
SERMON NOTES

Genesis #11 The Flood (Genesis 6:9-8:22)

As we have done previously in this study of Genesis, I want to use the flood account to briefly talk about the reliability of scripture. If you read the Bible for very long, you will eventually come to a point that challenges you to choose between trusting what it says, or going with what everyone else around you seems to believe. This is really a choice between faith and skepticism. For me, anyway, the flood of Noah seems to offer that kind of choice, in more ways than one. I do want to offer some scientific analysis of the flood also – not because we must have a scientific basis for faith, but rather to show that there are fewer *necessary* conflicts between faith and science than most people assume. Yes, there are points at which we must simply trust that God knows better than humans – but logic and reason do not have to be abandoned by Christians. In case you haven't noticed yet, this is a theme I am passionate about. The truth is, I can't stand to talk about this portion of scripture without engaging this subject just a little bit.

It seems to me, if we want to take the Bible seriously (and we do), that there are only two valid interpretations of Noah's flood (after this, I'll just call it “the flood”). The first is what I call the “Limited Big Flood,” theory. Scientists these days scoff at the idea of a worldwide flood. But there is a valid, Bible-believing way to look at the flood that seems to be supported by science. It works like this: we step back from Genesis 6-9 and say that those who recorded this history recorded it *as far as they understood it*. In other words the entire world *that they knew about* was destroyed by a flood. So when the Bible uses language that is universal – saying that the whole world was engulfed in water, and that all land-dwelling creatures died (except those in the ark), what it really means is all creatures that Noah and his family *knew about*, and the entire world that they were *aware of*. I need to say here that this interpretation must include the truth, however, that all human beings perished. The Bible is very clear on that point, and actually science seems to support it too.

I've already presented some of the scientific evidence that all human beings except one family did in fact perish by flood. The key pieces of evidence come from DNA research – which suggests something exactly like the flood account – and cultural research, which has discovered universal flood stories in cultures all over the world.

The Limited Big Flood theory has a few things going for it. First, geologists already subscribe to a number of Limited Big Flood theories to explain certain geographic features at various points around the world (for instance the Spokane Floods for Eastern Washington state and the Columbia gorge). According to geologists, these were massive floods far beyond the scope of anything that has occurred since humans started recording history. Second, if there were only a few million human beings (or less) at the time, they might all be living in one particular area – perhaps a low lying area. A really big flood could wipe out the entire human race without having to be a global flood. In fact, undersea explorer Robert Ballard (who found the Titanic) has discovered what appears to be the remains of ancient dwellings at the bottom of the Caspian Sea. In ancient times, perhaps the Caspian Sea was actually a great valley, and all the human race lived in it. A sudden flood inundating that valley (and eventually becoming the Caspian Sea) would theoretically destroy the human race.

There are problems with the Limited Big Flood Theory, of course. If human beings lived in a big valley, why didn't they just move up into the mountains when the flood came? Certainly some of the animals would have escaped that way, which leads us to the question of why Noah had to take animals on the ark, if God could have had them simply climb some hills? Certainly Noah would not have had to take birds on the ark. There are ways to address these issues, but they do pose something of a problem to the Limited Big Flood Theory. **However, I want to say, that you can absolutely be a**

good Christian, believe in the Bible and subscribe to the Limited Big Flood theory.

The second approach to the flood is more traditional – that, in fact there was a flood that covered the entire world and wiped out all land creatures except those on the ark. There are a few challenges to this theory also. We don't know when the flood occurred, but at most, it would have been perhaps 100,000 years ago (human beings did not exist on the earth much before that). It does seem to be stretching it to suggest that the incredible diversity of animal life that we find comes from a group of animals that fit into a space a little bit smaller than Vanderbilt Stadium.

However, you don't have to shut off your brain to believe World Wide Flood theory, either. If in fact, such a thing happened, we would expect that around the world we would find many dead things buried (fossilized) in multiple layers of sediment. In fact, that is what we find. We would also expect that simpler organisms which cannot move (like amoebas, bacteria, plants, crustaceans etc.) would be found in the lower levels of sediment, while more complex creatures, which can think and move enough to reach higher ground, would be found in the upper layers. That too, is confirmed in the fossil record of our planet. A few sea creatures, caught in massive amounts of eroded material spilling into the oceans, would be buried too, probably lower than land dwellers – and this is also the case. Because of the cataclysmic nature of a worldwide flood, there would of course, be exceptions to these generalities – times when a more complex fossil is found in a layer below a simpler organism. Once again, this is proven to be true.

The very abundance of animal fossils around the world points to either a series of cataclysmic floods, or one worldwide one. Animals that are not buried quickly are eaten by scavengers and bacteria, and their bones are usually scattered and broken. Not enough of them remains to become fossilized. To say it another way, almost all of the fossils discovered by scientists were preserved by either floods or landslides. Then you have the fact that geologists believe in many Limited Big Floods, the like of which, humans have never seen since. Limited Big Floods are actually not much more likely than one gigantic flood. They certainly haven't happened lately. And finally, you have the fact that almost all of the world's geological formations appear to have been affected by water in one form or another.

One more thing, and then we'll get to some application. Many people have a hard time believing that it could rain enough to create such a flood. But it was not only rain. The bible says, “on that day all the sources of the watery depths burst open, the floodgates of the sky were opened and rain fell on the earth...” Water came not only from the sky, but from sources trapped within the earth's crust also. Everyone knows that even today there are still vast reservoirs of underground water. There would be no farmers in Nebraska or Kansas without them. It is certainly possible that in the days of Noah there was even more water stored in the ground.

The reason I wanted to go into all this is because it is important for us as Christians to exercise our *minds* in faith, just as we do our *hearts*. You may feel as much a fool as Noah did, to believe what God says in the Bible, but it was exactly this “foolishness” that saved him. The Bible, which is God's Word to us, is as reliable for us as God's words to Noah were for him.

Let's consider Noah, for a little bit, because he is one of the heroes of the faith. God's dealings with him are very instructive for us. *God* initiated the process. Purely by grace, God chose Noah – Noah did not have to do anything to *earn* his salvation from the flood – after all, he didn't even know the flood was coming. He simply received the salvation that God was offering to him and his family. When God came to him, all Noah had to do was to say “yes” to Him. God told Noah *how* to be saved, gave him clear instructions, and provided him with the time and materials necessary. All Noah had to do was to believe what God said and act according to that belief. In fact, Noah lived by *faith* in just the same way that Jesus calls *us* to live. God initiates a relationship with us. He offers us salvation from ourselves, our sin and the coming destruction. All we have to do is believe what He says is true, trust

Him, and act according to that belief and trust.

It is also important to realize that Noah encountered some of the same difficulties in living out his faith which you and I have. First of all, what Noah did was, to any sensible person, stupid. No one had ever heard of a flood that could not be escaped by going to higher ground. It is even possible that no one had even heard of a flood before. In fact, in Genesis 2 it suggests that the ground was watered by springs and mists, and no rain had yet fallen. That condition *may* have prevailed until the days of Noah. Imagine the roars of laughter when Noah told his neighbors what he was doing. Imagine the polite, fake smiles when Noah urged them to trust God and be saved. Feel the ridicule he must have received from those who trusted in the empirical evidence of science: “there will be no flood, because there is no such thing as rain.” Or, “there will be no flood that we can't escape by going up into the hills.” In retrospect, we can see how foolish his contemporaries were, but at the time, *Noah* was the one who looked silly. And then there is this: God told Noah about the flood 120 years before it happened. It seems to indicate that he started building the ark right away. So Noah starts building this big boat, and he tells his friends and neighbors about the coming flood. A week goes by and nothing happens. A month goes by. Maybe it rains some, but no flood. Now a year goes by. Not only are people laughing at Noah, but Noah has got to be wondering himself – is it really coming? Ten years go by. Twenty. *Fifty*. One hundred years, and no flood. You can't tell me that Noah didn't struggle with doubt sometimes. Did he really hear God correctly?

If we really trust Jesus, sooner or later we are going to end up looking stupid for God. We may even question ourselves, and wonder if we heard right, or if we really *are* stupid. Jesus himself was ridiculed by those who did not understand his mission, while he hung on the cross. Paul wrote that wisdom of God is foolishness to those who are perishing. But the essence of relationship with God is trusting Him more than we trust anyone or anything else, and sometimes, from the outside, that looks dumb. We can receive encouragement from Noah's example, both in regard to God's grace and salvation, and also in regard to what faith is all about.