

A Universal Flood: 3000 B.C.

Author: David Livingston PhD

Definitions and Language Use

This was the Flood of Noah's day. It was a worldwide cataclysmic Flood sent by God to destroy all living things except for eight people who survived on the Ark. In addition to the Bible, many very early historical records also document this Flood.

Two problems about which there are great differences are: the date of the Flood, and whether it was local or universal. Critics of the flood narrative consider it either a myth, or a local flood story. There are apparent conflicts between the Bible and some areas of science relative to the date of the Great Flood. Both biblical and extrabiblical literature, being eyewitness accounts, should control the dating, with secondary importance given to scientific opinions, and sophisticated radiometric dating techniques.

The Hebrew word mabul is the word for 'flood' used throughout Genesis 6-9. It is a unique word used only for this stupendous event. Eight other Hebrew words are used to describe local floods. But none of these compare with the extent of the Great Flood. The Greek words kataklusmo and kataklysmos, used both in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, hardly need interpretation. Cataclysm denotes violent destruction. It occurs in Matthew 24: 38-39; and Luke 17: 26-27. In 2 Peter 3: 5-6 we are reminded of that which mankind desires to forget: that is, that God made the heavens and earth with its water, and by that water the world was cataclysthized, destroying the surface of the earth and all living, breathing creatures. The Flood was sent because of universal total human depravity, with extreme violence toward others, which warranted severe punishment.

Preparation for the Flood

Was an Ark really necessary? All the time, effort, and expense of building this enormous ship was wasted if it were only a local flood. Noah and his family, guiding a host of animals and other creatures, could have migrated to a higher area and waited for a local flood to flow out into the ocean.

Was the Ark large enough? Space on the Ark equalled over 500 railroad box cars. Experts say only one-third of that number would have been needed.

How did Noah gather animals into the Ark? Apparently they came to the Ark by instinct. They may also have hibernated for the whole time, minimizing the feeding and cleaning problems.

All Families on Earth Came From Noah and His Sons

Genesis Genealogies.

William Henry Green, a nineteenth century Princeton theologian, has influenced many to accept large gaps in the genealogical records. In his opinion, '... we conclude that the Scriptures furnish no data for a chronological computation prior to the life of Abraham; and that the Mosaic records do not fix and were not intended to fix the precise date either of the Flood or of the creation of the world' (1890: 303). He has allowed for great genealogical gaps in order to accommodate scientific information which he believes indicates a very old earth (1890: 286).

Considering the Flood as universal, all mankind since then are descended from the sons of Noah. These genealogies begin about 5000 BC.

Extent of the Flood: Geological Consequences

Peter prophesied in 2 Peter 3: 3-6 that scoffers would deny the world was destroyed by a flood. He said these willfully ignore this stupendous event. In verses 10-11, a prophecy of the destruction of the entire universe is described, with Noah's Flood used as an analogy. How could a local flood be the analogy for this awful event?

We cannot here reconcile the many complicated geological issues related to the Flood. But, for sure, a cataclysmic, worldwide flood would have had an enormous effect on the surface of the planet. Psalm 104: 8 says, 'The mountains rose up; the valleys sank down.' Oceans deepened due to the weight of water running off land surfaces into them. With the stupendous weight of new runoff water on the earth's mantle, mountains were uplifted. Today the continents and highest mountains are covered with sea fossils. Half the continental sediments are of oceanic origin. Geologists say this is because, at times, the continents have been under the sea, further confirming a worldwide Flood. Since mountains have waterborne fossils at their highest elevations (including Mt. Everest), it is evident that they were all under water at some time. However, this does not mean the waters had to be deep enough to cover modern Mt. Everest and other high mountains. Mountains were uplifted by the pressures on the earth's mantle. It seems most unfortunate that students of geology do not take the Great Flood into consideration as they attempt to interpret the geological data.

Local Flood Theories

Many scholars, if they believe in a flood at all, contend that it was a local event and happened as long as 100,000 years ago. They base this view on scientific data which seemingly presents insurmountable problems for a universal flood. In general, they hold to the following principles:

'Universal' means all that Noah could see. Only his personal 'world' was flooded.

The present high mountains have been there for millions of years and were as high before the Flood as they are now. There simply was not enough water to cover them all (Mt. Everest, for instance, is 29,000 feet high, thus the flood waters would have to be almost six miles deep). If water covered all the earth, where could it possibly have gone after the Flood?

The 'days' of Genesis 1 were long periods of time. Most local Flood proponents believe in a very old earth that has been in existence at least a million years with long palaeo-, meso-, and neolithic prehistorical periods.

Universal Flood

Considering the biblical narrative, which says that the Flood was universal, the words 'all' and 'every' are used 16 times in Genesis 6-9 to describe the totality of the Flood.

'Flood traditions' (the Gilgamesh Epic, the Atrahasis Epic, etc.), even though not as accurate as the Bible, all say the ark came to rest on a mountain. IMPOSSIBLE with a local flood. The world before the Flood was quite different from the world today. Since it did not rain before the Flood (Genesis 2:5), yet rivers flowed (v.10), there must have been great subterranean reservoirs of water. At the appointed time, the 'fountains of the great deep' (Genesis 7:11) spewed out their aquatic and volcanic contents while the 'windows of heaven were opened' as some form of water was precipitated. Coupling these mechanisms with the fact that 70% of the earth is presently covered with water in sufficient quantity to cover the entire (flattened out) earth to a depth of about 7,500 feet, we can conclude that the biblical story is, indeed, quite reasonable. Present mountain ranges are mostly sedimentary rocks attributable to a flood, or volcanoes. They could have been formed during the Flood, or finished rising just after it.

Prehistoric man has been described as living in the 'stone ages.' However, stone age people are a relative phenomenon. In every generation, including ours, since the beginning of time, some groups have lived in a 'stone age,' while nearby, people lived with high civilizations. The point is that a culture cannot be dated based on their use of stone implements. Braidwood's opinion, typical of many prehistorians, is completely speculative, 'Prehistory means the time before written history began. Actually, more than 99 percent of man's story is prehistory. Man is probably well over a million years old, but he did not begin to write history (or to write anything) until about 5,000 years ago'(1967: 1). If man could not, and did not write during prehistory, there is no way to be sure of his age (of one million years), sophisticated dating methods notwithstanding. This is so because radioactive dating methods cannot be calibrated with known dates before 5,000 years ago, thus cannot date stone age cultures (usually claimed to be older than 3000 BC).

Of course, the climate would be altered by catastrophes accompanying the Flood. Whereas rain had not fallen before the Flood, afterward it became a regular event. Rainbows can be seen in the falling water vapor, God's sign that He would never destroy the earth by water again. If only a local flood occurred, God's promise is broken every time a severe local flood occurs.

Literary Parallels to the Biblical Account

Which came first: the biblical narrative of the Flood, or the Mesopotamian epics? There are three choices:

the epics were written first, and the writers of Scripture used them;

the Bible was written first, and the epics copied them;
both the Bible and the epics were dependent on a primitive original.

Most scholars insist that the writer of Genesis used elements from local epics, but this is impossible to prove. On the other hand, the theory of a primitive original is based on no evidence whatsoever and is simply an opinion of those who hold to it. Although difficult to prove, the preferred choice is that the biblical record came first and inspired the others.

The Sumerian Deluge Story One of the oldest extrabiblical versions of the Flood story featured the survivor of the Flood, Ziusudra. Found in the Nippur excavations early in the twentieth century, it dates to 1600 BC.

The Gilgamesh Epic-Tablet XI A well-known tale, found in Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, and Hurrian literature. Even in the Holy Land, a clay tablet (date ca. 1200 BC) was found with this man's name on it. He was the most popular hero in the Ancient Near East. Using the version from Ashurbanipal's library, in 1872, George Smith published the eleventh tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic as *The Chaldean Account of the Deluge*. Gilgamesh's name appears among the kings in the Sumerian Kinglist (below). He was of the first dynasty of Uruk (Erech), the earliest period of Mesopotamian history. The Gilgamesh Epic indicates a close link with events immediately following the Flood. Someone who had survived the Flood still lived, possibly Ham. Gilgamesh visited him seeking immortality.

Atrahasis Epic It has astonishing parallels with the biblical account. But there are also great differences, which one can easily note by reading the account (ANET, Second Edition 1955: 104-106).

Sumerian Kinglists, the Flood, and the Establishment of City-States

The Sumerian Kinglists are very old documents referring to the establishment of cities and kingship before the Flood. High ages given for the kings are either deliberately inflationary, or we have not discovered the correct interpretation of their numbering systems. Sumerian, in general, is still not well understood.

Sumerian Kinglist Part I (Pre-Flood). 'When kingship was lowered from heaven, kingship was (first) in Eridu... These are five cities, eight kings ruled them for 241,000 years. Then the Flood swept over the earth.' This Flood has to be Noah's Flood. It is the Flood in which every human died except those on the Ark. Since the outworkings of divine kingship was at least one of the reasons which brought on the Flood and kingship was thus terminated, (divine) kingship had to be 'lowered from heaven' again after the Flood (see below).

Sumerian Kinglist Part II (Post-Flood). 'After the Flood had swept over the earth and when kingship was lowered again from heaven, kingship was first in Kish... in Uruk (biblical Erech) the divine Gilgamesh... ruled 126 years... its kingship was removed to Ur' (at the peak of its glory). Note that Kish was the first city established after the Flood. Excavations there indicate it was founded about 3000 BC. 'Divine' Gilgamesh listed above, actually visited a survivor of the Flood family (see Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic). Therefore, Gilgamesh must have reigned shortly after the Flood regardless what the Kinglist says. There are many other worldwide records of the Flood story in: The Samaritan Pentateuch, Jewish Targums, Berossus, Josephus, the Sibylline Oracles, the Koran, etc.

Date of the Flood

Flood Levels in Mesopotamian Cities.

Early in the archaeological excavations of Mesopotamian river valley sites, deep flood-deposited layers were discovered near the foundations of the city. At first these were interpreted as evidence of Noah's Flood. However, as excavations continued, it became clear that they were only severe local floods, not the cataclysm of Noah's day.

The Sumerian King List begins with Kish immediately after the Flood. Georges Roux says the kingdom of Kish began in approximately 2700 BC (Roux 1966: 120). H.W.F. Saggs points out that when the city of Kish was excavated, the earliest level was from the Jemdet Nasr period (Saggs 1962: 51, 60, ca. 2800-2400 BC).

The epic hero Gilgamesh was king of Uruk at about 2700 BC and, as the legend goes, was actually able to speak with a survivor of the Flood. (This would be impossible with a much earlier 10,000 BC date for the Flood.) The experiences of Gilgamesh, coupled with the Sumerian King List (in which he is mentioned), suggest a Flood date close to 3000 BC.

Radioactive Dating Methods:

How are They Calibrated?

Although the equipment used to date radioactive materials has become more sophisticated through time, basic problems originally discovered by Willard Libby, inventor of the C14 dating method, still pertain. Calibrated using known dates of Egyptian tomb artifacts, it has proven somewhat accurate back to only about 2000 BC. This has created problems for radio carbon dating older than 5000 BP (Before Present). Dates earlier than that cannot be calibrated since there is no historical material older than 5000 BP. W. Libby himself said: 'The first shock Dr. Arnold and I had was that our advisors informed us that history extended back only 5000 years. We had initially thought that we would be able to get samples along the curve back to 30,000 years, put the points in, and then our work would be finished... We learned rather abruptly that these numbers, these ancient ages are not known; in fact, it is about the time of the first dynasty in Egypt that the last [earliest] historical date of any real certainty has been established'(Libby 1958: 531). Furthermore, as Libby makes clear in his publication, all 'dates' higher than 5000 years BP are not absolute dates, but only measure residual C14. Dendrochronology does not help, either, since under certain conditions trees can grow two and sometimes three rings a year.

Egyptian Evidence

There is no Egyptian flood tradition in their literature. It is important to realize that recorded Egyptian history begins about 3000 BC. Egyptian prehistory was probably very short, with little

time passing after the great Flood. Although Egyptian historians consider the prehistorical period to be quite long, as seen above, C14 dates are not useful before 3000 BC.

River Deltas Begin Forming Worldwide about 3000 BC

Only the worldwide Flood was such a stupendous catastrophe as to make it possible for rivers worldwide to begin flowing at about the same time water on the landmass subsided into deepened oceans, rain fell, and rivers began depositing sediments at their mouths to form deltas. Investigations of these deltas worldwide have revealed that they are only a few thousand years old. The Tigris and Euphrates delta is formed in the Persian Gulf. Many maps of the earliest periods of history show the shoreline as far north as Ur. That means the delta has filled in at least 150 miles during recorded times. Herodotus, the Greek historian, reported that Egyptian priests told him none of the land north of Lake Moeris was above water at the beginning of the First Dynasty (p. 104). The Mississippi River delta was investigated in 1850 and found to be only 40 feet in depth. It has not been flowing very long. One other time-measuring feature — Niagara Falls — began falling and receding from Lake Ontario toward Lake Erie, less than 10,000 years ago. The point is that none of these rivers could have been flowing for more than a few thousand years.

Problems with an Early Date (100,000 – 10,000 BC)

If the Flood occurred as early as 100,000, or as late as 10,000 BC, one cannot find a 7000 year (or larger) gap in Scripture, or in any of the literature of the Ancient Near East, for that matter, between the Flood and the beginning of historical records from 3000 BC.

Nor can an explanation be found for the origin of families (nations) mentioned in Genesis 10-11. Cush was the grandson of Noah. The descendants of 'Cush' built cities whose foundations date no earlier than 3000 BC in almost all cases (Genesis 10). Cities that are claimed to be older: Jericho (7000 BC), Jarmo (6000 BC), etc., were dated by C14 which cannot be calibrated by absolute dates earlier than 5000 years before the present. More caution should be used when considering these early dates.

Ziggurats and pyramids are later than 3000 BC. If there were earlier civilizations, there is no trace of anything like ziggurats or pyramids at that time. A short time obviously elapsed between the Flood and their construction. But 7000 years? That is longer than the entire history of man since the Flood.

Genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10 may be stretched slightly, but they cease to be genealogies if large gaps exist. Gaps of 7000 years make them meaningless for genealogical purposes.

Problem with a Late Date

The date of the Great Flood in relation to local floods in the Mesopotamian river basin is, at the present, impossible to determine since a universal Flood completely altered the surface of the earth. However, strong evidence given above suggests a date not long before 5000 BC.

Conclusion: The Flood Occurred 5000 Years Ago

C14 is not useful in dating before 5000 B.P. according to the discoverer of the method.

River deltas suggest a recent (ca. 3000 BC?) flood.

All written history begins ca. 3000 BC.

Foundations of cities began then.

Families of mankind began then. Genealogies date back to it.

A 10,000 BC (or earlier) flood wreaks havoc with genealogies.

There is no record of a 10,000 BC flood in ANY of the literature.

The Gilgamesh Epic (and other epics) fit well into a 3000 BC date.

The biblical account did not derive from other literature. It is eyewitness testimony.

It is clear from the biblical account that there was a universal flood about 3000 BC.

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