

Dr. Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis, Session 7, Noah and the Flood, Part 1 (Gen. 6:9-9:29)

NotebookLM's 20-min. Podcast

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Welcome, everyone. We're diving deep into Noah's Ark today. Oh yeah, this one's a classic. It really is.

This story, I mean, it's captivated people for centuries, and we're going to try to figure out, like, where did it come from? Could there be any truth to it historically? And what's the deeper meaning? Yeah, and what always gets me is it's not just like this one-off story. We find these flood stories in cultures all around the ancient world. Right, and it's like each one gives us a peek into how humans way back then thought about God or God.

All that stuff. And it really makes you wonder if there's like some shared memory or maybe a real event that sparked these stories in the first place. For sure, it makes you think.

But one thing that always struck me about the Genesis account is like how long it is. Oh yeah, it's not messing around. It takes up so much space.

It's way more detailed than other stories in those early chapters. Exactly, like the writer was saying, hey, this is important, you know, like pay attention. Yeah, it's true.

And they don't skimp on the details, not just the flood itself, but the ark, the animals, the whole covenant God makes with Noah. It's like a blueprint for starting over. Like humanity gets a second chance after things got really bad.

And speaking of blueprints, you know, Dr. Mathews in his lecture on Genesis points out how the flood story mirrors the creation story, but it's like creation, but backward. Oh, that's a good way to put it. You've got the water swallowing up the earth, then they go back and boom, dry lands like a do-over.

Right, exactly. It's like hitting the reset button, but this time things are different. Definitely.

What do you think are the biggest differences between this new start and the original creation? Well, for one, after the flood, it's not paradise anymore, right? It's not that perfect Garden of Eden. Sin is still around. Temptation is still there.

But there's also that promise God makes to Noah, that covenant. Right, right. It's a big deal, that covenant.

And for anyone who needs a refresher, a covenant is more than just a deal. You know, it's like the sacred bond, this deep promise of relationship and blessings. Yeah.

It's not like, okay, I do this, you do that. It's way deeper than that. It's like a whole new chapter in how God relates to humanity, but with expectations on both sides.

Exactly. There's grace, but also responsibility. Okay.

Let's talk about those other flood stories for a sec from other cultures. Dr. Mathews mentions a bunch like from Samaria, Babylonia, Egypt. Is he saying the Genesis story, like copied those? Not quite.

Think of it more like they were all part of the same cultural conversation. Oh, okay. I get you.

Like imagine different cultures, each telling their version of the same folktale. Some parts will be the same, but each version has that culture's own skin on it. Makes sense.

So it's less about plagiarism, more about getting that wider cultural context. Yeah. So what are the biggest differences we see when we compare the Genesis flood to these other ancient stories? One that jumps out is why did the flood even happen? Like in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the gods send a flood because they're just straight up annoyed by humans.

They were being too loud. Seriously. Too noisy, too much commotion.

Basically, the gods were throwing a cosmic tantrum, which is pretty different from why the flood happens in the Bible. Yeah. In Genesis, it's all about humanity's wickedness, the violence.

It's a huge difference. Shows you how those cultures saw their gods. Like in Mesopotamian myths, the gods are kind of fickle, you know, easily offended.

You've got a short fuse. Totally. Yeah.

But in the Bible, God is holy. He's genuinely grieved by how messed up humanity has become. Which makes you think maybe all these flood stories are based on a real event.

Like there was a massive flood, but each culture interpreted it through their own beliefs. It's possible. And even if we can't definitively prove there was a global flood, these stories are still powerful.

For sure. It's not just about the facts. Right.

What matters is what they tell us about how people searched for meaning, how they saw their relationship with the divine, their place in the universe. So it's about looking past just the literal details and trying to get those deeper truths these stories are getting at. And in the Bible's flood story, that seems to be about God's power to judge, but also his absolute commitment to saving and redeeming humanity.

Couldn't have said it better myself. Yeah. And you know what's at the center of it all? That arc.

Yeah. Let's talk about that arc. Dr. Mathews gives us some pretty specific measurements.

He says it was 150 yards long. 150 yards. Wow.

25 yards wide and three stories high. To put that in perspective, 150 yards is basically one and a half football fields. Yeah.

We're not talking about a little rowboat here. Right. This was a massive project.

Definitely. Speaks to how huge the flood was and what it took to survive. Imagine being Noah.

You've got to build this crazy huge boat, round up all these animals, and then you're stuck on this thing for a year. No map, no destination. Talk about trusting God.

That's some serious faith right there. He doesn't even question it. He just does it.

Even when it sounds totally bonkers. And there's this one little detail Dr. Mathews brings up that I find so interesting. God shutting the door of the ark.

It's such a small thing, but it's powerful. Right. It's like God himself is making sure they're safe.

Sealing them in before unleashing all that water. It's like this image of God protecting them, looking out for them, even in this crazy world-changing event. But it also shows how serious this is.

Once that door is shut, there's no going back. Exactly. And that feeling of like, this is it.

This is the dividing line between who's saved and who's not. It has this whole other layer to the story, doesn't it? It really does. So we've got judgment, mercy, destruction, renewal, all mixed together.

And in the middle of it all is this arc, the symbol of human skill and divine protection. But before we get too focused on the arc itself, let's zoom out and look at these ancient creation myths. Dr. Mathews mentioned a few from Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Oh, yeah, those are fascinating. It's incredible how differently each culture approached the idea of creation itself. Like in the Egyptian myth, you've got this god, Adom, who just pops into existence from this watery chaos.

And then, get this, he creates other gods by sneezing and spitting. Wait, he sneezes and creates gods? I've never heard that one before. I know, right? It's a totally different way of thinking about the divine.

Like in the Egyptian myth, creation comes from the god himself. It's like part of him. But in Genesis, it's God speaking everything into being.

It's separate from him, right? Exactly. And that separation is huge. So it's showing God's transcendence, his existence outside and beyond the world he created.

What about the Mesopotamian creation myth, the Enuma Elish? Didn't Dr. Mathews say something about gods fighting in that one? Yeah, it's pretty wild. Imagine this. You've got this primordial soup, God's battling it out, and then one god gets killed, and his blood is what humans are made from.

Totally different vibe from Genesis, which is all about order and purpose. Wow, that's a lot to unpack. It sounds more like, uh... A cosmic soap opera? Yeah, kind of.

What's interesting is how violence is baked right into creation in that story. It shows how they saw the world, you know? God's constantly struggling for power. But in Genesis, creation comes from love, from purpose.

It's a reflection of God's character. Creation is inherently good, and humans have this special place within it. You know, Dr. Mathews also talked about the Canaanite creation myth, where Baal, their god, fights this chaotic sea monster.

It sounded like a superhero movie. It's this classic theme in myths, this fight between order and chaos. And Baal represented rain and fertility, which were super important for people living in that region.

So in a way, all these myths, they were trying to explain the world around them, to make sense of nature and what it means to be human. Exactly. They used stories of gods and goddesses to figure things out.

So instead of getting hung up on whether something literally happened, we should be asking, what do these stories tell us about how ancient people saw the world and their place in it? Right. And by understanding that, we can really appreciate what makes the biblical account unique. I like that.

It's all about context. So we've got all these myths floating around in the ancient world, but how are we supposed to understand them? Should we take them literally? That's the million-dollar question. And Dr. Mathews says, be careful about reading them literally.

He thinks we should approach them as symbolic stories. Like they're trying to tell us deeper truths about the human experience and our relationship with the divine. So it's less about historical fact and more about the meaning, the message behind the story.

Exactly. And that's where things get really interesting, because it forces us to engage with these texts on a whole other level, to go deeper, to grapple with those big questions they raise about life, death, purpose, and the nature of God. It's like we're peeling back the layers, trying to get to the core of what these stories are really about.

But what about myth versus reality? Could there be any truth to these flood stories historically? I mean, floods happen, right? Right. Yeah. And that's a question that still has scholars and archaeologists scratching their heads.

It's possible. Maybe these stories came from some real event, but it got exaggerated over time, passed down through generations, becoming part of their culture. Like a game of telephone, but with history.

Exactly. But we also have to remember, to those ancient people, these myths weren't just stories; they were explanations. They used them to understand their world, their origins, and their connection to the divine.

So they were trying to make sense of everything, using the tools and language they had back then. Yeah. And I think that's why these stories are still so powerful.

They speak to those deep human questions we still ask today. Where do we come from? What's our purpose? What happens when we die? Big questions. And to think, these ancient myths were tackling those same questions thousands of years ago.

I know. And that's why I think it's worth engaging with these texts. Even if we don't agree with everything they say, or take it all literally, they give us a glimpse into the minds of our ancestors.

And they challenge us to think about our own beliefs. So we've talked about flood myths, creation myths, the cultural background, and how to approach these stories. Anything else from Dr. Mathews' lecture that really stuck with you? You know, he mentioned this small detail in Genesis 7:7 that I thought was really interesting.

It says, then the Lord shut the door. It might seem like a minor thing. Wait, that reminds me of something we were talking about earlier: how God is actively involved in both judgment and preservation.

Yes, exactly. And that image of God shutting the door of the ark is so powerful, isn't it? It shows he's in control. But it also really emphasizes that separation between those inside the ark and those outside.

It draws a line, like this is the point of no return. Right. It's a serious reminder of what happens when we sin.

But it also reinforces that God is merciful, that he offers a way out, a way to be saved if you're willing to follow him. Okay, so we've covered a lot. Flood myths, creation myths, the cultural context, how to interpret these stories, and the deeper theological meaning.

And let's not forget about that ark. Oh, right. That's kind of important.

But I think it's worth remembering, the ark is more than just a boat. It's a symbol. And we talk about what it symbolizes.

Yeah. It represents way more than just this thing that floats. It's about safety, preservation, and hope.

It's like a visual, a concrete representation of God's promise to protect humanity, even when there's judgment happening. Yeah. And I think that's what people connect with, even if they're not religious.

That idea that even when things seem totally hopeless, there's still a chance for a fresh start. Even when everything's falling apart, you can still find refuge, be carried through the storm. Exactly.

And the fact that the ark is full of animals, that adds another layer. It does. It's like saying all of creation is wrapped up in this whole cosmic drama.

It's not just about us humans. Right. It's about preserving all the different kinds of life on earth.

And it reminds us that we're all connected. We're not separate from nature. We're all part of this delicate balance.

And that makes me think about all the environmental problems we have today. Climate change, pollution- that message feels even more important now. For sure.

It makes you wonder, what would we need to put in a modern-day ark to make sure everything survives? What would we need to protect? That's a good question. It really makes you think outside of just our own needs. It makes you consider the whole planet.

And remember how we were talking about potential historical evidence for the flood? You mentioned something about researchers thinking there was some massive flooding in the Black Sea region. Yeah. There's this theory that a ton of water from the Mediterranean Sea rushed into the Black Sea, like way back then, around the time that people think the flood happened.

So if that theory is right, maybe these flood myths are actually based on something real, even if it's been stretched and changed over time. It's possible. And that's what I love about this kind of stuff.

You've got archaeology, geology, biblical studies, and mythology all coming together. It's like a giant puzzle with pieces all over the place. Exactly.

And it takes looking at it from all those different angles to even start making sense of it. And even then, we might never get the full picture. Right.

But that's part of the fun. It's the searching, asking new questions, pushing ourselves to think differently. That's what I love about these deep dives.

They open up way more questions than answers. But it makes you want to learn more. Keep digging.

So what stands out to you, listener, as we wrap up talking about Noah's Ark? What resonates with you? Do you think these ancient myths are just symbolic? Or could there be some historical truth to them? And what about the meaning behind the story? What does it say about us as humans? Our relationship with God, our place in

the grand scheme of things. We hope you keep exploring these questions. Keep searching for answers.

Because these stories, they're really invitations to think about the big stuff in life. Faith, meaning, all of it. Thanks for joining us on this journey into the story of Noah's Ark.

We hope you keep diving deep into history, mythology, and everything that makes us human. It's like it's saying, this is how serious things are. But also, there's a way forward.

And not just for humans. Right. For all of creation.

It reminds us that we're all connected. We're not separate from nature. We're part of this delicate balance.

And when you think about the problems we're facing today- climate change, all that- that message feels even more relevant, you know? It really does. It makes you wonder, if we had to build a metaphorical ark today to save everything, what would we put in it? What would we need to protect? Yeah, exactly. It's a big question, but it forces us to think bigger, beyond just ourselves, to consider the whole planet.

Speaking of big questions, you mentioned earlier about possible evidence for a real flood. Researchers think there was some major flooding in the Black Sea region. Yeah, the theory is that tons of water from the Mediterranean Sea poured into the Black Sea basin, way, way back.

So if that's true, maybe all those ancient flood myths aren't just stories. Maybe they're based on something real, even if they got a little exaggerated over time. It's definitely possible.

And that's what I love about this stuff. You've got archaeology, geology, biblical studies, and mythology all coming together. It's like a giant puzzle with pieces scattered everywhere.

Exactly. And it takes looking at it from all those different angles to even start figuring it out. And even then we might not ever get the whole picture, but that's okay.

It's the journey that counts. Exactly. It's about the searching, the asking questions, the pushing ourselves to think differently.

And speaking of journeys, we've reached the end of ours for today. Time flies when you're having fun, right? It does. But as we wrap up our look at the Noah's Ark story, I'm curious: what stood out to you the most, listener? What parts resonated with

you? Do you see these myths as purely symbolic? Or could there be some historical basis to them? And what about that deeper meaning? What do you think this story tells us about human nature, our relationship with God, our place in this whole big universe? I hope you keep exploring these questions.

Keep searching for answers. Keep that curiosity alive. Because at the end of the day, these stories are like invitations to think about the big stuff, you know, life, faith, the meaning of it all.

That's what it's all about. And on that note, thanks for joining us on this deep dive into the story of Noah's Ark. We hope you'll keep on diving, keep on exploring the mysteries of history, mythology, and the human experience.

Keep on learning. Until next time.