

The Flood—a designed catastrophe?

Shaun Doyle

Catastrophe in geology has come into vogue again. Through the research of those such as J. Harlen Bretz on the Missoula Flood¹ and the wide acceptance of the asteroid impact hypothesis for the postulated Cretaceous/Tertiary (K/T) boundary extinction event,² secular researchers are recognizing more features of the rock record are best explained in catastrophic terms. In many ways, this has allowed more opportunity for direct dialogue between Flood geologists and secular geologists. The concept of catastrophe allows both secular and biblical geologists to work with similar frames of reference, which was not possible under the 150-year hegemony of a strict Lyellian gradualism. It may also allow biblical creationists to use more modern work as a crucial first step in explaining the rock record in the biblical framework.

However, the common language of ‘catastrophe’ only goes so far. The chronological contexts in which the catastrophes are conceived remain as contradictory as ever. A commitment to a broadly uniformitarian philosophy of history, especially with respect to chronology, necessarily restricts any rigorous application of catastrophist thinking to the rock record for secular geologists.³ Moreover, in terms of physical effects, the biblical Flood is considered far more devastating than any uniformitarian ‘catastrophe’. For most biblical creationists, most uniformitarian ‘catastrophes’ are just location-specific features of one massive biblical catastrophe—Noah’s Flood.

However, there is a conceptual divide between secular and biblical catastrophists that has been little explored, and has the potential to create much confusion. It has to do



with the very notion of ‘catastrophe’ itself. When a secular researcher conceives of a ‘catastrophe’ in the deep time framework, he conceives of an essentially *random* event that killed creatures *indiscriminately*. It is the result of spontaneous physical causes. As such, it can only be explained in terms of physical cause and effect.

However, the key catastrophe in the Bible that explains much of the rock record, Noah’s Flood, was not such a *random* event. It was a planned event—God announced to Noah He was going to bring a Flood and commanded Noah to build the Ark (Genesis 6:13–16), which would have taken a long time to build. Creatures were not killed in an indiscriminate manner in the Flood—*specific* classes of creatures were targeted for *total* extinction: humans and terrestrial *nephesh* animals (Genesis 6:17). Another feature of the Flood was that it was *designed* to allow for the survival of a specific group of humans and terrestrial *nephesh* animals both during the Flood and after it—those on Noah’s Ark (Genesis 6:18–20). While the Ark was clearly engineered to survive the Flood,⁴ it can also be said that the Flood was engineered to allow the survival of the Ark. God had stated *purposes* in the Flood catastrophe, and the Flood was *designed* to carry them out. Clearly the biblical Flood was not a random catastrophe.

Why does this difference matter? It presents a key difference for how biblical creationists and secular geologists conceptualize the rock record. Since the secular conception of ‘catastrophe’ is naturalistic, they are *constrained* to

conceive of the causes in such catastrophes in purely naturalistic terms. However, this is not so for the biblical Flood. The rock record is not ultimately subject to *naturalistic causes* but is ultimately a consequence of the *teleological concerns* presented in Genesis 6–9. This raises the thorny question of divine agency, mode of providence, and miracles, which is beyond the scope of this article to fully address. Suffice it to say here that teleological concerns do not *necessitate* miracles but *allow* for miracles.⁵

Of special concern for Flood modelers is the need to avoid thinking of the Flood as just a bigger version of a naturalistic catastrophe. The Flood is *qualitatively* distinct from any other catastrophe we have sufficient knowledge of because it has a teleology. This does mean that whether the Flood can be explained purely in terms of natural law is an open question because ‘natural law’ is not the final authority in evaluating Flood models—God’s stated purposes in the Flood are.

References

1. Oard, M.J., *The Missoula Flood Controversy and the Genesis Flood*, Creation Research Society Books, Chino Valley, AZ, 2004.
2. Froede Jr, C.R., The K/T impact hypothesis and secular neocatastrophism—why is this important to Flood geology? *J. Creation* 25(3):13–14, 2011.
3. Reed, J.K., Demythologizing uniformitarian history, *CRSQ* 35(3):156–165, 1998.
4. Woodmorappe, J., *Noah’s Ark: A Feasibility Study*, Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, CA, 1996.
5. Bardwell, J., Proposed boundaries for the use of miracles; in: Bardwell, J. (Ed.), *The Flood Science Review*, In Jesus’ Name Productions, pp. 1639–1644, 2011; www.injesusnameproductions.org.