

# God, Creation, and Chaos: What the Flood Ultimately Teaches Us about the History of the World

## Rationale

So often, when we think about the idea of creation, we think about the so-called natural order. In this sense, the idea of creation is something that belongs solely to the domain of the natural sciences: physics and chemistry; biology, astronomy, and geology. While many conservative Christians believe that they are protecting the authority of Scripture in affirming a young earth, six-day creation, there is also the unintended effect of reducing the claims of Scripture to the concerns of the natural, physical world. The story of the flood is an excellent example of this, which reduces the entire narrative of Gen 6 – 9 to a rather narrow set of concerns related to natural history: Was there a historical flood? If so, how wide of a region did it cover? And if it was worldwide, then there is the additional scientific question that asks how such a flood could have even been possible. Entire theories of science have been built around reading Gen 6 – 9 as a natural phenomenon.

In reading Genesis this way, however, many of the central features of the story are neglected. This sermon series will focus on three in particular: (i) Genesis' account of the relationship between creation, the flood, and moral evil; related, (ii) the way that the language of Scripture portrays the flood event as a judgment and the undoing of creation ("chaos"), which cannot be understood as merely natural history; and finally, (iii) the centrality that Scripture places throughout on the relationship between God and humanity, especially exemplified in the idea of "covenant faithfulness." To strip Scripture of its own language on the way to our own reconstruction of a past, natural episode loses something of the story, jeopardizes the claims that Scripture itself makes, and forces it to speak more authoritatively on some issues that are perhaps peripheral to it (and thus unanswerable).

Through a consideration of issues like the goodness of creation, the biblical idea of "chaos," the problem of worldwide "violence," God's covenantal faithfulness, and the first glimmers of "recreation"—all explicitly and intentionally present in Genesis—this sermon series will attempt to cast this central episode of Primeval history in biblical and theological context, while also demonstrating humility and openness regarding the state of geological study, and careful reflection on what Scripture demands regarding the historicity and scope of the event.

## Sermon Titles and Texts

- Sermon 1:** "God's Good Pleasure for and with His Creature: Creation, Chaos, and the God of Order. A Biblical Prelude to a Tragic Tale" (Gen 1:1 – 2:3)
- Sermon 2:** " 'The Earth was Filled with Violence': Moral Evil, Natural History, and the Unexpected Anti-Fulfillment of Creation. A Grievous Story" (Gen 3:1 – 6:12)
- Sermon 3:** "God's Judgment on the Earth: Creation, Flood, and Chaos in Biblical Context; More than a Natural Phenomenon" (Gen 6:9 – 8:19; cf. Gen 1:2; Isa 34; Jer 4; Ezk 14:12 – 23)
- Sermon 4:** " 'God Remembered Noah': Creation, Faith, and the Order of Righteousness. The Red Thread in an Otherwise Grievous Story" (Gen 1:28 – 30; 6:9 – 8:22; 1 Peter 3:18 – 22)
- Sermon 5:** " 'A Sign of the Covenant': God's Enduring Faithfulness, the Noahic Covenant, and the Hope of Recreation. A Biblical Postscript about our Merciful God" (Gen 9:1 – 17; cf. Isa 65:17 – 25; 66:15 – 24; Rom 8:18 – 30; 1 Cor 15; Rev 21 – 22)

## Bibliography

- Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1969.
- Gonzales, Robert R. *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Book of Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.
- Gunkel, Hermann. *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Translated by K. William Whitney. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Hill, Carol A., and Stephen O. Moshier, "Flood Geology and the Grand Canyon: A Critique." *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith*, 61.2 (2009), 99 – 115.
- Lacocque, Andre. The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006.
- Levenson, Jon Douglas. *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Löning, Karl, and Erich Zenger. *To Begin With, God Created ... : Biblical Theologies of Creation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary 1. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rethinking Genesis 1-11: Gateway to the Bible*. Didsbury Lecture Series. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015.
- Whitcomb, J. C., and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood*. Grand Rapids: Baker Hook House, 1961.