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DOI: https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF6-25Horst

# Does Second Peter Require a Global Flood?

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*Several recent scholarly treatments of the flood of Genesis navigate dissonance between mainstream science and a global understanding of the ancient deluge by positing a local flood behind the biblical account. However, these analyses specifically address literary and genre aspects of Genesis, and do not resolve the fact that a global perspective on the ancient deluge appears to be important to the rhetoric of 2 Peter 3:3–13, since the flood foreshadows and provides evidence for a future eschatological catastrophe of global/cosmic proportions. This article proposes an exegetical solution to this problem based on the recent treatment of this text by Ryan P. Juza. Juza argues that the passage focuses on the reliability of God's word to effect judgment for wicked humans, and that it portrays the flood as smaller in scope than the anticipated cosmic conflagration. Numerous Jewish interpretations of the flood from the second temple period lend additional historical-cultural plausibility to the sort of interpretation proposed by Juza. It follows that 2 Peter need not present a canonical challenge to a local understanding of the flood.*

Keywords: 2 Peter, Genesis, Noah, flood, New Testament, cosmology, conflagration

The great flood narrated in Genesis (chaps. 6–9) is among the most widely known stories of the Bible. From a young age, Sunday school students are presented with images or toys depicting Noah, his ark, and the pairs of animals who were preserved during the great deluge. Older churchgoers often wrestle with the theological and ethical questions that follow from this account of God's sweeping judgment against a wicked generation of humans, or ponder the parallel Jesus draws between the primordial flood and the future coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27).

In science-faith circles, it is likewise well known that the prospect of a global flood presents staggering challenges vis-à-vis a modern, scientifically informed worldview. The various questions covered by interlocution between flood geologists (who argue for a global flood) and more-mainstream scientists (who argue against it) are too extensive to enumerate here, but geologist Carol A. Hill's 2002 article "The Noachian Flood: Universal or Local?" can serve as a suitable survey of the most important issues.[1] In short, the acceptance of a worldwide ancient flood requires one to diverge seriously from mainstream scientific consensus at many points—even then, numerous serious unresolved problems remain.

Science-faith scholars who reject the reality of an ancient global flood have attempted to address the Genesis account in two major ways. The first has to do with the genre classification of the early chapters of Genesis (generally chaps. 1–11). Some scholars classify this portion of Genesis as *myth*. The idea is that the primordial stories are not meant to recount historical events, but rather communicate timeless truths about

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human existence, or make theological contrasts between the one true God of Israel and the polytheistic myths of other ancient Near Eastern cultures.[2] If the flood story of Genesis is considered a myth, then the text can faithfully accomplish its purposes without having to serve as a detailed account of what "really happened."

The second way scholars have attempted to address difficulties with the flood is to argue that a local rather than global flood lies behind the narrative of Genesis. For example, Hill interprets the early chapters of Genesis using her "worldview approach," in which ancient stories are interpreted relative to the worldviews of those who wrote them. Hill understands the biblical deluge as a real local flood that wreaked widespread havoc on the whole of the world that was known to the ancient Mesopotamians who recounted the event to later generations.[3] Hill argues that while a global flood is implausible, it is conceivable that a major ancient flood could have occurred that was essentially confined to the alluvial plain of the Fertile Crescent.[4]

Taking a slightly different approach to the "local flood" idea, Tremper Longman and John Walton understand the Genesis flood as a hyperbolic account of a local event that has been exaggerated for theological purposes.[5] These authors and others classify the early chapters of Genesis as *theological history*, in which real events lie behind the biblical accounts, but they are crafted with a priority on communicating theological truths rather than accurate historical information.[6]

Although the strategies just mentioned are potentially helpful for thinking about Genesis in particular, it must be borne in mind that subsequent biblical texts also mention the flood (see Isa. 54:9; Ezek. 14:12–23; Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:18–22; 2 Pet. 2:5, 3:5–6), and that claims made about the flood narrative in Genesis may or may not be transferrable to all of these passages. So, if a reference to the flood in one of these other writings also presents a problem to a modern scientific worldview, it is not resolved simply because a problem with Genesis is resolved.

In particular, the second epistle of Peter presents a challenge that to my knowledge has not previously been satisfactorily addressed in science-faith discourse. Peter[7] sets the biblical flood in parallel to the coming day of judgment, which involves a fiery catastrophe and the elimination of ungodly people:

> [I]n the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless. (2 Pet. 3:3–7)[8]

Here Peter describes the flood as the perishing of the "world" (Gk. *kosmos*), which by Peter's time would have been understood as much larger in scope than the world known to ancient Mesopotamians (or for that matter, the world known at the time when Genesis was composed). Further, Peter sets this event in parallel with an eschatological judgment that involves the disruption of the entire cosmos, seemingly to establish the flood as a precedent for such a cosmic catastrophe.[9] The text of 2 Peter thus presents exegetes with good reasons to understand the flood to be worldwide and comprehensive. So, one can make the case that a global flood is essential to the rhetoric of this passage. In other words, Peter's message is arguably invalidated if a global flood never happened. Suffice it to say, this passage presents an interesting situation for those who would resolve difficulties between science and the Genesis flood by interpreting it as a local flood. This explains why 2 Peter plays a salient role in John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris's seminal text on creation geology, *The Genesis Flood*,[10] and it continues to serve as a key biblical proof text necessitating a global flood in recent discussions.[11]

In this article, I will further explicate the potential problem 2 Peter presents for local interpretations of the biblical flood. I will then propose an exegetical solution to this problem based on the recent treatment of this text by Ryan P. Juza. Juza highlights textual elements of 2 Peter that underscore the greater scope of the eschatological catastrophe in comparison to the flood. The focus of the rhetoric of this passage is not per se that the biblical flood establishes a precedent for cosmic disruption, but that God's word is effectual for both creation and judgment. At multiple points, I will supplement Juza's argumentation along these lines with additional supporting evidence, especially in the form of comparative passages from Jewish sources that represent the literary and cultural world from which 2 Peter emerged. Ultimately, I argue that the exegetical insights here presented give us good reason to conclude that the rhetoric of 2 Peter regarding the biblical flood need not stand as a stumbling block for proposals involving a local understanding of the flood.[12]

It is beyond the scope of this article to build a case for a particular interpretation of Genesis, or to offer a comprehensive argument that twenty-first century Christians should adopt a local understanding of the flood. My goal here is much more specific: I address a lacuna in recent scholarly works that posit a local flood. Specifically, key recent scholarly treatments do not address the challenge presented by 2 Peter.

Further, it is important to clarify at the outset that I do not posit that Peter understood the flood to be local. If we were able to ask Peter how much land he thought the flood covered, I imagine he would say, "all of it," much as he would probably affirm that the sun revolves around the earth and the stars are fixed to a solid celestial structure.[13] The question with which I am concerned is not what Peter thought, but what the rhetoric of this biblical text of 2 Peter necessitates. If the text appeals to the flood to show that God has effected cosmic destruction before, and thus can be expected to do so again, then a local understanding of the flood seems to pose a significant problem vis-à-vis biblical authority. If, as I argue, the text appeals to the flood to attest the reliability of God's word to effect judgment for wicked humans, then a local understanding of the flood does no real violence to the rhetoric of the passage.

## Genre Differences Between Genesis and Second Peter

Insofar as recent authors categorize the flood of Genesis as *myth* or *theological history*, this categorization is predicated on an assessment of the genre of Genesis, or at least the initial chapters of Genesis, based on various characteristics of the composition. For example, Longman and Walton's interpretation of the deluge of Genesis relies on the identification of similarities between this material and ancient Near Eastern flood stories like those found in the epics of *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis*.[14] They also argue that the flood account is part of a repeating pattern of sin, judgment, and grace that occurs throughout the first eleven chapters of Genesis and establishes the context for God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[15]

These aspects of their analysis of the Genesis material do not reasonably apply to the diluvial allusions in 2 Peter, for several reasons. First, although a good case can be made for a literary relationship between the Genesis flood and a tradition of polytheistic ancient Near Eastern flood stories, we have no reason to imagine that the same literary tradition would have been known to the author of 2 Peter.[16] Second, while modern scholars identify a recurring pattern of sin, judgment, and grace in the early chapters of Genesis, it is by no means a given that the author of 2 Peter would have identified such a pattern in the text, as modern literary analysis is conducted under massively different assumptions than ancient biblical interpretation.[17] At the least, we find no indication that such a pattern bears on the references to the flood in the epistle (2 Pet. 2:4–10, 3:3–7), so it is highly questionable whether this aspect of the crafting of Genesis is relevant to 2 Peter. In short, Longman and Walton's analysis of Genesis cannot readily be applied to flood references in 2 Peter.

Following her "worldview approach," Hill posits that the Genesis flood should be understood within the worldview of the ancient Mesopotamians who initially passed on the story. The historical flood was a plausible local flood that covered the alluvial plain of the Fertile Crescent, which potentially constituted the whole of the world as it was known to the people living in that region at the time.[18] So, the flood was worldwide from the perspective of those who experienced it, but not "global" in the sense that modern people understand that term. One might accept this hermeneutical approach to the flood narrative of Genesis, but like Longman and Walton's analysis, it does not seem transferrable to 2 Peter. The epistle says that God did not spare "the ancient *world*" but rather "brought a flood on a *world* of the ungodly" (2:5, emphasis mine), with the result that "the *world* of that time was deluged with water and perished" (3:6, emphasis mine). If the author of 2 Peter understands the flood to have been applicable to the whole world, it is significant that the world as it was known when 2 Peter was written (i.e., around the late first century CE) was much larger than the world imagined by ancient Mesopotamians.

By the time 2 Peter was composed, it was common knowledge among people of high education that the earth was spherical, the approximate size of the globe had been accurately calculated, geographers had mapped roughly all of Europe, many of the North Atlantic islands, and the bulk of Asia and Africa. For that matter, it had been speculated for centuries that additional land masses inhabited by humans could be found beyond the oceans, on other parts of the globe. Although we cannot know with certainty exactly what the author of 2 Peter knew about the earth's shape, size, and geography, the text is sophisticated enough that we can assume someone involved in its production was highly educated, and would have had reasonably up-to-date knowledge of the rudiments of the astronomy and geography of the day.[19] At the least, it is fair to

say that the "world" understood by 2 Peter is substantially larger in scope than the world known to ancient Mesopotamians, or for that matter, anyone involved in the production of Genesis. So, Hill's analysis likewise does little to address the fact that 2 Peter seems to describe a worldwide flood.

In summary, genre analyses of the early chapters of Genesis in general, or the flood narrative of Genesis in particular, potentially provide a fruitful approach to considering this text, but references to the flood in 2 Peter must be considered in their own right, as the nature of this New Testament composition is quite different from Genesis.

## Parallels Between Primordial Flood and Eschatological Conflagration

Genre considerations are really a secondary matter when examining whether the flood material found in 2 Peter can accommodate the notion of a local flood. More important is the rhetoric of the text. Most biblical scholars understand the epistle to defend the certainty of future (eschatological) cosmic judgment on the grounds that God already destroyed creation once in response to human sin, so there is no reason to doubt that God will do so again. The eschatological judgment described is clearly global and comprehensive. This is apparent in that "the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire" (3:7). The text goes on to describe the eschatological catastrophe in greater detail:

> [T]he day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.[20] Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. (2 Pet. 3:10–13)

Peter talks about the heavens passing away, the dissolution of the elements, new heavens, and a new earth. This future judgment is anything but local. It involves a comprehensive transition from present creation to new creation. If the flood serves to confirm this future, global disruption of creation, it would seem that the flood must also be understood globally.[21]

To understand the purpose of appealing to the flood as a parallel to eschatological fire, exegetes commonly turn to the "scoffers" discussed in the passage: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" (3:3–4). Most scholars who interpret 2 Peter understand the scoffers' observation in one of two ways.

The less popular of the two major positions is that the scoffers reject the notion of the destructibility of the cosmos because—similar to the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical schools—they understand the cosmos to be eternal.[22] In this case, the flood demonstrates that the cosmos is indeed destructible. This position necessitates a global understanding of the flood, because the issue in question is the very persistence of the cosmos, and a local flood would not refute the scoffers' view. Indeed, certain scholars posit that the author understands the deluge not merely as a flood that covered the whole earth, but as a watery cataclysm that affected the entire cosmos, including both the heavens and the earth.[23]

The more popular position is that the scoffers reject the notion of the Lord's future appearance because—consistent with the Epicurean school of philosophy—they do not believe in divine intervention.[24] In this case, the flood demonstrates that God does, in fact, intervene in the world, and thus Jesus can return and fulfill God's purpose. A local flood carried out by God would still make this point, but in a sense, this position still involves questions of global scope in that the issue is ultimately whether the creation is open to interruption by God. Those who interpret the scoffers to posit a world closed off from divine intervention generally also understand this passage of 2 Peter to portray the flood as a cosmic-wide event that utterly destroyed the heavens and the earth.[25]

Scholars who articulate this cosmic understanding of the deluge in 2 Peter often appeal to *1 Enoch* 83:3–5 as a parallel within second temple Judaism. This passage, which was probably written during the second century BCE, portrays the biblical flood as a destruction of both the entire earth and the sky above. One can potentially take this as evidence that some Jewish thinkers, from around the time 2 Peter was written, understood the flood to have a more expansive scope than what is explicitly discussed in Genesis.

In sum, our passage of interest in 2 Peter appeals to the flood of Genesis as a justification for expecting a future eschatological cataclysm of comprehensive proportions,

and indeed, describes this flood as a decimation of the "world." The bulk of scholars who study this passage understandably conclude that Peter treats the flood as a cosmic disaster of global scope. If the flood does indeed serve as an example of a global/cosmic catastrophe that confirms the plausibility of a future universal conflagration, then the rhetoric of this passage rests on the global scope of the biblical flood. In other words, we have every reason to expect that God will fulfill the promises that the scoffers call into question (2 Pet. 3:4) because God has brought widespread disaster on creation once before. A local understanding of the flood would then invalidate the rhetoric of this passage, which presumably poses a problem for many Christians who consider 2 Peter to be authoritative scripture. At the least, this passage presents a difficulty to science-faith studies that to my knowledge has not previously been satisfactorily addressed.[26]

## The Scoffers and the Reliability of God's Promise

In *The New Testament and the Future of the Cosmos*, Ryan P. Juza analyzes the flood material of 2 Peter in a way that does not rely rhetorically on the premise that the flood had universal ramifications. The particularity of Juza's approach is based partly on his analysis of the scoffers who challenge the hope of the day of the Lord.[27] Whereas biblical scholars generally understand the scoffers to be making a philosophical point about the immutability of the cosmos (see above), Juza argues that, based on what is explicit in the text of 2 Peter 3:3–4, it does not appear that the scoffers are concerned with the indestructability of the cosmos per se. Rather, they observe that creation remains unaltered from its original, created state, and has done so "since our ancestors died" (3:4b; lit., "since the fathers fell asleep"), despite "the promise of his coming" (3:4a).

The majority of scholars understand "the fathers" in reference to the earliest generation of Christians,[28] in which case the argument is not that the world has persisted in its created state for a long time, but that Jesus was expected to return before the first generation of Christians died (cf. Mark 9:1, 13:30; Matt. 16:28, 24:34; Luke 9:27, 21:32), and this had not yet taken place (of course, this position assumes 2 Peter was written by a later author after the death of Peter, not by Peter himself). However, this interpretation is dissatisfying for several reasons.

First and foremost, "the fathers" does not appear as a reference to the first generation of Christians in any first-century writings.[29] By contrast, the New Testament frequently calls Old Testament figures "the fathers" (e.g., Acts 3:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:1).

Second, several New Testament passages refer to the Old Testament fathers receiving promises (Luke 1:55, 72; Acts 13:32, 26:6–7; Rom. 9:4–5, 15:8), as appears in 2 Peter.

Third, if the concern is that the first Christians died without seeing the Lord's coming, the scoffers' complaint should be that nothing happened *before* the fathers died, not *since* they died.

Fourth, the context suggests that the scoffers question "the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets" (2 Pet. 3:2). In other words, "the fathers" refer to the generation of Israelites to whom the prophets of the Old Testament communicated the promise of the Lord's future appearance, also known as the Day of the Lord.

For these reasons, a significant minority of scholars rightly interpret "the fathers" in reference to the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets.[30]

By the first century CE, when 2 Peter was written, the promise of the coming Day of the Lord had not come to pass over the course of several centuries, despite the fact that many prophecies specifically speak of this day's nearness (see Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:14; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14).[31] The scoffers appear to understand that "if Jesus had fulfilled God's promise, then the created world would have experienced change from its original state,"[32] and furthermore, they appear to reason that if God's promise were going to be fulfilled, it would have been fulfilled by now. So, 2 Peter suggests that these scoffers are not so much denying a philosophical idea about the immutability of the cosmos as they are challenging the reliability of God's prophetic revelation, and thus, treating the scriptures as though they are open to human interpretation (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20–21).

Juza proposes that Peter's rebuttal to the scoffers is organized into two sections. Verses 3:5–7 address the idea that the continuity of creation proves the prophetic promise to continue unfulfilled, whereas verses 3:8–10 respond to the notion that the long delay of the Day of the Lord indicates unfaithfulness on God's part. It is in the former of these sections that the Genesis flood is discussed, and the point seems to be that "*God's word takes precedence over the created world*. In other words, the validity of God's promise is not dependent on what

can be observed from the created order."[33] So, while 2 Peter 3:5–7 does draw a parallel between the primordial catastrophe wrought by water and the future catastrophe to be carried out by fire, the connection between this pair of events is not that they are two examples of the destructibility of the cosmos, but rather that they both attest the superiority of the Creator's word over creation itself. Notably, Peter explicitly mentions God's word multiple times in this passage: "*by the word of God* the heavens existed" (3:5), "*by the same word* the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire" (3:7). 2 Peter 3:6 says, "through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished"; here, the words "through which" (Gk. *di' hōn*) likely refer back to both water and word in verse 3:5, thus explicitly attributing the flood to God's word, as well.[34] If the argument in this passage is the reliability of God's word rather than the destructibility of the cosmos, it is not rhetorically so important that the flood must represent a widespread cosmic destruction. Peter's rhetoric only necessitates that the flood be a significant event carried out in creation by God's mighty word.

## The Flood and the Wicked "World"

Second Peter says of God's creation of heaven and earth that "the world of that time was deluged with water and perished" (3:6). The interpretation of this verse hinges on the meaning of the word "world." The typical range of meaning for the English word "world," and the etymological connection between the Greek word *kosmos* and the English "cosmos," readily give the impression that the passage is referring to the whole of creation. However, the Greek word *kosmos* has several shades of meaning not usually applicable to the English word "world." For example, in some contexts, *kosmos* can mean "adornment" (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:3). More importantly for our purposes, the New Testament often uses *kosmos* to connote a morally corrupt human system in its opposition to God.[35] To understand the significance of this usage, one might think of the second part of the commonly quoted Christian phrase, "in the world but not *of the world*."[36] "World" in this second instance is not referring to the material world, but rather to the patterns of behavior characteristic of humanity apart from a commitment to Christ. Likewise, *kosmos* in the sense of corrupt humanity evokes a very different domain of meaning from *kosmos* in the sense of the heavens and the earth.[37]

Scholars often understand "world" in 2 Peter 3:6 to refer to the whole of heaven and earth, which God is said to have created in the preceding verse (3:5), and which is potentially paralleled by the reference to "the present heavens and earth" in the next (3:7).[38] Such an interpretation aligns with the common understanding that the scoffers Peter is discussing are concerned with the immutability of the cosmos (see above). However, Juza rightly argues that "world" in this passage is better understood in reference to wicked humanity at the time of the flood, rather than the cosmos, on several grounds.[39]

First, the Greek word *kosmos*, which lies behind the English translation "world" in 3:6, does not serve as a neutral cosmological term in the other places it appears in 2 Peter. Rather, *kosmos* in this text consistently refers to wicked humanity (see 2 Pet. 1:4, 2:5, 20). If "world" refers to the cosmos as such in verse 3:6, it would be the only place where 2 Peter uses the word in this way rather than in reference to sinful humanity.

Second, verses 3:6–7 set up a parallel between the destruction of the world in the past flood and the destruction of the ungodly in the future fire. In both cases, Greek words built on the root *apol** express the destruction in question (*apollumi*, 3:6; *apōleia*, 3:7). This parallelism lends itself to an equating of the two "destroyed" parties in question, namely "the world" in 3:6 and "the godless" (lit. "the ungodly people") in 3:7.

Third, earlier in 2 Peter, the flood is discussed in the following way: "[God] did not spare the ancient world (*kosmos*), even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world (*kosmos*) of the ungodly" (2:5). This verse makes explicit the connection between the "ungodly" generation that was destroyed by the flood and the language of *kosmos*. So, it should not surprise us if Peter goes on in chapter 3 to use the language of the destruction of the *kosmos* in the flood to refer to the ungodly generation of that day. Indeed, it would be slightly unexpected if *kosmos* in 3:6 is found to carry some other connotation.

Fourth, wherever 2 Peter uses the language of "destruction" or "perishing" (i.e., words from the root *apol**), it is sinful humanity, rather than the broader material creation, that is destroyed (2:1, 3, 3:7, 9, 16). This consistency further supports understanding the destruction of the *kosmos* in 3:6 in reference to the ungodly generation of humans at the time of the flood.

Fifth and finally, Juza points out that when other New Testament texts discuss the flood, they highlight the destruction of ungodly humanity, not cosmic catastrophe (see Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:20). It is worth adding here that one of these instances, Hebrews 11:7, refers to Noah's condemnation of "the world" (*kosmos*) through his faithfulness, and scholars commonly understand *kosmos* here to connote sinful humanity rather than the physical world.[40] So then, a number of patterns in 2 Peter in particular, and the New Testament in general, support the reading of *kosmos* in verse 3:6 as a reference to the condemnation of ungodly humanity.

In addition to the arguments Juza mentions, I will note further that the flood narrative of Genesis itself makes clear that the deluge was occasioned by pervasive human wickedness, and the goal of the event was the removal of wicked humans from the earth (see Gen. 6:1–7). Although animals are also severely affected by the flood (6:7), nothing in the narrative suggests that God has any problem with the physical creation in general, but rather with humans in particular. So, if 2 Peter 3:6 emphasizes consequences for wicked humans, this is consistent with how Genesis portrays the flood.

Juza is not alone in interpreting *kosmos* in 2 Peter 3:6 in reference to the wicked generation of Noah's day. Many commentators and other exegetes, as well as contributors to multiple Greek lexicons, grant that this word in this text carries the connotation of rebellious humanity.[41]

It is also worth considering that if *kosmos* in 2 Peter 3:6 actually connotes the destruction of ungodly humanity by the flood, rather than the destruction of creation per se, then this fact is congenial to how most Jewish texts of roughly the same era describe the biblical flood. Although the texts of the New Testament are particular in their focus on Jesus Christ and the gospel, and Christians often acknowledge them to be inspired in a way that sets them apart from non-canonical Jewish writings, these biblical compositions nonetheless emerge from the Jewish milieu of the second temple literary period (roughly 200 BCE–200 CE). Thus, our understanding of the New Testament can be aided by comparison with other Jewish writings from this era. Discussions of Noah and the flood are also popular in Jewish texts of this literary period, so we have substantial basis for fruitful comparison. I will only reference the most relevant passages here.

Second temple Jewish writings generally discuss the flood primarily with reference to the purging of wicked humans. For example, a writing from the first century CE called *Biblical Antiquities* recapitulates the story of Noah and the flood (chap. 3). The description of the impending event simply says, "I [the Lord] will establish my covenant with you [Noah], to destroy all those inhabiting the earth" (3:4).[42] No mention is made of any damage to the earth itself, beyond the elimination of wicked humanity (cf. 3:1–3) and the plants that have budded upon the earth (3:3). Curiously, even the decimation of nonhuman animals is not mentioned explicitly.

Philo of Alexandria, a first-century CE Jewish interpreter of the Torah, emphasizes the cleansing away of the wicked generation of humanity and the preservation of creation as a whole. In his *Questions and Answers on Genesis* (2:15), Philo strives to explain that the flood's damage to the earth is superficial and merely removes a problematic generation of corrupt humans, while fundamentally preserving the creation as God initially designed it. He finds confirmation of this in the expression, "every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground" (Gen. 7:4) given that it is only "the face of the ground" (i.e., the earth's surface) that is decimated. He takes this portrayal of the flood's superficiality to signal that human, plant, and animal life were not eliminated from existence, but only temporarily wiped out to address the problem of a fickle and impious generation.

Many other texts likewise discuss the deluge with an exclusive emphasis, or at least primary emphasis, on the elimination of wicked humanity rather than the destruction of creation in its entirety.[43] In some cases, the flood is even said to have been a benefit to the earth. For example, a portion of the *Epistle of Enoch* that was written during or before the second century BCE describes the flood as cleansing the earth from all corruption (*1 Enoch* 106:17). The *Genesis Apocryphon*, one of the texts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, likewise describes the flood as God's compassion on the earth since it removed from the earth those who practice violence, wickedness, and deceit (*Genesis Apocryphon* [1Q20], col. 11).

The notion that the flood was ultimately beneficial to the earth demonstrates that the event primarily served to remove wicked humanity and was not understood as a catastrophe of cosmic proportions. Jewish authors may have derived this focus from the comment in Genesis that "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed [Noah] shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands" (Gen. 5:29), which potentially suggests that the flood reverses or at least reduces the curse on the

ground that God had pronounced after the transgression of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:17–19).

That the aforementioned Jewish authors emphasize the flood's function to purge human wickedness from the earth does not imply that they understood the flood to have destructive effects for only humans, still less that they understood the flood to cover the earth partially. The point is rather that they *describe* the flood, first and foremost, as a judgment against wicked humanity and as a cleansing of wicked humanity from the earth.

Specific second temple Jewish texts do exist that attribute to the Genesis flood a broader destructive effect for creation than what is described in the actual text of Genesis. The chief example is *1 Enoch* 83:3–5, which describes the ruin of both the earth and the sky (see above). In addition, *2 Enoch* spends a handful of verses discussing the specifics of the earth's disruption (70:4–9). The text mostly elaborates on the phenomena described in Genesis, but it does add an earthquake that deprives the earth of its strength (70:9). Even in *2 Enoch*, the focus remains on damage to the earth, not the whole of the cosmos, though the emphasis does lie more on the physically destructive aspects of the flood than on the purging of wicked humans, in particular.

Ultimately, comparative evidence from second temple Jewish interpretations of the Genesis flood weighs in favor of the plausibility of the position of Juza and others that 2 Peter 3:6 refers explicitly to the inundation of the "world" of wicked humanity rather than the flooding of the earth in its entirety per se. Such a focus on the judgment of rebellious humanity is thoroughly plausible within the milieu of first-century Jewish literature.

One might object that even if Peter describes the flood as destructive to the "world" of wicked humanity, this still implies a global flood because sinful humans live all over the earth. Indeed, Peter may well have understood that humans lived in multiple hemispheres, and he certainly knew that humans inhabited a much larger portion of the globe than the alluvial plain of the Fertile Crescent (see above). However, it is significant that when "world" (Gk. *kosmos*) describes humanity in its opposition to God in the New Testament, it need not express this idea at a global scale.[44] For example, the prologue to the Gospel of John describes the Son of God coming to the world and not being acknowledged or accepted by "the world" (John 1:10–11). The vast majority of humans living on the earth had no awareness of Jesus during his life. Rather, he was rejected by individuals in a specific region. Likewise, in John's Gospel, Jesus tells the high priest, "I have spoken openly to the world" (18:20), although this action took place in a specific locale (cf. John 15:18, 16:20, 17:14; Heb. 11:7). Interestingly, earlier in 2 Peter, God is said to have "brought a flood on a world of the ungodly" (2:5). The New Revised Standard Version idiosyncratically translates this phrase as "a world of the ungodly" to reflect the absence of the definite article in the Greek text where it would typically precede "world." The absence of the definite article in this passage does not necessarily imply that "a world of the ungodly" (Gk. *kosmōi asebōn*) refers to the ungodly people of a given region rather than of the entire globe, but the passage does lend itself to this interpretation to some extent (cf. 2 Pet. 2:6–8).

Admittedly, most ancient Jewish and Christian interpreters of Genesis presumably understood the flood to cover the entirety of the earth and to eliminate all human and animal life apart from that which was preserved on the ark. I do not intend to posit an ancient Jewish understanding of the flood as local, nor Peter's understanding of the flood along these lines. My point is that the text of 2 Peter 3:6 is sufficiently flexible that it could potentially be interpreted in reference to the elimination of ungodly people in a particular area where intense depravity had broken out. Contrary to the view of many scholars who analyze 2 Peter, the passage need not be understood to exaggerate the scale of the Genesis flood to cosmic proportions.

## The Incongruity of the Flood and the Eschatological Judgment

Juza posits that Peter portrays the flood as "*smaller in scope*" than the future, eschatological catastrophe.[45] Although the description of the future event likewise emphasizes the judgment of ungodly humans (see 2 Pet. 3:7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14), it is clear that the whole of "the present heavens and earth" will be affected (3:7; see above). The ancient act of creation narrated in this passage likewise encompasses both the heavens and the earth (3:5), but Juza notes that the flood is not described in the same cosmological terms. The deluge is said to affect "the world," which probably refers to ungodly humans, rather than the whole of creation per se (see above). Peter does not refer to any act of re-creation or re-ordering after the flood, as might be expected if the flood were understood to involve a total annihilation of the cosmos.[46] Likewise, if the goal of this passage is to show that the cosmos is destructible, we might expect the discussion to elaborate on some cosmological effect of the flood, but to the contrary, we

find language that can readily be understood only in reference to the destruction of the ungodly. Juza thus suggests that "Peter uses the flood story as an analogy for the consummation to identify *the target of God's condemnation* (i.e., ungodly humanity), not the scope of his judgment."[47]

Additionally, Juza points out that the account of creation in this passage, though certainly cosmic in scope, places more of an emphasis on the creation of Earth than on the creation of the heavens. The heavens are simply said to have "existed" long ago, whereas the earth's creation is described at greater length and in greater detail: "formed out of water and by means of water" (2 Pet. 3:5). Further, Peter describes the creation of the heavens with the generic "to be" verb (Gk. *eimi*), but expresses the creation of the earth with the much less common "to form" (Gk. *sunistēmi*), which makes the latter more prominent or "marked" within the sentence.[48] The emphasis on water in the process of Earth's creation obviously also connects this part of the creation account to the flood described in the next clause (3:6).[49] Peter probably places this greater focus on Earth's creation because the flood affected the earth and its inhabitants, but not the heavens. This focus on the earth underscores that our passage does not portray the biblical flood as a cosmic catastrophe (as some have argued), but rather as an act of judgment against the ungodly in which the superiority of God's word over God's creation is apparent.

In addition to the points Juza raises, it is worth noting that Peter refers to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as "an example of what is coming to the ungodly" (2:6, cf. 2:7–10), which presumably alludes to the same eschatological catastrophe discussed in chapter three.[50] This passage potentially serves as a parallel to the flood/fire comparison in that a local event from the book of Genesis establishes a pattern of God's future, comprehensive judgment against ungodly people.

Something of an analogy to the disproportion of past and future judgment in 2 Peter can also be found in Hebrews, where the author contrasts the shaking of the earth by the voice of God at Sinai with the greater eschatological shaking of both Earth and heaven: "At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven'" (Heb. 12:26; cf. 12:27–28; Hag. 2:6). The world has seen God's power, but the decisive work of God on Earth in the past is nothing compared to the disruption that the Lord's Day of Judgment will bring to all of creation.

Looking again to second temple Jewish writings, we find a handful of texts that parallel 2 Peter in placing emphasis on the earth's judgment in the flood in a way that rules out a comprehensive, creation-wide scope. Such references lend plausibility to Juza's interpretation by showing that it is at home in the literary world from which 2 Peter emerged.

Philo states that the waters of the flood filled the bulk of the area normally taken up by the air, apart from a small portion near the moon.[51] Consistent with the first-century intellectuals of the Greco-Roman world, Philo understood the earth to be a stationary sphere surrounded by a much larger rotating celestial sphere on which the stars were fixed. In the space between the earth and the celestial sphere were various concentric spheres that respectively contained the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The air occupied the area between the surface of the earth and the orbit of the moon.[52] Philo's point, then, is that the flood waters fully and thoroughly covered the earth, to the point that even most of the air was affected, but everything beyond the realm inhabited by humans—namely the moon, sun, planets, and stars—was totally unaffected.

The first book of the *Sibylline Oracles* elaborates on the biblical flood story, stating that God caused thick clouds to block out the sun, moon, and stars from view by terrified mortals (1:217–18); the author subtly indicates that the heavenly bodies themselves were unaffected by the deluge. In other words, the disaster focuses on the human habitation, not the whole of creation.[53] In addition, several other Jewish texts explicitly identify the dry ground as the target of the flood's destruction,[54] emphasizing the terrestrial scope of the event.

One other text is worthy of mention here. In a passage recounting the promise that Abraham would inherit the land of Israel, *Biblical Antiquities* states that God preserved the land of Israel during the flood, and did not allow the waters to destroy it:

> [I] will bring [Abraham] into the land upon which my eye has looked from of old, when all those inhabiting the earth sinned in my sight and I brought the water of the flood and I did not destroy it but preserved that land. For neither did the springs of my wrath burst forth in it, nor did my water of destruction descend on it. (7:4)[55]

It is by no means a given that Peter was aware of the idea that the flood did not affect the Promised Land, and of course, the notion that God preserved one special land from the flood is quite different from the position proposed by certain modern scholars that the flood could have been limited in scope to the alluvial plain of Mesopotamia, but at the least, *Biblical Antiquities* serves as a vivid example of how second temple Jewish writings often understand the biblical flood as far from cosmic in scope.

Again, an examination of Jewish sources from the second temple literary period confirms that Juza's interpretation of 2 Peter is at home in the Judaism of the time. Jewish authors often understood the flood to be an event that temporarily affected the surface of the dry ground of the earth, rather than a cosmic cataclysm that completely reset creation.

Juza's argument that Peter portrays the pending eschatological conflagration as greater in scope than the ancient flood is relevant for my purposes because it implies that a local understanding of the flood does not do violence to the logic of 2 Peter. The comparatively limited nature of the flood confirms that Peter's point is not to argue that this primordial event sets a precedent for cosmic catastrophe. Rather, the deluge demonstrates that God's powerful word has effected judgment against rebellious humanity and thus can be expected to do so again. If we imagine that wicked humans were destroyed by a regional flood that was initiated by God's word, such an occurrence would still serve Peter's purposes in bringing up the event in 3:5–7. The sorts of proposals scholars like Hill as well as Longman and Walton have offered do not render the rhetoric of this New Testament text invalid.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on one specific passage of the New Testament, but my analysis fits into a larger academic conversation about whether and how Christians might reconcile biblical material concerning the ancient flood with the insights of modern geology, hydrology, and other scientific fields. Typical approaches to Genesis give the impression that the Christian must either dismiss the flood as a mere myth spawned from ancient naïveté about the natural world, or discard mainstream scientific insights while clinging tightly to a traditional understanding of the biblical account. The sort of approach represented recently in scholarly contributions from Hill and from Longman and Walton constitutes a third way that gives due consideration to both science and scripture.

In similar fashion, standard treatments of 2 Peter leave one with the impression that they must either dismiss Peter's account of the flood as an untenable, culturally contingent ancient perspective or adopt a fringe understanding of the natural world to remain faithful to a classical view of the biblical text. The approach I have proposed (largely inspired by Juza's exegetical analysis) likewise offers a way forward that sacrifices neither science nor scripture in favor of the other. This could be considered an instantiation of the "two books" understanding of divine revelation, in which nature and scripture both reveal God to humans in different ways. Although these "two books" generally share little overlap, on the rare occasion that they appear to contradict one another, the faithful Christian thinker should look for some path to reconciliation, rather than discarding one in favor of the other. Such an approach is consistent with the best of the Christian tradition concerning the resolution of dissonance between the typical understandings of scripture and the natural world during a given era.[56]

## Notes

[1]Carol A. Hill, "The Noachian Flood: Universal or Local?," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 54, no. 3 (2002): 170–83, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2002/PSCF9-02Hill.pdf. See also Carol A. Hill, *A Worldview Approach to Science and Scripture* (Kregel Academic, 2019), chap. 7; Stephen O. Moshier, "Proposition 15. Geology Does Not Support a Worldwide Flood," in *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate*, ed. Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton (IVP Academic, 2018), 150–61; and Paul H. Seely, "Noah's Flood: Its Date, Extent, and Divine Accommodation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 291–311. Earlier iterations of this same basic disagreement are well summarized by Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Eerdmans, 1955), 171–249.

[2]E.g., Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 177–282; Daniel C. Harlow, "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62, no. 3 (2010): 181–87, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2010/PSCF9-10Harlow.pdf; and Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins*, 2nd ed. (Brazos, 2021), 60–90. Each of these treatments has particular nuances, and I have sought to address only the basic strategy employed.

The categorization of the flood account as "myth" was significantly catalyzed by the discovery of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which was initially published by Assyriologist George Smith ("The Chaldean Account of the Deluge," *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 2 [1873]: 213–34), though prior to this discovery, scholars suspected that ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Genesis flood

might be found, based on evidence for such traditions preserved in fragments of the third-century BCE Babylonian author Berossus. See George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis: Containing the Description of the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Deluge, the Tower of Babel, the Times of the Patriarchs, and Nimrod; Babylonian Fables, and Legends of the Gods; From the Cuneiform Inscriptions* (Scribner, Armstrong, 1876), 1–2. Of course, identifying Genesis as an adaptation of earlier flood traditions like that found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* does not rule out the possibility that such accounts stem from some historical event.

[3]Hill, *Worldview Approach*, 71–87, 167–68; cf. Hill, "Noachian Flood." Although Hill represents a recent articulation of this idea, academic debate over whether the flood can be understood as local extends back to the nineteenth century, when geological discoveries came to call seriously into question the assumption of a worldwide flood. For a nineteenth-century discussion of pertinent scholarship, see John William Dawson, *The Meeting Place of Geology and History* (Revell, 1894), 121–54. Even before this, Edward Stillingfleet argued for a flood confined to the lands inhabited by primordial humans (which to his understanding excluded North and South America, Australia, and perhaps portions of the other continents) as early as the mid-seventeenth century (Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or, A Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith: As to the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures, and the Matters Therein Contained*, 2nd ed. [Henry Mortlock, 1663], 538–51).

Ramm (*View*, 239–40) differentiates between three versions of a local flood position in the history of this discourse, each of which confine the flood to Mesopotamia. First, some imagine that humanity had not moved beyond Mesopotamia at the time of the flood (e.g., Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis,* volume one of the Expositor's Bible Commentary [Armstrong and Son, 1903], 55–57; and Arthur C. Custance, *The Flood: Local or Global?* [Zondervan, 1979], 13–63). Second, George Frederick Wright posits that the ice age killed off humanity outside of Mesopotamia, and the melting ice led to a flood that overwhelmed the last remaining human habitation (Wright, "The Deluge of Noah," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr, 5 vols. [Howard-Severance, 1915], 2:821–26). Third, some understand Genesis to describe a local Mesopotamian flood in universal terms. This view, which represents Ramm's own position (*View*, 238–49), acknowledges that humans inhabited other parts of the world not affected by the flood (cf., e.g., Dawson, *Place*, 151–54; and Walter S. Olson, "Has Science Dated the Biblical Flood?," *Zygon* 2 [1967]: 272). This third position aligns most readily with twenty-first-century scientific consensus, and represents the most recent local flood treatments, including those I engage in this article.

[4]See Carol A. Hill, "Qualitative Hydrology of Noah's Flood," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, no. 2 (2006): 120–29, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2006/PSCF6-06Hill.pdf.

[5]Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (IVP Academic, 2018), 36–41.

[6]E.g., Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Monarch, 2008), chap. 10; C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Crossway, 2011); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (InterVarsity, 2015); Longman and Walton, *Flood*; and William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Eerdmans, 2021), 35–203. William VanDoodewaard discusses at length the history of academic discourse on the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis and their genre classification in *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Reformation Heritage, 2015).

[7]For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the author of 2 Peter as "Peter," as is conventional in New Testament scholarship. This is not meant to suggest anything about the historical authorship of 2 Peter, which is irrelevant to my purposes.

[8]All quotations of scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

[9]The extent to which 2 Peter imagines the annihilation versus the renewal of the cosmos is a matter of significant academic debate, although most of the influential scholarly voices favor renewal over annihilation. For discussion, see, e.g., J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Baker Academic, 2014), 189–98; and Ryan P. Juza, *The New Testament and the Future of the Cosmos* (Pickwick, 2020), 205–47. The distinction between these positions is not crucial for my purposes, but I say "disruption" here to capture that, despite the extreme catastrophic language Peter uses, I imagine both continuity and discontinuity between the present creation and the new creation.

[10]John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Baker, 1961), 14, 15, 88, 271, 451–53.

[11]E.g., Marcus R. Ross, "The Recent Adam and Eve View: A Modern Young-Earth Approach," in *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views*, ed. Kenneth D. Keathley (B&H Academic, 2024), 164–65.

[12]Seely ("Noah's Flood") distinguishes between "concordist" interpretations that attempt to show that Genesis *describes* a local flood and his own position, which imagines *divine accommodation* at work in the Genesis account of a global flood that is rooted in a real local event. The proposals of Hill as well as Longman and Walton are roughly consistent with this latter category, though my goal here is not to adjudicate between the various treatments of Genesis.

Juza's analysis of 2 Peter does not address the question of a local flood, but rather makes the case that "*Peter does not elaborate on the cosmological effect of the flood*" and thus does not intend to prove the destructibility of the cosmos (*New Testament*, 225, emphasis original). In this article, I bring Juza's exegetical analysis to bear on the question of whether the rhetoric of 2 Peter falls apart if one understands the flood to be local.

[13]On the New Testament authors' understanding of the structure of the cosmos, see William Horst, "Did the New Testament Authors Believe the Earth Is Flat?," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 75, no. 3 (2023): 162–79, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2023/PSCF12-23Horst.pdf.

[14]Longman and Walton, *Flood*, 53–87.

[15]Longman and Walton, *Flood*, 100–111.

[16]Peter may well have been familiar with the Greek tradition of Deucalion's flood, though this account does not present parallels nearly as close to Genesis as the epics of *Gilgamesh* or *Atrahasis*. See Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women* fragments 2–7; Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 9:41–61; Plato,

*Timaeus* 22b–c and *Critias* 112a; Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3:1086; Virgil, *Georgics* 1:62; Gaius Julius Hyginus, *Fables* 153; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1:17:3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1:318–437, 7:356; and Plutarch, *Life of Pyrrhus*, 1.

[17]For an introduction to key characteristics of biblical interpretation during the second temple period, see Lidija Novakovic, "The Scriptures and Scriptural Interpretation," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Baker Academic, 2013), 85–101.

[18]Hill, *Worldview Approach*, 72–73, 167–68; cf. 71–87.

[19]On this and the preceding points, see Horst, "Authors," 162–79.

[20]Ancient manuscript evidence is divided over whether 2 Peter 3:10 should end with "will be disclosed [lit., found]," "will not be found," or "will be burned up." For discussion, see Juza, *New Testament*, 207–10. For my purposes, the distinction is not crucial.

[21]Scholars generally agree that the future judgment described in 2 Peter is global/cosmic. One exception is Peter J. Leithart, *The Promise of His Appearing: An Exposition of Second Peter* (Canon, 2004), who argues for a "preterist" interpretation in which the cataclysmic language describes a first-century event, rather than an eschatological one. I do not find Leithart's analysis persuasive for several reasons. First, he interprets expressions of the imminence of events woodenly, whereas the New Testament pervasively describes eschatological events as coming soon. Second, he presumes that the "fathers" of 2 Peter 3:4 must be the first generation of Christians, whereas a better case can be made that they represent figures of the Old Testament (see below). Third, his argument rests on a textual variant of 2 Peter 3:10 that is plausible but not definitive (see note 20).

The linking in 2 Peter between primordial flood and eschatological fire has some notable parallels within second temple Judaism. Both *Life of Adam and Eve* 49–50 and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:70–71 narrate the creation of pillars that recount the story of Adam and Eve, and which are made to withstand God's judgment in the form of both flood and fire. The burning imagined seems not to be eschatological per se, as the purpose is to preserve knowledge of primordial humanity for later generations. The *Epistle of Enoch* (1 Enoch 102:1), Pseudo-Sophocles (Fragment 2), and the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH 11:29–36) arguably all subtly cast eschatological fire as a repetition of the primordial flood; see Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (T&T Clark, 2007), 64–71. M. R. James, trans., *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo: Now First Translated from the Old Latin Version* (Ktav, 1971), 3:9–10, also connects the flood with eschatological resurrection and judgment (though fire is never mentioned), in that God's promise not to interrupt the cycle of seasons (Gen. 8:21–22) becomes a promise not to destroy the cycle of seasons *until* the day of judgment and new creation. Adams (*Stars*, 118–19) notes a few references within Roman Stoicism to parallel cataclysms by water and fire (Seneca, *Natural Questions* 3:27, 29 and *On Consolation* 26:6; cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 4:64).

[22]Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed. (T&T Clark, 1902), 292; Daniel von Allmen, "L'apocalyptique juive et le retard de la parousie en II Pierre 3,1–13," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 16 (1966): 257; Adams, *Stars*, 206–9; Edward Adams, "'Where Is the Promise of His Coming?' The Complaint of the Scoffers in 2 Peter 3.4," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 106–22; and Jörg Frey, *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter: A Theological Commentary* (Baylor University Press, 2018), 381–84. On the identity of the "scoffers" in 2 Peter, see also recently David K. Burge, "A Sub-Christian Epistle? Appreciating 2 Peter as an Anti-Sophistic Polemic," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44 (2021): 310–32, though Burge does not specifically address the scoffers' doubt in the promise of the Lord's coming, and a "sophist" could potentially be influenced by any number of schools of thought.

[23]E.g., Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977), 66; and Adams, *Stars*, 214.

[24]See, e.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 407–31; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter,* in Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Word, 1983), 293–95; Steven J. Kraftchick, *Jude, 2 Peter,* in the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries series (Abingdon, 2002), 153; Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1-2 Peter,* book 2 in the Letters and Homilies Series (IVP Academic, 2007), 372; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter,* in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (Baker Academic, 2008), 318; cf. Thomas Scott Caulley, "The False Teachers in Second Peter," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 12 (1982): 27–41. Neyrey shows that several second temple Jewish writings articulate roughly the Epicurean position on this matter, or evidence engagement with such a Jewish view. Some Epicureans did expect cosmic destruction, but the event would be rooted in a theory of physics, not a notion of divine intervention (see Adams, *Stars*, 109–14).

[25]E.g., Bauckham, *Jude*, 298–99; Kraftchick, *Jude*, 157; Earl J. Richard, *Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Smyth and Helwys, 2000), 378; and John Dennis, "Cosmology in the Petrine Literature and Jude," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (T&T Clark, 2008), 173–75.

[26]That this issue is not sufficiently addressed in science-faith discourse is pointed out in William Horst, "The Bible as a Two-Testament Collection of Writings in Science-Faith Dialogue," *Theology and Science* 22 (2024): 696, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14746700.2024.2399896.

[27]Juza, *New Testament*, 214–18.

[28]E.g., Fornberg, *Early Church*, 62–63; Bauckham, *Jude,* 290–93; David G. Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* in Epworth Commentaries (Epworth, 1998), 176; Witherington, *Commentary*, 372; and Frey, *Letter*, 382–83.

[29]The earliest possible examples come from two post-biblical Christian texts, *1 Clement* 23:3 and *2 Clement* 11:2, written by Clement, a bishop of the church in Rome, to the church in Corinth, but the context does not make clear which "fathers" are in mind.

[30]See Bigg, *Commentary*, 292–93; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude,* in the Christian Standard Commentary series (Broadman & Holman, 2003), 372–74; Green, *Jude*, 317–18; Adams, "Promise," 111–14; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude,* part of The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2006), 265–67; and Juza, *New Testament*, 215–16.

[31]Adams, *Stars*, 205.

[32]Juza, *New Testament*, 217.

[33]Juza, *New Testament*, 227. Emphasis original.

[34]English translations of this passage commonly rearrange the word order for the sake of eloquence, with the result that "out of water and by means of water" in 2 Pet. 3:5 immediately precedes "through which" in 3:6. This rendering lends itself to understanding "through which" to refer back to the two references to water in 3:5, but in the Greek text, the last words of 3:5 are "by the word of God." One would naturally understand "through which" simply to refer to God's word, except that "through which" is plural in the Greek, and "the word of God" is singular. Thus, exegetes typically favor understanding "through which" in reference to both water and word, e.g., David M. Russell, *The "New Heavens and New Earth": Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament* (Visionary, 1996), 189; and Adams, *Stars*, 213. Bauckham, *Jude,* 298, rightly notes that this interpretation leads to a "neat parallelism" in verses 5, 6, and 7, each of which then recounts actions carried out (1) by God's word and (2) by means of water/fire.

[35]Cf. Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 562. See, e.g., Matt. 18:7; Luke 12:30; John 1:10; Rom. 11:15; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:2; Col. 2:20; Heb. 11:38; James 4:4; and 1 John 2:16.

[36]The phrase "in the world but not of the world" comes from the *Address to Diognetus* 6:3, a second-century Christian text, though Christians often repeat these words without awareness of the source.

[37]More technically, these two meanings of *kosmos* are associated with two different "semantic domains." Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida place *kosmos* in the sense of "universe" in the semantic domain of "Geographical Objects and Features" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. [United Bible Societies, 1989], 1:1), and *kosmos* in the sense of "world system" in the semantic domain of "Behavior and Related States" (entry 41.38, 1:507). One might be tempted to say that the latter of these senses is a kind of metaphorical extension of the former, and thus it might be reasonable to imagine that Peter intends both senses at once, but to the contrary, Louw and Nida note that "it is this radical distinctiveness in semantic domains which is in a sense the essence of metaphorical meanings" (1:xviii). Likewise, the phrase "in the world but not of the world" is so impactful because it juxtaposes two very different semantic meanings of "the world."

[38]E.g., Adams, *Stars*, 214; Fornberg, *Early Church*, 66; Bauckham, *Jude*, 298–99; Davids, *Letters*, 271; and Horrell, *Epistles*, 177.

[39]Juza, *New Testament*, 223–24.

[40]E.g., James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (T&T Clark, 1924), 168; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Word, 1991), 340; and Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 2010), 408–10. Some commentators appeal to Jewish texts that depict Noah as a preacher of righteousness who called the ungodly world to repentance (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:74; *Sibylline Oracles* 1:125–36; *Jubilees* 7:20; cf. *1 Clement* 7:6).

[41]E.g., Hermann Sasse, "κόσμος," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 3:890; Horst Balz "κόσμος," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3 vols. (Eerdmans, 1990–1993), 2:311; Bigg, *Commentary*, 294; Schreiner, *Peter*, 377; Green, *Jude*, 321; and Witherington, *Commentary*, 374.

[42]M. R. James, trans., *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo: Now First Translated from the Old Latin Version* (Ktav, 1971), ad loc.

[43]*1 Enoch* 54:7–10; *3 Maccabees* 2:4; *Wisdom of Solomon* 10:4; Philo, *On the Life of Abraham* 41–44; *Sibylline Oracles* 1:131; 2:230; *Testament of Naphtali* 3; and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:75.

[44]Cf. Bauer et al., *Lexicon*, 562.

[45]Juza, *New Testament*, 224, emphasis original. Cf. pp. 222–25. Also Schreiner, *Peter*, 377; and Green, *Jude*, 321.

[46]Juza, *New Testament*, 224.

[47]Juza, *New Testament*, 225, emphasis original.

[48]That *sunistēmi* appears in the perfect tense in 2 Peter 3:5 also lends it an emphasis within the sentence.

[49]At the most basic level, *sunistēmi* expresses the notion of gathering together or collecting (Bauer et al., *Lexicon*, 972–73), so the phrase "formed out of water and by means of water" probably intends to evoke the description of Earth's creation in Genesis: "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear" (1:9). On the significance of this language, see further Juza, *New Testament*, 222–24; and Schreiner, *Peter*, 375–76.

[50]See Fornberg, *Early Church*, 43.

[51]Philo, *On the Life of Abraham,* 44.

[52]See Philo, *On Dreams* 1:134; *On the Creation* 54, 70, 113, 126; *Allegorical Interpretation* 1:8; *On the Cherubim* 22; *Who Is the Heir?* 221–24, 233; *On the Preliminary Studies* 104; *On the Life of Moses* 2:103; *On the Decalogue* 102–104; *Questions and Answers in Genesis* 1:10; 2:3; and *On the Special Laws* 1:13; 2:15. On first-century cosmological models, see also Horst, "Authors."

[53]The first book of the *Sibylline Oracles* was originally composed by one or more Jewish authors, probably between the second century BCE and the first century CE. The version that survives was apparently revised by at least one later Christian editor, and we cannot know with certainty which parts were original to the earlier Jewish version. However, nothing about the passage I discuss here suggests it is a Christian interpolation, so it is probably safe to assume it is part of the earlier Jewish composition.

[54]*Damascus Document,* 1:17–21; *Admonition Based on the Flood* (4Q370), 6; and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* 1:75.

[55]D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Doubleday, 1985), 2:313.

[56]On the "two books" approach, see William Horst, "From One Person? Exegetical Alternatives to a Monogenetic Reading of Acts 17:26," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 74, no. 2 (2022): 85–87, https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2022/PSCF6-22Horst.pdf.