

## “Were There Dinosaurs on the Ark?”

Date: October 2, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Genesis 6:1-22

Occasion Bible, sermon series

Theme: Historical Accuracy or God’s Truth for Us

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Making Sense of the Bible*, by Adam Hamilton, HarperCollins Publisher, NY, NY, 2014. Chapter 21 “Were There Dinosaurs on the Ark?” pp.199-206.

Children love to ask questions, and sometimes they even stump the grown-ups they ask. Like last week when Jillian asked me how a compass “works.” Now, I understand magnetic pull, but how do you explain that to a five year old? I was stumped.

Children have seen movies that included dinosaurs, and being curious, when they hear the story of Noah and the ark, they ask “Were there dinosaurs on the ark?” Maybe their little minds even reason, “How would those huge animals have fit on a boat?” “Wouldn’t the really mean dinosaurs have eaten the other animals, and maybe even the people who were on the ark?” Good questions!

As a person who accepts the scientific consensus on the age of the earth and the timeline of the various life-forms on our planet, the answer is simple. Dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago. *Homo sapiens* didn’t appear on the scene until around 200,000 years ago. No, there were no dinosaurs on the ark.

But it’s not just children who ask questions about the Bible, adults do too. Here are some more questions people have about the biblical story of Noah and the Ark: “Is the story historical? Was there a Noah? Did flood waters really cover the entire earth and destroy every living thing except what was on the ark?”

And how do we reckon with the morality of God sending universal destruction so that every living thing, including every human being, was destroyed? This story seems exceptionally harsh and

unjust to many who read it. And what about all of those other flood stories that occur in other ancient cultures, including the one in the Epic of Gilgamesh, which was written several hundred years before Moses?

Before we try to answer those questions, let's take a look at the backdrop for the story, which we read as our Scripture lessons this morning. This lays the foundation for the story of the flood. God looks upon the earth and sees that humanity has become evil, their hearts filled with evil thoughts. Genesis 6:11 says, "The earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence."

There is a moving statement in verse six that captures God's reaction to the violence which human beings were committing on the earth. It reads, "And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." The NIV translates it "God's heart was filled with pain."

This is the backdrop for the story of God's sending a deluge to destroy the earth: human beings doing horribly violent things to one another, horribly evil things, and God being grieved that he had created the human race at all.

In the thousands of years since this was written, human beings continue do incredibly horrible things to each other. On this World Communion Sunday, why can't the nations of the world get along? Why do we continue to hurt and destroy one another? Why do we do such evil things to each other? "God's heart was/is filled with pain."

Adam Hamilton in his book *Making Sense of the Bible* writes and I agree with him. "I don't think the story of Noah and the Flood was written to teach us ancient history. It was intended to teach us

something about God, something about ourselves.” However, I do think this story is anchored in history. The fact this story is told in multiple ancient cultures testifies to a period of massive flooding. It is possible these floods came at the end of the last Ice Age.

At the close of the last Ice Age, geologists tell us that major flooding occurred across the Northern Hemisphere. Ice sheets melted, creating shallow inland seas. In certain places, ice dams created massive bodies of water.

When the dams eventually broke, the force of the water destroyed everything in its path. There were as many as 40, perhaps more, of these massive floods during a 2,000 year period, which released massive amounts of water, as much as 300 feet deep.

While the onslaught of all this massive water pouring across the land destroyed all life in its path, these floodwaters did *not* cover the entire earth, as Noah suggest. But the magnitude of the flooding was such, that those who remembered it described it as a flood that covered the entire earth.

Many Christians would ask, “Why not simply accept the story of Noah as literally true, rather than explaining it geologically? And if you search the Internet you can find plenty of Young Earth Creationists who argue that there was a worldwide flood that covered all of earth for a short period of time.

If you don’t read any of the arguments on the other side, you might be convinced. But in my opinion, the preponderance of evidence is in favor of an old earth and against a recent flood in human history. The evidence is overwhelming.

So, is the Noah story true or not? Great question! Did it happen exactly as recorded in the Bible? The answer is “sort of.” Did Noah bring two of each of the millions of species of animals, that otherwise would not have survived a global flood, onto an ark? “No, I don’t think so.” Did water cover the earth to 20 feet above the highest mountain? Again, I don’t believe that happened.

However, there were localized floods that humans remembered and which were survived by some. There is a chance there could have been a Noah who built a boat and brought his family and some animals on the boat as an ice dam was preparing to break. Maybe.

Did God destroy every animal and every human being on the planet except for Noah and his family 4,300 years ago? I believe the answer is no. The story seems to be anchored in historical events that took place at the end of the last Ice Age, but is not entirely accurate from a historical perspective.

That’s one way to answer the question, “Is the story of Noah’s ark true?” But in a more important sense the answer is “Yes! The story is absolutely true!” Like other stories in the Bible, such as the Creation story, this story teaches profound truths.

The point of it being recorded in the Bible is not to give us an accurate account of ancient history. But to teach us about God and God’s will for our lives. So, what truth does this story intend to teach us? Well, as we earlier noted, “God’s heart was filled with pain,” as he looked at the violence humans were doing to each other.

This was not God’s intention when God created the human race. This was not God’s plan. And I would say, this story continues to speak of God’s grief over the violence that we perpetuate on one

another, sometimes even in God's name! Adam Hamilton reflects, "When I read Genesis 6 I can't help but think about the fact that in the last century, when humanity reached the apex of technological development, up to that point, over 100 million people died by war and genocide."

The story of Noah and the ark is an expression of God's grief over the rebellion of the human race. There are other truths:

We are also told in Genesis that Noah "was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." Noah teaches us to listen for God's commandments and to follow them.

Children love to read and hear the story of Noah and the ark, in part because children love animals. This story speaks not only about God's love for the human race, but also God's love and concern for animals. It was not just Noah's family that was saved on the ark.

This story is filled with truth that is still relevant for us today. But the important truth found in this story has little to do with the size of Noah's ship, the number of animals it could hold, or whether the floodwaters literally covered the entire earth.

The Bible is filled with these types of stories. They are told less to inform us about ancient history than to teach us about the human condition, and about the God who created us. I am not suggesting that nothing in the Bible is historically accurate, of course not.

But through these beautifully told stories, God speaks to the human heart, revealing who God is, and who God wants us to be.

So, may we learn what pleases the Lord, and what fills God's heart with pain. Amen? Amen!