

## 5. Destruction and Renewal

**Biblical material:** Genesis 5:32–9:29.

### Quotes

- In Genesis, seeing the world filled with violence, God decided to drown all mankind except Noah's family. But because that family carried the same genes as those who had drowned, violence continued unabated. *Robert Davis*
- The biblical account of Noah's Ark and the Flood is perhaps the most implausible story for fundamentalists to defend. Where, for example, while loading his ark, did Noah find penguins and polar bears in Palestine? *Judith Hayes*
- The only thing that stops God from sending another flood is that the first one was useless. *Nicolas de Chamfort*
- The Deluge: A punishment inflicted on the human race by an all-knowing God, who, through not having foreseen the wickedness of men, repented of having made them, and drowned them once for all to make them better—an act which, as we all know, was accompanied by the greatest success. *Voltaire, Dictionary of Theology*
- It pays to plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark. *Unknown*

### Questions

How do you deal with those who cannot accept the validity of the Flood account? How is it best to respond to those who consider the story of Noah a myth? Was there no other answer than to drown the whole world? How does this fit into the great controversy? How does the story reflect on God and his nature?

### Discussion

Surely the most pressing question about Noah and the Flood is not how he got all the animals on the Ark but how God looks in all of this. The drowning of all but eight of the inhabitants of the Earth surely raises some disturbing questions about God and his nature. Is he vindictive, imposing a harsh sentence on everyone—men, women, and children? And as some like to ask, what about the little babies?

And were those who got on the Ark so saintly either? The later record seems to indicate otherwise. Was God playing favorites, then?

Genesis 6 tells us that God saw the greatness of human wickedness, and he “regretted” having made mankind in the first place. Does this suggest God changed his mind? How are we to understand God's dilemma in dealing with sinful human beings? To what extent can he allow things to happen, and when does he have to intervene? What would have happened without the Flood?

The later picture does not seem to point to great improvement. Despite Noah's sacrifices and promises, he ends up getting drunk in his tent, a son plays the role of peeping tom, whom Noah then curses. The enduring consequences of sinful choices continues to be portrayed throughout the succeeding chapters of Genesis, a clear demonstration to angels and to men of what the rebellion leads to, and how the misrepresentation of the Devil is in complete contrast to the truth about God.

## **Comment**

All too often the whole idea of Noah and the Ark is simply an excuse for poking fun at such an oddball belief. The question of where to find penguins and polar bears in Palestine is just one example, as is the comment that “Noah was a brave man to sail in a wooden boat with two termites.” Some point to the story to suggest it is totally irrelevant and out-of-touch with today’s concerns: “On the other hand, the Bible contains much that is relevant today, like Noah taking 40 days to find a place to park.” *Curtis McDougall*

Not only does it seem ridiculous, or even totally unfeasible, but is it really important to believe? Many Christians today would say no, and suggest this is just another ancient myth, a way of describing the past that cannot be taken literally. So did it really happen, and how would we know? Evidence is provided to suggest that ocean sediments occur on high mountains; “proof” in the form of rapid entombment of plants, animals, and fish to form fossils; and multiple layers of sedimentary rock strata with buried tree trunks passing through them indicating a massive water-caused catastrophe. However all such evidence can be interpreted in different ways. And despite the widespread geographical locations, do they prove a world-wide flood?

Much depends on assumptions—like uniformitarianism, one foundational concept in modern geology, that sees slow ongoing processes, not cataclysmic disasters, as responsible for what is observed in the rocks. Others consider it likely that there was some kind of localized flood that was turned into the “legend” of Noah, rather like the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. Others still dismiss it all as pure invention.

While it’s important not to be credulous, the dismissal of Genesis as being factually credible strikes at the fundamental concept of Biblical truth. If it is myth, or legend, or interpretation, then much of the Bible becomes “nice ideas” rather than spiritual truth on which to live your life. The problem with such “reinterpretation” is not so much in the evidence, but in the presupposition that the Bible is not a reliable interpreter, and that other assumptions are better. But who’s to say?

## **Ellen White Comments**

Before the destruction of the old world by a flood, there were talented men, men who possessed skill and knowledge. But they became corrupt in their imagination, because they left God out of their plans and councils. They were wise to do what God had never told them to do, wise to do evil. The Lord saw that this example would be deleterious to those who should afterwards be born, and He took the matter in hand. For one hundred twenty years He sent them warnings through His servant Noah. But they used the probation so graciously granted them in ridiculing Noah. They caricatured him and criticized him. They laughed at him for his peculiar earnestness and intense feeling in regard to the judgments which he declared God would surely fulfill. They talked of science and of the laws controlling nature. Then they held a carnival over the words of Noah, calling him a crazy fanatic. God’s patience was exhausted. {1BC 1090}

To the long-lived, antediluvian race, only a step from paradise, God gave rich gifts, and they possessed a strength of body and mind of which men now have but a faint idea; but they used His bounties, and the strength and skill He gave them, for selfish purposes, to minister to unlawful appetites, and to gratify pride. They expelled God from their thoughts; they despised His law; trampled His standard of character in the dust. They reveled in sinful pleasure, corrupting their ways before God, and corrupting one another. Violence and crime filled the

earth.... By beholding evil, men became changed into its image, until God could bear with their wickedness no longer, and they were swept away by the flood. {FE 421}

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