

Remembrances of the Flood

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INTRODUCTION

The opening chapters of the biblical book of Genesis describe the earliest history of the human race. In addition to describing the creation of the cosmos and the spread of a fallen human race across the planet, it tells the story of a global, life-destroying flood. Three whole chapters, six through nine, are devoted to this unique event in the annals of history. This flood killed as many as a billion people, countless millions of animals, and completely reshaped the surface of the earth.¹ No historical event of a similar magnitude is recorded anywhere else in the whole of Scripture.

The cause of the flood was the wickedness of man. Indeed, "...every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." "The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind...from the face of the earth.'" (Gen. 6:5-7)*. There was one man on the whole earth, Noah, who was a man of "righteousness", "blameless" in his generation, and who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). The Hebrew word rendered as "blameless" by the NIV is an adjective meaning "complete" or "sound". The same Hebrew is used in Genesis 17:1, where the LORD asks Abram to walk with him and be "sound". Because of this "soundness", God chooses to save Noah and his family. God also uses Noah as a means to save many of the animals of the earth. Noah is to build an ark of very specific dimensions (Gen. 6:14-16). Into this ark he will bring not only his family, but also two of every kind of animal, and seven of every kind of clean animal.

The means of the earth's destruction is to be "a flood of waters" (Gen. 6:17, lit. from the Hebrew). The Hebrew word translated "flood" is "almost the proper name for *the* flood"² (italics author's). This flood will be sent to "destroy all flesh" (Gen. 6:17, lit. from the Hebrew). This will be no local flood, but something of universal destructive power. The "sluices of the heavens" and the "springs of the deep" opened, and it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. The waters covered the earth to a depth of 20 feet for 150 days. After a further 150 days the waters subside, and 40 days later Noah begins to check for dry land. He sends out a raven that does not return, and twice sends out a dove until it returns the second time with an olive branch. Noah, his family, and the animals then leave the ark. Noah offers burnt offerings of clean animals to God on a hastily built altar (Genesis 7:7 – 8:21).

* All Scriptural references are from the NIV unless otherwise noted

¹ Rehwinkel, Alfred. *The Flood: In the light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology*. (CPH, St.Louis, 1951) p.29

² Brown, F., S. Driver and C. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1906) p.550

God then “cuts a covenant” with Noah, and through Noah with all humanity, to “not cut off all flesh” from the earth through the waters of a “Flood” (Gen. 9:11, lit. from Hebrew). The sign of this covenant will be a rainbow. This covenant is unconditional: some have termed it a “royal grant” type of covenant.³ God also commands Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1, lit. from the Hebrew). These are imperatives in the Hebrew, the same commands given to Adam in the Garden of Eden, with the exception of the command to “subdue” or “rule” the earth.

This is the story of the global flood as related in Holy Scripture. If this Flood was the catastrophic event Scripture records it to be, then mightn’t oral and written traditions of this Flood exist among the various peoples of the earth? In fact, “the existence of the Flood traditions among the widely separated and primitive people is just what is to be expected.”⁴ This paper will compare the various flood traditions from around the world to the true account recorded in Scripture. In doing so, it will look for similarities in flood traditions from the same areas of the world, and from areas with similar geographies. It will attempt to determine to what extent these flood myths from around the world can be looked at as common memories of the global Flood described in Genesis 6-9.

FLOOD STORIES OF THE WORLD

Every continent of the world has peoples with flood stories or myths. These traditions are most common in the written literature of the Middle Eastern and European peoples, in Southeast Asia and its surrounding islands, and in North America. The flood traditions are least common in Africa.⁵ Typical examples of flood stories will be given, beginning with the written and oral traditions of Europe and the Middle-East, progressing through Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific Islands, and concluding in the Americas.

Europe

Europe has a rich written record of flood stories. The most important tradition, and the one that most closely resembles the Biblical Flood, is the flood of Deucalion. This flood story is attested to by a 2nd century AD author writing under the name of Apollodorus, and by the poet Ovid in the first book of his Metamorphoses. First, consider the story of Deucalion as recorded in pseudo-Apollodorus’ book, The Library. This flood was brought on by the wickedness of some of the men, especially certain tyrants who abused their power. These men bear some resemblance to the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4. However

³ Concordia Self-Study Bible - NIV. (CPH, St.Louis) p.18

⁴ Rehwinkel. The Flood. p.127

⁵ Rehwinkel. The Flood. p.129

Prometheus, having heard of Zeus' plan to flood the earth, warns one couple. These two people, Deucalion and Pyrrha, escape the flood in a chest-like ark, and float for nine days and nine nights. After the flood they land on a mountain and sacrifice to Zeus in thanksgiving for having been saved. They are then instructed to throw stones over their heads – *λααζ* – to repopulate the earth with *λαοι*. This provides an etymology for the Greek name for “people”.⁶ Plato describes this same flood in his dialogue entitled “Critias”. This reference to the flood of Deucalion by Plato, who lived in the 4th century BC, demonstrates the antiquity of the tradition. Plato actually writes that there were three floods before “the great destruction of Deucalion”.⁷

Ovid records the Roman tradition associated with Deucalion's flood. He writes that before the flood the great god Jove said:

“Mankind's a monster, and th' ungodly times /
Confed'rate into guilt, are sworn to crimes. /
All are alike involv'd in ill, and all /
Must by the same relentless fury fall.”

After the flood, Deucalion and Pyrrha pray to Jove for forgiveness of humanities sins. Rather than commanding them to “be fruitful and multiply”, Jove decides to recreate humanity. He tells them that:

“Mine be the care, new people to provide. /
I will from wondrous principles ordain /
A race unlike the first, and try my skill again.”⁸

Flood stories are found elsewhere in Europe, although they are not as close in detail to the Scriptural Flood story as those recorded in Rome and Greece. Scandinavia's Prose Edda is an example of one such story. The Edda is ancient saga of the genre preserved so famously in Iceland. It describes two traveler who encounter three kings, who tell them primeval stories extolling the courage of the giants and gods of yesteryear. One section of the Edda reads as follows:

“Bor's sons killed the giant Ymir, and when he fell, so much blood poured from
his wounds that they drowned the whole tribe of frost ogres with it - except for

⁶ Apollodorus. The Library. Sir James G. Frazer (trans.) (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1921, 1976) 3.8.1, 3.8.2

⁷ Plato. The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 2. B. Jowett (trans.) (Random House, New York, 1892, 1920) “Critias”

⁸ Ovid. The Metamorphoses. Horace Gregory (trans.) (Viking Press, New York, 1958) “Book 1”

one who escaped with his household; this one is known to the giants as Bergelmir. He climbed up on to his "lur" (boat hollowed out of a tree trunk; it can also mean coffin).and his wife with him, and there they were safe. From them spring the families of frost ogres.”⁹

A Celtic legend is similar, telling of how the flood came from the killing of heaven by the sons of heaven and earth, who were tired of being “squished” between them. A beneficent Titan saved a single pair of humans from the flood in a ship. In a Welsh story two men, Dwyfan and Dwyfach, escape a flood in a mastless ship with pairs of every sort of living creature. After the flood, they land in Prydain (Britain) and repopulate the world.¹⁰ A Lithuanian story is the most similar to the Scriptural account of all the northern European traditions. A supreme god sends two gods to destroy mankind because of their war and injustice. A few people and animals escape the flood by fleeing to the top of a mountain. As the waters rise, they climb into a nutshell dropped by the supreme god and escape the flood. Afterwards, the supreme god sends a rainbow to comfort those who survive the flood. One elderly couple on top the mountain help the god repopulate Lithuania¹¹.

Interestingly, a tradition exists in Turkey that associates a great flood with Alexander the Great. The great general is said to have built a canal through the straight of the Bosphorus in order to flood a Queen who would not pay him tribute. The Black Sea drowns the Queen’s town of Smyrna and would have destroyed most of the world, but Alexander opened up the Strait of Gibraltar and allowed the water to flow out to the Atlantic.

The Middle Eastern

The Middle-East, titular home to the Scriptural Flood narrative, is also home to the most closely related non-Scriptural written accounts of a global flood. Of these accounts the Gilgamesh Epic certainly stands out as one of the most important. The most complete edition of this Akkadian Epic dates to the 7th century BC, but portions of the story have been found on tablets that may date back to the 4th millennium BC.¹² The hero of the epic, Gilgamesh, encounters an immortal man named Utnapishtim. His immortality was granted after he survives a global flood. This flood is possibly brought on by the sins of

⁹ *The Prose Edda* Jean I. Young (trans.) (Cambridge, England: Bowes & Bowes, 1954) at: <http://www.angelfire.com/on/Wodensharrow/gylfaginning1.html> (Oct. 20, 2000)

¹⁰ Gaster, Theodore H. *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*. (Harper & Row, New York, 1969) at: <http://www.mythinglinks.org/ct~floods.html> (Oct. 20, 2000) p.92-93

¹¹ Gaster. *ibid.* p.93

¹² Lorey, Frank. “The Flood of Noah and the Flood of Gilgamesh”. (Vital Articles on Science/Creation, El Cajon, CA, 1997) at: <http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-285.htm> (Sep. 25, 2000)

mankind, as suggested in these cryptic lines from the Epic: “On the sinner impose his sin / On the transgressor impose his transgression!”¹³ Utnapishtim is given directions for building an ark, although the dimensions are slightly different than Noah’s ark. Utnapishtim’s ark is square, not rectangular, and has twice as many decks. Utnapishtim also saves the workmen who helped build the ark, and not just his family. The flood itself lasts seven days, the same length of time as the Scriptural account. The whole earth is not covered – there are fourteen mountains visible at the end of seven days of flooding. Utnapishtim’s ark comes to rest on one of these, and after seven days he begins sending out birds to look for dry land. First he sends a dove, then a swallow, then a raven. Utnapishtim then offers a sacrifice to the gods. The supreme god Enlil, surprised to see that anyone was allowed to survive, is convinced to bestow immortality on Utnapishtim and his wife:

“Thereupon Enlil went aboard the ship. Holding me by the hand, he took me aboard. He took my wife aboard and made (her) kneel by my side. Standing between us, he touched our foreheads to bless us: ‘Hitherto Utnapishtim has been but human. Henceforth Utnapishtim and his wife shall be like unto us gods.’”¹⁴

Summeria has a flood story in which a man by the name of Ziusudra is the main figure. This account, though much less elaborate than the Gilgamesh Epic, is very similar. For unknown reasons, the gods choose to destroy the five cities they had built. Only Ziusudra survives the flood in a “giant” or “huge” boat. Ziusudra is called “the preserver of the seed of mankind.”¹⁵ He too, after surviving the flood, offers a burnt offering sacrifice to the gods. The Chaldeans have their own very similar account in which the god Chronos warns the man Xisuthrus of a coming flood. Xisuthrus’ ark is to be “5 stadia by 2 stadia”, dimensions more similar to the Scriptural ark. He, too, saves his family and friends as well as all kinds of animals from the flood. Like Noah and Utnapishtim, he sends out birds to let him know if the flood waters have receded. He offers a sacrifice to the gods after the flood, and along with his wife, daughter and pilot is translated into heaven to dwell forever with them.¹⁶

Lastly, there is a Persian account of a great flood recorded in the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism. The melting of an overly abundant snow brings about this particular flood. There is no suggestion that this

¹³ The Ancient Near East, Volume 1. James B. Pritchard (ed.) (Princeton University Press, 1958) p.71

¹⁴ The Ancient Near East, Volume 1. p.71

¹⁵ The Ancient Near East, Volume 1. p.30

¹⁶ Smith, George. "The Chaldean Account of the Deluge". The Flood Myth. Alan Dundes (ed.) (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1988) p.42

flood will be a result of evil on the part of men. Ahura Mazda, the god of light, instructs Yima, the hero of the epic, as follows:

“...make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, and thither bring the seeds of sheep and oxen, of men, of dogs, of birds, and of red blazing fires. Therefore make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be an abode for man; a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, for oxen and sheep.”¹⁷

Africa

As was mentioned in the introduction, Africa has the fewest flood stories of any continent of the world. What stories there are have incredibly fantastic elements, and bear little resemblance to the Scriptural account except in describing a catastrophic flood. A few stories are worth mentioning to give a flavor for the type of account found on the African continent. First, there is a legend from Kenya of a woman who agrees to marry a man, on the condition he will not ask about her family. When he breaks this promise, her family's spirits drown the countryside with beer. Many people take shelter in caves.¹⁸ The Komililo Nandi people also have a flood story. In their account, Ilet, the spirit of lightning, came to live in human form in a cave high on the mountain named Tinderet. When he did so, it rained incessantly and killed most of the hunters living in the forest below. Some hunters, searching for the cause of the rain, found him and wounded him with poison arrows. Ilet fled and died in a neighboring country. When he died, the rain stopped.¹⁹

Three African stories that bear some similarity to the Scriptural account include the following account from Tanzania. When the rivers begin flooding, the god tells two men to go into a ship, taking with them all sorts of seed and animals. The flood rises, covering the mountains. Later, to check whether the waters have dried up, the man sends out a dove, and it comes back to the ship. He waits and sends out a hawk, which does not return because the waters have dried. The men then disembark with the animals and seeds.²⁰ In an account from the Ivory Coast, a charitable man gives away everything he has. The god Ouende rewards him with riches, advises him to leave the area, and sends six months of rain to destroy

¹⁷ “Vendidad”. *Sacred Books of the East*. James Darmesteter (trans.) (American Edition, 1898) at <http://www.avesta.org/vendidad/vd2sbe.htm> (Oct 21, 2000)

¹⁸ Abrahams, Roger D. *African Folktales*. (Random House, New York, 1983) p.336-338

¹⁹ Kelsen, Hans, 1943. "The Principle of Retribution in the Flood and Catastrophe Myths". *The Flood Myth*. Alan Dundes (ed.) (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1988) p.42

²⁰ Gaster, Theodore H. *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*. p.120-121

his selfish neighbors. The descendants of the rich man become the present human race.²¹ In a similar story from Cameroon, a girl lets a goat eat some of her flour, and in return for the kindness, the goat tells her there will be a flood. Only she and her brother escape. After the flood, they can not find mates. The goat reappears and says they can marry themselves, but they will have to put a clay pot with a broken bottom on their roof to signify that they are relatives.²²

Far East

The Far-East has so many flood stories, there is simply not room in a paper of this length to recount them all. Unlike the African legends, many of these stories are startlingly similar to the Scriptural account. First, there are two accounts from the Hindu scriptural tradition. The first concerns Manu, the first man. Manu is warned of a coming flood by a fish he has befriended. The fish tells Manu that when the year of the flood comes, “you will build a ship and come to me, and when the flood has risen you will enter the ship and I will save you from the flood.”²³ There is another Hindu myth about a great flood. “The Lord of the Universe,” to preserve king Satyavarata from dangers of the depravity of the age, sent him a large ship, and told him to gather himself, medicinal herbs, and pairs of brute animals aboard it to save them from a flood. Seven days later, the three worlds were flooded and darkened.

There are a few Far Eastern stories that, like the story of Manu, involve a fish. This theme also occurs in some North American flood stories. In a story from central India, a fish fed by a pious man warns him that a great deluge will come. The man prepares a large box into which he, his sister and a rooster embark. After the flood, the god Rama punishes the fish for warning the man of the flood and removes his tongue. The man is then ordered to repopulate the earth.²⁴ In a story from a northern Thailand, the warning of the flood comes from a mouse.²⁵

A number of Far Eastern flood stories begin with punishment being sent by the gods. Several regions of India, China, and many Indian Ocean islands speak of a great flood being sent because of humanity’s tyranny, warfare, or other wrongdoings. Sometimes the specific crime is the eating of a forbidden food, a theme repeated in North America. For example, the people of Kabadi, Northern New Guinea have a story about a fish that was not to be eaten. When the villagers eat the fish, a righteous man and his family and

²¹ Kelsen. “The Principle of Retribution in the Flood and Catastrophe Myths”. p.135

²² Kahler-Meyer, Emmi. "Myth Motifs in Flood Stories from the Grasslands of Cameroon". The Flood Myth. Alan Dundes (ed.) (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1988) p.251-252

²³ “Manu, the First Man”. Hindu Myths. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (trans.) (Penguin, New York, NY, 1975)

²⁴ Gaster. Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament. p.95-96

²⁵ Gaster. *Ibid.* p.96

many animals prepare for a flood and are the only ones to survive.²⁶ Other reasons given for a great flood include the love of a water demon for a human woman (Lushai, India), a quarrel between animals (Cochin, China), and the need for a new creation (Benua Jakun, Malay Peninsula and Batak, Sumatra).²⁷ The punishment stories are often the most similar to the Biblical account, including the saving of two people or a handful in a boat or raft who land on a mountain and repopulate the earth. Others stories, often from the same country, have little similarity with the Biblical account, other than describing “a great flood”.

Australia and Pacific Islands

Australia, most unusual of the continents, seems to have an inordinate amount of scatological and sexual references in their flood myths. A few of the Australian stories involve two sisters, rather than two men or a man and a woman as on other continents. Menstrual blood is prominent in some of the stories. Serpents, crows, and pelicans also play prominent roles, and the stories are often etymological in nature, describing why the animals are the way they are. An example of one Australian flood story that seems close to the Biblical account comes from Victoria State:

“Bunjil, the creator, was angry with people because of the evil they did, so he caused the ocean to flood by urinating into it. All people were destroyed except those whom Bunjil loved and fixed as stars in the sky, and a man and a woman who climbed a tall tree on a mountain, and from whom the present human race is descended.”²⁸

The New Zealand natives, the Maori, have a flood story that is somewhat similar to the Biblical account. In the distant past, the creator god Tane became angry that the tribes were fighting each other and not worshipping him. Two prophets came to teach the people the truth about god, but they refused to listen. In frustration, the prophets build a raft with a house on it, stocked it with food, and boarded two more men and a number of women. The priests then prayed for rain, which came and flooded the world for five days. After eight months, the waters thinned, and they landed on a mountain. The people on the raft were the only survivors.²⁹

²⁶ Gaster. *Ibid.* p.97

²⁷ Gaster. *Ibid.* p.99-100

²⁸ Berndt, Ronald M. and Berndt, Catherine. The Speaking Land (Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, 1994) p.297-300

²⁹ Gaster, Theodore H. Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament. p.110-112

Many of the Pacific islands have flood accounts as well. A story from the New Hebrides tells of a man, Qat, who builds a great canoe in the center of his island. Everyone laughed at him for building a canoe so far from the sea. When it was finished, he loaded it with his family and some of all the living creatures. A great deluge of rain came; the hollow in the center of the island filled with water which broke through the hills and carried the canoe out to sea. The Loyalty Islands have a similar myth, but their hero is named "Nol". The Fijians tell of a flood caused by the anger of the gods, from which there were only eight survivors.³⁰

The Americas

Almost every native tribe of the Americas has some form of flood myth. In fact, it could be argued that, outside of Asia, America has the richest universal flood tradition. Many of the tribal stories explain the origins of the peoples of the earth, especially the relationship between the various native tribes. Most of the stories include a great flood, a warning, and a small family or a couple of individuals escaping on a boat or by climbing a mountain. Sometimes the reason for the flood is fantastic, as in the story of the flood caused by a giant hitting his male organ with a shovel while bathing in the ocean, thinking it was a seal. But other times the reason is simply the anger of the god or gods at man's wickedness. The Skokomish of Washington State, the Hopi of Arizona, and the Tarahumara of Mexico all give man's warring and evil as the reason for a great flood.³¹ Stories from South America are very similar to those of North America. For example, the people of Panama tell of one man, his wife and family escaping a global deluge in a canoe. This family became the ancestors of all mankind.

A few unusual elements that appeared in Asia reappear in these stories. The Pomo of Northern California, like the Kabadi of Northern New Guinea, tell of a fish that was not to be eaten but was eaten anyway, causing a flood. The Skokomish of Washington State, like the Batak of Sumatra, tell of a few good people being saved from the flood by clinging to ropes lowered from the sky by the gods. Stories from both Greenland and the Toradje people of the Indian Ocean use seashells found on the tops of mountains as proof that their respective flood stories are true.

A few North American stories are not only similar to the Biblical account, but appear almost identically in other tribes clear across North America. An example of this is the story of the Hareskin and the Tinneh of Alaska, which is also found among the Montagnais of Eastern Canada. Kunyan (which means "Wise Man") foresees the possibility of a flood and builds a great raft. He tells other people, but they laugh at

³⁰ Gaster, Theodore H. Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament. p.106

³¹ Waters, Frank. Book of the Hopi (Penguin Books, New York, 1963) p.12-20

him. Then the great flood did come, with water rising higher than the trees and drowning all the people but the Wise Man and his family on his raft. “As he floated, he gathered pairs of all animals and birds he met with. Some time later, the musk-rat dived into the water looking for the bottom, but he couldn't find it. He dived a second time and smelled the earth but didn't reach it. Next beaver dived. He reappeared unconscious but holding a little mud.”³²

Interestingly, the flood stories of the native Americans are not isolated to areas prone to flooding. Of special note here is the flood story of the Papago people of Arizona. In this story, Montezume escapes the flood with the help of the trickster, Coyote, who warns him of its coming. They were the only ones to survive this flood which covered at least the “top of Monte Rosa”. The Great Spirit restocks the earth with people and animals with the help of Montezuma.³³

FEATURES OF THE FLOOD STORIES

What should a Christian make of this plethora of flood stories from all the corners of the earth? Some, such as Dr. Alfred Rehwinkel, believe that such stories are proof that “everywhere is found some trace of Flood tradition and a memory of a fearful catastrophe which destroyed mankind and left but one or a few survivors.”³⁴ Other scholars dismiss the possibility of any connection between these stories, believing them to be myths arising out of ancestral memories of horrible, but very local, flooding. There may be many families of myths, these scholars argue, but they cannot all be traced back to one, universal catastrophe. Which of these positions is the more tenable, given the evidence?

First of all, even if some of these stories are in fact mythologized recollections of the Flood, many of them may only be legendary accounts based on local floods. There is no need to believe that *all* flood stories are *either* recollections of Noah's deluge *or* local flood accounts. Some of them may be memories of Noah's flood, while others may be local. It is even possible that recollections of the Great Flood have been fused with stories of a local flood in the area, creating a new synthesized account. For example, many of the flood stories described above contain elements of the Biblical account: two people and animals surviving in an ark, for example. But other elements of the story, such as the origin of the water that caused the flood, seem to be of local origin. Islands near the sea attribute the flood to the rising of the sea (New Guinea); while northern areas attribute the flood to melting snow (Persia). Some stories, such

³² Gaster, Theodore H. Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament, p.117

³³ Erdoes, Richard and Alfonso Ortiz. American Indian Myths and Legends (Pantheon Books, New York, NY, 1984) p.113

³⁴ Rehwinkel. The Flood: In the light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology. p.128

as the Scandinavian and Celtic myths, are so filled with fantastic elements (a flood of blood?) that it is hard to see them as memories of Noah's flood. But alongside these fairy-tale flood accounts, in the very same country, flood accounts are found that are very similar to the Biblical account.

Second, the lack of flood mythology from certain areas, especially Africa, is noteworthy. The argument could be advanced that Africa's large deserts would make memory of a flood difficult to maintain. After all, if a people are not familiar with water, how will they continue to maintain a story about a world-inundating flood? This argument, however, does not explain the desert areas of the world, such as Mongolia and Arizona, where people do have stories of a global flood. The opposite argument could also be raised. If flood stories are local in nature, then an area with no water will have no floods to tell about. The same argument regarding desert areas with flood stories would also apply in this case. A Scriptural argument could be raised for why Africa, for example, has the least recollection of the Flood. It is the descendants of Ham who settle Africa (Gen. 10:6)³⁵. It may be that Ham, being the "least likely to succeed" of Noah's sons (Gen. 10:22-27), quickly forgot God and the Flood, and the story was not passed on as it was through Noah's other sons.

Third, there are certain patterns that appear among the flood stories that may suggest a genealogy of story development, at least among stories that in some sense represent a recollection of the Scriptural Flood. For example, the written flood accounts of Europe and the Middle East are very similar in nature. All of these stories contain the following elements: 1) judgement by the gods on man's wickedness, 2) a warning to a righteous man (Utnapishtim, Deucalion, Xisuthrus, Ziusudra), of a coming flood, 3) the building of an ark in which the man and his wife (and others) are saved, 4) post-deluvian thank-offering to the gods, and 5) repopulation of the earth. The first common element, that of divine judgement for humanity's sins, is present in at least one story from every continent. It could be argued, however, that a flood is never going to be interpreted as a blessing but always as a punishment, no matter what the culture. Interestingly, war is often cited as the particular sin of mankind. If Luther's translation of "tyrant" for the Hebrew hapax legomenon in Genesis 6:4 is accepted, the Genesis account also suggests that humanity's most obvious sin before the Flood was tyranny and warfare.³⁶ The theme of the righteous person (man or woman) being the one who is saved is also found in many of the stories. The gods do not necessarily save the powerful or rich, but the one who shows kindness, be it to a goat (Cameroon), a fish (India), or to the gods themselves. The thank-offering, however, seems to be limited to Europe and the

³⁵ Concordia Self-Study Bible - NIV. (CPH, St.Louis) p.21

³⁶ Kretzmann, Paul E. Old Testament Commentary. (Concordia Publishing House, St.Louis, MO, 1923) p.15

Middle East. The repopulation of the earth is common in every universal flood myth, as is to be expected: how else could there be people telling the story?

Of all the elements present in the Scripture-like flood stories that are *not* present in Scripture, the warning of a flood from a second party is the most interesting. Almost every continent has a story where an animal or god who is shown kindness but is not himself responsible for the flood, warns the righteous person of its coming. The Gilgamesh Epic and the Roman and Greek stories all have a secondary god or titan, who often does not agree with the supreme god's decision to flood the earth, warn the righteous man of the coming deluge. This messenger is sometimes berated by the supreme god after the fact, and sometimes even punished, as in the case of the Indian story where the fish lost its tongue. On other continents it is an animal that warns the people of the coming deluge. But in many other cases, especially when no reason is given for the flood, the one who is saved is just a wise man who puts two and two together and figures out a way to save himself and his family. It would seem that one of the elements of the Scriptural story that was hardest for people to explain was how the flood could be judgement, but also salvation for a few.

CONCLUSIONS

For the Christian, these various flood stories from around the world may serve to weaken their doubts about the authenticity of God's Word. If there was indeed a global flood as the Scriptures relate, it should not be a surprise to find that recollections of that flood remain among all the descendants of Noah. These stories may even be used apologetically in the same way, as a means of demonstrating that the flood account of the Holy Scriptures is not an "isolated story". However, these stories do not "prove" the Biblical account. They should not be used to demonstrate, for example, the veracity of the Scriptures. For the unregenerate, these stories may in fact serve to demonstrate that the Biblical account is just one of many stories of a "local flood" that, over time, have become legends of a global deluge. To see the Scriptures for what they are, the "veil" of unbelief must be lifted. Only the Holy Spirit, and no amount of external evidence, can in the end lift that veil.

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