

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XXXIV : GENESIS 6: 17–22 – THE MABBÛL / INSTRUCTIONS TO FILL THE ARK

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, Scene 4: Genesis 6:17-22; **Theme:** *God’s proclamation of His intent to bring the Flood to destroy all flesh on earth, as well as His resolve to establish His covenant with Noah and his family, along with the living creatures that He instructs Noah to take with him; and Noah’s full obedience to God’s instruction.*

¹⁷ And I, even I, am about to bring the Mabbûl, water upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under the heavens. All that is on the earth will perish.

¹⁸ But I will confirm my covenant with you, and you shall go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife, and the wives of your sons with you. ¹⁹ And from all the living, from all flesh; two from all you shall bring into the ark to keep them alive with you – male and female they shall be. ²⁰ From the flying creatures according to their kind and from the beasts according to their kind; from all creeping things of the ground according to their kind – two from all – they will come to you to keep them alive. ²¹ And as for you, you shall take for yourself from all food that can be eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself. And it shall be for you and for them for food.” ²² And Noah did this; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 17 – And I —

*behold, I am about to bring a flood, / water upon the earth,
to destroy all flesh / in which is the breath of life, / existing under heaven;
everything that is on the earth / shall expire.*

v. 18 – But I will establish My covenant / through you;

*and you shall come into the ark, / you,
your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives / with you.*

v. 19 – And every living thing / of all flesh,

*two of every sort / you shall bring into the ark,
to keep them alive with you; / they shall be male and female.*

v. 20 – Of the flying creatures according to their kinds, / and of the animals according to their kinds,

*of every / creeping [i.e. moving] thing of the ground according to its kind,
two of every sort / shall come in to you, to keep them alive.*

v. 21 – And you —

take with you / of every sort of food that is eaten,

and store it up for yourself; / and it shall serve for you and for them / as food.

v. 22 – And Noah did this; / according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

v. 17 – And I, even I, — There is strong emphasis on the opening pronoun: the whole design of judgment and covenant is the Lord’s. “I myself” – The repetition of the personal pronoun makes it perfectly clear that God is author of the flood. It is not a force that gets out of divine control as in Babylonian tradition; cf. Ps 29:10: ‘The LORD sits enthroned over the flood.’”
[Wenham, 1:174]

am about to bring the Mabbûl, — “Now the Divine announcement clarifies what was previously left obscure. At first God had said: ‘and behold, I will destroy them with the earth’ – a general statement that did not specify how He would carry out the destruction. In similar terms He commanded Noah to build the ark – a general instruction that did not explain the purpose of the ark. Now the matter is elucidated: the destruction would be accomplished by means of a deluge of water, and the ark would serve as a refuge for Noah and his household and the pairs of creatures from the waters of the Flood.” [Cassuto, 2:65]

THE MABBÛL — The word used for the flood of Noah is the word *mabbûl*, a direct transliteration from the Hebrew (as brought forth in the translation used by Boyd & Snelling, *Chronology*, 679-701). With very little variation, all our English versions translates this word as ‘flood’ but I would suggest the word itself implies more for the following reasons.

According to Hebrew word study books [New Wilson’s OT Word Studies (Kregel, Grand Rapids MI) 1987; Theological Wordbook of the OT (Moody Publishers, Chicago IL) 1980] there are eight Hebrew words translated ‘flood’ in the OT, seven of which are very general terms:

- *nāhār* — the most common Hebrew word used for ‘flood’ and means ‘a stream, a river’ (specially the Euphrates) and is also used of the currents of the sea (Jonah 2:3; Ps 93:3). It is used 120x in the OT, many times to refer to the major rivers of the Bible lands (with the exception of the Nile; see *yē’ôr* below).
- *nāchal* — ‘a valley, brook, river;’ the noun usually refers to a dry river bed or ravine which in the rainy season becomes a raging torrent, and/or the resulting torrent.
- *zāram* — ‘to flow, to pour out, to pour forth in floods’ and is of ‘a shower, a storm of rain.’
- *yē’ôr* — ‘a river (specially the Nile), a flood, a canal;’ normally ASV translates ‘river’ while the RSV translates ‘Nile.’ The primary meaning is ‘a river or stream which forms a definite channel through the land,’ usually referring to the Nile and/or its canals.
- *nāzal* — ‘to flow down (by the natural tendency of waters to do so), to flow forth;’ typically of a stream or abundant rain.
- *shibbōleth* — ‘a large and copious stream, a flowing stream, a flood.’
- *sheṭep* — ‘an overflowing stream, like an inundation; a flood, downpour.’ Used to describe flood water in Ps 32:6; Job 38:25; Nah 1:8; Dan 9:26; 11:22; the last three are in reference to judgment. The remaining reference is Prov 27:4, ‘the flood of wrath.’

But none of these words are used in Gen 6-11! The word *mabbûl* is used only 13x in the Old Testament, all in relation with Noah's flood (Gen 6:17; 7:6, 7, 10, 17; 9:11 (2x), 15, 28; 10:1, 32; 11:10; Ps 29:10). The Theological Wordbook of the OT explains the word as follows:

“A technical term reserved for the watery catastrophe which God brought on the earth during the days of Noah. That event was so well known that mabbûl usually occurs with the definite article. Mabbûl is used only once outside of Gen 7-11. Ps 29:10 says that ‘the LORD sits upon the flood, indeed, the LORD is enthroned king forever.’ Instead of Baal, the god of storm and thunder who according to the Ugaritic myths defeated *yam* the sea god, the Lord's voice is heard in the thunder, and it is he who reigns over the destructive forces of nature, in this case the storm so beautifully described in Ps 29.” [TWOT #1142; pg 489]

The uniqueness of the Hebrew word used to describe Noah's flood continues into the Greek. The LXX translates it as κατακλυσμός (*kataklysmos*; cp. our English word '*cataclysm*'), a word used in the New Testament only 4x and always in reference to Noah's flood (Matt 24:38, 39; Luke 17:27; 2 Pet 2:5). A form of this word is used once in 2 Pet 3:6, '*by which the world that then existed perished, being overflowed, flooded, inundate, deluged with water.*' Note there are other Greek words translated '*flood*,' none of which are ever used to describe Noah's flood:

πλήμμυρα (*plēmmura*), '*to fill, a flood of sea or river;*' is used once in Luke 6:48 of the flood waters that beat upon the house built on the rock.

ποταμός (*potamos*), '*a river, stream, torrent;*' translated '*river, stream*' 12x (Mark 1:5; Luke 6:48, 49; John 7:38; Acts 16:13; 2 Cor 11:26; Rev 8:10; 9:14; 16:4, 12; 22:1, 2) and 4x '*flood*,' 2x of the flood waters that beat down upon the house built on the rock (Matt 7:25, 27) and 2x metaphorically of the '*flood*' spewed out by the great dragon against the woman (Rev 12:15, 16).

Not only are the words *mabbûl* (Hebrew) and *kataklysmos* (Greek) unique and only used to describe Noah's flood, ***but note how the word is used in our text: ‘I will bring a mabbûl of water upon the earth’ (Gen 6:17); ‘the mabbûl of waters came upon the earth’ (Gen 7:6); ‘to escape the waters of the mabbûl’ (Gen 7:7); ‘the waters of the mabbûl came upon the earth’ (Gen 7:10); ‘never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the mabbûl’ (Gen 9:11); ‘the waters shall never again become a mabbûl to destroy all flesh’ (Gen 9:15). I find it interesting how many times the mabbûl is described as being a ‘mabbûl of waters;’ if the word means merely ‘flood,’ what other kind of flood is there than a ‘flood of waters?’ Lange calls the addition of ‘the mabbûl of waters’ a “mere tautology, and, in this case, a feeble tautology.”*** [Lange, 1:293]

While the etymology for this word is disputed, one suggestion is that it comes from the Akkadian root *n-b-l* meaning '*to destroy, destruction*' or other Akkadian words to mean '*inundation*.' "Aben Ezra gives us the views of the older Jewish grammarians. One class of these make it from *n-b-l*, comparing it with Isa 24:4, '*in mourning and desolate is the earth,*' – giving to *mabbûl* the sense of '*ruin*' and '*wasteness*.'" [Lange, 1:293] Henry Morris [183] says it could thus well be translated by '*the hydraulic cataclysm*.' ***So as we read of the mabbûl of Noah, we should keep in mind this was more than a mere flood but rather ‘a specific God-designed catastrophic event, a once-in-history total destruction of the earth by water’ (and if the young-earth scientists are correct, a catastrophe that literally split the ocean floors apart and rearranged the topography of the entire planet!). Special words in both the OT and the NT are used to describe this event, words used of no other normal flood-event. We should read these next few chapters in awe of the majesty of Him Who ‘sits upon the mabbûl.’ (Ps 29:10).***

water upon the earth — “Many exegetes regard the words water upon the earth as a later addition, but this view has nothing to support it. On the contrary these words are necessary; since the term *mabbûl* described something that had not yet come into existence, it was impossible for Noah to understand it without an explanation of its nature.” [Cassuto, 2:67]

to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under the heavens. — This verse parallels v. 13 as another divine pronouncement, reiterating God’s determination to destroy ‘*all*.’ ‘*All flesh*’ is used in its widest sense, ‘*all living creatures*,’ man and beast, any living thing that possesses the ‘*breath of life*’ (cf. 1:30; 2:7). This excludes those who exist in the water under the earth (Exod. 20:4; Deut. 5:8). “Our verse elaborates on the earlier announcement of v. 13; it gives attention to human culpability, but v. 17 is inclusive, ‘*all life under the heavens*’ and ‘*everything*’ with the ‘*breath of life*.’ ***This inclusive language as elsewhere in the account suggests that the cataclysm was worldwide in scope.***” [Mathews, 1:365]

TO BE FAIR ... — ***Sometimes opposing Bible viewpoints are presented as ‘us’ vs. ‘them,’ with ‘them’ presented as being rather ignorant or they would be one of ‘us.’ In our immediate context, while I firmly believe in a global, universal flood (as mentioned in lesson 31), I recognize there are good solid Bible believers who understands Noah’s Flood as a localized event, for whatever reason*** (e.g., Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, does not believe in a global flood, but no one could read Kidner without deeply appreciating his love for the Word of God). ***We should be reminded that by the language alone, these chapters do not demand a global flood.*** “A worldwide flood may be indicated (see 7:19-23; 8:21; 9:11, 15; 2 Peter 3:5-7); however, such comprehensive language can be used for limited situations (see Gen. 41:56-57; Deut. 2:25; 1 Kings 4:34; 10:24; 2 Chron. 36:23; Dan. 2:38; 4:22; 5:19; Luke 2:1).” [Waltke, 136] “An alternative understanding is that the comprehensive language of the text is hyperbolic or a phenomenological description (from Noah’s limited viewpoint), thus permitting a regional flood. And ‘*earth*’ can be rightly rendered ‘*land*,’ again allowing a limited venue. This kind of inclusive language for local events is attested elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 41:54-57), ***but the insistence of the narrative on the encompassing character of the flood favors the literal understanding of the universal view.***” [Mathews, 1:365] ***So while I acknowledge there are good, solid Bible teachers who only teach a local-flood, I reiterate my belief in a global flood, not only because I believe that is what the Word of God teaches but by the geological evidence as expounded by many young-earth scientists.***

breath of life — “‘*Breath of life*’ (*rûach chayyîm*) pertains foremostly to the animal world as in 7:15 (*rûach chayyîm*), but not exclusively (7:22); both passages are intimations of creation though the language there differs somewhat (*nephesh chayyîm*) (1:30). ‘*Breath of life*’ is inclusive for all living things in 7:22, as shown by the additional language ‘*breath*’ (*nish‘math*) and ‘*nostrils*,’ which reflect the creation of the first man (2:7).” [Mathews, 1:366]

from under the heavens — “‘*Beneath the heaven*’ may be a poetic alternative to ‘*upon the earth*,’ but Delitzsch and Cassuto may be correct to see it contrasting with ‘*beneath the waters*’ (cf. Exod 20:4), thereby excluding fishes and other water creatures from destruction.” [Wenham, 1:174]

All that is on the earth will perish. — ‘*Perish, expire*,’ *gāva* ‘; essentially equivalent in meaning to the common word ‘*die*’ (*mûth*) but often associated with the departure of a person’s vital ‘*breath*’ (e.g., Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33). It is a rarer word for dying, used in poetry and of the death of the patriarchs, and sometimes in the contexts of dramatic divine judgment (e.g., Num 17:27-28 [12-13]; Josh 22:20). [Wenham, 1:174; Mathews, 1:366] ***The Lord brought the flood***

with this intention, and according to His intention it shall be; 7:21 thus describes the realization of this pronouncement. God, the giver of life (2:7) is now taking it away.

v. 18 – But I will confirm my covenant with you, — This is the first time the word ‘covenant’ (Hebrew, *b^erîth*) is used in the Old Testament. Such an important word demands we take a deeper look as to its meaning and significance. By the grace of God and the Lord willing I will do an excursus on this in the near future. For now, a single observation: *Note it is ‘My covenant,’ the personal pronoun underscores that God is the author of the covenant. He sets the grant and provides its sanctions.*

with you — *“In contrast to what God will do with ‘all flesh,’ he will establish his covenant with Noah. This verse highlights not primarily God’s establishment of a covenant, but rather the establishment of that covenant with Noah. He is the chosen recipient.* This emphasis is brought out by the double use of ‘with you’ (*’ittākh*). The second one sounds almost redundant: [‘But I will establish my covenant with you, and] you shall enter the ark – you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.’ *This use of the resumptive pronoun establishes Noah as the person of supreme significance in this paragraph.*” [Hamilton, 1:283f]

and you shall go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife, and the wives of your sons with you. — “The thought of the previous sentence is continued: ‘in order that the establishment of the covenant and the fulfilment of God’s promise to Adam may be attained, let Noah and his sons, and their wives with them, pair by pair, enter the ark, and they would all be delivered thereby from the waters of the Flood.’ *The emphasis placed on the women (and your wife and the wives of your sons with you) points to the primary motive, the preservation of the species.*” [Cassuto, 2:69]

v. 19 – And from all the living, from all flesh; two from all you shall bring into the ark to keep them alive with you – male and female they shall be. — The chiasmic ordering of the verbs ‘come,’ ‘bring’ in vv 18 and 19 emphasizes that the animals are to board the ark at the same time as Noah and his family. Noah is initially commanded to bring two of every kind (6:19, 20) but see 7:2 where the Lord adds further details as to how many are to be brought. The ultimate goal of them entering the ark is to keep their species alive, which is the reason for specifying that they be *male and female*.

v. 20 – From the flying creatures according to their kind and from the beasts according to their kind; from all creeping things of the ground according to their kind — “Note how the list of animals, at first very general, is gradually made more specific with many echoes of the creation account. ‘Male and female’ (cf. 1:27); ‘according to their types’ (1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25). Note too the same sequence ‘birds,’ ‘land animals,’ ‘creeping things’ (1:20-24). Though ‘you shall bring into’ could suggest that Noah had to round up the animals, ‘will come to you’ (v 20) shows that the animals would arrive spontaneously. The twice-repeated verb ‘to stay alive, preserve life’ stresses the point of Noah’s heroic efforts and looks forward to the mission of Joseph (45:7; 50:20).” [Wenham, 175]

KEN HAM ON ‘SPECIES / KINDS’ AND HOW MANY ANIMALS WERE ON THE ARK — *Noah did not have to take all the species, just a sample of each kind.*

“As we’ve discussed, kinds are not the same as species. Most kinds consist of dozens or more species. Answers in Genesis asked scientists to do a large-scale study to determine what the kinds that were on the Ark would have been. For most land animals, as stated

earlier, the kind level is probably about the family level of modern classification, which is a grouping of similar animals, such as cats like lions, tigers, leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, etc. that can be documented to be interrelated through breeding.

“In determining how many animals were on the Ark, creation scientists assumed a worst-case scenario. In other words, if they weren’t sure if two animals were of the same kind, they assumed they were different kinds. For example, in bats they made every family its own kind, even though some of the families could probably be grouped together.

“In this ‘worst case scenario’ view, Answers in Genesis believes that there were slightly less than 7,000 animals on the Ark, representing slightly less than 1,400 kinds. Some more recent studies show that all that were needed may be as few as 2,000 – 3,000 animals from as few as 1,000 kinds. There was plenty of room on the Ark.” [Ham, 183]

– **two from all – they will come to you to keep them alive.** — “On the face of it, it appears as though this is an unnecessary repetition of what has already been stated in the previous verse. But actually there is no repetition here but an additional explanation. Above it is stated: ‘*you shall bring into the ark;*’ now Noah might have queried this instruction and said: ‘*How is it possible for me to search out all the different kinds of creatures upon earth and bring them with me into the ark?*’ To this potential question the following answer is given: ‘**two of every sort shall COME IN to you**’ — *of their own accord, as a result of an inner urge that God would arouse within them for their own preservation and the preservation of their species. There will be no need for you to take the trouble to search for them; they will come in of their own accord to you, so that you may keep them alive.*” [Cassuto, 2:69f]

v. 21 – And as for you, — As though to say: ‘*they shall do their part and come in to you, and you do your duty and prepare food for yourself and for them.*’

you shall take for yourself from all food that can be eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself. And it shall be for you and for them for food. — Noah was to gather food not only for his family to survive the Flood but for the animals as well. The vegetable kingdom continues to ‘*serve its lords*’ within the ark (cf. 1:26, 29-30). Also note that in spite of the Flood, the ‘*freshly plucked olive leaf*’ from the renewed earth before Noah disembarks shows that in the providence of God vegetation also survived outside the ark (see 8:11).

v. 22 – And Noah did this; according to all that God commanded him, so he did. — These words form a solemn conclusion to the preceding and also indicates a pause in the course of events, leaving Noah at work in fulfilment of God’s command. In contrast to the Gilgamesh epic which gives an elaborate and colorful description of the building and loading of the ark, Genesis gives this brief bald statement about Noah’s obedience, a recurring feature in Noah’s *tôl’dhôth* (v. 22; cf. 7:5, 9, 16). ***The phrasing ‘according to all,’ and the repetition ‘did ... so he did’ make this a very emphatic declaration of Noah’s total obedience. Similar formulae recur rarely in the Pentateuch, except at the erection of the tabernacle (Exod 39:32, 42; 40:16) and at some other high points in the wilderness wanderings (Num 1:54; 2:34; 9:5).*** [Wenham, 1:176] “***Noah’s actions model for later generations the obedience and the efficacy of faith when it is placed in the veracity of God’s word (e.g., Heb 11:7). Noah’s venture to build his vessel upon dry land while awaiting the impending floodwaters is exemplary of a person trusting in what cannot be seen or proven (Heb 10:38; 11:1-2). As is the case for many of the saints, God is calling upon Noah to accomplish a task that has no precedent, for an experience that had no counterpart. Ironically, the destruction by water that dooms all the living is the vindication of Noah’s faith***

and credits him with righteousness.” [Mathews, 1:369f] “This verse, which states, and reiterates, that Noah did all that he was commanded, provides us with a graphic picture of Noah working devotedly, with complete faith in all that the Almighty had told him, and in absolute obedience to the word of his Creator. The Bible undoubtedly intends to convey that Noah’s work in making the ark required considerable time.” [Cassuto, 2:71] “These few words underscore that Noah lived by faith (Heb. 11:7) but blank the tremendous effort and investment involved. It must have taken Noah years of work to cut down the multitude of needed trees, convey them to his building site, and fit and join the huge planks. Moreover, he must have spent a fortune to build a boat of such a prodigious size and to provision it with a sufficient and varied food supply for so many animals. The Mesopotamian stories focus on the flood hero’s actions; Genesis, on God’s activity and Noah’s obedience.” [Waltke, 137]