

The Flood Is Upon Us!

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As students of the Bible, we are all familiar with some of the details of the Noachian Flood recorded in Genesis 6-8. We remember the prelude to the Flood in which God describes the reasons why He considered it necessary to send it. We remember that it took Noah 120 years to build the ark. He loaded it with animals God sent to him, and then he and his family—eight people—stepped aboard and God shut them in. The rains soon fell and the great underground water reservoirs exploded, and every life on earth, except for those eight humans and their cargo of animals, perished.

The Flood is a stunning, mind-boggling event to contemplate. Considering the enormity of the earth, and understanding that during 1,600 years of good weather and long life, man, beast and vegetation proliferated in prodigious amounts, the number of lives that perished and the devastation of the earth must have been tremendous. He promises never to destroy the earth again by water, setting the rainbow as a sign of this promise between Him and every living creature (Genesis 9:12-14).

Although God has been true to His promise—and will remain true—the Bible is not done with floods. For Jesus states:

But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:36-39)

The thrust of Jesus' message is clear beyond question. He is concerned that when He returns, people will be so focused on—and thus distracted by—the secular concerns of life that they will be unprepared for the climactic events of His return. His concern is enhanced by three parables that follow this section, each dealing with the state of urgency and readiness we need to have as that time approaches.

Why would a Christian not be prepared as the end nears, when we should know full well that we are close? The answer is fairly obvious. Those caught in this "pre-flood syndrome" have their minds on something else.

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed addresses this clearly: "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world . . . choke the word" (Matthew 13:22). "The cares of this world" catch the people's attention as the "flood" begins and contribute to their deterioration.

Another Flood Is Coming

Did you know that Jesus prophesied the coming of another flood? At the very least, its headwaters are upon us, and the church is flailing around in it. But in reality, it is much deeper than that! Distracted, their footing unstable against the force of the rising waters, some are already being swept away by its currents.

In Luke 6:47-48, Jesus describes one who hears His words and does them as a man who, when building his house, digs his foundation deeply and upon rock. When a flood threatens it, the house remains intact on its secure base.

A wealthy man once engaged a contractor to build the finest house the builder had ever dreamed of building. He spared no expense, and the builder was well-pleased with his work. When the work was done, the wealthy man said to the contractor, "The house is yours and you must live in it." Only then did the builder notice all the flaws and imperfections, and he realized how much better he could have built it. A man must live in what he builds.

Jesus' metaphor in the parable is apt: a man's character is like a house. Every thought is like a piece of timber in that house, every habit a beam, every imagination a window, well or badly placed. They all gather into a unity, handsome or grotesque. We decide how that house is constructed.

Unless one builds his character on the rock-solid foundation of God's Word, he will surely be swept away by the flood now inundating the world. As I Corinthians 3:11 says, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Of the two builders in the parable, one is a thoughtful man who deliberately plans his house with an eye to the future; the other is not a bad man, but thoughtless, casually building in the easiest way. The one is earnest; the other is content with a careless and unexamined life. The latter seems to want to avoid the hard work of digging deep to ensure a strong foundation, and also takes a short-range view, never thinking what life will be like six months into the future. He trades away future good for present pleasure and ease.

The flood obviously represents the trials of life. Frequently, the trials of life descend upon us either through our own lack of character or because of events in the world around us. Is our house strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the horrendous events of the end time? Can it even withstand our own weaknesses?

Jeremiah 30:7 tells of a coming time of trouble that is so intense that man has never experienced one like it. Jesus says it will be so terrible that unless God cut it short, "no flesh would be saved [*alive*, Moffatt]" (Matthew 24:22). Is our house ready for this?

Water In Scripture

Revelation 12:15 shows the serpent, Satan, spewing a torrent of "water out of His mouth like a flood"! Aimed directly at the woman, the church of God, that torrent is a diabolical and merciless attempt to sweep her away!

Revelation is largely written in symbols. When used as a metaphor in the Bible, water can represent good and bad realities. Especially in large amounts, it can represent masses of people. Thus in Revelation 13:1, the Beast is understood to be rising either from a heavily populated area or from the majority of all dwelling on earth.

But water also symbolizes things important to God's instruction. In John 7:38-39 it clearly represents God's Holy Spirit. This usage, in turn, has a direct connection to another usage important to this article and understanding Revelation 12:15-16. In this regard Paul writes, "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26), and Jesus adds, "It is the Spirit [which] gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Words, like water, have awesome power to do good or bad. They can give life like Jesus' words, or they can devastate and destroy like a flood of water when it is out of control.

Interestingly, Revelation 12:15 pictures this flood spurting from the serpent's mouth, the very place on the body where words emanate! This flood may someday materialize as a real army, but today Satan is inundating the world with such a torrent of appealing misinformation that some of God's people are being swept away. They are not yet lost because our God is more powerful than Satan, and He can save from the uttermost. But many are putting themselves into spiritual—and perhaps even physical—danger by being distracted from God's focus, the Kingdom of God.

Satan's Tactics

Satan is a master of deception, and he destroys through misinformation. Revelation 9:11 names him Abaddon (Destruction) and Apollyon (Destroyer). Jesus calls him the father of lies (John 8:44), and Revelation 12:9 says he "deceives the whole world."

From Adam and Eve's encounter with him in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3), we can see how he works. Sometimes, he will "bend" truth just enough to ensure it does not say quite what God said ("Has God indeed said . . ."). If he must, he will tell bald-faced lies ("You shall not surely die."). For following his twisted but attractive reasoning, there is an implied promise of gratification ("You will be like God . . ."), but his intent is always to confuse, divide and destroy.

The result is Confusion (Babylon) the Great. We live in the midst of it at the very time prophecy shows him unleashing a torrent of misinformation to make the confusion and distraction even more intense. Thus even the very elect can be deceived in the process (Matthew 24:24). The vast networks of communications technology available today make it even easier for him to do this. Radio, television, telephones, computers and printing presses spew out prodigious amounts of information by the second! Most of this information is coming from **his** world. How much of it is really worthwhile?

Every day information concerning politics, economics, social issues, psychology, religion, conspiracy theories, foreign affairs, entertainment and education issues inundates us. How much of it is actually true? How much do we truly *need* to pay attention to?

Delusion and Apostasy

The prophecy of II Thessalonians 2 carries this flood of misinformation directly into our spiritual lives! Paul admonishes:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. (verses 3-4)

The flood of deception focuses directly on us:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (verses 9-12)

The headwaters of this flood are already upon us! The lies and distractions creating apostasy within the church of God are sweeping people toward spiritual death! Apostasy ("the falling away") is not necessarily a departure from an organized body, but a *departure from truth* as the context shows. It points to a deliberate abandonment of a former professed position or belief.

The man of sin opposes Christ. He will even claim to be God, and Satan will enable him to work miracles. Just before Christ's return, he will lead evil's greatest challenge ever against all that is good. The focus of the attack will be the destruction of truth. Only those who "receive the love of the truth" will be spared. If one does not have it, they will be deceived, believe the lie and be condemned. In this context, the lie is probably that this man is God or His main representative on earth, and that they should worship the beast and receive his mark at his word (Revelation 13:11-18).

Laying the Groundwork

Before the man of sin appears, Satan must lay some groundwork to prepare for his acceptance. What better way than to throw the world into quarreling, divisive and wearying confusion? People then yearn for some strong and seemingly wise hands to set things straight, so the nations can "catch their breath" and have a span of peaceful calm. In its wake, confusion creates directionless people, with little desire to change the status quo, whose minds are turned in upon themselves in an attempt to keep what they have.

Right now, humanity is being bombarded by religious disinformation ranging from bizarre, do-gooding New Age cults to the militant homosexual, lesbian and feminist attacks aimed at changing old-line Protestant and Catholic groups. Mainly within Protestant circles, the New World Order and other conspiracy theories abound, sometimes tenuously mixed with true prophecies of the Bible. Everywhere there are cries for tolerance of beliefs of every stripe, and in some sectors there are attempts to merge all religions into one.

Within God's church, we have seen a multitude of doctrinal changes alter one large group to the point that it is barely recognizable except by name. Other, smaller groups are badgered by peripheral issues like the calendar, sacred names and conspiracy theories. What we are witnessing are people subtly persuaded into an excessive concern for themselves. This distracts them from the focus God clearly

states in Jesus' end-time message: Get ready for the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Overcoming Is the Key

Every message to every church group in Revelation 2 and 3 concludes with "To him who overcomes." Christ's intent is clear. Our judgment is based upon growth in overcoming flaws involving character defects, evil self-centered attitudes and relationship problems with fellow man.

Overcoming involves learning and applying the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). I John 4:20 states:

If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

What concerns God is whether a person is actually and practically following Him with his mind, actions, words, time and energy. This proves to Him whether one sincerely loves the truth or merely sees his religion as an intellectual profession or social occasion.

Our deceitful mind can find multitudes of ways, reasons and excuses to avoid confronting the real issue of life—overcoming, allowing God to form and shape us into His image. Knowing this very well, Satan works to involve the intellectually inclined among us in pursuits that though they may involve religion and are stimulating and challenging, have little or nothing to do with overcoming. The issue, however, becomes so "big" that God's focus is lost under the ever-growing mounds of research.

He distracts others through conspiracy theories. Though these things may be occurring at least to some extent, and though people reason they are "watching world news," it is not preparing for God's Kingdom. It becomes so "big" in their minds that they are nearly consumed by it—it is all they can talk about!

Jesus said what is in the heart comes out the mouth. Where is there room for God in the heart when this other pursuit is crowding Him out? Are these people in danger of being swept away by the flood? I have noticed that people involved in this gradually become very suspicious and cynical of others, especially those with some authority. Satan subtly destroys the fabric of trust that any institution—be it a relationship, family, church or nation—must have to function.

The Day of the Lord is not yet upon us, but we are in the headwaters of the flood that is swiftly approaching. The flood of deception is a precursor of more physically persuasive tactics designed to deceive the whole world into accepting the lie. But for now, Satan is surely concentrating primarily on God's called-out ones.

God is permitting a sifting to take place. Paul uses the word "delusion" in II Thessalonians 2:11, indicating a "wandering out of the way." Does that not happen to people who are confused and have lost direction and motivation? They wander. They drift. They get tossed about in the winds and currents. But the love of the truth will keep a person clear-minded, focused on the right areas of life and motivated to overcome. And this will lead God to save them.

We need to examine honestly what receives our time and attention. We need to evaluate truthfully what is the focus of our lives. This will reveal whether we love the truth or merely profess to. Those who only profess to love it will be the one's sifted by the flood now swirling around us.

Jesus cried out in John 7:37, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." Brethren, this is our salvation. He says He is the way, the truth and the life. Now is the time to dig deeply into His Word to make that foundation sure. And let's truly live and build upon what we find there!