THE EXTENT OF NOAH'S FLOOD IN ANCIENT JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING

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I. Introduction

People who are committed to the scientific establishment's dating scheme are committed to the belief that earth's rock layers are a record of billions of years of history, that new life forms came into existence at different times throughout those billions of years, largely within the last 600 million years, and that humans came into existence around 300,000 years ago. There is no room in that narrative for a global flood that killed all but eight humans and all air-breathing land animals that were not on the ark because that would mean the sedimentary record of that brief cataclysmic event had been misinterpreted as a record of vast time in which no such population bottleneck had occurred. Since the prevailing view of the rock record is deemed beyond dispute, a matter of "settled science," believing that the flood of Noah's day was global is not an option for typical old-earth creationists. Therefore, they resist compelling exegetical evidence, grasp at hermeneutical straws, and appeal primarily to scientific arguments to deny a global flood and maintain peace with scientific orthodoxy.[1]

The impression often is given that real scholars, experts in the original languages and cultural history, as opposed to unsophisticated and naïve recent creationists, recognize that the Bible supports a local-flood interpretation. But that is a misrepresentation the effect of which is to bias one against the strength of the global-flood interpretation. The following online articles by two notable OT scholars serve as convenient counterexamples: 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 but valuable treatments, see, Jason Lisle and Tim Chaffey, Prosecution—

[1] See, e.g., Steven A. Austin and Donald C. Boardman, "Did Noah's Flood Cover the Entire World?" in Ronald Youngblood, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 210-229.

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? If, as old-earth creationists claim, Gen. 7:21-23 can mean that many air-breathing land animals survived the flood despite not being on the ark, then understanding Scripture is hopeless. It is no longer the objective word of God but clay that can be shaped into anything one desires.

II. Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation

Local-flood proponents sometimes seek to deflect the charge they are allowing modern science to run roughshod over Scripture by suggesting that the extent of the flood was debated from ancient times,[2] but that is not true. Regarding the history of interpretation, 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."[3]

A. Jewish Interpretation

All ancient Jews understood that the flood of Noah's day was global. These include the following:

1. Author of *Jubilees*

Jubilees was originally composed in Hebrew by an anonymous author. Most scholars recognize it was written sometime in the second century BC.[4] *Jubilees* 5:19b-26 states:

> But to any who corrupted their way and their counsel before the Flood, he did not show partiality, except **Noah alone**, for he showed partiality to him for the sake of **his sons whom he saved from the waters of the Flood** (and) for his sake because his heart was righteous in all of his ways just as it was commanded concerning him. And he did not transgress anything which was ordained for him. And the LORD said, "**Let everything which is upon dry land be blotted out: men and cattle and beasts and birds of the heavens and whatever moves on the earth**." And he commanded Noah **to make an ark for himself so that he might save himself from the water of the Flood**. And Noah made an ark in all respects just as he commanded him in the twenty-second jubilee of years in the fifth week of the fifth year. And he entered it in the sixth year in the second month on the first of the second month until the sixteenth day. And he and everything which we brought to him entered into the ark. And the LORD shut it up from outside on the evening of the seventeenth.

[2] This is suggested, for example, by Gavin Ortlund in his video "Was Noah's Flood Local?"
[3] Robert Bradshaw, Noah's Flood and the Tower of Babel (accessed on 10/15/24).
[4] Daniel M. Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 229-236.

And the LORD opened the seven floodgates of heaven,
and the mouths of the springs of the great deep were seven mouths in number;
and these floodgates sent down water from heaven forty days and forty nights,
and the springs of the deep sent up water until **the whole world was full of water**.
And the water increased upon the earth,
fifteen cubits the **water rose over every tall mountain**;
and the ark rose upon the earth,
and it moved upon the surface of the water.[5]

Jubilees 7:23b-26a states:

And everyone sold himself in order that he might do injustice and pour out much blood, and the earth was full of injustice. And afterward, they sinned against beasts, and birds and everything which moves or walks upon the earth. And they poured out much blood upon the earth. And all the thoughts and desires of men were always contemplating vanity and evil. And the LORD **blotted out everything from the face of the earth** on account of the evil of their deeds. And on account of the blood which they poured out in the midst of the land, **he blotted out everything**.

And **we were left**, I and you, my children, and everything which **entered with us into the ark**.[6]

2. Authors of *1 Enoch*

First Enoch is a collection of what originally were five independent writings. Chapters 1-36, known as the Book of Watchers, is widely believed to have been composed in Aramaic and then translated into Greek and Ethiopic. The Book of Watchers is itself a composite document the parts of which have different dates. Manuscript evidence from Qumran suggests that chapters 6-11 were written in the first half of the second century BC.[7] First Enoch 10:1-4a states:

And then spoke the Most High, the Great and Holy One! And he sent Asuryal to the son of Lamech, (saying), "Tell him in my name, 'Hide yourself!' and reveal to him the end of what is coming; for **the earth and everything will be destroyed**. And the **Deluge is about to come upon all the earth; and all that is in it will be**

[5] O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 65.
[6] Wintermute (1985), 70.
[7] Gurtner (2020), 21-25.

> **destroyed**. And now instruct him in order **that he may flee**, and his seed will be preserved for all generations.[8]

Chapters 37-71 of *1 Enoch*, which are known as the Similitudes of Enoch or Book of Parables, is extant today only in Ethiopic, but it may have been originally written in Aramaic or Hebrew. It probably was written sometime between Herod's rise to power in 37 BC and the beginning of the Jewish revolt in AD 66.[9] *First Enoch* 54:7-10 states:

> And in those days the punishment of the Lord of the Spirits shall be carried out, and they shall open all the storerooms of water in the heavens above, in addition to the fountains of water which are on earth. And all the waters shall be united with (all) other waters. That which is from the heavens above is a masculine water, (whereas) that which is underneath the earth is feminine. And they shall **obliterate all those that dwell upon the earth as well as those that dwell underneath the ultimate ends of heaven**. On account of the fact that they did not recognize their oppressive deeds which they carried out on earth, **they shall be destroyed by (the Flood)**.[10]

3. Author of 3 Maccabees

Third Maccabees was written in Greek by a Jewish author from Alexandria probably during the earlier part of the first century BC.[11] It states at 3 Macc. 2:3b-5a: "For you who created all things and govern the whole world are a just ruler and condemn all who act insolently and arrogantly. You destroyed men for their wicked deeds in the past, among them giants relying on their own strength and self-confidence, **upon whom you brought an immeasurable flood of water**."

4. Author of 4 Maccabees

Fourth Maccabees also was written in Greek by a Hellenized Jewish author outside of Palestine. It was probably written between 63 BC and AD 70.[12] It states at 4 Macc. 15:31-32: "**Like the ark of Noah, carrying the universe in the worldwide cataclysm** and stoutly enduring the waves, so did you, guardians of the Law, buffeted on every side in the flood of the passions and by the mighty gales of your sons' torments, so did you by your perseverance nobly weather the storms that assailed you for religions' sake."

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[8] E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 17.
[9] Gurtner (2020), 34-36.
[10] Isaac (1983), 38.
[11] H. Anderson, "3 Maccabees" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 509-512.
[12] H. Anderson, "4 Maccabees" in in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 532-534.

5. Author of Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles*

The first 323 lines of Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles* is thought to be a Jewish oracle that probably dates to around the time of Jesus' birth.[13] In Sibylline Oracles 1:131, God tells Noah that if the people do not heed his call to repentance, "I will destroy **the entire race** with great flood waters." He tells him in 1:132-135 to build an imperishable wooden house (the ark) "so that **you and as many as live with you will be saved**." Noah declares in 1:192-194, "For if this water commanded by God comes on, **earth will swim, mountains will swim, even the sky will swim. All will be water and all things will perish in water**." After the people refused Noah's entreaty, God tells Noah in 1:200-203, "'Now the time is at hand, Noah, (to say all in turn), **to do to the immense world** everything which on that day I promised and indicated to you.'" It is said of the flood in 1:224 that "measureless waters appeared and **the entire immense earth was covered**."[14]

6. Philo of Alexandria

Philo (ca. 20 BC – ca. AD 50) was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher in Alexandria, Egypt. "[He] is one of the most important witnesses to Jewish exegetical traditions and practices of the Second Temple Period."[15] He was a prolific writer and someone who clearly understood that Noah's flood was global and killed all humanity except Noah and his family. For example, he wrote in *On Abraham* 1:41-46:

> At whom God, being naturally indignant, and being angry that that which appeared to be the most excellent of animals, and which had been thought worthy of being reckoned akin to himself by reason of his participation in reason, when he ought to have practiced virtue, devoted himself rather to wickedness, and to every species of vice, appointed a fitting punishment for them, and **determined to destroy the whole race at that time existing by a deluge; and not only those who dwelt in the champaign country and in the lower districts, [42] but those also who lived in the most lofty mountains, for the great deep, [Genesis vii. 11] being raised to a height which it had never reached before, burst through its mouths with its whole collective impetuosity into the seas existing among us, and they overflowed and inundated all the islands and continents; and incessant floods of everlasting fountains, and of native rivers and torrents combined together, mingled with one another, and rising to a vast height, so as to surmount everything**. [43] Nor indeed was the air tranquil, for a deep and unbroken cloud overspread the whole heaven, and there were fearful storms of wind, and roarings of thunder, and flashes of lightning, and rapid hurlings of thunderbolts, ceaseless storms of rain being poured forth, so that one might have thought that all the parts of the universe were hastening to dissolve themselves

[13] J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 330-331.
[14] Collins (1983), 338-340.
[15] Gregory E. Sterling, "Philo" in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1063.

into the one element of the nature of water, until, while **the water from above kept pouring down, and that below kept bursting up, the streams were raised to a height above everything, so that they not only overwhelmed and hid from sight all the plains and all the level ground, but even the tops of the highest mountains, [44] for every part of the earth was under water, so that it was wholly buried and carried away**, . . . [45] **Then were speedily destroyed all the crops and all the trees, for an unlimited quantity of water is as destructive to them as a scarcity, and innumerable flocks of animals, both tame and wild, perished at the same time**; . . . **And one house alone**, that of the aforesaid just and God-loving man who had received the two highest of all gifts, **was preserved**; one gift being, as I have said already, the **not being destroyed with all the rest of mankind**, the other that of becoming himself, at a subsequent period, the founder of a new generation of mankind; **for God thought him worthy to be both the end of our race and the beginning of it, the end of those men who lived before the deluge, and the beginning of those who lived after the deluge**.[16]

He wrote in *On the Life of Moses* 2:63:

And what was expected happened at no long period after; for the evil abated, and the destruction caused by the deluge was diminished every day, the rain being checked, **and the water which had been spread over the whole earth**, being partly dried up by the flame of the sun, and partly returning into the chasms and rivers, and other channels and receptacles in the earth; for, as if God had issued a command to that effect, every nature received back, as a necessary repayment of a loan, what it had lent, that is, every sea, and fountain, and river, received back their waters; and every stream returned into its appropriate channel.[17]

He wrote in *On the Virtues* 1:201:

Now there was, in the subsequent generations, a man very greatly approved of, a most holy man, whose piety the sacred historian, who has written the books called the law, has thought worthy of being recorded in the sacred volumes. Accordingly, **in the great deluge when all the cities of the world were utterly destroyed (for even the highest mountains were overwhelmed by the increase and continual rising of the rapid flood), he alone was saved, with all his kindred**, having received such a reward for his virtue that it is not possible to imagine a greater one. [Genesis 7:1.][18]

Philo expresses the same understanding at multiple places in *Questions and Answers on Genesis*,[19] but only a small portion of the Greek text of that work survives. The English

[16] *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854-55) (electronic version).
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] See, e.g., 2:13, 2:23, 2:29, 2:63, 2:66.

translations are based on a sixth-century Armenian translation, which is known from only a handful of manuscripts from the thirteenth century.[20]

7. Josephus

Josephus (ca. AD 35-100) was a Jewish priest, military leader, and historian, who surrendered to the Romans during the Jewish War (AD 66-70). It is alleged by some that he did not believe that Noah's flood was global, but that is a misunderstanding of a comment he made. Josephus clearly recognized that Noah's flood was global and killed all humanity except Noah and his family. He explains in *Antiquities* (1.3.2):

> (75) God loved this man [Noah] because of his righteousness, but did not condemn the others alone for their wickedness; but **since it seemed best to Him to destroy also all humanity, as many as there were at that time**, and to create another race free of knavery, cutting short their lives and establishing their life expectancy not as formerly but at 120 years, **He changed the dry land into sea**. (76) **They were all thus obliterated, but Nochos alone was saved, since God suggested to him the following contrivance and means for salvation**. (77) Constructing an ark of four stories, three hundred cubits in length, fifty in width, and thirty in depth, he embarked with **the mother of his children and with their wives**, bringing in both other things, as many as were likely to be useful for their needs, and taking in also all sorts of living beings, male and also female, **for the preservation of their species**, some of these being seven each in number. (78) **The ark was firm** in its sides and its roof so as not to be inundated from any direction or to be overcome by the force of the water. **And Nochos was thus saved with his family**.[21]

Josephus adds in *Antiquities* (1.3.5): "When God gave the sign and began to send rain, the water streamed down for forty entire days, so that **it stood fifteen cubits high above the surface of the earth. And this was the reason why more were not saved since they had no possibility of flight**."[22] Only those on the ark were saved because there was no refuge from the floodwaters, no place to flee for safety, because the entire world was inundated.

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[20] Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, trans. by Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), vii; Sterling (2010), 1065-1066. Therefore, one cannot lean heavily on the precise wording of a text, as though one had confident access to the Greek original (e.g., the allegedly discordant statement in 2:28 that the water of the flood "*almost* flowed out beyond the Pillars of Heracles and the Great Sea"). Benjamin Garstad observes in "The Greek Character of Philo's Biblical Giants: A Reading of QG 2.82" in Francesca Alesse and Ludovica de Luca, eds., *Philo of Alexandria and Greek myth: narratives, allegories, and arguments* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 202: "There is a certain optimistic naïveté in the belief that when we have the manuscripts of an ancient author's works in the language in which they were composed, we necessarily have access to his *ipsissima verba*, but when all that survives is a translation, we must reconcile ourselves to standing at one unbridgeable remove, at least, from the author's thought."

[21] The reference number 1.3.2 is from Whiston's translation, but the translation is by Louis H. Feldman. It is made available online as part of the Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement (text is here).

[22] The reference number 1.3.5 is from Whiston's translation, but the translation is by Feldman (text is here).

The text that some claim indicates Josephus believed the flood was only local is *Antiquities* (1.4.1), which states: "The sons of Nochos, being three, Semas and Iaphthas and Chamas, who were born a hundred years before the Flood, were the first who came down from the mountains into the plains and made their dwelling there. And they persuaded the others who were very much afraid because of the deluge and who were hesitant to descend from the lofty places to take courage and to follow their example."[23] It is alleged that "the others" whom the sons of Noah persuaded to move into the plains from the mountains were people who had survived the flood outside the ark, but that interpretation contradicts what Josephus just wrote that all humanity was killed in the flood except Noah and his family, who survived because they were on the ark.[24]

It is not reasonable to believe that Josephus would reject the uniform Jewish understanding of the extent of the flood (see below) in an oblique comment, especially after having just affirmed the consensus view. Rather, Josephus assumes that Noah's sons lived in the mountains for decades before settling in the lowland. The others whom they persuaded to join them were descendants born to them after the flood during their time in the high country. Those descendants were reluctant to leave the mountains because of the fear that stories of the flood had instilled in them. This obviously is Josephus's elaboration on the flood narrative not something that is reported in the text.

8. Author of *2 Enoch*

"Second Enoch is generally thought to be a Jewish work that may date from as early as the first century [AD]."[25] There are two manuscript traditions, representing a longer and a shorter version. The longer version of 2 Enoch 34:2 notes various iniquities and forms of wickedness that will plague the world, and then states in 34:3, "And that is why **I shall bring down the flood onto the earth, and I shall destroy everything, and the earth itself will collapse in great darkness**."[26]

9. Rabbi Akiba (or Aqiva, Aquiba, Akiva) ben Joseph

Rabbi Akiba "is one of the best-known figures in rabbinic history."[27] He was a leading Jewish scholar in the latter part of the first century and early second century AD. The following is attributed to him in Mishnah-Tractate *Sanhedrin* 11:3A-CC A.1.: "The generation of the flood

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[23] The reference number 1.4.1 is from Whiston's translation, but the translation is by Feldman (text is here).
[24] Feldman's comment (note 277) that Josephus "seems to imply that there were others who survived the Flood, besides the immediate family of Noah" is ambiguous regarding the extent of the flood. He may mean that Josephus was implying there were unidentified passengers on the ark not that the flood was merely local. But either meaning would contradict what Josephus just wrote.
[25] Gurtner (2020), 145.
[26] F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 158. The shorter recension reads (p. 159), "Then I shall bring down the flood onto the earth, and the earth itself will be overwhelmed by a great quantity of mud."
[27] Azzan Yadin, "Akiba (Aqiva)" in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, eds., *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 315.

has no share in the world to come, nor will they live in the world to come, as it is said, And he **destroyed every living thing that was upon the face of the earth (Gen. 7:23) in this world**; and they perished from the earth in the world to come."[28]

10. Author of *3 Baruch*

Third Baruch is likely a Jewish composition that underwent significant Christian redaction.[29] If that is correct, the initial composition would be within the first two centuries after Christ.[30] The Greek text of *3 Baruch* 4:10-11 states:

> And the angel said, "Rightly you ask; when God caused the Flood **over the earth and destroyed all flesh** and 409,000 giants, and the **water rose over the heights 15 cubits**, the water entered Paradise and killed every flower, but it removed the sprig of the vine completely and brought it outside. And **when the earth appeared from the water** and Noah left the ark, he started to plant (some) of the discovered plants.[31]

11. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nadav

Genesis Rabbah is a collection of ancient rabbinical interpretations of Genesis that was created around A.D. 425-450.[32] After citing Gen. 7:21-22, *Gen. Rab*. 32:11 states:

> "**All flesh that crawls…perished…all in whose nostrils was the breath [*nishmat*] of the spirit [*ruaḥ*] of life [*ḥayim*]**…" – Rabbi Shmuel, son in law of Rabbi Ḥanina, colleague of the Rabbis, said: Here it calls *neshama ruaḥ*, and elsewhere it calls *neshama nefesh*. From where is it derived that we should apply what is stated here, there, and what is stated there, here? The verse states: *Ḥayim, ḥayim* as a verbal analogy. "**From all that was on the dry land, died**" – **to the exclusion of fish**. Some say that they were included in [the decree] to be annihilated, but they fled to the Great Sea, to the Atlantic Ocean, [where they survived].[33]

12. Rabbi Schlomo ben Yitzak, commonly known as Rashi

[28] Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.) (electronic version).
[29] Gurtner (2010), 148.
[30] H. E. Gaylord, "3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch)" in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 656.
[31] Gaylord (2010), 667.
[32] Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 238.
[33] The Sefaria Midrash Rabbah (2022), *Bereshit Rabbah* 32:11 (online here).

Rashi (ca. AD 1040-1105) is considered by many to be the greatest rabbinic commentator on the Bible. He lived most of his life in norther France, but in his youth, he studied with rabbinic scholars in Germany.[34] He states in his *Commentary on Genesis* that the floodwaters were 15 cubits "**above the summits of all the mountains**," that "**whatsoever was in the dry land [died]** – and not the fish in the sea," and that "**Noah only**" was left, meaning he and those who were with him in the ark.[35]

13. Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, also known as Abenezra or Ibn Ezra

Ibn Ezra (ca. AD 1089 – ca. 1164) was a Jewish biblical scholar. He lived in Spain most of his life, but from around 1140 he lived mainly in Italy but traveled to France, North Africa, London, and maybe Palestine.[36] He states in his *Commentary on Genesis* regarding Gen. 7:19:

> The word *me'od* (exceedingly) is repeated in the text in order to stress that the waters prevailed to their maximum potential. Why state, *and the mountains were covered* (v. 20), after having said, *and all the high mountains that were under the whole heaven were covered* (v. 19)? Its meaning is: **All the high mountains were covered with water (v. 19), and these mountains were covered by fifteen cubits of water (v. 20). There are those who maintain that there is a very tall mountain in Greece that the waters did not cover. However, we believe the words of our God and we put aside the foolish nonsense of man**.[37]

14. Rabbi David Kimhi (or Kimchi, Kimḥi, Qimḥi), also known as Radak

Radak (AD 1160-1235) was a renowned Jewish scholar of his day who lived in France.[38] He states in his *Commentary on Genesis* regarding Gen. 7:21:

> ויגוע...וכל האדם, the reason the word האדם [humankind] is mentioned last, is to tell us that even man, who thanks to his intelligence and foresight could have been expected to find ways of escaping this disaster by taking refuge on top of the mountains, etc., was unable to save himself. **The 15 cubits of water that covered even the tallest of the mountains made it impossible for any person to survive**.[39]

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[34] Sara Karesh and Mitchell M. Hurvitz, *Encyclopedia of Judaism* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 415.
[35] See Rashi on Genesis 7:20-23 available online here.
[36] Joan Comay, *Who's Who in Jewish History After the Period of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. by Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok (New York: Routledge, 1995), 193.
[37] See Ibn Ezra on Genesis, Sefaria online here.
[38] Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews from the Roman Empire to the Early Medieval Period Volume 2*, trans. by Moshe Spiegel (South Brunswick, NJ: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968), 758.
[39] See Radak on Genesis, Sefaria online here.

15. Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, commonly known as Nachmanides and Ramban

Nachmanides (AD 1194–1270) was recognized as the outstanding Jewish scholar of his day. He lived in Spain and directed a rabbinical academy in his hometown.[40] He says in this *Commentary on Genesis* that the statement in Gen. 7:19 that the flood waters prevailed upon the earth means "that the waters were in their complete strength, **overcoming even the high mountains and inundating them**." He comments in relation to Gen. 8:4: "The order of events in this matter was thus: on the day the rain began to fall *all the fountains of the great deep were broken up*, and the windows of the heavens were opened and the rain came down for forty days. During that time **the waters prevailed fifteen cubits above [the summits of all the mountains]**." That he understood this to include all the mountains of the world is made clear in his comment regarding Gen. 8:5:

> [I]t is known that the **Greek mountain Olympus is very much higher than they [the mountains of Ararat]**, and the land of Ararat, which is near Babylon, lies in the lower part of the globe! Perhaps we should then say that **the decrease of waters which took place on the seventeenth day of the seventh month was very much more than fifteen cubits, and at first the tops of the high mountains were seen, not the mountains of Ararat**, and it just happened that the ark was in the land of Ararat during the seventh month and it rested on the tops of those mountains.[41]

B. Christian Interpretation

All ancient Christians likewise understood that the flood of Noah's day was global. These include the following:[42]

1. Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr was an exegete, teacher, and prolific author who was martyred around AD 165. He states in *Dialog with Trypho*, chap. 138: "For when Moses had the rod in his hands, he led your nation through the sea. And you believe that this was spoken to your nation only, or to the land. **But the whole earth, as the Scripture says, was inundated, and the water rose in**

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[40] Comay (1995), 286.

[41] See Ramban on Genesis, Sefaria online here, here, and here.

[42] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from electronic versions of Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1896); Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887-1894); Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second series (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890-1900). The brief introductory information on the various writers is often taken from Everett Ferguson, *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

height fifteen cubits above all the mountains: so that it is evident this was not spoken to the land, but to the people who obeyed Him."

2. Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus was a bishop and apologist who wrote three books *To Autolycus* around AD 180. In Book III, chapter 18, he states:

> For Plato, as we said above, when he had demonstrated that a deluge had happened, said that it extended **not over the whole earth**, but only over the plains, and that those who fled to the highest hills saved themselves." He then says of Plato and others who made spurious claims about the flood that "it is evident that they who wrote such things and philosophized to so little purpose **are miserable, and very profane and senseless persons**.

He expressly rejects the claim that the great ancient flood did not cover the entire earth, stating:

> But Moses, our prophet and the servant of God, in giving an account of the genesis of the world, related in what manner the flood came upon the earth, telling us, besides, how the details of the flood came about, and relating no fable of Pyrrha nor of Deucalion or Clymenus; **nor, forsooth, that only the plains were submerged, and that those only who escaped to the mountains were saved**.

He adds in chapter 19: "And Moses showed that the flood lasted forty days and forty nights, torrents pouring from heaven, and from the fountains of the deep breaking up, so that **the water overtopped every high hill 15 cubits**. **And thus the race of all the men that then were was destroyed, and those only who were protected in the ark were saved**; and these, we have already said, were eight." He states in chapter 138: "**But the whole earth, as the Scripture says, was inundated, and the water rose in height fifteen cubits above all the mountains."**

3. Irenaeus

Irenaeus (ca. AD 115 – ca. 202) was a teacher at Rome before becoming Biship of Lyons. He states in *Against Heresies*, Book V, chapter 29, "For Noah was six hundred years old when the **deluge came upon the earth, sweeping away the rebellious world**, for the sake of that most infamous generation which lived in the times of Noah."

4. Tertullian

Tertullian (ca. AD 160 – ca. 225[?]) was a North African Christian apologist and prolific writer. He states in *On the Apparel of Women*, Book I, chapter 3: "I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not received by some, because it

is not admitted into the Jewish canon either. I suppose they did not think that, having been published before the deluge, it could have safely survived **that world-wide calamity, the abolisher of all things**."

In *Ad Nationes*, Book I, chapter 9, he argues against the charge that Christians are the cause of disasters that afflict the public by pointing out such disasters occurred in history long before there were any Christians. He states:

> As we have remarked already, three hundred years have not yet passed in our existence; but what vast scourges before that time fell on all the world, on its various cities and provinces! what terrible wars, both foreign and domestic! what pestilences, famines, conflagrations, yawnings, and quakings of the earth has history recorded![12] Where were the Christians, then, when the Roman state furnished so many chronicles of its disasters? Where were the Christians when the islands Hiera, Anaphe, and Delos, and Rhodes, and Cea were desolated with multitudes of men? or, again, when the land mentioned by Plato as larger than Asia or Africa was sunk in the Atlantic Sea? or when fire from heaven overwhelmed Volsinii, and flames from their own mountain consumed Pompeii? when the sea of Corinth was engulphed by an earthquake? **when the whole world was destroyed by the deluge?**

He states in *On the Mantle*, Chapter 1, section (2.3), "**There even was a time that the whole earth changed and was covered by all the water that exists**. Even today shell-fish and circular shells from the sea stay abroad in the mountains, craving to prove to Plato that **even the steeper parts were flooded**. **2** But by swimming out the earth changed and took on shape again, the same but different."[43]

5. Hippolytus

Hippolytus (ca. AD 170 – ca. 236) was a leading theologian in the church in Rome and the last prominent writer of the Roman church to use Greek. He was martyred around AD 236. He states in *The Refutation of All Heresies*, Book X, chapter 26: "And **in Noah's time there occurred a flood throughout the entire world**, which neither Egyptians, nor Chaldeans, nor Greeks recollect; for the inundations which took place in the age of Ogyges and Deucalion prevailed **only in the localities where these dwelt**."

6. Origen

Origen (ca. AD 185 – ca. 251) was one of the greatest scholars and prolific writers of the early church. He states in *Against Celsus*, Book IV, chapter 21 that the deluge "**effected a purification of the earth, according to the accounts of both Jews and Christians**." He adds in chapter 41, "And is it not a subject of admiration, that by the providential arrangement of God,

[43] Translation by Vincent Hunink (2005), available here.

the elements of all the races were brought into it [the ark]**, that the earth might receive again the seeds of all living things**, while God made use of a most righteous man to be the progenitor of those who were to be born after the deluge?"

7. Cyprian

Cyprian (ca. AD 200-258) was Bishop of Carthage until he was martyred in AD 258. He states in *Treatises of Cyprian*, Treatise XII, First Book, Testimonies, section 8: "That the first circumcision of the flesh is made void, and the second circumcision of the spirit is promised instead. and Noah, who, when **the world and men were perishing** on account of transgressions, **was chosen alone, that in him the human race might be preserved**."

8. Lactantius

Lactantius (ca. AD 250 – ca. 325) was a Christian apologist and teacher of Latin rhetoric. He states in *The Divine Institutes*, Book II, chapter 14:

> But afterwards God, when He saw the earth filled with wickedness and crimes, **determined to destroy mankind with a deluge**; but, however, for renewing the multitude, He chose one man, who, when all were corrupted, stood forth pre-eminent, as a remarkable example of righteousness. He, when six hundred years old, built an ark, as God had commanded him, **in which he himself was saved, together with his wife and three sons, and as many daughters-in-law, when the water had covered all the loftiest mountains.**

9. Ephrem the Syrian

Ephrem (ca. AD 306-373) was an exegete, teacher, and deacon in Nisibis and Edessa. He states in his *Commentary on Genesis*, Section II, paragraph 3:

> [Moses] undertook to show that no tree nor vegetation had been created along with the earth, because the rain had not yet come down. But after the great spring rose up from the great abyss and watered the whole face of the earth, and after the waters had been gathered together on the third day, then the earth brought forth all the vegetation.
>
> (2) These waters, then, over which the darkness had been spread on the first day are the same ones that rose up from the spring and, in the blink of an eye, **covered the entire earth**. **This was also the [same spring] that was opened in the days of Noah and that covered the surface of all the mountains on the earth**.[44]

[44] *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, Kathleen McVey, ed., trans. by Edward G. Mathews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 98.

He states in Section VI, paragraph 11(2): "The deluge came and **God blotted out all flesh. Only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark**."[45]

10. Cyril of Jerusalem

Cyril was Bishop of Jerusalem from about AD 350 until his death in 386 (despite three banishments). He states in *Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture II, section 8: "For consider what happened in the days of Noe. The giants sinned, and much wickedness was then **spread over the earth**, and because of this the flood was **to come upon them**: and in the five hundredth year God utters His threatening; but in the six hundredth He **brought the flood upon the earth**."

11. Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory (ca. AD 329-390) was a very influential theologian in the early church. He served briefly as Bishop of Constantinople (AD 379-381). He states in *Select Orations*, Oration XXVIII, The Second Theological Oration, XVIII: "Noah's glory was that he was pleasing to God; he who was entrusted with the **saving of the whole world from the waters, or rather of the Seeds of the world**, escaped the Deluge in a small Ark." He states in Oration XLIII (Funeral oration on the Great St. Basil), section 70: "Noah was entrusted with the ark, and the **seeds of a new world** committed to a small house of wood, **in their preservation from the waters**."

12. Ambrose

Ambrose (ca. AD 339-397) was Bishop of Milan who brought Augustine to faith in Christ. He states in *Three Books on the Duty of the Clergy*, Book III, chapter 18, section 108, "**In the flood, too, in Noah's time all flesh died, though just Noah was preserved together with his family**."

13. Pseudo-Clementines

Pseudo-Clementines are a set of pseudonymous works, a main component of which is *Recognitions of Clement*. That work originated in fourth-century Syria. The author states in Book I, chapter 29:

> But against these the righteous providence of **God brought a flood upon the world, that the earth might be purified from their pollution, and every place might be turned into a sea by the destruction of the wicked**. Yet there was then found one righteous man, by name Noah, who, being delivered in an ark with his three sons and their wives, **became the colonizer of the world after the**

[45] Ibid., 141.

subsiding of the waters, with those animals and seeds which he had shut up with him.

14. John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (ca. AD 347-407) was Bishop of Constantinople and the greatest preacher in the early church. He states in *Homilies on Romans*, Homily XXV, verse 13: "For if you will not believe by the punishments that are to come, at least believe by those that have happened already. For what have happened, and have come forth into reality, surely are not threats and words. Who then was it that **flooded the whole world**, and affected that baleful wreck, and the **utter destruction of our whole race**!" He states in *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, Homily 25, section 10:

> See the extent of the considerateness Sacred Scripture employs here too, describing everything in a human manner: it is not that there are sluice gates in heaven, but rather that it describes everything in terms customary with us, as if to say that the Lord simply gave a direction and immediately the waters obeyed their Creator's command, fell out of the heavens on all sides **and inundated the whole world**.[46]

He states in Homily 25, section 20:

> It is not without purpose that Scripture describes all this to us. Instead, its purpose is for us to learn that **not only people, cattle, four-footed beasts and reptiles were drowned but also the birds of heaven and whatever inhabited the mountains, namely, animals and other wild creatures**. Hence the text says, "The flood rose fifteen cubits above the mountains," for you to learn that the execution of the Lord's sentence had been effected. He said, remember, "After seven more days **I will bring a deluge upon the earth and I will wipe off the face of the earth all the life I have made, from human beings to cattle, and from reptiles to birds of heaven**." So Scripture narrates this not simply to teach us the flood level but that we may be able to understand along with this that **there was absolutely nothing left standing – no wild beasts, no animals, no cattle – rather, everything was annihilated along with the human race**. Since it was for their sake that all these creatures had been created, with the imminent destruction of human beings it was fitting that these creatures too should meet their end. Then, after teaching us **the great height reached by the flood waters** and the fact that they rose a further fifteen cubits above the mountain peaks, it further adds out of fidelity to its characteristic precision, "**There perished all flesh that moved on the earth – birds, animals, every reptile that moved on the earth, every human being – everything that had breath of life, everything on dry land: all perished**." That was not an idle reference in the words

[46] Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, trans. by Robert C. Hill (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 131-132.

"everything on dry land"; instead, its purpose was to teach us that **while others perished, the just man with everyone in the ark alone was saved**.[47]

15. Jerome

Jerome (ca. AD 347-419/20) was a major scholar of the early church. His translation of the biblical books into Latin, known as the Vulgate, became the standard Bible in the west. He states in *Against Jovinianus*, Book II, paragraph 25, "If at the deluge Noah was delivered, and **the whole world perished**, all men were flesh, and therefore were destroyed."

16. Augustine

Augustine (AD 354-430) is probably the most influential theologian in the history of the western church. He was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. He states in *City of God*, Book XIII, chapter 24:

> Without troubling themselves much, they might have found in a preceding page of this very book of Genesis the words, "Let the earth bring forth the living soul,"[7] when all the terrestrial animals were created. Then at a slight interval, but still in the same book, was it impossible for them to notice this verse, **"All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died," by which it was signified that all the animals which lived on the earth had perished in the deluge**?

He states in Book XV, chapter 11, regarding a textual discrepancy between the LXX and MT: "From this discrepancy between the Hebrew books and our own arises the well-known question as to the age of Methuselah; for it is computed that he lived for fourteen years after the deluge, though **Scripture relates that of all who were then upon the earth only the eight souls in the ark escaped destruction by the flood**, and of these Methuselah was not one." He says in chapter 27 of Book XV:

> But they who contend that these things [events of Noah's flood] never happened, but are only figures setting forth other things, in the first place **suppose that there could not be a flood so great that the water should rise fifteen cubits above the highest mountains**, because it is said that clouds cannot rise above the top of Mount Olympus, because it reaches the sky where there is none of that thicker atmosphere in which winds, clouds, and rains have their origin. They do not reflect that the densest element of all, earth, can exist there; or perhaps they deny that the top of the mountain is earth. **Why, then, do these measurers and weighers of the elements contend that earth can be raised to those aerial altitudes, and that water cannot**, while they admit that water is lighter, and liker to ascend than earth? What reason do they adduce why earth, the heavier and

[47] Ibid., 139-140.

> lower element, has for so many ages scaled to the tranquil ether, while water, the lighter, and more likely to ascend, is not suffered to do the same even for a brief space of time? . . .
> As to another customary inquiry of the scrupulous about the very minute creatures, not only such as mice and lizards, but also locusts, beetles, flies, fleas, and so forth, whether there were not in the ark a larger number of them than was determined by God in His command, those persons who are moved by this difficulty are to be reminded that the words "every creeping thing of the earth" only indicate that **it was not needful to preserve in the ark the animals that can live in the water, whether the fishes that live submerged in it, or the sea-birds that swim on its surface**.

In Book XVI, chapter 7, he addresses the question of how animals like wolves could be found on islands after Noah's flood. That was a question because it was understood that all such animals that were not on the ark died and therefore the current animals on the islands would have had to come from the ark, which raises the question of how that happened. Augustine observes: "it is asked how they could be found in the islands after the deluge, **in which all the animals not in the ark perished**, unless the breed was restored from those which were preserved in pairs in the ark." He offers possibilities of swimming, human transport, angelic assistance, or God creating them out of the earth on the islands as he did initially at creation.

He states in Book XVII, chapter 1, "For although both the patriarch Noah himself, **in whose days the whole earth was destroyed by the flood**, and others before and after him down to this time when there began to be kings over the people of God, may not undeservedly be styled prophets, . . ." He states in Book XVIII, chapter 22, that "after that **greatest and indeed universal flood, when only eight men escaped in Noah's ark**, not much more than a thousand years had passed when Ninus subdued all Asia with the exception of India." And he states in Book XX, chapter 16:

> For as soon as those who are not written in the book of life have been judged and cast into eternal fire,--the nature of which fire, or its position in the world or universe, I suppose is known to no man, unless perhaps the divine Spirit reveal it to some one,--then shall the figure of **this world** pass away in a conflagration of universal fire, **as once before the world was flooded with a deluge of universal water**.

Augustine remarks in *Reply to Faustus the Manichean*, Book XII, paragraph 17: "**That all flesh on the face of the earth, outside the ark, was destroyed by the flood**." He states in *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, chapter 27, "Once of old **there occurred a flood over the whole earth**, the object of which was that sinners might be destroyed." He says in *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin*, Book II, chapter 34: "How is it that they overlook the fact that men were even then sunk in so many intolerable sins, that, **with the exception of one man of God and his wife, and three sons and their wives, the whole world was in God's just judgment destroyed by the flood**, even as the little land of Sodom was afterwards with fire?" He says in *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Psalm XC, paragraph 10: "Hence **the waters of the deluge overtopped the highest mountains by fifteen cubits**." And he says in *On the Soul*

and Its Origin, Book IV, chapter 37: "In like manner, touching **the devastation of the deluge**, the Scripture testifies, '**All flesh died that moved upon the earth**, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, **and every man**: and all things which have the spirit of life.'"

17. Pseudo-Justin

A Greek writing that is usually known by its Latin title *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos* was at one time falsely attributed to Justin Martyr. It has long been assigned to the group of works known as Pseudo-Justin. Current scholarship tentatively attributes the writing to Theodoret of Cyrus (AD 393 – ca. 460) or to an unidentified fifth-century Antiochian theologian from Syria.[48] I mention this work because decades ago Davis Young suggested that the author "may have raised the possibility of a more localized flood." The Greek text he cited for that proposition was Pseudo-Justin, *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, 6:1282 [sic],[49] for which he offered the following translation:

> If, as many say, there was no flood in every place of the land, but only in those places where humans now live, how is it true that water was raised above the highest mountains to a depth of fifteen cubits? Response. Indeed it does not appear that the deluge did occur in every place, unless perchance the places were low-lying, in which the deluge took place, in certain places of the earth.[50]

The text given in PG 6:1281 is based on the 14th-century manuscript known as *Parisinus Graecus* 450, which is of questionable reliability.[51] But accepting it at face value, Young's rendering is misleading because he overlooked a double negative. The first line of the response is not, "Indeed it does not appear that the deluge did occur in every place," which would be a shocking statement in both content and casualness given the uniform contrary understanding, but instead reads: "**It does <u>not</u> (Οὐ) appear to be true that the flood did <u>not</u> (μὴ) happen in all the world**," i.e., the flood was indeed in all the world.

Young's rendering of the remaining text does not fit well with the immediate affirmation that the flood occurred in all the world. It has the author saying, in effect, "The flood did indeed occur in all the world, unless it did not occur in all the world, being restricted to the lowlands." That is backtracking that would make a politician proud. His translation also is odd for rendering

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[48] Peter Toth, "New Questions on Old Answers: Towards a Critical Edition of the *Answers to the Orthodox* of Pseudo-Justin," *Journal of Theological Studies* 65:2 (October 2014), 582.

[49] This is *Patrologia Graeca*, 6:1281:

> Ἐρώτησις λδ.
> Εἰ, καθώς τινές φασιν, ὁ κατακλυσμὸς ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ τῆς γῆς οὐ γέγονεν, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι ᾤκουν, πῶς ἀληθὲς ὅτι ὑψώθη τὸ ὕδωρ ἐπάνω πάντων τῶν ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων δεκατέσσαρας πήχεις;
> Ἀπόκρισις.
> Οὐ δοκεῖ ἀληθὲς εἶναι τὸ μὴ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν γεγονέναι, εἰ μή τι ἄρα κοιλότεροι ἦσαν οἱ τόποι, ἔνθα ὁ κατακλυσμὸς ἐγένετο, τῶν λοιπῶν τόπων τῆς γῆς.

[50] Davis A. Young, *The Biblical Flood: A Case Study of the Church's Response to Extrabiblical Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 27.

[51] See Toth's in-depth discussion.

ἔνθα as "in which" and λοιπῶν as "certain." Contrary to the impression given by Young, the author probably is putting the doubters' claim in the best light, saying it would make sense if they meant the flood *at first* affected only the lower areas and then gradually increased to cover the earth. I suggest something like: "It does not appear to be true that the flood did not happen in all the world, unless perhaps [they mean] the lower areas were the [first] places, then the flood occurred on the remaining places of the earth."[52]

18. Sulpicius (or Sulpitius) Severus

Sulpicius Severus (ca. AD 360 – ca. 420) was a Christian biographer and historian. He states in *Sacred History*, Book I, chapter 3:

> God being offended by these things, and especially by the wickedness of mankind, which had gone beyond measure, had **determined to destroy the whole human race**. But he exempted Noah, a righteous man and of blameless life, from the destined doom. He being warned by God that a flood was coming upon the earth, built an ark of wood of immense size, and covered it with pitch so as to render it impervious to water. He was shut into it along with his wife, and his three sons and his three daughters-in-law. **Pairs of birds also and of the different kinds of beasts were likewise received into it, while all the rest were cut off by a flood**.

19. Pseudo-Eustathius

The *Commentary on the Hexameron* by Pseudo-Eustathius, which includes commentary on Genesis, is an anonymous Greek work thought to have been composed in the late fourth or fifth century.[53] He states in reference to Noah and the ark: "And when the flood came, **the high parts of the mountains were covered by the water**. Even now, some cutting stones for building on the summit of Lebanon find types of marine fish, which happened to be trapped in the hollows of the mountains, solidified with the mud."[54]

20. John of Damascus

John of Damascus (ca. AD 650 [675?] – ca. 749) was a theologian and monk. He states in *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book IV, chapter 24: "Noah when he was commanded to enter the ark and was entrusted with the **preservation of the seed of the world** received this

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[52] The modifier "first" is implied by "then" (ἔνθα; see, Franco Montanari, ed., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [Boston: Brill, 2015], 695) and "remaining places" (τῶν λοιπῶν τόπων) in the following clause. For the meaning of λοιπός, see Montanari, 1252.

[53] Yulia Minets, *The Slow Fall of Babel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 128.

[54] This is *Patrologia Graeca*, 18:752: Ἐπενεχθέντος δὲ τοῦ κατακλυσμοῦ ἐκαλύφθη τὰ ὑψηλὰ τῶν ὀρέων ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος. Ἔτι γὰρ καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκρωρείας τοῦ Λιβάνου λίθους εἰς οἰκοδομήν τινες ἐκτέμνοντες, θαλαττίων ἰχθύων γένη εὑρίσκουσιν, οὓς συνέβη εἰς τὰ κοιλώματα τῶν ὀρέων συναποπαγῆναι τῇ ἰλύϊ.

command, *Go in*, saith the Lord, *thou and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives*. He separated them from their wives in order that with purity they might **escape the flood and that shipwreck of the whole world**."

III. Concluding Comment

As far as I can determine, all ancient Jews and Christians understood the Bible to teach that in Noah's day God flooded the entire world thereby killing all but eight humans and all air-breathing land animals that were not on the ark. The occupants of the ark were the seed for a new world. This uniform understanding continued until the modern era, only hundreds of years ago. If something this plain and unanimously agreed upon for so long can be proved false by modern science, then Scripture cannot be trusted as a source of truth. However loudly one may claim it is the word of God, one cannot know what it means until the "truth" to which it must conform is revealed from another source, which makes that source the controlling authority, the revelation one can actually trust. A text that potentially can mean anything ultimately means nothing. Rather than interpret Scripture to conform to current scientific interpretations of the data of nature, one should interpret the data of nature to conform to the plain and historically agreed meaning of Scripture. That would require only a fraction of the interpretive ingenuity that is now routinely applied to Scripture.