

EIGHT YEARS AFTER: EFFECT OF THE GENESIS FLOOD<sup>1</sup>

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*Because the book, The Genesis Flood, by Whitcomb and Morris has been such an outstandingly controversial call for Biblically-based historical science, criticism against it since its publication in 1961 is of direct interest to believers in the Flood as "an historic event world wide in its extent and effect." Study of its main points and logical development versus negative criticism reveals that it remains unscathed by eight years of controversy. The Christian camp is more clearly divided than before in the face of the realization that only two options are left: altering present geology or totally removing the Bible from history.*

**Introduction**

It has been eight years since The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company issued what has become one of the most passionately discussed apologetic works within so-called fundamentalist circles, *The Genesis Flood* (hereinafter referred to as *TGF*). Although previous books had promoted a world-wide catastrophic Flood<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> none so stirred the emotions as this thesis by Professors Whitcomb and Morris:

Either the Biblical record of the Flood is false and must be rejected or else the system of historical geology which has seemed to discredit it is wrong and must be changed. The latter alternative would seem to be the only one which a Biblically and scientifically instructed Christian could honestly take.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the Christians who had strong negative reactions insisted there was no need for such a sharp "either-or." Roberts complained:

The person who is just as committed to the inerrancy of scripture [sic], but who disagrees with the Morris-Whitcomb system, thus brands himself as both Biblically and scientifically uninstructed!<sup>7</sup>

LaSor, a professor of Old Testament, wrote:

This is an exceedingly difficult book for me to review for while I find in it much with which I am in entire agreement, I strongly oppose the methodology and the dogmatism in which it is presented. . . . The authors begin with the conviction that the Bible teaches a planet wide flood. This conviction is immediately transferred into a dogma from which no "Bible believer" is permitted to differ.

Thereafter in the book, the question is assumed to be closed. . . . As it stands, I fear it will drive some young people further from their Bible, it will serve to divide Christians even more into two camps. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Fear of what *TGF* would do to the young people was also expressed by Ault:

It could lead to the unfortunate result of retarding the development of true Christian scholarship in the younger generation. . . . It will be most unfortunate if the book is accepted uncritically by Biblical scholars and teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Since the authors' insistence upon such an "either-or" conclusion stood upon prior logical steps,<sup>10</sup> one would have expected negative critics to attack these, not the end product of a well developed line of reasoning. There were two basic steps involved in reaching this conclusion: (1) the Bible teaches nothing but a global Flood; and (2) such a global Flood is irreconcilable with existing historical geology. Yet even after six years of criticism, Morris could still write:

We advocate a worldwide and physically significant flood not because of science but because God's Word teaches it. Our entire argument, we feel, devolves upon the Scriptural exegesis, and *this is exactly the point which critics have seemed always to ignore.*" (Emphasis supplied)

In the text of *TGF* this claim emerged sharply: No problem, be it scientific or philosophical, can be of sufficient magnitude to offset the combined force of these seven Biblical arguments for a geographically universal flood in the days of Noah.<sup>12</sup>

But surprisingly, when one studies reviews of *TGF*, none include refutation of the geographical universality of the Flood on an exegetical basis. Where this leaves us eight years after will be outlined in this paper.

**Universality of the Flood**

In a recent study<sup>13</sup> this writer showed that the three strongest arguments for the universality of the Flood presented in *TGF* were: (1) the depth-time argument, (2) the Ark size and purpose argument, and (3) the apostolic commentary in II Peter 3:5-7. These are of fundamental importance because they force the whole universality discussion onto a specific base, viz., in lieu of any serious counter argument for a local Flood engaging these three definite elements, the universality question is closed in spite of LaSor's hesitation.

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**Depth-Time Argument** Prior to *TGF* most discussion about universality centered upon the relative ambiguity of the Hebrew word for “all” (*kol*). But instead of grounding their argument upon *kol*, the authors of *TGF* based it upon the depth given in Genesis 7:19-20: “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.”

If only *one* (to say nothing of *all*) of the high mountains had been covered with water, the Flood would have been absolutely universal; for water must seek its own level—and must do so quickly!<sup>14</sup>

One can further strengthen the argument by setting lower limits to the phrase, “under all the heavens.” What is the minimum area that could properly be described? Usage in Deut. 2:25 and 4:19; Job 28:24, 37:3, and 41:11; Dan. 7:27 and 9:12 shows it never refers to an area smaller than several hundred miles wide. Even in Deut. 2:25, many tens of thousands of square miles must be included (cf. Exod. 23:20-33; Deut. 11:23-25).

Given such a minimum area, where in the ancient Middle East can one place the Flood without including at least some points of land several thousand feet above sea level? And if these points must be covered, particularly for several months at the very minimum, there must have been a global inundation. Thus, even when one leans over backward granting all sorts of concessions to local floodists, the Scripture data still require a universal Flood.

**Ark Size and Purpose** Again an often overlooked feature is brought out in *TGF*.<sup>15</sup> Far from the problems of too little space in the Ark there is the problem of too *much* space. Since only eight humans and only two of each animal kind (Hebrew *min*) were taken, except for the sacrificial animals, the Ark must have been built for the salvation of a tremendous section of the animal kingdom from a global Flood.

One might try to neutralize this argument in one of two ways: (1) Reduce the Ark volume by reducing the cubit scale. But there is no evidence for a reduced cubit. (2) Claim the animals were for food. But the wide spectrum of many different kinds plus the Hebrew infinitive of purpose, *lehacheyot* (“to keep alive”), in Gen. 6:19 and 7:3 must then be explained.

**Apostolic Commentary in II Peter 3:5-7** Although this New Testament passage has been used to prove universality at least as far back as Thomas Burnet’s *Sacred History of the Earth* (1681),<sup>16</sup> there has been a strange lack of treatment by local Flood proponents.

In 1955, for example, Ramm never bothered to

list this passage in his index to *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, preferring to remark hastily, “An examination of the New Testament references to the Flood are not conclusive, one way or the other, but permit either a local or universal flood interpretation.”<sup>17</sup> Since *TGF* resurrects this passage and since no critic ever has dealt with II Peter 3, one can presume it is a final evidence.

Some Christians still may try desperately to present the Bible as teaching a local Flood, but they do not convince even those not directly concerned with exegetical niceties. Cassel, a Christian zoologist, once reflected on how a Bible teacher will “fudge” his exegesis when dealing with passages like the Flood narrative:

I still wonder whether he’s given me more time [in the genealogies and Genesis 1] because I demand it, or because it’s really there. *The same question applies to the days of Genesis 1 and to the universality of the Noachic Flood.*<sup>18</sup> (Emphasis supplied)

*TGF* authors skillfully quoted the sardonic observation of T. H. Huxley: “A person who is not a Hebrew scholar can only stand aside and admire the marvelous flexibility of a language which admits of such diverse interpretations.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **Irreconcilability of a Universal Flood**

After definitely proving the universality of the Flood, *TGF* authors next showed that it was irreconcilable with present historical geology. It was this step that generated the sharp “either-or” mentioned earlier.

One would expect critics to rebut by showing positively that a universal Flood is reconcilable with current historical geology. However, critics either flay away at the authors for daring to suggest something is wrong with historical geology or when they do harmonize they deny universality. Both rebuttals logically are irrelevant to *TGF* thesis.

Amidst criticism of the authors’ polemic and presumably, ungentlemanly style, one reads:

Those who dwell inside the house of geological science have been in the process of remodeling it continuously ever since it was built. Now Henry Morris and John Whitcomb have come along insisting in the name of the Master Architect that the whole thing is on a shaky foundation and must be bulldozed to the ground. Detailed plans for the fine new edifice which should be built in its place, they claim, were found by them in the pages of the family Bible.<sup>20</sup>

Only very recently a physicist and a geophysicist while making legitimate criticism of Patten mentioned that they did accept the “possibility”

of a global flood but declined to offer a hint as to how this was possible, given the existing framework of historical geology (which they also mentioned "was basically correct").<sup>21</sup>

Occasionally one observes an attempt to harmonize within the present geological system such as Tanner's in 1961. This evangelical geology professor proposed that the Flood was "a disastrous river flood coupled with a rise and advance of storm driven water and an extended torrential downpour of rain."<sup>22</sup> This, he claimed, "was the best a geologist can produce"<sup>23</sup> and meets "minimum Biblical requirements."<sup>24</sup> The maximum allowable depth would have been 15-20 feet and did not affect land over 100 miles away.

Obviously, according to Tanner, the 300-400 foot mounds along the Euphrates would not have been half-covered to say nothing of the apparent 22 foot draught of the Ark being overcome. He avoided discussion of Genesis 7:19-20, II Peter 3:5-7 or Ark size. If this is "the best a geologist can produce" it would be fair to agree wholeheartedly with *TGF* authors as to the irreconcilability of the Bible and present historical geology.

#### Only Two Options Left

When one encounters a logical contradiction between two statements there are three things that can be done to relieve the situation: (1) alter the first statement; (2) alter the second statement; or (3) deny logical antithesis. Local Flood proponents have tried to alter the Scriptural statement of universality, but they have failed. Thus only two options remain open.

**Altering Present Geology** One is staggered intellectually by even considering such a thing. Whitcomb and Morris were not unconscious of this:

It is certainly recognized that not all questions have been answered or all problems resolved. A complete reorientation of all the enormous accumulations of pertinent data and interpretations would take . . . several large volumes at least, and would require the intensive efforts of a great number of specialists trained in the various areas of geology and geophysics. But the Biblical framework can at least point the way for such studies, and it provides the basic key with which all such problems *can* ultimately be resolved.<sup>25</sup>

Few reviewers ever noticed this statement.<sup>26</sup> It is puzzling also to notice a stubborn reticence on the part of many scientifically trained Christians to take even the first preliminary steps in this direction. Such reluctance can only be explained by lack of appreciation of Scriptural declarations of universality or an unconscious toying with the idea of denying antithesis.

**Denying Antithesis** By denial of antithesis here is not meant that such people reject the logical concept of "either-or," but that they deny that Biblical statements of historical events can ever contradict scientific reconstructions of those events. There is a bifurcation of truth into two categories—Biblical truth (meaning of events) and historical truth (events in themselves). This is deeply related to modern trends in philosophy and theology.<sup>27</sup>

The Flood story retold over the ages, with a gradual accretion of distorted details until it was finally cast into its present form is the position commonly taken. We are not to read details, only the meaning (however that can be determined without reference to details). Liberals have treated the Flood this way for at least 100 years.<sup>28</sup> Representative of this approach is the treatment by Prof. Rahtjen in his recent Bible guide for laymen, now being used in many liberal churches:

Those who saw the event and wrote the story knew nothing about science or natural law. They were not the least bit interested in the "how" of what happened. They were interested in the *meaning* of the event. . . . If changing or rearranging the details of the story made the meaning stand out more clearly, then the changes were made.<sup>29</sup>

In a modern day example one thus might fail to notice whether the TV were on or off at a certain time because he had no awareness of how a TV works. Lack of ability to explain automatically causes sloppiness in observation. Such hypothesized observational naivete on the part of ancients, however, is wholly unfounded. Indeed the evidence is quite the other way.

Consider the tests given to false prophets in Deut. 13:1-3 and 18:20-22 and the Philistine experiment with the Ark of Jehovah in I Sam. 5-6. Reflect upon the evidence recently compiled by Forbes<sup>30</sup> and Neugebauer.<sup>31</sup> Boman has vividly described the Hebrew interest in details:

When an Israelite sees an edifice, his consciousness is at once concerned with the idea of how it was erected. . . . *What interests the Israelite, therefore, is how the Ark [Noah's] was built and made.*<sup>32</sup> (Emphasis supplied)

Observational details were important to the Hebrews.

It often is difficult to tell whether there is an unconscious entertaining of this "anti-antithesis" thinking or a lack of appreciation for exegesis that prompts Christians to insist upon the truthfulness of a current scientific model over against Biblical data. Dr. Bube wrote, for instance:

There is a case of confrontation between Biblical and scientific interpretations of a physical mechanism that scientific investigation has

elucidated, in opposition to a physical mechanism derived from an interpretation of the Biblical record; in this case the mechanism derived from the scientific approach has a high probability of being the correct one. This is because the scientific investigation of mechanism in the natural sphere is the proper area for scientific work, and because the search for physical mechanism in the Biblical record is seldom a proper activity.<sup>33</sup>

Is this really the issue? It seems the issue is not one of mechanism versus mechanism, but of mechanism versus certain observational data, at least in the case of the Flood.

If one is serious about exegesis and refuses to deny antithesis, then certainly the observations in Genesis 6-9 of what happened, *independently* of any understanding or lack of understanding of mechanism by the Biblical writers, must be as acceptable as any other "fact" used in constructing historical models. Not to accept such data in the basic stages of model formation is tantamount to banishing the Biblical narrative from history along with the liberal deniers of antithesis.

### Conclusion

Eight years after *TGF* the foreboding of LaSor has come true. Christians have been further divided into two camps.

One camp represented, but not exclusively so, by the Creation Research Society, has opted to begin the long arduous task of reappraisal of all data within a Scriptural framework of history. The other has chosen to refrain from so doing either because representatives have not yet realized the impact of the universal nature of the Flood in the Bible, or they have decided not to take seriously the historical data of Scripture.

At no point during the ensuing eight years has one critic disproved the main thesis of *TGF*, viz., "Either the Biblical record of the Flood is false . . . or else the system of historical geology which has seemed to discredit it . . . must be changed."<sup>34</sup>

### References

- <sup>1</sup>This paper is a much Condensed and updated version of the author's Master's thesis in the Department of Semitics and Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1968, entitled: "A Calm Appraisal of *The Genesis Flood*."
- <sup>2</sup>Rehwinkel, Alfred M. 1951. *The flood*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.
- <sup>3</sup>Clark, Harold W. 1946. *The new diluvialism*. Science Publications, Angwin, California.
- <sup>4</sup>Nelson, Byron C. 1931. *The deluge story in stone*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis.
- <sup>5</sup>Price, George McCready. 1923. *New geology*. Pacific Press Publishing Assn., Mountain View, California.
- <sup>6</sup>Whitcomb, John C., Jr., and Henry M. Morris, 1961. *The Genesis flood*. The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia. p. 118.

- <sup>7</sup>Roberts, Frank H. 1964. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 16, 1:28.
- <sup>8</sup>LaSor, William S. 1961. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Eternity*, 12, 8:43.
- <sup>9</sup>Ault, Wayne V. 1964. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 16, 1:31.
- <sup>10</sup>The statement on page 118 of *The Genesis flood* came after four chapters of detailed argumentation.
- <sup>11</sup>Letter from Henry M. Morris, May 7, 1967.
- <sup>12</sup>Whitcomb, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.
- <sup>13</sup>Clough, *Op. cit.*, pp. 41-58.
- <sup>14</sup>Whitcomb, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 10-14.
- <sup>16</sup>Discussed in Haber, Francis C. 1959. *The age of the world: Moses to Darwin*. The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore. pp. 71-83.
- <sup>17</sup>Ramm, Bernard. 1955. *The Christian view of science and scripture*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids. p. 249. This is doubly striking since he was careful to uphold only a year later (1956) the time-honored principle that Scripture interprets Scripture in Protestant biblical interpretation, W. A. Wilde Co., Boston. pp. 125-26.
- <sup>18</sup>Cassel, J. Frank. 1960. *The origin of man and the Bible*, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 12, 2:15.
- <sup>19</sup>Whitcomb, *Op. cit.*, p. 60.
- <sup>20</sup>Hearn, Walter R. 1964. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 16, 1:28.
- <sup>21</sup>Touryan, K. J. 1968. Review of *The Biblical flood and the ice epoch* by Donald W. Patten, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 20, 4:125-26.
- <sup>22</sup>Tanner, William F. 1961. *Geology and the great flood*, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 13, 4:119.
- <sup>23</sup>Tanner, William F. 1965. *Chronology of the ice ages*, *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 17, 4:115.
- <sup>24</sup>Tanner, *Op. cit.*, 1961. p. 119.
- <sup>25</sup>Whitcomb, *Op. cit.*, p. 332.
- <sup>26</sup>Examples of the some half-dozen exceptions out of well over 30 reviews are: Rusch, Sr., Wilbert H. 1961. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Moody Monthly*, 61, 12:29. And: Monsma, Edwin Y. 1961. Review of *The Genesis flood* by John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *Torch and Trumpet*, 11, 5:23-24.
- <sup>27</sup>For a recent popular treatment of excellent quality see: Schaeffer, Francis A. 1968. *The God who is there*. Inter-Varsity Press, Chicago. Or see: Schaeffer, Francis A. 1968. *Escape from reason*. Inter-Varsity Press, Chicago.
- <sup>28</sup>See an early discussion along these lines in Kalish, M. 1858. *A historical and critical commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*. Longman, Brown, Green, and Roberts, London.
- <sup>29</sup>Rahtjen, Bruce D. 1968. *Biblical truth and modern man*. Abingdon Press, Nashville. pp. 80-81. Rahtjen in context is discussing the gospels but his principle is everywhere applicable.
- <sup>30</sup>Forbes, R. J. 1966. *Studies in ancient technology*. E. J. Brill, Leiden. 9 vols.
- <sup>31</sup>Neugebauer, O. 1967. *The exact sciences in antiquity*. Second Edition. Brown University Press, Providence.
- <sup>32</sup>Boman, Thorleif, 1960. *Hebrew thought compared with Greek*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. pp. 74-75.
- <sup>33</sup>Bube, Richard H. 1968. Letter from the President of the American Scientific Affiliation, June, p. 3.
- <sup>34</sup>Whitcomb, *Op. cit.*, p. 118.