

The End of the Old

by Ray C. Stedman

We return to the story of the Flood from the seventh chapter of Genesis, to set this Old Testament passage in the light that streams from a New Testament passage. The Apostle Peter, in his second letter, says that scoffers will appear in the last days raising doubts about the return of Jesus Christ, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" {2 Pet 3:4}. That is, what grounds have you to expect this to be fulfilled? The basis for their scoffing will be that "all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation," {2 Pet 3:4b RSV}. Their claim is that Christians have no right to expect a supernatural intervention of God in the physical operation of the earth.

This is nothing more nor less than what we call today the theory of uniformitarianism, i.e., the scientific theory that what exists in the natural realm has been produced by laws that have operated in the past as they are observed today, and that these have never varied. Certainly much can be explained in this way, though not all, yet rigid uniformitarianism is the basis, as you know, for much of the approach of physical science to the study of the earth today. The Apostle Peter says that those who argue on this basis deliberately ignore a contrary fact. The essence of science is to deal with facts, but Peter's charge is that those who claim that there can be no supernatural intervention into the affairs of nature have deliberately ignored a fact, the fact of the Flood. Here is the way he puts it,

They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [Then he goes on to show how the past points to the future.] **But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

(2 Pet 3:5-7 {RSV})

As Christians, who believe that the apostles of Our Lord Jesus spoke by divine inspiration and were given a special word of authority about matters beyond human ken, we must read the story of the Flood in the light of this declaration. From this word of Peter there are three things very evident to guide us in our study of the Flood:

- First, this was not an ordinary flood, involving the ordinary forces that produce floods in our day. It involved unusual and distinctive forces which had perhaps never been employed before, and (we have been given great assurance of this in Scripture) have never been employed since.
- Second, its effects were literally world-shaking, for the whole structure of the earth was altered by this Flood.

- Third, it points to a future physical disturbance of the earth, this time not by water but by fire.

It is clear that the whole point of Peter's argument is that God does intervene dramatically in nature as well as in human affairs. He does so to produce sudden and quite abrupt changes in natural affairs, unanticipated, except by revelation. He did this before, and he will do it again. As we read Chapter 7 of Genesis we must note the parallels that occur between the Flood and the judgment which Peter says awaits this present world and which will be similar in many ways to the flood, but different only in the agent involved, fire instead of water.

Now, in Chapter 7 we notice first that this section brings before us **the basis on which salvation occurs**. After all, that is the heart of this whole story in Genesis. It is not attempting to give us scientific aspects of the Flood, although what it says is scientifically accurate. What it is trying to get across is a picture of something which is also happening in your life and mine, and which involves an important issue – that of salvation, deliverance from an overwhelming judgment. This is what we must emphasize in this account. It is brought out clearly in the first five verses:

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you seven pair of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of the earth. For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him." {Gen 7:1-5 RSV}

Notice that this account begins with an invitation. The RSV is certainly wrong in rendering this word of God to Noah, "Go into the ark." The Hebrew word is, "Come into the ark" with the clear implication that God is waiting in the ark. God will be with Noah in the ark, so Noah and his family are invited to join him there. We can hear in this *come*,

anticipations of the invitation which the Lord Jesus continually extended unto men. The whole thrust of all that God has to say to men finds its focus in one invitation. "Come unto me," Jesus said, "all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," {Matt 11:28 KJV}. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me," {John 7:37b KJV}. That is always the word of Christ to men: "Come unto me."

The answers to all the vexing problems of life will find the beginning of a solution at that place. "Come unto me." Christ is our ark to carry us through whatever judgments, floods, or catastrophes await us, both now and in the age to come. That is the whole teaching of this section.

The basis upon which this call was extended to Noah is given here, "I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation." It is important to notice that Noah was not only righteous, he was seen to be righteous. He was made righteous by believing the Word of God, as Hebrews 11 tells us. He believed what God said about a flood and he began to order his life in terms of that coming event, even though there was little evidence around him to support it. He believed God, and "became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith," says the writer of Hebrews {Heb 11:7b RSV}. But he not only believed, his subsequent actions demonstrated his belief. He *believed* God and therefore he *obeyed* God. You never can say you believe God unless you obey him, because that is what belief really is. It is our motivation to obedience, to activity.

Noah demonstrated his faith in his day and generation by constructing an ark in obedience to the word of God. He made an ark against the ridicule and contempt of his age. Imagine the mockery that greeted this dear old man as he built his ark on the plains, far away from any adequate river or ocean in which it might float. Imagine the reactions of his ungodly neighbors to the construction of the ark by this old saint, covering the one hundred twenty years that it took him to build it, with all his resources invested in it and the labor of his sons as well. How they must have poked fun at him and the stories he told of a coming judgment. And he was building it for animals, as well as men! You can imagine what was said.

It was not easy for Noah to obey God. There were no physical signs of coming judgment. The skies were clear overhead, the sun was rising and

setting, as it had for generations. As Jesus said, "Men were marrying and giving in marriage," {cf, Matt 24:38b}. Business was going on as usual and there were no signs of impending judgment. Yet Noah believed God and constructed an ark, thus condemning the world.

Now, is that not the test today, as it is in any age? The thrust of Scripture is always in this direction. Christians are not to be conformed to this world. They are to be different in their attitude and their reactions. The demonstration of our faith comes right at this point. How much have we believed God? It will be evident in the way we refuse to reflect the deluded attitudes of the world around us, in the way we refuse to give way to a hungering after things, the urge for materialistic gain; in the way we refuse to retaliate when someone abuses us or takes advantage of us; in the way we refuse to lie to one another, even with the so-called "white lies" which are the blackest of all, for they permit people to go on offending others for years because we do not love them enough to tell them the truth. Here is the test. Noah was seen righteous, his faith was genuine, and therefore he was called into the ark.

Notice that this salvation was linked with the animal creation. It is wonderfully comforting to me to realize that God cares for cats and dogs and elephants and wrens, all the animals, the birds and the insects – the whole world of nature. We sing of it sometimes in a hymn that has unusual claim upon our affections. I sense a response in the hearts of God's people every time we sing it. "Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature." I love that picture. There at the manger scene, there were the ox, the ass, and the sheep. The angels did not say, "Drive those animals out of here." They belonged in the picture, for God is Lord of all the earth, and all the things of earth are his, and he cares for them. As Jesus said, "not even a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father," {cf, Matt 10:29}. I don't know how many times I have been helped to belief by that simple little rhyme some of you have on your walls at home:

Said the Robin to the Sparrow,
"I would really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so?"

Said the Sparrow to the Robin,
"Friend, I think that it must be
That they've no Heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me."

We have here also divisions between clean and unclean animals. It is interesting that this occurred and is recognized long before the Law was ever given. This distinction is not only a part of the Law of Moses, but was made as early as the days of the Flood. It is a distinction which is essentially temporary and artificial. Actually, as the New Testament makes clear, there are no clean and unclean animals, for all the creatures of God are clean. But this artificial distinction was drawn in Old Testament days in order to teach men a needed truth, as all these physical things are intended to teach spiritual truth. As soon as the lesson was clearly evident in the work of Christ, the distinction disappeared. We are not to observe such distinctions today. It was intended to teach, by certain functions of the animals that were designated as clean, corresponding spiritual qualities that God loves; while the absence of these functions in the unclean animals was intended to teach that God disapproved of these in the life of men. Obviously these seven of the clean animals were taken into the ark in order to provide the sacrifices which Noah performs as he comes out of the ark.

Now the second great thing in this chapter is **the thoroughness of the Flood:**

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

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 heaven were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. {Gen 7:6-12 RSV}

It is difficult to see how anyone could read this as a myth, for it has such a precision about it. This eleventh verse seems to be copied right out of the log of the *Good Ship Grace* of Noah's day. The precise day upon which the rains came is recorded here by Noah. It came upon a precisely appointed day in the calendar of God, a day which was chosen in relationship to the man of God:

- It was in the six hundredth year of Noah's life that the Flood came. What does that suggest? Well, it suggests that this is the way God appoints his calendar. It is not on the basis of certain arbitrarily selected days in the future, as we do – "on the 12th of June, I intend to do such-and-such a thing," – but rather, on the basis of what has happened or not happened in the life of a certain person, or people. When the chosen ones have reached a certain prescribed point, then another event takes place. God sets up his date book by the progress of the people of God. When Noah's appointed task was completed, then the Flood descended.

We see this also in the New Testament: There are certain indications there that, when the church fulfills its appointed task and comes to the place of understanding the truth which God has determined upon, then it will be removed in the twinkling of an eye, and judgment will come. This is what Peter means in this second letter about, "hastening the day of God." He says, "the way you people live will determine how soon this event will occur. You can hasten the coming of the day of God," {cf, 2 Pet 3:12 RSV}. Remember that the Apostle Paul, preaching to the Athenians, said, "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and he has given assurance to all men in that he raised Christ from the dead," {cf, Acts 17:31}. That is the guarantee that a day has been appointed and the time of it is linked to the people of God, just as Noah's appointed day was.

- Notice also in this account that earth and all its peoples are involved. The very structure of the earth seems to be altered. "On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened." Here are two forces at work which have not been

employed since. This is what Peter refers to when he says that certain events have occurred in the past which are not reflected in present day activity, in the natural realm.

First, the fountains of the deep were broken up. That seems to suggest the raising of the level of the oceans, and possibly the breaking up of the floors of the oceans so that waters of the sea inundated the earth with great tidal waves that swept across the land.

Second, the windows of heaven were opened and the rain poured out – not merely for a few hours as we see in our day but for forty days and forty nights. There is here far more rainfall than can be accounted for by the normal process of evaporation and precipitation. From somewhere there came vast quantities of water upon the earth, both from above and from below. This has given rise to several interesting theories about the Flood:

There is, for instance, as I suggested in an earlier message, the "canopy" theory – the idea that the earth at one time was very much like the planet Saturn today, surrounded by rings, forming a canopy over the earth. Many astronomers believe that the rings of Saturn are made up of ice particles, which would of course be water, suspended in vast, thick rings around the planet. If something like that were true of the earth of that day, then perhaps the Flood represents a collapse of that canopy of vapor, water, or ice. This may account for what has been a puzzle to scientists for generations; the sudden death of large numbers of great mammoths and other animals imbedded in ice. They are now being discovered by the thousands, and some estimate even millions, in the Arctic regions. Evidently at one time the area was tropical but it was suddenly plunged into sub-freezing temperatures of such intensity that animals immediately perished, frozen in a quick deep-freeze that has lasted through the centuries since. They are discovered now with bits of grass still in their mouths, unchewed, so sudden was their death.

Another theory says that all these events were brought about by the near approach to earth of a heavenly body. A few years ago scientists were watching the approach to earth of a heavenly body, one of the asteroids, a miniature planet called Icarus, which was nearing the

earth at great speed. There was a time when scientists were saying that if Icarus deviated less than one percent from its course, it would have collided with the earth. But scientists long knew of this asteroid and were carefully watching it. There is a possibility that a near approach of a planetary body to the earth in Noah's day upset the whole gravitational equilibrium of the earth, raised the ocean levels, created tides both of water and possibly of the solid earth itself, and thus caused the Flood. Now I must hasten to point out that all this is theory. Such scientific and scriptural guesses are but theories. The Bible does not teach these but it simply implies that something like these is indicated.

- Verse 16 of this passage adds another significant thought:

And they that entered, male and female, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in. {Gen 7:16 RSV}

Noah did not slam the door shut, God shut it. He shut it seven days before the first rain-drop fell. While the sun was yet shining and the sky was blue, while the people around were still convinced that nothing was going to happen, God shut Noah in so that he could not get out. You can see how this pictures so beautifully what Paul calls, "the sealing of the Spirit," in the Epistle to the Ephesians {Eph 1:13, 4:30}. Those who enter our ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, are sealed by God, kept by the power of God, safe in Christ.

The **third emphasis** of this passage is given in these last verses,

The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming

creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man 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. And the water prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days. {Gen 7:17-24 RSV}

What a striking thing, the extent of the judgment of the Flood! Many today raise the question, was the Flood universal, i.e., did it cover the entire earth? It is very difficult to answer that. We have a suggestion in the next chapter, which I have already commented on, that the nature of the Flood was to produce huge tidal waves which swept across the earth. Perhaps this may account for the fact that the mountains were covered (occasionally, at least) to a depth of fifteen cubits deep when these gigantic waves swept in. I think it is necessary to point out that when it speaks of "the whole earth," the Hebrew word can also be translated "the whole land." This is what has made many wonder if perhaps this was more or less a localized flood. Certainly it was wide in extent, covering half or a quarter of the earth, but perhaps not all of it. Certainly, there is no theological necessity for a universal flood. It is not necessary, from a theological point of view, for the races as we know them today have descended from Noah. What is taught in the Scriptures is that we are all united together as descendants of Adam. So, theologically, there is perhaps some reason to view this as in some ways a limited flood.

But one thing is certainly clear: The Flood destroyed the civilization of that day. "the world that then was," says the Apostle Peter {2 Pet 3:6 KJV}, "perished." The civilization of that day came to an abrupt and sudden end. The Scripture warns throughout its whole extent of the suddenness of God's judgment. Every day bears testimony to the suddenness with which death can strike in individual lives.

This was underscored for me once when I had a near-fatal accident. Driving down the highway north of Davis, I was about ready to enter the freeway at Highway 80 when a man in a blue pickup truck, waiting by the side of the road, suddenly pulled into my path when I was traveling about 65

miles an hour. Without warning and only fifty yards away, he pulled across the road in front of me. My immediate thought was, "Well, this is it. I'll not get through this," for it looked impossible. But, by God's grace, I was able to swerve around him to the front, and he stopped enough so that I was almost able to get by him. Had he not stopped, he would have rolled me over, but as it was only the rear end of my car was damaged. None of us were hurt and we were both able to drive on after the accident. But it was a very close shave. I didn't have time to pray, just to act.

That sort of thing, the Bible says, can happen to an age as well. That is the whole meaning of this passage. The fabric of our society can grow so rotten it can no longer support itself. Like a sail in a tempest, a tear appears which rapidly rips open and soon the whole thing is in tatters. A total collapse follows once the process begins.

That is **the lesson of the Flood**. It is clear from this and every account in Scripture that the great and fateful questions of faith are addressed to us privately and almost inaudibly. Seldom does God confront us with dramatic moments of decision. These people before the Flood surely would have wished that the thunder would have rolled a week ahead. That would have tipped them off. But the skies are clear, and Noah is shut into the ark, while there is no physical sign of impending judgment. They are shut up to believing or disbelieving the offer God made them through Noah.

Is not that the lesson of our day?

Remember how Jesus said that no one would return from the dead to witness to the five brothers of the man who was in hell. No, that will not happen. "they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them," {Luke 16:29 RSV}. Thus we are right now facing the decisive events of our lives, in this word from God. We do not have to wait until after a second heart attack; we must make the decision now on the basis of what is set before us now. We cannot demand to wait until some tremendous catastrophe occurs.

A lady handed me a note from her son the other day in which he said, "When I see the world burning, in obedience to the prophecies, then I'll believe." That is too late.

That is also what these people said. When we hear the rain coming and the thunder rolling, we'll

believe. But God had shut the door and it was too late.

Do you take that seriously? You may die tomorrow, who knows? The great question of Scripture is, if so, if life is that uncertain, why not live now? Not in the empty death of the world's delirium, but in the full swing of the Spirit's power, knowing that all that is truly vital is kept safe in the ark of Jesus Christ – "kept by the power of God, unto salvation yet to be revealed in the last time," says the Apostle Peter {1 Pet 1:15 KJV}.

Whatever comes upon the earth, the word of the Lord Jesus to us is, "When you see these things begin to come to pass, lift up your head and rejoice," {cf, Luke 21:28}. Why? Because you know that what destroys others is, in the wisdom of God, compelled to bear you up, as Noah and the ark were borne up by the waters that destroyed the earth. If your relationship to God is right, the very things that destroy others and tear them apart will but add to your faith, bear you up, and keep you safe whatever that tribulation or testing may be.

Let us sit in quietness for a moment, each one occupied with his own thoughts before the Lord. Tell me:

- Does it frighten you to remain quiet before God?
- Do you know him well enough to welcome it?
- Do you get restless, nervous, eager to be away?
- This One who is the most important Being in the world, with whom you must reckon, are you afraid of him?

If so, it should tell you volumes about yourself. Where are you, in respect to the ark which moves through the deluge of our present generation?

- Are you in it – or outside it?
- Do you know Jesus Christ, really know him, so that you demonstrate it in your life?
- Are you outside, perishing, drowning?

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this look again of realism. What a wonderful function it is of your Word, to strip off veils, remove illusions, take away deceit from our eyes. Let us look at life as it really is – how dark

it is in many ways and yet how light it is, as viewed in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. Thank you, Lord, for the hope that is set before us, for the promises that undergird us, for the love that surrounds us and calls us by his power in this day and age, Amen.

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