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NOAH AND THE END OF THE WORLD

In the days of Noah, the ancient world was washed away in a great flood. The story of that flood stands as a reminder that God will destroy the world again someday.

God destroyed the ancient world because most of the people of Noah's day had forgotten about God and fallen into wickedness. The Bible says,

“The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”

Genesis 6:5 NIV

Because of man's wickedness, God was “grieved” that He had made man (Genesis 6:6), and He decided to wipe mankind from the face of the earth (Genesis 6:7). One man, Noah, found favor in God's sight (Genesis 6:8). The Bible says of him,

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”

Genesis 6:9 NIV

God told Noah to build a great boat out of cypress wood, (Genesis 6:14) in which he could save himself, his wife, his three sons, and their wives from the impending flood (Genesis 6:18).

God told Noah to take a pair of all creatures into the ark with him. Of the animals that were ritually clean Noah was to take seven pairs. He was also to take all kinds of food that the animals

would need while they were in the ark (Genesis 6:21). The Bible says,

“Noah did everything
just as God commanded him.”

Genesis 6:22 NIV

After Noah built the ark, God said to him,

“Go into the ark, you
and your whole family,
because I have found you righteous
in this generation”

Genesis 7:1 NIV

When Noah and his family were all safely inside the ark, God shut them in (Genesis 7:16). Seven days later, it began to rain and it rained forty days and forty nights (Genesis 7:4,12). Water accumulated and lifted the ark. In this way, the water which destroyed others, “saved” Noah and his family. (See 1 Peter 3:20.)

The water covered the earth for many days, until, finally, it began to recede, and the ark came to rest on Mt. Ararat. The tops of mountains began to reappear, and when the earth was sufficiently dry, God said to Noah, “Come out” (Genesis 8:16), and they came out.

God promised never to destroy the earth again by water. He said to Noah,

“I establish my covenant with you:
Never again will all life be cut off
by the waters of a flood;
never again will there be a flood
to destroy the earth.”

Genesis 9:11 NIV

As a sign of this promise, God set the rainbow in the sky (Genesis 9:13).

Noah is mentioned only one more time in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah mentioned him in connection with a promise that God made to protect (heavenly) Jerusalem from destruction. The prophet Isaiah quotes God as saying,

“To me this is like the days of Noah,
when I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again cover the earth.
So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,
never to rebuke you again.”

Isaiah 54:9 NIV

We know that this was not a promise to protect earthly Jerusalem from future destruction, for the earthly city of Jerusalem was subsequently destroyed at least twice. God seems to have spoken here about the heavenly Jerusalem, which is described in Revelation 21:9-14, saying that the heavenly Jerusalem would never be destroyed. (Compare Isaiah 54:11-14 with Revelation 21:9-14.)

Although Noah received very little attention in the Old Testament (outside of Genesis chapters six through nine), he received a great deal of attention in the New Testament, where he and the flood became a warning of things to come.

JESUS SPOKE OF NOAH

Jesus knew the story of Noah and He foretold that many of the people who would be alive at His return would be like the people of Noah's day. Jesus said,

“For in the days before the flood,
people were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,

up to the day Noah entered the ark;...”
Matthew 24:38 NIV

The people of Noah’s day had no conception of the things that were about to happen to them. Jesus said,

“...and they knew nothing about
what would happen
until the flood came and took them all away.
Matthew 24:39a NIV

Then Jesus foretold,

“That is how it will be
at the coming of the Son of Man.”
Matthew 24:39b NIV

We know that Jesus was referring to Himself when He spoke of the coming of “the Son of Man,” because Jesus is the Son of Man. See Matthew 16:13-15. In order to avoid punishment when the Son of Man returns, people need to be alert and on guard. Jesus said,

“Therefore keep watch,
because you do not know on what day
your Lord will come.”
Matthew 24:42 NIV

(This comparison of the day of the return of the Son of Man to the time when Noah went into the ark can also be found in Luke 17:26-27.)

WHAT THE BOOK OF HEBREWS SAYS ABOUT NOAH

The New Testament gives information about Noah that is not specifically stated in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews says that Noah saved his family by faith. Indeed, if Noah had not believed God, and if he had not taken God's warning seriously about the flood, he and his family would have died in the flood. The book of Hebrews says,

“By faith Noah,
when warned about things not yet seen,
in holy fear built an ark to save his family.”

Hebrews 11:7a NIV

The book of Hebrews also tells us that Noah inherited “the righteousness that comes by faith.” Noah was considered righteous because of his faith even before the same happened to Abraham years later. The book of Hebrews says,

“By his faith he [Noah]
condemned the world
and became heir of the righteousness
that comes by faith.”

Hebrews 11:7 NIV

Noah condemned the ancient world by the example he set, but it was neither his fault nor his intention that his faith and his righteousness should cast a revealing light on the wickedness of the rest of the people of his day.

CHRIST'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE DAYS OF NOAH

The New Testament also says that Christ Himself was involved with the events of Noah's day. The apostle Peter said that Christ went through the Spirit and preached to the people that were

alive in Noah's day, but who were in the spirit-world in Peter's day. Peter said,

“He was put to death in the body
but made alive by the Spirit,
through whom also he went
and preached to the spirits in prison...”

1 Peter 3:18b-19 NIV

The question is often asked regarding this passage, “At what time did Jesus go and preach to the spirits of those people that were disobedient in Noah's day? Did He go to Hades during the time between His crucifixion and His resurrection and preach to the spirits in Hades?” To say “yes” to this question would give a speculative interpretation to what the Bible says.

A more reasonable explanation is that Christ went through the Spirit and preached to the people by the mouth of Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). We can determine when Christ preached to the people by asking when it was that they were disobedient. The text says (1 Peter 3:20) that they were disobedient in the day's of Noah while the ark was being prepared. So all during the time that Noah was preaching and building the ark, God waited patiently for people to repent, but they did not repent. Instead, they remained disobedient. The apostle Peter described the people of Noah's day, speaking of them as people

“...who disobeyed long ago
when God waited patiently
in the days of Noah
while the ark was being built.”

1 Peter 3:20a NIV

In reference to the ark, the apostle Peter said,

“In it only a few people, eight in all,

were saved through water.”

1 Peter 3:20b NIV

The water that saved Noah symbolizes what happens to believers in Christ when they are baptized. Peter said,

“In it [the ark] only a few people,
eight in all,
were saved through water,
and this water symbolizes baptism
that now saves you also—”

1 Peter 3:20b-21a NIV

Many people think that baptism has nothing to do with being saved, but the apostle Peter, if he were asked, would not concur with such a thought. He felt that baptism does, indeed, have something to do with a person’s salvation. He even said that it “saves you.”

Peter was referring to a baptism, of course, that is preceded by instruction concerning the gospel of Christ, that is performed upon a person who has faith in Jesus and who has repented of sins; for if these do not precede baptism, baptism will not help anyone. If these are present, however, baptism does, indeed, save people.

The apostle Peter was not thinking of baptism as simply a dip in the water, for he explained that baptism is:

“...not the removal of dirt from the flesh,
but an appeal to God for a good conscience--
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 3:21b NASB

We see that the apostle Peter was thinking of baptism as “an appeal for a good conscience.” Therefore, Christian baptism is not for those who deny that they are guilty of anything, nor for those who think they have already been forgiven. Baptism is

superfluous in such cases. Baptism was designed for the person who knows that he is a sinner and who has a guilty conscience. He gets baptized because he wants to get rid of the pain that his guilty conscience is causing him and because he wants to avoid the punishment that is due him.

THE APOSTLE PETER'S WARNING

If God did not spare the ancient world, there is no reason for anyone to suppose that God will spare him if he persists in ungodliness. The apostle Peter said,

“He [God] did not spare the ancient world
when he brought the flood on its ungodly people,
but protected Noah,
a preacher of righteousness,
and seven others...”

2 Peter 2:5 NIV

The apostle Peter made two reassuring comments about the flood. He said that God “knows how to rescue godly men from trials” and how “to hold unrighteous people for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.” Such a comment makes us think that God will take care of His people in times of trial and that justice will be done in the end. Here are Peter’s comments:

“...if this is so,
then the Lord knows how to rescue
godly men from trials
and to hold the unrighteous
for the day of judgment,
while continuing their punishment.”

2 Peter 2:9 NIV

“The day of judgment,” of which the apostle Peter here spoke, is the same day as the one on which the Son of Man will return (Matthew 25:31-33.) That day has not come yet, due to the fact God is demonstrating His patience by waiting for people to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

Some people do not believe that the story of Noah and the flood is a true story. They want it to be a “myth,” because they feel threatened by it. Yet the story stands as a warning. People in Noah’s day could not conceive that God would destroy the world by water. The apostle Peter, speaking of the people in his day who could not fathom that God would destroy the world by fire, said,

“But they deliberately forget
that long ago by God’s word
the heavens existed
and the earth was formed out of water
and by water.
By these waters also the world of that time was
deluged and destroyed.”

2 Peter 3:5-6 NIV

GOD’S PATIENCE

It is a mistake to assume that God will never destroy the world again. What He promised was, never to destroy it again by water. The next (and final) destruction will be by fire. The same power that restrained the flood until its proper time had come, will also restrain the fire until its proper time has come. The apostle Peter said,

“By the same word
the present heavens and earth
are reserved for fire,
being kept for the day of judgment and
destruction of ungodly men.”

2 Peter 3:7 NIV

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Did anything good come out of Noah's preaching? If so, what?
2. The Bible said that Noah feared God (Hebrews 11:7). Is it right and proper for people to fear God? Please explain.
3. What are some of the things that Noah could have said to the people of his day?
4. What do you think the people of Noah's day may have said to Noah when they saw him building the ark?
5. What do you think the people of Noah's day may have said to him when he told them that a flood was coming?
6. Would God have saved Noah and his family, if they had not built the ark and gone into it? What do you think?
7. What is the purpose of baptism?
8. Does it make any difference whether or not a person is watching for the return of the Son of Man? If so, what difference does it make?
9. What can a person do to prepare himself (herself) for the next destruction of the world?