

This is a slightly edited version of a comment I attempted multiple times to post in response to Gavin Ortlund's YouTube video ["Was Noah's Flood Local?"](#) that he posted on 1/14/24. Each time I received a "returned error" message, and the comment was not accepted.

Gavin,

I appreciate and share your desire to “submit to the text,” to understand correctly what the inspired writer intended to convey in his own context. But I disagree with the suggestion that the better reading – the more culturally and contextually sensitive reading – is that the writer intended to convey that the flood was merely local. Indeed, though I accept the genuineness of your conviction, I think extrabiblical concerns have driven you to a forced reading of the text. That is not to say the interpretation is heretical; it simply is, in my judgment, quite wrong. Addressing this properly would take more than a comment to a video, but I hope that what I offer here in terms of pushback is expressed charitably and peaceably. This is well-plowed ground, but perhaps it will be new to a portion of your audience. I have not read the comments, so if I duplicate what others have said, forgive me.

As I think you know, your desire to avoid the contempt of secular critics like Bill Maher, whose smugness is insufferable, will not be fulfilled by promoting a local-flood reading of Scripture. He is a God-mocking atheist who will ridicule the flood narrative even as you read it. In the clip you provide, he includes the Bible’s reported ages of the patriarchs among the “impossibly childish” elements of the account, as he does the revelation about the building of the ark, both things you presumably accept as true. Reducing the number of animals or the distance they traveled to board the ark by making the flood local will not assuage him or those like him.

You give the impression (at least to me) that real biblical scholars, experts in the original languages and cultural history, as opposed to simplistic readers at places like Answers in Genesis, recognize that the Bible supports a local-flood interpretation. I think you underplay the strength of the global-flood interpretation to the point of caricature. In that regard, your viewers may be interested in these four articles by two notable OT scholars (URLs included in case the link does not come through): Gerhard Hasel ([The Biblical View of the Extent of the Flood](#) and [Some Issues Regarding the Nature and Universality of the Genesis Flood Narrative](#)) and Richard Davidson ([Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Flood](#) and [The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate](#) [see pp. 52-73]). For less technical articles, they may appreciate the evidence and arguments presented in Jason Lisle and Tim Chaffey, [Prosecution—Extent of the Flood](#) and [Defense—A Local Flood?](#); Andrew Snelling and Ken Ham, [Was the Flood of Noah Global or Local in Extent?](#); and Don Batten, et al., [Was the Flood Global?](#)

The clip you inserted from the YouTube channel Inspiring Philosophy insists that the statement in Gen. 8:9 that “the waters were still on the face of the whole earth” contradicts the statement in Gen. 8:5 that “the tops of the mountains were seen” unless the “whole earth” referred to in v. 9 is understood to be a localized region that did not encompass the mountains referred to in v. 5. In other words, the claim, as I understand it, is that the proper reading of the text is that the water was still on the face of the whole region that was flooded but the mountains that were beyond the reach of the flood could be seen in the distance. Among other problems,

this reading ignores the fact that Gen. 8:1-5 makes clear that the mountains mentioned in v. 5 became visible on the first day of the tenth month by the continued subsidence of the flood waters. Those mountains had been covered by the flood waters, and therefore they were not beyond the reach of the flood. The statement in Gen. 8:9 that the waters were still on the face of the whole earth is consistent with the tops of mountains poking through the surface because, as local-flood proponents often point out, literary context can indicate that “the whole earth” is being used in less than an absolute sense. Here, the clear sense is that the water remained on the entire earth, but its depth was decreasing, so high elevations had begun to appear. There are no comparable contextual indicators that the flood was merely local or regional. On the contrary, as the above articles indicate, the text makes clear that the flood was global in extent.

The phrase *hā`āreš* in Gen. 8:13a (“the waters were dried from off the earth”) refers to the ground or land and not to the globe, but that is clear in the context of the narrative. The waters were drying from the surface of the ground. As OT scholar William Barrick notes ([Noah’s Flood and Its Geological Implications](#)):

This is basically the view taken by R.W.L. Moberly, “Why Did Noah Send Out a Raven?” *Vetus Testamentum* 50/3 (2000): p. 351: “The juxtaposition of *hrb* in v. 13 with *ybš* in v. 14 clearly indicates a distinction — presumably between a muddy, boggy mess and firm, hard ground — in which *ybš* is the term for the complete disappearance of the flood waters from the earth” on day 371. Both major 11th-century rabbis, Rashi and Ibn Ezra, took the description in v. 13 to refer to the drying of only the top surface of the ground and that it left the ground insufficiently firm to walk upon (Freedman, “The Book of Genesis,” p. 42). Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, p. 187.

You say that there “seem to be” premodern exegetes who interpreted the flood as local and cite Josephus as an example, but Josephus quite clearly understood the flood to be global. He explains in *Antiquities* (1.3.2) that God loved Noah for his righteousness but determined to condemn the rest of mankind to create another race pure of vice. “[H]e therefore converted the dry land into sea. Thus were they all obliterated, while Noah alone was saved.” Noah embarked with his family on the ark. “Thus, Noah was saved with his family.” Josephus says (1.3.5), “When God gave the signal and caused the rainfall to begin, the water poured down for forty entire days, insomuch that it rose to fifteen cubits above the surface of the earth. That was the reason why no more escaped, since they had no place of refuge.” This is why Robert Bradshaw concludes, “It was the unanimous opinion of the Jewish and early Christian writers who wrote on the subject that Noah’s Flood was a global event” (see [Noah’s Flood and the Tower of Babel](#), which includes Josephus).

The text that you suggest proves otherwise (1.4.1) states (Thackeray’s translation): “The three sons of Noah – Shem, Japhet and Ham – born a hundred years before the deluge, were the first to descend from the mountains to the plains and to make their abode there; the rest, who by reason of the flood were sore afraid of the plains and loath to descend from the heights, they persuaded to take courage and follow their example.” There is no reason to assume, in fact there is every reason to assume the contrary, that Josephus means “the rest” or “the others” were survivors of the flood. Indeed, he has already made clear that all of mankind except Noah and his family were killed in the flood. The text says nothing about how long after the flood Josephus

assumes Noah's sons lived in the high country before venturing down to the plains. Given Josephus's understanding that all humans except those in the ark were killed, it is much more likely that he is thinking of later descendants who lived in the high country. After living there with them for however many decades, Noah's sons were the first to move to the lowland. They were then able to persuade the rest to join them.

You are right to be cautious about using the Nephilim to argue for a local flood. See, e.g., [The Nephilim and the Flood](#).

As for your claim that envisioning a global flood requires multiplying miracles that are not mentioned in the text, the first example you give is the transportation of animals to the ark and then back afterwards "from all around the globe." You note that Gen. 6:20 declares that two of every kind of bird, animal, and creeping thing will come to Noah to be kept alive by him during the flood, but you then add that it says nothing about any kind of miraculous transportation from their original location or back to it after the flood. Recognizing that directing all animals to the ark is a miracle, you immediately grant that this is going to be a miracle no matter how one slices it, but you think a global flood would require greater miracles, which you think puts it in doubt. From your description of the problem, e.g., arctic wolves in northern Canada and marsupials in Australia having to travel to the ark, and the accompanying map, it seems that you are ignoring modern YEC thinking. It is generally believed that the pre-flood world was geographically, ecologically, and biologically quite different from the world we inhabit today. Indeed, that world was "destroyed" in the flood (2 Pet. 3:6) (see, e.g., Andrew Snelling, [Noah's Lost World](#) and Timothy Clarey and Davis Werner, [The pre-Flood world resembled Pangaea](#)). And the representatives of the various kinds of animals that boarded the ark were different from the species we see today, being the ancestors in whom resided the potential for rapid diversification. Since you think a local (but massive) flood would reduce the number of animals and the distance they had to travel to board the ark and thus bring the nature of the miracle within your threshold of acceptability, it is not obvious why the hypothesized pre-flood geography and more generalized biology of ark specimens could not do the same.

Much has been written about how current biogeography may have resulted after a global Noachic flood (see, e.g., Troy Lacey, [Slow-Moving Animal Dispersion After the Flood](#) and [Why Are Australian Animals So Unique, and How Did They Get There?](#); Paul Taylor, [How Did Animals Spread All Over the World from Where the Ark Landed?](#); Don Batten, et al., [How did animals get from the Ark to places such as Australia?](#)). You note that explanations are available, without citing any, but object to the fact the explanations are not in the text, as though that makes them suspect or illegitimate. I am convinced, with Christians and Jews throughout history (exceptions, if any, being exceedingly rare), that what is in the text is that all humans and air-breathing land animals except Noah and his family were killed in the global flood and that the animals that survived dispersed from the ark. The fact God left it to human reasoning in light of that revelation to discover how the current state came from that beginning is not strange. On the contrary, he left us to discover many truths. You seem to think that the possible explanations being explored all constitute miracles, and miracles of a different order than those you accept, but that is not the case.

The second example you give for your claim that envisioning a global flood requires multiplying miracles that are not mentioned in the text is fitting all the necessary animals on the ark. You think that a local flood allows you to reduce the number of animals on the ark, but Gen. 7:22-23 says, “Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. ²³ He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.” So whatever air-breathing land animals that were not on the ark were killed in the flood. By your reading, all the land animals currently on earth descended from a much smaller slice of the pre-flood diversity (since only those in the local area boarded), or you are compelled to argue that Gen. 7:22-23 means that only the animals in a local region were killed. I consider that interpretation unreasonable. If the inspired writer intended to communicate in Gen. 7:22-23 that countless air-breathing land animals survived the flood despite not being on the ark, then understanding Scripture is hopeless.

Whether the ark could accommodate the necessary animals is a question of math and physics – the number and size of animals and the space available – not miracles. Of course, if one insists that the necessary number of animals could not possibly fit on the ark by dismissing the arguments and explanations to the contrary, then fitting them on the ark would require a miracle. But YECs are not appealing to a packing miracle. They are saying that the number of representatives of the various kinds, when properly assessed, can fit on the ark. Much thought and work has gone into this (see, e.g., Michael Belknap and Tim Chaffey, [How Could All the Animals Fit on the Ark?](#); John Woodmorappe, [How Could Noah Fit the Animals on the Ark and Care for Them?](#); Don Batten, et al., [How did all the animals fit on Noah’s Ark?](#); Marcus Ross, [No Kind Left Behind](#); Bodie Hodge and Georgia Purdom, [What Are “Kinds” in Genesis?](#); Nathaniel Jeanson, [Which Animals Were On the Ark with Noah?](#)). It does not seem fair to characterize their claim as an unrestrained appeal to miracles.

Given the clear revelation that all air-breathing land animals outside the ark perished in the flood, the necessary implication is that all present land animals descended from the animals on the ark. Rather than exploring how this could happen through a divinely programmed diversification potential (see, e.g., Nathaniel Jeanson, [Did Natural Selection Play a Role in Speciation?](#) and [Why Don’t More People Accept the Young-Earth View of Speciation?](#), you assume it could not happen without a miraculous intervention by God and then use that assumption as evidence that Gen. 7:22-23 does not mean what it quite clearly appears to mean. I don’t think that is listening to the text. I think it is allowing the limited thinking of the scientific establishment, which is dominated by a materialism that has no room for a divine programmer, to dictate the interpretation.

The third example you give for your claim that envisioning a global flood requires multiplying miracles that are not mentioned in the text is the alleged impossibility of caring for such a large number of animals on the ark. (Since it is allegedly impossible, it could only be done via miracles.) One unfamiliar with YEC material could get the impression that this is an unanswerable objection, but possible solutions have been provided for many years. It would have been helpful for those seeking the truth of the matter to alert them to articles like John Woodmorappe, [How Could Noah Fit the Animals on the Ark and Care for Them?](#); Michael Belknap, [How Could Noah Care for the Animals?](#); Calvin Smith, [How Could Noah Care for](#)

[Dinosaurs on Noah's Ark?](#) and [How Could Noah Look After Dinosaurs on Noah's Ark?](#); Troy Lacey, [Dinosaurs on the Ark: How It Was Possible](#) and [Feeding Carnivores on Noah's Ark](#); and Ark Encounter staff, [Ark Survival 101: Animal Care](#).

It is true the text does not explain how the animals were cared for on the ark, but that is true regardless of the extent of the flood. To say that one must “go way beyond the text to make it work,” meaning to explain how the animals were cared for, suggests it is somehow illegitimate to investigate that question when God did not reveal those details. That is a peculiar notion. By that standard, it would be illegitimate to investigate most everything, including how far stars are from the earth or the chemical makeup of rocks. Perhaps you are assuming that no non-miraculous explanation of caring for the animals is possible, and therefore the only way to explain it is to propose miracles that are not revealed in Scripture. But as you can see from the above articles, the proposed explanations of how the animals were cared for do not rely on miracles.

You object to the suggestion by Morris and Whitcomb in their 1961 book that God imbued the animals with a “migratory directional instinct” to lead them to the ark because that is not in the text, but the text does say (Gen. 6:20) that the animals would come to Noah. Wondering about how God accomplished the animals’ coming to Noah and conceiving the answer as him putting within the animals an instinctive drive to migrate to the ark’s location is simply trying to reason to details that are implied but left unspecified. Their claim that the animals also were empowered to become more or less dormant, essentially sedated, to help them endure life in the ark is indeed an unrevealed divine intervention. If put to the choice of denying the evidence from the texts, theology, and the history of interpretation that the flood was global or assuming a miracle that is not specified or precluded, I would opt for the latter, but that is not the modern discussion. As I say, work done in the 63 years since Morris and Whitcomb’s book offers plausible avenues of care for the ark animals that do not demand miracles.

The fourth example you give for your claim that envisioning a global flood requires multiplying miracles that are not mentioned in the text is the assertion that there is not enough water on earth to cover the Himalayan Mountains. That means God would have to miraculously create the additional water and then miraculously remove it. But as you acknowledge, YECs believe the flood brought about a global cataclysmic reshaping of the earth’s geology. They do so because of indications in the text (see, e.g., William Barrick, [Noah's Flood and Its Geological Implications](#) and Terry Mortenson, [Noah's Flood: a Historical, Global Catastrophe and Psalm 104:6-9—the Flood or Day Three of Creation Week?](#)). But they generally ascribe this reshaping to common rather than miraculous forces that were triggered in God’s timing (see, e.g., Steve Austin et al., [Catastrophic Plate Tectonics: A Global Flood Model of Earth History](#); John Baumgardner, [Catastrophic Plate Tectonics: The Physics Behind the Genesis Flood](#); and Andrew Snelling, [Can Catastrophic Plate Tectonics Explain Flood Geology?](#)). You acknowledge that is possible but complain that is not mentioned in the text. But again, it is reasoning from what is mentioned in the text to what is observed in the present. I submit that is a proper task of Bible-believing scientists. And it is not correct that “all the text credits for ending the flood is a wind.” Genesis 8:2 specifies that the “fountains of the deep,” which burst forth at the beginning of the flood, and the “windows of heaven,” which were opened at the beginning of the flood, were

closed. What is involved in the closing of the broken open fountains of the deep is proper for investigation.

The fifth example you give for your claim that envisioning a global flood requires multiplying miracles that are not mentioned in the text is the assertion that plants and trees and certain water animals could not survive a global flood. You mention the proposal from Morris and Whitcomb's 1961 book about floating rafts of vegetation, a non-miraculous explanation, and then declare, in what strikes me as a non-sequitur, "one way or another you've got to supply all these additional miracles." Your viewers may be interested in the following: Ginger Allen, [How Did Plants Survive and Disperse after the Flood?](#); David Wright, [How Did Plants Survive the Flood?](#); Andrew Snelling, [How Could Fish Survive the Genesis Flood?](#); Don Batten et al., [How did freshwater and saltwater fish survive the flood?](#); Troy Lacey, [Were Insects on the Ark?](#); and Gordon Wilson, [The Creation of Plants, Pollinators, and their Post-Flood Adaptations](#).

You appeal to geological evidence of a local Mediterranean flood and then suggest it could be the source of the shared memory reflected in the multitude of flood legends around the world, but there is good geological evidence of a global flood, which would be an even better source event. See, e.g., Andrew Snelling, [Global Evidences of the Genesis Flood](#) and [What Are Some of the Best Flood Evidences?](#).

You recommended the book by Carol Hill et al. titled *The Grand Canyon: Monument to an Ancient Earth*, a response to the earlier book, *Grand Canyon: Monument to Catastrophe*. In keeping with your spirit of fair inquiry, I wish you had noted Terry Mortenson's lengthy critique of that work ([The Grand Canyon, Monument to an Ancient Earth: The Deceptions Continue](#)) and John Woodmorappe's critical review ([The Grand Canyon in the thralls of shallow, doctrinaire uniformitarianism](#)). Your viewers also may appreciate the following: Andrew Snelling and Tom Vail, [When and How Did the Grand Canyon Form?](#) and Andrew Snelling, [The Monument Fold, Central Grand Canyon, Arizona](#).

God bless,

Ashby