

The Book of the Ancient World



Resource Pages

Compiled by Lisa Kelly

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Readings for Week Five

The Story of Uta-Napishtim and of the Deluge that Destroyed all that was on the Earth

Now in the Temple there were tables on which were inscribed the history of Uta-Napishtim the Remote, of him whom the Gods had made immortal. These tables had the very words of Uta-Napishtim upon them. And these are the words that were written there:

“I lived in Shurippak, the city of the sun, a city that was old, and had the Gods dwelling in it. The Gods decided in their hearts to destroy mankind by wind and by flood, so that none would be left living on the earth. Anu, the Father of the Gods, was there when this thing was thought upon, and Enlil, the Warrior of the Gods, and En-urta the Messenger of the Gods. But the Gods considered again, and they decided to leave living on the earth one man and his family.

“Ea went to the place where I was. He cried to me where I slept; he cried to me to come out of my house and to build a ship; he cried to me to abandon all my possessions and to save my life.

“He told me of the dimensions of the ship I was to build; he told me of the measures of grain I was to take on board that ship And he commanded that I should go before the elders and people of the city and say to them that Enlil bore ill-will towards them and that he was set upon destroying them. Then I said to Ea, ‘Whither shall I sail when I have built the ship?’, and he said, ‘To the Gods. Trust thy ship upon the flood and be not fearful.’

‘I spoke to the elders and the people of the city. They but mocked me. I gathered my servants around me and I began the building of the ship. I made it a hundred and twenty cubits in length; I covered it with pitch and bitumen; I provided a strong steering-pole for it. And when the ship was built I loaded it with grain, and took my family on board it. The beasts of the field and of the wilderness, also the birds came on board it; they came in pairs. When all was made ready the God Shamash appeared before me. He signified to me that at eventide a great flood would be loosed upon the earth.

“A rain-flood came at eventide. I watched the darkness coming and the storm. Terror possessed me as I watched. I went within where my family were and the beasts and birds were in pairs, and I bolted down the doors; yea, I bolted down the nine parts which I had made inside the ship. I committed the ship and all that was on board of it to the mercy of the Gods.

“Then a black cloud came up, and out of the black cloud and the whirlwind the Gods thundered. The Star Gods of the Southern Sky brandished their torches. Every gleam of light was turned to darkness. Floods descended out of the heavens. The waters attacked mankind as in a battle. Fathers no longer saw their children; brother no longer saw brother. The rains descended until the waters mounted to the tops of the hills. As they mounted up, the Gods themselves were filled with fright; they went out of their own places; they went into the high heaven of Anu. Ishtar, the Lady of the Gods, cried out like a woman in travail. Yea, Ishtar lamented, crying against herself for speaking of this flood in the presence of the Gods. The Gods of the Southern Sky wailed with her, and for six days and six nights rain fell and the wind beat down all that was upon the land.

“But after the seventh day the raging flood ceased; the whirlwind and the rainstorm ceased, and the waters no longer rose. I looked over the waters; I saw that calm had come. Calm had come, but the land had been laid out flat, and mankind had been turned to mud. I bowed myself down; I fell upon my face and tears flowed down my cheeks. I looked to the four quarters of the world and all that I saw was the open sea. Then for twelve days the ship went on. The ship rested on the mountain of Nisir and it moved no more.

“And when, after seven days, the ship still rested, I opened an air hole and light fell upon my face. I let a dove fly forth. The dove came back to the ship for there was no place for her to light. I let a swallow fly forth. The swallow also returned. I let a raven fly forth. The raven did not return; she saw the land come up through the sinking waters; she ate; she pecked on the ground; she croaked, and did not come back to me.

“Then I brought out all that was on board the ship; I brought all to where the four winds blew. I offered up a sacrifice. I poured out a libation where I stood upon the peak of the mountain. There Ishtar, the Lady of the Gods, appeared before me; she cursed Bel for having brought about the flood.

“The God Bel was wroth seeing that a portion of mankind had been saved from the flood. He raged. He cried out, ‘None shall be left alive; no man shall be left living in this destruction.’ But the God En-urta pleaded with Bel for mankind, and Bel relented. Then the God Ea went to the ship, and took me by the hand, and brought me forth and brought my wife forth; he turned our faces towards one another and made us kneel together. He blessed us, saying, ‘Formerly Uta-Napishtim and his wife were mortals; now let Uta-Napishtim and his wife be like the Gods themselves, having immortal life.’”

~From *Great Myths of the World* by Padraic Colum

The Great Ship that Saved Eight People

After Abel was slain, and his brother Cain had gone into another land, again God gave a child to Adam and Eve. This child they named Seth; and other sons and daughters were given to them, for Adam and Eve lived many years. But at last they died, as God had said that they must die, because they had eaten of the tree that God had forbidden them to eat.

By the time that Adam died, there were many people on the earth; for the children of Adam and Eve had many other children; and when these grew up, they also had children; and these too had children. And in those early times people lived much longer than they do now. Very few people now live to be a hundred years old; but in those days, when the earth was new, men often lived to be eight hundred or even nine hundred years old. So after a time that part of the earth where Adam’s sons lived began to be full of people.

It is sad to tell that as time went on more and more of these people became wicked, and fewer and fewer of them grew up to become good men and women. All the people lived near together, and few went away to other lands; so it came to pass that even the children of good men and women learned to be bad, like the people around them.

And as God looked down on the world that he had made, he saw how wicked the men in it had become, and that every thought and every act of man was evil and only evil continually.

But while most of the people in the world were very wicked, there were some good people also, though they were very few. The best of all the men who lived at that time was a man whose name was Enoch. He was not the son of Cain, but another Enoch, who came from the family of Seth, the son of Adam who was born after the death of Abel. While so many around Enoch were doing evil, this man did only what was right. He walked with God, and God walked with him and talked with him. And at last, when Enoch was three hundred and sixty-five years old, God took him away from earth to heaven. He did not die, as all the people have died since Adam disobeyed God, but “he was not, for God took him.” This means that Enoch was taken up from earth without dying.

Enoch left a son whose name was Methuselah. We do not know anything about Methuselah, except that he lived to be nine hundred and sixty-nine years old, which was longer than the life of any other man who ever lived. But at last, Methuselah died like all his people, except his father Enoch. By the time that Methuselah died, the world was very wicked. And God looked down on the earth, and said:

“I will take away all men from the earth that I have made; because the men of the world are evil, and evil continually.”

But even in those bad times, God saw one good man. His name was Noah. Noah tried to do right in the sight of God. As Enoch had walked with God, so Noah walked with God, and talked with him. And Noah had three sons: their names were Shem and Ham and Japheth.

God said to Noah, “The time has come when all the men and women on the earth are to be destroyed. Everyone must die, because they are all wicked. But you and your family shall be saved, because you alone are trying to do right.”

Then God told Noah how he might save his life and the lives of his sons. He was to build a very large boat, as large as the largest ships that are made in our time; very long and very wide and very deep; with a roof over it; and made like a long wide house in three stories, but so built that it would float on the water. Such a ship as this was called “an ark.” God told Noah to build this ark, and to have it ready for the time when he would need it.

“For,” said God to Noah, “I am going to bring a great flood of water on the earth, to cover all the land and to drown all the people on the earth. And as the animals on the

earth will be drowned with the people, you must make the ark large enough to hold a pair of each kind of animals, and several pairs of some animals that are needed by men, like sheep and goats and oxen; so that there will be animals as well as men to live upon the earth after the flood has passed away. And you must take in the ark food for yourself and your family, and for all the animals with you, enough food to last for a year, while the flood shall stay on the earth.”

And Noah did what God told him to do, although it must have seemed very strange to all the people around, to build this great ark where there was no water for it to sail upon. And it was a long time, even a hundred and twenty years, that Noah and his sons were at work building the ark, while the wicked people around wondered, and no doubt laughed at Noah for building a great ship where there was no sea. At last the ark was finished, and stood like a great house on the land. There was a door on one side, and a window on the roof, to let in the light. Then God said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and your wife, and your three sons, and their wives with them; for the flood of waters will come very soon. And take with you animals of all kinds, and birds, and things that creep; seven pairs of those that will be needed by men, and one pair of all the rest; so that all kinds of animals may be kept alive upon the earth.”

So Noah and his wife, and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, with their wives, went into the ark. And God brought to the door of the ark the animals, and the birds, and the creeping things of all kinds; and they went into the ark, and Noah and his sons put them in their places, and brought in food for them all. And then the door of the ark was shut, so that no more people and no more animals could come in.

In a few days the rain began to fall, as it had never rained before. It seemed as though the heavens were opened to pour great floods upon the earth. The streams filled, and the rivers rose, higher and higher, and the ark began to float on the water. The people left their houses and ran up to the hills, but soon the hills were covered, and all the people on them were drowned.

Some had climbed up to the tops of higher mountains, but the water rose higher and higher, until even the mountains were covered and all the people, wicked as they had been, were drowned in the great sea that now rolled over all the earth where men had lived. And all the animals, the tame animals—cattle and sheep and oxen—were drowned; and the wild animals—lions and tigers and all the rest—were drowned also. Even the birds were drowned, for their nests in the trees were swept away, and there

was no place where they could fly from the terrible storm. For forty days and nights the rain kept on, until there was no breath of life remaining outside of the ark.

After forty days the rain stopped, but the water stayed upon the earth for more than six months; and the ark, with all that were in it, floated over the great sea that covered the land. Then God sent a wind to blow over the waters and to dry them up; so by degrees the waters grew less and less. First the mountains rose above the waters, then the hills rose up; and finally the ark ceased to float, and lay aground on a mountain which is called Mount Ararat. But Noah could not see what had happened on the earth, because the door was shut, and the window may have been in the roof. But he felt that the ark was no longer moving, and he knew that the water must have gone down. So, after waiting for a time, Noah opened a window and let loose a bird called a raven. Now the raven has strong wings; and this raven flew round and round until the waters had gone down, and it could find a place to rest, and it did not come back to the ark.

After Noah had waited for it a while, he sent out a dove; but the dove could not find any place to rest, so it flew back to the ark, and Noah took it into the ark again. Then Noah waited a week longer, and afterward he sent out the dove again. And at the evening, the dove came back to the ark, which was its home; and in its bill was a fresh leaf which it had picked off from an olive tree.

So Noah knew that the water had gone down enough to let the trees grow once more. He waited another week, and sent out the dove again; but this time the dove flew away and never came back. And Noah knew that the earth was becoming dry again. So he took off a part of the roof and looked out, and saw that there was dry land all around the ark. Noah had now lived in the ark a little more than a year, and he was glad to see the green land and the trees once more. And God said to Noah:

“Come out of the ark, with your wife, and your sons, and their wives, and all the living things that are with you in the ark.”

So Noah opened the door of the ark, and with his family came out, and stood once more on the ground. All the animals and birds and creeping things in the ark came out also, and began again to bring life to the earth.

The first that Noah did, when he came out of the ark, was to give thanks to God for saving all his family when the rest of the people on the earth were destroyed. He built

an altar, and laid upon it an offering to the Lord, and gave himself and his family to God, and promised to do God's will.

And God was pleased with Noah's offering, and God said:

"I will not again destroy the earth on account of men, no matter how bad they may be. From this time no flood shall again cover the earth; but the seasons of spring and summer and fall and winter shall remain without change. I give to you the earth; you shall be the rulers of the ground and of every living thing upon it."

Then God caused a rainbow to appear in the sky, and he told Noah and his sons that whenever they or the people after them should see the rainbow, they should remember that God had placed it in the sky and over the clouds as a sign of his promise that he would always remember the earth and the people upon it, and would never again send a flood to destroy men from the earth.

So, as often as we see the beautiful rainbow, we are to remember that it is the sign of God's promise to the world.

~From Genesis v: 1, to ix: 17

Picture Study for Week Six



Title: Belshazzar's Feast by Rembrandt

Date: circa 1635-1638

Technique: oil

Material: canvas

Dimensions: 66 x 82.4 in

Location: National Gallery

Readings for Week Nine

The Ten Plagues of Egypt

The king despised the words of Moses, and would not listen to them, and great plagues were sent by the Lord upon the Egyptians.

First the river ran with bloody water, and the Egyptians that ventured to drink of it were visited with great pains and torment. There was no other water to drink, for all the springs were dried up. But to the Israelites the river was sweet and fit for drinking, and no way different from what it used to be. Then the king, being in great fear and not knowing what else to do, gave the Israelites leave to go. But when the plague ceased, he changed his mind and would not suffer them to go.

God, seeing he was proud and wicked, sent a second plague upon the Egyptians. A great number of frogs overspread the land; the river also was full of them. And the frogs crept into their houses, and spoiled the vessels that they used, and were found in what they ate and what they drank, and came in great numbers upon their beds. Pharaoh again grew afraid, and ordered Moses to take the Israelites with him and be gone. Upon which the whole multitude of frogs vanished. But as soon as Pharaoh saw the land freed from this plague, he forbade the departure of the Israelites.

God punished him with a third plague. An innumerable quantity of lice appeared upon the bodies of the Egyptians and upon their cattle, and there was no way of destroying the vermin. Then Pharaoh gave leave to the Israelites to depart. But when the plague ceased, he said they must leave their children and wives behind them, as pledges that they would return. Whereat God was provoked, and sent another plague. He filled the country with a number of small flies, of a kind that had never been seen there before, and whose bite was poisonous to both man and beast. But when Pharaoh refused to yield to this plague, and would only allow the Israelites and their wives to go if they would leave their children behind them, God visited the land with still more grievous calamities. The bodies of the Egyptians broke out into terrible sores, and a great many of them perished. Their cattle also were afflicted and perished. Then hail was sent down from heaven, and the hailstones were larger than any that had ever been seen in that country, and they broke down the boughs laden with fruit and did other damage. After this a tribe of locusts consumed the seed which was not

hurt by the hail, so that all hope of fruit of any kind was destroyed. Yet Pharaoh still contested with God, and would only let Moses take away the Israelites with their wives and children if they would leave their cattle behind them. Then a thick darkness arose and covered the land of the Egyptians, whereby their sight was obstructed and their breathing hindered, and it lasted for three days and three nights. And this was the ninth plague.

Then God told Moses that with one more plague He would compel the Egyptians to let the Israelites go. Moses told his people to get ready for the journey. In every household he commanded that a lamb should be killed as a sacrifice, and its blood sprinkled on the doorpost. Then the lamb should be roasted and eaten, and whatever portion of it was left should be burnt.

That night God went through the land of Egypt, and the firstborn in every Egyptian house was stricken dead. But God passed over every house that was marked with bloodstains, so that none of the Israelites died.

In commemoration of this event the children of Israel ever afterwards celebrated a yearly feast called the Passover, because God had passed over their households while visiting the tenth plague upon the Egyptians.

In every Egyptian house, in the royal palace as well as in the meanest hut, there arose a great sound of moaning and lamentation when it was found that the oldest child had been slain. And the people came to Pharaoh and begged him to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh himself was now anxious to be rid of them. So he called Moses to him, and said, — “Go away out of the land, you and your people, and take your flocks and herds with you.”

~From *Our Young Folks' Josephus* by William Shepard

Joseph and His Brethren

After the death of Isaac, Jacob grew richer and more prosperous, and in time he came to be looked upon as the most highly blessed by God of all the men in that country. He had twelve sons, who were strong and handsome young men, capable of doing much work in the fields. Jacob was very proud of these sons, and was fond of them all. But he was especially fond of Joseph, who, next to Benjamin, was the youngest of all, for Joseph was not only the handsomest of the young men, but he was also the kindest and the most obedient.

Now this affection of the father excited the envy and hatred of his brethren, and the hatred was increased when Joseph told them of two dreams of his, which, when interpreted, foretold that his future happiness would be greater than that of any of the others.

The first of his dreams was as follows: He thought that in harvest time he and his brothers were binding up sheaves of grain, and his sheaf stood still in the place where he set it, but their sheaves ran to bow down to it, as servants bow down to their masters. And the brothers were angry when they heard this dream, because it seemed to mean that they would bow down to Joseph. They did not let Joseph know the meaning they put upon it, but only prayed in secret that what they feared might not come to pass.

The second dream was even more wonderful than the first. It seemed to Joseph that the sun and the moon came down from heaven with eleven stars and bowed down to him. He told this vision to his father in the presence of his brethren, and begged him to interpret it. Jacob was secretly pleased with this dream, for it seemed to promise great things to his favorite son, and he guessed that this was its meaning: the sun and the moon signified the father and mother of Joseph, and the eleven stars were his brethren, and the time would come when Joseph, by the blessing of God, should be honored and deemed worthy of worship by his parents and his brethren. The second dream made the brothers still more angry than the first.

A short time after this, Joseph's brethren went down to a country called Shechem, which was famous for its pasturage, and there they fed their flocks. But as they had not told their father of their removal he became very anxious, and sent Joseph out to see if he could not learn any news about them. The brethren rejoiced when they saw Joseph coming towards them, for they had resolved to kill him. Reuben, the eldest,

was less hardened in his heart than the others, and he began to reason with them, telling them that it was a great crime to kill a brother, even if he had done a serious wrong, and Joseph had done no wrong. But when he saw that his words were of no avail, he begged of them at least not to kill their brother with their own hands, but to cast him into the pit that was hard by, and so let him die, and at least they would not then have defiled their hands with his blood. To this the young men agreed. Reuben took the lad and tied a cord around him and let him down gently into the pit. And then he went his way to seek for such pasturage as was fit for feeding the flocks.

After Reuben was gone, Judah, who was another of the brethren, saw a company of merchants, called Ishmaelites, who were carrying spices and Syrian wares out of the land of Gilead to sell to the Egyptians. Then he advised the others to draw Joseph out of the pit and sell him to these merchants, for in this way they would be rid of him without the guilt of murder. They all agreed to this; and Joseph was drawn up out of the pit and sold to the merchants for twenty pieces of silver.

In the nighttime Reuben came back to the pit with the intention of secretly saving Joseph. And when he called to him and received no answer he was much distressed, fearing they had destroyed him after he was gone. But when he went to his brethren and complained to them they told him what they had done, and he was satisfied.

The brethren then considered among themselves what they should tell their father. They had taken away from Joseph the coat which he had on when he came to them,—a beautiful coat of many colors given to him by Isaac,—so they decided to tear that coat to pieces, and to dip it into goat's blood, and then to carry it and show it to their father, that he might believe Joseph had been destroyed by wild beasts. And when they had so done, they came to the old man, and he recognized the coat as the one he had given to Joseph, and, believing that his favorite son had been slain, he lamented sorely and could not be comforted.

~From *Our Young Folks' Josephus* by William Shepard

Picture Study for Week Nine



Title: Joseph's Tunic by Diego Velázquez

Date: 1630

Technique: oil

Material: canvas

Dimensions: 223 x 250 cm

Location: El Escorial

Picture Study for Week Ten



Title: The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon by Edward Poynter

Date: 1890

Technique: oil

Material: canvas

Dimensions: 2,345 x 3,505 mm

Location: Art Gallery of New South Wales

Reading for Week Eleven

The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

~by Lord Byron

Picture Study for Week Eleven



Title: Prophet Isaiah by Michelangelo

Date: between 1508 and 1512

Medium: fresco

Dimensions: 365 x 380 cm

Location: Vatican Museums