

Theological Reflection on the Story of Noah and the Flood: Genesis 6:1–11:32

Over the course of history, the children of Adam populated the Earth and pushed the boundaries that God had set for them regarding their relationship with his creation. This disobedience caused God to reassert his power and guidance by fashioning a fresh start that would give the rest of humanity a chance to redeem itself. The consequence of this situation was a great flood that effectively ended almost all life but preserved the lives of eight people – Noah and his family. Following this, God made a covenant promise: never again would he destroy the earth by a flood.

The purpose of the flood was not simply to destroy people, but to confront disobedience and sin: a sin that had ravaged the earth and was placing creation in a situation that was becoming irrecoverable. God cares about his creation, and it hurts him deeply to see it being neglected or abused. The story of Noah shows us that if we do not protect and look after our Common Home, we are at risk of losing everything, as current science and ecology continue to warn us.

The issue today remains much the same. We have neglected, and continue to neglect, our Common Home. We must look for ways in our everyday lives to improve how we care for our Earth, and to heed the advice of those who have expertise and devote their time to researching these issues.

Sir David Attenborough, for example, has devoted his life to helping us understand and protect the natural world and encouraging all of us to make a positive impact. His words remain particularly relevant:

“We are at a unique stage in our history. Never before have we had such an awareness of what we are doing to the planet, and never have we had the power to do something about that.”

“Surely, we all have a responsibility to care for our Blue Planet. The future of humanity and indeed, all life on earth, now depends on us.”

David Attenborough recognises that we must work more closely together in society and in politics to achieve this:

“Real success can only come if there is a change in our societies and in our economics and in our politics.”

COP31

The world now faces another important moment in the ongoing struggle to protect our climate and our Common Home.

COP31 is the 2026 United Nations Climate Change Conference. COP stands for Conference of the Parties. The meeting will be held in Antalya, Türkiye, between 9 and 20 November 2026, and will be the 31st meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

It is a global UN summit focused on climate change and on how countries around the world are planning to respond to the continuing climate crisis. It brings together countries, governments, international organisations, scientists, civil society, faith communities and many others who have a role to play in protecting our shared future.

COP31 comes at a critical point in the global climate process. Following COP30 in Belém, Brazil, the international community must continue to move beyond promises and towards the practical implementation of commitments already made. COP31 will be an opportunity to strengthen cooperation, encourage greater ambition and ensure that action matches the scale and urgency of the challenge before us.

The 2026 conference is being hosted by Türkiye in Antalya, with Türkiye and Australia working in partnership in the lead-up to the conference. Australia will lead the COP31 negotiations, while the Pacific will also have an important voice in the process, including through a pre-COP meeting planned for Fiji and Tuvalu in October. This offers a stark reminder that climate change is a global problem, but its effects are not experienced equally.

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement remains at the heart of the modern COP process. It was agreed in 2015 at COP21 in Paris and brought nations together around a shared commitment to tackle climate change.

The agreement calls upon nations to:

- Reduce the amount of harmful greenhouse gases produced and accelerate the transition towards cleaner and renewable forms of energy.
- Hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.
- Strengthen national climate plans over time and regularly assess collective progress.
- Recognise the importance of supporting those countries and communities that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The Paris Agreement is therefore not simply a document about targets and statistics. It is about responsibility, justice and the future of humanity. The decisions made by governments today will affect not only those alive now, but also generations yet to come.

What was the last COP?

COP30 took place in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025. The location was particularly significant because Belém is situated in the Brazilian Amazon region, drawing global attention to the importance of forests, biodiversity and the natural systems upon which the whole world depends.

The Conference continued the international discussion about how countries can turn climate commitments into meaningful action. It also reinforced the importance of co-operation between nations, particularly in supporting communities that are already experiencing the severe effects of climate change. COP31 must build upon the progress made in previous conferences and address the areas where action remains too slow.

Who is responsible for this?

The COP process is organised under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The COP brings together the countries that are Parties to the Convention.

However, responsibility for tackling climate change does not rest with governments alone. Businesses, communities, schools, churches, charities and individuals all have a key role to play. Real and lasting change requires cooperation between every part of society.

This is why COP31 is important. Political leaders can make agreements, but those agreements must be translated into action in our homes, workplaces, communities and countries.

Why is it important to us and our faith?

Our late Pope Francis, stated numerous times how important it is to protect our Common Home.

In *Laudato Si*, he wrote:

“I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.”

He continued by reminding us that:

“We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”

This remains a powerful challenge to the world as we approach COP31. The environmental crisis is not simply a political or scientific issue. It is also a moral and spiritual issue. It concerns our relationship with God, with one another and with the creation that God has entrusted to us.

The story of Noah reminds us that creation matters to God. The covenant that follows the flood is not made only with Noah and his family, but with the whole of creation. The rainbow becomes a sign of God’s continuing relationship with the earth and every living creature.

As Christians, we are therefore called not to dominate creation carelessly, but to act as responsible stewards. We are called to recognise that the earth is a gift, not a possession to be exploited without limit. This is a message that comes straight from the Scriptures: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)

The late Holy Father also reminded us that our responsibility towards creation is connected to our responsibility towards one another, particularly the poor and vulnerable. There can be no genuine care for our Common Home without concern for those who are most affected by environmental destruction and climate change.

There is a hope that the kind of conversation and action Pope Francis has called for can continue to grow through COP31: a conversation that brings together governments, scientists, communities, young people, faith groups and those whose lives are already being affected by the climate crisis.

What can we do?

Action to tackle climate change from governments and large corporations is extremely important, but we can all make a difference in our daily lives and help to preserve our Common Home.

We can:

- Remember that everything we buy has an impact on the earth when it is made and when it is disposed of – keep the environment in mind when spending your money.
- Reduce unnecessary waste and avoid single-use plastics wherever possible.
- Walk, cycle and use public transport when it is practical to do so.
- Save water – for example, turn the tap off while brushing your teeth.
- Think carefully about what you eat and where your food comes from.
- Try growing your own vegetables or supporting local and sustainable food where possible.
- Recycle and re-use as much as possible.
- Reduce energy waste in your homes, schools and workplaces.
- Pick up litter if you see it on the street.
- Plant trees, flowers or vegetables where possible and help to create spaces that support wildlife.
- Talk about climate change and care for creation within your families, schools, parishes and communities.

Some larger social action activities could involve:

- Writing to your local Member of Parliament to ask what action is being taken to tackle climate change and to protect the natural environment.
- Supporting campaigns that encourage governments and businesses to act responsibly.
- Organising meet-ups within your local community and volunteer groups to help pick up litter, plant trees, create community gardens or protect local green spaces.
- Encouraging your school, parish or community organisation to reduce waste and energy use.
- Praying for political leaders and those attending COP31, that they may have the courage to make decisions for the common good rather than seeking only short-term advantage.

All of the above can help.

We may sometimes feel that our individual actions are too small to make a difference. However, the story of Noah reminds us, that faithfulness often begins with obedience in the things placed before us. Noah could not control the whole world, but he responded faithfully to the responsibility God gave him. Likewise, we cannot solve the climate crisis alone. But we can each ask: What has God placed within my care? What can I do today to protect our Common Home?

Remember this quote by Sir David Attenborough:

“The question is, are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book?”

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
You are present in the whole universe,
and in the smallest of all your creatures.
You protect us and watch over us in our daily lives.
Help us, in turn, to protect this world that you have created for us.
We give you thanks for this Common Home that we share.
We ask you to watch over us as we endeavour to change our ways
and try to help in whatever ways we can.
We pray for all political leaders, negotiators and representatives preparing for COP31.
Inspire them to make courageous and compassionate decisions
that will put us in the best position to care for our Earth
and to protect those who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
Help us renew the world that supports us.
Help us listen to one another so that we may work together more effectively.
Guide us to love our Common Home again
and to live as faithful stewards of all that you have entrusted to us.
Give us the wisdom of Noah,
the courage to act when action is required,
and the hope to believe that change is still possible.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

“We must never forget that the natural environment is a collective good,
the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.”

Pope Francis.

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