

Rom. 14:19
So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.



John 8:32
And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

November

3

2019

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST (4)

by Jim Stauffer

The Bible speaks of the church in two different aspects. It speaks of what we would call the church universal. This is the church Jesus died to establish (**Mat.16:18; Acts 20:28**). It also speaks of the church as a functioning unit in a local community. We would call this the local church. What is the difference and how do we know of which a given Scripture speaks? Our goal today is to make that identification in the hope it will aid us in our obedience to His instruction concerning each.

First, let us identify the universal church. When Jesus said in **Mat. 16:18**, *I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it*, He was speaking of the church to which all obedient converts would be added (**Acts 2:47**). This is the church the writer of the book of Hebrews describes as, *the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*, (**Heb. 12:23**).

One thing we have already learned in this short series of articles about the church is it is also referred to as the Christ's kingdom. Remember, Christ is reigning in heaven now and is referred to as a King on David's throne (**Luke 1:31-33; Acts 2:29-36**). His role as the King over His kingdom parallels with God giving him all authority over the church, His body (**Eph. 1:20-23**). This, the universal church then, is the body of Christ (**Col. 1:18**), of which all the saved are members. The one great distinction between this body and the local church is there is no organization or work that is done at this unit level. I repeat, there is no organization or method whereby this unit functions together to carry out the will of God. Oh, do not misunderstand, individual members of this group will continue to serve the king in ways He has directed, but the universal church does not have a specified function as a unit. One final point to be made about the universal church. It is comprised of, as the Hebrew writer indicates, *the general assembly* of individual saints. It is not comprised of the total collection of local churches, but rather it is the body to which each individual is added as they are

redeemed from sin.

Organization is the major difference between the universal church and the local church. It is through efforts of local churches throughout the world that God carries out His mission of salvation. The church is the *pillar and ground of the truth* (**1 Tim. 3:15**). That means it is the foundation and support of the truth which is the saving message of the gospel. It becomes the labor of the local church to communicate that message in each and every community it can reach throughout the world.

We now would like to notice some things Scripture, the word of God, instructs the local churches to do in spreading the gospel. First and foremost members of the church are to be disciples of Christ and as such they will communicate His principles of righteousness to those around them both in word and deed. But that is what each individual is to do as a member of the universal church. There are instructions concerning an organized effort the local church as a functioning unit is to make on this behalf. Let us look at those as we conclude.

There is a need to organize any unit into an effective force to accomplish any determined goal. The goal God has assigned the church is to be *the pillar and ground of the truth*. In order to accomplish that, the church must carry out the design God has chosen, since He is the author of all truth. The organization of the church begins with local authority. The apostle Paul told evangelists Timothy and Titus to establish elders in the churches. Paul and Barnabas did this as they established churches across the country they traveled. Elders are charged with the oversight of the local church (**Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1,2**). They are to be men who meet God's qualifications (not man's) (**1 Tim. 3; Titus 1**). They are instructed in the passages in **Acts** and **1 Peter** to have oversight of *the flock of God among you*, which limits their authority to the local church of which they are members. The Scripture also calls for another office in the church and that is the deacons. These men are not given the same

responsibility as the elders, but rather are to serve under the eldership helping to carry out the details of the designed mission as determined by the eldership.

As we conclude this article, let us remember both the similarities and the differences in the local church and the universal church.

First, they are similar in that the saved in Christ are both members of the church in the universal sense as they are added to His body. But they also have a responsibility to assume their role in the local church as it fulfills its function before God.

The local church has local authority for the purposes of organization. Elders in the local church as we previously stated are only authorized to carry out God's instruction. There is no authority that originates with them. They are simply servants of the Lord charged with overseeing the souls in that location. The church universal has no such organization or authority assigned to it as Christ is the head of the church which is His body. The local church is the unit God has designed to carry out the message of the King, Christ Jesus as He reigns from heaven.

In our next and final article in this series we will discuss the work of the church. That discussion will further clarify the difference in the local and universal church and hopefully enable us to avoid some of the transgressions made by others in the past who have not recognized the difference in how God has chosen to carry out His mission.

“Tell Me About: Faith”

“Mommy, tell me about when you and Daddy met!” “Daddy, tell me about what you do at work!” We are all familiar with the questions kids have for their parents. They want Mom and Dad to tell them about EVERYTHING! Well, as Christians we have a lot of questions for our Heavenly Father as well, and there is no better source of information because our God cannot lie, **Titus 1:2**.

One of the most fundamental points about which we should ask is “faith” so, “Tell me about Faith!” According to **Hebrews 11:1** “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” it is simply the ability to know about things which we cannot see. In fact it is just that simple. We use faith in everyday life quite frequently. For example, if I enter a dark room and turn the light switch to on and it remains dark I know, assuming the bulb is good, that there is a problem with the electricity. If the light comes on and illuminates the room I know for a fact that there is electricity flowing through the fixture. I know the electricity is there, though I cannot see the electricity itself, by the light it generates. Therefore I know about electricity by faith. That's all the more complicated it is!

Unfortunately I think most people are like little Johnny who, when asked to define faith in Sunday school class, said, “Faith is believin’ what you know ain’t so!” Poor Johnny is headed for a rude awakening in life. So much of what we call absolute knowledge in this world is really based on faith, the ability to understand truth that is not visible to our eyes: Gravity, Magnetism, Love. All of these are invisible and all too real!

Cleveland Reddinger

Different Accounts of the Flood and the Theology Behind Them

by Shane Scott

Gustav Doré, 1866

The Book of Genesis is not the only ancient account of a great flood. Other cultures, particularly in the region of Mesopotamia, also have flood stories. One of the most famous accounts of a flood is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which apparently preserves an even earlier flood story found in the *Epic of Atrahasis*.

Both of these accounts predate the record found in Genesis, leading some critics to conclude that Genesis borrowed from these prior accounts. And indeed, there are many features shared by all of these stories:

- Divine judgment
- Divine judgment by a flood
- Warnings given to one family
- The construction of a large boat
- The use of birds for reconnaissance
- Sacrifices offered by the survivors

At first glance these similarities are striking. However, once it is granted that there is going to be an ancient flood, most of these details are fairly predictable. Ancient people believed in deities; a boat would be the only way to escape a deluge; birds would be the logical choice for scouting; and sacrifices would be the normal course of action for devout survivors. In fact, if you read the ancient non-biblical flood accounts, what is far more striking is how *different* the Genesis account is at every important point. To illustrate, here is a section of the *Epic of Atrahasis*: Twelve hundred years had not gone by; the land had expanded and the people had multiplied. The land was bellowing like wild oxen, and the god was disturbed by their uproar.

Enlil heard their noise and addressed the great gods: “The noise of humankind is too loud for me, with all their uproar I cannot go to sleep.”

There are two important observations to draw here. First, the pagan flood accounts are polytheistic. There are multiple gods involved, and they are often working

at cross purposes with each other. Second, the reason for divine judgment is that “humankind is too loud.” People are too noisy, and they are keeping the gods awake! And so the gods attempt a series of efforts (disease and drought) to quiet humanity, culminating in a flood.

Enlil opened his mouth to speak and addressed the assembly of all the gods:

“Come now, let us all take an oath to bring a flood.”

Anu swore first, Enlil swore, his sons swore with him. . . .

Enki opened his mouth and addressed the gods his brothers:

“Why will you bind me with an oath? Am I to lay hands on my own people? . . .

Am I to give birth to a flood? That is the task of Enlil. . .”

As you can see, one of the gods, Enki, objects to this plan, and – as you might have guessed – decides to warn the hero, Atrahasis, to build a boat to escape.

By contrast, the Genesis account is striking in its sobriety. The key differences are staggering:

- There is only one God.
- The reason for divine judgment is utter human wickedness and brutality. *“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:5, 11).*
- God is heartbroken over the sinfulness of humanity. *“And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Genesis 6:6).*
- The one true God sees a human who is the exception, and determines to save him. *“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8).*

The contrast between the nature of God and the nature of humanity could not be more profound. In the ancient accounts, the gods are petty, conniving, and capricious. And human beings are mere annoyances. In the Genesis account, there is one God of absolute holiness, and human beings are those made in God’s image (making the sinfulness of humanity all the more tragic and perverse).

The vastly different views of deity are compelling. In the Genesis account, God is completely sovereign, in control of every aspect of the flood.

- *“For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:4).*
- *“He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground” (Genesis 7:23).*
- *“And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” (Genesis 8:1).*

By contrast, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the gods are frightened by their own flood! The gods were frightened by the Flood, and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu. The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching

by the outer wall. Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth, the sweet-voiced Mistress of the Gods wailed: “The olden days have alas turned to clay, because I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods! How could I say evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people!!”

It only makes sense that the pagan gods were terrified by the flood. In ancient mythology, the gods were part of the natural world (sun gods, moon gods, etc). So a cataclysm in nature would terrify gods who are part of that natural order. But the God of the Bible is separate from creation as the Creator, and since He is distinct from the natural order, He is in total control of the natural order.

That’s why the account of the flood in Genesis is the mirror image of the account of creation. In creation, God separates *“the waters” above and below (Genesis 1:6, 9)*. And in the flood, God does the reverse, unleashing the waters above and below **(Genesis 7:11)**.

Because its view of God is much higher than that of pagan stories, Genesis’s view of humanity is also much higher. After all, in Genesis mankind is made in God’s image. This is why God expresses such remorse about humanity’s plunge into brutality, and it also why God is determined to save a remnant in the form of Noah and his family.

There is another important difference that I should also mention. In *Gilgamesh*, the hero (Utanapushtim) becomes a god at the end of the story: Enlil went up inside the boat and, grasping my hand, made me go up. He had my wife go up and kneel by my side. He touched our forehead and, standing between us, he blessed us: “Previously Utanapishtim was a human being. But now let Utanapishtim and his wife become like us, the gods!”

At the end of the Genesis account, Noah gets drunk. In pagan religions, the view of humanity lurched between the extremes of slavery and deity. In Genesis, humanity is made in God’s image, but also capable of incredible failure.

For all of these reasons, it is unreasonable to think that Genesis “borrowed” from these ancient accounts. Instead, as Kenneth Mathews summarizes the point: Comparing the Babylonian versions and Genesis, A. Heidel in his classic study concluded, “The skeleton is the same in both cases, but the flesh and blood and, above all, the animating spirit are different.” Although the flood stories share in a general framework, it is speculative to say any more than that the pagan stories and Genesis arise from a common memory of the ancient deluge (*Genesis 1-11:26*. Vol. 1A. The New American Commentary, p. 101).

And all of this illustrates how crucially distinct the biblical record is from any other ancient account in its view of God and humanity.

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

HOURS OF WORSHIP

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

Visitors welcome

We conduct in home Bible Studies

We offer Correspondence Courses

OUR ADDRESS IS:

7845 Cottonwood Dr.

Lenexa, Kansas 66216

913-764-9170

Check out the following websites:

facebook.com/LenexaChurchofChrist

lenexachurchofchrist.org

Evangelist and Editor Jim Stauffer

Elders: Ron Peck and Jim Stauffer

Deacons: Bill Miller

Brandon Jimison

Casey Dent

Joe Hurd

NEWS AND NOTES:

PLEASE REMEMBER JAN PATRICK, STEPHEN KIMKER, STEVE WIMP, AND ALMA BAUMGARTNER, LINDIA JACKSON, TRUDY MULLEN
RON DALY
SUZANNE WIMP IS IN TRINITY REHAB

BIBLE CLASSES

SUNDAY MORNING

STUDY OF AUTHORITY

TEACHER - BILL MILLER

WEDNESDAY EVENING

THE BOOK OF JOB

TEACHER - JIM STAUFFER

SUNDAY SERMON: HOLDING TO A FORM OF GODLINESS



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10