

## The Epic of Gilgamesh: Friend or Foe to the Reliability of the Bible?

*"God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it....'" —Genesis 6:13–15 NIV*



**T**he text of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, communicates the reality of a primordial deluge in which "only a few people, eight in all, were saved" (1 Peter 3:20). Until the late nineteenth century, the masses presumed that the great primordial deluge was relegated to the Bible. All that changed, however, in November of 1872 when George Smith stumbled upon a tablet buried amidst myriad ancient Assyrian archaeological artifacts in the basement of the British Museum. To the astonishment of the West, he translated the account "of a flood, a ship caught on a mountain and a bird sent out in search of dry land—the first independent confirmation of a vast flood in ancient Mesopotamia, complete with a Noah-like figure and an ark" (David Damrosch, *The Buried Book*). Smith had unveiled the ancient Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, pre-

dating even the Book of Genesis.

Ever since Smith's discovery, critics of the Bible have insistently accused the biblical writers of borrowing the Flood story from ancient Mesopotamian mythology. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. It is far more plausible that the significant similarities between Genesis and Gilgamesh are best explained by a "common inheritance." As professor of archaeology Alfred J. Hoerth explains, "Both accounts derive from the same source—the actual event. There was a flood, and both the Bible and the Epic record it. As the descendants of Noah drifted apart and away from God, there must have been a long parade of human corruptions and polytheistic encrustations on the original and actual event" (*Archaeology and the Old Testament*).

Furthermore, dissimilarities

between Gilgamesh and Genesis are striking. In Genesis, a monotheistic God brings judgment because "the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence" (Genesis 6:11). In the polytheistic Gilgamesh story, the gods are capricious and random—the god Ea going so far as to accuse the god Enlil of the foolhardiness of bringing judgment by way of a flood. In Genesis, the Ark was not only large enough to fit the need (more than a million and a half cubic feet) but according to modern engineering standards ideally suited for floating and stability and could withstand waves in excess of a hundred feet. In Gilgamesh, the case is precisely opposite. Not only is the ship insufficient in size, but its cubed shape would render the ship unstable and likely to capsize and spin.

It is crucial to note, moreover, that the existence of corrupted Flood accounts such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the hundreds of others subsequently discovered serve to underscore the existence of a real McCoy. And that is precisely what the Genesis Flood account affords. It is written as history and corresponds to reality. No capricious gods clutter the text, and details that can be tested in an age of scientific enlightenment are wholly plausible.

Finally, the Epic of Gilgamesh reminds us that the reality of the Flood is impregnated on the collective consciousness of virtually every major civilization from the Sumerian epoch to the present age. They all have one thing in common. In contrast to the Genesis account rooted in history and evidence, they see the waters of the Flood through the opaque lens of paganism. —Hank Hanegraaff



## Fast Facts

### Archaeology Corroborates the Bible

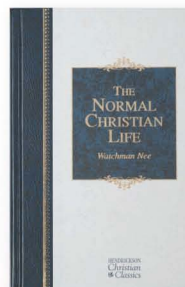
- **Merneptah Stele** contains the earliest reference to Israel in extrabiblical sources—"Israel is wasted, barren of seed"—inscribed in the granite slab shortly before 1200 B.C., demonstrating that as of 1230 B.C., Israel was already in the land of promise as a significant socio-ethnic entity meriting the attention of the mighty Pharaoh Merneptah
- **Tel Dan Stele** is a fragment of a black basalt monument dating to the ninth or eighth centuries B.C. with inscriptions bearing the earliest known reference outside the Bible to King David and the ruling dynasty he founded—"the House of David"
- **Moabite Stone** (or **Mesha Stele**) dates to c. 840 B.C. and memorializes the victories of King Mesha of Moab, including his subjugation of Omri King of Israel, demonstrating they are not the stuff of myth
- **Pilate Stone** demonstrates in spades that Pontius Pilate was the Roman authority in Judea at the time that Christ was crucified
- **Pool of Siloam**, where Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:7), was unearthed in June 2004
- **Nineveh**, the chief city of Assyria, was unearthed in 1845 by Henry Austen Layard, along with such artifacts as Sennacherib's Prism, Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk, and the ruins of Sargon's Palace, which provide weighty testimony to the reliability of the biblical record
- **The Dead Sea Scrolls**, ancient manuscripts found in 1947, predate the earliest extant Hebrew biblical text—Masoretic—by a full millennium and demonstrate conclusively that the Old Testament Scriptures have been miraculously preserved by God over time
- **Ossuary and bones of the High Priest Caiaphas**, who presided over the religious trials of Christ (Matthew 26:57ff), were discovered two miles south of Temple Mount in 1990

Archaeological artifacts cry forth from antiquity: "God has spoken" – "Scripture cannot be broken"

For further study, see Hank's new booklet *The Archaeologist's S-P-A-D-E* available for your donation to CRI.

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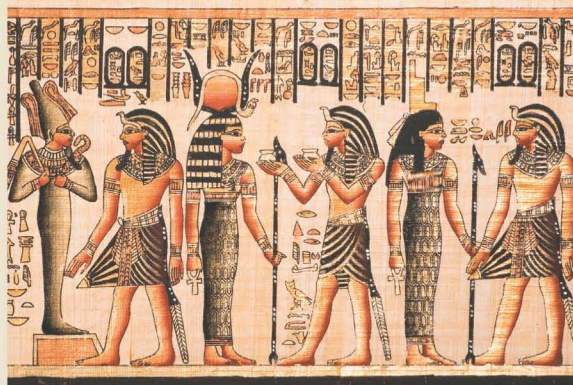


## Was Christianity influenced by ancient pagan mystery religions?

*"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."*  
—Acts 17:29–31 NIV

A common refrain sung by those determined to demolish the biblical Jesus in the court of public opinion is that His life, death, burial, and resurrection are myths borrowed from ancient pagan mystery religions.

The first prevailing myth widely circulated in this regard is that the similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions are striking. Purveyors of this mythology employ biblical language and then go to great lengths to concoct commonalities. Take, for example, the alleged similarities between Christianity and the cult of Isis. The god Osiris is supposedly murdered by his brother and buried in the Nile. The goddess Isis recovers the cadaver, only to lose it once again to her brother-in-law who cuts the body into fourteen pieces and scatters them around the world. After



finding the parts, Isis "baptizes" each piece in the Nile River and Osiris is "resurrected." The alleged similarities as well as the terminology used to communicate them are greatly exaggerated. Parallels between the "resurrection" of Osiris and the resurrection of Christ are an obvious stretch. And, sadly for the mysteries, this is as good as it gets. Other parallels typically cited by liberal scholars are even more far-fetched.

Furthermore, liberals have the chronology all wrong—most mysteries flourished long after the closing of the canon of Scripture. Thus, it would be far more accurate to say that the mysteries were influenced by Christianity than the other way around.

Finally, the mystery religions reduced reality to a personal experience of enlightenment. Through secret ceremonies, initiates experienced an esoteric transformation of consciousness that led them to believe that they were entering into a higher realm of reality. While followers of Christ were committed to essential Christian doctrines, devotees of the mysteries worked themselves into altered states of consciousness. They were committed to the notion that experience is a better teacher than words. In fact, the reason mystery religions are so named is that they directly involve secret esoteric practices and initiation rites. Unlike Christianity, which is rooted in objective history and evidence, the mysteries reveled in hype and emotionalism.

For a list of stations airing the *Bible Answer Man*, or to listen online, log on to [equip.org](http://equip.org). Listen also via satellite radio XM-170.

## Testimony

A glimpse into how your faithful prayers and generous financial gifts are influencing lives:

"I found the *Bible Answer Man* program as I was driving to get my son from school. I listened to Hank's answers to the questions and was amazed at the patience he would demonstrate toward the callers—and how resourceful he was! I was so much looking for a program like that! My son had a lot of questions about theological issues—especially salvation and end-times prophecies. So he ended up calling Hank and asking questions. He got not only answers, but also encouragement to stay in the faith and seek truth. I truly appreciate the radio program, which is a beacon in a vast turbulent ocean of cults and false prophets. Hank truly helps us and encourages us to read the Word for all it's worth and become familiar with the genuine Word of Christ so we can distinguish between true and false teachings. I truly appreciate his ministry and the people who work with him, and I pray that the ministry will be strengthened through the grace of our Lord Jesus and that it will go on enlightening more people like me."

—Gayane





**Hank Hanegraaff**  
President of CRI

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*  
—2 Timothy 3:16–17 NIV

## Why CRI Continues to Fight for the Truth

Isn't the biblical account of the Flood just a carryover from ancient Babylonian mythology? Didn't the Gospel writers simply borrow the idea of a dying and rising God from ancient pagan mystery religions? As we've seen in this edition of EQUIP, nothing could be further from the truth. Nonetheless, it's no secret that professors, political sages, and public personalities, through magazines, manuscripts, the media, and most notably the internet, are increasingly raising doubts in the minds of millions regarding the validity of the biblical worldview. Their driving principle seems to be, "Do anything you must—even make up the 'facts' if you have to—just so long as it helps to discredit Christianity."

Should you be frightened by this full frontal assault against everything we hold dear?

Not at all. The faith you and I share is rooted in history and evidence—the real facts confirm its claims. Beyond any reasonable doubt, you and I can know that we were designed by a Creator for a purpose, that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose bodily from the dead in vindication of His claims to deity, and that the Bible is divine rather than merely human in origin.

Anyone looking at the facts of history and science with an open mind cannot help but be convinced by the evidence. Yet millions are being led astray by smoke screens that reek havoc on Christianity by stumbling seekers and galvanizing skeptics against "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

In an age in which internet fallacies travel half-way round the world before truth has had a chance to put its boots on, it is ever more crucial to know what you believe and why you believe it.

And that's the reason, as I explained in a recent letter to you, I'm hard at work on one of the most important books of my life—*Has God Spoken?*—in which I will demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the Bible is divine rather than merely human in origin.

**And in appreciation for praying, giving friends like you, I've prepared a helpful excerpt from Part 2 of the book titled *The Archaeologist's S-P-A-D-E* as a special "sneak peek" booklet.** To receive your copy, simply request it on the enclosed EQUIP order form when you send your gift in support of CRI and the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast.

Your prayers and financial support make it all possible to answer the tough questions people are asking every day—about human origins, the Resurrection, the reliability of the Bible, and so many other vital issues. Thank you for all you have done and are doing to change lives for eternity.

...because Truth matters,

Hank Hanegraaff  
President

### MISSION STATEMENT

**To equip Christians to think Christianly.**

*"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."*—Colossians 4:5–6

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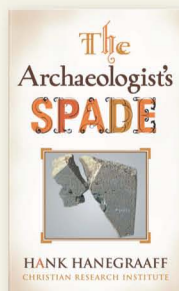
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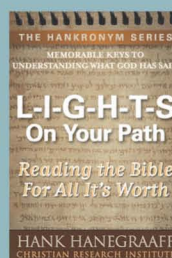
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