Flood Geology and Why it Matters

I will begin with a word about science. Many people, especially non-scientists, but to some extent scientists themselves are drawn into this misunderstanding, have a misguided understanding of what science is and what the goals of science as an enterprise are. This is at least partially due to the absence of even rudimentary training in the philosophy that undergirds science in our undergraduate training in the sciences and even in many graduate programs. As a result, we sometimes hear scientists or at least people with advanced degrees in the sciences proclaiming that some idea or other is a proven fact, or that someone who holds an idea different from their own is somehow “stupid, ignorant or wicked.”

 Science is never about “proof,” a construct limited to mathematics and logic. Instead, scientists are supposed to be engaged in an “open-ended search for truth” about the natural world. In such a pursuit, every hypothesis deserves at least cursory consideration. Arbitrarily eliminating explanations because they come from outside the realm of one’s experience is narrow-minded, and scientists at least like to be thought of as broad-minded. Yet some scientists (I consider them to be a vocal minority), do express rather testily their abhorrence of ideas that may originate in the Bible. Without getting into motives, this bigotry has set up the contest between two groups.

One group consists of those who claim that Darwinism is the panacea for all questions of origin. Such a position seems to have at its base a religious-like commitment to ideas that are far outside the realm of experimental science. It is abundantly clear even to many of the adherents of evolution that belief in Darwin’s theory of origins is a faith commitment to a position supported by precious little data. In the second group are those who, while scientists as much as the first group, choose to believe that the Bible account of origins is not only correct, but can be the basis of valid scientific, testable hypotheses that will give them superior insights into the natural world. After all, in science, an idea is a good idea, not because it came from the Bible, or Darwin, but because it inspires research and correctly predicts the outcome of as yet untried experiments.

And this brings us to a proper consideration of flood geology, that is, the hypothesis that there was in the not-too-far distant past a global catastrophe of epic proportions that destroyed the face of the earth as it was and deposited the fossil-containing sediments we find on the earth presently. Such an event must by its very nature be detectable on a grand scale, and the account in Genesis is fertile ground for hypotheses relating to the condition of the earth today.

For example, if a contemporary geologist working within the standard model of geology tells us that a particular layer of fossil-containing rock was laid down over 30 million years, another geologist with the Biblical perspective might predict that the layer was deposited much more quickly. He then sets out to test the two models to see which suits the data better. The second geologist has two advantages over the first: he or she has a starting point that inspires confidence, a theory that is rooted in experience and conviction; and he has a broader array of possibilities open to him, some of which the first geologist would never consider.

No real scientist should ever harbor seriously the idea that what he or she was doing would prove anything about one model or the other. That is not a goal of science (although, unfortunately, it is sometimes the goal of scientists). Rather, the scientist would hope that if he was working with a good model, the results would come out more often as predicted than otherwise. A good model in science is one that permits the adherents to more effectively learn about the natural world. Once the effectiveness of a model is demonstrated, it can become a recruiting tool, to attract other practitioners. Unfortunately, the acceptance of a new belief system in science is just as traumatic as it is in religion, and something akin to conversion must accompany the change, and as Kuhn points out, often times the practitioners in the competing paradigm must die off before change comes. So I don’t see that happening any time soon.

So Flood Geology can have an important role in how we operate as scientists, particularly those of us who are working in geology. We don’t just think other men’s thoughts after them; we have to fight for every inch of ground, and the struggle and the conflict are often traumatic. But every victory, every breakthrough is immensely rewarding and when we finally come to the point of publishing, it is a high moment. We can do revolutionary geology because we are not constrained by the mundane. That is an exciting place to be.

But is that the only thing that matters about flood geology? Is there more? Yes. There is a spiritual dimension as well. Just as the doctrine of creation provides an explanation for the world of biology, so recognition of the reality of the flood provides a framework for understanding the world of geology. The Bible itself scores the truthfulness of the flood account as the basis for our confidence in the truthfulness of Christ's return (Luke 17: 26-30) and the trustworthiness of God's deliverance (2 Pet 2:4-9). The Flood is also prominent in another passage in 2 Peter we will get to in a minute. But first, let us look at the rise of the secular version of geology.

Up until the early 1800’s geologists were generally believers in the Biblical account. William Smith, the father of stratigraphy, was a devout creationist as were other prominent figures. During the late 1700’s a Scottish physician and inventor by the name of James Hutton wrote a treatise on geology in three volumes. He called it “The Theory of the Earth” and the first two volumes were published in 1795 before his death. In these volumes Hutton laid out his revolutionary thinking about the earth. His conclusions were astonishing:

 *But if the succession of worlds is established in the system of nature, it is in vain to look for anything higher in the origin of the earth. The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning,—no prospect of an end.*

In these words, Hutton both planted the seeds for the growth of a secular theory of geology and began the fulfillment of a 2000 year old prophecy. From this seed would come the popularization of his ideas by Playfair, and the assimilation and reformulation of them by Charles Lyell whose resulting three volume treatise “Principles of Geology” thoroughly infected the thinking of the young Charles Darwin and led him to his own secularized and Godless view of nature. The rest is very interesting and sobering history.

The time period just before Christ is to return, variously referred to as “the time of the end” or “the last days” is broadly recognized by students of bible prophecy as terminating in 1798 at the close of the 1260 years prophecy. Without trying to support the day, suffice to say the ending of this prophetic period is easily recognized by its effect on the early Advent Movement. But it is this time that brings together our concern to know the importance of the Flood, and the beginnings of a new and specious apostasy. I n 2 Peter 3:3 and onward, we read the following prophecy:

*In the last days there will come scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying “where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they are willingly ignorant of: that by the Word of God the Heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*

This remarkable prophecy, nearly 2000 years before Hutton, uses nearly the same language to describe the condition of the world we have inherited as a result of Hutton’s errors: a world in its last days, that sees no prospect of an end, because it sees no vestige of a beginning. These scoffers willingly choose to ignore God’s miraculous creatorship, the basis of our worship, the source of our redemption and the hope of our rescue from this world. They also choose to ignore God’s destruction of the world and its inhabitants in a catastrophic worldwide flood, a spiritual reminder of the judgment and a physical reminder that the flood is the only basis we have that gives us hope of understanding of the true geologic history of the earth. Does that make belief in the flood important? I think that it does. Especially to those of us who wish to study the earth and to correctly understand its history. To me that is important.