

The Earth Submerged in a Cleansing Flood

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0 Comments



We have finally come to it. We have been building up to this point for a couple of weeks. It is almost like we have been glued to the Weather Channel or watching the clouds gather off in the distance. But it is finally here. The flood has come.

With it we see the vast ravages it had upon the land.

It wasn't that long ago that we saw the images on the television of the disaster that came with Hurricane Sandy. Some of you might have seen the flood damage there. I have in mind one picture of the subway station filled to the brim with water. The steps leading down to the transit looked like the steps that would lead down to a pool.

Yet, what happened on the Eastern seaboard doesn't even begin to compare to what we find here in this text. What is recorded here makes Hurricane Sandy look like a drizzle. The best mental picture we can get is a little dot floating along, virtually lost in the vast sea of darkness and water.

The flood was world-wide

I know that there are some who say that this was nothing more than a localized flood; contained only to a specific region. But, as we've seen with other passages, that is just a lame attempt to explain away the Scripture. The text makes it clear that it was a worldwide flood.

The amount of water mentioned is one indication. There in verses 19 and 20 it says that the waters covered the mountains up to 15 cubits. That's around 25 feet over the tip of the highest point. Add to that what it says in the very last verse of the chapter. It says the water prevailed on the earth for 150 days. The stuff wasn't dissipating or draining out for at least a half of a year. If it were localized, you would expect that there would be a good deal of run off.

What's even more pronounced is the extensive range of its devastation. The text repeatedly expresses how comprehensive the death toll was. In verse 21 it says that "all flesh died." In the next verse it says that "Everything on dry land died." And in verse 23 it says, "He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark."

The language here stresses that the damage was all-encompassing, to the point of being universal.

If we are going to take the Bible seriously, then we have to believe that the whole world was submerged in a deluge of water. The text makes it clear that this was a complete cleansing of the earth.

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And in this we are once again reminded of the gravity of sin and just how much God is repulsed by it. The scripture is seeking to remind us that God will not tolerate the presence of sin. He must judge it. It so infuriates him that he must deal with it.

Perhaps this is the real reason why so many people want to say that this was just a localized flood. Maybe this is what motivates them to try and interpret this passage as just being contained to this specific region. Maybe it is simply because they do not want to believe that God is this holy and that he takes sin this seriously.

Many people simply do not want to think of God in such terms. They don't want to believe that God is one who will wreak such havoc upon sinners. They want a tamer God. They want a God who will be much more lenient; one who will overlook a lot of things and not be provoked to such extreme displeasure.

But we must remember that God is not a teddy bear. He is a lion who rages when provoked.

Some of you may remember that scene from the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. The children were talking with the beavers about meeting Aslan, the Lion. Little Lucy was alarmed by the thought. She asked, "Is he safe?" Mr. Beaver responded dumbfoundedly, "Safe? Who said anything about being safe? Didn't you hear what we said? He's a lion! Of course he isn't safe! But he's good. He's the king I tell you."

The God presented in Scripture—the one presented in this Scripture, is not a tame lion. He is not one who will tolerate sin and coddle up to just anyone. He is inflamed by the corrupting deeds of men, and, at some point, He will lash out against those who continually provoke him.

The flood was the end of God's offer of mercy.

And I want to emphasize this because we need to remember that the day of God's grace does run out. We are reminded by this text that at some point the damns that hold back the terrors of God's indignation will break.

There was a long period prior to the flood. There was an expanse of time where God offered life and salvation to the masses. Last week we said that it might have taken 100 years for Noah to build the boat. And as a preacher of righteousness, Noah would have been calling to them their need to embrace the way of the Lord's salvation. Yet no one listened. At least not until the tide started to rise. Then there would have been many banging on the sides of the ship, crying out, "Let me in! Let me in!"

And, the extent of God's grace and patience most likely exceeded that time frame. It is likely that this offer of grace was probably extended for a longer time than that 100 years.

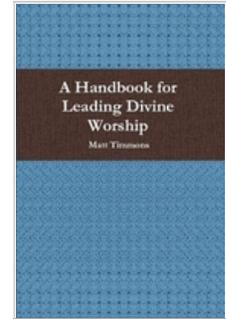
James Montgomery Boice talks about Methuselah and what his name means. You remember Methuselah from back in chapter 5. He was the oldest man that ever lived; 969 years. In his commentary Boice proposes that the name Methuselah comes from two Hebrew words: muth, meaning "die" or "dead," and shalach, meaning "to send." So his name could mean "when he dies, it shall be sent." And if you sit down and work out the numbers, you'll find that the flood came the very same year that Methuselah passed away.

Boice argues that every day that Methuselah lived was a sign of God's patience. God allowed Methuselah to have an extended life, far surpassing most other men of his time, because it was God's way of holding out his offer of grace and salvation to those people.

Think about it, Methuselah reaches 700 years. He's getting to be an old man by those



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standards. Another century passes. He's 800 years. Every time his name is called out, the people hear "when he dies, it shall be sent." He gets to be 850. 900. 955. 960. 965. 966. 967. 968. Every day now it is counting. You can see the sands slipping through the glass. Time is running out. Then Methuselah celebrates his 969th birthday. That same year he passes away. And not long after his eyes are closed, the sky starts to turn black with clouds.

But every day of Noah's life—every day of Methuselah's life—God was holding out the possibility of salvation. But it eventually ended.

I emphasize this because our Lord Jesus uses this text to teach us of his second coming. He said that the day when he comes again will be just like those of Noah. People will be marrying and be given in marriage. Two men will be in the field, one will be swept away in the heat of his fury. The other, by grace, will be left.

And so it is with us. Time is running thin.

I couldn't think of a better thing for us to think about at the outset of a new year. We are all making and breaking our New Year's resolutions. But this is also a time to remember that we are just that much closer to the end. Another year has come; another has gone, and we have drawn all that much closer to the day of accounting. We are one step closer to the day of our death, or we are that much closer to the moment when Christ will return. And, being that this is so, we are one step closer to our eternal destination.

Each of you must realize that the clock is ticking. If you have not yet made your amends with Christ, then you must know that your time is running out. During this time the Lord is sending out his offer of mercy. But there will come a time, just like it did in Noah's day, where it will no longer be given.

In his book, *Meet Yourself in the Psalms*, Warren Wiersbe tells the story of a frontier town where a horse bolted and ran away with a wagon carrying a little boy. Seeing the child in danger, a young man risked his life to catch the horse and stop the wagon.

The child who was saved grew up to become a lawless man, and one day he stood before a judge to be sentenced for a serious crime. The prisoner recognized the judge as the man who, years before, had saved his life; so he pled for mercy on the basis of that experience.

But the words from the bench silenced his plea, "Young man, then I was your savior; today I am your judge, and I must sentence you to be hanged."

In the same way there will come a time when the day of grace runs out. Jesus will say to those who have rebelled against him, "during your time on earth I was the Savior, and I would have forgiven you. But today I am your judge. Depart from me, you cursed of God, into everlasting fire."

I pray that you will not let this happen to you. But rather you would let today be the day of salvation.

The flood was a baptism for holiness

Before we close I would like to mention one last thing about the flood. It is something that I find most appropriate for today. In just a little while we will be going up the road and we will have the chance to worship the Lord through the sacrament of baptism. But I find it most appropriate that this text comes before us on this occasion.

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For what we have here is nothing other than a baptism. It is a baptism of the earth. (And it is one that we can all approve of, because it involved sprinkling and immersion!)

Throughout history theologians have seen a parallel between baptism and the flood. And this is why: In the flood, what we have is a cleansing. By these waters, God washed away the filth of sin. And in doing so he established a realm where sin would no longer have dominion.

And this is exactly what is symbolized by Christian baptism. As the waters roll over you, that flood portrays the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. It reminds us that we are new creatures in Christ and no longer under the dominion of sin.

Those of you who are coming for baptism today, as the waters roll over you today this is something that you must remember. You must understand that the evil in your life must die. Because of the cleansing of Christ, you must pursue purity before God.

And everyone here who has been baptized, the same is true for you. As you witness the sacrament, you must remember your own baptism. And in doing so you must hear the echo of its call upon your life, telling you what kind of life you are live before the Lord.

It is not appropriate for you to permit that tempestuous spirit to live on. Now that the blood of Christ has cleansed you, you must not let the contamination of broken promises and unchristian speech live on.

These things must change. And you must show that you are a new creature in Christ.

Conclusion:

You young people might have had the experience where you've gone to a friend's house and asked them to come out and play. But they respond to you that they can't because they just took a shower. They recognize that it would be wrong to defile themselves after having just been washed.

That is a most accurate description of how we should feel towards sin. Now that we have been showered with the flood tides of Christ's blood our response must be that we distance ourselves from the filth of sin.

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