

Was Noah's Ark Designed As a Floating Temple?

An Old Testament KnoWhy¹ for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 6: "Noah ... Prepared an Ark to the Saving of His House" (Moses 8:19-30; Genesis 6-9; 11:1-9) (JBOTLO6A). See the link to the video supplement to this lesson at the end of this article under "Further Reading."



Figure 1. Thomas Cole, 1801-1848: The Subsiding Waters of the Deluge, 1829

Question: In the Bible, Noah's ark is described as a huge, rectangular box with three floors and a roof, which makes it sound more like a building than a boat. Was Noah's ark designed as a floating "temple"?

Summary: In the Bible, God reveals the design of three manmade structures: two of these are temples and one is Noah's ark. To ancient Israelites, the dimensions, shape, layout, materials, and function of the Ark would have immediately suggested that it, too, had been designed as a "temple." In addition, the story of the Flood explicitly echoes the scenes of Creation and Eden found in the story of Adam and Eve, including the Ark's final destination on the heights of a mountain.

The Know

How did people in ancient times read scripture? The Prophet Joseph Smith held the view that scripture should be “understood precisely as it reads.”² In saying this, however, it must be realized that what ancient peoples understood to be a literal interpretation of scripture is not the same as what most people think of today.

To those who recorded Bible history, it was not enough to describe events in photojournalistic fidelity to the sights and sounds that might have been picked up “objectively” by a camera (if one had been available in their day). Rather, an inspired author would want to write a history that acknowledged the hand of God within every important occurrence. To the ancients, important events in history were part of “one eternal round.”³ They took pains to help the reader detect that current happenings were consistent with divine patterns seen repeatedly within scriptural “types” at other times in history — past and future. A simple description of the bare “facts” of the situation, as we are culturally conditioned to prefer today, would not do for our forebears.⁴

Consider, as a more recent example, Joseph Smith’s description of the Book of Mormon translation process. Modern readers are usually interested in the detailed, “literal” accounts given by some of the Prophet’s contemporaries about the size and appearance of the instruments he was supposed to have used and the exact procedure by which the words of the ancient text were made known to him. This kind of account appeals to us — the more *physical* details the better — because we think this kind of history will help us best understand what “actually happened” as Joseph Smith translated.

However, we should realize that Joseph Smith himself declined to relate the specifics about how he translated, even in response to direct questioning while he was meeting with a small group of believing friends.⁵ The only explicit statement he made about the translation process is his testimony that it was accomplished “by the gift and power of God,”⁶ a description that avoids reinforcing the misleading impression that we can understand “what really happened” through detailed accounts of observers.

Of course, there is no reason to throw doubt on the idea that instruments and procedures such as those described by Joseph Smith’s contemporaries were used in translation. However, by wisely restricting his description to the statement that the translation was accomplished “by the gift and power of God,”⁷ the Prophet resisted the effort to describe this sacred process in a way that would appeal to modern standards and sensibilities. Instead, he pointed attention to what mattered most: that the translation was accomplished by divine means.

	<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, 2.3-5 ¹⁵⁰	Exodus 14–15	Exodus 19–24, 32–34
Deutero-Isaiah	Isaiah 43.2, ¹⁵¹ 48.10, 54.7-9	Isaiah 40, ¹⁵² 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 ¹⁵³	<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

Figure 2. Typology in the Biblical Tradition⁸

How should this lesson be applied to the story of Noah? As we will see, the story provides plenty of physical details, such as the size of the Ark, the place where it landed, and the date of its debarkation. All these details are important to the story — indeed they are crucial to our understanding. However, in most cases, you can be sure that small details of this sort are not included merely to add a touch of “realism” to the account for the sake of moderns such as you and me. Rather, they are there to help readers make mental associations with scriptural stories and religious concepts found as “types” elsewhere in scripture. In the case of Noah, for example, those who wrote the Bible seem to have wanted to highlight themes that would tie back to the story of Creation and would anticipate the Tabernacle of Moses. A photorealistic description of the Flood would not have accomplished the aims of its author. What readers needed most was not a modern historical account, but rather some help to recognize the backward and forward reverberations of Noah’s story elsewhere in scripture.

With these considerations in mind, we are ready to begin to answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: *Was Noah’s ark designed as a floating temple?*



Figure 3. Noah Sees the Ark in Vision. Detail of Patriarchs Window, Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, England

Resemblances between the Ark and the Tabernacle. It is significant that, apart from the Tabernacle of Moses¹⁰ and the Temple of Solomon,¹¹ Noah's ark is the only man-made structure mentioned in the Bible whose design was directly revealed by God.¹² In this image, God shows the plans for the Ark to Noah just as He later revealed the plans for the Tabernacle to Moses. The hands of Deity hold the heavenly curtain as Noah, compass in his left hand, regards intently.

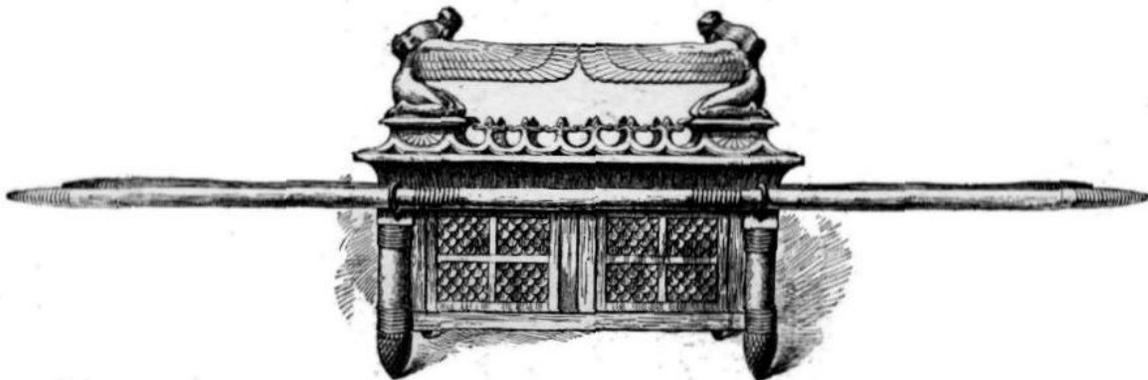


Figure 4. J. James Tissot, 1836-1902: The Ark of the Covenant, ca. 1896-1902.¹³

Layout and size of the Ark. There is no doubt among Bible scholars that, like the Tabernacle, Noah's Ark "was designed as a temple."¹⁴ The Ark's three decks suggest both the three divisions of the Tabernacle and the threefold layout of the Garden of Eden.¹⁵ Indeed, each of the three decks of Noah's Ark was exactly "the

same height as the Tabernacle and three times the area of the Tabernacle court.”¹⁶ Strengthening the association between the Ark and the Tabernacle is the fact that the Hebrew term for Noah’s Ark, *tevah*, later became the standard word for the Ark of the Covenant in Mishnaic Hebrew.¹⁷ In addition, the *Septuagint* used the same Greek term, *kibotos*, for both Noah’s ark and the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁸ Signaling another resemblance is that the ratio of the width to the height of both of these arks is 3:5.¹⁹

Rectangular shape and free-floating nature of the Ark. Going further, the shape of Noah’s ark was very un-boat-like. Westermann describes it as “a huge, rectangular box, with a roof.”²⁰ Thus, like the Ark of the Covenant, it was shaped like a chest. Not only was the Ark “not shaped like a ship,” it also lacked oars, “accentuating the fact that Noah’s deliverance was not dependent on navigating skills, [but rather happened] entirely by God’s will.”²¹ Its movement was solely determined by “the thrust of the water and wind.”²² This reminds us of the story of the infant Moses, the only other place in the Bible where the Hebrew word for ark appears. As you recall Moses’ deliverance from death was also made possible by a free-floating watercraft — specifically, in this case, a reed basket.²³ Reeds also seem to have been used as part of the construction materials for Noah’s Ark, as we will now discuss.

Temple allusions in the materials used to build the Ark. Genesis 6:14 reads: “Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.” Each of these three types of materials seem to have had temple connotations:

- *Gopher wood.* The referent for the term “gopher wood” — unique in the Bible to Genesis 6:14 — is uncertain.²⁴ Modern commentators often take it to mean cypress wood.²⁵ Because it is resistant to rot, the cypress tree was used in ancient times for the building of ships.²⁶ There is an extensive mythology about the cypress tree in cultures throughout the world. It is known for its fragrance and longevity²⁷ — qualities that have naturally linked it with ancient literature describing the Garden of Eden.²⁸ Cypress trees were sometimes used to make temple doors — gateways to Paradise.²⁹
- *Pitch.* There is a possibility of wordplay in the rhyme between *gopher* and *kopher* (“pitch”) within the same verse. As Harper notes, the word *kopher* might have reminded the ancient reader of “the rich cultic overtones of *kaphar* ‘ransom’ with its half-shekel temple atonement price,³⁰ *kapporeth* ‘mercy seat’ over the Ark of the Covenant,³¹ and the verb *kipper* ‘to atone’ associated with so many priestly rituals.”³² Some of these rituals involve the action of smearing or wiping, the same movements by which pitch is applied.³³ Just as God’s presence in the Tabernacle preserves the life of His people, so Noah’s Ark preserves a righteous remnant of humanity along with representatives of all its creatures.



Figure 5. Nik Wheeler, 1939-: Marsh Arab Village, 1974

- *Reeds.* Although reed-huts may sometimes serve as secular enclosures, references to them in Mesopotamian flood stories clearly point to their ancient use as divine sanctuaries.³⁴ In a Mesopotamian account of the flood story, Ziusudra enters into a “reed-hut... temple,”³⁵ where he stands “day after day” listening to the “conversation” of the divine assembly.³⁶ Eventually, Ziusudra learns that the council of the gods have decided to destroy mankind by a devastating flood. Regretting the decision, the god Enki warns Ziusudra and instructs him on how to build a boat. Similar to ancient Near East parallels where the gods whisper their secrets to mortals standing on the other side of temple veils separating the divine and human realms,³⁷ Enki conveys his message privately through a thin wall of the sanctuary.³⁸ Related accounts tell us that Enki instructed Ziusudra to tear down the reed-hut temple and to use the materials to build a boat.³⁹

Concluding “that the apparent lack of the reed-hut or primeval shrine in the Genesis flood account demands closer inspection,”⁴⁰ Jason McCann observes⁴¹ that reinterpreting the Hebrew for the description of “rooms” in the Ark would lead to an alternate translation describing it as “*woven-of-reeds.*” Thus, the *New Jerusalem Bible* translation of Genesis 6:14:42 “Make yourself an ark out of resinous wood. Make it with *reeds* and caulk it with pitch inside and out.”

Let’s now turn our attention to Creation and Garden themes in the story of the Flood, where we will find temple parallels not only to the *structure* of the Ark, but also in its *function*.

Creation. In considering the role of Noah’s ark in the flood story, it should be remembered that it was, specifically, a *mobile* sanctuary,⁴³ as were, of course, the Israelite Tabernacle and the ark made of reeds that saved the baby Moses.

Despite its ungainly shape as a buoyant temple, the Ark is portrayed as floating confidently above the chaos of the great deep. Significantly, the motion of the Ark “upon the face of the waters”⁴⁴ paralleled the movement of the Spirit of God “upon the face of the waters”⁴⁵ at the original creation of heaven and earth. The deliberate nature of this parallel is made clear when we consider that these are the only two verses in the Bible that contain the phrase “the face of the waters.” In short, we are made to understand that in the presence of the Ark there has been a return of the same Spirit of God that had hovered over the waters at Creation — the Spirit whose previous withdrawal had been predicted in Genesis 6:3.⁴⁶



Figure 6. The Ark as a Mini-Replica of Creation⁴⁷

The motion of the Ark “upon the face of the waters,”⁴⁸ like the Spirit of God “upon the face of the waters”⁴⁹ at Creation, was a portent of the appearance of light and life. Within the Ark, a “mini replica of Creation,”⁵⁰ were the last vestiges of the *original* Creation, “an alternative earth for all living creatures,”⁵¹ “a colony of heaven”⁵² containing seedlings for the planting of a second Garden of Eden,⁵³ the nucleus of a new world — all hidden within a vessel of rescue described in scripture, like the Tabernacle, as a likeness of God’s own traveling pavilion.⁵⁴

Just as the Spirit of God patiently brooded⁵⁵ over the great deep at Creation, and just as “the longsuffering of God waited... while the ark was a preparing,”⁵⁶ so the indefatigable Noah endured the long brooding of the Ark over the slowly receding waters of the Deluge.⁵⁷ At last, the dry land appeared.⁵⁸

The settling of the Ark at the top of the first mountain to emerge after the Flood would have reminded ancient readers of the emergence of the dry land at Creation. In ancient Israel, the Foundation Stone in front of the Ark of the Covenant:⁵⁹ “was the first solid material to emerge from the waters of Creation,⁶⁰ and it was upon this stone that the Deity effected Creation.”

Note also that it was “in the six hundred and *first* year [of Noah’s life] in the *first* month, the *first* day of the month” that “the waters were dried up.”⁶¹ The wording of this verse would have hinted to ancient reader that there was special significance to the date. They would have remembered that it was also the “first day of the first month”⁶² when the Tabernacle was dedicated, and that “Solomon’s temple was dedicated at the New Year festival in the autumn.”⁶³



Figure 7. J. James Tissot, 1836-1902 : *Noah’s Sacrifice*, ca. 1896-1902

Garden. Allusions to Garden of Eden and temple themes begin as soon as Noah and his family leave the Ark. Just as the book of Moses highlights Adam’s diligence in offering sacrifice as soon as he entered the fallen world,⁶⁴ Genesis describes Noah’s first action on the renewed earth as being the building of an altar for burnt offerings.⁶⁵ Likewise, in both accounts, God’s blessing is followed by a commandment to multiply and replenish the earth.⁶⁶ Both stories contain instructions about what the protagonists can and cannot eat.⁶⁷ Notably, in each case, a covenant is established in a context of ordinances and signs or tokens.⁶⁸ More specifically, according to Pseudo-Philo,⁶⁹ the rainbow as a sign or token of a covenant of higher priesthood blessings was said by God to be as an analogue of Moses’ staff, a symbol of kingship.⁷⁰ Both the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Noah prominently feature the theme of nakedness being covered by a garment.⁷¹ Noah, like Adam, is called the “lord of the whole earth.”⁷² Surely, it is no exaggeration to say that Noah is portrayed as a new Adam, “reversing the estrangement” between God and man by means of an atoning sacrifice.⁷³

Having outlined some of the Creation and Garden themes within the story of Noah, the next article will discuss a “fall” and consequent judgment.

The Why

Given their status as targets of humor and caricature, it is sometimes difficult to be taken seriously when discussing the well-worn stories of Adam, Eve, and Noah. Hugh Nibley described the problem this way:⁷⁴

The stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood have always furnished unbelievers with their best ammunition against believers, because they are the easiest to visualize, popularize, and satirize of any Bible accounts. Everyone has seen a garden and been caught in a pouring rain. It requires no effort of imagination for a six-year-old to convert concise and straightforward Sunday-school recitals into the vivid images that will stay with him for the rest of his life. These stories retain the form of the nursery tales they assume in the imaginations of small children, to be defended by grown-ups who refuse to distinguish between childlike faith and thinking as a child when it is time to “put away childish things.”⁷⁵ It is equally easy and deceptive to fall into adolescent disillusionment and with one’s emancipated teachers to smile tolerantly at the simple gullibility of bygone days, while passing stern moral judgment on the savage old God who damns Adam for eating the fruit He put in his way and, overreacting with impetuous violence, wipes out Noah’s neighbors simply for making fun of his boat-building on a fine summer’s day.

We do an injustice, both to these marvelous records and to ourselves, when we fail to pursue scriptural understanding beyond the initial level of cartoon cut-outs drummed into the minds of young children.⁷⁶ To understand the stories of Adam and Eve and Noah for what they are, we need to bring our best: the powerful tools of modern scholarship, the additional light shed by modern revelation, and, of no less importance, the consecrated dedication of inquiring minds and honest hearts diligently seeking divine inspiration. The simple fantasies of a “fanciful and flowery and heated imagination”⁷⁷ will not suffice.

Further Study

As a video supplement to this lesson, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “The Ark and the Tent: Temple Symbolism in the Story of Noah” on the YouTube Interpreter Foundation channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIfArfB54Mk>). For additional material on temple symbolism in the story of Noah, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Ark and Tent*, available as a free pdf download at www.TempleThemes.net.

For a verse-by-verse commentary on the story of Noah in Genesis and the book of Moses, see J. M. Bradshaw, *et al.*, *God's Image 2*, pp. 199-294. The book is available for purchase in print at Amazon.com and as a free pdf download at www.TempleThemes.net.

For a scripture roundtable video from The Interpreter Foundation on the subject of Gospel Doctrine lesson 6, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vrupSqzbIQ>.

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Endnotes

1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 J. Smith, Jr., Words, 29 January 1843, p. 161.

3 1 Nephi 10:19; Alma 7:30, 37:12; D&C 3:2; 35:1.

4 The same seeking for divine patterns in sacred history occurs today. For example, Church leaders have seen lessons in the story of Noah and of Joseph in Egypt that apply to the need for family preparedness (e.g., G. B. Hinckley, 'If ye are prepared ye shall not fear').

5 In response to a request in 1831 by his brother Hyrum to explain the translation process more fully, Joseph Smith said that “it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and...it was not expedient for him to relate these things” (J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 1:220).

6 *Ibid.*, 1:315; see also D&C 1:29, 20:8.

7 *Ibid.*, 1:315; see also D&C 1:29, 20:8.

8 N. Wyatt, *Water*, pp. 224-225.

9 Photograph courtesy of Stephen T. Whitlock, 1951-.

10 Exodus 25:8-40.

11 1 Chronicles 28:11-12, 19.

12 Genesis 6:14-16. Cf. E. A. Harper, *You Shall Make*, pp. 55-56; L. M. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured* (pre-publication draft), pp. 155-156.

13 J. J. Tissot, *Old Testament*, 1:229. In the public domain.

14 C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Glory*, p. 41. See also Wyatt’s discussion of the arks of Noah and Moses, the ark of the covenant, and the story of Utnapishtim in *Gilgamesh* (N. Wyatt, *Water*, pp. 214-216).

15 J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes*, pp. 77-87. Cf. Ephrem the Syrian, *Paradise*, p. 53; A. S.-M. Ri, *Caverne Syriaque*, p. 208. See the discussion in E. A. Harper, *You Shall Make*, p. 50 of readings of Genesis 6:16 in the Targums and the Septuagint, and for a description of parallels in 1 Kings 6:6 and Ezekiel 41:7.

16 J. D. G. Dunn *et al.*, *Commentary*, p. 44. Following B. Jacob, Wenham further explains:

... that if each deck were further subdivided into three sections (cf. *Gilgamesh*’s nine sections (A. George, *Gilgamesh*, 11:62, p. 90), the Ark would have had three decks the same height as the Tabernacle and three sections on each deck the same size as the Tabernacle courtyard.

Regarding similarities in the Genesis 1 account of Creation, the Exodus 25ff. account of the building of the Tabernacle, and the account of the building of the ark, Sailhamer writes (J. H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, p. 82, see also table on p. 84):

Each account has a discernible pattern: God speaks (*wayyo’mer/wayedabber*), an action is commanded (imperative/jussive), and the command is carried out (*wayya’as*) according to God’s will

(*wayehi ken/kaaser siwwah 'elohim*). The key to these similarities lies in the observation that each narrative concludes with a divine blessing (*wayebarek*, Genesis 1:28, 9:1; Exodus 39:43) and, in the case of the Tabernacle and Noah's Ark, a divinely ordained *covenant* (Genesis 6:8; Exodus 34:27; in this regard it is of some importance that later biblical tradition also associated the events of Genesis 1-3 with the making of a divine covenant; cf. Hosea 6:7). Noah, like Moses, followed closely the commands of God and in so doing found salvation and blessing in his *covenant*.

17 V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 280. See Exodus 27. Cf. J. W. Wevers, Notes, Genesis 6:14, p. 83. In other words, the dimensions of the Tabernacle courtyard "has the same width [as the Ark] but one-third the length and height" (Hendel in H. W. Attridge *et al.*, HarperCollins Study Bible, p. 14 n. 6:14-16).

18 C. Dogniez *et al.*, Pentateuque, p. 150 n. Genesis 6:14, pp. 314-315 n. Exodus 2:3.

19 See Genesis 6:15 and Exodus 25:10.

20 C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, p. 418. Cassuto further observes (U. Cassuto, Noah to Abraham, p. 60):

The sentence "and the ark went on the face of the waters" (Genesis 8:18) is not suited to a boat, which is navigated by its mariners, but to something that floats on the surface of the waters and moves in accordance with the thrust of the water and wind. Similarly, the subsequent statement (Genesis 8:4) "the ark came to rest... upon the mountains of Ararat" implies an object that can *rest* upon the ground; this is easy for an ark to do, since its bottom is straight and horizontal, but not for a ship.

21 M. Zlotowitz *et al.*, Bereishis, p. 230; cf. U. Cassuto, Noah to Abraham, pp. 60-61; L. M. Morales, The Tabernacle Pre-Figured (pre-publication draft), p. 155.

22 U. Cassuto, Noah to Abraham, p. 60. This recalls the ancient Sumerian story of *Enki's Journey to Nibru*, where the boat's movement is not directed by its captain, but rather it "departs of its own accord" (J. A. Black *et al.*, *Enki's Journey*, 83-92, p. 332).

23 Exodus 2:3, 5. See U. Cassuto, Noah to Abraham, p. 59. Note, however, that the Greek *Septuagint* translates the Hebrew word (*tevah*) differently in Genesis 6:14 (*kibotos*) and Exodus 2:3 (*thibis*) (C. Dogniez *et al.*, Pentateuque, pp. 314-315 n. Exodus 2:3). See C. Cohen, Hebrew *TBH* for a discussion of the difficulties in explaining why the same Hebrew term *tevah* was used in the story of Noah's Ark and the ark of Moses.

24 See, e.g., U. Cassuto, Noah to Abraham, p. 61.

25 R. Alter, *Five Books*, Genesis 6:14, p. 41; K. L. Barker, Zondervan, Genesis 6:14, p. 14. Cf. A. Chouraqui, *Bible*, Genesis 6:14, p. 27: “Fais-toi une caisse en bois de cyprès [Make a coffer of cypress wood].” See also A. Kaplan, *La Torah Vivante*, p. 17 n. 6.14 cyprès.

26 J. Feliks, *Cypress*.

27 For example, a 4500-year-old Cypress tree stands on the grounds of the Grand Mosque of Abarqu, near the village Shiraz in Iran’s southeastern province of Yazd (Abarqu's cypress, Abarqu's cypress). Cf. A. V. W. Jackson, *Cypress of Kashmar*.

28 See, e.g., J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Figure E25-2, p. 593, Endnote E-111, p. 729.

29 E.g., 1 Kings 6:34 (KJV mistranslates the wood as “fir”).

30 Exodus 30:11-13.

31 Exodus 25:17-22.

32 Exodus 29-30; Leviticus and Numbers *passim*.

33 See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, Endnote 3-57, p. 211; E. A. Harper, *You Shall Make*, pp. 3-4. Of the meaning of *kpr*, Margaret Barker writes (M. Barker, *Atonement*):

Atonement translates the Hebrew *kpr*, but the meaning of *kpr* in a ritual context is not known. Investigations have uncovered only what actions were used in the rites of atonement, not what that action was believed to effect. The possibilities for its meaning are “cover” or “smear” or “wipe,” but these reveal no more than the exact meaning of “breaking bread” reveals about the Christian Eucharist.... I should like to quote here from an article by Mary Douglas published... in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (M. Douglas, *Atonement*, p. 117. See also M. Douglas, *Leviticus*, p. 234: “Leviticus actually says less about the need to wash or purge than it says about ‘covering.’”):

Terms derived from cleansing, washing and purging have imported into biblical scholarship distractions which have occluded Leviticus’ own very specific and clear description of atonement. According to the illustrative cases from Leviticus, to atone means to cover or recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering. As a noun, what is translated atonement, expiation or purgation means integument made good; conversely, the examples in the book indicate that defilement means integument torn. Atonement does not mean covering a sin so as to hide it from the sight

of God; it means making good an outer layer which has rotted or been pierced.

This sounds very like the cosmic covenant with its system of bonds maintaining the created order, broken by sin and repaired by “atonement.”

34 A. L. Oppenheim, *Mesopotamian Temple*, p. 158.

35 J. M. McCann, *Woven*, p. 1.

36 T. Jacobsen, *Eridu*, 89-92, p. 158.

37 Cf. H. W. Nibley, *Babylonian Background*, p. 362: “The manner in which [Utnapishtim] received the revelation is interesting: the will of father Anu, the Lord of Heaven, was transmitted to the hero through a screen or partition made of matting, a *kikkisu*, such as was ritually used in temples.” See also J. M. Bradshaw, *Tree of Knowledge*.

38 T. Jacobsen, *Eridu*, 93-96, p. 158.

39 E.g., S. Dalley, *Atrahasis*, 3:21-22, p. 29; A. George, *Gilgamesh*, 11:22-24, p. 89.

40 J. M. McCann, *Woven*, p. 8.

41 See *ibid.*, pp. 9-17 for an extended discussion of this translation issue.

42 R. De Vaux, *Bible*, Genesis 6:14, p. 25.

43 Recognizing that even the most seemingly permanent temple complexes are best viewed only as way stations, Nibley generalized the concept of mobile sanctuaries to include all current earthly structures (H. W. Nibley, *Tenting*, pp. 42-43):

The most wonderful thing about Jerusalem the Holy City is its mobility: at one time it is taken up to heaven and at another it descends to earth or even makes a rendezvous with the earthly Jerusalem at some point in space halfway between. In this respect both the city and the temple are best thought of in terms of a tent, ... at least until the time comes when the saints “will no longer have to use a movable tent” [Origen, *John*, 10:23, p. 404. “The pitching of the tent outside the camp represents God’s remoteness from the impure world” (H. W. Nibley, *Tenting*, p. 79 n. 40)] according to the early Fathers, who get the idea from the New Testament... [E.g., “*John* 1:14 reads literally, ‘the *logos* was made flesh and pitched his tent [*eskenosen*] among us’; and after the Resurrection the Lord ‘camps’ with his disciples, *Acts* 1:4. At the Transfiguration Peter prematurely proposed setting up three tents for taking possession (*Matthew* 17:4; *Mark*

9:5; Luke 9:33)” (ibid., p. 80 n. 41] It is now fairly certain, moreover, that the great temples of the ancients were not designed to be dwelling-houses of deity but rather stations or landing-places, fitted with inclined ramps, stairways, passageways, waiting-rooms, elaborate systems of gates, and so forth, for the convenience of traveling divinities, whose sacred boats and wagons stood ever ready to take them on their endless junkets from shrine to shrine and from festival to festival through the cosmic spaces. The Great Pyramid itself, we are now assured, is the symbol not of immovable stability but of constant migration and movement between the worlds; and the ziggurats of Mesopotamia, far from being immovable, are reproduced in the seven-stepped throne of the thundering sky-wagon.

44 Genesis 7:18.

45 Genesis 1:2. The singular rather than the plural term for “water” appears in JST OT2, the source of Moses 2:2 (S. H. Faulring *et al.*, Original Manuscripts, p. 595). However “waters” (Hebrew *mayim*) the original term in Genesis, is used in JST OT1 as well as in the later translation of the book of Abraham. This raises the possibility that the change in OT2 was made erroneously or on John Whitmer’s initiative rather than the Prophet’s (see K. P. Jackson, Book of Moses, p. 10).

46 V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 1-17, p. 267. Though differing in detail, a number of Jewish sources describe the similar process of the removal of the *Shekhinah*—representing God’s presence—in various stages, and its return at the dedication of the Tabernacle. See, e.g., H. Schwartz, Tree, p. 51, see also pp. 55-56.

47 Photo licensed from Fotolia.

48 Genesis 7:18.

49 Genesis 1:2.

50 E. A. Harper, You Shall Make, p. 54. Cf. L. M. Morales, The Tabernacle Pre-Figured (pre-publication draft), pp. 160-162. Morales argues that the “building and filling of the Ark... exhibit a correspondence with the ‘building’ and filling of the cosmos” at the time of Creation (ibid., p. 161).

51 E. A. Harper, You Shall Make, p. 54.

52 L. M. Morales, The Tabernacle Pre-Figured (pre-publication draft), p. 163.

53 Cf. H. W. Nibley, Treasures, p. 185, where he argues from Mandaean and Gnostic sources describing the process of creating new worlds through a “colonizing process called ‘planting.’” “[T]hose spirits that bring their treasures to a new world are called ‘Plants,’ more rarely ‘seeds,’ of their father or ‘Planter’ in another world [cf. Adam’s “planting” (E. S. Drower, Prayerbook, #378, pp. 283, 286, 290)]. Every planting goes out from a Treasure House, either as the

essential material elements or as the colonizers themselves, who come from a sort of mustering-area called the “Treasure-house of Souls.”

54 Scripture makes a clear distinction between the fixed heavenly temple and its portable counterparts. For example, in Psalm 18 and D&C 121:1, the “pavilion” (i.e., booth or canopy; Hebrew *sukkah*) of “God’s hiding place” should not be equated with the celestial “temple” (i.e., palace; Hebrew *hekal*) to which the prayers of the oppressed ascend (see Psalm 18:6; D&C 121:2; S. E. Robinson *et al.*, D&C Commentary, 4:151. Contrast J. F. McConkie *et al.*, Revelations, p. 945, who mistakenly identifies the “pavilion” of D&C 121:1 as God’s heavenly residence). Rather, it is a representation of a movable “conveyance” (G. B. Eden, *Mystical Architecture*, p. 22; cf. M.-A. Ouaknin *et al.*, *Rabbi Éliézer*, 12, p. 82) in which God could swiftly descend to rescue His people from mortal danger (K. L. Barker, *Zondervan*, p. 803 n. 18:7-15). The sense of the action is succinctly captured by Robert Alter: “The outcry of the beleaguered warrior ascends all the way to the highest heavens, thus launching a downward vertical movement” of God’s own chariot (R. Alter, *Psalms*, p. 53 n. 8).

Some Christians came to view Psalm 18 as foreshadowing the Incarnation of God’s son (J. N. Sparks *et al.*, *Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 691 n. 17). Noah’s Ark was sometimes seen in a similar fashion: “The ark was a type of the Mother of God with Christ and the Church in her womb (Akath). The flood-waters were a type of baptism, in which we are saved (1 Peter 3:18-22)” (*ibid.*, Genesis 6:14-21, p. 12).

55 The word describing the agent of divine movement is expressed in the beginning of the story of Creation and in the story of the Flood using the same Hebrew term, *ruach* (in Genesis 1:2, the KJV translates this as “spirit,” while in Genesis 8:1 it is rendered as “wind”). In the former, the *ruach* is described as “moving” using the Hebrew verb *merahepet*, which literally “denotes a physical activity of flight over water” (M. S. Smith, *Priestly Vision*, p. 55), however Walton has argued that the wider connotation in both the Creation and Flood accounts expresses “a state of preparedness” (J. H. Walton, *Genesis 1*, p. 149): “*ruach* is related to the presence of the deity, preparing to participate in Creation” (*ibid.*, p. 149).

Consistent with this reading that understands this verse as a period of divine preparation, the creation story in the Joseph Smith’s book of Abraham employs the term “brooding” rather than “moving” as we find in the King James Version. Note that this change is consistent with the English translation given Hebrew grammar book that was studied by Joseph Smith in Kirtland (see J. Seixas, *Manual*, p. 31). John Milton (*J. Milton, Paradise Lost*, 1:19-22, p. 16; H. J. Hodges, *Dove*; cf. Augustine, *Literal*, 18:36; E. A. W. Budge, *Cave*, p. 44) interpreted the passage similarly in *Paradise Lost*, drawing from images such as the dove sent out by Noah (Genesis 8:6-12), the dove at Jesus’ baptism (John 1:32), and a hen protectively covering her young with her wing (Luke 13:34):

[T]hou from the first

Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread

Dovelike satst brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant.”

“Brooding” enjoys rich connotations, including, as Nibley observes (H. W. Nibley, *Before Adam*, p. 69), not only “to sit or incubate [eggs] for the purpose of hatching” but also:

... “to dwell continuously on a subject.” Brooding is just the right word—a quite long quiet period of preparation in which apparently nothing was happening. Something was to come out of the water, incubating, waiting—a long, long time.

Some commentators emphatically deny any connection of the Hebrew term with the concept of brooding (e.g., U. Cassuto, *Adam to Noah*, pp. 24-25). However, the “brooding” interpretation is not only attested by a Syriac cognate (F. Brown *et al.*, *Lexicon*, 7363, p. 934b) but also has a venerable history, going back at least to Rashi who spoke specifically of the relationship between the dove and its nest. In doing so, he referred to the Old French term *acoveter*, related both to the modern French *couver* (from Latin *cubare*—to brood and protect) and *couvrir* (from Latin *cooperire*—to cover completely). Intriguingly, this latter sense is related to the Hebrew term for the atonement, *kipper* (M. Barker, *Atonement*; A. Rey, *Dictionnaire*, 1:555).

Going further, Barker admits the possibility of a subtle wordplay in examining the reversal of consonantal sounds between “brood/hover” and “atone”: “The verb for ‘hover’ is *rchp*, the middle letter is *cheth*, and the verb for ‘atone’ is *kpr*, the initial letter being a *kaph*, which had a similar sound. The same three consonantal sounds could have been word play, *rchp/kpr*” (M. Barker, June 11 2007). “There is sound play like this in the temple style” (*ibid.*; see M. Barker, *Hidden*, pp. 15-17). In this admittedly speculative interpretation, one might see an image of God, prior to the first day of Creation, figuratively “hovering/atoning” [*rchp/kpr*] over the singularity of the inchoate universe, just as the Ark smeared with pitch [*kaphar*] later moved over the face of the waters “when the waters cover[ed] over and atone[d] for the violence of the world” (E. A. Harper, *You Shall Make*, p. 4).

56 1 Peter 3:20.

57 In the following chiasmic structuring of the account, Wenham demonstrates the pattern of “waiting” throughout the story, as well as the centrality of the theme of Genesis 8:1: “But God remembered Noah” (G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 157):

7 days of waiting for flood (7:4)
7 days of waiting for flood (7:10)
40 days of flood (7:17a)
150 days of water triumphing (7:24)
150 days of water waning (8:3)

40 days of waiting (8:6)
7 days of waiting (8:10)
7 days of waiting (8:12)

58 J. H. Sailhamer, Genesis, p. 89 observes:

The description of God's rescue of Noah foreshadows God's deliverance of Israel in the Exodus. Just as later "God remembered his covenant" (Exodus 2:24) and sent "a strong east wind" to dry up the waters before his people (Exodus 14:21) so that they "went through... on dry ground" (Exodus 14:22), so also in the story of the Flood we read that "God remembered" those in the ark and sent a "wind" over the waters (Genesis 8:1) so that his people might come out on "dry ground" (Genesis 8:14).

59 J. M. Lundquist, Meeting Place, p. 7. Ancient temples found in other cultures throughout the world also represent—and are often built upon—elevations that emulate the holy mountain at the starting point of Creation (see, e.g., E. A. S. Butterworth, Tree; R. J. Clifford, Temple; R. J. Clifford, Cosmic Mountain).

60 E.g., Psalm 104:5-9.

61 Genesis 8:13.

62 Exodus 40:1.

63 N. Wyatt, Water, pp. 215-216. See 1 Kings 8:2. Wyatt remarks that the expression about the New Year festival comes from S. W. Holloway, What Ship, noting that "[m]any scholars regard the search for the New Year festival to be something of a futile exercise" (N. Wyatt, Water, p. 235 n. 129).

64 Moses 5:5-8.

65 Genesis 8:20.

66 See Moses 2:28; Genesis 9:1, 7.

67 See Moses 2:28-30, 3:9, 16-17; Genesis 9:2-4.

68 See Moses 5:5, 59; Genesis 9:9-17.

69 See Pseudo-Philo, Biblical Antiquities, 19:11, pp. 129-130.

70 See J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, Investiture Panel, pp. 38-39 for a brief summary of the symbolism of the staff, and B. N. Fisk, Remember, pp. 276-281 for Pseudo-Philo's identification of the staff with the rainbow. Just prior to his equating of the rainbow and the staff as a "witness between me and my people," Pseudo-Philo, Biblical Antiquities, 19:12, pp. 130 has the Lord showing Moses "the measures of the sanctuary, and the number of the offerings, and the sign whereby

men shall interpret (literally, begin to look upon) the heaven, and said: These are the things which were forbidden to the sons of men because they sinned” (cf. JST Exodus 34:1-2).

71 See Moses 4:27; Genesis 9:21-22.

72 G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, p. 198.

73 L. M. Morales, The Tabernacle Pre-Figured (pre-publication draft), p. 197. Cf. O. S. Wintermute, Jubilees, 6:2, p. 66: “And he made atonement for the land. And he took the kid of a goat, and he made atonement with its blood for all the sins of the land because everything which was on it had been blotted out except those who were in the ark with Noah.” See also F. G. Martinez, Genesis Apocryphon, 10:13, p. 231: “I atoned for the whole earth.”

74 H. W. Nibley, Before Adam, p. 63. Commenting further on simplistic assumptions that believers too often apply to the story of Noah, Nibley wrote (*ibid.*, p. 66):

From where he was, “the whole earth” (Genesis 8:9) was covered with water as far as he could see; after things had quieted down for 150 days and the ark ground to a halt, it was still three months before he could see any mountaintops. But what were conditions in other parts of the world? If Noah knew that, he would not have sent forth messenger birds to explore. The flood as he described it is what he saw of it. “He sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground” (Genesis 8:8). Couldn’t he see for himself? Not where the dove went. It was not until seven days later that he sent it out again; and after flying all day, the bird came back with a green leaf fetched from afar; “so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (Genesis 8:11). Still he waited another seven days. When the dove did not return, Noah had his answer. In some distant place, trees were bearing and there was birdfood to be found. But not where Noah was. All that time he had not dared to open up.

Note that the author does not fall into the literary trap of telling where the birds went and what they saw. That became a standard theme of early Oriental literature, faithfully reflected in the classical stories of the sea-eagle and the hoopoe. All Noah tells us is what *he* saw of the birds and the flood. The rain continued at least in spots, for there was that magnificent rainbow. Why do Christians insist on calling it the first rainbow, just because it is the first mentioned? Who says that water drops did not refract light until that day? Well, my old Sunday School teacher, for one, used to say it. The rainbow, like the sunrise, is strictly the product of a point of view, for which the beholder must stand in a particular place while it is raining in another particular place and the sun is in a third particular place, if he is to see it at all. It is a lesson in relativity.

Of course, Nibley also took issue with skeptics who believed that there was no historical antecedent for the kinds of events reported in the Bible. As Parley P. Pratt wrote about such views in his day (P. P. Pratt, *Voice*, p. 4):

It was well for Noah that he was not well-versed in the spiritualizing systems of modern divinity; for under their benighted influence he would never have believed that so marvelous a prophecy would have had a literal meaning and fulfillment. No, he would have been told that the Flood meant a spiritual flood, and the Ark a spiritual ark, and the moment he thought otherwise he would have been set down as a fanatic, knave, or fool. But it was so—that he believed the prophecy literally. Here then is a fair sample of foreknowledge, for all the world who did not possess it perished by the Flood.

Truman G. Madsen further explains (T. G. Madsen, *Essay*, p. xv):

Mormons seem to be biblicistic and literalistic. But it is the recognition that the Bible is in central parts clear narrative, an account of genuine persons involved in genuine events, that is characteristic ... Creation was an event; the Resurrection occurred. The religious experiences chronicled in the book of Acts are acts in a book. The Bible, the point is, becomes thus a temporal document just as much as it is spiritual. And the same can be said for other Mormon scriptural writings. They too are “time-bound”; they cannot be understood in a non-historical way. They arise from and, it is hoped, return to the concrete realities of the human predicament.

For more about LDS perspectives on historicity of the scriptures, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1, Excursus 13: Some Perspectives on Historicity*, pp. 552-553. See D. E. Jeffery, *Noah's Flood* and C. M. White *et al.*, *Noachian Flood Story* for considered LDS perspectives on reconciling current scientific findings with the Genesis flood story. See also J. A. Widtsoe, *Flood*; M. S. Petersen, *Earth*, p. 432.

75 1 Corinthians 13:11.

76 LaCocque observes: “To consider [such stories as tales] for children is only possible when the story is vaguely known, when it is considered from a distance, and with a preconceived feeling that nothing can be learned from so ‘naïve’ a tale” (A. LaCocque, *Trial*, pp. 10-11).

77 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 25 March 1839, p. 137.