

# Lessons from the Flood and Noah's Ark

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The Flood of Noah's day was a global calamity that we can be thankful has never been repeated. Yet, the biblical account is more than one of death and disaster. It is a story of faith and salvation. There are many ways to approach this story. In this article, I want to discuss the Flood and the ark in line with the New Covenant Theology principle of Old Testament type and New Testament antitype, shadow and reality. What does the Flood picture? What does the ark picture? What do the occupants of the ark picture? And what can we learn from these things?

In 2 Peter 2:5, the apostle says that God "didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly." Contrary to what some scholars would have us believe, Peter is not describing a localized flood. He is writing of the Flood as such a major cataclysm (the Greek word translated "flood" in the verse is *kataklysmos*, which comes from a word meaning "to dash down") that it spelled the end of an entire world. Peter calls the world that ended the "ancient" world, or as it can also be translated, the "original" world. The Flood ended the world that began with Adam and began a new world that started with Noah and his family.

Of course, we don't need to get our information about the Flood only from Peter. We can go to the original source material—the account of the Flood in Genesis 6 through 8. It bears out the fact that, with the exception of the eight people and the animals in the ark, the Flood wiped out all humans and non-aquatic, air-breathing animals. We need to appreciate the fact that, if God had not saved those few people and animals, humanity and most animal life would have become extinct. By God's design, the ark was the sole means of salvation, and the survivors began a new world.

## **The Flood as a Type of Baptism**

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul talks of Old Testament events as examples "written for our admonition." The word that, depending on the translation, is variously rendered "examples," "warnings," "figure," "figurative meaning," and "types" is *typos*. It is the word from which

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we get the English word "type," both as it is used in "typeface" and "typewriter" and, as *Merriam-Webster's 11<sup>th</sup> Collegiate Dictionary* defines it as "a person or thing (as in the Old Testament) believed to foreshadow another (as in the New Testament)." The parentheses are in the original. That makes this a remarkable definition for a secular book as it accurately describes one of the primary ways that Christians are to understand people, things, and events in the Old Testament—as types of their antitypes or realities in the New Testament.

Is the Flood a type of something in the New Testament? It is. Peter tells us what. Speaking of the Flood, Peter calls baptism the Flood's *antitupon* or "antitype" (1 Peter 3:21). Unfortunately, I have to diverge here because many English translations mistranslate this verse. The *WEB* version, for example, says the Flood "is a symbol of baptism." This is a true statement, but it's not what Peter is saying here. The word "symbol" is from *antitupon*. Thus, the *WEB* version is saying that the Flood is the antitype of baptism. This is exactly backwards. Baptism is the antitype of the Flood. The New American Standard Bible gets it right. Peter is speaking of the Flood, then he says, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Essentially, this translation correctly says that, antityping the Flood, baptism now saves you....

With that straightened out, we're faced with another question. Does baptism save us? No. Peter quickly clarifies that he does not mean that baptism saves us when he adds, "not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience." Dunking in water is not what saves. What baptism represents saves us. Baptism is an expression of our faith—an appeal to God for a good conscience. We can also gain some understanding of Peter's point by looking at it without the part between the dashes: "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ, not baptism, saves us. Baptism merely shows our faith by picturing our sharing in His death, burial, and resurrection to new life.

Similarly, we can ask, Did the Flood save Noah and his family? No. They were saved through their believing God and entering the ark. Rather than the Flood saving them, it was the ark that saved them from drowning in the Flood. As the writer of Hebrews says, "by faith Noah prepared an ark for the salvation of his house" (Hebrews 11:7, *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* hereafter *LITV*).

Getting back to baptism, then, we see that according to a clear statement of Scripture, baptism is the antitype or reality of the Flood. Still, undaunted by what the Bible says, there are those who would teach that baptism is the antitype of circumcision. They base this on their understanding of Colossians 2:11. In Colossians 2, Paul has been speaking of Christ, and then he writes, "In whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2:11). They say that this circumcision made without hands is baptism. But, is baptism done without hands? No. We use our hands to baptize someone. This cannot be a reference to baptism. Paul is writing of spiritual circumcision, which is God's spiritually (without hands) stripping off our old, sinful man in regeneration. Paul elsewhere calls it circumcision of the heart: "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God" (Romans 2:29). The idea that circumcision is the type of baptism is an unbiblical fantasy. But Colossians 2 does lead us to another important point about the Flood being a type of baptism.

In Colossians 2:12-13, Paul says, "Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. You were dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." Paul says that, in baptism, we have been buried with Christ and he implies that in rising from the waters of baptism, we—as Christ rose in the Resurrection—rise to a new life with Christ.

So, rising from the "grave" of baptism pictures something. It depicts the end of our old life and the beginning of our new life. It also shows that we have been saved. Saved from what? Well, we've been saved from death and the grave, pictured by the water. But we wouldn't have to worry about death and the grave if it weren't for our sins (Romans 6:23). So, implied in our being saved from death and the grave is our being saved from our sins. Thus, as we saw earlier, baptism is a declaration of our trust in Jesus as our Savior—that He died in our stead, paying the penalty for our sins; it is a profession of our faith.

And here it is plainly stated:

Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried

therefore with him through baptism to death, that just like Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Romans 6:3-8

There is much to think about here in relation to the account of the Flood. The people and animals who were not in the ark, those who did not have the inward call from God, were immersed, were baptized. But they did not rise to new life. They stayed in their watery grave. They had no faith. The ark was not for them. Immersion alone is not enough. Rising is crucial. Also, those who did live through the Flood may not even have gotten wet. Yet, being in the ark that was in the water they were baptized (the ark, by the way, was a box-like vessel that likely sat very low in the water to minimize its being affected by the swells and winds). They were right there when God expressed His wrath against the world. But the ark sheltered them.

Looking again at Hebrews 11:7, we read, "Being divinely warned by God about the things not yet having been seen, moved with fear, by faith Noah prepared an ark for the salvation of his house; through which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7, *LITV*). By faith—trusting God—Noah built the ark and entered the ark. But it was the ark that saved him.

### **The Ark as a Type of Christ**

Although some people recognize the Flood as a type of baptism, many miss the fact that the ark is a type of Christ, specifically a type of Christ's atonement.

Genesis 6:7 tells us that God desired to "wipe off man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (*LITV*). This He did with the Flood. The Flood, then, was the expression of God's wrath. The ark was the means God provided for salvation from His wrath. In verse 14, we read part of God's instructions to Noah: "Make an ark of cypress timbers for yourself. You shall make rooms in the ark; and you shall cover it with asphalt inside and out" (*LITV*).

The word translated "asphalt" ("pitch" or "tar" in other versions) is *kâphar*. Besides meaning to cover something with pitch, this word also means to "make an atonement." In fact, this word is used for pitch only here, but it is used to mean atonement, purge, reconciliation, reconcile, cleanse, forgive, pacify, pardon, and so forth, about one hundred times in the Old Testament. Clearly, by covering the ark with pitch, Noah made it a vessel that typified the atonement of Jesus Christ. This vessel, then, is what saved them from God's wrath that killed the rest of the world.

I also want to point out that the ark had one door (Genesis 6:16). It seems unusual that such a large vessel should have only one door. I believe the door pictured Christ, the only way to salvation. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the word *thura* for the door in Genesis 6:16. It is the same word Jesus used in John 10:7 when He said, "I am the door." And, again in John 10:9, when Jesus says, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved."

### **The Occupants of the Ark as a Type of God's Elect**

All who entered the ark, including the animals, were chosen by God to be saved. They were a type of God's elect.

Although the Bible indicates that Noah and his family did some herding of the animals once they got to the ark, it says that God brought them to the ark: "And you shall bring into the ark two of every kind, of every living thing of all flesh, to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female; from the birds according to its kind, and from the cattle according to its kind, from every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind. Two from each *shall come in to you* to keep alive" (Genesis 6:19-20, *LITV*, emphasis mine). Genesis 7:15 says, "And *they went in to Noah and to the ark*, two and two of all flesh, in which is the breath of life" (*LITV*, emphasis mine).

The word "rooms" in Genesis 6:14, although used in almost every English Bible, is really a mistranslation. The Hebrew word is *qên*, and it means "nests," which is what it is translated as in twelve other places in the Bible. The animals had nests on the ark. We may wonder what the animals did when they were on the ark. Did they work? No, they rested in their nests as they were sheltered from God's wrath.

Did the animals really picture God's elect? Yes, I believe so. God called them from all over the world, and they came. Notice that there were

both clean and unclean animals (Genesis 7:8). This would seem to picture the elect from Israel and the elect from the rest of the nations. While the unclean animals went in two-by-two, male and female, the clean animals went in "seven by seven, male and female," as the Bible literally says. It is unclear whether this means seven clean animals (three pairs and one remaining animal) or seven pairs (fourteen animals altogether).

But what about Noah's family? Were they saved only because they were Noah's family? No. Nothing in the Bible shows them as complaining about or resisting the building or fitting of the ark or with entering the ark. They could have been like Lot's sons-in-law and scoffed (Genesis 19:14). They could have been like Lot's wife and looked back in yearning for the old world (verse 26), but the Bible never says that any of Noah's family did this. They didn't have to cooperate with Noah, and they didn't have to enter the ark, but they all did. The Bible never says anything about any of them doubting what God was doing. This, to me, indicates that God had called them to be saved by the ark, and that they were all saved by the ark because they put their trust in it.

### **The End of the Flood as a Type of the Resurrection of Jesus**

Baptism does not merely picture death. It also pictures resurrection. So, there must also be a coming out of the water: "And in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat" (Genesis 8:4). Ararat was the name of the region that contained the mountain range where the ark came to rest. Several Bible dictionaries say that Ararat means "the curse reversed."

Many centuries after the Flood, beginning with the Passover, God ordered that the seventh month be considered the first month (Exodus 12:1-2).<sup>1</sup> He also ordered at that time that the Passover lambs be killed on the fourteenth day of that month (Exodus 12:6). This is the day mentioned in Luke 22:7-8: "The day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed. He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.'" That night, which according to the Jewish manner of marking days, began the fifteenth day of the month, was the night Jesus and His disciples ate the last Passover and instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus was

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible does not explicitly state that the month referred to in Exodus 12:2 (named Abib in Exodus 13:4) was the seventh month, but both Jewish and Christian scholars agree that it is certainly implied. Even today, Jews use the civil calendar that counts Abib as the seventh month, but it is the first month in their sacred calendar.

arrested that night and crucified the next day—still the fifteenth day of the month. It was a Friday. Jesus was put in the tomb and stayed there over the Sabbath or Saturday, which was the sixteenth day of the month. Sometime early on the seventeenth day, the very same day that the ark came to rest on Ararat, Jesus rose from the grave.

The ark coming to rest on Ararat, with the waters continuing to subside so that the ark was now out of the water (Genesis 8:5), was a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It corresponds to the person being baptized coming up out of the water.

So, we see that the biblical account of the awful event of the Flood actually contains a beautiful picture of salvation. It shows us God's calling of the elect, and their putting their trust in their Savior. The one door of the ark pictures Jesus Christ as the one way to salvation, and the ark itself represents Jesus Christ's saving His people from God's wrath upon the sinful world by His atonement while they rest in Him. And it typifies the elect's sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection to new life of Jesus Christ that baptism pictures today.

The Flood is, indeed, an event that should fill us with awe. Not only does it demonstrate God's power, but it also pictures God's wrath upon a sinful world. The Flood shows the limited nature of the atonement. God wiped out the majority and saved only a very few. I suppose we might see Noah while building the ark as a type of Christ working for the salvation of the elect. This might also explain why the only people saved in the ark were his family, a type of Christ's family. But once they entered into the ark by faith, the ark pictured Christ, and the people did no work for their salvation. There was nothing the occupants of the ark could do to sail or steer the ark. They could only go about their daily business and trust God for their salvation, their course, the lowering of the waters, and their destination.

We, too, are occupants of an ark. God called us to this ark, and we entered it by faith. We trust in this ark to save us from our sins, to shelter us from God's wrath. We will stay in this ark through life's storms and through death, and one day it will bring us to rest on Mount Zion, triumphant with Christ in our resurrection.