

Mark Driscoll Was Wrong About Noah

According to pastor Mark Driscoll, “Noah was not a good guy but a graced guy.” In fact, he says, “The most common way Christians butcher the story of Noah is by misreading what the Bible actually says.”

Let’s take a look at what the Bible actually says to evaluate these strong claims.

Genesis 6:5 states, “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” (ESV). In stark contrast, verse 8 reads, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”

Pastor Driscoll is convinced that the normal (and obvious) way of reading this passage is wrong, and he rejects the idea that the Scripture is saying, “There were a bunch of bad guys who drowned and one good guy who got a boat. The moral of this story is that if you are a good guy, then God will save you from death and wrath.”

If that were true, he argues, then it would not be the gospel but rather salvation by works.

In contrast, he understands the text to say that Noah, like everyone else, was totally wicked, but he received grace from God (apparently by God’s sovereign choice), which then enabled him to live a godly life, as described in Genesis 6:9: “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”

And Pastor Driscoll points out that Genesis 6:8 is the first time in the Bible where the word *grace* appears, which then connects the passage to Paul’s message of grace.

Of course, it is true that none of us are righteous enough to stand before God without His grace and that without His help and intervention, we would all be lost. I'm not arguing that for a second.

But Pastor Driscoll's interpretation is contrary to the testimony of the rest of the Scripture, and it misunderstands the Hebrew as well.

Actually, the Hebrew expression "to find grace" in someone's eyes means to find favor or to please, as most translations recognize (see, for example, Proverbs 28:23), and the expression is unrelated to the New Testament concept of grace, which is expressed in other ways in the Old Testament (see, for example, Psalm 103:10-14, Micah 7:18-19 and Jeremiah 31:31-34). Anyone who knows biblical Hebrew well knows this to be true.

So, what the Bible is saying here is that, contrary to the rest of the human race, Noah stood out before the Lord, which is the opposite of Pastor Driscoll's interpretation.

Noah was different. He was righteous. As professor Bob Gladstone, my FIRE School of Ministry colleague, notes, "How refreshing Noah must have been to God's just heart! Noah would be like a new Adam, the father of a renewed Adamic race."

This is further confirmed in Ezekiel 14:14 (and Ezekiel 14:20), where Noah, along with Daniel and Job, is mentioned as an extraordinarily righteous man but not righteous enough to save Ezekiel's sinful generation: "Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God."

This same testimony is confirmed again in 2 Peter 2:5, which tells us that God "did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly."

Noah was chosen by God to build the ark and preserve the human race because he was righteous (Genesis 7:1). It was for this same reason that he was raised up to preach as “a herald of righteousness.” And the fact that a person is righteous because they live a righteous life is taught throughout the Bible, meaning throughout the Old Testament and the New (see, for example, Ezekiel 18:1-32 and Luke 1:6).

The key thing to remember is that this is the result of faith and the proof of faith, as Jacob (James) explains so clearly in his letter, where he teaches emphatically that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26).

So, Hebrews 11:7 presents Noah as a God-fearing man of faith, which was the key to his righteous living. In other words, because he believed in the one true God, he lived a righteous life (rather than earning his salvation by his good works). To quote Professor Gladstone again, “Noah was a human with a nature like ours. Yet that same Noah showed me that it is possible to live in this stubborn, rebellious world and still be truly innocent, holy, righteous—God’s friend.”

To be sure, we can always discuss questions of God’s sovereignty and His empowering grace, but those questions are not the subject of the flood account, nor are they part of the lesson the Lord wants us to learn from the text.

Instead, the moral of the story is clear: God destroys the wicked and delivers the righteous, as numerous biblical texts declare, and we become righteous by faith, which is demonstrated in a godly life.

Noah serves as a great example to all of us.

Michael Brown *is author of Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show The Line of Fire on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. Follow him*

at AskDrBrown on Facebook or at @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.