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Noah's Flood: Still a Compelling Account

1

Books come and go, but a few exceptional stories stand the test of time, such as Robin Hood, the Trojan War, and Romeo and Juliet. But few accounts are as deeply embedded in our psyche as those from the Bible: David and Goliath, Jesus walking on water, or Jonah and the huge sea creature. These accounts are known by practically everybody on the planet. One of the most persistent of these is the account of Noah and the Ark.

It is remarkable that the account of Noah's Flood persists; but it has been criticized, denigrated, and written off by intellectuals for more than two centuries by people who wanted to replace the Bible's history with another. But in recent decades, a small group of Christian scholars has been investigating the biblical, scientific, and archeological evidence for the historical veracity of the Bible's account, revitalizing the account and its appeal.

This has affected popular culture. Despite a remarkable inability to get the account straight, it has been repeatedly told by Hollywood. Every time it resurfaces, it triggers a round of criticism by secularists supposedly too sophisticated to believe the old biblical account. Some Christians agree with the secularists, and are embarrassed by Noah. But others have answered the criticisms, and maintain a belief in biblical history.

Noah on the big screen

In 2014, the account was remade as the epic Hollywood film *Noah* (Figure 1.1). It was a box office success, especially in foreign countries (except those Islamic countries that banned it). Film critics and a few religious leaders praised the film, claiming it would start discussions on 'faith and spirituality'. However, those filmgoers motivated to go back and read the Genesis account found that the movie

bore little semblance to the Genesis account. A report by *The New Yorker* said: “It is, Aronofsky said proudly, ‘the least Biblical Biblical film ever made.’”¹ Creationists, who make up over 30% of the population of the United States, objected to the distortions.²

Everyone expects Hollywood to embellish stories. Sometimes they do it to communicate better in moving from words on a page to images on a screen. Sometimes they must trim parts to meet a time limit. Often, their ego simply drives them to think they tell the story better than the author. In the case of *Noah*, that seemed the case; the film kept a few superficial elements but replaced the heart of the story. In the movie God is cruel and vindictive, even to Noah. Sin was redefined from disobedience to ‘environmental abuse,’ and so the primary purpose of the Ark was to save the animals and not people. All of this shrinks before the simple statement of Genesis 6:5: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Some aspects of the movie were laughable. Wounded, Tubal-Cain³—leader of the rebellion—breaks into the Ark as the Flood begins. He attempts to convince Ham to kill his father Noah. Instead, Tubal-Cain is killed by Ham. In another radical divergence in the movie, Noah’s sons are bachelors, although Shem brings his pregnant girlfriend onto the Ark. She has twin girls, and Noah is convinced that God wishes him to kill them, though he cannot bring himself to do it. As usual, Hollywood attempts to justify its own immorality and sentimentality as normative, while showing the God who will judge immorality as harsh and intolerant.

At least the movie had a flood. At least it was global. At least God was the Creator, though modern sensitivity required evolution be that process of creation. At least there was a Noah. At least he had a wife and three sons. At least there was a giant Ark. Sadly, everything else in the story was thrown under the bus.

More from Hollywood

Noah was not the first Hollywood attempt. In 1999, a four-hour Hallmark movie, *Noah’s Ark*, made a big splash (Figure 1.2). But once again, screenwriters could not resist ‘improving’ the story. Although they got the global Flood part right, little else survived their playing with the account, especially biblical chronology. Noah became a resident of Sodom and Gomorrah and a good friend of Lot, who later becomes a villain, in spite of the fact that Lot and the two cities existed hundreds of years later than Noah. Continuing the time distortion, Ruth, who also lived centuries later than Lot, was saved from the villain’s attempt to sacrifice her to the idol Moloch. Despite her rescue, she is later reluctant to enter the Ark—one of Noah’s sons had to play the cad, knock her out, and carry her in. As if Ruth’s tribulations were not enough, the voyage is interrupted by mutiny. Noah’s family opposed their captain, but the mutiny was subdued when God afflicted Noah’s family with dementia. In this movie, God was portrayed as alternatively confused, indecisive, foolish, and weak. The film was weak on theology, but strong on action and graphic violence—Hollywood cannot seem to stray from their own formula.

Even when producers don’t want to place the story in the ancient world, its elements are so compelling that they show up repeatedly in apocalyptic movies. A blatant example was the movie *2012* (Figure 1.3), which was set in the present, but showed global destruction. Mankind was saved in giant hi-tech realistically proportioned arks, but the concept was the same. This movie also showed the power of tectonic disturbances and the power of moving water on a large scale. But it missed the main point of Genesis—mankind was saved by grace and not through technology and ingenuity.

Entertainment that follows the Bible

An exception to Hollywood’s distortions was seen in the 2013 miniseries, *The Bible* (Figure 1.4). This ten-part series opened to a scene of Noah on



Figure 1.1.
The movie *Noah*

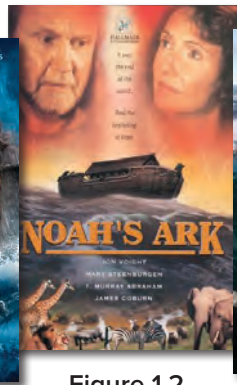


Figure 1.2.
The movie
Noah's Ark



Figure 1.3.
The movie *2012*



Figure 1.4.
The documentary
*The Bible: The
Epic Miniseries*

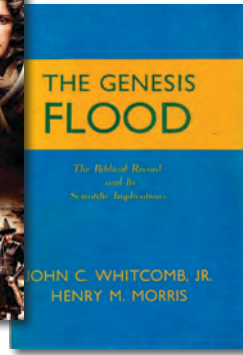


Figure 1.5.
*The Genesis
Flood*

the Ark, telling his family how God created the earth in six days and why he had to destroy it with the Flood. Artistic license is kept to a minimum, and the account was treated with respect.

More than a myth

The account of Noah is more than just entertaining mythology. For 3,500 years, it has been a staple of the biblical account of Earth's early history. Jewish believers in the Old Testament times accepted the account as straightforward historical narrative, and it was monolithically taught as such by Christians for nearly 1,800 years.⁴ Today, however, most people see it as nothing more than an entertaining tale. What changed in recent centuries?

Starting in the 1700s, intellectuals began to reject the Bible, attacking the Genesis account of Creation and the Flood. We will amplify on this issue in Chapter 3. They portrayed biblical history as 'primitive' Hebrew mythology, and created a new history linked to what they called science. Although the British Scriptural geologists challenged these new ideas⁵, Christians were slow to catch on. If one part of the Bible is false, then *any* part might be too. After long years of retreat, a few Christian scholars in the last half of the 20th century began to re-examine the 'scientific' consensus, and found abundant evidence that the new secular history was riddled with problems, and that Genesis had a stronger case than anyone imagined.

In 1961, theologian Dr John Whitcomb and Dr Henry Morris, a hydraulic engineer, co-authored *The Genesis Flood* (Figure 1.5).⁶ This book energized a number of Christian scientists to reconsider the possibility of a global Flood. Though vehemently rejected by the academic establishment, these people, despite being few in number and without significant resources, have published many books, articles, and DVDs.⁷ A major hurdle was understanding that the 'objective' sciences of evolutionary biology and uniformitarian geology (see in-depth section at the end of the chapter) are just as dependent on belief systems as Christianity. Numerous creationist organizations have sprung up over the world.⁸ These organizations are producing a steady stream of books, DVDs, journals, and magazines.⁹ There has even been a major museum opened,¹⁰ as well as a number of small museums, such as the *Glendive Dinosaur & Fossil Museum*, located in Glendive, Montana—the heart of dinosaur country.

For many years since the second half of the 19th century, people accepted a framework of a 'war' between science and religion. Today they are beginning to see that the conflict is between the worldviews of Christianity and naturalism (nature is all there is). A worldview is essentially the set of presuppositions or assumptions through which a person views the world. Secular historical science is predicated on the worldview of naturalism, which removes God from the picture and pins truth to man's reasoning ability, not to revelation

from the Bible. But two centuries, countless man-hours, and immense sums of money have resulted in ‘sciences’ that cannot explain field data, like the surface features, called landforms¹¹, observed all over the planet (see Chapters 9 and 10).^{12,13} If nothing else, this increasingly obvious failure suggests that a fresh look at the rock and fossil records is warranted. Once the Enlightenment naturalism is set aside, information is readily interpreted to support biblical history.

Many scholars say ‘There was no Flood’

In spite of these changes, and although Noah’s Flood has gone through a spate of entertainment popularity, many scholars, both secular and Christian, question its historicity (see Chapter 3). Secular scholars simply dismiss Noah’s Flood because it is inconsistent with their geological framework of uniformitarianism—the idea that presently observed processes account for all the rocks and fossils formed in the past. Some secular scholars simply deny that any significant flood event ever occurred; others try to explain the biblical account away as the exaggeration of a local flood. For example, several secular geologists suggested that a flooding event in the Black Sea explained the origin of the ‘tale.’¹⁴ Of course people who are atheists or agnostics reject the Bible and its history. For example, geomorphologist Dr Arthur Strahler (1918–2002), wrote in an anti-creationist book published by the anti-Christian Prometheus Books:¹⁵

Mainstream science has no obligation whatsoever to attempt to refute Flood geology—a hypothesis vaguely and confusingly worded, lacking in completeness of statement, and nearly devoid of evidence.¹⁶

A critic reviewing the movie *Noah* declared the Flood account was one of the most implausible stories in the Bible:

Darren Aronofsky brings out wild ambition and thrilling artistry to one of the Old Testament’s best-known, most dramatic, least plausible stories—Noah and the Ark—with Russell Crowe infusing the role

of God’s first seaman and zookeeper with all his surly majesty.¹⁷

However, ‘rational’ atheists and agnostics possess a belief system, just like Christians. Their belief system contains its own origin and earth history mythology and is believed to be backed by ‘science.’ The Bible purports to be God’s revelation to man with an overview of the history of mankind. Naturalism as a belief system cannot be demonstrated, any more than atheism can be demonstrated. A person would require infinite knowledge to *know* beyond a reasonable doubt that there is no God. Both belief systems look at the same evidence, but because of different starting assumptions of the past arrive at different interpretations (Figure 1.6).

Thus, the charge that Christians’ belief system can only be accepted on ‘blind faith’ is merely a red herring or dodge, something that misleads or distracts from the important issue of origins. Any belief system requires an element of faith; the real question is whether or not that faith is justified. Skeptic Mark Twain once claimed: “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.”¹⁸ But biblical faith is never divorced from reason or evidence, but from sight. So Christians have been justifying their faith in the Bible for 2,000 years. Skeptics are much newer at the game, and betray their novice status with many silly arguments that Christians answered long ago.

Some perceptive scientists and philosophers have noted a principle at work in the minds of people, even scientists, which may explain their automatic dismissal of Noah’s Flood. Dr William Dement, a leading sleep researcher, along with writer Christopher Vaughan, commented in regard to his discovery of REM (rapid-eye movement) sleep:

...when they are looking, people usually see only what they expect to find and they do not see what they assume for whatever reason could not exist.¹⁹

Could the skeptics of Noah’s Flood have overlooked the evidence because they did not expect to find it? And even if they see evidence for Noah’s Flood, they don’t ‘see’ the connection



Figure 1.6. Interpretations of the data depend upon a person's assumptions of the past or their worldview.

because they dismiss the Flood because it goes against their worldview of naturalism and rejection of the supernatural.

Why does it matter?

For many, the reality of Noah's Flood is irrelevant. Regardless of statements rejecting or affirming it, does it really matter if it occurred, and if the Bible's story is accurate? We believe it does. One reason is simply that Genesis is part of the Bible. The Bible repeatedly claims to be God's word. God claims to be incapable of lying (Hebrews 6:18). If the account is false, it would invalidate these foundational claims of Christianity. Also, Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It lays the foundation for the rest. Many concepts developed later in the Bible originate in Genesis. If Genesis is deemed reliable, especially after two centuries of persistent attacks, then it is an *affirmation* of the truth of Christianity. It then follows that God's revelation in the Bible cannot be ignored.

This has important implications for our lives. The Bible teaches us wisdom and truth, and is a guide in a culture that propagates so much

misinformation. Without the Bible's guidance, many mistakes will be made, some with eternal consequences.

The truth of Noah's Flood and the Bible has implications for nations and societies too. Nations that were built on biblical principles, like the United States, cannot abandon the Bible without suffering damage to its institutions, as we have seen in recent decades. We tend to complain about the problems with such countries until we realize that they could be much worse.²⁰ A people that lives in freedom, that gives accused people the right to a fair trial, and has a government to prevent tyranny is a nation that is the envy of most people who have lived on this Earth.

But these advantages, seen predominantly in the Christian West, are not guaranteed. The institutions are justified ultimately by the Bible. When the Bible is rejected, the institutions it upholds cannot last. When we look at the scope of history, it is those nations that have exercised influence and power in world affairs, despite the greater populations and resources of other lands. For example, the United States was simply a