

Chapter 10

Was the Flood global?

- Does it matter?
- Does the Bible say that Noah’s Flood covered the whole earth?
- Is there any evidence outside the Bible for such a Flood?

MANY Christians today claim that the Flood of Noah’s time was only a *local* flood. They claim it was confined to somewhere around the Mesopotamian region and never really covered the whole earth. The discovery of a layer of mud by archaeologists in the Middle East and more recently the finding of evidence for a local flood in the Black Sea have both been claimed as evidence for a (local) biblical flood.

People generally want a local flood because they have accepted the widely believed evolutionary history of the Earth, which interprets the fossils under our feet as the history of the sequential appearance of life over eons of time.

Scientists once understood the fossils (which are buried in water-carried sediments of mud and sand) to be mostly the result of the great Flood. Those who now accept the evolutionary billions of years of gradual accumulation of fossils have, in their way of thinking, explained away the evidence for the Flood—hence their belief in a local flood, or none at all. If they would think from a biblical perspective, they would see the abundant evidence for the Flood. As someone quipped, “I wouldn’t have seen it if I hadn’t believed it.”

Those who accept the eons of time with its fossil accumulation also, perhaps unwittingly, rob the Fall of its serious consequences. They put the fossils, which testify of disease, suffering, and death before mankind appeared, before Adam and Eve sinned and brought death and suffering

into the world. In doing this they also undermine the meaning of the death and Resurrection of Christ. Such a scenario also robs God's description of His finished creation as 'very good' of all meaning (see Chapter 2).

Some preachers will say they believe in a 'universal' or 'worldwide' flood, but really they do not believe that the Flood covered the whole earth. They side-step the clear teaching of the Bible, while giving the appearance of believing it, by cleverly redefining words. They mean 'universal' and 'worldwide' only in terms of an imagined limited extent of human habitation at the time. They imagine that people lived only, say, in a valley in Mesopotamia and so the flood could kill all the people without being global in extent.

Biblical evidence for the global Flood

The local flood idea is totally inconsistent with the Bible, as the following points demonstrate:

The need for the Ark

If the Flood were local, why did Noah have to build an Ark? He could have walked to the other side of the mountains and escaped. Travelling just 20 km per day, Noah and his family could have travelled over 3,000 km in six months. God could have simply warned Noah to flee, as He did for Lot in Sodom.

The size of the Ark

If the Flood were local, why was the Ark big enough to hold all the different kinds of land vertebrate animals in the world? If only Mesopotamian animals were aboard, or only domestic animals, the Ark could have been much smaller.¹



The size of the Ark makes sense only if the Flood were global.

1. See Chapter 13.

The need for animals to be on the Ark

If the Flood were local, why did God send the animals to the Ark to escape death? There would have been other animals to reproduce those kinds even if they had all died in the local area. Or He could have sent them to a non-flooded region.

The need for birds to be on the Ark

If the Flood were local, why would *birds* have been sent on board? These could simply have winged across to far-distant higher ground. Birds can fly several hundred kilometres in one day.

The judgment was universal.

If the Flood were local, people who did not happen to be living in the vicinity would not have been affected by it. They would have escaped God's judgment on sin. It boggles the mind to believe that, after all those centuries since creation, no one had migrated to other parts—or that people living on the periphery of such a local flood would not have moved to the adjoining high ground rather than be drowned. Jesus stated that the Flood killed everyone not on the Ark (Matt. 24:37–39).

Of course those who want to believe in a local flood generally say that the world is old and that people were here for many tens of thousands of years before the Flood. If this were the case, it is inconceivable that all the people could have fitted in a localized valley in Mesopotamia, for example, or that they had not migrated further afield as the population grew.

The Flood was a type of the judgment to come.

In 2 Peter 3, the coming universal judgment by fire is likened to the judgment by water of Noah's Flood: the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (verses 6 & 7).

The waters were above the mountains.

If the Flood were local, how could the waters rise to 15 cubits (8 metres) *above* the mountains (Gen. 7:20)? Water seeks its own level. It could not rise to cover the local mountains while leaving the rest of the world untouched.²

2. Mt Everest has marine fossils at its peak. There is enough water in the oceans so that if all the surface features of the earth were evened out, including the ocean basins, water would cover the earth to a depth of 2.7 km. This is not enough to cover mountains the height of Everest now, but it shows that the pre-Flood mountains could have been quite high and still been covered. See Chapter 11 for more details about how this could have occurred.

The duration of the Flood

Noah and company were on the Ark for one year and 10 days (Gen. 7:11, 8:14)—surely an excessive amount of time for any local flood? It was more than seven months before the tops of any mountains became visible. How could they drift around in a local flood for that long without seeing any mountains?



Floodwater entering the roads of Chennai, India. If Noah's Flood was only local, what would God's promise not to send a flood again mean?

God's promise broken?

If the Flood were local, God would have repeatedly broken His promise never to send such a Flood again. There have been huge 'local' floods in recent times: in Bangladesh, for example, where 80% of that country has been inundated, or in Europe in 2002.

All people are descendants of Noah and his family.

The genealogies of Adam (Gen. 4:17–26, 5:1–31) and Noah (Gen. 10:1–32) are exclusive—they tell us that all the pre-Flood people came from Adam and all the post-Flood people came from Noah. The descendants of Noah were all living together at Babel and refusing to “*fill the earth*”, as they had been commanded (Gen. 9:1). So God confused their one language into many and scattered them (Gen. 11:1–9).

There is striking evidence that all peoples on Earth have come from Noah, found in the Flood stories from many cultures around the world—North and South America, South Sea Islands, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Japan, China, India, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Hundreds of such stories have been gathered.³ The stories closest to the area of dispersion from Babel are nearest in detail to the biblical account—for example, the Gilgamesh epic.

3. Frazer, J.G., *Folk-lore in the Old Testament: studies in comparative religion*, Vol. 1, Macmillan, UK, pp. 105–361, 1918.

The Hebrew terminology of Genesis 6–9⁴

- ‘*The earth*’ (Heb. *erets*) is used 46 times in the Flood account in Genesis 6–9, as well as in Genesis 1. The explicit link to the big picture of creation, especially in Genesis 6:6–7, clearly implies a universal Flood. Furthermore, the judgment of God is pronounced not just on *all flesh*, but on *the earth*:

*“And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them. And, behold, I will destroy them **with the earth**”* (Gen. 6:13).
- “*Upon the face of all the earth*” (Gen. 7:3, 8:9) clearly connects with the same phrase in the creation account where Adam and Eve are given the plants on Earth to eat (Gen. 1:29). Clearly, in God’s decree the mandate is universal—the whole Earth is their domain. God uses the phrase in Genesis also of the dispersal of people at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:8–9)—again, the context is the whole land surface of the globe. The exact phrase is used nowhere else in Genesis.
- “*Face of the ground*”, used five times in the Flood account, also connects back to the universal context of creation (Gen. 2:6), again emphasizing the universality of the Flood.
- “*All flesh*” (Heb. *kol-basar*) is used 12 times in the Flood account and nowhere else in Genesis. God said He would destroy ‘*all flesh*’, apart from those on the Ark (Gen. 6:13,17),⁵ and He did (Gen. 7:21–22). In the context of the Flood, ‘all flesh’ clearly includes all nostril-breathing land animals as well as mankind—see Genesis 7:21–23. ‘All flesh’ could not have been confined to a Mesopotamian valley.
- “*Every living thing*” (Heb. *kol chai*) is again used in the Flood account (Gen. 6:19, 8:1,17) and in the creation account (Gen. 1:28). In the creation account the phrase is used in the context of Adam and Eve’s dominion over the animals. God said (Gen. 7:4) that He would destroy “*every living thing*” He had made and this happened—*only* Noah and those with him on the Ark survived (Gen. 7:23).
- “*Under the whole heaven*” (Gen. 7:19) is used six times outside of the Flood account in the Old Testament, and always with a universal meaning (Deut. 2:25, 4:19, Job 28:24, 37:3, 41:11, Dan. 9:12). For

4. Davidson, R.M., Biblical evidence for the universality of the Genesis Flood, *Origins* 22(2):58–73, 1995; grisa.org/origins-22058.

5. Some translations wrongly render ‘all flesh’ in Gen. 6:13 as ‘all people’ (e.g. NIV, whereas KJV and NASB are correct). This is clearly not the meaning of ‘all flesh’, as revealed by its use in Gen. 7:21 (where the NIV renders ‘all flesh’ correctly as ‘every living thing’).

example, “*Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine*”, said the LORD (Job 41:11).

- “*All the fountains of the great deep.*” The fountains of the great deep are mentioned only in the Flood account (Gen. 7:11, 8:2) and Proverbs 8:28. ‘*The deep*’ (Heb. *tehom*) relates back to creation (Gen. 1:2) where it refers to the one ocean covering the whole world before the land was formed. And it was not just “*the fountains of the great deep*” but “*all the fountains of the great deep*” which broke open.
- A special Hebrew word was reserved for the Flood or Deluge: *Mabbul*. In every one of the 13 occasions this word is used, it refers to Noah’s Flood. Its one use outside of Genesis, Psalm 29:10, refers to the universal sovereignty of God in presiding over the Deluge. The New Testament also has a special word reserved for the Flood, *cataclysmos*, from which we derive our English word ‘cataclysm’.

The decrees in Genesis 9 parallel those in Genesis 1.

In Genesis 9:1 God gives man the exact same commission as in Genesis 1:28—“*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*”. He also gives man dominion over “*every beast of the earth*” (Gen. 9:2, cf. 1:28) and man is instructed as to what he can and cannot eat (Gen. 9:4–5), which parallels Genesis 1:29–30. These decrees in Genesis 1 are universal in extent, and clearly they are also here, after the Flood. If Adam and his descendants were to rule the whole earth, so were Noah and his descendants. If ‘earth’ in Genesis 9:1 is the whole earth, as all would agree it is, then surely it is also the whole earth in the context of the Flood in Genesis 8:13!⁶

The New Testament speaks of the Flood as global

New Testament passages which speak of the Flood use universal language: “*the flood came and took them all away*” (Jesus, Matt. 24:39); “*the flood came and destroyed them all*” (Jesus, in Luke 17:27); “*did not spare the ancient world [Greek: kosmos], but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly*” (2 Pet. 2:5); “*a few, that is eight people, were saved through the water*” (1 Pet. 3:20); Noah “*condemned the world*” through his faith in God (Heb. 11:7); “*the world that then was, being flooded by water, perished*” (2 Pet. 3:6). All these statements presuppose a global Flood, not some localized event.

6. Batten, D., Adam and Noah: two beginnings, *Creation* 34(1):12–14, 2011; creation.com/adam-and-noah.

Answers to objections to a global Flood

Objection 1: 'All' does not always mean 'all'⁷

Some have argued that since 'all' does not always mean 'each and every' (e.g. Mark 1:5) the use of 'all' in the Flood account does not necessarily mean the Flood was universal. That is, they claim that this use of 'all' allows for a local flood.

However, the meaning of a word is decided by the context. From the context of 'all' in Luke 2:1, for example, we can see that 'all the world' meant all the Roman Empire. So, it is the context that tells us that 'all' here does not mean every bit of the whole land surface of the globe.

Similarly, to determine the meaning of 'all' in Genesis 6–9, we must consider the context, not just transfer the inferred meaning from somewhere else.

The word 'all' (Heb. *kol*) is used 72 times in the 85 verses of Genesis 6–9, 21% of all the times it is used in all 50 chapters of Genesis.

In Genesis 7:19 we read that "*all* (Heb. *kol*) *the high mountains under all* (Heb. *kol*) *the heavens were covered*". Note the double use of 'all'. In Hebrew this gives emphasis so as to eliminate any possibility of ambiguity.⁷ This could be accurately translated as "all the high mountains under the *entire* heavens", to reflect the emphasis in the Hebrew. Leupold, in his authoritative commentary on Genesis, said of this, "... the text disposes of the question of the universality of the Flood."⁸

Objection 2: The post-Flood geography is the same as the pre-Flood

Because the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were mentioned in the description of the Garden of Eden, and we have the Tigris and Euphrates rivers now, some have argued that the Flood could not have altered the topography of the world, and therefore it must have been local.⁹

However, there are major differences in the topography described for the Garden of Eden and the world now. There was one river flowing from Eden which separated into four rivers (Gen. 2:10–14), two of which

7. For a full treatment, see Kruger, M., Genesis 6–9: Does 'all' always mean all? *Journal of Creation* 10(2):214–218, 1996; creation.com/all.

8. Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of Genesis, Volume 1*, Baker Book House, US, pp. 301–302, 1942.

9. For example, Young, D.A., *Creation and the Flood: an alternative to Flood geology and theistic evolution*, Baker Book House, US, p. 210, 1997. Sadly, Dr Young has drifted more and more towards full-blown theistic evolution since he wrote this book, wherein he compromised the Bible by advocating 'progressive creationist' views.

were called the Tigris and the Euphrates. So the rivers had a common source before the Flood, which is very different from today. The other two rivers were the Pishon and the Gihon. The Pishon is not mentioned post-Flood and Gihon is used of the locality of a spring near Jerusalem in the times of Kings David, Solomon, and Hezekiah.¹⁰

The post-Flood world is not the same as the pre-Flood world. Someone may ask, ‘Then why do we have a Tigris and Euphrates today?’ Answer: the same reason there is a Liverpool and Newcastle in Australia; and a London, Oxford, and Cambridge in North America, although they were originally place names in England. Features in the post-Flood world were given names familiar to those who survived the Flood.

Objection 3: There is no evidence for such a Flood in the geologic record

What evidence would one expect from a global watery cataclysm that drowned the animals, birds, and people not on the Ark? All around the world, in rock layer after rock layer, we find billions of dead things that have been buried in water-carried mud and sand. Their state of preservation frequently tells of rapid burial and fossilization, just like one would expect in such a flood.

There is abundant evidence that many of the rock strata were laid down quickly, one after the other, without significant time breaks between them. Preservation of animal tracks, ripple marks, and even raindrop marks testifies to rapid covering of these features to enable their preservation. Polystrate fossils (ones which traverse many strata) speak of very quick deposition of the strata. The scarcity of erosion, soil formation, animal burrows, and roots between layers also shows they must have been deposited in quick succession. The radical deformation of thick layers of sediment without evidence of cracking or melting also shows how all the layers must have been still soft when they were bent.



Fossil 'graveyards' around the world, where the bones of many animals were washed together, buried and fossilized, are evidence for a watery cataclysm like the Flood.

10. The Gihon spring of 1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45, and 2 Chron. 32:30, 33:14 clearly has nothing to do with the Tigris–Euphrates river system of today, or the four-way split river system described in Eden.

Dykes (walls) and pipes (cylinders) of sandstone which connect with the same material many layers beneath show that the layers beneath must have been still soft, and contained much water. That the sandstone could be squeezed up through cracks above to form the ‘clastic’ dykes and pipes, again shows rapid deposition of many strata.

The worldwide distribution of many geological features and rock types is also consistent with a global Flood. The Morrison Formation is a layer of sedimentary rock that extends from Texas to Canada, clearly showing the fallacy of the still-popular belief that ‘the present is the key to the past’—there are no processes occurring on Earth today that are laying down such large areas of sedimentary layers. In reality, God’s revelation about the past is the key to understanding the present.

The limited geographic extent of unconformities (clear breaks in the sequence of deposition with different tilting of layers, etc.) is also consistent with the reality of the global Flood. And there are many other evidences for the Flood.^{11,12}

The problem is not the evidence but the mindset of those looking at the evidence. One geologist testified how he never saw any evidence for the Flood—until, as a Christian, he was convinced from the Bible that the Flood must have been a global cataclysm. Now he sees the evidence everywhere. The Bible talks about people being corrupted in their thinking after turning their backs on God (Romans 1:18ff.) and of people being so spiritually blind that they cannot see the obvious (Acts 28:25–27).



Photo by Joachim Scheven

Preservation of ripple marks (left) requires rapid burial, as in the Flood (lower Triassic rock, England). Folding of sedimentary rock without cracking or heating (right), such as at Eastern Beach, Auckland, New Zealand, suggests the folding occurred before the sand and mud had time to turn into stone, consistent with rapid deposition during the Flood (note people for scale).

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11. Morris, J.D., *The Young Earth (revised and expanded)*, Master Books, US, 2007; creation.com/young-earth.
 12. Austin, S. (Ed.), *Grand Canyon: Monument to Catastrophe*, Institute for Creation Research, US, 1994; creation.com/monument.

Conclusion

A universal **worldwide, globe-covering** Flood is clearly taught by the Bible. The only reasons for thinking the Flood was otherwise come from outside the Bible. When we use the framework provided by the Bible we find that the physical evidence from the rocks and fossils beautifully fits what the Bible says.¹³

Furthermore, the realization of the reality of God's judgment by the Flood in the past should warn us of the reality of the judgment to come—a judgment by fire—and stimulate us to be ready for that judgment (2 Peter 3:3–13). Those who are not 'in Christ' will suffer the wrath of God (John 3:36).

13. See Chapters 11–15 for other questions about the Flood and Noah's Ark.