

BEGINNINGS: Lesson Seven,
The Beginning of the End of the Ancient World
Genesis 6:1-22

Subject: Noah stood alone in a depraved culture upon which God decreed disaster.

Main Idea: The righteous are called to represent God in their culture.

Principles:

1. *We must not be shocked, but grieved, by the behavior of nonbelievers.*
2. *We represent God well by remaining faithful in every assignment He gives us.*

Introduction

According to a 2017 edition of Christianity Today magazine, modern Christian persecution worldwide hit an all time high for a third year in a row!¹ Approximately 215 million Christians experience what Open Doors researchers identified as high, very high, or extreme persecution.¹ In every generation, the Lord raises up individuals to represent Him. Sometimes, those representatives stand alone for God. Do you have that kind of courage?

Noah was called to represent God in His culture, and he stood alone. Noah was more than a righteous man; he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), and he preached to an exceedingly wicked generation. John Wesley wrote, “It is easy to be religious when religion is in fashion; but it is an evidence of strong faith to swim against the stream, and to appear for God, when no one else appears for Him.”ⁱⁱ In Noah’s case, with the possible exception of his wife and three sons, there was literally no one else – not a single soul.

Year before last, the region where I live moved up to claim the number one spot as the least “Bible-minded” city in the United States, with Boston and Providence (in Rhode Island) claiming the second and third positions.ⁱⁱⁱ Less than ten percent of the people in our area say they read the Bible even once in a typical week or have any strong confidence that the Bible’s principles are accurate. Unless revival occurs, it may not be long before believers in some parts of North America (or their children) will be standing alone.

Genesis 6 follows the genealogies of two different, spiritual lines of humanity. The Cainites lived with their fists in God’s face, while the Sethites (at least some of them) walked with God. The last Sethites named in Genesis 5 are Noah and his three sons. Chapter 6 begins by introducing the culture in which they lived.

¹ In twenty-five years of record keeping, no year has been worse.

I. **The Condition of Humanity** – Genesis 6:1-8

A. Population Increased – 6:1: Genesis 6:1 says that human beings began to increase in number on the earth. From this we may possibly surmise the passage of quite a bit of time since Creation, the number of years calculated by adding the ages of those in Genesis 5 being the very minimum. Many Old Testament genealogies are almost certainly representative of the total number of a man’s descendants, having been shortened and organized in a way that made the list more memorable. It was probably over this very long period of human population growth that the depravity described in Genesis 6 developed. Verse 2 gives one of the reasons (or evidence of) why the population at large became so evil: the “sons of God” married the “daughters of men,” who bore them children.

B. The Sons of God, the Daughters of Men, and the Nephilim – 6:1-2, 4: The meaning of the terms “sons of God” and “daughters of men” is not clarified in the text, thus not all Bible scholars interpret them in the same way. Three main views have existed throughout Christian history. All three have respected, conservative scholars who support them. Walt Kaiser has given helpful names to these theories.^{iv}

- i. “The Cosmologically Mixed Race Theory”: According to this view, the “sons of God” are fallen angels and the “daughters of men” are ordinary human women.
 1. *Support for this theory*: The noncanonical book of 1 Enoch (6:1-7:6), written about 200 years after the time of Christ, relates that two hundred angels married beautiful human wives. Their offspring were giants. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 tell us that God put sinful angels, who had “abandoned their proper dwelling,” in chains of darkness, holding them for judgment. Supporters of this view usually believe that these verses about fallen angels refer to the “sons of God” in Genesis 6. Furthermore, the term “sons of God” appears three times in the book of Job, and in all three instances it refers to angels.
 2. *Problems with this theory*: Major problems with this theory include the fact that Jesus said that angels do not marry (Mark 12:25), the idea of angels and humans intermarrying is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, and only human beings (and not angels) were punished by God in Genesis 6.
- ii. “The Religiously Mixed Race Theory”: This theory suggests the “sons of God” were individuals from the godly line of Seth, while the “daughters of men” were descendants of Cain’s ungodly line.

1. *Support*: Contextually, this theory fits well, since Genesis 4-5 describe two very different lines of humanity – a godly one and an ungodly one.
 2. *Problems*: One of the problems with this theory is that Genesis 6:4 indicates the resulting race was in some way outstanding. Supporters of the view sometimes conclude it was the wickedness of their offspring that was great. Though that conclusion fits well with the depravity described in Genesis 6, it raises the question of why children from “unequally yoked” (2 Corinthians 6:14) marriages would be more exceptionally wicked than the offspring of two nonbelieving parents.
- iii. “The Sociologically Mixed Race Theory”: This theory claims the “sons of God” were evil (possibly demon-possessed), despotic human lords and the “daughters of men” were beautiful women from the general populace.
1. *Support*: Some ancient translations render “sons of God” as “sons of nobles.”^v Also, historically, in ancient times (even into the Roman Empire), pagan rulers claimed to be gods. These power-hungry men were eager to build their reputations and extend their jurisdiction. According to this theory, the phrase “they married any of them they chose” implies polygamy, specifically, the building of harems. Proponents of the view say that the reference to “giants” is pointing to their political dominance. On that basis, they were “men of renown.” If these violent, oppressive men had been demon-possessed, it would further explain the terrible depravity of Noah’s generation.
- iv. Another Noteworthy Idea: A theory that combines aspects of the other views revolves around the ancient, cultural and religious practice of sacred prostitution, with the “sons of God” being fallen angels who possessed ancient cultic priests and their “marriage” to “daughters of men.” Ancient, sacred prostitution was based on the popular notion of gods and humans mixing. Prostitutes and their partners acted out the sexual union, and they believed this pleased the gods. The offspring of such unions would have been considered superior in that they were believed have been actual “children of the gods.”^{vi}

- v. The Nephilim: The exact nature and origin of the Nephilim of verse 4 is also, in many ways, mysterious. They are only mentioned one other place in the Bible – Numbers 13:33. According to that passage, hundreds of years after the Flood, Israelites spies reported that Nephilim were living in the land of Canaan – the land they hoped to overtake. Since the Nephilim of Genesis 6 could not have survived the Flood (Genesis 7:21-23), the Israelites’ description of these people, as *descending* from “Nephilim,” must actually mean that they were *like* Nephilim – because of their large physical stature; because they were princes, landlords, and “great men” of their day; or because of their reputation as “children of the gods.” While the culture considered the Nephilim to be renowned, “mighty men,” God judged them as depraved!

The End of the Age Decreed – 6:3: Because of mankind’s depravity, the Lord decreed He would restrict their days to 120 years. Some believe that 120 years refers to a shortened lifespan of humans, as evidenced in the genealogical record of Genesis 11. It is also may have been the length of time God determined to remain patient, until He brought judgment by the Flood. In that case, Noah’s generation would have had 120 years to listen to his message of repentance (2 Peter 2:5). Regardless of the meaning, God was incredibly patient for a long time, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Jude 14-15 tells us that Enoch also prophesied leading up to this time:

See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

C. God’s Grief over Human Depravity – 6:5-8

i. Human Depravity

1. Genesis 6 depicts the complete breakdown of society through personal wickedness. Verse 5 indicates that the corruption of man extended throughout the entire human race, thoroughly infecting every mind and heart. Human depravity results from the sinful nature, with which all people since Adam and Eve have been born. Depravity is the moral corruption that results from turning our backs on God. It does not mean that we are as bad as we could be but simply that all people are bad *by nature*. Romans 1 and 2 explain that, apart from God’s intervening grace, human beings suppress truth about God that is evident in creation and in each of our consciences.

2. Genesis 6:5 says “the Lord saw” the great wickedness and depravity of the human race. Hebrews 4:13 tells us that “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” We cannot hide our behavior, nor our innermost thoughts and attitudes, from God. In Noah’s day, God saw that sin had reached its full measure.
 3. The Flood was not God’s ultimate solution to human depravity and the sin nature. The Flood merely restrained the influence of evil. The promised Deliverer was God’s solution (Genesis 3:15)! We will only know complete freedom from the depraved nature when we have put our faith in this Deliverer, Jesus Christ, and when, by death or by translation at Jesus’ return, we have left our physical bodies behind.
- ii. The Lord’s Regret: Verse 6 says, “The Lord regretted that He had made human beings on earth, and His heart was deeply troubled.” The word “regret” is sometimes translated “relent,” “repent,” “regret,” or “grieve.” These words are anthropomorphisms – that is, they use a human quality or term to explain something, although inadequately, about God’s nature.^{vii} The implication is not that God’s character changed, for the Bible teaches that God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). The point is that God responds to our actions with emotion and passion. His “heart was deeply troubled.”
- iii. The Lord’s Decision
1. The Lord decided to wipe the human race and all other living creatures from the earth (the animals were involved in the Fall in the sense that they were under mankind’s rule^{viii}). Although the Bible tells us of many of God’s judgments on individuals and groups of people (some of which included acts of nature), the Flood was unique in that it was the only *general judgment* on mankind, and will be until the end of human history (2 Peter 3:3-7, 11-12).
 2. Why would God do something so drastic? One reason was that drastic circumstances called for drastic action. The Flood was simply the most effective way of purging the world. It allowed God to start again, not because His plan had failed, but until His plan was fulfilled in Christ. The Flood has also served as a symbol of baptism for New Testament believers (1 Peter 3:20-22) and as God’s reminder to people in every subsequent generation that future and final judgment awaits us. The Flood was nothing more than what every generation has deserved. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

- iv. Only Noah: There was one lone exception to the thorough corruption on earth. Noah alone found favor with God – only one person on the entire planet! Apparently, the other descendants of Seth had wandered from their faith.

Summary Statement: After the Fall, mankind’s condition continued to deteriorate.

Principle: *We must not be shocked, but grieved, by the behavior of nonbelievers.*

God knows the human heart. He is not surprised by the direction people go, but it grieves Him terribly. Grief is a love word. We don’t grieve over things we care little for. Jesus demonstrated God’s attitude toward sinners. Although He was grieved by their sins, Matthew 11:19 says He was the sinner’s friend.

Illustration: We once had a mentally ill relative living with us. This person made sinful choices that were downright despicable and greatly complicated our lives – relationally, financially, occupationally and legally. It was challenging! If I hadn’t known it before, I certainly learned that when we become involved with hurting, sinful, difficult people, at least on some occasions, we will be taken advantage of. At times, I felt so angry, but I learned not to be shocked by what sinners do. Despite our frustration, we determined to love this person with God’s love. It was a time of personal growth as we navigated daily decisions and prayed for wisdom to know *how to love wisely*.

I can’t help but wonder what kind of a relationship Noah had with his neighbors. How does one find favor in God’s eyes while living in a thoroughly depraved world? I believe Noah must have had a great deal of opportunity to learn to love wisely: how to speak truth without growing angry, how to lend help without being shocked when taken advantage of, and how to be of service without becoming ensnared by the sins of those he befriended.

In some places today, Christians have earned the reputation of being “intolerant” – not because of an appropriate hatred of sin, but because of their unkind attitude toward sinners. We must challenge ourselves about this.

Application: How is your attitude toward certain kinds of sinners reflected in the way you speak about them, not just publically, but in private? Jesus is a friend of sinners. Their behavior grieves Him, but it does not shock Him. If we are to represent Him well in our culture, this must be our attitude as well.

Transition: Although God’s heart was grieved over mankind’s condition, one man found favor in His eyes.

II. God's Faithful Representative – Genesis 6:9

A. Noah's Righteousness – 6:9 Verse 9 begins a new “toledot” in Genesis: the account of Noah and his family. The contrast between Noah and his generation couldn't be sharper. The first thing we are told is that Noah was righteous.

- i. What Makes a Person Righteous? The first time the term “righteous” appears the Scriptures is in Genesis 6:9. What does it mean that Noah was righteous? Was Noah perfect?
 1. Only God is truly perfect. When the Bible speaks of a person as righteous, it is not implying moral perfection, but a person's acceptance of God's standard as the model by which they attempt to live their lives. With respect to our ability to actually keep this standard, the prophet Isaiah said that because of the impact sin has on us, even our best efforts fall so pathetically short of God's standard that they appear as filth to Him (Isaiah 64:6).
 2. The Bible is clear that we are only made righteous in God's sight *by faith* (Romans 1:17, Philippians 3:9). This truth is foundational to salvation. We cannot *merit* salvation by any works of our own. Until we realize how great an offense our sin is to God, we can't grasp the value of what Christ has offered us. His death was a substitute for our own death – the penalty we owe for our sins. Faith in His payment on our behalf puts an end to the penalty we owe. However, that in itself would not put us in a position to gain eternity. Christ also lived a righteous life, and just as Christ's death for us was substitutionary, *Christ's life* also becomes a substitute for our own. Jesus' death wipes away the debt we owe, but Jesus' perfect life is the reason God credits righteousness to our account. The moment we put our faith in Christ as Savior, we move from being burdened with a debt too great to ever repay to being wealthy beyond our wildest imagination!
 3. God's promise to send a Deliverer was the basis of forward-looking faith for saints who lived before the time of Christ. Today, we look back at Christ's completed work as the fulfillment of God's promise and the basis of our faith. For Old Testament and New Testament believers, the result is the same: salvation is by grace through faith.
 4. Although our attempts to live righteous lives can never be good enough to earn salvation, once we are saved, God does expect us to throw all our efforts into living by His righteous standard. Our motivation to live this way is love for God, conviction that His standard is the very best for us, and gratitude for what He has done for us in Christ. However, the sinful nature is still within us, so we must learn to rely on God for power to live righteously.

5. Noah clearly accepted God’s standard as the one by which he would attempt to live. Impressive as his actions were, they didn’t earn him righteousness. He was made righteous by his faith. His preaching and building of the Ark were simply evidences of that faith (Hebrew 11:7).
- ii. Blameless Among the People of His Time: In addition to being righteous, we read that Noah was blameless among the people of his day. Like God’s people in every age, Noah represented God. His reputation was very important. He surely guarded it scrupulously. Noah’s preaching (2 Peter 2:5) was almost certainly mocked and was most definitely rejected by his generation. Nevertheless, his blameless reputation speaks to the fact that there was nothing in his words or behavior for which his neighbors could legitimately criticize him. At times, we may be tempted to take the attitude that we don’t care what others think of us. While it is true that only God’s approval of us is important, we must also remember that we represent God in our generation. Others may think and speak poorly of us, but it should never be because we have given them reason to do so. If we have, the best thing we can do is to be honest about our wrongdoing, ask forgiveness where that is warranted, and make every effort to rebuild a reputation that honors God.
- iii. Walked with God: Finally, we are told that Noah walked faithfully with God.
1. In the last lesson, we learned that Enoch walked with God. In the Garden (Genesis 3:8), and later in the land of Eden (where God also had a special presence [Genesis 4:14, 16]), “walking with God” may have been a physical possibility. After the Flood, this does not appear to be the case again, until the time in which Christ became flesh and made His dwelling with human beings (John 1:14).
 2. In every age, God’s own are still to “walk with Him” (Micah 6:8). For many years I had a friend with whom I walked for exercise daily. Before long, we knew one another intimately. It is uncomfortable to spend time with someone with whom we are in conflict. Walking with God presumes obedience. But it implies far more than outward compliance; it implies this same kind of intimacy I found with my friend – and even deeper! Practically speaking, this requires careful examination of God’s word and ongoing conversations with Him. Those with whom we spend the most time know us and influence us the most. With whom do you walk and talk the most?

- iv. Summary: The statements about Noah’s righteousness, blamelessness, and walk with God not only point out the vast difference between Noah and his culture, they also explain Noah’s ability to stand alone as God’s representative in the most evil of times.

B. Noah’s Sons – 6:10: The Bible doesn’t indicate whether or not Noah’s family walked with God as he did. We may assume they were people of faith because of Noah’s influence. We *do* know his wife, his three sons, and their wives were included in the small remnant of people God preserved through the Flood. God preserves a remnant for Himself in every generation, by His grace and mercy, in order to accomplish His purpose in providing a “Bride” for His beloved Son (Revelation 19:7, 21:2).

C. God’s Instructions to Noah – 6:11-21

- i. The Revelation: One day, God told Noah clearly of His plans to destroy the earth by flood. Based on Genesis 2:5-6, many have suggested that until the time of the Flood, the earth had never seen rain. They speculate that prior to the Flood, a type of mist from waters below and above the earth covered it, creating a tropical kind of environment. If it is true that no living person had seen rain up to that time, the idea of constructing an Ark must have seemed preposterous to Noah and those around him! Those who watched him build probably questioned his sanity. Such a remarkable structure designed for such a strange purpose surely became known far and wide. From what we are told about the spiritual condition of Noah’s generation, it is fairly safe to assume that Noah was despised and ridiculed.
- ii. The Construction: If the 120 years refers to the time between God’s proclamation and the coming of the Flood, it is possible that Noah spent the entire time constructing the Ark. It seems to have been rectangular in shape and flat-bottomed – a vessel designed to float, not to be navigated. God Himself would do the navigating. The size is given in cubits. A cubit was the length from a man’s elbow to the end of his middle finger.^{ix} The vessel was three stories, with plenty of headroom for the taller animals. It measured 135 meters (450 feet) in length, 23 meters (75 feet) in width, and 14 meters (45 feet) in height. A single exterior door was on the side. Although it is not designated, there may have been a corridor down the center of the boat with rooms on each side. The details about the roof are vague. But it seems a space of one cubit (about 45 cm or 18 inches) was allowed between the roof and the sides for light and fresh air.

- iii. Other Instructions: Later, God gave more specific instructions about the animals, based upon whether they were considered “clean” or “unclean.” But at this time (which may have been long before the animals needed to start coming to Noah), the instructions about the animals were general. Noah was also told to begin collecting and storing food for his family and all the animals, a monumental task in itself.
- iv. God’s Covenant: God told Noah that while every other living thing on earth would perish, He was making a covenant to protect Noah and his family. His covenant was His agreement, His promise. This assurance was certainly what Noah needed to hear, in light of the catastrophe God foretold. The covenant is not fully explained until after the Flood (chapter 9); all Noah has is God’s promise that he and his family would pass through the divine judgment unscathed.

D. Noah’s Obedience – 6:22: Genesis 6 ends with the amazing statement that “Noah did everything just as God commanded him.” Noah faithfully represented God by completing each of the tasks he had been given. Surely this included his preaching and his building assignments. They were both powerful warnings to his generation.

Summary Statement: Noah had a very big assignment, by which he was to represent God.

Principle: *We represent God well by remaining faithful in every assignment He gives us.*

Application: What assignments has the Lord given to you?

Often, the assignments God gives us feel overwhelming. They may require a lot of hard work and personal sacrifice. I’m certain Noah felt overwhelmed at the prospects of constructing something the size of the Ark and preaching to a generation that was so terribly wicked.

Your challenge may be raising children to love God in a godless culture. That’s a big assignment! He may call you to move to a far away place or He may ask you to remain faithful in some very monotonous job right where you are. Both of these are big assignments! Your assignment may involve having cancer, or representing Him while enduring some other hardship. Our God-ordained assignments are impossible to complete on our own. We are not gifted enough. We are not faithful enough. His assignments are designed to force us to rely on Him. They are God-ordained opportunities for us to represent Him well in our culture.

Conclusion

Most of us can thank God that we will never feel quite as alone as Noah surely felt in his assignment. But there may be a time and a place where you *will* stand entirely alone for Him. Whether we are alone or have much support, the God who has called you to represent Him will equip you to do it!

ⁱ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/top-50-countries-christian-persecution-world-watch-list.html>

ⁱⁱ Wesley, J. (1765). *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament, Volume 1* (31). Bristol: William Pine.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.barna.com/research/2016-bible-minded-cities/>

^{iv} Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (106–107). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

^v Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (108). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

^{vi} Carson, D. A., France, R.T., Motyer, J.A., & Wenham, G.J., Ed. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. (Ge 3:9-20). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{vii} Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (109). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

^{viii} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Vol. 1: Commentary on the Old Testament* (88). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^{ix} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Vol. 1: Commentary on the Old Testament* (90). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.