

Was The Flood Global?

Introduction. The Flood is one of the most prominent historical narratives in the Bible, with more attention being given to it than even to creation. Four of the first 11 chapters of Genesis are devoted to the flood and its aftermath. In fact, next to creation, the Flood is the single greatest event in earth's history; nothing comparable to it has happened since, nor will anything comparable happen again until the final destruction of the universe.

One of the most controversial aspects this section of scripture concerns the extent of the Genesis Flood. Three major positions are taken: (1) the traditional, which asserts the universal, world-wide, nature of the Flood; (2) limited or local flood theories, which narrow the scope of the Flood narrative to a particular geographical location in Mesopotamia; and, (3) a non-literal (symbolic) interpretation, which suggests that the Flood is a non-historical account written to teach theological truth.

The non-historical position can be readily answered by noting the evidences within the biblical account affirming the historical nature of the Flood. In the literary structure of the Flood, the genealogical frame or envelope construction (Genesis 5:32 and 9:28-29) plus the secondary genealogies (Genesis 6:9-10 and 9:18-19) are indicators that the account is intended to be factual history. The use of the genealogical "generations" or "account" in the Flood narrative (6:9) as throughout Genesis (10 times, structuring the whole book), indicates that the author intended this story to be as historically true as the rest of Genesis.

In this lesson, we will examine the fact of a world-wide from two distinct angles. First, we will see what the Bible says about the Flood. Second, we will examine the external evidence which supports the Bible's account.

I. ***Is It Possible To Interpret The Flood Described In Genesis As A Regional Flood?***

- A. Those who believe that the Flood was confined to Mesopotamia point out that the word "all" is not always used literally. The claim is made that the word is used in Genesis 6-9 in an accommodative sense for only the "inhabited portion" of the earth. The assumption is then made that only Mesopotamia was inhabited, and the conclusion is drawn that the Flood of Noah's time was confined to this region. For example, Hill Roberts, a physicist and participant in the "Lord, I Believe" seminars, writes, "Based on study of textural (sic) analyses by men more skilled at it than I, it seems there is some textural (sic) uncertainty as to the geographic scope of that flood of the land. If the flood was limited to mankind's region, that is wholly acceptable to some conservative Old

Testament textual (sic) scholars" ("Floods, Science and Religion, Kinds, Evening and Morning -- Sustained").

- B. This is the same kind of reasoning that the Jehovah's Witnesses use to justify their translation of John 1:1, which says "the word was a god." They justify it by appealing to Acts 28:6, where the same Greek expression is used, and is translated "a god." The problem with this reasoning is that it completely ignores the context of the passage.
1. In Acts 28:6, it is clear from the context that the meaning is "a god," because Luke is describing the the natives of Malta, who believed in a multitude of "gods." Similarly, it is clear from the context that John 1:1 is saying that the word was God (not a god), because John is talking about the one true God, not the pagans' misconceptions.
 2. Likewise, in Mark 1:5, the expression "all the land of Judea" is not being used in the literal sense of every single human in Judea.
 3. The question is whether there is anything in the context of Genesis 6-9 to suggest that the words "all" and "earth" are being used in an accommodative sense, or whether they are being used literally.
- C. We have abundant contextual evidence to show that the Flood covered the entire globe, not just a region.
1. The need for the ark.
 - a) Imagine building a wooden boat with nothing but hand tools. Now, imagine that the boat you are building is 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high (Genesis 6:15). This is an enormous amount of work.
 - (1) The ark would occupy an area of about 3/4 of an acre. Furthermore, with three levels, it would have over 101,000 square feet.
 - (2) It has been estimated that about 35,000 individual animals needed to go on the ark. With these dimensions, the animals would have had plenty of space.
 - b) If the Flood were merely a regional phenomenon, Noah and his family would have been able to move to higher ground, just as Lot was taken out of Sodom before it was destroyed. This would have been much easier, and more sensible, than building such a huge boat. But even if God wanted Noah to build a boat as an act of faith, why bother with all of those animals? Clearly, even if only Mesopotamia were inhabited by man, there must have been animals in other parts of the world. Why would Noah have to bring all of those animals with him?
 - c) It is evident that when God said that He would destroy the earth (Genesis 6:13), He meant it literally. It is precisely because He

intended to destroy the entire earth, along with all of the animals and birds, that Noah needed to build the ark.

2. The duration of the flood.

- a) Anyone who has studied Genesis knows that many details are left out of the various accounts that we would normally expect to be included. For example, we are not told how Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:8). However, we know precisely how long Noah and his family were on the ark, and this detail gives us some insight into the extent of the Flood.
- b) Noah and his family were on the ark for a year and ten days (Genesis 7:11; 8:13-16). Would a regional flood last a year? Several years ago, the Midwestern portion of our country suffered tremendously from severe regional floods. Yet, no one floated on the waters of these floods for anything like a year. We can imagine a flood lasting for weeks, or perhaps even a couple of months if it is severe. But can we really imagine a local, regional flood lasting for a full year? If not, the time span given is absurd, and the account is no more than a fairy tale.

3. The language of the passage.

- a) The term "the earth," occurring 46 times in the Flood narrative, always without some limiting term, clearly parallels the usage of the same term in the creation account (Genesis 1:1-2, 10). The text uses some indicator of the universality of the Flood at least 30 times (Genesis 6:7, 13, 17; 7:4, 19-13; 8:9; 9:11).
- b) In each of the four occurrences of the phrase "upon the face of all the earth" in Genesis outside the Flood narrative (Genesis 1:29; 11:4, 8-9), it clearly has the universal sense of the entire land surface of the globe.
- c) The integrity of God in keeping His promise is wrapped up in the world-wide extent of the Flood. If Genesis 6-9 describes only a local flood, then God has broken His promise every time another local flood has happened! The only way God's promise not to send another flood to destroy every living thing (Genesis 8:21) can be seen to have been kept is if the Flood was a universal one and the whole human race outside the ark was destroyed.
- d) There is no stronger way in Hebrew to express the total destruction of all existence of life on earth. If we have any respect for the integrity of the Bible, or if we have any regard for the meaning of words, we cannot see a regional flood in Genesis 6-9. Therefore, if the historical Flood was truly a localized event, then the account in Genesis is nothing but a myth, and the Bible is discredited.

II. ***Is There Any Evidence Apart From The Bible That A Global Flood Ever Occurred?***

- A. It is essential to recognize first of all that the Flood of the magnitude described in Genesis would be an event of almost unimaginable power. The quantity of water involved, and the force of that water's movement would have an enormous impact on the surface of the earth. That being the case, we would expect to be able to find some evidence of such a cataclysm in the physical world.
- B. But Hill Roberts again writes, "Geologically, the Flood of Noah was very short, a mere hiccup; although the spiritual significance would prove to be enormous. It would not be likely that such an event would leave much of any geological record, especially if it was a world flood in the sense of their view of the local world, as used in the New Testament for the spread of the gospel. The 1993 floods of the upper Mississippi, though widespread in destruction, have left very little of permanence in the regional geology other than some new sediment deposits in the Mississippi delta" ("Flood Geology in Genesis and the Time Thing"). However, evidence for the global Flood does indeed exist.
 1. Sedimentary strata.
 - a) In many places on earth, it is possible to see a cross-section of layers, or strata, of different sediments. Moreover, many fossils can be found within the rock. The fossils are arranged in horizontal layers; certain kinds of fossils will be in one layer, different kinds in the next layer, and so forth. Geologists assume that these strata were formed gradually over millions of years, because they assume that they were formed by the same ordinary processes that go on today.
 - b) However, the strata could much more easily have been formed by one catastrophic event, such as the Flood. This is because a flood of that magnitude would pick up and move enormous quantities of sediment. Of course, the sediment would be made up of many different materials of varying density. The sediments with the greatest density would settle to the bottom, followed by the next densest, and so on; distinct layers would form. Over time, as the sediment hardened, it would become rock, like the sedimentary rock layers visible today.
 - c) If the Flood of the Bible had occurred, plants and animals, overcome by the deluge, would be swept up in the water and trapped in the layers of sediment. As the mineral sediments settled, the plant and animal matter would do likewise. Over time, as the sediments hardened, chemical changes would take place in the organic matter, and the remains of the animals and plants would become what we know as fossils. The end result

would be fossils of a wide variety of species, sorted in horizontal layers according to their individual physical characteristics -- and that is exactly what is found in the strata of sedimentary rock.

- d) If the layers of rock had formed over millions of years by ordinary ongoing processes, as the geologists assume, then it is difficult to see how so many specimens would resist decay long enough to become fossilized. As we observe natural processes today, dead plants and animals begin to decompose long before they are covered with natural sediments. That being the case, it is highly unlikely, and perhaps even impossible, that the vast numbers of fossils available for study could have been formed gradually.
 - e) On the other hand, as has already been alluded to above, plants and animals trapped in underwater sediment do not decompose as quickly. These conditions are perfect for the formation of fossils in a relatively short period of time. It does not take millions or even thousands of years for fossils to form under such conditions. So, the available evidence within the sedimentary rock strata fits perfectly with the biblical account of the Flood.
2. Low fossils in high places.
- a) Mt. Everest, the highest known mountain in the world, rises approximately five miles above sea level. Yet, the topmost portion of this mountain is made up of sedimentary materials, including fossils, that are consistent with deposits left by flowing water. In other words, it looks like it was once covered with water.
 - (1) It is not necessary to postulate the existence of mountains as high as Mt. Everest at the time of the Flood, requiring six-mile-deep waters covering the earth, as some proponents of a local flood suggest would be necessary.
 - (2) The antediluvian mountains were very possibly much lower than at present. Job 9:5; 28:9 and Psalm 104:7-8 may well be referring to the process of postdiluvian mountain uplift.
 - b) Moreover, fossil remains of sea organisms have been found on every major mountain range. How did they get there? Although these facts are difficult to explain any other way, they fit quite nicely with the Flood of the Bible.
3. Antarctic coal and trees.
- a) Geologists will tell you that coal forms from decomposing vegetable matter. That being the case, you would not expect to find coal in Antarctica, where it is too cold for plants to grow. Yet, veins of coal have indeed been found there. In one location,

30 layers of coal, each one 3-4 feet thick, have been found. Moreover, fossilized tree trunks have been found near the South Pole.

- b) Most of us realize that trees do not grow at the South Pole, because of the extreme cold temperature. It is also nighttime for 6 months out of the year. These facts cannot be explained in terms of ordinary, ongoing processes. However, they could easily be explained by a global Flood, which could have carried the materials and deposited them in their current location.
- C. Flood geology (catastrophism) is an arch enemy of historical geology (uniformitarianism). Many despise flood geology because it offers an alternative to the "old earth" approach of modern science.
1. In our day and age, young people often are subjected to what may well represent one of the greatest possible threats to their faith -- the challenge of the conflict between evolutionary geology and the inspired scriptures.
 2. The simple fact of the matter is that it is impossible to correlate the Bible with evolutionary geology, even though there have even been Christians who have attempted such a compromise.
- D. Many historical geologists today argue that some catastrophic phenomenon, possibly a giant meteorite, destroyed the dinosaur population. We are told that this event had a tremendous effect upon the geological features of the earth's crust. Fossil evidence is everywhere! But the Flood of Noah, which is said to have destroyed all life on earth, was a "mere hiccup"! We should not, Hill Roberts says, expect any evidence whatever for this catastrophic event in the crust of the earth!
- E. Striking extra-biblical evidence that all human races, and not just the nations of Mesopotamia, retain memory of the universal Flood. Over 230 different Flood narratives are known and occur among the most diverse peoples of the earth. A world-wide Flood is by far the most frequently-given cause for past universally destructive calamities in the folk literature of antiquity.
1. A remarkable number of these oral and written traditions agree upon the basic points of the biblical account: all humankind was destroyed by a great Flood as a result of divine judgment against human sin, and a single man and his family or a few friends survived the deluge in a ship or other sea-faring vessel.
 2. The stories nearest to the area of the dispersion at Babel are the closest in detail to the biblical account. This vast body of ancient witnesses to a world-wide Flood is powerful testimony to the historicity and universality of the biblical Flood.

Conclusion. The Bible very clearly tells us that the Flood of Noah's time covered the entire planet. Moreover, there is ample evidence in nature to suggest that just such a global Flood did indeed occur. Therefore, we have no rational reason to doubt it. Sadly, some brethren believe that the reading of natural history by modern scientists is on par with the written word of God, perhaps even more reliable than the Bible, because the latter is far more susceptible to interpretation by fallible men.

This view is extremely dangerous. If it is allowed to propagate among us, then the interpretations of science will become more and more the authoritative word which judges true religion. If it is consistently applied, other miracles will fall also. When scripture is reconciled by science, scripture will always suffer. We have to make sure that the moral lessons of the Flood (Genesis 6-9; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 2:4-9; 3:5-10) remain intact and are applicable to us today.