

The Didache

[DID-uh-kay]

The *Didache* is the first known Christian catechesis. Written in the first century, the *Didache* is the earliest known Christian writing outside of Scripture. The name of the work, "*Didache*," is indeed appropriate for such a catechesis because it comes from the Greek word for "teaching," and indicates that this writing contains the teaching of the Apostles.

The *Didache* is a catechetical summary of Christian sacraments, practices, and morality. Though written in the first century, its teaching is timeless. The *Didache* was probably written by the disciples of the Twelve Apostles, and it presents the Apostolic Faith as taught by those closest to Jesus Christ. This series of books takes the name of this early catechesis because it shares in the Church's mission of passing on that same Faith, in its rich entirety, to new generations.

Below is an excerpt from the *Didache* in which we see a clear example of its lasting message, a message that speaks to Christians of today as much as it did to the first generations of the Church. The world is different, but the struggle for holiness is the same. In the *Didache*, we are instructed to embrace virtue, to avoid sin, and to live the Beatitudes of our Lord.

My child, flee from everything that is evil and everything that is like it. Do not be wrathful, for wrath leads to murder, nor jealous nor contentious nor quarrelsome, for from all these murder ensues.

My child, do not be lustful, for lust leads to fornication, nor a filthy-talker nor a lewd-looker, for from all these adulteries ensue.

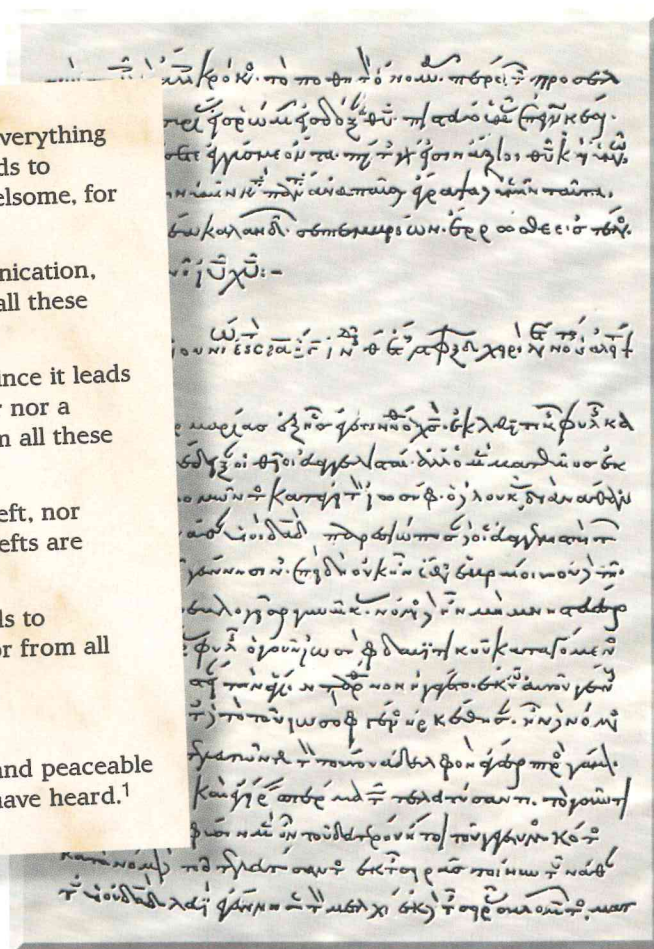
My child, do not be an interpreter of omens, since it leads to idolatry, nor an enchanter nor an astrologer nor a magical purifier, nor wish to see them, for from all these idolatry arises.

My child, do not be a liar, for lying leads to theft, nor avaricious nor conceited, for from all these thefts are produced.

My child, do not be a complainer, since it leads to blasphemy, nor self-willed nor evil-minded, for from all these blasphemies are produced.

Be meek, for the meek will inherit the earth.

Be long-suffering and merciful and guileless and peaceable and good, and revere always the words you have heard.¹



The *Didache* is the teaching of the Apostles and, as such, it is the teaching of the Church. Accordingly, this book series makes extensive use of the most recent comprehensive catechesis provided to us, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The *Didache* series also relies heavily on Sacred Scripture, the lives of the saints, the Fathers of the Church, and the teaching of Vatican II as witnessed by the pontificate of John Paul II.

1. Swett, Ben H. "The Didache (The Teaching)." © January 30, 1998. <http://bswett.com/1998-01Didache.html>

Understanding The Scriptures

A Complete Course On Bible Study



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FROM THE CATECHISM

294 The glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created. God made us "to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*" (Eph 1:5-6), for "the glory of God is man fully alive; moreover man's life is the vision of God: if God's revelation through creation has already obtained life for all the beings that dwell on earth, how much more will the Word's manifestation of the Father obtain life for those who see God" (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres* 4, 20, 7: PG 7/1, 1037). The ultimate purpose of creation is that God "who is the creator of all things may at last become 'all in all,' thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude" (*Ad gentes* 2; cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

355 "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). Man occupies a unique place in creation: (I) he is "in the image of God;" (II) in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds; (III) he is created "male and female"; (IV) God established him in his friendship.

705 Disfigured by sin and death, man remains "in the image of God," in the image of the Son, but is deprived "of the glory of God," (Rom 3:23) of his "likeness." The promise made to Abraham inaugurates the economy of salvation, at the culmination of which the Son himself will assume that "image" (cf. Jn 1:14; Phil 2:7) and restore it in the Father's "likeness" by giving it again its Glory, the Spirit who is "the Giver of Life."

1147 God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator (cf. Wis 13:1; Rom 1:19 f.; Acts 14:17). Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness.

1602 Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb" (Rv 19:7, 9; cf. Gn 1:26-27). Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its "mystery," its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, its various realizations throughout the history of salvation, the difficulties arising from sin and its renewal "in the Lord" in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church (1 Cor 7:39; cf. Eph 5:31-32).

2402 In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits (Ex 20:15; Dt 5:19; Mt 19:18). The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

2566 *Man is in search of God.* In the act of creation, God calls every being from nothingness into existence. "Crowned with glory and honor," man is, after the angels, capable of acknowledging "how majestic is the name of the Lord in all the earth" (Ps 8:5; 8:1). Even after losing through his sin his likeness to God, man remains an image of his Creator, and retains the desire for the one who calls him into existence. All religions bear witness to men's essential search for God (cf. Acts 17:27).

Endnote

1. GS 37 § 2.

Chapter 4

The Early World



*Noah and his sons are all descendants of Adam.
They carry original sin with them.*

Chapter 4

The Early World



Read

Genesis

4:17 - 5:5

6:1 - 9:29

11:1 - 9

The Evil Line Of Cain

- The descendants of Cain seek only personal glory in a world of sin and violence.
- Seven generations from Adam, the line of Cain reaches its evil peak in Lamech.

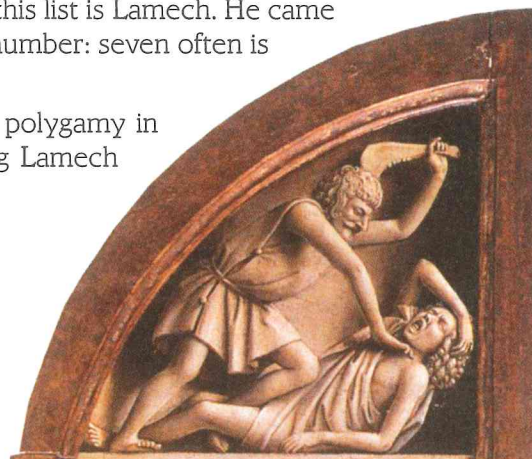
After Cain is punished by God, he is banished from the land and he goes to the land of "Nod," which means "wandering." There he has a son named Enoch. After that, he builds a city and names it after Enoch.

In fact, Scripture credits Cain's line with inventing most of the things that make civilization possible. Another descendant of Cain, Tubal-cain, was the inventor of metalworking. And Tubal-cain's half-brother Jubal "was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe."¹

But the descendant of Cain who gets the most space in this list is Lamech. He came seven generations down. Seven is not only a covenant number: seven often is a symbol of perfection in the Bible.

Lamech had two wives—the first record of bigamy or polygamy in the Bible. And in Genesis 4:23-24, we hear a little song Lamech made up for them.

Lamech said to his wives,
 "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,
 You wives of Lamech,
 hearken to what I say:
 I have slain a man for wounding me,
 a young man for striking me.
 If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
 truly Lamech seventy-seven-fold."



The first murder: Cain killed Abel out of envy—one of the traditional seven deadly sins, and one of the most dangerous.

Lamech has defied God's will. The marriage covenant is the primary covenant, a holy institution created by God. But Lamech treats women as if they were objects to be possessed. And he treats men as objects, too, killing them whenever he feels like it.

Instead of treating other people as images of God, Lamech and his followers live in a world of wars and bloody revenge. Seven generations down from Adam through Cain, the line of evil has reached its ugly completeness.

Lamech's code of revenge is exactly the opposite of God's intention. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the New Testament writers used, "seventy-seven fold" is translated "seventy times seven." Jesus would turn the song of Lamech on its head when he answered Peter's famous question:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." (Mt 18:21-22)

Christians multiply forgiveness as disproportionately as Lamech multiplied his revenge.



And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (Gen 4:10-11)

The Righteous Line Of Seth

- The descendants of Seth work for God's glory instead of their own.
- The People of God are his children, just as Seth was Adam's child.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth. Now we hear about his line—the faithful followers of God.

When Seth had a son, he named him Enosh. “At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gn 4: 26).

That phrase “to call upon the name of the LORD” means to worship God. Notice the difference between Cain's line and Seth's line. Cain named a city after his son to make a name for himself. But when Seth has a son, his work is not for himself but rather for God. The men of Cain's line care only about their own glory. But Seth's descendants, God's people, put the glory of God first.

This is where the City of God begins and God's covenant family finally begins to progress. We start almost with a new beginning in Chapter 5: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.” Then Adam fathered a son, Seth, again “in his own likeness, after his image.”² In other words, Seth was Adam's son in the same way that Adam was God's son. God isn't just our Creator. God is our Father as well.

Here we see two completely contrary cultures. The family of Cain reached its evil completeness in the murderous tyrant Lamech, whereas the family of Seth was built on worshiping God, “calling upon the name of the LORD.”



*Seth was Adam's son in the same way that Adam was God's son.
God isn't just our Creator. God is our Father as well.*

The Sons Of God And The Daughters Of Men

- The line of Seth is tempted by the sinful practices of the Cainites.
- Breaking the marriage covenant, they spread evil throughout the world.

Those two groups—the Cainites and the Sethites—had to live on the same earth. As long as there is evil, pride, and injustice, there will be no harmony.

The descendants of Cain saw the whole world in terms of wars and personal glory. On the other hand, the descendants of Seth, although they worshiped God, still had the seeds of sin in them that we all inherit from Adam and Eve.

So we read at the beginning of Genesis 6, “When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair and they took to wives such of them as they chose.”

Who are the “sons of God?”

God created Adam in his own image and likeness, and Adam fathered a son named Seth in his own image and likeness. The “sons of God,” then, must be the family of Seth, that family of God that built itself up, calling upon the name of the Lord. In other words, they are the original Church, God's family.

The “daughters of men,” on the other hand, are the descendants of Cain. We know that in the seventh generation of the wicked Cainites, Lamech became a polygamist, taking however many women he wanted. Now the descendants of Seth were tempted by that same sin. They “took to wife such of them as they chose,” implying that polygamy has entered into the line of Seth, the covenant family of God.

Sin is becoming institutionalized. We'll find, as we get further into the Old Testament, that breaking the marriage covenant always brings God's judgment every time. In fact, the very next verse (Gn 6: 3) tells us that God decided then to shorten our lives.

“Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.’”

But that didn't stop the spread of evil. The book goes on to tell us, “The Nephilim [or “giants”] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children of them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.”³

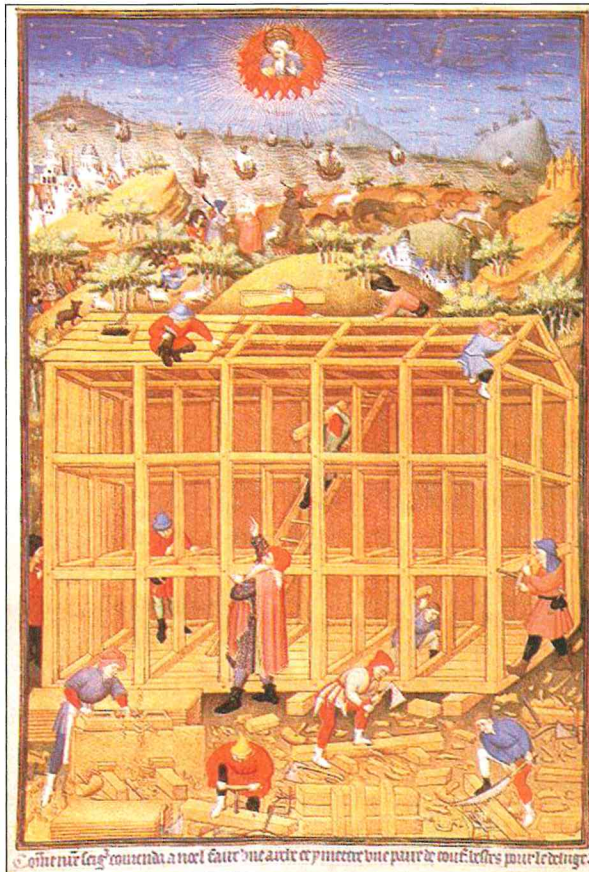
In Hebrew, “the men of renown” is literally “the men of *shem*,” the men of the “name”—which is what the word “shem” means. They were wicked tyrants who were making a name for themselves. As the lines of Seth and Cain intermarried, the whole world came to be dominated by the descendants of Lamech—unjust, violent men, building a culture of pure evil.

We see the result in Genesis 6: 5-6.

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

The Flood

- The wicked violence of the human race provokes God to send a great flood.
- One righteous man is saved, along with his family and representatives of every beast and bird.



With the lines of Cain and Seth mixed up, almost the whole world had gone over to the side of evil. Genesis tells us that “the earth was filled with violence.”⁴ There was one righteous group left: Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their families. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (Gn 6: 9).

So God decided to make a new beginning, starting the human race over again with Noah as the founder. “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Noah, therefore, was instructed to build an “ark”—a giant boat capable of carrying his family and enough animals to repopulate the earth. God would send a great flood, but Noah would be safe, and God promised, “I will establish my covenant with you” (Gn 6: 18).

We see the number seven throughout the story of the Flood. Noah took seven pairs of each clean animal, seven pairs of each bird, and one pair each of all the rest,⁵ and they followed him into the ark. Then God shut the door behind them. After seven days, the flood came.

The rain poured down from the sky, and water came up from the deep. For forty days and forty nights it rained. Forty is another important symbolic number in Scripture. Periods of trial and repentance often come in forties in the Bible; later we’ll see how Israel wandered forty years in the desert, and how Jesus fasted forty days. Even now, the season of Lent, our yearly time of repentance and fasting, takes up forty days in the Church calendar.

For 150 days,⁶ there was nothing but water. Then at last the waters started to recede, and in the seventh month the ark came to rest on Ararat, a mountain in what is today eastern Turkey.⁷

But what condition was the rest of the world in? Noah sent out a raven to see whether there might be dry land yet. The raven “went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.” Then he sent out a dove, and the dove returned to him. After seven days, he sent out the dove again, and this time the dove came back with an olive leaf. Now Noah knew the waters had begun to go down. The next time he sent out the dove, seven days later, it did not come back.⁸

Finally Noah released his passengers, and the animals spread out to repopulate the earth. Then he built an altar to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Like Adam, Noah would be the priest for his whole family—which, after the Flood, was all that was left of humanity.

Above: Noah builds the ark to God’s specifications: 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. Traditional pictures of the ark show something shaped like a boat. However, the Hebrew word for “ark” is “tebah,” meaning “box” or “chest” and may suggest the actual shape of the ark. A box shape would seem more practical for stability and volume and consistent with the narrative, considering the nature of the deluge.

Did The Flood Really Happen?

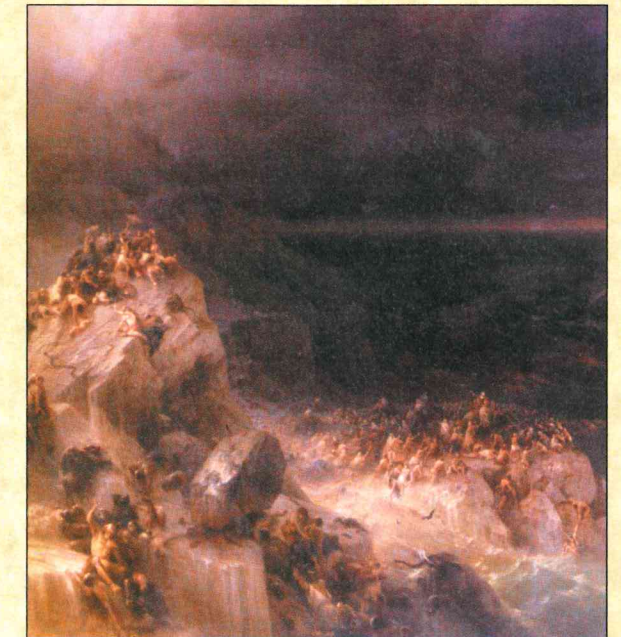
For a long time, Bible scholars tried to prove that there had been a flood over the whole earth, while scientists simply ignored the Bible story. But more recently, scientists and Bible scholars have been coming closer to agreement. Many geologists and archaeologists now think that the story of the Flood refers to a real geological event. Meanwhile, anthropologists point out that similar stories of a disastrous flood—and one family who survived it—are found in cultures all over the Middle East and Europe.

Archaeologists point out that Mesopotamia, the part of the Middle East where civilization first developed, sometimes went through terrible floods. A layer of flood deposit at Ur, one of the most ancient cities in Mesopotamia, showed that the city had been wiped out in some great disaster. Later in the book of Genesis, we read that Abraham, the ancestor of all the people of Israel, came from Ur. He and his family might easily have carried the true story of the Flood at Ur with them when they moved west.

One of the most interesting theories puts the Flood farther back than that. In a book called *Noah’s Flood*, two marine archaeologists point out that the Black Sea was an isolated lake until a few thousand years ago. Some of the first steps toward civilization were taken around that lake. When the Mediterranean Sea broke through (perhaps during a great storm), the water came in so suddenly and violently that all the towns and villages were under water in a few days. We know from other evidence that Oral Tradition can preserve a story accurately for thousands of years. The book suggests that this Black Sea flood was the source of the story of Noah and of all the other flood stories. Since the book was published, surveys have found whole towns on the floor of the Black Sea.

Neither of those theories necessarily contradicts the literal sense of the Bible. The Hebrew word translated as “world” in the Flood story could also mean “country,” so the sacred writers might have meant that the land as far as anyone could see was submerged.

Of course, the question of where the story came from is not really important to understanding the Bible. The important thing is to understand what the story says about our relationship with God.



Mount Ararat, the tallest peak in modern Turkey, is a snow-capped dormant volcanic cone, located in far northeast Turkey, 10 miles west of Iran and 20 miles south of Armenia. The mountain rises 16,945 feet above the surrounding plains. The Book of Genesis identifies this mountain as the resting place of Noah’s Ark after the great flood.

“Ararat” is a version of the name “Urartu” from the Hebrew Torah written by Moses which only included the consonants “rrt.”

The Covenant With Noah

- Noah and his family after the Flood are the beginnings of a new creation.
- Christians see the Flood as a “type” of baptism.

It was a new creation. The human race was founded again, with a righteous man as its founder. But had the Flood eliminated sin? No! He might have been righteous, but Noah was not perfect. Like every human, he inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve.

God knew, of course, that we would sin again. “I will never again curse the ground because of man,” God said after Noah’s sacrifice—not because the line of Noah was without sin, but for exactly the opposite reason: “for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

Then God blessed Noah and his family, saying to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”⁹ Those are the same words God spoke to Adam and Eve at the dawn of creation. As he did with Adam and Eve, God gave Noah and his family dominion over the living things of the world.

In fact, the story of Noah and the story of Adam are so similar that we can see a literary genius at work. The inspired author uses literary parallelism to leave us no doubt that the Flood begins a new creation.



God’s covenant with Noah and all creation, the rainbow, touches the plain at the foot of Mount Ararat.

After Noah’s sacrifice, God established his promised covenant with Noah and his family. God gave them the earth and all its goods, to have dominion over them. But there were conditions. A covenant goes two ways: a blessing for abiding by its conditions, and a curse for breaking it. “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.”

God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the world by a flood. As a sign, he placed the rainbow in the sky. When the rainbow appears after a storm, God told Noah, “I will look on it and remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” The rainbow is a universal sign. By making the rainbow the sign of the covenant, God shows that this covenant ultimately applies to all creation—as did the covenant with Adam.

God made an everlasting covenant with Noah and with all living beings (cf. Gn 9:16). It will remain in force as long as the world lasts. (CCC 71)

Christians see the Flood as a “type”—a symbolic precursor in history—of Christian baptism. The story in Genesis tells us in a symbolic way what happens when a Christian is baptized. Our old world of sin is washed away, and we are created anew, reborn in the waters of baptism. Like Noah, we still carry the potential of sin with us after baptism, but we have received God’s blessing and his promise that he will not destroy us.

Another Story Of The Flood



When archaeologists found ancient Babylonian tablets that told a familiar-sounding flood story, the whole world seemed to be in an uproar. Here, as part of the Epic of Gilgamesh, was a flood story many centuries older than the oldest Bible manuscripts. Yet the story it told was clearly similar to the story of Noah. Right away, some people jumped to the conclusion that the story of Noah must be “derived” from this older flood story.

Of course, a few moments’ thinking is enough to show that their conclusion won’t hold water. The story of Noah in its present form was written down later, that’s true. But it could well be the record of an oral tradition that goes back thousands of years. The flood story in Gilgamesh might just as easily be derived from oral traditions of the Noah story.

What the story does prove, however, is that some story of a worldwide flood was known all over the Middle East. In fact, anthropologists have found Flood stories, and flood heroes like Noah, all over the world. It seems that every culture preserves the memory of some great catastrophe long ago.

In the Gilgamesh story, the gods have decided to destroy humankind with a great flood. But one of the gods rebels and decides to save one man and his family. He tells Utnapishtim, the man who takes the place of Noah in the story, to build a boat, and to gather all the beasts of the field into the boat.

Then comes the horrible storm, and everything is wiped out except Utnapishtim and his boat. The destruction is so horrible that even the gods are quivering like dogs.

After seven days, the storm subsides, and the boat comes to rest on a mountain. To see if there’s any dry land about, Utnapishtim releases a dove, but the dove comes back. Then he sends out a swallow, but the swallow comes back as well. Finally he sends out a raven, and the raven doesn’t come back. Knowing that the waters have gone down, Utnapishtim releases all the animals and offers a sacrifice to the gods.

Clearly this is a version of the same story as the one about Noah—especially the details about sending out birds to see if the flood has gone down. But although the story has some of the same details, it doesn’t have the same point at all. In the Gilgamesh story, the gods are capricious tyrants battling against each other, and they bring on the flood for no good reason. (In one version of the story, the gods decide to destroy humanity because people make too much noise, and the gods can’t get any sleep at night.) Utnapishtim is saved mostly because one of the gods wants to undermine the other gods. In the Noah story, it is the wickedness of human beings that brings justice from the one true God, and Noah is saved because of his righteousness.



Above inset: A relief traditionally identified with the ancient King Gilgamesh of Uruk; from the palace of Sargon II, ca. 720 B.C.

Clay tablet with the flood story from the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of eleven tablets which were in the collection of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, 7th century B.C.

The Curse On Canaan

- Sin is not washed away by the Flood.
- Ham’s sin brings a curse on his son Canaan, ancestor of the Canaanites.

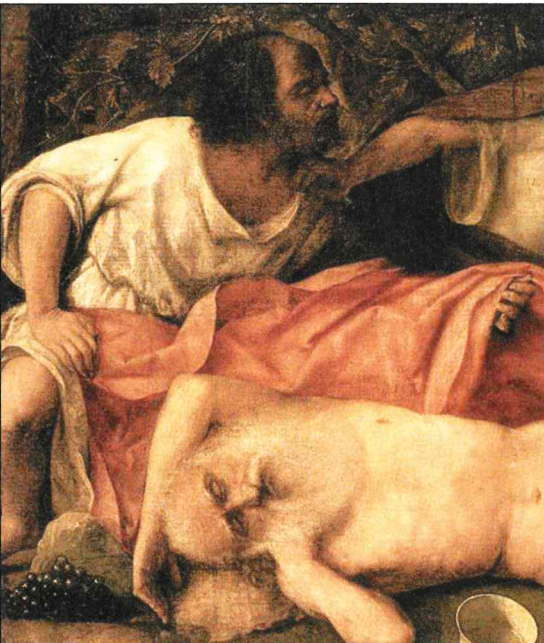
Once the flood waters receded, Noah and his family had to start from the beginning. They had to find food for themselves and their animals. Noah became a farmer, and one of his crops was grape vines. At harvest time, he made wine from the juice of the grapes. In Genesis 9: 20-27, we read the result of Noah’s drunken celebration:

“Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.¹⁰

“Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said:

‘Cursed be Canaan;
a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.’
He also said, ‘Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.’”¹¹

In spite of the universal Flood, sin was not destroyed in the world. Noah and his sons are all descendants of Adam; they carry original sin with them. Ham’s disrespect undermined his father’s authority at a time when his was the *only* authority. His sin earned a curse on his descendants—in particular on Canaan, regarded as the father of the Canaanites, hated enemies of Israel.



Noah therefore gave his blessing to Shem—one of two cases in Genesis where the first-born son didn’t succumb to pride and end up being passed over in favor of his younger brother. (The other case would be Abraham.)

The role of the first-born is always very important in a patriarchal society. When the family is the main unit of society and the father is the leader of the family, what happens when the father dies? Human mortality would create a crisis of leadership in every generation. The first-born is the natural mediator between the father and the rest of the children—the one who teaches the others what the father’s rules are. When the father dies, he is in a natural position to be the leader of the family.

But God chooses his servants according to his wisdom, not according to our rules. One of the recurring themes in Genesis is the preference for a younger son as heir instead of the first-born. It starts right at the beginning, when Seth becomes Adam’s heir instead of Cain. That is why Shem and Abraham stand out: they are the only two first-born sons in Genesis who follow the “usual” pattern. Shem’s family would be the foundation of the People of God. Remember that the word “shem” means “name” in Hebrew.

Above: *The Drunkenness of Noah* by Giovanni Bellini, ca. 1515

TABLE OF NATIONS according to Genesis 10

