

Genesis 7:1-8:22

Lesson 4

This section begins a new phase in human history with Noah and his household entering the ark, the old world is passing away and a new world is about to begin after the chaotic forces of “the waters” are released to cleanse and reform the earth both of its physical elements and its occupants.

Please remember to let this story unfold, read it through as narrative first before going back and giving explanation or give explanation and then read the account to allow the text to speak.

7 ¹Then the LORD said to Noah, “Enter into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.

Note that it is *Yahweh* speaking to Noah in this context and He commands to “enter” into the ark using the Hebrew term *BW* (כָּבַד). This key verb will appear seven times in this chapter. It should be noted that only Noah and his

household enter the ark. This contrast greatly differs from the Mesopotamian accounts that have the hero entering the vessel with his immediate family, his relations, craftsmen and boatmen.¹

This section credits the salvation, not only of Noah, but his family to his righteousness. Some have inferred from this that there is a lack of individual responsibility with Noah's righteousness saving his entire family. Ezekiel 14:20²; 18:20³ highlight individual responsibility so a possible inference is that Noah along with his family members are righteous, though this is likely not the meaning of the text here. It may be due to the period of time, the patriarchal nature of this time, that responsibility is vested with the patriarch. It is clearly an issue that the author did not choose to address here.

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, in The JPS Torah Commentary series (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 53.

² **even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord God, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness.**

³ **The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.**

² Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate;

The designation of “clean” and “not clean” here deals with animals used for sacrifice and not human consumption.⁴

³ and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.

This also includes birds that were used for sacrifice as well as animals.

⁴ For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”

This seven days is presumably the time necessary for the occupants of the ark to board and get properly accommodated. It should also be noted that Seven-day periods are characteristic of this story. The phrase “I will send rain” indicates the absolute power of this God who is

⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 54.

sovereign over all nature. He alone determines the extent and the duration of the flood. Forty is very often a symbolic number in the Old Testament that is connected with purification and purging of sin. In this context, this seems to be the meaning.⁵

⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

Noah is obedient to the command of God.

⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth.

⁷ And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

⁸ Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground,

⁹ two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 54.

Reminiscent of the account of the animals going before Adam to see what he would call them God now brings the animals before Noah in order to preserve them.⁶

¹⁰ And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

This very precise dating is truly unusual in the annals of biblical records. The flood comes upon the earth as the abyss that is mentioned at 1:2 is released and the openings in the expanse of the sky release the water from the celestial part of the cosmic ocean above. In other words the creation of chapter one is undone here at chapter seven and chaos returns to the earth.⁷

¹² The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis A Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 139.

⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 55.

This is the first indication of rain upon the earth and some think that it had never rained until this point.

13 On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark,

14 they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature.

15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.

16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

The notation that the Lord shut the ark is of note since it is an indication that Noah is saved because of divine grace

and not through the heroic efforts of some great hero.⁸ All that enter the ark do so following the command of God to Noah. It may be noteworthy here that even the animals seem to be delegated to Noah and here are given no expression of individual responsibility much in the same way as we saw earlier in this chapter with the family of Noah. The Septuagint actually clarifies this text somewhat and names Noah in this verse rather than using the pronoun for “him” that is found in the Masoretic text.

17 The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and separated the ark from the earth.

It is of interest that as the waters increased the ark serves the purpose of separating Noah and his family from the earth. This separation allows the waters to destroy the earth without destroying the occupants of the ark. They were saved by this separation from the earth.

18 The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.

⁸ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 55.

19 The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered;

The wording here speaks in very universal terms and does not easily fit with theories of a localized flood as all the mountains under the “whole of heaven” are covered.

20 the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

The implication of this verse may be that the ark floated with 15 cubits submerged in the waters and was able to clear all mountains.

21 And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings;

As God had given life now he removes life from the earth.

22 everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

This verse contains a very difficult concept that links it back to the point when God gave life through His spirit, so

now that spirit of life is extinguished in death. It should also be noted that this verse refers very specifically to the land animals and excludes marine life.

23 He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.

The divine intent of verse 4 has now been carried out in full.⁹

24 And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

The chaotic forces of the abyss reign on the earth for this very long period of time and absolutely insure that all land-based life is extinguished.

The Flood Subsides

8 1But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God caused a wind to blow over the earth, and

⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 56.

the waters decreased;

In the Old Testament “remembering,” especially when it relates to God does not have to do with retention or recollection of a memory, but focusing upon an object of memory that results in action.¹⁰ The action is the sending of the *ruach* (wind or spirit) of God to move over the surface of the waters in a manner that seems reminiscent of 1:2 where the *ruach* (wind or spirit) of God hovers over the surface of the abyss at the beginning of creation.

² the fountains of the abyss and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained,

It is noteworthy that the fountains of the abyss are closed along with the windows that had opened to release the waters of the heaven and then it lists a third source of water in the rain and it says it was “restrained.”

³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated;

¹⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 56.

⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

When the waters receded the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat not upon the peak but upon a lofty tableland that is mentioned in 2 Kings 19:37, Isaiah 37:38 and Jeremiah 51:27. It is known by the name Urartu in Assyrian inscriptions. This kingdom occupied a large portion of what is today known as Armenia, between the River Araxes and Lake Van. Today there is a mountain on the Turkish, Armenian and Iranian border called Ararat. It rises to nearly 17,000 feet above sea level and the peak is perpetually covered with snow.¹¹

The exact resting place of the ark is unknown to us despite a great deal of speculation and searching.

⁵ The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

In approximately 73 days the tops of other mountains begin

¹¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 57.

to appear.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made

Speculation is that this window was in the roof of the ark restricting vision of the ground, but it is hard to tell.

⁷ and let out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.

In the time before electronic navigation it was common for sailors to send out birds in order to discover if they were near land.

⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground;

⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him.

¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark;

11 and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

At the normal time that birds come to roost, the evening, the dove came back. It had been gone all day signifying that there were places for it to rest. It came back carrying a freshly plucked olive leaf, indicating that life was returning to the earth. The olive tree is one of the earliest to be cultivated in the Near East and is an evergreen. It is extraordinarily robust and sturdy and may thrive for upwards of a thousand years. It became a symbol of God's blessings of regeneration abundance and strength and this is likely the symbolic function that it serves here.¹²

12 Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

13 In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from

¹² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 58.

the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying.

On New Year's day, which was exactly one year after God first communicated with Noah the ground was dry, which means that there was no water visible. It would take an additional fifty-six days for the earth to dry and reach the state that it was on the third day of creation.¹³ The dates are significant because the flood lasts exactly one solar year (365 days) according to the calendar of Jubilees. This text would seem to indicate familiarity with the lunar calendar as well as the solar calendar.¹⁴

¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵Then God said to Noah,

Once again we have God speaking directly to Noah.

¹⁶“Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons

¹³ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 58.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, in the Word Biblical Commentary Series (Waco TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), p. 187.

and your sons' wives with you.

They receive the direct command from God to leave the ark and just as they had followed the command of God to enter the ark they now leave.

¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives.

¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

God's Promise to Noah

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Noah, without any apparent prompting builds an altar

to Yahweh and offers burnt offerings to God. This act of worship not only expresses the gratitude of Noah for safe deliverance, but also may serve an expiatory function. The earth has now been purged of its evil and the sacrifice symbolizes a restoration of a level of harmony between God and humanity.¹⁵ This is the first recorded account of the building of an altar in scripture though one is perhaps presupposed in 4:3-5.¹⁶

²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

The aroma of the sacrifice is pleasing to God and He makes a solemn promise to never again curse the ground because of humankind. The sacrifice clearly please God and some have seen it as having a calming affect upon him as if He were angry and needed to be appeased. Others have

¹⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 189.

seen this sacrifice as totally a gift of thanksgiving to God and having no propitiatory affect upon God. Still others have suggested that perhaps it serves some of both functions. Whatever function it actually served, the result is plain, God was pleased and this pleasure elicits a very positive response from God.¹⁷

God is not lifting the curse that He has already put on the ground He is indicating that He will make no further additions to that curse. The nature of man has not changed, what has changed is how God will respond to that nature.¹⁸

The word translated here as “youth” (נְעוּרִים) can designate a person from the time of their weaning to the time of young marriageable age.¹⁹ It is interesting that this acclamation of the evil tendency of humankind is not linked to a child at birth.

**22 As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,**

¹⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 189.

¹⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 190-191.

¹⁹ Milton C. Fisher, s.v. נְעוּרִים in R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 585-586.

summer and winter, day and night,

shall not cease.”²⁰

The ordered processes of nature will never again be interrupted because of the intervention of God because of mankind’s sinful tendency.

Synopsis

In this section Noah is told to enter the ark and once again the concept of his righteousness is highlighted as the reason for his being saved while the remainder of humanity will perish. Further instructions are given to Noah and it appears he continues to demonstrate obedience to these new instructions. The details regarding the onset and the duration of the rain are given to Noah. This information is indicative of the nature of God and of His desire for relationship with mankind. A detailed account of the flood follows that highlights the effect of the flood upon the earth with special emphasis on the living things.

²⁰ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ge 7:1–8:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The account of hope and the anticipation of Noah is highlighted in the sending out of the birds to search for dry land. Noah continues to demonstrate trust in God and longs for the day dry land will appear. This hope is finally realized when the ark is emptied of its contents. When this happens the response of Noah is to build an altar and respond to Him in an act of worship. This response pleases God and elicits a response from God in the form of promises not to curse the land further and not destroy all living creatures in this fashion again. He also promises that the seasons will continue. The response of God being pleased is notable and indicative that true worship pleases God.

Main Points

1. Noah is saved as a result of God declaring that he is righteous.
2. God demonstrates His control of creation by bringing chaos and destruction that destroys life.
3. God expresses pleasure in response to Noah's act of worship from Noah and the earth and the animals are blessed as Noah fulfills this function before God.