

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16, The Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9) and Mesopotamian Parallels

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16, The Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9) and Mesopotamian Parallels, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Robert Vannoy's Old Testament History course compares the biblical flood narrative with parallel accounts from Mesopotamia, exploring three potential explanations for their similarities and differences: derivation from a Proto-Semitic source, borrowing by the Hebrews from Mesopotamian accounts, or both stemming from a common original source. The lecture then examines the post-flood directives given to Noah, focusing on human dominion over animals, the sanctity of human life, and the establishment of the Noahic Covenant symbolized by the rainbow. Finally, it analyzes the curse on Canaan, debating its interpretation and implications, particularly concerning its historical misuse to justify slavery and segregation.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).



Vannoy_Genesis_Session16.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16, The Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9), and Mesopotamian Parallels

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript:

Briefing Document: Analysis of Flood Narrative and Post-Diluvian World (Vannoy Lecture 16)

1. Introduction: The Flood Narrative & Mesopotamian Parallels

- The lecture begins by examining the parallels between the biblical flood narrative (Genesis 6-9) and Mesopotamian flood stories (Sumerian, Babylonian, and Akkadian).
- **Core Similarity:** Both traditions involve a divine figure instructing a hero to build a ship to save his family and animals from a catastrophic flood.

2. Specific Parallels and Differences:

- **Ship Occupants:** While both accounts save the hero, his family, and animals, the details differ.
- **Biblical (Noah):** Noah, his wife, three sons, and their wives. A relatively small group.
- **Mesopotamian (Utnapishtim/Zuisudra/Atrahasis):** Varying accounts include the hero's family, kin, craftsmen, boatman, and close friends—a larger contingent.
- **Bird Release:** The use of birds to test for the end of the flood is common to both, but the number and type of birds differ.
- **Babylonian (Utnapishtim):** Dove, swallow, then raven.
- **Biblical (Noah):** Raven, then three doves.
- Vannoy mentions Alexander Heidel's observation that Noah's sequence is more logical, releasing a hardier bird first, unlike Utnapishtim.
- **Quote:** *"Utnapishtim is said to have released a dove, a swallow, and a raven in that order. Whereas Noah is said to have released a raven and three doves. Note the contrast there, Noah released the raven first and Utnapishtim released the raven last."*

3. Explanation of the Parallels: Three Main Theories

- The lecture then explores three possible relationships between the Mesopotamian and biblical accounts:

a. Mesopotamian Account Derived from a Proto-Semitic/Biblical Account:

- This theory argues that a pre-existing Semitic flood story (potentially Amorite), which may have also been the basis for the biblical account, was adapted by Mesopotamian cultures.
- Vannoy cites Albert T. Clay, who argued that the earliest discovered version of a story is not necessarily its origin.
- **Quote:** *"He says the argument that alleges the story originated with the Sumerians because the earliest version of it is found in the Sumerian language is no more final than it would be to say the work of Shakespeare has a German origin because a copy of it written in a German language was found in Berlin."*

b. Biblical Account Derived from the Mesopotamian Account:

- This theory posits that the Hebrews borrowed their flood narrative from the already established Mesopotamian stories.
- Vannoy cites Heidel, who notes that "the skeleton is the same in both cases, but the flesh and blood and, above all, the details and spirit are different".
- He questions the idea that mere borrowing can explain the degree of differences.
- **Quote:** *"The available evidence proves nothing beyond the point that there is a genetic relationship between Genesis and the Babylonian versions. The skeleton is the same in both cases, but the flesh and blood and, above all, the details and spirit are different."*

c. Both Stem from a Common, Older Source: * Vannoy explains von Rad's position, stating that while there is a relationship between the traditions, there isn't a direct dependence. * Von Rad suggests that both narratives are independent arrangements from a perhaps Sumerian origin. * Vannoy points out von Rad's hypothesis that the Israelites encountered a flood tradition in Canaan and incorporated it, while emphasizing there's no evidence to support this. * Both accounts derive from the "primitive recollection" of an actual cosmic experience. * **Quote:** *"Both versions are independent arrangements of a still older tradition which itself stems from perhaps the Sumerian."*

d. Common Source of National Occurrence * Vannoy suggests that both traditions stem from an actual, historical flood event, with independent development and transmission of the story, leading to both similarities and differences. * He also mentions the argument that the widespread flood story among various cultures is proof of a historical, "cosmic event" * He mentions that the existence of widespread stories doesn't prove historicity as stories often spread geographically by cultural diffusion and other means. *

Quote: *"The universal prevalence of flood legends cannot be considered proof of the actual reality of the flood... Stories can have an event in the that story comes and then just branches out and continues to branch out until you have it pretty fantastic like that. What they are saying is a story could start here and transmit this way and it is not necessarily a proof of historicity just because many people have it."*

4. Conditions Governing the Post-Deluvian World (Genesis 9)

- **a. Propagation and Maintenance of Human/Animal Life:**
 - God blesses Noah and his sons, repeating the command to be fruitful and multiply, thus filling the earth again.
 - Animals are given to humans for food, but they are not to consume blood, emphasizing a reverence for life.
 - **Quote:** *"Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it."*
- **b. Reconfirmation of Dominion Over Animals:**
 - Dominion given in Genesis 1:28, is restated.
 - Animals are described as fearing humans.
- **c. Sacredness of Human Life:**
 - God protects human life by instituting the death penalty for murder due to humans being made in the image of God.
 - **Quote:** *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."*
- **Connection to Levitical Law:**
 - The prohibition of eating blood is linked to the sacrificial system in Leviticus where blood is used for atonement.

- Vannoy suggests that this law is not meant to continue beyond the old testament sacrificial system.
- The lecture also briefly mentions the right of government to use the "power of the sword," citing Romans 13.
- **Noahic Covenant:**
 - God establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures, promising never to destroy the earth by flood again.
 - The rainbow is given as a sign of this covenant, a reminder for both God and humanity of this promise.
 - **Quote:** *"I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind."*
 - Vannoy notes that the purpose of this is so the world is preserved until God's final judgment.

5. The Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)

* The narrative shifts to an incident where Ham disrespects his father Noah, and Noah pronounces a curse on Canaan, Ham's son.

* This passage has been historically misused to justify slavery and segregation.

* Vannoy references J.R. Buswell III, who discusses the misidentification of African peoples as the descendants of Ham.

* **Quote:** * "Most of the advocates of slavery, if they considered the negro a human being, based their entire biblical case upon the confident assumption that the negro race must be identified as descendants of Noah's second son Ham." *

a. Ham's Offense: * Ham's offense was seeing his father's nakedness and telling his brothers, while Shem and Japheth acted respectfully to cover their father. * Vannoy argues that this shows disrespect and perhaps a sensual nature on Ham's part. * Vannoy addresses some arguments suggesting that Ham's offense might have been a sexual act, and argues it's not likely that is the meaning of the text.

* **b. Why Canaan was Cursed:**

- * Vannoy argues that the curse is not a mere expression of wrath, but rather a prophetic statement, showing Noah's divine understanding of the descendants of his sons.
- * The curse is not on Ham, but on Canaan, suggesting a hereditary disposition for the disrespect shown by Ham.
- * Vannoy posits that God's spirit allowed Noah to see that the traits seen in Ham will be passed down to his son Canaan, and possibly even be more egregious in him.
- * He suggests this because the Canaanites later become notorious in Scripture for abominable customs, specifically sexual perversions.

Concluding Remarks:

- The lecture analyzes both the similarities and differences between biblical and Mesopotamian flood stories, examining three possible explanations for the parallels.
- It then transitions to the post-flood world, the Noahic covenant, and the significant consequences of Ham's disrespect of Noah.
- The lecturer emphasizes that interpretations of the biblical text must be critically and contextually considered, especially in passages often misused such as the curse of Canaan.

This briefing document summarizes the main points and offers direct quotes from the lecture.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16, The Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9), and Mesopotamian Parallels

Old Testament History: The Flood Narrative and Its Aftermath

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are some similarities between the Mesopotamian and Biblical flood narratives?
2. Name three different Mesopotamian flood heroes.
3. In the flood narratives, what is the purpose of sending out birds? What are some differences in this incident?
4. What are the three main explanations for the relationship between the Mesopotamian and Biblical flood accounts?
5. What argument does Clay use to suggest the Mesopotamian flood account might be derived from a Proto-Semitic account?
6. According to the lecture, what is Von Rad's view of the relationship between the flood stories?
7. What did God say to Noah and his sons regarding the propagation and maintenance of human and animal life after the flood?
8. What are the two qualifications given to the post-flood command to eat animals?
9. Why is human life considered sacred after the flood, and what is the implication of this idea?
10. What does the Noahic covenant promise, and what is the sign of this covenant?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Both the Mesopotamian and Biblical flood stories feature a hero instructed to build a large ship, which is then filled with his family, animals, and birds, to survive a catastrophic flood. The narratives share the general structure of divine warning, ship construction, flood, and subsequent repopulation, although the details are different.

2. The Mesopotamian flood heroes mentioned are Ziusudra, Utnapishtim, and Atrahasis.
3. The purpose of sending out birds is to determine if the waters have receded enough to leave the ark. In the Mesopotamian story, three birds (dove, swallow, raven) are released in a specific order; in the Bible, Noah sends out a raven first followed by three doves.
4. The three primary explanations are: the Mesopotamian account is derived from a Proto-Semitic/Biblical account; the Biblical account is derived from the Mesopotamian account; and that both accounts derive from a common, older source.
5. Clay argues that the earliest extant version of a story does not necessarily indicate the origin of that story; he proposes that the Gilgamesh Epic was originally an Amorite legend, which later became Acadianized around 2000 B.C., and the Proto-Semitic version could have developed separately.
6. Von Rad suggests the Biblical flood story is not directly dependent on the Babylonian version; rather, both are independent arrangements of a much older tradition, possibly Sumerian, with the Hebrews integrating a Canaanite flood tradition into their religious ideas.
7. God instructed Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth; additionally, He told them that all animals would now be under their dominion and could be used as food.
8. The two qualifications given for eating animals is that the animals must be bled and not eaten with the blood still in them and that blood is sacred.
9. Human life is sacred because God made man in His image, making the taking of a life a serious offense. The implication of this idea is that the death penalty is instituted as a divine ordinance to protect human life.
10. The Noahic covenant promises that God will never again destroy all life with a flood; the sign of this covenant is the rainbow.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the different flood heroes (Zuisudra, Utnapishtim, Atrahasis, and Noah) as well as the details of the story, and analyze how these variations might reveal different cultural or theological perspectives.
2. Evaluate the three proposed explanations for the relationship between the Mesopotamian and biblical flood accounts, considering the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective, and discuss which account you find more compelling.
3. Discuss the various interpretations of the "curse on Canaan" from both a historical and theological point of view, examining how the passage has been used to support slavery and segregation, and discuss a more nuanced reading of the text.
4. Analyze the post-diluvian commands and covenants given by God to Noah, and explain their significance within the larger narrative of Genesis and the development of human history and religion.
5. Explore the broader implications of the flood story from ancient Mesopotamia and Israel to how they might impact modern understandings of theology, history, and our relationship with nature and each other.

Glossary of Key Terms

Acadianized: The process of adapting or translating a text or story into the Akkadian language, which was spoken in ancient Mesopotamia.

Amorite: A Semitic people who lived west of Mesopotamia; they are proposed to have been the source of an early version of the flood story.

Anthropomorphic: Describing God in human terms, giving God human characteristics and attributes.

Anthropopathic: Describing God's emotions in human terms.

Canaan: The fourth son of Ham; his descendants inhabited the land of Canaan, which was later occupied by the Israelites; his name has become associated with a curse in the Biblical narrative.

Deluge: A great flood; often used to refer to the biblical flood narrative.

Diffusion: The process by which cultural traits or stories spread from one group to another, regardless of migration.

Gilgamesh Epic: A Mesopotamian epic poem that includes a detailed flood narrative with a hero named Utnapishtim.

Historicity: The quality of being historically true or real.

Noahic Covenant: The covenant God made with Noah after the flood, promising never to destroy all life by flood again; the rainbow is the sign of this covenant.

Proto-Semitic: A hypothetical reconstructed language that is the ancestor of the Semitic languages (Akkadian, Arabic, Hebrew, etc.).

Sumerian: An ancient civilization of Mesopotamia, believed to be one of the earliest sources of the flood story.

Utnapishtim: The Mesopotamian flood hero in the Gilgamesh Epic; he is given immortality as a reward.

Von Rad: A biblical scholar who proposed that the Mesopotamian and biblical flood accounts have a common, older source, not direct dependence.

Zuisudra: The Sumerian flood hero in the earliest known versions of the Mesopotamian flood story.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Genesis, Session 16, The Flood Narrative (Gen. 6-9) and Mesopotamian Parallels, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Flood Narratives, Post-Flood World, and the Curse of Canaan

1. **What are the key similarities and differences between the biblical flood narrative and Mesopotamian flood stories?** Both the biblical and Mesopotamian flood accounts feature a divine decision to send a flood, a chosen hero instructed to build a large ship to save his family and animals, and the subsequent release of birds to test the receding waters. However, there are notable differences. The hero's name varies (e.g., Noah, Utnapishtim, Ziusudra). The number of people saved differs, with the biblical account having a smaller group. The order and types of birds released also differ between the stories. The Mesopotamian stories often involve more complex narratives with multiple figures and gods.
2. **What are the three main proposed explanations for the relationship between the biblical and Mesopotamian flood narratives?** There are three primary theories. First, that the Mesopotamian account is derived from an older Proto-Semitic or biblical account, perhaps taken to Mesopotamia by Amorites and then adapted. Second, that the biblical account is derived from the Mesopotamian narratives. Third, that both accounts stem from a common, older source or a historical event. There is no definitive evidence for any of the three explanations.
3. **What arguments exist for and against the idea that a widespread flood tradition proves historicity?** The widespread and uniform nature of flood stories across various cultures has been used to argue for an actual historical flood event. However, anthropologists argue that stories can spread through cultural diffusion, crossing linguistic and ethnic boundaries without necessarily being based on a historical event. The existence of other widespread, uniform legends (like the magic flight story) suggests that these narrative patterns can arise and spread independently without being indicative of a shared, single historical origin. Thus, the prevalence of flood stories alone doesn't prove a specific historical flood occurred.

4. **What are the conditions governing the post-deluvian world, as described in Genesis 9?** After the flood, God gives Noah and his descendants directions for the propagation of life. First, they are instructed to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. Second, the dominion of man over animals is reconfirmed, and animals are explicitly given to man for food, with the qualification that they must be bled (life is in the blood, and blood should be sacred). Third, the sacredness of human life is reinforced, establishing the principle of the death penalty for murder, as man is made in God's image.
5. **What is the significance of the Noahic covenant, including its sign?** The Noahic covenant is a divine promise that God will never again destroy all life with a flood. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow, which is meant to remind both God and humanity of this promise. The rainbow serves not just as a reminder of God's pledge, but also as a symbol of God's plan of redemption being carried out on Earth until the final judgment.
6. **How has the curse on Canaan in Genesis 9 been historically misinterpreted and misused?** The curse on Canaan, which states that Canaan will be a "servant of servants," has been historically misinterpreted and used to justify slavery and racial segregation. Proponents of these ideas associated the curse with the descendants of Ham, whom they wrongly identified as a specific race of people and then used the Biblical text to claim they were meant to be subservient. This interpretation is deeply flawed, as the curse was placed on Canaan, not Ham or all of Ham's descendants, and there is no basis for equating Canaanites with any specific race of people.
7. **Why is Canaan cursed rather than Ham, and what can be inferred from the text about the nature of Ham's offense?** The curse is placed on Canaan, not Ham, perhaps because Noah, guided by the Holy Spirit, foresaw that the negative traits seen in Ham would be perpetuated in Canaan's lineage. Ham's offense was his disrespect toward his father, Noah, by viewing his nakedness and sharing this with his brothers. This was viewed as a display of a perverse or "shameless" nature compared to the brothers' reverential modesty in covering up their father without seeing him.

8. **What do the content and applications of the curses and blessings within Genesis 9 reveal about God's plan for humanity?** The curses and blessings reveal prophetic insights into the different lineages stemming from Noah's sons. The curse on Canaan suggests his descendants would face servitude due to their negative characteristics. The blessings on Shem and Japheth suggest they would be blessed and occupy roles of influence, yet are not an indication of racial superiority. These statements are seen as predictive, guided by divine revelation and speak to the nature of their descendants rather than simply the three individuals.