

A discussion in the spring of 2015 between me (“bwv549”) and “tmgproductions”, a pastor(?) and blogger for the Grace with Salt site on the global flood.

I’ll include all relevant comments leading to and following the discussion on the global flood for completeness.

Why do so many go from mormon to faithless? [original post by tmgproductions]

I am not mormon, I have observed this sub for a while. I was wondering why most of the posts I see are mormons who go from mormonism to no faith instead of mormon to Christianity. In other words why does the baby get thrown out with the bath water?

[dblagent007]

The same analytical tools we used on the bath water (mormonism) can also be used on the baby (religious belief in general) with largely the same result (throw out junior and his dirty bath water).

[tmgproductions]

I see where you are going, I just think mormonism is intellectually indefensible while Christianity is.

[bwv549]

This is exactly the reasoning of believing Mormons: “well if Mormonism isn’t true, then what would you do, go be a [Catholic/Baptist/Evangelical]? (everyone laughs)”

Although Mormons don’t obsess over finding the flaws in other religions, at least on their mission, a Mormon will spend plenty of time inspecting the truth claims of Christianity and poking holes in many of them (the ones that contradict Mormon teaching, in particular).

The whole premise of Mormonism is built on the idea that Christians have it wrong. Or is your interpretation of the Bible **among all the gazillion Christian sects** the one that is correct because *finally* somebody came along who was finally honest and smart enough to figure out exactly what they meant 2000 years ago?

Christianity is not intellectually defensible, IMHO. Perhaps it boasts fewer testable claims than Mormonism (therefore it is easier to prove Mormonism false), but that is not a feather in your hat.

What claims would you like to defend? I am happy to hear you out.

If you want, we can start with any of these:

- How do we even know that the Bible books were written by the authors that we attribute to them? ([consider these arguments](#))

- Spontaneous “resurrection” (Lazarus effect) is a well-known medical phenomenon. When Christ was “resurrected” he still had the prints, etc, which is what we would expect from such an event. How can we be sure that Christ was resurrected?
- What proof do you have of creation ex nihilo?
- Why did it require the creation of a new word (“trinity”) to describe the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost that is described in the NT if the Bible is sufficient?
- Are you prepared to defend the story of Adam and Eve and Noah’s flood as a global event? I’d love to discuss these in more depth. If you don’t accept a literal interpretation of these events, why not?
- Are you prepared to defend the > 900 year ages of people in the Bible?
- Are you prepared to defend standard Christian morality: that a serial killer/rapist on death row who confesses Christ and “repents” will go to eternal bliss while a child born somewhere in Asia to Hindu parents who is abused their whole life and then dies in a natural disaster at the age of 7 (without confessing Christ) will burn in endless hell? [Sam Harris articulates this point nicely](#)
- If God called prophets across the millenia, why would he just stop? Do we not need prophetic guidance today? Or is the unity of Christian doctrine and faith evidence that we have all we need?
- Are you prepared to defend the virgin birth of Christ?
- Is the God of the OT really the same God as the NT? They seem to have such different character.

There are a few to get you started.

[bwv549]

A couple of afterthoughts:

I consider myself “Christian” in the sense that I want to incorporate all the great teachings of Christ into my life and I deeply respect Christ. I haven’t lost that aspect of my Christianity since deciding Mormonism isn’t for me. I just find little evidence to support the supernatural components that are not readily explained by coincidence, hyperbole, or natural phenomena. But, in the spirit of Christian brotherhood (you may not accept me as Christian given my unorthodox views and what not, but so be it), I welcome you here and appreciate the dialog.

[bwv549]

Many teachings in Mormonism (either originally or that developed later) were a response to deficiencies in Christianity.

- Baptism by immersion addressed the fact that many didn’t baptize the same way Christ was baptized.
- Baptism for the dead addresses the problem of how to deal with those that didn’t hear about Christ and died.

- The distinct members of the Godhead and corporeal nature of God was a response to contradictions of the trinity with many NT scripture.
- The heavy emphasis on works addressed the too heavy emphasis on grace alone and helps to reconcile many verses from the NT.
- The teachings on the fall of Adam (e.g. the fall of Adam was part of the plan of God and not a mistake) addressed the wacky Christian teaching that God just let Adam screw everything up for everyone.
- Mormon teachings on authority addressed inconsistencies in the way authority was transferred in the NT and how Christians deal with authority.

etc. But just because Mormonism isn't true doesn't eliminate the deficiencies in modern Christianity.

[tmgproductions]

I'm not interested in discussing many of those, but I am a creation apologist. So yes, I believe in a literal creation/flood and people who lived over 900 years old. Any questions?

[bwv549]

Sure, are you open to a discussion on those topics (e.g., flood/creation)?

I happen to be writing a document on the argument against a global flood right now, so I somewhat recently went through all the hebrew words in Genesis related to the flood and also the Greek associated with key NT verses that are used to support a global flood (I don't know either language, of course, but can still appreciate the transliterations). In addition, I'm familiar with the best arguments against a global flood and for evolution. I was a creationist at one point in life, but as I investigated the matter fully I was persuaded otherwise by the evidence. One of my buddies in grad school (blazingly smart fellow) was a YEC at heart, but over time even he accepted that he was probably wrong on the idea (he just wanted to see what he could do to bolster YEC ideas by computationally studying protein networks). Finally, I've been a biochemistry research scientist for many years, and I've done research in phylogenetics. If you're willing, I can toss out what I think are the best arguments against the creationist viewpoint and global flood and you can respond.

The best argument I've heard proposed for proving the creationist POV goes like this (from my YEC friend): if we can show that there was a truly massive influx of information (as might be measured by Shannon entropy, for instance) that dwarfed the information content available in the entire system, all within a very short amount of time, then we have good reason to believe that some outside, intelligent entity intervened with the system. (e.g., think cambrian explosion but try to quantify the information influx).

That is a testable hypothesis, IMHO, and one which I would respect. However, I've not yet seen any convincing demonstrations along these lines.

Anyway, I'd love to go through things methodically—I always learn new things, have a chance to better understand how somebody else views the evidence, and I can

find weaknesses in my own viewpoint (that's my favorite thing about Reddit, really). Even if I disagree, I will always acknowledge the limitations in the research, and I will disagree respectfully. You'll get my best arguments and links to the primary research literature where applicable/available (unfortunately lots of primary research is behind a paywall and I am no longer at an academic institution with broad access).

[tmgproductions]

I have yet to do much research into the Cambrian explosion, but it is intriguing from a YEC view.

Right now I am most fascinated with genetic entropy. Basically the concept that natural selection in its strongest form cannot keep up with the influx of deleterious mutations resulting in a net loss to the genome. And if this is the case, how can that process ever have given us what we have today. This seems to confirm a creationist prediction that we were created pristine and have been (for lack of a better term) de-evolving since creation (winding down).

I made this infographic to better explain: <https://gracesalt.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/money.png>

As for the science, here is a collection of 19 quotes on genetic entropy from secular journals: <https://justpaste.it/ynd>

And here is an article with the architect of genetic entropy (a former evolutionist, now creationist because of this evidence) defending his position against several normal responses: <http://creation.com/genetic-entropy>

[bwv549]

I'm familiar with the general idea (created pristine, then devolved) but wasn't familiar with the specific argument of genetic entropy. Thank you for sharing. It is an interesting hypothesis, and it is testable to boot.

Have you carefully considered rebuttals to genetic entropy? I read through what you posted, and then looked to see if any had already responded to the genetic entropy claims. I came across [this response](#) and read through some of it. I only have time for one today, but the first issue regarding Kimura's distribution of mutations looks to be a clear misunderstanding on Sanford's part.

So, did Sanford misrepresent Kimura? (I'm not suggesting that he did this intentionally or with deception in mind, just that it happened)

[bwv549]

Biggest problems with the idea of a global flood at 2348 BC (using [Ussher chronology](#)), loosely 2300-2500 BC.

1. The primary argument in favor of a global flood is that it says there was a flood that covered the whole earth in the Bible. However, there are very good reasons derived from the text itself to believe that the flood only covered the *land* and destroyed everything off of the land. This argument has been [articulated elsewhere](#), but basically you can go read the account in Genesis and substitute

land everywhere you see the word earth, and this is consistent with a whole host of other scriptures in Genesis and the rest of the bible. Why did Noah need to send out a dove if he could somehow tell that the floods had covered the entire globe? The story itself reads perfectly consistent with a local flood event once you understand the meaning of the word *eretz*.

2. tree-rings, varves, and speleothems - About the earliest any biblical literalists will place the flood is at 2500 BC. Many individual trees have been cored or stumped and found to have tree rings going back [well before 2500 B.C](#) and there are *living trees* with cores going back to 3047 BC. Even creationist dendrochronologists [will maintain that](#) a) The tree ring data, if interpreted at face value, is a fatal blow to the global flood hypothesis b) all efforts at proving the data unsound have been thus far unsuccessful (and be aware that the idea that seems most promising for proving this data wrong, ‘time-staggered repeated disturbances’ is not capable of refuting *individual* trees records) c) all biological studies of bristlecone pines show a single ring per year under a wide variety of circumstances. Correlation with fossilized trees takes the record back [unbroken 11,750 years](#). Varve deposits go back [at least 40,000 years uninterupted](#). Again, please note that the creation of varves requires seasonal changes. Even if we postulate 2–3 varves deposited per season, that still leaves us with a record extending back 13,000 years. Same thing for speleothem data. You can argue that natural processes were somehow drastically different from what they are now, but the varve, tree ring, and speleothem data do not support this and are orthogonal measures and each—independently—suggest there was no global flood at the suggested time and producing the suggested effects.
3. All kangaroo-like fossils are found in and around Australia ([example1](#), [example2](#)). What are the odds of this scenario?: all kangaroos lived in Austrailia. A male and female traveled from Australia (pangea makes the trip easier but then makes it more difficult to explain why early kangaroos just happened to stay in the Australian region rather than spreading elsewhere). After the flood, those two kangaroos make the long journey back to Australia (maybe God wanted to make Australia weird or something) or were carried by boat? I have seen many creationist attacks on the Bill Nye argument related to a fossil trail or the mechanism of travel back to Australia, but that is really the weaker question. The real question is: what are the odds that the distribution of fossils and current fauna match up under the global flood scenario? And how did that happen? But if God is able to magically transport kangaroos to and from the ark, why not just selectively kill the humans and/or animals that needed killing in the first place?
4. The dizzying richness of plants, animals, insects, and parasites seems drastically incompatible with an Ark-like bottleneck of ~4500 years ago—nevermind the logistics of housing and caring for all those animals. I’ve heard the idea of taking small animals, but that suffers from the migration problem (how do baby animals migrate to the ark?). Again, the amount of divine intervention required just to sustain the lives of that many animals seems far above the

work required to selectively kill all the bad people in the world. My wife has a BS in zoology, so we've spent a long time in museums and thinking about animal diversity. For instance, there are 91,000 insect species and an estimated 73,000 *undescribed* species of insects in North America alone ([source](#)). YECs get around the number of species by invoking the idea that God only needed a representative of each family (i.e., "kind"). Still, that requires that animals evolved at an extraordinarily fast rate in order to create all the species and their distribution today.

5. Was *everyone* in the world really wicked? All of them except Noah and his family totalling 8 people? Or was Noah's family the only righteous family in the *land*. Again, what are the odds that *all humans* were grossly wicked across the entire planet? Statistically, this seems improbable.

So, let's summarize: there are two ways to interpret the flood account and still hold that the Bible was telling the truth about Noah, a local flood occurred, or a global flood occurred. The local flood: 1) best fits the description of the bible and usage of the word *eretz*, 2) requires no manipulation of the varve, speleothem, or treering data, 3) doesn't require radical and statistically improbable animal migrations and improbable feats of animal husbandry 4) is most consistent with the richness and distribution of plant and animal life found on the earth today and the fossil record 5) doesn't require that all people on the globe were simultaneously wicked.

edit: formatting

[tmgproductions]

A local flood makes absolutely no sense and cannot account for the geology of the earth within a young-earth timeline. But if it was a global flood, a catastrophic event that rapidly sped up what we today interpret as gradual processes — then we are back in line.

No need for a boat or animals with a local flood. Just spend the 100 years of warning moving. Also you have this problem: <https://cdn-assets.answersingenesis.org/img/articles/wow/local-flood.jpg>

As for tree rings and even many other dating methods - we would not expect the uniform/gradual normal processes to be the same in the time before the flood, during the flood, or immediately after the flood. We're not arguing that tree rings don't form at one per year TODAY, just arguing that they may not have always behaved that way in the unobserved past.

[bwv549]

... We're not arguing that tree rings don't form at one per year TODAY, just arguing that they may not have always behaved that way in the unobserved past.

But, say, for the bristlecone pines — it is the *same* tree, and all evidence suggests that they make one layer per year. Is there good evidence to suggest that the earth's

cycles were *drastically* different going back in time?

Between varves, speleothems, and tree-rings you have 3 phenomena, from different parts of the world, that all show a consistent pattern over time (i.e., nothing drastically different about the depth of layers, for instance). I am in awe that you can so blithely dismiss such direct evidence. Those evidences alone are extremely powerful given their orthogonality. How good is the evidence that the annual cycle was wildly different going back just a few thousand years ago? We have, for instance, [written records from the Egyptians](#) that take us back to (and often beyond) the approximate year of the flood. Any indication that the annual seasons were wildly different back then in their writings?

[tmgproductions]

You ask for “good evidence” but I fear you and I differ on what that means. If I asked for good evidence for the existence of George Washington or William Shakespeare you would probably firstly go to a history book to tell me about his life or a book of his poetry, etc. I believe the Bible is a reliable authentic history book of a time we can no longer observe. I believe it is inspired by God and thus the ultimate source of absolute truth by which I then interpret all other evidence. Without that source we could argue over different evidences all day long. I’ve got this... well I’ve got this.. well I’ve got this... etc etc etc. There really wouldn’t be a way at the end of the day to decide whose interpretations were true unless we had a final source to compare our personal interpretations with. Thank God we do have that!

[bwv549]

But why do you believe the Bible is *good evidence* in the first place? You came suggesting that the Mormon way of knowing (spiritual feelings) was inadequate. You must have external validation. I think you are looking at the world like this:

- 1) The Bible is either true or false.
- 2) There is good evidence that some of the events in the bible happened as described.
- 3) Therefore, the Bible is “true” and can be trusted implicitly.

However, there is another possibility: some of the Bible may be accurate and some may not be (exaggeration happens, mistakes happen, history is rewritten by the victors, etc). Even more importantly, the standard evangelical interpretation of the Bible may not be correct in every particular.

There really wouldn’t be a way at the end of the day to decide whose interpretations were true unless we had a final source to compare our personal interpretations with.

Having led a team of scientists in a research laboratory at one point, I have some experience in this area. I agree that deciding between competing theories may be difficult, and is not an exact scientist. However, if one theory requires numerous special cases in order to fit with the data, and another requires no caveats, then the latter is far more likely to be the useful (i.e., “true”) theory. In addition, the

theory that is confirmed by the most number of orthogonal (i.e., independent) pieces of evidence is far more likely to be true (since the probability of two independent events occurring is the product of their probabilities).

So, if we examine the two competing interpretations of Noah's flood A) *eretz* means the whole earth and B) *eretz* means "land" indicating a local flood, then according to these criteria, how do they stack up?

The local flood requires no special cases to explain tree-rings, varve, or speleothem layer data, is consistent with known Egyptian and Chinese written histories, is consistent with the distribution and complexity of species on the earth, and is consistent with the flood story in Genesis itself (sending out a dove, local conditions of wickedness, usage of the word *eretz*, etc.). The global flood hypothesis requires that we invoke special rules to deal with getting all the *kinds* onto and off the ark and then rapid speciation rates to explain the diversity of life on this planet, fantastical seasonal changes to somehow account for the treering, varve, and speleothem data, the fantastical idea that virtually *everyone* on the earth was wicked at the same time and all deserved death by drowning, and that Noah was somehow able to intuit the exact extent of the flooding but needed a dove to determine what conditions were right outside the ark.

I'm not saying the global flood hypothesis is wrong. I'm saying the global flood hypothesis is *highly likely* to be wrong given the level of special cases required to make the global flood model work. I understand the appeal of creationism, having believed it myself for some time. But I also believe that I can do the most good in this world and be the most happy by having a correct understanding of the world around me. I also understand what it takes to try and be objective — it is not easy. I was months away from having a lifelong secure position and decided to walk away from it in part so that I could ensure my own personal objectivity on religious matters. So, I've eaten my own dogfood with this. I believe very deeply that the answers matter and we need to be careful that what we want to believe doesn't get in the way of figuring out what is real. You are clearly a bright fellow and you also care about helping others (rare combo). Sometimes it takes years to reconsider our deeply held beliefs. [please forgive me if I come across, or am, patronizing or preachy, I get that way sometimes] Regardless, I have enjoyed digging deeper into some issues with you and find it productive and enjoyable regardless of the outcome. Unlike many scientists, I think it is great for YECs to continue to try and find good evidence for their theory (even though I think it is highly unlikely to be right at this point) — it ultimately encourages all scientists to not take assumptions for granted and hence ends up being a benefit to knowledge seekers everywhere.

I have some well thought out arguments for evolution vs. special creation (at least, they convince me) if you are interested. Still happy to discuss the flood, or even genetic entropy in greater depth, too.

edit: minor clarification

[bwv549] (2nd response to "A local flood makes absolutely no sense...")

No need for a boat or animals with a local flood. Just spend the 100 years of warning moving

Allowed Noah to save the major species of that area while preaching right up until the time of the flood.

you have this problem

Did Noah get out a tape measure for each mountain, or was his description a general one? Is it at all possible that some exaggeration was involved? What is the likelihood of that compared with the likelihood of all the special cases required to make a global flood mesh with the available data?

[tmgproductions]

preaching right up until the time of the flood.

There is nothing in the account that infers that Noah tried to save anyone from the flood.

Is it at all possible that some exaggeration was involved

I prefer not to interpret the Bible as exaggeration. To me, the Bible is the only source of absolute truth by which all other accounts need to be interpreted through.

all the special cases required to make a global flood mesh with the available data

I would suggest not judging the ancient unobserved past by the uniform gradual processes we observe happening in nature today. If you're interested, check out this blog I wrote on that topic...

<https://gracesalt.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/the-4-ages-of-earth/>

[bwv549] (3rd response to "A local flood makes absolutely no sense...")

A local flood ... cannot account for the geology of the earth within a young-earth timeline

True. YECs use the flood as a crutch for trying to fit the data to a YEC viewpoint. It forces YECs to discount tons of very straightforward data in an effort to fit the data to their strained interpretation of the Bible.

A local flood makes absolutely no sense ...

Geologists agree that there were local catastrophic floods ([for example](#)) related to the melting ice from the last ice age. I have driven over the Northwest and seen the evidence myself for the draining of the massive lake Bonneville.

edit: clarification