

BEGINNINGS: Lesson Eight,
The Beginning of God Sheltering the Righteous
Genesis 7-8

Subject: Noah lived on the Ark while the world outside perished.

Main Idea: God often uses historical realities to foreshadow future realities and to convey spiritual truths.

Principles:

1. *Faith in Christ is the vehicle of our salvation.*
2. *Every final judgment is being been postponed but could come at any time.*
3. *Every past and present sacrifice reminds God of His Son's sacrifice.*

Introduction

Did you know that Ephesians 2:6 says God has raised us up with Christ *now* in order that He might show the incomparable riches of His grace *in the coming ages*? When God acts in human history, it always serves a greater purpose than what is immediately evident.

The Bible dedicates several chapters to the Flood. In fact, more verses in Genesis tell of the Flood than of Creation or the Fall. The Flood marked the end of an era. Noah's generation was so terribly depraved that God rightly brought judgment on it. But the Flood served an even greater purpose than an immediate cleansing of the Earth. It also foreshadowed a future event and taught a spiritual truth – that God is the Judge of the Earth and His just nature *requires* Him to pass judgment (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 9:8). The Flood revealed God's power over Creation, His freedom to rule, His inability to tolerate sin, and the serious measures He will take to ensure a holy remnant remains on earth.

The further we delve into the Old Testament, the more we will see that God *often* used historical realities to foreshadow future realities and convey spiritual truths. When God acts in human history, it always serves a greater purpose than what is immediately evident. The same is true with His present work in our lives. What He is doing is much bigger than we can imagine!

This is our second lesson on the Flood. You may have wondered whether any ancient, extra-biblical literature has been discovered to substantiate the Biblical record of the Flood. In fact, archaeologists have uncovered documents written by some of the world's most ancient cultures that contain "flood stories." The Gilgamesh Epic is one example. But in order to give the Biblical record the attention it deserves, we will postpone discussion of the extra-Biblical accounts until our final *Beginnings* lesson. For now, our purpose is to carefully consider exactly what God intended us to learn from the Flood, a significant historical event that has great meaning for our present lives.

I. Entering the Ark – 7:1-16 Chapter 6 told of the wickedness of Noah’s generation, God’s decision to send judgment, and Noah’s building of the Ark. Chapter 7 begins with the Lord telling Noah that the rain would begin in seven days. It was time for Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives, to enter the Ark. The seven remaining days were probably days of preparation. It seems that Noah and his family began to live on the Ark. The pairs of animals came to Noah during this time (7:9, 15), just as God had promised (6:20); he did not have to collect them.

A. Clean and Unclean Animals

i. Instructions for Noah

1. Previously, Noah was given a general instruction to take one pair of each kind of animal, each kind of bird, and “every kind of creature that moves along the ground” into the Ark with him. Marine life was obviously exempt, since the Flood wasn’t a threat to them. Once the time to load the Ark arrived, God gave Noah more specific information. He was to take one pair of every kind of “unclean” animal, but seven pairs of each kind of “clean” animal. After the Flood, the additional “clean” animals would be a food source for Noah and his family (9:3). They were also used for sacrifice (8:20). For both “clean” and “unclean” animals and birds, one pair was preserved for reproduction.
2. God gave Noah *specific* instructions at the time when they were needed. This is true for us as well. The Bible is a blueprint of general instructions for Christian living, but the specific details of God’s plans aren’t revealed until we need them. Are you currently waiting on God for specific instruction? Unless you have failed to ask for guidance, or are ignoring instructions that He has already given you, it may be that the time for you to act simply hasn’t arrived yet.

- ii. Old Testament Designation of “Clean” and “Unclean”: In Moses’ time, the classification of “clean” and “unclean” animals was standardized (Leviticus 11; 27:11), but some distinction must have been recognized much earlier, since there is no record of God clarifying which animals were “clean” and which were “unclean” for Noah. We do not know exactly how God determined which animals and birds would be “clean” and which would be “unclean.” Perhaps it was arbitrary. Some suggest the “clean” animals had “certain functions... corresponding (to) spiritual qualities that God loves” and the “unclean” animals lacked these functions, with the distinction teaching “that God disapproved of these [qualities].”¹ If this was true, the exact nature of these functions is unknown. What is clear, however, from the whole teaching of the Bible is that this *physical distinction* was to teach Old Testament saints a *spiritual*

lesson: God is holy and wants us to reflect His holiness by maintaining “clean” attitudes and behavior. The *physical* distinction was artificial and temporary, and according to the New Testament, we are not to observe it today (Mark 7:19, Hebrews 10:18).

B. Noah’s Obedience: The Biblical record emphasizes Noah’s complete obedience to all God’s commands (7:5, 7, 9). His obedience has significance on several levels. It was evidence of Noah’s faith and a testimony to those on the earth, right up until the day the floodwaters came. From a practical point of view, it also ensured the Ark was built well enough to keep him safe.

C. The Lord Shut the Door: Once the animals were onboard and the final seven days of preparation were complete, the Lord Himself shut the Ark’s door. Perhaps the door was physically impossible to close from the inside, but it is difficult to imagine God asking Noah to close it, with all of Noah’s extended family and neighbors still outside. Once the door closed, any opportunity to be saved from God’s wrath ended.

D. Water From Above and Below

- i. Clarification that Noah was Onboard: Once the door was closed, the waters came. It is possible to understand the phrase “on that day” (7:13) to indicate that Noah and his family entered the Ark on the day the flooding began, but it probably refers to verse 1, “that day” when God told Noah to enter the Ark (seven days earlier). If so, Noah and his family were already safely inside when the deluge began.
- ii. Nature of the Flooding: Genesis 7:11 tells us the water came from both *above* the earth and *below* it. Great upheavals and shifting of the earth’s crust are implied, apparently breaking free subterranean reservoirs beneath the earth’s crust. At the same time, an unusual amount of water came in the form of rain. At creation, God had separated the waters to create an atmosphere, with some of the waters raised above the earth and some left on it (Genesis 1:6-7). The release of the waters from above and below was, in a sense, the undoing of God’s creation. Almost certainly, tremendous changes to the face of our planet resulted and possibly to the earth’s atmosphere as well. Life, as it was known, permanently changed.

Summary Statement: Noah was saved by God’s grace. The Lord gave him the blueprint for building the Ark, told him when to enter it, and shut the door to close the passengers safely in.

The Flood was an actual historical event and the Ark was a real boat. God often uses historical realities to foreshadow future realities and to convey spiritual truths. Throughout time, the Ark has been a symbol of salvation from a future, final judgment. God’s instruction, “Go into the Ark,” can also be translated, “Come into the Ark.”ⁱⁱ Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Faith in Christ is the vehicle of salvation.

Principle: *Faith in Christ is the vehicle of our salvation.*

Hebrews 11:7 emphasizes that it was Noah’s faith that saved him: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an Ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Noah built the Ark without having ever seen anything remotely resembling it or a flood, much less one that would cover the entire earth. He just believed God – pure and simple.

Faith, as the Bible uses the term, is not mere intellectual assent. Neither is Biblical faith wishful thinking, *hoping* for the best. Biblical faith is based on knowledge. Although the facts that our faith rests upon may not have complete, scientific proof, we can still have confidence in them for historical, logical, and empirical reasons. Biblical, saving faith is a reasonable faith, and it is always evidenced by actions. If our life choices and decisions are not impacted, we do not have Biblical, saving faith.

The word *trust* explains the concept of Biblical faith well. The New Testament tells us that those who died in the Flood had no idea, right up to that moment, that anything was about to happen. Presumably, Noah also hadn’t seen any physical signs that the rains were coming. He built and entered the Ark simply because he *trusted* God.

Application: Jesus urges, “Come to me.” Have you come into the Ark of Salvation by trusting Jesus Christ? If not, will you choose this very day to trust in God’s Deliverer for salvation from the penalty of your sin and for salvation into eternal life? If you have already “entered the Ark,” so to speak, are you struggling to *trust Him* with the needs and circumstances you currently face? Trusting Him with the affairs of our daily lives is evidence of saving faith.

Transition: Once Noah, his family, and the animals were on the Ark, God closed the door and the deluge came.

II. Judgment By Flood - Genesis 7:17-8:14

A. Extent of the Flood

- i. A Localized Flood: Some people do not believe it was possible for the Flood to have been worldwide. Proponents of a more localized flood say that our planet does not have enough water for the highest peaks on earth to have all been covered at one time. They point out that although Genesis 6-7 states God's intent to "destroy the earth" (6:13), the Biblical writers used hyperbole in other passages. For example, Genesis 41:57 says *all the world* came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, when "all the world" is clearly from the perspective of those in Egypt. Similarly, it may only have been from Noah's perspective that "*all the mountains under the entire heavens were covered.*" Many of those who take this view fully believe the Bible when it says all life was wiped out. They just believe life was limited to the Mesopotamian region. Without a way to date the Flood, just how far and wide the population had spread by Noah's time cannot be determined.
- ii. A Universal Flood
 1. Those who believe the Flood was universal insist that, unlike other places in the Bible where hyperbole is used, Genesis 6-7 contains a special and a repeated emphasis that the Flood was over all the Earth.
 2. In response to the argument about water covering the Earth's highest peaks, they point out that upheavals in the Earth's crust at the time of the Flood would almost certainly have changed the face of the Earth. Prior to the Flood, the Earth's mountains may not have been at their present elevations. In fact, the Flood itself could have pushed the high peaks of today to their heights. Additionally, marine fossils have been discovered on some of the world's highest mountaintops, indicating that all these mountains were covered by water at some point. Scientists with opposing views explain these as resulting from plate tectonics.
 3. Third, since it seems that Noah had over one hundred years to build the Ark, if the Flood had been regional, in that amount of time he could have just relocated. He certainly wouldn't have needed to take pairs of every kind of animal and bird with him, since these would have surely spread outside the Mesopotamian region.
 4. The "flood story" tradition of many cultures may also support a universal flood.
 5. Finally, universal flood proponents say that the New Testament's comparison of the Flood to the destruction of the earth by fire at the end of human history supports the Flood's universality.

- iii. Conclusion: Whether the Flood was universal or local, it claimed the lives of every living human being on the earth, with the exception of the eight on the Ark.

B. Timetable of Events

- i. First 150 days: Noah was 600 years old when the Flood began (7:6). The waters continued for 150 days (7:24; 8:3) – 40 days and nights of rain followed by 110 days of high water. Whatever their height at the time of the Flood, the water level exceeded the highest peak of land by 15 cubits (about 23 feet or 6.8 meters).
 1. *The End of All Life*: The Bible emphasizes that every living thing that moved on land perished – birds, livestock, wild animals, all other creatures of the earth, and mankind. That fact is repeated three times in 7:21-23. It is disturbing to consider the tremendous emotional pain Noah and his family endured on the Ark as they heard the terror of neighbors, friends, and family members outside the Ark. In God’s mercy, Noah’s father Lamech, a man of faith (5:29), died five years before the Flood. However, according to Genesis 5:30, Lamech lived another 595 years following Noah’s birth and had other sons and daughters. In other words, Noah had younger brothers and sisters. Like Noah, they had plenty of years prior to the Flood to have their own families. But none of these were on the Ark with Noah. Neither was anyone in Noah’s wife’s family, nor the parents and siblings of his daughters-in-law.
 2. *110 Days of Slow Recession*: Once the rains stopped, the flooding continued for another 110 days. The recession of the waters occurred under God’s direction, just as the flooding had. Genesis 8:1 tells us “God remembered Noah” and sent a wind over the earth. When the Bible says that God remembers, it is not suggesting that He had previously forgotten. Rather, the image suggests His readiness to act on behalf of those being remembered. On this occasion, He acted by sending a wind that forced the waters to recede. Many years later, when Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land (Exodus 14:21), the Lord again used the wind to cause the waters to recede. The New Testament equates the wind with the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8; Acts 2:2). Just as wind sets its own mysterious course, beyond our control, and just as we see the effects of wind but not the wind itself, so it is with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. By God’s decree, the waters had brought chaos on the earth, “the undoing of Creation.”ⁱⁱⁱ Then, God sent the wind to restore order.

3. *The Mountains of Ararat*: 150 days after the Flood began, the Ark came to rest on Mt. Ararat (8:3-4). The lodging of the Ark onto something solid must have brought Noah's family encouragement. Today, the mountains of Ararat lie near the shared borders of Turkey, Armenia and Iran. Whether or not these are the "mountains of Ararat" of Noah's time is widely disputed.
- ii. Second 150-Day Period: Apparently, the waters receded much further over a second 150-day period. About 74 days after the Ark settled on Mt. Ararat, the tops of the mountains became visible (8:5).
1. *Noah's Days on the Ark*: The Bible does not tell us about Noah and his family's life on the Ark. It's possible that God had given Noah some indication how long he would be on the Ark, since He had instructed him to store food, although there is no record of such a conversation. Unless the Lord put the animals into hibernation, feeding and caring for them may have filled the larger part of the family's days. It was surely a year of emotional strain, mourning the deaths of relatives and acquaintances and wondering what life would be like after the Flood. They may have found creative ways to provide some entertainment or comic relief for one another. Many good conversations about God must have taken place.
 2. *The Raven*: After another 40-day period, Noah sent out a raven (8:7). Since ravens are not discriminating with regard to their diet and can obtain food from floating carcasses,^{iv} it could maraud over the waters without returning to the Ark as frequently as would be necessary for the survival of other bird species. Perhaps Noah was able to learn something by observing the raven's movements, or it might not have ended up being any help to him at all.
 3. *The Dove*: Then Noah sent out a dove to see if it could find land. It found none and returned to Noah (8:6-9). After seven days, Noah repeated this experiment (8:10) and this time, the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf. Olive trees are plentiful in the Middle East and extraordinarily sturdy trees. Some live as long as a thousand years. Today, the olive tree is part of the official symbol of the State of Israel. Noah knew plant life was becoming visible because the leaf the dove plucked was fresh, and not part of the flotsam. After another 7 days, Noah sent the dove out a third time. On this occasion, it did not return (8:12). Enough vegetation was above water level for its survival.

- iii. Dry Land: Finally, Noah saw dry land (8:13)! Although it was a joyous, landmark day, the earth's surface was so saturated with mud and transformed that its appearance must have been shocking. It took roughly two months to dry enough for Noah's family and the animals to safely leave the Ark (8:13-14). When they finally debarked, they had been on the vessel for just over one year.

C. Spiritual Significance of the Flood

- i. Warnings Ignored: The Flood of Noah's day has been the only *general judgment* of mankind since Creation. Matthew 24:38-39 says, "For in the days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the Ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the Flood came and took them all away." Despite the warnings that had been issued to them, through Noah's preaching and the visual of the Ark itself, Noah's extended family and neighbors – his entire generation – never believed God would take action. In the New Testament, Peter tells us that scoffers of every age prefer to follow their own evil desires and mock the notion of judgment: "Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation, they say. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed" (2 Peter 3:4-6).
- ii. Future Judgment Assured: God often uses historical realities to foreshadow future realities and to convey spiritual truths. The Flood stands in history as a warning to people of all subsequent generations that judgment is coming. Just as God judged the unrighteous of Noah's day by flood, He now holds the unrighteous for punishment by a future judgment of fire (2 Peter 3:7). The long delay may give the impression that God has forgotten our sin or chooses to ignore it. Scoffers assume judgment will never happen. In truth, God is patiently allowing more time for people to repent, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:3-9). Sinners may seem to be getting away with a great deal of wrongdoing, but in the end, justice will be served. All those who have disregarded God's invitation to trust Christ for salvation will one day be eternally separated from God and all of His good gifts.
- iii. The Flood and the Believer: For believers, the Flood reminds us to live our lives with expectancy; Christ's return and final judgment is certain and could come at any time (Matthew 24:36-42). While unbelievers will be condemned, our judgment will be for the purpose of reward and accountability. The Flood is also a picture of cleansing from sin and resurrection to new life, like baptism (1 Peter 3:20-22).

Summary Statement: Although God is longsuffering, the Flood serves as a historical reminder of God's wrath over sin and the reality of judgment.

Principle: *Final judgment is being postponed but could come at any time.*

Today, many pulpits fail to preach the Biblical doctrine of judgment. Speaking about suffering and judgment is especially unpopular with westerners, who have lived lives of relative ease. We would do well to remember that the certainty of future judgment is the very basis of all Christian missionary efforts, both outside our own regions and within.

The people of Noah's day did not receive supernatural signs warning them of impending judgment. Many people today believe they can wait until some later time in their life to start taking God seriously. At the moment, they are enjoying living life their own way. They foolishly ignore the possibility that they may meet death before another hour passes. God has mercifully given us a long season in which to warn others that judgment is coming. Would we hesitate to warn a child of physical danger he or she doesn't perceive? Then why are we often hesitant to give the most important warning of all?

Application: Why exactly have *you* hesitated to warn others of coming judgment? Do you actually doubt the truth of God's word about this? If so, may the lesson of the Flood be instructive. Are we afraid we will be mocked and ridiculed? Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). We are in good company if we are mistreated, for this is the very path that our Savior walked. In times when little courage has been evident within the Church, little power has also been evident. Have you noticed that it is not hard to be courageous when we have to do so to protect someone we truly love? Is it possible we fail to warn others because we don't love them enough? How will we excuse our lack of love one day to the One who *so loves* the world (John 3:16)?

All Christians are called to missionary work, either locally or outside one's region. In light of God's mercy on us, shouldn't we show others mercy by doing all we can to warn them that judgment is coming? Will you ask God to burden you with this mission and give you the love and courage to fulfill it?

Transition: Once the Flood was over, God called Noah, his family, and the animals out of the Ark.

III. Noah's Pleasing Sacrifice - Genesis 8:15-22

- A. Be Fruitful:** God's first instruction was to multiply, be fruitful, and increase in number on the earth. He had given this same instruction after Creation. Noah became the second Adam. Through him, the earth would be repopulated.
- B. Noah's Sacrifice:** Although righteous by faith and blameless among his peers, Noah was still a sinful man with a sinful nature. Noah had received God's grace, so the first thing he did when he got off the Ark was to thank and worship Him. In Genesis 8:20, we find the first mention of altar building in Scripture (no altar is mentioned in the account of Cain and Abel's sacrifices). The altar of sacrifice continued to be the method by which men approached God until Christ came to earth. Eden seems to have been recognizable as the place where God met with human beings prior to the Flood. Perhaps after the Flood, Noah stepped into a world where there was no recognizable, special place to meet with God. God no longer lived among mankind, but in heaven. As Noah's offering of clean animals and birds burned, the smoke rose upward, signifying a bridge between man below and God above.
- C. God's Declaration**
- i. The Pleasing Aroma of Noah's Sacrifice: Surviving a universal judgment must have left Noah humbled and grateful. The Lord smelled the aroma of his sacrifice and was pleased. Like Abel's, it must have been given with the right attitude. Failure to express gratitude to God is a defining characteristic of the godless (Romans 1:21). As the word "sacrifice" suggests, a true sacrifice is costly. Noah put to death some of the animals that he had been responsible for protecting. With fewer animals remaining, animal population would take longer to increase. However, even the most costly sacrifice Noah could have made would never have been worthy of an utterly holy God. What made Noah's sacrifice pleasing to God was that *God foresaw the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, in it.* Christ's sacrifice is the only truly worthy sacrifice that has ever been offered Him.
 - ii. God's Promise: In response to Noah's sacrifice, God promised never to destroy the earth in the same way again (see 9:11, 15). From that time forward, the seasons and laws of nature would remain constant. The earth would not be burdened any further than it has been since sin entered it. God made this promise, despite the fact that the Flood did nothing to change man's heart. Thousands of years later, we see that He has faithfully kept it.

Summary Statement: Noah offered pleasing sacrifices in response to God's gracious deliverance.

Principle: *Every past and present sacrifice “reminds” God of His Son’s sacrifice.*

The New Testament speaks of believers offering their bodies and their minds as sacrifices to God. In fact, Jesus calls us to give up our lives in order to follow Him (Matthew 10:38, 39).

Application: Are you willing to live a life of sacrifice, as Jesus did? What sacrifice to God can you offer?

- The Bible speaks of sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Is it time for you to exchange your habit of grumbling and complaining for thanksgiving and praise?
- Perhaps you need to give more of your resources, instead of guarding them for your own pleasure.
- You may need to sacrifice more of your time to help those in need.

Are you grateful enough for the grace God has extended you to offer Him costly sacrifices?

Conclusion

Noah’s sacrifice, costly as it was, wasn’t sufficient to pay the penalty for our sin. The Flood, devastating as it was, wasn’t a solution to man’s sin-sick nature. The Ark, the Flood and Noah’s sacrifice were real, historical objects and events that pointed to future realities that have occurred or will occur much later in history. When God acts in human history, His actions always serve a greater purpose than what is immediately evident. The same is true of His work in our lives: He is accomplishing something of far greater significance than we can presently imagine – something of eternal significance.

ⁱ <http://www.raystedman.org/complete-library> (Genesis 7:1-24: *Understanding Society: The End of the Old.*)

ⁱⁱ Willmington, H. L. (1997). *Willmington’s Bible Handbook* (11). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sarna, N. M. (1989). *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary (56). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

^{iv} Sarna, N. M. (1989). *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary (57). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.