For Thursday, April 13

Reading assignments:

Stephen Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, seventh edition, read the short section called “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” pp. 49-51, and then the excerpts from the flood story in Gilgamesh, Box 3.1 on pp. 52-53 (again of the seventh edition; if you got the sixth edition, you’ll need to look for these on other pages).


Written seminar preparation:

1. First: if the word “antediluvian” is unfamiliar to you, get to know it. *Ante-* means before; *deluvian* means the flood.

2. From the excerpt in the Harris book, it is a little hard to tell that the flood in Gilgamesh is caused by a council of gods headed by Ellil (Enlil). Most of the names mentioned -- Anu, Ea, later Ishtar, the Mistress of the Gods – are gods. Utnapishtim, of course, is not a god. Mesopotamian cities had their own local gods, and then there were the “great gods” above them. A couple of brief questions: (a) Do you see a motive given for the gods’ sending a Flood? (b) Do you see a motive given for Ea’s choosing Utnapishtime to survive the Flood? (c) What is the reaction of at least some of the gods in the excerpt to the destruction caused by the Flood?

3. According to Batto, the author of the epic of Gilgamesh made changes to the traditional Gilgamesh stories. These had the effect of “reworking the religious tradition,” making the epic for Batto “a clear example of . . . mythopoeic speculation” (26). What was the principal change made by the author of the epic?

For Friday, April 14:

Reading assignment:

(1) Batto: please read the rest of his Ch. 1 (pp. 27-40) in the special handout given out this week.

(2) Genesis, 2:4 to 4.26

Answer in writing:

1. On the Batto reading: Atrahasis has perhaps the most interesting connections to the Genesis chapters we are reading. With respect to relations between God/gods and human
beings, hat comparisons and/or contrasts can you make between Atrahasis (in Batto’s account) and the Genesis readings for today? (You might want to answer the Genesis questions first.)

2. On the Genesis readings: These take in the famous Adam and Eve story, Cain and Abel, and Lamech. We will not be pausing over these too long for analysis. But here are a few questions to call your attention to a few details. Please bring written notes on them to use in discussion:

a. The Hebrew Bible is said to include many etiologies – stories that explain the origin or cause of something. (See Harris, p. 100 of 7th ed.) For instance, Gen. 2.24 may be said to be an etiology for why, in the culture of the Hebrew Bible a man leaves his father and mother to live with his wife. What other “facts of life” or other things of interest may be said to be accounted for by details of the Adam and Eve story?

b. In the Cain and Abel story, note the footnote to 4.3-5. (Also relevant may be Exodus 33.19.) Note also that Cain’s crime is put in terms of his having spilled his brother’s blood into the ground. For the ancient Hebrews, blood was something terrified potent and belonged to God. This is called the first murder. But has there been a prohibition announced against killing?

c. What details might support the contention that Yahweh is having to “feel his way” a bit in his relation with humans, that he hadn’t quite anticipated how things would go with them.

d. Where do we see Yahweh extending some tenderness towards humans even while he is punishing them?