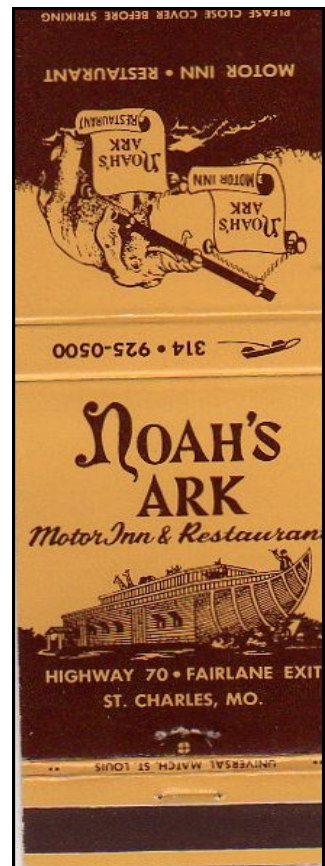
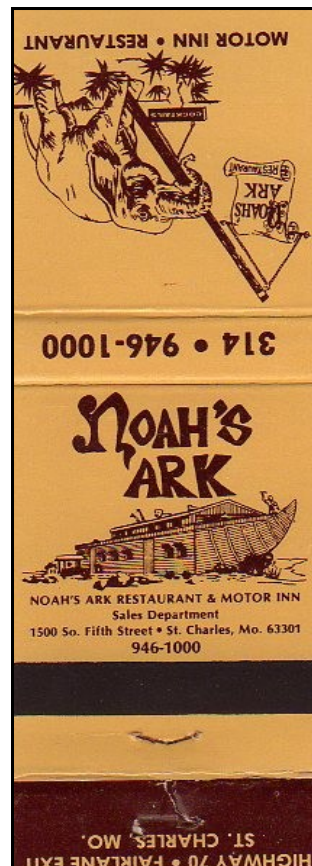


Myths & Tales:

Noah's Ark, as described in Genesis, is the vessel built by Noah at God's command to save Noah, his family, and the world's animals, from the Deluge. God sends a Flood to destroy the Earth. Noah is instructed to build an Ark and to retreat to it with his family and male and female representatives of the animals. The flood waters rise, and those inside the Ark survive as the rest of creation is extinguished. At the height of the flood "God remembered Noah", the waters abate, and dry land reappears. Noah and the animals leave the Ark, Noah offers a sacrifice, and God vows never again to destroy the Earth in this manner.

The story has been subject to extensive elaborations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, ranging from hypothetical solutions to practical problems (e.g. waste disposal and the problem of lighting the interior), through to theological interpretations (e.g. the Ark as the precursor of the Church in offering salvation to mankind). By the 19th century, the discoveries of geologists, archaeologists and Biblical scholars had led most people to abandon a literal interpretation of the Ark story. Nevertheless, Biblical literalists continue to explore the region of the mountains of Ararat, in northeastern Turkey, where the Bible says the Ark came to rest.

In 1862 William Thompson, later Lord Kelvin, calculated the age of the earth at between 24 and 400 million years. His calculations were based on almost a century of steady advances in the scientific study of geology, and for the remainder of the 19th century, discussion was not about whether Kelvin was right or wrong, but about just how many millions were involved. The field of Geology had a profound impact on attitudes towards the Biblical Flood and Ark story: without the support of the Biblical chronology, which placed the Creation and the Flood in a history which stretched back no more than a few thousand years, the historicity of the Ark itself was undermined. The influential 1889



Noah's Ark!

essays by Lux Mundi are usually held to mark a stage in the acceptance of a more critical approach to scripture. Mundi took the stance that the gospels could be relied on as completely historical, but the earlier chapters of Genesis should not be taken literally.

Biblical scholars were beginning to examine the origins of the Bible itself. The Noah's Ark story played a central role in the new theories, largely because it seemed to contain two stories, closely intertwined. It states twice over, for example, that God was angered with his creation, but the reasons given in each telling are slightly different; we are told that there was a single pair of each animal aboard, but also that there were seven pairs of the clean animals; that the source of the water was rain, but also that it came from the "windows of Heaven" and the "fountains of the Deep"; that the rains lasted forty days, but that the waters rose for 150. Using the newly developed tools of Biblical criticism, scholars discovered in the Ark narrative two complete, coherent, parallel stories. This, they decided, was how the entire the first five books of the Bible had been written: the work of many authors over many centuries, combining separate sources into a single whole.

The 19th century also saw the growth of Middle Eastern archaeology. George Smith made a remarkable discovery of a Mesopotamian story which paralleled the story of Noah's Ark in great detail. The story came in several versions, but the closest to Genesis 6-9 was found in a 7th century BC Babylonian copy of the Epic of Gilgamesh: the hero Gilgamesh meets the immortal man Utnapishtim, who tells how the god Ea warned him to build a vessel in which to save his family, his friends, and his wealth and cattle from a great flood which the gods planned to use to destroy all life on earth. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah%27s_Ark]Still, for many, the search goes on.

