

“Our Biblical Worldview”
(9) Living with view to the final judgment and life beyond

Introduction:

Let us begin this morning with the reading of Hebrews 11:7, which records the saving faith that characterized Noah.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah’s faith was shown in his life-long preparation for the judgment of God that was coming upon the world. He had believed what God had said respecting His coming judgment on the world of his day through a great cataclysmic flood. His faith moved him to build a great ark which delivered him, his family, and all of the animals which joined them from God’s wrath upon sin. Because he was a man who ordered his life in faith according to God’s word, he became an “heir of the righteousness”, that is, he will be found to be righteous through faith when he stands before the Lord at the final judgment of all mankind. Just as we are given the gift of Christ’s righteousness through faith alone, so Noah also was a recipient of that grace of justification through faith alone due to the grace of God alone. Upon God revealing Himself and His word to Noah of His impending judgment upon the world, Noah began to see the world and his responsibility before the Lord in a different light. He ordered all of his life thereafter according to what he had come to understand and believe about God and His future judgment of the world. He stood out as a man distinct from the world about him. His life of faith was ridiculed. He was mocked, but he is with the Lord and His people even now because of his faith in God and His Word.

The Word of God teaches that Christians, if taught rightly, have a worldview that is distinct and different from that which characterizes those of the fallen world in which we live. We have values and standards that differ from the people of this world. We have desires and interests that are distinct from those who live only for this world. We have expectations and aspirations that distinguish us from them. One of the significant differences between us and the world, if we are thinking rightly, that is, thinking biblically, is that we live in preparation and anticipation of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the judgment that He will execute upon the human race. Although we are living in this world, we are not living chiefly for the things of this world or what we may acquire or achieve in this life. We live with view to the coming of the Lord and the judgment that He will execute on the human race and of the new heavens and new earth that will follow as our destiny, which is God’s promise to the people of God. We are as Abraham who “waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

This view of watching and preparing for the realization of God’s promises and that we must pass through much tribulation, even the judgment of God, on our way to our final homeland, has characterized the people of God throughout history. When God revealed that His judgment was about to occur, He often warned His people to flee from that place, lest they, too, be overthrown along with the wicked. We read of Lot, his wife, and his daughters fleeing from Sodom and Gomorrah. We read that when God purposed to deliver a Jewish remnant from exile in Babylon, God commanded them to flee out of the city of Babylon, which He was about to overthrow.¹ And in the New Testament the Lord Jesus warned His disciples to flee Jerusalem when His judgment was about to fall upon it. Jesus said,

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who

¹ Isa. 48:20

are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.”

This was fulfilled in AD 70 after the Roman troops had laid siege to the city and destroyed it. And when the Lord brought us to salvation, we similarly fled from God’s impending judgment upon us. We took to heart His pronouncement of our damnation if we had continued in our sin. We fled from the wrath to come unto Jesus Christ in repentance from our sin and exercising faith in Him as our Savior and Lord. It is said of Christians that we

“have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus” (Heb. 6:18-20)

But there were other times rather than God telling His people to flee immediately from His impending wrath, He told them to prepare themselves for His judgment that would be poured out upon His enemies, but for them it was in the indefinite future. This is how we are to live in the world. We are to live with view to the future coming of Jesus Christ, the judgment of the world which He executes through history, and fully and finally at the end of history, which will then be followed by the glorious life promised us in eternity. As Peter wrote, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13). But it is also said with respect to our destiny, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). And the Lord has spoken to us through the hand of Peter these words:

¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy... ¹⁷For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’ ¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

Living in our preparation for the coming judgment of God is illustrated and foreshadowed in historical events recorded in the Scriptures. And perhaps the clearest case may be seen in the salvation of Noah and his family from God’s judgment upon the world through the great flood recorded in the early chapters of Genesis. Let us turn there to draw some spiritual lessons that will help shape our biblical worldview.

I. The increase of sin from the fall unto the calling of Noah

We read in the early chapters of Genesis that once sin had entered the world through Adam’s sin, it became more frequent, more egregious, and more pervasive through the subsequent generations. Let us consider this downgrade period of history, this descent into deep depravity.

A. Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4)

The first narrated episode of history after the fall is that of a man killing his brother and denying the fact and responsibility for having done so.² Shortly after sin entered the world its hideous nature began to be manifested. The struggle between the “seed of the woman” and “the seed of the serpent” began immediately; Cain rose to slay his righteous brother, Abel.³ Both men presented offerings to God. God accepted Abel’s

² It is popular to say that the episode is designed to show the struggle between two ancient ways of life: the nomadic and the farmer. For reasons why this was not the role intended by the writer, see H. C. Brichto, “Cain and Abel” in **The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible**, sup. vol. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.121.

³ This was the first act of hostility and injustice that the serpent’s seed (the reprobate) heaped upon the seed of the woman (the elect) (Gen. 3:15).

sacrifice offered in faith, but He rejected Cain's sacrifice. The reason why Cain's offering was not accepted is not specifically stated, however, it seems that God indicated to Cain that his sacrifice would be accepted if he had "done well" (4:7). It has always been popular preaching to say that Cain's sacrifice was not a blood sacrifice whereas Abel's was, and therefore Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable to God, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). However, this is saying something that is not stated in the text. There is no statement these were sacrifices for sin. Later in the Law of Moses sacrifices were prescribed of the type that Cain had offered to God.⁴ Farmers commonly offered grain to the Lord. Shepherds would offer a sacrifice from their flocks. Apparently it was Cain's heart or life before God which rendered his offering unacceptable.

It is not to be doubted, that Cain conducted himself as hypocrites are accustomed to do; namely, that he wished to appease God, as one discharging a debt, by external sacrifices, without the least intention of dedicating himself to God. But this is true worship, to offer ourselves as spiritual sacrifices to God. When God sees such hypocrisy, combined with gross and manifest mockery of Himself, it is not surprising that He hates it, and is unable to bear it; whence also it follows, that He rejects with contempt the works of those who withdraw themselves from Him. For it is His will, first to have us devoted to Himself; He then seeks our works in testimony of our obedience to Him, but only in the second place.⁵

God gave a warning to Cain that he was vulnerable to sin. He was about to be pounced upon by the beast, but he was to master it (4:7). It is shown through Cain that all of Adam and Eve's posterity are to resist and conquer sin when temptation comes. Cain failed. He rose to murder his brother. When God confronted him, "Where is your brother Abel?", Cain showed the effects of the fall to which his parents had subjected him. He lied to God. He denied responsibility. He showed his crass ignorance of the nature of God as had his parents in presuming that God had not seen him commit his sin. He also revealed the effect of sin in his callousness of heart toward his brother. He was without natural affection.

Even the creation groaned from under Cain's crime. The earth had been forced to drink the blood of an innocent man shed upon it. The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance for the injustice of his brother taking away his life (4:10).⁶ God said to Cain, "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (4:11). The earth would no longer co-operate in feeding Cain for he had fed it with his brother's blood. God cursed Cain. As God sent Adam and Eve from the garden, Cain was sent "from the face of the ground" (4:14). God consigned him to a life of wandering in the earth away from His presence, which was essentially a death sentence. Cain said, "It will come about that whoever finds me will kill me" (4:14). There is no suggestion of remorse for his crime, but Cain did have fear and sorrow of its consequences. God in His mercy set a sign upon Cain, so that his life would be spared by others. Cain "went out from the presence of the Lord", which was a further departure from God than even His parents had experienced. He survived to have descendants (4:17ff),⁷ but it is apparent that the effects of sin became aggravated in them to even a greater degree (4:23f). Mankind was departing farther and farther from God as it plunged deeper and deeper into sin. Genesis 4:16-23 records the ungodly lineage of Cain culminating in Lamech, an evil and vengeful man.

In this episode we see several things about the nature of sin. Sin does not stand still, but if not dealt with thoroughly, will fester and worsen, showing itself more hideous and pervasive in a person's life or in the society that does not address it quickly and righteously. Unless the Lord causes sin to be arrested through His temporal judgments or through the grace of regeneration of the sinner, it will continue to increase in its manifestation of evil until the time that God intervenes in His judgment, bringing an end to sin in His overthrow of the wicked.

⁴ Exod. 22:29; 23:19

⁵ Calvin, **Genesis**, p. 196.

⁶ See also Heb. 12:24.

⁷ The age-old question and challenge levelled, "Where did Cain get his wife?" arises at this point. The answer is that they came from the same source for the people who would rise up and kill him (4:14). The text records that Adam lived many hundreds of years and had other sons and daughters (5:4). Seth was born when Adam was 130 years old (5:3). There could have been large numbers of people living who had descended from our first parents.

But this this episode also reveals to us several things about the nature of God and His ways with sinners. First, God's rule over His creation and over man continued even after the entrance of sin into the world. God is still the Sovereign King. God's right and ability to rule over the creation had not been forfeited by Him, nor wrested from Him, due to man's sin. Second, God continued to have fellowship with mankind even after He had sent Adam and Eve out of the garden. God had not abandoned the race after it had fallen. He came to them and spoke with them. Third, God judges sin in the lives of people, indicated by His punishment of Cain for his crime. Fourth, yet we see that God showed mercy on Cain in that He gave him a mark which assured his preservation. God is a merciful and longsuffering God even to us, His sinful creatures. In conclusion, we have portrayed before us in Genesis 4 a good God who continues to show favor toward man and extends His mercy to him, nevertheless, man continued his descent into sin and his departure from the presence and blessing of God.

The episode concludes with a word which indicates there are some among the race who yet maintain a relationship with God. God in His mercy gives another son to Adam and Eve, Seth, who replaces the slain son. Through Seth's lineage "men began to call upon the LORD" (Gen. 4:26).

B. Events leading to the flood (Gen. 5-6:8)

The account of the world-wide flood reveals how pervasive and extensive sin had become in humanity. It also, of course, reveals God's attitude and reaction toward sin in His world. What seemed to be a rather minor infraction of God's law in the garden is now revealed as having totally corrupted human nature resulting in a race characterized by violence and immorality. Humanity invoked the disgust and anger of God who had created them. The only remedy was to wash and cleanse the world of its pollution by a great deluge.

The genealogy of Genesis 5 records the continual gracious blessing of God upon humanity through the lineage of Seth, who was God's replacement of slain Abel (4:25). God blessed the people whom He had created. In contrast to the lineage of Cain, godliness was present in Seth's descendants. They "began to call upon the name of the LORD" (4:26). Enoch had walked with God (5:24). And another Lamech is mentioned, who is a godly man who desires "rest" (5:29). The good Lamech fathers Noah through whom he hopes to have his desires realized. We read Genesis 5:28 and 29,

"Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, 'This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.'"

This Lamech is set forth in contrast with the Lamech in the lineage of Cain who longed for violent vengeance (4:23, 24).

But then, the godly line of Seth corrupted itself. The descendants of Seth, the "sons of God", intermarried with the "daughters of men," the cursed sons of Cain (Gen. 6:1f), and as a result apostatized from God and became morally corrupted for having failed to remain separated.⁸ Once again the seed of the serpent would oppose and corrupt the seed of the woman. But God would not overlook their sin, for the world had become utterly corrupted. Here is Genesis 6:1-8:

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ²that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.

³And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." ⁴There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward,

⁸ It is commonly accepted by scholars that this is a mythical account of angels and women having relations resulting in super human offspring. Some conservative interpreters hold the view that this literally occurred. The Lord Jesus indicated that angels did not marry, in other words, angels were incapable of procreating (Luke 20:36). I accept this and would like to think the writer of Genesis had enough sense to know as much. The traditional Christian position is that this account describes the intermarrying of godly and ungodly people, the seed of the woman with the seed of the serpent, resulting in the complete corruption of all.

when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.

⁵Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

The time had arrived when the wrath of God would come upon "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). This is the way that God orders history. He tolerates sin, showing forth His goodness in His mercy and kindness, but if it does not result in man's repentance from sin, He brings forth His judgment within history. He has always governed His world in this way, and He always will. There is no hope for our nation, for our present unless the Lord brings temporal judgment upon us of such a degree and nature that it results in national humility and repentance. Unless and until that occurs, the Lord will continue to take us down.

God had declared, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh" (6:4). Man was of a complete different nature than God. Man is "flesh." Man was "incurably corrupt, and carnal, and sensual, so that it is labour lost to strive with him."⁹ God's own people had defected from Him, resisting and striving against Him, and having polluted themselves, they lived as all others. God in His mercy gave a measure of time for people to turn from their sin--120 years (6:4). But time did not cure what is inherently sinful, for corruption and violence worsened, permeating all segments of humanity. Rather than God's goodness leading them to repentance, mankind perceived God's forbearance as their further license to sin. As one wrote,

The threatened vengeance moved with reluctant step. Long-suffering suffered long. Years dawned and closed, and still the sun was bright, the skies were clear. Surely if space for repentance brought the grace of repentance, the world would have been clad in sackcloth of penitence and shame. But something far mightier than external opportunity must work, before a soul can feel, and confess, and forsake its sins. Man, not arrested from on high, is man going downward in guilt. A lengthened respite is often nothing but a lengthened iniquity.¹⁰

When God "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thought of his heart was only evil continually," He was grieved, being sorry that He had made man (6:7). And because God is the Creator, He is free and right to be man's Destroyer. God purposed to destroy all living things from the face of the earth and would have done so completely, had not Noah "found favor" in His eyes (6:8).

C. The calling and commission of Noah (Gen. 6:9-22)

Here is the account of God's dealings with Noah:

⁹This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

¹³And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. ¹⁵And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life;

⁹ Matthew Henry, vol. 1, p. 52.

¹⁰ Henry Law, *The Gospel in Genesis* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1961), p. 70.

everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. ²¹And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.”

²²Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Noah is described as a “righteous man”, “blameless in his time”, and he “walked with God.” Here was a man whose life pleased God.¹¹ God regarded Noah alone to be righteous (cf. 7:1). Noah had found grace in the eyes of God (Gen. 6:5). Noah did not find God gracious to him because he had been righteous, for that would not be biblical grace (cf. Rom. 4:4). Noah had been righteous because God had dealt with him according to His grace. If it had not been for the grace of God producing faith and righteousness in Noah, he would have been as all others, living in sin and condemned by his sin. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.”

God had determined that He would stand in covenant relationship with Noah and his descendants (6:18-22).¹² God informs people who walk with Him of His plans and purposes, and so He spoke to Noah of His intentions. “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of the; behold I am about to destroy them with the earth” (6:13). And because Noah had found favor with Him, God made provision for him to escape His judgment on the world by instructing him to build an ark (6:14-17). Noah’s preservation, and those with him, is assured, because God determined to establish a covenant with him (6:18). This secured the others’ preservation because of their relationship to him. Noah followed the commandments of God fully in preparing an ark and gathering living things into it (6:22). After God had given instructions for Noah to build the ark, it is said of him, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.”

Noah was saved through his faith in God. He believed God’s words regarding the coming of a great flood that would kill all living things except for those few people and representative animals that were brought into the ark. Again, we read Hebrews 11:7 that describes Noah:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

God brought the flood upon the earth in judgment, destroying all living things except for Noah and those with him. God wondrously saved Noah and his household from His judgment through the ark, a haven of safety from the flood of judgment. Behold the goodness and the severity of God--His goodness in the mercy and grace extended to Noah and his family, and His severity in that He destroyed all living things, to the glory of His holiness and justice!

God had forewarned Noah of His judgment, and instructed Noah how to be saved from it. He would do so through an ark, that he would build over the course of his lifetime. He lived to prepare himself and his family to escape God’s wrath upon the world. He was saved through faith alone. He had believed God’s Word and thereby ordered his life according to faith. He did so confidently that he and those with him would

¹¹ We would assert, of course, that Noah was no more righteous than the grace of God made him so (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7), but God’s role in producing and preserving Noah’s righteous character is not in view. Noah was a good man, as good as men can be, and such persons God chooses to honor and bless.

¹² This is the first occasion the Hebrew word *berith*, translated “covenant” is found in Scripture. Sorting out the idea of covenant in Scripture is a difficult task. Some see only one covenant ever having been established, a covenant of grace. Others, whose theological persuasion is referred to as “covenant theology”, speak of two covenants, a covenant of works made with Adam, and the covenant of grace by which God saves His people through Christ. Still others, such as dispensationalists, see many distinct, totally unrelated covenants set forth in Scripture. It may be here that God is affirming to Noah that he will stand in a covenant relation which had been previously established (see note on Genesis 6:18 in the **New Geneva Study Bible** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 20), or, perhaps God only promised here what He would do for Noah later that which is recorded in 8:20-9:17.

not be condemned with the world, but would be delivered into a cleansed world. A new creation was before them. During the flood the world returned to a pre-creation watery chaos, formless and void of life excepting for that which God had preserved with Noah. After the execution of God's judgment, His wrath toward man was appeased. With the abatement of the waters and the reappearance of land, a new beginning is offered to humanity--a new creation.

After the waters receded Noah's first act was one of worship. He built an altar and offered sacrifices of burnt offerings to the Lord. The Lord responded to Noah's sacrifice, and on this occasion God established His covenant with him and all his descendants through him (8:20-9:17).¹³

A covenant in Scripture is an agreement that is made between two parties upon which a relationship may be based and maintained. Sometimes the covenant idea is a negotiated agreement between two parties of equal stature who enter into a mutually committed relationship with one another, as in a marriage covenant. But when God has established a covenant with man, it is always a sovereign king who makes a covenant with his subjects. In His covenant God sets forth the terms of what He Himself commits to do and declares the responses which He requires of His subjects in return. He does so making clear the consequences of failing to keep His covenant.

God established a covenant with Noah promising him that He would never again destroy mankind and the earth by a flood (9:11). The terms He set forth for Noah and his descendants were as follows: (1) they were to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth" (9:1); (2) the animals of the earth were placed under their dominion (9:2); (3) all living things were given for food, including animals excepting the blood within them (9:3f); (4) capital punishment was to be executed for the crime of murder (9:5-7). For His part, God promised Noah that there never again would be a flood to destroy the earth (9:8-11). As a sign of His covenant of peace with Noah and his offspring, God hangs His bow in the clouds. God is as a warrior who is at peace, putting away his battle weaponry. A condition of peace prevailed. Blessing was pronounced. A bright future lie before mankind (9:1).

The language of the account reveals that Noah and his descendants were entering a new world, a new creation. Further, God gave the same instruction to Noah and his descendants as He had first given to Adam and Eve in the garden. There was a new paradise before them, full of opportunity, but with responsibility and accountability before God.

II. The Old Testament is Christian Scripture

Now we understand the Old Testament as a record of God's historical dealings with His people. The Old Testament is a theological history, recording the nature of God and His ways among His people. But even though it records historic and physical events, as Christians we read our Old Testament as Christian Scripture. It sets forth through historic people and events types and symbols—earthly matters, which reveal and foreshadow spiritual realities for New Testament Christians. Even the Old Testament prophets understood that what they were recording was for a future time and for a people in the age of the Messiah, which is this present church age. Peter wrote,

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²***To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you*** through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

And the Apostle Paul wrote of the Old Testament Scriptures having been inspired of God for the benefit and instruction of New Testament Christians.

Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ⁷And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to

¹³ See the previous footnote.

eat and drink, and rose up to play.”⁸ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;⁹ nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹***Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*** (1 Cor. 10:6-11)

The Old Testament is Christian Scripture. When Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16f, he was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, our Old Testament. He wrote,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16f)

And so, in the Old Testament God meant what He said, but in the New Testament God tells us what He meant. One must read and interpret the Old Testament in the light of the coming of Jesus Christ, which is the record of the New Testament.

Paul had declared to the church at Corinth that the unbelieving Jews, who had the Old Testament Scriptures, nevertheless failed to understand God’s Word for they failed to see how they revealed Jesus Christ and the life of His people in them. Of the unbelieving Jews Paul wrote:

But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

What Paul was arguing was the need and importance to interpret the Old Testament spiritually, to see Christ foretold and displayed for us, and that Christian instruction, encouragement, warning and exhortation may be found there. The Old Testament is Christian Scripture. This has been the universal testimony of reformed Christianity until the novelty of dispensationalism of the 20th century. Most evangelicals due to the influence of dispensationalism deny understanding the Old Testament in this way. Here is one reformed writer from the early 20th century who sought to defend this historic understanding and application of Old Testament Scripture. Historically Protestants have interpreted the Old Testament to teach spiritual truths for New Testament Christians. This method of interpretation is opposed by those who claim that we are to interpret the Old Testament literally, not spiritually. These words are from John Wilmot’s book, *Inspired Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*:

It will be acknowledged that the Author (God) is the final exponent of His own thoughts expressed in what He says, and that what He meant, though not disclosed at the time of His speaking, determined His selection of the subjects and terms He used. Therefore, what He says will befit the spiritual compliment disclosed in what He means. Must the Spirit’s exposition of a subject be confined to our human understanding of the matter? Is there not such a thing as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning? Would it not be our wisdom to follow the counsel contained in the ancient couplet: “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed”? What God said in the Old Testament is given His meaning in the New Testament. Yet contentment with the finality of spiritual meaning as supplied in the New Testament is met with criticism: “Mysticising or vaporizing glosses called interpretation”. We are accustomed to sing of God’s providence, “God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain”. Is not this equally true of His Word? Examples of spiritual purpose and the spiritualizing principle abound in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles. Surely *their* manner of expounding what God says should be our guide in seeking to know what God means. If spiritualization is unwarranted we shall find ourselves in danger of placing our Lord and His apostles themselves, if reasoning be consistent, under criticism!¹⁴

III. The application of Noah’s faith and life to us

¹⁴ John Wilmot, *Inspired Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Reiner Publications, 1965), pp. 14f.

The point we are making is this: the Old Testament account of the judgment of God upon the world through a cataclysmic, world-wide flood, was a type, a foreshadowing of the final judgment of the world when Jesus Christ returns a second time. And just as God saved Noah by His grace and promised him that he would be saved from His judgment upon the world, similarly God has called us and has promised us that in Jesus Christ we will escape the judgment of God coming upon this world. But we must add this caveat, just as God had appointed the means by which He would save Noah and those with him—through the preparing an ark, so God calls us to order our lives in preparation for the judgment to come. Just as God required Noah to order his life in faith in view of God’s judgment, so we are also to do with view to our own salvation. As **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) once wrote of this, first stating the doctrine taught us through the Genesis account of Noah building the ark, and then setting forth its application for us.

DOCTRINE: We should be willing to engage in and go through great undertakings, in order to our own salvation.

APPLICATION: The use I would make of this doctrine, is to exhort all to undertake and go through this great work, which they have to do in order to their salvation, and this let the work seem ever so great and difficult. If your nature be averse to it, and there seems to be very frightful things in the way, so that your heart is ready to fail at the prospect; yet seriously consider what has been said, and act a wise part. Seeing it is for yourselves, for your own salvation; seeing it is for so great a salvation, for your deliverance from eternal destruction; and seeing it is of such absolute necessity in order to your salvation, that the deluge of divine wrath will come, and there will be no escaping it without preparing an ark; is it not best for you to undertake the work, engage in it with your might, and go through it, though this cannot be done without great labor, care, and difficulty, and expense?

I would by no means flatter you concerning this work, or go about to make you believe, that you shall find an easy light business of it: no, I would not have you expect any such thing. I would have you sit down and count the cost; and if you cannot find it in your hearts to engage in a great, hard, laborious, and expensive undertaking, and to persevere in it to the end of life, pretend not to be religious. Indulge yourselves in your ease; follow your pleasures; eat, drink, and be merry; even conclude to go to hell in that way, and never make any more pretenses of seeking your salvation. Here consider several things in particular.

In a number of places in the New Testament the second coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world is set forth with Noah and his salvation from the flood as the Old Testament type or shadow of the final judgment of mankind. Here are Peter’s words to Christians:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), ²that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, ³knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

⁸But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

¹³Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:1-13)

The Lord Jesus spoke of His coming in judgment that it would occur when those who will be damned are not prepared and not expecting His return. In doing so, the Lord drew upon the days of Noah to press the seriousness of the matter upon His hearers.

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷***But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*** ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and ***did not know until the flood came and took them all away,*** so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴***Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*** (Matt. 24:36-44)

On another occasion the Lord warned His disciples that they were not to deviate from their commitment to live righteously with view to His coming. He used the analogy of a master who became abusive of his servants to describe the one who is unprepared for His coming in judgment.

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. ³⁸And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

⁴¹Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”

⁴²And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵***But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.***

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Christians in the church at Thessalonica:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ²For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. ³For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. ⁶Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

¹¹Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thess. 5:1-11)

When Paul wrote, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief”, he was not stating that Christians know when that Day will arrive but non-Christians will not know. Rather, Paul was telling these Christians that the Day of Christ would not take them by surprise, catching them unprepared. They were to be prepared regardless of when He returns. This is how we are to live. Again, Jesus declared, “you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:44).

Now someone may be thinking with respect to himself,

“I have squandered so much of my life. I have not lived with view to the coming of Christ and the judgment to come. Do I even have a reason for hope that I will escape damnation on that Day? Is there no hope for me?”

What ultimately matters is how the Lord finds you when He comes. Your great need is not to build an ark, which took Noah a life-time, 120 years. But rather, you are but to flee into the ark that God has provided for you, even to Jesus Christ. Get to Him and you will be safe. Cast away that which keeps you from total surrender to Him. Discard any and all things that may hinder you from coming to Him. Acknowledge your sin. Confess your unworthiness; be as the Gentile centurion, saying to Christ,

“Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and I shall be healed of my sin.”

Come to the Lord Jesus as the leper, who came and fell on his face before Jesus, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean” (Luke 5:12). Claim the promise in faith of Him who said, “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:10).

It matters how you live! Your salvation may be sure *to* you, not secured *by* you, for that is what Christ did upon His cross, but your salvation may be sure to you and me as we live according to this Christian worldview. May our Lord enable us to live with view to His coming and the judgment that He will execute on the human race. And may we look beyond that judgment to the new heavens and new earth, our glorious destiny.

John Wilmot
Inspired Principles of Prophetic Interpretation
(Reiner Publications, 1965), pp. 14f.

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[This book is a classic treatment of a 20th century author who defended historic Protestant principles of interpretation over against the new and novel principles of dispensationalism that were largely popularized in the 20th century. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote the Forward to this book: “I was glad to hear that it was proposed to put these ‘Prophetic Studies’ by Dr. John Wilmot into permanent book form. I believe they will make a valuable contribution to such studies.” The following Table of Contents suggests the major points Wilmot argues.]

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