

“Much is to be gained by seeing what the facts tell us.”

Peter Beckman

# Noah and the Flood Story

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# Agenda

- Listen as I read the story of Noah and the flood and ponder the following questions
  - Would you agree that the author's writing style is simple and direct?
  - Would you agree that the author has a view of God as up close and personal?
  - Would you agree the story is complete?
- If you know what is unusual about this story, do not tell!

# Questions

- By what name is God called?
- How many of each type of animal are taken on board?
- How are the flood waters described?
- How long does the flood water come?
- What type of bird is sent to see if the waters have receded? How many times?
- What ritual does Noah perform after disembarking?

# Answers

- Name of God
  - Yahweh, which is often translated as “THE LORD”
- How many of each type of animals
  - 7 pair of clean, including birds; 1 pair of unclean
- Flood waters
  - Rain
- Duration of flood waters
  - 40 days and 40 nights
- Type of bird sent, how many times
  - Dove, three times
- Ritual
  - Sacrifice

# What was missing?

- Did the story give the following?
  - Names of Noah's sons
  - Description of the ark
  - Noah's age
  - Dates for beginning and end of flood
  - Where the ark landed
- If not, where do we get this information?
- Did the lack of these details prevent the story from being complete?
  - I claim not because all the significant events were included.

# *Again!*

- Listen as I read the story of Noah and the flood *again* and ponder the same questions
  - Would you agree that the author's writing style is very verbose and ponderous?
  - Would you agree the writing style is a literal one?
  - Would you agree that the author has a view of God as decisive and distant?

# Answers to Second Story

- Name of God
  - God
- How many of each type of animals
  - 1 pair of clean, including birds; 1 pair of unclean
- Flood waters described
  - Fountains of the deep
- Duration of flood waters
  - 150 days
- Type of bird sent
  - Raven, once
- Ritual
  - None



# Two Stories and Two Authors

- First author is called “J” by modern scholars
  - J calls God “Yahweh”, (Jahwe in German and it was German investigators who first discovered the differences we are exploring)
  - Yahweh (YHWH in Hebrew) is usually translated as “THE LORD” in modern translations
- Second author is called “P” for Priestly

# “J” Author

- “J” has a smooth and lean writing style
- Uses common expressions
  - Not everything is to be taken literally
- Writes in a good storytelling manner
  - Adds few details
- To J, God is up close and personal
  - God is grieved that He created people
  - God closes the door of the ark
  - God smells Noah’s sacrifice

# “P” Author

- “P” has a very verbose, detailed, literal writing style that is very different from that of J
- Adds lots of information not required by the story
  - Dimensions of the ark
  - Dates of flood
  - Names of Noah’s sons
- To P, God is remote and transcendent
  - God gives verbal commands, but no feelings or thoughts of God are mentioned
  - As we will see later, since God is so remote, there is plenty of room for the priests to insert themselves between the people and God!

# Comparison of Two Stories

- We saw six differences in the two stories
  - Name of God
  - Number of animals taken on board
  - Flood water description
  - Flood water duration
  - Type of bird sent out
  - Ritual after disembarking
- Which two of these differences are related?
- Which of those discrepancies are important and which are insignificant?

# Flood water description

- There is some difference, but not significant
  - J’s “rain” is typical of his (her?) plain, down to earth writing style
  - P’s “fountains of the deep” is consistent with his cosmic view of things, with God as a distant controller of the universe; to P, God saw the earth as corrupted (not just people) and announces his intention to destroy the earth; fountains of the deep suggest that the earth is cracking up
- As we examine other J & P stories later, you will see that though J and P differ from each other, each of them is internally consistent in their own views of heaven and earth

# Flood water duration

- J's "40 days and 40 nights" is simply a cliché that means a very long time, not a precise 40 day period
- P's 150 days *is* meant to be a precise period of time since starting and ending dates are given
- J's 40 days does **not** dispute the specific 150 day period given by P because J's phrase simply means a long time
- The difference is simply one of *writing style*
- One could say that on this point, the two authors are in *violent agreement!*

# Type of bird sent

- We will see later that J was written before P and that P did have a copy of J's text when he wrote his own version
- Virtually all the changes that P made (compared to J) are deliberate on P's part and explainable by what we know about what P stood for
- The type of bird sent is an exception: there is no known reason for P to change from a dove sent out three times to a raven sent just once, though the Epic of Gilgamesh has him send out three animals, including a dove and a raven

# Differences

- So far we have not encountered any significant theological differences between the two stories, but the next two are critical differences!



# Name of God

- J uses an actual name for God (Yahweh) whereas P uses a title (Elohim)
- P adheres to the belief that God's name of Yahweh *was not revealed until much later*
- When was God's name revealed?
  - J assumes God's name of Yahweh was already known as J states in the last verse of Genesis 4: "Then it was begun to invoke the name Yahweh."
  - But P, as we will see later, believes God's name was not known until the story of Moses and the burning bush
- This is a very important difference between J and P
  - One key reason P *rewrote* the story was to *remove* the name Yahweh! Why? To preserve the honor, for Moses, of being the first person to whom God revealed his personal name Yahweh

# Number of animals

- What is the significance of a “clean” animal as opposed to an unclean animal?
  - Clean means fit for sacrifice, such as sheep or goats
- What is the significance of the difference in the number of pairs of clean animals?
  - Need extra pair on board the ark if you are going to sacrifice and not make species become extinct since all animals not on the ark died
- What event in J’s story is related to the extra six pairs of clean animals, an event that does not occur in P’s version of the story?
  - Ritual of sacrifice
- Is P ruling out that a sacrifice could have been offered since no extra clean animals were available?

# Sacrifices

- Notice that the sacrifice performed by Noah is in the non-priestly version!
  - Isn't that backwards- wouldn't you expect the priestly version to emphasize the importance of performing a sacrifice?
  - Later, we will see that the P author strongly argues that only Aaronid priests could legitimately conduct sacrifices
  - Why?

# The Priesthood

- The Israelite priesthood was very different from the priesthood of modern Roman Catholicism
  - Israelite priests had families to feed, but no land to use to make a living
  - Priesthood was hereditary
  - A priest made his living as a priest, getting a 10% commission on each sacrifice, and thus being a priest was a very desirable job
    - Most common sacrifice was for meals, so whenever anyone wanted to eat meat, the priest got 10%, which he would use to feed his own family

# Sacrifices

- A major subplot over several centuries in the history of the Israelites is a feud for the priesthood between several families of priests
  - It is a struggle that can be seen if you know to look for it, but one that goes entirely unnoticed by the vast majority of Bible readers
  - One must pay careful attention to the difference between Aaronid priests and Levitical priests
  - We will examine this struggle in the coming weeks

# Sacrifices

- In this story, the P author is trying to overturn what would for him be a terrible precedent, namely that a man who is not an Aaronid priest could offer a sacrifice to God
  - Having Noah offer a sacrifice was objectionable to the P author
  - The explicit statement that only one pair of clean animals were on board was meant to preclude a sacrifice by Noah, and of course this is consistent in that P's story had no sacrifice
  - The disagreement is thus not over the value of making a sacrifice, but over the issue of who has authority to conduct a sacrifice

# Conclusion

- P's version (the second one written) was written to *oppose* two elements in J's version!
  - That the name of God was known in the time of Noah
  - That sacrifices could be legitimately conducted by anyone other than an Aaronid priest
- P rewrote J's story to (1) remove the name Yahweh and (2) remove the sacrifice by an unauthorized person; and in the process, P added details consistent with other stories he rewrote and P used a different writing style from J, so there was no attempt to fool people into thinking his version would be accepted as J's

# Find the Two Stories

- Next I will show you the text, with references highlighted (the “Lord”, Yahweh, indicates the J story and “God” indicates P)
- J has seven pairs of clean animals, 40 days of rain, dove sent three times, and a sacrifice
- P has only one pair of clean (and unclean) animals, 150 days of rain, a raven sent once, and no sacrifice



## Genesis 6:5-17

**5** 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. **6** And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. **7** So the Lord said, “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.” **8** But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

**9** These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. **10** And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

**11** Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. **12** And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. **13** And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. **14** Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. **15** This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. **16** Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. **17** For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die.

# Discrepancies and Redundancies

- Verses 5-8 speak of the “Lord”, but then the text abruptly (vs 9) switches to “God” for the rest of the slide
- Verses 5-7 say the earth was corrupt, God regrets making mankind, and decides to wipe out all people and animals on earth; but then verses 11-12 say the same thing (though in different words) as if verses 5-7 were not part of the story
- In verse 13 God tells Noah that He (God) will destroy the earth, and immediately afterward (vs 14) God instructs Noah on how to make an ark and in verse 20 to take one pair of every animal
- On the next slide we will see in vs 22 that Noah does all God said
- But then we will see in 7:1 that the Lord starts talking to Noah as if for the first time, despite having talked to him in verse 13 above, and God (here the Lord) contradicts His earlier instructions on how many pairs of animals to take on the ark

# Genesis 6:18 - 7:10

**18** But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. **19** And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. **20** Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." **22** Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Genesis 7:

Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. **2** Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; **3** and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. **4** For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." **5** And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.

**6** Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. **7** And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. **8** Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, **9** two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. **10** And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

# Discrepancies and Redundancies

- Despite 6:22 telling us that Noah did all God told him to do, 7:5 repeats this claim, though in different words
- Then we will see in 7:1 that the Lord starts talking to Noah as if for the first time, despite having talked to him in verse 13 above, and contradicts His earlier instructions on how many pairs of animals to take on the ark
- In verse 7:9, one pair of animals are taken on board, not the seven pair instructed in 7:3
- On the next slide, 7:13-14 repeat that Noah and the animals boarded the ark, culminating in 7:16, when referring to God, though this was described earlier in 7:2-4 and completed in 7:5, when it referred to the Lord

# Genesis 7:11-24

**11** In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. **12** And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. **13** On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, **14** they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. **15** They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. **16** And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in. **17** The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. **18** The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. **19** And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; **20** the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. **21** And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; **22** everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. **23** He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. **24** And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

# Genesis 8:1-11

**8** But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; **2** the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, **3** and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; **4** and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ar'arat. **5** And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. **6** At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, **7** and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. **8** Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; **9** but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. **10** He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; **11** and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

# Genesis 8:12-22

**12** Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

**13** In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. **14** In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. **15** Then God said to Noah, **16** “Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. **17** Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth.” **18** So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. **19** And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

**20** Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. **21** And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. **22** While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

# Conclusion

- The two stories overlap!
- The story of Noah and the flood as it appears in the Bible is actually an *interleaving* of two originally separate versions of the story
- And these two versions have some very significant differences!
- Opposing versions have been merged!!



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# One Story or Two?

- If treated as a single story, we have
  - Blatant contradiction of one pair of clean animals versus seven pair of clean animals
  - Inconsistent durations of the flood waters
  - A great deal of redundancy
    - Many events happen twice
  - Two birds sent for no apparent reason
  - No way to explain how two complete stories can be extracted from one text; this *cannot* be done unless there are two versions to begin with

# One Story or Two?

- If treated as two stories, we have
  - Exactly one name for God within each story
  - No internal contradictions in either story
  - No redundancy
  - No oddities, such as two birds
  - Consistent writing style within each version
  - Consistency in that the story with extra pairs of clean animals has a sacrifice, whereas the other story has no extra pair of clean animals and no sacrifice

# Ramification of Interleaving

- Notice how both key differences in the two versions were completely nullified by the interleaving of the two versions
  - J's version had Yahweh as God's name; P rewrote the story to remove "Yahweh", but the interleaved version has Yahweh in it!
  - J's version had Noah conducting a sacrifice; P rewrote the story to remove the sacrifice by a non-Aaronid priest, but in the final interleaved version, Noah conducts a sacrifice
- P's two key reasons for rewriting the story are completely undermined by the interleaving!



# Why Interleave Opposing Versions?

- Given the important ramifications of interleaving two opposing versions (creation of contradictions and discrepancies and nullification of motivation for P to write his version), one must ask: why would anyone think it wise to interleave these two versions?
- What prompted this merger?
- Given that P rewrote J's version to remove Yahweh and sacrifice, why would anyone merge them, to create an awkward, clumsy story that nullifies P's reason for writing, and results in a version like J's except it adds redundancy, oddities, and contradictions; the merged version is worse than either original! Why do this?
- We will answer this later

# Looking Ahead

- Are there more stories with two versions?
- Are there more stories that are interleaved?
- Can we determine more about these two authors?
- Were there more than two authors?
- Who interleaved these two versions?
- When and why?
- In the coming weeks we will investigate all these questions and much more