

o8. The Flood - Genesis 7 - 9



Noah is told to enter the ark (Genesis 7:1-5). “Yahwist”

- Then YHWH said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and your whole household, because I have seen you to be just before me in this generation. Of every clean animal take 7 pairs, male and female [needed for sacrifice; P has one pair, 6:19], and 1 pair of every unclean animal, male and female, and 7 pairs of every bird in the heavens, male and female, to keep their kind alive on earth. For in 7 days from now I will bring rain upon the earth for 40 days and 40 nights; I will wipe from the earth every existing thing that I have made.’ Noah did all that YHWH commanded.

‘In 7 days from now I will bring rain upon the earth for 40 days and 40 nights’(7:4).

7 represents a lunar symbol of fullness. 40 represents a symbol of a generation, the journey through trial to the promised land (see Numbers 14:34-35).

‘To the eyes of the sons of Israel the glory of Yahweh seemed like a devouring fire on the mountain top. Moses went right into the cloud. He went up the mountain, and stayed there for 40 days and 40 nights’(Exodus 24:17-18).

2. The Flood begins and Noah enters the Ark Genesis 7:6-10

⁶Noah was 600 years old, when the flood waters came upon the earth.

⁷Noah and his sons and his wife and his son's wives, went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

⁸Of clean animals and of unclean animals, of birds and all that creeps on the earth, ⁹2 of each they went into the ark with Noah male and female as God had commanded him.

¹⁰After 7 days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

Genesis 7:11-12

- ¹¹In the 600th year of Noah's life, in the 2nd month, on the 17th day of the month [=40+7] on that day, all the fountains of the great primeval deep [1:2] burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened.
- In **P** we are dealing with a collapse of the firmament = a reversal of the work of Day 2 [1:6-8]. The space needed for life is lost and so all outside the temple [the ark] is destroyed.
- ¹²And rain poured upon the earth 40 days and 40 nights.

2. Noah enters the Ark b: Genesis 7:13-16

- ¹³On that very day, Noah went into the ark with his sons, Shem, Ham and Japeth, with his wife and the three wives of his sons; ¹⁴they and wild animals of every kind, and livestock of every kind, and all that creeps on the earth of every kind, and birds of every kind, every winged creature. ¹⁵They all went into the ark, with Noah, two by two of all flesh that had life in them. ¹⁶And those that went in were male and female of all flesh, and they went in as God has commanded him. And YHWH shut the door behind him.

- The Flood in the history of religions (Westermann pages 398-406).
- This includes a comparison with the Flood Narratives in the Mesopotamian epic, Gilgamesh XI [See also L'Heureux *In and Out of Paradise*, 36-44], in the Babylonian Atrahasis epic (1700BC) [L'Heureux, 44-49], the Sumerian epic and in Apollodorus and Ovid.



The Genesis Narrative presumes that crime demands punishment, and that violence, left to itself, would destroy creation. It focuses attention on salvation.

This is in keeping with the central theme of the Pentateuch:

‘No matter how drastic man’s sin becomes, destroying what God has made good and bringing the world to the brink of uncreation, God’s grace never fails to deliver man from the consequences of his sin. Even when man responds to a fresh start with the old pattern of sin, God’s commitment to his world stands firm, and sinful man experiences the favour of God as well as his righteous judgment.’

(D. Clines *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, 1978) 76).

3. The Flood (Genesis 7:17) Yahwist

- ¹⁷The flood continued 40 days over the earth, and the waters increased and lifted up the ark so that it was high above the earth.

3. The Flood (Genesis 7:18-21) P

- ¹⁸The waters mounted and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated upon the surface of the waters. ¹⁹The waters mounted greatly upon the earth, and all the high mountains under heaven's expanse were covered. [Ararat = 17,000 feet; Caucasus = 19,000 feet; Everest = 30,000 feet]. ²⁰The waters mounted and rose 15 cubits above the mountain tops. ²¹All flesh, all that moved upon the earth, perished, birds and livestock and wild animals, and all that swarmed upon the earth, and every human being [’âdâm].

The Flood (Genesis 7:22-24)

- ²²Everything that had the breath of life in its nostrils, everything that lived on the dry land, all died. ²³So he wiped out every existing thing on the face of the earth, man and beast and crawling thing and bird of heaven - all of them were wiped from the face of the earth. Only Noah was left and what was with him in the ark.
- ²⁴The waters mounted over the earth for 150 days [= 5 months].

4. The turning point. The flood subsides (Genesis 8:1-3)

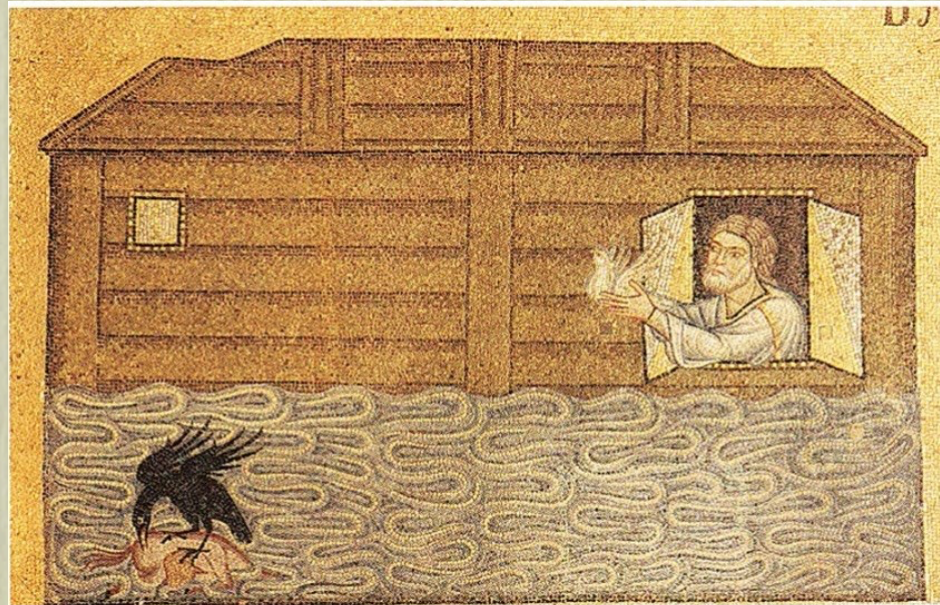
- ¹Then God remembered Noah and all the wild and domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow [1:2] over the earth so that the waters subsided. ²The fountains of the primeval deep and the windows of the heavens were closed. The rain from heaven was stopped and ³the waters receded gradually from the earth.

4. The turning point. The flood subsides (Genesis 8:3-5) [P]

- ³At the end of 150 days the flood was subsiding.
⁴On the 17th day [7:11] of the 7th month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.
⁵The waters continued to recede until the 10th month; on the 1st day of the 10th month the tops of the mountains became visible.

The flood subsides (Genesis 8:6-9) Yahwist

- ⁶At the end of 40 days Noah opened the window that he had made in the ark, ⁷and he sent the raven out and it flew to and fro until the water on the earth had dried up.



The flood subsides (Genesis 8:6-9) Yahwist

- ⁸Then he sent out the dove to see if the waters on the earth had subsided further. ⁹But the dove did not find any place where it could rest the sole of its foot, so it came back to him in the ark, because there was still water over the whole earth. He put out his hand and caught it and brought it back into the ark.

- In the Babylonian epic, after his ship lands on Mount Nisir, Gilgamesh waits for seven days before sending out a dove. Gilgamesh, too, has three attempts, sending out a dove first, then a swallow, and finally a raven. Our text starts with the raven. The practice of using birds to gather information was typical of ancient seafaring.

Genesis 8:10-12 Yahwist

- ¹⁰Noah waited thrice seven days; then he sent the dove out of the ark again. ¹¹And the dove returned to him in the evening, and it had a freshly plucked olive leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹²He waited yet another seven days and sent the dove out again; this time it did not come back to him.



The flood ends (Genesis 8:13-14)

- ¹³In the 601st year, in the 1st month, on the 1st day of **the month** [New Year's Day cult. The 1st year of the 7th century of Noah's life!] **the waters of the earth were dried up; Noah removed the hatch from the ark, and he saw that the face of the earth was drying.** ¹⁴On the 27th day of the 2nd month, the earth was completely dry.
- Flood lasted 12 lunar months + ten days [see 7:11] = 1 solar year. There are probably liturgical allusions in the numbers as well. The Babylonian calendar is being used because the ancient calendar of Israel has only names for the months and did not number them.

5. Noah leaves the ark (Genesis 8:15-17)

- ¹⁵Then God said to Noah: ¹⁶‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your son’s wives with you. ¹⁷And all the animals that are with you, all flesh of birds, of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth, bring them out with you, that they might breed upon the earth, and increase and multiply upon the earth’.

5. Noah leaves the ark (Genesis 8:18-19)

- ¹⁸So Noah and his sons and his wife and his son's wives went out together. ¹⁹And every animal, every creeping thing and every bird - everything which moves upon the earth, all of them went out of the ark by families.

Noah offers sacrifice (Genesis 8:20-21)

- ²⁰Noah built an altar to YHWH. He took clean animals and birds, and offered whole-burnt offerings upon the altar. ²¹YHWH smelled the sweet odour and reflected: “Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings [’âdâm]; indeed the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth. Never again will I slay every living thing as I have
- This is not a promise but a formal abrogation of the decision to destroy. God is portrayed as deciding to live with sinful human beings and not destroy them [= the human condition as experienced in history].



(Genesis 8:22)

As long as the earth lasts,
there will never cease
seedtime and harvest,
frost and heat,
summer and winter,
night and day.

6. The new world order and God's blessing (Genesis 9:1-4)

- ¹God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: 'Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth!
²Fear and dread of you shall come over all the animals of the earth, and over all the birds under the heavens and over all that creeps on the earth, and over all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hand. ³Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, as I have given you the green plants so I give you all. ⁴Only flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat.

- This is expressive of the tension experienced in the relationship of mankind with other animals. Human's can take life for food, but he must respect the divine blessing given to all living things. Restraint on blood-lust, or killing for the sake of killing, is provided by the demand that the God-given life-giving blood [dam] must not be eaten by man ['adam].

6. The new world order and God's blessing (continued) (9:5-7)

- **5**For your life-blood I shall demand satisfaction; from every animal I shall require it, and from human beings I shall require for the death of their fellow human beings. **6**Whoever sheds the blood of a human being by a human being shall his blood be shed, for God made human beings in the image of God. **7**But you, be fruitful and increase, spread over the earth and rule over it'.
- Humans have the responsibility to care for, provide for and protect other living things. We forfeit our right to live if we take human life. Those we see as outsiders are also made in God's image!

- 6. The new world order and God's blessing (continued) (9:8-11)

- ⁸God said to Noah and to his sons with him:
⁹'As for me, I am upholding my promise to you and to your descendants after you ¹⁰and to every living being that is with you, to the birds, to the livestock and to all living things with you, to all that have come out of the ark with you. ¹¹I am upholding my promise to you that never again shall all flesh be wiped out by the waters of the flood, and that never again shall the flood come to destroy the earth".

6. The new world order and God's blessing (continued) 9:12-16)

- ¹²God said: “This is the sign of the promise that I am making to you and every living being that is with you for all future generations. ¹³My bow I am putting in the clouds, which shall be the sign of the promise I am making to the earth. ¹⁴When I form clouds over the earth, and the bow becomes visible in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my promise to me and you and all living beings, and never again shall the waters become a flood so as to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶And when the bow is there in the clouds, I will look at it so as to remember the everlasting promise made by God to all living beings, all flesh that is on the earth”.

Genesis 9:17

- God said to Noah: “This is the sign of the promise that I will uphold between myself and all flesh that is on the earth’.

The covenant with Noah is for the whole human race. It forbids violence (the main cause of the condition that almost brought about the return to chaos).

It stands forever, and is not abrogated by the later covenant made with Abraham, which was for a special people for a special mission. This later covenant does not involve rejection of those not chosen for this mission.

A Jewish scholar U. Cassuto captures the essential symbolic significance of the narrative of the flood in his commentary on Genesis.

‘It depicts for us, step by step, the acts of divine justice that bring destruction upon the earth, which has become filled with violence; and the scenes which pass before us grow increasingly gloomier until in the darkness of death ... there remains only one, tiny, faint point of light, to wit, the ark, which floats on the fearful waters that have covered everything, and which guards between its walls the hope of future life.

Cassuto continued

[We then see] consecutively the various stages of the divine compassion that renews life upon earth. The light that waned until it became a minute point in the midst of the dark world begins to grow bigger and brighter till it illumines again the entire scene before us, and shows us a calm and peaceful world, crowned with the rainbow that irradiates the cloud with its colours – a sign and pledge of life and peace for the coming generations.’

The ambiguity of the human condition: Humanity is good and evil. Filial impiety and piety - its punishment and reward (Genesis 9:18-22) J

¹⁸The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japeth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah and the whole earth was populated from them.

²⁰Noah, as the first man of the soil, planted a vineyard. ²¹He drank from the wine and became drunk and lay naked in his tent. ²²When Ham the father of Canaan saw his father's nakedness, he told his two brothers.

Genesis 9:23-27 J

- ²³But Shem and Japeth took the cloak, put it on the shoulders of each of them, walked backwards and so covered the father's nakedness; their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴When Noah awoke from the effects of the wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said: 'Cursed be Canaan!' Slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers! ²⁶And he said: 'Blessed be YHWH the God of Shem, but Canaan shall be his slave. ²⁷May God enlarge [yapt] Japeth [yepet], that he may dwell in the tents of Shem and let Canaan be his slave'.



- Evil is still at work after the flood [See 8:21]
- The benefits of civilisation [vine-cultivation] traced to a human, not to the gods.
- The fruits of the soil are ambivalent, but in the world of human experience the forces of evil cannot completely dominate [Contrast Genesis 6, where the whole is corrupt].
- Our relationships with the soil, with our father, and with God affect all other relationships.

- Father-son relationship is critical for the realisation of the divine blessing [4th commandment].
- Justification for Semites [Israel] having Canaanites as slaves!

Genesis 9:28-29

²⁸Noah lived another 350 years after the flood. ²⁹All the days of Noah were 950 years; and he died.