

A Universal Flood

Does the Bible teach that the Noah's **flood** was universal?

An unbiased reading of Genesis 6-8 unquestionably demonstrates that Noah's flood was universal. Reasons for its denial are located in sources from outside the Scriptures, such as scientific arguments and the mythology of the ancient Near East.

Universal catastrophism can no longer be ignored. For instance, those who argue that the temperature on the planet is rising know very well that this phenomenon will result in catastrophes of a global nature. We may not be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the flood was universal, but we can clearly argue that this is what the Bible teaches. We will summarize here some of the biblical data.

1. Universality of Sin: The first two chapters of Genesis are mainly interested in the creation of our planet and all forms of life within it. It has a clearly universal outlook. Although the fall into sin takes place in the Garden of Eden, sin itself soon became a universal phenomenon (Rom. 5:12). By the time of Noah the human heart was corrupt beyond repair and “every inclination of the thoughts” of the human heart “was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). “The earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence” (verse 11). Humans had corrupted their ways and, in order to correct this situation, the Lord was ready “to destroy both them and the earth” (verse 13). This emphasis on the universality of the problem points to the universality of the means used by the Lord to deal with it.

2. All Humans: The language used to refer to humans is also universal and all-inclusive: “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal”; God was grieved “that he had made human beings on the earth” (verses 3, 6). It is obvious that the phrase “that he had made” is referring to the creation of humans in Genesis 1:26-28. In other words, God is bringing to an end the lives, not of certain ethnic groups, but of the humankind He had originally created. The Lord’s preservation of Noah and his family demonstrates that the rest of humanity perished in the Flood: “Only Noah was left” (Gen. 7:23).

3. All Living Things: The language used to refer to the animals is also universal. God is bringing to an end “all life

under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it” (Gen. 6:17; cf. Gen. 7:22). The language used here goes back to the Creation account (Gen. 1:30). In other passages we read: “Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth” (Gen. 7:21). The Lord was to “wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made” (verse 4). Again, the language points back to Creation (Gen. 2:6; 1:25). This is “the end,” the eschatological end of that generation. During the Flood God judged humankind: He gave humans a probationary time (Gen. 6:3), investigated the evidence (verse 5—“the Lord saw”), concluded that the earth was filled with violence (verse 13), pronounced a sentence (verse 7), and executed judgment against His creation (Gen. 7:11-24).

4. All the Waters: The Hebrew word *mabbul* is used exclusively to refer to the flood of Noah and not to local floods. Its waters destroyed all living things, including humans (Gen. 6:17), and covered the highest mountains of the earth (Gen. 7:20). The torrential rain and the breaking of the fountains of water of the earth lasted 40 days (verse 17). Noah had to wait inside the ark one year and 10 days (verse 11; Gen. 8:13, 14).

The Flood was a divine act that perhaps we’ll never be able to explain through the study of the natural world. It was a divine act of de-creation—almost returning the earth to its original condition—followed by the divine act of re-creation through an eternal covenant with humans and nature. When sin had apparently conquered the world, God preserved for Himself a faithful remnant through whom He would fulfill His plan for the human race. This universal judgment against human sin became a type of the universal judgment at the return of Christ (Matt. 24:38, 39). At that moment He will preserve His end-time remnant people. ■

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