

# Did Noah's flood really happen?



**Almost everyone has heard of Noah and his Ark, but hardly anyone believes it is actually true. The story of God flooding the whole earth, but allowing one family and lots of animals to escape in a great boat, is seen as the same kind of myth as the adventures of the Greek gods.**

Surely, if such a world-wide flood actually took place only a few thousand years ago there would be abundant evidence all over the place. Such global devastation must leave its marks.

## How big was the flood?

Some Christians have been so concerned by objections to the flood that they have come to see it as nothing more than a metaphor, or picture, with no historical reality. Others have said that there was a flood but that this flood was merely local, affecting only a limited geographical area. Still others have seen this disaster as universal in that it destroyed all human life, but stretching only as far as people had populated the world. The trouble with these sincere ways of getting round the problem is that they do not do justice to the plain meaning of the biblical text, which clearly states that the flood destroyed all life 'under heaven' and also stated that 'everything on earth will perish'.<sup>1</sup> The Bible tells us that God said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made'.<sup>2</sup> In the account, we read that the waters 'rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered'.<sup>3</sup> Surely the plainest interpretation of the Bible is that this flood covered the whole earth, that is, it was universal and global.

The question that many raise is that if this seems to be what the Bible teaches, is there any evidence whatsoever that points in this direction? Is there any evidence for a global flood? This is what we will now look at.

## **Watch your assumptions**

As we look at this evidence there is something very important that needs to be borne in mind, and it is that all of us approach evidence with certain assumptions which controls the way we look at the data. We tend to see what we expect to see. Pieces of evidence can be interpreted in a number of ways depending on how we look at them. This can be illustrated by the following picture. The same lines can be interpreted in two different ways.



The question with regard to evidence is which picture best suits the date? Which model most closely fits the information we have? Which belief system is most consistent with the evidence? These are the questions we must continually ask ourselves as we have a look at the evidence here.

## **Searching for hard evidence**

So, what is the evidence that possibly points towards a global flood of biblical proportions, like that experienced by Noah?

## Flood stories from around the world

The first piece of evidence is that all around the world there are literally hundreds of flood stories. In historical legends all around the globe there are ancient stories of the world being destroyed by a massive flood. From as diverse places as South America and China, India and Lithuania, Greece and Greenland, Hawaii and Alaska there are stories of some kind of ancient flood. Surely, the best explanation of this is that all their legends can be traced back to tales being passed down from the original survivors coming out of the ark. These stories were carried by people as they began to repopulate the world. Over the generations many of these stories had been adapted and altered, but there remains enough of a common core to point to a shared origin, the flood at the time Noah.



In 88 percent of these stories there is a favoured family. In 70 percent survival is due to a boat. In 95 percent the sole cause of the catastrophe is a flood. In 66 percent the disaster is due to man's wickedness. In 67 percent the survivors end up on a mountain. In smaller percentages birds are sent out, a rainbow is mentioned, and eight people are specifically saved. There seems to be no other credible explanation for all this than that all these stories have their original cause rooted in a real event, the flood at the time of Noah.

## Massive numbers of fossils

The second piece of evidence is the occurrence of so many fossils around the world. The important point to appreciate is that, for an animal to become fossilised, it has to be buried in sediment before it is eaten, or decays. Once the animal is covered in sediment, this sediment later hardens into rock and produces a mould of the remains. These then later disintegrate and the hole that is left is filled with some mineral that takes up the shape of the dead organism. Usually, sediment is dropped on the sea floor very slowly and there is very little chance for fossilisation to occur before the remains are eaten or rot. When this is realised, the phenomenal numbers of fossils all around the world becomes a bit of a problem. How were they all buried in such phenomenally large numbers? One clear answer is a massive flood with its associated erosion, rivers

and the washing downstream of great amounts of sediment. In other words, the evidence is consistent with a great deluge.

### **Evidence of rapid death and fossilisation**

The third piece of evidence is that it is obvious from the fossil record that many animals were killed and buried extremely quickly, sometimes within seconds. The Natural History Museum in London had the fossilised remains of a great sea lizard while giving birth, and there are other fossils of fish in the process of eating a mouthful of food. Again, this sudden death and burial is consistent with some kind of flood catastrophe.

### **Fossil graveyards**

The fourth piece of evidence is that of fossil graveyards around the world. Around our planet are layers of rock which have a phenomenal amount of animal remains, all thrown together as if they had been ripped apart and buried in some terrible catastrophe. A global flood could account for this as animals are drowned in massive numbers, and their bodies carried along in floodwaters before being buried and fossilised in the deposits that such a flood would produce. These rocks are filled with bones of such animals as elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, reindeer, horses, pigs and oxen. Some of these occur on isolated hills at considerable heights.



In northwest Nebraska there is a hill on which strata of rock containing bones has the remains of some 9,000 animals. In Burgundy in France, in what is known as the Saar valley, a hill crowded with animal bones rises to a height of 1,030 feet above the surrounding plain. These are only two examples of the kind of thing that can be found all over the world.

### **Coal and oil deposits**

The fifth piece of evidence for a global flood is the existence of coal beds and oil fields that we find around the world. The usual explanation for this is that these were formed from the remains of vast quantities of vegetable and animal matter over millions of years. The obvious question of course is how did all this get covered with sedimentary rock and buried in such a large scale process. Again, a global flood would be consistent with the evidence. When the deluge covered vast rain forests and swamps and so on, and swept sediment on top, it could produce the conditions for the formation of all these oil fields and coal beds around our planet.

## **Mammoths in deep freeze**

The sixth piece of evidence is the amazing preservation of literally thousands upon thousands of mammoths in Siberia. Mammoths were rather like elephants, but considerably larger, standing twelve to thirteen feet high at the shoulder. Their tusks weighed some 180 to 200 pounds, compared with an elephant's 40 pounds. The number and distribution of mammoth remains is phenomenal over northern Asia. Some are frozen, still with almost complete hair, bones, skin, and tusks. In one twenty year period, the tusks of some 20,000 mammoths were collected and that is only from one Siberian deposit. Experts estimate that as many as five million of these creatures perished at once. What catastrophe could have killed young and old alike, and then preserved them on such a scale? A world-wide flood, followed by a change in climate, is certainly consistent with the data and is perhaps the best explanation.



## **Mysterious lakes**

The seventh piece of evidence for a global flood, like that described in the Bible, is the existence of large inland bodies of water, sometimes called fossil lakes. Much of the water in these is now gone, due to evaporation and drainage over the years, but at one time there were vast inland seas on literally every continent. For example, the area of China now known as the great Gobi desert was once an inland lake the size of the Mediterranean. It is referred to by the Chinese as the great Han Hai, or interior sea. And then there is Lake Baikal in Siberia, which still has water in it and stands at 1,500 feet above sea level. Some of these may be explained in different ways but it is certainly possible that the best explanation is a global deluge. This would have provided sufficient water to fill the basins.

## **Runoff erosion**

The eighth piece of evidence for such a terrible flood is sometimes called 'water runoff erosion'. There is evidence from the shape of the earth's surface that great amounts of water, great sheets and rivers of water, once ran over its surface trying to

find the lowest point. This would have certainly happened once the floodwater began to abate and run off towards the sea. One of these erosion runoff features is that the surface of the continents are scoured and eroded in ways that could be explained by the draining away of water after a great flood. An example of such a feature is the great valleys or trenches which exist that could have been carved out by masses of water. The interesting thing is that some of these trenches run off the land and continue along the continental shelf for miles. Again, this is consistent with a belief in a global flood. Indeed, one of the explanations for part of continental shelves may well be a deposition of massive amounts of sediment and debris that were washed off the continents before trenches were gouged out of them later in the runoff period.

The Bible seems to teach that as well as rain coming down from above, waters also came up from the ground.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that there may have been phenomenal movement of the earth's surface at that time. This may have well included volcanic action, earthquakes and vast tectonic shifts. We must not think of the flood as a calmly and slowly rising water level, but torrential rain, massive water surges over the land bringing with it debris, vast swelling rivers that would make the mighty Amazon look small, as well as possibly seismic shifts in the tectonic plates and even tsunamis. Land masses may have been shifted up and down. All this great flowing of water would have left its marks in what can be seen in these vast trenches that can be observed on the continental shelves, as well as the piled up fossil graveyards, the rapid covering of what became oil fields and coal beds and in some areas the water left behind could have formed the inland bodies of water, known as fossil lakes.

Putting all this together, a good case can be made for a global flood. Of course each piece of evidence can be explained in a different way; it depends on our mindset, our assumptions and perceptions. Thinking again of the perception picture shown earlier, some see a young woman, others an old hag. Careful thought is needed to sift the evidence accurately to check that our assumptions are not manipulating our conclusions.

## **More Tentatively**

If the model of a catastrophic global flood is accepted, it is possible to make some other deductions, even if rather tentatively. What follows is presented with less certainty than what has gone before, but it is certainly worth consideration by anyone who is exploring this subject. It is perhaps plausible that, at that time, vast shifts of the earth's tectonic plates may have forced up mountains that did not exist before. This would explain the problem of why many of our high mountains appear relatively youthful from the degree of erosion they seem to have suffered. Many are sharp and jagged, rather than low and rounded, as we would expect if they were incredibly old. It would also explain why mountains, even like Everest, have limestone at their peaks, a rock that was once formed under water. More than this, it would instantly solve the problem of the objection that is often brought, that there is simply not enough water on our planet to cover mountains like Everest. It would also explain why our continents, that once formed Pangaea, fit together so neatly. Tectonic movement was far faster than we now observe. The problem with all this is that things simply do not move this fast today, yet we must be careful here; the normal geological

assumption of ‘the present is the key to the past’ may well be nothing more than blind faith. The speed at which things happen today may well give no indication of how they occurred in the past in catastrophic conditions. Indeed, in recent years mainline geology has been far more open to catastrophes and their fast and devastating effects.

The ‘springs of the great deep’<sup>5</sup> described in the Bible may well in part be the rising up of the sea through tectonic activity, pushing up the sea bed. As well as pushing the sea over the land this would raise the water tables of the continents and force water up through the ground, like water coming up through a drain in a flash flood. If this was true great waves would surge inland as the flood waters rose, but then when the seabed sank again water would rush back producing massive runoff erosion.

The loss of water from what the Bible calls ‘the floodgates of heaven’,<sup>6</sup> that is water in the atmosphere, could have radically changed the climactic conditions of our planet, possibly producing the freezing of the North and South poles, and so the almost instant icy preservation of so many mammoths and the like. Whereas before the flood the climate would have been far more equal over the earth’s surface, after the flood we would have had the birth of frozen polar wastes, icy tundra as well as sun scorched desert. The ‘Flood model’ does have explanatory power to explain the climate change that certainly has happened.

Another interesting thing in the biblical account of this catastrophe is that, after the flood was over we are told that God made a special agreement with Noah never to flood the earth again. To seal this covenant he gave the sign of the rainbow in the sky.<sup>7</sup> Again, if the atmospheric conditions had changed due to the amount of water that had come from ‘the heavens’, that is, sky or atmosphere, then we would quite naturally expect the skies to be clearer because of the lower water content. This would allow direct rays of sunlight to pass through the lower atmosphere in a way that they had never happened before. As we now of course know, it is these direct rays that pass through rain droplets refracting the light and so producing the rainbow. In other words, the account we are given does infer a mechanism as to why rainbows came into being at that time, even though the original human writers would have known nothing about how rainbows are produced. Unawares, the human writers of the story gave both the description of the coming of the rainbow and a possible mechanism. This is only an indirect type of evidence, but it does none the less possibly help to confirm the account. The writers could not have consciously contrived to put together the rainbow and its possible cause. They were ignorant of any causal connection.

## What does all this mean?

If anything near this model is true, then the flood was of frightening proportions. Yet does it have any significance to us today, apart from antiquarian fascination? In the New Testament, the apostle Peter teaches very clearly that it is a warning. It warns us that the same God who destroyed the world once by water will one day do the same with fire. The reason the flood came was because of judgment on human sin and wickedness, and God has not changed. One day he will bring judgment again; that will be the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will return. He tells us ‘you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own

evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation”<sup>8</sup>. This idea is strikingly similar to one that is at the core of modern geology. In 1832, William Whewell, a geologist of the University of Cambridge, coined the term ‘uniformitarianism’, which literally means ‘everything goes on as it has since the beginning’. This led geologists and others to rule out on principle creation and cataclysms. The apostle Peter predicts this and says that such people ‘deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men’.<sup>9</sup> He goes on to tell us that God is patient with us, ‘not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar: the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare’.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence of a world wide flood is a warning to us to be ready for the next cataclysm. God will judge the earth again, and even if we die first we also will still face judgement.<sup>11</sup>

How can we prepare for that judgement? God had warned Noah of the impending disaster and had told him to build and enter into an ark, where he would be saved from the coming storm. In a very real way, the ark is a picture of how we can be saved from the judgement that will come upon us. Those who trust in Jesus Christ and turn to him will be saved. Jesus is like the ark that can deliver us from God’s judgement. Like Noah, we need to hear God’s warning and trust in the way of salvation he has provided.

Jonathan Skinner November 2007.

## Further reading

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/flood.asp>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i1/flood.asp>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v15/i1/flood.asp>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/Home/Area/AnswersBook/global10.asp>

[http://creationwiki.org/Global\\_flood](http://creationwiki.org/Global_flood)

*The Genesis Flood - The biblical record and its scientific implications*, Whitcomb and Morris, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961.

*Studies in Flood Geology*, John Woodmorappe, Institute for Creation Research, 1999.

*The Geologic Column*, John Reed, Creation Research Society, 2006.

For an alternative biblical interpretation see: [http://www.kjvbible.org/greenland\\_ice\\_sheet.html](http://www.kjvbible.org/greenland_ice_sheet.html)

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6:17.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 7:4.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 7:19.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 7:11.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 7:11.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 7:11.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 9:13.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 3:3-4.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 3:5-7.

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 3:9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 9:27.