**Allegory and History in the Bible: Featuring Noach and the Flood**

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh\_flood\_myth**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh_flood_myth)

Gilgamesh’s supposed historical reign is believed to have been approximately 2700 BCE, shortly before the earliest known written stories. The discovery of artifacts associated with Aga and Enmebaragesi of Kish, two other kings named in the stories, has lent credibility to the historical existence of Gilgamesh. The earliest Sumerian Gilgamesh poems date from as early as the Third dynasty of Ur (2100–2000 BCE). One of these poems mentions Gilgamesh’s journey to meet the flood hero, as well as a short version of the flood story. The earliest Akkadian versions of the unified epic are dated to ca. 2000–1500 BCE. Due to the fragmentary nature of these Old Babylonian versions, it is unclear whether they included an expanded account of the flood myth; although one fragment definitely includes the story of Gilgamesh’s journey to meet Utnapishtim. The “standard” Akkadian version included a long version of the story and was edited by Sin-liqe-unninni sometime between 1300 and 1000 BCE.

# The Possibility of Allegory

**The Book of Beliefs and Opinions Section VII, 1 (Sa‘adyah Gaon)**

 And so I declare, first of all, that it is a well known fact that every statement found in the Bible is to be understood in its literal sense except for those that cannot be so construed for one of the following four reasons. It may, for example, be rejected by the observation of the senses, such as the statement, “And the man called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), whereas we see that the ox and the lion are not the offspring of womankind. Hence we must conclude that the implication of the statement embraces human descendants only. Or else the literal sense may be neglected by reason such as that of the statement, “For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24). Now fire is something created and defective, for it is subject to extinction. Hence it is logically inadmissible that God resemble it. We must, therefore, impute to this statement the meaning that God’s punishment is like a consuming fire, in accordance with the remark made elsewhere in Scripture, “For all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy (Zeph. 3:8) Again, [the literal meaning of a Biblical statement may be rendered impossible] by an explicit text of a contradictory nature, in which case it would become necessary the first statement in a non-literal sense ... Finally, any Biblical statement to the meaning of which Rabbinic tradition has attached a certain reservation is to be interpreted by us in keeping with this authentic tradition ... There exist, then, only four possible reasons for a non-literal interpretation of the verses of Sacred Writ, there being no fifth ...

**Guide to the Perplexed, II:25**

We do not reject the Eternity of the Universe, because certain passages in Scripture confirm the Creation; for such passages are not more numerous than those in which God is represented as a corporeal being; nor is it impossible or difficult to find for them a suitable interpretation. We might have explained them in the same manner as we did in respect to the Incorporeality of God. We should perhaps have had an easier task in showing that the Scriptural passages referred to are in harmony with the theory of the Eternity of the Universe if we accepted the latter, than we had in explaining the anthropomorphisms in the Bible when we rejected the idea that God is corporeal. For two reasons, however, we have not done so, and have not accepted the Eternity of the Universe. First, the Incorporeality of God has been demonstrated by proof: those passages in the Bible, which in their literal sense contain statements that can be refuted by proof, must and can be interpreted otherwise. But the Eternity of the Universe has not been proved; a mere argument in favour of a certain theory is not sufficient reason for rejecting the literal meaning of a Biblical text, and explaining it figuratively, when the opposite theory can be supported by an equally good argument. Secondly, our belief in the Incorporeality of God is not contrary to any of the fundamental principles of our religion: it is not contrary to the words of any prophet. Only ignorant people believe that it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture: but we have shown that this is not the case: on the contrary, Scripture teaches the Incorporeality of God.

If we were to accept the Eternity of the Universe as taught by Aristotle, that everything in the Universe is the result of fixed laws, that Nature does not change, and that there is nothing supernatural, we should necessarily be in opposition to the foundation of our religion, we should disbelieve all miracles and signs, and certainly reject all hopes and fears derived from Scripture, unless the miracles are also explained figuratively. The Allegorists amongst the Mohammedans have done this, and have thereby arrived at absurd conclusions. If, however, we accepted the Eternity of the Universe in accordance with the second of the theories which we have expounded above (ch. xxiii.), and assumed, with Plato, that the heavens are likewise transient, we should not be in opposition to the fundamental principles of our religion: this theory would not imply the rejection of miracles, but, on the contrary, would admit them as possible. The Scriptural text might have been explained accordingly, and many expressions might have been found in the Bible and in other writings that would confirm and support this theory. But there is no necessity for this expedient, so long as the theory has not been proved. As there is no proof sufficient to convince us, this theory need not be taken into consideration, nor the other one: we take the text of the Bible literally, and say that it teaches us a truth which we cannot prove: and the miracles are evidence for the correctness of our view.

**שו"ת הרשב"א חלק א סימן ט**

שאלתני על ענין מה שבא בפירושי ההגדות שפרשתי אני כי לדעת רבותינו ז"ל יש לעולם קצב. ועלה בלבך סתירה זה ממה שכתב הרמב"ם ז"ל ובקשת הראיה על דברי זולתו ז"ל. דע נכבדנו כי אלו הדברים כלם וכיוצא בהן אילו היינו באים לדון עליהם מצד החקירה האנושית ולפסוק אותם מן הסברא באמת החקירה תנצח שאין קצב לעולם. לפי שאין החקירה לקוחה אלא מן המורגש ומנהג הטבע. ואנו רואים הגלגלים בלי משתנים כלל מיום הבראם וכן הארץ בכללה הולכת על מנהג אחד תמידי. אבל באמת כל מי שטוען כן אינו אלא מצד הקבלה המסורה בידן של ישראל מפי חכמיהם עם הוראת המקראות. וכל שהקבלה או הנבואה הנחתו לא תנצחנו החקירה כי החקירה למטה מן הנבואה ... ויותר מזה אני רואה מן התמה בדבריהם שהם באמת מודים שאין חקירתם משגת לאמתת טבע הנמצאות כי יש לכל גוף מן הנבראים סגולות לא נודעו להם סבותם. כמשיכת האבן השואבת את הברזל בלי שידבק גוף לגוף ואחר כן ישוטט הברזל אחר מקום הסדן הקבוע בשמים ויפנה אליו ולפניו ינוח. היש דבר יוצא מגדר הטבע יותר מזה שיתנועע בעל גוף דומם בלי אמצעות גוף אחר מניעו ושיהפך הברזל פניו אל הסדן. באמת אם סופר זה לארסטו היה מכזיבו בלי ספק לולי שנתפרסם הענין פרסום רב. ואחר שהתקיים אצלו הענין הוא חוזר לבקש מן הטענות ומתחכם עליהם ... ודע כי כל חכם מחכמי תורתנו החסידים כשיראה דברי הפלוסופים וישר בעיניו דרכם כשהוא מגיע אצל הכתובים המורים כהפכם פרש אותם בענין שיהיה נאות לחקירה הפילוסופית ומשים ענין המקראות משל. לפי שאין דוחק אותו ענין נבואי או מצוה. אבל כשהוא מגיע אצל חכמי ישראל יפרש המקראות כצורתן ואף על פי שהחכמה הפילוסופית סותרת אותם. כענין תחיית המתים שאין הכתובים מוכרחים בו הכרח נחתך ויש לפרש כל המקראות בדרך משל. כענין המקראות שבאו יותר מבוארים בענין מתי יחזקאל. ואלא שהכריחם הכרח הקבלה המפורסמת באומה. ובמקום הזה יודה שהקבלה תבטל החקירה הפילוסופית. ואז תהיה לנו הוראה ממנו שאין משגיחין בחקירה כנגד הקבלה. לפי שחכמת השם למעלה מחקירתנו ... ואני איני מאשים אחד מן הפלוסופים בבטלם הענינים האלו כלם לפי שלא יכריחם דבר נבואי ולא קבלת חכם מחכמיהם. כמו שלא אאשים אחד מבני עמנו בשאינו מפרש קצת מן הכתובים כפשוטיהם להתחייב אצלו כי הוא משל מפני שהענין רחוק אצלו לפי הנחת השכל. ולמה נאשים אותו על ככה ועל כרחנו יש לו להודות בהרבה מקומות שדברו הכתובים דרך משל. ואם נתאמת אצלנו בלא שום ספק שנעשו אותות ומופתים שנשתנה בהם הטבע. וכן נתאמת אצלנו שהשם יתברך יכול לשנות את הטבעים כרצונו לשים מעמקי ים דרך לעבור ולכסות פני האדמה מים. היתחייב מזה שנאמין שעל כל פנים ישתנו הטבעים תמיד בלא טענה וכי יסופר אלינו כי נראה במקום חמור מדבר ומגיד עתידות הנאמין ונחייב זה להאמין. כי דברה האתון אשר לבלעם לצורך שעה ולפלא הענין. ויותר מזה שנאמין אף שיבראו לעתיד כפים לעצי היער או שיושם פה לעצים ויהיו בעל שכל ודבור עד שירננו מפני שאמר הכתוב (ישעיה נ"ה) וכל עצי השדה ימחאו כף אז ירננו עצי היער. זה אינו מן הדעת שנאמר ככה שאין דבר מכריחנו על זה עד שנאמר כן. כי באמת הרבה כתובים דברו דרך משל אבל כשיהיה הדבר מקובל בידנו למה נבטל הקבלה ואף על פי שתחייב החקירה הפילוסופית ביטולה ... ואיני אומר שנסמוך על הדין הזה להכזיב כל מה שיאמר כל חכם כי אילו אמרנו כן היה כסילות באמת. אך אני אומר במקום שיש מצוה או אפילו קבלה אין מדין האמת לבטל הקבלה מפני דברי החכם ההוא מן הצד הזה שאמרתי.

**רמב"ן על בראשית פרק ט פסוק יב**

זאת אות הברית אשר אני נותן המשמע מן האות הזה שלא היה קשת בענן ממעשה בראשית, ועתה ברא ה' חדשה לעשות קשת בשמים ביום ענן ואמרו בטעם האות הזה, כי הקשת לא עשאו שיהיו רגליו למעלה שיראה כאלו מן השמים מורים בו, וישלח חציו ויפיצם בארץ (תהלים יח טו), אבל עשאו בהפך מזה להראות שלא יורו בו מן השמים, וכן דרך הנלחמים להפוך אותו בידם ככה כאשר יקראו לשלום למי שכנגדם ועוד שאין לקשת יתר לכונן חצים עליו: ואנחנו על כרחנו נאמין לדברי היונים שמלהט השמש באויר הלח יהיה הקשת בתולדה, כי בכלי מים לפני השמש יראה כמראה הקשת, וכאשר נסתכל עוד בלשון הכתוב נבין כן, כי אמר את קשתי "נתתי" בענן, ולא אמר "אני נותן" בענן, כאשר אמר זאת אות הברית אשר "אני נותן" ומלת קשתי מורה שהיתה לו הקשת תחלה ולכן נפרש הכתוב, הקשת אשר נתתי בענן מיום הבריאה תהיה מן היום הזה והלאה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם, שכל זמן שאראנה אזכיר כי ברית שלום ביני וביניכם:

**Meiri, Magen Avot, 3**







# II. Test 1: Was there a Garden of Eden?

**Rambam**, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:30:

Consider the difficulty... in the statement that time existed before the creation of the sun! We shall undoubtedly soon remove this difficulty... All things were created together, but were separated from each other successively...

The account of the six days of creation contains, in reference to the creation of man, the statement: “Male and female He created them” (1:27), and concludes with the words: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (2:1), and yet the portion which follows describes the creation of Eve from Adam, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge, the history of the serpent and the events connected therewith, and all this as having taken place after Adam had been placed in the Garden of Eden. All our Sages agree that this took place on the sixth day, and that nothing new was created after the close of the six days. None of the things mentioned above is therefore impossible, because the laws of Nature were then not yet permanently fixed. There are, however, some utterances of our Sages on this subject [which imply a different view]. I will gather them from their different sources and place them before you, and I will refer also to certain things by mere hints, just as has been done by the Sages. You must know that their words, which I am about to quote, are most perfect, most accurate, and clear to those for whom they were said. I will therefore not add long explanations, lest I make their statements plain, and I might thus become “a revealer of secrets,” but I will give them in a certain order, accompanied with a few remarks, which will suffice for readers like you...The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand all the chapters of this treatise. When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it.

**Abarbanel**, Commentary to Genesis, p. 10:

The Rambam believed that there were not separate creative acts on six days, but rather everything was created on one day, in a single instant. In the work of Creation, there is mention of “six days” to indicate the different levels of created beings according to their natural hierarchy; not that there were actual days, and nor that there was a chronological sequence to that which was created in the acts of Genesis… This is the view of the Rambam which he considered as one of the major secrets of the Creation. He tried to conceal this view with ingenuity, as can be seen in his words there. But Ralbag went and tattled, revealing his secret, as did Narboni and the other commentators to his work; they uncovered his secret and publicized his view….

# III. Test 2: Did Noach’s Flood “Happen”?

**רמב"ן**

**ו:יט מכל בשר וגו'** ידוע כי החיות רבות מאד ומהן גדולות מאד כפילים וכראמים וזולתם...והנה יצטרך להביא מכלם שיולידו כמותם וכאשר תאסוף לכלם מאכל אשר יאכל לשנה תמימה לא תכיל אותם התיבה הזאת ולא עשר כיוצא בה, אבל הוא נס החזיק מועט את המרובה. ואם תאמר יעשנה קטנה ויסמך על הנס הזה ראה השם יתברך לעשותה גדולה כדי שיראו אותה בני דורו ויתמהו בה ויספרו עליה וידברו בענין המבול וכנוס הבהמה והחיה והעוף לתוכה אולי יעשו תשובה. ועוד עשו אותה גדולה למעט בנס כי כן הדרך בכל הניסים שבתורה או בנביאים לעשות מה שביד אדם לעשות והשאר יהיה בידי שמים.

**העמק דבר**

וימח את כל היקום. נמחו הגופות ודייק הכתוב אשר על פני האדמה דוקא אלו שהיו מונחים על פני האדמה. אבל נשתיירו כמה גופות שנפל עליהם עפר הרבה ע״י שטף המים ונשארו הגופות קיימין. והן הנה עצמות שמוצאין חופרי ארץ ומוצאין עצמות מבריות שלא נמצא עתה בעולם. ומזה שפטו הרבה שהי׳ לפני בריאה זו עולם אחר ואז היו בריות אחרות. ובאמת יש בב״ר כ״פ על המקרא והנה טוב מאד מלמד שברא הקב״ה עולמות ומחריבן ואמר דין הניין לו ודין לא הניין לו. וכ״ה בזוה״ק ויקרא עה״כ ואם זבח שלמים קרבנו מ״מ קשה לדעתי לומר כן שהרי מבואר בשמ״ר פ׳ ל׳ אלה תולדות השמים והארץ מה פסל שהי׳ בורא עולמות והי׳ מסתכל בהן ולא היו ערבים עליו ומחזירן לתהו ובהו. וא״כ לא נשתיירו מהם שריד ופליט. אלא נראה שהעצמות האלה המה מלפני ימי המבול. ואע״ג שנמצאים באקלים שאינם חיים שם זה נעשה ע״פ ששינו את דרכם על הארץ לפני המבול והלכו למקום אחר. ומה שמוצאין בריות משונות הוא ממה שהרכיבו שני מינים שונים ונולד ע״י זה בריות משונות כמו הפרד היוצא מהרכבת סוס וגמל. והי׳ ההשגחה שישתיירו עצמות אלו כדי שיבא דור אחרון ויכיר סתרי הטבע וזהו כבודו ית׳ כמ״ש בשירת האזינו בפסוק כי אשא אל שמים ידי. אך באותו עת היה הרצון שיהיו נימוחים מן הארץ כדי שלא יהיו נראים כלל. וישתדלו להרכיב עוד ולהעמיד בריות כאלו שנית. מש״ה כתיב עוד הפעם וימחו מן הארץ. הי׳ ההשגחה שלא ימצאון באותו הדור וכמה דורות מאוחרין העצמות המשונים כדי שלא ישתדלו לחדשן לכן נמח זכרם מן הארץ. והנה כתיב מאדם עד בהמה עד רמש. שהמחיה הי׳ לפי טבע הבשר שנוח להמחות תחלה. ובשר האדם נמחה תחלה ומש״ה נכלל כאן חיה בכלל בהמה משום שטבע בשרם שוה בזה:

**מלבי"ם**

וימח. אחר שמתו כולם כמ"ש ויגוע. נמחו גם גופותיהם שלא ימצא למו שארית על פני האדמה, ובזה היה בהפך שגוף האדם נמחה תחלה, כי הוא מצד הרכבתו חלוש יותר מגופי שאר הבע"ח ואח"כ גוף הבהמה שחזק יותר, ואח"כ רמש ועוף שגופותיהם הקטנים נסתרו בקנים ובמערות ונתקיימו יותר, ומבאר וימחו מן הארץ, שהגם שהרבה נשארו עצמותיהם החזקים כמטילי ברזל ולא נמוחו, בכ"ז נמחו מן הארץ כי ע"י שטף המים הובלו הפגרים לתוך העמקים ורובם נבלעו בעמקי תהום, אשר האדמה פצתה את פיה מעומק תהום רבה וירדו כמה אלפים אמה לעמקי שאול, עד שבצאת נח מן התיבה לא מצא שום רושם מפגרי בע"ח ועצמות הענקים ובע"ח הגדולים שהיו קודם המבול. ועדות ה' נאמנה מחכימת פתי להשיב דבר לחכמי הגעאלאגיא, שחופרים בעמקי האדמה ומוצאים עצמות גדולות מענקים ובע"ח גדולים שנאבדו מן הארץ ואינם עוד מימי המבול ואילך, והם מוכיחים מזה קדמות העולם כי יחשבו את האדמה שעשויה מינים מינים, שבכל עומק ידוע יש מין אדמה אחרת, ויחשבו לפי איכות האדמה שימצאו העצמות שם, ולפי חשבון כמה היה צריך עד שיולדו שטחי האדמה שהעולם קדמון מרבוא שנים, ושכבר היו בע"ח מימי קדם קודם לזמן היצירה שלנו. וכ"ז הבל וריק, כי בעת המבול פתחה האדמה את לועה ע"י הרעשים שבאו מעומק שאול ותהום רבה והפכה תחתונים למעלה ועליונים למטה והורידה פגרי הבע"ח עמוק עמוק, ונבקה חכמת הדורשים והחופרים לדעת איכות המהפכה הזאת אשר עשתה נפלאות במשך ק"ן יום של עמידת המים, עד שכל הסדרים שסדרו למו החוקרים מאיכות האדמה בכל שטח וכל חשבונותיהם בזה נתבלבלו אז וכל השערותיהם ודמיונותיהם ישא רוח יקח הבל, ולו חכמו ישכילו זאת ויראו מעשי ה' ונפלאותיו במצולת שאול איך מחה את כל היקום מעל פני האדמה ויטביעם בשאול תחתית עדי אובד:

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| **http://time.com/44631/noah-christians-flood-aronofsky/**The story of Noah may be part of the Abrahamic canon, but the legend of the Great Flood almost certainly has prebiblical origins, rooted in the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh dates back nearly 5,000 years and is thought to be perhaps the oldest written tale on the planet. In it, there is an account of the great sage Utnapishtim, who is warned of an imminent flood to be unleashed by wrathful gods. He builds a vast circular-shaped boat, reinforced with tar and pitch, that carries his relatives, grains and animals. After enduring days of storms, Utnapishtim, like Noah in Genesis, releases a bird in search of dry land. Various archaeologists suggest there was a historical deluge between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago that hit lands ranging from the Black Sea to what many call the cradle of civilization, the flood plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The translation of ancient cuneiform tablets in the 19th century confirmed the Mesopotamian flood myth as an antecedent of the Noah story in the Bible. In an interview with the London Telegraph, Irving Finkel, a curator at the British Museum and author of the recent book The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood, described one way the tradition may have emerged:*There must have been a heritage memory of the destructive power of flood water, based on various terrible floods. And the people who survived would have been people in boats. You can imagine someone sunbathing in a canoe, half asleep, and waking up however long later and they’re in the middle of the Persian Gulf, and that’s the beginning of the flood story.*Yet tales of the Flood spring from many sources. Myriad ancient cultures have their own legends of watery cataclysm and salvation. According to Vedic lore, a fish tells the mythic Indian king Manu of a flood that will wipe out humanity; Manu then builds a ship to withstand the epic rains and is later led to a mountaintop by the same fish. An Aztec story sees a devout couple hide in the hollow of a vast tree with two ears of corn as divine storms drown the wicked of the land. Creation myths from Egypt to Scandinavia involve tidal floods of all sorts of substances — including the blood of deities — purging and remaking the earth. |

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| **A NOTE ON THE FLOOD STORY IN THE LANGUAGE OF MAN, Joel B. Wolowelsky***https://www.lookstein.org/articles/flood\_man.pdf*On the simplest level, the Torah’s account of the Flood is part of its campaign against the pagan culture of the time. Despite the point by point convergence between the two stories, the differences between them are much more paramount and significant, as many have pointed out7 and need not be repeated here. Now, while this may be very interesting, it is not clear how relevant it is. Paganism is long gone from the Jewish consciousness. One need not look past the text and its traditional commentators to know that the true God—unlike the false deities worshipped by the pagans—is moral and caring, that He brings judgment on the world, and has established a covenant with mankind in general and later with the Jewish people in particular. What then is to be gained from taking note of the Gilgamesh Epic in a Torah class? There are at least two simple answers. First, if the Torah itself took note of the Epic—and a comparison of the two makes any other conclusion diffi cult—then we should take note of it. Second, it reminds us that we are reading a Torah text that is neither allegorical nor historical, but ki-leshon benei adam, expressing things as they were discussed by the multitudes and not necessarily as they were in actual detail. This frees us from such questions as how did animals from frigid climates survive in the Mediterranean climate (let alone how they got there and back), and whether native Peruvian Indians and Australian aborigines are really descended from Noah himself. Needless to say, this approach no more suggests that there was no catastrophic fl ood than does the position that God has no physical limb claim that “He took us out with a mighty arm” is false and that we were never taken out of Egyptian slavery. It has no relevance to the secular debate on the historicity of the Bible. We are not talking about whether the Flood happened but the literary devices the Torah used to describe it. |

[**http://www.jewswithquestions.com/index.php?/topic/71-the-mabul/**](http://www.jewswithquestions.com/index.php?/topic/71-the-mabul/) **(“Rabbi Shapiro”)**

If the reason for concocting the “Mabul didn’t really happen as we know it” distortion is in order to conform the Torah to the alleged current geological evidence against the real Mabul story, then such a distortion is not necessary because, as we will see shortly, there is no way to anticipate what the geological aftermath of the Mabul should look like to geologists; if the reason for the distortion is to change the Torah to conform to the scientific “evidence” of an uninterrupted civilization, then the distortion is useless, because it is clear from Torah Shebal Peh that the Mabul literally obliterated all of mankind except for Noach and company.

To begin with, the glaring omission from Torah Shebal Peh and our Mesorah of even a hint to any of the above interpretations of the Mabul makes it clear that such interpretations are simply not the way our sages understood this entire Parsha in the Torah. But although sufficiently conclusive, it’s not only proof by omission that tells us how Chazal Torah Shebal Peh understood the Mabul story:

Chazal tell us that R. Chiya and R. Yehuda saw actual physical effects of the Mabul on Mt. Ararat. Mesholim do not leave physical effects (Zohar 58, 82).

The Mabul water was not water as we know it. It was not fluid like water but had a thicker consistency (Sanhedrin 108a), and came from both the ground and the sky. And it didn’t merely rain and bubble up. The air and the ground themselves turned into water (according to the Ran – see Abarbanel (7:17) who has a different interpretation). The water that came from the ground was boiling hot (Zevachim 113a, Pirkei R. Eliezer 22) - hot enough to obliterate the flesh of the animals (Zohar 1:48). The flood waters caused the flesh of the people and animals to turn into water (Ramban 7:18). The water that came from the sky was cold as snow (Zohar 202). Each drop that fell from the sky was heated in Gehennom (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 53a – Note: There is such a thing as a Gehennom of cold [shel sheleg] as well as a Gehennom of heat [shel aish] – the Mabul waters contained both – Zohar ibid). But although the waters were hot enough to burn the flesh off the wildlife, they did not harm Noach in the Tevah, nor Og who was hanging on to it, because miraculously, when the waters neared theTeivah they were cool enough to protect the occupants of the Teivah from the heat that was devastating the rest of the world (Zevachim ibid).

The “waters” surgically destroyed what Hashem wanted them to destroy – but that which Hashem did not want hurt, remained untouched. This miraculous liquid, whatever its physical makeup, was treated with an other-worldly heat and an other-worldly chill that were designed to enforce the Heavenly verdict by means of the two types of Gehinnom. This Hellwater punished the humans and it punished the animals. It spared the fish because there was no heavenly verdict to punish the fish (Kiddushin 13a, Zevachim 113a). And it spared Noach and his company as well.

But it wasn’t only the Hellwater that was unnatural. Nature was turned on its head. The sun rose from the west and set in the east (Avos D’Rav Nosson 32, Sanhedrin 108a); the roles of the sun and the moon were altered (Yalkut Reuveni Noach) ; the entire earth tilted off its axis – cold climates found themselves near the equator and hot climates were suddenly freezing (see Malbim 7:22). The lifespan of creatures, and the productivity of the world itself changed after the Mabul (Bereishis Rabbah 34). The Maharitz Chiyus in Nidah (23a) says the Mabul caused geologic upheavals that created mountains and valleys where previously there were none.

The entire world was obliterated by the Midas Hadin that reigned, except Noach, his company, and his Teivah, which had a power like the Heavenly Teivah that can withstand intense Din. Had Hashem not prepared theTeivah, the entire world would have been destroyed (Zohar Tetzaveh 143).

Noach’s sacrifice after the Mabul repaired (nisbasem) the world, but not completely – when the Jews accepted the Torah on Har Sinai they fixed the world and the Destroyer [that was active during the flood] was permanently gone (Zohar Pekudei 115).

All flesh was destroyed but the flesh of humans was the first to be obliterated. Even though some animal bones remained undestroyed, they were still obliterated “from the earth” -- they were forced deep into the ground by the tremendous pressure of the waters (Malbim 7:23).

This Mabul was not merely “local.” It destroyed all humankind. Pharoh mistakenly decided he needn’t worry about Hashem bringing a Mabul down on his nation, because Hashem swore never to bring another Mabul. His mistake: “Hashem [promised] not to bring a Mabul on the entire world, but on one nation, He could still bring a Mabul” (Sotah 11a). In other words, when Hashem promised never to make another flood, He did not include in that promise not to make local floods. He only promised not to make another flood like the one he made, which was not local, but universal.

Also: “When judgment was made against Sedom, it had been determined to destroy only Sedom but not the entire world, because Rachamim was mixed with Din, as opposed to the Mabul, which destroyed the entire world and all those living in it.” (Zohar Noach124).

“’And [Hashem] destroyed everything in existence on the face of the earth, except for Noach etc.’ (Bereishis 7:23). And except for Og Melech haBashan … and except for Eretz Yisroel” (Pirkei R. Eliezer 23)

“Even the foundation of the millstone was destroyed [in theflood] … even the dust of Adam HaRishon was destroyed [in the flood]” (BereishisRabbah 28:3). See Ramban 8:11.

When the flood was over, “the water that came from up above was swept away by the wind (air); the water that came from down below was swallowed [back] into their place.”(Seder Olam 4 – see Ramban 8:1). The waters still had an effect on the earth until Shlomo HaMelech built the Bais Hamikdash (Tanchuma 17).

This is but a small sampling. The Mabul waters were other-worldy; the way the flood came was supernatural; the way the flood dissipated was supernatural as well. What geological effect this miraculous destruction and miraculous restoration had on the earth is impossible to anticipate. Was there tremendous pressure? Radioactivity? Changes in the atomic structure of some physical aspects of nature?

And it is very likely that there was much more to the story than our Medrashim tell us. When Hashem returned the earth to an inhabitable state, did He simply reverse the effects of the flood? There is no way to know. Did the Hellwaters and upheaval of nature cause a change the geology of the earth that would later be interpreted as an ice-age that happened millions of years ago? Did it create fossils that seem to have been formed eons ago? Did the fact that different types of flesh were destroyed at different intervals and their bones forced into the ground create different fossil strata? Who knows.

But to say with any accuracy whatsoever that the earth lacks the expected physical evidence of a Mabul is impossible, until, of course, someone can identify what physical evidence exactly we should be expecting. And I don’t see how that can be done.

**Zohar, Noach**

82. Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Yosi were on their way, when they came upon the mountains of Ararat, where they observed some deep ravines which had been left from the days of the Great Flood. Rabbi Chiya told Rabbi Yosi: These ravines are from the days of the Great Flood, and the Holy One, blessed be He, has left them to stay on throughout all the generations to come, so that the sins of the wicked would not be erased before him.

**R. Dovid Zvi Hoffman**

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**R. Gedalya Nadel**





**R. Michael Hattin, The Universal Flood**

Perhaps the simplest solution to the conundrum of the Ramban, who rightfully could not imagine all of the world's creatures and their needs being crammed into an ark of utterly inadequate proportions, is to suggest that not all of the creatures boarded. Not all of humanity was destroyed, and not all of the world was covered with 8000 meters of water! But this author further maintains that such a reading, while according with Rabbinic opinions that imply as much as well as with human reason with which God graced us, would NOT DIMINISH ONE IOTA from the Parasha's most enduring lessons, for these teachings have nothing to do with physics and geography and everything to do with the moral and spiritual state of mankind. Are these lessons of the Flood any less meaningful if the rains did not fall upon the Patagonian highlands or else the Australian outback? One who would so maintain has failed to internalize the Parasha's most salient features and has instead grasped onto its minor features.

Judaism demands of its adherents that they accept certain fundamental doctrines, but the universality of the Flood is not one of them. While no one has the right to emend the words of the Torah or to deny the received traditions concerning its commands, with respect to the Torah's narrative portions there is much room for interpretation and even for disagreement. Let us conclude with another citation from the Ramban, this one from our own Parasha concerning the chronology of the Flood. Concerning this chronology, Rashi had adopted the problematical interpretation of the Seder Olam Rabba and Ramban refuted his reading on purely textual grounds, offering a different chronology in place of Rashi's. He introduces his novel interpretation with the following telling words: "In some places Rashi himself takes issue with Aggadic Midrashim and exerts himself in order to explain the straightforward meaning of the text. His example thus gives us license to do likewise, for there are seventy facets of Torah interpretation, and many Midrashic sources preserve legitimate differences of interpretation between our Sages" (commentary to Bereishit 8:4).