

Foundations: Saved Through The Waters
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 54:8-10; 1 Peter 3:13-22; Genesis 6:11-7:10

Our final Scripture reading today is Genesis 6:11-7:10. May God add His blessing on the reading of His perfect, holy, and infallible Word. “Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them." Noah did everything just as God commanded him. The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made." And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.”

I'm by no means a sports fan, but one of my favorite memories growing up was watching ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. When there was nothing to do on a Saturday afternoon, there was always *Wide World of Sports*. Between that and the Olympics every four years, I was set. And what I remember most about the shows were not the actual events themselves but the stories about the athletes. While they were waiting on real-time transitions in an event, they would play pre-taped vignettes about how this guy had overcome a learning disability or this gal had made it through a damaged hamstring or some other kind of thing. The snapshot was rarely ever about victory after victory, but how victory came at a price, and despite hardships and adversity. Even if their stories didn't have immense tragedies, they'd focus on 4am start times and hours upon hours of practice after school. And that story wound up being more important than how they did in their event on that particular day and time.

I start with that thought today because Noah and his family go through real adversity. You might say that they go through the first major adversity recorded in Scripture where they didn't bring it on themselves! We're going to be going through the story of the flood for the next few weeks, so there's lots of time to talk about various aspects of it. But today I want to focus in on how God's call to Noah reflects the realities of our walk with God today – because God never changes, we know that He will remain steadfast in how He works with us even today.

Today's passage starts with a reiteration of why God is bringing the flood. We talked about this at length last week, but in case you missed it, it's worth repeating. God is not doing anything vicious or mean-spirited in flooding the earth. He is carrying out appropriate justice on all the wickedness that has taken place. As last week's passage put it, every inclination of the human heart all the time was only on doing evil. God floods the earth because it would be unjust for the wicked to go unpunished forever.

God says as much in today's passage. God tells Noah of His plans to wipe out the violence on the earth that humanity has wrought. But Noah – who again, we learned was righteous among his generation – God spares. God gives him a plan: build an ark. This ship God gives Noah the plans to build is massive. (Our translation puts it in feet, but those dimensions are somewhat questionable based on new evidence.) What we know is that it is probably about a football field and a quarter long, about half a football field wide, and nearly four stories tall, with a roof and three decks.

And on the ark, God will bring to Noah two of every unclean animal and seven of every clean animal to take care of. (This is the first time God makes a differentiation between animal categories, by the way, because some will serve as sacrifices for Noah and his family later.) It will be his family's job to feed and house them – but notice that God Himself leads all the animals to Noah. God makes a way for creation to continue despite His judgment.

Now before we go on, I want to stop and say that this is not just a story. We've all wondered, could a ship that size contain the number of animals that the Bible suggests? And the answer is, yes. A group of postgraduate students at Leicester University in England found that not only are the dimensions given of the ark seaworthy, it could well hold 70,000 animals without sinking. Multiple sets of scientists have done the math and found that based on the numbers of land and air animals on the earth today, all the different species, they could have originated from a group of 70,000. They aren't arguing if it happened, only that what the Bible tells us could very well have happened. So when we look at Noah's Ark, we aren't looking at a fairy tale but something that could have legitimately happened. And given that a flood legend existed in almost all ancient cultures, it almost certainly has a basis in reality.

But what all do we see here? First thought for the day, worthy of being up on your fridge: *God delivers His people*. Here we are, just six chapters into the first book of the Bible, and God is delivering His people from eminent destruction. This is a pattern we see early and often in Scripture. God rescues those who belong to Him. Noah and his family's salvation does not come from their ingenuity or cleverness, not from reading the skies or the tea leaves. Noah's family is saved solely by the grace of God. God did not have to save them, but He does.

This theme carries through Scripture. We're meant to see it. Something fascinating I have to share with you this week is about this word "ark." In Hebrew, the word is *tebah*. We don't hear about arks too often, right? Not a common word. It's not a common word in Hebrew, either. Throughout the entirety of the Old Testament, there's only one other place it's used outside the story of Noah and his family. Do you know where it is?

You might remember the story many, many years later of how the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. Because of God's blessing, the Israelite slaves grew into a large and powerful force. The Egyptians started to become afraid of them, and so the ruler ordered all male Hebrew babies killed. The midwives refused to obey, but these children were hard to conceal. In this time, Moses was born. Three months after his birth, wanting to save her child, Moses' mother puts Moses into a wicker basket covered in tar and pitch and set him by the bank of the Nile, hoping beyond hope that he would be delivered from certain death. Do you know what the word for that basket was in Hebrew? It's *tebah* – "ark." It's no coincidence. Just as Noah and company were saved via ark to continue the human race, Moses is saved via ark to become the leader of Israel.

God delivers His people. He rescues Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah, rescues Jacob from Esau, rescues Joseph from death in a well, rescues his family from starvation, rescues the Israelites from Egypt, rescues the next generation out of the wilderness beyond Egypt. He sends judges to rescue them. He sends mighty kings and wise prophets and noble priests. He saves them from captivity in Babylon.

And finally, God delivers His people once and for all through Jesus. Through Jesus, all of His people, Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, slave and free, they're delivered from sin and death and eternal punishment. By the cross of Christ, all who have trusted in God throughout the ages are saved, redeemed, and made whole, brought into God's Kingdom and restored. God's deliverance of His people is something we can celebrate in every generation. When God delivers us, we are baptized, the waters symbolizing our death and rebirth in Christ, as people saved through the waters, by God's grace, like Noah and Moses were.

God delivers because He keeps His promises, which He makes formally as covenants. God promises a covenant to Noah, but since that's completed in a couple chapters, we'll talk about it then. This will be the first major covenant in Scripture, but there are more to come.

Let's move on to the second major concept I see in today's passage, the one that we in the modern world need to learn: *God delivers us through adversity, not around adversity*. God doesn't make it rain everywhere except Noah's backyard. God could have done that, but He didn't. God didn't help Noah avoid the flood; He provided a way that Noah and his family could thrive through flood.

How often is this the biblical way of things? Jacob lives in exile before he is reconciled to Esau. Joseph goes to prison for two years before he becomes the second in command of Egypt. The miracle of the Exodus is not that the Israelites escaped around the Red Sea but went through it. In the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus prayed about His coming crucifixion, Jesus prayed about the possibility of avoiding it, if it were possible. Yet the Father saw Him through it, and because Christ saw it through, we now have the gates of heaven spread wide to us.

So often we wonder, “Why is this thing happening to me?” Honestly, many of us have faced awful trials and tragedies. There’s no denying it. We’ve lost family members and friends. We’ve faced financial burdens. We’ve faced emotional trials and personal injustices and hardships galore, broken bones and broken hearts and broken lives. And we wonder why God doesn’t just spare us all of that. Sometimes we even wonder what we’ve done to deserve what’s happened to us, as if karma were really a thing rather than an ancient myth. Or in our darkest moments, we wonder if God is even there if we suffer so greatly.

But we have to take the biblical example and apply it to ourselves. God will see us through, not around. Jesus warned us of this very thing when He said, “If they hated me, they will hate you too.” He said, “No servant is more than his master.” If Jesus, who was perfect, wasn’t spared abject suffering in this life but was delivered through it, we should expect that same thing. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray that we that we not be led into temptation but delivered from evil. We ask that God would spare us anything that would not grow us into His likeness. But we do not ask that we get around God’s plan. Jesus acknowledges this in John 12:27, saying that despite His heart being troubled, it was for the purpose of salvation that He comes to the hour of His death.

And as we think about good parents today, especially as we celebrate Mother’s Day, we know that we are best off delivered around some trials and delivered through others. When we think about our mothers, we are glad they protected us from all sorts of things we didn’t even know were things. They watched out for our safety; they made us put on our coat and hat when it was negative something outside. They layered on sunscreen and fed us healthy meals and kept a close watch on us, closer than we might have realized.

And yet at the same time, they knew that we would not learn how to ride a bike unless we had some scraped knees. A fender bender might be the price of learning how to drive. Dating often brought broken hearts with it. They drove us to sports we had no chance of winning and cheered us on as we lost. They dropped us off for those dates and bought those bicycles and lent us their cars. They prepared us, but they also knew that we would only learn through the challenge, not avoiding it. And we thank them for it today. Moms, we are grateful for you.

In the same manner, don’t let your suffering go to waste. Assume that God has a greater point and purpose to it. Maybe it’s to lead you back to Him, to break you of your self-reliance, to get you back into His Word and into prayer and into church. Maybe it’s to teach you something. Or maybe it’s not for you at all. Maybe your gracefulness through great difficulties and hurdles is meant to inspire and teach someone else. I imagine that there was a lot of heartache that went into building that boat for half a century. But God redeemed that time and delivered Noah and his family through it.

Final thought for us today, a prayer and a challenge: *our faithful obedience is a significant determining factor in how we approach trials and how well we come through them.* Noah had a lot of work to do. We don’t know how long it took, but many estimate it anywhere from 50-120 years, depending on what help Moses had. He not only had to build the boat, but he had to find food and collect it for all these different species. Yet twice in this passage, we hear the words, “Noah did all that God commanded him to do.”

How faithfully prepared are we to carry out the Lord's instructions to us? If we're honest with ourselves, probably not very much. If I had to point out a key failing in my life and the lives of most people I know who are very much committed to being Christians, it would be consistent obedience to God. I don't mean that we're willfully sinning every day, living as if we don't belong to God, not that at all. I mean that Noah was commended for doing everything that God commanded. It's that 100% marker that is so difficult.

This isn't to say that God doesn't forgive our failings and weakness. God isn't looking to zap us if we fall into bed exhausted without praying or if we occasionally have a bad day at work where we lose track of time to spend with Him. What is the greater issue – for me, at least, and I'm guessing you too – is that we're inconsistent with turning to God on a regular, daily basis.

It's not that we never do these things, but that we are haphazard. Surveys have shown that less than 40% of Christians in the United States attend services every weekly. (In fact, attendance records in comparison to personal surveys show that the number may be closer to 25%.) In many African nations, that figure is closer to 90%. It's expected that to have a close walk with God, you'll be in church. Now I'm probably preaching to the choir because you *are* here today! But seriously, if worship is a central point in our time with God each week, kind of the cornerstone event, if we can't carve that time out every week, we may have a problem carving out other time with Him too.

This is ultimately not about creating guilt. We might feel guilty because we are guilty of not spending the time we should with God. But that's not the core of this point. As we talked about in youth group this week, when we adore God, when we worship God, it's not about God being self-seeking. God isn't changed by our worship and adoration. We are. When we focus on the perfection of God – His goodness, love, mercy, grace, justice, long-suffering – we start to become more like Him. Our faithful obedience in turning to Him daily and seeking after Him, whether through Scripture or service, through Bible study or devotions or prayer, it's actually for our benefit. These forms of obedience draw us close to Him, make us more like Him, and prepare us for the trials that lie ahead.

People who walk closely with God experience the same hardships and troubles as those who don't, and sometimes even worse. Our emotional state isn't protected when we experience great loss. Jesus was emotional about the cross. Paul was emotional about being abandoned by his friends while he awaited near-certain execution in jail. The difference is knowing, trusting, and believing that God will deliver us through whatever is happening to us. If we've done the prep, if we've built the ark, when the rains come down, we're still going to get wet, but we're not going to drown. So our challenge now is to stay close to God – to be in prayer, in worship, in study, in faithful service to others – so that when trials come, we will know by faith that God will deliver us through them.

Next week, we'll hear more about the travels of the ark and what happened next. For now, remember the words of Jesus – “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Whatever trouble we face, know that our Deliverer, our Savior, our Redeemer, will see us through it. May we draw close to Him and know His steadfast power and love through the floods in our lives.

