

October 2007

## "NOAH'S ARK. REALLY?", SHE ASKED. "YES, REALLY," I REPLIED.

By Mark Stephens, Master of Combined Sciences

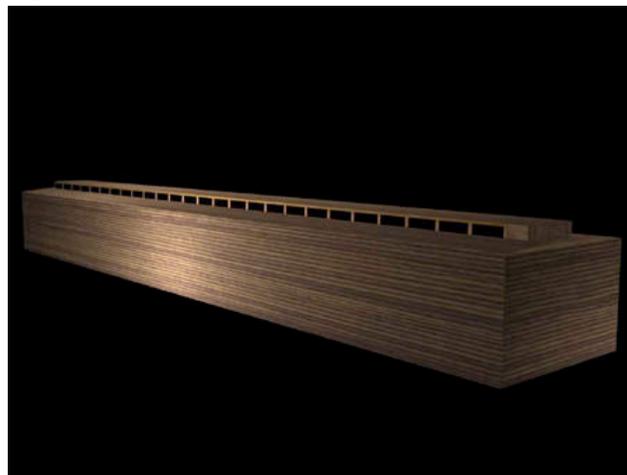
The objective of this article is to help people gain a true understanding of Noah's Ark that will help their faith in God, our Creator, and help them to bring faith to others as they share this understanding.

**Real life experience brings out need for true understanding.** I was inspired to write this article about Noah's Ark because of an experience I had in a foreign country while assisting others in their use of English, which included the reading of the English Bible. One young lady contacted me later by email, as she had been discussing Noah's Ark with a friend and had run into difficult questions about the Ark. She knew she needed a true understanding about this for her own faith and to help build faith in others. In her email to me she asked several questions that we all might have about Noah's Ark. These questions also helped me with the title that I decided to use for this article.

My response to her about her difficult questions was purposefully not very technical and was reasonably brief due to language considerations. However, it was based on the truth of the Bible and scientific evidences. The following includes some of the information I used to respond to her questions.

**The importance of Scripture:** First, the truth of the Genesis account of creation and the other accounts in that book of the Bible, such as Noah's Ark and the worldwide flood, is the solid foundation for our understanding of God, our Creator, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Genesis is not just an allegory or story line to give us an idea about creation and other early events. It is inspired by God and it is God's divine revelation to mankind. It not only tells us of the creation and origin of life but it is the foundation of moral law, marriage, and the family. The account of Noah's Ark is an illustration of God's merciful plan for man to escape the degradation and death into which he and all creation had fallen as a result of man's sin. God preserved mankind and His other created kinds of air-breathing land animals from total destruction with the Ark. An understanding of the flood is foundational for our understanding of what God has provided for us through Christ.

Figure 1



Representation of Noah's Ark based on the Biblical description

Some would say that our salvation is just about Christ, not about Genesis, or that they just do not believe Genesis is true. But if we believe in Christ, through whom our salvation comes, why should we not believe Him regarding the Genesis account, including Noah's Ark, or when He said in Matthew 24:37-39,

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (NIV).

Hebrews 11:7 and II Peter 2:5 provide other confirmations of the Genesis account of the flood.

**Actual Biblical account:** I will comment on some of the scriptures about Noah's Ark, but due to space limitations I cannot provide the full text here. However, it is important for you to read and compare the account of Noah's Ark in Genesis 6:5-7:24 from both the King James Version and from a more modern version such as the New International Version to get a more accurate picture

of Noah's Ark. Also, *The Defender's Study Bible* provides careful theological and creation science commentary on these verses. The commentary of this Bible is written by a well respected theologian and scientist, Henry M. Morris, PhD., LL.D., Litt.D.<sup>1</sup> I will provide some of Morris' assessments from his commentary below.

**Correct image of Noah's Ark:** What did this very large, amazing vessel look like? It was an ark, not a boat. The Hebrew word for "ark" (*tebah*) does not mean "boat."<sup>2</sup> It means, quite literally, "box".<sup>3</sup> This same word was used to describe the floating vessel into which baby Moses was placed to be saved from being put to death by Pharaoh.<sup>2</sup> The Ark was a long, rectangular box approximately 450 ft. long, 75 ft. wide, and 45 ft. tall. (The unit of measure used in the King James Version is the cubit, which is generally accepted to be about 18 inches.)<sup>4,5</sup> The Ark had no outside deck or curved bow like we generally associate with boats. The one cubit window placed at the top of the Ark was probably an opening for light and ventilation extending circumferentially around the Ark, with a parapet to keep out the rain. The single large door in the side was to be closed only once (after the animals were in) and was to be opened only once (to release them a year later). The Ark had lower, second, and third stories or decks.<sup>6</sup> A representation of the Ark based on the Biblical description (Gen. 6:14-16) is shown in Figure 1 on the first page of this article. The Noah's Ark many of us have been presented in drawings, books, and movies, especially in children's materials, is that of a relatively small boat with a little house in the middle, with animals crowded upon an outside deck, and with giraffes' heads sticking out of the boat. As previously stated, there was no outside deck on the Ark; everyone and everything was contained inside the Ark. The door was shut and was not opened until the Ark landed.<sup>7</sup>

To reiterate, the Ark was not a boat. Boats are designed to go somewhere and be propelled through the water. The Ark had no propulsion system, such as an engine or sails, and it had no steering such as a rudder. It was designed by God, and that design was communicated to

<sup>1</sup> Morris HM (1995) *The Defender's Study Bible*. World Publishers, Inc., Iowa Falls, IA, 1348-1349

<sup>2</sup> Pickett T (2005 Jan 12) Noah's Ark: <<http://www.GenesisFiles.com/NoahsArk.htm>> Accessed 2007 Sep 23.

<sup>3</sup> Dooley T (2003) *What Was the Ark Really Like? The True Story of Noah's Ark*. Master Books. Green Forest, AR, 67-70

<sup>4</sup> Ham K (2005) *Was There Really a Noah's Ark and Flood?* Answers in Genesis (USA), Petersburg, KY, 23

<sup>5</sup> Morris HM, 21

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22

<sup>7</sup> Dooley T, 67-68

Noah and was followed in Ark's construction. The Ark was designed as a place of shelter—a provision for the people and animals on board to stay afloat for over a year. (371 days). Thus, the Ark was a very large box, superbly designed by God, and sustained by His power until it came to rest on Mt. Ararat.<sup>8</sup>

**Building Material to Withstand a Worldwide Flood:** Noah's Ark was made out of gopher wood (KJV). *Gopher* is the Hebrew word used for this material and is translated cypress in the NIV, but the exact species is not known. It has been presumed by some to be a type of cypress, cedar, teak, or mahogany. Gopher wood could have been a material which was far stronger than conventional wood, and the Antediluvians may have had processes for strengthening wood of which we are not aware.<sup>2</sup> The Ark was made waterproof, not by a bituminous pitch (a different Hebrew word) but by some as-yet-unknown "covering". The Hebrew word for "covering" is *kopher*, equivalent to *kaphar*, and is frequently translated as "atonement" (Lev. 17:11). In providing a protective covering against the waters of judgment, the ark becomes a beautiful type of Christ.

Worldwide Flood? Yes. Dr. Morris's commentary on Gen. 6:13 points out that Noah's Ark was built to save those inside against a worldwide flood, not a local flood.

"God did not promise to destroy man *from* the earth but *with* the earth. The physical earth-system itself, as man's home and dominion, must share in His judgment. The Flood obviously was to be global and cataclysmic, not local or tranquil, as many modern compromising Christians have sought to interpret it."<sup>5</sup>

Atheists and naturalistic evolutionists are pleased with the various compromises on the Genesis account by those of us who simply will not believe the straightforward textual account, but they laugh and scoff at us at the same time. To escape a local flood, Noah and the animals could simply have moved away. But there is evidence of a worldwide flood all over the world—by the disruptive changes to the earth's surface, the massive layering of deposits, and the formation of billions of fossils laid down over its one-year duration (Gen. 6:17-8:19).<sup>9</sup>

**Dimensions, Design and Stability:** The Ark was 1.5 times the length of a standard football field, which is 300 ft. long. Noah's Ark was perfectly designed by God for stability in rough seas. The Ark was six times longer than it was wide. Modern ocean-going vessels like aircraft carriers and oil tankers are still built to this same

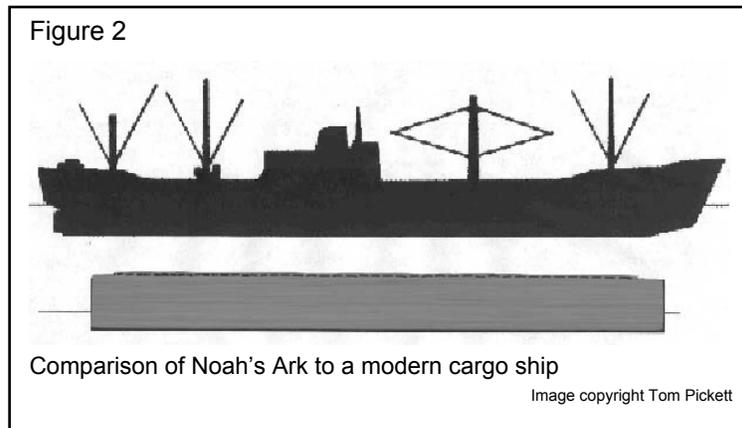
<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 68-71

<sup>9</sup> Morris HM, 22-27

ratio. When it was fully loaded, the Ark displaced about 22 ft. of water. Since it was 45 ft. high, just about half of the Ark was submerged, with the other half above the water. This provided perfect stability in the water; it was one of the most stable floating platforms ever built.<sup>7</sup>

The ratio of the dimensions of the ark is 30×5×3. This design is a perfect design to prevent capsizing in rough seas.<sup>2</sup> Specific stability testing of the Ark was performed by constructing a scale model of the Ark. It was tested in a special tank at Scripps Institute of Oceanography at La Jolla, California. The tank was capable of generating giant waves relative to the model ark, simulating severe sea conditions. The waves were much larger than would be experienced in the ocean today. The ark proved impossible to capsize. Due to the rectangular shape, it was capable of righting itself, even from 90 degrees. This is unheard of on an ocean-going vessel. Most vessels will develop severe stability problems at more than a 60 degree list. Dr. Werner Gitt, an engineer, showed by modern mathematics and physics that the dimensions of Noah's Ark were optimal for the most important factors in ark construction: first stability, and then, efficient use of building material.<sup>10</sup> He also pointed out why the images shown in children's books and elsewhere are actually ridiculously unstable. It is no wonder that confusion and disbelief in children and adults come from such misrepresentations.

**Capacity:** Comparison of the capacity of Noah's Ark with the capacity of a modern, 550 ft. long cargo ship shows the same capacity for both (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> The Ark had a volume of 1.4 million cubic feet and a gross tonnage of 14,000 tons. This is the equivalent of 522 railroad box cars. The ark could have carried over 125,000 sheep-sized animals. Interestingly, there are less than 18,000 species of land animals alive today. Also, the average size of most animals is less than that of a sheep.<sup>2</sup> Since there are not more than about 25,000 species of land animals known (mammals, bird, reptiles, amphibians), either living or extinct, and since the average size of such animals is certainly much less than that of a sheep, it is obvious that all the animals could easily have been stored in less than half the capacity of Noah's Ark, with each pair in appropriate "rooms" (literally "nests" in Hebrew).<sup>5</sup> It is apparent that the ark had plenty of room to hold the animals specified by God and much room



left for the other things such as food and other supplies for support of Noah's family and the animals. Creationist estimates for the minimum number of animals that would have been necessary to come on board the Ark have ranged from 16,000 to 35,000. The Ark as described in the Bible truly was a gigantic vessel. It was not until relatively recent times (in the late 1800s) that a ship was built that exceeded the capacity of Noah's Ark.

**Feasibility:** I want to mention the book by John Woodmorappe, *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study*, because it provides a scholarly assessment of the feasibility of Noah's Ark.<sup>11</sup> Dr. Henry Morris sums up the book by stating in the foreword, "In this unique volume, John Woodmorappe has provided an amazingly complete and compelling response to the many critics of the Biblical record of the Flood and Noah's Ark. While not questioning the possibility of God's miraculous activity in connection with the gathering and care of the animals in the Ark, Woodmorappe has shown that the Genesis record makes perfect sense even if no miracles at all were involved."<sup>12</sup> This work is a systematic evaluation of the housing, feeding, watering, and waste-disposal requirements of some 16,000 animals on Noah's Ark. It is also a comprehensive rebuttal to the myriads of arguments that have been made against the Ark over the centuries. It is shown that it was possible for eight people to care for 16,000 animals, and without miraculous

Divine intervention.<sup>13</sup> Woodmorappe concludes that it is obvious from this work that the oft-repeated pseudo-intellectual arguments against the Ark are without foundation. Fallen humans do not want to be reminded of God's judgment in the past any more than they want to be informed about God's judgment in the future. No doubt humanists will continue

repeating the same old false claims about the Ark and the Flood, or perhaps even dream up some new ones. The compromising evangelicals will continue promoting the local-flood copout because of their uncritical acceptance of such anti-Biblical claims ("after all, so many scientists can't be wrong"), and go on twisting the Bible—no matter how grotesque the contortions. But no matter, the evidence clearly shows that the Ark account and global Flood could have happened exactly as the Bible teaches. Far from actually being the modern-

<sup>11</sup> Woodmorappe J (1996) *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study*, Institute for Creation Research, El Cahon, CA

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ix

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xi

<sup>10</sup> Gitt W (2004) *How Well Designed Was Noah's Ark?* (DVD), Answers in Genesis (USA), Hebron, KY

istic travesty of “believing what you know isn’t true,”  
faith in God and His Word are eminently reasonable.<sup>14</sup>

I hope and pray that sharing the above information has helped you to come to a true understanding of Noah’s Ark and to hold your faith. Also, I hope it will help you to share your faith confidently with others to help them come to faith and hold theirs too. ☩

## COMING EVENTS

**Thursday, October 11, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631**  
To be determined.

**Thursday, November 8, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631**  
Dr. David Plaisted will discuss the sequence of events in the Genesis flood and some astronomical evidences for a past catastrophe

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 219