The Natural Reading of Noah’s Flood as a Local Flood

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(Aschmann.net/BibleChronology/NaturalReadingOfGenesis6-9.pdf)

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Does the Bible Teach a Global or a Local Flood?

Traditionally Noah’s flood has been viewed as a global flood, with water covering the entire earth. However, some simple physical calculations show that this would be impossible, as shown in this article, this article, and this article, among many articles on the Reasons to Believe website and many other websites. One of the most thorough presentations is Hugh Ross’s excellent book Navigating Genesis, especially chapter 17.

But when we read the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9 it certainly appears that it must have been a global flood, which appears to make the Bible conflict with the findings of objective science.

However, in reality the Bible text supports a local flood just as readily as a global flood, provided it is translated and interpreted using the most common meanings of these words instead of those with a bias towards a global flood. (See 3. Modified ESV Text of Genesis 6-9.)

The problem is that in these chapters we face two different kinds of bias, which we can call translation bias and interpretation bias. The first refers to a translation done on the basis of certain presuppositions that the text itself does not require. Examples are given in the relevant section below.

The second refers to reading the text of the Bible on the basis of certain presuppositions that the text itself does not require. Even in the case of words that are not the result of translation bias, we can easily misinterpret some words if our presupposition is that the flood was global. Examples are given in the relevant section below.
1. **Translation Bias**

It turns out that our English translations suffer from a bad case of *translation bias*. In fact, much of the misunderstanding of these chapters is based on the translations of just a couple of words, which I discuss in the following paragraphs.

1.1. **“On the Earth” or “In the Land”**

The Hebrew word הָאָָ֖רֶץ /'eres/ is extremely common in the Old Testament, occurring 2503 times, and is translated “land, country, ground, earth”, though the majority of its cases are translated “land” or “country”. Its definite form הָאָָ֖רֶץ /hā'āreṣ/ “the land”, occurs many times in Genesis 6-9, and the ESV always translates it as “the earth” in these chapters, though elsewhere it is far more often translated “the land”, as in Genesis 34:30. To our modern minds “the earth” sounds like it is referring to the entire planet,¹ but this is actually a fairly uncommon meaning for this Hebrew word, and in fact it can very naturally be translated “land” every time it occurs in these chapters, the idea being that, just as in the time of the Tower of Babel, it is probable that the people had not spread out over the earth as God had commanded them in Genesis 1:28, but had remained in just one area. This drastically changes our perspective on the meaning of Genesis 6-9, and makes a local flood a perfectly natural interpretation, whose effects were nevertheless global as far as the destruction of humankind is concerned. In the text in the *big chart* below each case of this is marked in red, and the word land is in bold to show that I changed it from earth.

Often הָאָָ֖רֶץ /hā'āreṣ/ “the land” is preceded by the preposition ב /bə/ “in, on, at”, producing the word הָאָָ֖רֶץ /bə'āreṣ/² which is most commonly translated as “in the land” in the ESV, as in Genesis 34:21, but in Genesis 6-9 it is always translated “on the earth”, except once, in Genesis 6:5, where it is translated “in the earth”. I have changed all of these to “in the land”, except that Genesis 6:5 has “in the land” since I didn’t change the word in.

הָאָָ֖רֶץ /hā'āreṣ/ “the land” can also be preceded by a different preposition על /al/ “on, on top of, upon, over”, producing the uncontracted phrase על הָאָָ֖רֶץ /al-hā'āreṣ/, which is most commonly translated as “over the land” or “on the land” in the ESV, as in 1 Kings 23:33 or Genesis 19:23, but in Genesis 6-9 it is always translated “on the earth” or “upon the earth” or “over the earth”. I have changed all of these to “on the land” or “upon the land” or “over the land”, and have marked “on” or “upon” or “over” in dark green and על in dark green to show that they need never be changed in these chapters.

A different Hebrew word הָאֲדָמָָ֑ה /ādāmā/ also occurs in Genesis 6-9, and the ESV usually translates it as “ground”, though occasionally “land” or “soil”. These need no adjustment, since their meaning is naturally understood as local. All of the cases in these chapters are the definite form הָאֲדָמָָ֑ה /hā'ādāmā/, “the ground”. All of these cases are shown in blue.

In one case the preposition על /al/ “on” occurs before הָאֲדָמָָ֑ה, in Genesis 7:8, and I marked this in dark green. The preposition ב /bə/ “in, on, at” does not occur with this word in Genesis 6-9.

Another extremely rare Hebrew word הָחָרָבָה /ḥārāḇâ/ “dry land, dry ground” also occurs in Genesis 7:22, with the prefix ב /bə/ “in, on, at”, and the ESV translates it as “on the dry land”, although technically it should be “on dry land”, since it is indefinite (the NIV translates it correctly as “on dry land”). Even so, I didn’t change this in the ESV, since it probably won’t significantly affect any interpretation bias. This is shown in light green.

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¹ Even in English “earth” does not always refer to the whole planet, as we can see from verses like Genesis 24:52, 26:15, and 28:15, among many others, and its meaning also depends on its context.

² /bə/ “in the” gets contracted to /bā/.
1.2. “Mountains” or “Hills”

The word הרים /hāˈrîm/ can mean “mountains, hills, hill country” (the singular is היר /hār/ “mountain, hill, hill country”, but in Genesis 6-9 it only occurs in the plural). Most of the mountains in Israel are not very tall, and these are the ones generally referred to in the Old Testament, so they didn’t really need words to distinguish hills from mountains. And if the flood occurred in central Mesopotamia or even a dry Persian Gulf, because that is where all of the people were living, no mountains would be visible, only local hills, and it is quite possible that these are the ones referred to in Genesis 7:19.

For the “mountains of Ararat”, in the Bible the name Ararat referred to a country, not a mountain, and corresponded to the ancient region and kingdom of Urartu (see 2 Kings 19:37, Isaiah 37:38, and Jeremiah 51:27). The mountain we know today as Mount Ararat historically did not even have this name. Thus the original readers of Genesis 8:4 would have thought not of this mountain but of the region and kingdom, whose borders came down almost to the edge of the Mesopotamian plain, in fact almost to Nineveh, as can be seen by this map and this map.

Actually the Bible does not say that the ark ended up on the very top of a high mountain, and it more likely settled on some hill at a much lower altitude, probably not far above the Mesopotamian plain, which reaches 400 meters (1300 feet) above sea level where it meets the foothills.

I have changed all of these cases to **hills**, bold and in *pink*. (The definite form is הרים /hāˈrîm/ “the hills”. The construct form is הרים /hāˈrê/ “hills of”.)

1.3. “The Heavens” or “The Sky”

The word שמים /šāˈmayim/ is translated as “heavens, heaven, sky” in both the ESV and the NIV. However it always seems to be either “the heavens” or just “heaven”, never just “heavens” or “the heaven”.

This word has several problems. One is that it is one of a group of Hebrew words that are always plural, never singular. In other words, in Hebrew you can never say “heaven” or “sky”, only “heavens” or “skies”, at least in the case of this word. (There are several other Hebrew words that are sometimes translated “heaven” or “sky”, but they are very rare, and do not occur in Genesis 6-9. This is the normal word for “heaven” or “sky”.)

(The Hebrew word for water מים /ˈmayim/ has the same oddity: you can only say “waters”, never “water”. And a number of other words follow the same apparently arbitrary rule. Conversely there are a number of other words like עוף /ˈôp/ “bird” that can only be singular, even when their referent is obviously plural!)

Another problem with this word is that it can either mean the sky that we can see or heaven where God lives. The actual meaning can only be known from its context in each case. (See the Brown-Driver-Briggs section of this page.) And its meaning cannot be based on how a particular translation decides to

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3 No mountain in Israel west of the Jordan exceeds 4,000 feet (1219 meters), the highest being Mount Meron northwest of the Sea of Galilee at 1208 meters (3,963 feet). East of the Jordan none are higher than this except in the far south, up to 1854 meters (6,083 ft), and Mount Hermon in the far north at 2814 meters (9,232 ft).

4 There is actually another word for “hill” in Hebrew, גבעה /gibˈâ/, which according to the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon is “smaller than [a] mountain”. However, this word is much less frequent than הרים /hār/, and the vast majority of its uses are in poetry or prophecy, often as a poetic synonym of הרים /hār/. Other than these, the few specific uses of the word (e.g. Exodus 17:9-10, 1 Samuel 7:1, 2, Samuel 2:24-25, etc.) are to hills whose height cannot be determined. הרים /hār/ is the normal word for hill or mountain.

5 Ancient Jewish, Christian, and Islamic tradition said that Noah’s ark came to rest not on what is today called Mount Ararat, but on a mountain called Mount Judi or Mount Qardū, which is in the first range of mountains north of the Mesopotamian plain, at 2,089 meters (6,854 feet), in present-day Turkey, close to where Turkey, Syria, and Iraq meet. It is also close to where the River Tigris comes out of the northern mountains into the plain. (The coordinates given in the link above, and the place marked on Google Maps as Cudi Daği is located incorrectly, as is obvious by the fact that it is supposed be 2,089 meters tall, but the altitude at the place marked is only 600 meters. I have located the correct location at: 37°22′43.4"N 42°27′09.5"E, which seems to be the highest point in its range, at least until you go much farther east. This tradition is probably much closer to the actual location than Mount Ararat is, but it is impossible to know for certain how close it really is.)
translate it: in Genesis 6-9 the ESV always translates it “the heavens” or “heaven”, never sky; the NIV has “sky” twice in these chapters, and “the heavens” the rest of the time. However, I contend that in every case in Genesis 6-9 the meaning is “the sky we can see”.

This word can occur either without the article: שָמֶַ֫יִם /šāˈmayim/ “sky, heaven” or with it: הַשָמַָ֖יִם /haššāˈmayim/ “the sky, the heavens, (the) heaven”, but this difference does not help us to determine its meaning: it occurs with both meanings both ways, frequently in each case, though the form with the article is more common. In Genesis 6-9 it only occurs with the article, 9 times. Surprisingly, the ESV translates it as “the heavens” 8 times, but as “heaven” once, in Genesis 6:17, even though the form is identical. The NIV has “the heavens” in this case.

I have changed all of these cases to the sky, in olive with sky in bold, except in Genesis 6:17, where I have the sky with both words in bold, since the ESV had “heaven” with no “the”. (The form “in pause”, that is, at the end of a sentence or before a major break in the sentence, is הַשָמָָֽיִם /haššāˈmāyim/; 6 of the 9 cases in these chapters are these.)

Changing the translation to sky vastly changes our perspective in some of these cases. For example, in Genesis 6:17 it sounds quite impressive when God says, “I will bring a flood of waters upon the land to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven.” This sounds like it is referring to the heaven where God lives, and naturally gives a planetwide perspective. However, this Hebrew word is identical to all the other cases in these chapters, and should naturally be translated, like them, “under the sky,” referring to the sky over the land where the people lived, clearly in a poetic fashion, but with no planetwide implications. (See also the comments on Genesis 7:19 below.)

1.4. **Navigating Genesis**

*Navigating Genesis* deals with all of these words in greater or lesser detail in chapter 16 (though its handling of the hills is slightly different from my view here), and inspired me to write this page, since I thought it would make these ideas more real if I actually adjusted the text to its most natural reading. However, I strongly recommend that you read the book, since what I am presenting here is very limited.

This book also points out that in several instances it is important to understand that the perspective of these chapters is generally that of Noah, and should be viewed from his point of view. For example, in 7:19 it says, “And the waters prevailed so mightily on the land that all the high hills under the whole sky* were covered.” However, this should be understood as “under the whole sky (that Noah could see)”, so it would mean all the hills within his view. (See the discussion of שָמֶַ֫יִם /šāˈmayim/ above.) A similar case occurs in Genesis 8:5 in relation to the hills becoming visible and in 8:9 in relation to the waters still covering the whole land. I mark these three cases with asterisks and explanatory links.

2. **Interpretation Bias**

Even when no translation bias is involved, certain words can still be affected by the interpretation bias of the reader. For example, the word כָּרָב /ḥārāˈḇâ/ “dry land, dry ground” in Genesis 7:22 which was discussed above will naturally be interpreted according to the reader’s understanding of Genesis 6-9 as a whole, as to whether it applies to all the dry land on the planet or only the dry land in a local area. As I have made clear, I believe the latter should apply.⁶

And of course, even the English word “land” must be interpreted according to this same criterion, whichever Hebrew word it is translating, though it is much less prone to be interpreted as planetwide than “earth”. Again my point is simply that there is absolutely nothing in Genesis 6-9 that requires a planetwide understanding of the Flood.

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⁶ It is interesting that this is not the word used in Genesis 1:9-10 to refer to the dry land which was separated from the sea, which certainly in that context applies to the whole planet. That word is יַבָשָה /yabbāˈšâ/, also translated “dry land, dry ground”, and is almost as rare as כָּרָב. But again, that word also must be interpreted carefully according to its context, since in Joshua 3:17 and 4:18 it applies only to the dry ground the Israelites needed to cross the Jordan.
3. **Modified ESV Text of Genesis 6-9**

In choosing the English Standard Version (ESV) for this exercise I am not being particularly critical of the ESV: on the contrary, it’s the translation I personally prefer for my Bible reading and study. But all the Bible translations that I know of have this same bias to a greater or lesser degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modified ESV text of <em>Genesis 6-9</em>, with key words in color, and all modified words in <strong>bold</strong></th>
<th>Hebrew text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increasing Corruption on Earth</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong> When man began to multiply on the face of the <strong>land</strong> and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in a man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The Nephilim were in the <strong>land</strong> in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noah and the Flood</strong></td>
<td>The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the <strong>land</strong>, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man in the <strong>land</strong>, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the <strong>land</strong>, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the <strong>sky</strong>, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.</td>
<td><strong>7</strong> These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now the <strong>land</strong> was corrupt in God’s sight, and the <strong>land</strong> was filled with violence. And God saw the <strong>land</strong>, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the <strong>land</strong>. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the <strong>land</strong> is filled with violence</td>
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7 *Genesis 6:3* Or *My Spirit shall not contend with*
8 *Genesis 6:4* Or *giants*
9 *Genesis 6:13* Hebrew *The end of all flesh has come before me*
through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the land. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. 10 Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 11 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. 12 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. 13 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the land to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under the sky. Everything that is in the land shall die. 14 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. 15 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 16 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 17 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them.” 18 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 19 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, and seven pairs of the birds of the sky also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the land. For in seven days I will send rain on the land forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the land.” 20 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

10 Genesis 6:14 An unknown kind of tree; transliterated from Hebrew
11 Genesis 6:15 A cubit was about 18 inches or 45 centimeters
12 Genesis 6:16 Or skylight
13 Genesis 7:2 Or seven of each kind of clean animal
14 Genesis 7:3 Or seven of each kind
15 Genesis 7:4 Hebrew all existence; also verse 23

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ground. Two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the land.

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the sky were opened. And rain fell upon the land forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the land, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.

The water increased forty days on the land. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the land. The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the land, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily on the land that all the high hills under the whole sky were covered. The waters prevailed above the hills, covering them fifteen cubits. And all flesh died that moved on the land, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the land, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the sky. They were blotted out from the land. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the land 150 days.

The Flood Subsides

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the land, and the waters subsided. The fountains of the deep and the windows of the sky were closed, the rain from the sky was restrained, and the waters receded from the land continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest.

16 Genesis 7:20 A cubit was about 18 inches or 45 centimeters.

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<table>
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<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the land. Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole land. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the land. Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore. In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried off from the land. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the land had dried out. Then God said to Noah, “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the land—that they may swarm in the land, and be fruitful and multiply on the land.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the land, went out by families from the ark. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the land remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”</td>
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God’s Covenant with Noah

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>17 Genesis 8:21 Or dishonor The Natural Reading of Noah’s Flood as a Local Flood</td>
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</table>
And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the land and upon every bird of the sky, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of the man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

And you, 18 be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly in the land and multiply in it.”

Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the land with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the land. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the land.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the land and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be a sign of the covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the land.”

God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the land.”

Noah’s Descendants

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of...
Noah, and from these the people of the whole land were dispersed.\(^{19}\)

20 Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.\(^{20}\)

21 He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.

22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. 23 Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

He also said,

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem;
and let Canaan be his servant.

27 And God enlarge Japheth,"

and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,
and let Canaan be his servant.”

28 After the flood Noah lived 350 years. 29 All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

* This is from Noah’s perspective, the sky that he could see, and the nearby hills that he could have seen if they had not been covered with water.
** Again this is from Noah’s perspective, the hills that became visible from where the ark was resting.
*** Obviously the waters were not still on the face of the whole land, since the ark had settled to earth, and the tops of the hills were visible. But they were apparently too distant for the dove to reach, so from the dove’s perspective, it was true. But here it is clear that “land” or “earth” refers to something far smaller than the whole planet.

4. **Different Biases in English and Spanish**

It is interesting that in Spanish translation bias 1.1 discussed on page 2 does not occur, since מָרֹאִים/’eres/ is only translated in one way in Genesis 6–9 in both the Reina Valera 1960, the most commonly used version in evangelical churches, and in the Nueva Versión Internacional, as “tierra”, and the preposition ב/ba/ “in, on, at” is only translated in one way, as “en”, so both “in the land” and “on the earth” come out as “en la tierra”, with precisely the same ambiguities as Hebrew has.

\(^{19}\) Genesis 9:19 Or from these the whole earth was populated

\(^{20}\) Genesis 9:20 Or Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard

\(^{21}\) Genesis 9:27 Japheth sounds like the Hebrew for enlarge
Confusingly, אֲדָמָָ֑ה /ʾăḏāˈmâ/ is also always translated in Genesis 6-9 as “tierra”, making potential ambiguities slightly greater than in Hebrew. And even חָרָבָה /ḥārāˈḇâ/ is translated simply as “tierra” in the Reina Valera 1960, though the Nueva Versión Internacional translates it as “tierra firme”, which means “dry land”.

In addition, the preposition על /ʿal/ “on, on top of, upon, over”, is never translated the same as ב /bə/ “in, on, at” in Spanish, but always as “sobre”, so there is no potential confusion here as there is in English.

However, translation bias 1.2 discussed on page 3 still applies in Spanish, at least in certain versions like the NVI, though the RV60 uses “montes”, which is just as ambiguous as the Hebrew הָרִים /hāˈrîm/, or even nowadays tends to just mean “hills”.

Translation bias 1.3 discussed on page 3 is much less of an issue, since in Spanish the word for the sky that we can see or heaven where God lives is the same, “el cielo”, just like הַשָּמַָ֖יִם /haššāˈmayim/. However in the various Spanish Bibles it is translated with both the singular and the plural in these chapters, even though in Spanish it would not be plural; the plural might tend to suggest heaven where God lives, introducing a slight translation bias.

Thus the translation bias in Spanish in these chapters ends up being far less than in English. Instead, in Spanish, Hebrew, and other languages in which these words have similar ambiguities it becomes far more a question of interpretation bias.22

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22 This should not be interpreted as implying that English generally has a greater breadth of vocabulary than Spanish, or that Spanish generally matches the semantic domains of Hebrew; it just happens that in the case of these words this turns out to be the case. Spanish in general has just as great a breadth of vocabulary as English, even more in some areas, less in others.