

# Genesis 6-11; Moses 8

Come Follow Me



# Genesis 6.1-4 – The Sons of God & The Daughters of Men

Genesis 6.1-4 has deep Mesopotamian roots... Jewish literature like 1 Enoch retold the story (of Gen. 6.1-4) and shows a keen awareness of that Mesopotamian context. This awareness shows us that Jewish thinkers of the Second Temple period understood, correctly, that the story involved divine beings and giant offspring. That understanding is essential to grasping what the biblical writers were trying to communicate.

(Michael Heiser, [\*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible\*](#), 2019, p. 102)

# Gen. 6.1-5 The Nephilim הנפילים

1. One explanation of this passage is that it is descriptive of disobedient angels (sometimes called Watchers) who descended from celestial realms and cohabitated with human women, producing a race of giants.
2. An alternate explanation results by understanding the term “sons of God” to be the pious race descended from Seth, who sinned by marrying descendants of Cain, who would have been pagans. (This is sometimes called "The Sethite" interpretation.

(See: Heiser, [\*Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible\*](#), 2019.)

## Gen. 6.1-5 The Nephilim הנפילים

Verse 4. *There were giants in the earth* נפלים *Nephalim* [*Nephilim*], from נפל *naphal*, “he fell.” Those who had *apostatized* or *fallen* from the true religion. The Septuagint translate the original word by γίγαντες [*gigantes*], which literally signifies *earth-born*, and which we, following them, term *giants*, without having any reference to the meaning of the word, which we generally conceive to mean persons of *enormous stature*. But the word, when properly understood, makes a very just distinction between the Sons of Men and the Sons of God: those were the *Nephalim* [*Nephilim*], the *fallen earth-born* Men, with the animal and devilish mind. These were the *Sons of God* who were born from above, children of the kingdom, because children of God. Hence, we may suppose originated the different appellatives given to *sinners and saints*: the former were termed γίγαντες [*gigantes*], *Earth-born*, and the latter αἰῶσι saints, i. e. persons *not of the Earth, or separated from the Earth*.

*The same became mighty men—men of renown.*] גברים *Gibborim*, which we render *mighty men*, signifies properly *conquerors, heroes*, from גבר *gabar*, “He prevailed, was victorious;” and אנשי השם *anshey ha-shem*, “men of the name;” ἀνθρωποι ὀνομαστοί [*anthropoi onomastoi*], Septuagint; the same as we render *men of renown*, *renominati*, *twice named* as the word implies, having one name which they derived from their fathers, and another which they acquired by their daring exploits and enterprizes.

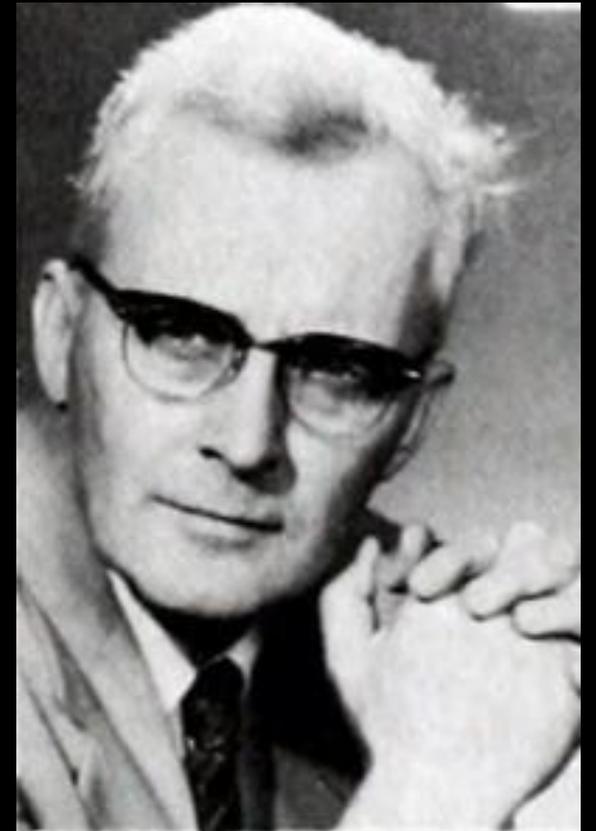
It may be necessary to remark here, that our translators have rendered seven different Hebrew words by the one term *giants*, viz. *nephilim*, *gibborim*, *enachim*, *rephayim*, *emim*, and *zamzuzim*, by which appellatives are probably meant in general, persons of great knowledge, piety, courage, wickedness &c. and not men of enormous stature as is generally conjectured.

Adam Clarke's Commentary, volume 1. London, 1825.

# The JST of Gen.6.1-4 changes the narrative

It is the Joseph Smith Enoch which gives the most convincing solution: **the beings who fell were not angels but men** who had become sons of God. From the beginning, it tells us, mortal men could qualify as “sons of God,” beginning with Adam. (Moses 6:68) How? By believing and entering the covenant. (Moses 7:1) Thus when “Noah and his sons hearkened unto the Lord, and gave heed ... they were called the sons of God.” (Moses 8:13) In short, the sons of God are those who accept and live by the law of God. When “the sons of men” (as Enoch calls them) broke their covenant, they still insisted on that exalted title: “Behold, we are the sons of God; have we not taken unto ourselves the daughters of men?” (Moses 8:21)

(Hugh Nibley, [“A Strange Thing in the Land: The Return of the Book of Enoch, Part 8,”](#) Ensign, Dec 1976, 73)



# The Giants



There is a prevailing doctrine in the Christian world that these sons of God were **heavenly beings who came down and married the daughters of men** and thus came a superior race on the earth, the result bringing the displeasure of the Lord. **This foolish notion is the result of lack of proper information**, and because the correct information is not found in the Book of Genesis Christian peoples have been led astray. The correct information regarding these unions is revealed in the inspired interpretation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Book of Moses. Without doubt when this scripture was first written, it was perfectly clear, but scribes and translators in the course of time, not having divine inspiration, changed the meaning to conform to their incorrect understanding. These verses in the Prophet's revision give us a correct meaning, and from them we learn why the Lord was angry with the people and decreed to shorten the span of life and to bring upon the world the flood of purification.

(Answers to Gospel Questions, 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957-1966], 1: 136.)

# Who was Noah?

Genesis 5.29

Noah נח *Noach* – “rest” very similar  
to נוח *nuach* – “rest”

יִנְחֵמֵנוּ “shall comfort us”

From נחם *nacham* – to be moved in  
pity, to have compassion, to be  
comforted, consoled

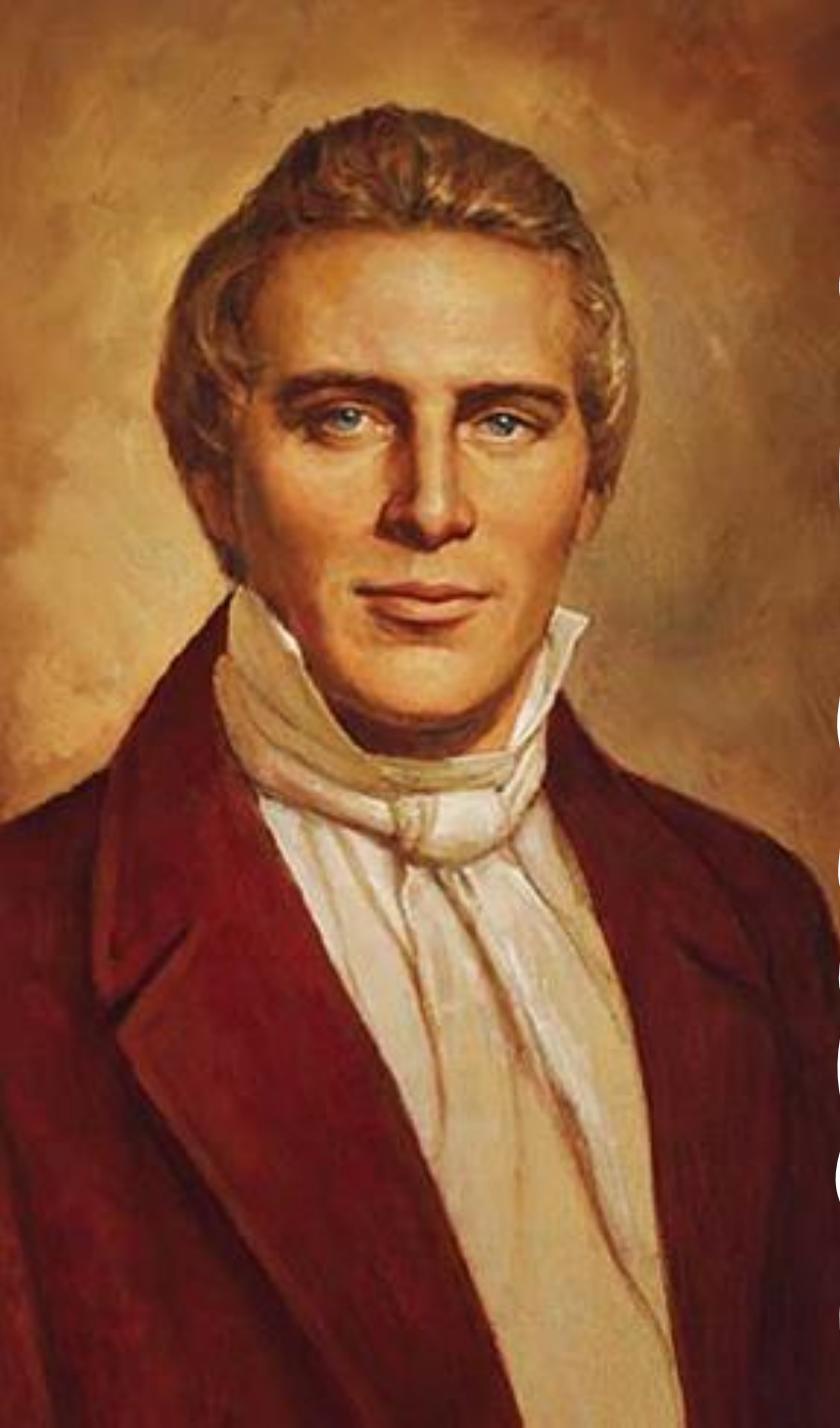


Make thee an  
ark!

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵבַת

Genesis 6.5-22





# Gen. 6.6-7 Why is God repenting?

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See Moses 8:25–26. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated: “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors. As it read [Genesis 6:6], ‘It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth’; also [Numbers 23:19], ‘God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the Son of man, that he should repent’; which I do not believe. But it ought to read, **‘It repented Noah that God made man.’**” (*Teachings*, p. 327.)

Gen. 6.6

וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ

KJV: **And it repented** the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

RSV: **And** the LORD **was sorry** that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Compare to Moses 7.28-29, 31, 37-40



The connection between the Giants, cosmic warfare, the Psalms, 1 Enoch, and Jesus

# Psalm 22

The most powerful testimony that the pre-exilic Israelites understood the full magnitude of the Atonement is found in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. All four of the gospels recognize that it is about the Atonement. References to Psalm 22 in Matthew are:

And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots (Matthew 27:35).

# Psalm 22

1. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?
7. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
8. He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.
12. Many bulls have compassed me: strong *bulls* of Bashan have beset me round.

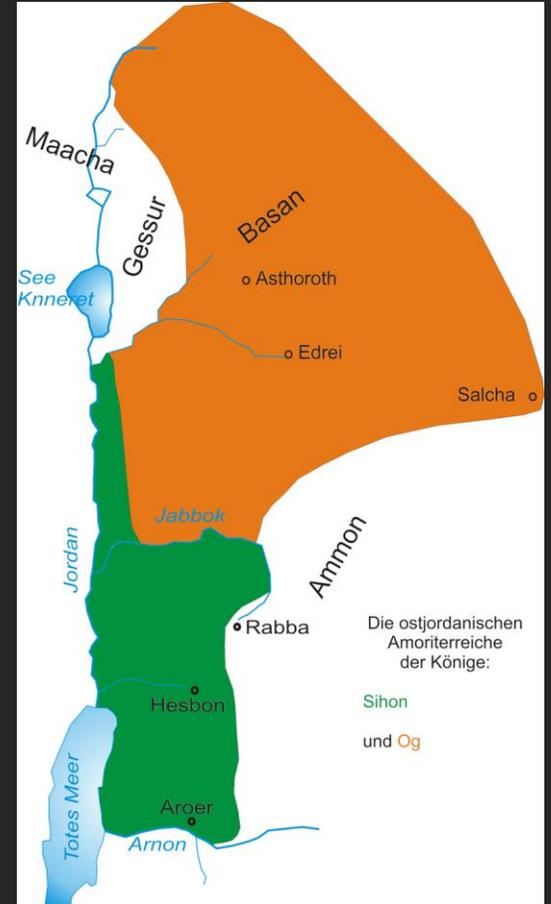
# The “Bulls of Bashan”

(see Numbers 21.33-35 & Deut. 3.4-11- as it relates to Og)

Things to consider:

Bashan carries a deep message. It is connected to Gen. 6.1-4. Jeroboam’s rival kingdom was set up in Dan near Bashan. Amos 4 tells us of the “**cows of Bashan**” – Amos 4.1-2.

Since the “**cows of Bashan**” are said to speak to their “husbands,” scholars are universally agreed that Amos is specifically addressing upper-class women of northern Israel who were idolaters of the golden calves of Bashan. (Heiser, *Unseem Realm*, 181/377 electronic version)



# Bashan בַּשָּׁן

- Amos could be targeting temple priestesses who served the gods along with male priests. It is also quite possible that the cows of Bashan are the deities themselves in the form of the idols. This possibility is strengthened by noticing their crimes: “oppressing the poor [dallim]” and “crushing the needy [ebyonim].” These same two Hebrew words are used in Psalm 82, where the corrupt elohim are accused of exactly these same crimes (Psa 82:3–4).
- For our purposes, what we know for sure about Bashan is that it has secure associations with demonic powers. Although Psalm 22 wasn’t originally messianic in focus, Matthew’s use of it fixes that association. The implication is that Jesus, at the moment of agony and death, was surrounded by the “bulls of Bashan”—demonic elohim who had been the foes of Yahweh and his children for millennia... **Bashan was ground zero for Old Testament demonic geography.** (Heiser, p. 181-182 electronic version)

# Understanding this unlocks Psalm 68

- The first thing that sticks out in this passage is that the infamous Mount Bashan is called the “mountain of God” (68:15). The phrase “mountain of God” is actually “mountain of elohim” (har-elohim) in Hebrew. That means it can be translated as either “mountain of God” or “mountain of the gods.”
- The latter makes more sense than the former in context for the very observable reason that the two mountains in the passage—**Bashan and Sinai—are rivals at the beginning of the psalm**. The mountain of the gods (Bashan) “looks with hatred” at Yahweh’s mountain, Mount Sinai. God desired Sinai for his abode, and the psalmist asks Bashan, “Why the envy?” This would make little sense if Bashan was already under Yahweh’s authority.

<sup>15</sup> A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan;  
a mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan.  
<sup>16</sup> Why do you look with hostility, O many-peaked mountains?  
This mountain God desires for his dwelling.  
Yes, Yahweh will abide in it forever.  
<sup>17</sup> The chariots of God  
are twice ten thousand, with thousands doubled.  
The Lord is among them at Sinai, distinctive in victory.  
<sup>18</sup> You have ascended on high; you have led away captives.  
You have received gifts from among humankind,  
and even from the rebellious, so that Yah God may dwell there.

# Understanding this unlocks Psalm 68

- The psalmist intends a contrast of association. In the Old Testament, Sinai is firmly associated with Yahweh and Israel. **Bashan is the polar opposite of Sinai. It symbolizes unholy ground.**
- The rest of the psalm describes an assault on Bashan by Yahweh and his holy army. We know the description refers to spiritual warfare since there was no such engagement of the Israelites in the Old Testament, and also because **verse 17 clearly speaks of a divine army.** Yahweh, the divine warrior, will one day tear down the strongholds of Bashan. He will lead a train of captives down from the mountain (v. 18).

# At the base of Mount Hermon



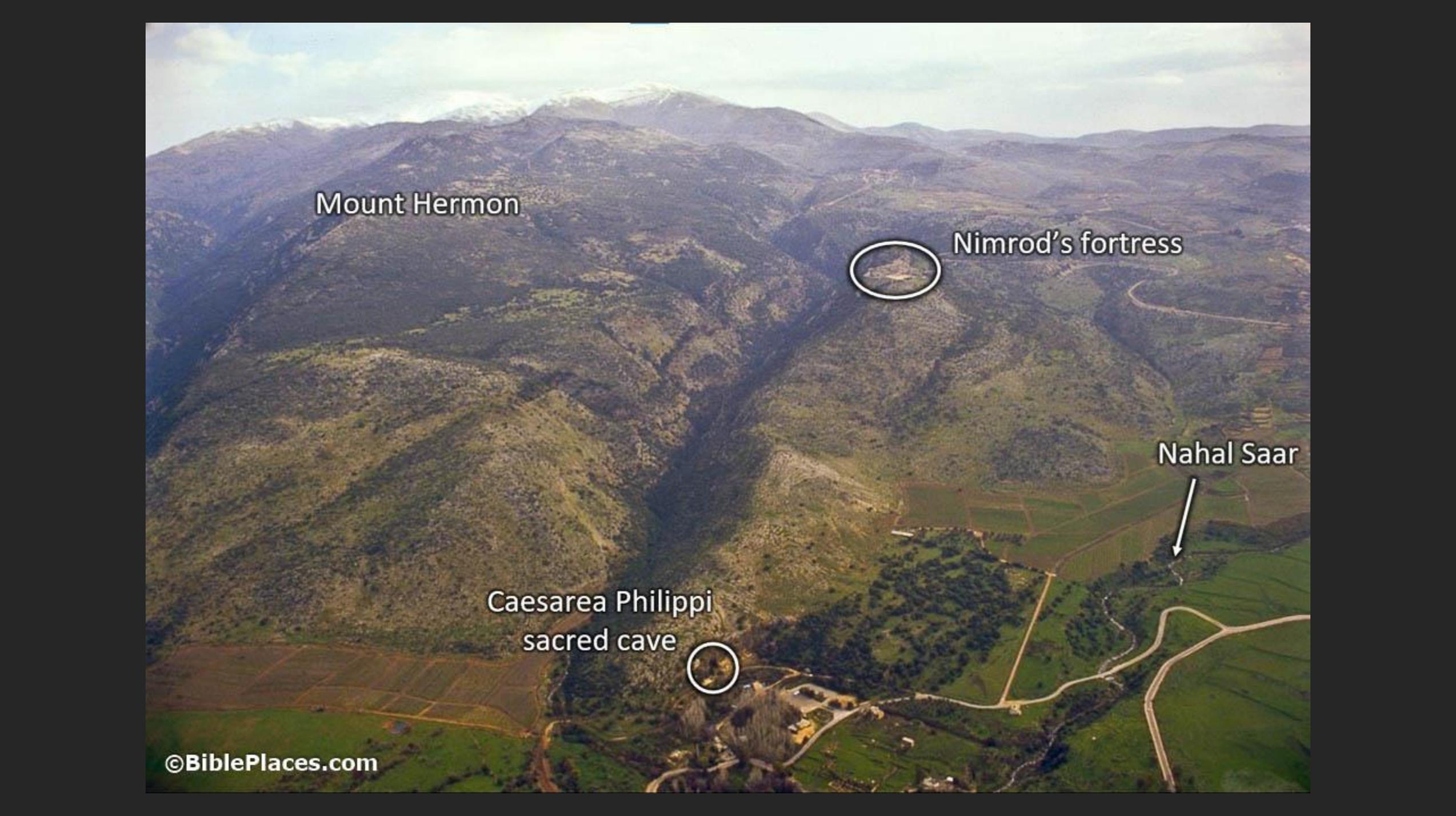


Matt 16.15 Who do you all say I am?  
λέγει αὐτοῖς Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι





Handwritten text or signature in the bottom left corner, possibly reading "H. P. 015".



Mount Hermon

Nimrod's fortress

Nahal Saar

Caesarea Philippi  
sacred cave

# What about the good people in this day?

During the nearly 700 years from the translation of Enoch to the flood of Noah, it would appear that nearly all of the faithful members of the Church were translated, for 'the Holy Ghost fell on many, and they were caught up by the powers of heaven into Zion.' (Moses 7:27.)" (Elder McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p. 804.)



# Who is this God? Moses 7:29

The question here is not about the reasons behind God's tears. Enoch does not ask, why do you weep, but rather, **how are your tears even possible**, "seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?" Clearly, Enoch, who believed God to be "merciful and kind forever," did not expect such a being could be moved to the point of distress by the sins of His children. And so a third time he asks, "**how is it thou canst weep?**"

The answer, it turns out, is that **God is not exempt from emotional pain**. Exempt? On the contrary, God's pain is as infinite as His love. He weeps because He feels compassion. As the Lord explains to Enoch, "unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood . . . and misery shall be their doom and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?"

## Who is this God? Moses 7:29

It is not their wickedness, but their “misery,” not their disobedience, but their “suffering,” that elicits the God of Heaven’s tears. Not until Gethsemane and Golgotha does the scriptural record reveal so unflinchingly the costly investment of God’s love in His people, the price at which He placed His heart upon them. There could be nothing in this universe, or in any possible universe, more perfectly good, absolutely beautiful, worthy of adoration, and deserving of emulation, than this God of love and kindness and vulnerability. That is why a gesture of belief in His direction, a decision to acknowledge His virtues as the paramount qualities of a divided universe, is a response to the best in us, the best and noblest of which the human soul is capable. But a God without passions would engender in our hearts neither love nor interest. In the vision of Enoch, we find ourselves drawn to a God who prevents all the pain He can, assumes all the suffering He can, and weeps over the misery He can neither prevent nor assume. (Givens, *The God who weeps*, accessed September 2015)

# The Flood narrative: A composite text – Gen. 6-9

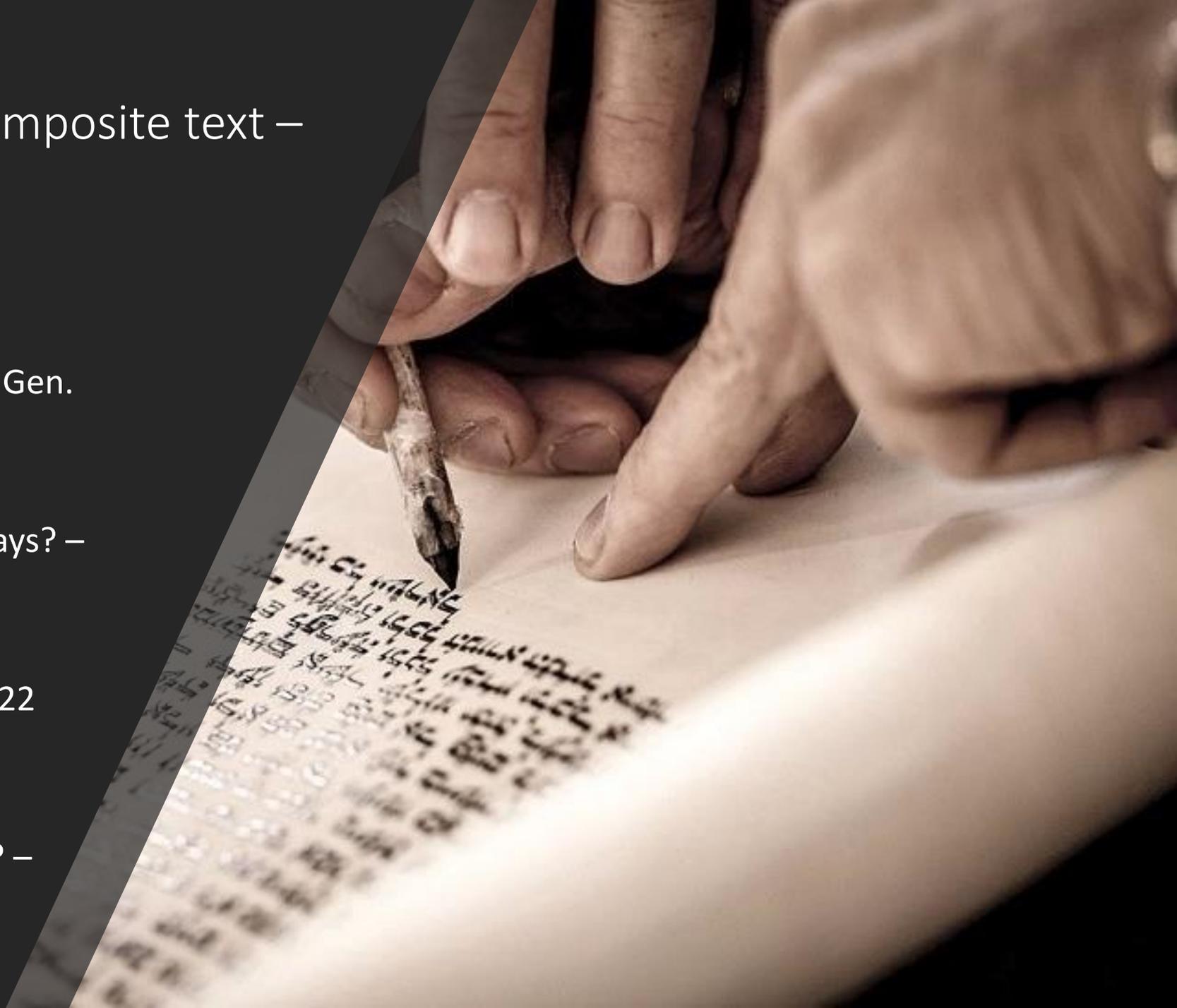
Things to consider:

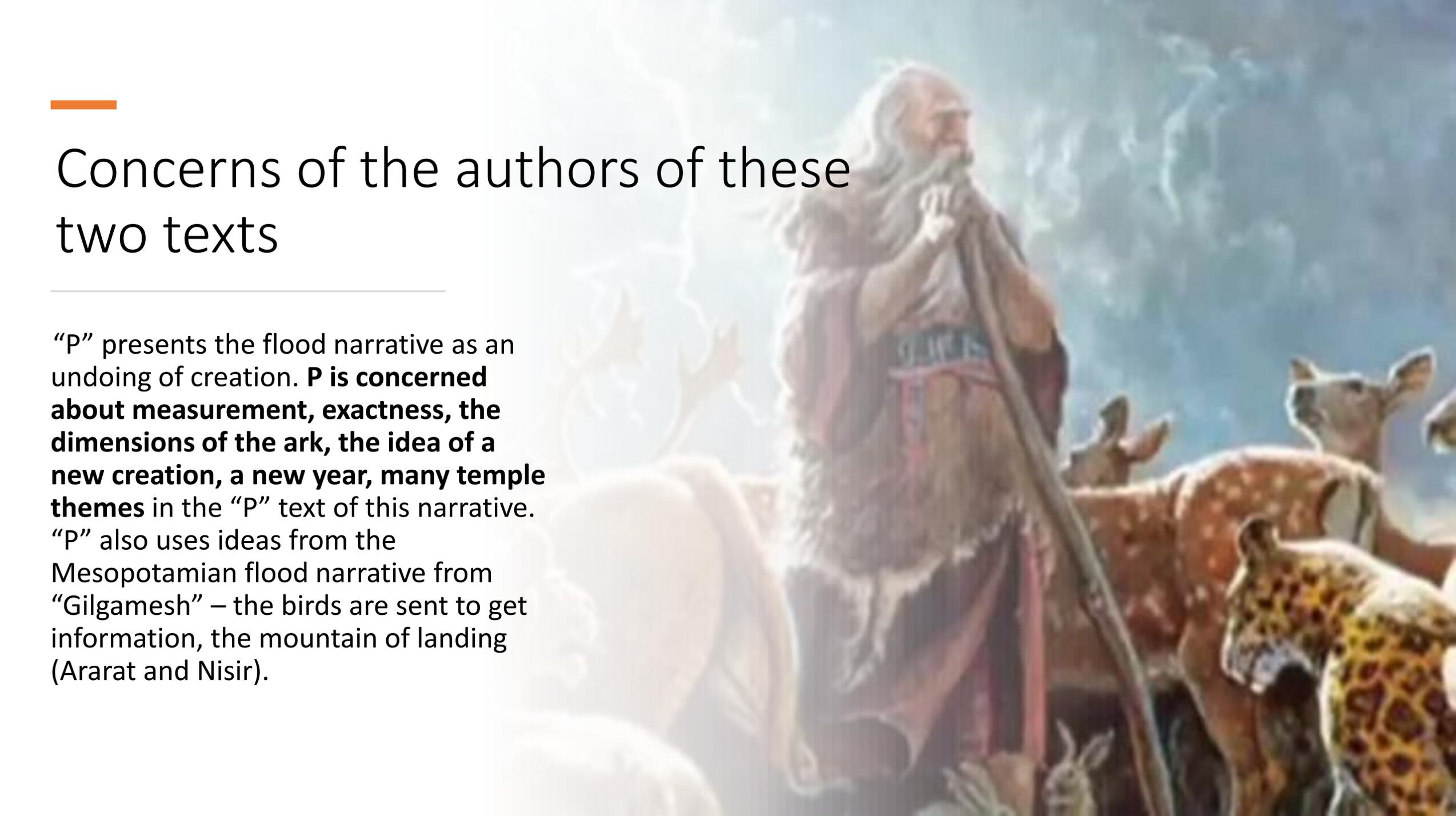
Rain or the undoing of creation? – Gen.  
7:4 versus 7:11

Length of flood – 40 days or 150 days? –  
Gen. 7:17 versus 7:24

Do they “die” or “expire” – Gen. 7:22  
versus 7:21

Beasts – by “sevens” or by “twos”? –  
Gen. 7:1-2 versus 7:8-9





## Concerns of the authors of these two texts

“P” presents the flood narrative as an undoing of creation. **P is concerned about measurement, exactness, the dimensions of the ark, the idea of a new creation, a new year, many temple themes** in the “P” text of this narrative. “P” also uses ideas from the Mesopotamian flood narrative from “Gilgamesh” – the birds are sent to get information, the mountain of landing (Ararat and Nisir).

# Concerns...

“J” celebrates the recreation after the flood through the medium of sacrifice. “J” also describes God in anthropomorphic terms throughout the narrative – God *closes* the door to the ark (Genesis 7:16), he “smells” the sweet smell of the sacrifice (Genesis 8:21), and is *sorry* he made man to begin with, due to mankind’s bad behavior (Genesis 6:5-7).





# Doublets in the Flood Narrative

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1. The corruption of humanity- 6:5 J, 6:13 P
2. The commission to enter the ark- 7:1-3 J, 6:18-21 P
3. Entering the ark – 7:7 J, 7:13 P
4. Death of creatures – 7:22-33 J, 7:21-21 P
5. The end of the flood – 8:2b-3a J, 8:3b-5 P
6. The promise of no more flood – 8:21b-22 J, 9:1-17 P

# The ark as a prototypical temple

Many similarities exist between the ark of Noah and the temple:

1. It's description.
2. It is revealed by God.
3. Three divisions.
4. Gopher wood – a pun?
5. Creation themes.
6. Mountain motifs.
7. It's timing.
8. Eating/garments.

Image source: [Bradshaw, "Floating Temple," 1.28.2018.](#)

	<i>Chaos (flood)</i>	<i>Creation (exodus)</i>	<i>Covenant</i>
Genesis	Genesis 1.2	Genesis 1.3-25	Genesis 1.26-31
Genesis	Genesis 7.17-8.9	Genesis 8.10-19	Genesis 8.20-9.17
Exodus	Exodus 1.22, 2.3-5 <sup>150</sup>	Exodus 14-15	Exodus 19-24, 32-34
Deutero-Isaiah	Isaiah 43.2, <sup>151</sup> 48.10, 54.7-9	Isaiah 40, <sup>152</sup> 41.18, 43.19, 48.6-8, 50.2, 51.9-11, 51.15	Isaiah 51.3, 52.7-12, 54 <i>passim</i> , 55 <i>passim</i> (esp. v. 3)
Pseudepigrapha <sup>153</sup>	<i>Jubilees</i> 5.20-6.3, <i>T. Naphtali</i> 6.1-10, <i>1 Enoch</i> 65-66, 83, 89.1-9	<i>4 Ezra</i> 13.1-13, <i>1 Enoch</i> 89.10-40, <i>2 Enoch</i> 24-30	<i>Jubilees</i> 6.4-16
Gospels	John 1.1-5, 14-16	<i>Baptism:</i> Matthew 3, Mark 1.3-8, Luke 3.2-17, John 1.6-8, 19-28 <i>Stilling storm:</i> Matthew 8.18, 23-27; Mark 4.35-41, Luke 8.22-25, <i>Walking on sea:</i> Matthew 14.22-33, Mark 6.47-52, John 6.15-21, (21.1-14) Revelation 12.7-9, 21.1-22.5	Matthew 5-7

	Work Declared Good	Completion Formula	Blessing Pronounced	Multiply and Fill the Earth	Curious Workmanship	Mountain Theophany
<b>Creation</b>	Gen. 1:31 "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good"	Gen. 2:1 "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them"	Gen. 2:3 "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it"	Gen. 1:28 "And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"	Gen. 1:11–12, 20–22, 24–25 The variety of species is emphasized.	
<b>Deluge</b>	Gen. 9:11–17 God establishes a covenant	Gen. 6:22; 7:5 "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he"	Gen. 9:1 "And God blessed Noah and his sons"	Gen. 8:17; 9:1 "Bring forth with thee every living thing . . . that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth"	Gen. 6:14–16 Divine pattern for building the ark specified	
<b>Tabernacle</b>	Ex. 39:43; cf. 39:43 "And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it"	Ex. 39:32; cf. 39:43; 40:33 "And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did they"	Ex. 39:43 "And Moses blessed them"	Josh. 18:1 "And the whole congregation of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them"	Ex. 31:3–4 "I have filled [Bezaleel] with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. To devise cunning works in gold, and in silver, and in brass"	Ex. 24:12 "And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount"
<b>Nephi's Ship</b>	1 Ne. 18:4 "And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good"	1 Ne. 18:4 "And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord . . ."	1 Ne. 18:24 "Wherefore, we were blessed in abundance"	1 Ne. 18:24 "And it came to pass that we did begin to till the earth, and we began to plant seeds"	1 Ne. 18:1; cf. 18:2 "We did work the timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship"	1 Ne. 17:7; cf. 17:8 "The voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. And it came to pass that I arose and went up into the mountain, and cried unto the Lord"

# Literal or figurative?

“I would like to know by **what known law the immersion of the globe could be accomplished**. It is explained here in a few words: ‘The windows of heaven were opened’ that is, the waters that exist throughout the space surrounding the earth from whence come these clouds from which the rain descends. That was one cause. Another cause was ‘the fountains of the great deep were broken up’—that is something beyond the oceans, something outside of the seas, some reservoirs of which we have no knowledge, were made to contribute to this event, and the waters were let loose by the hand and by the power of God; for God said He would bring a flood upon the earth and He brought it, but He had to let loose the fountains of the great deep, and pour out the waters from there, and when the flood commenced to subside, we are told ‘that the fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained, and the waters returned from off the earth.’ Where did they go to? From whence they came. Now, I will show you something else on the back of that. Some people talk very philosophically about tidal waves coming along. But the question is—How could you get a tidal wave out of the Pacific ocean, say, to cover the Sierra Nevadas? But the Bible does not tell us it was a tidal wave. It simply tells that ‘all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upwards did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.’ **That is, the earth was immersed. It was a period of baptism.**” (John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:74–75.)

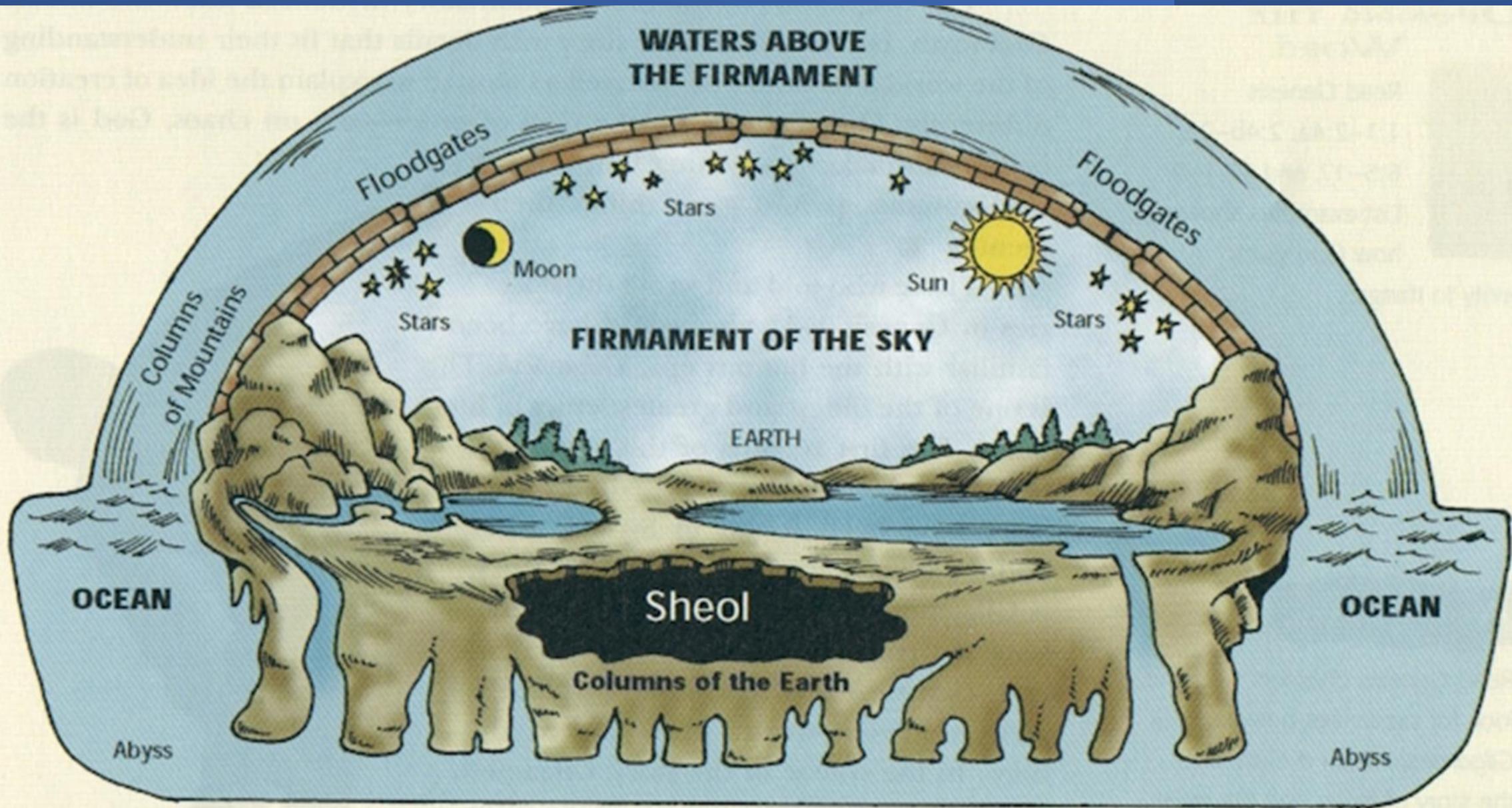
# Literal or figurative?

However, John H. Walton (whose argument is that "If we are to reach an understanding of an ancient text such as Genesis 1 and presumably also Genesis 6-9, we have to be able to think about the issues the way the ancients would have") provides an interesting alternative explanation, namely that to Noah's "an ancient Near Eastern mindset", "the mountains of Ararat" were not regarded as mountains but as **the pillars of "the heavens"**:

"Genesis 8:3-5 Tops of the mountains visible. This is the most difficult statement to explain for those arguing that the text does not require a global flood. In saying that the tops of the mountains became visible, this verse conveys that the tops, not just the flanks of the mountains, had been obscured. ... If it were not for 8:3-5, an interpreter can easily claim that the face value of the text does not demand a geographically global flood. All of the other statements are compatible with a flood of the known populated world. ... We must still consider whether 8:3-5 strikes us the way it does because we are thinking in terms of our understanding of the world. **Would this text have meant something different if we could read it with an ancient Near Eastern mindset?** ... In the Mesopotamian worldview the known world was comprised of a single continent fringed with mountains (such as the Zagros mountains in the east and the mountains of Ararat in the north) and ringed by the cosmic sea. **The fringe mountains were believed to hold up the heavens and have roots in the netherworld. In the east, the mountain primarily associated with this role is Mount Masu. ... What happens if we try to read the Flood narrative against the background of this sort of worldview? ...**

# Literal or figurative?

**Is it possible that the ancient writers did not count the mountains at the fringes of the world among the 'high mountains' that the water covered?** Cosmic mountains were places of the gods and would be impervious to flood waters sent by the gods. In this scenario, the ark drifts to the edge of the known world and rests against the mountains of Ararat (or perhaps on the foothills of Ararat). Noah views this as the edge of the world, just as some before Columbus's day believed they could reach the edge of the world. There the ark sits while the water recedes and the tops of the mountains in the occupied portion of the continent become visible. This means that when the waters totally dissipate, the ark is at the foot of the Ararat chain. **The logic of not including the fringe mountains is that they were believed to support the heavens, and the waters are not seen as encroaching on or encountering the heavens.** This way of thinking yields a flood of the then-known world (with boundaries as described, for instance, in the Sargon Geography and in the list of Noah's descendants in Gen. 10) it covered all the elevated places that were within eyesight of the occupants of the ark. Though this would be a geographically limited flood, **it could still be anthropologically universal if people had not yet spread beyond this region. One of the advantages of seeking out views such as this is that they allow us to affirm the truth of the text without getting tied up in complicated logistical and scientific discussions.** (Walton J.H., "Genesis," *The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids MI, 2001, pp.326-328)





The curse אֲרָץ put upon  
Canaan... a servant of servants  
shall he be – Gen. 9.20-29

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Genesis 9:20–27. Why Did Noah Curse Canaan in This Event When He Was Not Even Present?

The account of Noah’s “nakedness” and the role his sons played in the event is a puzzling one, especially the part in which Noah awakens and pronounces a curse upon Canaan, the son of Ham (see Genesis 10:6), who does not even seem to be present at the time.

# This story is about boundaries

Think of the Torah as an account of the transition from the creation of nature, to the creation of culture, to the creation of a Divinely sanctioned political community (i.e., the Israelites on their way to the promised land at the beginning of the book of Joshua).

Along the way we have to deal with marriage, sex, property, kinship, inheritance, parent-child obligations, etc.

So this last part of the book of Noah is about boundaries, sexual boundaries, and how they have to be understood and observed, and the disastrous consequences when they are violated.

# This story is an Etiological Tale

Among other purposes, this story involving Ham, Canaan and Noah's nakedness likely served as a justification for the later Israelite conquest of both the Canaanites and the Philistines: already from the time of Noah, Genesis suggests, the descendants of Shem (the Israelites) were destined to rule over the descendants of Ham (the Canaanites) and of Japheth (the Philistines), but whereas the Philistines would later be tolerated (they would live in Israel's tents), the Canaanites would not be. Like their ancestor Ham, they are beyond redemption. "But what was so terrible about viewing Noah's nakedness?" the reader asks. This is a good question: such behavior hardly seems offensive, at least initially. Moreover, why would Noah curse Canaan, Ham's son, instead of Ham himself? Interpreters have been troubled by this odd passage for centuries, offering various solutions, some of which blame Noah as well as Ham and, by extension, Canaan. According to the vast majority of interpretations, some sort of sexual indiscretion must have been in view.

Reasoning that Ham must have either castrated or raped his father, late ancient rabbis developed an explanation of this story capable of accounting for both the curse of Canaan rather than Ham and the severity of Noah's reaction. Since Ham made it impossible for his father to beget further sons, Noah appropriately denied him future sons, making Canaan and all his descendants into slaves rather than free men, who would be capable of passing on their property to others. Alternatively, the rabbis reasoned, perhaps Ham sexually abused his father and did not castrate him, though they were not sure why this behavior would result in the curse of Canaan.

## This story is an Etiological Tale

Late ancient Christians offered a very different set of interpretations. From their perspective, Ham's sin was not so much sexual as disrespectful: Ham laughed at his father's nakedness and made fun of his father's shame in public, prefiguring the ridicule Christ would face when dying on a cross. As the fourth-century bishop Methodius put it, "When overpowered by wine, [Noah] was mocked." Assuming that Noah prefigured Christ, bishop Ambrose of Milan recalled the story to emphasize the importance of modesty: "Ham, Noah's son, brought disgrace upon himself, for he laughed when he saw his father naked, but they who covered their father received the gift of a blessing." Since Christians respect Christ's flesh like Shem and Japheth respected the flesh of their father, Ambrose argued, they too will be blessed. Reluctant to imagine that Noah, a savior like Christ, had been raped or castrated, Christian interpreters offered comparatively mild interpretations of this passage. Still, they were also convinced that Ham—and by extension his son Canaan—were wicked and deserved the harsh punishment they received.

# This story is ... complicated

There is yet another interpretive possibility: perhaps readers are to imagine that Ham engaged in incest not with his father but with his mother. The nakedness of one's mother is identified as identical to the nakedness of one's father in Leviticus ("You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother," Leviticus 18:7). Moreover, in Deuteronomy, incest with a father's wife is described as "uncovering the father's skirt." The nakedness Ham uncovered may have been that of his mother. If so, the curse of Canaan rather than Ham becomes somewhat more logical: Canaan can be understood as Ham's progeny via his sexual liaison with this mother. Noah then curses the product of their union, just as Yhwh cursed the product of David and Bathsheba's adultery, leading to the death of their first child.

Whichever interpretation is preferred, however, Ham, the legendary son of the primeval patriarch Noah, is depicted in Genesis as engaging in some sort of shaming sexual infraction. As a result, Genesis suggests, Canaan and his descendants ought to be legitimately enslaved in perpetuity, a claim that would go on to have disastrous consequences when reapplied several centuries later in the context of North American slavery.

# For further reading

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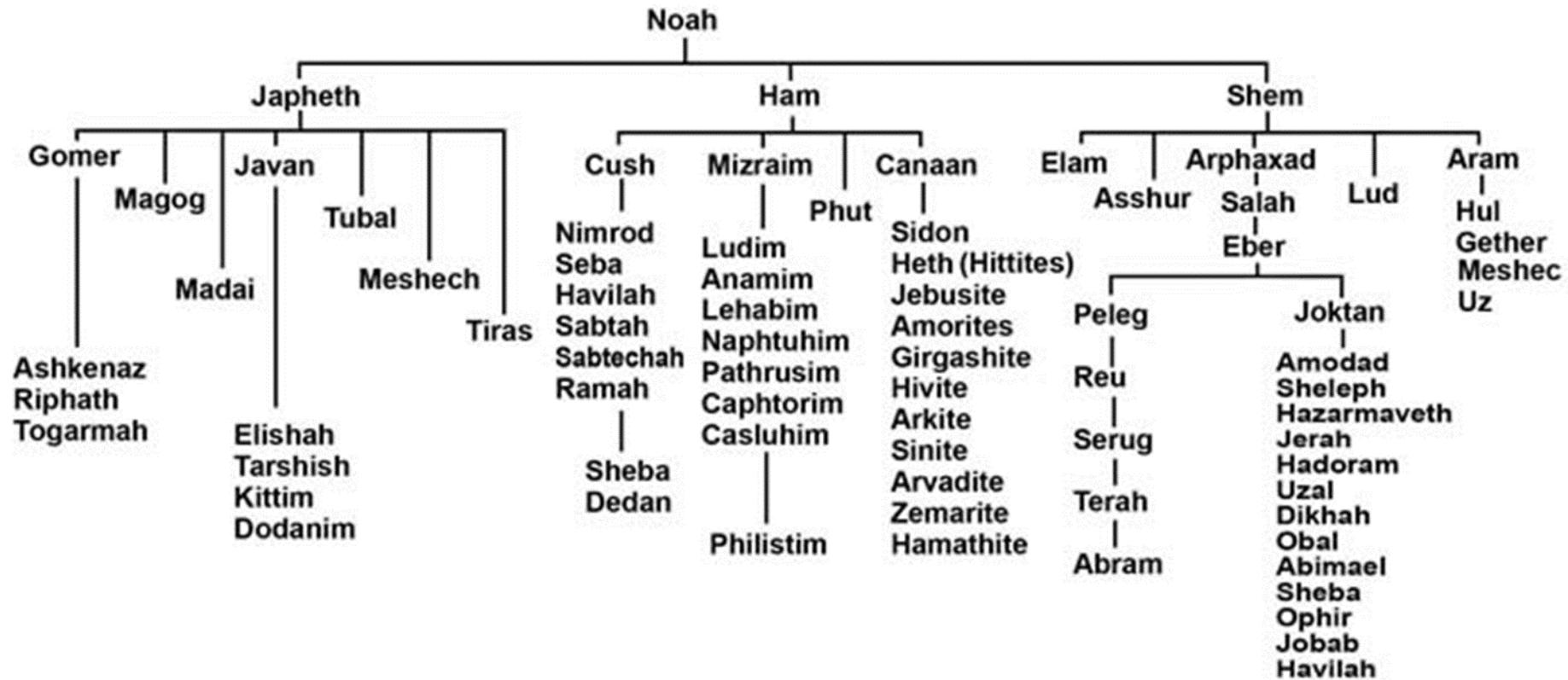
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# Genesis 10: The Table of Nations



# Genesis 11 – The Tower of Babel

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The Ziggurat as a cosmic mountain.

The Temple as the embodiment of the cosmic mountain.

This can be read as a polemic against Babylon.





## The Tower is a Polemic

The temple of Marduk in Babylon was supposed to have been built by the Annunaki gods with specially prepared bricks. Its name, "house with the uplifted head," reflects its claim to have reached the heavens. But Genesis unmercifully batters these claims. (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis World Biblical Commentary*, p. 244.)

“Let us make our name great” versus “I will make your name great”

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Genesis 11.4

Genesis 12.1-2

Ether 1.38-43



# Babel a pun

Babel is a pun on the word or idea for confusion. בָּלַל means to “mix” or “confound,” and בָּבֶל Babel, as used in Gen. 11.9 is connected to Babylon, and can also mean “confusion (by mixing).”

Nahum Sarna offers this explanation: “Babylon, Hebrew *Babel*, was pronounced *Babilim* by the Mesopotamians. The name is apparently non-Semitic in origin and may even be pre-Sumerian. But the Semitic inhabitants, by popular etymology, explained it as two separate Akkadian words, *bab-ilim*, meaning “the gate of the god.” This interpretation refers to the role of the city as the great religious center. It also has mystical overtones connected with the concept of “the navel of the earth,” the point at which heaven and earth meet. **The Hebrew author, by his uncomplimentary word-play substituting *balal* for Babel has replaced the “gate of the god” by “a confusion of speech,” and satirized thereby the pagan religious beliefs.**” See: Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of*

*Biblical Israel*, Schocken Books, 1966, p. 69-70.