

Session 2

The Flood

Eight persons were saved through water, and Peter says Baptism corresponds to this.

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the New Testament itself, in 1 Peter 3:20–21, explicitly names the flood as the pattern of Baptism, and reads Peter's startling sentence with their own eyes: *Baptism... now saves you*. They wrestle honestly with Peter's qualification about the removal of dirt and the appeal to God, and see that the flood water both judges and carries.

Catholic Touchstone. The Catechism states it plainly: the Church has seen in Noah's ark a prefiguring of salvation by Baptism, for by it a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water (CCC 1219). This is not our clever reading; it is Peter's, and the Church has simply never stopped reading it.

What You Need to Know

Tonight the study shifts gears. Session 1 showed a pattern; tonight an apostle interprets the pattern for us in writing. 1 Peter 3:20–21 is the only place in Scripture that uses the word *baptism* and the word *saves* in the same sentence with baptism as the subject, and it does so by pointing backward to the flood. For a study that is apologetic in nature, this is the load-bearing wall: whatever Baptism is, Peter says it *now saves you*. Every honest reading has to start there, including the objections.

First, the flood itself. Genesis 6–9 is a de-creation and re-creation story told in Genesis 1's own vocabulary. The waters above and below, separated on day two, collapse back together (Genesis 7:11); the world returns to the watery chaos of Genesis 1:2; and then God makes a wind, in Hebrew *ruach*, the same word Genesis 1:2 uses for the Spirit, pass over the earth (Genesis 8:1); the waters subside, and in time dry land stands out again (Genesis 8:13–14), as on the third day (Genesis 1:9). The verse itself says wind; the echo of the Spirit over the deep is the narrator's deliberate craft, and we present it as exactly that. Noah steps out into a washed world, receives the blessing of Adam nearly word for word (compare Genesis 9:1 with 1:28), and God hangs his bow in the clouds. The flood is Genesis 1 happening again: through water and wind-Spirit, an old corrupted world dies and a new one is born.

Second, the strange double character of the water. The same flood that destroys the corrupt world *carries* the ark. The water is simultaneously judgment on sin and the very thing that lifts Noah's family to safety. Peter noticed the preposition: they were saved *through* water, not merely from it. This double character is the deepest thing tonight teaches about Baptism: in the font, something in us really dies, and we are really carried. St. Paul will say it without imagery in Session 11: buried with him in baptism, raised with him.

Third, the sentence itself. Read 1 Peter 3:18–22 several times before the session, aloud. Peter's flow: Christ died and was made alive; in the days of Noah eight persons were saved through water; *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God*

for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Greek word behind *corresponds to this* is *antitypos*: the flood is the type, Baptism the antitype, the reality the pattern pointed to. Peter is not decorating with an illustration; he is using the technical grammar of typology and then making a present-tense claim: *now saves you*.

Fourth, prepare for the objection, because it is strong and your group deserves it at full strength. Many serious Protestant readers say: Peter immediately clarifies himself. Not the removal of dirt from the body, that is, not the physical washing, but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, that is, the inner act of faith. And it saves *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*, so the resurrection is doing the saving, not water. On this reading Peter mentions baptism only to point past it. Hold that argument respectfully; the answer is in the session, and it is better because the objection was honest.

Finally, the dove. Genesis 8:8–12: Noah sends out a dove over the waters, and it returns with a freshly plucked olive leaf, the sign that the waters had subsided; Christians have always seen peace returning to the world in that image. File the image away and say nothing tonight beyond noticing it. The group will meet a dove over water again at Session 9, and it should feel like recognizing an old friend.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

Genesis 8:11 (RSV2CE)

The flood narrative deliberately replays creation: waters cover everything, a wind-Spirit (*ruach*) passes over them (Genesis 8:1), dry land appears, and a new humanity receives the old blessing (Genesis 9:1). The New Testament then closes the loop in a single sentence:

...in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Peter 3:20–21 (RSV2CE)

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr • *Dialogue with Trypho*

St. Justin, writing in the mid-second century, teaches in substance that the flood was already a mystery of salvation: righteous Noah, saved with his family through water and wood, prefigures the new humanity saved through the water of Baptism and the wood of the cross, and the eight persons point to the eighth day, the day of Christ's resurrection.

Leader note: Notice how early this is: barely a century after the apostles, Christians were already reading the flood exactly as Peter taught them to. Water and wood together also quietly foreshadow Session 12.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *Letters*

St. Cyprian, the third-century bishop and martyr, teaches in substance that the ark of Noah was a

type of the one Church: as those inside the ark were saved through the water that destroyed the world outside, so the saving water of Baptism belongs to the Church, the ark God has built for the salvation of the human race.

Leader note: If someone raises the hard edge of this (what about everyone outside?), do not improvise. The Church's mature teaching holds both truths: all salvation comes from Christ through his Church, and those who through no fault of their own do not know Christ or his Church, if they sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive to do his will as conscience makes it known, can still be saved (CCC 846–848). Name both, promise the topic returns in Session 14, and keep the room.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *City of God, Book 15*

St. Augustine teaches in substance that the ark is a figure of the Church sojourning through the flood of this age, and he lingers over one detail: the door set in the ark's side, through which every saved creature entered, signifies the wound opened in the side of the crucified Christ, from which flowed the sacraments by which those who believe enter the Church.

Leader note: Say nothing more about the side wound tonight. It is a planted seed; Session 12 (Blood and Water) will open it. If a sharp participant gasps at John 19:34, smile and say: hold that thought for a few weeks.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1219 makes tonight's typology official: the Church has seen in Noah's ark a prefiguring of salvation by Baptism, for by it a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. CCC 1220 adds the double character the group will discover: if spring water symbolizes life, the water of the sea is a symbol of death, and so baptismal water can signify the mystery of the cross; by Baptism the Christian enters into Christ's death. CCC 845 gathers the ark-and-Church image: the Church is the ark that saves.

CCC 701 quietly holds the dove for later: at the end of the flood, the dove released by Noah returns with an olive branch; when Christ comes up from the water of his own baptism, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down upon him. Read 701 yourself before Session 9; tonight it stays in your pocket.

Paragraphs for this session: 1219–1220, 845, 701

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Why water? (master thread): tonight adds a hard new datum to the sealed question. Water in the flood is not gentle; it judges *and* saves, kills *and* carries. If anyone wrote a soft answer in their My Guess box last week, tonight should quietly complicate it. Do not resolve.

Water plus Spirit: Genesis 8:1, the *ruach* over the flood waters, is instance two of the pairing. Let a participant spot it if possible; if not, point at it once and move on.

The dove (planted tonight, resolved Session 9): dove over water, returning with peace. One admiring sentence, no more.

The door in the side (planted tonight via Augustine, resolved Session 12): do not explain it.

Peter's sentence (resolved across Sessions 8–10): the group meets *baptism now saves you* tonight and will not fully digest it for weeks. That is by design; the sealed guess and this verse mature together.

Session Goals

1. The group can retell the flood as a re-creation story: waters return, the *ruach* moves over them, a new world emerges.
2. The group has read 1 Peter 3:20–21 aloud and can quote the clause *Baptism... now saves you* accurately, including its qualifications.
3. The steelman (Peter points past the water to inner faith) has been given at full strength and answered from the text.
4. The group can articulate the double character of the water: judgment and rescue in the same element.
5. The dove and the door in the side are planted, unexplained.

Timed Plan (85 minutes)

5 min • Welcome and opening prayer

10 min • Win questions

15 min • Build: the flood as Genesis 1 replayed (Genesis 7:11, 8:1, 9:1), Q1-Q3

15 min • Live discovery: 1 Peter 3:18–22, finding the apostle's own interpretation

10 min • Build: the double character of the water, Q5

15 min • Steelman: does Peter point past the water?

5 min • Send questions

10 min • Live It, memory verse, closing prayer

If you must land at 75 minutes, cut: Q3 (Genesis 9:1 blessing parallel; summarize it in one leader sentence) and the Dig Deeper box. Never cut the live discovery of 1 Peter 3 or the steelman.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you did not abandon the world you loved, even when it filled with violence. You carried Noah through the waters and set your bow in the clouds. Carry us tonight through your word. Teach us what your apostle Peter meant, and give us honest hearts before hard sentences. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win • open the room

QW1. When you read the flood story this week, what struck you that you had never noticed before, or what bothered you?

QW2. Have you ever had something painful turn out to be the very thing that carried you somewhere good? How do you tell the difference, in the middle of it, between drowning and being carried?

Build • into the text

Set the scene briefly: Genesis told us the world God made through water and Spirit was very good; by Genesis 6 it is filled with violence. Now watch *how* God renews it. Have three different readers take Genesis 7:11, Genesis 8:1, and Genesis 9:1.

Q1. Genesis 7:11 says the fountains of the great deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened. Thinking back to creation (day two, the waters above and below), what is God allowing to happen to his creation here?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Creation is being un-made. On day two God separated the waters above from the waters below; here the separation collapses and the primordial deep swallows the world again. The earth returns to something like Genesis 1:2: water everywhere, and one wooden vessel with life brooding inside it. The flood is not random divine anger; it is de-creation, told deliberately in creation's own vocabulary.

Q2. Genesis 8:1: God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. The Hebrew word for wind here is *ruach*, the same word translated *Spirit* in Genesis 1:2. Where have we seen this exact picture before, and what happens next both times?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 1:2, where the *ruach* of God moves over the face of the waters; and both stories then run through subsiding waters to dry land and new life (Genesis 8:13–14 with 1:9). Genesis 8:1 itself says a wind; the echo of the Spirit is the narrator's craft, and the group may hold it precisely as that: creation's grammar replayed: water, the breath of God, a new world. The narrator wants us to understand that God renews the world the same way he made it.

Q3. Compare Genesis 9:1 with Genesis 1:28. What is God doing for Noah's family, and what does that make Noah?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God repeats Adam's blessing almost word for word: be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. Noah steps out of the water as a new Adam at the head of a new humanity in a washed world. Hold this: coming up out of the water as a new person in a new creation is precisely the shape the New Testament will give to Baptism.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Now the hunt. Tell the group: one of the apostles read this story exactly the way we just did, and wrote down what it means, and his answer is the boldest sentence about Baptism in the Bible. Give them only this: **1 Peter 3:18–22**. Have them find it, read it aloud twice, and underline every word connected to water.

Let the shock of Baptism... now saves you land in their own voices. Do not soften it and do not explain it yet.

Q4. Peter says eight persons were saved *through* water, and that Baptism *corresponds to this*. The Greek word is *antitypos*: the flood is the pattern, Baptism the reality it pointed to. According to the plain grammar of verse 21, what does Baptism now do?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It saves: *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you*. Baptism is the subject; saves is the verb; you is the object; now is the tense. Whatever qualifications follow (and they matter, and we are about to take them seriously), any account of Baptism has to be able to say this sentence out loud without embarrassment.

Q5. Look at the flood water itself. The same water that destroys the violent world is the water that lifts and carries the ark. What does that double character suggest about what happens to a person in the water of Baptism?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Something dies and someone is carried. The water is judgment on the old corrupt world and rescue for the new one, at the same time, in the same element. Baptism is not a bath added to an otherwise unchanged life; in it the old self is drowned and a new self is carried to shore. St. Paul will say this without any imagery at all later in our study: we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that we might walk in newness of life.

STEELMAN • PRESS THE OBJECTION AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the objection, and it deserves your best voice, because thoughtful Christians we love hold it:

Peter no sooner says *baptism now saves you* than he corrects any magical misunderstanding. Not, he says, the removal of dirt from the body: so not the physical water rite. But an appeal to God for a clear conscience: so the saving thing is the inward turn of the heart, faith reaching out to God. And it saves through the resurrection of Jesus Christ: so the real power is the risen Christ, not a font. On this reading, Peter mentions the ceremony only to point past it to what matters: personal faith in the risen Lord. Is that not the most natural way to honor the whole verse?

Q6. Before we answer: what is genuinely right in this reading? Name at least two things.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Two things in it are simply true, and Catholic teaching insists on both. Baptism is not magic hygiene; a rite performed with no repentance and no faith, as a scrubbing of the flesh, is exactly what Peter excludes, and the Church requires faith around every Baptism: the adult candidate's own repentance and faith, or, for an infant, the faith of the Church, the parents, and the godparents professed at the font. And the power is entirely Christ's resurrection; the Catechism itself teaches that the baptismal water signifies that our salvation flows from the death and resurrection of Christ. The font has no voltage of its own.

But watch what the objection has to do to the grammar. Peter's contrast is not water versus faith; it is one description of Baptism versus a better description of the same Baptism. Not: baptism does not save, faith does. Rather: Baptism now saves you, and here is what Baptism is, not a removal of dirt from the body (which is all a mere washing could ever be) but an appeal to God for a clear conscience (which is what this washing actually is), and here is where its power comes from, the resurrection. The qualification tells us what kind of thing Baptism is; it does not transfer the verb to something else. Peter could easily have written *faith now saves you, of which baptism is the picture*. He wrote the opposite, in a letter, to churches, on purpose.

And the flood will not let us split water from faith anyway. Ask the group: was Noah saved by faith, or through water? Scripture says both without blushing: by faith Noah constructed an ark (Hebrews 11:7), and eight persons were saved through water (1 Peter 3:20). Faith built the ark; the water still had to carry it. Faith and the water rite are not rivals in the story Peter chose; they are exactly how God's rescue works: his gift, received in faith, delivered through the element he appointed. That is the Catholic doctrine of a sacrament, found intact inside a fisherman's sentence.

DIG DEEPER • OPTIONAL

For a strong group: Genesis 8:4 notes the ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month. The group already saw that the eight persons made early Christians think of the eighth day, resurrection day. Ask: why might the early Church have loved numbering and dating details like these? (Not numerology for its own sake, but the conviction that the God who saves through water is also the Lord of time, and that patterns in the story are promises.) Keep it light; this is dessert, not dinner.

Send • out of the room

QS1. Peter says Baptism is *an appeal to God for a clear conscience*. If your Baptism was an appeal made for you or by you, what would it look like to renew that appeal, honestly, this week?

QS2. Where in your life right now does the water feel like it is drowning you rather than carrying you? What would trusting the ark look like there?

Live It This Week

- Pray for the dead of your family by name once this week, entrusting them to the mercy of the God who remembered Noah.
- Read 1 Peter 3:18–22 once more, alone, slowly, and sit for two minutes with the sentence *Baptism now saves you* without arguing with it in either direction.
- Next time you enter the church, touch the holy water and remember: this is ark water. Something drowns; someone is carried.

Memory Verse

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Peter 3:21 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the true ark; in you God has made a way through the waters. Drown in us everything that belongs to the old world: our violence, our grudges, our despair. Carry everything you are saving. We hold up to you now, in silence, the people we most want inside the ark with us. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Genesis 7:11 • De-creation: the deep returns

Genesis 8:1 • The *ruach* over the waters; creation replayed

Genesis 8:8–12 • The dove and the olive leaf (planted, unexplained)

Genesis 9:1 with 1:28 • Noah blessed as a new Adam

1 Peter 3:18–22 • Live discovery: Baptism corresponds to the flood and now saves

Hebrews 11:7 • Steelman answer: faith built the ark; water carried it

Genesis 8:4 • Dig Deeper: dates and numbers as promises