

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XXXII : GENESIS 6:9–12 – THE FLOOD: RIGHTEOUS NOAH / CORRUPT EARTH

*“Noah’s experience presents decisively the author’s assertion that the Lord judges human sin but provides a means for perpetuating the creation blessing (1:26-28) and the salvation hope for an elect seed (3:15). The recurring theme of blessing, threatened by sin but preserved by divine mercy, is found in the two narratives that make up the Noah *tôl’dhôteh* : the flood story (6:9-9:17) and the account of the patriarch’s drunkenness (9:20-27).” [Mathews, 1:349]*

“The piety of Noah, his preservation, and the covenant through which God appointed him the head of the human race, are the three main points in this section.” [Keil, 1:141]

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE — Along with my usual references, this and the following Flood lessons will be using much material from ‘*Grappling with the Chronology of the Genesis Flood*,’ Steven W. Boyd & Andrew A. Snelling, editors; Master Books, Green Forest AR; first printing 2014; sixth printing 2022. The translation used in these next few studies will be from this resource.

Episode 1 Theme: *God’s intent to destroy all corrupted flesh on the earth by means of a Flood, while preserving righteous Noah, his family, and a limited number of all living creatures; God’s instructions for an Ark intended for the preservation of Noah, and Noah’s wholly obedient response to God’s instructions.*

Episode 1, Scene 1: Genesis 6:9, 10; **Theme:** *The righteousness of Noah in his generation and his fathering of Shem, Ham, and Japeth.*

⁹ These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a righteous man; he was unmixed [for blameless] in his generations. With God Noah walked. ¹⁰ And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japeth.

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 9 – This is the history of Noah.

**Noah / was a wholly righteous man / in his generations;
with God / did Noah walk.**

**v. 10 – And Noah begot / three sons,
Shem, / Ham, / and Japhet.**

v. 9 – These are the generations of Noah: — Cassuto: ‘*This is the history of Noah.*’ This serves as the rubric of the entire section of the Flood which comes to narrate the history of Noah, i.e., the world events that are particularly connected with the personality of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man; he was unmixed [for blameless] in his generations. With God Noah walked. — Noah is described by three phrases: ‘*a righteous man*,’ ‘*blameless*,’ and ‘*walked with God*.’ Each has its emphasis but they collectively tell the same story about Noah’s life. Each of these words / phrases will be explained next. Cassuto uses ‘*perfect, without blemish*’ as an adverb, thus ‘*a wholly righteous man*.’ [Cassuto, 2:48] “Noah is distinguished from the ‘*people of his time*’ by his upright character (i.e., ‘*the only good man*,’ GNB). His piety and righteous courage

became renowned in later times (Ezek 14:14, 20; Isa 54:9-10) and he was commonly associated with the virtue of godliness (Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20), receiving the unique appellation ‘*preacher of righteousness*’ (2 Pet 2:5). Jewish literature celebrated Noah’s place in history as the paragon of righteousness (e.g., Sir 44:17; Jub. 5:19; Wis 10:4; 1 Enoch 67:1) and added to his reputation by fanciful stories about his birth (e.g., 1 Enoch 106) [In *1 Enoch* Noah is said at birth to have ‘*opened his eyes and made the whole house bright*’ and ‘*opened his mouth and blessed the LORD of Heaven.*’].” [Mathews, 1:356]

Noah was a righteous man; — Hebrew, *tsaddîq* . ‘*Righteous*’ occurs here for the first time in the Bible. Its significance for our narrative is conveyed in 7:1 where ‘*righteous*’ occurs again; the Lord explains that Noah’s moral conduct is the reason he and his family are preserved. It is a very common term in the OT (used 206 times, most frequently in Psalms and Proverbs). The adjective is primarily manward, combining piety and ethics, one who keeps the moral law. The ‘*righteous*’ serve the interest of the creation (Gen. 8:9; 12:10), their neighbors (Ezek. 18:5-9), and their King. They are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage others. In short, it is the most general Hebrew term to describe good people. Near synonyms include ‘*innocent*’ and ‘*upright*.’ Noah was thus one who recognized and observed his responsibilities to God and to his fellow man. It does not mean he was sinless.

The word group ‘*righteous*’ also often conveys a forensic nuance in legal contexts in which the ‘*righteous person*’ or ‘*just one*’ meets a standard of right conduct; they are ‘*innocent*’ or ‘*acquitted*’ of specific offenses (e.g., Exod 23:7-8; Deut 25:1). [Mathews, 1:357f; Wenham, 1:169f]

he was unmixed [or blameless] — Hebrew, *tāmîm* , ‘*blameless, unblemished,*’ also occurs here for the first time in the Bible. The Hebrew word means ‘*complete, whole, sound*’ signifying wholehearted commitment; being opposed to what is deceitful, pretended, and vain. It is a term much more rarely applied to people than ‘*righteous,*’ being most frequently used to describe blemish-free sacrificial animals (e.g., Exod 12:5; Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; etc.). Probably the same idea is carried over into the human realm and indicates moral uprightness and integrity in a person’s behavior (e.g., Deut 18:13; Prov 11:5; cf. Gen 20:5-6). Blameless denotes to abstain from sin (2 Sam 22:24; Ezek 28:15) and walking in the law of the Lord (Ps 119:1), but it does not mean to be without sin (e.g., David, though an adulterer and a murderer, can still claim ‘*I have been blameless before him*’ – 2 Sam. 22:24). The pairing of ‘*blameless*’ and ‘*righteous*’ suggests that Noah is wholly committed to righteousness (cf. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 18:30; 19:7-8), giving his contemporaries no excuse to criticize his conduct. [Mathews, 1:358; Wenham, 1:170]

in his generations. — “*The plural is somewhat difficult.... According to the plain meaning of the text, the purpose of the plural seems to be to glorify Noah: not only was he righteous, but he was wholly righteous; not only was he outstanding in his righteousness among his contemporaries, that is, among those who, like himself, belonged to the tenth generation after Adam, but he was pre-eminent in righteousness relative to all the generations that lived on earth in his days.*” [Cassuto, 2:49f] “The clause, ‘in his generations,’ is emphatical. For he has already often said, and will soon repeat it, that nothing was more corrupt than that age. Therefore, it was a remarkable instance of constancy, that Noah being surrounded on every side with the filth of iniquity, should hence have contracted no contagion.” [Calvin, 1:252]

With God Noah walked. — While others ‘*walked before God*’ (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, godly kings; 17:1; 48:15; 2 Kgs 20:3), only Enoch (5:22, 24) and Noah are said to have ‘*walked with God.*’ This indicates Noah is of the same righteous lineage as Seth both by physical descent and

moral conduct. Enoch is saved from death, Noah from the Flood. ***“In the Hebrew sentence structure ‘with God’ opens the sentence. This inversion is an aspect of the Hebrew word order which gives God pride of place in the sentence, thus accentuating the fact that the standards by which Noah’s righteousness is judged are divine, not human.”*** [Currid, 1:186]

v. 10 – And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japeth. — The genealogical notice serves several functions: (1) to link Noah with Adam and his three sons, (2) to present Noah as head of the nuclear family, and (3) to foreshadow the destiny of Noah and his three sons as the common ancestors of humanity. ***“Noah’s sons are presumably considered righteous, as they are mentioned before the general corruption of the rest of the world in vv 11-12.*** Cassuto (2:51) plausibly argues that this is Ezekiel’s understanding, for in 14:14-20 he says that Noah, Daniel, and Job would only deliver themselves by their own righteousness and would not have saved their children. As Ezekiel must have known of Noah’s sons surviving, he must have believed they were righteous. ***However, it is certainly Noah’s righteousness on which Genesis concentrates; it is not much interested in his children’s behavior at this point.”*** [Wenham, 1:170]

Episode 1, Scene 2: Genesis 6:11, 12; **Theme:** *The total corruption of earth in the sight of God.*

¹¹ Now the earth had become corrupt before God, and the earth filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and it had become corrupt because all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

**v. 11 – But the earth was corrupt / in God’s sight,
and the earth was filled / with unrighteousness.**

**v. 12 – And God saw the earth, / and behold, it was corrupt;
for all flesh had corrupted / their way upon the earth.**

v. 11 – Now the earth had become corrupt before God, — ***“The Waw expresses antithesis, as though to say: ‘But, in contrast to those previously mentioned, all the people of the earth were corrupt, and their corrupt behaviour polluted and corrupted the land that they inhabited.’”*** [Cassuto, 2:51] ‘Corrupt’ is the Hebrew *shāchath*, ‘to destroy, to ruin, to corrupt, to spoil.’ The stem is used to describe the spoiling of a belt (Jer 13:7), a pot (Jer 18:4), a spring (Prov. 25:26), a city (Gen. 18:28), or a nation (Jer. 4:7). The word is frequently used to describe the sudden destruction of peoples and cities in war or through divine judgment (e.g., Gen 18:28, 31, 32). “The key term here is the verb *shāchath*, which appears first as a Niphal imperfect (‘corrupted’ – v. 11), then as a Niphal perfect (‘it was corrupt’ – v. 12), then as a Hiphil perfect (‘had corrupted’ – v. 12). We might note that v. 13b, read by all the modern versions as ‘behold, I will destroy them,’ is another form of this verb (Hiphil participle with suffix). ***To capture this consistency of word choice we may render the above as ‘gone to ruin was the earth ... indeed, it had gone to ruin ... all flesh had ruined its way ... I will ruin them.’ The choice of the same word to describe both the earth’s condition and the intended action of God must be deliberate. God’s decision is to destroy what is virtually self-destroyed or self-destroying already.”*** [Hamilton, 1:278]

and the earth filled with violence. — ‘Violence’ is the Hebrew, *chāmās*, ‘violence, cruelty, injustice, lawlessness.’ The word denotes any antisocial, unneighborly activity. Very often it involves the use of brute force, but it may just be the exploitation of the weak by the powerful or the poor by the rich (e.g., Amos 6:1-3) or the naive by the clever (Prov 16:29). ***One Hebrew dictionary states ‘chāmās is cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights***

*of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality.... a favorite instrument of **chāmās** is false accusation and unjust judgment.*’ (TDOT, 4:482). The word never describes violence which is the result of catastrophes in nature, but only that which stems from human malice and hatred.

v. 12 – And God saw the earth, and it had become corrupt — “The expression ‘And God saw’ recalls to the reader’s mind the story of Creation (1:31): ‘And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.’ *The world as it emerged from the hands of the Creator was exceedingly good, but now, because of man’s conduct, it was corrupt.*” [Cassuto, 2:53] “Much of what is said here has arisen in the genealogy and closing record of the old world; its repetition adds to its solemnity. But the words ‘*corrupt(ed)*’ and ‘*violence*’ give new insight into the prevailing anarchy (and into the ugly side of the might and fame noted in verse 4).” [Kidner, 87]

because all flesh — Wenham states most commentators recognize that ‘*all flesh*’ here and throughout the flood story (cf. 6:19; 7:16; 8:17; 9:11, 15-17) includes both man and beast, thus some translations include the animals as inclusive in this condemnation: ‘*for every creature had corrupted its way*’ (Holman Christian Standard Bible); ‘*for all living creatures on the earth were sinful*’ (NET); ‘*for all living beings had corrupted their ways*’ (Complete Jewish Bible). It should be noted that the covenant of 9:9-16 is made with both man and animals. “Animals too, like the goring bull, transgress the hierarchy of being (God – humanity – animals – plants), and whoever does so, intentionally or unintentionally, is liable to capital punishment (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:28). The narrator links human morality with the state of the animal and natural worlds (see Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-21).... Both people and animals have transgressed the parameters of their order and the hierarchy ordained by God. As Dumbrell [*Covenant and Creation*] states, ‘This is a picture of the total rupture of created relationships on the part of the creature.’” [Waltke, 134] Others limit ‘*all flesh*’ to humanity as often in the prophets; e.g., Jer 25:31: ‘*for all humanity had corrupted their way*’ (Amplified); ‘*for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways*’ (NIV); ‘*for humanity had corrupted its way*’ (NASB); ‘*for everyone on earth was corrupt*’ (NLT). In Keil’s opinion, “The term ‘*flesh*’ in ver. 12 cannot include the animal world, since the expression, ‘*corrupted its way*,’ is applicable to man alone. The fact that in vers. 13 and 17 this term embraces both men and animals is no proof to the contrary, for the simple reason, that in ver. 19 ‘*all flesh*’ denotes the animal world only, an evident proof that the precise meaning of the word must always be determined by the context.” [Keil, 1:141f] Lange [1:292] also notes *this should teach us to beware of applying an inflexible literality to such terms as ‘all’ when thus used, since the mention of the whole race ‘does not preclude the exception of Noah and his family.’ Methuselah was also still alive at that time as well, dying the year the Flood began.*

had corrupted their way — Hebrew, *dar^ekō*, ‘its way, its mode of life.’ *This reiterates that sin is not an isolated event here or there: corruption pervades the lifestyle of the antediluvian population. They are corrupt to the cultural core. “Men were becoming monsters, sinking down into brutality – becoming dehumanized through lust and cruelty.”* [Lange, 1:292] “*Such is the progression of sin. It begins in private, when people still have a sense of right and wrong. But once people develop the habit of sinning, they gradually lose their shame, and immoral behavior becomes the accepted – even the required – norm.*” [Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, or *The Five Books of Moses* in book form (Mehorah Publications LTD, Brooklyn NY) 2011, page 31]

on the earth. — ‘*Earth*’ also occurs three times in the passage, indicating that the fortunes of humanity and the earth are intertwined.

NOAH THE PARAGON OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Noah is distinguished from his vile age by his being the only person left in the ancient world who is totally committed to righteous living (see 6:9). [footnote: Jewish literature celebrated his righteousness (e.g., *Sirach* 44:17; *Jubilees* 5:19; *Wisdom of Solomon* 10:4; *1 Enoch* 67:1.)] Along with Job and a certain Daniel of antiquity, he is legendary for being a righteousness man outside of Israel (Ezek. 14:14, 20). The writer of Hebrews holds him up as an example of a righteousness that comes by faith: ‘*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*’ (Heb. 11:7). Peter bestows on him the unique appellation ‘*a preacher of righteousness*’ (2 Peter 2:5). [footnote: This depiction of Noah is unique in Scripture, but not in Jewish literature. Jewish and Christian traditions also taught that Noah was persecuted. Mathews summarizes: ‘Noah is depicted as the stalwart preacher forewarning doom, but the people “sneered at him, each one, calling him demented, a man gone mad” (*Sib. Or.* 1.171-73). Josephus’s account envisions that the patriarch felt threatened for his life and fled the country with his family (*Ant.* 1.3.1). Luther supposed, “More than one miracle was necessary to prevent the ungodly from surrounding and killing him.”’ However, the notion that he was persecuted overreads the biblical texts. According to the New Testament, his preaching and lifestyle condemned sinners. We need not detain ourselves here to exegete the disputed “[*Christ*] preached to the spirits in prison ... in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:19, 20).] Here is a covenant partner who counts upon God to keep his word and upon whom God can count to live by his word. An unregenerate person, shackled in sin, cannot generate that kind of virtue. Such faith is God’s gift to those whom he chooses as covenant partners. God knew the one to whom he extended such grace. Instructively, the first three heroes of faith listed in Hebrews are from Genesis 4-6: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. All believed God, but their destinies were significantly different. Abel believed God and died. Enoch believed God and did not die. Noah believed God, and everyone else died in the Flood; eventually he died a natural death at the good old age of 950 years. We cannot dictate where faith will lead. The human tendency is to see only Enoch as the example of faith, but Abel is also given as our example. What all three have in common is that they walked by faith and pleased God. That faith is an example to us. Yet Noah was not perfect. The striking parallel and contrast between the saintly Noah before and during the Flood (6:8-9) and the drunken sinner, who exposes his nakedness after the Flood (9:21), directs the audience to look to God, not humans, for salvation.” [Waltke, 154f]