

The Great Flood -- Two Different Versions

The story of the flood that appears in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* closely resembles the account of the flood in the Hebrew Scriptures. In *Gilgamesh*, the tale is told by the aged Utnapishtam, who was chosen by the god Ea to survive the rising waters.

THE BABYLONIAN VERSION: (trans. The Epic of Gilgamesh, N. K. Sandars. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972, pp. 108-109.)

You know the city Shurruk, it stands on the banks of the Euphrates. That city grew old and the gods that were in it were old. There was Anu, lord of the firmament {earth}, their father, and warrior Enlil their counselor, Ninurta the helper, and Ennugi, watcher over canals; and with them also was Ea. In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamor. Enlil heard the clamor and he said to the gods in council, "The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel {everyone talking at once}." So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea warned me in a dream. He whispered their words to my house of reeds, "Reed-house, reed-house! Wall, O wall, hearken reed-house, wall reflect; O man of Shurruk, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. These are the measurements of the barque {boat} as you shall build her: let her beam equal her length, let her deck be roofed like the vault that covers the abyss; then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures."

THE HEBREW VERSION: (Genesis 6:11-19, *Revised Standard Version*)

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.