis} to \textit{Gilgamesh} and both to the Bible is an episode that constitutes the center of the narrative.

The long tradition of retelling the Flood story and commenting on the different versions is taken up in the Excursus below, “On Interpreting \textit{Gilgamesh}.”

\textbf{Genesis and \textit{Gilgamesh}}

Gary A. Rendsburg has shown that, if the story of the Flood in Genesis is considered a unified, coherent narrative, it parallels the narrative in \textit{Gilgamesh} point by point and in the same order.\textsuperscript{1872} In challenging the widespread notion that the Genesis narrative was stitched together by combining two sources, the Yahwist (J) and the Priestly (P) sources, Rendsburg largely follows Gordon Wenham’s analysis of the story.\textsuperscript{1873}

Rendsburg identifies nine features shared by the Bible and the account in \textit{Gilgamesh} that influenced the biblical story: material, dimensions, decks and population of the ark; the Flood itself; the mountaintop landing, sending out of birds, setting free the animals and sacrifices.\textsuperscript{1874} Of these the sequence in which the animals are freed before the sacrifice is performed is the most puzzling. Genesis 8:15-19 has Noah sending all the people and all the animals out of the ark—then sacrificing clean animals and clean birds (8:20). One might have thought the selection of animals to be sacrificed would be made before the animals had been dispersed.

In \textit{Gilgamesh} the same sequence appears, but it does not lead to the same questions because, after three different birds are sent out of the ark, and one did not return, Utnapishtim claims that he “sent them out to the four winds” (11:155-56),\textsuperscript{1875} without specifying who “they” are. (The four winds may not merely suggest that birds had been released; the reference could be to all the inhabitants of the ark dispersing across the earth.) The problem of clean animals and birds does not appear in \textit{Gilgamesh} because, in sharp contrast to Noah’s sacrifice of animals, Utnapishtim sacrifices only plants that give off fragrant scents (reeds, cedar, and myrtle). The gods are attracted to the scent.

The biblical account, then, reflects Israelite sacrificial rites, even though the story then creates a problem. On the other hand, Rendsburg noticed that the Mesopotamian emphasis on the gods savoring the fragrant sacrifice is retained in the biblical account, where Yahweh “smelled the appeasing fragrance” and said to himself that he could never again curse the earth because of humanity, “because his heart contrives evil from his infancy” (8:21). The polytheism of Mesopotamian thought is transformed in a monotheistic retelling of the story. But Rendsburg points out that the anthropomorphism of God’s smelling the fragrance is found only here in the Bible.\textsuperscript{1876} While following the \textit{Gilgamesh} account of the Flood point by point, in matters where it counts most—the
“morality factor” absent in *Gilgamesh*, the covenant established, and the dry land that is mentioned in the biblical account—the Bible diverges from the older source.

Reading the biblical Flood narrative as a coherent, unified whole, then, reveals even more clearly than the division of the text into Yahwist and later Priestly versions the strong influence of *Gilgamesh* on the Bible.

**Identifying the Center**

A great scholarly effort has been made to distinguish different narrative sources of the Torah and to date the sources to establish the composition history of at least the first five books of the Bible. The Flood story has been a particularly difficult narrative to distinguish the older “Yahwist” source from a later “Priestly” source. An excellent analysis has been proposed by Norman C. Habel. With its roots in the late 17th Century CE and developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Documentary Hypothesis traces, among other things, the different names for God in the Pentateuch. The Flood story is, in this approach, considered a composite text that is difficult to separate. Habel finds a significantly different vocabulary used in the early “Yahwist Account” (where the tetragrammaton YHWH is employed) and the later “Priestly Account” where the plural *Elohim*, “God”) is employed. Here is an example from Habel’s analysis.

**Two Speeches from Genesis: The Flood**

**From The Yahwist Account: Genesis 6:7**

And YHWH (the LORD) said, I will blot out (machcach) from the earth (adamah) the men (adam) that I created (bara)

w y’mr yhwh ‘mchh ‘t—h-‘dm ‘shr—br’ty m-‘l pny h-‘dmh

man and beast, the creeping things, and the birds of the sky;

m-‘dm c’d--bhmh c’d--rms c’d—cwp h-shym‘m

for I am sorry (naham) that I made them.”

by nchmty by csyhm

**From The Priestly Account: Genesis 6:13-14**

Then God (Elohim) said to Noah, “I have decided to put and end to all flesh (basar),

w y’mr ’lhym l-nh qç kl-bsr b’l-pny

for the earth (ereç) is filled with lawlessness (chamas) because of them.

ky—ml’h h-‘rç chms m-pnyhm

So I am about to destroy (shachath) both them and the earth.

w-hnny mashchythm ‘th—h-‘rç

Make yourself an ark (teban) of gopher wood (gphr);
Rhetorical Criticism: Chiasmus

A very different approach, Rhetorical Criticism, taken by Gordon Wenham, challenges the Documentary Hypothesis and sees instead a unified narrative. Wenham sees a chiastic structure in the biblical Flood story. Schematically, it looks like this.

The Shape of the Flood Story in Genesis 6-9

A Noah (6:10a)
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 (7:1-3)
H 7 days waiting for the flood (4-5)
I 7 days waiting for the 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 (8:1)
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 (9:1-4)
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)
A similar chiastic pattern obtains in *Gilgamesh*. Note the centrality of “God Remembers Noah” in Genesis and “The Great Goddess Repents” in *Gilgamesh*.

**The Shape of the Flood Story in *Gilgamesh* Tablet 11**

A  Location of Utnapishtim and Wife (Shuruppak) (11.11-13)

B  Gods, especially Enlil, decide to send the Deluge (14-18)

C  Ea speaks to the reed fence (19-22)

D  Ea’s *turru* (23-27)

E  Build a Boat (28-31)

F  Utnapishtim responds to Ea (32-35)

G  Ea’s advice to Utnapishtim (36-47)

H  Preparing the Boat, Festival, Entering (48-88)

I  The Flood begins, destruction (89-112)

J  The gods respond to the destruction (113-15)

K  THE GREAT GODDESS REPENTS (116-23)

J’  The gods respond to the destruction (124-28)

I’  The Flood ends, Utnapishtim’s response (129-45)

H  Preparing to Leave the Boat (146-55)

G’  Utnapishtim’s offerings to the gods (156-62)

F’  The Great Goddess responds to Enlil (163-70)

E’  Enlil sees the Boat (171-79)

D’  Ea’s *turru* (180-94)

C’  Ea admits disclosing the vision (195-97)

B’  Enlil blesses Utnapishtim and Wife (“like us gods”) (198-203)

A’  Location after the Flood (source of rivers) (204-05)
Note that, like many oral compositions, the story moves toward the maximum force of the Flood, reaches a central point, and then moves in the opposite way, with each element in the decline of the Flood matched by its growing intensity. For our purposes, the center, according to Wenham, is the statement that in the midst of the Flood God remembers Noah.

If we focus on *Atrahasis*, we see a similar movement toward a center. Tablet III highly emphasizes the destructive force of the Flood. The destruction is so intense that the gods themselves are filled with terror and retreat to the highest heaven. Deprived of their food and drink—the very reason humans were created, to work so that the gods do not have to work, the primary work being the production of food for the gods—the gods come to suffer along with the dying humanity. The Great Goddess of *Atrahasis*, the “midwife” of the gods and the chief Mother Goddess, Nintu (also called Mami), grieves for her lost “children.” *Atrahasis* had previously told of her role in creating humankind. After many years the “noise” of humanity had irritated Enlil (or Ellil). The “noise” has been interpreted by Anne Daffkorn Kilmer as overpopulation. While this may seem strange at first, consider that in the Sumerian south of Mesopotamia the more the cities grew, the more vulnerable they became to the ancient scourges of city life: plague, famine, and Flood. Most of *Atrahasis* indeed points to a cause of these killers: Enlil, upset by the “noise,” bullies the other gods in the Assembly to agreeing that humanity must be destroyed entirely. Only Enki/Ea holds out and finds crafty schemes to keep a remnant of humanity alive. In these efforts he is aided by the human who listens to him. The only human to survive the flood is known by his epithet, *atra-hasis*, the overly-wise one.

When disease and famine do not finish off humans, the last attempt ordered by Enlil is the Flood, and it creates a particularly difficult problem for Enki to solve. He had subverted the will of Enlil in the earlier attempts, but Enlil demands that Enki swear an oath to support the Assembly. We will see how this works itself out in *Gilgamesh*. The same device—trickery, deception—is used in *Atrahasis*. The conflict between Enki and Enlil is runs through all attempts by Enlil to destroy humankind. In *Atrahasis* the conflict is ultimately resolved, as it is in *Gilgamesh*. (Many of the myths of Enki involve conflicts with gods and goddesses, and the conflict is usually resolved by the clever Enki, who then offers a reconciliation between the contestants.)

The center of both *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis* is, though, something else. Nintu is so upset that she had been complicit in the destruction of her “children” that her speech is really the turning point of the narrative. In a sense she, like Yahweh, “remembers.” For her, though, it is the terrible loss of life that makes her inconsolable. And she challenges Enlil for initiating the process.

Many have noticed the theological difficulties with the biblical Flood, nearly all of them flowing from the monotheism of the Bible versus the polytheistic character of Mesopotamian religion. There is no place in the Bible for a Mother Goddess. Indeed, there is no place for a conflict between Yahweh and any other god, so the story has to
incorporate an anthropomorphic deity who forget and remembers, in an interior monologue, that allowing humanity to survive the Flood is part of the plan.

Nintu’s speech moves the other gods. When Enki enables one man to survive, she again moves in a challenge to Enlil. The situation gives rise to another eloquent speech by the goddess. (She denounces Anu as well as Enlil, a point that will later be dropped in Gilgamesh.)

Ea’s Response to Enlil
Ea takes responsibility for his deceptive actions. His challenge to Enlil incorporates the final wisdom of the Flood story. Rather unlike the rather sunny promises that bring the biblical Flood story to an end, Ea places demands on the gods, especially Enlil, to deal justly with humans, even evildoers. (Note that in Tablet 11 Utnapishtim is not identified as a “king,” and Enlil is never given his usual title as King of the Gods. It is as if Enlil, in his oppression of the people, has violated the first ethical principle of kingship.)

“Ea shaped his mouth to speak, saying to warrior Enlil:
‘You, sage of the gods, warrior,
how is it—how could you—without thinking bring on the Flood?
Punish the one who commits the crime; punish the evildoer alone.
Give him play so he is not cut loose; pull him in so he is not lost.

Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let lions rise up and diminish the people!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let the wolf rise up and cut the people low!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let famine be set up to throw down the land!
Instead of your bringing on the Flood, let plague rise up and strike down the people!

I, I did not unhide the secret of the great gods.
The over-wise one, a vision was shown to him; he heard the secret of the gods.
Now you decide what to do with him!”  (11.180-197)

The challenge to Enlil and the demand for justice are clear enough here. Ea accuses Enlil of acting irrationally, without talking through the plan in the Assembly of the Gods. Where other stories of the Flood identify the cause of the Flood as the evil propensities of humans, this version places the blame on the gods themselves.

Nevertheless, the Flood will have cosmic consequences. Human life will from now on be limited. The catalog of fates that will keep the number of humans down has a resonance in other ancient literature. Famine, plague and flood are, as we have seen, the dangers specific to settled, civilized populations. The lion and the wolf remind us that Gilgamesh distinguishes clear the civilized world and the wilderness outside the walls. Curiously for an Iron Age that saw increasing violence from organized warfare, the catalog does not list war. Since such warfare was so essential to the role of the king, possibly the absence of war on the list—its presence would provide a kind of natural or normal justification for the practice—is another implicit qualification of kingship.
Once again Ea emphasizes the destructive powers of nature and the gods. Just as Mesopotamian thought considered humans as, essentially, workers who relieved the gods from the need to labor (especially in providing food and drink), humans are in no way the pinnacle of creation, even though creation stories show that we preserve in ourselves a piece of the godhead. Just as humans are not the center of the universe, there is no talk of a grand resurrection. Utnapishtim prepares us for the response of the furious “warrior” Enlil.

**Oppression and Justice**

Even the gods must learn from experience. There may be a question of justice here. (Ea’s stern conclusion to the Flood story suggests that.) But the turns taken by both The Goddess Ishtar and “counselor” Enlil are prompted by empathy. At the center of the Flood story in both *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh* the Great Goddess of the piece “remembers” her children, grieves for their loss, and demands that Enlil take responsibility for the decision to bring on the Flood. In order to do this, she must recognize her complicity in the Assembly of the Gods.

Enlil’s recognition of his error leads to blessing both Utnapishtim and his wife. Turnings what is essentially a curse upon all humankind to a blessing recalls Enkidu’s curse and then blessing of the *harimtu* in Tablet 7, but Enlil’s recognition is, of course, on a cosmic scale and changes history. For much of Mesopotamia, the Flood changed history by having kingship “descend” from the gods to humans. For Uruk, the change brings The Goddess to earth as her Eanna descends and eventually ends up in her greatest city.

The Prologue to the “Laws of Lipit-Ishtar” (ca. 1930 BCE) provides an insight into the understanding of kingship centuries after it had become the dominant form of rule in Mesopotamia. Lipit-Ishtar was the fifth in the First Dynasty of Isin, the city that came to dominate Mesopotamia after the collapse of the Ur III dynasty. Lipit-Ishtar claims that the gods An and Enlil gave kingship to the goddess Ninisina, i.e., the nin of the city Isin and called Lipit-Ishtar to the “princeship of the land.” Ninisina is often taken as a local form of the goddess Ishtar.) In Isin the ruler calls himself *sipa*, that is, “shepherd.” But as ruler of other major cities Lipit-Ishtar uses other appropriate titles:

- in Nippur, also *sipa*
- in Ur, *engar*, “husbandman,” i.e., farmer
- in Eridu, *mush-nu-tú-mu*, “he who does not forsake the city”
- in Uruk, *en*, as we have come to expect
- and finally Isin again—and the lands of Sumer and Akkad generally, *lugal*

The “Laws of Lipit-Ishtar” is not the earliest of the Mesopotamian codes of law. The “Laws of Ur-Namma” (ca. 2100 BCE), king of Ur (and originally from Uruk, it appears), was earlier. Both share with the famous Akkadian code, the “Laws of Hammurabi” (ca. 1750 BCE), a prologue that establishes the king’s commitment to guarantee the law. Martha T. Roth points out the frames—prologues and in some cases epilogues—establish “the role of king as the divinely authorized guardian and administrator of justice.”
Modern readers of these law codes are often disappointed at how pedestrian they are, fixing the prices of things and establishing rules of inheritance and the like. Roth makes the important point that none of the codes are comprehensive or exhaustive. There is no complete “law of the land.” Conspicuously absent for those who are familiar with the Torah is anything like the Ten Commandments, with their negative apodictic, like “Thou shalt not kill.” Some were apparently set up on stone tablets that could be consulted. But the codes that have a frame emphasize the king’s commitment to justice. The protection of the most vulnerable persons in the realm, widows and orphans, are sometimes singled out as primary responsibilities of the king.

The high gods are mentioned frequently, especially An and Enlil as establishing kingship. Lipit-Ishtar claims to be the “son” of Enlil and the “heart’s desire” of Inanna. Enki/Ea is mentioned in a number of the prologues and epilogues. (The “Laws of Hammurabi,” which has Shamash delivering the Law to the king, mentions both Enki and Ea by name.) Ninsun and Nisaba, famed for their wisdom, and Babylon’s Marduk are also cited.

The Mesopotamian law codes, then, provide an historical and cultural context for the Akkadian Flood stories that take both the Great Goddess and Enlil to task for their failures to deal justly with humankind—at least in the opinion of Enki/Ea and his messenger, Utnapishtim/Atrahasis. *Gilgamesh* alone among the Flood stories identifies Ishtar with the Mother Goddess.

**The Turru of Ea**

The admonitions of Enki/Ea in *Gilgamesh* do not, then, reflect the actual codes of law, but they do establish a new order after the Flood, and that order involves principles of justice that do in a way reflect the famous biblical tradition. While the Ten Commandments are well known in the West, they comprise a tiny portion of the *tôrâh* (“instruction”), whose laws are far more involved with the “sins” that make priests impure, many of the sins unintentional.

One of the advantages of schematic displays of the Flood in Genesis and in *Gilgamesh* is that they explain the repetition of motifs before and after the center. Genesis 6:18-20 establishes a Covenant with Noah that is balanced after the Flood with the Covenant with all flesh (9:8-10). In *Gilgamesh*, what might be called Ea’s turru, a kind of response that makes a person retract from, e.g., taking an oath, or retreat from an earlier position, the equivalent to the biblical covenant with all flesh is Ea’s response to the destructiveness of the Flood. Instead of a Flood, humans will henceforth be subject to natural forces that will keep the population low, that is, will reduce the “noise” that so bothered Enlil. Instead of a Flood, humans will die from predatory animals (lion and wolf) and from the famines and plagues that create such difficulties for settled populations. This compromise between the positions of Ea and Enlil is prefaced by a straightforward appeal for divine justice: punish (only) the one who commits the crime (the *bêl hitti*) and the one who does evil (the *bêl gîllati*). Humanity should not be punished collectively for the fault of individuals.
Ea’s challenge to Enlil is paralleled by the rather cryptic instruction to Utnapishtim. Before Ea instructs Utnapishtim in the kind of boat he is to build, Ea tells the “man of Shurippak” to tear down a house and build a boat; to abandon riches and “seek life;” to scorn possessions and hold onto “life.” To do this Utnapishtim will have to load the “seed” of every living thing onto the boat. The instructions, though given indirectly through the reed fence, has the sound of a universal ethical norm. That it appears to be qualified by Utnapishtim, who loads his treasure onto the boat, the principle is a correction for humanity itself. The chiastic pattern of the storytelling splits Ea’s wisdom as it does God’s principles in Genesis. An oral retelling of the story would make the patterning clear and the aesthetic pleasure in recognizing the patterning would reinforce the message.

_Atrahasis_ Tablet III, which provides another, probably earlier version of the story, also displays a chiastic narrative pattern and a parallel to Ea’s split turru.

**Enlil Blesses Utnapishtim and His Wife**

“Enlil came up into the boat.
He took my hand and picked me up.
He brought my wife up and had her kneel at my side.
He touched our foreheads and, standing between us, he blessed us.
‘Up to now, Utnapishtim has been human.
Now Utnapishtim and his wife will become like the gods.
Let Utnapishtim live far away, at the source of the rivers.’
So they took me far away, to live at the source of the rivers.

_In your case, now, who will assemble the gods for you
So that you can find the life you are searching for?’_” (11.198-206)

Gilgamesh has been laboring hard to find the one human who has escaped the common lot of humanity. What he discovers is the craft of Utnapishtim and his wife.

In spite of its similarities the _Gilgamesh_ Flood ends differently from the biblical account. A remnant of humanity and all other living creatures has, of course, been saved. Utnapishtim—and, note, his wife—are given a special blessing. As we have seen, the one constant feature of Mesopotamian thought is that humans must die. Utnapishtim and his wife are the great exceptions to the rule. Their situation is rather like the hero Herakles in Greek myth. When Odysseus goes searching for him in the Underworld, where, as in Mesopotamian thought, a pale shadow of all humans end up, Odysseus finds only the shadow of Herakles—but is told that the real person lives with the immortals. There is some question about Utnapishtim and his wife. Are they divine or does “like the gods” indicate that they are not fully divine? They do not dwell with the gods. It is true that they live beyond the Waters of Death in a place that is the source of the earth’s rivers. Since the cosmic waters are the domain of the god who has saved them, Ea, this is a special place where a human can live forever.

The Lady of the Gods, who earlier had been identified with Ishtar, challenges Enlil, charging him with that he brought on the Flood “without thinking.” The original
The possibility adopted here is that Enlil has bullied his irrational decision through the Assembly of the Gods. Like a tyrannical human king, the King of the Gods has acted like a despot. We take Ishtar’s charge, and Enlil’s raging when he notices that life has survived in spite of his decision, to mean that Enlil had not thought through the Flood and must learn something in the process. He does. Ea makes the case against him, and Enlil relents.

Ea makes two very different points. The significance of the first is easily lost on the reader since it is stated in such a terse way, in the manner of proverbs. In essence it reveals—or invents—a very profound ethical principle: only the offender (sinner, criminal) should be punished. (The point is reversed in the biblical story. There all humans except for Noah are declared guilty; only the blameless survives.) And the ruler ought to have some compassion for the one who strays.

If the first point demands justice (for the guilty alone) and advises mercy (in other cases), the second point is almost brutal in proposing a terrifying exchange. If the gods wish to keep the number of humans low, to avoid population it is better to have a natural world that is hostile to human life. To the traditional fears of settled communities, famine and plague, Ea adds another that seems perhaps remote to the modern world: predatory animals. While lions and wolves are mainly nuisances today, wild animals still presented a threat to many in the ancient world.

Rather than the comforting ending of the Flood in the Bible, where humanity becomes once again bound to God and where the natural world is healthy in its cycle of the seasons, where nature is even enhanced for humans in that we are allowed to eat meat, the *Gilgamesh* Flood story ends in a still-grim reality.

**Utnapishtim’s Wife**

Before Gilgamesh has a chance to respond to Utnapishtim’s Flood story, Utnapishtim hurls a challenge at him: who will stand up for Gilgamesh in the Assembly of the Gods—as Ea (and finally Enlil) had in Utnapishtim’s case? Prove that you, too, could live a life like that of the gods: stay awake for one week. Since Gilgamesh has been defined as the sleepless one early in *Gilgamesh* and has slept (if at all) only at the end of The Bull of Heaven episode, this is an amazing challenge.

The Sleep Test brings in a new character, one often overlooked but a significant addition to the story. Like the Quest for Life, possibly the major legacy of *Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim’s Wife is to live on for centuries whenever the Flood is retold. As a figure providing wisdom, sometimes as a personification of Wisdom herself, Utnapishtim’s wife takes a special place in Gnostic mythology.

Utnapishtim’s wife, or perhaps better generically “Noah’s wife,” is all the more remarkable because different traditions portray her as one who carries gnosis to those enlightened ones who are able to understand it—and as one of only two women mentioned by name in the Qur’an as an archetypal betrayer of men. Because she remains
anonymous, Noah’s wife is often ignored in readings of *Gilgamesh*. In sharp contrast to her garrulous husband, the wife at first glance seems to epitomize the marginalized, silenced females in Middle Eastern societies—evidence, perhaps, that the status of women diminished from Sumerian times through the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE.¹⁸⁸⁹

She does, in fact, have very little to say. But I think her presence, and her few spoken lines are far more important than they first appear.

Utnapishtim’s wife appears in two of the six columns in Tablet 11. At the end of the flood story, she is raised, as we have seen, with her husband, to the special status that Gilgamesh himself may be seeking.

As in the Sumerian flood story—but quite unlike the biblical flood—the wife is given a prominent place and translated into a kind of divine state along with her husband, although she is given no specific role to play in rescuing humanity. She remains silent, though. Since the flood story is presented by Utnapishtim himself, and is clearly a story whose wisdom requires Gilgamesh’s complete attention to understand, the storyteller may be following a long-held tradition in the Middle East, where men are advised not to discuss their wives with other men—even to mention their names.

No sooner does Gilgamesh hear the story of the Flood but he is given The Sleep Test, which he fails miserably. If he cannot stay awake, how can he expect to live in this exalted status? Utnapishtim comes up with a clever way to convince Gilgamesh that he has been asleep for a week, as the wife fulfills a traditional role in baking bread each day. Easily overlooked is the very brief exchange between Utnapishtim and his wife when Gilgamesh falls asleep.

Utnapishtim said to her, to his mate,
“Look at this hero who is seeking Life!
Sleep blows over him like a wet haze!”

His mate answers Utnapishtim The Faraway:
“Touch him, so the man will wake up.
Let him take the road and return in peace,
Go out the gate and return to his land.”

Utnapishtim says to her, to his mate:
“Humans are trouble and will give you trouble.
Come on, bake his daily bread and line them by his head,
And score the days score on the wall.” (11.211-221)¹⁸⁹⁰

Here the wife offers her advice, a compassionate response to Gilgamesh’s plight. Note that she asks that he return home in peace (*ina shulme*), as it appears he eventually does.

“Humans are trouble,” *raggat amēlūti iraggiki*, Utnapishtim tells her. Utnapishtim sees humans (*amēlūtu*), not men in particular, as bad (*ragāgu*),¹⁸⁰¹ so he rejects her advice and instead proposes a scheme that will convince Gilgamesh that he is unfit for divinity. The key words are difficult to translate exactly. The word *raggu* (seen in the
ancient world as equivalent to Sumerian níg-érím) is generally “wicked” or “evil,” and appears frequently with synonyms and antonyms (like “law-abiding” and “criminal”). In its various forms—raggish, rīggatu, ruggugu, targīgu—the root largely generates terms for injustice, tingeing on violence. Andrew George prefers, “Man is deceitful, he will deceive you,” while Benjamin R. Foster has, “Since the human race is duplicitous, he’ll endeavor to dupe you.” Stephanie Dalley translates the line, “Man behaves badly: he will behave badly towards you.” In the Flood story Utnapishtim tells he offers no explanation for the gods’ decision to flood the earth. This line, which ties a man, Gilgamesh, to humankind, could be Utnapishtim’s explanation, the way Atrahasis attributes Enlil’s wrath to the “noise” (rigmu) raised by a numerous people and the Bible suggests that violence is the cause of God’s anger.

Gilgamesh is like other humans, in Utnapishtim’s view. If Gilgamesh is prone to violence, the line would reflect Siduri’s first view of him and possibly Utnapishtim’s assessment of him when the hero comes into his view. On the other hand, if humans are deceptive, Utnapishtim may be thinking of Gilgamesh as crafty, the way a follower of Enki/Ea should be.

Whatever the nuance of Utnapishtim’s observation about humanity and Gilgamesh might be, the device he comes up with, The Sleep Test, works. Gilgamesh awakens, refreshed. He tells Utnapishtim that, no sooner had he dozed off but Utnapishtim touched him and he awakened. Utnapishtim points out the bread by his head, from dried up and leathery through the stages of moldy gray to the fresh loaf still on its coals.

Gilgamesh is crushed by the facts. He laments that a thief has taken hold of his flesh. Where he had once held celebration in his bed-chamber, now Death lies there. Wherever he turns, he finds only Death.

The Purification of Gilgamesh

At the request of his wife, Utnapishtim will offer Gilgamesh a parting gift, one that has about it the terrible irony that marks Gilgamesh’s journey at every stage. Gilgamesh is given another “secret” of the gods, a plant called “The Old Man Will Be Made Young.” Gilgamesh is elated. He does not eat the plant himself, significantly enough. The plan is to return to the city of Uruk and give the plant to the elders before he tastes it himself, so that they will be revived before he will be. It is a remarkable awareness of the other—and, as I interpret the lines, an acceptance by Gilgamesh of his role as king.

In a terrible twist, though, the plant is lost. Gilgamesh must return home without the life-giving plant.

Often ignored in the narratives of the Flood and the life-giving plant is the moment of transformation for Gilgamesh. The movement from despair to a healthy-minded recognition of the other is described in terms entirely consistent with the earlier symbolism in the story. Immediately after Utnapishtim banishes the boatman, he tells Urshanabi:
The man you led here: matted hair covers his body. 
Skins have destroyed the beauty of his flesh (\textit{dumuq shērēshu}).
Take him, Urshanabi, and lead him to the washing-place.
Let him wash off the filthy hair in water like one who is pure.
Let his skins be thrown off; have them carried to the sea;
let the goodness of his body shine forth.
Bind his head with a new headband (\textit{parsīgu}).
Let him put on a garment, the robe of life (\textit{shubat baltishu})
so that he can return to his city,
that he can complete his journey.
Put on him the elder’s robe--and let it be new always. (11.249-60)

Given the transformation, the return to Uruk takes on greater significance. What does the return of Gilgamesh mean? Urshanabi is no longer to travel to the place where Utnapishtim and his wife live, but Gilgamesh is prepared to return home. At this point, though, Utnapishtim’s wife intervenes.

\textbf{The Wisdom of Utnapishtim’s Wife}

Utnapishtim’s wife comes to Gilgamesh’s aid again in a rather peculiar turn to the story. Gilgamesh is crushed by his failure and once again sees only death before him. Utnapishtim closes off the possibility that other humans will make the journey to him by cursing the boatman. The best he can offer Gilgamesh is a purifying cleansing and a new robe—and a new role as elder in the city of Uruk. As column v ends, the two men board the boat and begin their return to Uruk.

The turn comes just at the beginning of the sixth (and final) column on Tablet 11. The wife chides Utnapishtim for neglecting the time-honored role as host.

\begin{quote}
Then his mate said to him, to Utnapishtim the Faraway:
“Gilgamesh has come here—has strained, has toiled—
What have you given him as he returns to his land?” (11.271-73)
\end{quote}

\textbf{The Gift}

Immediately Gilgamesh and the boatman turn about, and Utnapishtim this time follows her advice. The great irony at this point is that Gilgamesh returns only to receive what appears to be the greatest gift—a plant like a box-thorn, found deep in the waters, with which a man can renew his youth.

Gilgamesh finds—and loses—the magic herb. It is the last and, as it is the closest he comes to achieving the “life” he has sought, most bitter of the many disappointments he has suffered. He and the boatman return to Uruk, and Gilgamesh calls attention to what is his most conspicuous compensation, the walls of his city, and his role there as king.

The author of a children’s illustrated series on Gilgamesh offers an intriguing spin on the loss of the plant. In \textit{The Last Quest of Gilgamesh}, Ludmila Zeman depicts a serpent slithering down a tree and snatching the plant from a sleeping Gilgamesh. The serpent and the tree suggest the biblical Garden of Eden. The explanation of the serpent’s theft
of the flower is, however, that it is Ishtar’s revenge for having been rejected by Gilgamesh. (Gilgamesh mourns his loss, but is suddenly given back Enkidu—with the help of the woman who had seduced and humanized Enkidu at the beginning of the story.)

*Gilgamesh* 11 does, of course, feature a snake (*sērēu, nēšu sha qaqqāri*), but no hint that Ishtar is behind the theft. Indeed, the return of Gilgamesh to Uruk, as I read the text, is a return to his role as *en*—and a special relationship to Ishtar. But Ludmila Zeman’s bold interpretation is useful in seeing the later episodes of *Gilgamesh* tied to earlier ones, particularly where the goddess Ishtar is concerned.

**The Other Secret**

The gift Utnapishtim offers Gilgamesh is another secret of the gods.

Utnapishtim not only follows his wife’s advice but picks up his wife’s language. Unless the wife, as another proxy of Ishtar, is acting in a particularly crafty way, her advice to Utnapishtim to act like a good host should be taken in a straightforward way, although the results are not what the receiver of the gift expects.

Utnapishtim agrees that Gilgamesh has traveled far from his land to find Utnapishtim, and he “has strained, has toiled.” For these hard efforts Utnapishtim reveals to Gilgamesh another “secret.” It is a *pirishtu* of the gods. Such secret lore was carefully guarded. A room in the temple could be called the *bit pirishti*, and a special keeper of the sacred house, the *ērib-bit-pirishtu*, had access to that room.\(^{1895}\)

The secret is a certain plant (*shammu*) with special properties. To reach it Gilgamesh must descend to the *apsû* (11.282), the watery dwelling of Ea. The word “plant” here is a common term, but it has special characteristics. Utnapishtim describes it as like a box-thorn, whose thorns, like a wild rose, will prick the person who attempts to take it. (Perhaps it was considered an underwater healing plant like the Plant of Birth eaten by pregnant women to protect the fetus and provide a safe delivery, which was seen as a journey through waters.) If Gilgamesh can possess the plant, something marvelous can happen. Exactly what effect Utnapishtim is describing is, alas, not entirely clear: part of the key line is missing in the text. When Gilgamesh is able to bring the plant back, though, he calls it a *shammu nikitti* (or *nibitti*).\(^{1896}\) While this (obscure) phrase is usually translated as a plant of rejuvenation, the *nikkitu* part is a term meaning fear, worry or concern. Hence Benjamin R. Foster takes it as a “cure for heartache” and Andrew George prefers the “Plant of Heartbeat.” The rejuvenation is derived from the way it is characterized. It is a plant by which can regain his stamina (Foster) or his vigour (George). This is his *napishtu*, the term used frequently in *Gilgamesh*, usually with the sense of life, vigor, vitality, and good health, but which has a wide range of meanings. In this context it probably approximates our *libido* as well as any term in *Gilgamesh*.

In another key line, Gilgamesh indicates what he will do with the plant. To Urshanabi he reveals that he will take it into the “heart” of Uruk, give it to an elder to test it, and then eat of it himself. The plant will be called “The Elder Has Become a Young Man Again” (11.298).
Gilgamesh does not eat it at once—and ends up losing it. The final blow to his desire to find “life” comes when he stops for the night, finds a pool of water, and bathes in it. A snake, which Gilgamesh will call the “Lion of the Earth” (11.313), catches the fragrance of its scent (!) and snatches it away. As it turns away, the snake sloughs off its skin. The snake shows that it is indeed a plant of rejuvenation, but Gilgamesh is crushed. What has he gained, ultimately, from his toil? The secret plant had benefited only the snake. The enigmatic lamentation is beautifully expressed in Foster’s translation:

Now, floodwaters rise against me for twenty double leagues,
When I opened the shaft, I flung away the tools.
How shall I find my bearings?
I have come much too far to go back, and I abandoned the boat on the shore.

(Foster 95)

Immediately after this, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi continue their journey, break bread, and stop for the night. Then they arrive in Uruk.

The plant of “life” and its loss to a snake by a water channel is the culminating episode in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” as it is here. Like the reference to the hero’s killing The Bull of Heaven that opens that poem, the plant of life (gish-ti) offered by the “wise physician” shows that the en, under the guise of Amaushumgalanna, is one of the earliest exploits of the Urukean hero.1897

In Tablet 11 the poet/briqueteur provides the relatively long Flood story followed by increasingly compressed bricks of narrative: the Sleep Test, the Purification of Gilgamesh, the voyage back that is interrupted by Utnapishtim’s wife, the Gift of the Plant and its loss. Before Gilgamesh and Urshanabi finally reach Uruk, the very brief lament at the loss of the Plant is worth considering. The three lines can easily be overlooked. The syntax is torturous. It is the last utterance of Gilgamesh before he describes Uruk to Urshanabi, the repetition of lines from the First Prologue that completes the frame.

In one sense the lament puts into the mouth of Gilgamesh a recollection of what had just happened before the snake stole off with the Plant. He had found a pipe or channel—a rattu—that allowed him to descend to the depths of the waters. With the help of heavy stones attached to his feet, Gilgamesh reaches the very bottom of the apsû. This is the dwelling place of Ea. (The signs at the end of the line are not clear, but they may identify the apsû as the mushab of Ea.1898 At any rate the identification of the apsû/abzu with Ea/Enki is one of the most persistent links in the traditions of Sumerian religion.)

The descent into the deep waters has reminded many readers of techniques used by pearl divers in places like Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf. It is appropriate that the secret plant that offers “life” is to be found in the apsû where the god of living waters has a dwelling so dark that no light penetrates it. It is the last reference to Ea in the eleven tablets of Gilgamesh. (In Tablet 12 Ea provides another opening to the underworld, a takkapu, that will allow Gilgamesh to communicate with Enkidu.) It is fitting that Utnapishtim would know a secret guarded by his master, Ea.
Gilgamesh ascends by releasing the heavy stones. This may recall the mysterious Stone Things Gilgamesh destroyed and nearly prevented his making the voyage to Utnapishtim’s dwelling. Now he laments that he had released the unūtu, the implements he had used, i.e., the stones. Once again certain unspecified stones have prevented him from accomplishing what he desired—in this case returning to the apsû.

The waters in this episode are called by different names. Initially they are the apsû and the tâmtu (the vast encircling sea or ocean). Now Gilgamesh is prevented from returning because the edû is rising far and wide. The word denotes the onrush of water, like a floodtide, which is bearing down on Gilgamesh. The choice of this term, which can mean a river flood, is striking, since it refers to a rare and catastrophic flood—much like the Flood narrated in this tablet—rather than the annual high water expected in the rivers, the mīlu.1899

It would be impossible to find the “signs” to the place where he could dive again, especially since he had not left the boat on the shore where he had emerged from the sea.

In very few lines the descent into the apsû and the ascent with the Plant, followed by the lament at losing the possibility of repeating the heroic action resonate with the great themes of Tablet 11 and in many ways of the poem as a whole. Gilgamesh has been told over and over again that he will not succeed in his great quest. He comes closest to achieving his goal with the Plant in Ea’s apsû. The lament is as tricky a piece of poetry as is found in Tablet 11. This is the last chance the reader has to gain an insight into the inner life of Gilgamesh. The loss is clearly upsetting to Gilgamesh, but he is not crushed by it. This may explain the clarity of his description of Uruk upon his return to the city.

It may also explain the poet’s decision to open Gilgamesh with a Gilgamesh who has seen the Depths—the nagbu, yet another name for the cosmic waters that are found in Tablet 11: abūbu and edû (the floods), apsû and tâmtu (the cosmic seas). We now know why he has seen “everything.” Involved everywhere there is water there lurks the crafty god and his dark wisdom.

**Speech Acts**

Gilgamesh is mainly silent in Tablet 11. Of the 328 lines, Gilgamesh speaks only 36 (including the formulaic introductions of speaker and listener). Utnapishtim is, of course, given the vast majority of the lines, since he tells Gilgamesh of the Flood. He addresses the Flood story to Gilgamesh, speaks to him, to Utnapishtim’s wife, and to the boatman. In a tablet where secrets are revealed and the god of all words, including deceptive speech, is always in the background, the reader is expected to look very closely at what might at first seem to be transparent talk.

Where Gilgamesh does speak, much of what he says has to do with death and loss. After the Flood story, he says nothing and promptly falls asleep. When he awakens, he protests that he had not slept, but faced with the evidence, he laments his lot. Death is everywhere. (Where he had spoken obsessively, compulsively about Enkidu in the previous tablets, he does not mention Enkidu’s name in Tablet 11.) Much of what he says comes in the late
episodes. After the Sleep Test he says nothing until he has descended into the depths and ascended with the Plant. Almost immediately he loses the Plant and laments its loss—but not without having the Plant long enough to form an intention to use it.

The lines where he tells the boatman of his intent to return to Uruk, try out the Plant, eat it himself and give it to the elders have been read in different ways. The lines (11.294-99) can be read as a preoccupation with himself or, as I read them, the first sign that Gilgamesh is thinking of himself as the proper ruler of Uruk. The reader has come to empathize with the intense suffering of Gilgamesh, especially on his long quest for “life.” He stage of the quest brings disappointment, but the process has finally brought him out of himself. And it is not simply that he is thinking of Enkidu. (Recall that the parallel in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh,” where he gains and loses the gish-ti, has nothing to do with the loss of a friend. The only “friend” Gilgamesh has in that poem is the god Enlil, his kuli, who is as closely associated with kingship in that poem as Inanna is of loving relationship she has for the one she has selected as her en.)

The reader has been put in a situation of following Gilgamesh through his ordeals and entering into his interior life even when he is not explicitly articulating his feelings. The gradual expansion of roles for Enkidu from the early Sumerian stories reaches its culmination in the late Gilgamesh. From having no presence at all in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh” and (naturally) in “The Birth of Gilgamesh,” Enkidu appears as the faithful servant, comrade in arms, friend and finally a most intimate friend. But he is not exactly needed for Gilgamesh to search for “life.” The empathy Gilgamesh develops for Enkidu as he completes his entire life is transferred to Gilgamesh upon the death of Enkidu. (Until that point the inner life of Gilgamesh is mainly hinted at through his heroic activities, not the expression of feelings.) The reader is drawn into the story of Gilgamesh in his agonized search for the meaning of life.

He may lose the one chance he has to change the fate of humans—the mysterious Plant at the bottom of the apsû—but he has learned enough to think of himself in relation to his citizens.

In his suffering we see a moment of clarity such as is found in certain Greek tragedies. The excesses of the Joy/Woe Man are gone: like Enkidu before his death, Gilgamesh has been healed, if not cured of the situation that marked him at the beginning of the poem. The return to Uruk will confirm this. The oppressor of Uruk’s youth has learned from his experience.

The Return to Uruk
As they arrive at Uruk, Gilgamesh speaks to Urshanabi the boatman:

Go up, Urshanabi, and walk the walls of Uruk.  
Inspect the foundation, notice the brickwork:  
see if the interior is not of burnt brick  
and if the Seven Wise Ones did not lay down its foundation.  
One square mile is city; one square mile a grove of date palms;
one square mile is a clay-pit;  
half a square mile the House of Ishtar.  
Three square miles and a half make up Uruk. (11.315-20)

Note two things operating in the return. Gilgamesh has come home as king and en. In the Mesopotamian (or at least Akkadian) idea of humanity, recall, the poles are the lullû-man, humankind in its primordial state, and sharru, king. Gilgamesh, far from oppressing the people as he had before, returns to help them. Secondly, the blockage at the death of Enkidu is clearly sexual. And this is overcome in the acceptance of Ishtar in the last two lines of Tablet 11. Gilgamesh has come home: to himself, to the city, to the sheepfold (11.313, the last of 26 references) and the goddess. He has accepted the Sacred Marriage.

If anyone could stand up for Gilgamesh in the Assembly of the Gods, it would have to be Ishtar. Gilgamesh returns with a sober wisdom and has overcome his melancholia. In the other episode in which health is a concern in Gilgamesh, no physical cure is offered. When Enkidu sickens, as we have noticed earlier, he is afflicted with what Babylonian physicians might have diagnosed as the “daughter of Anu,” and a cure might have been achieved astrologically or ritually. The poet is not, however, interested in showing that possibility. Rather, the poet introduces Enkidu’s horrible dream of the Netherworld. Beyond this life is yet more suffering. Enkidu bitterly curses the prostitute, the woman who had initiated him into manhood.

Enkidu is not cured in the episode. On the other hand, “wisdom” comes to him. The Akkadian text does not make explicit that he has gained wisdom. Rather, it says explicitly that his heart has grown quiet. He turns the earlier curse of the prostitute into a blessing. We would say that he was “healed.”

If, as I think, that the Enkidu of this version of the Gilgamesh story, which narrates neither birth nor death of Gilgamesh, is a proxy for Gilgamesh, the healing of Enkidu, which involves the ability to bless the harimtu who transformed him into a human being, anticipates the healing of Gilgamesh, when he returns to Ishtar, who, through the Sacred Marriage makes him godlike. (The transition is completed in the underworld, as it is for her lover, Tammuz.)

The acceptance, first Enkidu’s and later Gilgamesh’s, of the feminine militates against the interpretations that see Gilgamesh as anti-feminist. The feminine is everywhere in the poem: in Ishtar, Ishhara, Ninsun, Irini, in Siduri, in the Scorpion-woman, in Utnapishtim’s wife, and finally, to complete the loop, in Ishtar’s sanctuary, Eanna.

The difficulty in hearing the poem in this way is characteristic of Western thought, especially modern Western thought. What blocks our hearing are two interrelated biases that are only now (perhaps) being overcome. Time and again the advice given to Gilgamesh (though in the Old Babylonian version, not this one) is dismissed as hedonistic and decadent advice to abandon all “higher” concerns for the pleasures of the moment. The reduction of “seek life” to “hedonism” is one that reveals our puritan joylessness and
guilt-ridden sexuality more than anything else. The great Mesopotamian symbols sum up the *healthy* life: food and drink that give man life and at the same time a relationship with the community and the gods. The very affection by which the man and wife, parent and child exist: not in a bloodless, bodiless affection, but in the fullness of flesh.

We recall that “flesh” (*šīru*) of the gods in him. Mesopotamia did not split, as we have been inclined to do, “flesh” and “spirit” (*napishtu*), “life” (*balāṭu*) and the body (*zumru*). Rather, it is the living unity that matters and functions.

What was problematic with Gilgamesh is not that he was filled with “joy,” but that he obsessively repeated the festivities, like some celebrities today. The day and night festivities in Uruk exhaust the population and leave the king sleepless. This obsessive behavior is paralleled in the incessant repetition of his grief, when he is incapable of bringing his *nissatu* in line with conventional mourning. Only his encounter with Utnapishtim and his wife brings him both sleep and, not a return to obsessive festivity but to a normal relationship with his city, his work, and his “wife” Ishtar.

This should be kept in mind in listening to the treatment of the prostitute at Enkidu's death. The West still staggers under the burden of the violent biblical denunciation of the “Queen of Heaven” and the “Whore of Babylon.” Not surprisingly, the biblical prophets denounce ‘whoredom’ when they mean idolatry and false religion. Especially when Hellenistic tendencies to see the body as the enemy and as evil are strong, the prostitute is likely to symbolize depravity at the center of man's existence.

Against this Hellenistic/Gnostic tendency in the West is what is often described as temple prostitution in Mesopotamia. The temple women (not all of whom actually practiced prostitution, it appears) in the service of the great goddess were seen as women who had “knowledge” that could indeed be dangerous. A Sumerian proverb warns against marrying one, since she knows so many men. As Enkidu’s curse of the prostitute shows, she is in the nightmare vision of the world beyond. (The “sister” of the goddess of life, Ishtar, is the goddess of the netherworld, the terrifying Allatu/Ereshkigal.)

In mythic terms, Enkidu's curse of the *harīmtu* establishes her destiny—and the fate of all such women. She becomes (i.e., is) what he says she is. So too with the “blessing” which follows:

- May governors and noblemen love you.
- Even at a great distance men will strike their thighs in anticipation.
- Even farther away they will shake out their hair.
- No soldier will hesitate to drop his belt for you.
- He'll give you obsidian, lapis lazuli and gold.
- He'll give you earrings and jewelry.
- Even the *āshipu* (*mash-mash*) of the gods will let you enter.
- For you even the mother of seven will be forsaken. (7.153-61)

Certainly Mesopotamia saw in the feminine the great dualities Erich Neumann has brought to our attention: the Good Mother and the Terrible Mother, the Witch and the Virgin.
That the response to this complex on the part of the two “sick” heroes, Enkidu rejects the woman and then accepts her—is a reconciliation that “postmodern” thinking strives to do too, against the background of a single-minded anti-feminism.

One may wonder how a return to Uruk can be squared with Gilgamesh’s rejection of Ishtar in Tablet 6.

Recall that the central episode in Gilgamesh opens with Ishtar’s proposal and Gilgamesh’s rejection of the proposal. Ishtar flies into a rage and then flies into the heavens to retrieve the dreaded Bull of Heaven. The defeat of The Bull of Heaven leads to Enkidu’s crude insult to Ishtar and to the heroes’ joyous celebration—and to Enkidu’s death.

Paralleling the oppression of Uruk’s youths by Gilgamesh and Enlil’s oppression of humanity, Ishtar’s oppression of her lovers is yet another example of tyrannical rule. As Gilgamesh represents the case against Ishtar, each of her lovers has been hurt in the experience. The list includes:

- Dumuzi (= Tammuz), the lover of Ishtar’s youth
- The allallu-bird
- The lion
- The horse
- The shepherd
- The keeper of the date grove

Each of the lovers has his fate changed by the goddess who can even change male into female and female into male, the Great Goddess with a retinue of the most diverse and unusual deities and humans. From Gilgamesh’s perspective at the time this is a story of total loss. Dumuzi has a communal lamentation his death. The allallu-bird cries out for his broken wing. The lion is captured in pits. The horse is made into a swift battle weapon. His mother weeps perpetually for him.

As we noticed earlier, each successive figure in the list of lovers is described in more detail. The two humans who complete the list are given the most vivid accounts. The anonymous shepherd offered bread and meat to Ishtar day after day, only to be turned into a wolf that is attacked by his shepherd boys and their dogs. The man who tends the date-palm orchard has a name, Ishullanu, and his fate is the most detailed of all. His case is the one that closest resembles Gilgamesh’s own. She offers her love; he (mentioning his mother, who, recall advised Gilgamesh not to accept the goddess’s offer in the Sumerian version of the story) rejects her and is placed in a dreadful situation where he can move neither up nor down. (The situation suggests a man climbing a date palm.) Gilgamesh has cause to be wary.

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The brilliance of the poetry should not obscure another side to the story. At a glance the list suggests a theme in Gilgamesh that is struck early: the evolution of civilization itself. Ignoring Dumuzi for the moment, the list shows a change in the bird that enables the bird to survive in the wild: the apparently “broken” wing is a device that calls attention to the
bird and protects eggs and baby-birds in the nest. The captured lion allows protection from its prey—and in the context of Mesopotamian kingship, provided kings to pursue their royal sport of hunting lions released from their cages. Fitting out the horse with whip, spur and lash and training it for battle shows humans transforming wild animals into domesticated stock. (Recall that archaic cylinder seals show the en both hunting lions and domesticating animals.)

The shepherd who is turned into the wolf that would endanger the flocks is, admittedly, a reversion from the early stage of civilization to the wild. As Enkidu was being transformed from a beast-like state into a human being, Shamhat takes him to a shepherd’s camp, where he learns to eat and drink food processed by humans. Dumuzi, who heads the list, is most often seen as a shepherd and, as such, a liminal figure, neither completely human nor completely wild. All of Gilgamesh’s stories may well have been familiar to Mesopotamian storytellers, but the great variety of Dumuzi stories (and rituals) shows that the tempestuous love between the Great Goddess and the human she eventually transforms into something like a godlike state was probably the oldest and most popular myth known throughout ancient Mesopotamia.

In the love poetry Dumuzi is seen mainly as a shepherd, but while he contests with the farmer, he is also seen as sharing some features with the farmer. The farmer represents an advanced stage of civilization. The establishment of settled communities was prompted by agriculture, of course. The choice of human settlements in the Sumerian floodplain required a well-watered area. It is still possible to see the original centers of Iraqi cities and towns, watered by rivers or irrigation canals. In most cases they were oases where the ubiquitous date palm groves sprang up naturally and then were cultivated by humans to make them so productive. No better symbol of city life existed in ancient Mesopotamia than the cultivated date grove. The *Gilgamesh* poet needed to make no more than a reference to the date palms in the “heart” of Uruk—literally at the doorstep of Ishtar’s Eanna—to evoke the “inner” city. The protective walls, of course, represent the divide between the outermost city and the surrounding wilderness.

The story of Ishullanu is, of course, ironic in that Gilgamesh develops most fully the story that comes to represent his own situation more than the stories of the other lovers. As king and en of Uruk, Gilgamesh represents the highest development of civilization in the Sumerian city-state. Ironically, his quest for “life” takes him as far away from Uruk as was possible to conceive, and he finds himself trapped in a situation much like Ishullanu, neither here nor there. The resolution can come only when he returns to the walled city with Ishtar and her Eanna at the center.

It is never entirely clear from Gilgamesh’s list of Ishtar’s lovers why Ishtar changed their fates. Possibly all of them in some way resisted her proposal. As I read *Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh must go through an agonizing process to learn what his dual role in the city-state must be: king and lover of Ishtar.

Since the two powerful ruling deities, Enlil and the Great Goddess, had been oppressors and had had to learn from their experiences, I suggest that Gilgamesh in the central
episode of Gilgamesh has known only the unrepentant gods. The audience of Gilgamesh is provided a glimpse into the inner lives of these important figures and suffers with them as they remake themselves.

Enkidu is “healed” (though condemned to an agonizing death) in repenting the curse he laid on the harimtu who helped him make the transition from “primal human” to civilized companion of Gilgamesh. The insight that guided him is analogous to the insight Gilgamesh finally achieves—on an even higher level. The end of Tablet 11 brings us back to the opening lines of Tablet 1. He has “seen” the Depths and “heard” the dark secrets. “Healed,” he returns to Uruk to cut his experiences into a text that we can now read.

The approach taken in this interpretation of Gilgamesh has been influenced by a remarkable essay by Bernd Jager that appeared more than thirty years ago. In “The Gilgamesh Epic: A Phenomenological Exploration” Jager touched upon many features of the text emphasized here: the story line (with no interest in Tablet 12); Uruk and its walls; the “boundless and formless natural forces” that threaten the city, especially the Flood; the relationship between chasing (the Stalker) and seducing (the harimtu); and key figures in the poem, like doors and gates, circles; and the return of Gilgamesh to his city. Most of these themes and concerns have been discussed by interpreters of Gilgamesh over the years. Jager’s “phenomenological exploration” is unusual in highlighting the psychological conditions of both Enkidu and Gilgamesh.

Jager takes the position that reading is intersubjective. He envisions his “exploration” as a dialogue, a “table conversation,” between a “contemporary psychologist” and “an ancient Mesopotamian poet.” Not surprisingly, Jager brings many Western philosophers and theorists into the discussion: Plato, but also Kierkegard, Heidegger, Mircea Eliade, Gaston Bachelard, Rollo May and Erwin Straus. He returns often to the walls of Uruk, which figure the “human limits,” with their ultimate expression “as the other.” In dealing with the bull-image in the poem, especially the bullfighting that takes place in Tablet 6, Jager sees the city as a “sacred circle,” at its best a circle holding in a happy, civilized population. It is with the unhappiness of Enkidu and Gilgamesh, however, that the psychologist-interpreter is at his best. Jager thinks that Enkidu’s unhappiness is a reaction to the city, where the “natural” man cannot find a place and “longs for the vastness and the innocence of his former life.” His reaction is a “severe depression,” the poetic description of which “probably constitutes the first of that condition” in history. Jager notes the motif in Enkidu’s emotional expression of his “melancholia.” To Gilgamesh Enkidu complains that he has lost the power of his “arms.” For Jager, the motif of the “arms” returns to the arms of the woman (seeing the harimtu as both lover and mother). The psychologist sees in Enkidu’s melancholia a “failed evolution,” a “remaining hopelessly stuck in an impossible world while overcome with longings for paradise. Melancholia, and its twin sister paranoia, never move beyond childish purity, beyond the desire to surrender to God and mother.” Depression, for Jager, involves an experience of “a lack of boundaries, an absence of strong contours.” The “primary aspect of the world of depression” is, according to Jager, is its “uninhabitability.”
Gilgamesh, on the other hand, is marked by “adventure” and “nostalgia.” The “adventure” in this case is Gilgamesh’s “heroic” journey, which Jager likens to that of the “prototypical adventurer,” Odysseus. “Nostalgia,” within the “structure of depression,” however, “degenerates into a “wanton, measureless suffering because the homecoming of which it dreams lies prior to and beyond human reality and offers no resistance to a perverse imagination.”

Jager reminds us that the **algia of nostalgia** points to an “aching connectedness with the past.”

Jager’s detailed analysis of the adventures of Gilgamesh is still one of the most acute interpretations of the poem. For our purposes, though, it is the brief summary of “The Return” that caps his analysis, for it suggests at least a kind of relief for Gilgamesh. (Jager does not treat Enkidu’s response to Shamash in that key passage we have emphasized here.)

Jager notes that Gilgamesh bathes himself four times in the poem. “Bathing is a removing and an emerging, it forms a break in a straight path, but is is also a going to the depth and returning to the surface.” Bathing is a renewal that “makes possible a new beginning, a return to an origin.” Gilgamesh’s last dream of immorality is the the “marvelous plant growing near the bottom of the ocean.” The loss of the plant robs Gilgamesh of all his illusions. Jager sees in the plant, as we do also, the first time Gilgamesh speaks of his people, as he “wishes to share his treasure” with them. Even though he loses the plant, and his illusions, Gilgamesh is now “ready to live in contentment amidst his people.”

The road back to Uruk is cleared. The story “has come full circle” as the the Gilgamesh and Urshanabi approach the walls of Uruk. “The poem, like the city and like life, is delimited. The poet sings of limits which embrace a town, unify a poem and gather the substance of a life. That which delimits a city is also that which makes a city possible; equally, a life without the boundary of death would be deprived of all coherence.”

Bernd Jager does not deal with the various means Mesopotamia used to bring relief to the suffering of those like Enkidu and Gilgamesh. As with many interpreters of *Gilgamesh* who focus on the walls of Uruk, which brings both Gilgamesh and the poem as a whole “full circle,” the interior of the city, with the silent figure of Ishtar at the center is not an issue for Jager as it is with us. Nor is the action of Gilgamesh within the city upon his return: his inscribing his sufferings in a precious stone, as much (or more) permanent as the walls he had constructed. The end of Tablet 11 points to the relief of Gilgamesh as it was anticipated in the First Prologue. There, the language of relief—for Mesopotamia a mixture of poetry, magic, ritual, and theology—is captured in the same words as was used in Shamash’s correction of Enkidu’s attitude toward the *harimtu*. Gilgamesh always operates on a slightly different scale than that of his friend Enkidu. Entering the city of Ishtar provides him with relief and produces the writer as earlier Gilgamesh had been a **briqueteur** of poetry that was constructed orally.

**Notes to Chapter Nine**


See CAD 11.ii.276 for the range of meanings.


A discussion of this passage, together with a transliteration of the Akkadian, photograph of the tablet and a reproduction of the R. Campbell Thompson’s hand-copy of the text (courtesy of Oxford University Press) is provided in Gardner and Maier, 291-300, and reprinted in Maier, *Gilgamesh, A Reader*, 20-28.

George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation*, 213-21. Tigay noticed the odd stylistic variation in the Flood account in Tablet 11. Where otherwise Tablet 11 is consistent with the late version, the Flood itself does not seem to have been revised for its place in the tablet, 229-38; see also Gardner and Maier, 291.

Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 34.

George, 220.

On this form of chiasm, see “Chiasmus” at en.wikipedia.org .

Alter, 34-39.


After Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus*, 110. Gmirkin includes *The Sumerian King List*, which he considers to be much later than most scholars do; as is his date for *Gilgamesh*. The King List does not include a narrative of the Flood, but it does emphasize the importance of the Flood in changing human history by allowing kingship to descend from heaven. Estimates of the date when *Gilgamesh* was composed vary widely. Gmirkin suggests the early 1st millennium BCE, when the 12-tablet text was found in the Libraries of Assurbanipal; others suggest a date as early as 1600 BCE, roughly contemporary with *Atrahasis* for the author; Walther Sallaberger, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos: Mythos, Werk und Tradition* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2008), suggests the Isin II period (1157-1026) for the author, 94-97. Sallaberger places *Gilgamesh* within the period when many types of literature were canonized.


On sources, Rendsburg also refers to *Atrahasis*, where in an as-yet unpublished fragment Ea announces that, as in Genesis 9:11, there will be no other Deluge and that the human race will endure forever, 121.

The features are tabulated, 126.

George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh, A New Translation*, reads the lines as referring to the raven that did not return to Utnapishtim and that the sacrifice (incense) was made to “the four winds,” 94. Foster’s reading, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, supports Rendsburg, reading Utnapishtim “released all to the four directions” (and in the next line making offerings to the “four directions”), 89.

Philo was concerned, as elsewhere, with the anthropomorphisms in the passage, first with the apparent inconsistency that Noah offers sacrifice to both the LORD and God, where earlier only one aspect of the Deity had been involved, and then with the apparent repentance of the LORD God, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, II, *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (n.p.: Hendrickson, 1993), 830-31.

The “morality factor” may not been as absent from *Gilgamesh* if Ea’s *tarru* and Utnapishtim’s comment to his wife are included in the discussion. See below.

Rendsburg, 124-35.


For an overview of the approach with the different sources examined separately, see Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations*, esp. 1-20 and 211-23.


Roth, 2.

Roth, 4.

From the Akkadian verb *tāru*, with its great range of meanings. See CAD 18:273-78.
Chapter Nine: A Darker Wisdom


1890 For the wife’s speech, George = ll. 214-17; Parpola, *Standard*, = ll. 213-16.

1891 CAD 14:62 gives only this reference to *ragāgu* and takes its sense as “to be bad, wicked.” See also CAD 14 and 18 for *raggish, riggatu, ruggugu*, and *targīgu*. Compare the synonym *nullātu*, “malicious talk” (among other meanings), CAD 11.ii.333-34.

1892 Anderson points to these as the normal behavioral expressions that bring an end to the rituals of grief, 74-82.


1895 CAD 12.398-402.

1896 CAD 11.ii.223.


1898 Parpola fills in the break with [*mushab Ea*]; both Foster and George hesitate to add that detail.

1899 CAD 4.35-36.


1901 Attempts to square the advice of Siduri in this version with the Old Babylonian version, where she gives Gilgamesh the reasonable advice to return to “normal” life (with wife and child, especially), are not convincing, but that view may be reflected in the notorious Tablet 12, which is often ignored by translators, e.g., George and Foster. See Susan Ackerman, 129-30.

1902 For this very controversial question, see Henshaw, 191-323.

1903 Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 83; Gardner and Maier, 22.


1906 Jager, 23.

1907 Jager, 25.

1908 Jager, 27.

1909 Jager, 40-41.
Jager, 42.

Jager, 42-43.