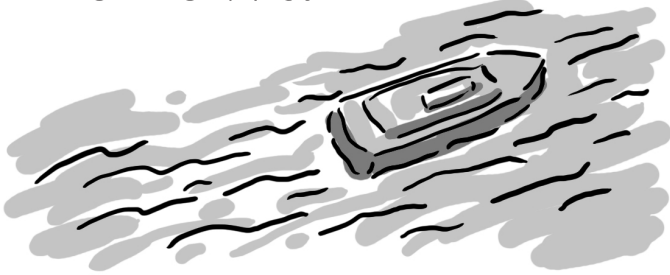


Destruction *and* Renewal



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 5:32–9:29.*

Memory Text: “The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth” (*Genesis 9:16*).

“Have you heard the latest about Noah, that religious fanatic?”

“Noah, pious Noah?”

“Well, pious Noah’s piety has made him mad. Says water is going to drop out of the sky.”

“Water from the sky?”

“Says it’s going to create a flood and kill all life on earth, except those who go into the ark.”

“The ark?”

“It’s a thing that floats on water, like a boat. Says only those who get into it will survive the rain. He’s building it now. Says water is going to be God’s judgment upon us for all our sins. Please, we’re not all that bad, are we?”

“Water from the sky . . . ? Why would a decent guy like him make up something so crazy?”

“Because he *is* crazy. And such a legalist. Doesn’t he know how we’re saved by faith alone? And standards, standards, standards—he’s always griping about standards.”

“Noah’s a bit intense, but he’s basically an honest, upright guy.”

“Fine, but why should we believe in something that has never happened before? The scientists say it isn’t feasible; the philosophers say it violates natural law. Water rises from the earth each morning as a mist; it doesn’t drop out of the sky, right?”

“Right . . . I guess.”

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 4.*

“For All Flesh Is Come Before Me”

Adam and Eve had children after Cain and Abel, including Seth (*Gen. 5:4*), whose line of descent outlines the history of the pre-Flood patriarchs loyal to God. Noah was of this branch (*vss. 28, 29*).

Read Genesis 6:1-13. What kind of picture does it present about the state of unregenerate humanity? In what ways might we see not only our age but even ourselves in here?

Though some commentators suggest that the designation “sons of God” (*Gen. 6:2*) refers to heavenly beings, context and content indicate a reference to the descendants of Seth. The “daughters of men” (the “men” who multiplied in verse 1) would then designate the posterity of Cain. The “sons of God,” representing the line of faith, contracted marriages with unbelievers and succumbed to the danger of such alliances.

In these verses, the wickedness of humankind could not be stated more emphatically. Notice the words *every*, *only*, and *continually* (*vs. 5*). The Hebrew word translated “imagination” is derived from the verb earlier rendered by “to form” (*Gen. 2:7*) and here indicates “deliberation” and “action.” In the Old Testament the word *heart* describes the complete inner life of a human being, as it is the seat of emotion, will, and understanding. The words *corrupt* and *violence* in verses 11 through 13 expand the picture of verse 5.

How do Genesis 6:6, 7 depict God’s sorrow for what was taking place?

After describing the human heart, the author turns to the grief and the affliction of the heart of God. Moses describes the Lord in terms that human readers can understand. God is not some far-off abstract idea or unbending principle; like us, He is portrayed as characterized by will, open to the tragedy of sin and prayer and weeping over human guilt. These words give us a feeling for how difficult it is to explain or even understand the introduction and great increase of sin.

Compare Genesis 6:6 with Matthew 23:37. What do both tell us about how “emotionally” tied the Lord is with this world? What other verses show this tie (for instance, John 3:16)? How does this help you better understand God’s ties to you individually?

Key Text: *Genesis 6:5-8*

Teachers Aims:

1. To describe the condition of the world prior to the Flood.
2. To discuss Noah's faithful obedience and what it means that he found favor with God.
3. To expound on the destruction of the entire world by water.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Impending Destruction (*Gen. 6:7*)

- A. Because of humanity's great wickedness on the earth, the Lord decides to destroy it with a flood of waters.
- B. The Lord asks Noah, a descendant of Seth, to build an ark.
- C. Noah shows true faith in action by obeying God's command.

II. Into the Ark of Safety (*Gen. 7:2-23*)

- A. God instructs Noah to bring two of every unclean animal and seven of every clean animal into the ark, male and female.
- B. Noah and his family are the only human beings that enter the ark.
- C. The Deluge destroys the whole earth and reverts it back to a watery waste, much like the dark waters on the first day of Creation.

III. A New Covenant (*Gen. 8:20-22, 9:12-15*)

- A. After the Flood, Noah builds an altar and makes an offering to the Lord.
- B. God promises never again to destroy every living thing by water and gives a rainbow as a sign of His covenant.

Summary: Because of the great wickedness of humankind, God destroys the earth with a flood. Only Noah and his family and the animals taken aboard the ark survive. After the Flood, God promises not to destroy the earth with water again.

COMMENTARY

God's refashioning of the world after the Flood parallels the sequence of events during Creation week. Interesting coincidence, surely, but what is the deeper significance underlying this? In an effort to appreciate the spiritual values contained in these parallels, let us first look at Noah's world to learn why it was destroyed, why God refashioned it, and what this teaches us about His mercy.

I. Righteous Noah

Noah lived in a world that had so rejected God that Heaven gave it the death sentence. Humanity's every thought and action focused on evil (*Gen. 6:5*). Violence had reached a point that God could not let it continue. The creation that He had pronounced "very good" (*Gen. 1:31*) had become "corrupt" (*Gen. 6:11*). Twice the Lord

Noah and the Gospel of Grace *(Gen. 6:8-22)*

Read Genesis 6:8. Notice: Noah finds “grace” in the eyes of the Lord (the first time the word *grace* appears in the Bible). Grace is God’s unmerited favor poured out upon unworthy sinners (*Rom. 4:14-16; Eph. 2:5, 8; 2 Tim. 1:9*).

Read what Scripture says about the character and life of Noah. *Gen. 6:9, 22; Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5*. Why, considering the kind of person Noah was, did he need God’s grace? See also *Gen. 9:20, 21; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8*.

Noah, a sinner like the rest of us, nevertheless revealed a life of faith and obedience. This is best seen in the fact that he obeyed the command of the Lord to build the ark.

Read Genesis 6:22 and 7:5. What do these verses tell us about how true, saving faith—the kind of faith that not only builds the ark but gets into it, as well—is manifested in the life of a believer?

In the midst of a violent, corrupt world, the Lord has this man, Noah, whose faith was most clearly made manifest by his works. This is a crucial point that all people who love the Lord and the great promises of salvation through grace alone, by faith in Jesus, must remember. Noah could have had all the faith possible, but had he not acted on that faith and obeyed the Lord’s commands, he and his family would have been swept away with the rest of the world in the Flood (see *Heb. 11:7*). That should be a great object lesson for all of us who, day by day, claim the righteousness of Jesus for us as the only hope of our salvation: A faith that isn’t manifested in obedience isn’t really faith at all.

Look at your life during the past week: How has your faith been manifested in your works? What works revealed a decisive lack of faith on your part? What changes do you need to make?

declares that He was sorry that He had made humanity (vss. 6, 7). Some English translations say that He “repented” or “was sorry” that He had brought the human race into being.

But “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God” (*Gen. 6:9*). The Old Testament uses the word *righteous* to describe a person who avoids sin and does good to his or her neighbors. *Blameless* implies “wholeness” or “completeness,” and the Septuagint (the first Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses here the same Greek word that it applies to sacrificial animals. Only the blameless may dwell on God’s holy hill (*Ps. 15:1, 2*), and blamelessness is the prerequisite for intimate fellowship with God.

Noah also walked with God, a characteristic he shared with Enoch (*Gen. 5:23, 24*). The Bible frequently uses the imagery of “walking” to describe a whole way of life. The patriarch lived in obedience and in relationship with God.

God tells Noah that He plans to destroy His creation with a global flood (*Gen. 6:17*), but will rescue Noah and his family. Noah must construct an ark (vss. 14-16) and, along with his family, enter it with representative examples of the various kinds of living things (vss. 18-20). The Lord promises to establish His covenant with Noah (vs. 18).

The apostle Peter called Noah “a herald of righteousness” (2 *Pet. 2:5, NRSV*). Jewish tradition in such works as the Sibylline Oracles and Jubilees portrays Noah as preaching a call for repentance. As the years dragged by and those who responded to his preaching died or drifted back into the world’s corruption, Noah must have become discouraged. Only his trust in God enabled him to endure the constant scoffing until the day came when God directed him and his family to board the ark (*Gen. 7:1*).

II. The Unmaking of the Earth

The description of the events of the Flood follow in reverse order those of Creation week. In Genesis 1 God created the world out of chaos and declared it good; in Genesis 7 He de-created it, because it had become evil. Genesis 1:6-8 tells how God separated the waters above from the waters below. Genesis 7:11 mingles them again. Dry land emerges in Genesis 1:9, 10 and vanishes in Genesis 7:19, 20. The living things He created in Genesis 1:20-26 He blotted out in Genesis 7:21-23. The good creation that had become corrupt was no more. Only Noah and his family survived (*Gen. 7:23*). The Bible says it this way: Then God “remembered” Noah (*Gen. 8:1*). When God “remembers” in Scripture, He intervenes in human lives and history. He rescues Lot from Sodom (*Gen. 19:29*), gives Rachel children (*Gen. 30:22*), and delivers Israel from Egyptian slavery (*Exod. 2:24; 6:5, 6*).

The Lord now begins to re-create the earth, following the same sequence as in Genesis 1. A wind blows (*Gen. 8:1; cf. Gen. 1:2*), the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven close (*Gen. 8:2; cf. Gen. 1:6*), the waters recede (*Gen. 8:3; cf. Gen. 1:9, 10*), and the dove

The Flood (*Gen. 7:1-16*)

What does the reference to “clean” and “unclean” animals imply about the knowledge Noah already possessed on this matter? *Gen. 7:2, 3, 8; 8:20.*

The fact that God distinguished “clean” and “unclean” animals long before the difference was explicitly stated in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 presupposes the clear knowledge of the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals from earliest times, certainly long before the Jewish nation was established.

Read Genesis 7:7-24. What evidence can you find in these texts that shows that the whole world rather than just a small, local section was destroyed by the Flood? Compare *Gen. 7:19* with *Dan. 7:27, Job 28:24.*

The Deluge covered the earth, and the world returned to the conditions that existed before God had prepared a habitable globe (*Gen. 1:2*), with the exception of Noah and those with him in the ark. The repeated biblical statements, “the waters prevailed . . . increased greatly upon the earth . . . prevailed exceedingly . . . fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered . . .” (*Gen. 7:18-20*), indicate a worldwide catastrophe. The words regarding the extent of those killed, contrasted with only Noah and those in the ark remaining alive, also testifies to the worldwide extent of the Flood. The universality of the Flood is further attested to by the worldwide distribution of Flood legends and the global distribution of fossil remains. In short, the texts are very clear that the Flood was worldwide, as opposed to some mere local event. This point is important because many Christians, influenced by some scientists who claim that there was no worldwide Flood, make the Flood only a local event, despite the clear testimony of the Scriptures to the contrary.

Have you ever had an animal that you had to put to sleep? How does that analogy help us understand what was happening here and how God must have felt about this act of destroying so much of the “good” world He had created? What “good” in your own life must you jealously guard lest it turns into “only evil continually” (*Gen. 6:5*) and becomes something that must be destroyed?

returns with an olive leaf (*Gen. 8:11; cf. Gen. 1:11, 12*). Finally God permits the saved animals and human beings to leave the ark and to be fruitful and multiply (*Gen. 8:15-19; cf. Gen. 1:21-28*).

As Noah witnesses the mountaintops emerge from the receding waters, surely this draws his mind back to the account of that other time when water covered the whole earth. Such comparisons were not mere coincidence. In refashioning the earth, God deliberately mirrored the sequence of events during Creation week as a means of drawing Noah's attention, and ours, back to our origins and the apex of Creation, the creation of man and woman, who enjoyed face-to-face communion with God. By bringing what is lost to mind in this

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 9:8-17; Exodus 20:24; Hebrews 11:7; 13:8; 2 Peter 2:4, 5, 9*

- 1 The background of the Genesis flood story shows us a God who experiences sorrow and grief. How are we to view such statements as Genesis 6:5-7, in which we are told that God is sorry for creating the human race? How do we reconcile this view of God with the more congenial view (to some) of God as unchanging?
- 2 It is common to view grace as a concept that appears primarily in the New Testament and rarely—if ever—in the Old Testament. Yet, Genesis 6:8 states that God's grace preserved Noah's life from destruction by the Flood. Does this mean that the same kind of grace active in the New Testament can be found in the Old Testament after all? How is this grace similar or identical? How, if at all, is it different? Consider also those who refused or did not receive grace.
- 3 The Genesis flood is clearly a worldwide event, corroborated by scientific evidence and by similarities found in ancient flood myths. What would be the implications of accepting current theories that suggest that the Flood was a local event? How would it affect the message that the Bible seems to be giving us?
- 4 Why, if God felt that Creation was such a failure, did He choose to save any of it at all? Was He uncertain about His decision? What do we make of the fact that life on planet Earth seems not to have improved significantly?
- 5 Noah's first act on leaving the ark was to offer a sacrifice and to worship God. God's response was to make a covenant with Noah. What does this say about the role of prayer and worship in our relationship with God?

The Lost Generation

If you read the Genesis account of Noah and the Flood by itself, you'll notice that nowhere does it teach that anyone else was even offered an opportunity to get into the ark. It sounds as if it were to be built only for Noah, his family, and the animals (*Gen. 6:13-22*). Other verses, New Testament verses, vaguely hint at something else (*Heb. 11:7, 1 Pet. 3:20, 2 Pet. 2:5*). Ellen White, of course, is very clear that Noah's work on the boat was to be a witness to the world of what was coming and that Noah "entreated them to seek a refuge while it might be found."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 97. Considering all that we know about the Lord and His desire for the salvation of all humanity (*1 Tim. 2:3, 4*), it's not surprising that God was offering people a chance to be saved.

It says a lot, however, about the degenerate character of that generation that only Noah's family, and the animals, got on the boat. After all, it would have taken humility and the willingness to face the scorn of the majority to have sided with Noah. It would have meant being unpopular. It would have meant having faith in something that you didn't fully understand. It would have meant admitting you're in a situation in which you can't save yourself but must depend upon God. These are hardly the attributes one would expect to find in such an evil generation.

Compare what it meant for those in Noah's generation to have sided with Noah and what it means to make a stand for Christ and all His commandments today. What parallels exist?

The good news in all this is that God is always offering people a way out, always offering people a chance to get on the ark. The same Jesus we see weeping over Jerusalem is the same Jesus who surely was pleading through Noah for people to repent; it's, of course, the same Jesus who is pleading with us today, as well, who is calling us to get into the ark before people are swept away and taken away in the final judgment (*see Matt. 24:38-41*).

What factors work against you staying faithful to Jesus? What have you found is the best defense against the forces that would turn you away from Him and the truth for this time? What practical things can you do to avoid or at least alleviate, as much as possible, these factors?

way, God declares His longing to restore this communion to us. The land itself that emerges from the watery grave points to God's power to restore the soul from sin. The old nature must be buried as was the old world by water, a symbol of the baptism that Christ would one day offer to the whole earth, even as the Flood covered the whole earth. Rising out of the watery grave into the newness of life, the earth points Noah to God's power to regenerate the soul.

God took a risk when He created our world, and what humanity did with it disappointed Him. But He does not give up. He creates again. And Scripture declares that He will re-create one final time. God's people await "the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire. But, in accordance with His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 *Pet.* 3:12, 13, *NRSV*). Revelation 21:1 foretells a new heaven and earth replacing the old ones. Ultimately, the Flood tells us that God never gives up on His creation.

Witnessing

Peer pressure can be a positive, and sometimes negative, force in our lives. For instance, if we learn at work that a co-worker never misses attending church on Sunday, we may push a bit harder to get out of bed on time and make certain we are at Sabbath School on time. On the other hand, if others notice that we faithfully observe the Sabbath hours from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, they may ask why we do this, and a line for dialogue is opened.

In our lesson this week, we learned that peer pressure was a decisive factor in keeping people from truly listening to Noah's predictions regarding a catastrophic, global flood. With their very lives hanging in the balance, these same people were unwilling to face rejection or retaliation by their peers, even if by doing so they may have saved their own life and the lives of others close to them. Sadly, they were not strong enough of character to take the big step and challenge the status quo.

In no way is this type of behavior limited to Noah's time! How many times have we observed children, teenagers, and adults giving in to a crowd mentality because they were unable (or maybe unwilling!) to choose correctly for themselves. Choices made under those types of circumstances are generally disastrous for all involved.

As followers of Christ, each of us must lead by example. Our conviction to the truth must be unwavering to those around us. No matter how adverse the circumstances, others must always see God's reflection in us.

Peer pressure can work for the good of others. Let's boldly exert our influence so that we bear constant witness of Christ's presence in our hearts and lives.

Covenant and Renewal

How did Noah express his dedication, homage, and gratitude to God upon leaving the ark? *Gen. 8:20.*

“Here was a lesson for all succeeding generations. Noah had come forth upon a desolate earth, but before preparing a house for himself he built an altar to God. His stock of cattle was small, and had been preserved at great expense; yet he cheerfully gave a part to the Lord as an acknowledgment that all was His. In like manner it should be our first care to render our freewill offerings to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 106.

How did God respond to Noah’s devotion and worship? Write out the response, paraphrasing it in your own words. What is God saying here? *Vss. 21, 22.*

The divine response is stated in human terms. God had destroyed the world because “every imagination” of the thoughts of the human heart was evil (*Gen. 6:5*); that same idea, about humanity’s evil, is restated here, even after the Flood. The Lord is expressing the sad fact that even despite the Flood, humanity wasn’t in and of itself going to change for the good. What’s fascinating is that from the way the text is written, it appears that God’s resolve not to destroy the earth again comes in response to the sacrifice offered by Noah. This blood sacrifice is linked with the promise; it’s not the goodness of humanity, obviously, but what’s in the sacrifice that leads to the new promise. God’s going to spare them a flood despite themselves. In some ways this reflects the same principles found in the gospel: God saves not because of ourselves but only because of mercy and grace toward us.

Read Genesis 9:8-19. What’s promised here? Who is included in this covenant? What can we learn from this about the *new covenant* promise of salvation we have in Jesus? What are the similarities, what are the differences? Compare *Gen. 9:12* with *17:7, Ps. 105:10, Heb. 13:20.*

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Think back to the time when you gave your first public speech. Remember how your presentation was received. Did the children—if it was show-and-tell time in grade school—enjoy what you brought? If it was a persuasive speech in English class, were your classmates convinced? Why did so few of the earth’s inhabitants respond to Noah’s appeals? How did Noah’s close relationship to those who did respond, his family, impact their acceptance of his warning? What does this tell us about discipling people toward Jesus?

Thought Questions:

❶ You have heard the comment “Drastic times call for drastic measures.” After Adam and Eve’s choice to eat from the forbidden tree, humankind quickly lost sight of God. “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (*Gen. 6:5, NIV*). Discuss what your ideas are on what caused this rapid decline. In light of the biblical evidence and the ideas raised during your discussion, why did God have to take drastic measures to halt humankind’s fall away from Him? How will you explain the reasons for the Flood to a friend?

❷ “Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark” (*Gen. 7:15, NIV*). Why didn’t this miraculous occurrence sway public opinion in favor of entering the ark? What issues and ideologies in the society of that day prevented a whole generation of people from hearing God’s warning? If you were filming a news report of this event, what kind of narrative would you give? Today there are individuals who God’s Spirit is striving to call to Him. How do we find them and share our testimony of God’s goodness in a saving way?

Application Question:

Taking turns in class, describe a time in which your mobility was limited. For example, was it after an injury, or were you on a long airplane flight? How did you feel when you were freed? As you consider what it was like for the inhabitants of the ark, share what they may have thought when they saw that first rainbow. Why did God choose such a dynamic and vibrant representation of His covenant with humanity? Bring paper and crayons to class and invite the class members to draw a rainbow (yes, the adults!). Then have them give it to one of the children at your church with a note of encouragement.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 90–104.

“Many at first appeared to receive the warning; yet they did not turn to God with true repentance. They were unwilling to renounce their sins. During the time that elapsed before the coming of the Flood, their faith was tested, and they failed to endure the trial. Overcome by the prevailing unbelief, they finally joined their former associates in rejecting the solemn message. Some were deeply convicted, and would have heeded the words of warning; but there were so many to jest and ridicule, that they partook of the same spirit, resisted the invitations of mercy, and were soon among the boldest and most defiant scoffers; for none are so reckless and go to such lengths in sin as do those who have once had light, but have resisted the convicting Spirit of God.

“The men of that generation were not all, in the fullest acceptation of the term, idolaters. Many professed to be worshipers of God. They claimed that their idols were representations of the Deity, and that through them the people could obtain a clearer conception of the divine Being. This class were foremost in rejecting the preaching of Noah. As they endeavored to represent God by material objects, their minds were blinded to His majesty and power; they ceased to realize the holiness of His character, or the sacred, unchanging nature of His requirements. As sin became general, it appeared less and less sinful, and they finally declared that the divine law was no longer in force; that it was contrary to the character of God to punish transgression; and they denied that His judgments were to be visited upon the earth. Had the men of that generation obeyed the divine law, they would have recognized the voice of God in the warning of His servant; but their minds had become so blinded by rejection of light that they really believed Noah’s message to be a delusion.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 95, 96.

Discussion Question:

Have people in the class place themselves in the mind of someone who lived in Noah’s time and have them give all the reasons they shouldn’t believe in the Flood. What lessons can we learn from their thinking, not only for ourselves and our own faith but about how we can understand the thinking of others who don’t take our warnings about the end of time seriously?