

Literary analysis of the Flood

On the surface, the Flood Narrative (Genesis 6-9) appears to have some duplications and contradictions such as the number of animals taken on the Ark and the timetable of the Flood. To explain this and deny Mosaic authorship, source critics have proposed that the Flood Narrative was composed of many small textual units from two different sources (J and P), which were woven together by later redactors. Each source wrote with the objective of promoting their own religious views. To understand how the Flood Narrative is divided by hypothetical sources by source critics, see the article: Literary analysis of the Flood at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/5system_moses/dh11_flood.aspx. Source critics expect duplication, contradictions, and mythological material from the combining of two different sources dated 400 years apart (P was hypothetically dated 400 years later than J).

Literary analysis of Genesis 6-9 would indicate otherwise.

The literary structure of the Flood Narrative is a detailed and organized **chiasm**. Furthermore, the contradictions pointed out by skeptics are not contradictions at all and instead fit into this designed narrative. The structure of the Flood Narrative exhibits the following:

1. The literary unit has symmetrical inclusios, which designate a beginning and an end.
 - A. The primary genealogy (Noah) sets the boundaries of the whole literary unit.
 - B. The narrative has a prologue and epilogue, and
 - C. The secondary genealogy (Noah's sons) encapsulates the body of the narrative.
2. The whole literary unit has a symmetry that is parallel in concept and equivalent in number.
3. The chiasm ascends towards doom and recedes from it.
4. A detailed examination of the literary structure can be seen in this form (1) (2):
 - a. The primary genealogy: The beginning of the genealogy formula where Noah's age at the time of the Flood and descendants are listed (Gen 5:32)
 - b. Prologue: The sin of man (Gen 6:1-8)
 - c. The secondary genealogy: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 6:9-10)
 - d. God's first "My covenant with you": A decree to destroy life (Gen 6:11-20)
 - e. The preservation and second purpose of animals (Gen 6:21-22)
 - f. God's second decree to Noah: The preservation and primary purpose of animals (Gen 7:1-10)
 - g. Entering the ark (Gen 7:11-16)
 - h. The Flood rises (Gen 7:17-24)
 - x. But God remembered Noah (Gen 8:1-5)

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h'. The Flood subsides (Gen 8:6-12)

g'. Leaving the ark (Gen 8:13-19)

f'. God's third decree to Noah: Sacrificing to God (Gen 8:20-22)

e'. The second purpose of animals: Food for man (Gen 9:1-7)

d'. God's last "My covenant with you": A decree of blessing and preservation of life (Gen 9:8-17)

c'. The secondary genealogy: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 9:18-19)

b'. Epilogue: The sin of man (Gen 9:20-27)

a'. The primary genealogy: The ending of the genealogy formula where Noah's age of death is listed (Gen 9:28-29)

By pairing the first half of the chiasm with its corresponding inverted parallel, one can gain a better understanding of each idea of the chiasm:

Idea (a): The primary genealogy -the beginning of the genealogy formula where Noah's age at the time of the Flood and descendants are listed (Gen 5:32)

Inverted Idea (a'): The primary genealogy - the ending of the genealogy formula where Noah's age of death is listed (Gen 9:28-29)

Observation: Genesis 5 is a genealogical listing that follows a consistent pattern as exemplified by Adam's genealogy (Gen 5:3-5). The genealogy begins with 1) the ancestor's name, 2) his age when the heir is born, 3) his age after the heir is born, and 4) his age when he dies (except in the case of Enoch who did not die and instead was taken by God). Of all the genealogies in Genesis 5, only Noah's broke the pattern. Noah's genealogy is split in the middle: half is given before the Flood Narrative (Gen 5:32) and the other half after (Gen 9:28-29).

Idea (b): Prologue: The sin of man (Gen 6:1-8)

Inverted Idea (b'): Epilogue: The sin of man (Gen 9:20-27)

Observation: The prologue introduces the sinful and wicked state of man preceding the Flood and shows that this moral state was the cause of the Flood. The epilogue concludes the Flood narrative with a comment about the future of Noah and his sons; namely, their sinful moral state. Noah gets drunk and Ham is cursed. The Bible specifically warns against drunkenness, because its effects could lead to one's nakedness and dishonor (Hab 2:15, Lam 4:21), which, before God, is indecent and unholy (Ex 20:26, Deut 23:12-14). While it is difficult to understand what Ham did, the Hebrew verb for "saw" in Gen 9:22 indicates that Ham looked upon his father with more than a harmless glance, and perhaps to ridicule or mock his father. As for Canaan, the race that Ham is patriarch of, archeologists have determined that this group was well known for their deviant sexual practices.

Idea (c): The secondary genealogy: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 6:9-10)

Inverted Idea (c'): The secondary genealogy: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 9:18-19)

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Observation: The secondary genealogy brackets the body of the Flood narrative, and it begins with the statement of Noah's righteousness and the naming of his sons. The body of the narrative ends with the naming of the sons, whose descendants will populate the earth.

Idea (d): God's first "My covenant with you": A decree to destroy life (Gen 6:11-20)

Inverted Idea (d'): God's last "My covenant with you": A decree of blessing and preservation of life (Gen 9:8-17)

Observation: There are two apparent observations involving two words that are common between the first and last divine addresses to Noah: **mabbûl**, which refers specifically to the Noahian Flood and **covenant**.

The Flood term, "mabbûl", is used only 13 times in the Bible. In the first divine address to Noah, "mabbûl" is used once as God resolves to destroy life. In the last divine address to Noah, "mabbûl" is used three times as if God is emphasizing what He would never use again.

The term "covenant" is used in a similar fashion. In the first divine address as God resolves to destroy life with a flood, He mentions the term "covenant" once, in which He will save Noah, his family, and the animals. In the last divine address as God resolves never to destroy life with a flood, He describes the terms of the covenant more specifically and with repeated and apparent emphasis (7 times).

Idea (e): The preservation and second purpose of animals (Gen 6:21-22)

Inverted Idea (e'): The second purpose of animals: Food for man (Gen 9:1-7)

Observation: Before the Flood, in His first divine pronouncement revealing that Noah will be saved, God informs Noah that the ark will also save the animals. The animals are not for Noah's consumption, and Noah is instructed to gather additional provisions for both his family and the animals. After the Flood, God reveals another purpose to the animals. In addition to restoring life to the Flood ravaged earth, God proclaims in His covenant with Noah that animals are now a food source for man (an addition to the plant source provided in the Edenic Covenant found in Gen 1:20-30; 2:15-17).

Idea (f): God's second decree to Noah: The preservation and primary purpose of animals (Gen 7:1-10)

Inverted Idea (f'): God's third decree to Noah: Sacrificing to God (Gen 8:20-22)

Observation: The Bible did not state Noah's age when God first spoke to him about building an ark, but by Noah's 600th birthday, the ark was completed and ready to board. Given the technology of the time and dimensions of the ark, it undoubtedly took many decades to build. Thus, God's second divine address (Gen 7:1-10) occurs many years after the first divine address.

In this chronological context, the supposed doublet of the number of animals that destructive critics use as evidence of 2 distinct sources does not exist. In the first divine decree (Gen 6:19-22), Noah is informed of the coming Flood and to admit pairs of animals so that they will be saved. In the later second divine address, Noah is informed of more specific details: clean animals by 7 pairs, birds by 7 pairs, and unclean animals by 1 pair (Gen 7:2-3). This distinction and reference to clean animals in God's second address parallels the section about God's third address to Noah following the Flood in which Noah sacrifices the clean animals to the Lord.

Idea (g): Entering the ark (Gen 7:11-16)

Inverted Idea (g'): Leaving the ark (Gen 8:13-19)

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Observation: Within the whole Flood narrative, there are only two places where there are complete dates stating the day, month, and year, and their respective sections parallel and mirror each other. The literary design and complexity of the Flood narrative is undeniable. Note:

- 1) the sequence and subject material is identical.
 - a) the complete date of when the Flood began and when Noah first saw dry land.
 - b) the reference to Noah's whole family.
 - c) the references to birds, animals and every creeping thing.
 - d) the reference of "went in" and "went out" of the ark.
- 2) a lexical study of the Hebrew verbs for entering and leaving the ark also add to this parallelism. The Hebrew words *bô'* (entering) and *yasa'* (leaving) are reciprocal verbs of each other.

Idea (h): The Flood rises (Gen 7:17-24)

Inverted Idea (h'): The Flood subsides (Gen 8:6-12)

Observation: In this section, the repetition is significant and emphasizes the loss of life and the extent of the Flood. In the chart below, the parallelism can be seen:

- 1) the disappearance of the last traces of life.
- 2) the search for and discovery of the earliest traces of life.

A detailed analysis of the chronological dating of the Flood is also revealing. The supposed contradictions that destructive critics point out do not exist when examined carefully:

The Chronology of the Flood (3)

Summary	Event	Date	Genesis
Waiting in the ark 7 days (Gen 7:7, 10)	1. Noah entered the ark	Noah's age: 600 Month 2, day 10	7:7-9
	2. 7 days later: Rain began falling	Month 2, day 17	7:10-11
Water continued for 150 days (Gen 7:24)	3. 40 days later: Heavy rains stopped	Month 3, day 27	7:12
	4. 110 days later: Prevailing waters receded and the ark rested on an Ararat mountain	Month 7, day 17	7:24; 8:4

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Water receded in 150 days (Gen 8:3)	5. 74 days later: Tops of mountains visible	Month 10, day 1	8:5
	6. 40 days later: Raven sent out, and a dove sent out and returned	Month 11, day 11	8:6-9
	7 days later: Dove sent out again and returned with a leaf	Month 11, day 18	8:10
	7 days later: Dove sent out a third time and did not return	Month 11, day 25	8:12
	22 days later: Water receded	Month 12, day 17	8:3
Earth dried in 70 days	22 days later: Water receded	Noah's age: 601 Month 1, day 1	8:13
	Land completely dry, and Noah exited the ark	Month 2, day 27	8:14-19

Total: 377 days - Noah and his family spent 1 year and 17 days in the ark.

The days that are mentioned are themselves a literary design. (4) For each numbered day, there is an ascending and descending parallel which point to the apex in a chiastic fashion. This precise and purposeful design cannot be explained by destructive critics.

- a. 7 days till 40 day storm (7:4)
- b. 7 days till the Flood (7:10)
- c. 40 days of the Flood (7:12, 17)
- d. 150 days prevail (7:24)
- x. The Flood crests, the ark rests, God remembers Noah (Gen 8:1)
- d'. 150 days waters abate (8:3)
- c'. 40 days first birds sent out (8:6)
- b'. 7 days next bird sent out (8:10)
- a'. 7 days last bird sent out (8:12)

Furthermore the chronological dates themselves are paired and have a literary design. (5)

The **complete** date is given when Noah **enters** the Ark.

Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. (Gen 7:6)

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. (Gen 7:11)

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The month and day are given when God **remembers** Noah.

In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. (Gen 8:4)

The water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible. (Gen 8:5)

The **complete** date is given when Noah **leaves** the ark.

Now it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up. (Gen 8:13)

In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. (Gen 8:14)

It is highly doubtful that destructive critics, who believe that the narrative was the synthesis of fragments from principally two sources, J and P written 400 years apart, can explain the beauty, preciseness, and organization of the literary structure of the Flood narrative. Destructive source critics never considered the literary unity of the narrative in their hypothesis. When read within its context and literary structure, the apparent contradictions and supposed doublets do not exist.

Destructive critics have long considered the Flood a myth or perhaps a local flooding in the Tigris-Euphrates valley that grew into a legend and associate the biblical account with other ancient Mesopotamian flood accounts. Two of the earliest writings discovered are the Atra-hasis Epic (1646-1626 BC) and the Gilgamesh Epic (650-700 BC). There is an earlier Sumerian version (2000 BC) but only 1/3 of the fragments are in possession. All three ancient accounts appear to be variations of the same account.

While the extra-biblical ancient Mesopotamian flood accounts are similar, they do not resemble the biblical account of the Flood. The biblical account differs obviously by:

- 1) The Flood was motivated by a judgment of mankind's morality.
- 2) The dates of the Flood were specified with complete dates.
- 3) The length of the Flood was significantly longer and detailed.
- 4) The size of the ark was significantly larger and had a seaworthy design.

In addition, the biblical account differs significantly in the portrayal of God. In the biblical account:

- 1) There is only one monotheistic Creator God who is omniscient and omnipotent. Other accounts feature polytheism.
- 2) God has a supreme concern for humanity. Other accounts toy with and have little concern for mankind.
- 3) God lives and judges by an impeachable moral standard. Other accounts do not demonstrate any moral standard; gods break their own vows.

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Yet Mesopotamia was not the only culture that had a legend of a catastrophic flood that destroyed all of mankind except a few who escape in a boat. Other cultures had their Noahic hero: Manu for the Hindus, Fah-he for the Chinese, Nu-u for the Hawaiians, Tezpi for the Mexican Indians, and Manabozho for the Algonquins. A diverse variety of cultures had a flood legend: aborigines of the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, the Battaks of Sumatra, the Kurnai – a tribe of Australian aborigines, the Fuji Islanders, the natives of Polynesia, Micronesia, New Guinea, New Zealand, New Hebrides, the ancient Celts of Wales, the tribesmen of Lake Caudie in Sudan, and the Greenlanders. (6)

There is great debate whether the Flood was a worldwide or local catastrophe. In light of the number of legendary stories across diverse cultures and geography, would a local flooding in the Tigris - Euphrates valley explain this?

If Moses authored the Pentateuch, then the Flood narrative is dated around 1440 BC. The Mesopotamian flood accounts are therefore the earliest accounts of a flood. Destructive critics believe that the author of Genesis rewrote the Mesopotamian account with a Jewish theological interpretation. The details of the Flood account suggest otherwise: either the two accounts are of different events or the Mosaic account is an accurate narrative of the original catastrophic event that predates and gives rise to the Mesopotamian and worldwide legends.

When studied in its context, the Flood Narrative is a complete and whole literary unit; it is difficult, if not impossible to identify any fragments let alone fragments from disparate sources.

References:

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