

## Messages From Genesis “The Days of Noah”

Back in the days of the Cold War with Russia, you might occasionally hear of someone building a bomb shelter in case there would be a nuclear blast. PBS television had a documentary about a real estate developer, building and selling condominiums. But these were not your normal condos! They were being built *underground*, in a remote area of the U.S. These were meant to be shelters from disasters that might be on the horizon: a nuclear war.....environmental disasters.....and possible ensuing famine and the breakdown of law and order. Food for up to 4 years was stored in the walls. Every available space was used for survival tools. The documentary also highlighted another community, where a small group for religious reasons were carving homes out of rock, underground. They too were storing up food, preparing for any kind of cataclysmic event.

How do people react when they hear of something like this? How do *you* react? Most people, I guess, just kind of chuckle and blow it off - maybe think about it for a brief moment, but then go on with the normal routine of living.

I wonder how people reacted when Noah began to build the ark! Noah was not building a little row boat or kayak – but a huge ship! 500 feet long (the length of about 1½ football fields, 45-50 feet high!). There is an attraction in Williamstown, KY called the Ark Encounter. It features a full-sized replica of Noah's Ark. Perhaps some of you have been there.

I can imagine Noah's neighbors starting to get curious when Noah begins to gather a huge stockpile of wood – truckload after truckload arriving from the local lumber yard. As the ship begins to take shape, friends and neighbors begin to wonder if Noah hasn't flipped his lid! We can guess at some of the comments. "Good grief, why is he stockpiling all that wood!" And as it starts to take shape: "He's building a *ship! Here!* Look at the size of that thing!" Remember, too, we don't know whether Noah lived by the sea. So, even if he finished this monster-boat, how was he ever going to transport it to a body of water? When we lived in the Poconos I decided to make a wishing well for the front lawn. So I worked on it in the basement of the parsonage. As it began to come together, I have to admit, I was so proud of that thing! I was just about finished building it when the thought crossed my mind: Am I going to be able to get this through the sliding glass door? I discovered I couldn't! So I had to take some of it apart, and finish it outside. Maybe Noah's neighbors wondered, "How's he ever going to move that monstrosity to the nearest sea?"

Also, the account in Genesis doesn't say whether Noah told everyone that God was sending a great flood. If Noah did tell them, apparently they only ignored him, or laughed at him. I suspect after a while people just got used to the sight of Noah hammering away...and the ridiculing died down, and Noah was no longer the sole topic of conversation. People just settled down to their business-as-usual routines. But once Noah began to take animals onto the boat, curiosity was peaked again – and people just stood by, watching, and shaking their heads.

*Then one day it started to rain.* It rained and rained and rained and rained. 40 straight days and nights. You know the story. Noah and his wife, and their 3 sons and their wives – 8 people

inside, and a zoo full of animals. *And everybody else perished in the flood!*

Why did God send such a Flood? These awful words found in Scripture tell us why. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humans was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humans on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, 'I will blot out from the earth the humans I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air—for I am sorry that I have made them'...now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth'" (Genesis 6:5-7, 11-13)

What God had created as *good* had now become totally degenerate and wicked. Sin is introduced in the Adam and Eve story. And things just get worse and worse (including Cain murdering his brother Abel). The Bible pictures God as “being sorry” that He had made the world. Then we hear those horrible words, 'I will blot out man whom I have created...I have determined to make an end to all flesh...'.

However, Noah and his family were spared. How come? "But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9).

*What does this story mean for us?* Somebody has called this story "a parable of God's justice and mercy."

***It speaks of God's justice (or judgment).*** The Flood is God's punishment on human wickedness. God is holy. God hates sin. Sin destroys people and God's good creation. Sooner or later evil must be judged.

Now this kind of talk does not make for a “feel-good” sermon! But it's reality. It's life. It's truth. The distinguished New Testament scholar, Alan Richardson, wrote: “Modern folk who often hold sentimentalized notions about the love of God, based upon their failure to appreciate the horror and extent of sin, are apt to take offense at the biblical picture of humankind as perishing in its wickedness and at the thought of the awfulness of the divine judgment.” The Flood reminds us that God judges evil.

Is the world any better today than it was in Noah's time? In some ways, perhaps yes. In most ways, not. I really don't need to elaborate, do I? Russia destroying the nation of Ukraine. Militant Jihadists chopping off people's heads, blowing up people with bombs. Our politicians lying and demonizing their opponents. Scammers and hackers. The garbage that comes through our TV and movie screens. A first-grade teacher asked her class, “What's the shape of the world.” One little tyke spoke up, “My daddy says the shape of the world's a mess.” It is!

Walter Russell Bowie has these comments on the Flood: "The ancient story is a parable of terrible reality. There can be a point in the disintegration due to evil when something has to break. Then the forces of decency left on earth are not strong enough to hold back the pressure of moral consequence."

The story of Noah and the Flood is a parable of God's justice, His judgment. But it's also a parable of **God's mercy**. God spared Noah. He didn't blot him out with the rest of the world. "Male and female of every creature went in, just as God had commanded him. Then the Lord closed the door behind them" (Genesis 7:16). Here is a delightful "anthropomorphism", which means attributing to God a human characteristic. As Noah is loading the boat with animals, it pictures God being there, taking part in the process, and when they are all in, God closes the big door behind them! Genesis 8:1 says, "God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark." Even as God is bringing massive judgment on a decadent world, He is tenderly watching over Noah and the animals, holding them dear to His heart!

*The New Testament sheds further light on the meaning of this ancient story.* The New Testament writers and the early Christian Church saw in the story of Noah and the ark a "type" or foreshadowing of Christ and His work of salvation. For instance, 1 Peter 3:20-21 says that as Noah and his family were kept safe in the ark, Christians are saved through *the waters of baptism*. Baptism symbolizes becoming a Jesus follower - having our sins washed away - having new life in Christ. Jesus is our ark of safety and salvation.

*Jesus Himself commented on the days of Noah.* Speaking of His return, Jesus said this: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:36-37). Jesus says the time prior to His return will be like the time when Noah lived. What did Jesus mean?

Maybe Jesus is saying that the time before His return will be a time when evil will increase and the world will get worse and worse. Other Scriptures tell us this: 2 Timothy 3:1-5a says that wickedness will increase prior to the Lord's return. "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power."

But also, I think Jesus is saying that His coming will be unexpected, and many will not be prepared, just like many missed the signs that a flood was coming. "For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:38-39).

Jesus says, just like in the days of Noah, before His return people will be eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage. Now what's wrong with eating? What's wrong with getting married? Nothing! The point is, people in Noah's time were just so immersed in the everyday affairs of life that they were unprepared for the judgment God was about to bring. They gave no thought to the moral and spiritual decadence in them and around them.

Do you think there's some of this today? People too busy to go to church...or to pray...or to feed their souls. Even Sunday is just another day - no longer a day set aside for worship, or to rest. People are not necessarily doing *bad* things...earning a living...taking children to their soccer games and dance classes...cleaning the house and mowing the lawn...attending their birthday parties and wedding receptions. But these ordinary things of life can keep us from making God a priority, and paying attention to the spiritual dimension of life. William Barclay says Jesus' words are a warning "never to become so immersed in time that we forget eternity, never to let our concern with worldly affairs, however necessary, completely distract us from remembering that there is a God, that the issues of life and death are in His hands".

The story of Noah and the ark and the flood is a sober reminder that there is moral accountability woven into the fabric of life – God judges people and nations for their sins. But *all of us* have access to the mercy and forgiveness of God made possible through Jesus Christ. When we turn from our sins and trust Him as our Savior, He becomes our "*ark of safety*" to save us from the righteous judgment of God. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".

I love what the Bible says about Noah! It says, "Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:8-9). We too can find *grace* in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace means we can't earn and don't deserve God's goodness and mercy, but God offers forgiveness and salvation to us as a gift through Christ. We too can be "righteous", like Noah - not because we are that good, but because we put on Christ's righteousness, and we can be right with God because Jesus' blood covers our sins.

So.....get on the boat! Climb aboard the Ark of Safety that Jesus built for us.

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