

# How To Survive The Flood

*“And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But 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.”*

*-Genesis 6:17-18*

After talking about the factors that led to the flood and the judgment of God, we now come to the flood itself. Like with everything else in Genesis, the temptation that we will have as westerners is to focus our attention on the historicity of the flood. We have to remember though, that while we believe that these stories are rooted in history, these stories in the early parts of Genesis are archetypal stories. Meaning that they are the symbolic foundations for every story told by man from the time of Adam until now. In fact, it would be safe to say, these stories are so true, that they not only have historical significance, but they have deep symbolic significance that is so profound that every one of us can locate our own stories within these narratives. That is why I have personally been focusing, not on the historicity of these stories, but instead on the symbolic reality of these stories.

The story of the flood is no different, because, even though this was a singularly unique event, the significance of this story for us is that it symbolizes how one world ends and a new one begins. When I am using the term “world” I am using it in a broader sense than the globe at large. Every human life is a “world” unto itself, and so are family structures, and even societies and nations. But, because we inhabit this world of sin and death, all the individual worlds present in the here and now are destined for decay and destruction. Every individual will die, and every civilization, no matter how vast, powerful, or wise, eventually meets their end. This story tells us how we might survive the “floods” that are coming to us.

## What The Flood Represents

*And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were*

*with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.*

*-Genesis 7:19-24*

Ancient man used to think of the waters as representing unformed chaos that signified both potential and danger, life and death. If we think about it, this symbol makes a lot of sense. Waters are constantly shifting, they are deep and foreboding, and they can easily drown us. But, they are also life giving, they are both teeming with life that we can draw out for our own benefit, they are cleansing, and water is one of the most fundamental needs for all life. This is why in Genesis 1:9-13 God creates the world, and draws both land and life itself out of the waters, signifying God shaping the unknown chaos of the world into the basic potential of all life. In Genesis 6 though, man has taken that gift of life that God has given to us, and instead of spreading His justice and stability, man spread chaos and instability. This gets so bad that God says of man that:

*“...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

*-Genesis 6:5*

At this point, man is no longer bringing stability to the earth, but instability, he has descended into a state of constant chaos and danger that threatens to destroy the earth itself. As God witnesses this descent, He makes the decision to destroy man with a flood, or in other words, to bring back over the earth the chaotic waters and “cleanse” the earth of its wickedness. This gives us a hint into what “floods” represented to ancient man. I believe that the Romanian, religious historian Mircea Eliade explains this best in his first volume of “A History of Religious Ideas”.

*However, if we examine the myths that, in other cultures, announce the coming flood, we find that the chief causes lie at once in the sins of men and the decrepitude of the world. By the mere fact that it exists—that is, that it lives and produces—the cosmos gradually deteriorates and ends by falling into decay. This is the reason why it has to be recreated. In other words, the flood realizes, on the macrocosmic scale, what is symbolically effected during the New Year festival: the “end of the world” and the end of a sinful humanity in order to make a new creation possible.*

*-Mircea Eliade - A History of Religious Ideas*

According to Eliade, the flood represents the need in the world for constant renewal. Since we are fallen, all that we form, and all that we are, is corruptible and decaying. Through this we can understand that one of the reasons why God introduced death into the world in Genesis 3, beyond being a punishment, was also as a means of preservation. Listen to the way that God describes this choice in Genesis 3:22-23:

*“Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.*

*-Genesis 3:22-23*

This isn't necessarily presented as a direct act of retribution, instead there is an implicit worry presented in this text. God is clearly not afraid of man becoming a rival to Him, but instead it seems that God is worried about what would become of man if He was allowed to deteriorate forever.

This is actually what Hell is in the Bible. An eternity of decay and corruption. It is a mercy that decay is finite, that all that begins to rot, will eventually cease rotting when it ceases to exist. That is why the most disturbing image of Hell given to us is in Isaiah 66:24:

*“For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”*

To even try to imagine what infinite decay would look like actually gives us nightmares, and that thought has actually given birth to our most disturbing works of fiction. This is what zombies represent, immortal beings that have lost their humanity and continue to exist in a state of constant corruption.

Once we understand this, then we just have to apply this same logic to cultures. Cultures themselves have a shelf life, they eventually become corrupt and need to end so that their corruption can be stopped. This is why Eliade in his quote above says that ancient cultures saw “floods” as both a bad thing, and a good thing. Good in that floods cleanse by washing away the corrupting elements so that there can be rebirth, but bad in that the flood does bring an end to a world. And this type of thinking is not absent from the biblical authors:

*“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone*

*into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”*

*-1 Peter 3:18-22*

The thing that might sound odd to us is Peter saying that Noah and his family were “saved through water”. We would think that Peter would say that Noah and his family were saved *from* the waters, not *through* them. By wording it this way Peter is saying that the waters were used by God to cleanse the Earth of its evil and preserve the goodness of Noah and his family. And we see this theme throughout the Bible. This is why the Israelites go through the Red Sea, and the Egyptians are drowned in those same waters. And this is also why we are baptized.

The waters of baptism carry this very image. We are fallen and corrupt, and so we are subject to decay and death. And yet, because of the resurrection, death no longer is our final end, but instead our entrance into eternity with God. And so we are submerged into the waters of chaos as a symbol as God putting to death the corruption of our souls, that the image of God that we have had since birth might be redeemed and reconstituted through Christ.

To put this much more succinctly, the flood waters represent a perpetual cycle of death and rebirth, as also represented by the ancient image of a snake eating its own tail (sometimes called “ouroboros”).



Ancient man believed we were stuck in a perpetual cycle of death and rebirth and so we had to be ready to rebuild after these “deaths”. To make this more accessible, let’s look at this at an individual level. When we grow up we go through many cycles of “death” and “rebirth”. When we were young and living under our parents’ authority, that represented a particular “world” that we had to inhabit, and it was good for a time. But, if someone continued to live under the direct authority and subsistence of their parents until they were 40, we would understand that this stage of life has reached a stage of decay that is unhealthy for both the parents and the child.

What is supposed to happen is that when the child reaches adulthood, they are supposed to move out, this moving out is a “flood” in which that particular “world” ends, and a new one is born out of it. So when this happens, both the parent and the child are thrown into a state of chaos in which they no longer know how to function properly, they have to learn how to behave appropriately in this new state. If they can’t learn how to do this, this new world collapses and they are submerged under chaos. This process repeats itself throughout someone’s life. It happens when they leave school and search for a career, when they get married, when they have kids, when they retire, and so on until their physical death.

However, a “flood” can also happen for bad reasons, more like what is happening in Genesis 6. So if someone decides to cheat within a marriage, they have brought about an end to the world that they inhabited due to their sin. This one decision, throws everyone involved into chaos and threatens to drown them. They too will have to learn to inhabit the new world that they now live in. When a catastrophic end like this occurs, the temptation will be to try to retrieve the old world and live as though nothing happened. But this isn’t possible anymore. Like Noah, they have to accept that the old world is gone and they are now tasked with building a new one. This could look like reconciliation, or, unfortunately, a divorce. But now that we have a better understanding of what the flood represents, the question we have to ask is what Noah can teach us about surviving the flood.

## Surviving The Flood

*Then the LORD said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. “You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female;*

*-Genesis 7:1-2*

The first thing that we notice about Noah, is that he is described as “righteous”. This does not mean that he was perfect, we see that clearly in future passages, but simply that he walked with God and sought to honor Him. This is the most important component about Noah’s story, since God was not simply trying to preserve life, but goodness.

As spoken before, the flood comes as a necessary response to human corruption and evil. If God wanted to merely preserve life, He would have never sent the flood in the first place, nor would He have taken from man the fruit of the tree of life. God isn’t primarily interested in saving the lives of men, but instead in saving our souls.

*“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

*-Mark 8:36-37*

Viktor Frankl was a Holocaust survivor who wrote a first hand account of his experiences in the concentration camps in his profound book “Man’s Search For Meaning”. When he first talks about the concentration camps, he makes an interesting observation:

*“On the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from camp to camp, had lost all scruples in their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal force, theft, and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles - whatever one may choose to call them - we know: the best of us did not return.”*

*— Viktor Frankl - Man’s Search For Meaning*

When we think of the Holocaust we tend to think of the Nazi soldiers as inhuman monsters, but we forget they were merely men like you and me. And while some were driven to this level of evil by true sadism and malevolence, many more were driven by far more innocuous things. We forget that in order for the Holocaust to have even been possible, it required participation from individual Germans at every level of their society. Viktor expresses here something that is almost unthinkable for us, that it even required the participation of fellow Jews trying to preserve their own lives. Not every act of evil carries with it wicked motives, oftentimes evil is perpetrated in truly subtle ways in which a culture can become so corrupt that individual citizens participate with it merely by living within it.

*“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”*

*-Revelation 18:4*

A little further on we will talk more clearly about when a “world” becomes so corrupt that we can no longer participate with it, even in an attempt to save it. But for now, it’s important to understand that corruption itself acts as a current that can threaten to pollute even the most noble aspirations.

*“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”*

*-1 Peter 4:4*

Peter here uses the term “flood” to describe the corrupting behaviors of Roman culture. He uses this metaphor both to describe the “pull” or the “force” of a decaying culture, but also to describe the destruction that cultures like this produce. It is in response to this type of moral decay that God sends His flood to the earth in order to wash the earth of this corruption and produce ground where the righteous may flourish. So in order to avoid the flood waters, we have to be careful that we aren’t being swept away by the corruption that is swallowing up the world around us.

Unfortunately, it isn’t even enough to simply be opposed to what is going on around us, we have to be in pursuit of the good, not merely running from the bad. To help understand this, we should look at the ministry of Christ. Jesus was born into a time of terrible corruption and debauchery. Rome had occupied Israel and was using brutal tactics to oppress the Jews, and more and more of their pagan culture was influencing the Israelites. Because of this, many Jews grew up with vivid hatred towards Rome, to the point where all the Jews were yearning for their Messiah to rise up and overthrow the oppression of the Romans and cleanse Israel.

The problem was that this hatred blinded the Jews from God. All they could see was what they were against, and they had forgotten what they were supposed to be for. To such an extent that they didn’t recognize God Himself when He was walking amongst them. The same temptation exists for Christians today. We can become so obsessed with preserving our culture, that we forget to keep guard over our own souls. This can lead us to be carried away, either in the debauchery of our current moment, or in the hatred of our culture. When Genesis talks about Noah, it doesn’t describe him as angry or vindictive towards his world, it merely states that: “Noah walked with God.” (Genesis 6:9)

Noah's focus was not on the world, but on God. He wasn't living in reaction to the decay of his culture, but in pursuit of God. His decision to do this didn't make his physical survival more likely, it actually made it less likely. To go against the "flood of dissipation" doesn't make you popular with the ones in authority, it tends to make you a target. Noah made this decision anyway though, because to preserve his own soul was more valuable to him than saving his life. This enabled Noah to not only preserve his relationship with God, but to also save his family from the oncoming flood waters.

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

*-Matthew 16:24-25*

## The Heart of The Reformer

This attitude of Noah also enabled him to become a true reformer as opposed to an angry revolutionary. When corruption begins to pollute a world, we can approach that corruption with one of three different attitudes: naivete, revolution, or reformation. In order to understand these attitudes better, I'll use the example of a marriage.

When a marriage becomes corrupt it usually begins primarily with one member developing bad habits. While it is possible that this behavior can be as extreme as an affair, or abuse, usually it begins more subtle than this. It can be a dismissive attitude, neglect of the other person's needs, or a refusal to compromise. As this behavior grows, the other partner has to respond to this negative behavior usually in reactive ways. They can respond to the dismissive attitude with disrespect, or they can nag in response to neglect, or they can become passive in response to their partner's refusal to compromise. While these behaviors start in subtlety, they develop until their corruption is unavoidable, and when this happens, the other spouse will be forced to respond to the failing marriage.

The naive partner will ignore the corruption. They will bury their head in the sand and pretend as though everything is fine, even when the marriage is falling apart. This will usually continue until the marriage becomes so toxic that it either ends through divorce, or both people will become lost in the corruption. The revolutionary partner will rebel against the marriage. They will turn towards the marriage itself in wrath and blame their partner for all their problems. They will then seek a contentious divorce, and usually remain embittered towards their former spouse for the rest of their lives. And that bitterness, and failure to see their own sin in the marriage will usually sabotage every future relationship.



The final way to approach it is with the heart of a reformer. A reformer is someone who is seeking above all else to preserve as much as they possibly can of the relationship. They see the corruption in the relationship not as an enemy, like the revolutionary, nor do they ignore it like the naive person, instead they see it like a surgeon sees cancer. They don't hate the corruption for its own sake, they hate the corruption because of their love of the thing that has been corrupted.

*“And 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. “Of 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.”*

*-Genesis 6:19-20*

When Noah is called to build the ark, he builds it to preserve as much of the old world as he possibly could. Unfortunately for him, all that could be saved was his own family and the surrounding animals, but even so, his heart was to save all that he could. Going back to our example of the married couple. Someone with this attitude would be courageous enough to call out the corruption in the marriage. Not in a wrathful or vindictive way, but instead in a way that is seeking wholeheartedly to save the marriage at all costs. They will have the tough conversations necessary, pursue godly counsel, and most importantly, they will search diligently within their own souls to see how they have contributed to the current state of the marriage.

Unfortunately, just like the situation with Noah, it might be the case that the marriage can't be preserved, but the only person who will actually be able to know that for sure, is the person who is trying with all their heart to preserve the marriage itself. The person who is willfully ignorant won't understand the evil within their marriage, and they will even be participating with its toxicity. And the person who is a revolutionary will only be able to see the flaws in their partner, and so they will end the relationship even when it might have been saved, and will become more corrupted in their characters as a result of the divorce. While the reformer, because they are pushing so hard to reform the marriage, to bring it back to the purity it once had, they are the only ones that have the power to actually save their marriage, and even if it is too late, they will be preserved even through the grief of its end.

This should be our heart. I think that most Americans feel a “flood” coming for our culture. We sense an end to the current order of things. This doesn't mean that the country itself is doomed, simply that we are in desperate need for renewal. We don't want to be naive to the problems facing our culture. Ignorantly believing that everything

is fine when it really isn't, and willfully turning a blind eye to all the corruption going on around us. If we do this, not only will we fail to preserve anything, we will also become a passive part of the overall problem. But, if we allow our anger, no matter how justified, to drive us, we will become violent revolutionaries. We will sink into a culture of bitter complaining as we constantly criticize all that is happening around us, and either seek its violent end, or merely disconnect ourselves entirely from what is happening around us.

If we seek to be reformers, then we will be like Noah who sought above all other things, to merely walk with God. This supreme goal will allow us to search passionately for the good in our society and seek to root out what is bad, including what is bad in us. But we won't do this in a spirit of anxiety, desperate for this change and terrified of the results. We need patience because renewal is something that takes time.

*Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.*

*-Genesis 7:24*

Some people fail to cause true reform because they don't have the patience to let their efforts grow. They give up prematurely, not because they were doomed to fail, but instead because they lacked the self control necessary to wait out the storm. To the one that can balance this powerful passion for renewal, and a patience in the will and timing of God, they will find that even if they fail to preserve the world that they live in, they may succeed in saving themselves and their own families from the flood. And the wonderful hope that we have as Christians, is that this cycle of death and rebirth is coming to an end. Jesus is coming back, and when He does He will set up a kingdom free from corruption, one where righteousness will reign forever, and one where we will be redeemed from our own corruption, standing perfected in the righteousness of our Lord and Savior.

**1 Corinthians 11:26**

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.