

The Global Catastrophe and the Great King

In the great conflict between truth and error there are two very large words that get thrown around. One of those words is the word uniformitarianism – an eight-syllable monster that means simply: the way we observe the world today is the way it has always been. The rate at which mountains form, oceans form, rocks form is the rate at which they have always formed. Formation, erosion, sediment deposits happen in a uniform way and have always happened at a uniform way. The Bible describes uniformitarianism in 2 Peter

³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3–4)

All things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. If you are a uniformitarian, you look at rock formations in the Grand Canyon, you look at how long it takes for an organism compressed in mud to turn to stone, or to become coal or oil. You then see how much of this is buried or present, and you calculate backwards, using uniform timing to how old the earth is, or how long it took for make. Many geologists disagree with the Bible's timeline and hold to an Earth billions of years old, because they apply uniformitarianism to the rocks, fossils, and formations that they discover.

The second large word in this battle over truth is the word catastrophism. Catastrophism is a geological theory that suggests that Earth's features and landscapes are formed by sudden, large-scale events, or catastrophes, rather than gradual, slow processes. Catastrophism is the belief that the world has been radically re-shaped by a global catastrophe. Sedimentary rock, fossils, oil and coal, polar ice caps, great lakes, mountain ranges both above and below the oceans are best explained not by a uniform slow process, but by a global flood.

In fact, on May 18, 1980, a volcano went off at Mount St Helens in Washington state. The after effects of that catastrophe have been studied now for forty years. They found 440 feet of sedimentary layers had formed. Rapid erosion had caused gullies that were assumed to take hundreds or even thousands of years to develop. The layers of peat in Spirit lake have been found to be the early formation of coal, something that was thought to take thousands of years. A local catastrophe within our lifetime has shown how formations assumed to be thousands of years old can actually be very young, and caused rapidly by volcano and flooding.

Scripturally, our choice is between uniformitarianism or catastrophism. We either believe, as the scoffers do, that all things continue as they did. Or we believe one of the most important events in history was a global catastrophe.

Genesis 7 describes this global flood. Having studied how Noah built the Ark, we now turn to Genesis 7 where Scripture shows us the final preparations that were made, the power of this flood, and how it progressed. And of course, there is a great theological point here that goes beyond dating rocks and fossils. The great point is that when God intends to judge sin and rebellion, He will do so, and none will escape.

I. The Preparation for the Flood

1 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. 2 You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; 3 also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made." 5 And Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth. 7 So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, of animals that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, 9 two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.

It is now 120 years since the Lord first gave the command to build the Ark. The Ark is built, and the day has come. Noah's grandfather, Methuselah, dies that very year. Now the Lord commands Noah to fill the Ark and to come into the Ark. It's comforting that God says "come into the Ark", not "go into the Ark", suggesting God's presence will be in the Ark with Noah.

It is not that Noah was a better man according to his own works, but that he was a man saved by grace, a man who walked by faith. Noah was chosen, but Noah also responded and believed.

Taken aboard was seven each of the clean kind (which would be the domesticated animals used for food and sacrifice), and two each of all the other kinds of birds, wild animals, land animals, and of reptiles. A male and female, to make sure the species soon propagate and repopulate the earth.

This clean and unclean distinction is not given anywhere prior; perhaps God allowed Noah to use his own judgement. The Mosaic Law then spelt it out, and then in the church age, Christ declared all foods clean and Peter's vision showed that table fellowship could now happen between Jews and Gentiles, meaning all foods could be eaten.

Any creature that could live or survive a flood did not need to be taken aboard, any aquatic, amphibian, and even many insectoid species.

So how did Noah manage to gather all these animals? And how did they fit aboard the Ark? First, Noah had many years to do this. In the 120 years spent building the Ark, there was more than enough time to become the most expert zoologist in the world, identifying, categorising, and where needed, capturing the animals.

Second, as Noah grew in his knowledge of the animal kingdom, he would have realised which animals represented a distinct species, a separate kind, that needed saving. Noah did not need to take every breed of dog, only one pair that represented the kind that would be the ancestor of dogs, possibly of wolves, foxes, coyotes, jackals. Of the land vertebrates, there are only around 33,000 named living species. These are divided into fewer than 7800 *genera* and 938 *families*. One creationist ministry estimates the number of kinds on Ark at around

1400, and the number of animals a number as low as 7000. We've already seen that the biblical dimensions of the Ark could accommodate about 125,000 sheep-sized animals, with additional room for provisions and living quarters. Noah would have chosen young animals, who take up less space, don't eat as much, and don't create as much waste, would have had more time to reproduce after the flood. "Research into low-tech animal care methods shows that a small group of people could manage the needs of up to 16,000 animals effectively. There are simple systems that Noah could have used to allow his small family to reasonably care for the thousands of animals aboard the ark."

Third, animals have been known to exercise strange behaviours prior to a natural cataclysm like an earthquake or volcano, often bolting or fleeing before humans are aware of any trouble. It's quite plausible to imagine God causing a similar behaviour and directing many animals straight down Noah's path, where selecting seven or two, would have been a simpler task.

Noah obeys God, and seven days after God's announcement, Noah and seven other people, with all the gathered animals are in the Ark, and the rain begins.

II. The Power of the Flood

⁰ And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. ¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. ¹² And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark —¹⁴ they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. ¹⁵ And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which *is* the breath of life. ¹⁶ So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

The Bible chooses to mark the beginning of the Flood by the age of Noah. When he is 600 years, 2 months and 17 days old, the Flood begins. The actual waters pouring onto the Earth lasts forty days, though Noah and the animals are in the Ark for a full 370 days. Verses 13 to 16 repeat what we saw in verse 7. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives enter the Ark, with all the animals they have saved. Very importantly, the Lord shuts Noah in. This was an Ark that needed to be sealed from the outside, and there was only One who could seal it from the outside and survive the Flood, and that was the One sending the Flood. And perhaps, from one point of view, Noah could not think of opening the Ark and saving those who might when it was too late, ask him to take them aboard. God gave a window of mercy, and when it was refused, God shut Noah and his family in, and as it were, sealed the door.

But the flooding of the Earth takes place for forty days. Under current atmospheric conditions, forty days of rain are mostly impossible. But notice something that is often missed: the flood waters came both from below and above. The fountains of the great deep were broken up. That refers to massive gushers of water, probably bursting out of the earth through tectonic plates cracking and moving. Water bursting out from below in jets that would have gone kilometres into the air would have produced its own rain. A 2021 study estimated that the Earth's crust, specifically within the upper 10 kilometres, holds approximately 43.9 million cubic kilometres of water, which is more than the amount frozen in ice sheets and glaciers.

Huge amounts of water are pouring up from below, and huge amounts are falling from the sky. Those who believe the earth once had a water canopy above the atmosphere believe it fell during the forty days as well.

The world was probably mostly a sea-level land-mass, and so you don't need as much water to completely cover the earth. We imagine this as a time of massive reshaping of the surface of the earth. The world was a relatively flat landmass, with mountains quite low by modern standards is now torn apart into multiple continents, huge mountain ranges push up, massive trenches and valleys sink, some lands slip below the water, land that was underwater is now pushed up and out.

The waters themselves are carving the land, reshaping the landscape entirely. Oceans and great lakes are being filled up from below, and from above. The earth is returning to the state of Genesis 1:2, where it is all water, and no dry land. The earth is becoming again without form and void. This is clearly a second creation; a do-over. In fact, Peter tells us this is a transition from the first world to the second world.

⁵ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water. (2 Peter 3:5–6)

And just as the Spirit hovered over the waters, so God will send a wind to assuage the waters, reveal the dry land, and begin again with a new family, whom He will again charge to fill the earth and subdue it.

The narrative tells us how far the Flood went.

III. The Progress of the Flood

¹⁷ Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. ¹⁹ And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. ²⁰ The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. ²¹ And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. ²² All in whose nostrils *was* the breath of the spirit of life, all that *was* on the dry *land*, died. ²³ So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who *were* with him in the ark remained *alive*. ²⁴ And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days. (Genesis 7:17–24)

Forty days of water from above and water below. Eventually, the Ark, built on dry land, is picked up and carried. As the waters keep filling and submerging the world, the Ark is rising above it all. Peter tells us this is a picture of baptism: everything that is submerged under the water dies, everything that comes up and out of it is saved and alive.

The waters increase and increase, till the high hills and mountains (of that era) are covered. We need not think of Noah's world as having Mount Everest at 8000 metres; rather, the mountains of his day are covered, and it is as the Flood progresses over the next year that the mountains as we know them are formed. Fifteen cubits up means the highest point on earth was at least covered by 7 metres of water.

Verse 21 through 24 give us the morbid result. Notice how many times the word all and every occurs. ²¹ And **all** flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and **every** creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and **every** man. ²² **All** in whose nostrils *was* the breath of the spirit of life, **all** that *was* on the dry *land*, died. ²³ So He destroyed **all** living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth.

And then the exception is given. Only Noah and those who *were* with him in the ark remained *alive*

Now this leads to a fairly important question: was this truly a Global Flood? There are many voices today who say that this was a localised Flood, a flood of the known world where civilisation existed. Those who believe in a local Flood object to a global flood, saying that the waters needed to cover the earth could not have drained away. They believe it was a local flood around the area of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, that covered the area where human civilisation was centred, but did not cover the whole earth. They point to the geological column, the amount of species throughout the world and conclude it was a local Flood.

But as we've already seen, the wording of Scripture speaks of covering the whole earth, of all the land under the heavens. It speaks of the mountains submerged by 7 metres. It speaks of all flesh dying.

No local flood continues to rise for 150 days. No local Flood takes 370 days to abate. Furthermore, if it was merely a local flood, why not just tell Noah and his family to move? You don't need a boat if you have a local flood. And finally, when God makes a covenant in chapter nine to never again Flood the earth, if it was merely a local flood, it means He has broken that covenant again and again, because the world witnesses local floods again and again.

The earth's conditions were changed after the flood, new seasons, rainfall, the rainbow, enmity between man and beast, all of which suggests a universal Flood.

Those of us who believe this was a universal flood recognise that the Flood was a combination of something natural and supernatural. It was natural in the sense of what the waters did, what the earthquakes did, what Noah's Ark did. But there may have been some accelerated processes around the geology, or even the speciation after the Flood. Some geological formations are best explained by the six days of creation, not by the Flood. On the other hand, the fossil record, with millions upon millions of creatures buried alive in mud that turned to stone is best explained by a global flood.

The Flood also loses all sense of its theological purpose if we reduce it to a local flood. Consider how Psalm 29 uses the Flood. The first 9 verses refer to thunder and lightning as the voice of the Lord.

¹ Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. ² Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. ³ The voice of the LORD *is* over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The LORD *is* over many waters. ⁴ The voice of the LORD *is* powerful; The voice of the LORD *is* full of majesty. ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the

wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, And strips the forests bare; And in His temple everyone says, “Glory!”

Then consider verse 10.

¹⁰ The LORD sat *enthroned* at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. ¹¹ The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace. (Psalm 29:1–11)

The Flood was a moment of enthronement. The whole earth, His entire creation, corrupted and marred by sin, now covered and cleansed by a baptism of justice. Sitting over it is the God who made the world in and out of the water the first time, and could do it again. Sitting over all the rebellion of man was the Lord, whose power over water none of the Nephilim could match, none of the sophisticated cities of pre-Flood man could endure. After all the fist-shaking at God, after climbing into whatever flimsy boats they had, after all the clambering up on what towers they had made, after the scrambling to climb whatever mountains they had, finally, every last wicked man succumbed to the wrath of God. Eventually the shouts of rebellion were swallowed by the sound of rain, water, and waves. Here is the true Neptune, the true Poseidon. God of the waters. He surveys this watery grave with brokenhearted satisfaction. Justice has been done. And yet there is also mercy: a small rectangular box, floating above the waters – all that is left of humanity, all that will repopulate the land. To the angels, what has become of the pride of man? How does man's scoffing rebellion now seem? One bobbing box, dwarfed beside waves pouring over the Earth. The Lord sits enthroned.

The British expositor Alexander Maclaren said:

“For a hundred and twenty years the wits laughed, and the “common-sense” people wondered, and the patient saint went on hammering and pitching at his ark. But one morning it began to rain; and by degrees, somehow, Noah did not seem quite such a fool. The jests would look rather different when the water was up to the knees of the jesters; and their sarcasms would stick in their throats as they drowned.

So is it always. So it will be at the last great day. The men who lived for the future, by faith in Christ, will be found out to have been the wise men when the future has become the present, and the present has become the past, and is gone for ever; while they who had no aims beyond the things of time, which are now sunk beneath the dreary horizon, will awake too late to the conviction that they are outside the ark of safety, and that their truest epitaph is, “Thou fool.”

Consider again the words of 2 Peter regarding the flood, and see his evangelistic exhortation: ³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.” ⁵ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:3–9)

In other words, don't be fooled by uniformitarianism. Don't wilfully forget that you live in a

world scarred by catastrophism. It's a permanent reminder that God judges sin. The delay is not proof of millions of years. The delay is proof that God is longsuffering and kind, giving space and time for all to come to repentance. Another global catastrophe is coming, and He will once again be King over the flood of fire, showing mercy to those who accept His Ark of His Son by faith.