

final sacrifice after the flood. The idea of two supposed documents, dated from the ninth and the fifth centuries B.C., each omitting important details of the story, has received a serious blow, through an unexpected archeological discovery.

In 1872 a cuneiform tablet that had been excavated from Nineveh twenty years earlier was found to contain a Babylonian flood story, part of the Gilgamesh Epic. This flood story closely parallels the Old Testament account in striking details, more closely, in fact, than it parallels either of the so-called J or P accounts. The hero, Utnapishtim, is warned by a friendly god of the approaching flood, the result of the god Enlil's wrath. Utnapishtim builds a cubical ark, and thus rescues himself, his family, many craftsmen, wild and domestic animal species, and all his gold and silver. After the seven day inundation, Utnapishtim sends out a dove, a swallow, and a raven. The ark ends up on Mount Nisir, and Utnapishtim makes an offering to the hungry gods. He and his wife are rewarded by being made gods and dwelling 'in the Far Distance.' Although written long before Moses' time, the Babylonian story is remarkably similar to the Old Testament record.

The Babylonian story, as the Old Testament account, also employs frequent repetition to achieve emphasis and vividness -- for example, one of the gods complains to Enlil:

On the sinner impose his sin,
On the transgressor impose his transgression!
Yet be lenient, lest he be cut off,
Be patient, lest he be dislodged!
Instead of thy bringing on the deluge,
Would that a lion had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of thy bringing on the deluge,
Would that a wolf had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of thy bringing on the deluge,