**The Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood**

**Richard M. Davidson**

Script

Instructions: Advance the PowerPoint slides at every new paragraph and anywhere you see “/”

[1] This presentation summarizes the article: The Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood by Richard M. Davidson in the journal *Origins.*

[2] The extent of the Genesis Flood has been vigorously debated by biblical scholars. / For those who accept a recent creation week of six literal consecutive, 24-hour days, a universal Flood is necessary to explain the existence of the geologic column. / The thesis of this study is that only the traditional interpretation of a worldwide flood does full justice to all the relevant biblical data. / The author summarizes 22 lines of biblical evidence which support the universality of the flood.

[3] There are three major positions about the extent of the Genesis Flood: / The traditional, which asserts the universal, worldwide nature of the deluge, / limited or local flood theories, which narrow the scope of the Flood story to a particular geographical location in Mesopotamia; / and a non-literal or symbolic interpretation, which suggests that the Flood story is a non-historical account written to teach theological truth.

[4] Against this third position, Davidson first notes the evidences within the biblical account that affirm the historical nature of the Flood.

[5] In the literary structure of the Flood story, genealogical information frames the Flood Account, / appearing immediately before / and after.

[6] Genealogical information appears within the flood story as well

[7] These genealogical references are indicators that the account is intended to be factual history.

[8] The Hebrew word for generations is used 13 times in the book of Genesis. In fact, it forms the structure for the entire book. / The use of this word in the flood story—as throughout Genesis—indicates that the author intended this story to be as historically veracious as the rest of Genesis. / The literary analysis indicates that all of Genesis 1-11 must be taken as historical narrative prose, just like the rest of Genesis.

[9] A number of references in the book of Job may allude to the then-relatively-recent Flood. / One verse describes God restraining the waters or sending them out to inundate the earth. / Another describes wicked men being snatched away before their time by water, / and another describes God overturning mountains.

[10] The historical occurrence of the Flood is part of the saving/judging acts of God. / Its historicity is assumed by later biblical writers / and is essential to their theological arguments.

[11] According to the biblical writers—/ far from being a non-historical, symbolic, or mythical account written only to teach theological truths, / the Flood narrative is intended to accurately record a real, literal historical event.

[12] For Christians who take seriously the biblical record and accept the historicity of the Flood account, / the question still remains whether the event described is to be taken as a local, limited flood / or a universal, world-wide cataclysm.

[13] The limited flood theories rest primarily on scientific arguments that present seemingly difficult problems for a universal flood. / Davidson suggests that, although much more study is needed, these problems are not insurmountable.

[14] The traditional conservative understanding is that the Flood narrative describes a universal, world-wide Deluge. / It should be noted that the majority of liberal-critical commentators agree. But even though they agree that the narrative describes a universal Flood, / they don’t believe it actually happened. Even some conservative scholars have rejected a worldwide flood in favor of a local one.

[15] The thesis of this article is that only the traditional position of a literal, universal world-wide Flood does full justice to the biblical data

[16] …and that the universal interpretation is crucial for Flood theology in Genesis / and the theological implications drawn by later biblical writers

[17] Perhaps the most important kind of biblical evidence for a universal Flood is the specific all-inclusive terminology found within the Genesis account itself. / Davidson summarizes information about this terminology and refers the reader to three articles by the late Gerhard Hasel for additional details.

[18] These eight terms or phrases from Genesis 6-9, / most echoing their counterparts in the world-wide creation account of Genesis 1-2, indicate universality.

[19] The Hebrew word translated “earth” occurs 46 times in the Flood narrative, always without any accompanying indication that would limit its scope. / It parallels the use of the same term in the account of world-wide, universal creation in Genesis 1, / which clearly gives a universal context for its usage in Genesis 6-9.

[20] Some have argued that if Moses had wished to indicate the entire world, he would have used the Hebrew word “tebel,” / which means the world as a whole, or dry land in the sense of continents. / But Davidson points out that this term only appears in poetic texts and never in the narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible and concludes that this argument from silence does not adequately consider the context and carries little weight.

[21] A second expression, “upon the face of all the earth” appears twice in the flood account.

[22] This phrase clearly alludes to the first occurrence of the same phrase in the universal context of creation and therefore implies the same kind of universality in the flood account

[23] The immediate context of the Flood story is the universal sinfulness of humankind whom God had made and created to have dominion over “all the earth.”

[24] And the succeeding context is the universal dispersal of man after the Tower of Babel “upon the face of all the earth.”

[25] In each of the four occurrences of the phrase in Genesis OUTSIDE the Flood story, / it clearly has the universal sense of the entire land surface of the globe.

[26] There is nothing in the Flood narrative to indicate anything less than universality.

[27] There IS one place in Genesis where the context indicates that the phrase has a limited meaning. / That is the verse about the famine in Egypt. / But Davidson points out that there is a slight change in word order in the Hebrew text from elsewhere in Genesis.

[28] A third phrase—”face of the ground’—appears five times in the Genesis flood story, including these: that God will blot out man from the face of the ground / and that he blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground.

[29] The phrase occurs in parallel with universal terms we have just noted, / the earth in Genesis 7:23 / and the face of all the earth in Genesis 8:9.

[30] The phrase also alludes back to its first usage in the universal context of creation.

[31] The flood account includes 12 uses of the phrase that is translated “all flesh.” / The narrative states that God will “make an end of all flesh,” / that God will “destroy all flesh,” / and later that “all flesh died.” / The phrase translated all flesh is kol basar.

[32] Kol means “all.” / And basar means flesh. / Together kol basar means all flesh and indicates totality. / “Ha” means “the,” and when it appears before basar, / it means the flesh and indicates unity or entirety. / When kol and “ha” and basar all appear together, / it means both totality and unity. Although kol can occasionally express less than totality if the context indicates it, the phrase kol basar as it is used in Genesis 6-9 indicates totality. The one occurrence of “all THE flesh” indicates totality as well as unity.

[33] The expression “every living thing” of all flesh is another expression of totality. / The similar term in these verses means literally “all existence. /This term is given further universal dimensions by the addition of the clause harking back to creation—”all existence that I have made” / and by the exclusive statement that “Only Noah and those that were with him in the ark remained alive.

[34] Davidson quotes Gerhard Hasel: “There is **hardly any stronger way** in Hebrew to emphasize total destruction of ‘all existence’ of human and animal life on earth **than the way it has been expressed.** The writer of the Genesis Flood story employed terminology, formulae, and syntactical structures of the type that could not be more emphatic and explicit in expressing his concept of a universal, world-wide flood.”

[35] The phrase “under the whole heaven” is used 6 times in the Old Testament outside the flood narrative, always with a universal meaning. / For example the phrase is used to describe God’s omniscience / and depict His sovereignty.

[36] Davidson notes that the usage of “under the whole heaven” in Deuteronomy 2:25…

[37] Is further qualified and limited by the phrase “who shall hear the report of you,” / which is potentially universal and not an exception to the universal sense.

[38] These phrases-- “under the whole heaven” and “under all the heavens” universalize the phrase “under heaven” in the Flood context. / The word heaven alone can have a local meaning, / but here the context is clearly universal.

[39] Ecclesiastes, which contains numerous allusions to creation, likewise utilizes the term “under heaven” (and the parallel expression “under the sun”) / with a universal intention.

[40] In the Flood account this phrase “under the whole heaven” is part of these forceful verses describing the extent of the Flood: And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. / One critical scholar notes that, not only does it assert the flood’s universality, but gives the exact height of the waters above the highest mountains.

[41] The biblical language here simply cannot be explained in terms of a local sky or local mountains being covered by snow. Citing another scholar, Davidson points out that the writer is not content with a single use of kol (or all); / but since ‘all’ is known to be used in a relative sense sometimes, / the writer removes all possible ambiguity by adding the phrase “under all the heavens.” / This double “kol” cannot allow for a relative interpretation.

[42] Davidson refers to an entire scholarly article by Gerhard Hasel devoted to the phrase “all the fountains of the great deep,” mentioned in Genesis 7 and 8.

[43] Hasel connects these verses to the universal “Deep” or world-ocean in Genesis 1:2 / and also mentions Psalm 104:6

[44] The “breaking up” and “bursting forth” of not just one subterranean water spring in Mesopotamia, / but of ALL the “fountains” of the Great Deep, / coupled in the same verse with the opening of the windows of the heavens, / far transcends a local scene.

[45] In another article, Hasel shows how the Hebrew Bible reserves a special term for the universal Genesis Flood. / Mabbul, which occurs 13 times in the Old Testament, seems to have become a ‘technical term for waters flowing or streaming forth and as such designates the flood being caused by waters. This technical term clearly sets the Genesis Deluge apart from all local floods / and is used in Psalm 29:10 to illustrate Yahweh’s universal sovereignty over the world at the time of Noah’s Flood.

[46] Davidson quotes Gerhard Hasel again: The Genesis flood narrative provides ample evidence of being an account which is to be understood as a historical narrative in prose style. It expects to be taken literally.

[47] There is a consistent and overwhelming amount of terminology and formulae…which on the basis of context and syntax has uniformly indicated that the flood story wants to be understood in a universal sense:

[48] The waters destroyed all human and animal plus bird life on the entire land mass of the globe. To read it otherwise means to force a meaning on the carefully written and specific syntactical constructions of the original language which the text itself rejects.

[49] After discussing the 8 words or phrases from the biblical text that affirm the universality of the flood, / Davidson turns to the other biblical evidence for a universal flood

[50] First, all the major themes in Genesis 1-11 are universal in scope. / Creation was not local. / The fall of humanity involved the whole human race, not just the people of Mesopotamia. / The plan of redemption is certainly universal in scope. / And the sinful condition of man at the time of the Flood is described this way: / And God saw that the wickedness of humanity was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

[51] Such universal sinfulness naturally calls for universal judgment.

[52] Second, the divine purpose given for bringing the Flood makes explicit its universal scope: / And the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” / Nothing less than a complete destruction of the human race is described.

[53] Third, genealogical lines from both Adam and Noah are exclusive in nature, / indicating that as Adam was father of all pre-Flood humanity, / so Noah was father of all post-Flood humanity. / From the descendants of Noah “the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood” and the Tower of Babel experience spreads humanity across the globe.

[54] In addition, striking extra-biblical evidence that all human races, and not just the nations of the Fertile Crescent, are included in the descendants of Noah, and retain memory of the universal Flood, is found in the amazing prevalence of ancient flood stories throughout the world. / A world-wide flood is by far the most frequently-given cause for past universally destructive calamities in the folk literature of antiquity. / A remarkable number of these oral and written traditions agree upon the basic points of the biblical account. / The stories nearest to the area of the Dispersion at Babel are the closest in detail to the biblical account. / This vast body of ancient witnesses to a world-wide Deluge is powerful testimony to the historicity and universality of the biblical flood.

[55] Fourth, the same inclusive divine blessing to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth is given to both Adam and Noah. This is another link between universal creation and the flood, between the original beginning and the new beginning.

[56] Fifth, the covenant with its rainbow sign is clearly linked to the extent of the Flood, and includes the whole earth. If there was only a local flood, then the covenant would be only a limited covenant, and the rainbow sign would be stripped of its meaning.

[57] Sixth, the viability of God’s promise and the integrity of God in keeping His promise is wrapped up in the world-wide extent of the Flood. This point cannot be underscored too heavily. / If Genesis 6-9 describes only a local flood,/ then God has broken His promise every time another local flood has happened! / The only way God’s promise not to send another flood to destroy every living thing can be seen to have been kept / is if the Flood was a universal one and the whole human race outside the ark was destroyed.

[58] Seventh, the universality of the Flood is underscored by the enormous size of the ark. / Saving all the animals and plants in the ark would be unnecessary if this were only a local flood, because they could have been preserved elsewhere in the world. Yet the divine insistence in the biblical record is that the animals were brought into the ark to preserve representatives of all the various kinds. / As a matter of fact, if only a local flood were in view, the building of any ark at all would have been superfluous because God could simply have warned Noah and his family in time to escape the coming judgment by going somewhere else.

[59] Eighth, the covering of “all the high mountains” by at least 15 cubits could not involve simply a local flood. Since water seeks its own level across the surface of the globe, / even one high mountain covered in a local Mesopotamian setting would require that same height of water everywhere on the planet’s surface.

[60] Davidson notes that it is not necessary to postulate the existence of mountains as high as Mt. Everest at the time of the Flood, and thus to require waters covering the earth to a depth of six miles. The antediluvian mountains were very possibly much lower than at present. / Passages in the book of Job and Psalms may well be referring to the process of postdiluvian mountain uplift.

[61] Ninth, the duration of the Flood makes sense only with a universal flood. / The Deluge of rain continued for 40 days (Gen 7:17). / The highest mountains were still covered five months after the Flood began. / And the tops of the mountains were not seen until after seven months. / The Flood waters were not dried up enough for Noah to leave the ark until one year and ten days had passed (Gen 7:11; 8:14). Such lengths of time seem commensurate only with a universal and not a local flood.

[62] Tenth, the receding activity of the water is described by Hebrew phrases that should be translated as “going and retreating.” / This implies oscillatory water motion that lasted for 74 days. / The waters rushing back and forth like an ocean tidal movement as the overall level gradually decreased, supports a universal interpretation, but is incongruous with a local flood theory.

[63] Eleventh, the New Testament passages concerning the Flood all employ universal language: / swept them ALL away; / destroyed them ALL; / did not spare the ancient WORLD; / preserved only EIGHT persons; / condemned the WORLD.

[64] A local flood would not have ended the antediluvian world. / We have the unequivocal corroboration of the New Testament that the destruction of the human race at the time of the flood was total and universal.

[65] Twelfth, the New Testament Flood typology assumes and depends upon not only the historicity, but also the universality of the Flood to theologically argue for an imminent world-wide judgment by fire.

[66] Peter argues that just as there was a world-wide judgment by water causing the unbelieving antediluvian world to perish, / so in the antitype there must be a universal end-time judgment by fire bringing about the destruction of the ungodly.

[67] Thirteenth, numerous biblical scholars have recognized a highly significant theological point of the Flood narrative: / Noah’s flood is nothing less than the cosmic undoing or reversal of creation, returning the world to its original unformed-unfilled state at the beginning of creation week. One scholar describes the deluge as an act of uncreation, undoing the work of separation by returning everything to the primeval, watery chaos from which the created order first arose.

[68] The creation account in Genesis 1 describes how God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were below from the waters which were above. / During the Flood, when the fountains of the great deep burst open and the windows of heaven were opened, the two halves of the primeval sea…were reunited [and] creation reverted back to its original state. Only a cosmic, universal Flood can theologically encompass the cosmic reversal or undoing of creation described in Genesis 6-9.

[69] Finally, the cosmic reversal of creation is followed by a cosmic New Beginning. One scholar has shown the precise literary parallels between the seven days of creation and the successive stages of “re-creation” after the Flood.

* The wind over the earth and waters
* Division of waters
* Appearance of plants
* Appearance of light
* Deliverance of animals
* Animals together with men, blessing, food for men, image of God
* Sign of covenant

[70] The universal dimension of the Flood is underscored by detailed parallels between the cosmic creation account and the “re-creation” after the Flood.

[71] Davidson concludes by explaining that the question of the extent of the Genesis Flood is not just a matter of idle curiosity with little at stake for the Christian faith. / For those who see the days of creation in Genesis 1 as six, literal 24-hour days, a universal Flood is an absolute necessity to explain the existence of the geologic column. / A literal creation week is inextricably linked with a world-wide flood.

[72] But a universal Flood is crucial, not only in seeking to reconcile science and Scripture. / It is also pivotal in understanding and remaining faithful to the theology of Genesis 1-11 and the rest of Scripture. / The many links we have noted between creation and the flood not only support the universality of the Flood, / but also serve to theologically connect Protology and Eschatology.

[73] The theology of the universal flood is a pivotal part of the major theme that runs through Genesis 1-11. / In the creation account, we learn about the character of the Creator / and his original purpose for creation. / The Flood story shows us how human rebellion and sin / resulted in divine judgment and “uncreation” / and reminds us of the coming world judgment. / The “Re-creation” after the Flood / reminds us of the eschatological salvation of the faithful covenant remnant and the universal renewal of the earth.

[74] The full article—The Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood—may be found in the journal Origins, which can be accessed online.

[75] An expanded study of this topic by Dr. Davidson is available in another article—“The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate, which may be found in the *Andrews University Seminary Studies*.