

The Earth After *the* Flood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 9–11.*

Memory Text: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Years ago a British philosopher and strong supporter of evolution, Bertrand Russell, joked about the climactic conclusion of the evolutionary process: “If I were granted omnipotence, and millions of years to experiment in, I should not think Man much to boast of as the final result of my efforts.”—Dan Falk, quoted in *Universe on a T-Shirt* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 203.

Putting aside the philosopher's error regarding origins, one could understand the cynicism regarding humanity. This point becomes especially apparent regarding the Flood and afterward. You'd think that after a flood, which wiped out the entire earth, people would have gotten the message regarding God's attitude about sin and rebellion; apparently they didn't. The stories that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write don't paint a pretty picture; humanity, obviously, didn't learn much. Things started to degenerate quickly, even immediately.

This week we'll take a look at the early days after the Flood, at the changes that came and at the results. Yet, even amid all this carnage and rebellion, we can see the working of a God who loved the fallen race and worked to save it from itself despite itself, much as He still is doing today.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 11.*

Noah and the New Earth

No doubt Noah and his kin stepped off the ark into a new world, one in some ways radically different from what they had known before. It's hard to imagine what must have gone on in their minds. In one sense, they must have been terrified, seeing the landscape a wreckage. We today, thousands of years later, though we see evidence of the Flood, are used to it: It's all we have ever known. Plus, who knows in what way nature has been able to adjust and heal after the initial devastation. For Noah and those with him, though, it must have been a heart-wrenching, even fearful experience.

Read Genesis 9:1-3. What hope and encouragement did Noah and his family receive from the Lord, especially considering their circumstances?

Compare the above verses with the words of the Lord to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28-30. What differences are there between the two accounts, and what do you think were the reasons for the differences? What great change took place over their relationship to animal life?

The most radical change, of course, came with the introduction of meat eating, something that was not allowed before. Many of the beasts that before were their companions now were to become their meals. Something wonderful, something harmonious, was lost to sin. Isn't that always the case?

Human beings, according to the Bible texts, were not originally carnivores; neither were the animals. In the original earthly paradise, despite the great distinction between human beings and the animals (*Gen. 1:26, 27*), they also were linked in many ways: All were created by God, all had life, and they were to share a similar diet. Perhaps this was all part of God's way of showing humans that despite their superior status, they needed to respect those creatures over whom they had "dominion."

What's some of the wreckage you see in your own life because of sin? What steps can you take toward healing and restoration?

Blood and Life

“But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (*Gen. 9:4-6*).

What do you believe these verses here are saying to us, today, as Christians?

With these verses, we see again the results of sin, of God acknowledging the reality of what life will be like for human beings in a fallen world. It’s very interesting, too, that the command against eating blood is something that clearly predates anything Jewish, anything linked with the Levitical laws of cleanliness and uncleanness. Centuries later, in the book of Acts (*15:20, 29*), the Gentile converts were admonished to, among other things, abstain from blood, more than likely a clear reference to what was happening here in Genesis (*see also Lev. 17:11, 1 Pet. 1:19*).

What reason does God give for the strict prohibition regarding the taking of another human life?

There’s been much debate over the centuries regarding the meaning of these texts and especially their application. In every case of someone killing another person, should that person be killed, regardless of the circumstances? Many Old Testament laws were put in place to deal with special circumstances (*see, for instance, Num. 35:11*). Then, of course, we have numerous Bible texts about forgiveness, turning the cheek, and not judging; then, too, there are the accounts in the Old Testament of the Israelites, at God’s command, wiping out entire cities. Regardless of how one puts all these together and formulates a theology regarding justice and punishment, one point is not debatable: Human life is precious and must be regarded as such. The Lord will surely have His day of reckoning for those who disregard the sacredness of human life (*2 Cor. 5:10*).

After the Deluge *(Gen. 9:18-29)*

No matter the Lord's gracious offers of peace, safety, and prosperity or His warnings of judgment, destruction, and death, folk just don't seem to get it, do they? Of course, we don't need Bible stories to prove that point; after all, we have our own selves—and what more proof do we need?

Read over Genesis 9. After the Flood God establishes a covenant with every living creature, promising never to destroy the world again with a flood, even using the beauty of a rainbow as a token of His promise. What story does God then immediately contrast with this, His promise of this “everlasting covenant”? What messages are in there for us? Also, what does it tell us that righteous Noah (*Gen. 7:1*) should be so heavily involved in this sordid tale?

Noah's words about his children were not forever sealing the fate of posterity; rather, the incident seemed to reveal character traits already there and how these traits, as they often are, would be passed down from one generation to another. “The sin of Ham was not an unintentional transgression. He may have seen his father's shameful condition accidentally, but instead of being filled with sorrow over his father's folly, he rejoiced in what he saw and found delight in publishing it. . . . Ham's two older brothers did not share his perverted feelings. Adam also had had two well-disciplined sons, Abel and Seth, and one child of sin, Cain. Although all had received the same parental love and training, sin manifested itself much more markedly in one than in the others. Now the same spirit of depravity breaks forth in one of Noah's children, while the older sons, reared in the same home and under the same conditions as Ham, show an admirable spirit of decency and self-control. As the evil trends of criminal Cain were perpetuated in his descendants, Ham's degraded nature revealed itself further in his offspring.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 266.

Very often we are so concerned about our sins being forgiven, which, of course, is important (*Rom. 4:7, Eph. 1:7, Col 2:3, 1 John 1:9, 2:12*). Yet, when you read the story of Noah doing something so bad here, what should that tell us about the importance of how our actions, especially the actions of those who have great responsibility, can be fraught with negative consequences? What can you learn from this about how our actions influence others toward either the good or the bad? Think about some next big decision you have to make. What will be its influence on others?

Scoffers—Past and Present

In 2 Peter 2, the apostle writes against false teachers who were once faithful to the Lord and who then turned away. With that background in mind, read 2 Peter 3:1-11 and then answer these questions:

- 1** To what source and authority does Peter immediately point the false teachers and scoffers? Why is that answer so important?
- 2** What's the real motive behind the scoffing? In what ways do we see the same principles manifested today?
- 3** What point is Peter making by reference to the Flood story here? *See 2 Peter 2:5.*

What is fascinating among Peter's words is his statement that the scoffers will say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). These verses point to a dramatic fulfillment of prophecy that has been especially revealed in the past century and a half. Science has proposed a geological interpretation that favors long ages, rather than a sudden catastrophe like the Flood, to account for the surface condition of the earth. In other words, things just keep on as they have before; many of the massive canyons and rock formations didn't come, we are told, by some sudden catastrophe but simply were the result of things continuing as they were from the beginning of creation; they're there only from a long uniform progression of events.

This idea also is the basis of evolution, a steady process of things slowly evolving as they did from the beginning of time, rather than a sudden literal six-day creation of life on the earth, as the Bible teaches. It is remarkable that long ago Peter pointed to these two areas as being the points of contention in the last days. That this has happened as predicted is a strong sign that we are living in a time when we are going to have to make a firm choice on whose side we are going to stand.

Read over again the texts for today in Peter. Might you see yourself in there—some doubts, some questioning, some scoffing? What must be done in order to get you back on the narrow path? *Matt. 7:14.*

The Tower of Babel

Chapter 10 of Genesis then recounts, in a very general sense, the repopulation of the earth after the Flood. People are born, nations are formed, and the masses start spreading out into powers that will, in some cases, appear later in the Bible.

Read Genesis 11:1-10. What example do you see of scientific advancement and what the people intended to do with this knowledge?

Considering their recent history, why might they have wanted a tower that went into heaven?

What reason does the Lord give for wanting to stop them? *See also Gen. 3:22, 6:5.*

“The dwellers on the plain of Shinar disbelieved God’s covenant that He would not again bring a flood upon the earth. Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him. One object before them in the erection of the tower was to secure their own safety in case of another deluge. By carrying the structure to a much greater height than was reached by the waters of the Flood, they thought to place themselves beyond all possibility of danger. And as they would be able to ascend to the region of the clouds, they hoped to ascertain the cause of the Flood.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119.

Perhaps the most fascinating verse in the story of Babel is verse 6. The Lord sees that, working together, these people are going to acquire a great amount of knowledge and technical skill. One would think that would be good; after all, look at how much good technology has done for us today. And yet, the Lord here clearly sees this as something bad and moves to stop it by confounding their language, hence spreading them out and making it much more difficult for them to pool their resources and fulfill their schemes. Why would He do that?

What lesson is here for us? What kind of knowledge are we seeking? What are we doing with that knowledge? What important lessons could this story have for us on a personal level? *See also 2 Tim. 3:7.*

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “After the Flood,” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 105–110.

“The prophecy of Noah was no arbitrary denunciation of wrath or declaration of favor. It did not fix the character and destiny of his sons. But it showed what would be the result of the course of life they had severally chosen and the character they had developed. It was an expression of God’s purpose toward them and their posterity in view of their own character and conduct. As a rule, children inherit the dispositions and tendencies of their parents, and imitate their example; so that the sins of the parents are practiced by the children from generation to generation. Thus the vileness and irreverence of Ham were reproduced in his posterity, bringing a curse upon them for many generations. ‘One sinner destroyeth much good.’ Ecclesiastes 9:18.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 118.

“Geologists claim to find evidence from the earth itself that it is very much older than the Mosaic record teaches. . . .

“But apart from Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Those who reason so confidently upon its discoveries have no adequate conception of the size of men, animals, and trees before the Flood, or of the great changes which then took place. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of conditions differing in many respects from the present, but the time when these conditions existed can be learned only from the Inspired Record. In the history of the Flood, inspiration has explained that which geology alone could never fathom.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 112.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are some ways in which science tends to be another attempt at creating a modern Tower of Babel? Why, like the one in antiquity, is it also doomed to failure?
- ❷ As a class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Share your answers with each other.
- ❸ We, of course, can do nothing about our genes or our genetic traits of character. What can we do, though, to try and lessen, as much as possible, the negative impact of those traits of character? What role does the gospel have in this important work? How does the idea of the new birth fit in with this important concept of character formation?

The Angry Husband

by G. MAZUNDA

A pastor in northern Malawi held evangelistic meetings that resulted in eighteen new believers. On the day of the baptism, a woman ran to the river and asked to be baptized. She had attended the meetings, but fear of her husband had held her back from asking for baptism. The pastor questioned her briefly then baptized her.

Someone saw this woman being baptized and reported it to her husband. When she returned home that afternoon, her furious husband locked her inside the house and took the keys. She could not escape. Then he went looking for the pastor who had baptized his wife. "Who authorized you to baptize my wife without my permission?" he demanded.

The pastor told him that his wife had decided on her own to be baptized. No one had forced her. The still-angry husband threatened to kill the pastor. Then he left.

He meant what he said to the pastor. He rounded up some men and boys, and they marched to the chief's house, for the chief had permitted the religious meetings to take place. Then the gang saw a young Adventist boy walking nearby and began stoning him. Though injured, he survived.

Throughout the following week the woman's husband threatened her. "Don't go to that church!" he demanded. No one who knew this woman's husband ever expected to see her in the church again. But on Sabbath she came to worship. It was youth Sabbath, and the Pathfinders led out.

When her husband learned where his wife had gone, he followed her to the church. When he arrived he saw the young people lined up in formation outside the church. They looked so smart in their uniforms. When they marched into the church, he followed them in and sat down in the back. He soon forgot his anger.

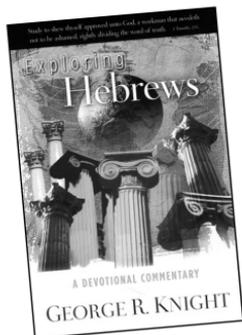
The pastor preached a powerful sermon that day and made an altar call. To everyone's surprise the angry husband stepped out of the row and walked to the front. No longer angry, he was subdued by the Holy Spirit. He wanted the joy, the peace, and the forgiveness that he saw in these Christian young people.

The angry husband remained true to his commitment. He and his wife faithfully worship God together today.

Our mission offerings support evangelism in Malawi, eastern Africa, and around the world.

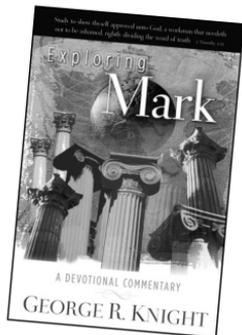
G. MAZUNDA is a women's ministries director in her local church in northern Malawi.

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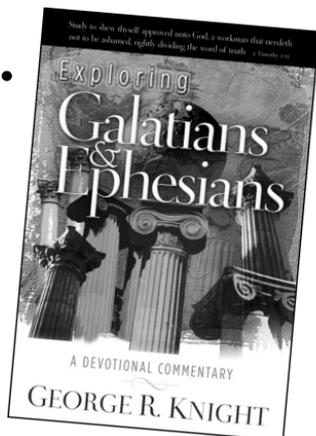
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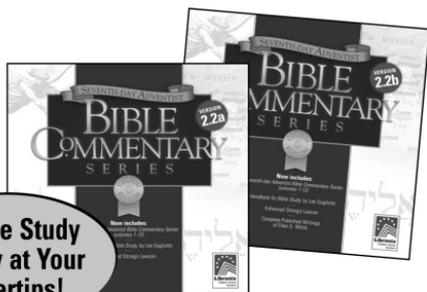
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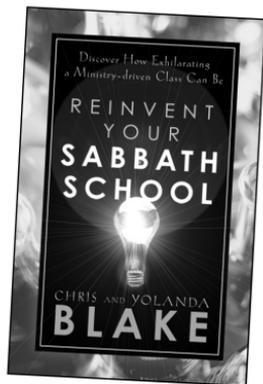
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Jemila wanted to go to school, but her father refused. "Girls work and marry and have babies," he said. "They don't need to read." When Jemila was 10 years old, her father tried to marry her to an old man, but her mother refused. Seething with anger, her father divorced her mother.

"You must go away," Mother told Jemila. "I have friends at the Adventist college. You will be safe there, and you can study." So Jemila went. She works long hours to earn her keep and pay her school fees, but she is happy. "I am learning at last," she says. "And I have met Jesus."

Hundreds of young girls in Ethiopia have escaped early marriage and found refuge and hope at Adventist schools in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian Adventist College has started a secondary school that has 1,000 students. But it has no dormitories, no administration building, no classrooms. I want to help change that, so I'm giving a generous Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on December 30. I want to help young people such as Jemila prepare for a brighter future. For me, it's personal.



Jemila

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