

The Flood



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 6:13–7:10, 2 Pet. 2:5–9, Genesis 7, Rom. 6:1–6, Ps. 106:4, Genesis 8, Gen. 9:1–17.*

Memory Text: “‘But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.’” (*Matthew 24:37, NKJV*).

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5, NKJV*). The verb “saw” (*Gen. 6:5*) brings the reader back to each step of God’s initial Creation. But what God sees now, instead of *tov*, “good,” is *ra’*, “evil” (*Gen. 6:5*). It is as if God regretted that He had created the world, now full of *ra’* (*Gen. 6:6, 7*).

And yet, God’s regret contains elements of salvation, as well. The Hebrew word for “sorry” (*nakhm*) is echoed in the name of Noah (*Noakh*), which means “comfort” (*Gen. 5:29*). Thus, God’s response to this wickedness has two sides. It contains the threat of justice, leading to destruction for some; and yet, His response promises comfort and mercy, leading to salvation, as well, for others.

This “double voice” already was heard with Cain and Abel/Seth, and it was repeated through the contrast between the two lines of Seth (the “sons of God”) and Cain (the “sons of men”). Now we hear it again as God differentiates between Noah and the rest of humankind.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 23.

Preparation for the Flood

Read Genesis 6:13–7:10. What lesson can we learn from this amazing account of early human history?

Like Daniel, Noah is a prophet who predicts the end of the world. The Hebrew word for the “ark” (*tevah*) (*Gen. 6:14*) is the same rare Egyptian loanword that was used for the “ark,” in which the infant Moses was hidden, who was preserved in order to save Israel from Egypt (*Exod. 2:3*).

Also, some have seen in the general structure of the ark parallels to the ark of the tabernacle (*Exod. 25:10*). Just as the ark of the Flood will permit the survival of humankind, so the ark of the covenant, a sign of God’s presence in the midst of His people (*Exod. 25:22*), points to God’s work of salvation for His people.

The phrase “Noah did; according to all that God commanded” (*Gen. 6:22, NKJV*) concludes the preparatory section. The verb *‘asah*, “did,” referring to Noah’s action, responds to the verb *‘asah*, “make,” in God’s command, which began the section (*Gen. 6:14*) and is repeated five times (*Gen. 6:14–16*). This echo between God’s command and Noah’s response suggests Noah’s absolute obedience to what God had told him to do, to *‘asah*. It is interesting that this phrase also is used in the context of the building of the ark of the covenant (*Exod. 39:32, 42; Exod. 40:16*).

“God gave Noah the exact dimensions of the ark and explicit directions in regard to its construction in every particular. Human wisdom could not have devised a structure of so great strength and durability. God was the designer, and Noah the master builder.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 92.

Again, the parallel between the two “arks” reaffirms their common redemptive function. Noah’s obedience is thus described as a part of God’s plan of salvation. Noah was saved simply because he had that faith to do what God commanded him to do (*see Heb. 11:7*). He was an early example of a faith that manifests itself in obedience, the only kind of faith that matters (*James 2:20*).

In short, though Noah “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (*Gen. 6:8*), it was in response to this grace, already given him, that Noah acted faithfully and obediently to God’s commands. Isn’t that how it should be with all of us?

Read 2 Peter 2:5–9. Why was only Noah’s family saved? What lesson can we learn from the Noah story regarding our role in warning the world about coming judgment?

The Event of the Flood

The verb ‘*asah*, “make,” which refers to Noah’s actions, also is a key-word in the Genesis Creation account (*Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31; Gen. 2:2*). Noah’s acts of obedience to God are like God’s acts of creation. What we can take from this link is that the Flood is not just about God punishing humanity, but about God saving us, as well.

Read Genesis 7. Why does the description of the Flood remind us of the Creation account? What lessons can we learn from the parallels between the two events?

An attentive reading of the text covering the Flood reveals the use of many common words and expressions within the Creation story: “seven” (*Gen. 7:2, 3, 4, 10; compare with Gen. 2:1–3*); “male and female” (*Gen. 7:2, 3, 9, 16; compare with Gen. 1:27*); “after its kind” (*Gen. 7:14, NKJV; compare with Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25*); “beasts,” “birds,” “creeping things” (*see Gen. 7:8, 14, 21, 23; compare with Gen. 1:24, 25*); and “breath of life” (*Gen. 7:15, 22; compare with Gen. 2:7*).

The Flood story reads, then, somewhat like the Creation story. These echoes of the Creation accounts help reveal that the God who creates is the same as the God who destroys (*Deut. 32:39*). But these echoes also convey a message of hope: the Flood is designed to be a new creation, out of the waters, which leads to a new existence.

The movement of waters shows that this event of creation is, in fact, reversing the act of Creation in Genesis 1. In contrast to Genesis 1, which describes a separation of the waters above from the waters below (*Gen. 1:7*), the Flood involves their reunification as they explode beyond their borders (*Gen. 7:11*).

This process conveys a paradoxical message: God has to destroy what is before in order to allow for a new creation afterward. The creation of the new earth requires the destruction of the old one. The event of the Flood prefigures the future salvation of the world at the end of time: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (*Rev. 21:1, NKJV; compare with Isa. 65:17*).

What in us needs to be destroyed in order to be created anew?
(*See Rom. 6:1–6.*)

The End of the Flood

Genesis 7:22–24 describes the overwhelming and comprehensive effect of the waters, which “destroyed all living things” (*Gen. 7:23, NKJV*) and “prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days” (*Gen. 7:24, NKJV*). It is against this background of total annihilation and hopelessness that “God remembered” (*Gen. 8:1*). This phrase is situated in the center of the texts covering the Flood, an indication that this idea is the central message of the Flood story.

Read Genesis 8:1. What does it mean that God “remembered” Noah?

The verb *zakhar*, “remember,” means that God had not forgotten; it is more than just a mental exercise. In the biblical context, the “God who remembers” means the fulfillment of His promise and often refers to salvation (*see Gen. 19:29*). In the context of the Flood, “God remembered” means that the waters “stopped” (*Gen. 8:2*) and that Noah will soon be able to leave the ark (*Gen. 8:16*).

Though no direct command is yet given to leave, Noah takes the initiative and sends first a raven, and then a dove, to test the situation. Finally, when the dove does not come back, he understands “that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked” (*Gen. 8:13, NKJV*).

Noah’s behavior is rich in practical lessons. On one hand, it teaches us to trust God even though He does not yet directly speak; on the other hand, faith does not deny the value of thinking and testing. Faith does not exclude the duty to think, to seek, and to see if what we learned is true.

And yet, Noah goes out only when God, finally, tells him to do so (*Gen. 8:15–19*). That is, even when he knows it’s safe to leave, Noah still relies on God and waits for God’s signal before going out of the ark. He waited patiently within the ark. “As he had entered at God’s command, he waited for special directions to depart. . . . At last an angel descended from heaven, opened the massive door, and bade the patriarch and his household go forth upon the earth and take with them every living thing.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 105.

Read Genesis 8:1, Genesis 19:29, and Psalm 106:4. What does the expression “God remembers” mean? What does this truth mean for us, now—that is, how has God shown you that He “remembers” you?

The Covenant: Part 1

Now it was the moment when the promised covenant was to be fulfilled. “ ‘But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you’ ” (*Gen. 6:18, NKJV*). In contrast to the divine threat to destroy (*Gen. 6:17*), this covenant was the promise of life.

Read Genesis 8:20. What did Noah do first when he went out of the ark, and why?

Like Adam and Eve, who surely worshiped God on Sabbath immediately after the six days of Creation, Noah worshiped God immediately after the Flood, another creation event in and of itself. There is a difference, however, between the two acts of worship. Unlike Adam and Eve, who worshiped the Lord directly, Noah had to resort to a sacrifice. This is the first mention in the Scriptures of an altar. The sacrifice is a “burnt offering” (*olah*), the oldest and most frequent sacrifice. For Noah, this sacrifice was a thanksgiving offering (*compare with Num. 15:1–11*), given in order to express his gratefulness to the Creator, who had saved him.

Read Genesis 9:2–4. How did the Flood affect the human diet? What is the principle behind God’s restrictions?

Because of the effect of the Flood, plant food was no longer available as it used to be. Therefore, God allowed humans to eat animal flesh. This change of diet generated a change in the relationship between humans and animals, in contrast to what had been between them in the original creation. In the Creation account, humans and animals shared the same plant diet and did not threaten each other. In the post-Flood world, the killing of animals for food entailed a relationship of fear and dread (*Gen. 9:2*). Once they started eating each other, humans and animals, no doubt, developed a relationship quite different from what they had enjoyed in Eden.

God’s tolerance, however, had two restrictions. First, not all the animals were proper for food. The first restriction was implicit in the distinction between “clean and unclean” animals, which was a part of the Creation order (*see Gen. 8:19, 20; compare with Gen. 1:21, 24*). The second one, which was explicit and new, was to abstain from the consumption of blood, for life is in the blood (*Gen. 9:4*).

The Covenant: Part 2

Read Genesis 8:21–9:1. What is the significance of God’s commitment to the preservation of life? How does God’s blessing fulfill that commitment?

God’s commitment to preserve life was an act of grace; it was not a result of human merits. God decided to preserve life on earth in spite of human evil (*Gen. 8:21*). Genesis 8:22 reads, literally, “all the days of the earth” (*DRA*); that is, for as long as this present earth remains, the seasons will come and go and life will be sustained. In short, God has not given up on His creation.

In fact, the following text, which talks about God’s blessing, takes us back to the original Creation, with its blessing (*Gen. 1:22, 28; Gen. 2:3*). The Lord, in a sense, was giving humanity a chance to start over, to start fresh.

Read Genesis 9:8–17. What is the significance of the rainbow? How does this “sign of the covenant” (*Gen. 9:13, NKJV*) relate to the other sign of the covenant, the Sabbath?

The phrase “establish . . . covenant” is repeated three times (*Gen. 9:9, 11, 17*), marking the climax and fulfillment of God’s initial promise (*Gen. 6:18*). Following the preceding section, which parallels the sixth day of the Creation account, this section parallels the section covering the seventh day of the Creation account, the Sabbath. Inside the text, the repetition, seven times, of the word “covenant” resonates with the Sabbath. Like the Sabbath, the rainbow is the sign of the covenant (*Gen. 9:13, 14, 16; compare with Exod. 31:12–17*). Also, like the Sabbath, the rainbow has a universal scope; it applies to the whole world. Just as the Sabbath, as a sign of Creation, is for everyone, everywhere, the promise that no other worldwide flood will come is for everyone, everywhere, as well.

Next time you see a rainbow, think about all of God’s promises to us. Why can we trust those promises, and how does the rainbow show us that we can trust them?

Further Thought: A comparison between the mentality and the behavior of the people and the state of the world before the Flood and that of the people in our days is particularly instructive. To be sure, human wickedness is not a new phenomenon. Look at the parallels between their time and ours.

“The sins that called for vengeance upon the antediluvian world exist today. The fear of God is banished from the hearts of men, and His law is treated with indifference and contempt. The intense worldliness of that generation is equaled by that of the generation now living. . . . God did not condemn the antediluvians for eating and drinking. . . . Their sin consisted in taking these gifts without gratitude to the Giver, and debasing themselves by indulging appetite without restraint. It was lawful for them to marry. Marriage was in God’s order; it was one of the first institutions which He established. He gave special directions concerning this ordinance, clothing it with sanctity and beauty; but these directions were forgotten, and marriage was perverted and made to minister to passion. A similar condition of things exists now. That which is lawful in itself is carried to excess. . . . Fraud and bribery and theft stalk unbuked in high places and in low. The issues of the press teem with records of murder. . . . The spirit of anarchy is permeating all nations, and the outbreaks that from time to time excite the horror of the world are but indications of the pent-up fires of passion and lawlessness that, having once escaped control, will fill the earth with woe and desolation. The picture which Inspiration has given of the antediluvian world represents too truly the condition to which modern society is fast hastening. Even now, in the present century, and in professedly Christian lands, there are crimes daily perpetrated as black and terrible as those for which the old-world sinners were destroyed.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 101, 102.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the common characteristics of the pre-Flood society and ours? What do these common characteristics teach us about God’s grace, that, despite all this, He loves the world and is, still, seeking to save whom He can?
- 2 Some people argue that Noah’s flood was only a local event. What is wrong with that idea? If this were true, why would every local flood (and every rainbow) make God a liar?

Faithful Grandparents

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

In the evening, after it was too dark to work in the maize field, the Reyneke family gathered around a large kitchen table for supper in their small farmhouse in central South Africa. Father, Mother, and their seven boys and four girls ate homegrown food every evening: maize porridge along with potatoes, pumpkin, and meat. Afterward, the children cleared away the dishes, and Father opened his Dutch Bible for family worship.

On this particular evening, Father opened the Bible to Exodus 20 and read, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work” (*Exodus 20:8–10, NKJV*).

“Listen,” Father said, puzzled. “It says here, ‘Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest.’” The idea of resting on the seventh day was new to him. He and the family had always observed the first day, Sunday, as the Sabbath, but the Bible said otherwise.

Father made a note in the margin of his Bible. Beside the words “Six days you shall labor” he wrote, “Plow time.” Beside the words “On the seventh day you shall rest” he wrote, “Rest time.” The matter was clear to him. His family started keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Families took notice on the neighboring farms, and soon three of them also were keeping the Sabbath.

Time passed, and a Seventh-day Adventist literature evangelist stopped by the farm and sold Father a little Dutch-language book titled *God’s Covenant With Man*.

Through the book, Father and Mother learned about the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the first time. They understood that other people also worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath.

While there is no historical record of Father and Mother joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 4 of their 11 children became Adventists. One of their grandsons is Gideon Reyneke, a pastor who helps oversee mission work in South Africa and 14 other countries as executive secretary of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.



Gideon said he owes his Adventist heritage to faithful grandparents who simply read the Bible and obeyed it in the 1920s. “We pray that by telling this story from generation to generation, it will yield results and bring many more people to Jesus Christ,” he said.

This quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help spread the gospel in GIDEON REYNEKE’S home Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Key Text: *Matthew 24:37*

Study Focus: *Genesis 6–10, 2 Pet. 2:5–9.*

Part I: Overview

Many people have questioned the historicity of the biblical story of the Flood, arguing that such a worldwide event is incompatible with modern scientific views of natural history. However, there is a record of a colossal deluge in the collective cultural memories of many peoples far from each other, all over the world, and not only in the ancient Near East, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece. Flood narratives are found in India, China, among the ancient habitants of Ireland, among the Maya peoples in Mesoamerica, Native Americans, ancient peoples of South America and Africa, and even among aboriginal tribes of Australia. The fact that modern science cannot make sense of the Flood phenomenon is not proof that this event never took place. Modern science's failure to account for the Flood is simply another evidence of the limits of science, especially when dealing with something as supernatural as the Genesis flood.

This week, we shall not study the biblical story of this cosmic event in order to understand it from a scientific point of view. We do not possess all the data to be able to comprehend this phenomenon. Apart from the scientific discussion, a number of questions will be debated. The fundamental question concerns God Himself: What does this story teach us about the God of the Bible and His purpose? Gnostic philosopher Marcion of Sinope (AD 85–AD 160), and many other Christians after him, used the Flood to demonstrate that the God of the Old Testament was a violent and cruel God, set in diametric opposition to Jesus, the God of love.

Part II: Commentary

The God of Justice

After the events of the Creation and the Fall, the disobedience of our first parents escalated until the world was filled with corruption and wickedness. From the time of Cain and Abel, humanity was divided into two camps. It is interesting that each genealogical line is defined on the basis of their relationship with God. While the genealogy of Cain (*Gen. 4:17–22*) is introduced by his rejection of God (*Gen. 4:16*), the genealogy of Seth (*Gen. 5:1–32*) is introduced by the image of

God (*Gen. 5:1*). This contrast explains why the line of Cain is later identified as “the sons of men,” whereas the line of Seth is identified as “the sons of God” (*Gen. 6:1, 2*). No wonder God is worried when He observes that the two lines are getting mixed up, producing a new genealogical line that is in open rebellion against God. The phrase “took . . . for themselves” (*Gen. 6:2, NKJV*) suggests the intention of the “sons of God” to replace and counter God’s divine operation of marriage, as illustrated by the words “He took” the wife and brought her to Adam (*Gen. 2:22*). The “sons of God” want to take God’s place, an attitude that is reflected in the words “saw . . . that they were beautiful” (*Gen. 6:2*). In Hebrew, it is the same word *tob*, “good” (translated here “beautiful”) that is used, just as in God’s response to creation when He “saw that it was good” (*Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25*). This replacement of God leads the “sons of God” to commit acts that are no longer in keeping with God’s laws in Creation, but in line with their own sinful desires.

Meanwhile, the use of the plural “wives” suggests the introduction of polygamy, and the phrase “of all whom they chose” suggests wild and uncontrolled sexual activities outside of the divine Law. “Took . . . for themselves of all whom they chose” (*Gen. 6:2, NKJV*) has even the connotation of self-service, violence, and rape (*see Gen. 39:14, 17*). All these sexual acts were not just a repudiation of God but also abuse of women.

The biblical text reports that God saw the wickedness (*Gen. 6:5*). This is the second time that the biblical text reports God as the One who “sees” (*compare Gen. 6:1–4*). In parallel to the Creation account, the divine act of seeing immediately follows the divine word: “The Lord said . . .” (*Gen. 6:3*). “Then the Lord saw . . . the wickedness of man was great” (*Gen. 6:5, NKJV*). This line is a second echo to the refrain of Creation, “And God saw . . . that it was good” (*Gen. 1:4*). But here the original “good” (*tob*) of God’s creation has been replaced by what is contrary to it: wickedness (*ra’ah*). God’s next comment is a tragic evaluation of the situation. The “great wickedness” does not refer just to some specific actions or occasional evil deeds; it describes a thorough and definitive condition, and concerns the root, the profound motivations, of the human heart wherein God finds radical evil. Humanity has reached the point of no return. God must intervene with a worldwide flood to preserve a remnant of the human race from complete moral degradation and thus extinction.

The God of Love

In this divine intervention, the language evokes Creation. God regrets that He created humanity. The divine “regret” is associated with the

divine sadness. God “was grieved in His heart” (*Gen. 6:6, NKJV*). The Hebrew verb *‘atsab*, “grieve,” is the opposite of joy (*Neh. 8:10*) and refers to mental pain (*Gen. 3:16*). God’s emotion has to do with His love for humans. Significantly, the Hebrew verb *nakhm*, translated “sorry” (*Gen. 6:6, NKJV*), contains the positive nuance of “grace” and “love.” Hence, the translation “sorry” for the Hebrew word *nakhm* does not fully account for God’s sentiments. The divine “regret” does not mean that God has changed His mind; instead, it contains elements of grace and “comfort.” Thus, the word *nakhm* appears sometimes in parallel with the word *shub*, “repent” (*Jer. 4:28, Jon. 3:9*).

The use of the word *nakhm* brings hope into the picture—the prospect of salvation through the Flood. God’s emotion reveals His love for humans. Nevertheless, God expresses His love through His judgment. God’s response to wickedness through destruction is an act of love. The Hebrew word *makhah*, “destroy,” is presented in a wordplay with the preceding word *nakhm* (“sorry,” “comfort”), which evokes God’s sadness and compassion toward humanity through Noah. While *nakhm* suggests the positive face of judgment, *makhah* reveals its negative face. Furthermore, the word *makhah* belongs to the language of judgment. It means, more precisely, to “erase.” This “erasing” means a physical destruction that operates in reversal of Creation, undoing God’s creative acts. But beyond the physical destruction, this act of judgment also refers to being spiritually erased from the book of life (*Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28, 29*). In biblical thinking, love and justice belong together (*Mic. 6:8*).

The God of Wisdom

The combination of love and justice is precisely what makes God’s wisdom what it is. God does not just save through His good will and love. The details of the building of the ark (*Gen. 6:14–22*), which would allow Noah and his family to survive the Flood, are tangible evidence of God’s serious attention to the reality of life. These minute architectural details not only testify to the historical reality of the ark’s construction; they reveal the divine concern for the success of the operation. God gave precise instructions for that purpose. The resinous wood of the tree, used to build the frame of the ark, and its sap were designed to make the ark watertight inside and out. A window was provided at the top of the ark to make a passage for light and air, situated within a cubit of the edge of the roof. It was probably some kind of lattice constructed along the line of the roof, bringing in light in such a way that the different apartments within the ark were lighted and ventilated.

The God who cared for the construction of the ark is the same God who later will give detailed instructions for religious life and spiritual

salvation through the sacrifices of the sanctuary service. In fact, there are many parallels between the blueprints given for the ark and the tabernacle. The dimensions of the ark (*Gen. 6:15*) are given according to the same standard and with the same words used for the construction of the ark in the tabernacle (*Exod. 25:10*).

How big was the ark? If the cubit equaled 18 inches, or 45 centimeters, 300 cubits for the length of the ark would have equaled 450 feet, or more than 137 meters; 50 cubits for its width would have equaled 75 feet, or 22 meters; and 30 cubits for its height would have equaled 45 feet, or 13 meters. These measurements have no special symbolic or spiritual significance; they simply suggest the magnitude of the size of the vessel, which was large enough to accommodate the animals and humans on board. But the many parallels between the ark and the tabernacle carry a profound meaning: the God who saves spiritually, Jesus Christ, is the same Creator God who saves us physically and materially.

Discussion and Thought Question: How do the three dimensions of God—justice, love, and wisdom—relate to each other theologically?

Part III: Life Application

Thou Shalt Not Kill. The essential lesson of the Flood is the affirmation of life. After the destruction of His creation and the death of all humans outside the ark, God says yes to life. In that context, God enjoins humans not only to multiply but also not to take life, for life is sacred. This principle applies first to animals. So, God’s toleration for some consumption of meat, considering the post-Flood situation, is qualified by the commandment not to eat flesh with the blood, because the blood represents life (*Gen. 9:4*). But for humans, God’s application is absolute. Because God created humans in His image, their blood should not be shed (*Gen. 9:5, 6*). Although the lives of animals are sacred, as indicated in the blood proscription, it is significant that only human life requires an accounting before God (*Gen. 9:5*).

The Hebrew language has several verbs for killing. All these verbs apply to both humans and animals except one, the verb *ratsakh*, which applies only to humans. Significantly, it is the verb *ratsakh*, “kill” (*KJV, ASV*), “murder” (*NIV, ESV*), that is used in the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:13*). The nuance of this usage does not differentiate between the case of murder and other cases, but between the object that is killed—humans or animals. Therefore, the sixth

commandment should not be translated as “you shall not murder,” implying only the specific case of a criminal act, but “you shall not kill humans” in the absolute sense.

Thought Question: How do you apply this principle to the situation of military service or the question of capital punishment?

Notes
