

# Examining the Cosmos

## Session 10 *The Journey of Man*

### Reference Document 16

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#### THE PURPOSE AND EXTENT OF NOAH'S FLOOD

Some Bible interpreters view Noah's Flood, Genesis 6-9, as a mass extinction event of global proportions. This interpretation doesn't necessarily arise from the biblical text but more likely from a modern, global perspective of the world. The passage describes an intense 40-day downpour, accompanied by an upsurge from aquifers. The resultant flood wiped out the entire human population of that time and all birds and mammals associated with them, except for the people, Noah and his relatives, and animals aboard the ark.

Both the Genesis account and several other biblical references give significant clues to the Flood's geographical extent. Psalm 104:6-9 offers an important interpretive guideline:

*You, (God), covered it (Earth), with the deep as with a garment, the waters stood above the mountains. But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; They flowed over the mountains; they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.*

The psalmist says water would "never again" inundate the globe- once the continents had formed and the ocean receded, the second creation day. Likewise, Job and Solomon comment that in preparing Earth for humanity, God established a "boundary", "fixed limits" or "doors and bars" for the oceans that "the waters would not overstep".

The regional limitation of the Flood may be inferred from the Genesis story itself. Noah's comment in Gen. 7:19 that "all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered" likely implies that from one horizon to the other Noah could see only water. Later, with the receding of the waters well underway, Genesis 8:5 reports that from his vantage point atop the ark Noah could see the tops of distant hills and mountains. The dove he then released could find only "water over all the surface of the earth" Gen.8:9. Perhaps the dove flew too low over

the water to see the faraway land that Noah could easily distinguish from his higher point of view.

The most compelling biblical argument for a regional rather than global catastrophe comes from reflection on God's purpose in sending the Flood. An epidemic of evil threatened humanity. As with disease, perhaps close human contact had heightened the contagion of sin. God's subsequent emphasis on the necessity to spread out suggests that prior to the Flood humans had huddled together in one geographical area, a direct violation of God's earlier command to multiply and fill the earth. His judgment against human wickedness, the surgical removal of a deadly cancer, need not extend beyond their geographical boundary.

Even after the Flood, people resisted God's command to move. Genesis 11 explains how God forcibly intervened to scatter humanity throughout all the habitable landmasses of Earth. The Bible indicates that humanity initially occupied a small region of the planet. A 40-day downpour in that area would have been sufficient to rescue humanity from complete self destruction due to the escalation of evil. However, the resultant flood, because of its relatively brief duration, would not have left any significant geological or archeological evidence.

Nevertheless, anthropology should show a relatively early and rapid occupation of all the habitable continents. According to RTB's creation model, given the relationships among people who survived the Flood, (all the men on the ark were blood related to one man, Noah, whereas the women on board may not have shared any close blood relationship), genetic research can be expected to show that the most recent common ancestor for males bottlenecks at a later date than does the most recent common ancestor for females.