

Genesis 7:1-24

The Flood

On an island about 800 miles from the north pole, on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, sits the global seed vault. It is built more than 100 yards inside a mountain and contains nearly one million seeds, some reputed to be as old as 10,000 years. The seeds are stored in three-ply foil packages, and the environment is temperature and humidity controlled. It is expected that the seeds will last 1,000 years. It is, essentially, an ark to guarantee future agricultural production in case of global disaster.

Noah, too, had built an ark. His was to house a mere eight people and a large variety of animals. Unlike the global seed vault, however, Noah knew for certain that his ark would be needed. God had specifically told him that the earth would be destroyed in a great flood. This was not merely a vessel built *in case* something happened, it was built *because* something was about to happen. God had commanded, and Noah had obeyed.

Chronology of the Flood Narrative (using Noah's age)

2-17-600	The Flood began (7:11)
7-17-600	Ark rested on Ararat (8:3)
10-1-600	Tops of mountains appeared (8:4)
1-1-601	Waters dried up (8:13)
2-27-601	Noah left the ark (8:14)

The Command to Enter the Ark

The narrative continues from the previous chapter with another speech by God in which He gave Noah a specific command. That mandate is related in the first half of the passage. Noah's compliance is recorded in the second half. We can notice that God spoke to Noah directly, and not in some dream or vision. Also we can see that God not only told Noah what to do, but He told Noah why he had been chosen to do it. "The Lord said to Noah, 'enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time'" (v. 1).

Two things to mention. First, Noah's household was provided safety because of Noah. There is no indication in the text that they had any reason to be saved themselves. They were, no doubt, as wicked as any of their awful generation that God had proposed to destroy. We will see this specifically with Ham later. Second, as we have mentioned previously, there is no reason to presume, from either the text or the context, that God chose Noah because Noah was somehow righteous in himself. No particular good deeds of Noah are put forward to commend him. No great works of righteousness are attributed to him. He simply obeyed God, as it was in his character to do so. But lest we forget the source of that good and obedient character, it was God's grace alone that supplied the ability to obey. It was the purpose of God to preserve the human race, and Noah was the representative through whom He chose to do it. God's sovereignty was on display here, not the righteousness of Noah.

Before finally entering the ark, Noah was given one last set of detailed instructions. God commanded Noah to “²take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; ³also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth.” (v. 2-3). These instructions were not in opposition to those given earlier, but rather served as a supplement. Noah was provided with the extra animals so that he might make the appropriate sacrifices after the Flood without diminishing the opportunity for species to reproduce, and perhaps to serve as a supply of protein for the eight refugees on board.

The concepts of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ relate to the later Mosaic law. Though the Mosaic law had not yet been given - the writer was simply using the terms familiar to his audience - it is clear that God chose to preserve even the unclean animals. Under the Law to eat or even touch an unclean animal made one unclean himself (Leviticus 11). It was a mandate preserved throughout the Old Testament. Yet, these animals were also preserved by God.

Some have argued that this anachronistic use of language indicates textual error or redaction. Infact, though the Law was not given until much later, the ideas of ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ were not unknown to the Hebrew people before that time. Distinctions of Israel as ‘holy’ or “set apart” for God were embedded into their culture. When blessed by manna, the Lord reminded His people that they were unique.

“²²Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³then he said to them, ‘this is what the Lord meant: tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until Morning.’ ²⁴So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. ²⁵Moses said, ‘eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.’ ²⁷It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘how long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? ²⁹See, the Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ ³⁰So the people rested on the seventh day” (Exodus 16:22-30).

So there is no reason to think that the people of Noah’s day did not understand that obedience to God required differentiation from those around them, and there is no reason to think that Noah could not understand the distinction between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ animals.

God gave Noah a timetable for completing his tasks, “for after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made” (v. 4). The word (*mātar*) means a continual rainfall. It does not usually refer to a torrential downpour. That is a different word (*gešem*) in the Hebrew.

“⁴¹Now Elijah said to Ahab, ‘go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower. . . . ⁴⁵In a little while the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:41, 45).

“¹¹Tell those who plaster it over with whitewash, that it will fall. A flooding rain will come, and you, O hailstones, will fall; and a violent wind will break out ¹³There will also be in My anger a flooding rain and hailstones to consume it in wrath (Ezekiel 13:11, 13).

The potency of the rain was not its force, but its duration. The rain would fall steadily, day and night, for forty days. It is the same language used when God ‘rained’ down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, or when He ‘rained’ down hail on Egypt.

“Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24).

“Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt” (Exodus 9:23).

However, God also ‘rained’ down manna on His people in the wilderness.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction’” (Exodus 16:4).

God took complete responsibility for the Flood. This was no natural disaster. But as the text reads, God is only destroying what He, Himself has made. All the world is His, and He is at perfect liberty to do with it what He chooses. For Noah to complain would be equally foolish and hopeless. He could no more control the weather than any other mortal.

So Noah obeyed, and Noah obeyed completely. The writer succinctly states that “Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him” (v. 5). Again we have the relationship between command and execution we saw in the previous chapter. It is curious to think that the great labor of Noah in building the ark and organizing the animals is reduced to such a brief commendation. Only a few scarce details are offered in the following verses.

“⁶Now Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth. ⁷Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood. ⁸Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, ⁹there went into the ark to Noah by twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah” (v. 6-9).

The Flood was dated by the age of Noah. And it seems that Noah fathered no more children after the Flood, though he lived an additional 350 years. The entire human race was to develop from these few alone.

The wording of verse 7 makes it appear as if the loading of the animals and Noah’s family used almost all of the seven days allotted to them. They must have been glancing fearfully at the darkening sky and studied the water ominously accumulating around them on the ground.

God had kept His promise. “It came about after the seven days, that the water of the flood came upon the earth” (v. 10). Noah had been obedient to God because he believed God would do what He said. Noah understood, and lived by the truth, that God would be faithful to His word.

The Judgment of the Flood

Again our passage is divided into two segments. The first focuses on the commencement of the Flood and the preservation of Noah, his family, and the animals selected to be saved. The second half of the narrative gives unrelenting emphasis to the forty days of rain and the unavoidable death that occurred as a result.

These verses seem to be a repetition of the previous passage. In fact, while some argue that this implies a textual error, or some other concern with the integrity of Scripture, in fact, such repetition was common in ancient writing. So here, verse 6 describes the coming of the Flood and verses 7-9 Noah’s entry into the ark. And again, verses 10-12 describe the Flood and verses 13-16 Noah’s entry. Such repetition was used as a literary device for emphasis and is not an example of textual error.

In the Flood, God reversed the steps of Creation. The language used in describing the destruction of the earth replicates the context of Genesis 1. Essentially God uncreated. In Creation, “⁶God said, ‘let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ ⁷God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so” (Genesis 1:6-7). Then, the waters had been separated. Now they came together, and with devastating force. “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened” (v. 11).

The beginning of the Flood was given a specific date, or at least as specific as could be given using the methods of dating available at the time. Such specificity was significant. Abraham’s circumcision, Moses’ death, and the Passover all received the same emphasis. These events marked the history of the Hebrew people. They were as memorable to them as July 4, 1776, December 7, 1941, or September 11, 2001 are to us. They defined them as a people.

Some biblical scholars have tried to be more specific. However, the ancient Hebrews used two calendars (a fact which does not help the historian), one with the new year beginning in the fall and another with the new year beginning in the spring.

“Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field” (Exodus 23:16).

¹“Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²“this month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you”” (Exodus 12:1-2).

Which “new year” is intended here is unclear, so we can only guess.

As for those left behind, their days were going along like most others. Noah, by now, certainly had become less of a novelty and more of an eccentric. He had been building the ark for so long that people must have wearied even of mocking of him for doing so. Indeed, Scripture says the members of that wicked generation were entirely unaware of their doom.

“³⁷For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

The “fountains of the great deep burst open” (v. 11). The expression “great deep” is often used in the Old Testament poetic and prophetic literature.

“Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep” (Psalm 36:6).

“Was it not You who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep” (Isaiah 51:10).

It is intended to describe an endless space, understandable only to the mind of God. And from such a space “the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights” (v. 12). The continuous rainfall did not let up for more than a month. It was not torrential, as we said, but it was constant. It was relentless. There was no respite from the Flood.

“On the very same 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” (v. 13). It is curious that each time Noah’s family is mentioned, his sons are spoken of before mention is made of his wife. In addition, we learn the names of his sons, but we are never given her name. This is not, perhaps, too surprising in ancient cultures, which were invariably patriarchal in structure. I do not think we need to read anything into the omission of her particularly, as if to suggest she was in some way more unrighteous than others of her generation. After all, Noah’s three daughters-in-law are not mentioned by name in Scripture either. It also seems that the three sons of Noah had not yet fathered any children of their own before the Flood. Only these eight are saved. Since Noah and his wife ceased having children after the Flood, Noah’s sons were entirely responsible for the progeny of the new world.

As Noah and his extended family entered the ark, so too “¹⁴every beast after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, all sorts of birds. ¹⁵So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life” (v. 14-15). No details are given about this remarkable processional. The reader is left to their own imagination about the coming together of all these beasts and their noisy (and quite probably pungent) embarkation. No doubt that is because such details are not necessary to the larger elements of the narrative. The point is God’s judgement of man’s sin and Noah’s faithfulness.

When all were inside the ark, “the Lord closed it behind him” (v. 16). God, Himself, shut the door. God assumed full responsibility both for the death of the wicked and the preservation of the righteous. It is not

possible to conceive of the thoughts of Noah as he looked about the dark interior of the ark, listening to the increasingly heavy fall of rain outside.

As the Flood increased, nothing is mentioned about the occupants of the ark. Instead all attention turned to those outside. Beyond the confines of the ark, the scene was entirely one of devastation and death. One might think of the ark as a new Garden of Eden, within which all was well and safe, but outside of which was suffering and death.

The rain fell relentlessly. “The flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth” (v. 17). The logical sequence of the deluge is pronounced in the three phrases “the water increased,” “lifted up the ark,” and “rose above the earth.” The inevitability of the death was clear. Nothing could survive as the waters continued to rise.

Yet, even though “the water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, . . . the ark floated on the surface of the water” (v. 18). Noah, without either means of propulsion or navigation, was entirely at the mercy of the raging storm. He was sealed inside a vessel that was not of his own design. He had not engineered the ark with an expectation of its needs. There is no reason to think Noah had any sailing skills whatsoever. He had simply obeyed God, and was now dependent upon God for his preservation. God’s grace was Noah’s only surety.

The writer seems unable to refrain from emphasizing the utter totality of the Flood.

“¹⁹The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. ²⁰The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. ²¹All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; ²²of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died” (v. 19-22).

Words such as ‘everywhere’ and ‘all’ are repeated (eight times to be exact) and belie any argument that the Flood was localized. There is continued emphasis and repetition of the fact that all life outside the ark perished.

The writer then summarized the entire section in one brutal sentence. “Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark” (v. 23). Again the emphasis is on the totality of the destruction. No one person, not one animal, was preserved from the wrath of God except those whom God chose to save. And it was God who chose to save them. It cannot be argued that Noah survived by his own cunning and skill. Noah simply obeyed and was saved. And Noah’s family was saved because of Noah. One can think of Lot and his family in Sodom and Gomorrah.

“¹²Then the two men said to Lot, ‘whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; ¹³for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it’” (Genesis 19:12-13).

But as we will see with Lot and his family, we will see with Noah's family that being saved from one catastrophic event by association with a person who honored God was no assurance of ultimate salvation.

As if to punctuate the fact that no one could have survived the Flood, the writer concludes that "the water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days" (v. 24). There has been some question of whether these 150 days includes the forty days during which the Flood came to the earth, or if these are an additional number of days, bringing the total to 190 days. Though a detail, it seems that the chronology better suits including the forty days in these 150, rather than in adding them together.

Takeaways

Again the narrative emphasizes not only Noah's obedience but God's faithfulness. God proved Himself trustworthy at every point of the narrative. Like Noah, we are given commands to obey. We may not find the commands convenient or popular, but that is no excuse for disobedience. To be sure, the survival of humanity does not depend upon our obedience. But God has chosen to use His people to move forward His kingdom, and we would do well to participate in that process.

Another point to consider is the ark. God knew exactly the kind of vessel Noah would need to survive the Flood. In His omniscience, God knew precisely Noah's future needs. Noah's role was merely to place his faith in God and trust Him. Like Noah, we live in a world that is to be destroyed. Unlike Noah, we do not know when. Yet, God has still offered us His truth in which to place our faith. Many people choose to place their faith in other things. Money, power, family, friends, themselves. But I fear none of these 'arks' will survive what is to come. Storms come, they overwhelm us, and when they do, it is a good place to rest inside the ark that God has planned for us to use to ride it out.