

Why the identity of Noah is important for the origins debate

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Alternative views of the Flood

- **Creationist view: 'Global Flood'**
- "Flood Geology"- all sedimentary strata were laid down by a global flood.
- All humans except Noah's family died.
 - William Morris
- **Liberal view: The 'Flood parable'**
- "The Flood: not global, barely local, mostly theological."
 - Paul Seeley (2010)
- "I assume the flood is another more parabolic rather than more historical story."
 - John Goldingay (2010)

A tragic dichotomy

- **Creationist view: 'Global Flood'**
- Ancient peoples had no knowledge of the Earth as a globe.
- There is no geological evidence for a global flood.
- Logs of Bristlecone Pine are lying on the ground in California that are dated by overlapping tree ring records back to 6600 BC).
- **Liberal view: the 'Flood parable'**
- If the Flood was not a catastrophic event, this destroys the basis that Noah was saved by faith (Heb Ch11)
- This is the main driver for the Creationist view.
- If we can find a credible explanation for the Flood that does not undermine faith, there is no need for the Creationist view.

The liberal view is based on evidence for a significant flood around 2900 BC

- The Sumerian King List places the Flood before the kingdom of Kish, which began around 2900 BC.

<u>Name of Dynasty</u>	<u>Number of kings</u>	<u>Total length of reigns, yr</u>
------------------------	------------------------	-----------------------------------

Eridu	2	64,800
Badtibira	3	108,000
Larak	1	28,800
Sippar	1	21,000
Shuruppak	1	18,600

~~~~~The Flood~~~~~

- The King List agrees with the Mesopotamian Flood stories that the Flood hero came from Shuruppak.

|       |    |        |
|-------|----|--------|
| Kish1 | 23 | 24,510 |
| Uruk1 | 12 | 2,310  |

# Why this evidence is unreliable

- The original King List began with the kingdom of Kish.
- The antediluvian section was a later addition, derived from the Sumerian Flood Story, which has the same order of cities.
- We know it is not true because Uruk was dominant for 500 years before Kish, called the 'Uruk World System'.

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| ~~~~~The Flood~~~~~    |                        |                                   |
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# Why we shouldn't use the King List to over-rule the Bible

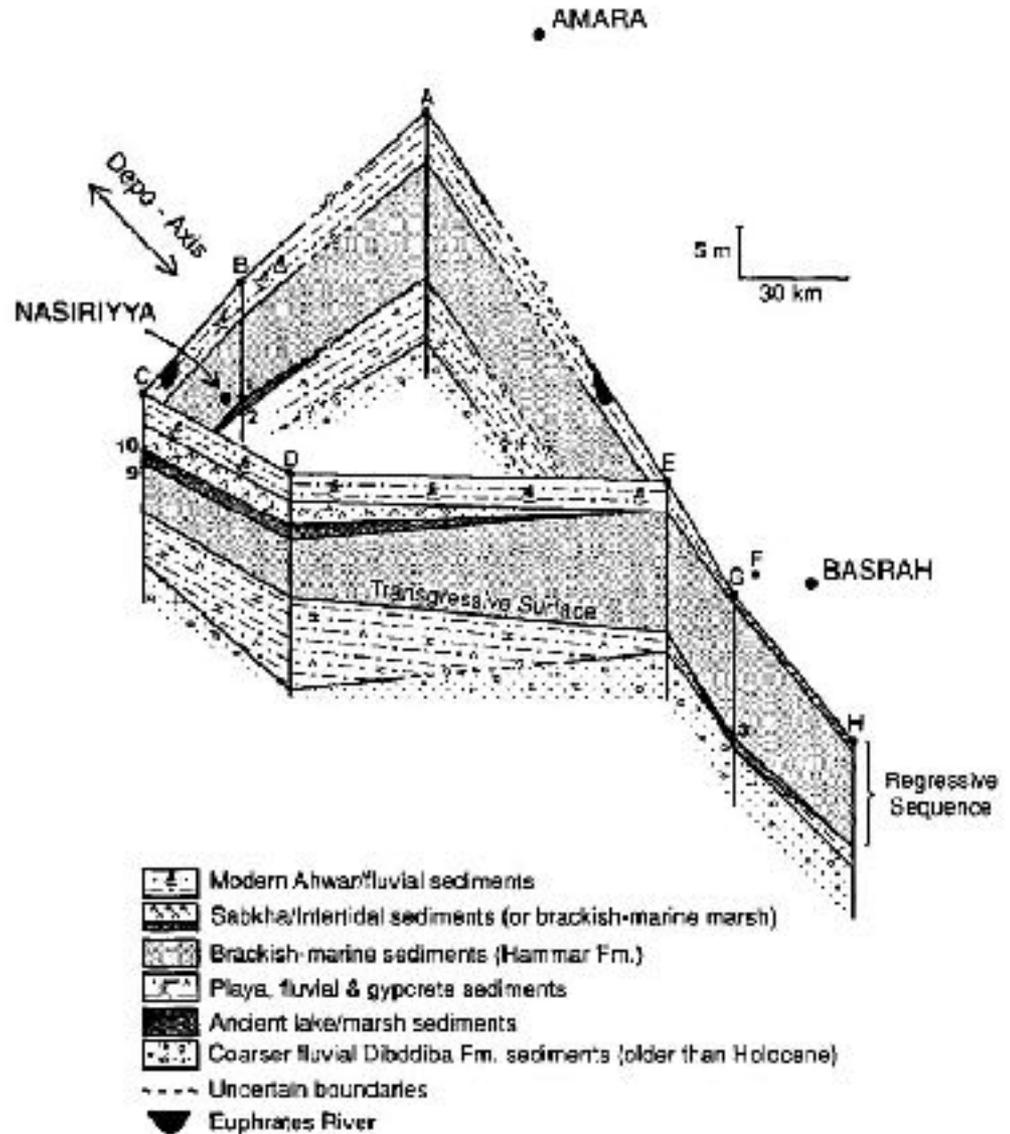
- The King List was composed hundreds of years after the medium-sized flood of Kish and Shurrapak.
- It advertises its own ignorance about what happened before the First Dynasty of Kish.
- The King List was composed as a piece of political propaganda. It should not be trusted as an unbiased record. **The King List is not gospel truth!!**
- Most likely the Mesopotamian accounts conflated more than one flood event. Anachronistic conflation is a common occurrence in ancient literary sources.

# The true date of the Flood

- 1. The biblical account describes all Middle Eastern peoples as descended from Noah's sons, placing the Flood in the distant past.
- 2. The biblical account describes the Flood as a cataclysm whose effects lasted a year.
- 3. Submergence for a year would have damaged Sumerian temples built of mud bricks.
- 4. The oldest mud brick temple structures at Eridu date back to ca. 5500 BC, and show no sign of submergence.
- 5. Therefore we should look for the Flood before Eridu.

# Drill-core evidence from Mesopotamia

- Evidence for flooding of the Mesopotamian plain:
- Sapropel layer rich in organic matter (samples B1, B2) dated to 5500 - 5700 BC.
- This was followed by marine flooding of the plain.



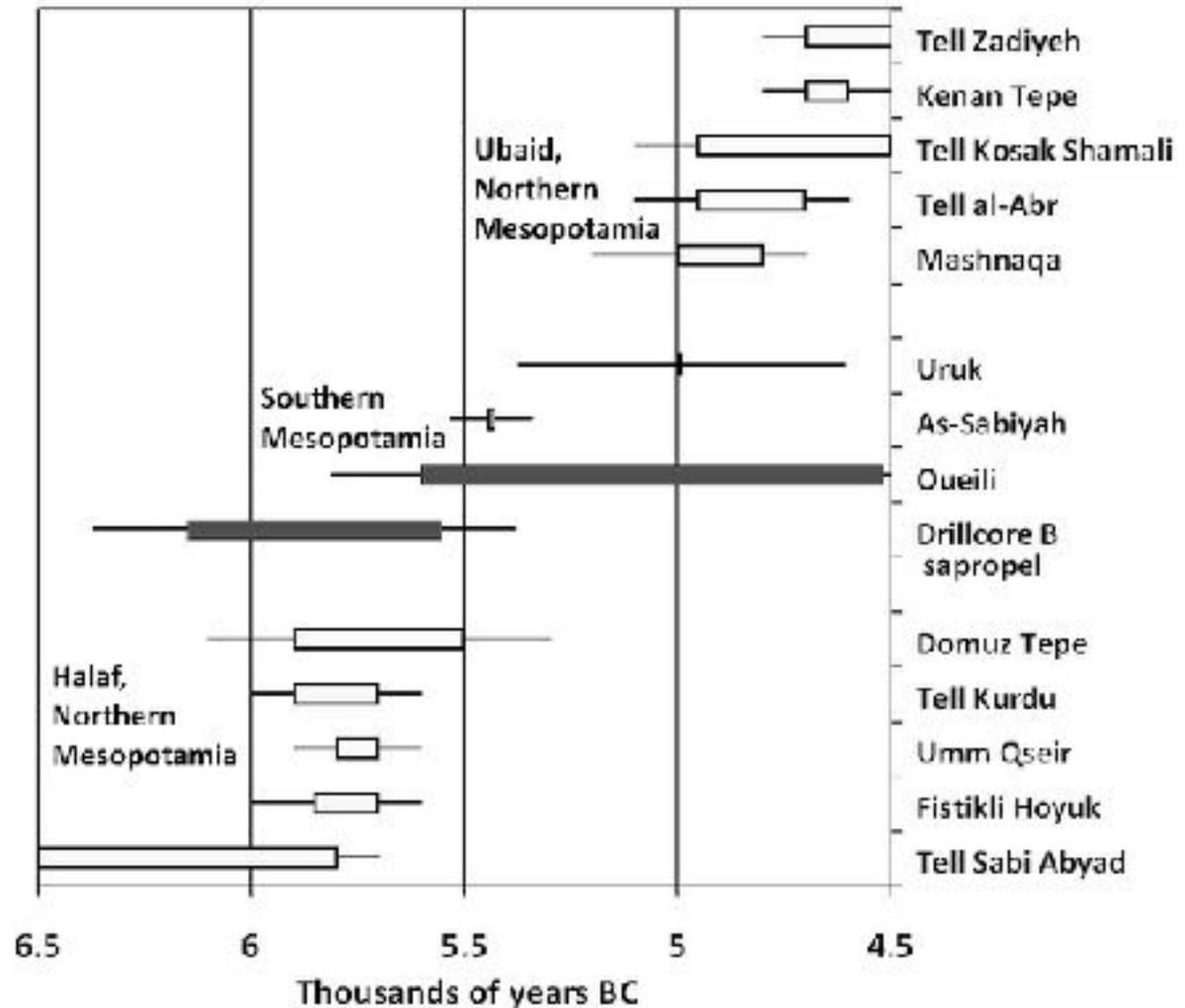
# Cultural gap in northern Mesopotamia

No pre-flood remains in the south

- North

- South

- North



# What does Genesis say about Noah and the Flood?

- To understand the meaning of the text, we need to know the history of the text
- Evidence in Genesis for more than one textual source
- This is normally called the Documentary Hypothesis
- The Documentary Hypothesis claims that Genesis was assembled from three main written sources (P, J, E) that are recognized by their different usage of divine names (Yahweh & Elohim), and by other stylistic features.

# Unfortunately the Documentary Hypothesis was corrupted by Wellhausen

- Wellhausen (1887) linked the Documentary Hypothesis to a theory of the evolution of the Jewish religion that held that the sources were late fabrications of early Israelite history.
- Evangelicals have largely rejected the Documentary Hypothesis because of this linkage.
- If we remove this linkage, the Documentary Hypothesis is valid.



## **Wellhausen (1887) on Exodus:**

- “The priestly document... has actually been successful, with its movable tabernacle, its wandering camp, and other archaic details, in so concealing the true date of its composition that its many serious inconsistencies with what we know... are only taken as proving that it lies far beyond all history.”

## Example of distinct source traditions regarding the birth of Benjamin (Gen 35)

*Jacob had twelve sons;*

**The sons of Leah:** Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

**The sons of Rachel:** Joseph and Benjamin.

**The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah:** Dan and Naphtali.

**The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah:** Gad and Asher. *These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.*

*Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." As she breathed her last- for she was dying- she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.*

# Comparison of Genesis accounts of Creation and Flood

- The creation is described in two separate accounts, Gen Ch1 and Gen Ch2, which are sequential and have different viewpoints.
- Gen Ch1 (Priestly) has a cosmic perspective
- Gen Ch2 (Yahwist) has a local, anthropomorphic perspective
  
- In contrast, these same two sources are interleaved in the Flood Story.

# Word usage in the Yahwist accounts of creation and flood (Denis Lamoureux)

| • <b>Word/expression</b>              | <b>J Creation</b> | <b>J Flood</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| • <b>Yahweh</b>                       | 29x               | 10x            |
| • Anthropomorphic deity               | 2:8, 3:8,21       | 6:6, 8:21      |
| • Rain                                | 2:57:4,10,        | 8:2b           |
| • <b>Face of the ground</b>           | 2:6, 4:14         | 6:7, 8:8,13b   |
| • Evil                                | 2:9,17, 3:5,22    | 6:5, 8:21      |
| • <b>Man &amp; woman (animals)</b>    | 2:23-24           | 7:2            |
| • Curse/cursed                        | 3:14,17, 4:11     | 8:21           |
| • Offering                            | 4:3-5             | 8:20           |
| • <b>Breath of life in 'nostrils'</b> | 2:7               | 7:22           |

# Usage in Priestly creation and flood stories

| • <b>Word/expression</b>       | <b>P Creation</b> | <b>P Flood</b>      |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Elohim                       | 35x               | 16x                 |
| • The deep                     | 1:27:11,          | 8:2                 |
| • Face of the waters           | 1:2               | 8:18                |
| • According to its/their kind  | 1:11-12, 21-25    | 6:20, 7:14          |
| • Wild and domesticated        | 1:24-25           | 7:14, 21, 8:1, 9:10 |
| • Birds referred to as 'wing'  | 1:21              | 7:14                |
| • Swarm                        | 1:20-21           | 8:17, 9:7           |
| • Creeping thing of the ground | 1:25,30           | 6:20, 8:19          |
| • Creeping thing creeping      | 1:26              | 7:14, 8:17          |
| • Man made in image of God     | 1:26              | 9:6                 |
| • Male and female              | 1:27              | 6:19, 7:9,16        |
| • Be fruitful and increase     | 1:28              | 8:17, 9:2, 9:7      |
| • Fish of the sea              | 1:28              | 9:2                 |
| • It will be food for you      | 1:29              | 9:3                 |

# Differences between the Priestly and Yahwist accounts of the Flood

- “In the P creation story, God creates a space (firmament) that separates waters that are above it from waters below. The universe in that story is thus a habitable bubble surrounded by water.
- This same conception is assumed in the P flood story, in which the ‘apertures of the skies’ and the ‘fountains of the deep’ are broken up so that the waters flow in.
- The J creation account has no such conception, and in the J flood story it just rains.”

» Friedman (2003)

# Similarities in Priestly and Yahwist sources

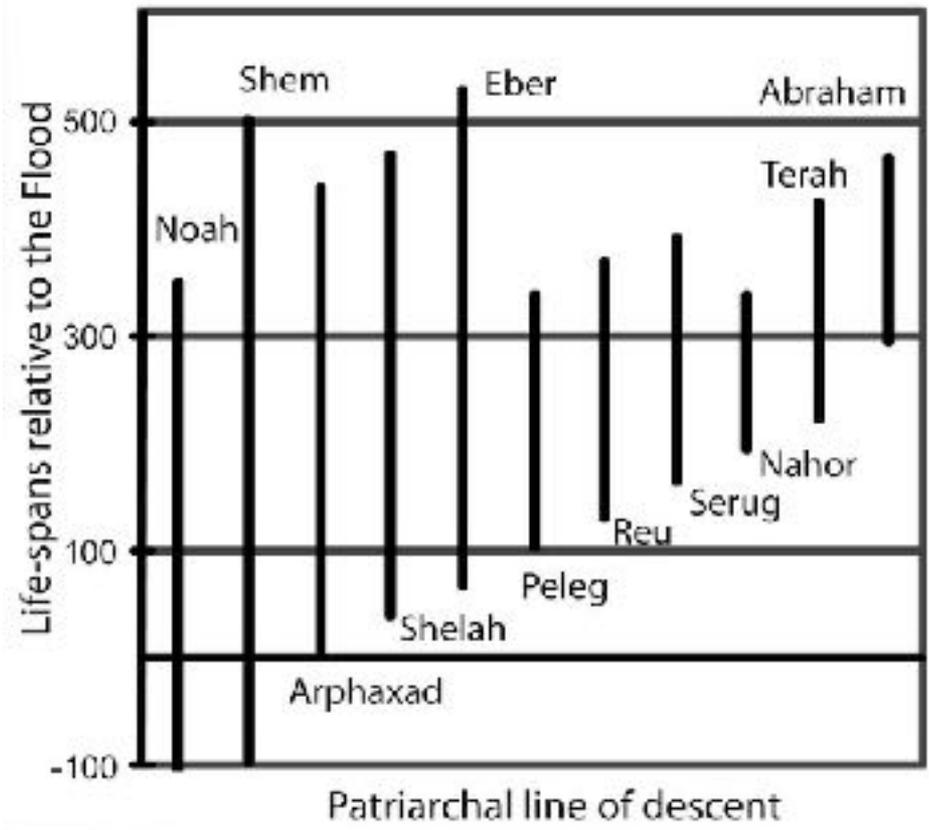
- Every living thing that moved on the earth perished- birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth and all mankind. (P)
- Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. (J)

# Mesopotamian epic sources agree about the devastation of the Flood

- In the Atrahasis Epic, the gods discuss the Flood Hero's escape as follows:
  - “We, the great Anunna, all of us, agreed together on an oath! No form of life should have escaped! How did any man survive the catastrophe?” (Dalley, p. 34)
- The Flood Hero of the Gilgamesh Epic describes the scene after the flood as follows:
  - “I looked at the weather; silence reigned; for all mankind had returned to clay. The flood-plain was as flat as a roof.” (Dalley 1991, p. 113)

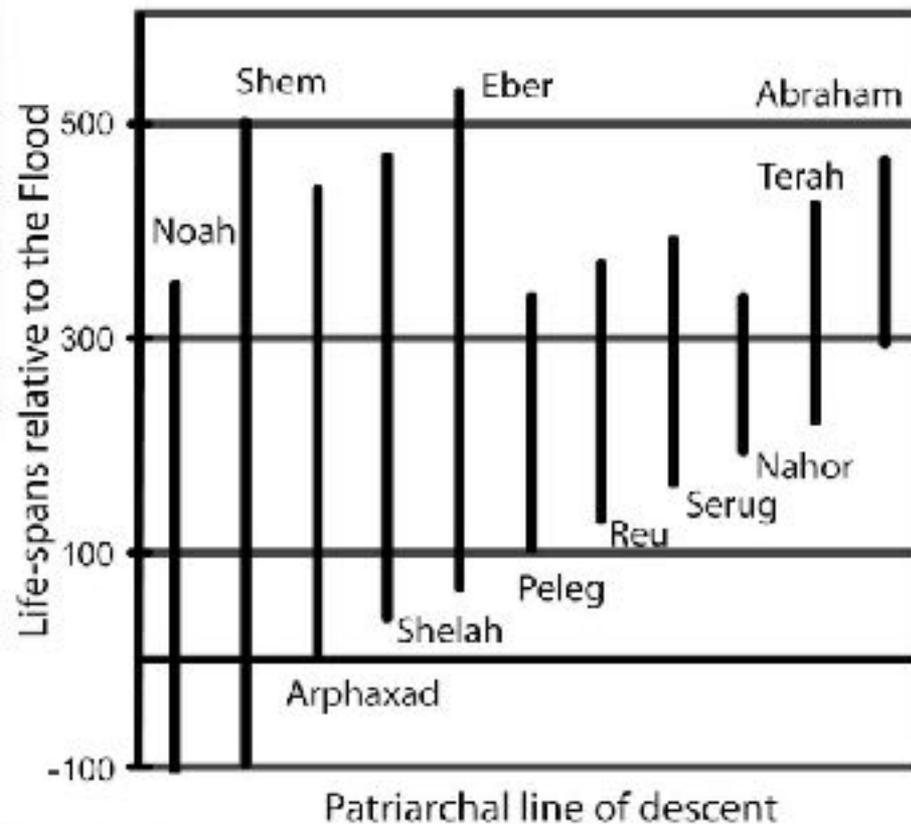
# Why do many evangelicals dismiss the accuracy of biblical accounts before Abraham?

- One reason they dismiss the earlier events of Gen 1-11 as largely fictional is the reported 'fantastic' life-spans of the earlier patriarchs.
- Even Whitcomb and Morris comment that "a strict chronology interpretation" of the genealogy of Shem would be "astonishing, if not almost incredible."



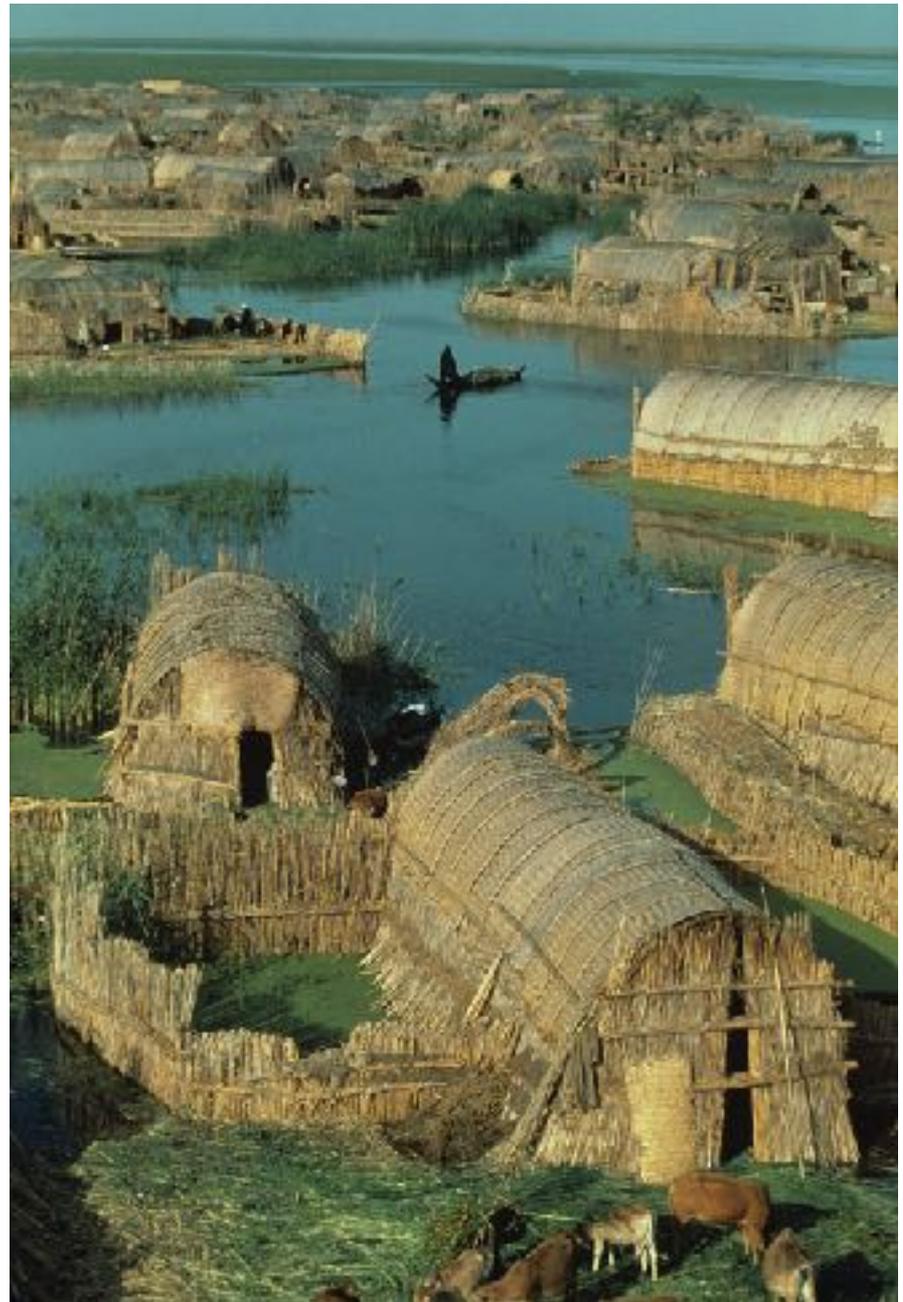
# But the quoted life-spans of Abraham and Isaac are 175 & 180 years

- In fact these 'almost incredible' life-spans are found only in P.
- The Yahwist records only the following statement: Then the LORD said, "My spirit will not contend with man for ever, for he is mortal; his days will be 120 years." (Gen 6:3)
- In the Yahwist's account, the story of the Flood is no less credible than the life of Abraham.



# Is the size of the Ark incredible?

- Both biblical and Mesopotamian accounts describe the ark as the size of a one-acre field.
- It could have been a giant raft with a 3-story reed-built house on it.



# Conclusions

- The widely-believed age of the Flood around 2900 BC is inconsistent with a conservative interpretation of Genesis.
- Empirical evidence supports a flood around 5500 BC that is consistent with the biblical account of a catastrophic flood that destroyed all of the *known* earth.
- Placing the Flood at this early stage of Mesopotamian history is consistent with the biblical belief that all Middle Eastern peoples were descended from Noah.
- Noah was a real person who was probably the ancestor of the Sumerians.
- Genesis describes real history, but in a stylized way.