



**Rescued by God**  
**Genesis 7:1-5, 17-18, 8:6-19**  
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Over the course of the summer, we are going from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, to see the larger arc of God's story. So far, we have witnessed the intimacy of God with humanity in the story of creation, and we have seen humanity distanced from God through the presence of sin. We left ourselves last week with a God who was so distraught, sorrowful, and grieved with the sin of humanity, that God was ready to wipe it all out and start again.

We pick up this week with the story of the flood. In the midst of God's preparation to flood the earth, the scripture tells us that there was one person God was willing to spare, for "Noah found favor in the sight of God." In our New Revised Standard Version, the scripture says, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation." Noah is the first of humanity to be called *righteous* in the Biblical text.

In his commentary, scholar Miguel De La Torre offers a note about the righteousness of Noah. In the Hebrew, Torre offers, the word translated into our English text as "righteous" is the word *tsaddiq* (saa-deek). "Where English translations use 'righteous,'" Torre says, "Hispanics would read the words *justo* or *justicia*, 'just' or 'justice.'"<sup>i</sup>

Torre says the distinction is pretty important, because righteousness is something one can be on their own. "To be righteous does not necessarily require others."<sup>ii</sup> However, "Justice ... can only occur in community, manifesting itself in relation to others. ... Justice cannot be reduced to a private expression of faith; it's a public action."<sup>iii</sup>

Understanding the difference is important to understand the value of God centering Noah in the work of rescuing humanity and creation. Noah is saved because he was *just* – not simply righteous – and in the midst of a "dismal story of pain, [Noah is the one] who embodies a new possibility."<sup>iv</sup> What God desires for creation going forward mimics how God first gave life to the created – in peace and harmony, where justice is the norm, not the exception.

In preparation for the flood, Noah is given precise instructions for the ship that will carry creation into its new beginning. On that ship, God tells Noah to take seven pairs of all clean animals and the birds of the air, and one pair of all unclean animals. Noah does all he was instructed to do, and he, his wife, his children and their mates, they all boarded the ship.

And then, as Forrest Gump so eloquently stated, "One day, it started raining and it didn't quit for [40 days]. We been through every kind of rain there is. Little bitty stingin' rain... and big ol' fat rain. Rain that flew in sideways. And sometimes rain even seemed to come straight up from underneath. Shoot, it even rained at night." ... Forty days and forty nights, "the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it

rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.”

The amount of rain and the depth of the flood ensured there was no question about life on earth. All that lived, all that remained of God’s created, resided on the ark.

At the end of forty days the rain stopped, but the flood was not over. Noah sent out a raven, and then a dove. The raven hovered over the waters, but the dove returned, having no dry ground on which to rest. Seven days later, Noah sent out another dove, and this one returned with an olive leaf, so Noah knew the waters were subsiding. And yet, Noah waited on the ship another seven days. He sent out another dove, and this one did not return. Noah stayed on the ship until the boat was on dry ground, but he did not disembark the ship until instructed by God, who said, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you – birds and animals, and every creepy thing – so that they may abound on the earth. And be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

7 days on the ship prior to the rains, 40 days on the ship while it rained, and another 14 days of drifting on the flooded earth, Noah and creation were aboard the ship for 61 days.

As they disembark, God is once again giving life and purpose to creation. Just as God had offered the instructions in the beginning to the first of the created humanity, God reiterates the instruction to Noah and his family, “be fruitful and to multiply on the earth.” ... “And ever animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on earth, went out of the ark by families.”

The flood story is one of scientific and apologetic debate. Did such a flood really occur? Is it possible that Noah and his family were used by God to re-begin the story of creation? Does the Biblical flood story match up with the Epic of Gilgamesh, or the other ancient flood stories of other cultures? Scholar Miguel De La Torre writes, “Such questions are irrelevant to the reasons why a flood story appears in the Bible. ... The story appears to make a theological statement concerning the character of God, a God who can create and destroy an entire world. This is a God who judges human rebellion while showing mercy to the remnant that remains faithful to God’s justice.”<sup>v</sup>

The flood story, albeit, a short 61-day event in the greater arc of the universe, tells us a lot about God. “God creates, God destroys, God judges, God saves, and God remembers. The story also teaches us that God changes.”<sup>vi</sup>

We have already seen one significant change in God, who came to despise the very humanity that was created in God’s likeness. And now, in the aftermath of the flood, we will see another change in the Creator.

To understand the change in God, one needs to simply ask, *what was different after the flood?* What *really* changed through the decimation of creation?

The waters rescinded, the animals repopulated the skies and the land. (Seemingly the creatures of the sea had no need of rescue from Noah.) Noah and his family are given the same instructions as Adam and Eve, to multiply and fill the earth (and they did).

The creation looks like it's back to where it was before, with the hopes that humanity – the ones who brought about God's judgmental flood 61 days earlier – would revert to the image of God in which we were first created. But in reality, "The flood has effected no change in human kind."<sup>vii</sup> If we skip forward just a few chapters we will find that as the story of Noah ends, Noah gets drunk, his grandson Canaan is cursed, and the very next story following in Genesis 10 is about the Tower of Babel, where humanity is condemned for once again trying to usurp the power of God, and is scattered around the earth.

The creation has not changed. "But [the flood] has effected an irreversible change in God, who now will approach his creation with an unlimited patience and forbearance."<sup>viii</sup> "Universal rebellion against God and God's ways continues. Humans do not change, but thankfully God does. The God who brought the flood promises never again to destroy the earth in like fashion. Rebellion, wired into the human condition, will never again be washed way."<sup>ix</sup>

After Noah, his family, and the creatures of the earth have all disembarked, God forms a covenant with Noah, which is found in Genesis, chapter 9. "In verse 11, God gives the promise at the center of the covenant. "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." What just happened will never happen again! That is unconditional. No matter what humans do, never again will God respond with a world destroying flood. Never again will the cycle of nature be disturbed so totally. Never again will all life be drowned by a flood. The waters of chaos will never again destroy all life on this planet."<sup>x</sup> This promise, this covenant, is sealed with a visible sign, which is the rainbow in the clouds.

As God spoke the words of the covenant to Noah and his sons, he said, "When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember the covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." ... God declares that the rainbow is not a sign for *us* to remember the covenant, but a visible reminder to God of the covenant that has been made, so that God might never let the creation be destroyed again by such a flood. God is setting a sign that says, I (God) know of the troubles my creation will experience, but instead of letting creation be destroyed like this again, I – God – will find a new way to redeem that which I have created.

The flood story, God's rescuing of humanity and choosing to show mercy in allowing the story of creation to continue on the other side, becomes the third leg on this arc of the universe. In these opening stories, we find a pattern which will repeat itself as the arc of God's creation continues. God creates and establishes an intimacy with humanity; humanity turns from God and is thus distanced from the one who gave it life; and then God rescues us from our own depravity.

Intimacy *with* God. Distanced *from* God. Rescued *by* God.

This story gets put on repeat as we continue in the arc of the universe to come. Indeed, as scholar R. R. Reno notes, we find in the New Testament writers, an affirmation that the story of Christ is little more

than a repeat of the story of the flood. Reno writes, “The New Testament writers were confident that God is sufficiently powerful and solicitous of our humanity to work according to a comprehensive and effective plan. They [(the New Testament authors)] treated Noah, the ark, and the flood as revealing the economy of salvation.”<sup>xi</sup> Reno further adds, “The Genesis narrative foreshadows the larger economy of salvation depicted in scripture. The flood story provides clues for discerning the pattern of the divine plan. ... God provides an ark for those whom he rescues.”<sup>xii</sup>

Even Peter, in the writing of his early letters, “connects the waters of baptism with the waters of the Flood, as a water of judgment beyond which is a life from the grave of the living God.”<sup>xiii</sup>

In the story of the flood we see a divine act of redemption and salvation. God has given the created the freedom of choice, and thus, God will not control the behavior of the created; God will not micromanage that which is made in God’s likeness. No ... no matter how insistent God may be that we live as those created in such a just and merciful image, God will not force our faithfulness. And yet, even for a creation that fails to live into its created image, God will no longer allow the kind of suffering the Flood brought about on creation. Instead, God will find a way to rescue us. Time and again, God will be the one to rescue the lost, to heal the broken, to give life to the dying, and to give purpose to all of God’s created.

As the story continues, we will see this three-fold patten repeat. God will establish intimacy with the created, we will distance ourselves from God, and God will find a new way to rescue us. Intimacy ... distance ... rescue.

In every story of the Biblical narrative ... in every story of human existence ... in every story that defines who we are as God’s created, we should listen for this pattern: intimacy, distance, rescue.

We serve a mighty God, who has the power to recreate the creation, but who has chosen, in love for the creation, to find a new way to give life ... who has chosen, in covenant with the created, to find a new way to redeem us ... who has chosen, in the quest of creation’s well-being, to raise up new generations of the faithful, those who may be just and righteous, that we – those created in God’s image – might share in the work of God, offering life, joy, peace, and wholeness to all of God’s created. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre. *Genesis: Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> De La Torre.

<sup>iii</sup> De La Torre.

<sup>iv</sup> Walter Brueggemann. *Genesis: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.

<sup>v</sup> De La Torre.

<sup>vi</sup> De La Torre.

<sup>vii</sup> Brueggemann.

<sup>viii</sup> Brueggemann.

<sup>ix</sup> De La Torre.

<sup>x</sup> Stan Mast. “Genesis 9:8-18 Commentary.” February 21, 2021. <http://cepreaching.org>. Retrieved July 5, 2023.

<sup>xi</sup> R. R. Reno. *Genesis: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010.

<sup>xii</sup> Reno.

<sup>xiii</sup> Gerhard von Rad. *Genesis: A Commentary (The Old Testament Library)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973.