

GENESIS—WEEK 8

THE FLOOD



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Creation by Michael van der Borch (~1300 – 1370)
On display at the Museum Meermanno in The Hague, Netherlands*

The flood lasts a year, which Noah couldn't possibly have been prepared for. Yet God provides.

So, upon exiting the ark, Noah worships through sacrifice. God responds with a covenant that blesses Noah and promises to never flood the earth again. He sets a sign of this covenant—the rainbow.

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Thank you.

Genesis 7:11–9:17 — The Flood
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1 Genesis 7:11-16 (ESV)

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.

Here's another popular misconception about the Bible. Many people assume that the flood was entirely rain. But the text says, "*all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.*" Rain was only part of it.

People even criticize the Bible based on this misconception. A popular 1988 book titled Innumeracy gave many examples of "numerical illiteracy." One of those examples was the Biblical flood. The author claimed that rain intense enough to cause such a great flood would sink any ship. However, that assumes it was all rain. You'd think the author would read the passage before criticizing it.

Even so, don't interpret this as some great plot against God's word. It's just sloppiness. Many famous quotes are botched. Popular misquotes include, "Badges? We don't need no stinkin' badges!" and, "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

It's all just normal human error, not something sinister. Still, any time you hear the Bible misquoted, that may be a cue to chime in. But don't feel pressured. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

The goal is glorifying God.

We've been focusing on Jesus' lordship and about relating to Him like a boss. The goal of this is change. Serious commitment to the lordship of Christ leads to action. Volunteer to serve Christ, and He'll seize the moment.

But this doesn't mean having an "anything goes" attitude. Be yourself the way you would be with your boss. It's okay to pray, "I want to follow wherever you lead, but I don't think I'm ready to go to Siberia." Besides, if you leave too many options open, it can be hard to figure out which one God is pointing to.

God's plans for you will fit the gifts and aptitudes He has given you. Winnowing things down can help you get a pretty good guess at what He's calling you to—or at least get it down to a few alternatives. Then you can just pray for confirming signs or open doors.

It's good to spend time meditating on where your calling might be.

If God opens a door or closes a door, take the hint.

2 Genesis 7:17-8:5 (ESV)

The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

The time span involved here highlights the miraculous nature of this event. God didn't tell Noah to store a year's worth of food on the ark—and there's no way that could have worked out anyway. God only said,

“Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them.” — Genesis 6:21 (ESV)

Obviously, God supernaturally helped Noah take care of the people and animals on the ark. Just as God personally brought the animals to the ark, and shut the door to the ark, and brought the flood, so He personally got them through this trial.

And just think about what a trial this was. Noah faced impossible task after impossible task. What he was trying to do never looked possible.

But this trial did what great trials do, gave Noah rock solid faith. By the end of all this, he knew that he could trust God.

You don't really know that parachutes work until you've jumped out of an airplane.

Yesterday we discussed being yourself while seeking His will. We noted that you can say, “But I don't want to go to Siberia.” So, what do you do if you find yourself in Siberia anyway? What about trials?

Then, seek the explanation. Frustration, even anger, is not wrong. It's perfectly fine to say prayers like, “You wanna tell me what You're up to this time?” This can even be the secret to handling trials.

Trials teach patience. They are rarely resolved quickly, nor figured out quickly. Pray for understanding.

3 Genesis 8:6-19 (ESV)

At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. Then God said to Noah, “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

What a strange moment this must have been as they exited the ark. Just imagine how Noah and his family felt—overwhelmed by relief, grief, fear, reverence, and just about anything else you can think of. It was all too much to process.

Actually, many science fiction dramas depict a similar situation—say, right after a nuclear holocaust. While the sci-fi dramas are obviously different, there’s one curious similarity—worrying about whether it’s safe to go out.

But this similarity ends up highlighting the big difference. After all the testing with the birds, God simply tells Noah, “Go out from the ark.” Unlike sci-fi, everything here is about God.

When Noah left the ark, he was completely at peace.

There is no greater joy than knowing, for sure, what God wants you to do. Even being almost sure is a thrill. But how can we be sure?

Hearing Him speak in an audible voice would definitely do the trick, but that’s not the norm. Still, we can get pretty sure, just with normal answered prayer, such as opening and closing doors.

This is the great reward of discipleship. If you seek to know (and do) God’s will, you will learn to hear His call. This may be rare (it has to be at first), but rare is still awesome. Ask God to “treat” you to some clear guidance. Confess your weak listening skills and ask for clarity.

But beware, when you’re following a sure calling, you’re best prepared for trials. Expect them.

4 Genesis 8:20-9:7 (ESV)

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

*“Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.*

And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

So, what does a man who walks with God do when he comes off the ark?

Worship. Here, worship takes the form of a sacrifice. For this Noah has to build an altar and then sacrifice some of the animals on it. Just think about how precious those animals are. Not only does each one belong on the endangered species list, but Noah has just spent a year keeping them alive.

His sacrifice is impressive, and the LORD is suitably impressed. Remember, God can make more animals, so He’s not worried about them becoming extinct. But, to Noah, these animals are irreplaceable. That makes this sacrifice significant.

The LORD responds with a significant blessing. He basically gives the planet to Noah, but with one restriction—blood is precious. Eating flesh with blood in it is prohibited, and so is shedding man’s blood.

Have you ever done spontaneous worship—something more than a quick prayer dart giving thanks? Think of your narrow escapes: auto accidents barely avoided, trips to the emergency room, things arriving or being completed in the nick of time.

All too often, we don’t even remember to take a moment to give thanks, much less to give serious worship. Think back to a time when you dodged one of life’s great bullets and play through how you could have worshiped God then.

Try to set things in your head so that after the next time, you’ll be ready to give the glory to the LORD.

5 Genesis 9:8-17 (NKJV)

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your [a]descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

You can only see a rainbow when it’s not raining. You have to be looking at rain far away, with the sun behind you. The (oversimplified) physics is that you are looking at sunlight reflecting off raindrops.

<https://www.physicsclassroom.com/class/refrn/Lesson-4/Rainbow-Formation>

The rainbow is the perfect symbol for this covenant because you normally see a rainbow after a storm has passed. The sky has to be clear around you to let the sunlight through so it can reflect off the raindrops. A rainbow is a sign that the storm is over.

And what a majestic sign it is, which fits this one-way covenant to a tee. God makes a promise and demands nothing in return. The rainbow is entirely God’s doing.

Man can’t contribute anything—except to gaze at it in awe.

This is a beautiful example of grace. God bestows a blessing. God displays His power and His majesty. We watch and are humbled. It’s His show.

Part of serving Christ as Lord is understanding that He is Lord of everything—the clouds, the laws of physics, the heavens, and the earth. Nothing happens outside of His will.

This is the foundation of grace. God is not out of His depth. While He is grieved by our sin, He’s not challenged by it. He can handle it. He has the ability to deliver grace. This is in stark contrast to our inability to forgive. We are weak. We haven’t mastered the situation, so it controls us.

Let’s ask for His grace to teach us to give grace ourselves. We can’t gain this from trying harder.

Only by the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit can we rise above our pain.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How can you tell when it's good to correct an error and when it's good to leave it alone?
2. Have you ever had a trial that strengthened your faith?
3. Have you even been certain about what God wanted you to do?
4. What is your usual response to a close call?
5. Is there something or someone you can't forgive?