

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ASSUMPTIONS OF “EDEN’S GEOGRAPHY ERODES FLOOD GEOLOGY”

JAMES R. HUGHES*

Received 14 April 1997; Revised 13 May 1997

Abstract

In “Eden’s Geography Erodes Flood Geology” (The Westminster Theological Journal, Spring, 1996, pp. 123-154), John C. Munday argues that a cataclysmic view of a world-wide Flood cannot be supported after an analysis of the geography of Eden. Munday bases his argument on two unproven assumptions: 1) Moses was the author of Genesis 2 and 2) the account was written from the perspective of the Israelites living in Canaan around 1500 B.C. These assumptions are invalid. It is more consistent with the data to attribute the account to Adam. He communicated it (possibly orally) from a pre-Flood perspective. Moses used Adam’s account (unchanged) when compiling Genesis. The geographical terms in Genesis 2 are generic. They are not specific to any location, and could have been used for both pre-Flood and post-Flood geographic features. Eden’s geography was destroyed by the Flood. Its location cannot be found in a post-Flood setting.

An article in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, “Eden’s Geography Erodes Flood Geology” (Munday, 1996, pp. 123-154), argues that it is difficult to support the cataclysmic view of a world-wide Flood (proposed by expositors such as Henry Morris) after an analysis of the geography of Eden.

Put briefly, the test is this question: Is Flood geology consistent with the geography of the garden of Eden taken literally (Munday, 1996, p. 125)?

Some weakening of geographic actualism or Flood geology is the logically necessary outcome. Holding to actualism in the garden geography seems the least-forced of the alternatives, but then the negative impact on the Flood geology paradigm is severe (Munday, 1996, p. 154).

The approach of the article is to establish the location of Eden by the references given in Genesis 2, and then to show that the current geology of the proposed location of Eden (the southern Mesopotamian valley near the Persian-Arabian Gulf) does not support the views of those who hold to the world-wide, cataclysmic-Flood view (Munday, 1996, p. 133).

The author, Munday, presents what appears to be a logical argument to lead to his conclusions, and he is clearly very knowledgeable about the geology of the Near Middle East. Although his argument appears convincing on the surface, it would be possible to show that Munday’s logic is flawed since he uses an argument based on an invalid dilemma. He presents the alternative that the Bible either is incorrect about the geography of Eden or about the extent of the Flood. This position is both logically and theologically invalid.

Another way to demonstrate the weakness of Munday’s conclusions is to examine the assumptions on which he

bases his argument. If these assumptions are not correct, which I will show, then whether or not his logic is correct, his conclusions are unsupported. The purpose of this essay is to examine the assumptions on which he bases his argument, not to challenge his methodology, logic, or knowledge of geology, because he is clearly mistaken in his assumptions, whereas in the latter his errors are not as evident.

Moses as the Author of Genesis Two

The first assumption of Munday is that Moses wrote Genesis 2. He says: “Based on the Bible’s own witness, Moses wrote Genesis two and the rest of the Pentateuch” (Munday, 1996, p. 126).

Munday demonstrates Mosaic authorship by pointing to various OT and NT passages which refer to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. Liberals might dispute that Moses composed the book of Genesis in its final form, but few conservative theologians would. However, to say that Moses is the author of Genesis 2 does not tell the whole story. Moses is also the author of Deuteronomy, but it is likely the case that he did not write the final chapter about his own death. It is possible, of course, that he did write it prophetically; but it is more natural to believe that Joshua or Eleazar wrote this portion of the book. So, although Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, he may not have written every word in it.

The book of Psalms has often been attributed to David. This does not mean that he wrote every word in the Psalter. In fact a major portion of the collection was written by Asaph, Moses, and others. Yet, because David is the principle author of the core-portion of the Psalms he is often attributed with the general authorship of the collection. In a similar way, Moses may be attributed with the authorship of the Pentateuch; and yet portions of it may be from the hands of other authors.

Luke is undisputedly the author of the Gospel of Luke. Yet, he tells us that he used sources for compiling his work

*James R. Hughes, 57 Vanbrugh Ave., Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1N 3T1, jhughes@shl.com

(Lk 1:1-2). In a similar way it is quite possible that Moses also used sources for his work.

Munday does acknowledge at the end of the paragraph in which he states that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch that "Moses may have relied on earlier historical records (both oral and written), and interpolations were probably made after him by copyists (Munday, 1996, p. 127)." He then draws his conclusion - "Based on this view, it may be surmised that the obvious audience of Genesis 2 was the early Israelite community and any who followed later" (Munday, 1996, p. 127).

Munday has started with an unproved assumption by stating that Moses wrote Genesis 2 for his contemporary audience. He acknowledges that Moses may have used source material. But this is far different from showing that Genesis 2 is in fact the words of Moses and not the words of the source author. If Moses did not write Genesis 2, but only copied it from an earlier writing, or wrote it down from oral tradition, then it may not have been written for the "early Israelite community." Before Munday can jump to his conclusion, he must demonstrate that Moses actually composed the words for his audience.

In this regard, Roland K. Harrison states:

There may well be quite a number of sources designated in the Old Testament writings which have not actually been recognized as such by most modern scholars. Genesis appears to be a case in point, with the clue to the underlying sources being provided, not by the incidence of the divine names or the presence of supposed duplicate narratives, but by the phrase translated "these are the generations of" (Harrison, 1969, p. 543).

The exact meaning of the word תולדות (*toledoth*) has been hard to determine. The NIV usually translates it "this is the written account of." By using these words, the translators of the NIV communicate the view that there were written sources that Moses used to compile the book of Genesis. Harrison notes further that Genesis 5:1 uses the word ספר, which can be translated as 'scroll' or 'book' and can only be a reference to a written record, presumably on clay tablets (Harrison, 1969, p. 547).

Harrison indicates that it appears to have been standard practice for communications in the ancient Near East to commence with a title and end with a colophon which could contain the identity of the scribe. In longer communications that covered more than one tablet, the sequence of the tablets and the flow of the narrative were indicated by repeating the first few words of the following tablet on the previous tablet. It appears that the use of תולדות falls into this category (Harrison, 1969, p. 544).

Harrison concludes that Genesis 1:1-37:2 was composed from a number of literary sources (Harrison, 1969, p. 548). He also says: "What is evident, however, is that the princi-

pal facts concerning the individual in question have been recorded *before* the incidence of the phrase in question, and that they are not recorded after its occurrence" (Harrison, 1969, p. 545). Based on this observation, Genesis 5:1 seems to indicate that what preceded (Gen 1:1 through 4:26), was the account written, dictated or orally communicated to others by Adam (Harrison, 1969, p. 545). Harrison notes that the use of תולדות in Genesis 2:4 is only appropriate as a concluding sentence (Harrison, 1969, p. 546) and suggests that the use of תולדות refers to the owner of the tablet or "the history written or possessed by ..." (Harrison, 1969, p. 547).

These observations by Harrison [and at least one other writer, for example Wiseman (1977)], seem to indicate that a major portion of the book of Genesis was not in fact composed by Moses, but by others, including Adam (whether written or handed down orally). This in no way undermines the fact that Moses was the compiler of these writings into the narrative which we now have as the book of Genesis.

Other writers [for example (Blocher, 1984, p. 30) and (Kidner, 1967, pp. 22-26)] disagree with Harrison about the interpretation of תולדות and feel that it should be interpreted as a heading. Regardless, Munday has not dealt with the possibility that Moses did not write Genesis 2, but copied it from an earlier writing.¹

If in fact Adam was the 'author' (even if handed down orally) of the first portion of the book of Genesis, then Munday's assumption that Moses wrote Genesis 2 is not correct. If his first assumption is not correct, his second assumption, which rests on it, is very difficult to accept.

A Mosaic Audience for Genesis 2

The second assumption of Munday is that the audience of Genesis 2 was the Israelites for whom Moses wrote the book of Genesis. He states:

Based on this view, it may be surmised that the obvious audience of Genesis 2 was the early Israelite community and any who followed later. The point of interest here is that Moses communicated to a post-Flood audience; hence, his description of the pre-Flood garden location was apparently intended to be meaningful in terms of a post-Flood landscape. It was plainly implied that the post-Flood landscape had real correspondence

¹There are many who claim that we cannot accept as complete, or literal, the genealogies in Genesis 5 (Munday says that they are not complete, see page 133, especially footnote 37). But if we accept the Genesis account at face value, Adam could have handed down orally the account of creation to one of his descendants (e.g., Methuselah), who in turn could have told the account to Shem (Shem was about 100 years old at the time of the Flood, and Methuselah died in the year of the Flood). Shem lived 500 years after the Flood (Gen 11:10, 11) until the time of Jacob. Oral transmission would only have had to pass through one intermediary from Adam to Shem. Shem could have dictated the account to provide a written record. Abram could have taken the written record with him to Palestine.

with the pre-Flood landscape, and that this correspondence was sufficiently close to permit the audience to generally understand the garden location (Munday, 1996, p. 127).

While Wright allowed that “eastward” might refer to the eastern portion of Eden, and Lemaire pointed out that in Hebrew “eastward” can refer to the temporal past, others agree that Eden was eastward of the Hebrew audience. The author(s) of Genesis, whether Moses or later redactors, are held to have resided in Canaan, even if the outline and elements of the garden story owed their origin to Sumerian sources. Hence, it is concluded that Eden was east of Canaan (Munday, 1996, p. 134).

[T]he story’s audience was intended to comprehend the garden’s geography. Both proposed datings are post-Flood; therefore, a post-Flood audience was intended to understand a pre-Flood location (Munday, 1996, p. 130).

However if the author of Genesis 2 was Adam, then he, rather than Moses, wrote (or related the account) for his contemporary audience. It is of course possible that Moses changed the names related to Eden’s geography to contemporary names when he incorporated Adam’s account into Genesis.

There are four considerations which make it likely that the Genesis 2 passage was written (or told) from Adam’s perspective, not Moses’; and therefore we should not expect to find the geography of Eden understandable after the Flood.

1) Names are Generic and Could Easily be Reused

Munday considers the possibility that the names for pre-Flood geographic features were remembered and re-used after the Flood. So, for example, there may have been a river named פֶּרַח before the Flood and one given the same name after the Flood. However, Munday dismisses this idea (and in particular, the remarks of Morris who suggests this idea in his commentary) by saying: “If renaming has occurred in Gen 2:10-14, it would be appropriate to look for specific evidence of geographical renaming elsewhere in Scripture” (Munday, 1996, p. 152).

There is! There are clear instances in the Bible of place names being used for more than one geographic location, and in some instances for three different locations - for example: Eden (Gen 2:10; Ezk 27:23), Cush (Gen 2:13; Ezek 29:10), Asshur (Gen 10:11²; Gen 25:18) Kadesh (Josh 12:22; 15:23; 20:7; 21:28 [compare I Chron 6:72]), Goshen (Gen 47:6; Josh 10:41; 15:51), and Zanoah (Josh 15:34; Neh 3:13; 11:30; Josh 15:56; 1 Chron 4:18). But Munday would

²This assumes that Assyria is the same name as Asshur, which Munday appears to accept.

probably not accept this, as he would want a specific instance in Scripture of a “geographical place name being applied to a new location because the earlier site had been lost, destroyed, or forgotten” (Munday, 1996, p. 153).

It could be argued that the Flood was a unique event and that Noah and his sons attempted to maintain some continuity from the pre-Flood world to the post-Flood world by using names for rivers and locales that were familiar to them. This could have been the case especially if the geographic features reminded them of the pre-Flood geography. This is not an unheard of phenomenon. In Ontario, where I live, one finds a London, Cambridge, and Waterloo, and dozens of other towns and geographic features named after the settlers’ locations in Europe.

Whether or not Noah and his sons reused the names themselves is really not the important question. The question is can the words themselves support reuse? Two considerations which make this idea plausible are:

- Of the eight location names mentioned in Genesis 2, at least three (Eden, Cush, Asshur) are used for at least two geographic locations. This implies that the names were not specific to any one locale.
- Of the eight locations, all eight are based on generic terms which could be applied to many pre-Flood and post-Flood geographic features.

The etymological conclusion is that Eden may signify either a place, as in a steppe or a fertile plain, or pleasure (Munday, 1996, p. 136).

The word [**Pishon** (or Pison or Pihon, פִּישׁוֹן)] itself may mean “the gusher” or “to cascade” or “dispersive” (from a root meaning “to spread”) (Munday, 1996, p. 137).

This is consistent with the accepted derivation of the word **Havilah** from a West Semitic root meaning “sand” and hence “land of sand” (Munday, 1996, p. 139).

The Hebrew גִּיחוֹן [**Gihon**] derives from a root meaning “to bubble” (Munday, 1996, p. 141).

CUSH (כּוּשׁ) [dark-coloured, first; perh. an *assembly, people brought together*, Ges., 6^e Aufl (Hackett, 1876, p. 519 and Fausset, p. 146).]

This name [**Tigris**] is a modern Greek equivalent of the Persian *Tigras*, Arabic *Dijlat* (or *Diglat*), from the Akkadian *Idiglat* and Sumerian (*I)digna... The root meaning of Tigris is “arrow,” as to “signify a dart, or swiftness” (Munday, 1996, p. 141).*

According to Brown, Driver & Briggs **Asshur** is derived from the root rva = rvy (Brown, 1952, p. 78) which can take meanings such as *good, gracious, happiness, blessedness, straight* (Brown, 1952, pp.78, 80).

Euphrates: in old Persian, *Ufrâta*, according to *Delitzsch*, or the good and fertile stream: *Ufrâtu*, according to *Spiegler*, or the well-progressing stream (Keil and Delitzsch, 1949, p. 81).

It seems to be clear that the geographic names used in Genesis 2 are so generic that they could be used in many contexts.

Munday dismisses Morris' suggestion that the pre-Flood names were remembered by those who came after the Flood, and says: "No evidence supporting this explanation was provided" (Munday, 1996, p. 152). Morris may not give a satisfactory explanation for the reuse of the names by those who came after the Flood. But it is not necessary to show that the names were reused by Noah and his sons. Rather, the evidence presented above demonstrates that it is possible that the pre-Flood names could have been reused after the Flood by any of Noah's descendants, because in fact some names are reused, and all of the names represent generic geographic features.

Munday has not demonstrated that the names are not generic terms used before and after the Flood. He seems to dismiss the possibility because it does not support his view.

2) Other Pre-Flood References Support Genesis 2 as being for a Pre-Flood Audience

In Genesis 4 references are made to two locations, Nod (Gen 4:16) and Enoch (Gen 4:17). If Moses wrote the book of Genesis and used names that were meaningful to his contemporaries, then we should expect to find some references to these locations outside of this account (either in the Bible or elsewhere). However neither of these locations can be identified in a post-Flood context. The fact that they cannot, seems to indicate that their location was relevant for a pre-Flood audience. Also, the fact that the location Enoch was named after a pre-Flood person, seems to indicate that the account in Genesis 4 is given from a pre-Flood perspective.

There is additional support for the idea that Genesis 4 provides names for a pre-Flood audience, and from a pre-Flood context. It is found in the references to the sons of Lamech. We are told in Genesis 4:20-22 that Jabal "was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock," and that Jubal "was the father of all who play the harp and flute." It is evident that this account was written for a pre-Flood audience. After the Flood there were no descendants of Lamech left alive. His sons could not be the ancestors of any post-Flood herdsmen or musicians, since all who came after the Flood were descended from Noah.

If it is the case that Nod and Enoch were the names of pre-Flood locations given to a pre-Flood audience, and if the reference to Jabal and Jubal is for a pre-Flood audience, then it is consistent to consider the locations in Genesis 2 as being pre-Flood locations mentioned for a pre-Flood audience.

Of course, one could argue that Moses preserved the account of Genesis 4 as it was handed down, but changed the account in Genesis 2 for his contemporary audience. If one wants to argue for this view, then he would have to demonstrate that this is the case. Munday appears not to have demonstrated this; he has assumed it.

3) It May Not be Possible to Identify Eden's Location, Even in General Terms

Munday goes to considerable length to identify the location of the Garden and Eden, and comes to the conclusion that he can give it a fairly precise location. He says:

Gen 2:8-14 contains the geographic data subjected to most analysis over the years. Because several pieces of the data therein have allowed no determinative conclusion, some commentators have concluded that the garden's location is obscure and will remain so. This conclusion is accurate only with regard to a precise fix on the garden's location, because as will be shown the data certainly indicate the garden's probable regional location to within roughly 15,000 square miles, i.e., the southern Mesopotamian valley near the Persian-Arabian Gulf. This conclusion is the common one ... (Munday, 1996, p. 133)

As Munday undoubtedly knows, other expositors have taken the same data and come to a very different conclusion. For example, Keil and Delitzsch use the data to point to a northern location:

According to the present condition of the soil, the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris are not so closely connected that they could be regarded as the commencement of a common stream which has ceased to exist. The main sources of the Tigris, it is true, are only 2000 paces from the Euphrates, but they are to the north of Diarbekr, in a range of mountains which is skirted on three sides by the upper course of the Euphrates; and separates them from this river. We must also look in the same country, the highlands of Armenia, for the other two rivers, if the descriptions of paradise actually rests upon an ancient tradition, and is to be regarded as something more than a mythical invention of the fancy. The name *Phison* sounds like the *Phasis* of the ancients, with which *Reland* supposed it to be identical; and *Chavilah* like *Colchis*, the well-known gold country of the ancients. But the $\Phi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ \omicron $\kappa\acute{\omicron}\lambda\acute{\xi}\omicron\varsigma$ (*Herod.* 4, 37, 45) takes its rise in the Caucasus, and not in Armenia. A more probable conjecture, therefore, points to the *Cyrus* of the ancients, which rises in Armenia, flows northwards to a point not far from the eastern border of Colchis, and then turns eastward in Iberia, from which it flows in a south-easterly direction to the Caspian Sea. The expression, "which

compasseth the whole land of Chavilah,” would apply very well to the course of this river from the eastern border of Colchis; for סבב does not necessarily signify to surround, but to pass through with different turns, or to skirt in a semi-circular form, and *Chavilah* may have been larger than modern *Colchis*. It is not a valid objection to this explanation, that in every other place *Chavilah* is a district of Southern Arabia. The identity of this *Chavilah* with the *Chavilah* of the Joktanites (chap. x. 29, xxv. 18; 1 Sam. xv. 7) or of the Cushites (chap. x. 7; 1 Chron. 1.9) is disproved not only by the article used here, which distinguishes it from the other, but also by the description of it as land where gold, bdolach, and the shoham-stone are found; a description neither requisite nor suitable in the case of the Arabian *Chavilah*, since these productions are not to be met with there. This characteristic evidently shows that the *Chavilah* mentioned here was entirely distinct from the other, and a land altogether unknown to the Israelites. ...The *Gihon* (from גִּיחֹן to break forth) is the *Araxes*, which rises in the neighbourhood of the Euphrates, flows from west to east, joins the Cyrus, and falls with it into the Caspian Sea. The name corresponds to the Arabic *Jaihun*, a name given by the Arabians and Persians to several large rivers. The land of *Cush* cannot, of course, be the later Cush, or Ethiopia, but must be connected with the Asiatic Κουσσῶνα, which reached to the Caucasus, and to which the Jews (of Shirwan) still give this name. But even though these four streams do not now spring from one source, but on the contrary their sources are separated by mountain ranges, this fact does not prove that the narrative before us is a myth. Along with or since the disappearance of paradise, that part of the earth may have undergone such changes that the precise locality can no longer be determined with certainty (Keil and Delitzsch, 1949, pp. 82-83).

Munday dismisses the northern location. “[O]ne might argue for a different location for the garden. But the geographic data do not harmoniously point anywhere else (Munday, 1996, p. 150).” But how does his proposed location stand in the face of analysis?

In Genesis 2.8-14 there are eight geographic references. Munday’s conclusion about each, with my comments, is as follows:

Eden

Hence, it is concluded that Eden was east of Canaan. The latitude in biblical compass directions allows eastward locations to include not only Babylonia but also Assyria (present-day Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran); in fact,

any location from the “Trans-Jordan to the far side of Mesopotamia” is allowed (Munday, 1996, p. 134).

Since ‘eden’ can mean generically a fertile plain, we are told in Genesis 2.8³ that God planted a garden in the eastern portion of a fertile plain. To suggest that this had to be east of Canaan, is to assume the point that is being proved. If Moses did not write the account, but rather the account came down from Adam, it could be just as valid for Adam to give the location as east of wherever he was living. To conclude that Eden was east of Canaan is to read something into the passage which is simply not there.

Pishon/Havilah

An intriguing possibility for the Pishon has been highlighted in Landsat imagery. The now-dry Wadi Batin, which forms the present-day northwestern boundary of Kuwait, is clearly delineated by Landsat across more than 400 km of Arabian desert. This region fits the possible location for Havilah. Zarins believes that the Wadi Batin was the Pishon, and that the Karun River from the Zargos Mountains was the Gihon. Consequently, Zarins believes the garden was close to the present Gulf head (Munday, 1996, pp. 140-141).

In conclusion regarding Pishon, its association with Havilah is consistent with a location somewhere in Arabia, most likely its northern half somewhere eastward of Edom and Moab. The probability is that the Pishon coursed through the eastern half of the Mesopotamian valley, a region traditionally proposed as the garden site (Munday, 1996, p. 141).

The mention of Havilah, nevertheless, does point to the Arabian peninsula. As a place name, Havilah is used in Gen 25:18 and 1 Sam 15:7... Havilah must have lain at the other [eastern] end, to the east, of the Amalekite range of habitation (Munday, 1996, p. 141).

[T]he accepted derivation of the word Havilah from a West Semitic root meaning “sand” and hence “land of sand” (Munday, 1996, p. 139).

When one reads the account in Genesis 2.8-14, he gets the impression that the Pishon was a significant river equal in importance to the other rivers mentioned. It seems to be incredible that a major river such as the Pishon could disappear from the historic and geographic records so that it left effectively no historic trace of its location. Much of the geography from Moses’ day is still identifiable. If the Pishon was a major river in Moses’ day, then we would expect to find other historical references to it, or at least be able to identify its location more easily. The fact that Munday has to appeal to a dry wadi as a potential location for the Pishon,

³A literal rendering is: “And he planted, the LORD God, a garden in a fertile plain [Eden], from/in the east.”

seems to indicate that the Pishon did not exist after the Flood.

The Amalekites and Ismaelites who appear to have lived in the region of Havilah (Gen 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7) are generally considered to have lived in a territory ranging from the southwest of what is today the Gaza strip, through the north-eastern part of the Sinai peninsula to the westernmost part of the Arabian peninsula [south of modern Jordan] (Douglas, 1982, p. 454 and Avraham, 1986, p. 168). They appear to have controlled, or at least used, the caravan route which went from Egypt through Canaan and on to Assyria (e.g., Gen 38:27-29). This location for Havilah is at least 1,000 km from “the southern Mesopotamian valley near the Persian-Arabian Gulf.”

It seems hard to reconcile the location of the Havilah of Genesis 2 and I Sam 15:7 with Munday’s proposed location for the Garden of Eden, and with a dry wadi that is supposed to have been a river flowing through what is now the Arabian desert. It seems to be more reasonable to understand the term ‘havilah’ in Genesis 2.11 as a different location and to accept the suggestion that the generic sense of ‘havilah’ (‘land of sand’) could easily be used to refer to both a pre-Flood location and a post-Flood location.

Gihon

The Hebrew גִּיחֹן derives from a root meaning “to bubble”; such a name could hardly apply to a placid river on a plain, unless its head were in hill country (Munday, 1996, p. 141).

In sum, the Gihon probably was a river flowing from Kassite country in the Zagros mountains into the Tigris-Euphrates system near the Gulf. The Gihon perhaps was the Karun River, or possibly the Kerkha River (Munday, 1996, p. 142).

The location of the Gihon cannot be identified in contemporary geographic terms, and appears rarely in the historical records. As with the Pishon, it is hard to believe that the location of a second major river in Moses’ day would no longer be identifiable. It is also clear from Munday’s own word-analysis that the location of the Gihon does not fit well with the current southern flat Mesopotamian geography in which the rivers flow placidly. It is simpler to conclude that the reference to the Gihon is given in a pre-Flood context rather than in a post-Flood context.

Cush

The term כּוּשׁ is found in many Hebrew scriptures and is identified as either Cush or Classical Ethiopia (i.e., modern Sudan). The identification Ethiopia is certain in many instances, such as Num 12:1; Esth 1:1; and Jer 13:23. But an African location is not at all indicated by

Gen 2:13, unless Eden’s geography is regarded as fantasy (Munday, 1996, p. 141).

The fact that Cush in the remainder of the OT is not used to refer to a southern Mesopotamian location, and instead is found in a very distant geographic location does not support Munday’s conclusion: “These data indicate an Arabian-Mesopotamian context for Cush in Gen 2:13” (Munday, 1996, p. 141). Contrary to what Munday says, we do not need to conclude that Eden’s geography must be regarded as a fantasy if Cush is not in an Arabian-Mesopotamian context. Rather, it supports the view that the author is describing a pre-Flood geography, not a post-Flood geography.

Tigris/Asshur

While the Hebrew for the third river is חֲדַקְלָא (“Hiddekel”), there is almost universal agreement at present that the river indicated is the Tigris. This name is a modern Greek equivalent of the Persian *Tigras*, Arabic *Dijlat* (or *Diglat*), from the Akkadian *Idiglat* and Sumerian (*I*)*digna*. ...The root meaning of Tigris is “arrow,” as to “signify a dart, or swiftness (Munday, 1996, p. 141).”

In Scripture and elsewhere, the word Asshur is used to designate the city, the region, the nation, and a deity. Without any doubt, the word here refers to the capital city of Assyria (Munday, 1996, pp. 142-143).

It is the case that the term ‘hiddekel’ is used in Assyrian monuments to refer to the same river that is called elsewhere by the name Tigris. This does not in itself prove that the reference in Genesis 2.14 is in fact the same river as that mentioned in Dan 10:4 and known as the Tigris today. It is quite possible that the term ‘hiddekel’ was used in its generic sense (“arrow,” to “signify a dart, or swiftness”) to refer to a river after the Flood, or was used to name a river which reminded the first post-Flood inhabitants of Assyria of the river they found mentioned in Adam’s account of the geography of Eden.

Genesis 2.14 tells us that the Tigris “runs along the east side of Asshur.” Since the term ‘havilah’ in the context of a river is understood to be a geographic territory, we should be consistent and assume that the term ‘asshur’ also refers to a territory. However, in a post-Flood context the Tigris does not run along the east of the territory of Asshur (Assyria); it runs to the west of the fertile and densely populated portion of Assyria (Douglas, 1982, p. 98). This, of course, does not fit with Munday’s interpretation; so he concludes that the reference to ‘asshur’ is to the post-Flood city rather than the territory. Munday switches identifications to support his theory. He fails to demonstrate that the Tigris of today must be the ‘hiddekel’ referred to by the Genesis 2 account. Munday accuses Morris of using the word ‘evident’ to describe his

understanding of the geography of Eden (Munday, 1996, p. 151). He has done essentially the same thing when he concludes that “without any doubt” the term Asshur refers to the capital city.

Euphrates

The 19 instances of פֶּרַת in Scripture have always been held to refer to the Euphrates (Munday, 1996, p. 143).

It cannot be disputed that most⁴ of the uses of the term פֶּרַת refer to the Euphrates river. This does not prove, however, that the location in Genesis 2.14 is the same river as that referred to in the post-Flood context, especially since the term פֶּרַת as we have noted, has such a generic meaning - “good and fertile stream.” The Euphrates of today is the river mentioned in Genesis 2 only if the Moses wrote Genesis 2 and used names of geographic locations which were known to the Israelites around 1500 B.C.

Of the eight geographic locations mentioned in Genesis 2, only three (Tigris, Asshur, Euphrates) are easy to locate in modern geographic terms, and then only if interpreted in a particular way (e.g., reading Asshur as a city rather than as a territory), and only if it is assumed that Moses wrote Genesis 2 for a contemporary audience. Yet, Munday concludes:

All the above considerations converge very strongly on the conclusion that the garden of Eden was located in Babylonia. ... Taking into account all the evidence points more harmoniously to Babylonia (Munday, 1996, p. 143).

He then moves from this conclusion to the point he really wants to make: That there could not have been a world-wide Flood of cataclysmic proportions:

If actualism guides a conception of garden geography, then finding the site in the present lower Mesopotamian Valley precludes Flood geology, because the supposed consequence of the Flood was a deposit miles in thickness, and, inevitably, obliteration of all geographic clues (Munday, 1996, p. 150).

Rather than being a straightforward matter of mapping the references in Genesis 2 to modern geography, it appears from the evidence that it may not be possible to identify Eden’s location, even in general terms. The evidence in fact points more clearly to a unique pre-Flood geography and the reuse of generic terms for geographic terms in a post-Flood context. Morris’ conclusion about the evidence appears to be more accurate than Munday’s:

In general, it is evident⁵ that the geography described in these verses does not exist in the present world, nor

⁴There may be some doubt about the word as it is used in Jer 13:4-7. If this is the same word, it may give evidence for a generic use of the word פֶּרַת.

⁵That is, from Morris’ preceding consideration of the difficulties of associating the geographic references with contemporary geography.

has it existed since the Flood. The rivers and countries described were antediluvian geographical features, familiar to Adam the original author of this part of the narrative. They were all destroyed, and the topography and geography completely changed, when “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (II Peter 3:16) (Morris, 1976, pp. 89-90).

This means, in turn, that the names which seem to be postdiluvian (Ethiopia, Assyria, Tigris, Euphrates) were originally antediluvian names. The names were remembered by the survivors of the Flood and then given to people or places in the postdiluvian world, in memory of those earlier names of which they were somehow reminded later (Morris, 1976, p. 90).

4) Some Other Biblical Examples of Geography or History are Understandable only by a Contemporary Audience

Someone might contend that an account of pre-Flood geography would have little relevance to a post-Flood audience. In one sense this is true, since the account of Eden’s geography did not give Jewish readers, and does not give us, any useful information with respect to locating the Garden of Eden. This however does not make the account irrelevant. The Holy Spirit may have determined to include some aspects of the original geography of the Garden:

1. To convict the pre-Flood world of its sin (Gen 6:5). The account written by Adam would point to a real location and would vividly remind them that they were sinners under judgment.
2. To remind the post-Flood world, that the Garden was real, a place positioned in space, and not just a fairy-tale.
3. To point to the coming eternal Paradise which will be a well-watered, fruitful land.

The references to the geography of Eden are, in principle, no different from the geographical references we find in other parts of the OT (e.g., Gen 13:18; Josh 15-19), or the lists of names we find in many places in the OT (e.g., Gen 4:18, 5, 35; Ezra 2). These accounts and lists were written for a specific audience in ancient times and are somewhat obscure to us. Although we may not be able to understand all the details, this does not make the accounts and lists irrelevant for us.

Munday’s Assumptions Fail to Support his Hypothesis

The portion of Scripture we have been considering reads as follows:

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds

through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (NIV, 1984).

A face-value reading of this passage, as it is translated in the NIV, indicates that a single river flowed from Eden and went through the Garden and then broke into four rivers after it had passed through the Garden. There is nothing in the contemporary Middle Eastern geography which corresponds to this description. There is no southern Arabian-Mesopotamian location which corresponds to the description of a single river branching into four rivers.

Munday bases his argument on two assumptions:

1. Moses wrote the account in Genesis 2, and
2. Genesis 2 was written for contemporaries of Moses.

Both of his assumptions appear to be false. He has not proven that Moses wrote Genesis 2, nor has he given evidence that Genesis 2 was written from the perspective of Moses' readers. He has assumed both. The natural and literal reading of Genesis 2 is from the perspective of someone (i.e., Adam) who lived while the Garden still existed and who knew precisely where it was. This implies that it was written for a pre-Flood audience. Munday needs to demonstrate that the audience was in fact 15th century B. C. Israelites. Unless he can demonstrate this, the natural conclusion is that Genesis 2 was written for a pre-Flood audience.

We do not need to accept Munday's conclusion:

The possible resolution of the problem is to weaken (or abandon) either (1) Flood geology or (2) actualism in the garden geography. Either alternative necessitates a change in paradigm derived from the literal hermeneutic (Munday, 1996, pp. 150-151).

We can in fact accept the Genesis 2 account as being an actual statement of pre-Flood geography, and also accept that there was a world-wide flood that changed the geography of the earth to such an extent that it is not possible to find the location of the Garden of Eden in a post-Flood world.

It is a sad commentary on the state of the Church today when a purportedly Reformed and Presbyterian publication such as *The Westminster Theological Journal* agrees to publish an article such as Munday's which clearly does not admit a Reformed perspective on either hermeneutical strategy or Biblical authority. It is questionable that the editors of *The Westminster Theological Journal* continue to hold to their historic confession. The Westminster Confession of Faith is very clear in terms of how we are to interpret Scripture:

Quote - Psalm 72:12-17

12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.

13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.

14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.

16 Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

17 May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.

©1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers

All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (Confession of Faith, 1959, 1:7)

The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (Confession of Faith, 1959, 1:10)

If we are to determine whether or not there was a world-wide Flood, the solution is not to concoct, as Munday does, an indirect and obtuse argument from a passage of Scripture that does not deal with the Flood (Genesis 2). The solution is to accept the clear teachings of the OT and NT (such as Gen 7:17-24 and 2 Pet 3:5-7) which unequivocally demonstrate that the Bible intends to teach that the Flood of Genesis was world-wide and cataclysmic in action.

References

- _____ The New International Version, 1984. (Zondervan. Grand Rapids, MI).
- _____ The Confession of Faith, 1959 (William Blackwood and Sons. Edinburgh and London).
- Avraham, Negev, editor. 1986. The archaeological encyclopedia of the holy land, Revised edition. Nelson. Nashville, TN.
- Blocher, H. 1984. In the beginning. Intervarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. 1952. Corrected impression A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford, 1907. London.
- Douglas, J. D. et al., editors. 1982. New Bible dictionary, Second edition. Tyndale. Wheaton, IL.
- Fausset, A. R. Undated. Bible encyclopaedia and dictionary-Critical and expository. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, MI.
- Hackett, H. B., editor. 1876. Dr. William Smith's dictionary of the Bible-Comprising its antiquities, biography, geography, and natural history. Hurd and Houghton. New York.
- Harrison, Roland K. 1969. Introduction to the Old Testament. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kidner, D. 1967. Genesis. Intervarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL.
- Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F. 1949. Biblical commentary on the old testament. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, MI. Volume 1.
- Morris, Henry M. 1976. The Genesis Record. Baker Book House. Grand Rapids, MI.
- Munday, Jr., John C. 1906. Eden's geography erodes flood geology. *The Westminster Theological Journal* 58(1):123-154.
- Wiseman, P. 1977. Clues to creation in Genesis. Marshall, Morgan and Scott. London.