

Lutheran Foundations: A Confirmation Curriculum[©]

It Starts Here! Stories of the Old Testament

The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish

Year 1, Lesson 4: The Great Flood

Review

The Bible is True – It is true in different ways depending on genre!

Creation is Good.

We are created in the image of God.

We have dominion over creation.

The Fall – Wanting to be like God

Cain and Able

Sin has consequences, God is merciful.

Today's Story: The Great Flood

Genesis 6:1 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. ³ Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

⁹ These are the descendants 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.

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon 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 because of them; now I am going to destroy

them along with the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵ This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶ Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷ For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters 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. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰ Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. ²¹ Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." ²² Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Genesis 7:1 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; ³ and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. ⁴ For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for 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.

⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth. ⁷ And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸ Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, ⁹ two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰ And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.

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 The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, ¹⁴ they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature. ¹⁵ They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. ¹⁶ And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in.

¹⁷ The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. ¹⁹ The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; ²⁰ the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. ²¹ And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; ²² everything on 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, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. ²⁴ And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

Genesis 8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ² the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, ³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹² Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

¹³ In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” ¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. ¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

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. ²¹ And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease."

Genesis 9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. ⁵ For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image
God made humankind.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it."

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." Genesis 6:1 – 9:17 NRSV*

Here is what we know:

1. There is a great deal of evidence for regional floods all over the world across time. Some of these floods were enormous and caused spectacular amounts of death and damage!
2. There is compelling evidence that between 7,000 and 9,000 years ago, the Mediterranean Sea broke through a land barrier and flooded the Black Sea region catastrophically. (10 cubic miles of water every day for 300+ days, covering 39,000 square miles.) This may have been the source of an oral history that is now recorded as Noah's flood.
3. Many of the civilizations in the ancient middle east have flood sagas. Something bad happened there involving lots and lots of water!

BUT

There is zero evidence for a worldwide flood anytime in the last 6,000 years (age of the world according to the Biblical literalists).

In fact, there is zero evidence of a worldwide flood in the last 110,000 years. The Greenland Ice Cores prove this absolutely.

It gets worse for Biblical literalists:

1. There is not enough (known) water for a global flood that covers all the mountains
2. There is not a globally consistent flood deposit. Instead, we find fine layering of sediment everywhere.
3. The fossil record does not support a global flood.
4. Thick layers of limestone argue against both a young earth and a global flood
5. We don't know how many animal and insect species there are in the world... but millions... 8.7 million? 13.6 million? More? Many more? We are still discovering 10's of thousands of species every year.
6. The ark didn't just carry all of the animals/insects, it also carried food and water for all of them for an entire year. There is no way all of this fit into a boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. The math is impossible. Not unlikely, impossible.
7. A global flood would have destroyed fresh water fauna
8. Our genetic diversity does not allow universal descent from 8 persons (5 of whom are related by blood) within the last 6,000 years.
9. Many countries in the middle east itself do not have geological evidence of a major flood. There is no geological flood evidence in Israel/Palestine.
10. The Bible itself speaks of groups of people who were not on the Ark, but who existed both before and after the flood. The Nephilim are an example.
11. The dove that Noah releases returns with an olive leaf. A global flood would have killed all olive trees everywhere. There would be no fresh leaves.

So, we are as sure as we can be – from multiple scientific disciplines and from the Bible itself – that there was no global flood.

But people fight and fight and fight and fight and fight. We are told that if we have any doubts about a global flood and an ark containing between 2 and 14 of every animal species in the whole world then we disbelieve the Bible and distrust God.

This is wrong and crazy and ignorant.

If anyone says this to you,

1. Find a new friend. No one gets to tell you that you don't trust God!
2. Don't trust anything they say about the faith or the Bible.
3. Be very clear that that person doesn't know the first thing about Hebrew.

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN IN HEBREW

This is the key for us! We need to know about the limitations of that language. We also need to know about the literary styles of ancient people writing in Hebrew!

Stick with me here!

English has about 170,000 words and about 48,000 additional obsolete words. English is an expansive language and is still growing.

Biblical Hebrew has 8,198 words based on only 2,099 roots. 2,415 of the 8,198 words are proper names. Biblical Hebrew is a highly compressed language. Words have to do double and triple duty. Translators have to decide what the word probably means by using context and rabbinical commentary. Many translations are EQUALLY possible for many sentences. That is the case here.

The Bible says that:

1. Noah's flood covered the whole "erets"
2. "Erets" is the space that God carved out under the dome of the sky and between the waters in the creation story
3. Noah brought all of the animals of the "erets" with him into the ark
 - a. "Erets" can be rightly translated "earth", "land", "ground", "country", or even "field". It can be "everything", it can be "everything known to me", it can be "the entire area", it can be "everything around here".
4. The water covered every "har" by 15 cubits (20ish feet)
 - a. "Har" can be rightly translated as either "mountain" or "hill"

So it is totally reasonable to translate the story as one about a devastating, localized flood and the rescue of a family and all of the animals from that local area.... Neither science nor the Bible have any problem with that claim!

As an aside, people who survive disasters talk like the narrator of the Noah Story:

- Everything was on fire! Everything! There was nothing but smoke!
- I thought I was going to die! I couldn't breathe! I was drowning! I couldn't figure out which way was up! Water all around me!
- There was blood everywhere! Everywhere I looked I saw only death!

As we have said before – and as we will say again – people fight about side stuff in the Bible because that keeps them from having to listen to and deal with the lessons that would condemn or challenge them!

So people build arc replicas, arc parks, and zoos of fiberglass animals. They embrace pseudo-science, resist and demean actual scientists, and damage our witness in the world. Why do they do this?

Well, some of them are fleecing suckers. There is real money to be made here.

Others have become convinced that every word in the Bible must be literally true or no word is true. If the flood wasn't a global flood within the last 6000 years then Jesus may not have been real! This is nonsense, of course...

The other reason – the unspoken reason:

As long as I am waging a war about the truth of the Bible and insisting on a global flood (though NO ONE thinks that the ancients knew about the earth being a globe...), then I can pretend I am the good one, the faithful one. I don't have to face my brokenness, my sins, my failures... I don't have to wonder if I am under judgement. I don't have to listen to the lessons the story is trying to teach.

It's like Cain wanting to have an argument with God regarding whether or not it was reasonable for God to ask him if he knew Able's whereabouts... Um, Cain, let's talk about the murder. Let's not waste time in a philosophical discussion about your responsibilities to keep track of your brother's location minute to minute.

I do this. So do you. We aren't murderers, but we would much rather not talk about anything that makes us look bad, anything that makes us feel bad. Right?

Your job is to figure out what the lessons of Noah's flood are for you! Here are some possibilities:

1. God is aware of what is going on in the world and what each of us is doing.
2. God cares about righteousness and goodness

3. God is Just. There are consequences for sin and disobedience. Punishment is real.
4. God provides plans and routes of salvation
5. God saves people who are imperfect!
6. God makes and keeps promises. God can be trusted!
7. God loves the world. God loves us.

The story of Noah, the Ark, and the Flood speaks an inspired and powerful message about judgment and grace that has instructed God's people throughout the ages about God's hatred of sin and his love for his creation. Most importantly, we see God's promise never to destroy the Earth again fully realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, where God takes the judgment for sin upon himself rather than pouring it out on humanity. Thus, through the lens of Christ, the biblical Flood story proclaims the marvelous news of God's grace and love for his people

And one last thing:

We continue to talk about our job being to learn these stories in our bones so that we can MEDITATE upon them – instead of having silly fights about the limits of their historicity. The flood story shows up a few times in the New Testament, and never as a requirement that a person must believe some specific detail about the size or extent of the flood! Instead, in every case, we see that someone has been MEDITATING on the flood story for a long long time!

In Luke 17, Jesus refers to the flood (and several other OT stories) in answering a question from the Pharisees about when the kingdom of God would come. Bottom line: It will come suddenly when many least expect it, when many are consumed with the ordinary trivialities of life.

In Matthew 24, Jesus is talking to his disciples about the end of the world and his own ultimate return. Again, he uses the story of the flood to talk about the unpreparedness of many and the sudden and complete transition that will occur.

Peter refers to the flood in both 1 and 2 Peter. In 2 Peter, the flood is lifted up as one example among many that God knows how to rescue the righteous – and can be counted on to do so! In 1 Peter, the flood is used to talk about baptism! God's chosen ones were "saved through water".

So you and I are trying to walk in the footsteps of Peter and Jesus. Learn the Stories! Meditate on them!

* New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright 1989,
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