

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

Review

Last time, we looked at the story of the murder of Abel by his brother Cain who was jealous of Abel and angry with God who had accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. We saw that Abel brought his offering in faith, trust, and gratitude, while Cain apparently did not. We saw that God warned Cain of the danger posed by envy, but Cain failed to heed the warning and killed his own brother.

We then looked at two genealogies – first the descendants of Cain for six generations, then the descendants of Adam and Eve's son Seth down to Noah. We discussed the impossibility of writing down a complete genealogy, and the necessity for all genealogies to have a limited focus and purpose – the focus and purpose of the genealogies we find in God's Word being to show that Jesus – God the Son came to earth in the form of the man Jesus of Nazareth in fulfillment of the messianic prophecies connected with the Biblical genealogies.

The Flood of Noah

Genesis 6-9 contains the story of the great flood in Noah's day, and the miraculous survival of Noah and his family whose lives were preserved by God along with the lives of all the animals that God directed Noah to bring with him into the ark that Noah built in accordance with God's direction. Although the cohesive story of Noah's flood takes up four chapters of Genesis, we will not be able to cover it all in one go with the depth it demands. Therefore, we will tackle the story in two parts. In this first session, we'll cover the reasons for the flood and the construction of the ark. In the second part we'll review the events of the flood itself and its aftermath.

The story of Noah's flood is familiar. Children's Sunday school classes throughout the world almost always have a model of the ark somewhere on a shelf or a painting of it on the wall. Children are given fun activities in which they make animals to put inside a model of the ark. We learn this story as children and pass it on to our own children. Even unbelievers are familiar with the story – although they don't recognize it as historical.

Even though most people are familiar with this story, I don't think many (if any) of us fully understand either the facts it relates, or their place and meaning in God's redemptive plan for mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we deeply ponder the story of the flood, several difficult questions spring to mind.

- Did the flood of Noah really happen, or is this story merely a well-intentioned myth designed to teach important moral lessons like Jesus' parables?
- Assuming there **was** a great flood in Noah's day, was it global in scope or limited to the eastern Mediterranean basin?
- If a flood did once wipe out all of mankind except Noah and his family, why?
- What was so special about Noah?
- Who are "the sons of God" mentioned in Genesis 6:1, and how are they connected to the flood narrative?
- Who were (are) the Nephilim (giants) mentioned in Genesis 6:4?

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

When we teach the story of the flood to our children, we don't mention these difficult questions, and if the children themselves ask them we deflect the questions without really trying to answer them. If the truth be told, we usually ignore these nagging questions in our own minds as we read the story in our devotions. We're not going to do that in this study, but I give fair warning – our discussions very likely won't come up with many solid answers to these questions either. With that understood, let's delve into the story of the flood.

We **can** put the first of these questions to rest straight away. The flood of Noah was most certainly an historical event as was God's preservation of Noah and his family through the flood's devastation. We know this Biblically from Jesus' own teaching. Speaking of the day and hour of His promised return, Jesus used the example of Noah and the flood.

36“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. 37For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Matthew 24:36-44 (ESV)

Clearly, Jesus believed and taught the story of Noah's flood as historical fact. So should we.

The Corruption of the Earth

1When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, 2the sons of God [בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים bēn 'ēlōhîm] saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. 3Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in [דִּין dîn] man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” 4The Nephilim [נַפְלִים nāp̄lîm - giants] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. Genesis 6:1-4 (ESV)

In tackling this contentious passage, we should first ask ourselves whether it belongs together with the story of the flood at all. Recall that Genesis 5 was devoted to the genealogy of the patriarchs from Adam through Seth to Noah. But remember that the chapter and verse designations in our modern Bibles weren't part of the original text. They were added later as an aid for us to look up and memorize scriptures.

A great deal of confusion has arisen about the meaning of these first few verses of Genesis 6 and their relationship with God's statement in Genesis 6:9 that Noah was “***...blameless in his***

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

generations.” In particular, it has been proposed that the “sullyng” of mankind’s genetics by angels who intermarried with women and produced offspring was the primary cause for God’s “decision” to wipe out mankind. But this in turn raises some vexing questions. Why then, did the line of the Nephilim (נפילים *nāpīlim* - **giants**) apparently survive the flood? Did the “sons of God” come back and reinfest mankind with their corruption of our “blameless generations?” Did they somehow hoodwink our omniscient God by polluting the bloodline through one of Noah’s daughters in law?

Many Bible scholars have assumed from the juxtaposition of the strange narrative in Genesis 6:1-4 with the definitive statement in Genesis 6:9 that the two are related. But it may very well be that Genesis 6:1-4 is rightfully a side note to the genealogy of Genesis 5 rather than an explanation of the cause for the corruption God found on the earth.

So, who are the “**sons of God**” mentioned in Genesis 6:1 & 4? Clearly there was something notable about them which merits special mention in the genealogy. The Hebrew text doesn’t offer much additional insight. It literally means exactly what we have in our English translations. Were they (*are* they) non-human? Many have proposed that they are angels. Others have proposed that they are some hitherto unknown extraterrestrial life form. The idea that they are angels has some Biblical support.

6And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— 7just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, [ἕτερος *eteros* σάρξ *sarx*] serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Jude 1:6-7 (ESV)

In the Greek, the phrase translated as “unnatural desire” by the ESV – ἕτερος *eteros* σάρξ *sarx* – means “strange flesh.” The little phrase “**likewise indulged in sexual immorality**” seems to relate back to the “**angels who did not stay...**” Jude writes of. If indeed these “**sons of God**” are angels, it adds credence to the idea that their corruption of the human bloodline did indeed contribute to God’s “decision” to destroy humanity in the flood.

Regarding Nephilim our information is also quite scant. The Hebrew word נפיל *nāpīl* means giant. We find only two uses of this name in God’s Word – here and in the report brought back the spies whom Moses sent up into Canaan from Sinai following the Israelites’ exodus from captivity in Egypt.

32So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” Numbers 13:32-33 (ESV)

Here in this account, Moses says that the Nephilim still present in the land at that time were descended from Anak. The Anakim are mentioned throughout the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. They were noted for their large size just as the Israelite spies reported. Although the Israelites under Joshua defeated and killed many of them during their conquest of the land, some were still left alive in the Philistine cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Joshua 11:21-22). Since Goliath was a Philistine man of Gath (1 Samuel 17:4), it is possible that he too was one of the Nephilim descended from Anak.

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

Clearly then the Nephilim line either survived the flood through Noah's own natural descendants, or the "sons of God" "visited" the "daughters of men" again even after the flood. This would lend credence to the idea that their existence was not a primary reason why God brought the flood. If it had been, God would have failed in the purpose for which He brought the flood, and God **never** fails in His purposes.

Before we move on, let's take a closer look at Genesis 6:3. The ESV translates the Hebrew דָּיַן **dîn** as "abide in." The English translations I looked at are split almost evenly in their rendering of this word which means judge, contend, plead, vindicate, or govern. Some English translations render it as "remain with" or "abide in" as the ESV does. Others translate it as "strive with" or "contend with." Humorously, the Amplified version (really as much a commentary as it is a translation) hedges its bets and translates the word as "**strive and remain with.**" Whichever is correct though, the idea that man would henceforth live 120 years seems clear enough. Interestingly, Moses the presumed scribe God used to write Genesis was himself 120 years old when he died (Deuteronomy 34:7).

⁵The 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.

⁶And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."

⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Genesis 6:5-13 (ESV)

Here at last we find in Genesis 6:5 a statement everyone agrees about requiring no explanation or justification. If we truly search our own hearts, all of us find this statement rings true. This tragic state of our being is another sad consequence of mankind's fall in the garden. Pastor Brian once said that prior to the fall, Adam and Eve had knowledge of good – dwelling as they did in the daily presence of God Himself – but not of evil. Since the fall though, mankind has undeniably become very well versed in the knowledge and practice of wickedness just as God states here.

Genesis 6:6 tells us that "***...the LORD regretted that He had made man...***" But let's look carefully. This doesn't imply that God **came** to regret that He had made man. God knew from before the beginning that mankind would fall into sin. In fact, God Himself created the opportunity for our sinfulness when He gave us the gift of free will. This passage tells us that our sin grieves God's Spirit although it doesn't surprise Him.

Notice that throughout our discussion of Genesis 6 so far, I have put the idea that God "decided" to destroy life on earth through a flood into quotes. I did this to make a subtle but important point. Indeed, God did decide to destroy animal and human life on earth by a flood just as we read in this chapter. But that decision was made by God before He even created the heavens and the earth. This

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

brings into sharp focus the depth of God’s love for mankind. He knew before He created us that we would fall into sin necessitating not only the flood of Noah, but eventually the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our redemption.

As mentioned earlier, we find a contentious statement in Genesis 6:9 that “...**Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.**” A multitude of words have been written about this brief statement, and little can be served by us adding to them. It’s important for us to ponder, but not vital. Noah was a man – born like we are with a sinful nature. As with us, Noah’s righteousness was imputed to him by God, not part of his own character. Noah’s heart was corrupted by the curse of sin just like every other human heart since the fall in the garden. Thus, when God chose Noah as His vessel who would eventually bring forth Jesus His מָשִׁיחַ **māšîaḥ**, it was a marvelous example of God’s unmerited favor.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Regardless of why God chose Noah, we need to be sure we understand that Noah **was** sovereignly chosen by God Almighty. Without any doubt at all, God had to choose **someone** to survive the flood. It was necessary that the line of mankind be carried forward so that Jesus – God the Son might eventually be born of woman to bring redemption out of sin not only for people born after the flood but those who came before (e.g. Adam, Eve, and Cain) through His death on the cross in our place and His resurrection into glory!

Before we move on, notice that God says here in Genesis 6:13 that the earth is filled with violence due to the presence of people and animals. Although we scarcely mentioned it at the time, God Himself was the first to kill an animal for a specific purpose. Recall that before the fall (and apparently even up to the flood), all people and animals ate only plants. But just prior to evicting mankind from the Garden of Eden, God slaughtered an animal or animals and used the skin to clothe Adam and Eve. Of course, mankind has continued and perfected the trend of violence, starting with the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, and culminating with the warfare we find in the world today.

ASIDE – I do wonder why the land, the animals, the creeping things, and the birds had to suffer along with mankind due to our wickedness, but of course God made provision for their restoration as well through Noah and the ark. God also apparently somehow preserved the plants through the flood as we shall see. But once again, we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

The Construction of the Ark

¹⁴Make yourself an ark [תֵּבָא *tebá*] of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. ¹⁶Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

19And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. 20Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. 21Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them.” 22Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. Genesis 6:14-22 (ESV)

The English word “ark” is found in God’s Word in three distinct contexts. It is used here to speak of the vessel Noah built, and it is found in the book of Exodus referring to the basket of reeds into which Moses was placed by his mother (Exodus 2:3 & 5). In both these contexts, the Hebrew word is תֵּבָה **tēbâ** (vessel). Notably, it is a different word from the one used for the Ark of the Covenant (אָרוֹן **’ārôn** – *chest*). Of all the English translations I looked at, only the NLT translates תֵּבָה **tēbâ** as “large boat” instead of using the archaic English word “ark.” But even the NLT renders אָרוֹן **’ārôn** as “ark.” In English, the word “ark” may be used to refer to anything that offers safety or protection, especially a storage closet for scripture in synagogues, but it is rarely used outside of Bible translations. However, once again I digress...

The word “gopher” in Genesis 6:14 is an English transliteration of the Hebrew גֹּפֶר **gōpēr**. Nothing at all is known of the meaning of this name – if indeed it is a name at all. The Spanish Bibles I looked at translate it as “the wood of a coniferous tree.” The Luther Bible translation renders it as “Tannenholz – fir wood.” It may well be that the word isn’t a proper name or a noun at all. In English, for example, the word “oak” can be both a noun and an adjective. It can act as a noun as in the phrase “mighty oak,” or it can be an adjective as in “oak dining table.” One man I talked with down in the midlands one afternoon was adamant in his belief that “gopher wood” refers to a manner of construction, not a specific species of wood. But let’s extract ourselves from that rabbit hole and press on (to another 😊).

The cubits mentioned in God’s specification of the ark’s dimensions were the length of a man’s forearm (roughly 18 inches) – see the [Biblical Weights and Measures](#) reference sheet. Thus, the ark was about 450 feet long, 75 feet in beam, and 45 feet high (including the draft and superstructure). This would make the ark roughly half the length of a modern Nimitz class aircraft carrier and about a third of its beam. There’s been a great deal of discussion about whether these dimensions would be adequate to carry all the people and animals God commanded along with their food for an entire year at sea. Little can be gained by debating this question. A modern aircraft carrier is crewed by over 6,000 people with their provisions needed for cruises lasting for several months. Furthermore, much of the space inside an aircraft carrier is taken up by the propulsion system, fuel for the aircraft, and the aircraft themselves. Given those facts, it is certainly conceivable that the ark was large enough to fulfill its purpose. God says through Moses that He specified Noah’s mission in this manner. Who are we to question it? Before we move on, note that Noah (perhaps with the help of his family) constructed this enormous vessel on his own. By contrast, thousands of people – even tens of thousands including those working in ancillary industries – are needed to build an aircraft carrier. It was an enormous undertaking!

Notice in Genesis 6:17, God says that the flood would destroy “...*all flesh in which is the breath of life*...” Presumably, this excluded the plant life which somehow God preserved through the flood (at least partially). Thus, when Noah sent out the dove from the ark after the flood waters had

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

subsided, she was able to find a living olive tree twig with new growth upon it. But here we are getting ahead of ourselves again.

Before we move on, notice that God once again uses the phrase “*according to their kinds*.” With all due (none in actual fact) apologies to the supporters of evolutionary theory this would seem to indicate that the types of life we find in the world today are the same as those found in Noah’s day with the exceptions of those types like the [passenger pigeon](#) and the [dodo](#) which have since gone extinct.

In Genesis 6:18, God says that He will establish His covenant with Noah and his family. In this way God reassured Noah that He would preserve them despite the utter destruction that the flood would bring. Of course, God fulfilled His promise to Noah (and to all mankind) by placing His bow in the sky after the flood dissipated.

Boarding the Ark

¹Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. ²Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, ³and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. ⁴For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” ⁵And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. ⁷And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, ⁹two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. Genesis 7:1-10 (ESV)

ASIDE – The Word of God gives no indication of how long it took Noah to build the ark. Some have suggested that it took him about a century. But it may have taken much longer. All that we can tell for sure is that it must have taken Noah less than 600 years to build the ark, since he was 600 years old when the ark was finally put into commission for its voyage.

Once the ark was completed, God gave Noah the Word to bring the animals, his family, and himself aboard. Notice that God told Noah to bring both clean and unclean animals into the ark. Obviously, this was required. Otherwise, the unclean animals wouldn’t be alive today, and we wouldn’t be able to eat our shrimp and grits! But all of this raises a question. How did Noah know what animals were clean and which were not? God’s dietary laws weren’t handed down to Moses until thousands of years later. Is Moses getting ahead of himself here in Genesis 7? Possibly, but more likely there was an unwritten tradition as far back as Noah’s day that differentiated clean and unclean animals although that tradition wasn’t formalized into written law until later.

Genesis 6:1-7:10 – The Flood Part 1

In Genesis 7:1 we read that God told Noah He had found him righteous before Him in his generation. But what was it that made Noah righteous? As we have seen, Noah – being a man under the curse of sin like all other men – had no righteousness of his own nature. Once at the end of chapter 6 and again here in Genesis 7:5 we see that Noah did all the LORD had commanded him – to build the ark and gather the animals. Noah obeyed God’s commands by faith, trusting that God would fulfill His promise to establish His covenant with Noah (Genesis 6:18). God credited Noah’s faithful obedience as righteousness despite the universal curse of sin upon mankind. The Hebrews writer points this out.

7By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Hebrews 11:7 (ESV)

With Noah, we find the first instance in which God credited someone’s faith as righteousness. God continues to do this throughout His Word – the most famous recipient of God’s gift of righteousness being Abraham. Hebrews 11 – the Hall of Faith – chapter is devoted to this topic of righteousness through faith. Indeed, God continues to bless the faith of Gospel believers and clothes us with His righteousness in place of our own inherent wickedness.

***10I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*** Isaiah 61:10 (ESV)

Looking Ahead

Next time, we’ll continue our examination of the story of the flood of Noah.