

Lesson 6

Genesis Chapter 6, 7 & 8

Noah and the Flood

Whenever genealogies appear in Scripture, as they did for the first time in our last lesson, they are meant to signify the passing of time and the unfolding of human history. The story of man, begun in the first chapters of Genesis, is now going to proceed in a way that will spread out in many directions. What was it like when the family of man began to fill the earth? We know from the account of Cain and Abel that the human story is going to be marked by violence and tragedy, as well as by faith and hope. Those two men were examples of how differently the descendants of Adam and Eve will respond to God. Abel loved God; Cain loved himself. Cain murdered his brother, which was the fruition of his rebellion against God. His hard, unyielding heart, revealed first in his inadequate offering to God, turned eventually against his brother. His departure from the presence of the Lord meant that his descendants would live and develop away from the light of the truth and the covenant God had made with Adam and Eve. Among them, we noted, was arrogance and violence.

Seth, however, was a son given to Eve to replace the murdered Abel (just as John was the son given to Mary to replace the murdered Jesus). He was a man who called on the Lord's name, a covenant-keeping man. Among his descendants was faithful obedience and friendship with God.

We discovered in Genesis 5 that men were waiting for a deliverer. Even in this ancient, pre-historic era in the story of man, a picture begins to take shape of men who know that they are justly under God's curse and who are waiting for a male offspring to make some kind of difference for them. Remember Lamech naming his son "Noah," a name that means "rest."

In this lesson, we will watch the further development of man's history, formed out of the two lines of descendants from Cain and Seth. How will the violence and pride of Cain's line co-exist with the covenant-keeping of Seth's line? Why did God send such a devastating flood upon the earth? God has shown Himself to be remarkably patient and unconquerably loving to His human creatures. Will this continue?

- **The first four verses of Genesis 6 are difficult to interpret conclusively. Some of the difficulty is removed, however, by determining who the "sons of God" and "the daughters of men" were. Recalling what you know from Genesis about human civilization up to this point, who do you think they are?**

We know that there were at least two lines of human development from Adam and Eve, one through Seth and one through Cain. If Seth's descendants were those who called on the name of the Lord, and Cain's were those who lived independently of God, then it is possible that "the sons of God" were male Seth-ites and the "daughters of men" were female Cain-ites.

- **What do we learn from vs. 5 about the direction in which human civilization developed, even though there had been a community of covenant-keeping men? What appears to have weakened that community?**

It appears that intermarriage between the two human communities led to a weakening of goodness on earth. Instead of the faith of the one group lifting up the other, wickedness and evil imagination prevailed. Throughout Scripture there are sober warnings about marriage between people of faith and people without faith or those with false religion. In the history of Israel, one of the greatest dangers the nation faced was the threat presented when Israelites married idolatrous women. Likewise in the New Testament, St. Paul speaks specifically against marriage between a believer and an unbeliever (see 2 Cor. 6:14-16). Because human nature is frail and prone to sin, a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever introduces the possibility of a weakened commitment to

keeping God's covenant. If the unbeliever is the wife, as it seems to be the case here in Genesis, the danger is even greater, since she is the one who will nurture children in that family. The Catholic Church continues to guide Christians away from mixed marriages (see CCC 1633-34). In the case of early human civilization, it is possible that mixed marriages led to a widespread collapse of righteousness on the earth.

- **Why do you suppose the animals and creeping things were included in God's plan of punishment?**

For animals to be included in the cleansing of the earth suggests the inseparable relationship between man and the rest of creation. The dominion God had given him has real meaning - when man goes down, so does all the rest of the earth. This helps us to see clearly how all the elements of creation led up to the creation of man. He was not just one player among many. Without man, the rest has no meaning.

- **Noah found favor in God's eyes. He was a righteous man. Think for a moment what a statement like this represents about the man, Noah. If human society had become so corrupted by wickedness that God wanted to blot man out, what must it have been like for Noah to live righteously in their midst? Read also Heb. 11:7. What kind of person do you picture Noah to be?**

It is never easy for a man to live righteously when everyone around him is wicked. It requires self-discipline, courage, and faith. In Hebrews, Noah is described as one who was warned about events "yet unseen." He built a huge ark in the middle of dry ground. What kind of confidence did he have in the unseen realities? It was profound. He did not live his life according to what he could see. He exhibited a detachment from the world around him, relying only on God's commands. Quite possibly he had to face ridicule or abuse from people who lived only according to the imaginations of their own hearts. This is heroic virtue. Truly he was God's friend.

- **What is an Ark? What did it look like? How big was the ark? How long did it take for Noah and his son's to build the ark?**

The Ark was a boat that was intended to safely transport the family of God's covenant safely through the flood (typology?). The ark was a **covered** structure approximately 440 feet long x 73 feet wide x 44 feet high, A three story ship with only one opening (in it's side),.

Noah was 500 years old when his son's were born (triplets?), Noah and his family entered the ark when he was 600 years old, so it took as long as 100 years to build the ark and collect the animals.

- **Where did Noah get the material to build the ark? How did he pay for this material? Were Noah's sons willing participants in this project? What would have happened if one or more of them were not willing?**

The land where Noah lived pre-flood would have had forests to use but it would naïve to think that all the materials Noah needed would have been close at hand and free for the taking. As the patriarch, Noah would have had wealth. Flocks, goods, would have been built up and handed down to him as his birthright. These goods would have been used to pay for materials that were not available to him that would be needed. Shem, Ham and Japeth, as sons of Noah, would have been acutely aware of what was being used to pay for this material, after all it was their family's wealth (and Shem's inheritance). As young boys they would have blindly followed Noah, and his wife's lead, but as adults, with wives of their own, it required a conscious decision on their own to continue to follow their father's lead. Anyone of the three could have undermined the effort by refusing to continue.

- **How close to the nearest body of water was the ark? What do you think Noah's neighbors thought about this big boat in the middle of the desert? What do you think they said about Noah (and his son's), both to his face and behind his back?**

Noah's neighbors were more than likely very happy to separate Noah from his money. What they thought of his "project" would have bordered on idiocy. What they said when Noah wasn't around was probably not nearly as civil as what would be said to his face.

- **What covenant is God talking about in v:18? What is the significance of this covenant?**

Read Genesis 7

- **Notice in the first five verses of this chapter the prominent use of the number seven. What meaning should that number have in this context?**

The number seven should remind us of the hallowing of the seventh day of the first creation, which became a sign of the covenant God made with all creation. We are to comprehend that God is undertaking a re-creation of the earth and even of man himself, in a sense. He wants to renew the covenant. We should not mistake this for just another attempt to get things right. Rather, we are to absorb from all the details that evoke the creation that it is God Who desires to free man from his problems. God's unrelenting initiative in seeking to restore man to his original destiny is unequivocal proof of His love for us. The enormity of God's persistent love should rise up above all the details of man's early history as the sun rises in the morning sky. We dare not interpret any of it apart from the illumination of that bright light. Behind, above, beneath, before, and throughout everything is the glorious love of God for mere mortals. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy Name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:9)

- **God's intention in sending the Flood is to blot out every living thing except Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark (vss. 4, 21-23). Think about what you have seen in God's reaction to sin thus far in Genesis. He did not blot out Adam and Eve; He did not blot Cain out. But now, He is blotting out almost all living things. What do you think is the significance of this?**

As God continues to reveal Himself within man's history, He shows that although He is patient with sinners, ready to forgive, and tender in His care of them, a time does arrive when, because He is just, He does execute judgment. Rebellion, wickedness, and evil cannot continue unchecked. This is a truth that will appear again and again through Scripture. The history of Israel is full of episodes of judgment upon sin, after a period of forbearance. Jesus spoke often of "the day of the Lord," when God calls everyone to account and acts as the just Judge. The Flood is Scripture's first warning that man should never mistake God's patience and mercy as grounds for presumption. If the Lord is slow to punish sin, it isn't because He winks at it. As St. Peter says, "First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.' They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:3-7)

- **Notice that the first water mentioned in the Flood comes not from rain but from fountains bursting up from the ground (vs. 11). This water is combined with water from "the windows of heaven" to flood the earth and destroy every living thing. Read Gen. 1:6-8. What do you suppose is the significance of this reversal back to waters not being separated by earth?**

This joining together of the two "waters" is yet another sign that God is re-creating the world to rid it of evil. It is a powerful reminder to men that nature, which is easily taken for granted, doesn't exist and function on its own but only by the power and will of God. If we count on the sun coming up every day and the waters of the oceans remaining where they are, we must understand that God could return the ordered universe to chaos in the twinkling of an eye.

- **How long was Noah and his family on the ark?**

Noah was 600 years, 1 month and 17 days old when he entered the ark.

Noah was 601 years, 1 month and 1 day old when he removed the ark's covering.

Noah was 601 years, 2 months and 27 days old when he left the ark.

Answer: 1 year and 10 days.

Read Genesis 8

- **A wind from God blowing over the earth makes the waters subside (vs. 7). What other scene from Genesis is this kind of language meant to evoke?**

. "In the beginning," the earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). To read in Genesis 8:7 that "the wind" of God, which is His breath, the Holy Spirit, is blowing over the earth helps us to recognize the beginning of the re-creation. The repetitive use of language from the original creation story teaches us that God's original plan for the universe and for man was a perfect plan. That is why the re-creation scenes in Scripture, wherever they appear, always use language from the original one. God doesn't keep trying out new ideas until something works. He is determined to make His original plan work, no matter what rises up to derail it. No fault can be found with the plan. Human history will reveal where the problem lies.

- **Do you think Noah and his family got impatient to leave the ark? If God had miraculously made the waters appear, what question might they have legitimately asked about how long it took for the waters to recede? Why do you think God did things this way?**

Responses will vary. It would have been natural for Noah and his family to be eager to get off that boat. Perhaps they did wonder why they had to wait so long, while nature ran its course. Maybe they longed for a miracle or two to speed things along. Why didn't God do that? This is a question we should be willing to ponder from time to time. We could have asked it right after Adam and Eve left Eden. Why didn't God immediately send "the woman" and her "seed" to set things right? Surely Israel's long wait for the appearance of the Messiah was punctuated with cries of "how long, O Lord?" In our own day, the Church echoes what St. John wrote, two thousand years ago, at the end of the Book of Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). As difficult as it is sometimes to accept, God carries out His plan for creation through natural and supernatural means. It must matter to Him to allow nature and human history to take time to arrive at their destination. When we bump up against this, it reminds us how much of God's work is mysterious and inscrutable to us. We must agree with the Psalmist: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it." (Ps. 139:6) Sometimes it looks to us as if a miracle or two would be so much more efficient. God isn't aiming at efficiency. His desire for us is holiness. God, the Artist, works in the media of time, nature, and human history to create the perfection that is our destiny. It takes faith to believe that. Noah is our example

- **Think of the picture of the dove going back and forth from the ark, looking for habitable land-someplace where he could live and thrive. Read Matt. 3:16-17 and CCC 701. How are these two scenes related?**

The Church helps us to see the Holy Spirit as the dove that looks for habitable ground. In the days of Noah, it was dry earth that the dove sought and finally found. The appearance of the dove with

the olive branch was a sign that a new life for man on the earth was about to begin. At the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descending on Him in the form of a dove is a powerful sign that finally the soil of the human soul will be fit for the presence of God's Spirit once again. Is there any thought more beautiful than this?

- **Look at the command God gives Noah in vs. 17. What is this language reminiscent of? What should this prepare us for?**

This language reminds us of God's charge to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. It prepares us for a renewal of the covenant God made in Eden and probably a code of behavior

- **What was the very first thing Noah did when he got off the ark (vs. 20)? How does this act confirm God's confidence in Noah? Did Noah live up to his name?**

Noah offered a burnt offering to the Lord as soon as he got off the ark. It pleased the Lord greatly to see a man live this way-not just the faith in his heart but his public act of making an offering. God makes a promise never to curse the ground again because of man. Noah's life provided "rest" for all those who came after him. Never again would they have to fear a return to chaos on the earth. This is the first episode of God's people being saved through the faithful obedience of a human being. It will not be the last.

When you read the account of the Flood, realizing that everyone except Noah's family died because of God's judgment, did you ever have a twinge of wondering if that was fair? After all, if some human civilizations developed away from the covenant-keepers, thus becoming intensely evil, perhaps we want to say that they didn't know any better. Maybe we think they never really had a chance to live their lives the way Noah did. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, helps us to understand better just exactly what was going on among men whose lives were given over to wickedness. It is worth examining what he has to say in the first chapter of that letter:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; 21 for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

Here we see that St. Paul says that anyone who lives on the planet Earth, whether he lives among covenant keeping people or not, knows enough about God to live in the right way. Why? Because God has revealed Himself in His works. Looking around at the world in which he lives, a man is capable of recognizing that (1) there is a God (2) He is powerful (3) He deserves to be honored and thanked (Rom. 1:20-21). When a man chooses not to act on what he knows to be true, he suppresses the truth. It isn't that he has been deprived of it-he simply refuses to live by it.

When that happens, things go downhill fast, as St. Paul tells us:

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. 29 They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.

This is a description of what happened in the early history of man and what continues to happen when men, like Cain, know what is right to do but refuse to do it. When that happens, the most merciful thing God can do is to punish man. It is often only when men are faced with suffering and death that their autonomy crumbles to ash, and they are willing to cry out to God, Whom they are finally ready to acknowledge as the only One who can help. The Flood was just such an occasion. It was the just, merciful response of God to the mess man had made for himself. St. Peter, in 1 Peter 3, tells us more about the Flood, lest we still have any misgivings:

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

The people swept away in the Flood were not necessarily eternally lost. Their death was a temporal punishment until Christ preached to them the message of redemption they needed to hear. Those who were merely ignorant surely responded with great joy. But those who, like Cain, had hardened their hearts through sin, might well have had the same reaction to Christ as Cain had to God - "Thanks, but no thanks." We should never worry about the justice and fairness of God (see CCC 632-635).