**Writing Assignment #1**

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This paper will attempt to comparatively analyze the two mythical stories “The Flood” from The Epic of Gilgamesh and “The Story of the Flood” in the Genesis. It will analyze the two myths in terms of similarity, differences and purpose of the myths within Mesopotamian society. Additionally, a personal question about the myths will be posed at the end.

In both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Genesis flood stories, the protagonist is presented with a global flood meant to punish all of mankind. These myths both present a judgement from God, or the Gods, in which they seek to purify the world. In the Epic of Gilgamesh Utnapishtim says, “That city was already old when the gods within it decided that the great gods should make a flood.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Similarly in the Genesis: 6 God States, “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.”[[2]](#footnote-2) While Gods message is more explicit, both myths imply the creation of an all-encompassing flood. Secondly, a parallel between the two stories is the releasing of birds, particularly doves and ravens, in order to find land. This test to find land is incredibly similar in both myths. Although Noah releases 3 doves and a raven and Utnapishtim releases a dove, swallow, and a raven this similarity cannot be overlooked. The Genesis: 8 states, “he sent forth the dove out of the ark; 11 and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so, Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Comparably, the Epic of Gilgamesh states, “I put out and released a raven. The raven went and saw the waters receding. And it ate, preened (?), lifted its tail and did not turn round.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The birds appear to have a deep symbolic meaning in finding land within both these stories.

While the two stories are eerily similar, there are distinctive differences between them. The first key difference between the two ancient stories is that God directly tells Noah of the flood, whereas Utnapishtim is not supposed to be aware of what the Gods had planned. In the Genesis there is one God as the people who followed it were monotheistic. The Epic of Gilgamesh follows polytheistic religion of many gods. In Genesis: 6 God tells 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.”[[5]](#footnote-5) God appears to display his disgust with the state of humanity and wants Noah to assist in essentially starting over. Conversely, in the Epic of Gilgamesh Utnapishtim is not supposed to be aware of the flood which a group of gods; Anu, Ellil, Ninurta, Ennugi, and Ea are planning. However, the god Ea seems to have a change of heart and decides to warn Utnapishtim. Ea is attempting to save humanity and acts against the other gods as their goal is to kill every human being. On the other hand, God is giving the orders and engaging a cleanse of humanity. The second key difference is the reasoning God, or the Gods, have for creating the flood. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the gods seem have an evil nature and don’t give a good reason and almost enjoy the destruction they cause. It appears the Gods did not think over this decision, “Even the gods were afraid of the flood-weapon. They withdrew; they went up to the heaven of Anu.” Post flood the Gods are angry at Utnapishtim for surviving. This highlights lack of morality in these “Gods”. In the Genesis, God seems regretful for creating humanity as they have become increasingly violent and wicked. In other words, the story does not make God appear evil wanting to destroy mankind and start anew.

The key purposes of both these myths are to show the people of Mesopotamia that humanity’s purpose is to serve their Gods, or God. These myths while rooted in some truth provide moral principles for humans within the society to live their life by. The Flood stories highlight that sinful and wrongful behaviour can lead to your death as well as the death of your entire species. These two sources provide ways in which human beings should live their lives and provides a moral compass to live your life with. Stories such as the floods display what happens if you go against God, or the Gods, words. Thus, people who follow these religions or books are more likely to live an admirable life, they are then less likely to act immorally. This would have created a more unified and obedient society. Floods appear to have a symbolic meaning of destroying an old life to begin a new one. This can be seen in many traditions such as baptisms and prenuptial cleansings. In these rituals water acts as a flood which causes purification.

Through reading the sources it becomes clear that the stories are linked. More than likely one or the sources is a copy of the other. More than likely the story was adjusted to better fit the separate society it was in. One question I have about these myth’s is how many people within Mesopotamia had access to these religious texts? Seeing as lower-class people in the ancient world often didn’t have the ability to read or write, what effect could the myths have had on them? I wonder whether all people in the society were influenced by these myths or only people within the aristocracy. While both myths have had an enormous impact on humans ever since their creation, there are distinctive differences to the stories that make each unique to their own society’s.

1. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Flood* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Genesis: 6: The Flood Story and Noah* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Genesis: 8* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Genesis: 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)