

Forty Days and Forty Nights

Genesis 7:1-24

I have spent my whole adult life doing work projects on the various houses that we have owned. Some of those have been major projects, whole rooms, kitchens, bathrooms. Closets. Decks. And for the last two years, a gazebo. I've been doing that since we moved to a church-owned manse in 1990. So, 33 years now. And I'm really not at all done yet, though I am finding out at my age now that those projects tend to take longer.

That seems like quite a long period of time, but really, it isn't. Noah worked on a project for 100 years! The construction of that massive barge-like wooden box which we call Noah's Ark took about 100 years. This morning, in Genesis 7, we read about the conclusion of that construction project, 100 years after the account we studied last week in Genesis 6.

In Genesis 6:3, we read of God's final warning to the sinful generation which had degenerated so rapidly in the 1500 or so years since the creation of the world.

Gen. 6:3 And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

That was, I believe, the Lord's warning. A warning of impending judgment. In other words, it was a warning that the flood would come in 120 years. We know that Noah was 500 years old when he begat his firstborn son, Shem. And shortly after Shem's birth is mentioned, we read about the Lord's instructions to Noah,

Gen. 6:13 And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself

an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. 15 And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die."

Noah, of course, did "according to all that God commanded him." And 100 years later, when Noah was 600 years old, the time came for the great flood. After a construction project lasting 100 years, the ark was ready. Now, I don't need to convince you that this flood actually happened. I don't need to waste anytime proving to you that this account is an actual historical account, so I won't. I'll just proclaim to you that we are reading the history of this world, the inspired, infallible account of events that actually took place.

And the overriding impression that we get from chapter 7 is the Lord's sovereign control over all those events. It is absolutely astounding to see how completely and how thoroughly the Lord governs all these events of the great flood according to his own purpose. I have chosen to study God's sovereign control in terms of his sovereign authority, his sovereign power, and his sovereign judgment. First,

I. THE GREAT FLOOD REVEALS THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY OVER ALL HIS CREATION.

Let me be sure to define my words. "Sovereign" means that God doesn't answer to anyone. It means that he is at the top of the chain of command, that he is able to do whatever he wants without being held accountable to anyone else. Sovereign

authority means that God has the right and the ability to govern his creatures in any way that he pleases. We see several examples of that here. First,

A. The Lord invites the chosen family into the ark.

God had chosen Noah. God had poured out his grace upon Noah, and that grace was not without effect, for Noah was a righteous man. And like all righteous men, like all true believers, he was a chosen man. And his family, therefore, was a chosen family.

And the Ark belonged to God. Noah was the builder, but God was both the architect and the owner. And so Noah and his family could enter only at God's invitation.

v.7

The Lord gave them permission. Actually, I believe those words would be better translated as an invitation than mere permission. You could well translate verse 1, "Come into the ark." Or, "Come and enter the ark, you and your whole family."

Now, the time has come, and Noah and his family accept the Lord's sovereign invitation.

v.5-7

v.13

All of that is such a good illustration of salvation. Salvation is a work of God. Salvation comes to those whom God has chosen, at his own invitation. And we are called upon to accept that invitation, to receive the free gift which he so graciously offers. Noah and his family accepted the invitation.

There is more here about the Lord's sovereign authority. We also see that,

B. The Lord specifies the animals to be offered in sacrifice.

As I mentioned last week, you must not get the impression that Noah nor his family was without sin. Noah was righteous, blameless and upright, but not sinless. So sacrifices had to be offered. Thus the Lord commands Noah to bring 7 of every kind of clean animals.

v.2-3

Now, this isn't a contradiction of the instructions to bring two of every animal, just additional details not originally provided in those first instructions. Take two of all animals, male and female, in order that they might be able to reproduce and remain alive as a species after the flood. But in addition, with animals determined to be clean, take 7. With some simple math, that means three pairs of male-females, and one extra, presumably for a sacrifice.

A couple comments. First, there is no mention in Scripture before this of the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Two possibilities come to my mind, therefore, about how the distinction was to be made. First, that God had revealed to Noah which animals were considered clean, and simply not had that revelation recorded in Scripture. That's certainly possible, though it's equally certain that we can't prove that it did happen. The other alternative is that Noah was able to make that distinction himself. As one commentator writes, "it became quite apparent to man that certain forms of animal life were in reality rather striking pictures of sin and its uncleanness. So a natural abhorrence against such creature arose."

Again, a very possible thought, but also not provable. But one way or another, there was a distinction made. And of the clean animals of particular usefulness for man, and by implication fewer in number, God instructs Noah to take three pairs--thus able to

reproduce more effectively than a single pair. And there was one animal left, clearly to be used for sacrifice.

Gen. 8:20 “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”

So, in his sovereign authority, the Lord specifies the animals to be offered in sacrifice. And then, as the most obvious and visible demonstration of his sovereign authority,

C. The Lord himself brings all the animals into the ark.

Don't think for a moment that Noah was compelled to go out on great search expeditions to gather together all the animals. That isn't the case. The Lord brought the animals to Noah.

v.14-16

The animals came to Noah! Also,
v.8-9

This was likely the first animal migration in history. Prior to the flood, there was a pleasant climate and abundant food available everywhere, along with presumably a uniformly warm climate all over the earth. Thus, the animals were likely not ecologically isolated in different climates and habitats as they are now, but were more or less uniformly distributed around the world. So distance wasn't a problem.

And it isn't hard to realize that migratory instincts were part of the genetic program of the animals, for animals to this day have remarkable migratory and directional instincts, abilities inherited from their ancestors on the ark. So the picture is one of a great migration brought on by the Lord's sovereign authority and providence.

God had given Noah a final, seven day notice in verse 4. And when all the last minute preparations were finished, the animals entered. And the Lord shut the door!

v.16

It's not like an airplane, where the flight attendants shut the door by pulling it inside. With the ark, God is the one who shuts the door, from the outside. And remember, there is just one door. No back door to exit. And no way for the ungodly to get in. Not once the door was shut.

Since the Lord himself brings all the animals into the ark, we really should refer to it as Noah's ark at all. It's the Lord's ark. For the Lord is revealing his sovereign authority over all his creation. Secondly,

II. THE GREAT FLOOD REVEALS THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN POWER OVER ALL THE FORCES OF NATURE.

What is particularly striking about the flood is how clearly the events described correspond to both the geological structure of our earth today and the natural forces with which we are familiar. Everyone of us knows what rain is. We can study rain from a scientific perspective and even as a meteorologist. Rain is a very well defined scientific phenomena.

However, prior to the flood, there was no rain. The waters above and the waters below were separated, as we read in,

Gen. 1:6 Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” 7 Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. 9

Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.”

The best way to describe these conditions is to speak of a great and dense blanket of water vapor above the atmosphere. It was a water vapor canopy extending over the earth, effectively creating a huge worldwide greenhouse, maintaining an essentially uniformly pleasant warm temperature all over the world. There would be, therefore, no great air-mass movements, no windstorms, and even little damage from the UV rays of the sun. Further, there would be no rain. The earth would be watered by dew or ground fog caused by local evaporation and condensation in each day-night cycle.

But, when the time came in God’s plan for the flood, that great vapor barrier above the atmosphere would precipitate and the water would fall to earth as rain, something no one on the earth had seen until that time. And so, with his sovereign power, we realize that,

A. Rain falls only at the Lord’s command.

And it fell. And fell.

v.4

Forty days and forty nights worth of rain.

v.10-12

What a descriptive explanation—“the fountains of the great deep were broken up.” The floodgates of the heavens were opened. With incredible consequences,

v.17

v.24

How did God accomplish this great flood? All sorts of speculation has been offered. Perhaps the sudden tilting of the earth’s axis, or a bombardment of the earth by asteroids or meteorites, a sudden slipping of the earth’s crust, a nuclear explosion detonated by extraterrestrial space travelers, the gravitational forces resulting from a near miss by a wandering planet or comet, and others.

All of those are pure speculation, and not worth my time describing in preaching the word, because none of them are in the Bible. But there is one thing quite clearly implied in the text about how this flood began. And it is easily explainable in terms of science and geology.

v.11

Notice what happens first. The springs of the great deep burst forth. The waters below the surface break forth first! The fountains of water under the earth opened up, likely the initial action which triggered the rains from above.

It is at least implied in verse 11, that was a rapid buildup and surge of intense pressure throughout the underground system of water, and once the first fountain opened, the pressurized fluid would surge through at that point and further weaken nearby boundaries, until soon a worldwide chain reaction would develop, cleaving open all the fountains of the great deep throughout the world. There would have been volcanic explosions and eruptions, pouring great quantities of fluid onto the earth and sending immense quantities of dust into the atmosphere. All of those things can be easily seen to trigger another chain reaction among the upper waters, penetrating that upper canopy of water vapor and causing the waters above to condense into liquid and start moving earthward as a torrential global downpour of rain.

There were great and huge quantities of water, water formerly restrained in the heavens above AND in the earth below. The sudden release of all this water would create a downpour unimaginable to us, a downpour which, at God's command, lasted for forty days and forty nights.

The great flood reveals the Lord's sovereign power over all the forces of nature! Indeed, geological processes, like that which I've just described,

B. Geological processes occur only at the Lord's command.

Read again,
v.11

Now, I can't prove to you from that single verse that everything happened just as I described it, but that single verse does at the very least imply that sequence of events. And the words I used to describe those events were primarily the words of Henry Morris, a PhD scientist in hydrology, a man who chaired the Department of Civil Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute for 13 years. Scientifically, he knows what he's talking about. Water in the earth was his scientific specialty. And the description given in the Bible for the worldwide flood is perfectly explainable in scientific terms.

Amazing, isn't it! How exciting it would be if more Christians who believed the Bible would also study geology and hydrology and biology. Maybe we could get rid of some of the foolish theories secular geologist and biologists have come up with! Because you don't have to suspend belief in the Bible in order to study science!

One more thing about the Lord's sovereign power. And here I

will consciously contradict what is often taught even by Christians trying to make the Bible conform to secular scientific theories. This was a worldwide flood, a worldwide catastrophe. Not just a local storm in one particular area. And to be sure,

C. A worldwide catastrophe comes only at the Lord's command.

There was the Lord's command. And it was worldwide. Let me prove that from the text.

v.17-20

Everything in those verses speaks of a worldwide flood. A flood lasting 40 days, producing enough rain to lift the ark high above the earth, even above the highest mountain. Mt. Ararat was 17,000 feet high, and a 17,000 foot flood is not a local flood! The mountains were covered, even washed away. And in verse 19, all the mountains under all the heavens were covered. Not just a few of them. All of them.

Additionally, we read in,

v.21

And, v.22

Then, v.23

Then finally, we read in verse 24 that this flood lasted 150 days. It was over a year before enough land had been exposed to permit the occupants to leave the ark. This was not merely a heavy local rainstorm. Nor even something comparable to that horrible storm and hurricane that came across Florida and the Carolinas last week. Rather, this was a worldwide catastrophe which came at the Lord's command, a catastrophe which we'll see in weeks to come that forever changed the atmosphere and environment of the world in which we live.

I should say in passing that this flood also accounts for the vast fossil record which presumably proves evolution. With scientific integrity however, what the fossil record proves is that lots of living things were killed in an abrupt world-wide catastrophe. So the fossil record of dead things buried in layers all over the earth validates the biblical account which we have just read. This great flood actually happened, and it revealed the Lord's sovereign power over all the forces which we call the forces of nature.

Finally, the moral implications of the flood.

III. THE GREAT FLOOD REVEALS THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN JUDGMENT OVER ALL THE PEOPLES OF THIS WORLD.

Notice first, the NT explanation of the flood, in,

Hebr. 11:7 "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

For Noah and his family, the flood waters were salvation. For the world, they were waters of condemnation. We see both of those things here in Genesis 7. First,

A. The waters of the flood are waters of condemnation for mankind.

If anything can be said about the flood, the fact that it brought about God's judgment upon a sinful world is certainly obvious. God had made a determination, a judgment, a decree of justice, which we studied two weeks ago,

Gen. 6:5 "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from

the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

As he promised, he did.

v.4

Even more descriptive of that judgment are,

v.21-23

Every living thing perish. All men, and animals, every creature that had the breath of life--men and animals, birds and creatures that move along the ground. Everything.

It was God's judgment upon sin! By building the ark, showing that the floodwaters would come, Noah was God's agent to condemn the world. And let me assure you, that that ark speaks of a far greater, future judgment. An eternal judgment. That judgment, accurately prefigured by the flood, is described this way,

Rev. 20:11 "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

But amazingly, and I say that because it still amazes me, amazingly, the waters of condemnation are also waters of salvation! So amazing is God's marvelous grace. So amazing is

his sovereign electing love.

B. The waters of the flood are waters of salvation for the chosen family.

Notice how verse 23 ends.

v.23b “Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.”

Or, again, in those marvelous words of,

Hebr. 11:7 “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

And Peter virtually ignores the judgment of the flood waters in order to speak about the salvation of Noah and his family.

1Pet. 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Don’t be misled by those verses into thinking that a man is saved by the sacrament of baptism, for Peter specifically say that it isn’t outward dirt that needs to be cleaned away, but the dirt on our soul, the dirt of a guilty conscience. That dirt is cleaned away, by the work of the Holy Spirit so perfectly illustrated by baptism. And the waters of baptism are symbolized by the waters of the flood, waters which brought salvation to Noah and his family even

as they brought condemnation to the rest of the world.

Those thoughts should thrill your soul! The thought that the greatest demonstration of God’s judgment that this world has yet ever seen, the greatest manifestation of God’s holy wrath against the sinfulness of human beings, that act of the great flood was also an act of deliverance.

Let that thought thrill your soul, to realize that the God of justice, the God of vengeance, is your God of eternal salvation. It is a salvation that we celebrate here this morning. And so, as we think upon these words, and as we prepare to partake of the Lord’s Supper, let me end with these great words written by the Apostle to his dear son in the faith, Titus,

Titus 3:3 “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”

So today, I will stress these things. So we are saved by the water which God provides, the washing of being born again. And when you read about the flood, when you are confronted by the judgment of the floodwaters which God brought upon sinful men, don’t miss this, that God saved his chosen people through that same water. It is that salvation which I proclaim to you today!