

The History of the Redaction of the Genesis Flood Narrative Reconsidered by Joseph Guy Normand Cholette (2001)

During the last century the history of the redaction of the Genesis Flood narrative has been predominantly interpreted in the perspective of the documentary hypothesis. According to this view the present Flood narrative was formed by a final redactor (R) who has amalgamated two different flood versions. These two flood versions are interpreted as the J source (the Yahwist), which comes from the Davidic or Solomonic period around the 10th or 9th century BC, and the source P (the Priestly writer), which comes from the exilic period around 6th or 5th century BC. During the last decades the documentary hypothesis has been seriously challenged by scholarship. Today some scholars proposed to understand the history of redaction of the Flood narrative in the perspective of the supplementary hypothesis. In the light of this proposal the narrative was gradually formed throughout the centuries by the successive work of the different redactors. During the last decades, several scholars have also questioned the chronology and the dating of the two sources J and P. Some proposed to interpret the source J in the light of the exilic period and other the source P before the exile. Consequently these alterations on the J and P sources have a major impact on the history of the redaction of the Genesis Flood narrative.

The current study proposes to reconsider the history of the redaction of the Genesis Flood narrative in light of these new interpretations of the sources J and P. The proposal examines the Flood narrative in the perspective of eight propositions which define the method of the history of the redaction. The first chapter establishes some parameters for the source hypothesis in the Flood narrative proposing a pre-exilic date for P and an exilic date for J. From these premises, the second chapter proposes to demonstrate that P pre-dated J and was supplemented by this later. Then six propositions are presented to support the hypothesis that P's Flood narrative was supplemented by J. To conclude, the third chapter attempts to discover the specific theological approach used by J to supplemented by P. The chapter examines the final form of the Flood narrative in light of the temple ideology that was proposed by S. W. Holloway. According to Holloway the final form of the Flood narrative should be interpreted in the light of an idealization of the Solomonic temple. Holloway maintains the proposal on the basis of two types of arguments. First, Holloway attempts to draw some parallels between the description of Noah's ark (Gen 6: 14-16) and the description of the Solomonic temple (1 Kgs 6). Second, Holloway points out the cultic terminology in the Flood narrative that seems to indicate that Noah behaves

according to the priestly theology found in the Holiness Code (H) in the Book of Leviticus. Assuming the chronology of the sources J and P proposed by documentary hypothesis, Holloway proposed that P as one of the final redactors would have been responsible for the priestly theology in the Flood narrative.

However, a close examination of Holloway's proposal clearly demonstrates that the cultic terminology in the Flood narrative is not in P but rather in J. Curiously, in the Flood narrative J expressed a very good knowledge of the Holiness Code (H), which critics have traditionally dated around the exilic period. Such knowledge of the Holiness Code by J poses a dilemma for the dating of the sources J, P and H proposed by the documentary hypothesis. In the Flood narrative J is much closer to H than P. Why such similarities between J and H? Why this distinction between H and P? If scholarship maintains the traditional dating of J around the 10th or 9th century then the exilic date for H should to some extent be reconsidered. If scholarship remains firm in the exilic date for H then, in light of these observations, the possibility of an exilic date for J should seriously be considered. Interestingly these observations tend to confirm the latest researches which proposed that J does not belong to the 10th or 9th century but rather to the exilic period.

In light of the supplementary hypothesis proposed in the second chapter of the current study this observation becomes even more meaningful. An analysis of P's Flood narrative reveals that the material corresponds better to the pre-exilic prophetic setting of the 8th century. Consequently, as one of the final redactors, J would have reinterpreted the ancient P's Flood narrative in the perspective of the Holiness Code, which became so prominent during the exilic period.