

## The Unsinkable Noah

Over the Christmas break, I took the opportunity to visit the Tom Zaller *Titanic Exhibition* currently touring the world. The recreations with images, sound and light, were quite awe inspiring - on occasions terrifying. But I was personally a bit disappointed that there were no actual artefacts from the Titanic wreck discovered in 1985 by marine archaeologist Dr Robert Ballard, two miles below the sea and 370 miles off the coast of Newfoundland, Ballard subsequently went looking for evidence of Noah's flood – not that he acknowledged such a person or indeed an ark. Like many of our Christian scholars today, he gave no credence to the Noah “myth”. He was motivated by the numerous flood stories across a wide diversity of human cultures.

He found evidence of a cataclysmic inundation – an ancient shoreline twelve miles out from the Black Sea's present coast, 300 feet below the present sea level, and extending in a rim just to the north of Mt Ararat in Turkey. There were ancient houses of dressed stone and fossilised molluscs of a variety that only live in fresh water – all dating to around 5600 BC. In 2001 he published his report in the prestigious *American Journal of Archaeology*. Well that confirmed the occurrence of a major deluge, but for confirmation of the Noah story we need to go to the New Testament – assuming of course that we accept the Gospels and epistles as the Word of God to us.

Luke includes Noah in the genealogy of Jesus, and as we have said before, we can't have a Jewish Messiah with mythological figures in His ancestry. He would have no credibility whatsoever. Peter, the one upon whom Jesus said He would build His Church, relied on the historical accuracy of the flood account to reinforce his teaching on the fate of false teachers. “*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned... and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.*” (2 Peter 2 4-5). And Peter is at pains to reassure his readers that his sources are reliable, “*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables*” (2 Peter 1:16).

Noah has a place in the Jewish hall of fame wherein hang the portraits of the heroes of faith. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and here at the back, Enoch. (Heb 11). But wait a minute, here is an empty picture frame. The inscription reads *By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household*” (Heb 11:7). One of the faith heroes, one among the “*Cloud of Witnesses*” that surround believers (Heb 12:1), has gone missing. In fact he never actually existed? The author of this epistle so rich in Old Testament teaching, ranks the historicity of Noah along with that of the patriarchs, in developing his

arguments on that great theme of faith, without which “*it is impossible to please God*”.(Heb 11:6). Better get *this* right!

But now for Jesus himself – and we *surely* accept the Gospels as a true record of Jesus' words. In Mat 24 - the Olivet discourse – the disciples ask Him, “*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?*” (Mat 24:3). Jesus prefaces his reply with timely words of warning, “*Take heed that no man deceives you*”.(Mat 24 4), and then He goes on, “*For as in the days before the flood... until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be*”.

The original Greek here is absolutely emphatic that the coming of Christ will be characterised by exactly the same conditions as those prevailing at the time of Noah. It uses the adverb we encountered in looking at Jonah - ὡσπερ (HOSPER) *exactly like*, and it reinforces that comparison, with the conjunction we previously associated with Adam - γὰρ (GAR) *indeed*. And these two are strung together - - *Let there be no misunderstanding about this. Indeed, exactly like the days before the flood.....*”. Jesus was absolutely unequivocal in linking His second coming to the historicity of Noah.

I realize that I have used the Bible to prove the Bible and this is a conscious choice. When He was on earth, Jesus endorsed the Old Testament which was His bible. “*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*” (Mat 5:18). He also preauthenticated the New Testament by appointing the apostles as authorised spokesmen for Him, “*I have given them Your word;*” (John 17:14). So we either accept the Bible whose message of salvation, we have embraced, or we look to some other authority for answers to the great questions of life. But there can be no cherry picking – discarding those parts of scripture that we find inconvenient or difficult to reconcile with our own perceptions.

In my next essay I will trace the origins of a presumption that feels itself qualified to second guess Jesus and the apostles, about the reliability of particular scriptures. But more importantly, we will analyse the implications of ruling a thick red line through the biblical accounts of Adam, Jonah and Noah

“*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*”.(Isaiah 8:20)