

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1–7:24

Dr. George O. Wood

Genesis 6 and 7 provide a great deal of intrigue for us. One item of intrigue is this business about the sons of God marrying the daughters of men and the Nephilim that are produced. Another is an aspect of Scripture that is perhaps the most open to criticism and scrutiny in the modern age: What's all this business about a flood destroying the earth? How are we to understand this event today?

As we look into these two chapters in God's Word, I want to point out again that our reason for looking at the Scriptures is not that we might have a more accurate understanding of the world before the Flood. Rather, Paul says in Romans 15:4 that these things were written for us. They were written for our understanding that through the comfort and strength of Scripture we might have hope. In other words, these two chapters contain a personal application for our everyday lives. Also, these two chapters have great application for the world in which we live. Not only do they relate to us as individuals, but also to our age.

The Scriptures speak of the time of Noah as being sort of an example of what we would expect in the age immediately before the world's destruction by fire. In Matthew 24:37, Jesus says, "As it was in Noah's day so it will be in the coming of the Son of Man." In addition, 2 Peter 3 speaks of the fact that the world once destroyed by water would a second time be destroyed—this time not by water but by fire. We understand from Peter that the character of the days of Noah would be largely like the character of the end-time days. That is, there would be scoffers; there would be individuals saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Of course, we can recognize from these two chapters that considerable time passed as Noah's built an ark, and during that time

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

there was scoffing. That is also characteristic of the world in which we live. Where is God, and when will He intervene in human history?

As we look at those two facets—the application of the Word of God to our lives and the application of the Word of God to our age—I'd like to share some things. First, the conditions that provoke God's judgment. Next, the attitude that God has as He is about to make judgment. Then I want us to see the provision that God makes for His people in the midst of judgment. Finally, we'll look at the judgment itself.

I. What conditions provoke God's judgment on an individual level and on the level of the world?

A. I think three conditions reveal themselves in the text of Genesis. One is estrangement from God. As man moves into human history on planet Earth in these early chapters of Genesis, there is a gradual going away from God. Man's gradual alienation becomes so intense that by the time we come to Genesis 6:5 we see that "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (NIV). That phrase signifies so very clearly that there is no time to think of God. There is no time to have fellowship with God. Instead, attitudes are totally set against Him. This alienation from God on the planet up until the time of Noah has come in spite of God's efforts time and again to establish fellowship with the men and the women He has allowed to exist. God has tried to establish that fellowship by giving mankind the hope and promise of Genesis 3:15, where the seed of woman would destroy the serpent—a prophetic promise to hang one's religious hopes upon. When the first man and woman fell, it was God who provided protection by killing animals so that man and woman could be clothed. In this we see the institution of sacrifice also as a means of relating to God. Without a substitute, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

Man gradually keeps moving away from God. This is particularly manifested in the experience of Cain. Yet even when a man has killed his own brother, God provides mercy in the midst of judgment. This was done for Cain. We see God reaching out to man through the line of Seth. Or through Enoch, who called upon the name of the Lord. Or through Noah.

In other words these men have been left in the midst of thousands of years of time—witnesses of God so that the world might have contact with God through people who are in contact with Him. Even during this time there is preaching being proclaimed. For example, Jude 14 and 15 says that Enoch, in his days, preached righteousness and that he warned the world of the judgment that was coming. Noah also is seen as a preacher of righteousness. The mercy of God and the attempt by God to establish relationships with His people are further seen by the longevity of life. But in spite of all of God's reaching out in kindness to establish relationships with people, we find instead a falling away from God.

This has very strong personal application, of course. You can look within your own heart for a moment and ask yourself how you are in fellowship with God. Are you a stranger to Him? Is he a stranger to you? I must confess that these words have put my own heart thinking: I wonder how God feels about my personal relationship to Him? Forget that I'm a pastor, a preacher. He is looking, first of all, for my time. He is seeing the need for me to build the kind of relationship with Him that brings Him joy—that brings me joy. The Scriptures speak so personally of God. I don't think it would be too much to even say that God is lonely for our fellowship—not that God could ever be lonely, but He desires our fellowship. How He longs to meet with us! How his heart is grieved as He looks over the world and sees that so many of the men and women that are coming into existence know nothing of Him at all!

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

Here's a question I've used in groups: When, if ever, did "God" become more than a word to you? In your own life, is God more than a word? In Noah's age, God was simply a word. Yet God craves and longs for fellowship.

The Scriptures are so strong on the fact that God seeks our fellowship that it gives us a whole new perspective on the nature of worship when we come together. Sometimes it's a struggle to get up on Sunday morning. Why shouldn't I be doing something else this day? The answer comes through very strongly in fellowship. As much as we may or may not have anticipated this meeting together with one another and the Lord, the Lord has anticipated it far beyond our anticipation. He longs to commune with us. He longs to sense and to know that we are willing to be in His presence, to talk with Him, to sing praises to Him. But also to open our lives that He might talk with us. Fellowship is what He craves. The reason He made man is that man might be in His image and walking with Him. But gradually there is that estrangement from God. "The thoughts of men are only on evil continually"—not upon God at all.

B. A second condition that provoked God to initiate judgment was what I might call the breakdown of God's design for marriage. God's design for marriage is clearly and carefully seen in the creation of man and woman. Not only is His design for marriage for one man and one woman, but also that the man and woman might be in fellowship with Him. When marriage was first made, it was between two people who knew God. Their relationship was really a triangle between themselves and God. God was a part of the picture.

Now we see in Genesis 6:1-4 some very strange things happening within marriage: "When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown” (NIV).

People have looked at these verses as yielding one of two possibilities in interpretation. The first I don’t hold to; the second I think makes more sense.

Some have suggested that the phrase “sons of God marrying the daughters of men” means there is a demonic invasion of the human race instituted by fallen angels that come down to earth and have intercourse with women and marry them. To their families are born children who are half man and half God. Those who take this point of view say this explains the ancient mythologies of wild, savage, half-man and half-God kinds of beings. Every ancient people had these kinds of theologies except the Hebrews. There is no Hebrew mythology; there’s just Scripture.

The phrase “sons of God’ in its most common usage in the Old Testament refers not to men as it does in the New Testament, but instead it refers to angels. For example, three references in Job and a reference in Daniel 3:25 use the term “sons of God” to describe angelic beings. Some put this together with the idea that is advanced in Jude 6 regarding angels that do not keep their proper habitation. It’s thought these angels did not keep their proper relationship as angels but instead sinned and fell further through their union with mortal women. Of course there’s another explanation: that Jude is simply referring to angels that were fallen to begin with.

But back again these half-man, half-demonic kind of beings. Some people say that this is really a key theologically, because Satan has tried to destroy woman’s seed. He’s not able to destroy the seed, so he decides to corrupt it. Thus we find the word “corrupt” used to describe the existence of mankind.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

Finally, others who hold this position see it as but a harbinger, a foretaste of what it's going to be like at the end of the age when, in Revelation 9, planet Earth is invaded by a host of demonic activity that Revelation symbolizes in the figure of locusts.

Against that position is the view that this passage does not indicate a fallen angel marriage with mortal women at all. Instead, it reflects a new marriage between the sons of Seth, who can be called the sons of God, and the daughters of men, mainly the descendants of Cain. Indeed in Genesis 4 we see the development of the line of Cain, and in Genesis 5 is the line of Seth. While it is true that "sons of God" is used to describe angels in Job and Daniel, never does the term in either the Old or the New Testament refer to fallen angels. Furthermore, Jesus indicated in the Gospels that angels neither give nor are given in marriage. That is, they are created beings, not procreating beings.

Furthermore, it seems here that during the whole descent of Seth's generation in Genesis 5, there has been a keeper of the faith. We have seen a number of godly families. Now, however, in Genesis 6 it's being said for the first time that instead of marrying within the families of faith, there is marriage outside one's faith. There is the marriage of believing sons with unbelieving daughters. And, by the way, that is not limited only to Genesis 6. It's found throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. It's the downfall of Israel in the Book of Judges. It's also the downfall in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Believers, do not be mated together with unbelievers."

Of course, we have some unique situations that also come to bear. Some of you may be in a marriage in which one of you is a believer and one of you is not. First Corinthians 7:10–14 is very clear to say, "Live with your spouse, and by your dedication to Christ you will also have a

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

saving influence upon your children.” They will have a better chance by your staying in that home and being a Christian than if there were no Christian parents.

But specifically, the Scriptures on intermarriages between believers and unbelievers are directed toward people who have not yet married. The counsel is: Do not become involved in a marriage where one partner is a believer and the other is not. Because there is a general pull, and over a period of time the unbelieving atmosphere will dominate rather than the believing atmosphere. This certainly happens within the text of Genesis 6. By the time the two lines intermarry, the wickedness becomes so great that it is seen as perpetual. At the time such marriages are taking place, there is the notation that nonbelievers were on earth in those days. The nonbelievers are mentioned again after the marriages, creating almost two sets. They were in existence before the intermarriages, and they came to be the children of such marriages.

Who in the world were the nonbelievers? You find the word in Numbers 13. It’s used to describe the enemies of Israel as they were coming into the Promised Land. “The giants who were there,” meaning men of tall stature. Actually the word is “nonbelievers,” meaning “the fallen ones.”

There are several ideas that could be associated with that. Some have said they’re called the fallen ones because they’re bigger than normal and they stumbled a lot. I think, however, another strong possibility could also be a term to describe thieves and robbers—violent men who fell upon people. We still use that term today when we talk about violence—so-and-so fell on so-and-so. Indeed, we have the presence of violence and corruption on the earth seen in Genesis 6. That’s not too hard to understand. These were the leading instigators of this kind of violent life. They were called men of renown.

If you were looking for heroes in the world, it is not the godly who are the heroes. It is those who exploit. The men of renown are the heroes in culture whose actions and lives are testimonies of

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

walking away from God rather than walking to God. Since the nonbelievers were in the land when the marriages were taking place, it wasn't long before the children of such mixed marriages become "the fallen ones."

During this period of time, God sees this happening. In Genesis 6:3, He says, "My spirit shall not abide in man forever. He is flesh." That is, man has fallen so far away from God that man could not even be described as made in the image of God in terms of spirit. He's now simply flesh, following the passions of his flesh. Therefore, the Lord says his days will be 120 years. This doesn't mean that man's life span is going to be shortened to 120 years, but rather that mankind on planet Earth has 120 years left. According to Genesis 5:32, Noah was 500 years old when he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth. Put that together with Genesis 7:6—Noah was 600 years old when the Flood came. That means when the Lord gave man 120 years to go, Noah was 480 years of age. When God drew the line, Noah had not yet become the father of his three sons. It seems to me that one of the problems believers always have is this: thinking that the age is so wicked that married couples ought to cease having children for the sake of "Let's not bring a child into such an evil world." Noah would have had advanced knowledge of the Flood before he became a father. Nevertheless he had children, and they themselves were saved from the Flood. I think this is great encouragement to parents today.

There's always the threat of what a child is going to be exposed to. Will he walk away from the faith? There's a great advantage of that child being brought up in a home that's faithful to God. That's no guarantee that the child will never go wrong, but the advantage is there. Even as God took risks in making man and woman to begin with, we take risks to bring children into the world. But such is in the plan of God.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

C. Another condition that takes place in this world before the Flood is the corruption of a moral and spiritual life. I've read Genesis 6:5 about wickedness being great and evil thoughts continually. Genesis 6:11 says that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence. This is the way Cain's line was going.

It started out with Cain murdering. The seventh from Adam in Cain's line was Lamech. He kills a man for striking him and now violence is at work full force. The earth is filled with violence. This does not mean that everybody was a violent person. Jesus says they were eating, drinking, and giving in marriage. They were going through the normal activities of life. There's nothing wrong with eating, there's nothing wrong with drinking (but there's something wrong with drunkenness), and there's nothing wrong with giving in marriage or being given in marriage. One needs to eat, one needs to drink, and one also marries.

But in that whole process of eating, drinking, and marriage, God is out of the picture. He's out of the routines of life. Alongside those who were living life normally, there were also the violent. Here is what I would call a thin veneer of law that rests over society. There is always violence. When the thin veneer is stripped away, we see violence raise its head in an ugly manifestation. Take the veneer of law that holds our American society together, withdraw it, and we do not live that far away from social chaos that can break out in time of crisis. This is a violent age.

II. What is God's attitude in light of these conditions—estrangement, breakdown of the family as God designed it, and a gradual corruption of moral and spiritual life?

The Scriptures reveal at least two attitudes.

A. The first is patience. We see it most clearly demonstrated in 1 Peter 3:20: "When God's patience waited in the days of Noah." When God's patience waited. Why does God withhold judgment for as long as He does? Why doesn't God do something about the problems of evil

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

immediately? The reason is when God acts, He acts consistently. If you do something about the problem of evil in the world, you must do something about the problem of evil in every individual. If you're asking God to set things right in society, remember that when He does He'll also set things right with you. And He will do it in a judging way if you've not come to Him on your own. Second Peter 3:3 notes that in the last days scoffers would say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Peter goes on to say that the reason He has not come is this very thing: "He is not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

It's fascinating to note that when Noah got into the ark, God's judgment came. When the work God gave Noah to do was finished, God's judgment was there. I cannot help but think of the mission Christ gave to the church: "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to all nations and then the end will come." When the work is done, God brings the curtain down. It's a responsibility we have.

It's tremendous, however, to know that God is patient. It's tremendous to know it on a personal and individual level. That patience always prompts us to be close to God. Rather than provoking us to see God as one who never takes action, it provides us instead with repentance and a joy toward God that He could be so loving toward anyone so rebellious.

B. Along with patience on the part of God, there is also grief. That's how God feels as He looks at the world. Genesis 6:6 describes Him as being sorry that He had made man upon the earth.

Very human terms are used of God here. He's sorry; it grieved His heart.

Before God ever takes the action of judgment, whether it's here with Noah, or later in the Old Testament with the prophets, or in the New Testament at the end of the age, God's judgment is always preceded by grief. Grief on God's part and grief on the part of those who know God's judgment is coming.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

This grief of the Lord is probably most clearly seen in the example of Jesus' own personal ministry, which is marked by weeping. Three times in Jesus' life He weeps. He weeps at the tomb of Lazarus when the judgment of death has moved in upon Lazarus as it moves in upon all men. He wept over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41. When He comes into that city at the end of His ministry, He weeps because it will not accept Him and because its continued rebellion against God will bring it to ashes. He weeps all during His ministry for the sins and the cares of the world. Hebrews 5:7 says that throughout His ministry Jesus is seen as giving supplications to God with loud cries and tears. His prayer life was marked by an accentuated emotional feeling toward the world and toward individuals and toward others. He feels things deeply.

When God proclaims judgment, He never does it with a harsh hand and strident voice. He never does it like I've seen people do it—by coldly and casually saying, "You're going to hell!" God speaks with incredible emotion, eyes brimming over with grief. God's judgment is always proclaimed by men whose eyes also brim. God is the parent who only reluctantly and at last gives up and lets his rebellious child do as he will. God is seen in the Scriptures as either a parent—that is, a father—or as a bridegroom. In both cases He's passionately involved. It grieves, hurts, rends Him when we walk away and become strangers and become divorced from Him. His judgment is preceded by grief, but His judgment will ultimately come.

III. God makes a provision that His judgment against sin might be escaped.

This provision is beautifully seen in Genesis 6, 7, and 8 where God calls a person—and in turn a family—who has been in relationship with Him. Through the calling of Noah and his family, God provides assurance for all believers of every age that those who trust in Him will never live to experience His wrath. Christians are saved from the wrath of God. There may be persecutions that Christians will endure—hard times that believers will go through—but there will never be

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

on the part of believers an experience of God's wrath. Even as Noah was saved when the world was destroyed by water, so God's believers will be saved when the world is destroyed by fire.

God will save those who call upon Him.

It is said of Noah that he was righteous, blameless, and that he walked with God. What a description. Righteous and blameless. Trusting that in his relationship with God, he was right—that in his relationship with others, he was right. He had fellowship continually with God.

It is interesting to note that in Luke 1, Zachariah and Elizabeth, the father and mother of John the Baptist, are also seen as having these same three qualities. They were righteous, blameless, and they walked with God—beautiful qualities, by the way, to describe as goals for our own lives.

God provides that Noah, with his believing family, will be saved. And to make their life on planet Earth possible, He will also preserve the animals because there is a tie between man and nature. Thus, God provides a plan of escape—the ark.

The ark really is not a navigable boat. There's no rudder or steering mechanism on it. It was designed to float, not to steer. It wasn't a powerboat of any kind. One of the root words for "ark" is "chest." It should be seen as a great thing that floated on the waters.

This ark had rather incredible dimensions. You will notice the measure of cubits being used. A cubit is possibly a foot and a half, meaning that the ark was about a football field and a half in length, about 75 feet wide, and about 45 feet tall. God goes on to say that it's to be in three decks. That brings the total square footage of the ark to about 100,000 square feet, which is about 2½ acres.

Given the fact that God uniquely called the animal kingdom into the ark, a common question is: How did they all fit? It was a pretty big boat. Also, we should reckon with the term "species"

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

that God is saving. He's saving two of kind, not all the variations within a species. It is mathematically possible if we deal with species.

The ark itself is built with gopher wood, which evidently is cypress. It was coated with pitch, a black, oily substance that kept the boat from leaking. The same word for *pitch* is the root word in Hebrew for "atonement." It's beautiful term because it means "to cover." God covers. What he covers, nothing of the evil one can leak in to destroy your salvation. You either float or you don't.

Evidently, there is ventilation around the ark. Noah is told to make a roof—a better translation is an opening—for light for the ark and to finish it to a cubit above. We shouldn't think of a little square in the middle to look straight up. If they had put the window at the top of the roof, the floods would then come in and sink the boat. So evidently what this is—and I think this is a fair analysis—is about 18 inches from the top of the boat there was an air space completely around the boat, an opening for light or for air that provided a ventilation shaft. We also see that there were nests in the boat—spaces or stalls for the various animals. There is a door in the boat—only one door. There is also food, which Noah gathered. God doesn't provide miraculously for food in this period of time; that's man's job.

How like a fool Noah may have felt at times when he was asked, "What are you doing with that?" There was no water around, but he acted in obedience to God. In fact, one of the beautiful things about Noah is how he continually responds to what God says. Again we have the phrase, "He did all that God commanded him" (Genesis 6:22). That's a beautiful example for our personal lives.

IV. Then the judgment itself comes.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

As judgment is approaching, the Lord gives seven days. He indicates in Genesis 7:4: “In seven days I will send rain upon the earth.” There’s a last week of time to gather the animals and the family into the ark. Evidently, what we have is a supernatural migration of animals into the ark. If God can naturally provide for the migration of animals over incredible distances, certainly for a special occasion such as the judgment of the world He’s capable of providing supernatural migration.

Then, in Genesis 7:16, God sees all are in, and the door is shut. It is God who shuts the door; it is not Noah. It is God who opens; it is God who shuts.

In the New Testament, the example of the door occurs again. This time Jesus is seen as the door. The ark provides a beautiful model of Jesus, for there are not many ways into the ark. There is but one way.

In Revelation 3:8, Jesus says, “I set before you an open door.” Come into the ark of God, into the fellowship of God. The preceding verse says, “I shut and no man opens. I open and no man shuts.” Jesus has chosen now to open the door. No one can shut the door of invitation until He himself shuts it. When He has shut it, no one can open it. He cries at the door and says that His door is open.

Open your door. “Behold I stand at your door and knock. If anyone will open the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20). He will come into your heart. And because His door is open, you can go into Him. God opens the door.

When the seven-day period is passed, the Flood is unleashed in all of its fury. In Genesis 7:11 we find the nature of the Flood. “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

the heavens were opened” (NIV). Notice the waters came from two sources—from the depths and from the heights.

It would perhaps be found fanciful to speculate on what was the geological and climatic character of the earth before the Flood. In the polar regions there have been giant mammoths found frozen with grass still in their mouths. Today in those areas, no such beings could live in the cold temperatures. Some have postulated that the earth at one time had an even temperature zone all around. But perhaps the Flood brought geological and climatic changes. Perhaps even the world at that point was tipped on its axis, creating polar regions and diversity in the climate. Perhaps before the Flood the mountains weren't as high as they are today. In other words, a whole lot of things could have been shaped because of this cataclysm on planet Earth.

When God moves in judgment, His judgment is total and His salvation is total. When God is finished with judgment, we find this: “He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground. Man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air. They were blotted out from the earth” (Genesis 7:23). Total.

There is some discussion about whether this was a limited flood or a universal flood. It should be noted that Scripture says everything that is breathing is destroyed. The judgment is total. If God's judgment is total, so also is His salvation. Noah was left, along with all who were with him in the ark. Not half were saved, but everything that was in the ark lived and was saved.

There is no half measure in salvation either. We are either saved or we are not saved. We have either crossed the line from death unto life, from darkness unto life, or not. There is never a half measure. God's judgment is total, but his salvation is also total. Thank God that it is.

I called this sermon “The love of God”—a rather unusual title for something related to the Flood. But I feel that sometimes we look at a chapter like God's judgment and we see only the judgment

THE LOVE OF GOD

Genesis 6:1-7:24

and forget to see that the judgment is God's last resort. All along—up until the moment of judgment—he has loved us and sought to rescue all those who would trust in Him. It is God's love that motivates Him. Only when all hope is lost will God bring judgment. Just as when a child grows up in a family, every measure will be taken to see that good relationships are maintained with that child. But if, after repeated rebellion, the child walks away from the relationship, there's ultimately a point at which the parents can do no more except excise that child from living in their house. God excises these sons of Cain from living on this earth.