

Genesis 6:9-7:24 “Baptism: The Waters of Judgment”
Psalm 29, 46
1 Peter 3

April 19, 2009

After the flood was over, God promises never to destroy the world again by water,
but water remains a potent sign of judgment.
The prophets often speak of the armies of the nations as a rising flood
that threatens to deluge the City of God.

Psalm 46 speaks of this at the end of the first stanza:
“Though mountains great be hurled into the ocean’s depths,
though seas may roar and foam and billows shake the shore,
though mountains tremble at their power.”

The mountains tremble before the power of the seas.

But the very next verse speaks of another water:
“A river brings refreshing streams to cheer the city of our God.”

The mountain of the LORD does not tremble at the power of the seas.
God’s holy mountain does not tremble at the roaring of the nations.

In the same Psalm water is both the threat of judgment and destruction
and also the sign of refreshment and joy.

When the oceans rage and the waters threaten destruction,
there is a river that makes glad the City of God.

When the trials and temptations of life wash over you –
there is a river that flows from the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ to his people.

[Sing Psalm 46
Read 1 Peter 3:8-22]

Introduction:

I’m sure you’ve heard of the most dangerous acid in the world:
hydroxic acid has killed untold thousands.
It has caused more damage to buildings and cities than any other chemical,
and has devastated the environment.

Hydroxic acid is the chief component in acid rain,
but it is also found in many common foods and beverages.
It is so addictive, that once you are hooked,
if you try to stop taking it, you’ll die.

Hydroxic acid is also called dihydrogen monoxide –
but you probably know it better as water.

Water has caused more damage on earth than any other chemical known to man.
And yet we cannot live without it!

Today we are looking at the Flood – which Peter says is a type of baptism.
The Flood demonstrates that the same water which is a blessing –
can also become a curse.
And yet even the waters of judgment that bring destruction upon the earth
can also bring salvation to God’s people.

We turn today to Book 3 of Genesis – the generations of Noah.
As we have seen, the phrase “these are the generations of”
is really about the descendants of the person named.
The generations of Adam was all about his descendants.
And as we’ll see in chapter 11, the generations of Terah is all about Abraham.

This may suggest to us that “the generations of Noah”
is really about his descendants as well,
because the story of the Flood is really the story of the salvation of humanity –
which is why Peter will refer to the Flood as a type of baptism.

1. One Righteous Man (6:9-13)

9 These are the generations of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.

Noah walked with God.

10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

We saw last time that Enoch and Noah are both said to have “walked with God.”
And we saw that this form of the word “to walk” carried connotations of
“walking in judgment.”

Like Enoch, his great-grandfather, Noah walked with God –
he was a prophet who spoke with God,
and who spoke for God.

What is more, Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.
God will call Abraham to be blameless
(I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless – Gen 17:1),
but Noah was blameless.
The word for blameless is the word that is used throughout the Law
for a sacrifice that is without blemish.
It is emphasizing that Noah is both morally righteous – he does what is right –
and ceremonially clean – he is blameless.

I think sometimes we try to get around this.
We are uncomfortable saying that Noah was “righteous”
so we point out that he was a sinner too.
And that’s true – but that is not the point here!

The point is that he was righteous.

He was different from everyone else.

Noah walked with God.

Noah was a righteous man – blameless in his generation.

While various people throughout scripture are called “righteous” –

Noah alone is called “a righteous man.”

Ish tsadiq.

If you are trying to figure out who you are in this story,

you can be Noah’s children – or you can be the wicked.

But there is only one Noah.

Noah is unlike the rest of humanity.

The rest of humanity was corrupt.

The world was full of violence, blasphemy, arrogance, and wickedness.

But Noah was different.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt,

for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

13 And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh,

for the earth is filled with violence through them.

Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

God saw.

And so God said.

He saw that the earth was corrupt.

And so he said, “I will destroy them.”

It is too bad that we don’t have a word in English

that can do what this Hebrew word “shachat” can do.

Because *shachat* means “corrupt”

and *shachat* means “destroy.”

In verse 11 and its first usage in verse 12

it is a reflexive form – namely, doing something to oneself (nifal),

but the second time it is used in verse 12 and then in verse 13

it is causative form (hifil).

Probably the closest way to say it is:

“Now the earth was self-destructive in God’s sight...

and God saw the earth, and behold, it was self-destructing,

for all flesh was destroying its own way on the earth.”

And so God said to Noah,

“I will destroy them with the earth.”

One thing we learn from the Flood,
is that God's judgment against humanity
simply completes the self-destructive path that we have chosen.

Left to ourselves, we destroy ourselves.

It is true of individuals.

It is true of nations.

Violence and pride will work for a little while –
for a decade, a century, a millennium.

In Genesis 5 we are told that it lasted for 10 generations
(where 10 is a number of completeness).

But the self-destructiveness of sin will not continue forever.

God will not let humanity destroy itself.

No, God will destroy humanity –
and yet God will save his people.

Notice that throughout chapter 6 the name used is "God" –
Elohim.

The covenant name of Yahweh will only be introduced in chapter 7.

This is the second time that we have seen this pattern in Genesis.

The first time was in Genesis 1-2,

where the creation account of Genesis 1 used the name "Elohim"
but chapter 2 used "Yahweh."

Even so the "uncreation" account is told in two parts –

the first focusing on the judgment of Elohim against all the earth,
the second focusing on how Yahweh redeemed his righteous one.

2. Outside the Ark, No Salvation (6:14-7:5)

And so God tells Noah to make an ark of gopher wood.

Have you ever wondered what kind of wood this was?

Well, so have a lot of other people!

When you think of "gopher" you probably think of a small fuzzy critter.

But in fact, "gopher" is simply a Hebrew word,
and no one knows what it means!

The word for "ark" is only used here and in the story of Moses.

It is not even remotely related to the word used in Exodus
for the ark of the covenant.

The ark was 300 cubits (around 450 feet long),

making it a massive seacraft,

but the dimensions would render it seaworthy,

and the description is eminently practical for survival!

While the line of Cain builds cities,

the heir of Seth – Noah – builds an ark,
a picture of the City of God.

The three levels of the ark

are described in terms that make you think of the three parts of the universe –
a three story universe:
the heavens above,
the earth beneath
and the waters beneath the earth.

After all, the “lower” story of the ark will be submerged beneath the waters,
so it is not called a first story, but the “lower” deck.

In verse 16, when it says to make a roof for the ark, the word there actually means “noon”
or “midday” which is why the translators have offered the footnote
suggesting “skylight” as an alternate meaning.

If you look at the ark as a picture of creation –
then you can see that just as there are windows in the heavens,
so also there is a window in the roof of the ark.

If all of creation is about to be undone.
If God is going to return creation to tohu vbohu (a watery abyss),
then the ark will be all that is left of creation.

In verse 17 God says that he will bring a flood of waters.

This word, “mabbul” is used in scripture only in Genesis 6-11 and in Psalm 29.

It speaks of cosmic sea – the deluge that destroyed the earth.

It is not used to refer to ordinary floods.

When God says that he will not flood the earth again,
he uses this special word, “Mabbul.”

This one time he will bring Mabbul upon the earth.

This one time he will return to the earth to a watery abyss –
like the tohu vbohu in the beginning.

And everything that is on the earth shall die.

But, he says, to Noah,

I will establish my covenant with you (singular), and you shall come into the ark,
you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

Here we are told that God will establish his covenant with Noah (singular)
and through Noah he will save humanity – and all creation in him.

And so he tells Noah to take 2 of each animal into the ark,
and he promises that these animals will come to him.

Noah did not have to go round up the animals.

God sent them to him.

God called, and the animals came to the one righteous man

and entered the ark.

22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

But having promised that he will establish his covenant with Noah,
we hear for the first time in this narrative the covenant name of Yahweh:

*7:1 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household,
for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.*

And now the LORD calls Noah to distinguish between clean and unclean animals.
Noah is to bring seven pairs of all clean animals and birds
(those useful for worship),
but only one pair of unclean animals.

*4 For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights,
and every living thing that I have made
I will blot out from the face of the ground."*

5 And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.

Once again we hear that Noah does what the LORD says.

So the when the flood comes,
the ark is the one and only place of salvation.
Outside the ark, there is no salvation.
Outside the ark is death and judgment.

You can see why the early Fathers often spoke of the church as the ark.
The church is the place where we find salvation.
By passing through the baptismal waters of judgment
we escape the destruction that God brings against the earth.

And that is why we confess that outside of the church
there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.
If Shem had said, "wow, Lord, I believe all that you have said.
Thanks for the warning!"

And then if Shem had said, "Oh, well, dad, all that building would take a hundred years!
I think I'll just build me a little raft!
I'll see you after the flood!"
What do you suppose would have happened?
Hmmm.

I think we probably would be telling stories about Noah and his *two* sons!
If you say that you believe what God has said,

then you need to act accordingly!
God has said that the church is the body of Christ,
the mother of believers.
Outside the church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

3. The Undoing of Creation (7:6-24)

Verses 6-24 then tell of the undoing of creation.

After a hundred years of building and preparing, the flood of waters finally came.

After describing carefully all that Noah did in obedience to the voice of the LORD
we are told in verse 16 that the LORD shut him in.

We'll come back next time to the chronology of the flood
and the structure of the narrative,
but for today, it is sufficient to know that

*11 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.
12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.*

We need to remember what Genesis has already told us about creation.
Remember that Genesis 1 says that God created a firmament (raqia)
to hold back the waters above from the waters beneath.
Genesis (and really the whole of scripture)
presents a flat earth with a solid dome over it
protecting it from the cosmic sea.
When the windows of heaven are opened,
the waters above the heavens (the waters above the stars)
come pouring down.

People sometimes debate the question of whether the Genesis flood
was a local flood or a universal flood.

Genesis certainly portrays it as a universal flood.
In other words, the universe was flooded.

Most people who say they believe in a “universal” flood really don't.
They only believe that the earth was flooded.

But Genesis says that the windows of heaven were opened,
the raqia – the firmament – no longer held back the cosmic sea (the Mabbul),
and so the whole of creation was inundated.

Genesis 7 describes this flood as the undoing of creation –
a truly universal, cosmic flood.

I will leave it to the scientists to figure out
how to make sense of the fossils and geologic evidence.

I will only add this:

so long as the whole human race was wiped out,
then the Flood was truly a cosmic flood.

Because Adam (man) was created in the image of God,
with dominion over all the creatures.

If Adam's race is wiped out,
then truly the entire universe is meaningless.

And as you read the central description of this Flood,
the death of Man is the point:

17 The flood continued forty days on the earth.

The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.

*18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth,
and the ark floated on the face of the waters.*

*19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth
that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered.*

20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

*21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts,
all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind.*

22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

*23 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.

24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

The waters prevailed.

The waters increased.

Man was supposed to have dominion –

but now it is the waters that prevail.

Man was supposed to increase and multiply –

but now it is the waters that increase.

And while God has promised that the Mabbul (the cosmic Flood) will not return,
I cannot say that man has regained the mastery over the waters.

We *think* that we have tamed coastlands, rivers and floodplains

But the waters above and the waters beneath do not owe any allegiance to man.

When God gave man dominion over the creatures,

he did not give man dominion over the waters.

And every time we defy the waters, we lose.

We have rebuilt New Orleans – but it will flood again!
In my youth in California I saw the magnificent homes built on the cliffs
 overlooking the Pacific Ocean –
built just a few years before with the confidence that it would take centuries
 for the ocean to eat away that much of the cliffs.
And then one winter came a storm
 that did a century’s worth of damage to those cliffs –
 and those homes slid into the sea!

They say that the oceans are rising.
 Whether or not man is contributing to it is beside the point.
If the oceans are rising, then nations will spend billions –
 trillions of dollars to fight against the seas.
And the nations will lose.

You cannot defeat the waters of judgment.
 But you can be saved by them!

This is the point of 1 Peter 3,
 where we are told that 8 people were saved by water in the days of Noah.
And Peter tells us that baptism corresponds to this.
Because baptism “now saves you” –
 and as though he recognized
 that some people would find this a strange way of saying it,
 he added
 “not as a removal of dirt from the body
 but as an appeal to God for a clean conscience,”
Notice that Peter does not apologize for saying that baptism saves you –
 but instead he says that baptism saves you
 “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead –
 because Jesus has passed through the waters of judgment in his death,
 and has been raised up to life –
 therefore baptism saves you.

Again, remember that a sacrament has two parts:
 the outward sign and the inward reality.
And the whole point of a sacrament is that the outward sign and the inward reality
 are joined together.

And so even as you have been washed in the waters of baptism,
 so too you have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus,
 as your sins are washed away in the same waters of judgment that fell upon him.