

## Afterword:

### Ian Michael's Flood Is Not Moshe's

If Ian Michael were transported back in time to experience the Great Flood personally, he would comprehend what was happening in terms of *natural regularities*, for that is the way his mind functions. Since an epic Flood necessarily involves overwhelming forces of nature, he would immediately want answers to questions about *nature* such as, where did all the water come from? And where did it all go when the Flood was over? Even as an eyewitness he would not see it as an event that God “engineered” directly—the only way Moshe could understand it.



#### What Really Happened During the Great Flood?

In the royal libraries of the Old Babylonian Kingdom (c. 1900-1600 B.C.E.) there are stories that unquestionably describe the Great Flood as an event of epic magnitude. It was not simply one more in a series of periodic inundations. It was in a different category entirely and served a far more important function than local history: it divided time itself into “before” and “after.” Before the Great Flood, men (mostly kings) were larger than life. They performed heroic deeds; they fought monsters in epic battles (and usually came out winners). Other accounts tell of men of suprahuman wisdom and god-like power. But then came the Great Flood, and humankind survived only in the person of one exceptional man and his offspring. With the Flood, primeval time came to an end. The inhabitants of the post-Flood world were more normal in size and they performed more normal deeds. Time proceeded at a normal pace, and lifespans shortened to a more normal length. Despite the dramatically different portrayal of divinity in the Hebrew accounts, to some extent here too the Great Flood divided time into “before” and “after.”

Was there actually an event involving immense amounts of water covering large regions of land, with great loss of human and animal life and a changed world thereafter? The answer is almost certainly “Yes” and there is a very plausible explanation. As the ice sheets of the last ice age melted, ocean levels rose approximately 390 feet. That this happened around the globe probably accounts for stories of a Great Flood originating on every continent and not a few islands as well.

Under-sea archeological evidence confirms that the level of the sea rose in relatively recent times, covering places where humans, like us, lived and worked. One particularly interesting site is the Cosquer Cave on the Mediterranean coast of France. Its entrance is now 121 feet below the surface of the sea and can only be accessed by scuba divers (several of whom have died in the attempt). Since the cave is decorated with beautiful paintings of horses and monkeys, and outlines of human hands, it seems that the artists simply walked into the cave when the entrance could be accessed on what was then dry land.

That same 390-foot rise in sea level flooded several large areas on the shoreline of the Mediterranean. Examples are the land now underlying the northern half of the Adriatic Sea and a large region attached to the NE coast of Tunisia. The areas that disappeared were substantial; each was roughly the size of modern-day Jordan (35,000 square miles). An even larger region of the northern shore of the Black Sea also vanished. William Ryan and Walter Pitman have written about this event in their intriguing volume *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries about the Event that Changed History*.

Of course, the post-glacial rises in ocean levels were not rapid, requiring hundreds or thousands of years. However, as the East Asian Tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina with its storm surge of more than 20 feet in 2005 have demonstrated, low-lying land can be rapidly and completely destroyed by what we readily recognize as natural events. An underwater landslide off the coast of Norway (840 cubic miles of debris), the Storegga Slide, produced a monstrous tsunami that sometime around 6,000 B.C.E. is thought to have completed the channel that separates England from Europe.

Summing up, we must remember that the people who experienced the Great Flood necessarily attributed it not to *natural* events but to *suprahuman* reality. A catastrophe beyond the ability of humans to

perpetrate had to have been caused by God to punish wickedness. For the people of the Old Babylonian Kingdom the suprahuman being was Enki, the god of freshwater. This understanding of natural catastrophes was preserved by Hebrew narrators for many centuries.

### The Geological Column and Flood Geology

The geological column is the sequence of rock layers (strata) found in many places worldwide often containing plant and animal fossils. The geological column is not mentioned in Genesis or anywhere else in the Bible. Only in the last couple of centuries has it been identified as an entity in *nature*. A “global Flood,” however, comes up frequently in discussions of the Genesis narrative because of the claim that the worldwide geological column may well be the result of a “global Flood.”



The logic here is impeccable except for one major problem: as lawyers would say, it “assumes facts not in evidence.” It is certainly true that the Great Flood had to be global if the geological column is global—if the geological column is the result of the Flood. At this point the translation of the Hebrew word *'erets* is critical. This is the word that underlies “earth” in the familiar texts: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), and “As the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth” (Gen. 7:17). The word *'erets* can mean “earth” in the sense of territory or land or fertile soil; what it can *not* mean is Planet Earth, the globe on which we now know we live. Moshe knew only of the *'erets* that was fixed in its place by God. What moved was the sun (as Moshe could plainly see), certainly not Moshe’s beloved and stationary *'erets*. Thus, for Moshe the Genesis account affirmed only that the Flood covered all the *land* (*'erets*) he knew about, including the mountains, and that it killed all the humans and animals he knew about except the few God saved in the ark. To him the term “global Flood” would have made no sense whatever.

“Flood Geology,” as the term is now commonly used, rests on a Hebrew-into-English translation that is misleading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because *'erets* can instantly morph from “land,” “territory” or “soil” into a “planet Earth” held by gravity in its orbit around the sun. This anachronistic mental picture is the mistaken basis of “Flood geology.” Even if, as presently seems highly unlikely, the geological column could be shown to be the result of a water-inundated globe, it would still not prove the Genesis account true, for that is not what the Genesis account is about. Here Ian Michael, looking at Genesis over Moshe’s shoulder, needs to remember that he is, indeed, reading someone else’s mail.

### The Ongoing Conversation between Science and Religion

Science and religion have been talking to each other ever since science blossomed as a discipline in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sometimes the conversation has been quite civil and productive, sometimes not. When civility has been lacking, the topic of conversation has all-too-often, been the Genesis narratives of Creation and the Great Flood.

A distinguishing characteristic of humanness is our fundamental need to explain things—first to ourselves (as “understanding”) and then to others (as “explanation”). We want explanations for everything that exists and every event that happens. We want to know the processes by which events occur; we also want to know the purposes and values of things and events. In other words, we want to know both fundamental causes and ultimate meanings. So we have the intellectual projects of science and theology. Given this complementary, sibling relationship, science and theology really should get along better. They have much to learn from each other—if they will listen. We hope that our forthcoming book will foster charity on the part of readers who are scientifically-knowledgeable as well as those trained in the discipline of theology. One thing that religion can learn from science is the value of an understanding that is ever-advancing. Happily, the idea that science constantly advances is universally acknowledged; unhappily, the equal importance of theological (and religious) progress is widely unrecognized or ignored. Even worse, it is often actively denied.