

ARTICLES

THE ANTEDILUVIANS

William H. Shea
Research Associate
Biblical Research Institute
Silver Spring, Maryland

WHAT THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT

Some features such as names, places, and events from Genesis 3-6 that describe the period between creation and the flood are compared with early Mesopotamian texts which refer to the same persons and events. The comparison shows that both sources knew of a number of the features of this period and its people. The most likely explanation is that both sources ultimately go back to the same period, the Bible having transmitted such information in an accurate, historical narrative, while the Mesopotamian sources mythologized them.

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 3-6 tells of the experiences of some of the earliest members of the human race — those who lived during the interval between creation (as recorded in Genesis 1-2) and the flood (as recorded in Genesis 7-9). From an evolutionary approach to biology, geology, or biblical studies, the “antediluvians” cannot be historical figures. A more direct reading of the biblical text, on the other hand, indicates that the author of these narratives and lists understood them to be historical individuals. The archaeologist cannot assist our search for evidence of their existence, for his spade only works upon the surface of the earth as it was modified by the Noachian flood. Although evidence for antediluvians should lie deeper in the geologic strata, geologists have not yet produced such evidence.

Is there any other avenue that might be explored for evidence relating to these individuals? Yes: through “literary archaeology,” i.e., explorations of our remote past through some of the most ancient written records of mankind. Scholars who work with literary and archaeological texts from the ancient Near East agree that writing was invented by the Sumerians, probably around 3000 B.C. in terms of traditionally assigned dating. The hieroglyphic writing of Egypt followed soon thereafter in terms of

its development, but pride of first place in writing goes to the cuneiform or wedge-shaped script impressed upon clay tablets in Mesopotamia.

The first cuneiform texts were written in the Sumerian language, an ancient-world linguistic island whose closest modern relatives are the agglutinative languages of Finland and Hungary. This same script was subsequently adopted by scribes who wrote and spoke languages from the eastern branch of the Semitic language family, Akkadian, which is best known from its representatives in the Assyrian and Babylonian dialects. Because Akkadian and biblical Hebrew belong to the same linguistic family, we can examine early Sumerian and Akkadian myths (stories dealing with the actions of the gods) and epics (stories emphasizing the activities of human heroes) for similarities to the early biblical stories that are found in Genesis 3-6. (We will ignore Egyptian texts, which are generally more removed from the biblical scene.)

The Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians had creation stories, flood stories, and stories about individuals who lived between these two events. In a previous issue of *Origins*, I discussed some parallels between the biblical and Babylonian creation-flood stories.¹ This study suggests that the parallels between the biblical and Babylonian sources of knowledge about the antediluvians point to a common origin of such details and that those sources in turn indicate that they are rooted in the history of the actual individuals who lived through such experiences.

One precaution must be issued: I believe that the historical details are more accurately represented in the biblical text and that these details have gone through mythological modifications as they were transmitted by other individuals in the ancient world. Nevertheless, these sources demonstrate a resemblance sufficient to posit that they ultimately came from the same source and have diverged in different directions, the biblical retaining its historical narrative character, and the Babylonian turning into mythology.

Whereas other ancient Near Eastern texts studiously avoid any moral charge in their presentation, the biblical text tends to inject the moral element into its narratives, e.g., in the story of the Fall, in the experiences of the antediluvians, and in the reason for the worldwide flood.

THE FALL

The biblical story of mankind's fall (Genesis 3) is well known and does not need repeating. Are there any parallels in ancient Near Eastern sources? Yes: the Adapa Epic.² While the Adapa Epic contains elements of myth in which humans interact with the gods, the story concentrates

upon a human hero and thus qualifies better as an epic. For the purposes of this discussion, we need only a summary of this epic as it relates to the Genesis 3 account of mankind's fall.

Adapa was a wiseman (not a king) of Eridu, the first antediluvian city in the Sumerian king list. As such, he belonged to the first "significant" generation of mankind. On one occasion while he was fishing in the Persian Gulf, the south wind capsized his boat. In anger he cursed and broke the wing of the south wind. For this offense he was summoned to heaven to appear before Anu, the great high god. There he was offered the bread and water of life. Unfortunately, following the advice of Enki, the god of wisdom and the patron god of his city, Adapa refused the gods' offer of nourishment, thereby inadvertently passing up his opportunity to gain immortality. Instead, he was sentenced to return to earth and live out the life-span of an ordinary mortal. Moreover, because of his offense and his refusal, certain consequences, such as diseases, passed upon mankind.

While some elements in this story have been mythologized, some basic points are similar to the biblical story of the fall. These are summarized as follows:

1. Both subjects underwent a test before the deity.
2. The test was based upon something that the subjects were to consume.
3. Both failed the test and thereby forfeited their opportunity for immortality.
4. As a result of their failure, certain consequences passed upon mankind.
5. According to their respective sources, both subjects qualify as members of the first generation of mankind.³

A significant difference between these two stories is that Adam violated the moral law of God, while Adapa violated the physical laws of nature.

A final point of comparison requires a brief examination of the linguistics involved; specifically, the labial letters — b - w - m - p — the phonemes which are pronounced especially with the lips. In different dialects within the larger language family, words containing these phonemes differ in pronunciation. A modern example of labial shifts is found in the name of the Korean city which is now pronounced Busan instead of Pusan. An example from antiquity was the word for sun and the sun-god. In Hebrew it was Shemesh (cf., the town of Beth-Shemesh, the town of the temple of the sun-god). The Akkadian pronunciation differed

only in vowels to produce Shamash. In Canaanite, however, this word was pronounced Shapsh (or Shapash if fully vocalized), i.e., the middle consonant simply shifted from an M to a P. I believe that the same phonetic shift occurred between the names of the heroes of these two epics, which phonetically at least, are the same. The M in Hebrew Adam has shifted to the final P in Akkadian, and the Akkadian retains or employs a final vowel which the Hebrew did not. To the above list of similarities between these two stories we may add a sixth detail: they carry the same name when a minor phonetic shift is recognized. Thus, both the biblical Hebrews and the ancient Mesopotamians had a knowledge of this representative from the first generation of mankind: he had the same name, and his deeds resulted in similar consequences.

THE GENEALOGIES OF GENESIS 4 AND 5

The book of Genesis provides paired genealogies of two lines of antediluvians. The second half of Genesis 4 gives the genealogy of the line of Cain, while Genesis 5 consists mainly of the genealogy of the line of Seth down to the time of Noah and the flood. The line of Cain can be designated as the “secular” line, for the sole achievements of the different generations seem to be related to their material accomplishments. The line of Seth introduces a religious, if not moral, distinction between the two lines, by mentioning the righteousness of Enoch, followed by Noah and the flood narrative.

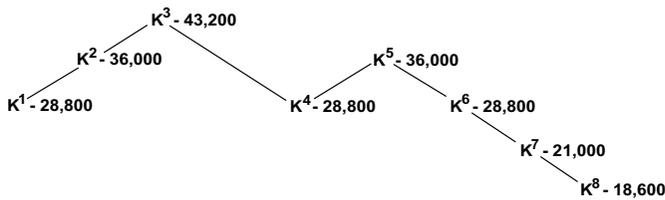
The Babylonian sources also provide two lines of the more-famed antediluvians, but they are no longer distinguished upon the basis of their righteousness or moral qualities. One line contains the wisemen or *apkallus*, headed by Adapa. In the other line are the kings of the antediluvian cities. Given the importance of the kingship in the political theology of the Sumerian (and Akkadian) city-states, one can understand why this element has been emphasized. The Sumerian king list identifies five antediluvian cities and lists the eight rulers who ruled them.⁴ The minor variations in the different textual editions, especially in the order of cities number two, three and four,⁵ will not affect the broader points of comparison in our discussion.

Not only do the Sumerians and Babylonians know of two major lines of men before the flood; they also handled the references to them in somewhat similar ways. In Genesis 5 the birth ages, life ages, and total ages of the patriarchs are given, while in Genesis 4, no ages are given for the line of Cain. A similar phenomenon occurs in the case of Babylonian literature, for only the list of kings is assigned ages. The

ages of the wisemen are not given. Once again, however, a transformation has occurred. The life ages in the biblical record have become ages of reign in the Sumerian king list. The underlying distinctions, seen in the realm of moral theology versus political theology, can be outlined as follows:

- Bible: Genesis 4 — unrighteous line, no ages
 Genesis 5 — righteous line, life ages given
- Babylon: line of wisemen, no ages
 line of kings, regnal ages given.

When we use the text critical edition established by T. Jacobsen⁶ for the study of the Sumerian king list, we can see an interesting pattern in the regnal ages of these long-lived kings. After one gets past the first four kings, for which there is a rise and then a dip, there follows a steady decrease in the length of the reigns of the next four kings. These ages can be plotted in a graph-like sequence:



This general pattern of decline in the lengths of reign, as conceptualized by the ancient Sumerians, continued after the flood. The Sumerians depict an even-more dramatic drop than does the biblical pattern, probably because they began with suspiciously grand figures. Nevertheless, both sources convey the idea that the antediluvians were a race of very long-lived persons. While the dates are given according to the length of reign, it is obvious that they paralleled the lengths of life. The drop after the flood fell to about 1000 years per king for the first post-diluvian dynasty, which was located at Kish (24,510 years for 23 kings) and then it declined further to about 200 years per king at Uruk (2,310 years for 12 kings). Finally, it ended at a mere 40 years per king at Ur, the location of the third post-diluvian dynasty (177 years for 4 kings). Thus the downward trend of the lengths of reign, and hence ages of life, continues the pattern that was established in the antediluvian period. The same pattern is followed in general, but with different figures, through the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.

There is also an interesting development in the tradition about the antediluvian wisemen in the Babylonian sources. The Sumerian king list gives the names for five antediluvian cities to which the institution of kingship was successively transferred. While the biblical record does not exclude the possibility of other antediluvian cities, it mentions only the city which Cain built and named after his son (Genesis 4:17). When one studies the list of wisemen in the earliest Babylonian texts, it becomes apparent that all were originally connected with the first antediluvian city, Eridu.⁷ If there really was only one antediluvian city, it would have made sense for the post-diluvian Sumerians and Akkadians to have originally collected the names of all these wisemen around one center initially. In later texts, however, as the tradition became adapted, the wisemen were distributed to the other antediluvian cities.

To summarize this section, both the biblical and the Babylonian sources knew of two main lines of very long-lived antediluvian personages. Thus we have two different testimonies to the actual existence of those individuals.

THE CITY AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE LIST IN GENESIS 4

The genealogy of Genesis 4 clusters several of its individuals around the city which we have mentioned above. It says that Cain, after leaving the presence of the Lord, founded that city east of Eden (v 16-17). The name of the first antediluvian city in the Sumerian king list was Eridu, which strongly resembles the name of Cain's grandson, Irad (Hebrew *ʿyrad*). The first part of this name — *ʿyr* — is the word for “city.” To this is attached a *d* or *dalet*, which appears to have been left dangling. Hebrew has resolved this problem by preceding it with an *a*-vowel. On the other hand, the Babylonian form has a *u*-vowel following it. Around the age of Moses, the Hebrew language lost these final vowels, but it can be argued that originally there should have been such a vowel at the end of Irad's name. The Hebrew letter *ʿayin* with which this name begins is not represented in the cuneiform script of Sumerian and Akkadian, so there is a virtually complete correspondence between these two names, with the minor exceptions mentioned.

One problem remains: the Hebrew text says that the city of Eridu was named after Cain's “son,” Enoch, not his grandson Irad. Can this discrepancy be resolved? The pronominal suffix on the noun “son” is the Hebrew letter *w* or *waw*, used here as a vowel letter. One possible explanation is that the vowel letter was a simple addition by a later scribe, with a more original text stating that the city was named after

the son of Enoch: Irad. It should be remembered that the Hebrew word for “son” refers to any descendant, just as the word “father” refers to any ancestor. One could, therefore, refer to Irad as a son of Cain, because there was no technical word for grandson. Given this understanding of the biblical text, these two names do correspond. The name of the first city should be Irad, and the name of the first antediluvian city in the Sumerian king list was Eridu. Both names can be taken as direct phonetic equivalents, and both sources give the first city the same name.

Furthermore, in the Babylonian tradition, Enki was the patron god of the city of Eridu. As the god of wisdom, he was consequently a special patron of the wisemen who resided there. Is there any echo of Enki’s name in the biblical record from one of the antediluvian personages who became mythologized or deified? Let us examine the name of Enoch, written as *ḥenok* in Hebrew. If the strong laryngeal letter at the beginning of this name were assimilated into the initial vowel that is found in Enki’s name, we have the same name, with the Sumero-Akkadian version adding the final vowel. Thus the name of Cain’s son, Enoch, is now deified into the name of the god of the first city.

Where was this first city located? Genesis 4:16-17 says that Cain went to the land of Nod, east of Eden, his wife bore a son, and he built a city and named it after his son. The logical connection is that Cain built the city in the land of Nod, a name that might be echoed in the Babylonian traditions. One of the addition names for Enki, the patron god of Eridu, was Nudimud,⁸ which means that the land of Enki is also the land of Nudimud. If one drops the last element (*-mud*) from this name, or, as an alternative derives it from the biblical word for east (*qedem*), the remainder of the name associated with Enki is Nud, which corresponds quite directly with the biblical name of Nod.

We can also connect the name of the city’s builder. In the Greek tradition, his name was Oannes, but in the earlier Babylonian cuneiform, his name was *u₄-an*.⁹ Some have attempted to link this name with Enoch, i.e., *ḥenok*. This correspondence does not seem too direct, however, because of the final *k* in the biblical name. Instead of a final consonant, one could suggest that an initial consonant is missing, because the *u*-vowel at the beginning of the name stands alone, unconnected with the following *a*-vowel to make a diphthong. What reasonable consonant could we suggest here, and why? In Hebrew consonantal form, Cain’s name is spelled *qyn*, and it is vocalized as *qayan*. If we apply the *q* from the beginning of Cain’s name to the beginning of *u₄-an*’s name, the result is *(q)u-an* or *quan*, respectably close to the biblical Cain,

allowing for variations in vocalization. This suggests that the name of the builder of Eridu, Oannes in Greek and Uan in Akkadian, resembles Qain, the biblical name of the builder of the first antediluvian city.

We have now compared five names that are connected to the first antediluvian city. They are summarized and compared as follows:

BIBLICAL			BABYLONIAN	
First human	Adam	=	Adapa	First wiseman of the first city
Name of the first city	Ḫenok	=	Enki	Patron god of the first city
Builder of the first city	Qain	=	Q ₄ -an	Builder of the first city
Grandson of the builder of the first city	Irak	=	Eridu	Name of the first city
Location of the first city	Nod	=	Nudimud	Title of the first city's god

Even with allowances for phonetic shifts and modifications in the course of transmission, it is possible that both sources connect five pairs of similar names with the first antediluvian city. These similarities point to their joint knowledge of the originals from which they have been taken, i.e., the historical city that existed before the flood, along with the various personages who were associated with it.

THE CULTURAL COMPLEX AT THE END OF THE GENESIS 4 GENEALOGY

The final generation listed in the Genesis 4 genealogy (the line of Adam's less-righteous descendants) is elaborated so that three sons are mentioned. The chief materialistic accomplishment of each son is listed as: 1) animal husbandry for Jabal, 2) musical instruments (pipe and lyre) for Jubal, and 3) metallurgy for Tubal-Cain. Let us examine the Mesopotamian approach to the development of these cultural accomplishments in antediluvian times.

The feature of animal husbandry among the antediluvians is seen in the Sumerian king list. The third and last king of the second antediluvian city, Bad-Tibira, was given two specific designations. He was deified as "the god Dumuzi," and he was identified as a shepherd. The other kings were not identified with an occupation other than king. Also, even if a secondary occupation were selected, a "shepherd" would be unusual. There is a stark contrast between a shepherd with his flocks and a king with his throne in his royal palace in his capital city. Nonetheless, the Sumerian tradition insisted upon linking these two with a deified figure.

Both the biblical text and the Babylonian tradition emphasize animal husbandry as a part of the work of antediluvian society.

The second cultural accomplishment is the invention of musical instruments — the flute (pipe) and the harp (lyre). The Babylonian tradition logically credits the wisemen for such an invention. Nugal-Priggal, one of the later sages in the list of the seven wisemen before the flood, was the inventor of the lyre. While there does not appear to be any direct correspondence between the inventors in the biblical and Babylonian traditions, both agree that this was one of the inventions of the antediluvians.

The third cultural feature is metallurgy, and Tubal-Cain forged instruments of bronze and iron. The same tradition about the antediluvians appears through several avenues in Babylonian lore. The second antediluvian city was associated with metallurgy, for its name, Bad-Tibira, means “wall” or “fortress” of the “metalworkers.”¹⁰ We can compare the personal name of Tubal with the city name of Tibira. Vocalization aside, we can see that the only consonantal element in which they differ is in the final consonant, the biblical name presenting an *l*, while the Babylonian name was written with an *r*. These two letters are classified phonetically in the category of phonemes known as laterals because they are pronounced especially with the lateral margin of the tongue. U.S. soldiers employed this phonetic feature in World War II by using passwords in the South Pacific that included *r*, because that sound was difficult for Japanese soldiers to pronounce, and it came out as an *l* in their speech. With a phonetic shift it would not be difficult to equate these two names.

Sippar, the name of the fourth antediluvian city according to the Babylonians, refers to bronze, one of the two antediluvian metals identified by Genesis 4. The last antediluvian capital city in the Sumerian king list was Shurruk, and its last king was Ubar-Tutu. (He was the father of the flood hero, Ziusudra, the Sumerian Noah who saved his family in the Ark through the flood.) Ubar-Tutu presumably died before the flood, for the total of his regnal years is given in the Sumerian king list. His name is similar to some names at the end of the Genesis 4 genealogy. If the elements are reversed, his name becomes Tutu-Ubar, and if a phonetic shift is employed for the final lateral, as was suggested above, it could be transformed into Tutu-ubal. If we were to drop one of the duplicated syllables in the first element of this name, we would have Tu-ubal or Tubal, which is also found in the name of Tubal-Cain in Genesis 4, the third and last of the brothers responsible for developing the arts and the sciences before the flood. While Ubar-Tutu is not specifically connected

with metalworking in the Babylonian tradition, he and Tubal-Cain are located in the last generation before the flood, and the names resemble each other with minor alterations. Thus, both the city of the metalworkers and the city of bronze have been located in antediluvian times, and one of the last antediluvian kings has a name similar to the name of the developer of metallurgy.

In summary of this section, we can conclude that all three features of the Babylonian traditions correspond to those mentioned in Genesis 4: animal husbandry, musical instruments, and metal working.

THE FLOOD HERO AT THE END OF GENESIS 5

Each ancient Near Eastern flood story has a hero: the biblical hero is Noah, the Old Babylonian hero is Atra-Hasis, the Sumerian hero is Ziusudra, and the Neo-Assyrian hero is Utnapishtim. Because their names cannot be connected linguistically, it may appear that Noah's name is unknown outside the Bible. In this regard, one other flood story from Mesopotamia or Anatolia should be considered: the Hurrian Flood story, the tablet for which was found in the archive at Boghazkoy, the ancient Hittite capital of Hattushash. Fortunately, though the tablet is badly damaged so that very little of the text is legible, enough can be read to recognize that the text presents a flood story whose hero is named na-ah-ma-su-le-el.¹¹ Assyriologists have observed that the name has a general resemblance to Noah, but they have not gone further with the comparison. E. A. Speiser has observed about this name: "Comparison with Noah has been suggested; such a possibility cannot be ruled out, but neither can it be relied upon."¹²

I would suggest a more detailed comparison between this name and Noah's. Is it possible that the names of two antediluvian patriarchs were joined here? The first name would be na-ah, which corresponds quite directly with Noah. The most likely candidate for the second name, ma-su-le-el, would be Methuselah, or ma-(tu)-su-le-el. The final element or sign in this name, *-el*, is the word for God or god. It might have functioned as a determinative or phonetic complement for "god" from a Semitic (non-Hurrian) language. As Methuselah was the longest-lived, antediluvian patriarch, it would not be surprising that some memory of him would also be preserved.

THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF LIFE BEFORE THE FLOOD

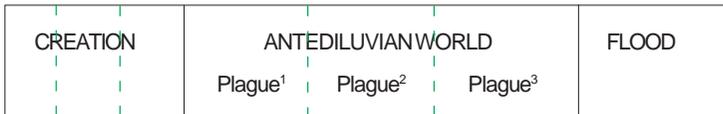
In an earlier (1984) study published in *Origins* (Vol 11, p 9-29), I provided a comparison of the literary structure of "creation-flood"

stories with the literary contents of Genesis 1-9. I concluded that creation and flood stories were linked in the ancient Near East; they did not just circulate separately and independently. The tripartite structure (the extended format containing a narrative of creation, antediluvian life, and the flood) is found in the Sumerian creation-flood story (the Eridu Genesis) which dates from the early second millennium and the Old Babylonian creation-flood story known as the Atra-Hasis epic. Only the Neo-Assyrian form of the flood story lacks this type of literary structure, for there the flood story is independent of the creation story and has only a brief reference to the antediluvians before the flood. In other words, the two older forms of these texts contain the extended format while the later form does not. In my previous study I diagrammed these comparisons along with the parallel outline of the biblical text in the following manner:¹³

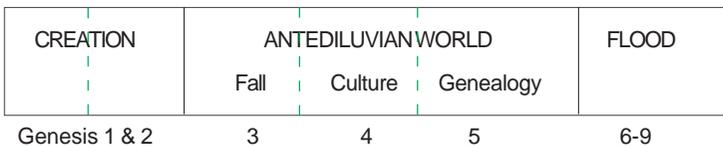
I. The Sumerian Creation-Flood Story; the Eridu Genesis, ca. 1600 B.C.



II. The Akkadian Creation-Flood Story; the Atra-Hasis Epic, ca. 1600 B.C.



III. The Hebrew Creation-Flood Story; Genesis 1-9



We will concentrate on the middle third of these outlines — the antediluvian period of life. The two lower diagrams suggest a further tripartite subdivision of the antediluvian period, and this subdivision is evident from both biblical and extrabiblical sources.

The biblical materials, being probably the best known, will be considered first. After the description of the fall in Genesis 3, the biblical text relates the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, before it launches

into the more extended genealogy in the latter part of the chapter. The sad and unfortunate fratricide was an isolated incident in human history. While demonstrating the malice that man's now-fallen nature was capable of, it did not provide a lengthy description of the general conditions of the time. Further details are seen in Genesis 4:12 (and reiterated in v. 14), when God pronounces Cain's fate: the ground and fields would no longer yield him their strength, and he would be a wanderer and a fugitive on earth.

In short, Cain would live a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence. Having no permanent roots, he would have to be a food-gatherer, along with whatever he could obtain from his herds and flocks. This, then, appears to be the first lot of man, as it is described more extensively for this branch of Adam's family than the type of existence under which the line of Seth lived.

This description of Cain's life after he murdered Abel is closely paralleled by the type of existence that was predicated for man, according to the Eridu Genesis.¹⁴ After creating man, the birth goddess abandoned him to his own devices. Unable to thrive under those circumstances, man was basically a dirty, ragged, uncultured, semi-nomadic herder of animals. We might designate the nomadic and outcast stage as Phase One of antediluvian life, which was apparently limited and restricted more to the direct descendants of Cain. In the extrabiblical, ancient Near Eastern source, this stage has been generalized and broadened to represent the experience of all mankind.

Phase Two of antediluvian life might be described as one of prosperity, success, and longevity. This is represented in particular by the genealogy of Genesis 5 and the kings and cities of the Sumerian king list. Neither list provides much information about living conditions, but the Babylonian sources emphasize the prosperity that flourished after the birth goddess showed pity toward her creation by establishing cultural centers and bestowing the gift of kingship upon mankind. In fact, conditions improved so much that some kings reigned over cities and countries for periods up to and in excess of 36,000 years. While Genesis 5 does not present as self-congratulatory a picture, it emphasizes the fact that there was a race of long-lived giants, and thereby conveys the idea that the pristine, primitive world was beneficial for mankind.

This primeval and prosperous picture did not last. Phase Three (the final phase of antediluvian life) was one of adversity and decline. Because mankind perverted the gifts of the Creator (Genesis 6), God took the serious step of appointing a worldwide flood to purify the earth

and its inhabitants from their wickedness. Once again the biblical story conveys a moral lesson that is lacking from the Babylonian epic. Although the Babylonian sources also indicate a time of adversity for the antediluvians, this decline was not caused by the moral evil of mankind; it occurred by the virtual whim of the gods. This is revealed more clearly in the Atra-Hasis Epic which describes three periods of physically bad experiences for the antediluvians: a plague executed by the god Namtara, a drought activated by the god Hadad, and a famine as a climax.

In each adverse case, however, the people were able to escape because Enki, the god of wisdom, told Atra-Hasis which god would relieve the dire circumstances if he were offered sacrifices and worshipped. Atra-hasis followed Enki's instructions carefully, and in each case relief came to the people. Enlil, the chief active administrative god, however, was not appeased, and after the plans for mankind's destruction had been thwarted, Enlil determined to bring the ultimate solution to eradicate all of mankind. Rather than appointing one god to accomplish his intentions, he persuaded the entire council of the gods to agree to this procedure of total devastation by flood. This time, the general population was destroyed, and only the flood hero, along with some of his family and livestock, escaped. The final solution *almost* accomplished its purpose, but Enlil was enraged because some persons from mankind remained.

There is a discrepancy in the way that the extrabiblical sources portray antediluvian life. The Eridu Genesis and the Sumerian king list convey the idea that the antediluvian world thrived until the time of the flood. In contrast, the Atra-Hasis Epic depicts life as worsening drastically. Are we to assume that its author knew of the antediluvian period only as one of fear, terror, and dread, while the author of the Eridu Genesis viewed it as having unbridled prosperity and success? If so, then the authors of these two texts did not have access to the alternate views which the opposite texts present. This would leave a very narrow line of transmission for distinct and contrasting pictures of antediluvian life.

Other portions of these stories overlap enough for us to realize that they do not diverge, for the most part, until they describe the final events before the flood. The tension between the Eridu Genesis and the Atra-Hasis Epic is resolved by arranging their episodes of antediluvian life in sequence. The Eridu Genesis emphasized the first phase, man's nomadic condition leading into the flowering under kingship. The Sumerian king list described the second phase, man's prosperity, success and longevity, while the Atra-Hasis Epic concentrated upon the final phase, the declining period that occurred shortly before the flood.

There is no contradiction unless one attempts to superimpose all three types of conditions upon the same period of time. The biblical text narrates the three phases of antediluvian life in chronological order, presenting the entire time span between creation and the flood. While Genesis 4 and 5 discuss the series of long-lived and apparently righteous men, at least in one of the lines of Adam's family, Genesis 6 focuses on the moral evil of men as reaching its peak until it brought on the flood. If the extrabiblical cuneiform sources are arranged to follow this sequence, the elements of the Eridu Genesis are paralleled by Genesis 4, the Sumerian King List is paralleled by Genesis 5, and the Atra-Hasis Epic is paralleled by Genesis 6.

One final point might be made about the chronology. There is no explicit chronology for the first phase, either in the Bible or in the Eridu Genesis. The chronology of the second phase is bounded by the lengths of reign of the Sumerian king list from Babylonian sources and by the patriarchal dates in the biblical record as recorded in Genesis 5. While the dates are not the same, both sources discuss events upon a long magnitude of time, as compared to present-day human life-spans. The numbers are different, but the general trend of long-lived kings remains.

The chronology of the final phrase is short in both the Atra-Hasis Epic and in Genesis 6. According to Genesis 6:3, God determined that this period of probation, as E. A. Speiser puts it,¹⁵ was to last for 120 years. This was a relatively short time in terms of the lengths of the lives of the patriarchs as given in Genesis 5. The Atra-Hasis Epic has a similar period of time for the adversities that mankind experienced just before the flood. The text of both passages dealing with the plague and the drought begins by noting that "1200 years had not yet passed,"¹⁶ and this leads up to the occurrence of those adverse events. The fact that all three of these adverse events occurred within a 1200-year period indicates a quasi-probation period even by implication in the Mesopotamian source.

Here we wish to emphasize the very close similarity between these two final periods of existence before the flood, as described by the biblical and the Babylonian writers. They relate to each other by a factor of 10, expanding from 120 to 1200. There is also a parallel ratio involved. The lives of the biblical patriarchs approximated 1000 years, and the probationary period at the end was approximately 100 years. In the Babylonian sources, on the other hand, the lengths of the reigns of the kings were given in 10,000s of years, and the probational period approximated 1000 years. A logical supposition would be that both writers

knew of the same events in a similar relationship, even though their details differed. In addition, we notice again that the Babylonian source has shifted from a moral to a physical causation.

After having reviewed this evidence, we can modify the chart that was utilized above, by adding more details that are seen when all these sources are brought together:

	A	B			C
	CREATION	ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD			FLOOD
		Phase I Nomadic Period	Phase II Longevity & Prosperity Period	Phase III Evil Period (moral/ physical)	
Bible	Genesis 1-2	Genesis 4	Genesis 5	Genesis 6	Genesis 7-9
Sumerian	Eridu Genesis —	Eridu Genesis —	Sumerian King List	— —	Eridu Genesis —
Akkadian	Atra-Hasis Epic	—	—	Atra-Hasis Epic	Atra-Hasis Epic

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preservation of their traditions about origins, the ancient Mesopotamians (the oldest writing society in the world) retained a full format of ideas about creation, the people who lived in the world immediately afterwards, and the flood — the great deluge which swept over the world and destroyed the antediluvians. When information about the antediluvians from these ancient Mesopotamian traditions are compared with the narratives that are preserved in the early chapters of the Bible, a number of rather direct and striking similarities are seen.

Babylonian sources identified two great lines of antediluvian patriarchs, but instead of classifying them according to their righteous or unrighteous conduct, they transformed these lists into two lines of political figures, kings and wisemen. That these individuals were very long-lived

is even more emphatically stated in cuneiform literature than in the Bible. When examined carefully in the light of comparative linguistics, the names of some of these individuals resemble biblical personalities, especially those that cluster around three points, at the beginning and the end of the genealogy of Genesis 4, and at the end of the genealogy in Genesis 5. Both the biblical and the extrabiblical sources describe the same cultural accomplishments for the antediluvians: the building of a city or cities, animal husbandry, metallurgy, and musical instruments.

In addition to these cultural features, both sources have characterized various successive periods of antediluvian experience. The different periods are divided into three eras. The period of nomadism that followed man's creation, according to the Eridu Genesis, is reflected in Cain's experience after he became a vagabond and a wanderer (Genesis 4:12,14). The period of the long-lived patriarchs which followed is reflected in both the Sumerian king list and the genealogy of Genesis 5. Both sources describe the final antediluvian period as being evil. In the Bible it was a morally evil time, whereas in the Atra-Hasis Epic, the gods imposed evil, physical conditions upon mankind for their own selfish reasons.

Our study has shown similarities between the biblical account and the Babylonian traditions of the antediluvian period. We can best describe their relationship by saying that their respective bodies of knowledge about these persons and events is derived from a common source. That source should ultimately be the historical persons and events that were preserved through oral tradition and written form in their respective societies. Under the influence of divine inspiration, the biblical account retained its historical narrative character, while the Babylonian treatment of these traditions became greatly mythologized, though some of the original contents and their similarities to the biblical record remain.

ENDNOTES

1. Shea WH. 1984. A comparison of narrative elements in ancient Mesopotamian creation-flood stories with Genesis 1-9. *Origins* 11:9-29.
2. (a) Speiser EA. 1955. Akkadian myths and epics. In: Pritchard JB, editor. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p 101-103. (b) For my detailed analysis of the Adapa Epic, see: Shea WH. 1977. Adam in ancient Mesopotamian traditions. *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15:27-42.
3. Shea 1977, p 39 (Note 2b).
4. For a useful discussion of these wisemen and the sources in which they are referred to, see: Hallo WW. 1970. Antediluvian cities. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 23:62.
5. For a discussion of these textual variants, see *Ibid.*, p 61-63.

6. Oppenheim AL. 1955. Babylonian and Akkadian historical texts. In: ANET, p 265-266 (Note 1).
7. Hallo, "Antediluvian Cities," p 62 (Note 4).
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p 64.
10. Ibid., p 65, n 95.
11. Speiser EA. 1985. Genesis. Anchor Bible. 3rd ed. Vol. 1, p 42. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
12. Ibid.
13. Shea WH. 1984. A comparison of narrative elements in ancient Mesopotamian creation-flood stories with Genesis 1-9. *Origins* 11:25.
14. Jacobsen T. 1981. The Eridu Genesis. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100:513-529. For the discussion of man's nomadic conditions before he was granted the gift of kingship, see especially p 516-518.
15. Speiser, Genesis, p 42 (Note 11).
16. Lambert WG, Millard AR. 1969. *Atra-Hasis: the Babylonian story of the flood*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford, p 67, 71, 73.