

## Noah's Box

### Lessons from Noah's Vessel

**Genesis 7:1-5 HCSB** Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you *alone* are righteous before Me in this generation. (2) You are to take with you seven pairs, a male and its female, of all the clean animals, and two of the animals that are not clean, a male and its female, (3) and seven pairs, male and female, of the birds of the sky--in order to keep offspring alive on the face of the whole earth. (4) Seven days from now I will make it rain on the earth 40 days and 40 nights, and I will wipe off the face of the earth every living thing I have made." (5) And Noah did everything that the LORD commanded him.

There is an extra-biblical account that underscores and largely agrees with the biblical account of the flood.<sup>1</sup>



There is a Mesopotamian flood account, now found in one form in Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The story<sup>2</sup> is that the hero Gilgamesh encounters a fellow by the name of Utnapishtim who possessed immortality. When asked how he had gained immortality, Utnapishtim described a great flood to Gilgamesh.

There are many tantalizing parallels between this ancient account and the one found in the Bible:

1. The gods decided to destroy all humans on earth using a flood.
2. The decision was based on defects found in humans.
3. One god (Ea, pronounced eeyah) decided to reveal the plan to Utnapishtim.
4. Utnapishtim built a boat (using his reed hut for materials)
5. The hero, Utnapishtim, took his family, friends, craftsmen and possessions into the boat
6. He took the animals into the boat
7. Utnapishtim's boat came to rest on Mount Nisir.
8. He sent out three birds: a dove, a swallow and a raven
9. He built an altar and offered a sacrifice.
10. Utnapishtim was ultimately blessed because of his obedience.

There are several notable differences however:

1. Moses' account is theistic; The Epic of Gilgamesh is polytheistic and chaotic with the gods working against each other.
2. Elohim reluctantly brought the destruction to limit man's violence to man; Enlil capriciously destroyed man on mere impulse rather than moral motivation.
3. Elohim is deeply thoughtful, reflective and rational; Enlil exhibits poor impulse control.
4. Elohim is omniscient and omnipotent; Enlil was easily tricked by a lesser god and a human.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bible-history.com/babylonia/tab\\_gilgamesh.gif](http://www.bible-history.com/babylonia/tab_gilgamesh.gif)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab11.htm>

- Elohim is inherently ethical and true to His word; the gods lack ethics and break their word without compunction (Ea hints to Utnapishtim from outside his hut to circumvent his oath to Enlil. Ea even instructed Utnapishtim to mislead the inhabitants of Shurppak so that they would not realize a flood was coming even when the huge ship was being built.

One of the biggest differences in my mind is their respective descriptions of the vessels. Here is an image representing the description of Utnapishtim's ark:



<sup>3</sup>Let's look at each vessel. Here they are - drawn to scale using the same cubit length of 0.5m.

<p><b>Utnapishtim's Ark.</b> [3]</p> <p>(Epic of Gilgamesh)</p> <p>120L x 120B x 120D cubits, around 90 000 tons assuming density of 0.4</p>	
<p><b>Noah's Ark.</b> (Bible)</p> <p>300L x 50B x 30D cubits, around 22 000 tons assuming density of 0.4</p>	

Which do you think would be more stable in high seas?

Regardless, what I'd like to focus on today is the actual word "ark". It has become such a ubiquitous term and so closely associated with Noah's adventure that we almost always assume some kind of ship when we hear the word "ark".

However, the word we find in Genesis' account of the flood is not the word for boat. It is the word *Tebah* (Strong's #8392); pronounced *tay BAH*;

The word translated ark is the Hebrew word "*tebah*" (pronounced *tay BAH*). It does not actually mean ark in the sense that we have come to understand it. Essentially, it means a chest or box. Note the description given in Genesis 6. The measurements given for it are rectangular, and there is neither a keel, nor a rudder, nor a sail. Moses did not say that Noah built a boat, but a box.

Oddly, it is the same word that is used in describing one of Moses' OWN adventures. Please turn to:

<sup>3</sup> Taken from [www.worldwideflood.com](http://www.worldwideflood.com)

- **Exodus 2:3-5 HCSB** But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. (4) Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him. (5) Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile while her servant girls walked along the riverbank. Seeing the basket among the reeds, she sent her slave girl to get it.

In both cases, where we see the English word “basket” here the Hebrew word “tebah” is being used. Again, we see a container that is coated to make it water proof and set afloat without any type of control mechanism on the water.

Take a look at direct references to Noah’s vessel that were written in Greek:

- **Matthew 24:38 HCSB** For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark.
- **Luke 17:26-27 HCSB** "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man: (27) people went on eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah boarded the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.
- **Hebrews 11:7 HCSB** By faith Noah, after being warned about what was not yet seen, in reverence built an ark to deliver his family. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.
- **1 Peter 3:20 HCSB** who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared; in it, a few--that is, eight people--were saved through water.

In each case, where we see the English word “ark” the Greek word...

Kibotos (Strong’s #2787)

...is represented. In order to emphasize the idea that “tebah” is a box and not a boat, let me point out another example of how “kibotos” was used in the New Covenant:

- **Hebrews 9:4 HCSB** It contained the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered with gold on all sides, in which there was a gold jar containing the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.
- **Revelation 11:19 HCSB** God's sanctuary in heaven was opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary. There were lightnings, rumblings, thunders, an earthquake, and severe hail.

On both occasions that “kibotos” was used in these two passages, the ark of the covenant was the intended meaning. The Ark of the Covenant was a gold plated box that contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s miraculous rod, and a small sample of manna.

So, the ark was essentially a container, a box if you will, much like Moses’ floating basket or the boxy piece of furniture found in the Holy of Holies. Regardless of how our translators have chosen to interpret the word, the important fact is that in such a vessel, the humans and animals were utterly helpless, cast about in the waters without any control over their fate.

Allow me to draw some lessons from what has so far been an intellectual exercise in linguistics:

1. Salvation comes when we cast ourselves helplessly into the hands of Elohim.
2. God is prevenient. He always comes first.
  - a. He decides the fate of the world.
  - b. He decides who gets warned (e.g. Abram and Sodom) Amos 3:7
- **Amos 3:7 HCSB** Indeed, the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing His counsel to His servants the prophets.
  - c. He tells us how to be delivered.
  - d. He tells us when to be delivered.
  - e. He brings us the requisite resources.

- f. He shuts the door.
  - g. He brings the judgment.
  - h. He ends the judgment.
  - i. He tells us when to get out. Though Noah sent out birds to see what the earth's condition was, he couldn't get out till God told him to (Genesis 8:15-16).
  - j. He establishes the covenant. He sets the terms, not us (contrary to Jacob's attempts to maneuver God into a favorable contract).
  - k. He gives us the signs.
3. Both the judgment and the salvation come from God. (Isaiah 45:7)
- [Isaiah 45:7 HCSB](#) I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.
4. Salvation always comes by obedient faith.
- a. Noah had to believe God and obey.
  - b. Moses' mother had to believe God and disobey Pharaoh.
  - c. The children of Israel had to obey the divine Presence in the Ark of the Covenant.
5. In God's saving box lies not only protection and salvation but provision.
- a. God cared for all the needs of His creatures in Noah's ark.
  - b. God provided for Moses' family's needs through the basket.
  - c. God provided for His people demonstrated in the ark of the covenant:
    - i. The manna symbolized feeding His people.
    - ii. The Ten Commandments symbolized His providing law, order and spiritual relationship.
    - iii. Aaron's rod symbolized leadership and direction.

### **Conclusion:**

The world keeps telling you that you need to be in control. "Eat of the fruit and you shall be gods." The lie is as old as time. Take control of your own life. Seize the reins of fate. Be responsible for your own salvation. Choose the god, religion, truth or philosophy that suits you.

The Word presents a different choice. Give God control of your life. Cast yourself helplessly upon His mercy. Listen to His voice and sublimate your will to His. What you think or feel is irrelevant – you must listen to the sovereign creator of the universe.

Brothers and sisters, to paraphrase our brother Joshua:

"Fear the Lord and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshipped and worship the Lord. But if it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the false gods who were beaten by Elohim in Egypt or the ones He beat in Canaan, the gods of sex, money and violence. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh" (Joshua 24:14-15)