Detailed analysis of the Hebrew text of the Genesis Flood

Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood

Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling (Editors)

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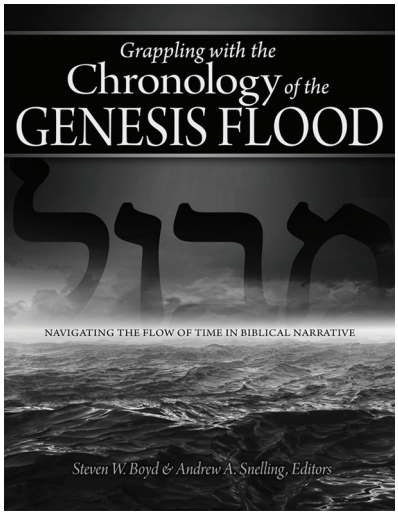

Michael J. Oard

I have always been uncertain about the meaning of several words and phrases in Genesis 6 to 9. These include the two mechanisms of the Flood, 'the fountains of the great deep' and 'the windows of heaven', as well as the chronological order of the narrative. I am also uncertain about exactly when the Flood peaked and what is meant by the word 'prevailed'. Little has been written on the chronology of the Flood, and this very scholarly book admirably fills that gap with 756 pages of text, not counting the glossary and three indexes. References are located at the end of each of the 16 chapters.

This book does an extensive analysis of the Hebrew in Genesis 6 to 9, but it is not an easy read. The interpretive challenge is discussed by the ingenious method of using the backdrop of a seafaring voyage. The authors address basic questions like the temporal chronology of the narrative as a whole and the dividing of the verses into episodes and scenes. They do not declare which of the three main positions the Hebrew favours for the peak of the Flood: (1) it peaked on Day 40 and decreased slowly, (2) it peaked on Day 150, or (3) it peaked on Day 40 and remained steady state until Day 150. They do mention the majority of scholars have accepted the second position. Of course, a majority opinion does not mean it is necessarily true. Unfortunately, the book does not answer, or provide meaningful possibilities, for the rest of my questions. Hopefully, they will be addressed in two sequels, which are planned.

The chronology of the Flood

Boyd and Snelling's key point is the verb form of *wayyiqtol*. It is commonly used to show a temporal sequence in Hebrew verbs and verb phrases in narrative but does not necessarily mean a temporal chronology. This is discussed throughout the volume and is the main thrust of chapter 10, where they explain that a strict temporal sequence for *wayyiqtol* became an assumption about the year 1900. Nevertheless, there are dozens of obvious exceptions in the Old Testament. Other aspects of the narrative must be analyzed to derive the temporal sequence:

> "… individual events of the Flood narrative depend not on the presence or absence of the *wayyiqtol*, but on other contextual and linguistic factors" (p. 356).

The assumption that Genesis 6 to 9 is a strict temporal sequence has resulted in several absurdities. Among them is that Noah would have had to enter the Ark three separate times, in Genesis 7:7, 13, and 15. Unfortunately, the temporal assumption reinforced the Documentary Hypothesis, which claims the first five books of the Bible are a compilation of four or more authors or traditions, and that Genesis 6 to 9 was cobbled together by two or possibly three of these authors. According to the hypothesis, later an editor put the accounts together into one. Recognizing that the *wayyiqtol* is not always sequential pulls the rug out from under the Documentary Hypothesis.

Further principles of Hebrew grammar indicating temporal order are developed in chapters 11 to 13. In chapter 14, this enables the authors to subdivide the narrative into three episodes and 18 scenes. Each scene represents a narrative unit. Non-negotiable fixed chronological points are defended. They include Genesis 7:1, the beginning of the Flood and the age of Noah; Genesis 8:4, the Ark grounding at 150 days; Genesis 8:5, the tops of the mountains being observed; Genesis 8:13, Noah's age when the waters had dried up and he removed the covering of the Ark; and Genesis 8:14, the age of Noah when the earth was dry.

Along the way, we are given an analysis of the various extant manuscripts of Genesis 6 to 9. As the authors stress, it is necessary to know the original Hebrew before we can analyze the chronology. As it turns out the Masoretic and Samaritan Pentateuch texts are the best for this purpose. The Septuagint apparently has difficulties. The authors also list and analyze opinions on Flood chronology. They mention the elaborate chiastic structure[1] of the Flood account, but they indicate the structure is not absolute.

Geological and geophysical issues

Chapters 5 to 7 interrupt the Hebrew analysis to discuss geological and geophysical issues. The chapters present one model of the Flood, but the analysis of the Hebrew can be incorporated into other Flood models as well. Chapters 5 to 7 appear to be an unnecessary intrusion into a book, the main theme of which is Hebrew chronology. There is much I can agree with in these chapters. Chapter 5 is a good history of Flood and secular geology. I agree the relative sea level, the level of the floodwater, oscillated; the mountains rose late in the Flood; and the Flood waters regressed after Day 150, followed by a post-Flood rapid Ice Age. Reasons for the general fossil order in sections 4 to 6 of chapter 7 are particularly praiseworthy.

Many Flood geologists will disagree with some aspects of the geological and geophysical model the book presents. Some will take issue with catastrophic plate tectonics (CPT) and question whether the geological column represents an absolute temporal sequence of biblical earth history. Also disputed is whether the pre-Flood/Flood boundary is just below the Precambrian/Cambrian boundary of the geological column. North American megasequences are considered absolute, and the Flood/post-Flood boundary appears to be somewhere between the Cretaceous/Tertiary and the mid Tertiary. Boyd and Snelling declare a consensus among creationists on the pre-Flood/Flood boundary where there is none. Froede and I have demonstrated the pre-Flood/Flood boundary is equivocal.[2,3] The Cambrian[4] strata could not have been deposited immediately after the beginning of the Flood since they are the bottom layer of a thick, widespread layer of Paleozoic and Mesozoic strata that has very little

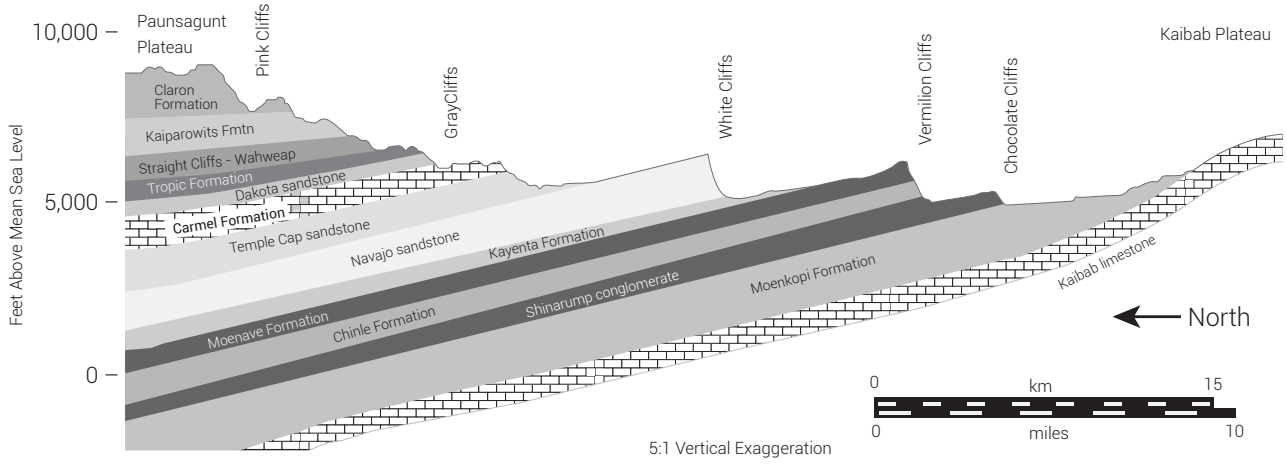

Figure 1. Schematic of the Grand Staircase north of Grand Canyon, which is located near the top of the anticline of the Kaibab Plateau (drawn by Peter Klevberg).

deformation. This would imply the catastrophic mechanism that began the Flood waned by the time the Cambrian layer was laid. Although *Grappling with Chronology* is dogmatic about the geological column, it admits the considerable contention that exists concerning the Flood/post-Flood boundary. In my opinion, the defense of the location of the Flood/post-Flood boundary is superficial.

Chapter 6 of the book admits CPT is a working model but holds onto it dogmatically. It claims 'only' CPT can explain the geological and geophysical observations, North America megasequences, mountain building, and how the continents down buckled in areas where they proceeded to collect sediments. Indeed, CPT does explain some evidence, but numerous details, some of which seem contradictory, have yet to be worked out.[5] One questionable claim is that CPT caused mountain uplift, yet there are many mountain ranges, like the Ural and Transantarctic Mountains, that do not readily fit into the CPT paradigm, unless there were paleo subduction or paleo continental collision zones.

Especially troubling to me is that Walker's biblical geological model is summarily rejected.[6,7] His model has powerful explanatory value. He classifies the Flood into stages and phases, proposing the Genesis Flood was like a flash flood that can be divided into two main stages, the Inundatory and Recessive Stage. These two stages he subdivides into phases. He proposes that when the mechanism of the Flood was unleashed the water rose quickly (the Eruptive Phase). Then it continued to rise slowly or 'prevailed' (the Ascending Phase). At the peak of the Flood the waters began to recede and rush off of the continents. At first they formed wide currents (the Abative or Sheet Flow Phase) which eventually transformed into more narrow currents (the Dispersive or Channelized Flow Phase). Geomorphology, the study of the earth's surface, gives supportive evidence for a sequence of sheet flow followed by channelized flow.[8,9]

I am convinced Walker's classification is rejected since it does not strictly adhere to the geological column. If Walker's model is correct, the geologic column would need to be modified. As Walker fleshed out his model, he mentions that dinosaur tracks would define strata formed early in the Flood before the water covered the Earth. Some advocates of the K/T boundary model believe the Mesozoic is middle or late Flood. Mesozoic strata have billions of dinosaur tracks and millions of eggs. These represent live dinosaurs that had to have been dead by the peak of the Flood.[10] Tracks and eggs are usually found in areas of thick sedimentary rocks along with evidence hundreds of metres of erosion exposed the trace fossils. All of the fossilized dinosaurs' activity can be placed between Day 40 and Day 120, during the Ascending Phase of the Flood, because the first 40 days of rain would have washed away their tracks. The dinosaurs had to have been dead well before the time the continents were eroded, at the start of the Recessional Stage. Dinosaur tracks and eggs also show that the peak of the Flood could not have been at Day 40, also indicating practically all the geological column was deposited on the continents before Day 150.

Evidence for the geological column is provided by strata in the Grand Canyon and the Grand Staircase (figure 1). Agreed, this is an ordered sequence of the Paleozoic up until the early Cenozoic. However, advocates of an absolute geological column need to look beyond this area. The geological column has to apply over the *entire* Earth—continents as well as the ocean bottom. Creation scientists need to do much more analysis of how the geological column applies to biblical earth history. Reading Dr Reed's and my book is a good place to begin.[11] It presents both sides of the argument, for and against the geological column.

Flood geology needs the same extensive analysis the rest of Boyd and Snelling's book provides. Our Flood models must be backed up with a large body of published research in the areas of geology, geophysics, paleontology, and geomorphology. I have attempted to do so with the Flood/post-Flood boundary. Recently, I published an e-book defending the location of the boundary at the Late Cenozoic.[12]

References

1. A chiastic structure is a literary technique in which two or more clauses are balanced against each other by a reversal of their structure. In the case of the Flood account, the chiastic structure is balanced around Genesis 8:1a: "But God remembered Noah …".
2. Froede Jr, C.R. and Oard, M.J., Defining the pre-Flood/Flood boundary within the Grand Canyon: were all the pre-Flood sediments scoured down to basement during the Flood? *Creation Matters* **12**(4):3–4, 6, 2007.
3. Oard, M.J. and Froede Jr, C., Where is the pre-Flood/Flood boundary? *Creation Research Society Quarterly* **45**(1):24–39, 2008.
4. The geological column is used for discussion purposes only.
5. Reed, J.K. (Ed.), *Plate Tectonics: A Different View*, Creation Research Society Books, Chino Valley, AZ, 2000.
6. Walker, T., A biblical geologic model; in: Walsh, R.E. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Creationism*, technical symposium sessions, Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA, pp. 581–592, 1994.
7. biblicalgeology.net/.
8. Oard, M.J., *Flood by Design: Receding Water Shapes the Earth's Surface*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2008.
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11. Reed, J.K. and Oard, M.J. (Eds.), *The Geologic Column: Perspectives within Diluvial Geology*, Creation Research Society Books, Chino Valley, AZ, 2006.
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