

SESSION 46: COMMANDS AND OBEDIENCE

Genesis 6:17-22

October 20, 2024

PREFACE

What strikes me right off, when I read Genesis 6:17-22, is that this world today—and perhaps even some who call themselves Christians, believers, followers of Christ and Father God—have an insufficient impression of who and what God is. In this narrative, from 1:1, we have repeatedly seen evidence of His grace, His mercy, His patient and loving condescension to His creation.

And that is the most comfortable picture of God to us: He *loves* us, He forgives us, He is longsuffering and patient. That is an absolutely accurate picture of our God, and because it is so comforting, we cling to that aspect of Him. But there is another aspect of our God that is just as accurate, just as true—but can be far less comfortable.

God—that is, God the Father, Son, and Spirit—is all-powerful, ruling His sovereign will as He pleases. And what is easy to lose sight of is that this aspect of His Being is just as inherently true as what we might think of as His “softer side.” What can be easy to forget is that God’s omnipotence—at times *brutal* omnipotence—is just as right, just as righteous, as His grace and mercy. Whatever He does, be it pleasing or a brutal affront to our senses, is *right*. No matter how little we understand it, no matter how uncomfortable His decision may leave us, nothing He does is wrong.

Monday morning last I was reading a number of Jesus’ parables in the gospel of Matthew, one of which was the parable of the tares amid the wheat—that is, weeds sown in with the crop one wants to keep. In the parable—in Matthew 13:24; turn there please—the hired hands ask if they should go out at the early stage and pull the weeds, but the landowner says for them to wait until the time of harvest. Jesus then explains this parable to His disciples beginning at v37.

Read Matthew 13:37-43.

Note particularly that last section beginning at v41. Look who is doing this: that gentle, loving, gracious flower-child Jesus—“the Son of Man.” The Christ Himself will be judge over all, and He will be the one to “throw them into the fiery furnace,” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

And it will be right to do it. That will be a righteous sentence against those will reject the sovereignty of God.

Just so, the sentence handed down by righteous and holy God in Genesis 6 will be right. As this world works hard to shave off the sharp edges of Father God and His Son—when it even acknowledges them at all—we must redouble our efforts to see God for who and what He truly is, and part of that is that He is never wrong or unjust in His decisions.

Beginning in v14 God has dictated the dimensions and structure of the ark—not a navigable ship, but, at best, a barge: essentially a watertight shoebox. Now He describes the reason for its construction and how Noah is to use it.

Read Genesis 6:17-22.

v17

Here with v18 we have a picture of the fullness of God’s character: The stern judgment of v17 is contrasted with the grace and mercy of v18. For all those outside the ark, that sentence of death will be total; no more delay, no more 120-year stays of execution. The door has now shut on God’s patience.

“As for Me, behold I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall breathe its last.”

Let’s remind ourselves of the nature and behavior of those who are about to be destroyed.

Read Genesis 6:11-13.

And, remember, this description is *after* God allowed them a period of 120 years to repent and change their ways.

As for Me, behold I... 📌

Note in v16: “You [Noah] shall make... “ and again, “You shall make...” lower in the verse. Now in v17 God declares what He will be doing: “As for Me, behold I...” The LSB best expresses the juxtaposition of v17 with v16 (“You” vs. “I”), but the NASB and KJV best express the emphasis in the original text of the incredible nature of such a judgment visited upon the One who created it in the first place: “Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth...” (the Hebrew requires “*the* flood” over “*a* flood,” emphasizing that this will be a unique flood). This doubling (“I, even I”) could also be used to establish the *certainty* of what God was about to do (see Genesis 41:32).

As to God’s right not only to destroy the world He has just made, but to destroy it by these particular means, the venerable Matthew Henry writes,

He told him, particularly, that he would destroy the world by a flood of waters. God could have destroyed all mankind by the sword of an angel, a flaming sword turning every way, as he destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians and the camp of the Assyrians; and then there needed no more than to set a mark upon Noah and his family for their preservation. But God chose to do it by a flood of waters, which should drown the world. The reasons, we may be sure, were wise and just, though to us unknown. God has many arrows in his quiver, and he may use which he please...

to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven;

Two clarifications are included here, modifying “all flesh”: First, “in which is the breath of life,” meaning all human beings and all animals; the flesh of fruit and vegetables is not included—although certainly there will be an initial wiping out of those that do not survive the flood. Second, “under heaven,” in the Bible a common way to express “in all the earth” or “in all existence” (Acts 4:12), which Moses reinforces with “everything that is on the earth shall breathe its last.”

So v17 represents God’s righteous judgment—His wrath—infllicted upon those who have determinedly rejected Him. But now this same God will express His righteous grace and mercy upon Noah and his family.

The juxtaposition of v17 to v16 reminds me of a moment shortly after Linda and I returned to Iowa after 20 years in CA.

We had rented the upper apartment in an old house in Marshalltown—in which it was the habit of the owner and landlord to rent to those who were either on the dole or just could not afford the rent. Some of these he had “work off” the cost of their rent by doing chores around the property. He related to me one day a conversation he had with a young woman renting out the basement apartment. He listed the work he expected her to do, and she then she replied with, somewhat indignantly, “What are you going to be doing?” He answered her impertinence with something like, *What is it to you if I sit in the shade and watch; you’re working off your rent.*

This passage does not include such impertinence from Noah, but it does include a “you do this, while I do this” exchange.


“But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.”

Opinions vary—all over the board, in fact—regarding which covenant is referred to here; two possible interpretations seem appropriate.

1. This could be God (Elohim) simply promising to save Noah and his family through the upcoming flood. This would seem to fit in with the rest of the verse.
2. This reference to “My covenant”—note that He “*will* establish” it—could refer to the formal covenant God will establish with Noah after the Flood. With my extremely deficient knowledge of Hebrew grammar, this is not just in the *future* tense (“will”), but in the *perfect* tense, meaning it is used “to emphasize assurance about whatever is being expressed in the sense that the ‘completeness’ of that event is an assured conviction and truth” (Blue Letter Bible). So probably the best interpretation is that this is God saying *I assure you now that after the Flood I have already established this covenant with you*. This covenant we will look at more closely when we get to Chapters Eight and Nine.

vv19-20

Then God adds the beasts and the birds to those who will be secured in the ark.

“And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.” 

We cannot look to this verse to determine the answer to the question, Two of every *what?*, for the word “kind” is not in the original text. Based on it being in v7:14, however, where this command is reiterated and expanded, we know that God commands two of every *species* (*minah*) of animal.

Read Genesis 7:13-16.

We will see, as we turn the page to Chapter Seven, that “two of every” is just a starting point, but that can wait until our next session.

In this confused, even perverse age in which we live, it is incumbent on us to note the clarity offered by God in His instructions to Noah regarding the collection of animals. He does *not* say, *Bring one that considers herself to be male, or one that believes herself to be female*. No, He says, “they shall be male and female,” for this would be the only way to ensure generations to follow.

Verse 20 reveals that it will not just be the lovable and huggable mammals that are brought into the ark.

“Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive.”

Birds and bugs and crawling things will be added to the ark’s menagerie. And for those who have wondered just *how* all these beasts will be acquired, the verbs in these two verses explain. Verse 19 says that Noah “shall bring” (*tabhi*, i.e., cause to come in), that is, by whatever practical means, Noah would go get them and bring them into the ark. Verse 20, however, says that the birds and creeping things and others “will come” (*yabhau*), that is, they will arrive on their own initiative, presumably either by instinctive impulse or divine impetus. And if there is any doubt as to the why for all this, God is explicit: “to keep them alive.”

v21

We have already seen the supernatural at work—in the detailed commands and descriptions handed down personally, audibly by God, in the gathering and welcoming of the beasts, and, of course, in the devastating deluge to come. But now, in His final instruction, God leaves it to Noah and his family to secure for themselves sufficient food for the humans and the beasts—no small thing, considering they will be shut up together for over a year’s time.

“As for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them.”

v22

The concluding v22 of this narrative always reminds me of the story of Abraham and his son Isaac—another instance of God’s command being answered by unquestioning obedience. We find that in Chapter Twenty-two.

Read Genesis 22:1-3.

Remember, at this time Abraham is over one hundred years old, and has been praying for a son through Sarah for most of his life. God has finally answered that prayer in the affirmative. Isaac is probably now an older child or young teenager—large enough to carry a load of firewood. To say this son is precious to the old man would be a gross understatement. Yet now, God requires of Abraham the life of his only, long-awaited son. And what is Abraham's response? "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey..." In other words, unquestioning obedience. That does not negate probable anxiety, wonderment—even anger in his heart. But he obeys. And we have a similar, if not identical, situation here at the end of Chapter Six. God has just detailed this extraordinary, seemingly insurmountable task to this old man, and what is his response?

Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

Period. God says to do it—so I do it. This is the behavior of someone who knows who and what God is. When the omnipotent, omniscient Lord of the universe tells you to do something, no matter how insane the order, you obey. Noah understands the full breadth and depth of God's character and sovereign lordship. He is and will be experiencing God's grace and protection; soon he will be witness to the fullness of God's wrath against evil.

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