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Did the Waters of the Flood Cover the Highest Mountains of Earth?

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Abstract: This article considers the depth of the Great Flood, concluding that "the exact nature of the flood is not known."

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THIS question, really of insignificant importance, is a good example of man-made objections to the sacred character of the Bible, and therefore to faith.

The coming of the flood and its extent and duration, are described in the seventh chapter of the Book of Genesis. The account states that "the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered."

A cubit, an ancient and well-known measure of length, is the distance from a man's elbow to the end of his middle finger. The Egyptians fixed the length of a cubit as 20.61 of our inches; the Greeks, 18.25 inches; the Romans, 17.4 inches; the Hebrews, 17.58 inches; and the English, 18 inches. The variation is small, from eighteen to less than twenty-one inches.

If we employ the largest of these values, 20.61 inches, fifteen cubits would be something less than twenty-six feet. This, then, was the depth of the flood, according to Genesis.

The suggestion has been made that the flood filled every hollow and valley until the earth was a great sphere of water, covering the highest mountain peaks twenty-six feet deep. Mount Ararat, seventeen thousand feet high, "upon the mountains" of which the ark rested, would according to this view have been completely under water. It is doubtful whether the water in the sky and all the oceans would suffice to cover the earth so completely.

Another suggestion is that the earth at that time was so flat that a depth of water of twenty-six feet would cover the highest hill. There is no existing evidence of this supposition; and Mount Ararat did exist then according to the record.

It has also been suggested that a blanket of water twenty-six feet thick lay up and down the sides of every hill, mountain and valley. This would seem to be in defiance of the law of gravity, though under a long continued, furious rainfall such a layer, not too thick, might roll down every slope.

The fact remains that the exact nature of the flood is not known. We set up assumptions, based upon our best knowledge, but can go no further. We should remember that when inspired writers deal with historical incidents they relate that which they have seen or that which may have been told them, unless indeed the past is opened to them by revelation.

The details in the story of the flood are undoubtedly drawn from the experiences of the writer. Under a downpour of rain, likened to the opening of the heavens, a destructive torrent twenty-six

feet deep or deeper would easily be formed. The writer of Genesis made a faithful report of the facts known to him concerning the flood. In other localities the depth of the water might have been more or less. In fact, the details of the flood are not known to us.

Latter-day Saints know, through modern revelation, that the Garden of Eden was on the North American continent and that Adam and Eve began their conquest of the earth in the upper part of what is now the State of Missouri. It seems very probable that the children of our first earthly parents moved down along the fertile, pleasant lands of the Mississippi Valley. The great floods that have often occurred there make the description in Genesis seem very reasonable indeed.

Great floods have visited the earth. That has been amply proved. For example, Professor C. Leonard Woolley, studying through excavations the ancient history of Mesopotamia, has found indisputable evidences of a flood in the neighborhood of Abraham's ancestral city of Ur. Whether that flood is the great flood of Genesis is not certain, for we do not know whether at that time the children of Adam had spread from their original home in what is now America into the lands now denominated Asia. (See Woolley, *The Sumerians*.)

Latter-day Saints look upon the earth as a living organism, one which is gloriously filling "the measure of its creation." They look upon the flood as a baptism of the earth, symbolizing a cleansing of the impurities of the past, and the beginning of a new life. This has been repeatedly taught by the leaders of the Church. The Deluge was an immersion of the earth in water. (See Doctrine and Covenants 88:25; Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:274; *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 603; Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:331.)

Though the whole of the earth was covered with water the depth was immaterial. When a person is baptized it does not matter how far under the water he is brought, nor whether every part of him is at the same depth. The essential part of the symbolism is that he should be completely immersed.

So with the story of the Flood. All parts of the earth were under water at the same time. In some places the layer of water might have been twenty-six feet deep or more; in others, as on sloping hillsides, it may have been only a fraction of an inch in depth. That the whole earth, however, was under water at the same time was easily possible under a terrific, long-continued downpour, such as is described in Genesis. The depth of the layer of water is of no consequence.

Many Bible accounts that trouble the inexperienced reader become clear and acceptable if the essential meaning of the story is sought out. To read the Bible fairly, it must be read as President Brigham Young suggested: "Do you read the scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them?" This is our guide. The scriptures must be read intelligently. (See *Discourses of Brigham Young*, pp. 197, 198.)—J. A. W.