

The Flood

BIBLE BASICS

The Corruption of the Human Heart

Before diving into the narrative of the Flood, it is essential to recall the foundational themes established in the opening chapters of Genesis.

Genesis Chapter	Key Themes	Focus
Genesis 1	Creation, Intelligent Design, Spiritual Purpose, Human Uniqueness	Divine Order and Intent
Genesis 2	Adam, Eve, Divine Ordinances (Sabbath, Mankind, Work, Marriage)	Sanctity of Life and Relationship
Genesis 3	The Fall, Disobedience, Consequences of Sin (Death, Shame, Toil), Promise of Redemption	Introduction of Corruption and Hope
Genesis 4 & 5	Sin Outside Eden, Lineages (ungodly Cain vs. godly Seth)	The Spread of Moral Decay

By Genesis 6, mankind had begun to multiply on the face of the earth. However, the growing population was accompanied by a profound moral decay, setting the stage for divine judgment.

God's Response to Evil

In this contemporary era many individuals find themselves grappling with profound questions concerning the existence of evil and the apparent absence of divine intervention. The horrors of war, the increasing corruption, and the seemingly endless cycle of violence and suffering can lead to a crisis of faith for some. They wonder, "How can a benevolent and omnipotent God allow such evil to persist? Why does he not intervene in the affairs of humanity as he did in the biblical times of Noah?"

Genesis chapter 6 recounts the story of Noah, a righteous man chosen by God to build an ark and save his family and a pair of every animal species from a great flood. The flood would cleanse the Earth of

its wickedness. To fully grasp the extent of humanity's sinfulness during Noah's time, one must dive into the events that unfolded after Cain's murder of his brother Abel.

In Genesis 4:12, God declared to Cain, "A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." In response, Cain expressed his fear that anyone who encountered him would kill him: "it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." (Genesis 4:14). This fear confirms that the concept of killing was already familiar to humanity, indicating that corruption had spread deeply within the second generation.

The third generation witnessed the birth of Enosh, the third son of Adam and Eve. According to Genesis 4:26, it was during Enosh's time that "men began to call on the name of the Lord." This verse implies that nearly everyone else had abandoned God, suggesting a widespread and intentional departure from His ways. It was not a matter of struggling with sin but rather a willful desertion of God, leading inexorably towards catastrophe.

The judgment of the Flood was a response to radical, pervasive moral decay. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," noting that "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually". The earth was described as "corrupt before God" and "filled with violence". "All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth"

While today's world faces challenges such as murders, wars, rapes, corruption, and violence, there are still numerous individuals dedicated to serving God and living by His commandments. Unlike Noah's time, humanity today has not reached the same level of universal corruption. Far from it. Recognizing this distinction is crucial for understanding the differences in God's response during Noah's time and now.

Invitation to Purifying Waters

God provided Noah with precise instructions on how to construct the ark, including the type of wood to use and how to seal it. He specified the dimensions, the location of windows, the number of levels, and who and what Noah should take with him. Noah spent around 100 years building the ark before the flood actually occurred, demonstrating God's patience and mercy. The Ark of Salvation was displayed before the entire nation. Despite this grace period, humanity did not repent and turn away from their evil ways.

The floodwaters originated from two sources: torrential rain from the heavens and subterranean water expelled from the earth due to shifting tectonic plates. The earth was inundated for 40 days, covering hills and mountains to a depth of 15 cubits above their peaks. The ark floated for 150 days, drifting with the currents until the waters began to recede. The ark eventually came to rest atop Mount Ararat, where it remained for about two months. Three months later, the mountaintops became visible. From the onset of the rains until Noah and his family were able to disembark from the ark, a full year had passed.

The waters prevailed "exceedingly," covering all the high hills under the whole heaven. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, completely covering the mountains. "All flesh died that moved on the earth," and the waters prevailed for one hundred and fifty days. The sources affirm that the flood is a true story, not merely a fable or symbolic myth. The consistency of the narrative is supported by:

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- **Cultural Memory:** Approximately 500 cultures across the entire world, including those in Mesopotamia, India, China, the Americas, and Greek mythology, possess a historical memory of a great catastrophic flood.
 - **Archaeological Findings:** Marine fossils have been discovered on the top of mountains, suggesting a great flood brought them there.
 - **Geological Evidence:** Geologists note that specific global stone layers, such as limestone and sandstone found across Europe, the Middle East, and North America (like the Grand Canyon), suggest that a vast amount of water moved these layers across the entire world.

The Great Flood served as a transformative and purifying event marking the end of a corrupt and sinful era and paving the way for a new beginning with Noah and his family. The Ark prefigures the sacrament of Baptism, delivering the recipient through the destructive waters of judgment and chaos. Just as the floodwaters covered the earth, the waters of Baptism purify the soul, leading to a new life. "From the beginning of creation, "the spirit of God moved over the waters," and over and again Scripture testifies to the fact that water is purifying. It was with water that God washed away the sin of the world in the time of Noah." - St. John of Damascus.

The Prisoner of the Lord

Once Noah, his family (Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives), and the animals were inside the vessel, "the LORD shut him in" (Genesis 7:16). Noah did not close the door himself; God controlled the timing and the confinement.

Noah had already "made sacrifices" by building the Ark for years, enduring potential ridicule from society. The resulting isolation can sometimes feel lonely, a common experience when one chooses to dedicate themselves fully to God, leaving behind worldly friends or gatherings.

This sacrifice of the world stems from the similar concept of how St. Paul calls himself "the Prisoner of the Lord". The Fathers interpret this confinement as the Gift of Righteousness, rather than just a cost.

- **Chained to God:** To be a "prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 3:1), as St. Paul described himself, is a positive, chosen bond. As St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote while awaiting execution, he saw his chains as a sacrament that gave him "union with Christ".
- **Freed from the World:** The chains represent the choice to be bound to the Almighty God. This discipline means that worldly desires ("fleshly or earthly desires") come second to God's will. It is a joyful commitment to follow all that God wants, making one a "bond servant of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:1).

The Raven and the Dove

Noah sent out two birds to determine the state of the earth:

1. **The Raven:** This was an unclean animal. It flew "to and fro until the waters had dried up" but never returned to Noah. The Fathers interpret the raven as symbolizing those who, having been delivered, go back into the world and "feast on dead corpses," or corruption, failing to return to their master.

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2. **The Dove:** The dove, often symbolizing peace and the Holy Spirit, initially found no resting place and returned to Noah, finding rest in its master. Sent out a second time after seven days, it returned with a "freshly plucked olive leaf". While the dove's return signified that the waters were receding, the dove's return also shows loyalty stemming from a true relationship, demonstrating service born out of profound gratitude for salvation. Sent out a third time, the dove did not return, confirming the earth's complete dryness.

St. Augustine powerfully compares those who procrastinate their spiritual reformation to the ominous crow. He warns that such behavior threatens ruin, echoing the tale of the crow that left Noah's ark and never returned.

"You do not know when that last hour is going to come and yet you say, 'I am reforming.' When are you going to reform? When are you going to change? 'Tomorrow,' you say. Behold, how often you say, 'Tomorrow, tomorrow.' You have really become a crow. Behold, I say to you that when you make the noise of a crow, ruin is threatening you. For that crow whose cawing you imitate went forth from the ark and did not return." – St. Augustine Sermons on the Liturgical Season 224.4.

In contrast, Maximus of Turin draws a parallel between Christ and the dove, emphasizing Christ's command to his followers to be as simple as doves. He interprets the prophet's words, "Who will give me wings like a dove, and I shall fly away and be at rest?" as a description of Christ's triumphant return to heaven after his earthly suffering. The dove's descent during the initiation of the church's sacraments symbolizes the fulfillment of this prophecy.

"Christ is a dove because he commands his holy ones to be as doves when he says, 'Be simple as doves.' But the prophet speaks of what Christ the dove is when, in his person, he describes his return to heaven after his suffering: 'Who will give me wings like a dove, and I shall fly away and be at rest?' When Christ the Lord, therefore, initiated the sacraments of the church a dove came down from heaven. I understand the mystery, and I recognize the sacrament. For the very dove that once hastened to Noah's ark in the flood now comes to Christ's church in baptism." – St. Maximus of Turin Sermons 64.2.

God's decision to end the propagation of evil is not surprising, given humanity's inclination to overlook divine justice. The same way a human will disagree with a killer being freed when he is evidently guilty; it is not a surprise that God will put an end to the propagation of evil. But did God rush to annihilate humanity? In Genesis 6:3, it says: "And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.'", meaning that humanity has an abundance of time to repent from their evil. This shows the nature of God's sovereignty, emphasizing His perfect balance between justice and mercy.

The Rationale for the flood

St. Peter's declaration in 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah preached repentance to humanity underscores the gravity of their situation. Yet, their response to this preaching was disheartening, as

Christ points out that they were preoccupied with earthly concerns such as eating and drinking. God offered humanity an additional seven days for repentance after Noah and his family entered the ark, but no one heeded the call. In Genesis 7:10, after Noah and his family went inside the ark, we see that God gave humanity an additional 7 days. An additional chance for repentance. But no one repented.

The most profound rationale for the flood lies in the story of salvation. The incarnation required a sinless human to redeem a humanity that is filled with corruption. As St. Gregory the Theologian asserts, "For that which He Christ has not assumed, He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved." In other words, God had to take on our full humanity to be able to save us. This humanity of Christ needs to come from a human, namely St. Mary.

During Noah's time, humanity's corruption was pervasive, leaving only one righteous family. This family eventually brought forth Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and ultimately, St. Mary, the bearer of God. Through her, God took flesh to save all of humanity, demonstrating His love and mercy for both those who lived before and after the flood.

St. John Chrysostom's Homilies on Genesis further illuminate the significance of human choice in this narrative. He emphasizes that God created human beings with free will, allowing them to choose virtue or wickedness. Noah's righteousness stands in stark contrast to the corrupt nature of his contemporaries, underscoring the individual's capacity for moral agency.

"Do you see how the Lord created our nature to enjoy free will? I mean, how did it happen, tell me, that while those people showed enthusiasm for wickedness and rendered themselves liable to punishment, this man opted for virtue, shunned association with them and thus felt no effect of punishment? Is it not crystal clear that each person chose wickedness or virtue of his own volition? You see, if that were not the case and freedom did not have its roots in our nature, those people would not have been punished, nor would others receive reward for their virtue. Since, however, everything has been allowed to remain with our choice owing to grace from on high, punishment duly awaits the sinners, and reward and recompense those who practice virtue." – St. John Chrysostom Homilies on Genesis 22.5.

Noah is presented as a type or symbol of Christ. He was chosen to save humanity because of his contrasting righteousness. If Noah's family had also become corrupt, the consequences would have been dire. However, God is in control, and He patiently endured the sins of humanity until they gave Him no other choice but to proceed with the flood. The flood occurred not only because God is just but also because He loves us and wants to save us. While the story highlights God's justice, it also reveals His patience, mercy, and love.

The Ark and the Church

The ark is not merely a vessel, but a profound symbol of the City of God's pilgrimage through history. It represents the Church, saved by the wood of the cross where Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and humanity, hung. The very dimensions of the ark - three hundred cubits in length, fifty in breadth, and thirty in height - correspond to the proportions of the human body. Just as a person lying down is

six times longer from head to foot than they are wide, and ten times longer than they are high, so too is the ark. This correspondence emphasizes that Jesus became incarnate as a human being, taking on the form of those he came to save.

The door in the side of the ark is a symbol of the wound made by the lance in the side of Christ on the cross. This door is the entrance through which believers enter the Church, as they receive the sacraments that flow from that wound. The sacraments are channels of grace, allowing believers to participate in the salvation won by Christ on the cross.

The fact that the ark was made out of squared timbers is a symbol of the stability and firmness of a holy life. A cube, with its six equal sides, stands firm no matter how it is turned. Similarly, a person who lives a holy life is steadfast and unwavering in their commitment to God, regardless of the challenges they face.

Undoubtedly the ark is a symbol of the city of God on its pilgrimage in history. It is a figure of the church that was saved by the wood on which there hung the “Mediator between God and men, himself man, Jesus Christ.” Even the very measurements of length, height and breadth of the ark are meant to point to the reality of the human body into which he came as it was foretold that he would come. It will be recalled that the length of a normal body from head to foot is six times the breadth from one side to the other and ten times the thickness from back to front. Measure a man who is lying on the ground, either prone or supine. He is six times as long from head to foot as he is wide from left to right or right to left, and he is ten times as long as he is high from the ground up. That is why the ark was made three hundred cubits in length, fifty in breadth and thirty in height. As for the door in the side, that surely, symbolizes the open wound made by the lance in the side of the Crucified—the door by which those who come to him enter in, in the sense that believers enter the church by means of the sacraments that are issued from that wound. It was ordered that the ark be made out of squared timbers—a symbol of the foursquare stability of a holy life, which, like a cube, stands firm however it is turned. So it is with every other detail of the ark’s construction .They are all symbols of something in the church.” - St. Augustine City of God 15.26

Every detail of the ark's construction holds symbolic meaning, pointing to some aspect of the Church or the Christian life. The ark is a rich tapestry of symbolism, each thread woven together to create a beautiful and meaningful whole.

The Ark, built according to divine instructions, is the primary symbol of divine protection. This protective vessel prefigures the Church as God's means of salvation. Just as the world outside the Ark was filled with violence and every living thing perished, the Ark alone offered refuge. This parallels the necessity of dwelling within the Church, the spiritual vessel established by God to deliver mankind from the chaos and destruction of sin.

When God delivered Noah, He commanded that he and his entire household enter the Ark—his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives. The protection was not granted to isolated individuals, but to those who

gathered inside the vessel. This teaches that salvation is often found communally, requiring the shared journey within the Church, the spiritual Ark.

The seven-day warning given before the Flood and the long period of the Ark's construction are seen as precursors to the Church, symbolizing that this protection is there for you at all times. Just as Noah and his family were "shut in" by the Lord for their safety, the faithful find secure confinement and refuge in God's presence, rather than seeking the corruption of the outside world

Building our Ark (Faith & Good Works)

Noah, though he "found grace in the eyes of the LORD", was not passively saved. He demonstrated his faith through years of meticulous obedience.

1. **Obedience and Righteousness:** Noah was instructed to build the Ark of gopherwood with specific dimensions and materials. He performed "according to all that God commanded him, so he did". This dedication and obedience are necessary responses to God's grace.
2. **A Testimony of Faith:** The long period of building the Ark (estimated 25 to 100 years) was a testimony to Noah's patience and faith. He was also a "preacher of righteousness" during this time.
3. **The True Heart:** Noah's righteousness was not simply mechanical rule-following, but stemmed from his true heart and his "true understanding of who God is". This is the essence of good works: actions motivated by a genuine desire for a relationship with God.



Review Questions

1. What was the major sin that Cain did and why? [Cain got jealous of his brother Abel because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and did not accept Cain's.]
2. Why did the heart of man become evil? [Man moved away from God.]
3. What were the instructions that God gave Noah regarding the Ark? [God told Noah the type of wood to use and how to seal it. He told him what should be the length, width, height, where the windows should be located, how many levels, who and what to take with him into the ark.]
4. How many days did it rain and how many days did the Ark float? [It rained for 40 days. The Ark floated for 150 days.]
5. What does it mean when God said In Genesis 6:3 "yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years" mean? [This verse means that humanity has 120 years to repent from their evil. That is a very long time.]
6. What was the message Noah preached? [He was preaching repentance.]
7. What became of Noah's family? [It brought forth Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who became the people of God in the Old Testament and most importantly brought forth

St. Mary, the bearer of God.]

8. How is Noah a symbol of Christ? [He was chosen to save humanity because of his contrasting righteousness.]
9. What is learned about God from this story? [We learn the Justice of God, if we look a bit deeper, we also find His patience, His mercy and His love.]
10. How does the Ark compare to the Church? [The Ark is a figure of the church that was saved by the wood on which there hung the “Mediator between God and men, himself man, Jesus Christ.”]