

The Genesis Flood: Was It Actual, Folklore, Figurative or Imagined?

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Introduction

The Genesis flood has generated a lot of controversy within and without the Church. Christians of all stripes have held differing views about the flood. Today, increasingly believers are veering towards to different views clearly foreign to the Bible. The Scientific community, premised on Humanistic world view seem to hold more sway to the extent that their dogmas have even invaded some of the once respectable Seminaries across the world. To hold on to the Bible's narrative in its literal sense in the first 11 chapters of Genesis is thought to be anti-intellectual and in some cases commit career suicide (Dockery & Thornbury 2002; Craig 2008)¹. Rationalism, humanistic thinking and a host of them have invaded literary all spheres of life and in the quest to remain credible, respectable, many Christian have retreated into enclaves that scarcely can confidently assert that God literary created the world in six literal days not the Geological ages over billions of years as held by some. Others hold Theistic or Process evolution which directly flies against the page of scripture. The Genesis flood is within the first eleven chapters of the first book of the sacred scriptures. The bible commences with the creation account on to the fall and its effects to the global flood and onwards the narration goes. People argue about whether the flood really took place or not. In this paper, we explore some thoughts around the flood, whether it really took place, its extent, nature and what the implications could be. This is by no means a detailed consideration but touches on key points.

The issues

¹ Sadly, as of 2021, Dr. William Lane Craig has seemingly veered into the logical conclusion of rationalism and Evidential apologetics. His 2021 book *In Quest of the Historical Adam*. He literary denies the literal Jesus hiding behind Augustine or Owen who suggest that Adam could be both literal/historical or figurative! Craig lane Joins Dr. Hugh Ross among others that reject the historicity of Genesis 1-11. Interestingly, others (in the past like Albert Schweitzer [Jesus] or Arthur Jeffrey [Muhammad, 1926]) have made similar curiously enterprising excursions into history around Jesus or Muhammad. In a sense, Craig's plunging over the precipice is hardly surprising, given his brand of apologetics, evidence not the text per se, is the guiding principle. All these brilliant men have defenders for sure but in the multitude of many words is a rejection of scripture for what it is.

In dealing with this matter, the question that begs answering is, what really are the issues relating to the flood. Well, we here highlight some key issues the Christian should be aware about.

We commence our discussion with the issue of the Book of Genesis, which means '*Beginning*' derived from the Septuagint. The book has been attacked as having been compiled by different people (i.e. the JEDP arguments, documentary hypothesis etc.), tells stories that are not factual, repetitions (e.g. Creation account in Chapters 1 & 2), conflicting, yea, incoherent patchwork², possibly a plagiarised piece of work³, exaggerated life times and yet too short for the formation and development of the Earth, the flood, the spread of mankind, language etc. among others. In short people argue that the entire book tells fairy tales which cannot be proved empirically.

Secondly, people disagree on the feasibility of the Ark or animals voluntarily entering the Ark, let alone the capacity of the ark to host all the species in the world.

In the third place, the Adam and Eve story, even talking to a serpent sound like folklore that could not have been. How can a human being converse with a snake? Where and why the garden? Why would God put man in the garden to set him up for failure? Did God know that the fall would take place? Why not prevent it then? A rejection of the Adam and Eve story and eventual fall denies original sin. It also implies that the Marriage and creation accounts are folklore or imaginary at best. Jesus was mistaken to refer to Genesis 2:25 as he discoursed issues to do with marriage.

In the fourth place, some places mentioned in the book cannot be verified or proved that they existed. Thankfully, some of these places are being verified by Archaeology although we do not necessarily need this evidence to believe the divine account.

In the fifth place, they argue that the words used in the text differ. For instance, the names used for God change from Elohim to Yahweh and then Adonai across the page of scripture. This is a problem for some especially that it is claimed that Moses wrote the book of Genesis.

In the seventh place, some have problems with the accuracy of some scientific statements which cannot be proved. They even have problems with other books such as the Psalms, John or Job claiming that some aspects could not be true. Job for instance gives descriptions of the Leviathan (Crocodile?) ostrich or some

² Others like Dr. Thomas Cahill (1999) for example, in his book *The Gifts of the Jews*, have called the Bible a hodgepodge of conflicting ideas drawn from multiple sources.

³ Proponents argue that the Flood story was plagiarized from Mesopotamia's *Epic of Gilgamesh* for example.

such creatures. Genesis touches on Genetics without using that word per se. This is troubling for some.

In the eighth place, the Genesis flood, whether it actually even existed, was local or global in nature. If it was global, how can we explain how the flood took place and for how long? A lot of debate has been generated with some concluding by rejecting the actuality of the event altogether or turning to theistic evolution (such as Hugh Ross, Craig and others). For others, the notion of the flood does not make sense at all. Scientists like Asimov have rejected the proposition citing factors best known to the evolutionary scientific community. As far as he is concerned, men like Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) were guessing when they put forth several thoughts around planetary science⁴ (as quoted in Patten, 1966).

There is also the idea of Ice, was there an Ice epoch that explains why parts of the earth were and some remain frozen? Has the planet always been warm or cold? Patten argues that the catastrophe that took place of the Earth equally triggered the Ice that we presently see. He argues that historically, the North and South poles were first not where they are and thus warmer. He also argues that the impact from Space brought this coldness to the planet, hence the existence of Fossils of animals that were probably grazing when the sudden coldness came upon them! Others argue that the planet has gone through geological ages over billions of years including the Ice age that can be explained from a scientific perspective. We could talk about other aspects such as the desert formation and other interesting Phenomena.

There obviously other thoughts that could be generated around Genesis and in particular, the flood.

Probable conditions in the Early Earth

Conditions on the Earth are difficult to state exactly but they certainly are not exactly what they were when the creator finished his work on day six. Things would change following the fall but it is safe to say that in its pristine state, the Earth was different and in some sense had a warmer climate, no winds and probably no rain as we know it today. From the Genesis Account both in the first and particularly the second chapter (i.e. 1:6-7;2: 5-6 & 9:13-15), it appears a mist or steam emanated from the ground and watered the earth. Further, according to Patten (1966), the earth seemed to have been covered with a vapour canopy (or Primordial Canopy) akin to the one on planet Venus. The atmosphere definitely had ozone and other filters to regulate the amount of solar rays reaching the Earth. This atmospheric and vapour canopy ensured that as the some of the

⁴ Jonathan Swift was a writer who suggested that Mars had two moons, the inner moon revolved round Mars faster than the red planet rotated on its axis as well as the direction of the said Satellites. All these three were verified and found true 150 years later by Asaph Hall in 1877. Isaac Asimov assumes Swift was dreaming!

short waves solar rays reached the earth's surface (while others deflected by the effective Ozone layer...), they were reflected back up as long waves which were trapped by the canopy. This ensured a near equilibrium uniform and somewhat stable temperature on the entire planet there by no triggers for any winds to carry or cause rain clouds to move around and drop rain⁵. Moisture at that the time was probably at its maximum level. A point is that the vegetation grew well in a humid context and trapped most of the Carbon dioxide. Patten argues that the composition of gases in the atmosphere was equally different even offering some probable suggestions. A good question is raised as to where the Nitrogen could have come from as evidence is hard to come by on the Earth, could it have been from beyond planet Mars say the asteroid belt? Patten further argues that prior to the deluge, 'the canopy condensed and was eliminated at the time of the Flood cataclysm' alongside the Ice captured in the process from extra-terrestrial sources which eventually formed the ice. What is interesting to note from Patten is that there is a possibility that there could have been other catastrophes of smaller magnitudes but the Genesis flood was clearly the worst.

The Genesis Flood and Ice Epoch

The Early earth had some interesting things going. When God created the world, he was immensely pleased having created a perfect world. However, sin soon entered the world and thus disrupted everything including the equilibrium that once existed. Resulting from that Genesis three scenario, things are not as they once were including creation going into a state of groaning. With time, as hinted at elsewhere in this paper, human beings degenerated from good to worse triggering God's wrath. Noah was appointed to build the ark being a righteous man in his Generation. The flood came and destroyed everything. It was a catastrophic flood that literally wiped out all organisms as we know them. Where did this flood come from? Well the text of scripture tells us that it was at God's instigation to wipe creation clean and start afresh with only eight that had been preserved in the Ark. This Ark is a type of Christ, so Peter seems to suggest. Using the Scientific lenses, according to Patten (1966), could have been triggered by various forces in nature from within and without the planet. These forces cause Tsunamis to take place as the tides went high or the undersea earth opened and closed up among others. As the tides were triggered by the intrusion of some celestial body, it brought debris with it as it probably disintegrated while passing through earth's orbit. This debris could have filtered into the planet as well as impacted the moon generating craters as well as bringing extremely cold ice from space. This ice covered parts of the planet causing the Ice age, catastrophic destruction as well as effecting changes to the Earth's axis and orbit respectively. Thus we could account for the Ice at the

⁵ Patten calls this 'the Greenhouse effect' where waves are trapped and thus keeps the Earth warm. According to him, Carbon dioxide composed 0.5-1% of the atmosphere in those early days and could have, alongside the canopy contributed to keep the planet warm. He further suggests that Nitrogen and Ice could have been deposited on the Earth by an earlier astral catastrophe that could have taken place.

Poles, the global flood and the fossils that we discover today that are still very well preserved, some with blood sample in them! Humanistic Scientists reject such propositions in favour of the uniformitarian evolutionary perspectives. They argue that the planet has evolved rather than created by a super human being. They further claim that there is a theoretical chance that over the 4.6 Billion years that earth has been around, it is possible that an asteroid could have impacted the Earth wiping out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. They also claim that the planet goes through Geological ages, one of them being the Ice Age. They even go so far as to assert that we are now at the verge of either another ice Age or just coming out of one! The arguments continue as more theories come to the fore.

Why Creationists Argue that the Flood Really Took Place

Creationists such as Henry Morris, John Whitcomb, Ken Ham, Philip Johnson among many young 'Earthers', claim that the biblical account must be accepted as it is period! God has spoken and what He says is true. From a presuppositional perspective, the Bible states that the Flood took place and it was global in nature. All creatures were wiped out and only Noah survived. To reject this view or even to have a syncretic view such as Theistic Evolution is to reject Gods word and therefore unbelief. The Flood is mentioned not only in Genesis but in other parts of Scripture, Old and New Testament before we even begin to talk about the external evidence found in other literature, nature among others. Young Earth creationists hold that some fossils appear to have an apparent inherent appearance of old age but that is only apparent. The creator could have created them that way, with apparent age in them. So, why should Creationists believe? God says so!

Possible Explanations for What Could Have Happened During the Flood

There are several explanations to what could have happened to the flood. First it must be stated that among those that accept that a flood did take place, some reject the idea that it was global in proportion citing all sorts of reasons such as the sufficiency of rain water to cause a deluge. But what they forget is that the Genesis account states that the flood water came both from the rain as well as from the Earth. The second objection is whether the water could have possibly covered all the tallest mountains in the world such as the Himalayas. The other group agrees with the biblical Genesis account that it was the whole earth not just the known world then. The flood came and submerged literary everything except that buoyant Ark housing Noah, family and other organisms. The Bible does indeed state that the flood was global. If that be the case, how then did the flood take place? What mechanisms can we use to possibly explain this phenomena? Various authorities can be summoned to come to our aid. The first is obviously the Genesis flood (1961) book that explains what could have

happened. The book argues both from a hydraulic, scientific as well as a Theological Perspective. Morris and Whitcomb argue that God caused the vapour and clouds to form as well as water from within the Earth to flood the planet. Another, Donald Patten (1966) argues that a number of possibilities working together could have potentially triggered the flood. He argues from what we observe in the universe (i.e. our Solar system, such as Neptune and Saturn systems), from Gravitational forces within the Earth exerting and causing changes to the planet, the Tides affected from forces outside the planet once two bodies with given masses come into close proximity or even collision and finally the nature of the planet i.e. its composition-Lithosphere and hydrosphere. Patten argues that an unknown body could have intruded into the earth's orbit round the sun causing disruption not only to the Earth but to the moon and then escaped to another orbit much like the Halley's comet is believed to have emanated from the Neptune system. If what Patten argues is true, then it certainly makes more sense than the evolutionary assumptions perpetrated by evolutionary scientists.

Why Evolution and Uniformitarianism Cannot Be Correct

Evolution claims that the Earth has always existed and creatures evolved over time from lower to higher forms. This is a Dogma in evolution. Similarly, Uniformitarianism states that things evolved with time, through the Geological ages, as things changed over the earth. Animals evolved and died, as found in the fossil record. Billions of Years are evidenced in the buried record with the Oldest at the bottom and newest at the top. This argument seems to make rational sense but cannot account for everything. That notwithstanding, Evolutionary Scientific Geologists argue that the idea of a cosmic super natural being does not fit into the structure of Evolutionary development.

When weighed against the evidence at hand, some troubling observations emerge. Some of these are the following that knock out these as the formidable incontestable facts:

1. Evolution claims that organisms developed from lower forms to complex. This contradicts some scientific laws such as entropy.
2. Uniformitarianism assumes that things have been the same over the long periods of assumed billions of years. It also assumes that the older organisms' fossils should be at the bottom while the recent at the top. Both these arguments cannot hold because some things are not as postulated. For example, how do we explain some tree species found at the bottom of a heap and 'older' fossils at the top?
3. Uniformitarianism and evolution assume that organisms that die, decay leaving us bones for our observation and proof. How do we explain those organisms that have been found perfectly preserved with food in their mouths

hardly digested? In recent findings, even some blood samples have been exhumed. In the extremely cold areas, some fossils have been found perfectly preserved and appear to have died suddenly and abruptly.

4. Evolution and Uniformitarianism assumes that there has not been any cosmic disruption affecting the earth in the past. That is an assumption because evidence could suggest some disruption not only to the Earth but other planetary bodies. An example is the Neptune orbit. Could it be that something happened given the orbit of the planet relative to other satellites or even the now downgraded planet Pluto. What about Saturn and its rings, Jupiter and the asteroid belt between Mars and the Jovian planet? Looking at our own Earth, is it not possible that somebody could have on one occasion or two intruded into the Earth orbit and disrupted the planet triggering the floods? Is it not possible that both the Magnetic forces as well as the forces between two celestial bodies of a given magnitude could have triggered the flood? It is a reasonable argument that the tides could have been raised while the forces within the earth cause other formations on the planet while Noah's ark floated to safety.
5. How can Uniformitarianism and Evolution explain the global stories about the flood? These stories are narrated from Ancient times and by people separated by thousands of miles.

Biblical Evidence for the Genesis Flood

The Bible is God's word and mere declares what actually took place. It states many things and within the first chapter commences by stating that God exists and created all things (Gen 1:1). He created a perfect world which He now sustains by His providence. Within six days, all the creating work was done and then when He takes a panoramic evaluation, Elohim declares that it was very good. In the second Chapter, the picture kind of slows down and gives further details of the creative work in the first chapter except that the focus is on man as the crown of creation whose job description is clearly laid down long before the fall comes along. In time, humans become so evil that God commands Noah to build a boat in which animals and humans enter to survive the ensuing flood. This flood is so catastrophic resulting in virtually death of all creatures that had breath in them. For 120 days, the flood waters come and fill the Earth from the rains and from openings in the earth (Whitcomb, 1972).

How or where this moisture comes from is not exactly clear from scripture but two are mentioned, the rain and openings in the Earth. Some have suggested that the tides resulting from gravitational and cosmic forces cause the waters to rise and cover the earth, akin to Tsunamis on a magnified scale. Repeatedly and right across Scripture, the flood story is mentioned and never forgotten. Even Peter, alludes to the flood and how only 8 people were saved. At the end of

Chapter 8, after the surviving humans alight from the Ark, God makes a covenant, promising never to have a flood of global proportions. The Bible declares that the flood indeed took place at some point in history.

What others Have Said About the Flood

Dr Henry Morris and John Whitcomb did the Christian world great service when they produced their land mark book, *The Genesis Flood* (1961). In that book, they raise a very potent argument, previously unknown or considered. It was interesting because a renowned Scientist and Theologian came together to author this book. In that book, they argue about the flood using existing theological and scientific arguments. Although trashed by the scientific community today, the Genesis flood argument holds water. Francis Schaeffer (1972), Henry Morris (1974) and John Whitcomb (1972) equally wrote helpful books about the Genesis in time and space. They each trace the early history of the Earth and in the process establish the Biblical position. Another, Donald Pattern has written a whole book arguing and demonstrating that the flood actually did take place and is a viable possibility considering cosmic evidences (i.e. our and other planets like Neptune, Saturn etc.), Ancient literature (e.g. common folklore stories right across the world) and Gravitational forces. His potent arguments are worth considering. It is equally heart- warming to interact with ancient writers or scientist like Josephus, Newton, Halley, Whiston, Jonathan Swift among others that have argued from a Theistic stand point. Others like Hugh Ross, William Lane Craig, John wright, Martin Redfern, Asimov, Hawkins among others argue from a scientific perspective either assuming or stating that the Creationist views are not scientific, discounted and therefore cannot stand the Test.

How to improve the module

This module had a very good primary reference material by Donald Patten. The book tackles unique aspects that other Creationists did not focus on such as evidence as well as some empirical, graphical aspects. He makes some well-considered assumptions with potent arguments. However, the book appears very old (1966) but gives very good working principles on Catastrophism in relation to Uniformitarianism. To improve this module, it would be great to expose students to current creation thinking on many matters he rightly raises. The module is interesting because it highlights alternative explanations to evolutions (i.e. Catastrophism with Cosmic forces at play to foster the flood) that have been suggested but entirely ignored by the world. This was eye opening. This is a solid foundation for the Apologist.

Lessons learnt from the unit

The Genesis flood has been attacked from all angles

Some of the attacks come from believers especially those of the Old earth view

God created the world in six literal days

The flood that is recorded in the Bible at first glance appears to have all arisen from the rain fall but no, students need to read most carefully.

The flood and 'streams' or gates from the earth contributed

Patten suggests that Tidal activity made the flood possible to be global.

The Genesis flood was global rather than local

Testimony from different parts of the world and even included in folklore such as the Gilgamesh testify that the flood indeed did take place.

Patten argues that astral catastrophism rather than Uniformitarianism is what holds because we have evidence from not only the Universe but even here on the earth.

Examples that point to astral events in the past include the apparently disrupted orbits of certain satellites, comets and even planets. Pluto, Halley's comet, our moon and those of Neptune all point to some disruptions both in the past and present. Another example is what happens when two bodies with gravities intermingle, one of them will most likely be affected and in some cases even break apart. The asteroid belt may suggest an ancient planet that disintegrated as it encountered Jupiter or some such planet.

Ancient Scientists such as Newton and others were theistic assuming that God created the world.

These self-same 'Christian' scientists discovered the laws of Nature using the Judeo-Christian World view.

Josephus, an ancient Jewish historian writes about the Ark having settled on the mount of Ararat and people taking artefacts from it even in his day.

Josephus believed that the global flood was as a result of the rains exclusively, which may not be entirely true. He also writes refers to authorities in his time that lived in different parts of the world that equally refer to the flood. Patten (1966) has done a great job referring to Josephus and others

The scientific community has been hijacked by humanistic thinking as supported by Huxley and others.

Two people can look at the same data but arrive at different conclusions. This is because our world view colours how we look at the world.

Drs Henry Morris and John Whitcomb's land mark book of 1961 revived the debate between Creationism and Evolution. The debate continues to this day.

It has been assumed that Carbon 14 has been decaying at the same uniform rate over time by Dr Libby and others.

The Early Earth is believed to have been covered by a vapour canopy akin to the one on Venus

The Ice and Nitrogen are suspected to have come from extra-terrestrial sources by Patten. This could explain why the Ice epoch and Nitrogen in the atmosphere exist or came from. It is suggested they could have emanated from beyond Mars, probably the asteroid belt or beyond.

The Greeks claim that there was once a planet (called Electra⁶) that existed but disappeared/retreated because of some cosmic deity conflict with Ares.

The water vapour canopy had a two-fold function, as suggested by Patten. First, it reflected the deadly short wave solar radiation from reaching the Earth (which had a potential to exterminate life on Earth, at least after the fall). Second, it kept that long waves within the atmosphere to warm the planet among other things such as depletion/breakdown of the Ozone layer from O3 to Q2.

Patten suggests that during the orogenic period, gravitational conflicts and tidal upheavals of magma could have contributed to the topographical nature of the earth's landscape. He also claims that the Ice Epoch could have been triggered by Ice from extra-terrestrial sources, some of which ice remains trapped in some rocks in unlikely places. All this could have happened before the great cataclysmic event of the global flood.

The Christian scriptures such as Psalm 8, 19, Job 38, Hebrews 1; 11 among others declare that God created the world. They further state that the created order clearly testify to God's existence, potency and sustaining power. Werner Gitt (2006) testifies to the same effect as he writes about the stars, astronomy.

Werner Gitt (2006) states well when he argues that Astronomy, as all sciences have both limitations and problems. He states that science is excellent but must be viewed with respect to God.

⁶ Though some today refer to Electra as a star (rather than a planet) or collection of them

Halley, Newton, Whiston and Swift did much work to help the scientific world either in their discoveries or writings. Their collaboration is admirable and Christians could emulate them. For instance, Halley did a survey of 1,500 years of records before he confidently predicted the return of the Halley's comet in 1758 or later returns. Though he never lived to see its return (died 1742), he was dead right. Today, the Halley's comet faithfully returns every 76 years, the last being in March 1986. Next sighting is probably 2061. This author saw Halley as a young Teen ager while living in Rhodes Park, Zambia March 1986.

The Early scientists in the modern era (such as Newton, Halley among others) were theists and viewed this work of research as a call from God. Current Christians need to emulate these early pioneers and engage in enterprises that glorify God.

The early scientists in the modern era 'all presumed that the past of our solar system may have been markedly different from the present arrangement.' - Patten They rejected the Ptolemaic notion that the earth was the centre of the Universe and instead agreed with Kepler and Kuiper respectively. Their work laid the foundation for later scientists based on the theistic premise such as astro catastrophism.

Job mentions many animals and gives accurate descriptions. Animals such as the lion, Donkey, cow, Ox, Jackal and the Ostrich among others are mentioned. Patten claims that the book of Job 'is one of the most profound of all works' for a good reason. Job makes several land mark statements that have been proved scientifically true.

Several traditions/motifs and stories of flood, mysticisms related to nature have been recorded from different parts of the world. Patten samples a few from India (Aryans & Dravidians), Mexico (Aztec), Middle East (Jews and Arabs etc.). All these give insights into what people thought. The story of the Halley's comet are equally instructive because a lot of superstition had been attributed to the visit of the said phenomena.

Patten claims that the Canopy collapsed during the cataclysm event of Genesis 6 resulting in a differently composed atmosphere and therefore the amount of radiation on the Earth. This also partly explains why longevity declined after the flood. This is a reasonable suggestion.

Ozone is thought to be toxic to body cells (once ingested or exposed to) and can be lethal even in trace elements. It could contribute to the shortness of life expectancy in the current age.

Conclusion

As is evident, the flood actually took place as declared by the Bible. Genesis is not mere folklore but an account of the world, including the flood. The first eleven Chapters of Genesis must be taken as literal and never be surrendered to liberalism or atheistic views. The other accounts littered around the globe pointing to the global flood are to be treasured though they in of themselves do not prove anything.

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