

A COMPARATIVE STUDY FOR YOUTH

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ANCIENT POLYTHEISM

for use with

SECRET of the Scribe



MARCIA HARRIS BRIM



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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY & ANCIENT POLYTHEISM

*A resource enabling parents
to discuss with their children
the differences between
Christian and Pagan beliefs.*



MARCIA HARRIS BRIM

A Comparative Study for Youth

VOLUME I

**CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY &
ANCIENT POLYTHEISM**

FOR USE WITH

SECRET
of the Scribe

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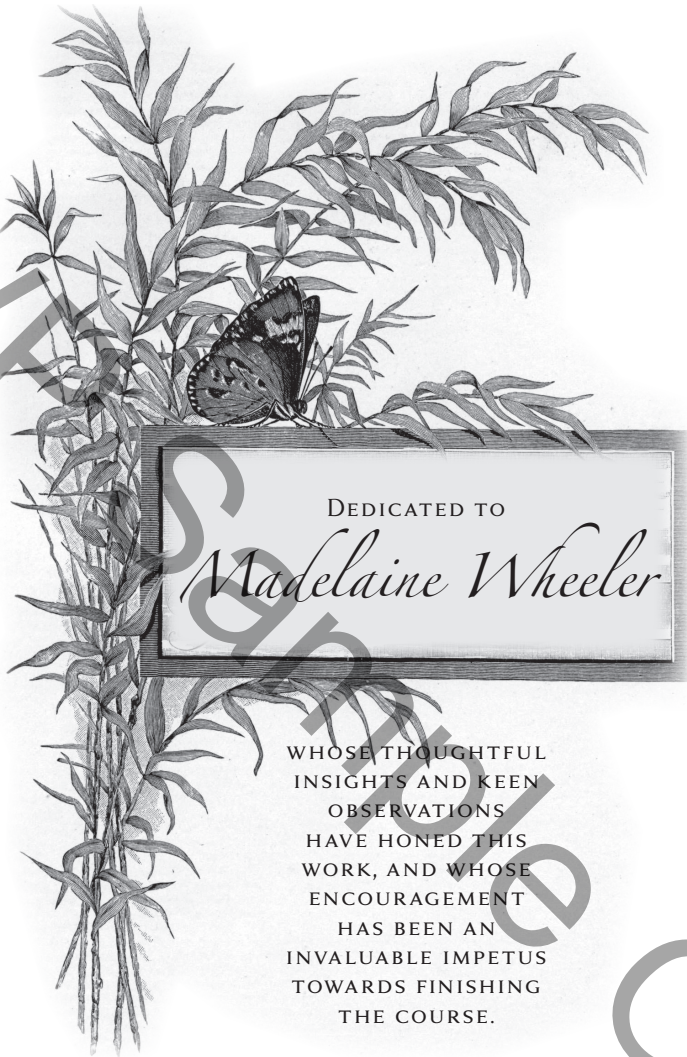
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Madelaine Wheeler

WHOSE THOUGHTFUL
INSIGHTS AND KEEN
OBSERVATIONS
HAVE HONED THIS
WORK, AND WHOSE
ENCOURAGEMENT
HAS BEEN AN
INVALUABLE IMPETUS
TOWARDS FINISHING
THE COURSE.

Only

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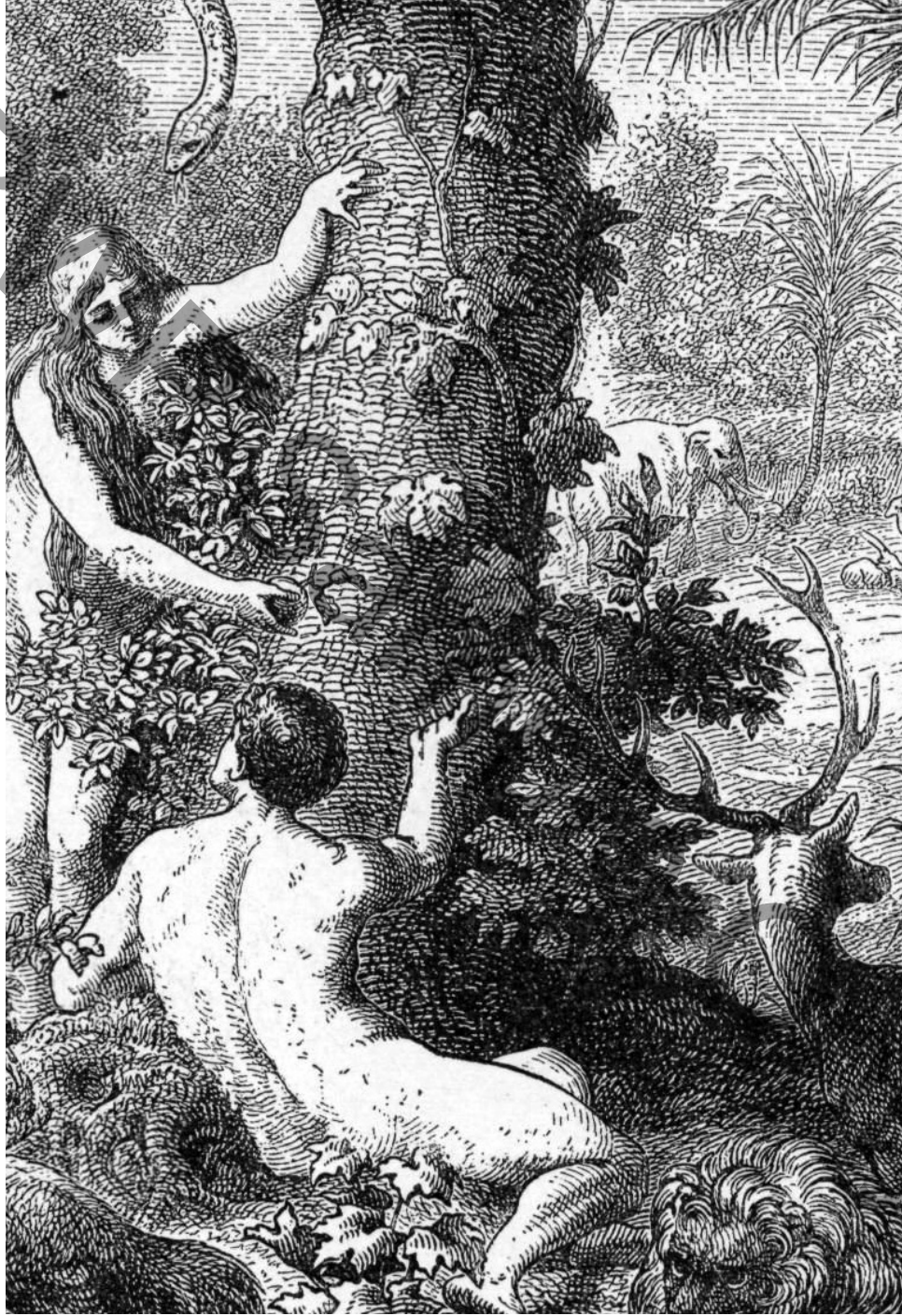
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Parent/Teacher Introduction

This HNET Christian Reader's Guide is not the typical ten-page companion that accompanies many works of historical fiction. While *Secret of the Scribe* has its own educational value and literary merits, it was commissioned to facilitate the five chief objectives of this Christian Reader's Guide:

- 1 To teach Christian worldview through teaching Christian theology
- 2 To teach Christian theology using literary methods
- 3 To juxtapose pagan belief against Christian belief
- 4 To fuel discussion about God's Word
- 5 To prepare children for the big ideas presented in great books, apart from the challenge of classical literature

FIRST OBJECTIVE:

Teaching Worldview through Theology

Our first purpose is to provide young people a fuller understanding of the Christian worldview. A worldview is based upon an integrated whole of presuppositions. The Christian's assumptions about the nature and meaning of reality are rooted in Scripture. An understanding of God's Word that provides an integrated and holistic view of the world comes from theology. Theology begins with the study of God, and encompasses His work in and through mankind. Thus a Christian's worldview is based upon his or her theology. *Teaching children a solid Christian theology develops a solid Christian worldview.*

After more than six years of teaching worldview classes to Christian homeschool students ages 10 to 13, I am troubled by significant gaps in their Christian theology. In general, Christian children lack a Christian worldview because they have an insufficient understanding of Christian theology. They know some things well: the plan of salvation, a stockpile of memorized verses, lots of Bible stories and an arsenal of arguments for the age of the earth. Nonetheless, this knowledge does not constitute the theological understanding necessary to have a Christian view of the world. Their most notable weaknesses are their understanding of the character and nature of God and His special creation of man. The basis of theology is the study of the character and nature of God and His purposes for His creation. This is the foundation upon which a Christian theology and worldview is built. The Bible does not begin with Scripture's climactic event. Genesis starts by addressing the worldview question "Who is God?" and "What is His purpose for mankind?" The question "How can I be saved?" – though critically important for humanity – must

ultimately rest upon a solid understanding of God, His works and His purposes. Without such a foundation we lack the theology necessary to see the world through a Christian lens, let alone to live the fullness of the Christian life.

Nevertheless, God in His mercy has made the answer to “How can I be saved?” simple enough that a small child can experience salvation. But that child must be mentored and disciplined in the understanding of the Christian faith so that he grows up to be a mature believer, producing fruit that will last. Statistics tell us that large numbers of young adults abandon their Christian worldview in college.

Many, I fear, are walking away because they have a deficient view of the world based on a partial Gospel. The Gospel begins in Genesis 1.

Let's look at this problem using an analogy. Imagine that a biblical worldview is like a beautiful country home, built of bricks and with a substantial wrap-around porch. The porch has a swing and a couple of rocking chairs and hanging baskets full of blossoms. This handsome, restful spot is the delight of the homeowners. On a warm summer's evening, there is no place they would rather be. This lovely porch represents the work of Christ that gives rest to our souls. Our Christian young people's worldviews possess a beautiful front porch.

Now let's imagine that all the individual Bible verses they know represent red bricks. The more verses they know, the bigger their pile. But therein lies the problem – the pile. The bricks have not been mortared together to form a house. Their porch wraps around a jumble of bricks, not a secure brick home. Without mortared bricks, those Bible stories which should be windows through which they see both the porch and the world beyond, lie carefully stacked upon the ground. Here's where their knowledge about the age of the earth and other pieces of scientific apologetic information helps. It provides the windows with packing material for storing and protecting them from the guys who like to throw rocks.

Christian children may not have a house, but do they really need one when they have an amazing front porch? Some nights in spring are a little chilly, but there is no better place to smell the apple blossoms and listen to the song birds. Summer may be stifling in the heat of day, but the porch roof provides shade and the evenings are always so lovely. Autumn can be the most pleasant time of year, but the nip in the air forebodes a difficult season ahead. The winter is not at all pleasant spent on the porch. Indeed, a porch will not provide the shelter of a home. Our children are in great need of a home.

Why is it that we are constructing so many porches and so few homes? Perhaps it is because of our own insufficient worldview. Our own salvation theology is clear and we want our children to experience the forgiveness of Christ and eternal life. But Paul labored in the churches to see “Christ formed in them”.¹ He recognized

¹ PG. GALATIANS 4:19

full well that the Gospel is not an end in itself; it is the beginning – an amazing beginning, what the Bible calls a new beginning in Christ. We are made new creations and are given again the same purpose that God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden – to become like God, to bear His image and to spread His image and likeness across the whole earth.² The wording has changed ever so slightly, while the meaning remains exactly the same: we are called to be like Christ, the image of the invisible God. Therefore, this Christian Reader’s Guide and its subsequent companions seek to develop a child’s understanding of the God who creates and saves and His singular purposes for both actions. In short, this guide builds Christian theology with the prayer that our children’s “porches” will lead into houses that will remain.

SECOND OBJECTIVE:

Teaching Theology using Literary Methods

While my degree happens to be in theology, the method this work employs does not result in a systematic theology that dissects the various doctrines of Scripture. A typical theology may begin with the various attributes of God such as His omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, etc, etc. All are followed by a definition and a collection of verses supporting each facet of God’s nature. While these and many other attributes of God spring right from the pages of Scripture, this fact-based approach – which is actually a scientific approach – is not the primary method God uses to teach us about Himself. God cannot be distilled into a collection of facts, even when those facts describe His nature. God is always more. God will not be reduced to a quantifiable level that the scientific method requires. God can be known, but He cannot be comprehended.

God has revealed Himself in three ways: through nature, through His Word and through the Incarnation. Scientific means are helpful in studying what God has revealed about Himself through His creation, but nature cannot display the personhood of God which is central to His Trinitarian being. So God came and lived among us and wrote His story through us. And God invites us to participate in this story with Him. We have been invited to share in the very life of the Trinity. This reality will *never* belong to the realm of science.

While the term *theology* (the study of God) is actually a field of science, the tools for accomplishing its aim are better found in the humanities. From beginning to end, God teaches us about Himself through stories. He uses the convention of language and the medium of culture to reveal Himself to mankind. He shows Himself to us in the context of a living narrative. Sometimes He is the leading character, other times He plays much more of a supporting role, other times His presence goes

² GENESIS 1:28; MARK 16:15

completely undetected ... but He is there. With careful reading that is married to the understanding that each individual narrative is actually a part of the unfolding epic, we can uncover a picture of rich complexity and astounding beauty for those who will work to see it.

Stories demand effort on the part of the reader to extract their meaning. They require us to think and rethink, while facts can be filed away in memory. Gathering facts is a scientific skill, mining for meaning is a literary exercise. I often wonder if, living in a scientific world, we are tempted to value learning facts about God rather than striving to discover His Person within the pages of His narrative. Yet, this narrative approach is not nearly so tidy. It does not lend itself to worksheets or multiple choice tests. It looks more like journaling or poetry – more like a response to literature, less like a lab summary. God's unfolding narrative is a *love story* – not something that can be dissected or classified. Without a literary approach to Scripture, Bible stories may remain merely a collection of narratives that can stand alone but happen to cohere through historical progression and common ancestry. With this approach, the value of the story can be reduced to its ability to provide moral teaching and wisdom. Helping children see these stories as intricate pieces of God's grand narrative is as important to the formation of a Christian worldview as is the trowel to the work of a brick mason.

THIRD OBJECTIVE:

Juxtaposing Ancient Polytheism and Biblical Monotheism

While we are seeking to build theology using literary rather than scientific methods, that is not this guide's only novel approach. Through teaching worldview classes I have discovered how much Christian theology can be clearly taught when Christian ideas are compared and contrasted to the ideas of other worldviews. This is especially true when comparing the conflicting beliefs about the character and nature of God. Comparison and contrast becomes a powerful tool for teaching Christian theology. Thus, this guide unapologetically gives serious attention to polytheism or what the Bible calls paganism – the worship of many gods. Through examining polytheism closely we more see more clearly what it looks like to worship one God. In the same way that the dark deepens one's appreciation for the light, the ramifications of falsehood make the truth that much more compelling.

It is especially appropriate that the first HNET novel, *Secret of the Scribe*, revolves around the worldview of polytheism. The central conflict of the Old Testament is the clash between ancient polytheism and biblical monotheism -- the choice between worshipping one God or worshipping many. Knowing Whom we worship,

what worship is, and why we worship is foundational to the Gospel. Again, here is critical mortar that cements bricks together and allows a home to take shape.

The primary theology taught through this guide that springs from its juxtaposition of polytheism and monotheism could be summarized as follows: the purpose of our lives is worship. The chief expression of worship is obedience. Obedience is that which progressively moves us in cooperation with the Spirit of God towards the likeness of God. We were made to be like God. We have been called to be like Christ. Christ-likeness is a life of worship. Salvation is the means that makes this life possible. The understanding of this life is rooted in the Old Testament.

FOURTH OBJECTIVE:

Stimulating Discussion about God's Word

While this guide covers a lot of content, it has been structured to foster discussion. Thus, there is no workbook, answer key, or script to follow. Instead, the guide provides plenty of thought-provoking material from Scripture and from the texts of polytheistic religions, and discussion questions to get you talking about what you have read. Challenging students to think and interact stimulates learning. Conversations are valuable in and of themselves, regardless of the dialogue's result or its lack of tangible output. Learning to converse about important ideas is one of the most vital skills your student will gain. As your student practices articulating his own questions and engaging in a back-and-forth dialogue with you, his grasp of the subject will deepen and become personal. The ancient philosopher Socrates believed in this method of teaching for these very reasons. A student who works out an idea in dialogue instead of merely being lectured develops a much more comprehensive understanding of the idea itself and its implications.

This may all sound well and good, but what about the homeschool parent who is trying to create learning records? Do not despair. At the end of each unit a chart is provided, upon which the student will synthesize his or her learning about the given topic. Beyond the blank charts, a filled-in sample is available on each topic for the teacher. These samples are teaching aides for the parent, not check lists and certainly not answer sheets. The blank charts are a tool, aiding the child's ability to capture the similarities and differences between polytheism and monotheism. Your child's synthesis may vary. Children should record the ideas that impressed them; if the ideas are in the general ball park, parents must resist the desire to correct. The charts will be a concrete help in visualizing and grounding the big ideas you and your child discuss, and provide an enduring record of what the child learned. As you progress through the lessons, the guide provides instructions for when and where to fill in the charts. Each participating child should keep a separate set.

We have talked about the value of discussion and tried to allay the teacher's concerns about tangible learning output, but we have not fully addressed the objective stated at the beginning of this introduction – “to foster rich discussion about God's Word”. The discussion ideas that this guide gleans from Scripture are gathered using an atypical method. For Protestants the typical approach to Bible study is topical or expository. In a topical study, the student looks up a series of verses or passages on a particular subject – for instance stewardship or purity – in order to understand what the Bible teaches on this area of Christian living. In an expository study, the student looks deeply at the intent of a particular text, studying line by line, even word by word to “expose” the meaning and application of a particular passage of Scripture. Both approaches are used effectively in pulpits and Bible study books to build up the Body of Christ, but this guide uses a different approach. In viewing Scripture as God's literary masterpiece, this guide examines some of the great *themes* originating from the Word of God that run the breadth of the text from Genesis to Revelation. This guide covers great swaths of Scripture, rather than focusing on any particular passage, because our purpose is breadth not depth. We are striving to help the student gain *context* for the great volume of content he already knows. It is our prayer that through completing the course of all four HNET Study Guides, Christian students will gain a structural framework for Scripture's great ideas by discussing its great themes.

FIFTH OBJECTIVE:

Priming Students for the Great Books

The final purpose of this guide is to prepare children ages 10-13 for a high school study of the western great books. The approach already discussed in this introduction lays the groundwork for exploring the great works of Western literature. As noted, this guide aims to ground a child's worldview by expanding and anchoring his or her theology, by developing the ability to compare and contrast conflicting ideas and by fostering conversational/critical thinking skills. The student who is hit with a barrage of challenging ideas in Marx or Darwin will handle the challenge much better if he or she has the ability to compare these ideologies point by point with a scriptural worldview. In order to do this, the student's theology must be comprehensive enough to withstand the challenge. To withstand requires thinking, for which the fundamental skill of compare and contrast will be an invaluable aide in successfully reading the great books without being engulfed by their challenging ideas. This Guide and its subsequent companions teach compare/contrast skills while bolstering one side of the comparison – a biblical worldview.

A final preparation this guide offers the future great books student is the ability to “cut one’s teeth” on great ideas, without having to choke on the advanced literary style of most classic work. *Secret of the Scribe* is intentionally written in simple, flowing prose, yet its narrative provides a platform for some of the same big ideas addressed by the classics. Learning to recognize and wrestle with big ideas as a prerequisite to wrestling with the classics will serve future scholars well.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

1. Read *Secret of the Scribe*.

Secret of the Scribe should be read prior to working through the context of this guide. As noted earlier, the novel was written to provide a pagan setting for contrast with the narrative of Scripture. In some exercises, you will be asked to look up and read portions from *Secret of the Scribe*. Thus it is important to have the book available for the entirety of the time spent in this guide.

The index provides a series of topics explored in this guide. Many of the topics spring from the pages of the historical novel. Those that do not are included because they are necessary to flesh out the monotheistic story of Israel, which this guide covers in some depth.

2. Be prepared to spend multiple days on each lesson.

Within each lesson you will find numerous logical breaks (provided through charting activities). You control the speed at which your family travels. Take your time and enjoy the journey! Stop the lesson as soon as your child is no longer engaged. Do not be surprised if working through a single guide takes six months or more. Ideally, work through all four guides while your children are between the ages of 10 and 13. Remember, your goal is not to provide a crash course in theology because you know “winter” is coming.

3. Create each child’s notebook by photocopying the Student’s Notebook Material found in the Appendix.

Before you begin your study, each child will need some form of notebook to contain all the charts he or she will be working on. You will need to photocopy all of the material in the appendix labeled “Student’s Notebook” for each participating member in your family. If you are using this program in a classroom or co-op setting, you will need to pay a small copyright fee to BrimWood Press for written permission to legally photocopy materials for non-family members. Please contact Marcia@brimwoodpress.com.

4. Relax your expectations.

The Parent Charts encompass more material than a child should be expected to record. Celebrate each insight they are able to document. Remember, the charts are not a writing assignment in which grammar and sentence structure rule the day. The ideas they are recording are so much more important than grammar. Use other subjects to teach the mechanics of writing. You may wish to create your own notebook, capturing the ideas of the whole family.

5. Wait to write.

The Discussion Questions are intended for rich, free-flowing conversation. Resist the temptation to record your child's wonderful responses. Having to pause for an accounting scribe will destroy the art of conversation and hinder the development of thought. Again, it will burden the exercise and work against its effectiveness. Jot your own notes in the margin of this guide, when each discussion comes to its natural close.

6. Have a Bible and the *Secret of the Scribe* available for each lesson.

Look up all the Bible passages in the text. Those in the footnotes are optional. Just because students know a particular Bible story or passage of Scripture, do not shortchange your family's ability to see it in the larger context. This guide highlights major themes that are developed across multiple texts of Scripture. Bible stories are well known; Bible themes are not.

7. To begin:

There is no other teacher prep work required before each lesson. All lessons have been designed to be read aloud and discussed. There is, however, one lesson which you may need to modify according to the innocence of your child. Lesson 12, which looks at the consequences of idolatry, may be inappropriate for some children at the current time. Prayerfully consider how much *can* be covered, as it provides some of the clearest rationale for the goodness of biblical monotheism.

To begin these lessons with your students, have the children read the student introduction aloud, and familiarize them with the charts and the Jacob Journal. Note that for those who decide to use their journal pages you will provide additional blank pages as needed. Remember to adapt the length of the lesson to the attention span of your children.

Special Note:

There are several reasons for the high degree of repetition in this guide. It teaches some deep theological concepts that many young people will not readily grasp the first time around. It is written to develop a big picture perspective that for many requires reiteration. The guide is building an awareness of Biblical themes which are discovered through repetition.



LESSON III:

Gilgamesh's Flood versus the Genesis Flood

Read the portion of the ancient story of *Gilgamesh* as quoted in *Secret of the Scribe* on page 87.

The excerpt you read came from an ancient story that would have been well known to the Sumerians living in Tabni's day. Gilgamesh was a great Sumerian king of the city-state Uruk, and lived about 700 years before the setting for *Secret of the Scribe*.

Gilgamesh became legendary in his own time for the impressive walls he had built around his city. From there the story grew and intertwined with the

Sumerian beliefs about the gods and goddesses. By the time it was handed down to the Babylonians, it was a larger-than-life epic about a half-man half-god whose exploits rival that of the legendary Greek hero, Odysseus.

Today's surviving tale was probably pressed into clay tablets by some Babylonian scribe around the time of King Hammurabi's reign (c. 1700 B.C.).⁴ In the 1800s, these Cuneiform tablets were discovered in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria (669-633 B.C.), at Nineveh by archeologist Sir Austen Henry Layard.⁵ This was a fantastic archeological find, as *Gilgamesh* is the oldest surviving work of literature known to man. Yet what he found was still just a copy of a Mesopotamian story that had been told by bards and recorded by scribes for perhaps a thousand years.

Among the many tales told about Gilgamesh, there is a fascinating account of a great flood in which the gods destroyed the world. Everybody drowned except one man and his family who survived by building a big boat. Humm ... sound familiar? Below is a paraphrased version of the flood story told in *Gilgamesh*. Read it carefully, as we are going to compare it to the story of Noah's flood in the Bible.

⁵ SCHOLARLY OPINION AS TO THE AGE OF THESE TABLETS WIDELY VARIES.

⁶ ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA ONLINE



GILGAMESH'S FLOOD

THE CITY OF SHURRUPAK, ON THE BANK OF THE EUPHRATES RIVER, GREW LARGE. AS THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE GREW, THE NOISE OF THE CITY INCREASED, UNTIL IT BOTHERED THE GODS.

"THE NOISE OF THE HUMANS MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SLEEP AT NIGHT!" COMPLAINED ENLIL TO THE OTHER GODS. "LET US DESTROY THEM UTTERLY." THE OTHER GODS ALL AGREED, BUT EA SNEAKED AWAY TO THE MAN UTNAPISHTIM (OOT-NAH-PISH-TIM). HE WANTED TO WARN HIM.

"LISTEN! YOU MUST GET RID OF EVERYTHING YOU OWN AND RESCUE YOURSELF. YOU MUST BUILD A BOAT, WITH A BEAM AS LONG AS HER LENGTH AND A ROOF OVER HER DECK. THEN YOU MUST PUT INTO THE BOAT THE SEED OF ALL LIVING THINGS."

"WHAT WILL I TELL THE PEOPLE IN THE CITY WHEN THEY ASK WHAT I AM DOING?" SAID UTNAPISHTIM.

"YOU MUST SAY THAT ENLIL IS VERY ANGRY WITH YOU, SO YOU MUST LEAVE THIS CITY. TELL THEM, HOWEVER, THAT ENLIL WILL SHOWER THEM WITH FOOD AND RICHES," REPLIED EA.

THE VERY NEXT DAY, JUST AS THE SUN CAME UP, UTNAPISHTIM AND HIS FAMILY AND SERVANTS CONSTRUCTED THE BOAT. UTNAPISHTIM BUILT THE KEEL AND THE RIBS AND LAID THE PLANKING. THE ENTIRE FLOOR OF THE BOAT WAS A SQUARE

– EACH SIDE WAS A HUNDRED AND TWENTY CUBITS IN LENGTH. IT WAS AN ACRE IN ALL, DIVIDED INTO SEVEN DECKS IN NINE SECTIONS. UTNAPISHTIM STOCKED THE BOAT WITH ALL HIS POSSESSIONS, FROM HIS FAMILY TO BOTH TAME AND WILD ANIMALS. THEN HE CLOSED THE BOAT.

THE VERY NEXT DAY, THE GODS SENT BLACK CLOUDS, THUNDER, LIGHTENING, AND HEAVY RAIN. THE STORM WAS SO TERRIBLE THAT THE GODS THEMSELVES WERE FRIGHTENED AND REGRETTED IT. THEY RAN AWAY AS FAR AS THEY COULD FROM THE SIGHT OF THEIR OWN DEVASTATION. ISHTAR WEPT, “WHY DID I WISH THIS EVIL ON MANKIND?” ALL THE GODS WAILED AND MOURNED.

THE TERRIBLE STORM LASTED SIX DAYS AND NIGHTS. WHEN, ON THE SEVENTH DAY, THE RAIN CEASED AND THE WINDS DIED DOWN, UTNAPISHTIM PECKED OUT OF THE BOAT. ALL HE COULD SEE WAS WATER EVERYWHERE, EXCEPT A MOUNTAIN, ON WHICH THE BOAT WAS GROUNDED. AFTER SEVEN MORE DAYS, UTNAPISHTIM SENT OUT A DOVE, WHICH RETURNED BECAUSE SHE COULD NOT LAND ANYWHERE. THEN HE SENT A SWALLOW, WHICH LIKewise RETURNED. THEN HE SENT A RAVEN, WHICH DID NOT COME BACK. SHE MUST HAVE FOUND LAND. UTNAPISHTIM CELEBRATED BY MAKING A BIG SACRIFICE TO THE GODS. HOWEVER, ENLIL WAS ANGRY WHEN HE SAW THAT SOME HUMANS HAD SURVIVED THE INUNDATION. EA GENTLY REBUKED HIM. “WE MUST NOT CHASTISE MANKIND TOO HARSHLY. BETTER FOR HIM TO SUFFER FROM FAMINE OR WILD BEASTS THAN FROM A FLOOD!” SO THEN ENLIL BLESSED UTNAPISHTIM AND HIS WIFE AND MADE THEM IMMORTAL AND “SENT THEM TO LIVE IN THE DISTANCE, AT THE MOUTH OF THE WATERS”.⁶

⁷ THIS STORY IS BASED ON A COMPILATION OF NUMEROUS PASSAGES FOUND IN *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Who was the god who decided to send the flood, and what was his role relative to man's creation in the Sumerian creation story from lesson 1?
- 2 Why did Enlil send the flood?
- 3 Does this story give you any clear understanding about why Ea decided to save Utnapishtim and his household?
- 4 What warning/instructions did they give him for saving himself and his household?
- 5 What is Utnapishtim supposed to do in terms of his city? Did he warn his countrymen?
- 6 What do you note about the size of the boat, the duration of the rain storm and the final destination of the boat?
- 7 What purpose did the birds serve?
- 8 What is Utnapishtim's response to surviving the flood?
- 9 How do the gods respond to his sacrifice?
- 10 What is Enlil's blessing of Utnapishtim?

Answer three questions on chart **CC-3, The Great Flood**, for the Gilgamesh Flood column, beginning with "Why was man wiped out?"

Now let's compare Gilgamesh's flood with the biblical account.

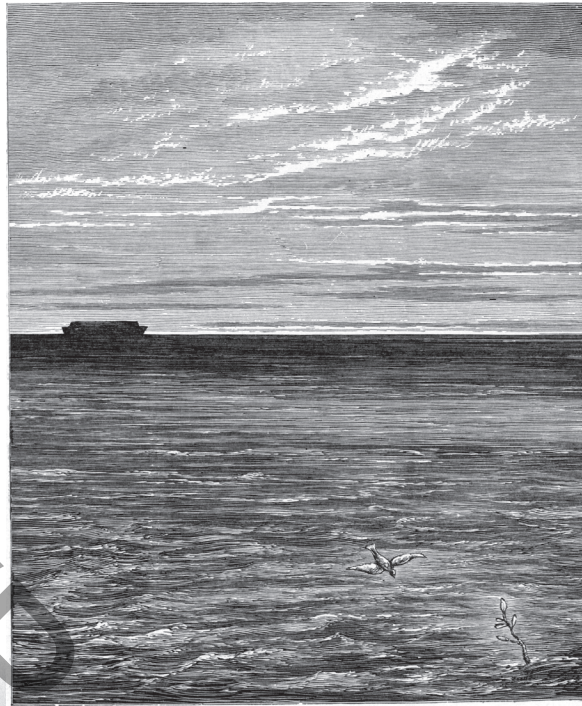
Read Genesis 6-9:17 and discuss the following questions:

- 1 Why did God send the flood?
- 2 Why did God choose to save Noah and his household?
- 3 What warning/instructions did God give him for saving himself and his household?
- 4 What do you note about the size of the boat, the duration of the rainstorm and the final destination of the boat?
- 5 What purpose did the birds serve?

- 6 What is Noah's response to being saved from the flood?
- 7 How does God respond to Noah's sacrifice.
- 8 How is God's blessing in Genesis 9:1-7 like Genesis 1:26-30. Do Noah and his offspring who live after the fall still have the same purpose as Adam and Eve? What else does God promise Noah and his descendants in verses 8-17?
- 9 Now compare the blessing God gave to Noah, with the blessing that Enlil gave to Utnapishtim. Stage a mock debate, picking sides about which god gave the better blessing. Each side should come up with reasons for why Enlil's or God's blessing was the best. Get creative, spend a few minutes and have some fun coming up with your best supporting arguments for each side.
- 10 It appears Utnapishtim was saved because he was favored by one of the gods, but there is little told us about his character and why he found favor. In contrast, we are told a good deal about the character of Noah. Why is Noah's character so important to this story?
- 11 Why is the lengthy description of the evil committed by the people God wipes out equally important to this story?
- 12 What is the consequence of sin?
- 13 What have you learned about the difference between the supernatural being(s) (God and Enlil) through comparing these two flood accounts?



Go to chart **CC-3**, noting the similarities between the Gilgamesh flood and the story of Noah. Answer the first two questions under the Noah's Flood column.



The bulk of the actual Gilgamesh flood story can be read online. Google “Gilgamesh flood Tablet XI”. Reading this account is highly recommended for older students. In it, Gilgamesh seeks Utnapishtim, who had been given the gift of immortality. As you read, look for parallels in Gilgamesh to the Garden of Eden and man’s loss of immortality.

LESSON IV:

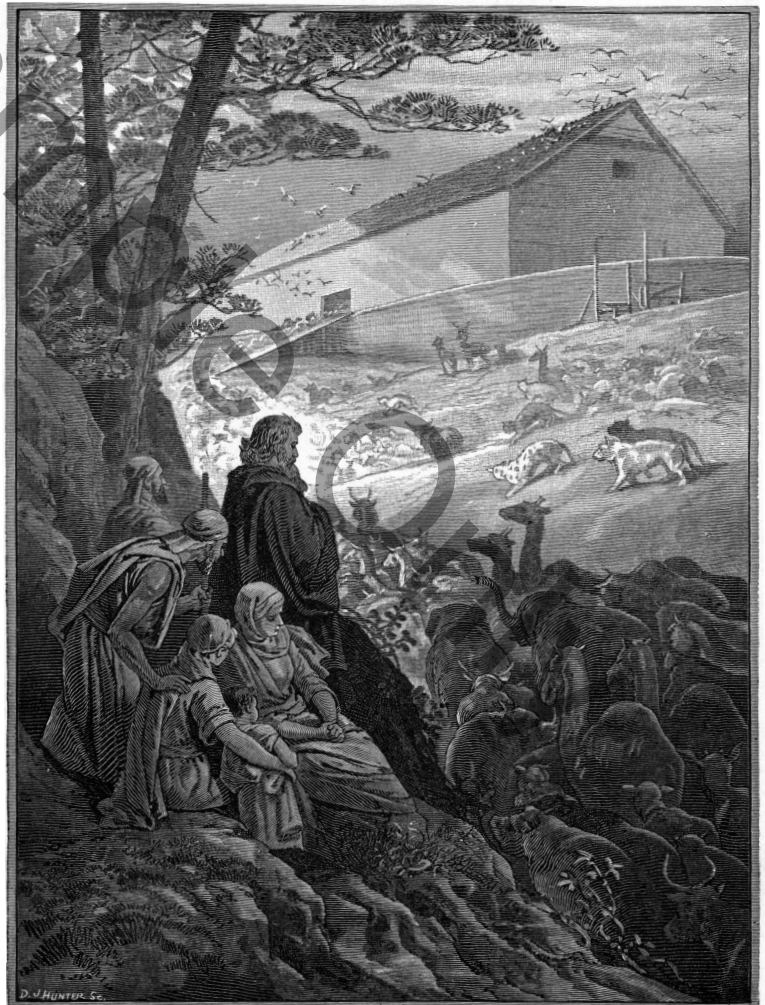
Diving Deeper – the Flood Continued

There are three gods in the Gilgamesh account of the flood which play a specific role: Enlil, the grumpy, irritable god who causes the destruction of mankind; Ea, the sneaky spoiler of Enlil’s plans who saves one man and his family; and Ishtar, the weeping, benevolent goddess who grieves over the destruction of mankind. The three actions – destroying, saving and weeping – are done by three different supernatural beings with three different sets of motives. The Babylonian scribe who wrote this tale down could never imagine a single God who would destroy, grieve and save all in the same story. What motivation could explain all three actions of God?

The world was not destroyed by a flood because God was kept “awake by man’s noise”. The flood was not some capricious whim. God had to destroy humankind because they had chosen sin and death. From the beginning, people were made to

reflect the likeness of God, but to fulfill their God-given purpose was dependent upon man's choice. People were given free-will. Man could choose to be like God through obedience, or man could choose to be a god unto himself – making his own rules – and disobeying and rebelling against the authority of God. While God gave man this freedom, He also provided the clearest of warnings – to choose disobedience would result in death. “In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.”⁷ In the Garden, Adam and Eve chose death by eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. By the time of Noah, rebellion against God was so great that everyone except Noah was deserving of death. Therefore, the creatures made to be the very representatives of the all-good God had to be destroyed, because they had become utterly evil.

Now let's stop a minute. If people had become utterly evil through exercising their ability to disobey God, why did an all-knowing God give human beings free-will to begin with? God could have pre-programmed people to make decisions by instinct, like the rest of the creatures. On the other hand, God could have just stopped with the creation of animals. Think about it; without free-will God would have been a zoo keeper. There would have been no sin, no evil, no suffering – just a lot of beautiful creatures living in God's beautiful world. But without free-will and the possibility for sin, man would never have known real love. At least not the highest form of love – love based on choice. Without the ability to disobey, man would not have had the genuine ability to obey God. Man expresses his love to God through his obedience. God expresses His love to man through His provision. God's provision is ultimately an invitation to participate in His very life. This life is a life of love, for God is love. Man was given the freedom to receive God's gifts of love and to share in His life, or he could reject both His life and love. Most of humanity said no to God. This freedom to choose led to the destruction of the flood, but this same freedom also made it possible for Noah to walk with God.



⁷ GENESIS 2:16,17

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why did God destroy the world?
- 2 What did God give man that made sin possible?
- 3 Why did God give people free-will?
- 4 What's the difference between the love we have with our pet and the love we have with our parents? What is your parents' love for you based on? What is their love for each other based upon? How is the love of adoptive parents different from those who give birth to their children? (These questions point out that there is a difference both in the quality of love and in the basis of love. When a man and woman marry, they are choosing to love each other for a lifetime. When parents adopt a child, they are choosing to love a person they did not give birth to.) Why is choice an essential part of our love relationship with God?
- 5 How or why is our obedience to God an expression of our love for Him?

Some might still be wondering: why all this discussion about love and free-will? God punishes wicked people and saves righteous people ... it's that simple. Is it? Is God just sitting in His heaven looking for people to reward or punish? Is He like some cosmic Santa Claus who periodically passes out presents or lumps of coal? The answer to all of these questions is no. While Scripture clearly teaches that God judges mankind and blesses or punishes the deeds of the righteous and the unrighteous, He is not indifferent to the impact of His judgments. God is transcendent, high above and separate from His creation, yet He is also present in His creation and affected by His dealings with mankind. **Again, read aloud Genesis 6:5-8.**

Think about what you just read. God grieved. He suffered pain both because of mankind's evil and the destruction He caused. It was Ishtar who grieved in the Babylonian account of the flood. She was tenderhearted while Enlil was ruthless ... that's easy to understand. But try to wrap your heads around the idea of an all-knowing, all-powerful God who both justly sentences people to death while He willingly suffers because of their damnation.

The idea of God giving man free-will just got more complicated. Why would God make a free-willed creature, knowing man's choices would cause Himself pain and suffering? Again, why would God suffer? He is God. While we're asking questions, how is it that our sin and suffering can affect God when He is so big and all-powerful and is enthroned above the earth? How could what happens here affect Him way up there?

Let's start with the second question first. How can our sins affect God? To clarify, there is one way that our sin does not affect God even while our suffering does. God is incorruptible. He cannot be corrupted by our sin. When I was young someone taught me a very bad analogy about God. They said God is like a big white sheet and if He were to have a relationship with a sinner like me, it would be like throwing a mud clod on the sheet and God would no longer be pure. That bad analogy leads to a faulty understanding about God because it implies, among other things, that the way God stays holy is by keeping His distance from things that are not. If that were the case, then after Adam and Eve sinned, God would have had no more contact with the human race until Christ came and covered people's unrighteousness. After Genesis 1 and 2, there goes the whole Old Testament, in which, God is said to have been friends with people who were real sinners. God can befriend sinners because man's sin does not stain God.

The truth which the Scriptures teach is that God is holy. He is so holy, nothing can taint His purity. God is holy whether He is in heaven, on earth or in the depths of hell. He cannot be corrupted by your (or anyone else's) sin. He is God. Thus His Spirit can live inside the hearts of people like you and me who still struggle with sin, but we do not sully Him.

God is incorruptible, but God is not untouchable. God is compassionate, tenderhearted and long suffering. My sin and suffering affects God in much the same way that people are affected by the suffering of a close relative or friend who is dying of cancer. We didn't cause their cancer, nor can we catch their cancer, but we are greatly grieved by our loved one's pain. Grieving over the suffering of another is a characteristic of being a person. Our personhood was given to us by our Maker, in whose image and likeness we were created. God is a Person who grieves over us because He loves us.

Now let's go back to the first question. God knew the pain He would endure because of our sin and suffering before He made the world. So why did He make people, knowing the suffering they would cause Him? Now it might be tempting to jump to the wrong conclusion: "God must have needed someone to love pretty badly if He was willing to suffer like that." This idea could not be further from the truth. God does not need anyone to love. Remember God is one God who is



three Persons called the Trinity. The Father, Son and Spirit have been sharing a communion of love since before the world began.⁸ Out of the overflow of this Trinitarian love, God chose to create man, knowing the tremendous price He would pay. He bore the pain of mankind because to share with us the life and love of the Father, Son and Spirit was worth more than all the suffering of God and humanity combined.

Thus, for the same reason that God made the world, God saved the world through Noah. God's first great act of salvation was demonstrated through the ark. It was God, not some angel sneaking behind His back, who warned and provided the means by which Noah and his family could be saved. God loved Noah and Noah



loved God. Noah sought to obey God. He was God's representative in a dark and corrupt world. When the Bible says, "Noah walked with God" it means that Noah was truly experiencing life with God. This was the life man was created for and this was the life God saved and carried through the flood in an ark.

God chooses to suffer and to save because God is love. It is impacting to ponder the idea that God has been choosing to suffer down through the ages of time. When God wiped out His creation with the flood, he suffered. When God saved Noah he willingly took on more suffering because He knew that his descendants would

not walk with Him as Noah did. The Old Testament goes on to recount many instances in which God would be given reason to grieve and suffer again. Across the pages of human history, His sufferings climaxed on the cross. Nailed to a torturous tree, God would not only suffer for man, He would die. Why would God suffer and die? The answer lies deep in the love of God.

We cannot fully understand this because we cannot comprehend the depth, width and breadth of His love. Christ, knowing the love of the Father, endured the inestimable suffering and shame of the cross for the joy set before Him. Suffering is limited to the scope of time. In eternity it will be no more, while the love of God

⁸ JOHN 17:23,24

will endure forever. Precisely because of His enduring love, God did make the world, knowing that for the span of human history He would suffer.

Discussion Question:

- 1 In Gilgamesh's flood Enlil destroys, Ea saves, and Ishtar grieves. Why is it difficult for people to comprehend a God who would do all three things?
- 2 Enlil destroys people because he was put out by their noise. Ea saves Utnapishtim for some unexplained reason. Ishtar grieves because her beloved people are being destroyed. What character quality of God explains all three actions?
- 3 Can God be a God of love while still condemning some people to destruction? How do we know that God still loved people even though He caused the destruction of the flood? Why did He destroy so many people with a flood?
- 4 What does God's choice to save Noah and grieve over those He did not save teach you about God?
- 5 How did Noah's choice to obey and walk with God result in life – his own and ours as well?
- 6 Could a man or woman, given mortal life, eternally bear the ages and ages of human suffering? When God limited man's lifespan, by stopping his access to the Tree of Life, was this a gift of mercy?
- 7 In addition to the immensity of God's love, what does the fact that God bears all this suffering say about the strength of God?
- 8 When we are tender-hearted and compassionate towards someone who is suffering, even someone who is suffering because of their own bad choices who are we being like?

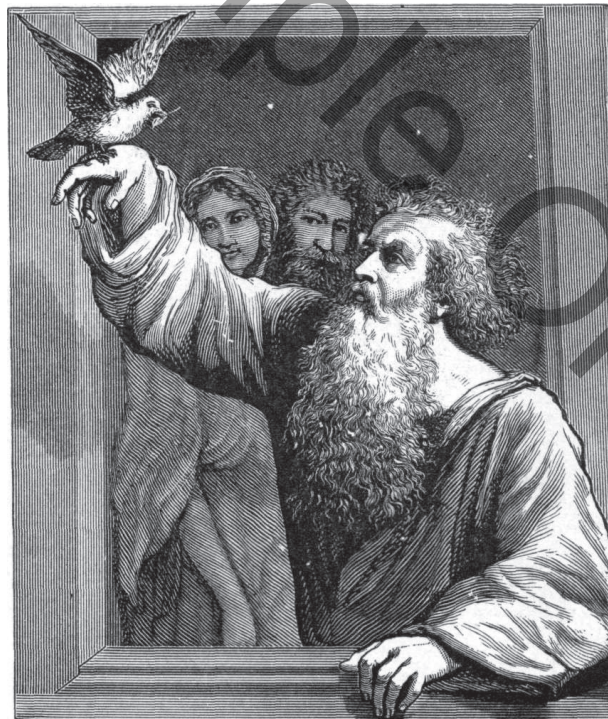
In this lesson, we have come face to face with the love of God. This love of God is the greatest theme of Scripture. To attempt to contain this theme on some paper chart would be impossible, so we will content ourselves with a series of smaller themes, which when taken all together will reflect our humble recounting of the everlasting love of God. If you are keeping a Jacob Journal it would be good to reflect there about the love of a suffering God. This might be helpful to you now or in the years ahead when you will face suffering. We will come back to the topic of pain and suffering and how it affects people towards the end of these lessons

where you will find other discussion questions that will help you to delve into this topic further.

Consider ending this lesson in prayer, as it calls us to ponder the love of our suffering Creator and Savior.

All students should go to the chart **CC-3** and fill in the final question under the *Noah's Flood* column.

Older students should add the account of God saving Noah from Genesis 6 – 8 to the theme chart **TC-1** and the re-establishment of man's purpose after the flood from Genesis 9 to chart **ST-2**. In this lesson, we introduced the importance of man's free will. Man's free will is his decision to either obey or disobey God. That decision is ultimately the choice between life and death. Man's choice introduces another major theme of Scripture. Older students should go to (**Choose Life or Choose Death**), chart **ST-3** and answer the question regarding free-will. Note man's first choice to disobey from Genesis 2. From Genesis 6 note the condition of man's heart in Noah's day and the consequences man receives for his evil choices. Finally, turn to the last theme chart **ST-4** on **Suffering**. Note the suffering of God and man from Genesis 6 – 8. See the parent charts for further clarification.



CC-3: The Great Flood*

Comparison Chart 3 Parent/Teacher Copy	Gilgamesh's Flood	Noah's Flood
<p>WHAT SIMILARITIES DO YOU SEE BETWEEN THESE TWO STORIES?</p>	<p>God/gods destroy the world with a great flood. Only one man and his family survive. They build a boat to save both the family and animals. When the boat comes to rest, they release several birds to see if they can find dry land. Both Noah and Utnapishtim offer sacrifices to God/gods after safely leaving the boat.</p>	<p>People were made to represent the all-good Creator God. They were warned that, if they disobeyed, they would die. Rather than becoming like God, they became utterly evil and deserving of destruction. Sending the flood was God's righteous judgment. Yet the same God who brought judgment showed mercy to the righteous and made a way of escape. Noah was greatly blessed by God for his obedience. God saved both people and the animals through Noah.</p>
<p>WHY WAS MANKIND WIPED OUT?</p>	<p>They annoyed the gods by disrupting their sleep. People were made to meet the needs of the gods. When they inconvenienced the gods, the most powerful god (Enlil) decided to do away with them.</p>	<p>Noah walked with God. He obeyed God and was fulfilling his purpose to represent God on the earth.</p>
<p>WHY WERE UTNAPISHTIM'S AND NOAH'S FAMILIES SAVED?</p>	<p>Ea liked Utnapishtim for some undefined reason. Perhaps this was a way of foiling Enlil's plans.</p>	<p>God's character is just and merciful, compassionate and full of love. God grieves over the destruction of man, whom He made out of and for love. (He loves mankind, but He holds him responsible for his evil.) Knowing Noah's descendants would reject and disobey Him again, God nevertheless chose to save Noah. God chose to suffer because of man's sin. He gives man hope (the rainbow) and is Himself man's hope.</p>
<p>WHAT DO THESE STORIES REVEAL ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF THE GODS/GOD?</p>	<p>Some gods are neither merciful nor just. They need rest and get irritable when they lose sleep. Some are crafty like Ea. They contradict one another. They instruct people to lie. They can be frightened by the power of the other gods (Enlil was the storm god) Some were sympathetic like Ishtar. They could make mistakes like Enlil, who was chastened by Ea for being angry that some humans survived. They were a mixture of good and evil, power and weakness.</p>	<p>God's character is just and merciful, compassionate and full of love. God grieves over the destruction of man, whom He made out of and for love. (He loves mankind, but He holds him responsible for his evil.) Knowing Noah's descendants would reject and disobey Him again, God nevertheless chose to save Noah. God chose to suffer because of man's sin. He gives man hope (the rainbow) and is Himself man's hope.</p>

*Please note: these charts are for parent reference. The summaries provided here are more elaborate than what a student will be able to synthesize on his or her charts.

CC-3: The Great Flood

Comparison Chart 3 Student Copy	Gilgamesh's Flood	Noah's Flood
<p>WHAT SIMILARITIES DO YOU SEE BETWEEN THESE TWO STORIES?</p>		
<p>WHY WAS MANKIND WIPED OUT?</p>		
<p>WHY WERE UTNAPISHTIM'S AND NOAH'S FAMILIES SAVED?</p>		
<p>WHAT DO THESE STORIES REVEAL ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF THE GODS/GOD?</p>		



Marcia Harris Brim

has been writing and publishing for the broader homeschool market for six years. This is the first major work she has written specifically for Christian homeschool families and private Christian schools. It combines her love of history and worldview with her educational

degree in Theology from Multnomah Bible College. While her previous curricula help students develop thinking skills, this work encourages students to think Christianly about their world and the life they lead within it.

Marcia has been uniquely equipped to provide a framework for teaching Christian theology as a necessary foundation for a Christian worldview. She did not learn to read until her mid-thirties. Severely dyslexic, her learning disabilities are in part due to an inability to retain knowledge without a contextual framework – the big picture. This has driven her to seek to understand the scope of Scripture. Thus this work is born out of her own great need to see God's Word as a whole, set within a framework that puts the parts of Scripture together. For many, this framework will be unnecessary, as it is simply the sum of the parts. For others, it will be life changing, as the messages of God's Word will cohere in ways they have never seen before.

*May this work be a blessing to your family,
as it was born out of weakness and dependence
on our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

