

Rescued by the Ark

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Genesis 6:1-8

When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Matthew 24:34-39

"Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man."

We who believe in God believe also that he has made the universe according to certain principles of goodness and truth. We also believe God has made man for a purpose, to reflect his image male and female. This means there is a proper relationship between the sexes, one that can't be violated without compromising the image of God. An improper relationship runs counter to the Creator's purposes for human life and, in fact, constitutes a denial of the Creator himself.

So as we look about us, surveying the culture that is the context for our daily life, we can't help but wonder whether God could be pleased with what's happening. In fact, it strikes us that the Creator must be seriously displeased with the behavior of his human family. Considering some of the unnatural acts certain people are committing, with respect to human reproductive functions, we wonder, in fact, whether perhaps God is so disappointed with the human race that he might wish to just wipe us out and start over. We wonder whether the wickedness of mankind is so great in the earth, to the extent that people can entertain only the most corrupt and evil intentions, that perhaps God would like to say, "I'm sorry I made those creatures, and I'll just have to blot them out and replace them with people who'll listen to me and do what's right."

Now, you might think I'm describing how many Christians of today feel about the corruption that has overtaken our Western civilization. But I'm not talking about you and me, or other Christians living today. I'm talking about a few people who, according to Scripture, lived many thousands of years ago. As they looked around in their neighborhood, they saw people committing sexual acts that were unnatural — not men and women engaging in a normal marital relationship, but women who gave themselves to — or were seized by — mysterious non-human beings whom the Bible calls "the sons of god."

Whoever these beings were, the Hebrew phrase "sons of God" doesn't mean what it sounds like to us. It doesn't mean these were beings God had commissioned to represent him. The Hebrew word *ben*, or "son," can mean "belonging to a certain type," and the Hebrew word *'elohim*, usually translated "god," basically denotes one who is strong or mighty. So these "sons of god," whoever they really were, were beings who had some kind of unusual more-than-human power. And what Noah and his family saw going on — for, of course, they are the observers I'm

speaking about — was such a serious distortion of what God had intended for the human race that they knew God was going to have to do something about it.

We're all familiar with the story the Bible tells. God ordered Noah to construct a large wooden vessel called the ark. At the proper time, Noah was to take on board his immediate family, eight people in all, along with pairs representing the major species groups of land animals and birds. All of this was for the purpose of repopulating the earth after the flood that was to come.

The Bible then proceeds to describe the flood. Apparently, a heavy cloud cover originally blanketed the entire earth, so that temperatures were much the same around the globe (which explains, for example, why coal is found in Antarctica or other now-cold locations). However, the moisture in the cloud cover precipitated out at a rapid rate — the Bible says over a period of forty days — with the result that the land was covered with water. Once the water ran off into what became the oceans, the exposed land area dried up. However, with the cloud cover gone, living things were exposed for the first time to bombardment by the sun's gamma rays. This could explain why the human life span — described in the early chapters of Genesis as reaching in some cases more than 900 years — was reduced to a maximum of the 120 years mentioned in Genesis 6:3. Whatever people think of the Bible's account of the great flood, the scenario it lays out is not entirely inconsistent with "scientific" thinking today, and helps to explain some things about the world as *we* know it.

But I digress, for it's not the flood that's important but *the reason God allowed it to happen*. It came because, as Genesis says:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7).

Now fast-forward to twenty-first century America, or Western civilization in general. In Noah's time, the epitome of behavior that disregarded God's purpose was an improper mating between non-human creatures, whatever they were, and human females. Is there behavior in our time that displays the same disregard for the Creator's intention? Of course there is, in the practice and advocacy of "gay marriage," the coupling of human beings of the same sex. Along with that is the attempt to nullify the normal results of male-female coupling through the practice of unrestricted abortion. Additionally, we have the phenomenon of "gender dysphoria," in which some people claim to be a different sex from what their body parts would indicate. (I'm sorry, folks, but we have to talk about this.)

Once people discard the idea that we're here because God designed us, God's purpose in creating humankind male and female never comes into consideration. We are, indeed, in the same cultural situation as Noah and his family, observers of our neighborhood in which, as Genesis says, "the wickedness of man [is] great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil continually." And, like Noah, we can expect that our Creator will not stand by and permit the wickedness of our time — a corruption that goes well beyond the specific actions I've mentioned thus far — to continue without consequence. He will allow his cleansing judgments to take effect, just as he allowed the waters of the earth's cloud cover to precipitate in Noah's time and flood the earth. The judgment will not be another flood, for God has told us that he will never permit that to happen again. But another type of judgment will take effect.

I said God will *allow* that judgment. He doesn't have to take any specific action for the judgment to occur. All he has to do is let people do what they're already inclined to do. As Paul says in Romans 1:28, describing the same phenomena we observe today, "And since they did not

see fit to acknowledge God, God *gave them up* to a base mind and to improper conduct.” The consequence of actions that disregard God’s purposes is built into the actions themselves. Western culture, as we know it, will collapse into unlivable and unsustainable moral chaos, or perhaps be overrun by the merciless onslaught of Muslim *shari’ah* law. What force or influence do you see at work in our world today that would hold off that judgment?

We who grieve over the godlessness of our time need a vessel that would carry us through the coming judgment, delivering us into a new era in which humanity can make a fresh start with God. We need an ark — not an ark like Noah’s big wooden boat, but another kind of ark.

Listen, then, to what Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:18-22:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

Do you hear what Peter is telling us? There isn’t going to be another worldwide flood through which God’s people will escape by floating in a boat. There will be another kind of judgment, and another kind of “ark” that will carry believers through that judgment. That “ark” is *baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus*, the baptism Paul describes in Romans 6:3-5:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Those who take seriously God’s purposes for human life are being saved from the judgment coming upon the world, once again, through water — the water of Christian baptism. Of course, it’s not the water itself that delivers from judgment, but what that water *means*. The water of baptism, as Peter says, is not a cleansing like Noah’s flood but an appeal to the mercy of God. As Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into testing (*peirasmos*), but deliver us from evil.” Baptism enacts our deliverance from the judgment upon the world, through entrance into the death of Christ, which severs our connection with the corrupted values of our culture. As Paul points out in Romans 7, if you’re married and then you die, you’re no longer married — because you’re dead! In the same way, if you’re life is enmeshed in the corruption of our culture, but then you die, you’re no longer married to that culture or subject to the judgment coming upon it. When we’re baptized in water, we enter into Christ’s death, and this delivers us from the judgment. We are, as Peter says, “saved through water.”

Baptism also enacts our entrance into the resurrection life of Christ, which is the new creation that supplants the world we see all about us. Peter, in his Second Letter, calls it the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Because Jesus lives, in dimensions that transcend the four space-time dimensions of everyday perception, we have an “ark” that carries us through the turmoil and terror of the judgment to fall upon a world that turns away from its Creator. For us, *Jesus Christ is the ark*.

You might be thinking, “Baptism is only a ritual. It’s just a symbolic action in which we declare our intent to serve the Lord. How can a simple ceremony make any difference in whether or not we’re going to be “delivered from the evil” to come?” Of course, our baptism won’t make any difference — it won’t put us into the ark — if we think of it that way. But it will make a difference if we take it seriously and live it out. If we hang onto the common worldview that says

that only what we see has any substance, then the memory of our baptism won't mean much. But if we take on the Christian worldview that sees Jesus living now, and able to deliver those who belong to him, then we'll begin to understand how our baptism into Christ has made a difference in our destiny.

That's what salvation is, by the way: a change in the way we see the world. As Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The word "repentance, in the New Testament, is *metanoia*, literally, a "change of mind." To be delivered by Christ is to take on a different way of thinking about reality, or as we say, a different worldview. Baptism is our entrance into another way of looking at things, a way that enables us to go through the difficult times to come and to "come out on top" at the end. It's no wonder that, in the earliest Christian worship of which we have a record outside of the New Testament, believers prayed, "We thank you, our Father, for the *life and knowledge* which you made known to us through Jesus your Servant; to you be the glory for ever" (*Didache*, early second century). It's *what we know* that makes the difference.

Judgment is coming, perhaps coming soon, upon a corrupt civilization that ignores God's design for human relationships. People trapped in the popular worldview can't see it coming; as Jesus said of the people in Noah's time, "they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away" (Matthew 24:39). But you and I can see it coming. And, through our baptism into Jesus, we have an ark to carry us through the turmoil to come. As Jesus commanded us, "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

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