

### 3. Theories of the Flood

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#### a. Inscriptions and Writings: Israel Stele



Also known as the Israel Stele or Victory Stele of Merneptah, it is the reverse of a large granite stele originally erected by the Ancient Egyptian king Amenhotep III, but later inscribed by Merneptah who ruled Egypt from 1213 to 1203 BC. The black granite stele primarily commemorates a victory in a campaign against the Libu and Meshwesh Libyans and their Sea People allies, but its final two lines refer to a prior military campaign in Canaan in which Merneptah states

that he defeated Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam and Israel among others.

The stele has gained much notoriety for being the only Ancient Egyptian document generally accepted as mentioning "Isrir" or "Israel". It is also, by far, the earliest known attestation of Israel. For this reason, many scholars refer to it as the "Israel stele". This title is somewhat misleading because the stele is clearly not concerned about Israel— in fact, it mentions Israel

only in passing. There is only one line about Israel: "Israel is wasted, bare of seed" or "Israel lies waste, its seed no longer exists" and very little about the region of Canaan. Israel is simply grouped together with three other defeated states in Canaan (Gezer, Yanoam and Ashkelon) in the stele.

## **b. Scripture Reading: Genesis 7:1-20**

### **c. Theories of the Flood**

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. (Genesis 7:11).

The chronological specifics indicate that we are meant to understand this as an actual historical event. But what is the nature of this event?

The phrase most translations render as "floodgates of the sky" is Aruboth haShama'im and is more properly translated with "windows of heaven." This exact same term is found in Malachi 3:10 where the Lord is pictured as opening the windows of heaven to pour out blessings on His people (this kind of usage is also seen in 2 Kings 7:2,19). The idea of the windows from above being opened in order to bring destruction is pictured in Isaiah 24:18.

*Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster will fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare; for the windows above are opened, and the foundations of the earth shake. (Isaiah 24:18).*

In the same way, "all the fountains of the great deep" has its parallels such as Deuteronomy 4:18 where we read of fish that are "in the water below the earth." Thus, the picture is that of the sky and the ocean loosening their bonds so that their waters fall upon the land.

Was this a world-wide flood or was it merely limited to the geographical area of Mesopotamia?

### **1. Arguments for a Universal Flood.**

#### **a. The depth of the flood.**

Genesis 7:19-20 says that ALL the high mountains which were under ALL the heavens were covered by the waters of the flood.

The peak of Mount Ararat extends to an elevation of around 17,000 feet. If only this one single peak was covered, then most of the world would also be covered.

#### **b. The duration of the flood.**

The flood is said to have lasted 371 days – a little over a year. Local floods do not last this long.

c. The need for the ark.

If the flood was to be merely confined to a certain isolated area, it would not have been necessary for Noah to build a big ship. He could have moved to higher ground.

## **2. Arguments for a Local Flood.**

a. HaAretz is “the land.”

The Hebrew word which is translated “the world” throughout the flood narrative (HaAretz) can be translated “the land.”

“The LAND of Nod” (Genesis 4:16).

“In the LAND of Shinar” (Genesis 10:10).

“Out of that LAND went forth Asshur” (Genesis 10:11).

Each of these instances uses the same basic word. It can refer to the entire world, or it can merely refer to a certain area of land.

By the same token, when the Bible says that the world was covered by water, we need not take this to refer to the entire planet earth. It could merely be a reference to that land area.

b. Universalist terms can be used in a limited sense.

The Scriptures sometimes use terms like “all” and “every” in a way which is understood to be a limited sense.

Most people who advocate a universal flood do not take this command to refer to ocean animals. Thus even the universalist understands that there are times when universal language is used in a limited sense. Therefore when we read of every living thing being destroyed in the flood, we can understand it to refer to the living land animals in that particular area, not necessarily to a flood which covered the entire planet.

c. Where did the water go?

Mount Everest rises over 5 miles above sea level. There are many other mountains in the world which are over the 3 mile mark.

For flood waters to cover the earth would mandate that either the mountains were not there (thus they would have to be very recent in origin) or else that water came from some supernatural source and then went away again. Another possibility would be that the ocean beds somehow sank to collect the excess water.

It is interesting to note that sediment deposits have been found underneath the Sumerian ruins at Ur, at Fara and at Kish, lending some credence to the theory of a local flood.

### 3. Summary.

UNIVERSAL FLOOD	LOCAL FLOOD
The purpose of the ark was punishment of world-wide sin. In a local flood some could have escaped.	The word <i>aretz</i> is often used to describe a local area.
The authors of Genesis use language of totality.	The account is given from the viewpoint of the narrator is from his perspective; from that viewpoint the destruction is total.
The the ark indicates that this was no local flood. A vessel of this size would not have been needed to escape a local flood.	The ark, even though very big, could have never contained all then living species of animals.

#### **d. Another Mesopotamian flood account from the Gilgamesh Epic**

A number of “Flood Traditions” have come down to us from a number of ancient cultures. The most popular of these in the one found in the Gilgamesh Epic.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a long Akkadian poem on the theme of human beings’ futile quest for immortality. A number of earlier Sumerian stories about Gilgamesh, the quasi-historical hero of the epic, were used as sources, but the Akkadian work was composed about 2000 BC. It exists in several different recensions, none of them complete.

In the story, Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu seek immortality through fame, but when Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh finds that fame to be hollow. Unable to accept the finality of death, he goes to Utnapishtim, the Babylonian counterpart of the biblical Noah, to learn the secret of his immortality.

This interview takes place on the 5th of seven tablets. Utnapishtim tells the story of how he was spared the destruction of the great flood through the building of a giant square barge.

- o The boat consisted of seven decks and was overlaid with pitch.
- o It took only seven days to build it.
- o Utnapishtim saved his family and relatives along with animals and craftsmen.

o The flood began when “the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether waters, Ninutra the war-lord threw down the dykes, and the seven judges of hell, the Annunaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame.”

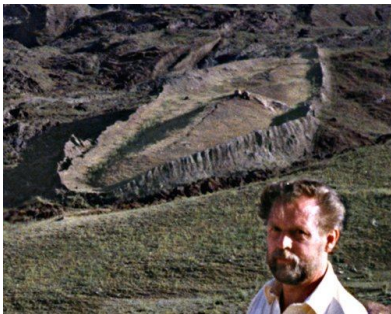
o The storm lasted for 6 days and nights after which “the surface of the sea stretched as flat as a roof-top.”

o The boat landed atop the mountain of Nisir. After seven days on the mountain, Utnapishtim released a dove, then a swallow, and finally a raven before leaving the boat and making a sacrifice to the gods.

Utnapishtim goes on to explain that he received eternal life due to the unique circumstances of the flood, but he consoles the dejected Gilgamesh with news about a plant of life. A snake swallows the plant before Gilgamesh can use it, however, and he finally returns home, reluctantly accepting death without future resurrection as inevitable.

#### e. The quest for Noah’s Arc

Modern searches of Noah’s Ark (1949 to present)



- In the 1980s and 1990s the Durupınar site was heavily promoted by Ron Wyatt. It receives a steady stream of visitors and according to the local authorities a nearby mountain is called "Mount Cudi" making it one of about five Mount Judis in the land of Kurdistan. Geologists have identified the Durupınar site as a natural formation but Wyatt's Ark Discovery Institute continues to champion its claims.

In June 2006, Bob Cornuke of the Bible Archeology Search and Exploration Institute took a team of 14 American "business, law, and ministry leaders" to Iran to visit a site in the Alborz Mountains, purported to be a possible resting place of the Ark. The team claimed to have discovered an "object" 13,000 feet above sea level, which had the appearance of blackened petrified wooden beams, and was "about the size of a small aircraft carrier" [400 ft long (120 m)], and supposedly consistent with the dimensions provided in Genesis of 300 cubits by 50 cubits. The team also claimed to have found fossilized sea creatures inside the petrified wood, and in the immediate vicinity of the site. One member of the team claimed that 'a Houston lab used by the Smithsonian' tested some beams and confirmed they were petrified wood containing fossilized sea animals, but the name of the laboratory was not given. No one outside the expedition has offered independent confirmation, and apart from a few purported beams, no photographic images of this supposed Ark in its entirety have been made available (though short video segments have been made available). The team's consensus on the "object" is not

absolute; Reg Lyle, another expedition member, described the find as appearing to be "a basalt dike". It is the official position of the BASE Institute that Iran was the logical resting place of the Ark. Their website does not definitely claim the object to be the Ark, but concludes that it is "a candidate"

- In 2007, a joint Turkish-Hong Kong expedition including members of Noah's Ark Ministries International claimed to have found an unusual cave with fossilized wooden walls on Mount Ararat, well above the vegetation line.
- In 2010, Noah's Ark Ministries International I (NAMI) released videos of their discovery of the wood structures. Members of Noah's Ark Ministries International reported carbon dating suggests the wood is approximately 4,800 years old. It is unlikely that there was any human settlement at the site at altitude of 4,000 meters. Randall Price, a partner with Noah's Ark Ministries International from early 2008 to the summer of 2008, stated that the discovery was probably the result of a hoax, perpetrated by ten Kurdish workers hired by the Turkish guide used by the Chinese, who planted large wood beams taken from an old structure near the Black Sea at the cave site. In a response to Price, Noah's Ark Ministries International stated that they had terminated co-operation with Price in early October 2008, and that he had never been in the location of the wooden structure they identified, and regretted his absence in their find.

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From a Wikipedia article found at  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Searches\\_for\\_Noah's\\_Ark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Searches_for_Noah's_Ark)

**Discussion Questions:**

What are we to make of the fact that a document predating the book of Genesis also contains a story of the flood with many of the same aspects of the Biblical account? Does this mean that the biblical account has been copied? Or does it attest to the strong possibility of the Flood as an actual event? What theory of the flood do you find plausible? A universal flood or an extended local flood? Would a positive identification of fossilized pieces of the ark make a difference to your faith?