

“Noah’s Ark: The Temple & Seed of New Creation”

Genesis 6:9-22

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4th Sunday Before Easter

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Our sermon text this morning is found in Genesis 6:9-22. Listen now to God’s holy and inerrant word.

It is more to be desired than gold; even much fine gold. It is sweeter also than honey; sweeter than the drippings of the honeycomb.

9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits.

16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them.” 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Thus far the reading of God’s word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Prayer...

In order to read the Bible rightly, we have to not only pay attention to the particular text we’re reading, but also notice how this text relates to larger overall story that the Bible is telling.

The Bible is, I would argue, the greatest work of literature ever written, and, like any great work of literature, the themes that develop throughout the pages of the Scriptures are not only those that are stated explicitly, but also those that are hidden in the details of the text.

In other words, what I’m arguing for is the idea that the Bible, taken as a whole, is a deep, complex, immersive work that builds on itself and fits together perfectly because, though it may have had dozens of human authors - the Scriptures also have one divine author - the Holy Spirit, who is bringing all the threads together into one remarkable tapestry.

Reading the Bible on its own terms, paying attention to its symbolism, its typology, is essential for understanding the depth and richness of its meaning.

And that means, in order to properly understand the text before us today, we must slow down and think about the details of the text and how they fit into the grand narrative of Scripture.

In our text this morning, the God who made heaven and earth determines, as he himself puts it, “to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence.”

But even as God comes to judge the evil of the world, he elects to preserve both human and animal life, and he does it in this way:

He finds Noah, a righteous man, and he tells him, with very precise instructions, to build an ark, a kind of giant wooden box, so that he and the animals God will send him can float on the waters of judgment and be saved.

It’s worth mentioning that it might have been otherwise. God could have saved Noah and his family and his animals in some other way. He might, for example, have led Noah and the animals to some special valley that he then protected from the floodwaters.

But God didn’t do that. He told Noah to build an Ark. And so when we come to this story, if we’re going to understand it rightly, we’re going to have ask questions like, “Why an Ark?” And “Why an ark built in precisely this way?”

So, let’s talk about this ark for a few minutes.

The first thing to say is that the very precise instructions that God gives Noah in this text about how to build the Ark are not given because Noah is ignorant.

Human society has come quite a way by this point. They are building cities and musical instruments and forging instruments of bronze and iron. In fact, in very short order after the flood, Noah’s descendants will build a giant tower to heaven.

If God had simply wanted to tell Noah to build a large boat, and let Noah figure out the details, he could have done that.

But God does not do that. He tells Noah exactly what to do, with precise measurements and specifications. This should indicate to us that the Lord is not merely giving Noah a way of not dying in the flood to come. He's doing something much more mysterious and interesting than that.

The Lord says to Noah: *14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. 16 Make a roof [or a window] for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.*

The first thing to say is that, despite what you have seen in popular images of Noah's Ark, what God tells Noah to build here is not really a sailing vessel.

The Hebrew word that is translated in Genesis 6-9 as "Ark" is not the Hebrew word for ship or boat or sailing vessel.

It's actually a very uncommon word that simply means "box" or "chest," and the only time it appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is in the story of Moses and the Nile, where the basket Moses is placed in is called literally, an Ark.

And if you look at the measurements that God gives Noah for the Ark - 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, 30 cubits tall, you can see — this wasn't a vessel built to cut through the waves.

No, this was a giant wooden box, built simply to float on the surface of the waters — it didn't have to go anywhere in particular, it wasn't meant to sail to certain port, it simply was meant to float until the floodwaters subsided.

God told Noah to make the ark of gopher wood. No one knows what gopher wood is. That word that appears in your Bible is simply the transliteration of the actual Hebrew word, and has nothing to do with the English word for the small mammal we call a gopher.

So, God tells Noah to make the ark out of wood, and to make rooms in it, and to cover it with pitch.

Now, the size of the ark that the Lord tells Noah to build is enormous.

The ark was to be 300 cubits long, which is about 450 feet.

For context's sake, 450 feet is over half as long as the Titanic was.

If this helps you imagine, 450 feet is one and half football fields, or just under a tenth of a mile.

This is a huge structure that the Lord tells Noah to build.

In addition to its length, the Ark was to be about 75 feet wide and 45 feet tall.

The Lord also specifies that the Ark was to have a roof, and a door in its side, and that it should be built in three distinct sections — with lower, second and third decks.

Now, fascinatingly, the very fact that God gives such special blueprints and plans for the Ark helps us to understand what the ark is for.

In the Scriptures, if you read them from beginning to end, there are only a very few structures where we receive a detailed account of how long and wide they are—and so the fact that we receive this information about the Ark means that we should consider it carefully and think about what that means.

The first structure for which the Bible gives precise measurements is here in this text — Noah's Ark.

Interestingly, the only places where precise measurements for structures are given in the Scriptures are all temples — places where God's special presence will dwell, where he will commune with his people — places that will be, in a sense, where heaven and earth meet.

As we heard this morning in our Old Testament reading from Exodus, the next place in the Scriptures where the Lord gives precise measurements for a structure is when he tells Moses how to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness after he covenants with the people of Israel at Sinai.

Then, precise measurements appear again later in the Old Testament when Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem.

The last two places in the Scriptures where precise measurements are given for structures occur both in visions. First, in Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 40 and following, where the Lord shows Ezekiel a vision of the temple that will come.

And then, as we heard in our New Testament reading this morning, where John receives a vision of the New Jerusalem, and is given precise measurements for that city — a city, which is of course, a temple.

In addition, the three sections of the Ark also point toward another correspondence with the tabernacle and the temple — structures that God commanded also to be built with three distinct sections.

Another piece of evidence underscoring the Ark's proto-temple character is that Noah is clearly meant to be understood as a priest.

God orders Noah to take sacrificial animals with him on the Ark, and the first thing that Noah will do after he returns to dry land will be to build an altar and offer sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord.

The Ark, understood in this way, is meant to be a kind of floating temple, a picture of the universal church through the ages — outside the Ark, there is only death and destruction as God pours out his judgment on the wicked through the floodwaters.

But inside the Ark, there God is present in a different way — in the Ark, God is present to save, to deliver, to keep safe, to protect, to establish his covenant with Noah and his offspring.

But the Ark is not only a kind of temple, and picture of the church. It is also the seed of the New Creation.

As the Lord goes on to explain in verses 19-22:

19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

This is one of the most fascinating parts of the whole Noah narrative — God's intention and care for the preservation of animal life.

In this, of course, we see God's commitment to his world is not limited just to the human beings he set at the crown of his creation — no, God loves all that he has made — and given that the Great Flood is a foreshadowing of the Last Judgment, the preservation of animals in this narrative gives us confidence for God's plan of redemption includes animals as well in the New Heavens and the New Earth to come.

In fact, if you think about it for a moment, the reason God told Noah to build such a massive Ark, the reason for such a gargantuan project in terms of its scale, was precisely because of the animals that the Ark had to hold.

If the Ark had only had to hold Noah and his family, it could have been much smaller. But God's commitment to animals in this narrative — the animals he made, the animals he called "good," is so significant that he instructs Noah to spend a hundred years building a Ark that was exponentially larger than it would have needed to have been if its purpose was simply to save human life.

Notice also that Noah did not have to go out and find all the animals for the Ark. No, God says to Noah that *"two of every sort [of animal] shall come in to you to keep them alive"* — God would supernaturally bring the Animals to Noah at the right time, and then Noah would take them into the Ark with him.

Now, we don't know exactly how this happened. The text doesn't tell us. But it's fun to imagine. Did the animals show up slowly, over time, and wait under the trees, watching the Ark be built? Or did they appear all at once, just at the end, just before the rain began to fall?

Either way, this picture is strongly reminiscent of Genesis 2, where, in the Garden of Eden, the Lord brings every sort of animal before Adam so that he can name them.

Noah here is a kind of New Adam, and he will rule over the animals for all the months that the Ark floats on the waters, in much the same way that Adam ruled over the animals in the Garden before his sin.

In fact, in many ways, the Ark is meant to be a kind of floating Garden of Eden.

You have Noah and his wife, the New Adam and Eve, along with their children. You have the Ark made of gopher wood, like the trees of the Garden. You have the animals, living peaceably under the rule of their human masters.

And indeed, in Genesis 9, after the flood, when Noah and the animals are able to re-enter the new world, God will repeat the same command he gave to Adam and Eve in the garden, as he will tell Noah and his family to *“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”*

In this way, Noah’s Ark is not simply a convenient vessel for surviving a flood, but as the Ark floats on the waters it becomes, in a fundamental way, the seed of the New Creation, and a profound picture of God’s mercy.

In the face of human violence and wickedness, God might have simply ended human life and the world that he had made.

But that is not what he does. That is not who our God is.

Instead God will judge the world through water, but causes for an Ark to be built, an Ark that is to be a refuge, a place of salvation and protection from the deluge that the Lord will bring.

Outside the Ark, there will be nothing but death. But God will maintain his covenant with humanity through Noah, the New Adam — and inside the Ark there will be safety and life — and a seed of the new world that would come after the flood.

And beloved, in this way, the Ark becomes a powerful sign for us of the character of our God.

Will God always judge evil? Yes, of course he will.

But in his judgment, the Living God, whose character is always to have mercy, will also always provide for us a way of escape, a way of protection, a way of deliverance.

And in this way, the Ark becomes a powerful type, a powerful picture of our Lord Jesus Christ and the church that he would build, and that's something that I think is worth reflecting on. Indeed - we will reflect on this more in the weeks to come.

It's also worth remember that our Lord Jesus, remembering the flood that he had sent long ago, is also the one who taught his disciples and us, saying:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.