



# The Deluge in Rabbinical Sources

During the “seven days” when the world was flooded by sheets of light, and terrifying signs and commotion filled the heavens, “the Holy One . . . reversed the order of nature, the sun rising in the west and setting in the east.” [\(1\)](#)

But during the Deluge “the sun and the moon shed no light” [\(2\)](#) and for an entire year the planets did not follow their regular courses. [\(3\)](#) It may be that because of dust discharged by volcanoes the sky remained veiled for a long period, and this veil made any celestial orientation impossible for the few survivors; but quite possibly the statement refers to a change in the celestial orbits. The rabbinical sources add that the earth was quaking, and the sun was darkened, and the foundations of the cosmos were dislodged. The entire world was in volcanic activity; “amidst lightnings and thunders a very loud sound was heard in the entire world, never heard before.” [\(4\)](#)

The Flood was caused by waters pouring from above, but also by waters drawn up from the ground. “All the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and all the windows of heaven were opened.” [\(5\)](#) The waters that came from the sky were heated. Many passages in the rabbinical literature refer to the heated water. [\(6\)](#)

The rabbinical literature also refers to great tides and surges of water that covered the face of the earth. “The flood began to toss the ark from side to side. All inside of it were shaken up like lentils in a pot.” [\(7\)](#) It is also said that not one, but many arks or vessels were used as a means of escape, but they were ruined or capsized one after the other in the surging water. [\(8\)](#) Judged by this, one would think that there were ample signs of the impending catastrophe, and attempts to organize rescue by preparing boats or ships, all probably destined to fail. The Biblical account, in order to explain the survival of the human species and some land animals, made the ark of Noah the central theme of the story. There must have been many Noahs, and the Midrashim also say so—but probably none of them escaped with his boat the outrages of nature. Possibly, in some caves high in the mountains, in far separated regions of the earth, human beings survived the Deluge; but hardly any vessel or ark. The attempt to find the remains of an ark on Mount Ararat are probably as futile as looking for the ribs of Adam. Yet such attempts are made even in our time. [\(9\)](#)

The duration of the flood is described differently—forty days, and also much longer. [\(10\)](#) Like the former catastrophe of the fall of man, this catastrophe of the Deluge, according to the Hebrew cosmogony, changed the nature of herb, animal and man. The prosperity of the time before the great flood was gone, never to return; the world lay in ruins. The earth was changed; even the sky was not the same.

The continents changed their places in the former catastrophes, and once again in the catastrophe of the Deluge. The areas which are now the shores of the Mediterranean were the shores of an open ocean—or so one may conclude from the following statement: “Before the birth of Noah, the sea was in the habit of transgressing its bounds twice daily, morning and evening. Afterwards it kept within its confines.”

As volcanoes erupted, the sky was darkened, and the ocean swelled and rolled on a helpless planet that fluttered when caught in hydrogen clouds of cosmic origin.

## References

1. Tractat Sanhedrin 108B of the *Babylonian Talmud*, ed. by I. Epstein (19xx). [ Taken literally, this statement implies a reversal of the Earth's rotation, or a "tippe-top" -type reversal of its poles. For a discussion of the latter possibility, see Peter Warlow, *The Reversing Earth* (London, 1982) and discussion by V. J. Slabinski and C. L. Ellenberger in *KRONOS* VII. 2 (1982), pp. 86-96; cf. also *KRONOS* VIII.3 (1983), pp. 84-89. In the electromagnetic model proposed by Velikovsky in *Cosmos without Gravitation* (1946) or such as that conceived by R. Juergens ("On the Convection of Electrical Charge by the Rotating Earth," *KRONOS* II.3 [1977], pp. 12-30) and E. R. Milton, a disturbance of Saturn of the magnitude described here would almost certainly bring about drastic changes in the Earth's rotational motion.].
2. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1928), vol. I, p. 162.
3. Midrash Rabba to Genesis 25:2.
4. Ha-Yewani Zerahiah, *Sefer Hayashar, The Book of the Righteous*, ed. and transl. by S. J. Cohen (New York, 1973), p.
5. Genesis 7:11.
6. The opinion of Rabbi Hisda to this effect is recorded in Rosh Hashanah 12A and Sanhedrin 108B. Cf. J. B. Wiedeburg, *Astronomische Bedenken* (Jena, 1744), p. 80, and sources in Ginzberg, *Legends* Vol. V, p. 178.
7. Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. I, p. 162.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 35.
9. E.g., the expedition recounted by D. Balsinger and C. Sellier, jr. in *In Search of Noah's Ark* (Los Angeles, 1976). If there are some ancient fossilized structures that resemble an ark, as some explorers assert, then more probably it was the presence of these remains which caused the Biblical penman to relate the rescue ship to the mountainous crag of Ararat in the southern Caucasus.
10. It appears that the tradition of "a year" of the deluge led to confusion in calculations, and the traces of this confusion seem to be found in the double redaction of the story of the Deluge. The age of Noah and his contemporaries would indicate that the year was shorter; it could still have consisted of a number of months, but not of months of thirty days; and the days themselves could have been shorter.

