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JOSEPHUS AND OTHER ANCIENT SCHOLARS ON THE BIBLICAL FLOOD

By David Plaisted

Josephus (AD 37–c. 100) was a first-century Jewish historian and apologist of priestly and royal ancestry who survived and recorded the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Josephus's two most important works are *The Jewish War* (c. 75) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. 94). *The Jewish War* recounts the Jewish revolt against Rome (66–70). *Antiquities of the Jews* recounts the history of the world from a Jewish perspective. Josephus fought the Romans in the First Jewish-Roman War of 66–73 as a Jewish military leader in Galilee. He eventually surrendered to the Romans. In 71 AD, he arrived in Rome, becoming a Roman citizen.

His works are significant because of what they reveal about ancient scholarship. For example, he shows that not only primitive tribes had flood legends but also scholars from the most advanced societies. This is significant because advanced societies had written records that would preserve the truth reliably over long periods of time. For primitive tribes, one can imagine their history gradually modifying over many generations, but not so with advanced societies possessing writing.

When writing about the Jews, Josephus mainly draws on Jewish sources, but the Flood involved the whole world, so non-Jewish sources also mentioned it. It's not just because the Bible mentions the Flood that Josephus also does, because his history did not always agree with the Bible, but because it was so well accepted in his day by all people. Josephus also has some interesting material about flying snakes that is relevant to creationism. However, Josephus is not inspired, so his account may be incorrect in places.

Plato in *Timaeus* and *Critia* also appears to be describing the world before the flood and the flood itself, giving evidence that he accepted the flood as a historical fact. *The Gilgamesh Epic*, originating in the region of ancient Babylon, also recounts a worldwide flood. Numerous other scholars from various locations also attest to the occurrence of the flood. Not only this, but many ancient scholars also asserted that men before the flood lived nearly a thousand years. Thus the Biblical account has extensive support from ancient scholarship.



A Roman portrait bust believed to be that of Josephus, from Plagnieux, P. 'Les sculptures Romanes' Dossiers d'Archéologie

General Information about Josephus

The following material from Creationism.org gives general information about Josephus:¹

Josephus - an intriguing historical figure (circa 37-100 AD) has given us a pivotal perspective of ancient Jewish history and of life in Roman occupied Palestine, approximately one generation after the life of Jesus Christ. As a personal friend of the (as he had correctly prophesied!, 2 years prior...) newly inaugurated Roman emperor Flavius, Josephus moved to Rome where he had unparalleled access to the best scholars and libraries of the Roman Empire... Josephus - as a well trained and articulate rabbi had been commissioned to write a comprehensive "History of the Jews" for the Romans. From the libraries of Rome (...and as a friend of the Emperor...) he had access to virtually all Western learning. He

¹ Josephus—*Antiquities of the Jews*—Intro. <<http://www.creationism.org/books/josephus/index.htm>> Accessed 2009 Apr 20

drew upon a myriad of distinguished contemporary and past writers from around the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world in the course of his research....

When he gets to the story of Noah, the Ark, and Mt. Ararat he draws together collaborative writings from numerous non-Jewish sources.

The following material is taken from *Antiquities of the Jews* by Flavius Josephus.² It parallels the Genesis account of the flood taken from the first nine chapters of Genesis, especially chapters 6 through 9.

Book I, Chapter 3

Concerning The Flood; And After What Manner Noah Was Saved In An Ark, With His Kindred, And Afterwards Dwelt In The Plain Of Shinar

1. NOW this posterity of Seth continued to esteem God as the Lord of the universe, and to have an entire regard to virtue, for seven generations; but in process of time they were perverted, and forsook the practices of their forefathers; and did neither pay those honors to God which were appointed them, nor had they any concern to do justice towards men....But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their dispositions and their acts for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to their wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married; so he departed out of that land.

2. Now God loved this man for his righteousness: yet he not only condemned those other men for their wickedness, but determined to destroy the whole race of mankind, and to make another race that should be pure from wickedness; and cutting short their lives, and making their years not so many as they formerly lived, but one hundred and twenty only, he turned the dry land into sea; and thus were all these men destroyed: but Noah alone was saved; for God suggested to him the following contrivance and way of escape: - That he should make an ark of four stories high, three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits broad, and thirty cubits high. Accordingly he entered into that ark, and his wife, and sons, and their wives, and put into it not only other provisions, to support their wants there, but also sent in with the rest all sorts of living creatures, the male and his female, for the preservation of their kinds; and others of them by sevens....

3. This calamity happened in the six hundredth year of Noah's government, [age,] in the second month, called by the Macedonians *Dius*, but by the Hebrews *Marchesuan*: for so did they order their year in Egypt....

4. For indeed Seth was born when Adam was in his two hundred and thirtieth year, who lived nine hundred and thirty years. Seth begat Enos in his two hundred and fifth year; who, when he had lived nine hundred and twelve years, delivered the government to Cainan his son, whom he had in his hundred and ninetieth year. He lived nine hundred and five years....Now Lamech, when he had governed seven hundred and seventy-seven years, appointed Noah, his son, to be ruler of the people, who was born to Lamech when he was one hundred and eighty-two years old, and retained the government nine hundred and fifty years....

5. When God gave the signal, and it began to rain, the water poured down forty entire days, till it became fifteen cubits higher than the earth; which was the reason why there was no greater number preserved, since they had no place to fly to. When the rain ceased, the water did but just begin to abate after one hundred and fifty days, (that is, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month,) it then ceasing to subside for a little while. After this, the ark rested on the top of a certain mountain in Armenia;...So after he had stayed seven more days, he sent the living creatures out of the ark; and both he and his family went out, when he also sacrificed to God, and feasted with his companions. However, the Armenians call this place, (GREEK) *The Place of Descent*; for the ark being saved in that place, its remains are shown there by the inhabitants to this day.

6. Now all the writers of barbarian histories make mention of this flood, and of this ark; among whom is Berosus the Chaldean. For when he is describing the circumstances of the flood, he goes on thus: "It is said there is still some part of this ship in Armenia, at the mountain of the Cordyaeans; and that some people carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they take away, and use chiefly as amulets for the averting of mischiefs." Hieronymus the Egyptian also, who wrote the Phoenician Antiquities, and Mnaseas, and a great many more, make mention of the same. Nay, Nicolaus of Damascus, in his ninety-sixth book, hath a particular relation about them; where he speaks thus: "There is a great mountain in Armenia, over Minyas, called Baris, upon which it is reported that many who fled at the time of the Deluge were saved; and that one who was carried in an ark came on shore upon the top of it; and that the remains of the timber were a

² Josephus F *Antiquities of the Jews* <<http://www.interhack.net/projects/library/antiquities-jews/b1c3.html>> Accessed 2009 Apr 20

great while preserved. This might be the man about whom Moses the legislator of the Jews wrote."...

9. Now when Noah had lived three hundred and fifty years after the Flood, and that all that time happily, he died, having lived the number of nine hundred and fifty years. But let no one, upon comparing the lives of the ancients with our lives, and with the few years which we now live, think that what we have said of them is false; or make the shortness of our lives at present an argument, that neither did they attain to so long a duration of life, for those ancients were beloved of God, and [lately] made by God himself; and because their food was then fitter for the prolongation of life, might well live so great a number of years: and besides, God afforded them a longer time of life on account of their virtue, and the good use they made of it in astronomical and geometrical discoveries, which would not have afforded the time of foretelling [the periods of the stars] unless they had lived six hundred years; for the great year is completed in that interval. Now I have for witnesses to what I have said, all those that have written Antiquities, both among the Greeks and barbarians; for even Manetho, who wrote the Egyptian History, and Berosus, who collected the Chaldean Monuments, and Mochus, and Hestius, and, besides these, Hieronymus the Egyptian, and those who composed the Phoenician History, agree to what I here say: Hesiod also, and Hecatseus, Hellanicus, and Acusilaus; and, besides these, Ephorus and Nicolaus relate that the ancients lived a thousand years. But as to these matters, let every one look upon them as he thinks fit.

Book II, Chapter 10 How Moses Made War With The Ethiopians

But Moses prevented the enemies, and took and led his army before those enemies were apprized of his attacking them; for he did not march by the river, but by land, where he gave a wonderful demonstration of his sagacity; for when the ground was difficult to be passed over, because of the multitude of serpents, (which it produces in vast numbers, and, indeed, is singular in some of those productions, which other countries do not breed, and yet such as are worse than others in power and mischief, and an unusual fierceness of sight, some of which ascend out of the ground unseen, and also fly in the air, and so come upon men at unawares, and do them a mischief,) Moses invented a wonderful stratagem to preserve the army safe, and without hurt; for he made baskets, like unto arks, of sedge, and filled them with ibes, and carried them along with them; which animal is the greatest enemy to serpents imaginable, for they fly from them when they come near them; and as they fly they are caught and devoured by them, as if it were

done by the harts; but the ibes are tame creatures, and only enemies to the serpentine kind:...As soon, therefore, as Moses was come to the land which was the breeder of these serpents, he let loose the ibes, and by their means repelled the serpentine kind, and used them for his assistants before the army came upon that ground.

Timaeus and Critia

Now we consider some material from the Greek author Plato. *Timaeus* and *Critia* are two of Plato's dialogues and are the only existing written records which specifically refer to Atlantis. These dialogues appear to describe the world before the Flood. The following material is taken from *Timaeus*.³

...he began to tell about the most ancient things in our part of the world-about Phoroneus, who is called "the first man," and about Niobe; and after the Deluge, of the survival of Deucalion and Pyrrha; and he traced the genealogy of their descendants, and reckoning up the dates, tried to compute how many years ago the events of which he was speaking happened.

In the first place you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones; in the next place, you do not know that there formerly dwelt in your land the fairest and noblest race of men which ever lived, and that you and your whole city are descended from a small seed or remnant of them which survived. And this was unknown to you, because, for many generations, the survivors of that destruction died, leaving no written word.

Now in this island of Atlantis there was a great and wonderful empire which had rule over the whole island and several others, and over parts of the continent...But afterwards there occurred violent earthquakes and floods; and in a single day and night of misfortune all your warlike men in a body sank into the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea....

It is interesting that Plato apparently regarded Noah (Niobe) as a real person and considered that there was a "first man," and also considered the "Deluge" as a historical event and even was interested in how long ago it happened in his day.

Plato also gave an account of Atlantis, in *Critias*, recorded about 370 BC. Plato described Atlantis as a vast continent west of the Mediterranean, in the Atlantic ocean. Atlantis was peaceful and prosperous and advanced in

³ Jowett, B *The Dialogues of Plato*, Volume 3, Benjamin Jowett, editor, Edition: 3, Macmillan, London, 1892

knowledge. However, the people of Atlantis became complacent and their leaders arrogant; in punishment the gods destroyed Atlantis, flooding it and submerging the island in one day and night. The following is material from *Critias*:³

...they had such an amount of wealth as was never before possessed by kings and potentates, and is not likely ever to be again, and they were furnished with everything which they needed, both in the city and country.

Here was Poseidon's own temple which was a stadium in length, and half a stadium in width, and of a proportionate height,...All the outside of the temple, with the exception of the pinnacles, they covered with silver, and the pinnacles with gold. In the interior of the temple the roof was of ivory, curiously wrought everywhere with gold and silver and orichalcum; and all the other parts, the walls and pillars and floor, they coated with orichalcum.

Also whatever fragrant things there now are in the earth, whether roots, or herbage, or woods, or essences which distil from fruit and flower, grew and thrived in that land; also the fruit which admits of cultivation, both the dry sort, which is given us for nourishment and any other which we use for food—we call them all by the common name pulse, and the fruits having a hard rind, affording drinks and meats and ointments, and good store of chestnuts and the like, which furnish pleasure and amusement, and are fruits which spoil with keeping, and the pleasant kinds of dessert, with which we console ourselves after dinner, when we are tired of eating—all these that sacred island which then beheld the light of the sun, brought forth fair and wondrous and in infinite abundance.

With such blessings the earth freely furnished them; meanwhile they went on constructing their temples and palaces and harbors and docks.

Some of their buildings were simple, but in others they put together different stones, varying the color to please the eye, and to be a natural source of delight.

Of the water which ran off they carried some to the grove of Poseidon, where were growing all manner of trees of wonderful height and beauty, owing to the excellence of the soil,...and there were many temples built and dedicated to many gods; also gardens and places of exercise,...

The surrounding mountains were celebrated for their number and size and beauty, far beyond any which still exist, having in them also many wealthy villages

of country folk, and rivers, and lakes, and meadows supplying food enough for every animal, wild or tame, and much wood of various sorts, abundant for each and every kind of work.

Twice in the year they gathered the fruits of the earth—in winter having the benefit of the rains of heaven, and in summer the water which the land supplied by introducing streams from the canals.

For many generations, as long as the divine nature lasted in them, they were obedient to the laws, and well-affectioned towards the god, whose seed they were; for they possessed true and in every way great spirits, uniting gentleness with wisdom in the various chances of life, and in their intercourse with one another. They despised everything but virtue, caring little for their present state of life, and thinking lightly of the possession of gold and other property, which seemed only a burden to them; neither were they intoxicated by luxury; nor did wealth deprive them of their self-control; but they were sober, and saw clearly that all these goods are increased by virtue and friendship with one another,...

By such reflections and by the continuance in them of a divine nature, the qualities which we have described grew and increased among them; but when the divine portion began to fade away, and became diluted too often and too much with the mortal admixture, and the human nature got the upper hand, they then, being unable to bear their fortune, behaved unseemly, and to him who had an eye to see grew visibly debased, for they were losing the fairest of their precious gifts; but to those who had no eye to see the true happiness, they appeared glorious and blessed at the very time when they were full of avarice and unrighteous power.

Zeus, the god of gods, who rules according to law, and is able to see into such things, perceiving that an honorable race was in a woeful plight, and wanting to inflict punishment on them, that they might be chastened and improve, collected all the gods into their most holy habitation, which, being placed in the centre of the world, beholds all created things. And when he had called them together, he spoke as follows – [The rest of the Dialogue of Critias has been lost or perhaps was never written.]

Gilgamesh Epic

Next we consider the well-known Gilgamesh epic which is believed to originate from the area of ancient Babylon.⁴

⁴ Kovacs MG (1989) *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA

O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu: Tear down the house and build a boat! Abandon wealth and seek living beings! Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings! Make all living beings go up into the boat. The boat which you are to build, its dimensions must measure equal to each other: its length must correspond to its width. Roof it over like the Apsu.

I watched the appearance of the weather—the weather was frightful to behold! I went into the boat and sealed the entry...Just as dawn began to glow there arose from the horizon a black cloud...Stunned shock over Adad's deeds overtook the heavens, and turned to blackness all that had been light. The...land shattered like a...pot. All day long the South Wind blew..., blowing fast, submerging the mountain in water, overwhelming the people like an attack. No one could see his fellow, they could not recognize each other in the torrent. The gods were frightened by the Flood, and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu.

On Mt. Nimush the boat lodged firm, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway. One day and a second Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway. A third day, a fourth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway. A fifth day, a sixth, Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway. When a seventh day arrived I sent forth a dove and released it. The dove went off, but came back to me; no perch was visible so it circled back to me. I sent forth a swallow and released it. The swallow went off, but came back to me; no perch was visible so it circled back to me. I sent forth a raven and released it. The raven went off, and saw the waters slither back. It eats, it scratches, it bobs, but does not circle back to me. Then I sent out everything in all directions and sacrificed (a sheep). I offered incense in front of the mountain-ziggurat.

Thus scholars of Roman, Greek, and Babylonian origin, together with numerous others, all accepted that there was a worldwide flood, and scholars from all over the world accepted that men before the flood lived nearly a thousand years. This is only reasonable when one considers that Noah and his family would have told their children what happened before and during the flood, and their children would have told others, so that the knowledge of the flood and the pre-flood world would have been widely dispersed in the world and would have come down to us from many sources.

Flying Snakes

As for the flying snakes mentioned by Josephus in connection with Moses' war against the Ethiopians, their existence is backed up by Herodotus who lived in the fifth century BC. Also, the Bible in Isaiah 14:29 and Isaiah 30:6 refers to "fiery flying serpents." The following material is from The Artesian Wells blog.⁵

...this very story (of the war on the Ethiopians) is referred to by Iranaeus as if an established fact, and it could possibly be what Stephen was referring to in Acts 7:22.

The well-respected Greek, Aristotle, said that in his time it was common knowledge that creatures like this also existed in Ethiopia. Similar animals (three feet long) were also described in India by the geographer Strabo.

Imagine what it would be like trying to defend against flying snakes that were aggressive and trying to bite! It would be nearly impossible. Also, it's possible that the snake in Eden was a beautiful, golden flying snake. Then God's curse to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:14), makes more sense if the serpent had been able to fly beforehand.

Conclusion

It's amazing to think that at one time so many respected scholars believed in a worldwide Biblical flood. This confirms our faith that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

How scholarship has changed, and how light has been replaced by darkness! It reminds one of the Bible verse, "For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon you, and his glory shall be seen upon you." (Isaiah 60:2)

One wonders how much farther this process of covering up of the truth will go before Jesus returns, and how many other truths have been obscured and lost by men who are trying to forget the truth. ☹

⁵ Anonymous <<http://artesian.blogspot.com/2006/02/flying-snakes.html>> Accessed 2009 Apr 20

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 14, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church,
6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631

Dan Reynolds, PhD will examine the "RNA world" hypothesis and rapidly "evolving" lizards in his presentation: "Have Scientists Recently Discovered How Life Began and How Species Evolve?"

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