

Genesis, Part 9

Noah and the Flood

Archaeologists tell us that many ancient civilizations have a flood tradition with details paralleling the Genesis account. These stories involving their fanciful gods and goddesses were likely corruptions of the original history of the flood that was handed down from generation to generation. Many ancient peoples tell the story of a great flood from which only one man and his family escaped by building a boat. The closest parallels to the biblical account come from Mesopotamia, in the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics. Both texts date from around 1600 BC. Like the biblical story, they tell of a man who was advised by his god to build an ark to escape the flood. He did so, loaded it with goods and animals, floated on the floodwaters for a short while, and sent out birds to see if the waters were abating. Eventually, the ark grounded on a mountaintop and the flood survivor emerged and offered sacrifices which greatly pleased the gods, who rewarded him with eternal life.

The similarities between the biblical and Babylonian accounts of the flood show that it was a well-known story in the ancient Near East. There are, however, differences between the accounts, which show that they have not simply been borrowed from each other. There are differences in detail, like the size and shape of the ark, the duration of the flood, and the types of birds that were sent out to inspect the floodwaters. But these are relatively trivial differences. Much more important are the theological differences between the accounts. These are so considerable that it seems likely that the author of the biblical account was deliberately trying to correct or refute the common Oriental view of the flood. In particular, Genesis is trying to explain what God is really like and how he relates to the world.

In the Babylonian versions, the gods agreed on a flood to stop human population growth, but one dissented and tipped off his worshipper Atrahasis (the equivalent of Noah). When the flood was unleashed, unable to control it, the gods cowered before it like dogs. After the flood, the gods hurried to the sacrifice as they were hungry since sacrifices had stopped during the flood. One of the top gods was surprised to find a man had

survived the flood (evidently this god was neither omnipotent nor omniscient).

The whole theological and ethical outlook of Genesis is different.

- First, the flood was sent not to curb human noise or fertility but because of human corruption and sinfulness (6:11–12).
- Secondly, Noah was saved not because he chanced to worship a god who disagreed with the flood decision but because he was righteous ... blameless among the peoples of his time. Throughout the flood story, Noah is portrayed as doing exactly what God commanded him (e.g. 6:22; 7:9; 8:18).
- Thirdly, the God of Genesis is all-powerful and all-knowing. He is always in total control of the flood and knows just what is happening. It was when God remembered Noah that the flood waters started to recede (8:1–2).

The sacrifice after the flood did not quench God's appetite Unlike the Mesopotamian gods, He did not need human food. The sacrifice appeased his wrath. Despite continuing human sinfulness (cf. 8:21 with 6:5), God promised that never again would the earth be destroyed in a flood. The rainbow was God's pledge that he would maintain and protect the whole earth (8:22–9:16). Finally, while the Atrahasis epic ends with the gods inventing miscarriage and female infertility to curb population growth, Noah is urged three times to "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (9:1; cf. 8:17; 9:7). Despite sin, God is basically on our side and concerned for the welfare of the human race. This goodwill was secured by Noah's sacrifice and by the greater sacrifice of Christ.

Genesis regards the flood as the great dividing point in world history. The flood was a great act of de-creation. It returned the earth to the situation of primeval watery chaos that existed before God started speaking in 1:3. Life was destroyed. Water covered everything, even the mountain tops, so that the planet looked as it did in Genesis 1:2, *thou wa boho*. When God remembered Noah, he sent a wind over the earth (cf. the hovering spirit/wind of God in 1:2) to begin the process of recreation. The world was born anew. The land and waters were separated, and Noah, the new head of the human race, emerged from the ark and, like Adam, was told to "Be fruitful and increase in number" (9:1, cf. 1:28).

Gen 6:9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰ And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.” These two descriptive words, “righteous” and “blameless,” are very significant. The first one implies that Noah conformed to the standard of his understanding of the will of God. It is translated as *dikaiousune* in the LXX, meaning Noah had adjusted to the righteousness of God. The second term is later used for unblemished sacrifices. These two terms do not imply Noah was sinless, as 9:21 will show.

Sidetrip: About the Generations

There are ten people in the line from Adam to Noah. It is interesting how God buries little tidbits of information in His Word. Their names are proper names, they are not translated from Hebrew but only transliterated to approximate the way they were pronounced. The meaning of proper names can be a difficult pursuit since direct translations are not readily available. Many study aids, such as conventional lexicons, can prove superficial when dealing with proper names. Even a conventional Hebrew lexicon can prove disappointing. A study of the original roots, however, can yield some fascinating insights. (It should be recognized, however, that the views concerning the meaning and significance of the original roots are not free of controversy and are subject to variant readings.)

Adam – The first name, Adam, comes from *adomah*, and means “man.” As the first man, that seems straightforward enough.

Seth – Adam’s son was named Seth, which means “appointed”. When he was born Eve said, “For God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.”

Enosh – Seth’s son was called Enosh, which means “mortal,” “frail,” or “miserable.” It is from the root *anash*: “to be incurable”; used of a wound, grief, woe, sickness, or wickedness. (It was in the days of Enosh that men began to defile the name of the Living God.)

Kenan – Enosh’s son was named Kenan, which can mean “sorrow,” “dirge,” or “elegy.”

Mahalalel – Kenan’s son was Mahalalel, from *mahalal*, which means “blessed” or “praise”; and *El*, the name for God. Thus, Mahalalel means “the Blessed God.” Often Hebrew names included “El,” the name of God, such as *Dani-el*, “God is my Judge,” or *Nathani-el*, “Gift of God,” etc.

Jared – Mahalalel’s son was named Jared, from the verb *yaradh*, meaning “shall come down.” Some authorities suggest that this might have been an allusion to the “Sons of God” who “came down” to corrupt the daughters of men, resulting in the Nephilim (“Fallen Ones”) of Genesis 6.

Enoch – Jared’s son was named Enoch, which means “teaching,” or “commencement.” He was the first of four generations of preachers. The earliest recorded prophecy was by Enoch, which amazingly enough deals with the Second Coming of Christ.

Methuselah – The Flood of Noah did not come as a surprise. It had been preached on for four generations. But something strange happened when Enoch was 65, from which time “he walked with God.” Enoch was given a prophecy that as long as his son was alive, the judgment of the flood would be withheld; but as soon as he died, the Flood would be sent forth. Enoch named his son to reflect this prophecy. The name Methuselah comes from two roots: *muth*, a root that means “death”; and *shalach*, which means “to bring,” or “to send forth.” Thus, the name Methuselah signifies, “his death shall bring.” And, indeed, in the year that Methuselah died, the Flood came. Methuselah was 187 when he had Lamech and lived 782 years more. Lamech had Noah when he was 182. The Flood came in Noah’s 600th year. $187 + 182 + 600 = 969$, Methuselah’s age when he died. Interestingly, Methuselah’s life was, in effect, a symbol of God’s mercy in forestalling the coming judgment of the Flood. It is therefore fitting that his lifetime is the oldest in the Bible, symbolizing the extreme extensiveness of God’s mercy.

Lamech – Methuselah’s son was named Lamech, a root still evident today in our English word, “lament” or “lamentation.” Lamech suggests “despairing.”

Noah – Lamech, of course, is the father of Noah, which is derived from *nacham*, “to bring relief” or “comfort.”

<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>English</i>
Adam	Man
Seth	Appointed
Enosh	Mortal
Kenan	Sorrow;
Mahalalel	The Blessed God
Jared	Shall come down
Enoch	Teaching
Methuselah	His death shall bring
Lamech	The Despairing
Noah	Rest, or comfort.

Here is a summary of God’s plan of redemption, hidden here within a genealogy in Genesis! (Source: <https://www.khouse.org/articles/2000/284/>)

Back to Genesis

Gen 6:11 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And 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.

The biblical record presents the Flood as a distinctly moral judgment. The human race had become so corrupt (vv. 11–12) and full of violence (vv. 11, 13) that God’s wrath would destroy all flesh, except Noah, who walked with God.

Gen 6:14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark is 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. 16 Make a roof for the ark, finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark on its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks.

The Ark

The Ark was a large floating barge made of what many believe to have been cypress wood and pitched with bitumen. It had no means of propulsion, not even sails, and no means of steering it. It just drifted on the waters. God was in control.

Regarding its measurements, there are two “cubits” in the Bible. The regular cubit is the distance between an average man’s longest finger and his elbow, usually around 18 inches (cf. Deut. 3:11; 2 Chr. 2:3). There is also a longer royal cubit used in construction (i.e. Solomon’s temple), which was common in Egypt, Palestine, and sometimes Babylon. It was 21 inches long (cf. Ezek. 40:5; 43:13). Using the first “regular” cubit of 18 inches, the physical dimensions of the ark were probably around 450 feet by 75 feet by 45 feet. This is about half the size of the Queen Elizabeth II. In either case, the ark was large enough to hold the collection of animals, the food needed, and the members of Noah’s family. There were three levels to the ark, with a window either in the roof of the top level or more likely running all around the sides of the above-deck level (6:16). Their purpose was likely for ventilation and letting some sun into its dark interior. There was one door in the side of the hull.

Gen 6:17 For 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. 18 But 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. 19 And 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. 20 Of 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 into you to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them.” 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

We do not know how many species of animals there were in that day, but what is known is that verse 20 indicates that God brought the animals to Noah. Noah didn’t have to round them up.

Gen 7:1 Then 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. 2 Take 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, 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the heavens also, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For 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.” 5 And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.

Unlike the Nephalim, Noah and his family had remained undefiled and were declared “righteous before me” according to God. They had adjusted to the *dikaiousune* of God.

Note how verse 2 seems in conflict with Genesis 6:19 where it says, “You shall bring two of every sort into the ark.” Here in 7:2, we get slightly different details. Noah is charged to bring seven pairs of clean animals and only one pair of unclean animals. Why the difference? We should view verse 7:2 as an elaboration on what was ordered in verse 6:19. But what constituted a “clean” animal versus an “unclean” one and why more of the clean over the unclean?

The exact basis upon which the distinction between the clean and unclean was made in this early period is not clear. Apparently, the distinction was well known to Noah, and he needed no further instruction on the subject. When we get to the Age of Israel and the giving of the Law we will see this issue clarified. Certain animals were declared clean by God and others were not. Only clean animals were to be offered as sacrifices or consumed for food. Evidently, God had somehow expressed this rule to Noah and this was not recorded in Scripture. The reason for the larger number of clean animals then becomes clear. The extra number would provide animals for sacrifice after the Flood, some food (e.g., milk) during the Flood, and would facilitate rapid reproduction of the clean animals after the Flood.

These instructions were given to Noah seven days before the beginning of the forty days of rain. The implication is that it took Noah a week just to

load the passengers on the ark. Perhaps grain and other foodstuffs had already been placed on board.

The Flood

Gen 7:6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9 two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast, according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, according to its kind, and every bird, according to its kind, every winged creature. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in.

The Ark gets loaded and Noah and his family enter "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened" (Gen 7:11). Note that the rain began and fell for 40 days, but the rain was not the only source of the Flood. On that day "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth". The waters came not only from what must have been a supersaturated atmosphere but also burst forth from the earth itself.

Notice also that the judgment is focused on man specifically and "all flesh in which there was the breath of life" thus excluding the fish who would be at home in the water.

“And the Lord shut him in.”

Gen 7:17 Then the flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. 20 The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind. 22 Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days.

The Genesis Flood was no ordinary happening. This act of divine judgment cannot be explained entirely by naturalistic means. The Hebrews had a special word, *mabhul*, to refer to this event. The commencement of the Deluge is dated precisely according to the year (600th), month (2nd), and day (17th) of Noah’s life (7:11).

The waters of the Flood came from two sources: (1) the fountains of the great deep broke open, and (2) the windows of heaven were opened (7:12). From the beginning of the rain until the Flood reached maximum depth was 150 days (7:24). Three stages in these 150 days can be distinguished:

1. For the first forty days, the waters increased (lit., grew great). This enabled the ark to float (7:17).
2. The waters prevailed (lit., were strong). The ark began to move about (7:18).
3. The waters prevailed exceedingly (lit., became strong exceedingly). The mountains were now submerged to a depth of fifteen cubits (7:19–20).

Is the Genesis narrative describing a universal Flood? Some hold that Genesis contains an exaggerated version of a Mesopotamian river flood.

Others think the narrative points to an unprecedented regional flood that covered all of the inhabited world. Others argue that the Flood was geographically as well as anthropologically universal. The key exegetical issue is the meaning of *'eretz*. Should it be translated as earth or land?

The following statements in the text point toward the geographical universality of the Flood:

1. The whole of the animal population died (7:21).
2. The whole human population (all in whose nostrils were the breath of life) perished, save Noah and those with him on the Ark (7:22–23).
3. “All the high mountains under the whole heaven” were covered to the extent of fifteen cubits (7:19–20).
4. The Flood prevailed for 150 days. The abatement of the waters took another 220 days (8:13–14).

The ark is an illuminating picture of our salvation in Christ (see 1 Peter 3:18–22).

- The salvation and the ark were planned by God, not invented by humans.
- There is only one way of salvation and there was only one door in the ark.
- The ark was made of wood, speaking of the humanity of Christ: He had to be born as a man to save us.
- The word for “pitch” in 6:14 is the same as the word “atonement” used later in the OT.
- God invited Noah and his family into the ark (7:1); then, once they were in, God shut them in so that they were secure (7:16).
- The ark saved not only humankind but also the creatures within it, just as Christ’s death will one day deliver creation from the bondage of sin (Rom. 8:18–23).
- The ark saved Noah and his family from judgment because they believed God’s promise (Heb. 11:7); Christ saves us from the wrath to come as we believe Him.
- First Peter 3:18–22 connects the ark with the resurrection of Christ; the waters buried the old world but raised Noah to a new life.
- Noah was faithful to obey all that God commanded; Jesus said, “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29).

- Noah was brought safely through the floods; Christ went through the flood of suffering (Ps. 42:7) and came out in victory.
- Noah went out of the ark, the head of a new creation with his family; and Christ came out of the tomb, the Head of the new creation, and the Father of a new family.
- Noah went through the judgment and was kept safe, just as the believing Jewish remnant will go through the Tribulation to establish the kingdom on earth.
- Enoch was raptured before the judgment came (5:21–24; Heb. 11:5), just as the church will be raptured before the wrath of God is poured out upon the world. See 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9–10.

The Flood Subsides

Gen 8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. 2 The fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the waters had abated, 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

The heavy rains lasted 40 days (7:4, 12), but the waters continued for 110 days (cf. 7:24, “The waters prevailed on the earth 150 days”). The 40 days was part of the 150 days, with apparently lighter rain falling (or subterranean water upheavals continuing for another 110 days.

The ark rested in the mountains of Ararat 150 days after the rains began. Assyrian records may identify such a name in Armenia of eastern Turkey, but the precise location remains unknown. After it was clear that the earth was suitable for habitation, the eight people and all the animals left the ark. The theme of “rest” seems to be quite strong throughout the story. The ark rested (v. 4); at first, the dove could find no place to set its feet (v. 9; lit., “could not find a resting place for its feet”). When the ark came to rest on Ararat, this was more than a physical landing on dry ground. It was a new beginning; the world was clean and at rest.

Gen 8:6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7 and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. 9 But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. 11 And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. 12 Then he waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore. 13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. 17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” 18 So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. 19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

To assure himself that the Deluge would not return, Noah waited forty days before taking action. He then opened a window of the ark and dispatched a raven (8:6–7). This window is mentioned here for the first time. The raven no doubt was selected because, as a bird of prey, it could feed upon the carrion which must have been scattered about on the ground. From the movements of this bird, however, Noah could not ascertain the condition of the ground.

Seven days later Noah sent forth a dove (8:8–9). The ground was apparently still too wet and muddy for the fastidious dove. The bird flew back and forth and then returned to the safety of the ark.

Noah anxiously waited (*yachel*) seven more days. He dispatched a dove which returned to him that evening with an olive leaf (8:10–11). Noah knew that the waters had receded to the lower elevations where olive trees commonly grow. A third dove sent forth seven days later did not return to the ark (8:12). The gentle creature now found a clean, dry place to make her nest. The covering of the ark was removed 163 days after the grounding of the vessel. The face of the ground was now *charabh*, i.e., dry (8:13). Fifty-seven days later the earth was dry (*yabheshah*). After some 370 days on board, the eight humans and their animal cargo departed from the ark (8:14–19). The departure was divinely directed, obediently executed, and orderly conducted. Noah emerged into a world cleansed from sin by judgment. God was giving the human race a second chance.

The Aftermath

Gen 8:20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. ²² While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

Worship was Noah’s first concern after exiting the ark. He built an altar, the first altar mentioned in the Bible, though one was suggested in the language of the offerings of Cain and Able. Noah, functioning as a priest to his family, offered on his new altar burnt offerings of every clean animal (8:20). The burnt offering was the symbol of complete consecration and gratitude.

God was pleased with the worship of Noah. The narrator describes the pleasure with which God smelled the aroma of the sacrifice. God resolved that he would not again “curse the ground” because of man. Never again would there be such massive destruction of life as occurred during the Flood. The reason for this divine resolution is clearly stated: “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (8:21). God would have to schedule worldwide catastrophes in every generation if he were to respond

to human corruption as he did at that time. By demonstrating his wrath against sin in the days of Noah, God accomplished his purpose.

The marvelous grace of God was revealed anew in the promise that He made concerning earth's seasons: "Until all the days of earth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter and day and night shall not cease" (8:22). The language does suggest, however, that the present order is not eternal.

Learnings

We see in the flood account at least these six practical considerations:

- God must punish sin. There must be death to the old before He can establish the new.
- God gives warnings but eventually, His patience ends and judgment comes.
- God has always saved people the same way: by grace (6:8), through faith (Heb. 11:7).
- True faith leads to obedience (6:22; 7:5).
- True witness demands separation from sin, and Noah and his family kept themselves unspotted from the world.
- Whether "the sons of God" in 6:1–4 were angels or the family of Seth, the same lesson is seen: God condemns compromise and rebellion, but rewards the separated saint.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FLOOD													
600TH YEAR											601ST YEAR		
MONTHS OF 30 DAYS													
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	
					Ark Rested			Mts. Seen	Raven Sent		Cover Removed	Exit Orders	
17th Day					17th Day			1st Day	10th Day		1st Day	27th Day	
7:11					8:4			8:5	8:6		8:13	8:14	
40 Days											57 Days Waiting		
150 Days: Water Prevailed					163 Days Water Receded								
TOTAL TIME OF FLOOD: 313 DAYS													
TOTAL TIME IN ARK: 370 DAYS													