

## Results of a Survey of Archaeologists on the Biblical Flood

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**F**or the last twenty-five years, I have been intrigued with archaeology and devoured any article on archaeology that appeared in the newspaper or magazines. In 1997, as I was reading the Jan/Feb issue of *Biblical Archaeological Review*, I decided I would like to celebrate my sixty-fifth birthday at a dig site in Israel. I wrote letters to a few archaeological excavations telling why I would be of value to their work team: twenty years of delicate camera repair work; fifty years in taking photographs, and previous work on a survey team at a construction site.

A few weeks later I received a letter from Dr. Yosef Garfinkel (Hebrew University) indicating they would be looking forward to having me come to Sha'ar ha-Golan,<sup>1</sup> in the upper Jordan Valley, and join them in their dig in the Yarmukian culture<sup>2</sup> that flourished between 6400–5800 BC. Having been raised in a conservative fundamental Christian church, I was surprised that we would be excavating in a time frame about 2,000 years before the generally accepted biblical creation date of 4004 BC! This concept was new to me but because this was the only acceptance letter, I joined them.

During my three-week stay in Israel, I kept wondering why the biblical flood of Genesis had not destroyed this very ancient town where I was digging. This made me curious, so whenever I met a new archaeologist, I would ask if they had found any evidence of the Genesis flood. Most replied “No,” but a few did not want to talk about that subject. I felt I needed a broader survey than just a half dozen archaeologists. I figured I could do a good survey by e-mail. Thus from a directory of members of the prestigious American School of Oriental Research, I selected over one hundred names for the survey.

The e-mails that I received back contained twenty-six replies to the questions and six replies that only made

comments about the questions. The survey asked four questions. The first question asked for their religious affiliation, and very few replied to it. The second question was “Have you found evidence that there was a worldwide flood at about 2350 BC as the Hebrew Bible suggests?” Twenty-six answered, “No”; none answered, “Yes.” My third question was “Have you found any place in the archaeological time chart, back to about 10,000 BC where there could have been a worldwide flood as narrated in Genesis Chapters 6, 7 and 8?” Again, twenty-six answered “No”; none answered “Yes.” My last question was “Could some of the stories in Genesis be flawed because of the 1,000 or more years that it took before they were written down?” To this question, sixteen answered, “Yes”; three said “No”; and one person replied, “Not sure.”

Out of the twenty-six archaeologists that answered the survey, only about one-third answered the questions without any comments. Those who made comments expressed many thoughts on the biblical flood. I promised to keep all names anonymous, so their comments that follow are listed alphabetically as Dr. A, Dr. B, Dr. C, etc. Here is a sampling of those comments:

- Dr. A: There is nothing in the archaeological record that supports a universal flood such as Genesis 6–8 depicts, not within the historical period or even in the prehistorical human period. By genre, the early chapters of Genesis are patently myth, not history, similar to the Mesopotamian myths of the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh.
- Dr. B: There is some archaeological evidence for local floods in Mesopotamia, however, there does not seem to be any archaeological evidence for a *world-wide* flooding.
- Dr. C: Most of the so-called histories in the Bible are stories. Stories have more value to mankind than histories, as they are an excellent vehicle to spread truth and other immeasurable values. That's why the Bible is an inspiring guide for so many people.
- Dr. D: The biblical narrative about the flood shouldn't be read as historical accounts but as stories, similar to other Near Eastern stories, that attempt to explain and understand various aspects of existence—the damaging powers of water, the fragility of life, the widespread extent of evil and discord, the preferentiality of “the chosen few,” etc. Furthermore, it is a good tale that would be entertaining to young and old alike.
- Dr. E: The Bible is neither a scientific, historical, geological, etc. textbook—it used chance events, myths, legends, etc. to teach *religious* truths. It is currently being used for propaganda by unscrupulous, unlearned, often stupid people for their own agendas—missing the real value of the writing!

Following are some comments about the fourth question: "Could some of the stories in Genesis be flawed because of the 1,000 or more years that it took before they were written down?"

Dr. F: On your fourth question, all stories in all cultures and all times get somewhat "flawed" in telling/retelling particularly in an oral tradition phase. But that should not encourage you to think that they necessarily reflect the truth. Good luck with your progress.

Dr. G: The Mesopotamia parallels suggest that the biblical story did not evolve over 1,000 years but was borrowed a relatively late period [late pre-exile or early exile] from the Babylonians.


Dr. H: The stories are not flawed in their historical situations and intention.

Dr. I: I think transmission of the biblical text was accurate in essential points so that is not the solution to the problem ... a solution might lie along the lines of what "worldwide" meant to the then known world of the storyteller.

Dr. J: I don't accept the premises established by the question. I'm not convinced the Genesis material requires a 1,000 year oral tradition, but I also don't believe the Genesis account is "Flawed." The textual evidence of Genesis 6-9 can be legitimately read any of several ways. The original meaning could have been either (1) a universal flood, implied by "the face (or surface) of the earth" (Gen. 7:4), or (2) a local flood, implied by some of the Hebrew terms used, such as "earth" which can mean simply "Land, country" ... Likewise the scientific and geological evidence is not conclusive. I believe the flood was a real, historical account. We can only conclude that the flood waters covered the inhabited land (Gen. 6:7).

## Conclusion

Twenty-six responses are perhaps not enough to draw a completely valid conclusion, but I think it is significant that 100% of those answering the questions have never found any evidence of a literal worldwide Genesis flood in any historical time period up to 10,000 years ago. Also, 100% of those who only commented on the questions never indicated that they had found any evidence of a literal worldwide Genesis flood either.

So whatever we may decide about the nature of the biblical flood account, the *Harper's Bible Dictionary* is apparently correct when it says, "Despite numerous attempts to find archaeological evidence for a universal deluge, one has not been found ..." 

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>www.hum.huji.ac.il/archaeology.golan

<sup>2</sup>Josef Garfinkel, *The Yarmukians* (Bible Land Museum, 1999).

# The World's Oil Supply Revisited



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In the years since I first published on this,<sup>1</sup> there have been an increasing number of people becoming aware of the potential difficulties the world will soon face with oil supply. In my previous article, it was noted that many experts were saying the world would soon face perpetually declining oil production rates. By the end of this century, there will be no commercial quantities of oil as we have today. The big argument has been over when the production rate will peak and begin to decline.

At the time I wrote the last piece on this topic (July 2000), oil production in many countries was thought to be stable. But December 1999 was the peak of Great Britain's oil production. Since then production in many of the world's major oil supplying countries has plummeted. Britain has become a net oil importer this year, and the government expects to see a 20% decline in the pound due to this event.<sup>2</sup> Oman was producing 960,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2000 but they are hoping not to go below 650,000 bbl/d in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Indonesia's production has dropped 17% since then.<sup>4</sup> Since the world's production is the sum of the individual country's production, the decline in major suppliers is worrisome.

In 2000, we produced 71% of the world's oil from countries whose production is post-peak. By 2002, just two years later, that had increased to 75.3%. Exploration success continues to decline with the oil industry finding one barrel of oil for every nine it produces.<sup>5</sup> In 2012, the world will produce 50% of its oil from old worn out fields producing small quantities per field.

The immanent decline in oil production was highlighted during 2004 by special sections devoted to the issue at conventions of the Society of Petroleum Engineers, the Offshore Technology Conference, the Society of Exploration Geophysicists, and by a conference on reservoir management I attended. The industry knows that we no longer will be able to fuel the world.

The concerns are summed up in a simple mathematical relationship. Today, the world produces 80 million barrels per day (mmbbl/d). By 2020, the present fields will only