

Hebrews 11:7
(Selections from Genesis 6-9)
“By Faith Noah Constructed An Ark”

Introduction

There are few stories as deeply imbedded in the human historical memory as is the story of the great flood. Nearly every ancient religion has its version of the flood story and of the man who build a great ship in which life on earth was saved.

What is it about this story that we find so disquieting? Is it the prospect of a loving God who created the earth and called it good now calling it wicked and destroying it? Or is it the fearful symmetry between the deluge of water destroying all in its wake and the deluge of fire predicted by Peter in the words we read last Sunday:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10:-13).

Whenever books or movies address this kind of global holocaust that nuclear weapons have made imaginable, the emphasis is on the calamity, its horror and the attendant death of hope. But in the Bible, the emphasis is always on God’s promise of salvation through the catastrophes, the floods and fires of life. Here, the emphasis is not on the flood, but on the ark, and on the person whom God chose to save his people from destruction.

God always provides a way through, but it is important that we note how God punishes, how God provides, and how we are to survive disasters that, apart from God’s grace, would one day finally separate us from his love.

Body

- 1. Note, first, how God punishes our unrepentant wickedness and rebellion: He lets go of us so that we might know the consequences of our rebellion.**

This is so often the key to understanding God’s judgments: in the creation account, God separates the “waters above from the waters below,” creating a

safe space between sky and sea for us to live our lives and pursue our dreams. It is God's restraining hand that preserves and sustains humanity, as he gives sunshine and rain to the just and the unjust alike. But when God finally responds in judgment to human rebellion and unbelief, it is usually simply by removing his protective hand so that we get what we have been asking for. If our words and deeds persistently say to God, "Leave us alone," God finally says, "All right. I'll leave you alone." And, in the awful words repeated three times by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:24, 26&28, God gives us up to the destructive consequences of our persistent, unrepentant rebellion against him.

2. Note, secondly, how God saves: He chooses someone to provide an ark of refuge from the storms of life.

God doesn't remove the floods and fires and troubles of life, nor does he remove us from them, but he carries us through them. He provides a way through the storms and through the fires, by sending a savior to provide a refuge that will save us from the waters of destruction. This is key: God uses people like us to save, to provide, to bring his way of salvation to those whom he entrusts to us. The task is not someone else's. Nor does God miraculously send floating down from the sky a rescue vessel built and equipped. He calls a man, Noah, to build the ark.

So, too, in order to provide the salvation that no mere human can provide, he entered our history, took human flesh, and bound himself to us for time and eternity, a greater Noah making through his life and death and victory over death the new redeemed community, the only ark in which we can survive the judgment of which Peter wrote.

3. Note, thirdly, why this particular person, Noah, "found favor in the eyes of the Lord": He was called "a righteous man, blameless in his generation," because he "walked with God."

Noah believed God's Word. How did he know God's Word? Andrew Huck sent me an interesting email last week, charting out the genealogy of Genesis 5 and noting several interesting things that a careful reading of the chapter reveals: [*see Andrew's observations on the final page*]. So, Noah was, in fact, surrounded as he grew up with a "great cloud of witnesses" to the stories of creation and fall, redemption, rebellion, warning, and God's patience in waiting for the oldest person of all to live out his life before sending judgment, and finally of God's mercy in providing a place of refuge.

And Noah sought God's approval, although it cost him the respect of the people of his age. He bore the mocking and abuse of those who watched him spend 120 years building, in the middle of a field, a wooden ship with a volume of 1,500,000 cubic feet and deck space of 100,000 square feet. As he

walked in faith based upon God's promises, he "found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

And he testified to God's justice and mercy. As Noah built the ark, Methuselah and other patriarchs lived on, testifying with Noah of the coming judgment and pleading with the people of their age to repent and turn from their sin and rebellion, and enter the ark of safety.

Conclusion: What does this have to do with us?

Do you notice the progression in these stories? Abel drew near to God. Enoch drew near to God and walked with him. Noah drew near to God, walked with him, and obeyed him in this radical act of providing an ark of refuge for his family and for all who would heed God's call. Our author chose these illustrations as pictures of enduring faith in the face of trouble.

What does that look like for us? You and I are called – not only in the good times, but especially when our lives are coming apart, when all we cherish seems threatened, when God seems silent to our cries for help – to draw near to God, to walk with God, to trust him and to obey his call to follow. In Christ, God has provided the only ark in which to survive the final holocaust of which all other horrors of human history are but types and shadows.

So what does it mean for you and me to trust God? Do you know, are you learning, committing to your heart and mind, the promises of God's Word which alone can give you confidence to stand in the face of whatever life throws at you? In the face of temptation, can you say with the apostle Paul, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13)? Can you say from the heart in the face of seeming disasters, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37)? Only those who know his word can trust his promises.

What does it mean to seek and gain his approval? When tempted to win the approval of others, or simply to do whatever you most want at the moment, are you stopped by a deep sense of the presence of the One who redeemed you and filled again with longing one day to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21)?

What does it mean to proclaim his justice and mercy? Do you seek, in word and deed, to live so that those who know you have reason to believe that the gospel is true, because in some measure you display his justice and mercy?

By faith, Noah believed and obeyed, and God remembered Noah, and the world was saved.

Andrew Huck's Observations (from Andrew's email)

- For [the last 50 years of Adam's life](#), the first 9 patriarchs were all living.
- [Fourteen years after Seth died](#), Noah was born. Seth was a child of promise after Abel was murdered by Cain. Noah received that promise from God that he and his family would be saved from the flood and that God would not destroy the world again with a world wide flood.
- [The last 40 years of Noah's life](#), all 10 patriarchs born after the flood were alive including Abraham.
- Shem, the son of Noah, lived to see the first 100 plus years of Isaac's life and the first 50 years of Jacob's life.
- Seventy-eight years after the death of Shem, the children of Israel moved into Egypt during the drought.
- [The first deaths from old age began occurring during Abraham's lifetime](#). First, Noah died. Then Abraham's grandfather, Nahor died. His lifespan was considerably shorter than that of the others. His son, Haran also died in Ur. It was perhaps at this time that Terah, Abraham's father, left Ur and moved his family to Haran.
- The long ages of the earlier patriarchs allowed for God to leave a witness to future generations which were shortened after the flood, first to 500 years, then after 4 generations to about 250 years. By the time the children of Israel left Egypt, the age span was about 120 years which God had before ordained.

(Gen 6:3 "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.")

God had determined that the life span of man should be reduced when he saw the wickedness which developed before the flood.

- The time span from the end of the flood to the call of Abraham to move to the land of Caanan was only 370 years. Noah died 350 years after the flood.
- The time span from the end of the flood to the entering into Egypt was 580 years.
- [The time span from the death of the last of the 10 patriarchs born after the flood to the entering into Egypt was just under 50 years.](#)
- Three generations overlapped during the first 2000 years of history. Adam lived to tell Methusaleh of the experience of walking with God in the garden, of the fall, the first murder, and all he knew firsthand from God of the creation. Methuselah lived to the year of the flood and could have related all this to Shem, Noah's son who would live 500 years after the flood to impart this and all the experiences of the flood to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The events of creation, the Garden of Eden, the fall, and the flood were not the result of hundreds of retellings of ancient history changing the real events to myth. God had left a witness in Shem. Jacob lived the first part of his life while Shem was still alive. He knew of the long ages of men which had lived before him. That is why he remarked to Pharaoh that *"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."* Gen 47:9

