

Lessons from Noah's Ark: Many Rooms Plus One Door Equals Lots of Grace

Genesis 6:9-22

Dr. Michael Helms

January 22

Once you get past the coloring book and the puzzle phase of life, the story of Noah and the Ark stops becoming a sweet children's story and begins to carry a lot of theological freight.

If you didn't grow up hearing this story, it may be met with some skepticism that such a thing could happen.

How could a man that lived before meteoric iron was used by humans find ways to fell trees, make boards, and construct a vessel the size that God commanded to house every animal on the planet for 40 days and nights to survive a flood that covered the earth?

The logistics of getting all those animals on board an ark is certainly a mystery. This is obviously one of the miracles of God at work in this story. I have trouble getting our dog into come in the house. I can't imagine gathering every animal known to board a boat.

The movie "Noah" does a good job imagining what it might have been like as the animals just showed up at the appointed time and filed into the ark as if they were in robotic motion.

The biblical story just says that the animals "came to Noah and entered the ark. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord shut him in." (v. 7:15,16). Too bad the mosquitoes and the roaches got the message.

It's very hard to picture life on board the 450-floating vessel, the first one ever made that held one family and the animals of every living thing for 40 days and 40 nights with only one window. I'm not sure where the family quarters were located on this boat but I would have been clamoring for a window seat.

I don't remember coloring any baby dinosaurs or dinosaur eggs as a part of the ark when I was a child. That never seemed to be a serious part of the discussion among religious leaders until a few decades ago when people began to realize that if you believe the earth is only about 6,000 years old, you've got to put dinosaurs on the ark.

Putting dinosaurs on the ark is troubling because it pits biblical faith and scientific reason against one another for many people.

God is the creator of the universe. Therefore, God is the author of all science. Anything that science can prove is just God pulling back to curtain to allow us to see a little bit of his work behind the scenes. Christians should have no problems with their faith and science coexisting. We don't have to make a choice between science and our faith. We can hold onto both and be a faithful follower of Jesus and faithfully interpret the Bible.

God is a big God. God is big enough to make an old earth just as God is big enough to make an infinite space. We don't have to reduce the size of God or force science into a very narrow interpretation of the Bible. The Bible wasn't written for that purpose.

The Bible was written to inform us of the God who is behind our beginnings. It is written to tell us of God's love for us and how our sin separates us from God and his blessings. It is written to show us how God has continued to lead, guide, and direct people through his Spirit, his prophets, and his Word, so we can have abundant life and eternal life. God did that most clearly through Jesus, who was God in the flesh.

Through Jesus, God identified with all of humanity's problems, even to the point of taking our sin upon himself through the cross. His divinity was proven through his sinless life, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into heaven.

However, when we read accounts of God's interaction with us throughout history, stories like Noah and the Ark, what is this story supposed to teach us about God, especially when it has so many elements that make it sound so story bookish to unbelievers?

You know an unbeliever is going to ask, "What if someone just made this story up?"

When I was in college, I discovered that the story of Noah's Ark isn't the only flood story in Western Literature. In fact, it isn't even the oldest.

The oldest piece of western literature is called "The Epic of Gilgamesh," so it predates the writing of the book of Genesis as much as 700 years. Parts of it sound a lot like the Noah story.

The fact that another culture had a story with some similar qualities is very interesting. At first, such a similar story seems to cast doubt on the biblical story. Just because it was written down first doesn't mean that it existed first.

Thousands of years ago, cultures were very oral. Before stories were ever written down they were told for hundreds, even thousands of years.

So, let me show you something interesting. The Epic of Gilgamesh poem comes from ancient Mesopotamia. Where is ancient Mesopotamia? It is where the Bible said the Great Flood occurred.

We are told that the ark came to rest on Mt. Ararat, which is in modern day Turkey, just to the west of the Iraq border.

The fact that more than one flood story existed in this region is good evidence that there was a Great Flood. Both the Gilgamesh Epic and the biblical story involve a man escaping a flood in an ark.

Now who is that God called from this region to travel to a new land?

He asked this man to go to this new land on faith and he would make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens. It was Abram.

I believe that the story of Noah's Ark first traveled to the land of Canaan and with Abram, who became Abraham.

Abraham was known as a man who walked by faith and not by sight. He went to a land where God told him to go, a land flowing with milk and honey, even though he had never seen the land. He went there by faith.

Abraham may have been willing to go because he knew the story of Noah, the story that you and I know.

While others in his region may have been spinning the story of the Great Flood in a totally different way that left God out, Abraham held on to the God-inspired story of Noah because it helped him understand how God was speaking to him. This story later became added to the growing repertoire of stories that helped the Jewish people understand, Yahweh, the maker of the heavens and the earth.

I admit, it would be easy to get lost in the details of a story like Noah and the ark.

However, this story is not designed to answer every question about how ark was built, the age of the earth, how Noah kept all the animals alive on the ark, how it smelled inside the ark, whose job it was to feed the animals, or whether there was a penguin on board.

A \$100 million replica of the ark in Kentucky may help some people believe but Noah didn't have access to their tools or to a Lowes to purchase his supplies, so it doesn't do a lot for me.

This story is designed to teach us that sin is costly. Sin leads to death and we need the grace of God to escape our sin problem.

Despite how bad it got, God didn't give up on humanity or His creation. Because of His grace, he saved a remnant.

The scripture says that Noah found favor with God. The word for favor is the word "chanan," (Khaw-nan). It means that God had mercy on Noah. He showed kindness to him. God stooped down and showed some grace to this one man and his family.

Did Noah deserve God's grace? No. Noah was part of humanity and as a part of humanity his heart had sin and evil thoughts like everyone else's. We see this by the sin Noah committed after the ark settled on dry ground, but the difference in Noah and the other people seems to be that when God spoke to Noah, he listened.

Noah did not have Christian radio. He did not have a Bible. He did not have Sunday school or a worship service to attend. He did not have a pastor. He did not have a men's group. He did not have a religious App to help him with his quiet time. He did not have a television with a religious

station where a prosperity preacher told him if he'd build the Ark he'd strike gold on Mt. Ararat when he landed.

Noah had what is common to all of us, the voice of the Spirit of God that speaks to us. You've heard that voice.

The Prophet Elijah described the Spirit as the "still small voice of God."

The voice of God speaks to us because God loves us.

It is out of grace that God comes to us to extend an invitation that we take up residence in one of his many rooms. It is out of grace that God comes to us and seeks to take up residence in our hearts.

Just as Noah made enough rooms on the Ark for all the animals, the Bible teaches that God has plenty of rooms for all of us in his family. Jesus said before he ascended back to heaven that he was going there to prepare a place for all of us.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." John 14:1-4 (NRSV)

There were many rooms in the ark but there was only one door.

The text says that once they were all in the ark God closed them in.

Saying that God closed them in is a way of saying that God was protecting them, that they were safe because they passed through that door.

We can try to figure out all the logistical details of this story. We can build an ark and try to show three dimensionally what the ark might have looked like but it will never erase all our questions. In fact, it may create more.

The details of how tall and how long the ark was or what kind of wood it was made of are all interesting details that flavor the story but these are not the most important elements.

This story points to something much more basic and simple. Noah, his family and the animals had one door to enter through. There seems to be a message there, because we have one door through which we can access God's grace and that door is Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:9-10 (NKJV)

Do you believe Jesus? Will you allow other things to steal the grace that he offers you?

What about you? Have you come through the door Jesus has provided for you by faith and received the grace of God? Is one of the rooms in heaven reserved for you? Don't let doubt be the thief that comes and steals and destroys your relationship with God.

You can be an intellectual and still have faith. You can embrace science and still have faith. If you have doubts about science and an old earth you can still have faith.

If you want to believe in a young earth, that's fine, just come to Jesus, that's what's most important.

However, you cannot come to God without faith. You cannot receive the Lord without grace. That's a gift. That's the gift Noah, his family, and even the animals received.

Abram walk more than a thousand miles by faith. If you've never done so, won't you walk a few steps and profess your faith in God this morning and be baptized. Accept God's grace before God closes the door.

This invitation is open to you, or any who will come and join us in proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

© Copyright 2017 by John Michael Helms