

Starting Over

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[0 : 00] Living God, we believe that you inspired the author of Genesis to write this story about Noah and the flood. You have a purpose in inspiring the story and making sure that it has been recorded for us.

And I pray in your mercy and grace, you would fulfill that purpose today. For I pray in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. We are talking about a lot of water.

And we're talking about a lot of mess. I mean, can you imagine the condition in that ark, on that cruise ship? And we're talking about a lot of trust.

Ever since I heard this story as a little boy, Noah has been, for me, the model of what it means to walk with God. He's out in the desert, kilometers from any sea or lake that can float the kind of ship that he has built.

There's no cloud in the sky, at least no cloud that pretends the kind of deluge the text describes. He's believing a word from a God he does not see.

[1 : 17] He's trusting a word which nothing in his circumstances points to and no one else in his culture believes. Rightly, does the author of the New Testament book we call Hebrews lift Noah up for us as a hero of faith.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence of things not seen. Twice in the text, for emphasis, twice in the text, the author of Genesis says, Thus Noah did, according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Oh, to have such faith. What has long fascinated me is the fact that this is not the only flood story we have.

Many other cultures in many other places around the globe have preserved stories very much like the story we have in Genesis 6 to 9.

Francis Schaeffer. It is interesting that among the common myths in the world's history, no other myth is so widespread as the story of the flood.

[2 : 30] All over the Middle East, throughout China, in the native peoples of the Americas, we find stories of a great flood.

Archaeologists, for instance, have found in the ruins of the ancient Babylonian empire stories of a flood that follows the same pattern we have in Genesis 6 to 9.

Creation comes into being. Humans rebel against the gods. A huge flood comes. And creation begins anew. You've likely heard of the so-called Epic of Gilgamesh.

It's a Babylonian story written probably 1,700 years before the birth of Christ. And in the Epic of Gilgamesh, a sage tells Gilgamesh, a king, about how to get immortality.

According to this story, humanity is getting too noisy. And it's making it hard for the gods to sleep. One god secretly warns his favorite human to build a boat to save his family.

[3 : 38] He does what he's told to do. The flood comes. And after the waters recede, he offers a sacrifice. And according to the Epic, the gods gather like flies around the sweet sacrifice and then bestow immortality on the man.

Now, early in the 20th century, it was fashionable to argue that what we have in Genesis is a copy or an adaptation of that epic.

But few people will say that in our time. For the simple reason that archaeologists have found other different flood stories in other places than the Babylonian empire.

For instance, among the ruins of the Sumerian empire, we have a list of kings divided between, quote, kings before the flood and kings after the flood.

The ancient Near East, the large area of Mesopotamia, has not one but many flood stories.

[4 : 45] And although these flood stories have a lot in common, the Genesis story tells a different story. In the others, the gods are offended because the humans are too noisy.

In the Genesis story, God grieves over the corruption of sin and the overstepping of boundaries. In the others, one human is warned secretly.

In the Genesis story, all of humanity is warned through the preaching of Noah. In the others, a human pilots the boat. In Genesis, Noah has to wait on God. In the others, the humans leave the boat at will.

In the Genesis story, Noah waits for the command of God. And in the Genesis story, God makes a promise. God makes a covenant that affects the whole universe and every creature within it.

The fact that there are many flood stories reinforces a presupposition with which I live and work. A presupposition that I actually learned while living in the Philippines from 1985 to 1989.

[5 : 50] And the presupposition is that all cultures, ancient and modern, have myths that are in touch with the truth.

My presupposition is that all the myths of ancient and modern cultures are somehow in touch with truth. These myths might distort the truth, and in some cases grossly so, but they are nevertheless rooted in truth.

Part of the work of evangelism is to get in touch with the truth at the root and then show how the gospel speaks to it. Now, the fact that there are flood stories all over the globe says to me that something significant did actually happen.

Something universal. This is why the Apostle Peter can say in his second letter, By the word of God, the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

Something happened that was truly cataclysmic. You scientists among us can tell us that 65 million years ago, one half to three-fourths of all living species disappeared.

[7 : 13] Why? Something happened to which Genesis 6-9 points us. Now, in this story, we have revealed for us a wide range of the attributes and character of the Creator.

The Creator is the judge. He does not tolerate for long the corruption of the world that He has made. The Creator is sovereign. His plans for the world will not be thwarted, even if it means He starts all over again.

The Creator cares. Indeed, the Creator suffers in His caring. God feels sorrow that He has made this creature that has ruined His world. The Creator teaches.

He teaches Noah to great detail, everything he needs to know to build his ark. The Creator smells the sweet smell of the sacrifice. The Creator is grieved.

The Creator is grieved. This word grieved is a mixture of anger and anguish. Much as we see Jesus at the grave of His good friend Lazarus, crying out, snorting in spirit, as John says, weeping with this mixture of anger and anguish.

[8 : 27] The Creator is gracious. The Creator is gracious. He spares Noah and his family. And the Creator remembers. He remembers Noah and He remembers His covenant.

There are a lot of questions we could ask about this story. A lot of challenging questions. I want to ask three. They are, Why, What, and Now What?

Why does the flood occur? What is the flood? What is the nature of this flood? And now what?

What does it mean for us? This story is referred to by a number of New Testament authors. You might be surprised that Jesus refers to it quite a bit.

How does this part of the story that makes sense of our stories make sense of our stories? So, why the flood? What is the flood? And now what?

[9 : 30] And I invite you to have your Bibles open. Lay them on your laps. Because I'm going to point you to a number of specific texts. And it will be a lot easier to follow if you actually have your Bibles open in front of you.

There should be enough in the pew racks to pass on to everyone. So, I'm going to wait until you do that. Okay? As many of you as possible have your Bibles open in front of you.

Okay. Why the flood? Why this flood? For two reasons. The first is the sin of humanity. Over the past Sundays, we have seen how the author of Genesis 1 to 11 develops what we're calling this avalanche of sin.

We've also noticed how grace keeps pace with the sin. But we notice this avalanche. It's getting worse and worse and worse until God chooses to no longer tolerate it.

Genesis 6 verse 4. 6-4. Then the Lord saw. The first time in Genesis 1 to 11 we hear the word the Lord saw.

[10:42] Is in Genesis 1 when God has finished making his good world. And God saw that all he has made. And look, it was very good. But as this avalanche continues to disintegrate.

As it continues to move downward. The Lord saw and it was not good. Genesis 6 verse 5. The Lord saw that the wickedness of humans was great on the earth.

And that every intent of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually. Awful. Every. Only. Continually.

Now it's text like these that has led the church to form what is called the doctrine of total depravity. I know. I am raising something very offensive in our time.

Every. Only. Continually. Totally. Depraved. The doctrine does not say that there is no good in us at all. That's not what it says. The doctrine says that every part of us has somehow been affected by sin.

[11:49] Our minds. Our hearts. Our wills. Are all affected by sin in one way or another. Which is why we've been saying.

That our ethics can never be built on the way things are. Saying to another person. This is just the way I am proves nothing. Because the way I am is not the way I'm supposed to be.

And which is why we need a new heart. Psalm 51. Behold I was brought forth in iniquity. In sin did my mother conceive me.

Create in me a clean heart. Oh God. Now take careful note of the word corrupt. In 6. 11 and 12.

6. 11 and 12. The earth was corrupt in the sight of God. God looked on the earth. And look. It was corrupt. For all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

[12:50] Now. Here's the interesting thing. This word corrupt can also be translated destroyed. Go back and read those texts now. Putting the word destroyed in the place of corrupt.

6. 11 and 12 again. The earth was destroyed. In the sight of God. God looked on the earth. And look. It was destroyed. For all flesh had destroyed their way on the earth.

The earth was destroyed before the flood. The point being. That what God chooses to destroy. Had already destroyed itself. This is crucial to grasp about the living God. Judgment is giving humanity the final form of our chosen self-destruction.

The second reason for the flood. The crossing of boundaries. Genesis 6 verse 2.

[13:58] 6-2. The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful. Or literally good. And they took wives for themselves. The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were good.

And they took wives for themselves. Saw. Good. Took. Where have we seen and heard these words before? Saw. Good. Took. In the story of the fall of humanity.

In Genesis 5. 3 verse 5. It says that Eve saw that the tree was good for food. And took its fruit. And ate. The fall takes place because humans cross a boundary.

Saw. Good. Took. The avalanche of sin leads to another crossing of a boundary. The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were good.

And they took them as their wives. They had intercourse with them. The question is. Who are these sons of God? Some say.

[15:07] That they are men of the godly line of Seth. That's developed in Genesis 5. And then they argue that even Seth's line has become so corrupt. Some say.

They are kings or rulers. Who exert dominance over women. And some say. That they are non-human. God-like beings. They are angels.

Who like the angel who became the devil. Rebel against God. And against God's order in the universe. I take that interpretation. In the book of Job.

We hear of the sons of God. Who gather in this heavenly court. One of these sons of God. Is the Satan. The serpent of old. The apostle Jude.

Speaks of angels. Leaving their proper dwelling. You see then. What is going on in this Genesis story.

[16:06] There has been. An horrific. Violation. Of the created order. There has been. A destructive.

Overstepping. Of boundaries. In Genesis 1. We hear the refrain. After it's kind. Everything is created. To reproduce.

After it's kind. The angels. The angelic beings. Are going against the will of the creator. They are blurring this line. Between the heavenly. And the earthly. They are breaching. A God given boundary. The result. Of this horrific. Cosmic. Rebellion. Is the emergence. Of a creature. That was never to exist. What the text calls. The Nephilim. Creatures. Mere humans. Cannot control.

[17:00] David Atkinson. The overstepping. Of God given limits. Produces. Giants. That humans. Can no longer handle. It sets free. Powers. Which should have no place.

In this world. The sons of God. Taking. The daughters of men. Is the culmination. Of a chain. Of overstepping.

Boundaries. Adam and Eve. Overstep the boundary. And take from the forbidden tree. Cain. Kills his brother. Lamech. Takes two wives. And then boasts.

In revenge. And God was sorry. Says the text. Understandably so. Genesis 6.

7. The Lord was sorry. That he had made humans. On the earth. And he was grieved. To his heart. But.

[17:57] Boy are we going to. Meet that little word. In the Bible. Again and again. And again. But. But Noah. Genesis. 6. 8. But Noah.

Found favor. In the eyes. Of the Lord. Why Noah? Why does he find favor. In the eyes of the Lord? Grace.

Grace. The author is careful. To keep things in order. 6. 8. Noah found favor. Then 6. 9. Noah walked with God. The author. The author is emphasizing. That Noah finds.

Favor with God. Before he walks with God. It's grace. That enables him. To walk with God. Old Testament scholar. J. A. Moitier. Suggests that we read.

Genesis 6. 8. Backwards. Noah found favor. Noah found grace. Read it backwards. Grace found Noah. Grace.

[18:55] Enabled Noah. To walk with God. And to live in intimacy. With God. Grace enabled Noah. To believe this strange word. Build a boat. In the desert. With no cloud in the sky. It's grace that enabled Noah.

To throw himself. On a word. His contemporaries. Judge. To be absurd. Thus the second question. What is this flood?

Lots of water. That's clear. But what is the text. Emphasizing. About this flood. Blot out. Blot. The NIV has. White from. I understand that. But I think it's better. As blot out. It's used three times. In the text. Six. Seven. I will blot out.

Humans. Whom I've created. Seven. Four. I will blot out. Everything that I have made. And seven. Twenty. Three. Thus. He blotted out. Now. This verb is used.

[19:52] In Psalm. Fifty. One. Blot out. My transgressions. Blot out. My iniquities. It's a cry for cleansing. So that I can start over again.

I will blot out. Means I am now going to cleanse my creation. And start over again. How is this cleansing to take place?

By a removal of a protective barrier. Say that again. By the removal of a protective barrier.

Look at Genesis 7.11. 7.11. On that same day. All the springs of the great deep burst forth.

And the floodgates of the heavens were opened. Deep. Heavens. Opened. Deep. Then look at 8.2.

[20:53] After the flood subsides. We read. The springs of the deep. And the floodgates of the heaven. Were closed. Deep. Heavens. Opened.

Deep. Heavens. Closed. What is going on? Humanity. Had made. Anti-creation.

Choices. And is now going to be given. Anti-creation. David Wenham. In releasing the flood.

The waters. Pent up below. And above the earth. God is undoing. His great acts of separation. Whereby the dry land was created. And the waters were confined to the seas.

The earth is going back to Genesis 1.2. When waters covered its face. Boundaries were broken by humans and angels.

[21:50] And judgment comes now with a boundary being removed. It is awful. The Hebrew word for flood is mabo.

Now mabo is a technical term. For a part of the structure of the universe. It refers to the heavenly waters. In the Hebrew thought. There were waters beneath the earth.

And waters up in the heavens. The firmament. Spoken into being in Genesis 1. The heavens. Separates these waters. The waters below. And the waters above.

And the flood involves. Removing that firmament. So all those waters. Can simply come down. The flood.

In the words of Gerhard von Roth. Is a catastrophe. Involving the entire cosmos. The boundary is removed.

[22 : 47] And the waters break loose. And creation is allowed to sink into chaos. Humanity is being given the full implications.

Of our desire for no boundaries. You want no boundaries? Then there will be none. You may have seen in the cartoon.

In the Vancouver Sun last Monday. A man is kneeling by his bed to pray. He's in a hurry. So he makes it a real quick one. And he prays. Just give me what I deserve.

You never want to pray that. In the flood. Humanity is giving God what we deserve. We want no boundaries.

There will be no boundaries. Thus the third question. Now what? Grace.

[23 : 56] That's what? Grace. Unexpected. Unmerited. Undeserved. Grace.

Grace. In spite of nothing changing in the human heart. Before the flood. God saw that the wickedness of humans was great. That every intent of the thoughts of their heart was only wise continually.

Genesis 6.5. And after the flood subsides. Genesis 8. Verse 21. 8.21. I will never again curse the ground on account of man. For the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Nothing changed. Grace. God restores creation even though nothing changed in the human heart. God puts the boundary back.

Out of grace. Genesis 8.1. God remembered Noah. This word remembered always has this sense of remember to save.

[24 : 56] God remembered Noah to save him. God is not going to give up on humans. 8.1. God caused a wind to pass over the earth and the water subside.

As God did in the beginning. When the spirit, the wind, hovered over the surface of the deep. And as God did when he brought Israel through the Red Sea. God begins again.

8.17. Be fruitful and multiply. 9.1, God blessed Noah and said, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God renews the original creative blessing.

This is grace. And God makes a covenant. This is grace upon grace. An unconditional covenant.

There's no, I will do this if you do that. If you'll shape up, I'll give you a blessing. None of that at all. It's just, I will. No expectation placed on humanity.

[25 : 53] A purely unilateral covenant. Which is the point of the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth. The covenant God makes is not determined by anything in us.

The covenant is not bound to anything in us. It's all of grace. Genesis 9.9. 9.9.

Now behold. Now that's literally how the text begins. It's too flatly translated with a simple now. The behold was left out. Behold is a command.

Behold is the imperative form of the verb to see. Behold. Look. Now if you trace this word through the Bible, you discover that nearly every time this word look or behold comes, it's because it's introducing a surprise.

It's introducing an unexpected turn in the story. As Jesus dies on the cross, Matthew says, Behold, look. The curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

[26 : 54] The earth shook. The rocks split. And the graves were open. All unexpected. All a surprise. Genesis 9.9. Now behold. Unexpected.

Big surprise. Now behold. I myself do establish my covenant. In the face of human sin. Noah too is a sinner. God makes a covenant. An agreement.

A new agreement. Genesis 9.9. Now behold. I myself do establish my covenant with you, Noah, and with your descendants after you, us, and with every living creature.

For better or for worse. For richer or poorer. In sickness and in health. As long as we both shall live. God makes a covenant with us. While we're still sinners. This is grace. Note the content of this covenant.

[27 : 55] God promises to keep the earth turning, so to speak. 8.22. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, and cold and hot, and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease.

That's why it's so appropriate when we wake up in the morning that the very first thing we say is, Thank you. You're keeping the earth turning again.

You're keeping your covenant. In this covenant, God affirms the dignity of human life, and he sets up systems to protect this dignity.

Though fallen, humans still bear the image of God. 9.6. And God protects that dignity by giving governments the authority to check human violence by the threat of the consequences of violence. 9.6. And then the heart of the covenant. 9.11. All flesh shall never again be cut off by the waters of the flood.

[29 : 04] Never again will there be a flood to dash the earth. This is pure grace. God is going to keep the boundaries intact. Never again. Never again. Yes, as the story unfolds, as the larger biblical story unfolds, we realize that there's going to be another massive cleansing when Jesus brings the new heaven and the new earth.

But never again will God let the earth be destroyed by flood. Oh, there are times when it feels like that's what's happening. If you've ever been caught up in a typhoon or hurricane and it dumps huge amounts of water, it seems like the earth is going to be destroyed again.

It feels like some kind of boundary has been removed. But never again, never again, shall the earth be blotted out by the removal of a protective barrier.

It's grace. And this is the sign. Genesis 9.12. This is the sign of the covenant I'm making between me and you and every living thing.

I have set my bow in the clouds. In the Old Testament, bow almost always refers to a bow of war. I've set my bow in the clouds.

[30 : 16] I've put my bow in the very part of reality that seems to threaten you. In spite of human sin, God sets aside his bow.

As Derek Kidner puts it, the war is over. The weapon has become a sign of peace. Indeed, it's a sign of a covenant. And every time we see the bow, the rainbow, it's God saying, never again. Now this covenant, this noetic covenant, is not the only covenant God makes with humanity. It's the beginning of a series of covenants.

We've been referring to Genesis 1-11 as the first half of the Bible, Genesis 12-22 as the second half of the Bible. The second half of the Bible will begin with a covenant. A covenant with Abraham. where God says, I will bless you. I will bless your family. I'll bless your seed. And in your seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

[31 : 19] As the story continues to unfold, God makes a covenant with the children of Abraham, with Israel. Again and again we read, I will be your God and you will be my people. All I am I give to you.

As the story continues to unfold, God will make a covenant with Israel's greatest king, with David. I will raise up a seed after you who will come forth from you and I will establish his kingdom and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Until we come to the new covenant, as God calls it through the prophet Jeremiah. Behold, look, there it is again, another surprise.

Behold, days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. I will put my law within their heart. On their hearts I will write it. I will be their God and they shall be my people.

They shall not teach each one of his neighbors, saying, Know the Lord, for they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.

[32 : 20] And here is the sign of that covenant. A loaf of bread and a cup of wine. Jesus, son of Noah, son of Abraham, son of David, the seed of the woman, the new Adam, lifts up a cup of bread and a cup of wine and says, This is my body which is given for you.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. I put my bow in the clouds and I will remember.

Genesis 9, 14 and 15. It shall come about when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud and I will remember my covenant, my everlasting covenant.

I will remember my covenant. I will remember my covenant. Not only the covenant with Noah, but the covenant with Abraham and Israel and David and the new covenant. I will forgive their sins.

Their sin I will remember no more. I will remember my covenant to not remember your sins. And I will be your God and you will be my people. That is how the Noah part of the story that makes sense of our stories makes sense of our stories.

[33 : 29] I will remember my covenant. Every time we see the rainbow we are remembering that God is remembering and every time we see a loaf of bread and a cup of wine we remember that

God is remembering.

remembering. Now if you have spent any time in the Psalms in the prayer book of Israel you will know that God's faithfulness to his covenant is what encourages and emboldens the prayers.

Over and over again the prayers refer to God's loving kindness. Remember, O Lord, your loving kindness for they have been from of old. How precious is your loving kindness, O Lord.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to your loving kindness. Sometimes the term is rendered tender mercies. Remember your tender mercies. Now, in Hebrew it is the word hesed.

And hesed means loyalty to the covenant. Covenant loyalty. Your loyalty to the covenant has been from of old.

[34 : 30] How precious is your loyalty to the covenant. Be gracious to me according to your loyalty to the covenant. O Lord, I come to you on the basis of your loyalty to the covenant.

I do not appeal to anything in myself. I do not appeal to anything I have done or not done. I appeal to your hesed, to your loyalty to the covenant you made with me while I was a sinner.

Write your law on my heart. Give me a heart that wills what you will. that you promised in the covenant you sealed with the blood of Jesus. Let me know you even as I am known by you.

Let me never settle for anything less than you that you promised in the covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus. Be my God. Be all you are to me.

Don't let me be satisfied with lesser gods. That you promised me in the covenant you sealed with the blood of Jesus. Forgive my iniquity, my twisted ways. Do not remember my sin that you promised in this covenant you sealed with the blood of Jesus.

[35 : 43] Remember your covenant O God. Isaiah 54 For this is like the days of Noah to me when I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again so I have sworn I will not be angry with you nor will I rebuke you for the mountains may be removed and the hills may be shaken but my loving kindness will not be removed from you and my covenant of peace shall not be shaken.

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