

The Flood: Re-creation or the Completion of Creation?

or ... In the Beginning God Created... Covenant and Promise.

Elizabeth Harper, Durham Uni, UK e.a.harper@dur.ac.uk www.eharper.nildram.co.uk/phd.html June 2009

"The flood is the story of how God undid creation"¹

"It is very plain that the flood is represented not just as a punishment... but as reversal of creation."²

"Such a catalogue of allusions to and echoes of the narrative of creation *forces* the reader to view the flood as being more than a destruction, but as a de-creation."³

Genesis 1 and Genesis 6-9 The Connections and Disjunctions

1. Links between Genesis 1 and Genesis 6-9

6:7 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶתְהָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בְּרָאתִי 6:7 and YHWH said "I will blot out the *ādām* which I *created*"

6:12 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה 6:12 and *Elohim* saw the earth and behold it was corrupted +6:5

1:31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד 1:31 and *Elohim* saw all which he made and behold it was very good + 1:10,12,18,21,25 c.f. also Ex 39:43⁴

6:11 וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס׃ 6:11 And the earth was corrupt before the *Elohim* and *the earth* was filled with violence. + 6:13.

1:28 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ 1:28 and *Elohim* said to them "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth

Other shared vocabulary e.g.: ברא 'to create' with עשה 'to make', תהום 'deep', למינהו 'according to its kind'

Shared characters: earth (אָרֶץ), God (אֱלֹהִים), waters (מַיִם) *ādām* (אָדָם), and animals (under the following four headings: חיה עוף רמש בהמה (domestic) animal, creeping thing, bird, (wild) animal)

ארץ (earth) appears 29x in Genesis 1; 48x in Genesis 6-9 with אדמה (ground) 12x in Genesis 6-9

Earth as target of the flood 7:12-13, Earth as first beneficiary of God's promises 8:21

2. Genesis 1:3-20b

Missing: light אור, darkness חשך, morning בקר, evening ערב, to hover(?) רחף, firmament רקיע

luminaries מאור, great גדול, stars כוכבים, seasons מועד, rule/dominion ממשלה, to rule משל

to sprout דשא, grass דשא, to yield זרע, fruit trees פרי, sea ים, sea monsters תנן

to separate בדל, to call קרא, to gather קוה etc...

3. Genesis 1:20b-1:30

Missing: likeness דמות, rule רדה, subdue כבש

Present: Lists of animals עוף רמש בהמה חיה 1:20b,21,24,25,26,28,30. 6:7,19-20, 7:8,14,21,23; 8:1,17,19

in the image of *Elohim* בְּצֶלְמֵם אֱלֹהִים 1:27b 9:6 male and female זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה 1:27 6:19; 7:3,9,16

Elohim blessed וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים 1:22,28 9:1 be fruitful and multiply פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ 1:22,28 8:17; 9:1,7

וּמִוֹרָאֵכֶם וַחֲתָכֶם 9:2 replace וְרָדוּ וְכַבְשָׁה subdue and have dominion 1:28

the addition of meat (without blood) to a vegetarian diet 1:19-30 9:3-4 etc.

Conclusion: The significance of day 6, the insignificance of days 1-5. What do we make of this?

¹ Towner, S. *Genesis*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2001 p85

² Clines, D. J.A. "Theme in Genesis 1-11." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1976): 483-507 p302

³ Turner, L. A. *Genesis*. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000 p46

⁴ Hendel, R. S. "Tangled Plots in Genesis." In *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honour of David Noel Freedman*, eds. A. Beck, et al, 35-51. Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995. p46

De-creation Contested

Are things completely uncreated or simply culled?

The tension between a decision for universal destruction and an ark to save every living thing

- a) A return to a watery void 1:2? The firmament remains intact – only windows opened 7:11, 8:2
The deep remains in place – only fountains break forth 7:11, 8:2
Genesis 1:9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."
- b) The flood as Gen 1 backwards?⁵ Only by selective omissions
- c) The ark as a new Garden of Eden? Imaginative but no direct links

Is anything new created? Are there any new divisions?

- a) The 'wind, spirit' רוח 1:2, 8:1? 1:2 וַיִּרְוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּרִוְחָאֲפִי הַמַּיִם הַמֵּיִם and rūḥ hovered(?) over the face of the waters
8:1 וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכַּח הַמַּיִם הַמֵּיִם God caused a rūḥ to pass over the earth and the waters abated
Exodus 14:21 וַיִּזְלַף יְהוָה אֶת-הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֹזָה וַיִּשָּׁם אֶת-הַיָּם לְחֶרֶבָה and YHWH caused the sea to go back by a fierce east wind... and set the sea to dry ground
Eridu Genesis 130 'All the evil winds, all stormy winds gathered into one/ and with them then the flood was sweeping over (Jacobsen)
Atrahasis III: ii 'Adad kept bellowing from the clouds, the winds were raging even as he went up...' III iii 'the winds howled...' (Dalley)
Gilgamesh: 'For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world... When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled. (Sandars)
- b) A mirror of the creation order?⁵ Only by selective omissions. e.g. land ought to dry before plants grow
- c) Noah the new Adam? Noah and Enoch 'walk with God' הַתְּהִלָּה-עִמָּה
Adam, Noah and Terah (11:26), all have 3 sons, one of whom is elect (8 generations between them)

Conclusion: The promises are renewed to a *remnant* of the old creation. The triumph of 8:21 over 6:5-7. The "de-creation" of Genesis 4-6. The return to the start of Genesis 4: One family in an 'empty' land.

Alternatives

1. Purification

The purging and purifying of the work of day six – all that which was corrupted 6:11-13

Possible hints at purification: 6:7 בָּחַהּ 'blot out' washing language 8:20 sacrifice for purification?

2. Completion of Creation

"The [Atrahasis] floodstory tells of the one divine scheme of destruction and re-creation in order to complete the world of man and its organisation."⁶

Noah's flood adds to the creation and organisation of the world:

- A change in the nature of God 8:21 (?) A change in the status of the *ādāmā* 8:21(?)
- Division of righteous and wicked 6:5-8 Stable seasons for the world 8:22 (?)
- New relationship between animals and humans 9:2-3

But primarily: Command (Torah) to prevent violence 9:1-7 and Covenant to protect the earth 9:8-17

A Select Bibliography

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⁵ So claimed by Waltke, B. K. *Genesis*. Michigan: Zondervan 2001 p128-129 and Wenham, G. J. *Genesis 1-15*. Texas: Word Books, 1987 p207

⁶ Simoons-Vermeer, R. "The Mesopotamian Floodstories: A Comparison and Interpretation." *Numen* 21, no. 1 (1974): 17-34.

Introduction

"The flood is the story of how God undid creation"

This quote is echoed in numerous studies on the flood and it seems quite obvious.

The flood appears to be a story of de-creation and re-creation.

The waters above and below reunite.

They swamp the earth,

and reduce it, once again, to a watery void.

Some even claim that the rise of the flood mirrors Genesis 1 in reverse. It starts with an echo of Genesis 1:31

"And God saw that the earth was... corrupt",

then humans, animals, land all undone until the waters cover the earth just as in Genesis 1:2.

But look, there, floating on the top is the ark - a mini Garden of Eden.

Thankfully, God then remembers Noah, and recreates the earth again:

first sending the *rûăh*,

then separating the dry land;

then plant life appears – an olive branch;

followed by the release of the animals

and finally Noah, the new Adam is commissioned to multiply and fill the earth.

Such links are possible because the flood story is *full* of allusions to Gen 1.

It has the same rare vocabulary ('to create', 'the deep', according to its kind'), similar sentence syntax, analogous imagery.

So many similarities, that Turner can say:

"Such a catalogue of allusions to creation *forces* the reader to view the flood *as* being more than a destruction, *but as* a de-creation."

But are we forced to see the flood as de-creation?

Is the world really uncreated?

Is that what the allusions suggest?

It is these questions I wish to address.

I shall be dealing with the final form of the narrative, because the claims are made at this level.

But as I am comparing the Priestly creation, many, but by no means all, of the links will come from P!

Genesis 1 and Genesis 6-9

Initial Direct Links

Right from the start, the flood seems to echo creation. In 6:7 Adonai says

"I will blot out the adam *whom I have created*."

A statement almost begging to be linked with Genesis 1.

And Although the word to 'create' is not mentioned again, reference to what God has 'made' acts like a refrain keeping creation account before us.

Then at 6:12 we get "and God saw the earth and behold it was corrupted" syntactically almost identical to 1:31:

"God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good".

Of course, falling short of the goodness of Genesis 1 is no novelty

– we have already met Adam, Cain and Lamech

– but 6:12 states the extent of the evil much more starkly and other links reinforce this:

for example in Gen 1:28 humanity was instructed to fill the earth;

6:11 indicates that it has been filled, but with violence.

Something has gone wrong and these initial connections reinforce the Creator's sovereign right to deal with the situation.

Shared Characters

But once we start to read the stories together we notice all sorts of connections.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked relationships is that both stories have the same characters: Earth, God, Waters, Adam and Animals.

The flood is it seems a continuation story, a "what happens next" story.

Of course there is a new character Noah,

through whom God will save these other characters.

So we tend to call this Noah's flood. But there is just as much text given to the preservation of the animals as to Noah.

Yet far more frequent than either is 'earth'- *ʾereṣ* and *ādāmā*, just as in Genesis 1.

Habel has suggested that Gen 1 is primarily about earth: Earth's Revelation and perhaps we should call this Earth's flood.

For 7:11 tells us that it is *earth* that has been corrupted

and *earth*, with all flesh included, that God intends to destroy.

It is *earth* who will be overtaken by the waters,

and in 8:21 it is *earth* who is first to receive the "never-again" promise.

Differences – The missing Gen 1:3-20b

If we continue to look for links,

we discover that whole swathes of Genesis 1 are *not* in the flood story.

There are practically no links to any of the works of days 1-5.

Almost all the narrative connections come after verse 20.

Light and darkness, morning and evening,

sun moon and stars have no place in the flood.

It may be pitch black in Noah's shuttered ark,

and the world may die in a deep dark thunderstorm

but the writer never mentions light or dark.

How different from the Mesopotamian tales where daylight explicitly becomes deep darkness, until the sun once more spreads light.

Vegetation, too, with all its associated vocabulary has little place in the flood.

However improbable, it seems to emerge from the flood unscathed.

Out of *all* the content of the first five days of creation

it is really only the three core characters – earth, water and God

that the stories share in common.

Day Six – The focus

When we come to day 6, the situation changes dramatically

Practically *all* the significant vocabulary between 1:20b and 1:31 reappears, often repeatedly, in the flood narrative.

Every created work of day 6 appears.

The animals in their three categories – wild animals, domestic animals and creeping things are frequently mentioned alongside the birds,

each time combined in a wonderful literary interplay of non-identical repetition.

And of course there is *hā'ādām*, a created living creature, in the image of God, the cause of all the problems.

And, just as commands, blessings and the provision of food follow in Genesis 1;

so commands, blessings and the provision of food follow the flood.

There are differences, of course.

Besides the well-known new permission to eat meat,

the words fear and dread replace the command to subdue and have dominion

and the land animals get the commands and blessings they missed out on in Genesis 1.

But the vocabulary and syntax is otherwise almost identical.
The flood story, I want to suggest, is not so much a story linked to Genesis 1 but a story linked to day six of creation.

Problems with De-creation

Is anything re-created?

This raises several questions.

If the writer intended the flood as un-creating Genesis 1
wouldn't the vocabulary and works of days 1-5 feature much more prominently?
If 8:21 is right, nothing, not even evil, is totally de-created.

And is anything new actually created in this "new creation"?

It is made clear, ahead of time that *all* things will be preserved
and it was so. A remnant is preserved of everything.
It is from this remnant, a remnant of the old creation
that the world will be restored.

If we take the other view,

that creation is more about separation and division
than the making of things, the question still remains.
The main separations (night-day, sky-earth, human-animal, male-female) remain untouched.
The flood brings no new physical divisions.

What of the watery void?

So, if nothing is de-created or re-created,
what of the claim that the world returns to a watery void?

It is not hard to envisage the flood, at its height,
as equivalent to Genesis 1 verse 2 but the story never makes that link.

And there are differences.

At the beginning of Genesis 1 the deep covers the earth
until it is differentiated,
first by the making of the firmament
and second by the gathering of the seas.

The flood never mentions the firmament
and the heavens remain distinct from the earth.

Instead the image is of "windows" in the sky, opening and closing.

Though the ark is lifted up it never reaches the sky.

Similarly it is not the whole deep that floods the earth again,
but springs of water that well up and escape from it.

We must remember that waters cover the earth until the 3rd day of creation.

It is only in verse 9 that dry land appears, and living things can be created, a prerequisite for the work of day six.

So, in the absence of the explicit mention of days 1-5

I suggest that the flood picture is a return to verse 9 not verse 2.

By the flood reclaiming the dry land, the work of day six is wiped out. Only those granted alternative dry space, within the ark, can survive.

Other proposed evidence of de-creation

As for the wind that blows over the earth and causes the flood to abate,

I suggest it functions quite differently from the enigmatic *rûḥ* of creation that does nothing specific.

The mention of wind in the flood is intriguing, but for a different reason.

Wind usually whips up a flood not calms it down.

It does just that in Atrahasis.

I wonder if the wind is more a reversal of these Mesopotamian motifs
or a precursor to the wind drying the waters of the Exodus than a connection to Genesis 1:2.

The more I looked at the claims for re-creation, the more questions I found.

Time permits only one other example.

Noah, it is claimed, is the new Adam.

Both have three sons, from whom all people descend.

One son is elect while another sins and is cursed etc..

Yet Terah, father of Abraham, also has 3 sons, one elect.

And Noah has similarities to Enoch (he walks with God) and to Cain (especially in the following drunken episode).

The primeval narrative is a web of interwoven echoes,
a rich tapestry of allusions.

Noah is one of many characters with the potential to be a new Adam.

Like all of them he fulfils that potential only in part but the uniqueness of Adam remains.

A nuanced de-creation

I suggest, that de-creation is an inadequate explanation of the links between the stories.

In the light of Genesis 8:21 this is not surprising.

In this crux verse, God proclaims that he will never again destroy life
despite the evil inclinations of human hearts.

A statement made in direct contradiction to Genesis 6:5 where judgment is precisely *because* of the
evil inclination.

If God had created a new world, then the theology of Genesis 6:5, the theology of punishment would
have triumphed.

An evil world would have been declared irredeemable and fit only to be blotted out.

But instead 8:21 proclaims that mercy, promise and covenant prevail.

Judgement is not ruled out,

but the world will never be de-created,
a remnant will always survive.

If anything, it is human beings who undo creation with all their evil.

What God un-creates is not the world, but all that humans have achieved.

It is what happens between Genesis 4:17 and 6:5 that is de-created.

All the spread of humanity to fill the earth is wiped out

and we are taken back, not to Genesis 1:2

but maybe no further than Genesis 4:1

where one family have the chance to start afresh on the *ādāmā*.

Alternative 1: Purification

So if the links between creation and flood don't illustrate de-creation, what might they portray?

One common suggestion is that the flood should be seen as a cleansing of the world,
a kind of ritual purification of the earth.

This certainly fits the connections we have discovered.

It is the work of day 6

– the humans, animals and the dry land they live on –
that has become corrupted

and so it is the work of day 6 that must be purged and purified.

Days 1-5 are irrelevant.

All the evil that has multiplied and filled the earth since chapter four must be washed away.

But it is often complained that the flood fails to cleanse humanity,

evil inclinations remain,

but no purification ritual ever claims to do more than wipe out past faults.

The major difficulty is that language of cleansing and purification is scarce.

It does exist. Genesis 6:7 uses the vocabulary of 'blotting out', language that indicates the eradication of a stain.

And Noah's sacrifice might be a form of atonement.

Yet we must conclude that the language of purification is muted not explicit.

Alternative 2: The Flood as a Creation Narrative

An alternative explanation might come from studies of Atrahasis.

It has been proposed that the flood in that story is an integral part of creation not something that happens after creation.

The flood completes creation, it makes the world as we know it.

Perhaps the biblical flood is also the refinement of the creation activity of day six.

Although the physical world appears complete at the end of day six,

the flood story claims that it is not yet fit for purpose.

Something more is needed if God's intentions are to be fulfilled.

It is just that something more which Genesis 9 brings about.

Genesis 9 begins with a permission, a permission to eat meat.

It is one of several changes that brings the post-diluvian world in line,
at last, with the world the writer knows.

But attached to this permission is a prohibition,

a prohibition on murder,

which is followed by an emphatically repeated covenant sealed with the rainbow sign.

As Frymer-Kensky points out, this is surely P's answer to the problem that precipitated the flood.

Prohibition and promise,

command and covenant will prevent further floods.

"They are the essential prerequisites for the continued existence of [humanity] on earth."

Covenant and command (soon to become torah) may not be as tangible as sun and stars, sea and sky, plants and animals

but perhaps, for the writer, they are as intricately connected to God's created order as anything physical.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that there are indeed strong links between day six of creation and the flood narrative,

but they are not best explained by a theory of de-creation.

Intertextual links are always subtle and nuanced.

In part these links may be just literary and stylistic.

They indicate that the flood is a continuation story;

the conflicts in the plot are reinforced by the recollection of the relationships established in Genesis 1.

The links might also be the result of cultural influences or polemic.

An interconnected creation-flood narrative is part of the world of the author.

But at yet another level the links may form part of the theme and theology of the text.

That theme is not one of un-creation, although all that humans have achieved is undone.

Instead the story hints at themes of purification

and of the completion of creation,

and maybe further themes still waiting to be detected.