

The Fountains of the Great Deep and the Windows of the Heavens
in the Genesis Flood Narrative: Chronology

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Abstract. The biblical Flood narrative identifies two distinct sources for the waters that overwhelmed and destroyed the earth. Genesis 7:11 records the commencement of the Flood with the opening of both sources, and Genesis 8:2a reports their closing. Genesis 7:12 describes the concomitant rainfall as falling upon the earth “for forty days and forty nights.” Genesis 8:2b declares that the rain was restrained or withheld. Two major issues arise with these two water sources: (1) of what did each consist¹ and (2) how long did each continue? Both of these questions must be resolved by means of a careful exegesis of the Hebrew text. This paper focuses on the second question alone — the chronology involved with the water sources.

Key words. Flood, fountains, great deep, rain, 40 days, 150 days, prevailing, recession

1. Introduction

In the previous paper, exegetical analysis of the Flood narrative in Genesis 6–9 focused on the identification of the mechanisms (the rain from “the windows of heaven” and “the fountains of the great deep”). In the present paper the exegetical focus shifts to establishing the chronology

¹ For my answer to this first question see “The Fountains of the Great Deep and the Windows of the Heavens in the Genesis Flood Narrative,” *Journal of the Creation Theology Society* 1 (2022): 125–36. .

involved, specifically: when those mechanisms ceased functioning. As with the previous study, the aim is to provide geologists and geophysicists with biblically sound data enabling them to search for comparable physical evidence befitting the biblical chronology. Thus, this study also leaves geological or geophysical discussion to the appropriate experts in those fields.

Interdisciplinary interactions between biblical scholars and creation scientists can proceed along different paths of research. One path can include a detailed historical review of pertinent literature.² Another path deals with the exegesis of the textual unit itself. Post-exegetical commentary research can provide one means of identifying when the exegete has not analyzed every element of the text or has missed some reasons to support the rejection of one potential interpretation and accept another interpretation. \This paper takes the typical exegetical approach dealing with the biblical text as the primary source of information for properly and accurately interpreting the textual unit.

First, in the following content I present a preliminary translation of the pertinent textual unit with notes explaining translation choices. The translation helps to establish the context of the chronological statements involving the mechanisms for the Flood within the narrative. Second, I identify the structure of the textual unit. Identifying the structure helps to establish the flow of the text, the function of chronological statements, and the unity of the text. Third, I analyze the grammatical and syntactical elements of the textual unit. These elements establish the coherence of the text. Fourth, I identify the interpretive significance of the data from steps two and three. Fifth, I compare the results of the previous step with past and present interpretations by other biblical scholars. This brief survey identifies the variety of interpretations that have drawn attention to this particular topic regarding the chronology of the Flood mechanisms. Finally, I

² One superb example of this approach is Kurt P. Wise, “‘Fountains’ and ‘Windows’ in Genesis 7:11: An Historical Survey,” *Journal of the Creation Theology Society* 1 (2022): 3–50.

offer a concluding summary of the arguments supporting what I consider the best interpretation and its potential implications for future studies by both biblical scholars and creation scientists.

2. Preliminary Translation of 7:10–8:7 with Notes³

Rather than repeat the translation of 7:1–8:12 as published in the first paper,⁴ here I provide the translation of only the portions under direct scrutiny for the investigation of the chronology involved with the mechanisms identified in the Flood narrative. The translation represents a literal approach to the original language rather than a dynamic approach. For some readers it might read less smoothly than they might desire (see footnote 7 for one example).

Genesis 7:10 After seven days,⁵ the flood⁶ waters were⁷ upon the earth.⁸

³ A preliminary translation is exactly that, preliminary. The translation gets refined and revised with each exegetical analysis I pursue. Readers may note a few changes from my 2003 translation in my paper with geologist Roger Sigler, “Hebrew and Geologic Analysis of the Chronology and Parallelism of the Flood: Implications for Interpretation of the Geologic Record,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Creationism: Technical Symposium Sessions*, ed. by Robert L. Ivey, Jr. (Pittsburgh, PA: Creation Science Fellowship, 2003), 398–99 and my 2008 translation in the chapter “Noah’s Flood and Its Geological Implications,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. by Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 260–67.

⁴ Barrick, “The Fountains of the Great Deep and the Windows of the Heavens in the Genesis Flood Narrative,” 127–30.

⁵ **Underscored bold font** highlights the chronologically significant phrases of the text involving periods of time (as compared to actual dating markers). Robert E. Longacre, “The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative,” *Supplement Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 1 (March 1979): 106 indicates that v. 10 here is “somewhat transitional” — in other words, serving to introduce vv. 11–16. See discussion below in **4.1 Analysis of 7:10** for the function of וַיְהִי (wayhî).

⁶ For הַמַּבּוּל (hamabbûl), see Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000), 541 (מַבּוּל) and P. Stenmans, “מַבּוּל mabbûl,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 16 vols., ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. by Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 8:60–65.

⁷ The translation “were upon the earth” sounds somewhat awkward or stilted. However, it accurately represents the Hebrew perfect *hâyû*. A more dynamic translation would be “came upon the earth,” but the English makes it sound like the translator has misidentified the verb as a Hebrew imperfect.

⁸ Heb. וַיְהִי עַל-הָאָרֶץ, וַיִּמְדוּ הַמַּבּוּל הַיּוֹם, *ûmê hammabbûl hâyû ‘al-hā’āreṣ*. Cp. similar phraseology in 7:6, וַיִּמְדוּ הַמַּבּוּל הַיּוֹם, *w⁹ hammabbûl hâyâ mayim ‘al-hā’āreṣ*, in which “waters” occurs after the verb as a means of defining the first use of *mabbûl* — “waters upon the earth” in this textual unit (7:1–10); see John Goldingay, *Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch, ed. by Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 133, who translates *mayim ‘al-hā’āreṣ* “as water onto the earth.” H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 292–93, “the word *mabbûl*, ‘catastrophe,’ is modified by the apposition ‘water’ to show what kind of a catastrophe this was.”

7:11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month — on that day⁹ *all the fountains of the great deep burst open and the windows of the heavens were opened* **12** and¹⁰ *the rain came upon the earth*¹¹ **forty days and forty nights**. ...

7:17 Thus the flood came upon the earth **for forty days** and the waters increased and lifted the ark and raised it from upon the earth. **18** The waters prevailed and increased exceedingly upon the earth and the ark moved upon the surface of the waters. **19** The waters prevailed very exceedingly upon the earth and all the high mountains were covered which were beneath the heavens. **20** Fifteen cubits upwards the waters prevailed so the mountains were covered. **21** Thus all flesh perished: that which crept upon the earth among the fowl, the beasts, and the living creatures, and among all the swarmers that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind — **22** all which had the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils from all which *were* on the dry land died.¹² **23** Thus He obliterated all living things which were upon the surface of the ground — from mankind to beast, to creeper, and to the fowl of the heavens — they were obliterated from the earth, so only Noah and those with him in the ark remained. **24** Thus the waters prevailed upon the earth **one hundred and fifty days**.¹³

⁹ **Bold text** (without underscoring) identifies the specific dating markers providing either the start or the ending of an event or action.

¹⁰ Heb. וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל-הָאָרֶץ, *wayhî haggešem ‘al-hā’āreš*. Longacre, “The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative,” 106–8 takes *wayhî* as a main-line verb: “and (there) was” along with וַיָּבֹאוּ (*wayyābō’ū*, “and came”; v. 15) and וַיִּסְגֹּר (*wayyisgōr*, “and shut”; v. 16). He reasons that *wayhî* “seems to be the completion of the preceding suffixal verbs which occur in circumstantial clauses” (107).

¹¹ **Bold italicized text** identifies the pertinent event or action which the associated temporal marker qualifies temporally.

¹² By delaying the verb to the end of this sentence, the text emphasizes the death of all breathing creatures outside the ark. The placement also brackets vv. 21–22 with וַיִּיגַו (*wayyigwā*) and מָתוּ (*mētū*), as noted by Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 297: “As a single unit, these two verses begin and end with synonymous verbs (*wayyigwā* and *mētū*, respectively).”

¹³ Longacre, “The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative,” 113 identifies vv. 17–24 as the “peak (climax)” of the Flood narrative. Even a superficial reading of the text confirms the identification. The author’s style and flow bring readers along to this high point in the narrative. As Longacre also points out, 8:1–5 presents the first

8:1 Then God remembered Noah and all the living creatures and all the beasts which were with him in the ark. So God caused a wind to blow over the earth and the waters decreased. **2** *Thus the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed and the rain from the heavens was restrained.* **3** And the waters turned back from upon the earth, going and returning. *So the waters lessened from the end of one hundred and fifty days.* **4** Thus the ark rested **in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month**, on the mountains of Ararat. **5** And the waters were going and lessening **until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month**, the tops of the mountains appeared.

8:6 **When it came to the end of forty days**, Noah opened the hatch of the ark which he had made **7** and he sent out the raven — and it went out, going out and returning until the waters dried up from upon the earth.

3. Structure of 7:10–8:7

3.1 *Time-Reference Structures*

Numerous commentators have pointed out the two different time-reference structures of the Flood narrative:¹⁴

Table 1. Dates Relating to Noah’s Age

Dates	Events	Text Reference
Noah’s 600 th year	Year in which event commences	7:11
2 nd month, 17 th day, 600 th year	Water sources commence action	7:11
7 th month, 17 th day, 600 th year	Ark rests on Ararat range	8:4
10 th month, 1 st day, 600 th year	Decreasing waters reveal mountaintops	8:5
1 st month, 1 st day, 601 st year	Ground surface visibly drying	8:13

“postpeak episode” in the narrative (118). The 150 days referenced in both 7:24 and 8:3 designate the chronological occurrence of the narrative’s peak (climax). In his opinion, the text depicts the Flood waters as “prevailing at crest for 150 days,” at which time God intervenes to cause the waters to begin subsiding (119).

¹⁴ Cf. John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, ed. by W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 100.

2 nd month, 27 th day, 601 st year	Ground surface dried; departure from the ark	8:14–15
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Table 2. Periods of Days

Period Length	Events	Text Reference
7 days	Time remaining before onset of the Flood; Noah begins loading the animals	7:4
40 days & 40 nights ¹⁵	Pre-announced duration of initial rain	7:4
7 days	End of the 7 days before the onset of the Flood	7:10
40 days & 40 nights	The rain comes upon the earth	7:12
40 days	The Flood (<i>mabbûl</i>) occurs	7:17
150 days	The waters prevail over the earth	7:24
150 days	The waters begin to decrease	8:3
40 days	Time between mountaintops appearing and sending a raven out	8:6–7
[7 days]	Unmarked time between sending a raven out and sending a dove out	8:8 (cp. 8:10)
7 days	Second period of time before again sending a dove out	8:10
7 days	Third period of time before sending a dove out for final time	8:12

The first table of chronological markers tie the events to Noah’s age at the time of the events. No matter whether the months were twenty-eight days (the reference to the 27th of the month in 8:14–15 does not allow for months of any less) or thirty days in length, the total Flood event comprises a year plus ten days. Because 7:11 and 8:4 give a time of five months and 7:24 and 8:3 identify the same period as one hundred and fifty days, a thirty-day month applies in the Flood chronology.¹⁶ The focus of this study remains on the length of time the two major mechanisms for the Flood were functioning, so addressing the matter of the total number of days for the entire Flood must be treated in another study.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hartley, *Genesis*, 100 omits this period reference from his chart.

¹⁶ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 376 makes the same observation.

¹⁷ See Barrick and Sigler, “Hebrew and Geologic Analysis of the Chronology and Parallelism of the Flood: Implications for Interpretation of the Geologic Record,” 398–404 for my initial study of Flood chronology.

Observing the pattern of periods of days (Table 2), a number of commentators have gone on to identify the numeric parallels with a chiastic arrangement.¹⁸ Adding a variety of parallel materials within the narrative to those numeric parallels has resulted in an overall chiastic arrangement for the entire Flood account. This arrangement is not without its problems, however.¹⁹

3.2 *Chiastic Structure of the Flood Narrative*

The two tables above demonstrate one difficulty for most identifications of a chiastic (also known as palistrophic) arrangement of the Flood narrative: the periods of days are not as consistently patterned as claimed. The chiasm seems to work well only if the first “40 days and 40 nights” (7:4) are ignored. If the time statements are treated as two sets of two periods (“7 days” and “40 days and 40 nights”; 7:4a, 4b, 10, 12), no such equivalent pairing occurs at the end of the chiasm. In addition, the text identifies three 7-day periods involving the dove (8:10, 12), even though it omits direct statement of the time period in 8:8.

A second difficulty for identifying a chiastic arrangement involves disagreement between commentators about the central element of the chiasm. Dorsey²⁰ and Cotter²¹ find the center at 7:21–24, the Flood’s climax and destruction of all life on earth except what God preserves inside the ark. Bernhard Anderson,²² Goldingay,²³ Wenham,²⁴ and Hartley²⁵ place the center at 8:1,

¹⁸ E.g., Goldingay, *Genesis*, 136–37.

¹⁹ David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, ed. by Jerome T. Walsh, Chris Franke, and David W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), xxix takes the view that such “structures are generally speaking more in the exegete than in the text.”

²⁰ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 52.

²¹ Cotter, *Genesis*, 51–52.

²² Bernhard W. Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 1 (1978): 38.

²³ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 136.

²⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1, ed. by David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 156. See, also, Gordon J. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978): 338.

²⁵ Hartley, *Genesis*, 101.

God remembers Noah. Even more than the center of the chiasm, however, commentators “disagree on the number and identification of the parts.”²⁶ Wenham recognizes the subjectivity involved in creating such an extensive chiasm: “Nevertheless, there is certainly an element of artificiality involved in creating a palistrophe on such a grand scale, particularly in mentioning the number of days in reverse order as here.”²⁷ To be fair, Wenham also responds to this difficulty by suggesting that perfection in artistry can lose the viewer’s interest. In other words,

Total formlessness is incomprehensible. Absolute repetitiveness is dull. Our writer avoids both extremes. While the palistrophic structure provides him with a framework which draws attention to the main point of the story, he does not allow it to override his concern to reproduce the contents of his sources faithfully.²⁸

Interestingly, Wenham suggests that the 40 days in 7:17 acts merely as a palistrophic parallel to the 40 days of 8:6. In other words, the 40 days are actually part of the 150 days, but teased out to construct the literary symmetry of the narrative.²⁹

4. Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis

4.1 *Analysis of 7:10*

וַיְהִי לְשִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים
*wayhî P šib‘at hayyāmîm*³⁰ //

²⁶ Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 51.

²⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 157. See, also, Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” 340, “It should also be pointed out that certain items in the story do not fit the palistrophe exactly. For example, Noah’s sacrifice (viii 20 ff.) does not form part of the pattern.”

²⁸ Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” 340.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

³⁰ The Masoretes divide each verse by means of accents to indicate the joints or seams in the text determining units of thought. Cf. Mark D. Futato, Sr., *Basics of Hebrew Accents* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020); E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed., trans. and rev. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910), 59–62 (§15); and P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 3rd repr. of 2nd ed., with corrections (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 56–63 (§15). In narrative, the primary disjunctive marker consists of the *’atnāḥ* (looks like an inverted “v” under the marked syllable) marking the logical mid-point of a verse. I’ve divided the verses primarily in accord with the placement of the *’atnāḥ* — with a

After seven days, //

ומי המבול היו על-הארץ:

ûmé hammabbûl /³¹ *hâyû 'al-hā'āreṣ*
the flood waters / were upon the earth.

The use of *wayhî* (*wayyiqtol* verb form) at the beginning of this verse indicates a circumstance of time with the following verbal clause using the *qatal* form (*hâyû*) in the main clause fronted by the subject (“the flood waters”) as the focal point. Verse 10 emphasizes the calculation of the number of days that had “passed” (possible narrative use of *wayhî*),³² in contrast to v. 11, which establishes the date.³³ Verse 10 provides closure for the early statement in v. 4, “Indeed, after seven more days I will cause it to rain upon the earth” (*כִּי לַיָּמִים עוֹד שֶׁבַע יָמִים*) *ki P yāmîm 'ôd šib'â 'ānōkî mamṭîr 'al-hā'āreṣ*) and completes the introduction to the Flood narrative (7:6–10).

double solidus (/) marking its location in both transliteration and translation. An explanation is offered for any exception.

³¹ A secondary disjunctive accent often consists of the *zāqēp-qātôn* (looks like a colon above the vowel it marks). This accent often acts as a quarter marker. The solidus (/) indicates the placement of the *zāqēp-qātôn* in the Hebrew verse.

³² *wayhî*, however, is followed by *ל* (*l*) prepositional phrase best understood as temporal in function: lit. “for seven days” meaning “seven days’ duration”; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111 (§4.1.10c). Due to the prepositional phrase, there is no grammatical subject for *wayhî* (in other words, the translation “seven days passed” would be contrary to this grammatical fact; cf. Drew G. Longacre, “Navigation Points in Text: Methodological and Linguistic Preliminaries for the Study of the Semantic, Syntactic, and Discourse-Pragmatic Functions of *וַיְהִי* in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Literature*, ed. by Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling, 705–38 (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 716. Therefore, this use of *wayhî* merely marks the temporal statement as it introduces the closing verse of the section, is not verbal, and does not consist of a summary (cp. Longacre, 721, who has not completed his analysis of *wayhî* in the Flood narrative, but seeks to describe its potential functions in paragraph-level syntax). By context the duration of time is past, so the translation “after” most accurately represents the meaning of the temporal clause.

³³ Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. by W. G. E. Watson, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 86 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990), 62 (§38) translates this clause as “And after seven days” He takes the function as circumstantial temporal subordinate to the following *qatal* (*hâyû*).

How does this time reference fit with what appears to be two onsets of the *mabbûl* (vv. 6 and 10) and two entrances into the ark (vv. 7–9 and 13–16)?³⁴ In true Mosaic style, the author then proceeds to provide greater detail starting with v. 11.³⁵ Wenham notes that “the second panel [7:11–24?] does not simply repeat, but is more precise than the first [7:1–10?].”³⁶

Context governs the more complex dual function of *wayhî* here. No matter which way the exegete takes the function of *wayhî* in this verse, it does not impact establishing the chronology for the commencement and cessation of the Flood mechanisms.

4.2 Analysis of 7:11–12

בְּשֵׁנַת שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לַחַיֵּי־נֹחַ [11]
bišnat šib‘at šēš-mē’ōt šānâ laḥayyê-nōaḥ /
 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, /

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בְּשַׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
baḥōdeš haššēnî / b’šib‘â-‘āsār yôm laḥōdeš //
 in the second month, / on the seventeenth day of the month — //

בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתְּחוּ׃
*bayyôm hazzeh nibq’û kol-ma‘y’ nōt t’ hōm rabbâ / wa’ārūbbōt haššāmāyim
 niptāḥû*
 on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst open / and the windows of the
 heavens were opened

³⁴ Adherents to the Documentary Hypothesis, as well as evangelical exegetes, ask these questions — see Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Book of Genesis in the Revised Version with Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 96–97 for his list of repetitions and discrepancies which he takes as evidence for the Flood narrative being a composite of different Israelite traditions; and, Longacre, “Navigation Points in Text,” 706, who identifies the issue as making it possible to think the Flood “would have come in between at least two separate entrances of Noah into the Ark—cf. 7:7, 13, 15) and to think “the forty days of flooding would have occurred twice and the waters would not have begun to rise until after the rain had ceased.”

³⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 235 demonstrates this same structure in the Babel narrative with two “parallel panels.” Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 187–88 explains how Gen 2:4–25 picks up on “the skeletal telling” of 1:1–23 as “a thematic elaboration.” See Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “History or Story? The Literary Dimension in Narrative Texts,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. by David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti, 54–73 (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2003), 64–65 who refers to the occurrence of recapitulation in the Flood account. He also discusses panel structuring in the use of repetition in Hebrew narrative (69–71).

³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 178. He does not provide verse references for these “panels,” so I have sought to identify them by means of his discussion of structure (156).

[12] וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל-הָאָרֶץ

wayhî haggešem 'al-hā'āreš //
and³⁷ the rain came upon the earth //

אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה:

'arbā'îm yôm / w'arbā'îm lāy'lâ
forty days / and forty nights.

“On that day” (*bayyôm hazzeh*, v. 11) makes it clear that the Flood mechanisms commenced their actions on exactly the 17th day of the 2nd month of Noah’s 600th year. This verse opens the section containing vv. 11–16. Historical narrative in the Pentateuch includes other examples of such date formulas (cf. 8:4, 5, 13, 14; Exod 40:17; Num 1:1; 9:1; 10:11; 33:38; Deut 1:3).

In v. 12, *wayhî* functions as a narrative verb expressing the dynamic stative (“came” or “became”) without serving as a temporal circumstantial for a following verb — there is no other verb in this verse. With the narrative action closed in v. 12, v. 13 transitions to establishing the time of Noah, his family, and the animals entering the ark (vv. 13–16). Boarding the ark takes place “on that very day” (*b'ešem hayyôm hazzeh*),³⁸ the day the Flood mechanisms began to send the waters over the earth (v. 11).

4.3 Analysis of 7:17–24

Analyzing this section of the text unit relies on the pattern of repetitions as much as on the grammar and syntax of the text.

[17] וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל-הָאָרֶץ

wayhî hammabbûl 'arbā'îm yôm 'al-hā'āreš //
Thus the flood came **upon the earth** for forty days //

³⁷ See fn. 10 above. With *wayhî* potentially completing the idea presented by the previous two verbs, the clause could indicate result and could be translated “so.”

³⁸ Literally, “on the bone of that day,” a Hebrew idiom expressing exactitude; Koehler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 870 (I עֶצֶם 5). It could also express “on that selfsame day” by extension of “bones” as the core being or “self”; K.-M. Beyse, “עֶצֶם *ešem*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 16 vols., ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. by David E. Green, 11:304–9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 305. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 181, “a fairly rare phrase used to stress the memorableness of a particular occasion, e.g., Abraham’s circumcision (17:23, 26), the exodus (Exod 12:41, 51), Moses’ death (Deut 32:48).”

וַיִּרְבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־הַתְּבִיחַ וַתָּרָם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
wayyirbû hammayim wayyis'û 'et-hattēbâ / wattārām mē'al hā'āreš
and the waters increased and lifted the ark / and raised it from **upon the earth**.

[18] וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ
wayyigb'û hammayim wayyirbû m'ōd 'al-hā'āreš //
The waters prevailed and increased exceedingly **upon the earth //**

וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתְּבִיחַ עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:
wattēlek hattēbâ 'al-p'né hammāyim
and the ark moved **upon the surface of the waters**.

[19] וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ
w'hammayim gābrû m'ōd m'ōd 'al-hā'āreš //
The waters prevailed very exceedingly **upon the earth //**

וַיִּכְסּוּ כָּל־הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים אֲשֶׁר־תַּחַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם:
waykūssû kol-hehārîm hagg' bōhîm / 'āšer-taḥat kol-haššāmāyim
and all the high mountains were covered / which were beneath the heavens.

[20] חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה מִלְמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם
ḥāmēš 'esrēh 'ammâ milma' lā / gābrû hammāyim //
Fifteen cubits upwards / the waters prevailed //

וַיִּכְסּוּ הַהָרִים:
waykūssû hehārîm
so the mountains were covered.

[21] וַיִּגָּוַע כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר | הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
wayyigwa' kol-bāsār hārōmēs 'al-hā'āreš /
Thus all flesh perished: that which crept **upon the earth /**

בְּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבַחַיָּה וּבְכָל־הַשֹּׁרֵץ הַשֹּׁרֵץ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
bā'ôp ûbabhēmâ ûbahayyâ / ûb' kol-haššeres haššōrēs 'al-hā'āreš //
among the fowl, the beasts, and the living creatures, / and among all the swarmers
that swarmed **upon the earth,**

וְכָל הָאָדָם: <i>w'kol hā'ādām</i> and all mankind —

[22] כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפָּיו
kol 'āšer nišmat-rûaḥ ḥayyîm b'apāyw /
all which had the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils /

מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בַּחֲרָבָה מָתוּ:

mikkol 'ăšer behārābâ mētû

from all which *were* on the dry land died.

[23] וַיִּמַח אֶת-כָּל-הַיְקוּם | אֲשֶׁר | עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה

wayyimāḥû 'et-kol-hayqûm 'ăšer 'al-p^onê hā'ădāmâ /

Thus He obliterated all living things which were **upon the surface of the ground**

— /

מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּמָּחוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ

mē'ādām 'ad-b^ohēmâ 'ad-remēs w^o'ad 'ôp haššāmayim / wayyimmāḥû min-hā'āreš //

from mankind to beast, to creeper, and to the fowl of the heavens — / they were obliterated **from the earth**, //

וַיִּשָּׂאֵר אֶדְ-נֹחַ וְאֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּיבָה:

wayiššā'er 'ak-nōaḥ wa'ăšer 'ittô battēbâ

so only Noah and those with him in the ark remained.

[24] וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ

wayyigb^r.rû hammayim 'al-hā'āreš //

Thus the waters **prevailed upon the earth** //

חִמְשִׁים וּמֵאָת יוֹם:

ḥāmiššîm ûm^o'at yôm

one hundred and fifty days.

In this section, *'al-hā'āreš* makes seven appearances (vv. 17a, 17b, 18a, 19a, 21a, 21b, 24a)³⁹ with “upon the surface of the ground” (v. 23a) and “from the earth” (v. 23b) also being used. “Upon the surface of the waters” (*'al-p^onê hammāyim*, v. 18b) follows the first three occurrences of *'al-hā'āreš* and “upon the surface of the ground” (*'al-p^onê hā'ădāmâ*, v. 23a) follows the second set of three occurrences of *'al-hā'āreš*. Three times the verb “prevailed” is used (vv. 19a, 20a, 24a) — the first is followed by “upon the earth” in v. 19a and “all the high mountains were covered” in v. 19b, the second is followed by “the mountains were covered” in

³⁹ The same phrase occurs also in 8:1 and 7 (the last words for that section).

v. 20b and “upon the earth” in v. 21a, and the third is followed by “upon the earth” in v. 24a. The first four follow an inverted pairing of “earth” – “mountains” – “mountains” – “earth.”

Of the two verses with three lines (vv. 21, 23), the first ends with “all mankind” (v. 21c) and the second with “Noah and those with him” (v. 23c). These are two of three specific mentions of humans in 7:17–24 (see *mē’ādām* in v. 23b). For the climax⁴⁰ of the Flood narrative (7:21–24), “all mankind” (*w³kol hā’ādām*) certainly draws attention.⁴¹ As Hamilton puts it, “The Hebrew of v. 21 takes eight words to describe the loss of animal life, but only two words to describe the demise of human life.”⁴² Verse 21 lists all creatures and mankind in the order God created them.⁴³ In verse 22 *nišmat-rûaḥ ḥayyîm b³’apāyw*, “the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils” reminds readers and hearers of 2:7 (*wayyippaḥ b³’appāyw nišmat ḥayyîm*, “and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”). As pointed out in the notes on the translation of vv. 21–22,⁴⁴ *wayyigwa’* and *mētû* bracket the two verses thus emphasizing the death of all breathing creatures outside the ark. This bracketing can also indicate a potential chiasmic arrangement of these two verses depending also on the parallel *kol* clauses identifying those who experienced death in the Flood:

A *wayyigwa’*
 B *kol-bāsār hārōmēs ‘al-hā’āreṣ*
 ...
 B *kol ‘āšer nišmat-rûaḥ ḥayyîm b³’apāyw ...*
 A *mētû*

⁴⁰ Cotter, *Genesis*, 58 makes this identification in his literary analysis.

⁴¹ To visually highlight this point, I’ve placed these words in a box.

⁴² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 297.

⁴³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 183; Bruce K. Waltke, and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 140.

⁴⁴ See fn. 12 above.

Both Garrett and Andersen argue that the chiasm supplies one piece of evidence demonstrating “the artistic unity and solemnity” of the whole Flood narrative.⁴⁵ The repetitions and parallels highlight the theme of global destruction of all terrestrial and aerial life outside the ark.

4.4 Analysis of 8:1–5

[1] וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל-הַחַיָּה וְאֶת-כָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה
wayyizkōr ’ēlōhîm ’et-nōaḥ / w’ et kol-haḥayâ w’ et-kol-hab’ hēmâ /
’ăšer ’ittô battēbâ

Then God remembered Noah / and all the living creatures and all the beasts / which were with him in the ark.

וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם:
wayya’ăbēr ’ēlōhîm rūaḥ ‘al-hā’āreṣ / wayyāšōkkû hammāyim
 So God caused a wind to blow **upon the earth** / and the waters decreased.

[2] וַיִּסְכְּרוּ מַעֲיָנֹת תְּהוֹם וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם
wayyissākērû ma’yōt t’ hōm / wa’ārūbbōt haššāmāyim
 Thus the fountains of the deep / and the windows of the heavens were closed

וַיִּבְלֹא הַגֶּשֶׁם מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם:
wayyikkālē’ haggešem min-haššāmāyim
 and the rain from the heavens was restrained.

[3] וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַלֹּדֶד וְשׁוֹב
wayyāšūbū hammayim mē’al hā’āreṣ / hālōk wāšōb
 And the waters turned back from upon the earth, / going and returning.

וַיִּחַסְרוּ הַמַּיִם מִקֶּצֶה חֶמְשִׁים וּמֵאֵת יוֹם:
wayyaḥs’ rū hammayim / miqṣēh ḥāmiššîm ūm’ at yôm
 So the waters lessened / from the end of one hundred and fifty days.

[4] וַתָּנַח הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי
wattānaḥ hattēbâ baḥōdeš hašš’ bî’î /
 Thus the ark rested in the seventh month, /

בַּשְּׁבַע־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
b’ šib’â- ‘āsār yôm laḥōdeš //
 on the seventeenth day of the month, //

⁴⁵ Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Bible* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 22 citing also Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 39–40.

עַל הַרֵי אֲרָרָט:

'al-hārē 'ārārāt
on the mountains of Ararat.

וְהַמַּיִם הָיוּ הֵלֹךְ וְחָסָרוּ עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי [5]
w'hammayim hāyû hālôk w'hāsôr / 'ad haḥōdeš hā'āšîrî //
And the waters were going and lessening / until the tenth month; //

בְּעֲשִׂירֵי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רֵאשֵׁי הַהָרִים:
bā'āšîrî b' eḥād haḥōdeš / nîr'û rā'sê hehārîm
in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, / the tops of the mountains
appeared.

The biggest grammatical and syntactical issue for this section involves its opening clause: *wayyizkōr 'ēlōhîm 'et-nōaḥ* (v. 1). The use of the *wayyiqtol* narrative verb form actually involves a secondary issue, since the key difficulty has to do with a potential literary theme change in the panel structure of the Flood narrative. How do these verses relate to what precedes in 7:6–24? Boyd asks, “Could 8:1 be at a different time than is conventionally thought?”⁴⁶ The difficulty involves whether the *wayyiqtol* verb form here identifies a sequential action. The implication could be “that God only remembered Noah halfway through the Flood.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the big question is whether there is sufficient evidence or data to treat the lead verb in 8:1 in a totally different fashion for its time placement? Lee Anderson offers the following proposition regarding a potential chronological disjunction:

... the thematic shift from Genesis 7:24 to 8:1 at the height of the account’s pervading chiasmic structure allows for the *possibility* of a unique situation in the chronological progression of the account. ... Cassuto and Chisholm agreed that Genesis 8:1, while

⁴⁶ Steven W. Boyd, “Preface,” in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Literature*, ed. by Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling, xiii–xviii (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), xiv.

⁴⁷ Steven W. Boyd, Thomas L. Stroup, Drew G. Longacre, Kai M. Akagi, and Lee A. Anderson, Jr., “Traacherous Waters: The Necessity for a New Approach,” in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Literature*, ed. by Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling, 29–42 (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 40.

marking the center of the chiasmic structure, did not mark the centermost point in the chronology of the Flood itself but reverted to an earlier chronological point (i.e. the fortieth day of the Flood). Had there been seamless thematic progression (i.e. no notable shift in the account's topic or focus content), this possibility would be unlikely. However, as there is a considerable thematic shift occurring at this point, there remains the possibility of major chronological disjunction in which the beginning of episode 3 overlaps the concluding statement of episode 2.⁴⁸

Chisholm, whom Anderson mentions above, points to Gen 8:1 as an example of the flashback technique:

After a description of the devastating effects of the Flood and Noah's isolation (7:17–24), the theme shifts to God's concern for Noah and the removal of the waters (8:1). In 7:17–24 the waters are described as prevailing over the earth for 150 days, but in 8:1–5 the focus is on their receding between the fortieth and one hundred and fiftieth days. As the theme shifts from judgment to renewal, the scene shifts back to the fortieth day of the Flood, when God began the process whereby he caused the waters to recede.⁴⁹

However, Chisholm concludes that “Verse 2 is not in precise chronological sequence with verse 1.”⁵⁰ He indicates that vv. 2–5 expand on v. 1 to provide some details: how God ended the Flood and the timetable involved. The timetable to which Chisholm refers includes “from the end of one hundred and fifty days” (v. 3). Although he believes the flashback places the “process” preparatory to recession from the 40th day, the text specifies that the actual recession commences

⁴⁸ Lee Anderson, Jr., “Sounding the Structural Depths: Theme Tracing and the Segmentation of the Narrative,” in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Literature*, ed. by Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling, 639–704 (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 702.

⁴⁹ Chisholm, “History or Story? The Literary Dimension in Narrative Texts,” 68.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 68n37.

with the cessation of the mechanisms, which take place “from the end of” (*miqṣēh*) the 150 days, not before. In other words, the flashback merely reminds the reader that the mechanisms began with those first 40 days, not that any of them stopped at the end of those 40 days or at any time prior to the end of the 150 days.

4.5 Analysis of 8:6–7

[6] וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם

wayhî miqqēṣ ’arbā’îm yôm //
When it came to the end of forty days, //

וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת־חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

wayyiptaḥ nōaḥ / ’et-ḥallôn hattēbâ ’āšer ’āsâ
Noah opened / the hatch of the ark which he had made

[7] וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הָעֹרֵב

wayšallaḥ ’et-hā’ōrēb //
and he sent out the raven — //

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְוֵא וְשׁוֹב עַד־יִבְשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:

wayyēšē’ yāšô’ wāšôb / ’ad-y’ bōšet hammayim mē’al hā’āreṣ
and it went out, going out and returning / until the waters dried up from **upon the earth**.

The seeming repetition of *wayhî* and “forty days” appears to be a literary repetition the author used to maintain the unity of the Flood narrative. The use of *wayhî* here consists of the adverbial (temporal) circumstantial clause, rather than making the verb a mainline verb of the narrative itself. The mainline narrational verb in this case is *wayyiptaḥ*, “and opened.” Just as the Flood began when God “opened the windows of the heavens” (7:11) on the first day, Noah “opened the hatch/window of the ark” on the 265th day. The two uses of the verb *ptḥ* comprise yet another literary repetition providing the narrative with literary ornamentation and readers with delight and appreciation.

5. Interpretive Implications

A complication arising with the 150 days as the actual extent of the *mabbûl* involves the final section of the *tôp dôt* (history) of Noah. Noah's *tôp dôt* begins at 6:9, "These are the generations [or, This is the history/genealogy] of Noah" (אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ, 'elleh tôp dôt nōah). It concludes at 9:28–29 with these words:

וַיַּחֲיֶינָה אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל
wayhî-nōah 'aḥar hammabbûl
Thus Noah continued to live after the *mabbûl*

שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה:
š' lōš mē'ôt šānâ waḥămiššîm šānâ
350 years.

וַיְהִי כָּל-יְמֵי-נֹחַ תְּשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה
wayyihyû kol-y' mē-nōah t' ša' mē'ôt šānâ waḥămiššîm šānâ
So all the days of Noah came to be⁵¹ 950 years,

וַיָּמָת:
wayyāmōt
then he died.

The style follows closely that of the genealogy in Genesis 5.

Cassuto observes that "if Noah lived 350 years after the Flood had run its course, that is, after the waters had dried from the face of the earth on the twenty-seventh day of the second month of the six hundred and first year of his life, Noah would have attained, at the end of his days, the age of 951, not just 950 years."⁵² He uses 8:14–15 as the end of the 370-day Flood for his calculation. However, he goes on to point out that a 40-day *mabbûl* solves the problem.⁵³

Unfortunately, Hartley cites Cassuto for mentioning the difficulty, but implies Cassuto took the

⁵¹ This translation attempts to retain the literal force of *wayhî*. A smoother, more dynamic translation might be "totalled."

⁵² U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II, From Noah to Abraham, Genesis VI 9–XI 32*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (1992 repr.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 171.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

landing on Ararat as the end of the *mabbûl*.⁵⁴ He misses the date provided in 8:4 that the ark rested in the range of the Ararat mountains in the 600th year, the 7th month, on the 17th day, which does not add up to Noah living to 951 years. Wenham also notes the potential difficulty, but reasons that it may be resolved by understanding the *mabbûl* to refer to the 40 days comprising “the first destructive phase of the inundation.”⁵⁵

If the *mabbûl* lasted for 150 days, rather than just 40 days, what was the date (year, month, day) of its cessation? With the *mabbûl* starting in the 600th year of Noah’s life, in the 2nd month, on the 17th day of the month (7:11), a 150-day *mabbûl* would end five months (of 30 days each)⁵⁶ later in the 600th year of Noah’s life — in the 7th month, on the 17th day of the month. Therefore, whether the *mabbûl* lasted 40 days or 150 days, Noah’s age at death would still be 950 years.

6. Past and Present Interpretations⁵⁷

Does the Flood last for 40 days (and 40 nights; Gen 7:4), or for 370 days (7:6, 11; 8:13, 14)?⁵⁸

What is the significance of the period of 150 days mentioned in 7:24 and 8:3? The main issue involves 8:2–3, “Thus the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed and the rain from the heavens was restrained. And the waters turned back from upon the earth, going and returning. So the waters lessened from the end of one hundred and fifty days.” Does this

⁵⁴ Hartley, *Genesis*, 115.

⁵⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 203 and cf. 180.

⁵⁶ See arguments for 30-day months here by L. M. Barré, “The Riddle of the Flood Chronology,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41 (1988): 16 and F. H. Cryer, “The Interrelationships of Gen 5,32; 11,10–11 and the Chronology of the Flood (Gen 6–9),” *Biblica* 66, no. 2 (1985): 256.

⁵⁷ For an excellent survey of past and present literature about the chronology of the Flood narrative see Lee Anderson, Jr., “Waves of Opinion: The Chronology of the Flood in Literature Past and Present,” in *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood: Navigating the Flow of Time in Biblical Literature*, ed. by Steven W. Boyd and Andrew A. Snelling (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014), 189–230.

⁵⁸ Cotter, *Genesis*, 50 asks this same question.

indicate that the Flood's water sources (rain and the fountains of the deep) continued for the full 150 days, rather than just 40 days? A variety of views have been taken by biblical scholars.

6.1 *Chronological Inconsistency Due to Multiple Authors/Editors*

Along with other scholars, Cotter indicates that such seeming inconsistencies point to an edited composition joining together at least two different stories of the flood of Noah's time. In fact, he goes on to conclude, "there seems no doubt that two rather different stories about the same general course of events have been combined here."⁵⁹ Samuel Rolles Driver takes the 40 days and 40 nights as the duration of the Flood according to the J (Yahwist) Document of the Documentary Hypothesis — the longer period of time falls to the P (Priestly) Document.⁶⁰ He opines that a hypothetical compiler added the "forty days" in Gen 7:17.⁶¹ The Priestly writer's account specifies 150 days for the prevailing of the waters in 7:24.⁶² But, the debates and analyses arguing over the supposed multiple sources for the Flood narrative bring Cassuto to the opinion that "Anyone who studies the course of this research cannot free himself from the impression that, if the analytical method is capable of producing divergent results, its criteria cannot necessarily be as sound and reliable as many have thought."⁶³ Instead, Cassuto concludes that careful exegetical analysis reveals the beauty and harmony of a highly artistic work testifying to a single skilled author's work.⁶⁴ The "Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis" above in section 4 of this paper affirms Cassuto's conclusion regarding the Flood narrative's beauty and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 51. The same documentarian view is maintained by a number of commentators, including the following: Ryle, *The Book of Genesis*, 96–110. Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga & History*, trans. W. H. Carruth (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), first published in 1901, takes the Documentary position.

⁶⁰ Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis, with Introduction and Notes*, 2nd ed., Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 91.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 93.

⁶³ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II*, 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 34–35.

harmony consistent with a highly artistic work. Such a skilled narrative also argues strongly for a single author as well as for the unity of the text itself.

As Lee Anderson points out, the Documentary Hypothesis questions the unity and coherence of the Flood narrative, denies Mosaic authorship, and is rife with a number of logical fallacies.⁶⁵ Identifying the weaknesses of the Documentary Hypothesis does not mean that without its interference the chronology issue can be easily resolved. The matter is complex, as can be discovered from a survey of the literature and the variety of viewpoints thus revealed.⁶⁶ Twenty-five percent of the literature surveyed by Anderson took the Documentarian position.⁶⁷

On behalf of the Documentary Hypothesis, Wenham concludes that it “may yet be defended, if one is prepared to posit a most ingenious and thorough redactor who blended J and P into a marvellous and coherent unity.”⁶⁸ However, he goes on to conclude, “Yet a simpler and more economical hypothesis would have much to commend it. . . . it is better to think in terms of one epic source which has been reworked by a later priestly editor.”⁶⁹

6.2 40 Days Are Symbolic, Not Necessarily Actual Time

We might also note that some commentators look at the entire Flood narrative as filled with figures and symbolic numbers. For them, the number 40 merely symbolizes the purging of sin or purification, or the overcoming of evil.⁷⁰ Sarna makes this position clear in his *Understanding Genesis*: “the evidence is against a straight-forward historical interpretation of the biblical

⁶⁵ Anderson, “Waves of Opinion,” 192–201.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁸ Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” 347–48.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁷⁰ E.g., Sarna, *Genesis*, 54. Cf. Although he does not take the 40 days as purely symbolic, Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 291 reminds his readers of the significance of the number throughout the Bible: “forty regularly describes a period of trial terminating in the victory of good and the overthrow of evil; see Num. 14:33; Exod. 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8; Jonah 3:4; Matt. 4:2; Acts 1:3.”

narrative.”⁷¹ He concludes that the Flood narrative is merely a symbolic moral story to express a “biblical polemic against paganism.”⁷² As demonstrated in the chronological analysis, there is no need to take the numbers in the Flood narrative as figurative or symbolic. The text treats the numbers for dates and time periods as historical facts.

6.3 *The Matter of 40 Days and 150 Days Effectively Ignored*

Some scholars ignore the issue completely (at least in their published commentaries).⁷³

Anderson’s statistical analysis of literature taking a stance on this matter of how long the Flood’s mechanisms were operational showed that forty-nine percent of the literature he surveyed took no stance.⁷⁴ Ignoring the issue does not adequately respond to legitimate questions about the chronology of the Flood described in the narrative.

6.4 *40 Days Mark Water Sources’ Cessation*

According to some scholars, the rain ceased and the fountains of the great deep were closed after only 40 days.⁷⁵ However, we must divide this interpretation into two groups: one that holds the waters began their recession after the 40 days and one that holds the waters maintained their levels and power until the 150th day. The 150-day period (7:24 and 8:3) presents a challenge to those who think all the destructive power of the Flood took place within its first 40 days. Kidner recognizes this difficulty and concludes with Heidel, Cassuto, and Nielsen that the second

⁷¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 38. This view was also taken by Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, 7–12.

⁷² Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 59.

⁷³ E.g., John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein, 2:1–284 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 79–94; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 73–88; C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 185–92, 256.

⁷⁴ Anderson, “Waves of Opinion,” 228. Some of those sources might include those that take the position described in **6.2 40 Days Are Symbolic, Not Necessarily Actual Time** above.

⁷⁵ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II*, 44. Cf. Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator & Creation* (N.p: Ronald A. Simkins, n.d.), 140, “According to the Yahwist, God wipes out all living creatures with a flood produced by a torrential rainstorm lasting forty days.” Simkins never mentions any other mechanism or period of time.

section of the Flood narrative overlaps with the first section in what they consider typical Semitic style.⁷⁶

Boyd and Smith identify the *mabbûl* as the forty days referred to in 7:4, 12, and 17.⁷⁷ A variety of scholars use this identification to point to one version of the Flood narrative in which “the flood ends when the rain ceases.”⁷⁸ The *Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood* research group following their massive publication in 2014 of their preliminary studies continue to pursue the topic of the text’s 150 days and how that period of time relates to the Flood narrative and the event’s chronology. In his comparative pie chart of chronological perspectives of the extent of the Flood, Lee Anderson indicates that nine percent of surveyed sources hold that the peak of the Flood came on the 40th day.⁷⁹

In contrast to this version, the second version of the Flood narrative, according to scholars like Cotter, displays a chronology that is “remarkably precise, with dates and a calendar that correspond to the life of Noah.”⁸⁰ The results of the grammatical and syntactical analysis presented in this paper falls more in line with this second interpretation.

6.41 40 Days of *mabbûl* Followed by 110 Days of Prevailing Waters

The overall impression of the Flood narrative indicates that “The swelling of the waters is vividly portrayed by the repeated use of the key words ‘the waters prevailed’ to create an

⁷⁶ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 106. Kidner references Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 246 and Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in the Old Testament Introduction*, Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (London: SCM Press, 1954), 99. For Cassuto, see my references to him below. For an introductory description of temporal overlay in narrative texts, see Chisholm, “History or Story? The Literary Dimension in Narrative Texts,” 65–69.

⁷⁷ Steven W. Boyd and Douglas K. Smith Jr., “Genre and Geology: Meaning and Mechanism in Genesis 7:11b,” *Journal of the Creation Theology Society* 1 (2022): 72n97.

⁷⁸ Cotter, *Genesis*, 51.

⁷⁹ Anderson, “Waves of Opinion,” 228.

⁸⁰ Cotter, *Genesis*, 51.

ascending effect.”⁸¹ Northrup suggests a period of stabilization, quieting of the violent movement of waters, and precipitation of sediments for the 110 days following the first 40 days of the *mabbûl*.⁸² Whereas the sum of 110 plus 40 does equal 150, the text itself makes no specific reference to 110 days. Likewise there is no support in the text for a subdued Flood condition after the first 40 days.

6.42 40 Days of *mabbûl* Followed by 110 Days of Declining Waters

Cassuto takes the view that the production of waters ended after 40 days, but that they continued to prevail for 110 more days before declining: “consequently no more water was added to that which already submerged the land; but the layer of water did not subside for a long time, ... It was not till five months after the commencement of the Flood that the first sign of the decline of the layer of water was discernible.”⁸³ Having already decided that the Deluge took place in the 40 days of rain, Cassuto regards the wind as having begun to blow at the end of those first 40 days.⁸⁴ He continues with the assumption that the actions of v. 2 took place at that same point of time.⁸⁵ He recognizes that his view implies that the verbs of this verse might be taken as

⁸¹ Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11,” 35.

⁸² Bernard E. Northrup, “Identifying the Noachic Flood in Historical Geology: Part One,” in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Creationism*, vol. 1 General Sessions, ed. by Robert E. Walsh and Christopher L. Brooks, 173–79 (Pittsburgh, PA: Creation Science Fellowship, 1990), 176. Northrup also held to the sustaining of the prevailing waters until the end of the 150 days, after which the waters began to recede (177). Then, based on Gen 8:1–3 he proposed “a massive oscillation” produced by the repeated onslaught of tsunamis (177).

⁸³ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II*, 44. He later explains that the 40 days of rain were followed by 110 days of the Flood continuing on the earth so that the total time of the Flood prevailing came to 150 days (97). In agreement are: John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. by John King (electronic ed.; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 1:277–78; John Peter Lange, *Genesis or, the First Book of Moses*, trans. by Tayler Lewis and A. Gosman, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Old Testament 1, ed. by Philip Schaff (electronic ed. of a reprint of the 1868 ed.; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 304, 306; Susan A. Brayford, *Genesis: Commentary*, Septuagint Commentary Series, ed. by Stanley E. Porter, Richard S. Hess, and John Jarick (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 268, “Although the rain stopped after forty days and nights, the flooding of the water over the earth continued for 150 days” (note that this is a commentary on the Septuagint’s text of the Flood narrative).

⁸⁴ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II*, 101, “The blowing of the wind must be regarded as taking place immediately after the forty days of rain ...” and “The meaning is not that He remembered at the termination of the hundred and fifty days mentioned in the previous verse” (*ibid.*, 99; the previous verse being 7:24).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 99, “this took place, of course, at the end of the forty days of rain.”

pluperfects (“had [already] remembered,” “had been [already] closed,” and “had been [already] restrained”). However, he quickly objects to taking the verbs in this way, claiming that treatment of the verbs “is certainly incorrect and not in keeping with Hebrew idiomatic usage.”⁸⁶ Instead, he argues that,

The interpretation here must follow the same lines as the explanation we advanced regarding the relationship between the story of Creation and the story of the Garden of Eden. The preceding paragraph tells how the waters prevailed upon the earth, and this episode forms the theme of that paragraph up to the end; whereas this new paragraph deals with a different topic — the first stage of the deliverance of the survivors — and commences the narration of this story from the beginning, although the commencement antedates the conclusion of the episode described above.⁸⁷

According to Cassuto’s reasoning, the action of the wind in 8:1 (starting immediately following the forty days of rain) began to evaporate the waters (which continued to prevail over the earth) and they thus began their subsiding at that time, not after the 150 days.⁸⁸ As he says, “Only 150 days after the commencement of the Flood was the abatement of the waters noticed; till then their might alone was felt, as was stated earlier (vii 24).”⁸⁹ Likewise, Mathews declares that “The abatement of waters ... and the grounding of the ark in 8:3–4 show that the waters

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 99–100. Cassuto is referring to his discussion of Gen 2:5–25 in U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah, Genesis I–VI* 8, trans. by Israel Abrahams (1998 repr.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 96–137. He says of Gen 2:7, “The explanation, given by some commentators, of וַיִּצְרֶה *wayyīṣer* as a pluperfect (*Now the Lord God had already formed*) is simply an unsuccessful attempt at harmonization” (Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I*, 104). Later, in 2:19 he again declares that a pluperfect “cannot be considered seriously” (ibid., 128) and suggests that in the garden “the Lord God now formed particular specimens for the purpose of presenting them all before man in the midst of the Garden” (ibid., 129).

⁸⁸ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II*, 101.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 102.

already started their descent within the hundred-and-fifty-day period.”⁹⁰ This view regarding the subsiding of the waters after only 40 days runs contrary to the text’s insistence that the same mechanisms that initiated the Flood continue to operate for a full 150 days.

Driver takes the “forty days” in Gen 8:6 as a reference to “the entire period of the Flood.”⁹¹ Bernhard Anderson and others understand that the purpose of the first “40 days” (7:17) to be the explanation of “the time required for the ark to be buoyed on the waters.”⁹²

6.5 40 Days Included in the 150 Days⁹³

Dead Sea Scroll 4Q252 dated to 50–1 BC provides one of the oldest commentaries on the Flood narrative. The author of the scroll offers a solution to the difficulty of how the prevailing waters might decrease enough for the ark to come to rest in the Ararat range on the 150th day of the Flood (Gen 8:4). Here is his solution:

Col. I, line 7. And the waters prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days, **8.** until the fourteenth day in the seventh month, the third (day) of the week. At the end of **9.** one hundred and fifty days, the waters came down two days, the fourth day and the fifth day,

⁹⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 377. In n. 54 Mathews notes the agreement of T. E. Fretheim, “Genesis,” *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 392 and Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 298. Cf. also, Steven J. Robinson, “The Flood in Genesis: What Does the Text Tell Geologists?” in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Creationism: Technical Symposium Sessions*, ed. by Robert E. Walsh, 465–74 (Pittsburgh, PA: Creation Science Fellowship, 1998), 468, 470, 472; James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 349.

⁹¹ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 94. Driver explains that “the clause stood perhaps before v. 2^b ‘and (or that) the heavy rain from heaven was restrained’: the compiler, in combining P and J, has transposed it, and made it refer to 40 days after date named in v. 5” (ibid.).

⁹² Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11,” 35; Barrick and Sigler, “Hebrew and Geologic Analyses of the Chronology and Parallelism of the Flood,” 400; Barrick, “Noah’s Flood and Its Geological Implications,” 263n65.

⁹³ Anderson, “Waves of Opinion,” 228 found that seventeen percent of sources surveyed took the peak of the Flood as the 40th day, but argued that the destructive (prevailing) waters were sustained until the 150th day when they began to recede.

and the **10.** sixth day, the ark rested in the mountains of Hurarat (Ararat); it was the seventeenth day of the seventh month.⁹⁴

Goldingay focuses on the palistrophic (chiastic) arrangement of the narrative with its periods of time and dates. He takes the 40 days and nights as included in the 150 days (7:24) and the text as stating the length of the Flood as a solar year.⁹⁵ Wenham takes the same view and states that the 150 days of 7:24 are the same as the 150 days of 8:3.⁹⁶

6.6 40 Days Plus 150 Days Equals 190 Days

There are some commentators, however, who add the 40 days to the 150 days to equal 190 days.⁹⁷ In addition to Murphy, Hamilton takes this view in his *Handbook on the Pentateuch*.⁹⁸ However, this view adds 40 days to the Flood's total length and runs contrary to the text's calendar dates establishing the duration of the Flood.

6.7 150 Days Mark Water Sources' Cessation

Another view interprets 8:1–3 as indicating that the mechanisms for the Flood were not totally shut down until after the 150th day. As Lange quotes Knobel,

The 150 days, within which the destruction was accomplished, include the forty days of storm at the beginning. According to ch. 8:2, the rain continued all through these 150

⁹⁴ Jeremy D. Lyon, *Qumran Interpretation of the Genesis Flood* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 87.

⁹⁵ Goldingay, *Genesis*, 137. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11," 35 also takes the 40 days as included in the 150 days. Likewise, the following: Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 306.

⁹⁶ Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," 344. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 25 takes the same position. It must be noted, however, that Garrett does not understand the text to say that the rain continued for the entire 150 days. Instead, he takes the 150 days to "refer to the time from the beginning of the flood until the water abated enough for the ark to ground" (26).

⁹⁷ E.g., James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), 217. Murphy identifies the 150 days of 7:24 with the 150 days of 8:2, claiming that for half of those days the waters were rising (75 days?) and for half the waters were sinking (*ibid.*, 217).

⁹⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 71. However, although he mentions the 190-day viewpoint in his Genesis commentary and suggests Ezek 4 in the Septuagint as a possible parallel addition of 40 days to a period of 150 days; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 293, 298.

days. Still must we distinguish its more moderated continuance from the first storm of rain in the forty days.⁹⁹

Lange himself agrees by stating that the initial stage of the Flood involved “forty days of the flood-storm” and “one hundred and ten days, thereupon, of steady rain, and of the steady rising of the flood—so in general one hundred and fifty days.”¹⁰⁰ By timing the Flood from its inception to the grounding of the ark on the Ararat range, Blenkinsopp identifies the 150 days as the length of the Flood.¹⁰¹

In his survey, Anderson found that forty-four percent of sources examined took the view that the Flood’s peak came on the 150th day.¹⁰² The conclusions reached by this paper agree most fully with this view.

6.8 *Implications from Survey of Views*

No biblical exegete worth his salt can rest with what appears, so far, to be a majority viewpoint. We must not *count* commentaries or scholars, we must *weigh* them. In other words, we must allow the text itself to speak louder than all the scholars who have studied the text and published their conclusions. So it must always be with surveys — they do not prove anything and no survey actually looks at every single source ever published. It is the text that must speak and that’s why the text has been given priority in this study. The exegetical analysis presented in the

⁹⁹ Lange, *Genesis*, 306 citing August Knobel, without full bibliographic identification — I was unable to locate the exact same citation in *Die Genesis* (Leipzig, Germany: Weidmann’sche Buchhandlung, 1852), 85, available online, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb10410913?page=,1&q=%22150+Tage%22>, accessed 28 December 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Lange, *Genesis*, 309. Other commentators also pinpoint the closure or cessation of the mechanisms for the Flood at the end of 150 days: Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 202 (“the waters prevailed 150 days. It was not until after this period that the ‘fountains of the deep’ and the ‘windows of heaven’ were shut (8:2) and the waters began to retreat.”), 204 (“global eruptions and downpours continuing for 150 days”).

¹⁰¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 139.

¹⁰² Anderson, “Waves of Opinion,” 228.

first sections of this paper demonstrates the text's support of only one of the views observed in the commentaries.

7. Concluding Summary

Genesis 7:11–12 identifies the forty days and nights of rain with the two major mechanisms, implying that both contribute to the rainfall regardless of the length of time involved. In 8:1–3 the text says those same mechanisms continued for the first 150 days of the initial and prevailing stages of the Flood. At this point in my research, I am yet to be convinced that the thematic or panel transition at 8:1 offers sufficient evidence to alter the traditional and seemingly normal reading of the text. In other words, without further research and data I choose to retain the interpretation that sees the major mechanisms of the Flood continuing their actions throughout the first 150 days of the Flood. I continue to follow the research of Steve Boyd and his group with keen interest.

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