

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

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

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

The Babylonian Flood Stories

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

Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford, 1969) can only be understood with the aid of the other known flood stories. The Gilgamesh Epic presents a different problem for comparative analysis. Here the flood story is clearly in a secondary context, and, more importantly, this context is so different from the biblical as to cause serious differences in content. In the Gilgamesh Epic the story of the flood is related as part of the tale of Gilgamesh's quest for immortality. Utnapishtim tells his descendant Gilgamesh the story of the flood in order to tell him why he became immortal and, in so doing, to show Gilgamesh that he cannot become immortal in the same way. This purpose is explicitly stated, for the story is introduced by Gilgamesh's question, "As I look upon you, Utnapishtim, your features are not strange; you are just as I . . . how did you join the Assembly of the gods in your quest for life?" (Gilgamesh XI:2-7). Utnapishtim concludes his recitation with the admonition, "But now who will call the gods to Assembly for your sake so that you may find the life that you are seeking?" (Gilgamesh XI:197-98).

The nature of the story as "Utnapishtim's tale" colors the recitation of the flood episode and makes it fundamentally different from the biblical flood story.

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Jacob J. Finkelstein

(1922-1974)

In the three years since Jacob J. Finkelstein's premature death at 52, the measure of his loss to Assyriological and biblical studies has become increasingly apparent. J. J. Finkelstein was a many-faceted scholar. He was a superb cuneiformist; his ability to read and copy cuneiform texts was unparalleled among Assyriologists, and the volumes of cuneiform texts that he published are an enduring monument to his work. Also an acknowledged master of cuneiform law, Finkelstein published seminal and provocative articles on many aspects of Babylonian law. His interest in law was far-reaching, and his essays "The Goring Ox: Some Historical Perspectives on Deodands, Forfeitures, Wrongful Death and the Western Notion of Sovereignty" *Temple Law Quarterly* 46/2 (1973) 169-290 demonstrates an interest in and mastery of the entire field of History of Law. Although Finkelstein would not have considered himself a biblicist, he had a deep interest in the Bible, particularly in the relationship of biblical law and religion to Mesopotamian culture. His insights in this area were so numerous and perceptive that many biblicists came to Yale to sit in on his classes and to discuss their ideas with him. His death is thus a deep loss to everyone interested in the development of biblical and Western culture. A complete bibliography of Finkelstein's publications has been compiled by Peter Machinist and Norman Yoffee and appears in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein, Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 19, Dec. 1977.

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

The Atrahasis Epic

The recovery of the Atrahasis Epic provides new perspectives on Genesis because, unlike the other two Babylonian versions of the flood, the Atrahasis Epic presents the flood story in a context comparable to that of Genesis, that of a Primeval History. The flood episode of the Atrahasis Epic has been known for a long time, but the literary structure of the epic, and therefore the context of the flood story, was not understood until Laessøe reconstructed the work (J. Laessøe, "The Atrahasis Epic, A Babylonian History of Mankind," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 13 [1956] 90-102). In 1965, Lambert and Millard (*Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, London) published many additional texts from the epic, including an Old Babylonian copy (written around 1650 B.C.E.) which is our most complete surviving recension of the tale. These new texts greatly increased our knowledge of the epic and served as the foundation for the English edition of the Epic by Lambert and Millard (*Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford, 1969).

The Atrahasis epic starts with a depiction of the world as it existed before man was created: "When the gods worked like Man" (the first line and ancient title of the composition). At this time the universe was divided among the great gods, with An taking the heavens, Enlil the earth and Enki the great deep. Seven gods (called the Anunnaki in this text) established

themselves as the ruling class, while the rest of the gods provided the work force. These gods, whose "work was heavy, (whose) distress was much," dug the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and then rebelled, refusing to continue their labors. On the advice of Enki, the gods decided to create a substitute to do the work of the gods, and Enki and the mother goddess created man from clay and from the flesh and blood of a slain god, "We-ilu, a god who has sense," from whom man was to gain rationality. The various themes and motifs out of which this part of the epic is composed can all be documented elsewhere and do not seem to have originated with this text (for details see box).

This epic, ancient though it is, is already the product of considerable development, and the author of the composition has utilized old motifs and has

same problem recurs, and the gods bring famine (and saline soil), which again do not end the difficulties. At last Enlil persuades the gods to adopt a "final solution" (II viii 34) to the human problem, and they resolve to bring a flood to destroy mankind. Their plan is thwarted by Enki, who has Atrahasis build an ark and so escape the flood. After the rest of mankind have been destroyed, and after the gods have had occasion to regret their actions and to realize (by their thirst and hunger) that they need man, Atrahasis brings a sacrifice and the gods come to eat. Enki then presents a permanent solution to the problem. The new world after the flood is to be different from the old, for Enki summons Nintu, the birth goddess, and has her create new creatures, who will ensure that the old problem does not arise again. In the words of the Epic (III vii 1):

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united them into a coherent account of Man's beginnings in which he presents a picture of the purpose of Man's creation, his *raison d'être*, as doing the work of the gods and thus relieving them of the need to labor. In the same way, he seems to have taken the previously known story of the flood and juxtaposed it to his creation story to continue the tale of primeval man and indicate the prerequisites of human life upon earth.

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

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

To solve this problem, the gods decided to bring a plague, which ends when Enki advises man to bring offerings to Namtar, god of the plague, and thus induce him to lift the plague. This plague does not solve the problem permanently, for twelve hundred years later the same problem arises again (Tablet II 1-8) and the gods bring a drought, which ends when men (upon Enki's advice) bribe Adad to bring rain. Despite the fragmentary state of Tablet II, it is easy to see that the

In addition, let there be a third category among the peoples,

Among the peoples women who bear and women who do not bear.

Let there be among the peoples the *Pašittu*-demon to snatch the baby from the lap of her who bore it. Establish *Ugbabtu*-women, *Entu*-women, and *Igišitu*-women

and let them be taboo and so stop childbirth.

Other post-flood provisions may have followed, but the text now becomes too fragmentary to read.

Despite the lacunae, the structure presented by the Atrahasis Epic is clear. Man is created . . . there is a problem in creation . . . remedies are attempted but the problem remains . . . the decision is made to destroy man . . . this attempt is thwarted by the wisdom of Enki . . . a new remedy is instituted to ensure that the problem does not arise again. Several years ago Anne Kilmer ("The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and its Solution as Represented in the Mythology," *Orientalia* 41 [1972] 160-77) and William J. Moran ("The Babylonian Story of the Flood [review article]" *Biblica* 40 [1971] 51-61), working independently, demonstrated that the problem that arose and that necessitated these various remedies was that of overpopulation. Mankind increased uncontrollably, and the methods of population control that were first attempted (drought, pestilence, famine) only solved the problem temporarily. This overpopulation led to destruction (the flood), and permanent countermeasures were introduced by Enki to keep the size of the population down. The myth tells us that such social phenomena as non-marrying women, and such personal tragedies as barrenness and stillbirth (and perhaps miscarriage and

infant mortality) are in fact essential to the very continuation of man's existence, for humanity was almost destroyed once when the population got out of control.

Genesis and Atrahasis

This Babylonian tale, composed no later than 1700 B.C.E., is very attractive to us today and can almost be called a "myth for our times," for we share with the Babylonians a consciousness of a limited ecology and a concern about controlling the human population. In addition to this inherent relevance, however, it is very important for biblical studies, for it points out what (by the clear logic of hindsight) should have been obvious to us all along: there is an organic unity to the first section of Genesis. The importance of the Atrahasis Epic is that it focuses our attention away from the deluge itself and onto the events immediately after the rains subside. In Genesis, as in Atrahasis, the flood came in response to a serious problem in creation, a problem which was rectified immediately after the flood. A study of the changes that God made in the world after the flood gives a clearer picture of the conditions prevailing in the world before the flood, of the ultimate reason that necessitated the flood which almost caused the destruction of man, of the essential differences between the world before the flood and the world after it, and thus of the essential prerequisites for the continued existence of man on the earth.

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

It is not surprising that Genesis rejects the idea of overpopulation as the reason for the flood, for the Bible does not share the belief of Atrahasis and some other ancient texts that overpopulation is a serious issue. Barrenness and stillbirth (or miscarriage) are not considered social necessities, nor are they justified as important for population control. On the contrary, when God promises the land to Israel he promises that "in your land women will neither miscarry nor be barren" (Exod 23:26). The continuation of this verse, "I

will fill the number of your days," seems to be a repudiation of yet another of the "natural" methods of population control, that of premature death. In the ideal world which is to be established in the land of Israel there will be no need for such methods, for overpopulation is not a major concern.

Genesis states explicitly that God decided to destroy the world because of the wickedness of man (Gen 6:5). Although this traditionally has been understood to mean that God destroyed the world as a punishment for man's sins, this understanding of the passage entails serious theological problems, such as the propriety of God's destroying all life on earth because of the sins of man. Such an interpretation also causes great problems in understanding the text of Genesis itself and creates what seems to be a paradox, for the "wickedness of man" is also given as the reason that God decides never again to bring a flood (Gen 8:21). **Since the evil nature of man is presented after the**

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flood as the reason for God's vow never again to bring a flood, we should not infer that God brought the flood as a punishment because man was evil. Genesis also states that God brought the flood because the world was full of *hāmās*. The term *hāmās* is very complex, and a semantic analysis is presented below (p. 154). The wide range of meanings for the term *hāmās* means that a lexical analysis of the word is not sufficient to allow us to determine what particular evil is here called *hāmās* and what it was about this particular evil that necessitated a flood. The nature of the evil and the cause of the flood must be found in the story of Genesis.

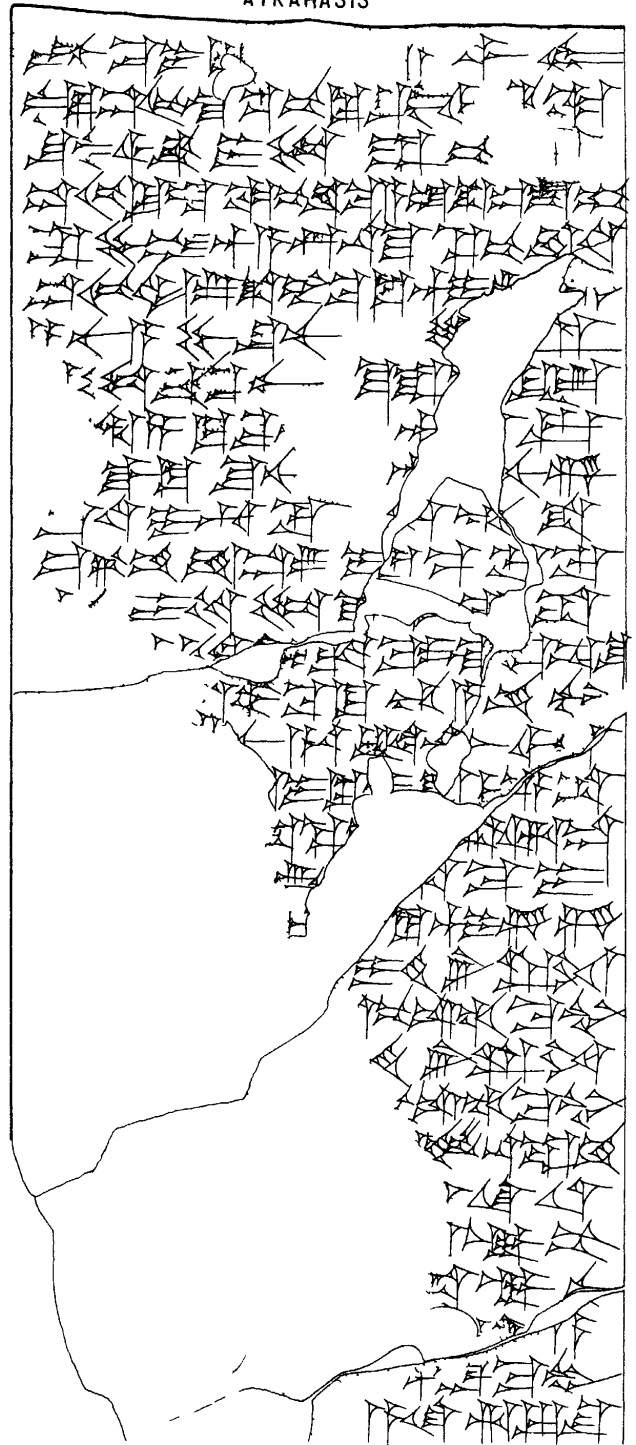
The Atrahasis Epic is so important to biblical studies because it enables us to determine the cause of the flood by focusing our attention away from the deluge itself and onto the events immediately after the flood, i.e., to Genesis 9. In this chapter God offers Noah and his sons a covenant, in which he promises never again to bring a flood to destroy the world, and gives the rainbow as the token of this promise. **At this time God gives Noah and his sons several laws, and the difference between the ante- and post-diluvium worlds can be found in these laws. These laws are thus the structural equivalent of the new solutions proposed by Enki in the Atrahasis Epic. In Atrahasis the problem in man's creation was overpopulation, and the solutions**

proposed by Enki are designed to rectify this problem by controlling and limiting the population. In the Bible the problem is not overpopulation, but “since the devisings of man’s heart are evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21), God must do something if he does not want to destroy the earth repeatedly. This something is to create laws for mankind, laws to ensure that matters do not again reach such a state that the world must be destroyed.

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

The Flood in Genesis

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



Copy of Tablet I, column 1 (BM 78941 + 78943) of the Atrahasis Epic, which begins:

“When the gods like men
Bore the work and suffered the toil —”

God decides to bring the flood, saves man, and resolves never to bring a flood again. If God is rational and consistent in his actions, there must have been a compelling reason that necessitated the flood. "Punishment" is not enough of a reason, for it not only raises the question of God's right to punish all the animals for the sins of man, but also raises the serious issue of God's right to punish man in this instance at all: If man has evil tendencies, and if he has not been checked and directed by laws, how can he be punished for simply following his own instincts? The flood cannot simply have been brought as a punishment, and its necessitating cause must lie in the particular nature of the evil which filled the world before the flood. Our best way to find out the nature of the evil is to look at the solution given to control the evil, i.e., to the laws given immediately after the flood.

The oral tradition of Israel (as reflected in the rabbinic writings) has developed and expanded the laws given to Noah and his sons after the flood into a somewhat elaborate system of "the seven Noahide commandments." The traditional enumeration of these is the prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual sins, theft, eating from a living animal, and the commandment to establish legal systems. Additional laws are sometimes included among the commandments to Noah and his sons, and the system of Noahide commandments can best be understood as a system of universal ethics, a "Natural Law" system in which the laws are given by God. Genesis itself, however, does not contain a list of all seven of these commandments. According to Genesis 9, God issued three commandments to Noah and his sons immediately after the flood: (1) he commanded man to be fruitful, to increase, multiply and swarm over the earth; (2) he announced that although man may eat meat he must not eat animals alive (or eat the blood, which is tantamount to the same thing — Gen 9:4); and (3) he declared that no one, neither beast nor man, can kill a human being without forfeiting his own life, providing for the execution of all killers, "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."

The significance of the first commandment (that of fertility) has already been mentioned: it is an explicit and probably conscious rejection of the idea that the cause of the flood was overpopulation and that overpopulation is a serious problem. Together the other two commandments introduce a very clear differentiation between man and the animal kingdom: man may kill animals for food (while observing certain restrictions in so doing), but no one, whether man or beast, can kill man. The reason for this "Absolute Sanctity of

Human Life" (as it is usually called) is given in the text: "for man is created in God's image" (Gen 9:6). Taken independently, these two commandments—the prohibition against eating blood (and the living animal) and the declaration of the principle of the inviolability of human life with the provision of capital punishment for murder — embody two of the basic principles of Israelite law.

The Bible views blood as a very special substance. Israel is seriously enjoined against eating the blood of animals, and this prohibition is repeated six times in the Pentateuch (Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; Deut 12:16 and 12:23-24). This prohibition is called an eternal ordinance (Lev 3:17), and the penalty for eating blood (at least in the Priestly tradition) is *kārēt*, which is some form of outlawry, whether banishment or ostracism (Lev 7:27; 17:10,14). The reason for this strict prohibition is explicit: the spirit (*nepeš*) of the animal is in the blood (Lev 17:11,14; Deut 12:23). The greatest care must be exercised in the eating of meat. According to the Priestly tradition, slaughtering of animals (other than creatures of the hunt) can only be done at an altar. Failure to bring the animal to the altar was considered tantamount to the shedding of blood (Lev 17:4). The sprinkling of the animal's blood upon the altar served as a redemption (Lev 17:11). In Deuteronomy, where the cult is centralized and it is no longer feasible to bring the animals to an altar, permission is given to eat and slaughter animals anywhere. However, (as with the animals of the hunt in Leviticus), care must be taken not to eat the blood, which should be poured upon the ground and covered (Deut 12:24).

The idea expressed in the third commandment, that of the incomparability and inviolability of human life, is one of the fundamental axioms of Israelite philosophy, and the ramifications of this principle pervade every aspect of Israelite law and distinguish it dramatically from the other Near Eastern legal systems with which it otherwise has so much in common. In Israel, capital punishment is reserved for the direct offense against God and is never invoked for offenses against property. The inverse of this is also true; the prime offense in Israel is homicide, which can never be compensated by the payment of a monetary fine and can only be rectified by the execution of the murderer.

Despite the importance of this principle, if we look at the world before the flood, it is immediately apparent that this demand for the execution of murderers is new. Only three stories are preserved in Genesis from the ten generations between the expulsion from the Garden and the bringing of the flood. Two of these, the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4:1-15) and the tale

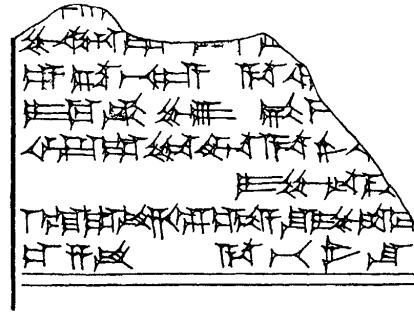
of Lemech (Gen 4:19-24), concern the shedding of human blood. In the first tale Cain, having murdered his brother Abel, becomes an outcast and must lose his home. However, he is not killed. In fact, he becomes one of “God’s protected” and is marked with a special sign on his forehead to indicate that Cain’s punishment (if any) is the Lord’s and that whoever kills him will be subject to seven-fold retribution. The next story preserved — that of Lemech five generations later — also concerns murder, for Lemech kills “a man because of my wounding, a young man because of my hurt” (Gen 4:23). Lemech, too, is not killed and claims the same protection that Cain had, declaring that as Cain was protected with sevenfold retribution he, Lemech, will be avenged with seventy-sevenfold (Gen 4:24). The main difference between the world before the flood and the new order established immediately after it is the different treatment of murderers, and the cause of the flood should therefore be sought in this crucial difference.

Murder has catastrophic consequences, not only for the individuals involved, but for the earth itself, which has the blood of innocent victims spilled upon it. As God says to Cain after Abel’s murder (Gen 4:10-12):

Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil. And now you are cursed by the earth which opened her mouth to receive the blood of your brother from your hand. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield its strength to you; a wanderer and a vagabond you will be on the earth.

The innocent blood which was spilled on it has made the ground barren for Cain, who must therefore leave his land and become a wanderer. This process of the cursing and concomitant barrenness of the ground had become widespread. The explanation of the name given to Noah makes this point. The Masoretic Text reads: “This one will comfort us from our acts and the toil of our hands.” Alternatively, if we follow the Septuagint (old Greek translation), the text would read: “This one will give us rest from our acts and the toil of our hands.” Either way, the latter part of the verse, “because of the ground which God has cursed” is clear: Noah’s name is explained by Genesis as related to the conditions which caused the flood, the “cursing” of the ground, and Noah’s role somehow alleviates that condition.

By the generation of the flood the whole earth has become polluted, (KJV “the earth also was corrupt”) and is filled with *ḥāmās* (Gen 6:11). The wide range of meanings of the word *ḥāmās* in the Bible encompasses almost the entire spectrum of evil. The



Copy of the fragment of Tablet II, column viii (Ni 2552), which translates:

The Assembly . . . [. . .
Do not obey . . . [. . .
The gods commanded total destruction,
Enlil did an evil deed on the peoples.
Atrahasis opened his mouth
And addressed his lord.

term can stand for evil of any sort (Ps 11:5; Prov 13:2); it may simply stand for falsehood, as in *‘ēd ḥāmās* “false witness” (Exod 23:1; Deut 19:15; Ps 35:1) and its occurrence with *mirmā* (Isa 60:18; Jer 6:7, 20:8), with the two together meaning something like “plunder and pillage.” *Ḥāmās* has a very close connection to *dāmīm* “bloodshed,” as can be seen from Ezek 9:9. Like *dāmīm*, the term *ḥāmās* can be used in a physical way, for *ḥāmās* (or the pollution from it) can cover clothes (Mal 2:16) and hands (Job 16:17; 1 Chron 12:17). In Genesis, the earth is filled with *ḥāmās* and has itself become polluted because all flesh had polluted its way upon the earth (Gen 6:11-12). It is the filling of the earth with *ḥāmās* and its resultant pollution that prompts God to bring a flood to physically erase everything from the earth and start anew. The flood is not primarily an agency of punishment (although to be drowned is hardly a pleasant reward), but a means of getting rid of a thoroughly polluted world and starting again with a clean, well-washed one. Then, when everything has been washed away, God resolves (Gen 8:21):

I will no longer curse the ground because of man, for the devisings of man’s heart are evil from his youth, and I will no longer strike all the living creatures that I have created;

and goes on to give Noah and his sons the basic laws, specifically the strict instructions about the shedding of blood, to prevent the earth's becoming so polluted again.

Pollution in the Bible

The idea of the pollution of the earth is not a vague metaphor to indicate moral wrongdoing. On the contrary, in the biblical worldview, the murders before the flood contaminated the land and created a state of physical pollution which had to be eradicated by

Israel was admonished not to allow compensation for murder . . . , for by doing so they would cause the land to become contaminated.

physical means (the flood). Although this concept may seem strange to us, it is not surprising to find it here in the cosmology of Israel, for Israel clearly believed that moral wrongdoings defile physically. This is explicitly stated with three sins — murder, idolatry, and sexual abominations — and it is interesting to note that these are the three cardinal sins for which a Jew must suffer martyrdom rather than commit them (*b. Sanhedrin* 74a). These are mentioned in Acts as offenses from which all the nations must refrain (Acts 15:20); these three offenses are given as the explanation of *hāmās* in the flood story by Rabbi Levy in Genesis Rabbah (31:16); and these (together with the non-observance of the sabbatical year) are given in the Mishna as the reasons that exile enters the world (Nezigin 5:8). According to the biblical tradition, the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan had defiled the land with the sexual abominations enumerated in Leviticus 18. As a result God had punished the land (Lev 18:25), and the land had therefore vomited up the inhabitants which had defiled it. For this reason, Israel is admonished not to commit these abominations and defile the land lest it vomit them out in the same way (Lev 18:24-28). Later, Israel was told that it has defiled the land (Jer 2:7) and that because Israel defiled the land with their idols and because of the blood which they spilled upon the land, God poured his fury upon them (Ezek 36:18).

The most serious contaminant of the land is the blood of those who have been murdered; the concept of “bloodguilt” is well known in Israelite law. Because of the seriousness of the crime of murder, and perhaps

also because of the mystical conception of blood in Israelite thought, the blood of the slain physically pollutes the land. For this reason, the discovery of a corpse posed a real problem for the people. When such an unsolved murder occurred, recourse was had to the procedure of the *‘eglā ‘ārūpā*, (“the breaking of the heifer’s neck”) a ritual meant to cleanse the land of the pollution of the murder: the elders of the nearest town were to bring a heifer to an uninhabited wadi, strike off its head, wash their hands over it and offer the following prayer:

Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen (the deed). Be merciful O Lord, to your people Israel whom you have redeemed and lay not innocent blood into the midst of the people (Deut 21:7-8).

The shedding of human blood was of concern to the whole nation, for it involved an actual pollution of the land. Israel was enjoined against this bloodguilt pollution and was admonished neither to allow compensation for murder, nor even to allow an accidental murderer to leave a city of refuge, for by so doing they would cause the land of Israel to become contaminated:

You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is deserving of death. He shall be executed. You shall take no ransom to (allow someone to) flee a city of refuge or to (allow someone to) return to live in the land before the priest’s death. You shall not pollute the land that you are in, for the blood will pollute the land, and the land may not be redeemed for blood spilled on it except by the blood of the spiller. You shall not contaminate the land in which you are living, in which I the Lord am dwelling among the children of Israel (Num 35:31-34).

The idea of the pollution of the earth by murder, of the physical pollution caused by “moral” wrongs such as sexual abominations and idolatry, underlies much of Israelite law. The composer of Genesis 1-9 had reinterpreted the cosmology and the early history of Man in the light of these very strong concepts. He has used a framework that is at least as old as the Epic of Atrahasis, the framework of the Primeval History of Creation-Problem-Flood-Solution, and has retold the story in such a way as to reinterpret an ancient tradition to illuminate fundamental Israelite ideas, i.e., the biblical ideals that law and the “sanctity of human life” are the prerequisites of human existence upon the earth.

The Atrahasis Account in Cuneiform Literature

Like Genesis, Atrahasis is the product of a long process of development, and many of the ideas and motifs contained in it can be traced elsewhere in Sumero-Babylonian literature. The idea of the division of the universe among the great gods can be found in the introduction to "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld," in which An takes the heavens, Enlil the earth, Ereshkigal receives the netherworld and Enki sets sail for the Apsu. The working gods are found in *UET VI* 118:20, and in "Enki and Ninmah" (11-12), in which the lesser gods work and dig the Tigris and Euphrates. The conception of the creation of man to relieve the gods from labor is found in "Enki and Ninmah" (25), as is creation from clay, for man is created there from the "heart of clay over the *abzu*" (33). Clay as the material out of which man is created is quite common in Mesopotamian literature. In the creation of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic, long recognized as a doublet to the creation of man, Aruru washes her hands, takes the clay, and either casts it upon the steppe or draws a design upon it. Similarly, in the Babylonian theodicy, Ea nips off the clay and Aruru fashions it. In the "ritual for the restoration of temples" Ea nips off the clay in the *abzu* and fashions both Man and a whole host of lesser deities. In the Sumerian myth of the descent of Inanna to the netherworld Enki creates the Kalatur and the Kurgarra from the "dirt under one of his fingernails" (*JCS* 5: 219-20).

The question of the killing of a god to create man presents a different picture. This motif is found in Enuma Elish, where Kingu, the head of Tiamat's forces, is killed after the defeat of Tiamat, and his blood is used in the creation of man. The only "Sumerian" text in which this motif is found, however, is the bilingual *KAR* 4, in which the Lamga gods are slain and mankind is created from their blood. This text has many ancient elements: the dividing of the universe, the digging of the Tigris and Euphrates, the giving to man of the hoe and the

corvée basket. This text, however, seems to be a late reflex of these traditions, and the Sumerian seems to be very late. There would, therefore, seem to be no Sumerian tradition in the use of blood in the creation of man, and Lambert's attempt to find it in "Enki and Ninmah" (Creation of Man in Sumero-Babylonian Myth) *CRAAI* 11, 1964:103) has now been given up (oral communication). Considering the special notion of blood that we find in the Bible, it seems likely that the blood motif in Atrahasis and in Enuma Elish may be a West Semitic idea, and may have entered Mesopotamian mythology with the coming of the West Semites.

Most of the motifs in the Atrahasis account of man's beginning are paralleled in the Sumerian myth of "Enki and Ninmah," and it is natural to assume that the Sumerian composition came first and that Atrahasis was already based on this account of the creation of man. This may be, but the precedence of the Sumerian tale cannot be presupposed, and the whole matter deserves serious study. There are several puzzling phenomena in the Sumerian story which might indicate that Enki and Ninmah is an adaptation of an Akkadian tale. One of these is the use of the word *zub-sig* for that which is bound on man at his creation. In context this is almost certainly the (corvée) basket and must be a loan from Akkadian *šupšikku*, the form of the more common Akkadian *tupšikku* that occurs in Atrahasis. Although both *šupšikku/tupšikku* and *zub-sig* may be ultimately derived from a third (substrate?) language, the Akkadian word is fairly common in Akkadian, while *zub-sig* in this sense may be confined to this story. Similarly, the other word for corvée basket that is used in Enki and Ninmah seems to be an Akkadian word (*terḥum*, line 12). In the light of such anomalies we should not assume that the Akkadian epic is derivative from the Sumerian, for "Enki and Ninmah" may have been written with Atrahasis in mind.