

Foundations: The Justice of God
By Jason Huff
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Psalm 29; Luke 6:46-49; Genesis 7:11-8:1

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Genesis 7:11-8:1. May God add His richest blessing on the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month -- on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in. For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished -- birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days. But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.”

Some stories, we assume everyone knows, at least for those of us over 40, I'm guessing. Fables and fairy tales were part and parcel of what everyone heard. I don't know if I heard Little Red Riding Hood and The Three Little Pigs or Hansel and Gretel from my mom or dad or early on in school, but we knew those stories. Rapunzel and Cinderella were well-known long before we could watch Disney versions on our VCRs and DVD players. Some of us were shocked, of course, when we delved into the original Grimm's Fairy Tales and found out just how gruesome they could be. We cleaned them up for children, but the original collections were both scholarly and definitely not suitable for kids.

In the same way, we have made Noah's Ark a story for children. How many pictures I've seen of animals serenely standing on an uncovered deck of the ark (which is not the way the ark was built), with water below and a rainbow above. Google “Noah's Ark” and you can find a section of nothing but clip art, with smiling Noah and the most charming lions and tigers and bears you will ever see. All of the pictures have two giraffes with their necks sticking out a side window, because, you know, giraffes do that, I guess. It's all so...cute!

But in making the ark a bedtime story for children, we've taken away its significance and importance. The cutesy ark might be pretty or fun, but it also makes it impossible to take the story seriously, which the Bible certainly does. Today, I want to wrestle with the implications of the flood and the way the Bible describes it so we do not miss its significance and what God is saying to us through it.

The Bible treats the flood narrative not as a story but as real history. This is incredibly important because many ancient peoples told a story of a flood. In fact, one of the oldest we have is the story of Gilgamesh. There are several lines in Gilgamesh and the biblical account of the flood that they must have had some common origin. Both have an ark and animals saved; both have sending of doves and ravens out to test the flood waters; both have a sacrifice after the ark comes to rest. They are clearly related. Some scholars have looked at the story of Noah and said, "Obviously, Noah is just a variation on this older tale."

But here's the real difference. Utanapishtim, who has the role of Noah in Gilgamesh, is a self-centered hero. His story is told in the first person. "I laid out her structure...I watched the weather...I went into the boat...I sealed its entry. I had the animals of the field go up..." All of it is a wild boast about all he did, things that would be impossible for any man, that he does while the gods cower. But what's more hysterical is that his ark is a gigantic cube. It's an enormous box on the water. In that culture, the cube symbolized perfection. Have you ever tried to sail a cube? You know what a cube full of stuff does? It sinks. You have a myth, a legend.

But not the story told in the Bible. As we learned last week, the ark in Scripture is seaworthy. It could hold all the animals that could legitimately populate the earth today. But more importantly, the story focused on God far more than it does on Noah. Noah played a part which he carried out by faith. He was responsible for building the ark's structure and for gathering an enormous amount of food to keep the animals fed. But that's where his responsibilities ended. It was a large task that Scripture suggests might have taken him the better part of a century to complete. Again, though, it was reasonable given the timespan.

But today's passage confirms that the animals came to Noah; he did not have to round them up. God provided for what Noah could not do himself. And perhaps most importantly, God seals the ark. The rains began the day Noah and his family went onto the ark. Could eight people have hoisted the door to the ark closed? Very unlikely. And yet they didn't have to. Scripture says, "The Lord shut him in." It was not contingent on Noah to be a hero, to be a strongman who by his might shut a four-story door. And while the boat was covered with pitch, how could the door be? It certainly couldn't have been sealed on the outside. It is God and not Noah who makes sure he and all those living on the ark are safe. The Bible doesn't tell us about super men but a super God.

And this is the first idea I want to think about today: *both creation and creation's undoing point to God's might and God's authority.* When we think of the ultimate power of God, we almost always turn to Genesis 1, where God creates the universe and takes it from chaos to order. But God's might and authority are just as much on display in the reversals of Genesis 7. God's authority is shown in bringing the animals to Noah; His might closes the ark's door. And both are shown as God unleashes the destruction of the flood.

God isn't just destroying the earth but reshaping it. Look at this language: "All the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened." The rains come for forty days and forty nights, but the floodwaters are there for 150 days – 5 months. How did this happen? We do not just have rain. We have a geological catastrophe. We have massive shifts in the land structure of the earth itself. Depending on how you look at the science – and obviously there are many different conclusions and disagreements – there are evidences that point towards many geological shifts that could be attributed to a worldwide flood. Not every theory holds weight, but there's plenty to suggest that this literally earth-shaking, devastating event changed the planet as we know it.

Yet at no point does God ever lose control of the flood. At no point is the ark in danger. Everything occurs just as God had told Noah before the flood. He has the authority and might to destroy creation, to remold creation; it is His and it responds as He desires. God's handiwork is just as evident here as it was when He set the sun, moon, and stars in place.

Everything in creation is just as much under God's control and authority now as it was during the flood. Nothing has changed. It's funny how we have no clue how to deal with it. We can get men on the moon and send a ship to Mars and have a probe out beyond the solar system, but we can't even predict the weather, let alone control it. But God sets everything in place and determines its courses.

There is no part of creation that God does not have sovereignty over. Everything bears the mark of its creator and is made for His purposes. And it's His choice what He does with creation. Whether He holds back the rain or sends it in torrents, whether He allows the plants to flourish and the gardens to grow or allows a drought, when the earth quakes or the volcanos blow, that's all at God's discretion.

We should recognize God's power and authority at that level, but it's also true at a personal level. If the God of creation and the flood loves us, what can He not do for us? Can He not move heaven and earth to aid someone He had claimed as His daughter or His son? We serve an awesome, majestic, powerful God that in one true sense, we fear. We respect. We bow before His immensity and perfection. But we also know that He is for us and not against us. When we come into God's Kingdom through the love and gift of Jesus, we know that all of the might and power and authority of the Father Himself is on our side.

May our prayers reflect that! When we pray that God might find us a new place to worship, let's pray confident God can and will open doors! When we pray that God might bring people into our lives to love into His Kingdom, let's pray confident in His power to do so! When we pray that we would be made more holy, less worldly, let's pray confident that God will change us! He made the earth and opened its deeps. He made the skies and opened their floodgates. He can do what we ask, and He will do it as it aligns with His perfect will. You are the child of the only, most powerful, most glorious God!

Now we come to the hard part. This is where things turn truly serious. The flood waters come, the rains downpour, the ark rises over twenty feet, two stories, above the tallest mountain. And everything on earth perishes. We hear the language of creation in reverse, and we hear it three times back-to-back, repeated to emphasize the sheer disaster of it all. No living thing with the breath of life in it that resides on the ground survives...only those on the ark. The narrative does not hide in pictures of cute animals or Noah and his family. It dives three times into the truth of it – that human wickedness has ended in utter ruin not only for humanity but for the original created order.

Here's the point we cannot miss that's so important, especially as we consider sharing the good news of Jesus with others: *God has rendered judgment before, and He will do so again.* As we've mentioned the past two weeks, this is not God having anger issues or acting out of malice. God is destroying the utter and total wickedness of humanity. The world had become full of violence, non-stop, everywhere. God did not just say, "Enough!" and throw down some lightning. Depending on how we read the text, God waited between 60-120 years between commanding Noah to build the ark and the flood. Plenty of time for repentance; plenty of time for people to turn from their wickedness. It didn't happen. And so in due time they received the penalty for their injustices and evil.

God's choice with the flood is to wash away wickedness in a very literal sense. We see that all the animals are washed away too, and while that may not seem "fair" to our minds, it reminds us that our sins have consequences far beyond the actions themselves. We do not see all those hurt by our disobedience. Creation itself groans, Scripture says, because of the way humanity has turned against God.

But these are not the actions of the Old Testament God in comparison to some different God in the New Testament. Some people have said that over time. The idea is that, "Oh, God doesn't act that way anymore." Some people have even said that Jesus is actually a completely different God. The early church shot that down very quickly as heresy. But we have a sense that God in ancient days was mean and harsh and now is kind and loving because of Jesus.

It's simply not true. God is incredibly patient in the Old Testament. He gives so many opportunities to people to turn to Him; He does not treat them as their sins deserve. He gives people groups and nations hundreds of years to repent of sin before bringing judgment. He brings prophets with warnings about sin. He establishes His power and authority, yet treats everyone with far more grace than they deserve considering how often they disobey His ways.

And Jesus is God's rescue plan; He reveals that through Him, salvation comes. But Jesus has a laser sharp view of eternal judgment. About half the references to eternal judgment in the New Testament come from Jesus' lips. 85% of the references to hell in our English translations of the New Testament are spoken by Jesus. He is more concerned about eternal judgment than almost any of the Old Testament prophets. The term "judgment" comes up 7 times in Ezekiel and 7 times in Isaiah. Jesus mentions it 8 times in Matthew, 3 times in Luke, and 9 times in John. Jesus is clear that He did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it. But Jesus is also clear that there is something to be saved from, and that is the perfect, holy, just wrath of God in eternal judgment.

Friends, if you have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord and that faith is proven true in your life and actions, you have nothing to worry about. But if we are truly Christians, we are concerned for the lost, those who do not know God. It's not a passive concern, not an "oh, they'll be alright" kind of concern, it's active, it's a knowledge that judgment is coming, judgment for all of us, judgment where we will stand before the throne of God and either all our treason against God will be laid bare, or Christ will stand as our defense attorney and declare, "Their price has been paid."

One of those ways we know if we belong to God is if we long for more people to know Him, not only to avoid the judgment to come but to know God's love and peace in this life even now. It's not something people want to talk about; many people don't believe in eternal judgment or hell. However, what's true is true even if no one believes it. If we see the flood in Genesis, if we see the partial judgments of God throughout history, if we see the judgment on Jerusalem that Jesus predicted that came about in 70AD, we know judgment has been carried out before, and there's no reason to disbelieve its future promised fulfillment. Not a callous judgment, not a harsh judgment, but the genuine earned wrath deserved by each person who refuses steadfastly to repent of sin.

Listen, go to Walmart, buy a book if you want self-help tips. Go to a psychologist to feel better about yourself. Buy tickets to a better concert than we can put on. We don't come to church to hear about an easy life or to feel warm and fuzzy. I know Jesus because He's called me, and I follow Him because He's put the love of God in me, and I follow Him because He is saving me from the wrath to come. That's unpopular in our culture, but it's true. And I encourage you to think about your life with Christ today and why it's important to share Him with others. If helping someone be transformed into Christ's image and helping them enjoy God's pleasure rather than face His punishment isn't motivating, I don't know what is.

Finally, our last thought of the day...after all this death and destruction. "But God remembered Noah...and the waters receded." God made Noah a promise. God did not forget. I can't imagine how hard it was for Noah and his family to be out there on the water for five whole months without a single sign that the flood was abating. Feeding these animals day after day, tiny and massive alike, hearing the rain on the boat for forty days straight, not knowing when it would end. I nearly gave myself a panic attack just writing that sentence!

But God remembered Noah. God stepped in and did as He said. Noah was never abandoned, not for a moment. Noah and his family were safe and secure in God's hands. There was no point that the ark was in danger of tipping, in danger of capsizing, in danger of leaking and sinking. Scary? Yes! Terrifying? Yes. But God remembered Noah.

Three words for the fridge, if you are a believer: *God remembers you*. In your pain, in your suffering, in your sunny days and your rainy ones, in your overwhelming happiness and your unfathomable grief, God remembers you. No matter what circumstances, no matter what your bank account says, no matter your home, your car, no matter your disease, no matter your trials and temptations, no matter your job, God remembers you. As we talked about last week, God takes us through storms, not around them. He does it for our own sakes and the sakes of others. But God has not forgotten you in the storm.

Friends, let us hold one another up in prayer. Let us support one another. Most often, we know, we feel, that God remembers us best when others remember us. As the church, we get to be God's hands and feet. Know that God remembers you – so reach out to someone here at CrossWay and let them know they are remembered too.

Next week, we head into the final days of the flood. Until then, let us keep our eyes on God, who is powerful enough to protect us, mighty enough to heal us, loving enough to remember us, and merciful enough to save us from the judgment to come.