

It feels enormously appropriate that we're doing the story of Noah on a morning when we've all been soaking wet. The story of Noah is one of hope, but it's also one which when anthropologists study the story of humanity is something which is called "A flood myth" and it's studied among other flood myths.

A flood myth is one in which a great flood, sent by a deity or deities, destroys human civilization, usually in an act of divine retribution. Parallels are frequently drawn between the flood waters of these myths and the primaevial waters which appear in various creation myths; if you think of Genesis it says "The Spirit was hovering over the waters" - these were the primaevial water of creation. And the flood waters being described as a measure for the cleansing of humanity in preparation for a rebirth after a falling away of the goodness into which they were born and created. And most of these myths contain a cultural hero who represents "humanity's craving for this good life". And there are many, many flood myths around the world. I wonder if you would like to have a guess how many cultures and civilisations have a flood myth?

[Twenty five?] Higher, higher than 25.

[Two hundred] Very good – bang on. (I didn't prep her, she's obviously studied this in the past.)

There are over 200 flood myths around the world. Now, I may be wrong, but if a worldwide flood never happened and if it was purely mythical, why on earth would there be so many stories about it?

The oldest known historical record of a global flood is the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh which is from the eighteenth-century BC. But here's the thing, we need to remember that just because something is dated earlier than the writings of Moses, that only confirms that the tablet was written earlier, not that its contents are essentially original or more accurate than the biblical account.

There are many similarities between the various flood myths, and you have to ask Why? Why so similarities?

In the biblical record we hear that Noah's descendants remained together up until God confused their languages at Babel (which is in chapter 11), after which they were scattered. So as these various people groups we scattered by God around the globe and then subsequently re-settled, this story of the Flood was shared via oral transmission down through these cultures, later becoming variously distorted, or corrupted, and enshrined as myths within the respective cultural histories.

And yet even so, even despite all this oral transmission and the various different places where this occurred, the residual similarities are striking. Here is a list of similarities present within the various myths:

- in 88% of the myths there is a favoured family;
- in 66% of the myths they were forewarned;
- in 66% (again) the flood is due to wickedness;
- in 95% this destruction is caused by a flood;
- and in 95% (again) this flood is global;

- 70% of the stories survival is due to a boat;
- and in 67% animals are also saved on this boat;
- in 73% animals play a significant part in the story (if you think of the birds that were sent out: a raven and then a dove);
- 57% the survivors land on a mountain;
- in 82% the geography is local;
- in 35% (again) the birds are sent out;
- in 7% a rainbow is mentioned;
- in 13% the survivors offer a sacrifice; and
- in 9% there were 8 persons who were saved.

What's most interesting (maybe only to me, as I have this kind of brain) is that if you combine the similarities into a consolidated account, this is what you get:

“Once there was a worldwide flood, sent by God to judge the wickedness of humankind. But there was one righteous family which was forewarned of the coming flood. They built a boat on which they survived the flood along with the animals. As the flood ended, their boat landed on a high mountain from which they descended and repopulated the whole earth.”

Does that sound familiar? That's the four chapters of Genesis [6-9], isn't it, which is amazing!

Some notable examples of variations in the Myth:

1. in the myth of Gilgamesh the boat is cube-shaped, which would actually be terrible for rough seas. And only seven days were given for building of it as well as to gather all the animals; and also three are only seven days of rainfall to cover the earth, and fickle gods destroyed mankind but later gave immortality to another;
2. in Hawaii a man named Nu-u made a great canoe with a house on it and filled it with animals. And in this story, the waters came up over all the earth and killed all the people, and only Nu-u and his family were saved. (Nu-u...Noah?);
3. in China, one of the Chinese legends explains that the flood was caused by an argument between a crab and a bird. Fuhi, his wife, three sons, and three daughters (8 people!) escaped a great flood and were the only ones left alive on the earth, and after the great flood, they repopulated the world; and
4. in Greece there is more than one Greek flood myth, but the one that most corresponds to Noah's Flood is about Deucalion who is told to build a chest to survive a flood. However, some men on high mountains are left alive

So with all these varieties of the myth why should we believe the Biblical account? Well, the language of Genesis 6-9 is descriptive and matter of fact in its stating the details; and it freely acknowledges the shortcomings of its supposed “heroes”. Such honesty and attention to detail is highly unusual in ancient mythology, though it *is* indicative of a true and authentic history.

A gentleman named Jerry Bergmann did a study called “Do Creation and Flood Myths Have a Common Origin?” And he resolved that through his extensive review of the creation flood myths. It was revealed a basic core of themes in all the existing myths. And this strongly indicates the common origin. The Genesis account, however, stands in stark contrast to all the other accounts because it shows a lack of corruption compared to the other accounts. These other accounts are, therefore, rightly referred to as myths because they have added mythological elements to the

original history. The original historical events can be seen through the modifications and embellishments which were added but this is not the case in the Biblical account. The Biblical account is therefore treasured by historians as being free from such mythical embellishments.

And there is actually archaeological evidence for the flood.

This is a picture of a mountain called Ararat in Turkey, which archaeologists believe to be the final resting place of Noah's Ark, and it's been heavily studied and agreed upon as a place where a boat came to rest after a flood; it's not disputed.

So we come to scripture and dig a little deeper into the scriptural account.

In the account, in chapter 6, we are introduced to these characters called the "Nephilim" or the "sons of God" who are quite possibly the offspring of fallen angels and human women which are alluded to in the Book of Enoch (which is an extra canonical book), and also in scripture to Nimrod in Genesis 10:9 – Nimrod was the ruler of Babylon and he's referred to as a mighty hunter before the Lord; he's possibly a descendant of one of these Nephilim and human women, which adds weight to the later narrative of David and Goliath, 'cause Goliath descended from a race of 'giants', the Rephaim).

In [Genesis] 6:3 we're told that the Lord said "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; **their days will be a hundred and twenty years.**" Some later translations try and make this refer to lifespan of human beings, but actually it's much more historically logical for it to have been a date from the pronouncement by which God would bring the flood; so he's saying my Spirit will not contend with their corruption for any more than another 120 years. Because Abraham lived to be more than 120 year old, so it doesn't make sense – God's not a liar.

In 6:6 it says "The Lord **regretted** that he had made humankind on the earth, and it **grieved** him to his heart." 'Grieved' or 'regretted' here also, oddly, means 'had compassion for' and 'desired to comfort'; in his regret at having seen what humanity had become he had compassion for them and desired to comfort them. And it refers to the aspect of loving kindness or mercy in God, as an attribute of his character, which always prefers compassion over judgement.

In 6:7 it says "The Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created, and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures, for **I regret that I have made them.**'" But this "I regret that I have made (or I am sorry that I have made) them" doesn't so much refer to 'created' as it does his having 'entered into covenant with' humankind, because he entered into covenant with creatures who had then disobeyed him, and therefore he was bound to act upon the covenant that he has instituted, which meant that he had to bring about judgement. But he had compassion so he decided to save humankind through Noah and his family. We see here the conflict in God between his wrath and his mercy. Of course, we know how this works out in the end because we have the whole picture of Scripture, and in James [2:13] it says God's mercy triumphs over judgement, but this is for us a particular indication of the battle within God's nature and of him having to 'crucify' his own desire for retribution so that he can show loving kindness or mercy on his creatures who really don't deserve it. And this represents the heart of Scripture.

So we come to Noah. Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. Well, 'Favour' here also equals 'Grace'. Noah was spoken well of by God not because Noah was righteous in himself (or holy) – self-righteousness does not equate to righteousness before God. Noah was one who sought the Lord for His grace, for His favour, not so he could speak well of himself but so that God could speak well of him. Noah found favour before the Lord because he sought God in every moment of

every day for God's righteousness.

This is GOD'S testimony about Noah: He was a righteous man, a blameless man, he walked before God. This is the same "one righteous man" theme, which continues all the way through Abraham when Abraham pleaded for God not to destroy Sodom. And what did he pray again, time and time again? If there be ten, if there be five; and if he'd prayed "if there be one" and there had been one found in Sodom God would not have destroyed Sodom. All the way to Jesus, when Jesus became the one righteous man holding out for God's mercy in the face of judgement.

And this was necessary because the scripture tells us the earth was corrupt in God's sight, the earth was filled with violence; God saw how corrupt the earth had become for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways – that's four instances of **corrupt**, and again of violence. And God said to Noah "I'm going to put an end to all the people" (that is also translated "I'm going to put an end to all flesh") "for the earth is filled with violence because of them, and I'm surely going to destroy both them and the earth." 'Destroy' and 'corrupt' come from the same root word in Hebrew. God's destruction is a visitation upon humanity, and upon the earth – because it has become corrupt it is necessary. And this implies the "eye for eye" and "life for life" which extends into the idea of accountability for lifeblood which comes up in chapter 9.

But. It's very interesting in 6:13 it says "God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end to **all flesh**, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'" This 'all flesh' for anybody who knows your New Testament has an interesting correlation with Joel 2 and Acts, where it says "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" which becomes the final merciful means by which the flesh is put to death, not by a flood upon the earth but by indwelling of the Spirit, through which the deeds of the flesh are put to death.

6:14: God said to Noah "Make yourself an **ark** of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark and **cover** it inside and out." The ark is a type for the church of new covenant believers who are 'in Christ' and in which we are kept safe in the day of judgement. But in the second part of this verse which says "cover it with pitch" the verb 'kapher' in Hebrew is the same as the verb cover which relates to atonement (it's from Yom Kippur, it relates to the Day of Atonement), and it's the covering which was over the Mercy Seat upon which the blood of the sacrifice was spilled, and by which the people were sanctified again. And it's the same use of word to which Paul refers to in Romans 3:21 where Jesus is equated as being the one who sits on the Mercy Seat and whose blood sanctifies humankind.

And this wonderful part of the story where God gives these particular instructions to how to build the ark. This notion of a specific pattern of God and of a specific plan of God comes all the way through scripture: in the stories of the exodus we have the designs of the temple in Exodus and then into the New Testament as Paul outlines the rules for holy living among God's people which are a consistent theme in his letters; and he points to himself and to the other apostles and says we are a pattern: as Jesus was a pattern we are a pattern – live like us. Imitate us as we imitate Christ. The thought here is not of an ideal but of a model that makes an impression because God has moulded it, and one that is effective through faith. Our words and our deeds bear witness to the life of faith that summons this faith and is grasped by faith, and the more our lives are moulded by God's word, the more our lives become a 'type' and a pattern that others can follow. It cannot be imitated, but is lived out only in the freedom of faith, and of obedience.

And then, finally, this testimony, this epitaph of Noah. (I would love to have this written on my tombstone.) "He did everything that God commanded him." (I would love to have that on my

tombstone!). This also points forward to the many times in Scripture that it is said of Moses in Exodus, and you can count them – it says it time and time again “Moses did everything the Lord commanded him” – and also of Jesus: Jesus in John 12:49 says “Everything I have said has come from my father”; in Hebrews 5:8 we learn that he was obedient even unto death, he learned obedience through suffering; and in Philippians 2[:8] it says he was obedient, even to the cross.

Now, we, if we are the church, and if we are the fulfilment of the ark, which one would we be more: a lifeboat or an ark? Because, unfortunately, the church sometimes puts itself forward, and its theology forward, as being a lifeboat for a troubled world – as that we can pull you out of the world but you will sit upon the waves and we will just be kind of grimly hanging on together, and nothing will really have changed and we will be flung around with the winds and waves of fortune just as everybody else is. But we really haven't escaped the world. That's not New Testament theology.

If we have an “ark theology” that our theology renders us as having been moved from one kingdom, from one world, into another, that through Christ, like Christ, we have overcome the world through our faith; that we are no longer in sin but have been made righteous; that we are not tossed around with the waves of the world any more but we have a faith which provides us a stable footing, not only in the day of judgement but now. Which are we: a lifeboat or an ark? Which would you rather be?

We preach Christ!

If you believe like I did that that verse which said “My Spirit will not contend with men for more than another 120 years” then Noah preached for 120 years! For the entire time he was building the ark he was preaching, and right up until the flood waters were at the necks of his fellow human beings he preached, and yet no one believed in his word! And yet his experience is not unusual for those in the world who walk with God and to whom is committed a prophetic word that speaks of future judgement against those who are in rebellion against him. Think of Jonah. Think of Elijah. Think especially of Jesus coming to his own and of his own not receiving him. Think of them when you consider whether we as Christian believers ought to preach salvation as coming exclusively through the name of Jesus – and particularly through the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

Brothers and sisters, whether or not the world deems us foolish, or ignorant, or intolerant, is that any reason to suppose that we should refrain from preaching Christ crucified and raised? I tell you it's not! We are happier by far, and so much more readily inclined to testify about our favourite celebrity, or our favourite sports team, or our favourite TV show than we are to preach about Jesus – how bizarre is that?

How have we become so intimidated by what the world thinks of us that we dare not mention the name of the one who saved us for fear of embarrassment or derision? How can we not revel in and exalt the name of Jesus? It truly is the most beautiful, the most wonderful and the most powerful name there is! There is no other name under heaven by which we are saved. He is the name above every other name, and his is the name at which every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, whether on this side of his returning or on the other, by which time it will be too late; and every bended knee confession will be a cry of anguish on the lips of the perishing! Should we preach Christ?

If you think I'm wrong then you'd better be sure you are right. Because you and I will both have to give an account for what we believe and for what we teach and preach. Personally, I wouldn't

ream of setting aside either the counsel of God or the grace of God for the sake of being well thought of by those who are in the world. Now is the time of God's favour. Today is the day of salvation. I would much rather find favour with God and be spoken of well by him and by Jesus (just like Noah before me) than I would to be found politically correct in the sight of the world. I dare not deny him for fear of him denying me when I finally meet him, as we've been singing about, face to face. Who do YOU want to think well of YOU? The world, those who are in the world, or the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

You see, the flood prefigures the day of judgement – it foretells of the day of judgement – when God's wrath will be visited upon unbelievers and believers alike. For those outside of Christ – for those outside of the ark – wrath **will** overcome them. But for those in Christ, the blood of Christ is our protector. I heard some of the testimonies this morning of people feeling they aren't good enough, or that the covenant that they had made with God might not be strong enough – but it's not, that's not the point: his covenant with us is what we hold to in faith; the blood of Christ is what sustains and what sanctifies us, not our own fulfilment, our own obedience, of his promises, and it's not whether or not we still come to church that renders us as being safe and saved. It's that you've made this commitment today, the blood of Christ has saved you, the blood of Christ sanctifies you – you need not fear any more because of him.

Just as the dove which was sent out by Noah after the flood prefigures, or foretells, of the Holy Spirit who is sent out from God to find soil which is sufficient for sustaining life, so the Holy Spirit who comes to indwell us is what brings peace. It's the presence and power of God's Spirit that we are to depend upon until such time as we are delivered upon the shore of the new heavens and the new earth, to enter the new Jerusalem which has come down to earth from heaven. And here's the promise, here's the sign of the rainbow. It's in this paradise where we will reside for evermore with the Lord: with God the Father; and with the Lamb, his son Jesus Christ, in the eternal peace and joy of the Holy Spirit as God's ambassadors on the earth. But this truth isn't only hope for then, it's also hope for now because the Holy Spirit is here, just as Jesus is here, and the Holy Spirit promises to bring peace, joy and righteousness to our hearts forever.

Amen.