✧ Memory of Humanity

A FREE SOURCE-FIRST WORKBOOK

FLOOD STORIES, *DIFFERENT* WORLDS.

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Five traditions. A simple comparison method. And a better question than “Did everyone remember the same flood?”

FREE 12-PAGE SAMPLE · OCTOBER 2026
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A better way to ask the question

Before comparing flood myths, separate what a source says from what history can establish.

Similar flood stories can feel like a clue to one forgotten catastrophe. They may be. But resemblance is the beginning of an inquiry, not its conclusion. A better comparison starts with the surviving version of each story and asks which details genuinely match.

1. **Locate the record.** Is it a clay tablet, a sacred text, a later manuscript or a collector's transcription?
2. **Identify the threat.** Who causes the water to rise, and why?
3. **Compare survival.** A boat, a mountain, a tree—or a transformation into another kind of being?
4. **Check the ending.** Does the old world return, or is something new created?
5. **Mark uncertainty.** Are we reading a dated archaeological object or interpreting a modern summary?

> **WHAT THIS SAMPLE DOES NOT CLAIM**
>
> It does not prove a worldwide flood, a single origin for all traditions, or the literal truth of any supernatural event. Nor does it claim that similarities are meaningless.

Edition note: this free comparison uses five selected records from the Memory of Humanity catalog. It does not represent the full range of regional versions.

Five traditions, not one flood map

These are regions associated with surviving texts or documented variants—not markers of the extent of prehistoric flooding.

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

Utnapishtim

A warned survivor prepares a vessel and later sends out birds.

HEBREW BIBLE

Noah

An ark preserves a family and animals; a covenant follows.

ANCIENT GREECE

Deucalion and Pyrrha

A couple survives; stones become a new human generation.

CENTRAL MEXICO · NAHUA

The Fourth Sun

An earlier world ends by water, and people are changed into fish.

SOUTHERN CHILE · MAPUCHE

Caicai and Trentren

Water rises while protective land also rises; variants differ.

THE SHARED QUESTION

What changes?

All five describe transformation, but survival and meaning differ.

Recording date ≠ origin date. The oldest copy we possess need not be the earliest telling. Accounts written down by later collectors may also reflect centuries of local variation and contact.

Open the world atlas: https://myth-atlas-research-jp.pages.dev/?theme=flood&lang=en

The comparison matrix

A small table can prevent a large generalization.

Tradition	Threat	Survival	Aftermath
Utnapishtim	Flood planned by gods	Vessel, household, creatures	Birds, sacrifice, exceptional life
Noah	Divine judgment	Ark, family, animals	Birds, sacrifice, covenant
Deucalion	Zeus brings destruction	Couple survives in a chest	New people arise from stones
Fourth Sun	Earlier era ends in water	Humanity changes form	People become fish
Caicai / Trentren	Sea-serpent raises water	Protective raised ground	Some beings are transformed

What similarities actually survive the test?

SHARED IN SOME ACCOUNTS

Extreme water, threatened human life, a changed order, survival in a protected place.

NOT SHARED BY ALL

A boat, rescued animals, birds, a divine covenant, or a single surviving couple.

> **Exercise:** Which two stories have the closest *sequence* of events? Which share only the broad idea of water transforming the world? Record both findings rather than forcing one answer.

Case file 01 · Utnapishtim

A literary flood preserved on cuneiform tablets.

MESOPOTAMIAN LITERARY RECORD

Gilgamesh · Tablet XI

01

XI **Object and text are different evidence.**
A tablet preserves a composition, not an eyewitness video of its events.

WHAT THE NARRATIVE INCLUDES

A flood warning, construction of a vessel, preservation of family and living creatures, the release of birds and an offering afterward.

TWO DETAILS TO COMPARE

The survivor releases a dove, then a swallow, then a raven. His exceptional fate after the flood differs from Noah's.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTED

Neo-Assyrian cuneiform material associated with the flood narrative survives and is cataloged by the British Museum.

WHAT IS NOT ESTABLISHED

The surviving tablet alone does not prove the boat existed or identify any local flood deposit as the event described.

Comparison prompt: Does matching an episode such as "birds were released" tell us more when we examine the bird sequence and narrative context?

Follow the text: SOAS, Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh, Tablet XI, lines 1–163. See the bibliography on page 12.

Case file 02 · Noah

A flood narrative embedded in a wider covenantal history.

HEBREW BIBLE · GENESIS 6–9

The ark and a covenant

02

WHAT THE NARRATIVE INCLUDES

Noah receives instructions to build an ark; his household and animals survive a great flood. He releases birds as the waters recede.

TWO DETAILS TO COMPARE

Genesis describes a raven and repeated releases of a dove. A covenant follows the flood—a different ending from Utnapishtim's.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTED

The narrative can be checked verse by verse in Genesis 6 (instructions), 7 (waters), 8 (birds) and 9 (covenant).

WHAT IS NOT ESTABLISHED

The text is a source for a religious and literary narrative. It is not independent geological proof of a worldwide inundation.

Why this comparison is useful

Gilgamesh XI and Genesis have unusually specific correspondences. Scholars can compare their literary contexts and formation histories, but the wording "Noah copied Utnapishtim" goes beyond what a simple side-by-side table proves. Mesopotamian literature includes other flood accounts as well.

A responsible timeline distinguishes the age of an idea, the period of a composition and the date of a surviving copy. Confusing these three can make a very persuasive—but misleading—graphic.

> **Comparison prompt:** Mark each shared event with a line or verse. Then list one difference that changes the moral meaning of the story.

Read: Genesis chapters 6–9. The source-link list is on page 12.

Case file 03 · Deucalion

A catastrophe with a strikingly different account of renewal.

ANCIENT GREEK MYTHOGRAPHIC TEXT

Deucalion and Pyrrha

03

WHAT HAPPENS

In the account in the *Bibliotheca*, a flood destroys an earlier human generation. Deucalion and Pyrrha survive in a chest or vessel.

WHY THE ENDING MATTERS

The pair cast stones behind them, from which new people emerge. The renewed human community is central, not simply survival aboard a boat.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTED

Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.7.2, is a cited literary witness. It is later than the myth's supposed era.

WHAT CANNOT BE CONCLUDED

Shared boat imagery by itself cannot establish the route by which a story was transmitted or the occurrence of a worldwide flood.

A difference worth keeping

In the Mesopotamian and biblical narratives, carrying living creatures through the disaster receives particular emphasis. The Greek tale includes the extraordinary making of a new generation from stones. What survives may therefore be a similar dramatic problem—how life continues after catastrophe—solved by different imaginative means.

> **Comparison prompt:** Put "saving previous life" next to "creating new life." Which tradition emphasizes each, and how might that distinction affect your interpretation?

Source: Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 1.7.2, Alpheios edition (linked on page 12).

Case file 04 · The Fourth Sun

Not every flood story is an ark story.

NAHUA COSMOLOGICAL TRADITION · CENTRAL MEXICO

A world age ends in water

04

THE SOURCE

The Nahua *Legend of the Suns* describes a sequence of earlier world ages. In the Fourth Sun, water ends an age and humans turn into fish.

DISTINGUISH ANOTHER STRAND

Accounts about a couple sheltered in a tree or hollow trunk are not the same detail as the Fourth Sun fish-transformation passage; versions must be kept distinct.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTED

A Nahuatl textual tradition was recorded and transmitted in colonial-period materials, accessible through modern scholarly editions.

WHAT WE CANNOT INFER

The account does not prove the historical end of a planetary age, nor does its water imagery make it a direct variant of Noah.

Why recording history matters

Even the apparently simple phrase “a Nahua flood myth” conceals separate episodes and retellings. The languages of the records, dates of their transcription, and interpretations of translators all matter. Mixing several versions can manufacture an artificial tale that no original source actually tells.

> **Comparison prompt:** When two summaries disagree, are you looking at a mistranslation, a version from another source, or two episodes that a later author joined together?

Source trail: Leyenda de los Soles, as discussed by Arqueología Mexicana (see page 12).

Case file 05 · Caicai and Trentren

Water rises. So does the landscape.

MAPUCHE NARRATIVES · SOUTHERN CHILE

Two beings, changing ground

05

THE CENTRAL CONFLICT

In recorded variants, the sea-serpent Caicai raises waters while Trentren raises or protects higher ground where people can escape.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF RESCUE

A raised mountain or earth is not a sealed ark. Some versions describe people or animals transformed in the aftermath.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTED

Published historical and ethnographic records preserve variants. A 2022 academic review compares documented versions and their collection histories.

WHAT IS NOT ESTABLISHED

The narratives do not directly measure the extent of any prehistoric tsunami, or prove a simultaneous global flood.

Respect the fact that a story has living contexts

Mapuche knowledge is not a single immutable paragraph. Accounts differ by locality, language, teller and context; collection by outsiders may add another layer of interpretation. A comparison should not choose whichever version most resembles another tradition and erase the rest.

> **Comparison prompt:** How does protection by a changing landscape affect the meaning of "survival" compared with survival inside a built vessel?

Source: historical comparisons linked in the SciELO academic article cited on page 12.

What science can really establish

The strongest conclusions are often narrower than the most dramatic headlines.

1 **Story recorded**

A dated text or artifact shows that someone preserved a narrative. It does not show that the narrated event occurred.

2 **Local environmental event documented**

A sediment layer, coastal deposit or written observation may support a flood at a certain place. The location and date must still be verified.

3 **A plausible historical relationship**

Researchers investigate whether event dates, story transmission and geography fit. Resemblance alone does not supply this connection.

4 **Direct link established**

This would require independent, converging evidence for a specific event and a specific tradition. For the cases reviewed here, no such direct proof is claimed.

> **Example: Ur.** Water-laid archaeological deposits at the Mesopotamian site of Ur are observations about that locality. They are not a sedimentary record covering every civilization, and do not alone identify Utnapishtim’s narrated flood.

A scientific paper about real flooding need not support every historical interpretation attached to it. Always check what data were actually measured.

Your two-story comparison sheet

Make your own interpretation—and keep the uncertainties visible.

STORY A	STORY B

1 · A SHARED EPISODE, WITH SOURCE CITATION

2 · THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE

3 · THE OLDEST SURVIVING RECORD I COULD LOCATE

4 · WHAT IS AN OBSERVATION, AND WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

5 · MY CONCLUSION (INCLUDE THE LIMIT OF THE EVIDENCE)

> Challenge yourself: if your conclusion is “these accounts share a common source,” write down the historical evidence that would be needed to test it. If you cannot name that evidence, label your idea a hypothesis.

Read the sources, then go further

The source list is part of the product. A conclusion without a route back to the record is hard to audit.

Utnapishtim · SOAS / Gilgamesh XI
soas.ac.uk/baplar/recordings/epic-gilgames-standard-version-tablet-xi-lines-1-163-read-karl-hecker

Flood Tablet · British Museum object search
britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=WCT5128

Noah · Genesis chapters 6–9 (Sefaria)
sefaria.org/Genesis.6-9

Deucalion · Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca 1.7.2
alpheios.net/alpheios-texts/Perseus.text.1999.01.0021/book1_card1.7.2.html

Fourth Sun · Legend of the Suns, Arqueología Mexicana
arqueologiamexicana.mx/node/6817

Caicai and Trentren · SciELO historical comparison
scielo.cl/scielo.php?pid=S0716-27902022000100197&script=sci_arttext

Ur sediment · Leonard Woolley, Excavations at Ur 1929–30 (Penn Museum)
penn.museum/sites/journal/9272/

Continue exploring, free

World Flood Myths · 5 Stories Compared
Gilgamesh vs Noah
Interactive world mythology map

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