

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

2010

Does Genesis Really Teach a Recent, Literal, Seven-day Creation Week and a Global Flood?

Richard M. Davidson

Andrews University, davidson@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

Recommended Citation

Davidson, Richard M., "Does Genesis Really Teach a Recent, Literal, Seven-day Creation Week and a Global Flood?" (2010). *Faculty Publications*. 1894.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/1894>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Does Genesis really teach a recent, literal, seven-day Creation week and a global flood?

by Richard M. Davidson

We have no information in Scripture as to how long ago God created the universe as a whole. But there is evidence strongly suggesting that the Creation week described in Genesis was recent, some time in the past several thousand years, and not hundreds of thousands.

Does Genesis 1–11 really teach a recent, literal, seven-day creation week and a global flood? In this article, I wish to share a summary of the biblical evidence which leads me to reply with a firm “Yes!” to this question.¹ I will briefly look at the three main parts to this question in turn.

1. Does the Genesis account of origins describe a literal, seven-day week?

Is there any evidence within the text of Genesis itself that would indicate whether the creation account was intended to be taken as literal? Indeed, there is. First, the literary genre of Genesis 1–11 points to the literal historical nature of the creation account. Many scholars have shown that the best genre designation for this part of Scripture is “historical narrative prose.”² The narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 lack any clues that they are to be taken as some kind of non-literal, symbolic/metaphorical, or “meta-historical” literature.

Second, the literary structure of Genesis as a whole indicates the intended literal nature of the creation narratives. It is widely recognized that

the whole book of Genesis is structured by the Hebrew word *toledot* (“generations, history”) in connection with each section of the book (13 times). This word *toledot* elsewhere in Scripture is used in the setting of genealogies concerned with the accurate account of time and history. The use of *toledot* in Genesis 2:4 shows that the author intends the account of Creation to be literal like the rest of the Genesis narratives.

Third, the phrase “evening and morning,” appearing at the conclusion of each of the six days of Creation, is used to define clearly the nature of the “days” as literal 24-hour periods. The references to “evening” and “morning” together outside of Genesis 1, invariably, without exception in the Old Testament (57 times), indicate a literal, 24-hour day.³

Fourth, the occurrences of the Hebrew word *yom* (“day”) at the conclusion of each of the six days of Creation in Genesis 1 are all connected with a numeric adjective (“one [first] day,” “second day,” “third day,” etc.). A comparison with occurrences of the term elsewhere in Scripture (359 times) reveals that such usage

always refers to literal days.

Fifth, in the Sabbath commandment (Exodus 20:8–11), by explicitly equating humankind’s six-day work week with God’s six-day work week at creation, and further equating the Sabbath to be kept by humankind each week with the first Sabbath after Creation week, the divine Lawgiver unequivocally interprets the first week as a literal week, consisting of seven consecutive, contiguous 24-hour days.

Sixth, Jesus and *all* New Testament writers refer to Genesis 1–11, with the underlying assumption that it is literal, reliable history. Every chapter of Genesis 1–11 is referred to somewhere in the New Testament, and Jesus Himself refers to Genesis 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.⁴

Finally, those who accept the inspiration of Ellen White find in her writings unambiguous testimony that Genesis 1 and 2 describe a literal week just like ours today. White writes what she was shown in vision: “I was then carried back to the creation and was shown that the first week, in which God performed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day, was just like every other week....

God gives us the productions of his work at the close of each literal day.”⁵

2. Is the Creation week recent or remote in time?

We have no information in Scripture as to how long ago God created the universe as a whole. But there is evidence strongly suggesting that the Creation week described in Genesis 1:3 to 2:4 was recent, some time in the past several thousand years, and not hundreds of thousands, millions, or billions of years ago. The evidence for this is found primarily in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. These genealogies are unique, with no parallel among the other genealogies of the Bible or other ancient Near Eastern literature.⁶

Unlike the other genealogies, which may (and in fact often do) contain gaps, the “chronogenealogies” of Genesis 5 and 11 have indicators that they are to be taken as complete genealogies without gaps. These unique

interlocking features indicate a specific focus on chronological time and reveal an intention to make clear that there are no gaps between the individual patriarchs mentioned. A patriarch lived x years, and begat a son; after he begat this son, he lived y more years, and begat more sons and daughters; and all the years of this patriarch were z years. These tight interlocking features make it virtually impossible to argue that there are significant generational gaps. Rather, they purport to present the complete time sequence from father to direct biological son throughout the genealogical sequence from Adam to Abraham.

To further substantiate the absence of major gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, the Hebrew grammatical form of the verb *begat* (*yalad* in the *Hifil*) used throughout these chapters is the special causative form that always elsewhere in the Old Testament refers to actual direct physical offspring, i.e., biological

father-son relationship (Genesis 6:10; Judges 11:1; 1 Chronicles 8:9; 14:3; 2 Chronicles 11:21; 13:21; 24:3). This is in contrast to the use of *yalad* in the simple *Qal* form in many of the other biblical genealogies, in which cases it can refer to other than direct physical fathering of immediately succeeding offspring. In Genesis 5 and 11, there is clearly a concern for completeness, accuracy, and precise length of time.

There are several different textual versions of the chronological data in these two chapters: MT (Masoretic [Hebrew] Text), LXX (Septuagint [Greek translation]), and Samaritan Pentateuch. The scholarly consensus is that the MT has preserved the original figures in their purest form, while the LXX and Samaritan versions have intentionally schematized the figures for theological reasons. But regardless of which text is chosen, it only represents a difference of about 1,000 years or so.

Regarding the chronology from Abraham to the present, there is disagreement among Bible-believing scholars whether the Israelite sojourn in Egypt was 215 years or 430 years, and thus whether to put Abraham in the early second millennium or the late third millennium B.C.; but other than this minor difference, the basic chronology from Abraham to the present is clear from Scripture, and the total is only some 4,000 (+/- 200) years.⁷

Thus the Bible presents a relatively recent creation (of life on this Earth) a few thousand years ago, not hundreds of thousands or millions/billions. While minor ambiguities do not allow us to pin down the exact date, according to Scripture the six-day creation week unambiguously occurred *recently*.

3. Does Genesis 6–9 describe a local or global flood?

Only a global flood does full justice to all the biblical data, and this position is consistent with a growing body of scientific evidence.⁸ Here I sum-

Subscribe to Dialogue

So you want to be a thinker, not merely a reflector of other people's thought? *Dialogue* will continue to challenge you to think critically, as a Christian. Stay in touch with the best of Adventist thought and action around the world. Get into *Dialogue*.

One-year subscription (3 issues, air mail): US \$13.00 **Back issues:** US \$4.00 each

I'd like to subscribe to *Dialogue* in English French Portuguese Spanish

Issues Begin my subscription with the next issue.
I'd like to receive these back issues: Vol. ____, No. ____.

Payment I'm enclosing an international check or money order.
My MasterCard or VISA# is _____
Expiration Date _____

Please Print

Name _____

Address _____

Mail to *Dialogue* Subscriptions, Linda Torske
12501 Old Columbia Pike; Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; U.S.A.

Fax 301-622-9627

E-mail torskel@gc.adventist.org

marize 20 lines of biblical evidence for a worldwide flood: (1) all the major themes in Genesis 1-11—Creation, Fall, plan of redemption, spread of sin—are universal in scope and call for a matching universal judgment in the Flood; (2) the genealogical lines from both Adam (Genesis 4:17-26; 5:1-31) and Noah (Genesis 10:1-32; 11:10-29) are exclusive in nature, indicating that as Adam was father of all pre-Flood humanity, so Noah was father of all post-Flood humanity, thus clearly implying that all humanity on the globe outside of the ark perished in the Flood; (3) the same inclusive divine blessing “Be fruitful and multiply” is given to both Adam and Noah (Genesis 1:28; 9:1), indicating that Noah is a “new Adam,” repopulating the world as did the first Adam; (4) God’s covenant and rainbow sign (Genesis 9:9-17) are linked with the extent of the Flood; if there was only a local flood, then the covenant would be only a limited covenant; (5) the viability of God’s promise (Genesis 9:15; cf. Isaiah 54:9) is at stake in the worldwide extent of the Flood; if only a local flood occurred, then God has broken His promise every time another local flood has happened; (6) the universality of the Flood is underscored by the enormous size of the ark (Genesis 6:14-15) and the stated necessity for saving all the species of air-breathing terrestrial animals in the ark (Genesis 6:16-21; 7:2-3); a massive ark filled with representatives of humanity and all non-aquatic animal species would be unnecessary if this were only a local flood; Noah and his family and the animals could have simply escaped to another region of the Earth; (7) the covering of “all the high mountains” of pre-Flood Earth (which were not as high as today’s post-Flood uplifted mountain ranges) by at least 15 cubits (Genesis 7:19-20) could not involve simply a local flood, since water seeks its own level across the surface of the globe; (8) the long duration of the Flood (Noah in the

ark over a year, Genesis 7:11-8:14) makes sense only with a global flood; (9) the New Testament passages concerning the Flood all employ universal language (e.g., “swept them *all* away” [Matthew 24:39]; “destroyed them *all*” [Luke 17:27]; “he did not spare the ancient *world*,...when he brought a flood upon the *world* of the ungodly” [2 Peter 2:5]; Noah “condemned the *world*” [Hebrews 11:7]); and (10) the New Testament Flood typology assumes and *depends upon* the global extent of the Flood; just as there was a global Flood in the time of Noah, so there will be a global judgment by fire at the end of time (2 Peter 3:6, 7).

Ten additional lines of biblical evidence for a global Flood are found in the numerous universal terms or expressions in Genesis 6-9 indicating the global scope of the Flood: (11) the *mabbul* (“Flood/Deluge”), occurring 12 times in Genesis and once in Psalm 29:10, is reserved exclusively in the Hebrew Bible for reference to the Genesis flood, thus setting the Genesis flood apart from all local floods and giving it a global context; (12) “the Earth” (Genesis 6:12, 13, 17), without any limiting descriptor, harks back to the same expression in the global creation (Genesis 1:1, 2, 10); (13) “the face of all the Earth” (Genesis 7:3; 8:9) echoes the same phrase in the global context of creation (Genesis 1:29); (14) “face of the ground” (Genesis 7:4, 23; 8:8) in parallel with “face of all the Earth” (Genesis 8:9) links with its usage in the context of global creation (Genesis 2:6); (15) “all flesh” (13 times in Genesis 6-9) is accompanied by additional phrases that recall the global creation of animals and humankind (Genesis 1:24, 30; 2:7); (16) “every living thing” of all flesh (Genesis 6:19; 9:16), and the similar expression “all living things that I have made” (Genesis 7:4), the latter specifically referring back to Creation; (17) “all existence [*kol hayqum*]” (Genesis 7:4,23) is one of the most inclusive

terms available to the Hebrew writer to express totality of life; (18) “all on the dry” (Genesis 7:22) indicates the global extent of the Flood, and clarifies that this worldwide destruction is limited to terrestrial creatures; (19) “under the whole heaven” (Genesis 7:19), a phrase always universal elsewhere in Scripture (see e.g., Exodus 17:14, Deuteronomy 4:19); and (20) “all the fountains of the Great Deep [*tehom*]” (Genesis 7:11; 8:2), harks back to the same expression in Genesis 1:2. The many links with the global creation in Genesis 1-2 show that the Flood is an eschatological, step-by-step, global “uncreation,” followed by a step-by-step global “re-creation.” It is difficult to imagine how the biblical writer could have used more forceful and explicit expressions than these to indicate the global extent of the Genesis flood.

4. Conclusion

Based upon the testimony of the Genesis account and later biblical allusions to this account, I must join the host of scholars, ancient and modern—both critical and evangeli-

Free subscription for your college or university library!

Do you wish to see *Dialogue* available in the library of your public college or university so that your non-Adventist friends may also have access to the journal? Contact the librarian, show him or her a copy of the journal, and suggest that they request a free subscription to *Dialogue*, writing on official letterhead. We will take care of the rest!

The letter should be addressed to: *Dialogue* Editor-in-Chief, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904-6600; U.S.A.

cal—who affirm the literal, historical nature of Genesis 1–11, describing a literal, recent creation week consisting of seven historical, contiguous, creative, natural 24-hour days, and a global, worldwide Flood.

A few years ago I summarized some of this evidence in a paper which I read at an annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (attended by evangelical scholars from many countries). After the presentation, Harvard-trained Gleason Archer, arguably the “dean” of Old Testament scholars until his recent death, came up to me and remarked privately: “You Seventh-day Adventists are just about the only denomination which still unabashedly and officially affirms the biblical truths concerning Earth’s origins. Please, do not give up your strong stand for a literal seven-day creation week and a global Flood.” I have taken his counsel to heart, and pray that the reader of this article, as well as the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole, will do so as well!

Richard M. Davidson (Ph.D., Andrews University), is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Chair of the Old Testament Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. E-mail: davidson@andrews.edu.

REFERENCES

1. I have dealt with the major biblical issues regarding Earth’s origins and the extent of the Genesis Flood in more detail in several previously published articles. See especially: “In the Beginning: How to Interpret Genesis 1,” *Dialogue* 6:3 (1994):9-12; “Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood,” *Origins* 22:2 (1995):58-73; “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14:1 (Spring 2003):4-43; and “The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42:1 (2004):49-77. These articles may be accessed on my Website: <http://www.andrews.edu/~davidson>.
2. See, e.g. Walter Kaiser, “The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, J. Barton Payne, ed. (Waco, Texas: Word, 1970), pp. 48-65; cf. John

- Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1996), pp. 227-245.
3. Even in Daniel 8:14, the reference is to a literal 24-hour day which stands for a day.
 4. See Henry Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), Appendix B: “New Testament References to Genesis 1-11” (pp. 99-101).
 5. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1945), 3:90.
 6. For other biblical genealogies, see especially Genesis 4:16-24; 22:20-24; 25:1-4, 12-18; 29:31-30:24; 35:16-20, 23-26; 39:9-14, 40-43; 46:8-27; 1 Samuel 14:50-51; 1 Chronicles 1-9; Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:1-17; and Luke 3:23-38. For comparison with non-biblical ancient Near Eastern genealogies, see, e.g., Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and their Alleged Babylonian Background,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16 (1978): 361-374.
 7. See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953 ed.), “The Chronology of Early Bible History,” 1:174-196. For the date of the Exodus as ca. 1450 B.C., see especially William Shea, “Exodus, Date of,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1982 ed.), 2:230-238.
 8. For recent summaries of scientific evidence for a global flood and flood geology, see Harold G. Coffin, Robert H. Brown, and L. James Gibson, *Origin by Design*, revised ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2005); and Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1998).

Pontius' Puddle

