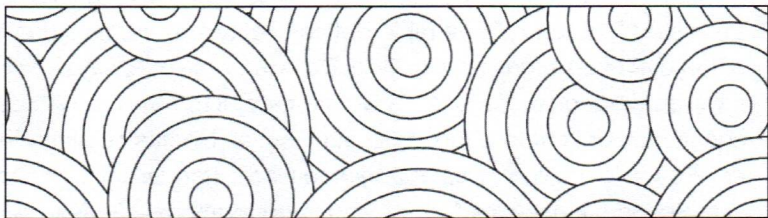


LESSON 5

NOAH AND THE ARK

GENESIS 6:9-22



OPEN IT UP

Readers of Scripture often consider Noah's ark a fun story. In fact, as children, we are programmed to imagine the sights and smells, to color pictures of giraffes and elephants, and to think of all the fun Noah had. It's like Noah won an all-expenses-paid trip from Ark Adventures, and he got to go on a zoo cruise. Awesome! But the story of the ark is *not* awesome. When we allow the Bible to inform our imagination, a very different story is created. The ark was built because of sin and God's necessary punishment of human wickedness. The story isn't thrilling; it is tragic.

CORRUPT EARTH • GENESIS 6:9-13

Humanity had forgotten God and allowed sin to dominate, bringing about no other option for God than to destroy the world with water. But Noah stands in contrast to the rest of humanity. And herein lies a lesson: God's faithful stand out. Some Christians try to hide their Christianity, afraid others will notice they are different. Yet that is exactly what we are supposed to be! Jesus refers to us as a light in the midst of a dark world (Matthew 5:14). Peter refers to us as a "peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9 KJV). Even though Noah lived in one of

the most wicked generations of human history, he was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). God’s faithful ought to look and act altogether differently than the world. Noah did, and he was rewarded.

Three comments are made about the character of Noah. First, “Noah was a just man” (Genesis 6:9). The word *just* means “fair” and indicates that Noah treated others equally. But the word can also be translated “righteous.” The Bible defines righteousness as a quality of behavior that aligns us with God. Deuteronomy 6:25 says, “Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.” So we learn Noah was obedient to God’s standard of behavior.

Second, Noah was “perfect in his generations” (Genesis 6:9). Other translations more accurately render Noah “blameless in his generations.” The term means that Noah’s life was in balance—with his family, with his fellow humans, and with his God. He harbored no secret sins, resentments, or grudges. His life was “whole” to be true to the meaning of the Hebrew term. Third, Noah “walked with God” (verse 9). This statement is made also of Enoch (5:22, 24), but no one else in Scripture. The prophet Micah includes walking “humbly with your God” among the things the Lord requires (Micah 6:8). Surely the phrase means that we must follow God’s will no matter what He asks. We trust Him and are devoted to Him totally.

In contrast to righteous Noah stands the wicked world. Scripture sadly reports, “All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Genesis 6:12). This explains the earlier statement that “the earth also was corrupt” (verse 11). Animals and plants do not sin. So one might wonder how they can be punished. Because humans are in charge of the world, the entire world suffers when we sin. Paul informs us, “The whole creation groans ... waiting for ... redemption” (Romans 8:22–23). Why does creation groan? The world seeks salvation as much as humanity does.

God’s judgment takes over when He maxes out His mercy. God’s mercy is proven not only by His provision of good but also in His postponement of judgment. But eventually the mercy meter reaches its maximum capacity, and then He enters into judgment (cf. Exodus 34:6–7). He declared to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:13).

ARK PREPARED • GENESIS 6:14-17

God gives instructions for building the ark, including the materials, methods of construction, and dimensions. First, let us understand that the Hebrew word for *ark* refers only to a floating container. It is the same word used to refer to the basket into which Moses's mother laid her baby (Exodus 2:3, 5). This was not a ship in any modern sense. Second, the ark was to be constructed of "gopherwood" (Genesis 6:14). No one knows what kind of wood this is, but a light, buoyant material is likely. The ark was then to be covered "with pitch" (verse 14) for waterproofing purposes.

The dimensions of the ark are given in cubits, approximately the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (18 inches or so). This means the ark, in our terms, would have been about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. The "rooms," or perhaps better "cells" (Genesis 6:14), were located on three different "decks" (verse 16). These would have been used to hold the animals in areas conducive to their survival. Although it is likely small animals were taken onto the ark, they would have grown rapidly, and therefore more room was necessary. The instructions for the ark are given not so much to teach us what the ark looked like but to show that Noah did exactly as God commanded.

COVENANT • GENESIS 6:18-22

Although God promised to destroy the world and everything in it (Genesis 6:17), He would nevertheless preserve a remnant of creation. God's "covenant" (verse 18) was an agreement between God and man that both preserves and protects humanity from God's wrath. The word is used for the first time in the Bible here and would go on to be found nearly 300 times. But the covenant is not offered unconditionally. God still expects Noah and his family to obey. Thus they must first enter the ark. Second, they must "bring two of every sort" of living thing—male and female—"into the ark" (verse 19). Third, they must collect "food" for themselves and for the animals entering the ark.

After receiving a litany of commandments, the Bible reports, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he

did" (Genesis 6:22). Noah's remarkable faith is captured by his simple obedience. Faith is not a feeling nor a condition bestowed by God. Faith is a response to God's grace, trusting that He will keep His word and offering ourselves to His service. The result of obedient faith is God's elevation of our status, what Scripture calls "righteousness" (15:6; Romans 4:3). Noah was saved by God's grace to be sure, but God's grace would have meant nothing without Noah's obedience.

WRAP IT UP

The destruction of the world in the flood is one of the saddest moments in Scripture. But it was necessary. God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6–7). We must proclaim and appreciate this wonderful feature of God’s character. But this passage goes on to say God is a being “by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (verse 7). The destruction of the world through the flood is perfectly in harmony with God’s character as revealed in Scripture. Indeed, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).



THINK ON IT

1. Why is the ark usually regarded as a “fun” story? What is the Bible’s focus? How can we focus the attention of Bible readers where the Bible places it?
2. What three details are given about Noah’s character? How can these apply to any Christian today?
3. We discussed that God’s judgment picks up when His mercy leaves off. How do you think God decides when it is time to stop being merciful and to start judging?
4. Why do you think the Bible offers instructions about the ark?
5. How is God both just and merciful? Why do you think people today find a conflict between these two attributes of God?