

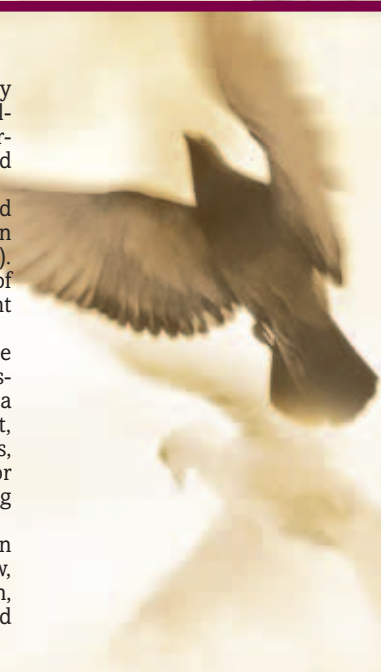
**WHEN THE BIRD DOES NOT RETURN (GEN. 8:6-12)**

Both similarities and differences exist between the biblical Flood story in Gen. 6—9 and the Mesopotamian flood legend known as the Gilgamesh Epic. Among the similarities are the birds—doves, ravens, sparrows—that are sent out to determine if the floodwaters have receded (Gen. 8:6-12).

Though the Gilgamesh flood story appears already in the mid-3rd millennium Sumerian stories, the epic account most widely known comes from the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). The story is related by the flood survivor, Utnapishtim, at the edge of the world, where Gilgamesh (king of Uruk around 2600 B.C.) had sought him to discover how to become immortal.

There is no reason given in this account for the decision by the council of the gods to destroy the earth. However, Ea, the god of wisdom, realizing that destruction was a mistake, warns Utnapishtim that a flood is coming. Utnapishtim tears down his house and builds a boat, into which he gathers animals in pairs, seeds of all plants, his relatives, and skilled craftsmen. The deities unleash the flood as a weapon for seven days, destroying everything which is not in the boat and terrifying themselves as well.

After the divine flood ceased, the boat rested on a mountaintop in the Zagros Mountains. Utnapishtim releases first a dove, then a sparrow, both of whom return without finding a place to land, and lastly a raven, who does not return. The flood is finally over and everything is allowed to leave the boat and repopulate the earth.



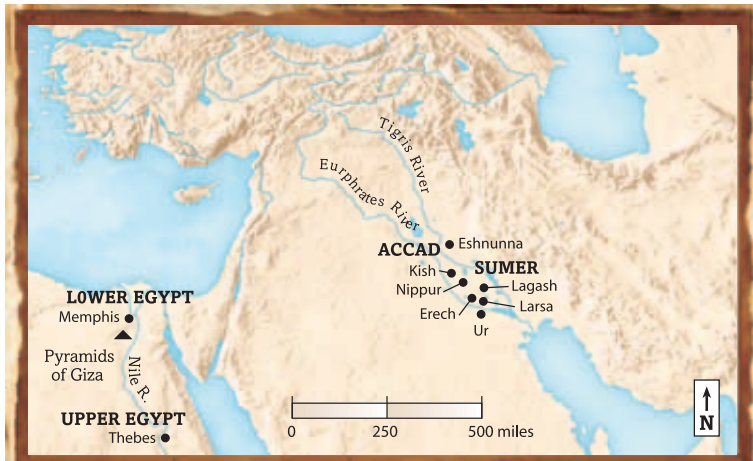
and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. <sup>20</sup>The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. <sup>21</sup>And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. <sup>22</sup>All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit<sup>a</sup> of life, all that was on the dry land, died. <sup>23</sup>So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. <sup>24</sup>And

7:22 <sup>a</sup>Septuagint and Vulgate omit of the spirit.

the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.

**Noah's Deliverance**

**8** <sup>1</sup>Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. <sup>2</sup>The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. <sup>3</sup>And the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased. <sup>4</sup>Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>And



**The Ancient Near East 3000 B.C.**

During the 3rd millennium Lower and Upper Egypt were united. Egypt's Old Kingdom (2700-2160 B.C.) produced the great pyramids, such as those at Giza. In Mesopotamia, the land of Sumer developed a system of independent city-states. Toward the end of the millennium this city-state rule was replaced by a more extensive territorial rule centered in Accad.