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The Dimensions of Noah's Ark

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Within this video, I reflect upon the significance of the dimensions of Noah's Ark. Within the video I reference this article by Gordon Wenham:

https://www.godawa.com/chronicles_of_the_nephilim/Articles_By_Others/Wenham-Coherence_Flood_Narrative.pdf. For more on the relationship between the Noah story and the Exodus—though still only scratching the surface—see this:

<https://alastairadversaria.com/2013/02/14/noahs-exodus-40-days-of-exoduses-01/>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. A couple of days ago, a listener of this podcast sent me an email asking me if I had any thoughts on the dimensions of Noah's Ark. Now, I have no settled opinion on the matter, but I have a few thoughts that I thought I'd throw at the issue and then open it up to see if anyone else has any suggestions or reflections on the matter.

The dimensions of Noah's Ark are given in Genesis 6. In verse 14 following, God says to Noah, So it's 300 by 50 by 30. And he's told you should make a window for the ark and

you shall finish it to a cubit from above and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.

So you have a description of Noah's Ark here. A description of a three-decked vessel. And this three-decked vessel has a window or skylight at the top, some have suggested.

It has a door and it has three decks, presumably, of 300 by 50 by 10 in height, all measured in cubits. The first thing that this might remind us of are the dimensions of the tabernacle. The dimensions of the tabernacle are 30 in length and 10 in width and 10 in height, all in cubits.

And then the dimensions of its courtyard are 100 cubits by 50 cubits. The dimensions of the temple double the measurements of the tabernacle. So the dimensions of the temple are 60 cubits by 20 cubits by 20 cubits or 30 cubits depending upon what we're measuring.

The tabernacle is three times as long as it is wide and the courtyard is twice as long as it is wide. Now that might be interesting in itself. We have the dimensions are also somewhat reminiscent.

The courtyard 100 by 50, three times that length is the length of the ark. So it's three courtyards of the tabernacle put together. On the other hand, the tabernacle is three times its length.

It's three times its width rather. And so it has three separate sections. It could be divided into three separate sections of equal distance.

Its core central section, the Holy of Holies, is 10 by 10. It's a cube shape. And in a similar way, we could say that the courtyard multiplied three times is the length of the tabernacle.

So maybe what we're seeing is a sort of tabernacle-izing of the courtyard as its length is multiplied by three. Other interesting things to notice is the significance of certain numbers, the recurrence of certain numbers within the story. If you read the story of the Ark narrative, you'll see at the very central numbers, there's 150 days of the waters rising and then 150 days of the waters abating until he lands upon Mount Ararat.

That's 300 altogether. So the length of the Ark is the length of the days that the Ark was afloat. Also, when we think about Noah's age at the time of the start of the flood, Noah is 600 years old.

150 times 4 when the flood comes or 300 times 2. After the flood, he lives for 300 years and 50 years. Again, his years, the years of his life, recall the dimension of the Ark. And so I think there's something going on in these sorts of figures.

The two central numbers of the flood, as I've mentioned, are these two periods of 150 days. So these two, essentially, five-month periods at the center. And it suggests some association with the length of the Ark itself.

We also see some other interesting numbers within the narrative. We see seven recurring on a number of occasions. What you notice is this whole structure narrative is heavily structured.

It's a polystrophy or a chiasm. And Gordon Wenham's work on this is particularly worth reading. I'll give a link to his article on the great polystrophy within the flood narrative.

But he observes at certain points it seems artificial. So there's a repetition of the seven days of waiting for the flood. Seven days and then seven days repeated.

And then at the end, you have seven days waiting for the waters to subside. And then another seven days of waiting for the water to subside. But it's written in a way that reveals that there was another seven days beforehand.

So at the beginning, you have a repetition of those seven days, which leads to a situation of just one seven days being presented as if it were two. And at the end, you have a period of three sevens being presented as if it were two. It provides a very neat literary structure.

But it also doesn't fit neatly to the facts. What it does is it shows that the literary structure is important and it's foregrounded. Now, as we look through the story of Genesis, we've noticed already the importance of two sevens.

The two sevens of the serving for Rachel and Leah. Or the two sevens that pass between Ishmael's birth and Isaac's birth. Or we might think about the two sevens of the period of time of the famine, of the years of plenty followed by the years of famine.

Or maybe even Joseph reaches the end of the 13 years and starts the 14th year as he is raised up to a new status in Pharaoh's court. And so seven and seven is a significant period of time already within Genesis. The narrative is also structured in a way that suggests at the very heart, you have God's remembering of Noah.

And you have on either side of that two sets of 150 days. And those periods of time, as I've mentioned, are the entire period of time that the ark is afloat before it lands on Mount Arad. But where else do we find these sorts of numbers? Where else do we go through an entire year within a narrative with a lot of emphasis upon specific numbers? So we have the period in which the waters, the rain is coming.

And that's 40 days and 40 nights. That's preceded by seven days of preparation. Where do we see that elsewhere? I think we find it in the story of the creation of the tabernacle.

If you look at Exodus chapter 24, at the very end of it, it says, Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain, in the eyes of the children of Israel.

So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights. Where have we seen seven days of preparation followed by 40 days and 40 nights? In the story of Moses, in the story of Noah.

Noah has seven days of preparation waiting for the rain to come. And then the rain occurs for 40 days and 40 nights. And there are other comparisons there.

There's the lifting up of offerings in verse 2 of chapter 25 of Exodus. And then we see the lifting up of the ark above the earth upon the waters, using very similar language. We see also the making of a wooden box, which is overlaid with some other material.

And there's a contrast there as well. It's the making of a wooden box, clear dimensions given, and overlaid in the first case with pitch. In the second case, it's overlaid with gold.

One is very rude, raw material. And the other is a glorious material. The covering of the mercy seat was also seen to be some sort of connection.

And within this story, I think we are seeing a parallel. That there is a parallel between the creation of the tabernacle that this proceeds, the seven days and the 40 days, proceeds the creation of the tabernacle. And the seven days and 40 days in the story of Noah, it is the actual event of the start of the flood.

The start, waiting for the start of the flood, and then the 40 days as the rains descend. Recognizing these two narratives alongside each other, you also should notice that they have a year pattern. If we're following a lunar calendar for Noah's year, then it's a full year that passes.

A full year that passes before he, from the day he gets on the ark to the day that he leaves it. And we have a full year passing in the story of Exodus as well. It says, then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, on the first day of the first month, you shall set up the tabernacle of meeting, etc.

This is the first day of the first month of the new year. They've gone through the whole Exodus experience, and that new year was established at the beginning of the Passover. It was the first of months for them in chapter 12 of the book of Exodus.

So we have two narratives following a year pattern, both involving strict instructions to make a particular box that's overlaid with some other material. And the words, they also record the word for the mercy seat, the covering. It has similar details in that respect.

It also involves seven days and 40 days. It involves measurements that are reminiscent, that this courtyard that is almost tabernacle-ized. And that connection, I think, suggests that these two stories can be read alongside each other in a way that is illuminating.

That as Israel leaves Egypt, they have a period of one year. And that one year is this journey, this journey when they end up landing upon a mountain. And landing upon the mountain, this new reality is created that is related to the mountain.

If you read the description of the ark and its various dimensions and other things like that, the Ark of the Covenant. And if you read, it's not the same word in the Hebrew, even though it is the same word in English. You'll see that the ark corresponds to the mountain, the box of the ark.

And then the covering can correspond to the pavement that the elders of Israel see this pavement above them. And God is above that pavement. So God's presence between the cherubim, above the mercy seat.

And so you have an image that corresponds with the mountain. And this, I think, is also one thing that will help us to think about the relationship between the Ark of Noah, Mount Ararat, and what's being formed in that occasion as well. At the very end of that story, there's an emphasis upon the bow, the presence of that sign that's put in the cloud.

In the story of the Exodus, there is a similar emphasis upon the cloud, particularly at the end. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting because the cloud rested above it.

And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. When the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up.

For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all of the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. So they're journeying. They're being brought in an ark.

They pass through an entire year. There are periods of seven, followed by periods of 40. And there is a judgment upon the rest of the earth.

And so it begins with this great judgment upon Egypt, the flood of the plagues. And they're wiped out in one. It's literally the event of the waters covering them in the Red Sea.

And then they're raised up and they're brought to this mountain. And in the mountain, they form this new covenant. And there's their emphasis upon the cloud at the end.

So I think reading those two narratives alongside each other is illuminating. And it may help us to understand the dimensions of the ark. That the dimensions of the ark are connected with the dimensions of the tabernacle and its courtyard.

That's just the start of some thoughts thrown at that issue. But I'm sure many of you have further thoughts. So I'll hand it over to you.

Please leave any thoughts that you might have in the comments or on my Curious Cat account. Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow.

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