

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?

Key Text: *Genesis 8:15-19*

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss some of the changes that occurred after the Flood.
2. To show that the Word of God transcends time.
3. To reveal the consequences of building the Tower of Babel.

Lesson Outline:

I. After the Flood (*Gen. 9:1-6*)

- A. The Lord assures Noah and his family that all living creatures would fear them.
- B. In addition to the “green herbs” (*vs. 3*), God gives “every moving thing that lives” to humankind for food (*NKJV*).
- C. The Lord gives explicit instructions that humankind “must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (*vs. 4, NIV*).

II. The Authenticity of God’s Word (*2 Pet. 2:5*)

- A. The book of 2 Peter validates the Genesis account of the Flood.
- B. The correlation between the Old and the New Testaments gives assurance that the Word of God is true.
- C. Peter’s prophecy that there would be scoffers in the last days is evident today (*2 Pet. 3:3-6*).

III. The Tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:1-9*)

- A. The wickedness of the human race continues despite its near extinction by water.
- B. Human beings rebel against God by erecting a tower that is designed to reach “unto heaven” (*vs. 4*).
- C. The Lord confounds the language of the people to cause them to disperse across the earth.

Summary: Although many question the legitimacy of Genesis, Peter proclaimed that the earth would in the last days be filled with scoffers just as it was in the days of Noah. His prophecy gives us assurance of the validity of the Old Testament, including Genesis.

COMMENTARY

In the previous commentary we noted the parallels between the sequence of events of Creation week and those of the two stages of the Flood. We saw how Genesis portrays the receding of the Flood as a re-creation of the world. Similarly, the covenant that God makes with Noah after the Flood also points back to certain features of Creation week. As we shall see, these parallel features testify to God’s eternal faithfulness and to the immutability of His covenant promises. God seals His covenant to Noah with a rainbow, a symbol

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*).

of His promise not to destroy the earth again by water. Later, we see God keep that promise, despite the rebellion at the Tower of Babel.

I. The Rainbow Covenant

In Genesis 1 God ended His creation with the Sabbath rest. Later, after the Flood in Genesis 9, He makes a covenant between Himself and all living creatures (*Gen. 9:8-17*). The rainbow will be its symbol. (Interestingly, the Old Testament uses only three symbols to represent a covenant: the Sabbath [*Exod. 31:16*], the rainbow [*Gen. 9:13*], and circumcision [*Gen. 17:11*]. While God establishes the circumcision covenant specifically with Abraham’s descendants, the rainbow covenant is with “all flesh” on the earth [*Gen. 9:17*].) The fact that the re-creation of the world after the Flood concludes with a covenant applying to the whole world further confirms that its parallel at the end of Creation week (the Sabbath) also is meant for the entire earth. The rainbow, the sign of that covenant, becomes a promise of God’s mercy to all future generations of a fallen race. “In heaven the semblance of a rainbow encircles the throne and overarches the head of Christ. . . . When man by his great wickedness invites the divine judgments, the Savior, interceding with the Father in his behalf, points to the bow in the clouds, to the rainbow around the throne and above His own head, as a token of the mercy of God toward the repentant sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 107.

The rainbow covenant not only points back to Creation week; it directs our attention forward to God’s call of Abraham and the covenant that God makes with him. It ties the first eleven chapters of Genesis (often called the Primeval History) with the rest of the book. In both covenants God “establishes” them (*Gen. 9:9, 11, 17; compare 17:7, 19, 21*). The two covenants are eternal (*Gen. 9:16; compare 17:13, 19*) and, as we have already seen, both have a sign (*Gen. 9:12, 13, 17; compare 17:11*). Also, the Lord wants those with whom He made it to “remember” (*Gen. 9:15, 16*) and to “keep” the covenant (*Gen. 17:9, 10*). (Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12, both used to refer to the Sabbath commandment, show that Scripture regards “keep” and “remember” as equivalent terms when employed in a covenant context.)

II. The Tower of Babel

While God is faithful, humanity breaks faith with God, sometimes with dire consequences as the Flood narrative and the rebellion at the Tower of Babel both show.

God had told Adam and Eve that He wanted them to fill the earth with human beings (*Gen. 1:28*), and He repeated the injunction with Noah and his family after the Flood, requesting them to disperse and populate the entire world (*Gen. 9:1*). But Noah’s descendants refused to do so. In defiance of the divine command, they decided to build a

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?

city and then a tower where they could remain together. Beyond that they declared that they wanted to “make a name” for themselves. Up to this point in the book of Genesis the pattern has always been that of a superior giving a name to someone: God to His creation (*Gen. 1:5, 8, 10*); Adam to the animals (*Gen. 2:20*); a husband to his wife and parents to children (*Gen. 4:25, 26; 5:3*). But the people of Shinar shatter

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 9:3; Leviticus 24:17; Daniel 12:4; 2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9; Revelation 22:14, 15*

- 1 After the Flood, God permits meat eating for the first time. Some have said that He does this because of the devastation of plant life at the time. Others have said that the introduction of flesh eating is intended to shorten the individual life span and limit the damage any one person could do in a single life. How do you view these explanations? What is the evidence for either of them?
- 2 Genesis 9:4-6 seems to suggest that God instituted, among other things, capital punishment, at least for murder. Do you think this is the case? If not, how would you explain the language that seems to indicate that God actively requires the life of the evildoer? Do you agree that the purpose of this passage is to describe, not prescribe, the present state of affairs? Explain.
- 3 After the Flood, Noah’s sons, and arguably Noah himself, exhibited many of the same traits that led to the Flood in the first place. Do you think God expected the Flood to cure or curb humanity’s tendency toward sin? If not, what do you think God intended by permitting these tendencies to manifest themselves again?
- 4 Second Peter 3:5, 6 predicts that people at the end of time will claim that the events in Genesis did not take place as written but that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (*vs. 4*). It is interesting to note that the people mentioned here do not disbelieve in the fact of divine creation as such. They merely disbelieve the literal details. Can we see parallels in current efforts to harmonize the biblical account of Creation with long ages of time, divinely guided evolution, and so forth?
- 5 The Tower of Babel story indicates that the people of the time had once again acquired a great deal of technical skill and were using it toward questionable ends. In this current age we are seeing, once again, great technological advancement and great anxiety concerning its possible uses. Are Christians today correct in feeling ambivalent toward such things as stem-cell research, genetic engineering, and so on? Explain.

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 pattern by seeking to establish a name on their own initiative.

In rebellion against God's purpose for humanity, they construct the city and the tower from fired brick, mortared together with bitumen, or asphalt. The plains of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers lack sources of building stone. It probably had to be imported at considerable expense from the distant mountains. Most construction employed mud or clay brick. But the terse literary style of the Bible, probably mentions the use of brick and asphalt mortar for another reason. The people of Shinar are building in opposition to God with flimsy materials. They could not raise the tower very high before the bricks would begin crumbling under their own weight. Even then God blocked their plan by transforming their single human language into several. The people who wanted to make a name for themselves did exactly that. Their city acquired the name Babel, which biblical tradition translates as confusion (*Gen. 11:9*).

Even after God saved a tiny remnant of humanity and made a covenant not to destroy the earth again by water, humanity rebelled against Heaven at the Tower of Babel. But amid all the confusion,

Witnessing

Following the Flood, God presented Noah and his family with a new start. They had the opportunity many of us only can dream about—the opportunity to begin fresh, to start over, and to try things a second time. For a time, God's influence permeated all of life. In time, however, life reverted back to pre-Flood days.

How awful, we say. What wasted opportunities, we say. We never would have allowed that to happen had we been there, we say. Wait. Can we be so sure? To see how we might have behaved, let's consider how we're behaving now in our homes, communities, and schools.

Do we

—love one another equally, disregarding cultural, racial, and social differences?

—pursue only Christlike friendships, pushing aside those who would lead us into temptation?

—follow Christ's example rather than looking for ways to circumvent His influence in our lives?

—place others' needs before our own?

—witness to others at every opportunity?

—intentionally/unintentionally pass on to our children love for sinful pursuits?

Are we able to state confidently that our time here on earth is used wisely in preparing others around us for the soon return of Jesus Christ? If not, now is a very good time to review the fate of those in Noah's day who spent their time in worldly pursuits. We do not want to miss the boat the second time around!

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.*

God keeps His promises, reminding us that He alone is faithful; when we deserve death, God intercedes with mercy. “Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations” (*Deut. 7:9*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Share your knowledge of gardening. What kind of plants do you prefer? How do you ensure a more abundant yield? After the Flood, God restated His original intention that His followers fill and inhabit the earth: “ ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’ ” (*Gen 9:1b, NIV; also see Gen. 1:28*). What directions did God give to make this possible? Read Genesis 9:1-7. How did God’s instructions after the Flood differ from those He gave to Adam and Eve? In what ways were they similar? What does this tell you about the consequences of sin?

Thought Questions:

1 Look up the word *covenant* in at least six passages of Scripture. Compare your findings with other class members. What does it mean for God to make a covenant with humankind? See Genesis 9:12-17. If you were doing an objective “risk-benefit analysis,” what risks did God take, and what benefits did humankind reap? Consider your personal journey with God. What have you done to affirm your relationship with Him?

2 When you read about Noah’s sons (*see Gen. 9:18-27*), what do you learn about sin and righteousness? Why is Noah’s prophecy about his sons so stark in regard to Ham’s descendants and so encouraging about Shem and Japheth’s? Covenant with God to invite Him to help you as you make daily choices on how to spend your time and talents.

Application Question:

As you read the story of the Tower of Babel recorded in Genesis 11, consider the time line that led up to this rebellion. Make a list of the characters who were on God’s side and a list of those who denied God’s involvement in their lives. Discuss why there were so many scoffers, even so close to the time of Creation. In 2 Peter 3:3, 4, we read about scoffers at the end of time, our generation. How will you pursue an aggressive strategy to build a positive connection to God? In what ways will you reorder your daily agenda/schedule in order that time spent with Him is a priority? Plan to share your new schedule with at least one close friend. Encourage each other to spend meaningful time with God.

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:

- 1** 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?
- 2** As a class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. Share your answers with each other.
- 3** 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?