



"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1)

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

MAY 2006

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If your church or group is looking for a speaker, the Seattle chapter does presentations on wide range of topics ranging from the scientific evidences pointing to God to the age of the earth debate. Contact us at seattle@reasons.org.

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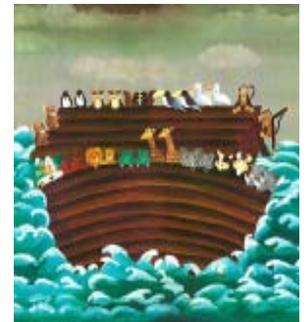
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The Flood of Noah

TIMOTHY D. BOYLE

The image many people have of Noah's Flood is the one found in children's books of a round-bottomed boat with giraffes and other zoo animals sticking their heads out the windows. The question I will address in this paper is how accurate this and other images of this event are in light of what the Bible says about the Flood. While I will briefly touch on extra-biblical evidences, such as the earth sciences, my primary focus will be on what can be legitimately inferred about this event from the descriptions in Genesis and other passages of Scripture.

One's understanding of the extent and purpose of the Flood is closely tied to one's view of creation and the age of the earth.¹ If the Genesis 1 creation account is interpreted to mean God created the earth in six 24-hour days some 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, then simple logic requires a global flood to explain things like water-laid sedimentary deposits thousands of meters thick. A young earth together with a non-global flood cannot be consistently held. The same is not true for the reverse, however, as a global flood would be possible with an old earth, although few hold that view. Those who interpret the Bible as teaching an ancient earth generally hold a non-global view of the Flood.



In analyzing what the Scriptures teach about these issues, I work with two premises. First, the God who created the universe is the same God who is responsible for the words of the Bible. While written by human beings in specific cultural situations, the words of the Bible are what God intended to communicate the message he wanted to give to us. Second, since God is responsible for the words of the Bible and the record of nature, these records must be internally consistent. Thus, any apparent conflict between these records should signal that our understanding of one, or both, are in need of adjustment.

When there is an apparent conflict between our understanding of these two records, there remains the problem of how one determines where the error lies. Theological conservatives have typically given automatic priority to their traditional understanding of the biblical text, often dismissing the apparent conflict with the scientific evidence as "the fallible words of evolutionary scientists versus the inerrant Word of

God.” On the other hand, theological liberals have typically given such great weight to the pronouncements of scientists concerning the record of nature that any adjustments deemed necessary to bring the two records into agreement usually comes from reinterpreting the Bible. Neither approach, as a knee-jerk reaction, is appropriate if one is really seeking truth.

What is needed is to carefully weigh the evidence looking for faulty interpretations in both realms and to come to tentative conclusions of how best to account for all of the evidence. While both “God’s Word” and “God’s World” are infallible, our understanding of them is not. Thus, we need to approach both with the respect and humility they deserve. As this paper is dealing primarily with the biblical data, we will be focusing on that aspect. In order to properly interpret the Bible’s teachings concerning the Flood, we must take into consideration the original languages and cultural context of the books of the Bible. We must also examine all relevant biblical texts to see what light they can shed on the Flood.

EXTENT OF THE FLOOD

A straightforward reading of the Genesis Flood account in most English Bibles gives the impression the floodwaters covered the earth. However, it is necessary to consider the words in the original Hebrew, as well as clues about the extent of the Flood in Genesis and other biblical texts. For instance, would the original Hebrew readers have understood the description of the Flood to mean the waters had stood above Mt. Hermon, which was the highest mountain of their experience? This, of course, is not a question we can answer. We can only attempt to put together a comprehensive picture of what the Bible says, taking into account the full range of meanings of words in the original languages, and infer how God, through his human authors, intended the message to be understood.

A bit of historical perspective is helpful at this point. The concept of a flood covering the planet is a fairly recent concept, as it is only in modern times that people have taken a global view of things. In biblical times, people only knew “their world” and would have understood this ancient flood as inundating the “world” of their ancestors. Thus, whether the Flood would have been “global” was not an issue for them. Hundreds of flood legends of people surviving a cataclysmic flood exist in societies around the world, with many of them having remarkably similar features to the Genesis Flood, albeit in much more mythological language. This certainly lends credence to the biblical assertion that all people descended from the family of Noah, but it does little to clarify the extent of the Flood.

In order to address this issue, we need to look carefully at the language used to describe the Flood. At first glance, Genesis 7:19 would seem to make it plain: “They [the waters] rose greatly on the earth, and all of the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered.” The next sentence, states the mountains were covered with water “to a depth of more than 15 cubits” (more than seven meters). Clearly, this cannot mean the top of every mountain was covered with standing water more than 15 cubits deep, unless “all of the high mountains under the entire heavens” were the same elevation. If mountains are of varying heights, there will be vastly different depths of water covering them.

The Hebrew word translated as “more than” can be taken to mean this was the minimum depth of the water, with the implication that lower mountains would be

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In the NEWS...

[The Good News of Da Vinci](#)

This *ChristianityToday* article discusses how Christians should use the book, *The Da Vinci Code*, as an opportunity to engage the culture. We should use our culture’s fascination with Jesus to talk about the real Jesus in a constructive way. Go to: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/001/23.62.html.

[Ingredients for Life are Many](#)

This article in the North County Times (CA) by RTB apologist Mark Ritter, challenges the notion that life is everywhere in the universe, we just haven’t found it yet. Ritter details some of the parameters for life. Go to: http://nctimes.com/articles/2206/02/19/science/ritter/15_23_532_18_06.txt.

[Sowing in Good Soil](#)

This Breakpoint article by Chuck Colson discusses the importance of developing a Christian worldview. Colson maintains once we understand the Biblical worldview we can defend what we believe, live the Christian life more fully and impact the culture. Go to: www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2190.

[A Faith Tailored for You](#)

This *ChristianityToday* article discusses how the hoopla over the Gospel of Judas is both absurd and revealing. It tells us nothing about the historical Jesus or Judas, but public fascination with it does tell us something about the spiritual state of America. Go to: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/006/3.22.html.

[Science and Democracy](#)

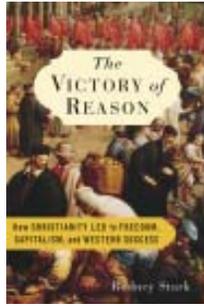
This Breakpoint article discusses how the Dover case has not settled the question of whether intelligent design should be taught in public schools. Why? Because most people oppose teaching a strictly materialistic explanation and in America people have a say in how they want their children educated. Go to: www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2262.

Book Reviews

The Victory of Reason

Rodney Stark
Random House, 2005

Reviewer: Pat Lewis



How does it happen that the West dominates the modern world in economic and technological superiority? Sociologist Rodney Stark proposes that it is Christianity that makes the difference. Freedom, science, capitalistic prosperity and attitudes favoring progress all grow out of the Christian belief in a conscious, rational Creator whose universe is a lawful, stable structure that invites human comprehension.

We have all heard that the time following the fall of Rome was the “Dark Ages,” a period of ignorance and barbarism. This is a myth! To the contrary, Europe after Rome was characterized by spectacular technological and intellectual progress. Individual freedom and secure property rights came about gradually. Among innovations were chimneys and fireplaces (Roman buildings were essentially unheated!), eyeglasses, clocks, water power and crop rotation. Rigid horse collars and nailed-on iron horse shoes, with improved wagons, made overland transport of heavy goods practical, while stirrups and deep saddles enabled mounted warriors with long lances to defeat foot soldiers. Ships built with round bottoms and sternpost rudders began making ocean voyages. And all over Europe, universities sprang up.

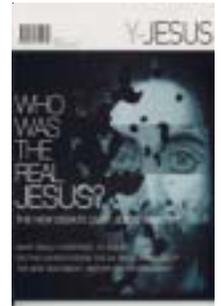
Why did these advances arise only there? The magnetic compass, paper manufacture and gunpowder were all discovered in China, but they were not developed into industries there. The Chinese thought of God as an impersonal sort of essence and the world to them was not founded on law. Greeks had a pantheon of gods but they were non-rational and limited in power. Muslims do not believe in consistent natural laws because Allah must be free to act impulsively as he wills. Mohammed and Moses wrote texts which were accepted as divine transmissions and therefore encouraged literalism. Unlike them, Jesus wrote nothing; so from the very start the church fathers were forced to reason out their beliefs from his remembered sayings. This has resulted in a well-established body of theological scholarship.

Can other cultures adopt the scientific and economic ways of the West and make them work without also adopting their foundation? Read this book and ponder our actions in the world.

Y-Jesus

Bill Bright, Larry Chapman
Bright Media Foundation, 2005

Reviewer: Jon Greene



Y-Jesus is a follow-up to *Y-Origins*, targeted at young adults. I saw this publication used as a handout to college students attending a U of W event featuring Ravi Zacharius.

Bright and Chapman open with real-life questions students often have about Jesus: Was He a real person? What are the historical proofs for His existence? Was He crazy, a pathological liar, or the Son of God? Religious and secular historical resources are referenced, including the Talmud and various historians, including Flavius Josephus.

The authors mention Malcolm Muggeridge and C.S. Lewis, two profoundly skeptical critics of Christianity, who, after careful investigation and research, accepted Christianity and became strong defenders of the Christian faith. Present-day skeptics (i.e., Jesus Seminar) are juxtaposed with the I AM words of Jesus and His claims to forgive sin and actually be God in human flesh.

An interesting chapter is devoted to the Da Vinci conspiracy, which is timely, because of the soon-to-be-released movie, *The Da Vinci Code*. The authors describe the main claims of the Da Vinci conspiracy, and then deconstruct each claim with historical facts. The Gnostic gospels are also covered, with comments by Norman Geisler and others.

Y-Jesus tackles questions young people have. One chapter is devoted to the “disappearance and reappearance” of Jesus – His death and resurrection. The theories of cynics and skeptics (Bertrand Russell, Joseph Campbell, and John Dominic Crossan) are challenged by noted historical scholars who wrote of Jesus’ death, empty tomb, and post-resurrection appearances. The arguments for His death and resurrection are convincingly presented.

After an ending chapter on theological reasons for the suffering and death of Jesus, the publication ends with numerous quotes about the person of Jesus Christ. Famous British author, H.G. Wells, wrote “I am an historian. I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.” Amen!

covered with hundreds or even thousands of cubits of water. Thus, some have taken the position this statement refers to the fact that the depth above the highest points in the region were sufficient so the ark, which presumably had a displacement of about 15 cubits as it floated on the surface, would not run aground. From the perspective of a global flood, this seems reasonable. However, we need to consider what other interpretations are allowable in the context of the original Hebrew.

We'll come back to the "covered" by "more than 15 cubits" phrase, but first let's look for clues regarding the extent of the Flood. The first issue is what the Hebrew words translated "entire earth" refer to. This phrase "kol erets" is used in the Hebrew Old Testament 205 times and in only 40 of these instances is the reference possibly to the entire planet. The other 165 instances clearly refer to a local area. Sometimes "kol erets" is modified by a place name, such as in Genesis 2:11, where it refers to the rivers in the Garden of Eden: "The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire [kol] land [erets] of Havilah, where there is gold."

But, even when "kol erets" is not attached to a specific place name, in most instances it is not referring to the entire planet. For example, Genesis 41:56-57 says, "When the famine had spread over the whole [kol] country [erets] (translated "all the face of the earth" in the KJV)... all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all [kol] the world [erets]." It is clear this refers to Egypt and the neighboring lands. No one would suppose ancient Japanese and American Indians came to Egypt to buy grain. Even if famine stalked their land and they knew there was grain in Egypt, they could not have survived the trip.

Numerous other instances of "kol erets" referring to a local area could be cited. Nevertheless, there are cases where the context does indicate a universal meaning for "kol erets." For example, in Genesis 1:26 where God mandated humanity to have "dominion over the entire earth." Thus, by itself, the term "entire earth" does little to clarify the extent of the flood. In the Hebrew, this term could be used to describe either a global or local event.

The expression "under the entire [kol] heavens [shamayim]" also needs to be considered. Like "kol erets," "kol shamayim" can refer to the skies above the entire planet or a limited area. For instance, this phrase is used in Deut. 2:25: "This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on the nations under heaven [kol shamayim] ..." In this passage, "under heaven" clearly does not refer to the entire planet but to those nations the people of Israel were to displace as they conquered the Promised Land (for this reason, the NIV leaves out the word "entire" although it is in the original Hebrew). Thus, this term does not clarify the extent of the Flood either. We must look at other evidence to determine that.

HINTS IN THE GENESIS TEXT

Several verses in the Genesis Flood account do throw light on the extent of the Flood. First, consider the dove Noah sent out after the ark had come to rest "on the mountains of Ararat." Genesis 8:8 states Noah's purpose in releasing the dove was to see if there were nearby areas where dry land had reappeared. Verse 5 indicates mountaintops some distance away were visible. Verse 9, however, says the dove returned because it "could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth." In this case, "kol erets" clearly cannot mean the entire planet because dry land was already in plain sight, although from the standpoint of the dove, which apparently could not fly that far (or at least didn't want to), water

Apologetic TOOLS

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still covered the “entire earth.” Verses 10 and 11 indicate, after waiting a week, Noah sent out the dove again and this time it flew back carrying a fresh olive leaf in its beak. This indicates that somewhere relatively close to where the ark rested there were olive trees that had survived the Flood and had fresh leaves on them. Would this be possible in a flood that covered the highest mountains?

In today’s world, olive trees grow only at lower elevations, so the global flood interpretation has to account for how an olive tree could survive being covered by thousands of meters of salt water for several months. Even if one supposes in the pre-flood world olive trees grew on the top of Mount Ararat, the highest mountain in the region, one still has to appeal to miraculous intervention by God to protect a tree or to cause a seed to be preserved and then sprout and grow to have leaves big enough to pluck—all in three months or less.

In fact, there are numerous aspects of the global flood scenario for which miraculous intervention by God—beyond that which is in the text—must be appealed to. This is not to say that God could not or did not bypass natural processes in bringing about his purposes in the Flood. After all, the text clearly indicates he did. However, the miraculous interventions directly referred to in the text are limited to the sense of God using natural processes in ways that would never happen without his direct intervention. Natural weather patterns, for instance, would never produce 40 consecutive days of intense rain anywhere in the world, much less in a place like Mesopotamia.²

Nowhere in the text are there indications God superseded the laws of nature he created. For instance, in the case of the rain clouds, God would need to intervene to keep the rain patterns stationary over Mesopotamia and replenished with new moisture for 40 straight days. There is no warrant—either biblically or scientifically—to speculate as some do the rain came from a “water vapor canopy” God had created above the earth and held in place until that day. Not only is such a proposal not supported by the text but it would violate the natural laws God set in place when he created the universe.

The other source of water was “the fountains of the great deep,” which God caused to open and spew forth their stores of water. The Hebrew term “rab tehowm,” translated here as “great deep,” can mean anything from the “depths of the ocean” to “abundant subterranean waters.” So, how does one decide what the intended meaning of this phrase is? A basic principle of biblical “exegesis” is to let the text speak for itself and not read into it presuppositions to arrive at a preconceived conclusion.

In the global flood interpretation, one has to appeal to more than “abundant subterranean waters” (aquifers) underneath the Mesopotamian Plain to explain the floodwaters. Thus, speculations abound as to how the oceans or vast stores of water underneath the seafloor could have sprung forth to flood the planet. One proposal has God placing huge caverns of water underneath the ocean floor when he created the earth. According to this hypothesis, these vast caverns were unstable, so as soon as a crack in the ceiling began, it all

collapsed and the weight of the material above the sub-oceanic waters forced the water out in a huge fountain that deluged the entire earth.³

To conceive of such scenarios, however, one has to envision God creating the earth in a somewhat instantaneous fashion with a “water canopy” above and “subterranean caverns” below—both in defiance of the ordinary workings of nature as God established them. God would then have had to maintain these things until the time of the Flood. Could God have done this? Of course, he “could” have, but did he? The Bible doesn’t give any indication of such fantastic scenarios and the record of nature cannot be reconciled with them. The only reason such scenarios are proposed is to attempt to explain how there could have been enough water to cover the entire planet.⁴

Where did the floodwaters go as they receded? Global flood advocates generally appeal to rapid mountain building and seafloor subsidence to create space for the water to flow into. Genesis 8:1, however, gives a strong clue as to where the waters went. It says God “sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.” From the standpoint of a global flood, this would not make any sense because the atmosphere above a global ocean would have universally high humidity and little, if any, evaporation would occur. There would also be no purpose in the wind pushing the water somewhere as everywhere was flooded. If the flood were regional, however, a strong, drying wind would speed evaporation and, if it were from the right direction, it would greatly assist in pushing the water towards the ocean.

The topography of the Mesopotamian Plain fits this understanding quite well. It is a very flat plain some 1,000 km long and 300 to 400 km wide. Given these dimensions, a flood only a couple of hundred meters deep would have covered an area so vast that a boat floating anywhere near the middle of it would not be able to sight any land. From the standpoint of Noah, “all of the high mountains under the entire heavens” would be hidden from view by the floodwaters.

A linguistic point of importance here is the Hebrew words translated “high [gaborahh] mountains [har].” “Har” is a broad term encompassing any significant rise in the land, from a mound to a tall mountain.⁵ Indeed, the KJV translates this phrase as “high hills.” Thus, the Hebrew “har” need not conjure up images of Mt. Everest. It could as easily apply to any elevated rise in the landscape.

Now, let’s return to the statement the “high hills/mountains” were covered “to a depth of more than 15 cubits”. The regional flood model needs to account for this. What does it mean to be “covered?” The usual translation of the Hebrew word, “kacah,” is “cover” which carries the sense of covering something so that it is hidden from view. For instance, after the Flood, when Noah drank too much wine, his sons covered [kacah] his nakedness with a garment. In the Hebrew, Genesis 7:19-20 does not specifically say what the “highest *har*” were covered with, although the obvious assumption is it was water.

There are two distinct possibilities for what the intent of this passage was. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* points to one possibility. It states, “In Genesis 7:19-20 the hills were ‘covered’; the

Hebrew does not specify with what. The NIV specification of water goes beyond the Hebrew. The Hebrew may merely mean that the mountains were hidden from view by the storm.”⁶

We can see this point by looking at the KJV, which is a more word-for-word translation. It reads, “And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that [were] under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.” The reference to a specific depth can be understood to mean that Noah was referring to the fact the water was deep enough so the ark would not to run aground on even the highest point in its immediate area. Since the ark was 30 cubits high, Noah could easily see how much of the ark was above water and figure out the minimum depth of the water. If this view is correct, the draft of the boat was 15 cubits, a reasonable figure.

The other possibility is the “covering” of the mountains refers to the amount of rain that fell. Fifteen cubits of rainfall (7-plus meters), if it were in the form of snow, would literally “cover” the mountains like a blanket. But, in all but the highest elevations, it would be rain and quickly run off to lower elevations. The obvious question is how would Noah have known how much rain had fallen? We can presume Noah did not directly measure the water that “covered” (fell on) the mountains. The only way he could have known this was for the information to be communicated to him by the Spirit of God. (Or alternatively to Moses when he recorded the story).

If we are to integrate this statement into a consistent understanding of everything the text tells us about the Flood, the most logical explanation would seem to be that this “more than 15 cubit” cover of water that had been laid down on the “high hills” of the region refers to the total rainfall that fell during the 40 days. While that would only average about 200 millimeters of rainfall a day—something that happens frequently with large storms—what would make it unprecedented is it occurred continuously for 40 days.

Such a super-storm is necessary to account for both the global and local flood scenarios and is conceivable if God intervened to control the weather pattern. It would certainly never happen naturally. It would take a monster storm sitting stationary to the west of the Mesopotamian Plain being continuously fed by moist air from the southeast. The strong winds blowing steadily across the Persian Gulf would create a giant tidal surge that would have pushed far up the valley. Together with the torrential rains and melting snow from the higher peaks, the water in the basin could easily reach a depth of one or two hundred meters in the lower areas and perhaps more. Since the slope of the land is so gradual, even after the winds driving the storm surge subsided, the flow back to the ocean would be very slow. With such a scenario, the ark could easily be floating for several months out of the sight of land even after the storm abated.

THE ARK’S LANDING PLACE

Contrary to the common perception the ark landed on Mt. Ararat,

Genesis says it ran aground in “the mountains of Ararat,” a region that begins in the foothills at the northern end of the Mesopotamian Plain and continues to its highest point, Mt. Ararat, some 300 km to the north. The geology of Mt. Ararat indicates it is a volcanic mountain that cuts through and over the sedimentary layers that preceded it. According to the global flood scenario, these sedimentary layers were laid down in the Flood. So, that leads to the impossibility of the mountain being created after the Flood deposits were laid down as some global flood proponents maintain. However, this in itself doesn’t disprove the global flood. So, what other clues do we have?

For starters, the global flood scenario suggests all of the sedimentary layers on the earth were laid down in the flood and its aftermath. Thus, the oil and coal that exist within these rocks are the result of the life that existed prior to the Flood. However, the Genesis text clearly alludes to the presence of such pre-Flood deposits. God directed Noah to cover the ark with “pitch” to make it waterproof. This “pitch” (tar) is a simply oil residue resulting from the lighter hydrocarbons having evaporated away. The global flood, however, would require these to be produced as a result of the Flood and the layers it laid down.⁷

Another point is the “mountains of Ararat” are well to the northwest of where Noah and his sons built the ark (assuming it was in the Mesopotamian plain, where most people lived at that time). Thus, the ark would have drifted against the runoff current to end up there. Since God would have needed to intervene to keep the weather patterns in place to accomplish his purposes in the 40 days of the main storm, according to one local flood scenario, he could have maintained a steady southeasterly wind for the next few months. Not only would this have slowed the flow of water towards the ocean, it would have gently pushed the ark against the runoff flow until it had run aground on “the mountains of Ararat.”

In fact, the fact the ark only went as far as the mountains of Ararat mitigates against a global flood, as the strong currents and winds that would necessarily be associated with a global flood would likely carry the ark far away from its original location. Even a slow drift over several months can add up to thousands of kilometers. But a gentle push by southeasterly winds against the slow runoff current of a regional flood could easily account for the final resting place of the ark as well as the lengthy time it took to run aground.

One other point to consider is the length of time it took for the earth to become “completely dry” (Genesis 8:14).⁸ According to the text, it took more than two months for the tops of surrounding “har” (hills/ mountains) to become visible (8:5). Admittedly, this does sound like the ark landed on the highest point in the region and it took two months for lower mountaintops to appear.

A related problem involves the geography of the hill country in what is now northern Iraq and southern Turkey, where “the mountains of Ararat” begin. Given the traditional understanding of the boundaries of this region, there would appear to be no isolated hilltop on which the ark could run aground that would not be in view of higher

mountain peaks further to the north. Can a regional flood scenario be reconciled with the biblical description on this point?

It would have clarified things if high peaks on the horizon had been referred to in the text, but the fact that they are not mentioned doesn't necessarily mean Noah could not see them. Such mountains would simply have been too far away to be of any use to him. The tops of the "har" referred to in verse 5, then, could simply be nearby hilltops a few kilometers distant. One clue in favor of this understanding is verse 7, where it says the raven Noah first released "kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth." I doubt the meaning here is the raven stayed aloft non-stop for 2 or 3 weeks, not returning to the ark and yet not finding any place to land. Apparently, it could fly a good bit further than the dove and had no need to take refuge in the ark, as there were exposed areas within its range.

Another possibility, however, is the region described as "the mountains of Ararat" included the hilly areas of what is now northern Iraq that would be out of sight of the much higher areas that are normally associated with that region. Such "har" do exist. For instance, to the south of present-day Mosel (ancient Ninevah), there are small mountains 200 meters or so above the surrounding plains that would fit the description if this area were considered to be part of the "Mountains of Ararat." If the ark landed on one of these isolated hilltops, it would be out of sight of the high mountains to the north. There would be somewhat lower hilltops within a few kilometers that would gradually appear as the waters receded. Such a scenario would match the biblical description, but admittedly, this is speculation, as there is no evidence these hills would have been considered part of the "Mountains of Ararat."

Either way, the question of why it would take more than two months for the lower hilltops in the surrounding area to appear needs to be addressed. We can only speculate, of course, but one thing to consider is it was a very long way to the ocean, the gradient is exceedingly low and there was only a narrow opening at the Straights of Hormuz. From this standpoint, even a regional flood, would require God's intervention to make it recede more quickly. That is why God sent the wind. Not only could it evaporate large quantities of water, if the wind were from the northwest, it would efficiently push the water towards the ocean. Without the wind, it would have taken much longer to drain the area.

PURPOSE OF THE FLOOD

It is important to consider God's purpose in causing the Flood. The Flood was God's judgment on the pervasive sin of Noah's day. In fact, the text indicates Noah and his family were the only righteous people left. Given the decadent, violent culture around Noah and his family, it is apparent God prevented them from being murdered—something that would have been expected during the long period of ridicule they suffered as they built the ark. In addition to this immediate purpose, God also used the Flood as a concrete illustration for all humans of the seriousness of pervasive sin as well as his provision of a means of

rescue from it.

A general principle we can derive from Scripture is when God judges sin, he limits his judgment to the people in question and the animals affected by their sin. We see this in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the various judgments on the people of Israel or other peoples. Of course, it can be argued God's judgment in the Flood was different than most other judgments in Scripture as it was a universal judgment (the exception being initial judgment at Eden and the "Judgment Day" at the end times which are also universal).

A global flood, in fact, requires that we treat these as very different kinds of judgments since animals that had no relationship to humans were destroyed. Since all air-breathing animals on the earth would have been destroyed by a global flood—except for the representative pairs on the ark—this leads to all sorts of difficulties in explaining how these creatures got to the ark, how the ark could accommodate all of them, how eight people could have cared for them and how certain species could have survived and returned to their specialized habitats far from Mesopotamia.⁹

Of course, one can always appeal to the miraculous intervention of God. However, it was God who dictated to Noah the dimensions of the ark and so we can speculate based on those dimensions what might be possible. If the ark wasn't big enough to hold representative pairs of all of the air-breathing animals of the entire earth—not to mention all the food that would have been required to feed them—then this is further biblical evidence the Flood was not global.

The Genesis text only mentions two categories of animals that were taken aboard the ark: "clean" and "unclean." This refers to whether they could be used for food and sacrificial offerings in the later Jewish ritual system. It says Noah took seven pairs of the "clean" animals (and seven pairs of each bird) aboard, while only one pair of each unclean animal was taken. This clearly indicates the purpose was not just to save species from extinction. It was to provide individual, ritually clean animals after the Flood for burnt offerings to God and to quickly establish the livestock Noah and his family needed. It would have taken many years for such animals to naturally spread back into the devastated area and they would had to have been re-domesticated.

Specifically, the Hebrew words, "yequwm," "chay," "behemah," "remes," "owph" and "basar" are used to describe the animals and humans that were saved or destroyed. "Yequwm" and "chay" are general terms for "life" and are not specific. "Yequwm" (7:4, 23) is translated in the KJV as "living substance" and would presumably include plant life, since it would be destroyed along with the air-breathing animals. As for aquatic life (a good bit of which would have died), since the "living substance" is qualified by the phrase "on the face of the ground," it does not appear to include those life forms.

"Chay," in this context (7:14, 21; 8:19; 9:2, 5) is translated "beast" and means "wild animal." But, it also means "life" in general, such as in the phrase "Noah's life" (7:11). In fact, in 6:19, 8:1, 17, and 21, it is translated in the KJV as "living thing," although it's identical to when

it is translated “beast.” Interestingly, “chay” is used together with “nephesh” after the Flood in 9:10, 12, 15, and 16 and is translated as “living creature.” Whether any differentiation is intended is unclear.

When used by itself, “nephesh” refers to the human “soul.” But, here it is combined with “chay” and refers to “soulish” creatures, those endowed with will and emotions. It is the same phrase used to describe the creation of birds and mammals in Genesis 1 and 2. And in 9:4, it is combined with “basar” to refer to the “lifeblood” in animals, which God commanded Noah not to eat.

“Behemah,” “owph” and “remes” are more specific terms that are fairly easy to deal with. “Behemah” refers to livestock and “owph” refers to birds. “Remes” is a fairly broad term that refers to short-legged animals that move quickly along the ground and would include rabbits and rodents, although it also can refer to reptiles such as lizards. Within the context of a regional flood in which God destroys all humans and their animals, it probably wouldn’t include reptiles, unless they were part of the human economy.

Perhaps the biggest issue with the Hebrew that needs clarification is the meaning of “basar” in this context. “Basar” has a wide range of meanings and is often translated with the English word “flesh.” For instance, when Adam refers to Eve as “flesh of my flesh”, this is the word used. Thus, it often refers specifically to human beings and not animals in general.

In Genesis 6:12, when the corruption of the earth is described, “basar” is clearly referring to human beings alone. All “flesh” [basar] had corrupted God’s ways and only humans have the capacity to sin against God. Likewise, in the next verse, “basar” clearly refers to people, since the “earth” (human society) is filled with violence because of them. In several verses thereafter, however, “basar” clearly refers to the animals brought onto the ark. Since these “basar” are described as having the “breath of life” [ruwach chay], this implies they are higher animals (birds and mammals) that can relate to humans. In 7:22, “neshamah ruwach chay” (breath of life) is used to refer to these “basar”, which is similar to the phrase “neshamah chay” used to describe God’s breathing in the “breath of life” into Adam in 2:7 so he became a “living soul” [nephesh chay]. “Ruwach” is the word for “spirit” (as well as “breath” and “wind”), so this supports the idea the animals referred to here are of the type that relate to humans and are part of the human ecology.

One question global flood proponents need to be able to answer is what possible purpose there would be in destroying parts of the earth that were totally unaffected by human sin. If God’s purpose were to judge human sin, his destruction of the parts of the earth (most of the earth, in fact) that were not affected by sin would serve no purpose.¹⁰

FINAL THOUGHTS

In concluding this discussion of the Genesis Flood, I want to briefly look at two other biblical passages that provide important data in support of the regional, yet universal, flood model. Psalm 104 is a

poem about creation that has many parallels with Genesis 1. It is clearly referring to events that took place during the Genesis 1 creation days. After describing God creating the earth and covering it “with the deep as with a garment” so “the waters stood above the mountains,” it says God caused the waters to flow to the places he had assigned for them. Then, in verse 9, it says God “set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.”

The global flood model requires that this passage be interpreted as referring to the Genesis Flood. But, unlike every other Scripture referring to the Flood, there is no mention of judgment in this psalm. Likewise, the context is clearly the Creation. God did not “stretch out the heavens like a tent” or “set the earth on its foundations” during the Flood. This Scripture clearly states after God caused the dry land to appear (on creation day 3), he would not again cause the waters to cover the earth. Thus, it follows the Flood could not have been global.

The other passages that must be considered are found in 2 Peter. In 2:5 Peter says, “if he (God) did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;...” This implies the flood was limited to the area where the “ancient world’s” [archaios kosmos] “ungodly people” lived. Likewise, referring to Noah as “a preacher of righteousness” implies an additional reason for having Noah build the ark was to serve as a “pulpit” from which to preach God’s message of impending judgment. If any had believed, they would have been allowed on the boat and would have been saved.

In the other passage, 3:5-6, Peter refers to the earth being created “by water” and then says, “By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.” The phrase, “the world of that time,” makes more sense in terms of a local, universal flood that destroyed the human world of Noah’s day, which was apparently limited to the greater Mesopotamian region.

The insistence by some that the Bible teaches a young earth and a global flood is a major stumbling block to many who might otherwise consider the claims of Jesus Christ and put their faith in him. It is true both the global flood and regional flood models have difficulties in fully explaining everything in the biblical text. As noted above, there are numerous statements in the Genesis text and elsewhere that cannot be reconciled with the global flood model. The main difficulty in reconciling the regional flood model with the text is the description of the ark’s landing site, but this is more a matter of what the text doesn’t say than what it does. I have suggested two plausible scenarios for reconciling this difficulty and perhaps there are others.

In my opinion, a consistent reading of the biblical evidence clearly points to a universal flood that was limited to the areas inhabited by humans in Noah’s day. If I am in error at any point in this evaluation, I am open to correction, and I challenge global flood advocates to likewise reevaluate their understandings of this issue. “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

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ENDNOTES

1. See my article: "The Age of the Earth in Light of the Bible," available at <http://www.konkyo.org/english/earth.html>
2. The wettest places on earth do have yearly totals on par with this, but it's spread out over much more time and in more limited watershed areas.
3. "The Hovind Theory", video by Kent Hovind
4. Likewise, the primary reason global flood proponents insist their interpretation of the Genesis text must be correct in spite of the numerous textual and practical problems it entails is that a young earth interpretation of Genesis 1 requires it, which in turn is required by the "Perfect Paradise" paradigm that assumes God could not call his creation "very good" if it contained "millions of years of death and suffering of animals prior to Adam's sin." For an excellent analysis of the issues surrounding this, I highly recommend the book, "Peril In Paradise" by Mark S. Whorton (Authentic Media, 2005)
5. We could say that in Hebrew, it is very easy "to make a mountain out of a mole hill!"
6. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, p. 449
7. As always, one could appeal to miraculous intervention and attribute its presence to God's direct creation of it. This, of course, is pure ad hoc, as there is no textual support for it.
8. In the Hebrew, the word translated here as "earth" [erets] is identical to that of the "earth" being flooded, and yet no one would suppose that the intent of this verse is that the entire planet became a desert. In this context, "the earth" obviously means the area where the ark was located.
9. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a thorough discussion of these issues. For a comprehensive analysis of this issue, I recommend the article, "Rapid Post-Flood Speciation: A Critique of the Young-Earth Model" by Greg Moore available at: http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/other_papers/rapid_post_flood_speciation.shtml
10. Global flood advocates, of course, answer that the entire creation was affected by the Fall of Adam, and thus it it wasn't "unaffected by sin." Even if we are to grant that assertion, however, if therefore God needs to bring judgment on the entire creation, why stop at the earth? If humans had never been to the Americas, for instance, and yet those areas of the earth needed to be destroyed in judgment, then why should the rest of the universe be different? The problem, of course, is that the young earth/global flood paradigm is a "perfect paradise" model with no decay or death prior to the Fall. This view, therefore, results in a necessary corollary that the very laws of nature itself were affected by the Fall. This issue is covered in the article, "Creature Mortality: From Creation Or The Fall?", available at: http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/other_papers/creature_mortality.shtml



Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound area and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction that the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, what God says through His word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

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Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science, the Bible and related topics.
- Working with teachers and homeschoolers to achieve a balanced approach to the teaching of origins.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of the RTB ministry.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, encouraging them to evaluate their worldviews.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

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