

# Noah & the Flood: The Back Story (Genesis 5:28-6:9)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Genesis

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## I. Genesis Flood: The Greatest Disaster in History

- a. Think of some of the greatest disasters in history:
  - i. August 6, 1945 an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan near the end of World War 2. Roughly 90% of the buildings in the city was leveled, about 70,000 people killed instantly and tens of thousands more died of radiation effects afterward.
  - ii. 1918-19 worldwide flu pandemic: 50-100 million people died.
  - iii. Black Plague in the 14<sup>th</sup> century: killed an estimated 1/3 of European population.
- b. Compare these tragedies to the flood in **Genesis**. (Read **Genesis 7:11**, and **7:17-24**; from NKJV)
  - i. If the account in **Genesis** is accurate, the great flood of Noah was by far the greatest disaster in human history.
- c. The story of the flood of Noah is no “children’s story”. In fact, some of the details we will discuss in this lesson are inappropriate for children! ‘Parental Discretion is Advised’ for this lesson.

## II. First Question: Did the Genesis Flood Really Happen?

- a. Today it is popular to dismiss the **Genesis** flood story as based on ancient fables, adapted and given religious significance in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- b. A recent NOVA documentary posted on YouTube, *The Secrets of Noah’s Ark*, focused on writings found on an ancient Babylonian clay tablet found in Iraq that spoke of a great flood, with a large round boat to save one man and animals. The documentary authors assumed that what was on the clay tablet was basically true (a great flood *did occur* long ago); and the biblical story had been borrowed and adapted from it.
- c. There are lots of similar (biased) justifications for rejecting the **Genesis** flood account, that typically go something like this:
  - i. It was impossible for the entire earth to be flooded.
  - ii. It was impossible to build a wooden boat large enough to put all the air-breathing creatures on it.

- iii. Many cultures have ancient accounts of a great flood. Therefore, the **Genesis** flood account was adapted from the pagan accounts (floods which may have been real, embellished or pure fable), and given a moral/religious significance.
- d. Early Christian writers were quite familiar with the ancient pagan accounts regarding a great flood. However, in their writings they explain that the account provided by Moses in **Genesis** was true; *the other accounts were fables* adapted from the true story.
  - i. Theophilus, overseer of the church in Antioch, wrote in book 3, chapters 18-19 of *Theophilus to Autolychus* (c. 180 AD):
    1. “For Plato...when he had demonstrated that a deluge had happened, said that it extended not over the whole earth, but only over the plains, and that those who fled to the highest hills saved themselves. But others said that there existed Deucalion and Pyrrha, and that they were preserved in a chest...Others, again say that Clymenus existed in a second flood. From what has already been said, it is evident that they who wrote such things and philosophized to so little purpose are miserable and very profane and senseless persons.
    2. “But Moses, our prophet and the servant of God, in giving an account of the genesis of the world, related in what manner the flood came upon the earth, telling us, besides, how the details of the flood came about, and relating no fable of Pyrrha nor of Deucalion or Clymenus; nor that only the plains were submerged and that those only who escaped to the mountains were saved.
    3. “And neither does he make out that there was a second flood. On the contrary, he said that never again would there be a flood of water on the world; neither indeed has there been, nor ever shall be. And he says that eight human beings were preserved in the ark, in that which had been prepared by God’s direction, not by Deucalion, but by Noah; which Hebrew word means ‘rest’, as we have elsewhere shown that Noah, when he announced to men then alive that there was a flood coming, prophesied to them saying ‘Come, God calls you to repentance’. On this account he was fittingly called (*by the Greeks*) ‘Deucalion’ (*from two Greek words meaning ‘come’ and ‘I call’*)”. (ANF v.2, p.116)
  - ii. Justin Martyr (c. 160 AD), in chapter 7 of his *Second Apology* wrote, “Formerly the flood left no one but him only and his family who is by us called Noah and by you Deucalion...” (ANF v.1, p.190)

- iii. Lactantius was a prominent Roman teacher of rhetoric who converted to Christianity. Later in his life, he was appointed by the emperor Constantine to teach his son. In book 2, chapter 11 of *The Divine Institutes*, Lactantius refuted the pagan philosophers regarding the great flood. He wrote:
1. "It is agreed by all that the deluge took place for the destruction of wickedness, and for its removal from the earth. Now, both philosophers and poets, and writers of ancient history, assert the same and in this they agree with the language of the prophets."
  2. (Lactantius then recalls the pagan account of Deucalion, son of Prometheus, who was spared in a great flood)
  3. (Lactantius concludes) "It is plain that they have corrupted this also, as they did the former account (*about the creation of the first man*); since they were ignorant both about what time the flood happened on the earth, and who it was that deserved on account of his righteousness to be saved when the human race perished, and how and with whom he was saved: all of which are taught by the inspired writings." (ANF v.7, p.59)
- iv. Origen also addresses this in book 4, chapters 41-42 of *Against Celsus* (c. 248 AD). Celsus was a harsh critic of the Christians and of the Scriptures. Celsus claimed the Biblical story of Noah came from multiple Jewish writers who were "falsifying and recklessly altering the story of Deucalion" and creating "fables clumsily invented for infant children". (ANF v.4, p.516)
1. Origen counters, "(Celsus), not being able to say anything against the *history* of the deluge..." (i.e., since he knows that the flood really happened...)
  2. (Celsus can only challenge details of the Biblical account, such as the part about the dove being sent out)
- v. Take-aways from early Christians:
1. Ancient accounts of a universal flood were widespread; everyone knew one really did occur.
  2. Moses' account (in **Genesis**) was the accurate one.
  3. Greek story of *Deucalion* in a great flood was adapted from the real event involving Noah.

4. Modern 'scholars' critical of the accuracy of the **Genesis** flood are unknowingly repeating arguments made by pagan critics, which the early Christian writers refuted 1800 years ago!
- e. (Most important) Jesus taught that the **Genesis** flood really did happen.
  - i. (Read **Luke 17:26-27**), "And as it was in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."
  - ii. Jesus, the ultimate Teacher (**Matthew 23:10**), taught that the day of judgment is real and will come by surprise, just as the flood of Noah did!
- f. Never forget the angel Gabriel's response when Mary asked how it could be possible for her, a virgin, to conceive a son, since she did not *know* a man.
  - i. The angel replied, "For with God nothing will be impossible." (**Luke 1:37**)
  - ii. The God of the Bible
    1. Spoke the entire universe into existence from nothing;
    2. Parted the Red Sea with a wall of water on the right and left; and
    3. Will bodily raise the dead on the Last Day.
  - iii. *When we grasp who God is*, there is no problem believing He could accomplish everything exactly as stated in the **Genesis** flood account.

### III. Prelude to the Flood: Wickedness and Corruption

- a. I will be using the Septuagint (a.k.a. the LXX) text in this lesson.
  - i. I am using a translation based on the Septuagint text for this series of lessons on Noah and the flood, which may be slightly different than what many use (typically based on Masoretic Text, abbreviated MT).
  - ii. LXX is Greek translation made about 200 years before Christ. In the New Testament, when Jesus or the apostles are quoting from the Old Testament, they generally follow the LXX.
  - iii. Two reasons I want to use the LXX in these lessons:
    1. When sharing certain insights from the early Christians into the text we are reading, it is helpful to be using the same text that they were reading from (LXX was the OT of the early

church). I believe you will be able to appreciate the reason for this later in this lesson.

2. Certain very important words found in the New Testament, like Greek words for '*righteousness*' and '*grace*'. These words first appear here in **Genesis**, in the LXX. So this will help us to get a better appreciation for how these terms were originally understood by the church in the beginning.
- b. Read **Genesis 5:28-6:8** (from LXX)
  - c. Noah born, son of Lamech (grandson of Methuselah, great-grandson of Enoch)
  - d. Noah at the age of 500 begets three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth
  - e. **Genesis 6:3**, "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not remain with these people forever, for they are flesh. So their days shall be 120 years'."
    - i. I had always assumed this meant that lifespan of men would be reduced from 900+ years down to 120.
      1. Some early Christians understood it the same way. In chapters 13 & 14 of *The Divine Institutes* (c. 304-313 AD), Lactantius noted that many people in his day lived to age 100, and "competent authorities report that men are accustomed to reach 120 years". He then refers to the **Genesis 6:3** passage, and states that while before the flood some had lived close to 1000 years of age, "God...gradually diminished the age of man by each successive generation, and placed a limit at 120 years, which it might not be permitted to exceed." (ANF v.7, p.63)
      - ii. However, some other early Christian writers understood it to mean that God would bring destruction to all flesh on the earth (the flood) in 120 years. Therefore, they assumed that this statement was made by God when Noah was age 480 (120 years before the flood).
  - f. A key verse: "Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful, and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose." (**Genesis 6:2**)
    - i. What does it mean here, "sons of God"? Isn't there just one 'son of God'?
    - ii. Does this expression refer to people, gods, angels or something else?
    - iii. In ancient times, in both Jewish and early Christian circles, this reference to "sons of God" generally was thought to refer to wicked angels who became enamored by human women. These angels came down to earth and had intimate relations with women; the resulting

offspring were 'the giants renowned of old'. In several Bible translations, this offspring of mixed race is referred to as "the Nephilim".

- iv. The main reason for NOT believing this angels-getting-together-with-women interpretation is right is that to most people, it seems REALLY STRANGE! Creepy, like science fiction or something out of Greek mythology. However, consider...
- v. Evidence from the Old Testament that the expression "sons of God" in **Genesis 2:6** referred to angels:
  - 1. **Job 1:6** "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." (similar reference in **Job 2:1**)
  - 2. **Job 38:7** "(Where were you when)...the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"
  - 3. There are 3 famous early, nearly complete manuscripts of the Bible (c. 330-400 AD) which include the Old Testament in the LXX. In two (*Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*) the expression in **Genesis 6:2** is 'the sons of God'; however the other one (*Codex Alexandrinus*) renders it 'the angels of God'! (Keep in mind that the LXX was translated about 200 years before Christ.)
- vi. Common objections today to the idea that angels could have come down and had sexual relations with human women:
  - 1. Aren't angels spirits, which therefore don't have physical bodies like we do? **Hebrews 1:7** reads, "And of the angels He says: 'Who makes his angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.'" (quoting **Psalm 104:4**)
    - a. Yet angels clearly can take bodily form, eat meals, etc. (**Genesis 18-19** visit with Abraham and Sarah; with Lot in Sodom.)
  - 2. Didn't Jesus teach that after we die, in the resurrection, we will become like angels (no marriage, no sexual relations)?
    - a. **Matthew 22:30** actually says, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." (NKJV, following the Majority Text; NU text just says "like the angels *in heaven*". Either way, Jesus is referring specifically to the good angels, the ones who are in heaven!)

- vii. Evidence from ancient Jewish sources supporting the view that **Genesis 6:2** refers to actual angels:
1. Philo (Alexandrian Jew, lived c. 20 BC - 50 AD), in chapter 2 of *On the Giants* wrote, "And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men that they were beautiful, they took unto themselves wives of all them whom they chose." Those beings, whom other philosophers call demons, Moses usually calls angels . . ."
  2. Josephus (93 AD), in *Antiquities of the Jews – Book 1*, chapter 3 wrote, "For many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good... the tradition is, that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants. But Noah was very uneasy at what they did; and being displeased at their conduct, persuaded them to change their dispositions and their acts for the better: but seeing they did not yield to him, but were slaves to their wicked pleasures, he was afraid they would kill him, together with his wife and children, and those they had married."
  3. The *Book of Enoch*, well-known in ancient Jewish circles and even quoted by Jude in the New Testament (**Jude v.14-15**), describes events that occurred before the flood of Noah. According to the *Book of Enoch* (chapters 7-15, 85-88, etc.):
    - a. A group of 200 rebellious angels became enamored with women, descended to earth, and cohabited with them.
    - b. The angels introduced all kinds of evils into the world. They introduced cosmetics, jewelry, sorcery and astrology. Fornication, violence and other corruption increased as a result.
    - c. The offspring produced by this mixed race were bloodthirsty giants.
    - d. These giants, who lived on the earth before the flood, are the origin of the demons. (More on this in an audio CD lesson, *What the Early Christians Believed about Satan and the Demons*, by David Bercot, available through Scroll Publishing)

- viii. Many early Christians speak about this. Practically all pre-Nicene (before 325 AD) writers say the same thing (in the flood story, 'sons of God' = angels). Examples:
1. Justin Martyr (c. 160 AD) wrote, "The angels transgressed this appointment and were captivated by love of women. And they begat children, who are those who are called demons." (*Second Apology of Justin*, ANF v.1, p.190)
  2. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (c. 180 AD) wrote, "In the days of Noah, He justly brought on the Deluge for the purpose of extinguishing that most infamous race of men then existent, who could not bring forth fruit to God. For the angels who sinned had comingled with them." (ANF v. 1, p.516)
  3. Athenagoras in *A Plea for the Christians* (c. 175 AD) wrote, "(certain angels)...fell into impure love with virgins, and were subjugated by the flesh and became negligent and wicked of the things entrusted to him. Of these lovers of virgins, therefore, were begotten those who are called giants." (ANF v.2, p.142)
  4. Clement of Alexandria in *Miscellanies* (c. 195 AD) tells the Greeks that they stole their stories of an ancient flood from Moses. Then he adds, "The angels...having sunk into pleasures, told the women the secrets that had come to their knowledge." (ANF v.2, p.446)
  5. Tertullian in *On the Apparel of Women* (c. 198 AD) provides an extended discussion on the angels who fell into sexual sin with women, confirming the book attributed to Enoch and speaking of how those angels introduced astrology, and says these angels "conferred...upon women that instrumental means of womanly ostentation, the radiances of jewels wherewith necklaces are variegated, and the circlets of gold wherewith the arms are compressed...and the black powder itself wherewith the eyelids and eyelashes are made prominent." (ANF v.4, pp.14-16)
    - a. Makes me think of **1 Peter 3:1-6** where Christian women are called to focus on inward adornment and true inner beauty, as opposed to outward adornment.
  6. Tertullian in *On Prayer* (c. 198 AD) also connects this (fallen angels) to *one of the reasons* for women covering their heads when praying and prophesying in **1 Corinthians 11:10**, "because of the angels". (ANF v.3, p.688)



7. Commodianus in *Instructions* (c. 240 AD) wrote, “Such was the beauty of women that it turned men aside. As a result, being contaminated, they could not return to heaven....And from their seed, giants are said to have been born.” (ANF v.4, p.203)
  8. Other early Christian writers who held to this view include Origen, Cyprian and Lactantius. (For more information see: *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot; article on Angels, Fallen)
- ix. On the other hand, I am aware of one ante-Nicene (before 325 AD) Christian writer who held to a different understanding of **Genesis 6:2**.
1. Julius Africanus in his *Five Books of the Chronography* (c. 245 AD) wrote:
    - a. “When men multiplied on the earth, the angels of heaven came together with the daughters of men. In some copies I found ‘the sons of God’. What is meant by the Spirit, in my opinion, is that the descendants of Seth are called the sons of God on account of the righteous men and patriarchs who have sprung from him, even down to the Savior Himself, but that the descendants of Cain are named the seed of men, as having nothing divine in them, on account of the wickedness of their race and the inequality of their nature, being a mixed people, and having stirred the indignation of God.
    - b. “But if it is thought that these refer to angels, we must take them to be those who deal with magic and jugglery, who taught the women the motions of the stars and the knowledge of things celestial, by whose power they conceived giants as their children, by whom wickedness came to its height on the earth, until God decreed that the whole race of the living should perish in their impiety by the deluge.” (ANF v.6, p.131)
  2. Conclusions from Africanus:
    - a. In his day (mid ‘200’s) some copies of the LXX in **Genesis 6:2** read “angels of God”; others read “sons of God”. (We can observe that same difference today, from manuscripts of the LXX we have dating 100+ years after Africanus.)

- b. Africanus personally thought this referred to a righteous line of men (descended from Seth) versus an ungodly one (descended from Cain).
  - c. However, Africanus also acknowledged the other understanding; that this could pertain to actual angels.
- x. Considerably later Augustine, who had enormous influence on later writers, wrote in *City of God* (c. 426 AD) that he believed the expression 'sons of God' in **Genesis 6:2** referred to the descendants of Seth. Augustine's points:
  1. Augustine acknowledged that 'many' Christians held to the earlier understanding of **Genesis 6:2** (that angels had relationships with human women).
  2. LXX was a reliable and an inspired translation.
  3. Augustine acknowledged that although angels are spirits, in Scripture they also had appeared to men in forms that could be seen and touched.
  4. Augustine agreed that the LXX translators had correctly rendered the expression 'angels of god' or 'sons of God'. However, he said it *also* could be rendered 'sons of gods' (following the Jewish translator Aquila).
  5. This term 'angels' in **Genesis 6:2** (LXX) has been applied to godly humans (example: **Malachi 3:1** in the LXX, a prophecy about John the Baptist). Based on what God said in **Genesis 6:3** regarding flesh, Augustine believed that God was speaking about humans. He concluded these passages therefore should be applied to the sons of Seth (the godly line from Adam).
  6. Augustine had to acknowledge that parts of the *Book of Enoch* were true, since Jude confirmed their authority as coming from "Enoch the 7<sup>th</sup> from Adam" (**Jude v. 14-15**). However, Augustine held that the overall book we have contains some false things in it too. Augustine believed that work had been corrupted over time; not everything in it should be relied upon.
  7. (Source: *Augustine's City of God*, Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers v.2, chapters 23-24, pp.303-306.)
- g. **Conclusion regarding 'sons of God':** Throughout the first 200+ years of the church, it appears that the predominant understanding of **Genesis 6:2-4** among Christians as well as Jews was that angels came down and had relations with women. The other view (that this referred to descendants of

Seth) did exist before the year 300 AD, but became popular only later. Either way, a corrupt race of cross-breed giants ensued, and wickedness was taking over the earth. It was so bad that God had to put an end to it!

- i. Appreciating how the early church understood this passage could benefit you in the future, in your own Bible study. It might help you to see certain passages of the New Testament (for example **2 Peter 2:4-5** and **Jude v.6**) in a new light, more in line with how they were often understood in the early church.

#### IV. Noah, the Righteous Man (Read **Genesis 6:8-9**)

##### a. **Genesis 6:8** (LXX) “Noah found grace in the presence of the Lord God”

- i. First time the word “grace/favor” (Greek: **caris**, Strong’s #5484) is used in the Bible (LXX).
- ii. This is a common word in the LXX and NT: simply means ‘favor’ (from context here and elsewhere, NOT necessarily ‘*unmerited* favor’).  
  
(To understand the meaning of “grace/favor”, you can see how the word is used in context by doing a word study with an interlinear Bible that has an Old Testament translated from the LXX, with a Greek concordance included, such as the Apostolic Polyglot Bible.)
- iii. Noah was a righteous man, and God looked with favor on him (because he was righteous). In **1 Peter 5:5** Peter quotes from **Proverbs 3:34-37** where in the LXX it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace (favor) to the humble.” God’s decision to extend favor often is connected to what we do (examples: decision to love and obey him, to be humble and not proud).
- iv. For further study on Biblical definition of ‘grace’: an audio CD by David Bercot, ‘*Grace – The Most Misunderstood Word in the Bible*’, available through Scroll Publishing; also an audio lesson ‘*How Does the Bible Define Faith and Grace*’, by Chuck Pike, posted online on the Woburn house church website ([www.walking-by-faith.org](http://www.walking-by-faith.org)).

##### b. **Genesis 6:9** (LXX) “...Noah was a righteous man, who was perfect in his generation and well-pleasing to God.”

- i. The Lord makes the same point in **Genesis 7:1** when He says to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and your family, because I have seen you righteous before me in this generation.”
- ii. Word in the NT translated as ‘righteous/just’ (**dikaios**, Strong’s #1342) first appears here in the LXX, applied to Noah. Much later (**Matthew 23:35**) Jesus would apply that term to Abel, as discussed in

a prior lesson. This noun form is 'righteousness' (**dikaioσunh**, Strong's #1343).

- iii. Consider what Ezekiel says, regarding Noah and righteousness. The Lord had told Ezekiel that he would send famine, and remove the Israelites from the land because of their wickedness. He adds, "Even though these three men: Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness', says the Lord." (**Ezekiel 14:14**; see also **14:19-20**)
  - 1. So CLEARLY the Lord does not have a problem calling certain people 'righteous' before Christ.
- iv. This is the same word ('righteous') used in New Testament
  - 1. In **Matthew 1:19**, applied to Joseph, the husband of Mary.
  - 2. In **Acts 10:22**, where Cornelius the centurion, before he becomes a Christian, is described as "a just (righteous) man, who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews".
- c. Some may be wondering, "But doesn't Paul say in **Romans 3:10** that *no one* is righteous? And doesn't **Isaiah 64:6** say that all our righteous deeds like filthy rags to God?" The doctrine of total depravity, that mankind became incapable of anything good after the Fall is popular in many Protestant circles. It is one of the foundational concepts of Calvinism, which has seen resurgence today, through seminaries that teach Reformation theology, as well as through popular Christian radio preachers, teachers and authors.
  - i. However, **Genesis 6:9** clearly teaches that all men did not become 'totally depraved' after the fall. Certain men after that, including Noah, were called righteous by the Lord. Noah lived a life pleasing to God, and as a result of that God showed him favor (grace).
  - ii. Also, note that after describing dozens of heroes of faith in **Hebrews 11**, examples like Abel, Enoch and Noah, the writer concludes: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." (**Hebrews 11:39-40**)
    - 1. Justin Martyr (c. 160 AD) makes the same point when he is asked by Trypho, a Jew, 'What will happen to the righteous men of the past (who lived before the Christ came)?'
    - 2. Justin replies to Trypho, "Since those who did that which is universally, naturally and eternally good are pleasing to God,

they shall be *saved through this Christ* in the resurrection equally with those righteous men who were before them, namely Noah, Enoch and Jacob, and whoever else there be, along with those who have known this Christ, the Son of God..." (*Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 45, ANF v.1, p.217)

3. (Justin later explains to Trypho that now that the Christ has come, "Those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in the Christ before death, shall likewise *not be saved.*"; ANF v.1, p.218)
- d. Conclusion regarding 'righteousness', from Noah:
- i. Man did not become totally depraved after the Fall. There have been some people who lived righteous lives, pleasing to God.
  - ii. However, there is no salvation apart from Christ. They will be saved through Christ along with those of us who believe in Christ and follow him.
  - iii. We can also receive God's favor, his grace, when we turn to him in faith, follow his son Jesus, and strive to live righteous lives like Noah.

## V. Recap and Conclusions from Today's Lesson

- a. The flood really did happen. Ancient world widely acknowledged a universal flood, and Moses' account in **Genesis** was the accurate one. Jesus referred to it as historic fact.
- b. The flood was the greatest disaster in human history. This is not a cute "kids story".
- c. Most early Christians writers understood the passage about "sons of God coming into the daughters of men" as referring to angels coming down to earth and having relations with human women. Their offspring were referred to as "Nephilim" or "giants".
- d. A few later writers attributed "sons of God" to descendants of Seth (as opposed to "daughters of men" being descendants of Cain).
- e. In the LXX, the important NT Greek words translated as "grace (favor)" and "righteousness" first appear in this account.
- f. Noah was called "righteous". It is clear that while most people ultimately became depraved following the fall of Adam and Eve, not all did. Noah's example shows it is possible to live a righteous life, even if you are living in a wicked and evil society.