

# **BaptistWay Press® Premium Commentary**

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## **Studies in Power & Purpose: God Unveils the Universe (Genesis 1-11)**

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Lesson Nine

### **The Flood: God's Judgment and Renewal**

#### **Focal Text**

Genesis 7:1-4, 17-24; 8:1-5, 13-16, 20-22

#### **Background**

Genesis 7-8

#### **Main Idea**

God judged sin through the Flood, but he also provided a new start for humanity.

#### **Question to Explore**

How has God provided for your rescue and renewal?

#### **Quick Read**

Having completed the building of the ark, Noah brought his family and the animals onboard, where they survived the flood and renewed humanity's covenant with God.

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### **Introduction**

It was the day after Christmas, December 26, 2004, a beautiful Sunday morning in the Indian Ocean. Things changed quickly. At 7:58 a.m., Jakarta's Geo-Physical Center detected an earthquake 155 miles southeast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It registered 9.3 on the Richter scale, the third most powerful earthquake ever recorded. It lasted 8-10 minutes, the longest in duration of any earthquake ever recorded. It unleashed a force 1,500 times greater than the atomic bomb that leveled Hiroshima in 1945.

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This shifting of the earth's plates cut an 800-mile gash in the ocean's floor and triggered a "tsunami" or extreme tidal wave. Thirty minutes later that devastating tsunami crashed over the coast of Aceh, a province of northern Sumatra. Waves were 115 feet high in some places. The tsunami wiped out dozens of villages and demolished 60% of the buildings in the capital city, Banda Aceh. This wall of water killed more than 230,000 people in fourteen countries and necessitated a worldwide humanitarian response to help provide relief, recovery, and reconstruction. Texas Baptists were a vital part of that work.

The Aceh tsunami of 2004 and the Flood that occurred in Noah's lifetime have one thing in common. They both brought about widespread death and destruction through massive amounts of water. On the other hand, we should note some differences between them. The tsunami did its destructive work in a matter of minutes or hours. It happened relatively quickly, while the Flood more methodically affected its victims over a forty-day period of heavy, unending rain.

In addition, unlike the Flood, the tsunami was not a direct judgment of God upon Aceh. The account of the Flood in Genesis 7-8 describes God's judgment, but does not linger there. The more prominent focus is upon the work of God in delivering Noah and his family to make a new start with humanity.

That is the same focus of the writers of the Gospels. They did not give lengthy or extremely vivid descriptions of the death of Jesus (God's judgment of sin); rather, they gave more attention to the saving work of God through the Son which was confirmed by his resurrection.

The Flood story is certainly the account of God's judgment upon human wickedness, but it is also the account of God's rescuing a righteous man and his family, and God's renewing his commitment to humanity.

## **Commentary**

Four chapters (Genesis 6-9) convey the biblical account of the Flood. The first one provides the reason that it occurred and the preparation of Noah in building the ark. The final one looks to the future relationship of God with his creation generally, and Noah specifically.

The two middle chapters communicate the Flood event itself from the time Noah entered the ark and the rain began, through the time the unleashing of the waters created the destructive Flood, until the time the waters receded, allowing Noah and the others to come out of the ark.

### **Final Instructions (7:1-4)**

God's first spoken instructions to Noah (6:13-21) regarded the building of a large boat because God was going to judge the world through a devastating Flood. God's second

speech to Noah (7:1-4) contains final instructions before the devastation would begin. The speech includes two commands and one statement of information. The remainder of this chapter is the narration of the unfolding of the imminent events.

The first command is “Go into the ark” (7:1). Only three verbs are found more frequently in the Old Testament than this one (occurs seven times in this chapter). It had the common meaning to go, to come, or to enter. In a theological sense this verb was used to describe God’s coming to his people to rescue or deliver them, and to the hope of a Messiah who would come. It was also used to describe a worshiper going to the sanctuary to pray and offer sacrifice.

I believe the best translation of this verb in this verse is “come,” in the sense that God invites Noah and his family to *come* into the ark where they will enjoy his presence and protection while the Flood rages outside. Other verses identify more precisely his family as three sons, his wife, and their wives (6:18; 7:7) and even name the sons (7:13). Note that the males are always listed first, and then the wives.

God declared the same evaluation of Noah’s character and conduct that the narrator had expressed previously (6:8-9). “Found” (7:1) translates the most common Hebrew verb that means “to see.” This translation obscures the writer’s intended contrast between the righteousness God saw in Noah’s conduct and the total corruption and wickedness God saw in Noah’s context (6:5, 12). The righteousness of Noah was a right relationship with God that he exhibited before his obedience in building the ark. Noah’s obedience was not the basis of his righteous conduct; rather, it was the demonstration of it (Hebrews 11:7).

The second command regards the taking of animals into the ark. The more general word of instruction about animals (Gen. 6:19-20) concerned the preservation of the various species. That word is expanded here. While seemingly only one pair of each animal and bird would be taken into the ark, here it seems that two pairs for some, and seven pairs for others, would be included. The phrase “a male and its mate” (7:2) denotes one pair. The total number of pairs depends on the number that precedes this phrase. (Victor Hamilton in the *New International Commentary* believes the “pair” in chapter six does not exclusively mean one pair but can allow for the two and seven pairs mentioned in chapter seven.)

Although later the Israelites would receive strict dietary laws from God regarding animals they should not eat (unclean) and animals they could eat (clean), the distinction here is not in that category. “Unclean” (7:2) is not the same word as the one used in the Book of Leviticus to designate “unclean” animals. God wanted Noah to include seven pairs of certain animals and birds in order to do some surveillance work (8:6-12), and to serve as sacrifices after the flood ended (8:20).

In the indicative statement, God repeated his intention to destroy comprehensively the living beings of his creation. The significance of the word underlying “wipe” (7:4) was

explained in Lesson Eight. The statement also includes the first mention of time designations in the Flood narrative proper (thus excluding the 120 years of Genesis 6:3). Genesis 7-8 communicates time in three ways including a number of days (7, 40, 150), calendar dates, and Noah's age.

- **Number of Days**
  - 7 Days (7:4, 10; 8:10, 12)
  - 40 Days (7:4, 12, 17; 8:6)
  - 150 Days (7:24; 8:3)
- **Calendar Dates** (7:11; 8:4, 13, 14)
- **Noah's Age** (7:6, 11; 8:13)

The obedient Noah complied with the final instructions (7:5-16). In the seven allotted days, the ark was loaded with his family and with the animals. Noah's relationship with the animals mirrored that enjoyed by Adam. No "round up" was necessary as the animals came to him (7:8-9). One sees the sovereign control of God in the fact that God closed the door when they were all safely in the large boat (7:16).

#### **Total Destruction (7:17-24)**

"Forty days" (7:17) is the phrase found frequently in the Bible to describe a brief period of time. That was the length of time Moses met with God on top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:18); the time spent exploring the land of promise by the Hebrew spies (Numbers 13:25); and the time of testing for Jesus (Luke 4:1-2).

Earlier the writer used the common word for rain (Gen. 7:4) and the one for heavy or torrential rain (7:12). But "flood" (7:17) is the technical term for this particular *Flooding* rain. Of the thirteen times this word *mabbul* occurs in the Hebrew Bible, twelve of them refer specifically to this Flood (Psalm 29:10 calls Yahweh the "King" of the flood).

The prevalent characteristic of these verses is redundancy due to the repetition of words and phrases. This repetition serves the purpose of building suspense and tension. It builds the tension in a dramatic effect in the same way music does in a movie. The terms "earth" and "water" occur six times each. The flooding water "increased" (7:17) and "increased greatly" (7:18). It was the undoing of God's creative work, as this was the same word for God's command for his living creation to reproduce themselves (Gen. 1:22, 28).

Due to the relentless rain, the water "rose" (7:18, 19, 20) and "flooded" (7:24). The Hebrew word used four times here normally described a strong or mighty warrior and the military success such warriors had in battle (Exod. 17:11 for the Israelites' success over the Amalekites in battle). The truth of the matter is the water was not just getting higher and higher; instead, God was using the water to conquer or triumph over human wickedness.

While God overcame sin through his judgment, he protected Noah and his family. The phraseology of the ark being lifted and floating (7:17, 18) would have been expected since it had neither rudder or sail or any other navigational aid. It needed none of them because God was the Captain of Noah's ark.

I live in the flat Houston area where we experience frequent street flooding and "all too frequent" overflowing bayous that produce flooding of homes and businesses. In fact, as I write these comments (March 29), we are experiencing some minor flooding due to heavy rain that is part of a massive storm that has brought high wind, hail, and rain to most of the state of Texas. These incidents, however, have no comparison to the Flood that covered mountains (7:19, 20) to a depth of about twenty feet.

This devastating Flood was comprehensive in nature. The Hebrew word rendered "all" or "every" is found eight times in verses 19-23.

God fully accomplished what he had declared he would do in this vehicle of judgment. Two things support that contention. Two words for death are used to describe the loss of life. Neither "perished" (7:21) or "died" (7:22) is the word for drowning. Secondly, the text says twice that all human, animal, and bird life except those on the ark were wiped out (7:23, 24), a passive voice verb. These lexical and grammatical realities together assert that God was in control. It was God who brought about the devastating destruction as a judgment upon human sin.

The reference to "a hundred and fifty days" (7:24) previews the next paragraph that conveys how long it took for the floodwaters to recede sufficiently for the occupants to leave the ark. It rained so massively for forty days that the waters remained for 150 days (probably inclusive of the forty days of rain).

### **Full Duration (8:1-5)**

Genesis 8:1 is the turning point or pivot in the Flood narrative. It begins the second half of the biblical account of the Flood, the part that focuses on the future after the judgment had been completed.

The sentence that begins this more hopeful component is the one that says "But God remembered Noah" (8:1). This is the first occurrence of more than seventy in the Old Testament where God is the subject of this verb *zakar* (Zechariah's name means "God remembers"). God also remembered Abraham (Gen. 19:29); Jacob's wife Rachel (Gen. 30:22); and his covenant with Abraham when the Israelite slaves in Egypt cried out (Exod. 2:24; 6:5).

This phrase does not mean God had a recollection of something he had forgotten. Instead it was the way to state that God had considered something and determined to act in a positive way. It was always tied to the imminent action of God who delivered Lot for

Abraham's sake, gave Rachel children, and delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. God will begin a new work of renewal and re-creation through Noah.

The waters God separated in creation to make life possible (Gen. 1:6) but reunited to destroy life (7:11-12), were separated again by his power (8:2). The piling up of the water stopped, and now it took time for the floodwater to go away completely. The word for "recede" (8:2, 3, 4) is a common word that means "to return," "turn around," or "go back." It is the word for the concept of repentance, a turning from sins in order to turn toward God. The same "wind" that began to move the chaos toward an orderly world (Gen. 1:2), now was instrumental in ending the chaos of the Flood, allowing the earth once again to resume its orderly purpose.

Five months since the rain first began, the ark rested on the ground (8:3-4). It would be another two-and-a-half months before the occupants of the ark would be able to walk on that ground (8:5). The writer was quite specific regarding the chronology but was vague about the geography. The phrase "mountains of Ararat" refers to the area of Urartu located near the sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers (2 Kings 19:37). Today it is the region of Armenia in eastern Turkey. This text was not understood to designate one specific peak, a Mt. Ararat, until the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

#### ***New Declarations (8:13-16, 20-22)***

Noah used some of the "extra" birds that had been in the ark to determine the time they could disembark (8:6-12). He used a raven and a dove to confirm that they could safely again walk on the dry land God created.

"Had dried up" (8:13) means free from moisture, while "completely dry" (8:14) means the absence of water. Except for its use here, the word rendered "covering" (8:13) which Noah removed, was used exclusively for the tanned animal hides that provided a covering for the tabernacle (Exod. 26:14; 36:19).

The calendar reference suggests that Noah and the others had spent approximately one year inside the ark (8:14).

God spoke to Noah for the first time since before the rain began (8:15-16). It was an invitation to leave the ark to balance his invitation to enter the ark (7:1). Noah obeyed God. He coordinated the exit of his family and the animals to greet God's renewed creation. They were to do the same thing God's original living creatures were to do. They had the responsibility to regenerate their species and grow their respective population in numbers.

The first act of Noah as the new "Adam" was the building of an altar. It does not mean that altars were not previously used by persons preceding Noah, but this is the first mention of an altar used for worship. "Burnt offerings" (8:20) were probably the oldest expression of sacrifice and the one most frequently offered later by the Israelites. Its

name is related to the verb “go up” or ascend, a reference to the smoke that ascended from the altar. The burnt offering was offered in a joyful and grateful spirit, but at its root had the meaning of “expiation” or the removing of sin and guilt.

In the mythical flood epics, the hero also prepared a food sacrifice for the gods but did so because the gods were famished. They had not eaten during the entire duration of the flood and were starving.

A pleasing aroma was often associated with the acceptance of the sacrifice by God (Leviticus 26:31; 1 Samuel 26:19; Amos 5:22). On the other hand, Genesis 8:21 is the only verse that declares that God smelled the “pleasing aroma” of the sacrifice.

God spoke again, but this time it was not specifically to Noah; rather, it was a declaration of self-reflection. He declared he would never again do two things. Both of those things involved judgment, a curse that punished the original sin, and the destruction that punished the great wickedness. God would never again “curse the ground” or “destroy all living creatures” (8:21).

The rationale for these declarations was not that humanity was no longer sinful and did not deserve the punishment. God realized the human being had not changed his rebellious and prideful nature. The inclination to evil or disposition to sin that caused God to send the judgment was still present (8:21; 6:5).

God was not giving up or resigned to live with the sinfulness of humanity. God determined to deal with sin or relate to sinful humanity in a new way. This new way would involve the heart of God in suffering. This is the firm declaration that would ultimately result in Jesus the Son dying on a cross to resolve the issue of human sin.

While God was working to resolve the issue of human sinfulness, his creation would enjoy the orderly regularity of the rhythms of the world. These rhythms are not the result of human work and goodness. They are gifts granted by God.

## **Conclusion**

Aceh was in constant conflict with the central government in Jakarta from the time it became part of Indonesia in 1945. It carried out an unsuccessful rebellion in 1953, seeking independence. From 1976, Aceh was engaged in a rebellion against Jakarta under the title of a “Free Aceh Movement.” That conflict was still ongoing almost thirty years later when the tsunami struck Aceh in 2004.

The devastation of the tsunami, however, shifted the political dynamics. Instead of fighting each other, Aceh and Jakarta both gave their full attention to the common goal of the humanitarian efforts toward relief, recovery, and reconstruction. While they were working together to rebuild a devastated area, they negotiated a settlement to their conflict via a third party in Helsinki, Finland. Only nine months after the disaster, the two

sides signed a peace resolution on August 15, 2005. It did not give independence to Aceh, but did grant limited autonomy.

The destructive Flood came, and when it was over, God began to do a new work, a work of renewal.

That is the way God works in his world.

That is also the way God works in our lives.

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**Meet the Writer: Dr. Ron Lyles**

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