

The Flood

Read: Genesis 6.17-24.

What occurred was far more than a large localised flood. “For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth” (v. 17). Evidently there was torrential rain as well the bursting forth of “the springs of the great deep”. These combined to raise the water to a level of “more than twenty feet” (6.9 metres) – the inhabitants of the ark cleared the mountains and saw no mountains. The waters remained at this level for 150 days in all.

Every living creature that “had the breath of life in its nostrils” perished along with the human race. “Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark” (vv. 21-23).

From our modern perspective, the death of animals and birds along with human beings may seem to be unjust. Somehow we can allow this fact to overshadow the divine grace by which they are preserved along with human beings. One commentator notes –

It has been a uniform principle in the divine procedure, when judgments were abroad on the earth, to include every thing connected with the sinful objects of His wrath (Gen 19.25; Ex. 9.6). Besides, now that the human race was reduced to one single family, it was necessary that the beasts should be proportionally diminished, otherwise by their numbers they would have acquired the ascendancy and overmastered the few that were to re-people the world. Thus goodness was mingled with severity; the Lord exercises judgment in wisdom and in wrath remembers mercy. (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown*).

Reflect:

- As we react to the story of the universal flood, we need to ponder two important questions: What is the ultimate disaster than can befall us as human beings? and What is the ultimate good we should desire?
- What does this have to say about our reaction to the disasters – whether natural or man-made – of our time? How do we prepare ourselves to receive God’s “ultimate good”?

7. A New Beginning. Reading: Genesis 8.1-9.17

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Studies in Genesis chapters 1-11

by Peter J Blackburn

6. The Great Flood

Reading: Genesis 6.9-7.24

We had spent a week at Lakes Entrance. On 20 December 1983, I made the following entry –

The township of Buchan is some 55 kilometres from Lakes Entrance. Near the town is the Caves Reserve where two caves, Royal and Fairy, are opened to inspection tours every day.

We descended down the narrow passage into the welcome cool air of Royal Cave. The action of water on the limestone over many years has produced some amazing formations, now skillfully illuminated for public view.

And what of the origin of the caves? The traditional geological explanation is that the area was the site of volcanic activity. Later, some 300 to 400 million years ago, seas covered this area of East Gippsland and the remains of shellfish and coral were deposited over a long period and formed limestone. As the ocean receded, the limestone was subjected to severe earth movement which folded and crumpled the land into its present regional formation. Then, over many thousands of years, acid water action has carved out the rock, leaving large chambers and underground passages. The formations in the caves were caused by the seepage of surface rain water containing dissolved oxygen and carbon dioxide from the air and some organic acids from the soil. This acidic water dissolved some of the limestone and led to the depositing of calcites in the various formations.

To some of us, the question is – did it take as long as that? So, a question to the guide, “Is it possible to compare old photographs with what we now see and observe stalactite formation taking place?”

“No, because stalactites form very slowly – it takes 1000 years for them to grow six inches... During my time, of course, I have noticed stalactite formation around the wire netting and electrical fittings”.

It all seems to depend on assumptions about the amount of water available to do the work. It could happen much quicker, as some of us have noticed under concreted house-water tanks.

Those of us who accept the Biblical account of a Flood in Noah’s time see here the evidence of that Flood in the more rapid deposition of limestone, faster carving of the caves, extended damp conditions to promote more rapid initial stalactite formation...

I'm not in a position to set out scientific grounds for my viewpoint (though there are scientists who do), but I can't help asking questions and being convinced that, after all, in this area too the Bible speaks the truth.

Of course, we are familiar with changeable weather – droughts and floods and bush fires. But when we look over a longer period there is often a pattern to our weather. Some scientists may propose a “big bang” to start it all off, but then would like changes to happen gradually over a long period of time with no major catastrophes.

Reflect:

- From our own experience, what has suggested that change can happen rapidly and that sometime there must have been a major catastrophe such as the Great Flood of Noah's time?

Corruption and Righteousness

Read: Genesis 6.9-22.

In the previous study we noted that sin had become “‘full-grown’ – not just lapses into wrong-doing but a continual bent towards evil. The LORD ‘was grieved... his heart was filled with pain’ (v. 6) – to the point of planning to scrub out this race of mankind, along with the animals and birds, ‘for I am grieved that I have made them’ (v. 7)”.

By contrast, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (v. 9) – “righteous” in his moral relation to God and “blameless” in his character and conduct – “a good man, a man of integrity in his community” (*The Message*). Like Enoch, Noah “walked with God”. His righteousness was more than goodness, but active faith in God, which is why we read in Hebrews 11.7b, “By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith”. John Wesley commented, “It is easy to be religious when religion is in fashion; but it is an evidence of strong faith to swim against the stream, and to appear for God, when no one else appears for him: so Noah did, and it is upon record to his immortal honour” (*Explanatory Notes on the OT*).

“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence” (v. 11). The word “corrupt” has come to have a specific meaning in modern social and corporate life. Here it has the general sense of “spoilt, ruined, rotten”. This corruption was universal – “all the people on earth had corrupted their ways” (v. 12b). They had passed beyond all possibility of reformation and change – “It’s all over. It’s the end of the human race. The violence is everywhere; I’m making a clean sweep” (v. 13 *The Message*).

Noah and his family were to be saved by making an “ark” or boat of “gopher” wood – generally thought to be “cypress” (as NIV). “The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high” with an “18 inch” window all around under the roof (vv. 15-16). That’s quite some boat. Importantly, as modern nautical engineers have commented, it represents a very stable vessel of almost identical dimensions to the *Great Eastern* which was used to lay the trans-Atlantic cable.

Such a boat has been shown to be of adequate size to house the numbers of animals and birds to be taken onto the ark – not just the pairs of v. 20, but seven of every kind of clean animal, as in 7.2). There needn’t have been the largest specimens of the various species.

Reflect:

- Is it possible that human sin could ever be so great that God would say, “That’s it!”? What is the “sin against the Holy Spirit” that “will not be forgiven” (Mt. 12.32)? How far can the corruption of a civilisation go before it will face destruction? (Note Abraham’s prayer for Sodom in Gen. 18.22-33).

Safe in the Ark

Read: Genesis 7.11-16.

How did the animals get there? We aren’t told. Certainly “seven days from now” (v. 4) wasn’t time to round them all up! Ants aren’t the only creatures to sense the coming of major changes of conditions. It is reasonable to assume a combination of instinct and divine impulsion. Similarly, within the ark were animal predators which, given the conditions – including the movement of the boat! – were not inclined to be killers. They may almost have been driven into hibernation, requiring less food than usual.

We are told that “on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened” (v. 11). This suggests major earthquake activity and the release of water trapped beneath the earth’s crust. It appears to have been a period of major geological change. Certainly the beginning of such activity would speed the entry of “believers” into the ark!

“Then the Lord shut him in” (v. 16). This didn’t make them “prisoners” – the ark was the only safe place to be!

Reflect:

- We are called to be “in” but not “of” the world of today (Jn 17.14-16) with its increasing corruption and violence. Where is our “safe place”?