

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

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In the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indiana Jones and his Egyptian friend exclaim, “They're looking in the wrong place!” as they realize, rather gleefully, that the bad guys have misinterpreted a clue on the location of the biblical Ark of the Covenant. Similarly (maybe not as gleefully), I suggest that searchers for the remains of the *other* biblical Ark, that of Noah, have been looking hard in places not suggested by Scripture. Instead, the clues seem to point to a location somewhere in the *Zagros Mountains*, just east of southern Iraq (figure 1).

You may wonder why I'm dubious about the traditional site, a spectacular 5,490-m volcanic cone called Agri Dag, or ‘Mount Ararat’ on English maps. (It is in eastern Turkey, near the center of the old Roman province of Armenia.<sup>1</sup>) I have doubts for several reasons. First, many centuries of searching that mountain have yielded nothing more tangible than unverified verbal accounts, fuzzy photos of possible rock formations, pieces of wood of dubious age and sources, and a number of outright frauds. Second, several creationist geoscientists have said that ‘Mount Ararat’ is a *post*-Flood volcano.<sup>2</sup> That is, the cone rose up *after* the receding floodwaters gouged out local river valleys and established drainage patterns, so could not be the place the Ark came to rest *while* the waters were receding. Third, its location, about 270 km north of the northern border of Iraq, through rough mountainous terrain, doesn't seem to fit the biblical clues.

So what are the biblical clues? First, there is Genesis 8:4,

“And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.”

Note ‘mountains’ is plural, so God is telling us that it was in the mountains of a region, not specifying a particular mountain. As for the region, 2 Kings 19:37 (and its parallel passage, Isaiah 37:38) may imply that the ‘land of Ararat’ was close to Assyria, the northern half of Iraq. Bible commentators identify the land of Ararat with the ancient kingdom of Urartu.<sup>3</sup> At this point many people connect Urartu with the later Roman province of Armenia. Indeed, the region of Armenia was contained in Urartu, but archaeological excavations have found Urartian villages much further southeast, extending into the Zagros Mountains.<sup>4</sup>

Genesis 8:5 (my translation) contains another clue:

“And the water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.”

This tells us that the mountain on which the Ark rested before this point was (at that moment) higher than other mountains within sight, say within 80 km.

After the account of God's covenant with Noah and a mention that his three sons would repopulate the

earth, we find mention of what Noah's first post-flood endeavour was, in Genesis 9:20,

“Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.”

I'm guessing this was at a base camp in a valley near the Ark, with the family living in tents (Genesis 9:21). Such places today are favorable to growing grapes. For the first few years after the Flood there would have been few trees big enough to supply timber or much firewood,<sup>5</sup> so they probably used the wood of the Ark itself. That suggests that the Ark may not exist today in its entirety. Also there would be many provisions in the Ark which a nearby base camp would allow them to unload gradually as needed. Finally, a base camp would allow them to explore the area in order to move to a permanent settlement.

Noah apparently lived long enough at that location to develop his vineyard to maturity, and long enough to know his grandson Canaan (Genesis 9:22, 25), at which time Noah's three sons were living near his tent. The last verse of chapter 9 looks ahead to Noah's death, 350 years after the Flood (not long before Abraham was born). If, as many commentators

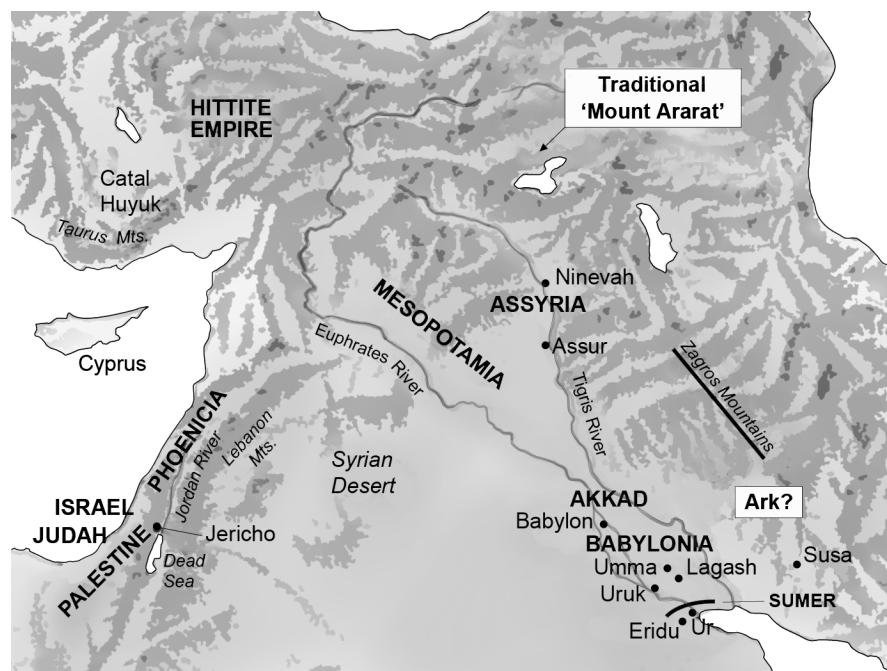


Figure 1. Possible sites for Noah's Ark.

think, Peleg (Genesis 10:25, 11:36) was born when the scattering from Babel took place,<sup>6</sup> then the great dispersion of mankind (Genesis 10:5, 20, 31–32) happened 101 years after the Flood, as Noah's great-great-grandchildren were being born (Genesis 11:10–16). The parenthetical (not fitting completely within the sequence of the narrative before and after it) 'Table of Nations' in Genesis 10 describes the families that scattered from Babel, concluding with Genesis 10:32,

"These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood."

The text of the account of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9 follows right on from the text of chapter 10, verse 32. If, as I mentioned above, we regard everything from Genesis 9:28 through 10:32 as parenthetical (which seems to be required by the account of Noah's death and some remarks in chapter 10), then chapter 11 would be taking up the narrative where it leaves off in Genesis 9:27, in Noah's base camp. That sets the background for the next big clue, Genesis 11:2,

"And it came to pass, as they journeyed *from the east*, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there [emphasis added]."

I'm quoting the King James Version here, because I think its translation of the Hebrew word *miqqedem*, 'from the east', is very accurate. The noun *qedem*, in a geographic sense, means 'east', or sometimes 'front' (the front of the tabernacle was its east side). According to lexicons, the Hebrew prefix *mi* (short form of *min*) most often means 'from' (including when used as a prefix to another Hebrew word).<sup>7</sup> Hence we have 'from [the] east'. Occasionally the phrase may mean 'to the east', as is faintly possible in Genesis 13:11. But I think use of



**Figure 2.** River valley in the Zagros Mountains.

a different preposition, *le*, meaning 'to', would have been more likely had that been the case.<sup>8</sup> Very often, however, 'eastward' is a different word, *qēdemah*, as in Genesis 13:14, 25:6, Leviticus 1:16, Numbers 3:38, etc. So our first hypothesis should be to take the phrase in Genesis 11:2 as meaning the Flood survivors traveled from some point in the east, i.e. they traveled westward.

Next, notice where they arrived, "a plain in the land of Shinar". Bible commentators all agree that Shinar is what we know today as the land of Sumer, or Sumeria, in the southern half of Iraq. Genesis 10:10, Daniel 1:2 and Zechariah 5:11 associate Shinar with Babylon, which was also in the southern half of Iraq. So, coming from the east, Noah's extended family arrived in southern Iraq (not northern Iraq, which Scripture usually calls 'Assyria').

We haven't exhausted the clues in Genesis 11:2. The Hebrew word translated 'journeyed' here comes from a root *nāsa*, which means "pull out, remove, set out, set forward, depart, journey."<sup>9</sup> With the prefix and suffix here, it means 'in their setting out'. I.e. the verb implies that not long after they broke camp, they came upon the plain of Shinar.

So putting all this information together, Genesis 11:2 implies that the Flood survivors set out westward from a camp not far to the east of the plain of Shinar in southern Iraq. A map shows that the camp must have been in the western part of the Zagros mountains.

### Was the Ark nearby?

The question then arises, 'Was the Zagros Mountains camp near the Ark?' There are several reasons to think so. First, the time between Noah's base camp near the Ark and the scattering from Babel seems to have been short, only about one generation. Noah's grandson Canaan was in the base camp, but Noah's great-great-grandson Peleg was born when (Genesis 10 indicates) God scattered everybody away from Babel. Also, Noah's great-grandson Nimrod (Genesis 10:8) seems to have been a leader in the rebellion (Genesis 10:8–10), going north after the Babel event to found Nineveh (Genesis 10:11).

Second, if Noah's family had travelled a long way, say from the traditional Mount Ararat all the way (800 km southeast through very rough mountain country) to the Zagros camp, they would have passed many



river valleys leading into Assyria, which is northern Iraq ... not ending up in Shinar, southern Iraq.

So it seems likely that they did not travel far to establish the base camp. If it was indeed near the Ark, then the site of the Ark is in the Zagros Mountains. That is where Babylonian and Assyrian legends put it.<sup>10</sup>

### Where in the Zagros Mountains?

The mountains east of southern Iraq are desolate and sparsely populated. Some of them are high. One that strikes my eye on the map is Zard Kuh, or Zardeh Kuh (I think 'Kuh' means mountain in the local language), 4,547 m in altitude at roughly 50.05°E longitude, 32.4°N latitude. It seems to be significantly higher than other peaks near it. A river near it leads down to the plain. However, there are many other possibilities. I would look along any modern or ancient river valley that emerges onto the plain of southern Iraq, preferring mountains that are relatively close to the plain (figure 2).

*Warning to Ark searchers:* the area is extremely dangerous, being fought over by Kurds, Iraqis, and Iranians. It may be that God is using those means to keep the site of Noah's Ark from being revealed to the world until the time it suits Him.

### References

1. Some histories suggest that the traditional mountain acquired the name 'Ararat' only as recently as AD 700. Often ancient Flood legends name a spectacular mountain near the people whose legend it is as the place where the vessel (sometimes a log, canoe, or cube) that saved their ancestors came to rest. Agri Dagh is one of the most spectacular local mountains—lofty, snow-capped, majestic, and isolated—that the Armenians could choose for their legend.
2. One was a pioneer creationist geologist, Clifford Burdick, in an early reference I no longer have at hand. Another is creationist geophysicist John Baumgardner, who visited the traditional site and told me that the mountain is without doubt a post-Flood volcano.

3. Zimansky, P.E., *Ancient Ararat: A handbook of Urartian Studies*, Caravan Books, Delmar, NY, 1998.
4. Lang, D.A., *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., George Allen & Unwin, London, Map I, p. 86, 1980. Note location of the ancient Urartian site at Saqqiz (or Saqqez), in the Zagros Mountains at about the latitude of Mosul, Iraq.
5. As Genesis 8:11 indicates, trees would begin sprouting (for example from floating twigs, branches, or seeds present with them) immediately after the Flood. But it would take a number of years to establish mature forests again.
6. Pierce, L., In the days of Peleg, *Creation* 22(1):46–49, December 1999; creation.com/in-the-days-of-peleg.
7. Holladay, W.L., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, pp. 200–201, 1974: 'basic meaning out of, away from'.
8. Also, there are no suitably high mountains, only a barren desert, just to the west of southern Iraq.
9. Archer Jr, G., Harris, R.L. and Waltke, B.K. (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Moody, Chicago, IL, 1980. Examples of the use of the word *nāsa* 'as 'setting out' (KJV "took their journey") include Gen. 46:1, Exo. 16:1 and Num. 1:51.
10. Speiser, E.A., Southern Kurdistan in the annals of Ashurbanipal and today, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 17/18:1–43, 1926–1927. On p. 18, Speiser says that the Assyrians and the Babylonians regarded 'Mount Nisir' as the site of Noah's Ark. Speiser identifies Mt. Nisir with Pir Omar Gudrun (or Pira Magrun, or other variations). The ~2,750-m mountain is at the western edge of the Zagros range, 32 km northeast of the town of Sulaymaniyah (spelling varies), Iraq. It is often snow-capped and visible from 160 km away, well-known to the Babylonians.

## The diminishing returns of beneficial mutations

Shaun Doyle

Beneficial mutations are often seen as the engine of microbes-to-man evolution.<sup>1</sup> However, beneficial mutations by themselves don't solve the problem of how to generate biological information (i.e. specified complexity<sup>2</sup>) *de novo*.<sup>3</sup> For that to occur, mutations not only have to be beneficial, but they have to add biological information. However, practically all beneficial mutations observed have been *losses* of specified complexity,<sup>4</sup> with only a tiny handful of highly disputable examples of mutations that increase information ever found (e.g. bacteria that digest nylon,<sup>5</sup> citrate<sup>6</sup> or xylitol<sup>2</sup>).

### Epistasis: how do mutated genes interact?

However, mutations need to be more than beneficial and net-information-increasing to produce new coordinated structures and systems, as microbes-to-man evolution requires. Mutations don't act alone; the effect of a mutation on an organism's phenotype depends on other genes, and mutations in those genes. This is called *epistasis*, and describes the effects of one gene upon another in the process of gene expression. It is determined by assessing the difference between (1) the cumulative effect of several mutations on a given trait and (2) the sum of the effects of the individual mutations on that same trait (which assumes that there is no epistasis because mutations affect a given trait *independently*). Any difference suggests epistasis is occurring. Epistasis is an important consideration for evolution because the ways that mutations interact will determine if they could possibly build new structures in a stepwise manner.

For microbes-to-man evolution to occur, mutations need to be not just information-increasing and beneficial,