

## **“THE ARK OF SALVATION”** **(Genesis 7:1-24)**

If you're around church for any length of time you become familiar with certain words used over and over, and one of those is the word "saved." Even people outside the church have seen or heard the words "Jesus saves." People in downtown Los Angeles have for years driven by a big "Jesus Saves" neon sign that was first put up on the BIOLA College building in 1935 and can still be seen in downtown LA today. One farmer in Pennsylvania advertises that "Jesus Saves" to thousands who drive by a busy highway next to his farm. This man, called the Rainbow Man, was seen by millions on TV as he sat behind the goalposts at football games holding up John 3:16 and wearing a "Jesus Saves" t-shirt.

Sometimes we become so familiar with a phrase that we don't stop to think about what it means. What does it mean to be saved? What does Jesus save us from, and why do we need saving? We see examples of salvation all the time when someone is rescued or delivered from imminent danger. One recent example was the 640 Afghans who escaped certain death by the Taliban and were airlifted out of danger on a US cargo plane.

On a day-to-day basis we don't think about the need to be saved, until we need saving. Whether your country is suddenly taken over by the Taliban, or a forest fire is quickly headed your way, or you find yourself lost or injured in the mountains, being saved is all you think about and all that matters.

Your greatest need, and my greatest need, is to be saved from eternal judgment and separation from God. Our greatest need is to be rescued from hell. And I want to impress on you that there's an urgency to be saved because all the indications are that Jesus is coming back soon. There's also an urgency because you never know when you'll draw your last breath and it will be too late to be saved. I heard just last week that a close childhood friend of mine died of Covid at age 61. He was here one minute and gone the next. "Jesus saves" is not just a slogan, but the best good news we could ever hope for.

One of the best illustrations of salvation – and one that helps us grasp what it means – is the story of Noah and the ark – and today we come to Genesis 7, where after building the ark for 120 years, Noah and his family finally climb aboard. In chapter 6 we saw how God was grieved to see the crown jewel of His creation – man made in His image – spiral downward into sin and depravity. Being a just God, God could not let evil continue without consequence; but being merciful and loving, God gave people an opportunity to change their ways and repent. Sadly, they did not, and sin became worse and worse to point where God said, "Enough, the time of judgment has come."

But God found one righteous man, Noah, and He tells Noah to build an ark – 450 feet long, 75 feet high, and 45 feet wide. "I want you to build this ark and then gather animals – two-by-two – and the ark will keep you safe from the flood I am about to send." In His mercy, God granted 120 more years before He sent the flood to give every opportunity for people to turn from their sins and turn to Him. But in chapter 7, that long period of 120 years comes to a close.

Chapter 7 is divided into two sections. Verses 1-16 highlights the salvation of Noah and his family, and verses 17-24 describes God's judgment on the unbelieving world. As we begin with Noah's salvation, we notice first that the door of the ark – the door of salvation is opened; then we see the door closed; and after it is closed, it is sealed shut. Each of these actions teaches us something about our salvation.

Let's begin with the door of the ark being opened. Verses 1-5 says, The Lord then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made." And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.

After holding back judgment for 120 years, and after the last nail is driven into the ark, God says, "Come into the ark." Although anyone could have entered the ark, Noah was the only one on earth found to be righteous. Unlike the rest of his generation who lived as though God did not exist, Noah recognized his sinfulness and turned to God for salvation. And because God's grace was extended to him, in gratitude Noah strived to live right and do what was right.

God says, "Not only are you and your family to get on the ark, but I want you to take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal and bird – a male and female, so that they can reproduce – and one pair of every kind of unclean animal and bird." In chapter 6 God tells Noah to take two of every kind of animal on the ark, and here He specifies that Noah is to take seven pairs of every kind of *clean* animal and bird. In the Old Testament, God designates some animals as "clean" animals – suitable for sacrifice – to remind His people that because He is holy and pure, they must come to Him with clean hearts. After Jesus' death on the cross there is no more distinction between clean and unclean animals, because Jesus – the ultimate "clean" and holy sacrifice for sin – has made us who are unclean, clean in His sight.

We read in chapter 8 that right after he gets off the ark, Noah makes a sacrifice to God. Since only clean animals were used in sacrifice, it makes sense that God instructs Moses to take more clean animals on the ark than unclean.

In verse 4 God says, "In seven days the rains will come and fall continuously for forty days and forty nights (kind of like Gold Beach in the winter), and I will destroy every living thing on the earth." In the Bible, the number forty often deals with judgment or testing, and this is the first time it's used in that context. Noah did all that the Lord commanded him. He built the ark just the specifications God told him, he gathered together the clean and unclean animals, and prepared to get on the ark.

The first great principle of salvation is that the door to salvation is open to everyone. God says to Noah, "Come into the ark," and for 120 years the invitation was open to everyone. One of the great words of scripture is the word "Come." God does not wish that any should perish, but all would come to repentance. He invites everyone to come.

In the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14), the groom – who is Jesus – sends His servants out to invite people to come to His wedding. They go out to the highways and byways and invite anyone they can find. No one is excluded. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to go out into the world and preach the gospel and invite everyone to come to Christ for salvation. Everyone was invited to get on the ark, but only eight got on board.

One feature about the ark we talked about briefly last time was the door to the ark. There was only one... one door. In a massive boat 475 feet long, there's only one door. This is one of many illustrations in the Bible showing that there's only one way to salvation.

In John 10 Jesus says, “So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:7, 9).

Jesus is the only way to salvation, and there is no other way. A recent survey, taken just last month, revealed that 60% of Christian Gen Z’ers – ages 16-24 – believe that Christ is *not* the only way to salvation – Jesus may be one of the ways, not the exclusive way. One of the main objections to Christianity is that it is narrow and exclusive, and therefore is not valid. How dare someone claim their way is the only way. The question is not whether Christianity is exclusive – it is – but why? Why is Jesus the only way?

The answer is because Jesus is the only one who can remove what is separating us from God. He’s the only one that can remove our sin and make us acceptable before a holy God. Try as we might, none of us can live a perfect life – we need someone outside ourselves, a mediator, to come and reconcile us to God. Only Jesus – being fully God and fully human – could pay the penalty for our sin and make us right with God. No other religion or philosophy can do that.

Some years ago, a group of scholars met in Britain to debate the uniqueness of Christianity. The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. When he heard what the debate was about, he said, “That’s easy. It’s grace.” The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. Every other religion offers a way to earn God’s approval. Only Christ offers to forgive our sins and make us acceptable unto God. That’s why He is the door – and the only door – through which we enter into salvation.

Right now, the door is open wide, and all are invited to come to Christ for salvation. But one day the door will be closed. Verses 6-13... “Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.”

Up to this point, there had not been rain on the earth. In chapter 2 we saw that God watered the earth with spring water from below. But now the rains come down and the floods came up. Noah and his family escape – they are saved – by going through the door and entering the sole means of deliverance God provided. Once inside the door to salvation was closed forever. God gives ample opportunity for anyone and everyone to come, but one day the opportunity to be saved will be over, and it will be too late.

Once aboard, the flood came from above and below. The floodgates of the heavens were opened and water came pouring down, and the springs below burst up through the ground. You have to wonder what those who refused to get on the ark thought as the waters rise around them. What are they thinking? We naturally suppose that they regretted their unbelief and cried out to God, but I think of the passage in Revelation 16 where in the tribulation God is pouring out plagues upon people, and twice it says that they refused to repent and glorify Him – instead the curse and blaspheme Him.

I've always remembered something a theologian named Greg Boyd said, "We become the decisions we make. The more we choose something, the more we become that something. We are all in the process of solidifying our identities with the decisions we make. With each decision we make, we pick up momentum in the direction of that decision." The longer someone refuses to get on the ark, the more set in their unbelief they become, even when the floodwaters are encircling them. Hebrews 3:15 says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart." Don't wait to make a decision for Christ, do it today.

The door to the ark was wide open for years, but one day it closed for good. And the next thing we see is that after the door is closed, God seals it shut. Verses 13-16 say, "On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord shut him in."

I love that last phrase... God shut him in. No matter how much rain came down or how high the waters rose, Noah was kept safe from judgment by God. In John 10:28 Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." Sometimes when the storms are raging and our boat is getting rocked, we wonder, "Is God going to keep me safe? Is my salvation secure? Is He going to see me through to the other side?" The answer is yes. It doesn't mean that there won't be perilous moments in life or times of doubt, but God promises that once you truly place your faith in Christ, and you've truly been born again, you are eternally saved from judgment. Revelation 3:7 says, "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." There are no guarantees of what might happen to us in this life, but we have God's promise that we will see us safely through to heaven and give us eternal life.

In verses 17-24 the focus shifts from Noah's salvation to the catastrophic judgment of the earth and those who refused to believe... "For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased, they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days."

God has sent many judgments upon the earth, but nothing comes close to the cataclysmic destruction caused by the flood. In the New Testament, Jesus said that the flood is a preview of an even more catastrophic judgment at the end of history when Jesus returns to earth. As we look at the judgment of the flood, we learn three important things that will also be true of the coming judgment.

First, the judgment of the flood is **historical** – it really happened. Many people today think of Noah and the ark as a children's fairy tale – an epic story, but not an actual event. But the Bible records it as a real, historical event. Jesus and Peter and Paul all refer to the flood as an historical event in the New Testament.

Also important is that Moses, the author of Genesis, uses specific days and dates...

- Noah was 600 years old when the flood came.
- The flood came on the seventeenth day of the second month.
- The rain fell for forty days and forty nights.
- The waters flooded the earth for 150 days.

Moses is not just spinning a good story, but recording actual history with a chronological timeline.

What's more is the fact that over 200 cultures around the world have a flood story in their history – all the way from New Guinea to Alaska, traditions have been passed down of a worldwide flood. Where do all these stories come from if they're not true?

In addition, there is lots of scientific evidence of a worldwide flood. For example, 75 percent of earth's land surface is made up of sedimentary rock – rock that was washed away, dissolved in fluid, and redeposited elsewhere. And in many of these sedimentary layers it's common to find massive fossil graveyards of a large number of animals destroyed at the same time by an incredible force.

Also interesting is that on the tops of every major mountain range in the world are fossils of fish and seashells – some hundreds of miles away from the nearest ocean. How did they get there? Genesis 7 says the flood covered the highest mountains. A great documentary I recommend you watch is called *Is Genesis History?* You can watch it on YouTube, and I believe also on Netflix. It explains more in depth the evidence of the flood.

The second thing we learn about the flood in light of the future judgment to come is that it was **universal or worldwide**. Those who can't conceive that a worldwide flood of this proportion could happen say that it was a local flood. But if you simply read what the text says, you would naturally conclude that the flood covered the entire earth...

- Genesis 7 repeatedly uses words like “all” and “every.” All of the earth was covered by a flood and everything in it perished.
- Noah was instructed to take two of every kind of animal to keep them alive when the flood came. If the flood was only local, the animals outside the flood zone would survive.
- Also, if the flood was only local, then why would Noah have to build an ark to survive – he could have just fled the area and returned later.
- In addition, God's promise in chapter 8 to never never again destroy the earth by a flood would not be true if the flood was just a local flood, because there have been numerous devastating local floods throughout history.

To me the most compelling reason to believe that it was a worldwide flood is because Jesus said the flood of Noah's day is a picture of the coming judgment on the earth – and that judgment – according to the book of Revelation is worldwide. Just as God completely destroyed the earth in Noah's day and started over, so in the future judgment, 2 Peter 3 says, the Lord will destroy the entire earth by fire and recreate it.

The flood was historical and universal, and the third thing about the flood that parallels the future judgment is that **it came suddenly, but not without warning**. Several hundred years before the flood, God had warned the people through the preaching of Enoch. When people did not change their ways, God says, "You have 120 years." And even as the people watched Noah build the ark and heard him explain why, they still did not repent.

God's Word gives us several warnings of the coming judgment when Jesus returns. Jesus said when you see...

- Wars and rumors of war.
- Natural disasters such as earthquakes and famines increase.
- Persecution against Christians ramping up.
- Many turn away from the faith.
- People hate one another.
- Mass deception.
- Increase of wickedness.

You will know that the end is near. Jesus also said that in the last days people will be so wrapped up in their day-to-day lives that they will be oblivious to the sudden return of Jesus. It will catch them completely off guard, and it will be too late for them to turn to Christ for salvation.

Noah and the ark is not just an epic story, it is written as a warning to make sure we're ready for the Lord's soon return in judgment. Right now, the door to salvation is wide open, and Jesus invites you to come and enter the door and be saved, but one day that door will close. Once you are saved and born again, God will shut you safely in and see you through all the way to heaven. Don't wait. Jesus saves, and He wants to save you.