

## Where is Noah's Ark?—a closer look at the biblical clues

Humphreys is correct that we should look elsewhere than Mount Ararat for the landing place of Noah's Ark. Geological evidences show that Mount Ararat is a post-Flood subaerial compound stratovolcano that sits on a fault that rifts all the fossil-bearing sedimentary layers in its plain. This opinion is held by Snelling<sup>1</sup> and Baumgardner<sup>2</sup> (but not Burdick, whose well-known paper was based on the presupposition that the Ark was on Mount Ararat<sup>3</sup>). Secular geologists agree, although their work is largely driven by the Turkish government's interest in finding suitable locations for nuclear power plants.<sup>4,5</sup>

Examining the Bible for clues as to where the Ark landed is not a new idea, however; a point could be made that all Ark searchers claim to follow what the Bible says (except for Muslims, who look to the Q'uran).<sup>6</sup> Nor is the subject as straightforward as Humphreys suggests. Simply following biblical leads has not resulted in any kind of agreement among Ark searchers, nor led to the Ark itself.

One proposed location of the Ark that surfaces now and then is the Zagros Mountains, directly east of ancient Babylon,<sup>7</sup> as favoured by Humphreys. However, the line of reasoning that leads to this area has inherent geographical and geological problems. The first difficulty is that this location is not in the territory of the mountains of Ararat (also called Urartu in history). The most southern border of Urartu at its greatest extent was somewhere in the upper Zagros Mountains south of Lake Urmia (this would be east of Mosul in the most northern part of Iraq, as Humphreys states). However, this is nowhere near Humphreys' proposed Ark location far to the south-east in the Zagros Mountains in Iran, east of Babylon. In fact, there is a distance of about 450 km

from the lower edge of ancient Urartu southward to this proposed Iranian Ark location.

A second problem is the placement of Shinar, which cannot have been in south Iraq; this means that the Tower of Babel cannot have been built at Babylon. The traditional belief that Babel was in South Mesopotamia is based on a coincidental linguistic similarity of the names 'Babel' and 'Babylon', plus a lack of knowledge of the geology of the area. The low-lying delta that forms the southern half of Iraq was most likely under water at the time that Noah's descendants were building the Tower. This is because all cities of south Mesopotamia are built on sediments washed down from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers during the meltdown at the end of the Ice Age; a curving east-west escarpment halfway up Iraq is an ancient shoreline that appears to lie where the post-Flood waters rested, and is at a higher elevation than any of South Iraq. The Tower of Babel and its three adjoining cities of Erech, Accad and Calneh were most likely located in the Khabur River triangle in the Al-Hasakeh governorate of north-east Syria.

Shinar was known to be a territory in Northern Mesopotamia in ancient times. This northern location for Shinar and the Tower of Babel is presented at length in a paper I published in March of this year.<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, Shinar is not Sumer; this is an old idea, still circulating in commentaries, that has been well refuted on linguistic grounds, and is not generally accepted by scholars today.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the biblical passages quoted by Humphreys as suggestive of the fact that Shinar is in the south (Gen. 10:10, Dan. 1:2, Zech. 5:11) actually do not say this; it is an assumption based on circular reasoning (i.e. because it is assumed that Shinar is the territory around the City of Babylon in the south, any reference to Shinar must refer to the City of Babylon).<sup>10</sup>

Traditions do not carry weight, as they are unreliable, and the traditions surrounding the many claimed Ark

locations (there are quite a few) have not aided us in locating the Ark. Neither does the age of those traditions mean anything. For instance, the strongest Ark traditions are with respect to Mount Ararat, but they are also the most recent—and Mount Ararat is not a candidate at all by virtue of scientific fact. The Epic of Gilgamesh, a Babylonian legend mentioned by Humphreys, has some recognizable Flood and Ark remnants in it; however, considering the mythical nature of this entire epic poem, the 'Mount Nisir' where the boat is said to have rested could be nothing but a tradition transferred to a known nearby mountain.

The many historical references to the Ark largely point to a different location altogether, Mount Cudi (pronounced 'Judi'). This mountain sits near Cizre on the Tigris River in Turkey, just north of the place where Turkey, Iraq, and Syria meet. A great deal of work on Mount Cudi as the most likely location for the Ark has been done by Crouse and Franz.<sup>11</sup>

We do not know exactly where Noah's family lived after leaving the Ark; they may have come south out of the Uartian mountains to the northern edge of the Mesopotamian plain before heading westward to Shinar. The distance from south of Mount Cudi to the centre of the Khabur triangle in northeastern Syria is about 160 km. Noah's clan would have travelled in a mostly westerly direction 'from the east' to get there.

One factor that gets missed by many is that the Ark did not necessarily land as high up on a mountainside as is popularly believed. We have a biblical clue, "And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days" (Gen. 7:24). It would appear that by the time the Ark grounded on the 150<sup>th</sup> day (Gen. 8:5), the Flood was essentially over, even though the ground was not yet dry. The Ark sat for two months before the tops of the mountains were seen (or became visible<sup>12</sup>); this is usually interpreted to mean that it was

the dropping water during this time that caused the tips of the mountains to become visible to Noah. But this is not what the Bible actually says, and we are paying special attention to biblical clues here. The Bible says that the tops of the mountains were seen specifically *on one day*, the first day of the tenth month (Gen. 8:5). The mountains around the Ark would have been of varying heights; we cannot expect that the water covering the whole earth suddenly dropped a large amount in one day for these mountaintops to become visible all at once. It should be considered that the Ark may have sat in a thick fog for those two months (a meteorological clue as to the weather conditions), and clearing of the fog made the tops of the mountains become visible on that day. Noah and his family may have gotten quite a surprise that day when they looked out and saw all those mountains towering around them. Also, the relatively accessible location of the Ark described by ancient historians would seem to indicate that the Ark did not land in a high, dangerous, or difficult-to-climb-to place.<sup>13</sup>

As a chemist, I cannot share the optimism that many display for finding a wooden vessel that could be as much as 5,000 years old. Already 2,000 years ago, ancient writers spoke of ‘the remains’,<sup>14</sup> indicating that there was perhaps not a lot of the Ark left then. We would expect that deterioration would have set in over the millennia, aided and abetted by ravages such as pilgrims taking mementos<sup>15</sup> (it would seem that tourists have not changed very much over the years!). We should perhaps think of the Ark landing at a modest height somewhere in those mountains of Ararat; over the thousands of years since, there would have been scavenging and decay, the roof would have caved in, the silts of time would have filled the broken-down hull, and trees would have grown up in the middle of it. In the end, traces of it would be hard to find. This is the realistic picture, as unwelcome as it

must be to those who are certain that they will find the Ark some day.

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### References

1. Snelling, A.A., *Earth's Catastrophic Past* vol. 1, Institute for Creation Research, Dallas, TX, p. 30, 2009.
2. Habermehl, A., A Review of the Search for Noah's Ark; in: Snelling, A.A. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Creationism*, Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA, and Institute for Creation Research, Dallas, TX, pp. 485–501, 2008; www.harpanddragon.com/ICC6-41.pdf. See Baumgardner's remarks on Mount Ararat as a post-Flood volcano on pp. 490–491.
3. Burdick, C.L., Ararat, the Mother of Mountains, *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 4(1):5–12, 1967.
4. Karakhanian *et al.*, Holocene-Historical Volcanism and Active Faults as Natural Risk Factors for Armenia and Adjacent Countries, *J. Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 113:319–344, 2002. For information on Mt Ararat, see pp. 330–339. Much volcanism has taken place in historic times; the Ark could not possibly be sitting on the surface of the mountain.
5. Yilmaz *et al.*, Geology of the Quaternary Geologic Centers of the East Anatolia, *J. Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 85:173–210, 1998. See p. 193 for the formation of the Ararat volcano from its beginning.
6. Habermehl, ref. 2, p. 487.
7. The site of ancient Babylon is called Al Hillah today, and is located in the Babil governorate of south Iraq.
8. Habermehl, A., Where in the world is the Tower of Babel?, *Answers Research J.* 4:25–53, 2011.
9. Habermehl, ref. 8, p. 29.
10. Habermehl, ref. 8, pp. 26–27.
11. Crouse, B. and Franz, G., Mount Cudi—True mountain of Noah's Ark, *Bible and Spade* 19(4):99–111, 2006.
12. Davidson, F. (Ed.), *The New Bible Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1967.
13. Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, Whiston translation, new updated edition, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, p. 526, 1987. Josephus states that the remains of the Ark are shown to anyone who wants to see them.
14. Josephus, ref. 13, p. 526.

15. Berossus, *History of Babylonia*, about 275 BC. Berossus' original manuscript is long lost, but Josephus quotes from it: "... some people carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they take away, and use chiefly as amulets for the averting of mischiefs" (ref. 13, p. 34).

### Russ Humphreys replies:

As I indicated before, I am happy for others to propose different locations for the Ark but will not engage in debating the merits of other sites favoured by others who are passionate about this topic, as there are enough potential ‘preferred locations’ to make such exchanges onerous, and to choose to limit responses to only one or two could (rightly) be seen as preferential.

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## Is Darius, the king of Ezra 6:14–15, the same king as the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:1?

This is a good article. However, Daniel 11:1–4 makes it clear that there would be only four Persian kings. This would be closer to 52 years, not 123 years for the Persian period. And if there is need only for one decree to restore Jerusalem, God gave that decree before Jerusalem was even destroyed through the prophet Jeremiah. The only decree that matters would be God's decree (through Jeremiah).

I am sure you are fixed on ending the Seventy Weeks with Jesus (Yeshua). However, Daniel makes it plain that the Temple would be destroyed at the end of the 70 weeks. He even says sacrifices would be stopped during the last week. The sacrifices did not end at the death of Yeshua (Jesus), but rather they continued all the way to AD 63/64.