

## **SESSION 42: THE FLOOD: AN OVERVIEW**

*Genesis 6:5 to 9:17*

September 15, 2024

### **PREFACE**

With v5 of Chapter Six we begin the Flood narrative. Verses 1-4 serve as a preface, setting the stage for what will follow. That is, in v5 Yahweh declares what He is about to do. He also gives the reason: “the evil of man was great on the earth...”; vv1-4 give us the background information that supports Yahweh’s conclusion in v5 about this evil.

I have included an outline for the Flood narrative in the handout, covering 6:5 to 9:17.

- I. 6:5-12 Yahweh’s decision to send the Flood as He saves Noah
- II. 6:13-22 The command to build the ark
- III. 7:1-5 The command to enter the ark
- IV. 7:6-24 The floods come
- V. 8:1-14 The floods abate
- VI. 8:15-19 The command to exit the ark
- VII. 8:20-9:17 The building of the altar and the covenant

Outline after John H. Sailhamer in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.

When we step back for a moment to consider the forest instead of the individual trees, we see some remarkable things going on in this multi-chapter narrative—things that we might easily overlook.

### **THE CREATION-FLOOD INCLUSIO**

The word *inclusio* is a Latin term meaning confinement, or enclosure. Although it need not be, it is more often than not related to biblical study. (In this secular culture, if you search for “*inclusio*,” your helpful search engine will come back with, “You must mean ‘inclusion’”—which is *not* the same thing.) None of my dictionaries even include the word, and I am slightly embarrassed to find that the clearest explanation of an *inclusio* I could find was in Wikipedia:

In biblical studies, *inclusio* is a literary device similar to a refrain. It is also known as bracketing, or an envelope structure, and consists of the repetition of material at the beginning and end of a section of text.

As Pastor Jeremy is wont to say, an inclusio defines a “unit,” a portion of Scripture that has clearly defined “bookends,” as it were.

The inclusio before us spans Chapter One to Chapter Nine, but reveals itself in v6:7.

### **Read Genesis 6:7.**

The attentive student of God’s word will read that and ask, *Wait a minute—where have I read that before?* You read it in Chapter One.

### **Read Genesis 1:25-26.**

Now, the true value of an inclusio is not in the literary structure itself, but in its effective emphasis of an idea, a truth, or, as in this instance, a narrative. The inclusio adds impact to what is being related here: Almighty God who created everything is now announcing—using some of the same wording—that He is about to *destroy* everything He had created.

We must let that sink in. There is no indication that God is destroying parts of His Creation *beyond* earth—heavens, stars, planets, atmosphere—nor does v7 mention the destruction of anything living in the seas, rivers, and lakes. But everything created for “the face of the land” and to fly in the sky will perish, except for those safely in the ark. The beginning of the inclusio—the detailed, meticulous structure, the systematic method of His creating one thing for another—adds power and tragedy to its end. Chapter One of Genesis reveals how tragic, how utterly *terrible* this inundation will be—and how terrible the sin and corruption of man has become that such an awful remedy is necessary.

One can only conclude, from reading the Creation epic recorded in Chapter One, that this was and is something important to Yahweh Elohim. This wasn’t an afterthought, something to casually while away a lazy Saturday afternoon, but a meticulously planned and executed work by the triune Godhead.

Knowing this—knowing how it was all Created—we can grasp the full weight of sin and corruption that was required to cause Yahweh to make this necessary, yet tragic, decision.

*Adam Clarke:* How great must the evil have been, and how provoking the transgressions, which obliged the most compassionate God, for the vindication of his own glory, to form this awful purpose! Fools make a mock at sin, but none except fools.

In our next session we will properly digest this evil.

### **ONE RIGHTEOUS MAN**

Verse 8 tells us that “Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh.” Why? Because he “walked with God” (v9), just as Enoch, Noah’s great-grandfather, was described in 5:5 & 24.

### ***An Interesting Repetition***

Whenever something is repeated a number of times in a relatively brief span of verses we should pay close attention, because it typically means the authors—the human and the Spirit—are telling us something special.

In Chapters Four and Five we have name lists that move from one man to the one son that will continue the line of interest. But look at v5:32.

**And Noah was 500 years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.**

OK, we get it: these three sons represent the beginnings of three separate lines—three *rac*es, as it were—that will be dispersed after the Flood. I find it curious, however, the number of times these three brothers are mentioned by name. Look at v6:10.

**And Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.**

7:13.

**On this very day Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark,**

9:18.

**Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan.**

I can imagine that those scholars who subscribe to the theory of multiple authors for the Pentateuch (E, J, P, D, and R [Redactor or compiler]) would say that these repetitions of the sons’ names stem from the respective authors stating them for their own purposes.

See a discussion of this in Session 4.

Since that is not our position in this class, without further study at this moment I would say that the repetition simply emphasizes the unique situation that Noah's immediate descendants do not follow just one line in Scripture, but three; so they all are mentioned as a trio each time. (However, I reserve the privilege of amending this position at a later date.)

#### **NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT**

If you look again at the outline for the Flood narrative, you can see on the left-hand side that the perspective, or viewpoint, of the narrative shifts. From 6:5 to 7:5 the narrative is expressed from God's viewpoint: Here we are allowed the privilege of looking down from heaven to see what Yahweh Himself sees; his thoughts are shared with us, as well as His conversations with Noah, and we are granted an intimate insight into what God feels in His "heart."

Then from 7:6 to 8:14 (the story of the actual Flood) the narrative shifts to an earthly, or horizontal perspective: Now we experience the actual inundation through Noah's eyes.

Finally, from 8:15 to 9:17 the viewpoint shifts back to God's when in v15 we are told, "Then God spoke to Noah, saying..."

The result of this structure is that Moses has presented the story in an almost *cinematic* manner; the perspective shifts with the important action: When God is the one speaking, we have His perspective; when the Flood is raging, we have the perspective of the eight humans sealed in the ark; once the flood waters abate, we are once again privy to God's viewpoint. For example, look at vv20-21 in Chapter Eight.

#### **Read Genesis 8:20-21.**

Thus we see how the profound importance of this moment is expressed in at least two ways:

- the literary device of the *inclusio* from Chapter One to Chapter Nine, and
- the dynamic, cinematic narrative.

And this importance will be expressed in even more ways as we pursue this passage—not least, that it culminates in Yahweh establishing an historic covenant with Noah.

## A PICTURE OF TWO HEARTS

I would like to conclude this overview of the Flood narrative by zeroing in on the two verses that set it up.

### Read Genesis 6:5.

Here we have a painful description, by the all-knowing God, of man's condition. Note the absolute *totality* of his evil:

“the **evil** of man was **great**” (abundant evil)

“on the **earth**” (the *whole* earth)

“**every** intent”

“of the **thoughts of his heart**” (from the core of his being)

“**only evil continually**”

What an indictment!—especially when compared to the other end of the inclusio, as in v1:31.

**And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.**

Man, in a relatively brief period of time had become grossly evil to the core: his heart. This is not a reference to man's physical heart, the organ, but to “the fountain of life in the blood, and therefore [used] for life, or the principle of natural life... the seat of feeling and affections” (Wilson). Along with the absoluteness of this condition expressed by the other words in this verse, we have a picture of humanity utterly *consumed* by evil.

Now let's consider the *other* heart in this encounter.

### Read Genesis 6:6.

Most of us are familiar with other passages in God's word that anthropomorphize Him. We know that He is spirit-kind (e.g., John 4:24, in Jesus' own words), but we accept that from time to time the writers of Scripture will employ language using human reference points to describe or explain deity.

Being spirit-kind, Yahweh God probably does not have a literal, pumping organ suffusing blood throughout His physical body. But God (with Moses) wants us to know that He experiences emotions similar to our own.

We just read in Chapter Eight that Yahweh “smelled the soothing aroma” coming from the burnt offerings on the altar made by Noah after the flood. It’s a pretty safe bet that in His “natural” state, God does not have a nose, but He can still inhale and appreciate the aroma of the sacrifice.

Similarly, though he does not possess the same physical organ, we are told that because of the sin of mankind, “He was grieved in His heart.” The word is the same used in v5 (*leb*, pronounced “lev”), which represents the seat of feeling and affections or emotions. God *feels*, and this deplorably sinful state of man cuts Him deeply.

The ESV has the best translation with “it grieved him **to** his heart.” Young’s Literal Translation has, “and He grieveth Himself—unto His heart.” The idea is that God’s response to the sin is so visceral (another anthropomorphism) that He experiences the pain, it “grieved Him”—it hurt, it caused pain—all the way to the core of His being.

There is a picture of two hearts: the first so bad “that every intent of [its] thoughts [are] only evil continually,” and the second so holy and so gracious that the condition of the first causes it painful anguish.

Personally, I come away from this with two thoughts, two questions that I put to myself:

First, even as I may not fit the description of humanity just before the Flood, what have *I* done that might have caused my Lord such painful grief?

Second, does sin—either my own, or the sin in others—grieve *me* as it does my Lord?

# SESSION 42

## The Flood: An Overview Genesis 6:5 to 9:17

### An Outline

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Perspective: <i>Earth</i>	{	IV. 7:6-24	The floods come
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