

HOW TO BELIEVE THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF A "UNIVERSAL" FLOOD WITHOUT VIOLATING THE NATURAL LAWS WHICH WE SEE IN THE EARTH (A brief summary-type presentation)

There are several evidences that the Biblical flood was widespread in the earth, rather than being a very localized flood. Most important is the fact that the Genesis account (chapters 6-8) indicates that the Flood was a very major physical disturbance on the earth. Some of the statements in these chapters (Amer. Revised Version, 1901) which make it necessary for us to recognize the major proportions of the Flood are these:

Genesis 7:11 states that "all the fountains of the great deep [were] broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened." This seems to make it clear that the oceans supplied water for flooding, in addition to the falling of rain. Probably earthquakes in the oceans caused great waves of water to wash up on the land, and it may be that uncommonly large cyclone funnels carried water onto the land from the sea.

Genesis 8:4 and 5 give us information by which we know that the ark was floating continuously for six months (cf 7:11), and that the water was still so high that no appreciable amount of land could be seen until about seven and one-half months after the Flood began. Chapter 8:6-10 gives us further confirmation of the long period that was required for the major part of the waters to run off into the oceans. In relation to this fact, remember that the falling of rain had continued for only 40 days (7:12).

These facts, as recorded in the Bible, lead us to conclude that the Flood was a truly major physical disturbance on the earth. We are not saying that the Flood had covered the tops of mountains higher than perhaps 2,000 feet. There were no mountains that high in the area which conservative Bible scholars agree was the dwelling place of pre-diluvian man. (Compare the fact that, even at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel--Genesis 11:1-9, the idea of dispersing beyond the region of Mesopotamia was not something that man had contemplated.) Even though Genesis 7:19 says that "all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered," we do not need to take this as applying to areas of the earth which were completely beyond the region which God had designated for the occupancy of early man. (See the [of Eichman's] for an explanation of why such terms as "all" and "under the whole heaven" of 7:19-23 can legitimately be regarded as spoken from the standpoint of the local observers in the flood area.) But the fact that distant, high mountain ranges and distant continents may not have been covered with water should not lead us to believe that the Flood had no appreciable effect upon the remote continents. Any earth-disturbance which caused all of the conditions described in Genesis 7 to 8, over an area so extensive that an ark was necessary to save the animals of that region, must certainly have been great enough to affect at least the shores and lowlands of all continents of the earth. In fact, it is possible, as many Bible scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries have suggested, that the rotation and axial inclination of the earth could have been somewhat altered--at least temporarily. Three possible effects of such alteration could have been (1) a hastening of the movement of polar ice to produce more intense glaciation, (2) extreme changes in the temperature of air masses in certain parts of the earth, and (3) the conditions which brought about the rapid freezing and burial of large numbers of mammoths in Siberia. (The freezing and burial of these mammoths is a very remarkable reality which does not allow a satisfactory explanation based on presently-known phenomena.)

Belief in a Biblical flood such as we have just described allows us to give due reverence to the Biblical language we find in Genesis 6-8 and still to avoid the contradictions and immense scientific problems which are so common in "Flood

geology" books. For example, (1) the problem of how there could have been enough water to actually submerge all the highest mountains of the world at once, or (alternately) why there are great amounts of valid evidence that most of the mountains of the world are very old (some proponents of "Flood geology" say the mountains were not formed until the Flood); and (2) the problem of the type of animal-distribution which we find on the earth at the present time. (If all the mammals in the most remote continents had been killed during the Flood, then nothing short of a supernatural distributive act of God would have been required to move the marsupials of Australia to their present location without having them also distributed in other areas of the world.)

A further question, related to the height of the mountains during the Flood, which might perplex some readers is the altitude of what is presently known as Mount Ararat. It is very unlikely that this mountain, of which the highest peak is about 17,000 feet in elevation, is what the Genesis account speaks of as "the mountains of Ararat" (8:4). By consulting a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia one can easily learn that Ararat was a large district which was a very long distance from where Moses was when he wrote the Book of Genesis. The precise boundaries at the time of the writing of the Bible are not known--just as we do not know the exact location of the Garden of Eden, even though Genesis 2:10-14 gives specific names of rivers and districts by which the position of the Garden originally could be identified. So, there is no way to know even the approximate location of the place where the Ark came to rest, and likewise no reason for thinking that the 16,873-foot peak of the present region of Ararat in the country of Turkey was submerged by the Flood.

Below are two short sections from a chapter entitled "The Flood," written in 1990 by Phillip Eichman, a conservative Christian professor in Ball State University, in Indiana. (The book or manuscript of which this chapter forms a part is unpublished, as of July 1991.)

These two sections are written in order to show that the wording of the Biblical story of the Flood, in chapters 6-8 of Genesis, does not declare that the waters of the Flood completely covered all the continents of the earth. In my estimation, the explanations given in these two sections are acceptable; though, I do not feel that we should use the term "local flood," as the commentator C. M. Woods does at the end of the second section. Eichman himself agrees with me that the size and force of the Biblical Flood were so great that it must have affected all continents, at least to some extent.

--D. E. Wonderly

[erets, earth--as in Gen. 7:21]

This Hebrew word may also be translated in other ways. Young's Analytical Concordance lists the references for eretz as follows: [erets]

"country"	140 times
"ground"	96 times
"earth"	677 times
"land"	1458 times

Custance⁵ has stated that of the 677 times that the word was rendered "earth," about 100 of these could be translated as "land." Also, there are other more specific Hebrew words to denote the earth. The word, tebel, for example, meaning "earth" or "world" is typically used in regard to the entire earth (see Psalms 24: 1).

Based upon these language considerations some scholars have concluded that eretz might also be translated as "land" in the passages regarding the flood. The flood then, could be seen as localized rather than universal. That is, the flood would have been limited to the geographical region known to mankind at that time.

Another question which has been raised in regard to the language of Genesis is the use of hyperbole (figures of speech which are exaggerated for emphasis). There are numerous examples of the use of hyperbole in the Bible.⁶ The phrase "under the whole heaven" for example, may be considered as a hyperbole. This in no way should be seen as a negative or skeptical view of Scripture. Much of the Bible was written in figurative language and our understanding of these passages may be increased if we look at them as figurative rather than literal. In this case, the phrase "under the whole heaven" is interpreted as meaning all of the world that was known by persons at that time.

An interesting speculation calls attention to the fullness and exactness of the description of the flood here given and relies on this fact to suggest that the flood record is based on an eyewitness account, perhaps a log book of Noah. If this be true, such statements as all the high mountains (19) may be understood to mean all those within the view of the observer. At any rate under the whole heaven (19) might mean no more than "under the whole horizon". Further, it is true that such words as "all" and "every" are sometimes used in the Old Testament in a limited sense, strange as this sounds to the modern reader. See, for example, 6s. 41:57; Deut. 2:25 and I Kings 10:24. Again the word "earth" may also mean "land" or "the inhabited earth". Thus, the local flood hypothesis seems to be a valid alternative.⁸

[This number 8 is a reference to C. M. Woods, The Living Way Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1: Shreveport, LA, Lambert Book House, 1972, p. 20. The entire paragraph is a quotation from that commentary.]