

Summary and Blog Post Session 23 Unedited

Noah in the New Testament

A couple of weeks ago I suggested that, if you had time, you might look through the New Testament and see how many references you could find to Noah, the ark, or the flood. The flood is one of the major events in biblical history, so it should not surprise us that the New Testament writers repeatedly return to it.

One of the first passages that comes to mind is Matthew 24. Jesus is speaking about future events and says:

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

He then compares His coming to the days of Noah:

“For just as the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.”

Jesus reminds us what life was like before the flood. People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, carrying on with ordinary life until the day Noah entered the ark. The picture is important. While Noah was building the ark and warning of judgment, the world around him simply continued as normal. People were occupied with everyday concerns and paid no attention to what God was saying.

Jesus says it will be the same when the Son of Man comes. Life will not necessarily grind to a halt while the world waits for some dramatic announcement. People will be engaged in ordinary activities. Then suddenly God's plan will unfold.

The passage goes on to say:

“They did not understand until the flood came and took them all away.”

That wording raises an interesting question. Who was taken away in the flood? It was not Noah and his family. The ones taken away were the people who remained outside the ark. The people who ignored God's warning were swept away in judgment.

That observation affects how I understand the verses that follow:

“Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.”

Many people immediately connect those verses with the rapture, and I understand why. We have all heard that picture presented many times. But I think there is another possibility worth considering.

Growing up in a dispensational church, I was taught that there is a distinction between the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ. Christ came once as a baby in Bethlehem. In the future He will come for His church in the rapture, and after the tribulation He will return again to establish His kingdom.

The next event we are waiting for is the rapture. Paul describes that in 1 Thessalonians when he says the Lord will descend from heaven, the dead in Christ will rise first, and believers will be caught up together with Him.

But I do not think Matthew 24 is describing the rapture. I think it is describing the second coming of Christ. In the flood narrative, those who were taken away were the unbelieving world. Noah and his family remained. If Jesus is deliberately using that pattern, then the ones taken in Matthew 24 would be those removed in judgment, while those left would remain to enter the kingdom.

Whether you agree or disagree, it is worth thinking through the passage carefully.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13 provides another passage that helps me understand this picture.

Jesus tells the story of a man who sowed good seed in his field. An enemy came afterward and sowed tares among the wheat. When both began to grow, the servants asked whether they should pull out the tares immediately.

The answer was no. Both would remain together until the harvest.

When Jesus explains the parable, He identifies the field as the world. The good seed represents the sons of the kingdom, while the tares represent the sons of the evil one. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Then Jesus says:

“Just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.”

Notice the order. The tares are gathered out first. The Son of Man sends His angels, and they gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness. These are cast into the fiery furnace.

Then the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father.

The same pattern appears again. The wicked are removed, while the righteous remain.

That is why I connect Matthew 24 with Christ's return to establish His kingdom rather than with the rapture of the church. During the tribulation there will be both believers and

unbelievers on the earth. When Christ returns to establish His reign, the unbelieving are removed and the righteous enter the kingdom.

Other parables point in a similar direction. The parable of the dragnet separates good fish from bad fish. The sheep and goats are divided. Again and again there is a separation at the end.

The point is not to create controversy. It is simply to encourage careful reading of the text.

The Holy Spirit and the Future

That discussion naturally raises questions about the Holy Spirit during the tribulation.

There must be a continuing work of the Spirit because people will still be saved. Scripture speaks of a future turning of Israel to the Lord. Jewish people will recognize the fulfillment of their Scriptures and will bear witness to those around them.

The Holy Spirit must still be active because no one can be born again apart from His work.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the Spirit is like the wind. The wind blows where it wishes and accomplishes its purpose. In that future day God will continue to work powerfully through His Spirit.

The gathering of the church is a unique ministry of the Spirit in this present age. When the church is raptured, that ministry reaches its completion. Yet God's saving work will continue, because people cannot come to faith apart from the work of the Spirit.

Noah in Hebrews 11

Another important New Testament reference to Noah appears in Hebrews 11.

The chapter begins:

“By faith Noah...”

That statement immediately tells us something important. Noah believed God.

Faith, at its simplest, is taking God at His word. Noah was warned about things not yet seen. He was told a flood was coming, though he had never witnessed anything like it.

He had never seen rain. God did not even give him a sample thunderstorm to demonstrate what was coming. Noah simply received God's word and believed it.

Because he believed, he acted.

Hebrews says:

“In reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.”

Noah's obedience was based entirely on God's promise.

Imagine explaining that construction project to your neighbors. A massive boat is being built where there is no sea. Rain has never fallen from the sky. Yet Noah spends years preparing because God said judgment was coming.

Would we have believed him?

Honestly, I think many of us would have struggled. Yet Noah believed God.

That is why Hebrews holds him up as an example of faith.

The passage says that through this faith he became: “an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

That brings us to a central truth of the gospel.

None of us possesses enough righteousness to stand before God. We need a righteousness that comes from God Himself.

Paul speaks of wanting to be found in Christ, not possessing a righteousness of his own, but a righteousness that comes from God.

That is what salvation is. God offers His righteousness as a gift. Noah believed God and received what God promised. The same principle remains true today.

When helping people who struggle with assurance, we should direct them back to God's promise rather than to their feelings.

Someone may say, “I don't feel saved.”

The question is not how they feel. The question is whether they have believed God's promise.

God says:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”

Have you believed Him?

Faith rests on what God has said.

Of course, genuine faith produces results. James tells us that faith without works is dead.

If Noah had said he believed God but never cut a tree, never shaped a board, and never built an ark, we would have serious reason to question whether he truly believed.

His work did not earn salvation. His actions demonstrated his faith.

The same principle operates throughout life. When we genuinely believe a warning, we respond to it. If a tornado is heading toward your house, you do something about it. Belief produces action.

Noah's obedience flowed from his faith.

Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison

One of the more challenging passages connected to Noah appears in 1 Peter 3.

Peter writes:

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...”

He then says Christ was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

“in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.”

Peter identifies these spirits as those who were disobedient during the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared.

Naturally, that raises a number of questions.

Who are these spirits?

When did Christ preach to them?

Why would He proclaim anything to them?

Was He offering them another opportunity?

Several explanations have been suggested.

One view is that Christ preached through Noah while Noah was alive. The Spirit of Christ was working through Noah as he proclaimed God's message to the people of his generation. Those people are now in prison, but the preaching itself occurred during Noah's lifetime.

Another view is that Christ did indeed proclaim something to those spirits after His death, but not as an offer of salvation. Instead, it was a declaration of victory. It was a proclamation that God reigns, that Christ has triumphed, and that His victory stands despite their rebellion.

Those are the two primary approaches that are often discussed.

The Conquering Character of Christ

Thinking about that second possibility highlights something I fear we do not emphasize enough.

We sometimes fail to appreciate the conquering character of Christ.

Many modern portrayals present Jesus as gentle and loving, which He certainly is. But they sometimes leave the impression that He is passive or weak.

The Jesus of Scripture is not weak.

The book of Revelation presents Him as a conquering King. He confronts evil. He judges rebellion. He rules with authority.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He does not fail in the mission given to Him.

When Scripture speaks of Him leading captivity captive, breaking the bars of hell, and building His church against the gates of hell, it presents a victorious Savior.

Even our gathering as believers reflects that reality.

When the church assembles, we are not simply participating in a social club. We are gathering as the people of Christ in a world where Satan is called the god of this age.

Every true conversion represents another soul rescued from darkness.

Every faithful church that proclaims the gospel stands as a testimony to Christ's authority and victory.

That is why the growth of Christ's kingdom matters. Every person brought to faith is another demonstration that the King continues His work.

Whether we understand 1 Peter 3 as Christ preaching through Noah or as Christ proclaiming victory to imprisoned spirits, the passage ultimately points us back to the triumph of God over unbelief and rebellion.

Noah preached. Very few responded. Yet God preserved His own.

Lot was rescued from Sodom. Few escaped with him. Yet God preserved His own.

The gospel continues to go out today. God continues to save people. For that we should be deeply thankful.

Before leaving 1 Peter 3, there remains one more statement that deserves careful attention:

“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you.”

That verse raises important questions of its own. We will have to leave those for another time.