



## Bible Study

# Noah and the Flood: Living a Holy Life in a Corrupt World (Genesis 6-8)<sup>1</sup>

### *Why Study the Book of Genesis?*

Why study the book of Genesis? Shouldn't we just be worried about saving our souls and how to live without concerning ourselves with what things were like in the beginning? Isn't it enough to just say our prayers and worry about our salvation rather than think about these great subjects and remote events?

There are at least three reasons we might consider in response to these questions.

First, there is a direct relation between how you behave and what you believe about man's origins. Fr. George Calciu, an imprisoned Orthodox priest behind the iron curtain, once told a group of young people, "You have been told that you descend from apes, that you are a beast which must be trained." But, if we realize the way God intended us to lead our lives and how He created us with special care, then we will live accordingly.

Second, the book of Genesis is part of the Scriptures, God's revelation to us, and God has given us the Scriptures for our salvation. There is much patristic commentary on Genesis. For instance, St. John Chrysostom delivered 67 homilies on the book of Genesis, many of them during the weekdays of the Great Lent, when this book was read by the early church. Therefore, the reading of Genesis was considered a part of the everyday life of people who went to church.

Lastly, Christianity is a religion which tells us about what we are going to be doing in eternal life. It prepares us for something eternal and not of this world. Therefore, it is important for us to understand where we came from, where we're going, and the purpose of our life. So, when we study books like Genesis and Revelation, then we know what our whole life is all about.

Today, we look at Noah and the flood in order for us to understand how to live a holy life in a corrupt world.

---

<sup>1</sup> **References:** Rose, Fr. Seraphim. Genesis, Creation and Early Man. Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000.

### ***A Patristic Commentary on Genesis 6-8:1***

*Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:1-3)*

This is how corruption began to enter into the world. The “sons of God” were the offspring of Seth, while the “daughters of men” were the offspring of Cain. The offspring of Seth were the chosen people and were to preserve themselves in virtue, because through them Christ was to come. The offspring of Cain were the forbidden people. The sons of God were to keep themselves pure and were not to marry into the line of Cain. Here, we see that the sons of God were moved by carnal lust.

Saint Ephraim says that there was a preponderance of daughters born to the offspring of Cain, indicating that they might eventually die out. Therefore, they desired to marry the sons of Seth in order to preserve their race. He goes on to say that:

...the daughters of Cain adorned themselves and became a snare to the eyes of the sons of Seth.... The entire tribe of Seth . . . was stirred to frenzy over them.... Because the sons of Seth were going in to the daughters of Cain, they turned away from their first wives whom they had previously taken. Then these wives, too, disdained their own continence and now, because of their husbands, quickly began to abandon their modesty which up until that time they had preserved for their husbands' sake. It is because of this wantonness that assailed both the men and the women, that Scripture says, 'all flesh had corrupted its way' (Genesis 6:13).

Certainly, corruption gradually seeped into the world. This is how the devil works. There is an analogy of the boiling frog. If you throw a frog into boiling water, it will immediately jump out. But if you put it in water of normal temperature and begin to raise the temperature very gradually, it will eventually boil without even realizing it. This is what the devil does to us. It starts with a look, or a listen, or dirty joke, etc., and before we know it, we are immersed in sin without even realizing it.

The hundred and twenty years mentioned does not refer to the life span of man, but to the time given for repentance before the Flood. This is an indication that God is merciful and longsuffering.

But actually, corrupt humanity had much more time than this to repent as we see in the indication of Noah's name. We read that Lamech called his son Noah, which means 'rest' or 'relief' and prophesied saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed" (Genesis 5:29). In Noah's days, therefore, it was known that there would be an end to the sins of humanity – the Flood. Noah reached the age of five hundred when the Lord mentions the one hundred and twenty years. Therefore, the people had about 600 years to repent! (see Saint John Chrysostom's Homily 22(5) on Genesis).

*There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. (Genesis 6:4)*

Concerning the "giants" that are mentioned, Saint Ephraim says that the offspring of Seth, the chosen race, were tall and full in stature, while the offspring of Cain were small. He bases his interpretation on the fact that to Cain, the earth had been cursed and would produce small harvests. The Lord told him, "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength" (Genesis 4:12). Therefore, the offspring of Cain lacked nutrition and became small, while the offspring of Seth who were blessed and lived in the land along the boundary of Paradise ate of produce that was abundant and full of strength. When the sons of Seth married the daughters of Cain, their tallness prevailed.

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:5-8).*

Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes that God does not "regret", but Scripture tells us this in human fashion to teach us the excess of sin that aroused the anger of a loving God (Homily 22(15) on Genesis).

We see also that the animals were to endure punishment as well. This is because everything was brought into existence for the sake of mankind, including the animals. If human beings were to be removed, then what need would there be for animals (See Saint John Chrysostom, Homily 22(16) on Genesis)?

*This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth (Genesis 6:9-11).*

The Church Fathers comment on the chastity of Noah and his temperance in only having three sons. The men and women of his generation fell into carnal lusts and probably had many sons and daughters (Saint John Chrysostom, Homily 24(3) on Genesis). Saint John Chrysostom also mentions that Noah was responding to God's plan in both keeping his chastity and virtue, while still having sons who would populate the earth after it was destroyed (Homily 24(4) on Genesis).

*And God said 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. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them." Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did (Genesis 6:12-22).*

A cubit is supposed to be the distance from the elbow to the end of the hand, roughly eighteen inches. Therefore, the dimensions of the ark were approximately 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Therefore, it had the length of 1 ½ football fields; its width was about the length of a junior high basketball court, and its height about three to four stories high.

One can imagine the ridicule that Noah would have faced from his neighbors in building such a structure. How could Noah endure the mockery, the ridicule, the scorn, and sarcasm? Noah kept his gaze fixed on the promises of God. Saint John Chrysostom says:

That is the way things are, you see: when one is smitten with that love, and directs one's whole person to the search of God, one takes no notice of visible realities; instead one has constantly before one's mind the object of one's love, by night and by day, going to rest and getting up. So don't be surprised if this just man, once he gave that direction to his thinking, took no notice of the people endeavoring to bring him down: giving evidence of his own resources and winning favor from on high, he proved superior to them all (Homily 23(7) on Genesis).

We see that Noah's virtue is made all the more evident especially in the face of his adversaries. Christ even told us, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). You see, it is impossible for a virtuous person who follows Christ's commands and travels the straight and narrow path to enjoy the praise and admiration of people. This is how strongly evil resists virtue (Saint John Chrysostom, Homily 23(8) on Genesis).

The food that is taken aboard consists of vegetables, an indication that the time spent on the ark was a time of abstinence and fasting. After the flood, it mentions that those who came out of the ark included Noah's son, Ham, the father of Canaan (Genesis 9:18). This is an indication that Ham had not been able to keep his abstinence on the ark, but had conceived Canaan. Later, Canaan would be cursed for the sin of his father, who lacked self-control and mocked Noah (see Genesis 9:20-27).

*Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made." And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth. So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of clean animals, of animals that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. (Genesis 7:1-9)*

How did Noah know which animals were “clean” and “unclean” before the Mosaic Law was in place? Saint John Chrysostom says that this came from the wisdom of Noah’s own nature implanted by God. Even today, we have a sense of which animals are of a kind that can and cannot be eaten.

More clean animals were taken on board, as they would be offered as a sacrifice after the flood, without destroying any of the pairs.

There are of course many rationalists who doubt that a vessel of this size could house two of each type of creature (of course, excluding fish, insects, and other creatures that would be able to survive on their own). This is not really the focus of our discussion, since we are concentrating on the virtue of Noah. However, one modern estimate has found that such a vessel, divided into several floors, could easily hold two of every kind of animal alive today, with room to spare.

*And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark— they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life. So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in. Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. (Genesis 7:10-17)*

The gathering of all the animals into the ark must have been a spectacular sight. Consider also the sight of animals coming in peace to Noah and being in harmony with one another – just as it was with Adam in Paradise. Yet, the people did not repent of their wickedness and believe that their destruction was imminent.

Saint John Chrysostom also comments on the fact that it rained for forty days and forty nights. He questions, “Wasn’t it possible for [God], if He wanted, to send all the rain in one day? But why say in one day? In one moment!” The reason, according to Saint John, for the forty days and nights was to give even further opportunity to repent and escape punishment.

See also that Noah was six hundred years old at the time of the Flood. Therefore, God gave mankind only one hundred years and seven days, not the one hundred and twenty years to repent. This is because, as Saint John Chrysostom says, men had become unworthy of more time, being unmoved even when seeing the Ark and its animals miraculously assembled in it. It was clear enough by then that the people were not going to repent.

These people were given a further chance to repent when Christ descended into Hades, as it says in the first epistle of Saint Peter, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:18-20). After death, these people had the excuse that Noah was not Christ or God himself, and now, in Hades, they had a chance to accept Christ. Perhaps some who perished in the flood accepted Christ and some did not. To those who are hard hearted and who let pride get in the way, they won’t even accept Christ, even if He appears to them.

*The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days. Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided (Genesis 7:18 – 8:1).*

See how much Noah endured! This was a time of fasting, prayer, and labor. Saint John Chrysostom summarizes beautifully the circumstances in which Noah found himself and the hope and faith that he retained:

...the rain fell for forty days and forty nights, and for a hundred and fifty days it remained at the same level reaching fifteen cubits above the mountains, and that while this was happening, [Noah] the just man happened to be in the ark, unable even to enjoy a breath of fresh air, with all the brute beasts living with him, consequently it says, “God was mindful

of Noah.” What is the meaning of “mindful”? It means God took pity on the just man living in the ark, had mercy on him for the straitened conditions in which he found himself, reduced as he was to such helplessness and uncertain as to what extreme his difficulties would extend. I mean, consider, I ask you, what thoughts he was entertaining after the forty days and forty nights during which the flood of water poured down, seeing as he did the waters remaining at the same level for a hundred and fifty days and not subsiding in the slightest; what was even more distressing, the fact that he was unable to see what was happening with his own eyes, since he was shut in, and because unable to gauge with his eyesight the extent of the disaster he suffered the greater distress and imagined worse things each day. I for my part, however, am amazed how he wasn't overwhelmed by coming to a realization of the destruction of the human race, his own isolation and that difficult style of existence. Still, the cause of all these advantages he enjoyed was his faith in God, through which he kept up his spirits and bore everything without resentment, so that he was nourished by hope and felt no effect of these troubles (Homily 26(8) on Genesis).

### ***Living a Holy Life in a Corrupt World***

In order to live a holy life we must go into the saving enclosure of the Ark. The Ark is a symbol:

#### ***Baptism and Repentance***

Baptism is of course our first step in living a holy life. In the story of Noah, we of course see water in the flood. The waters of baptism are called the waters of regeneration. When we enter the baptismal waters, we put off the old man with its corrupt nature that was subject to death, and put on the new man in Christ that grants us the possibility of inheriting eternal life. We have a responsibility each day to keep the new man pure.

The Church Fathers contemplate on the eight souls saved in the Ark and say these eight souls point to the eighth day, which is the resurrection, the start of the new life, and the second coming of Christ. The world was created in seven days, and the eighth day is the start of the world to come. When Christ resurrected on the eighth day, it ushered in a new era in which He rose in a glorified body as the first fruits of mankind, who will likewise resurrect in the body to enjoy His presence in heaven eternally.

Of course, each time we sin, we cannot re-enter the waters of baptism. Therefore, the Ark also represents repentance, also known as the baptism of tears.

Saint Ambrose of Milan says, “In the Great Flood . . . all people died, except for Noah and his family. So, the outer man perished, while the inner one is renewed. This does not only happen in the water of Baptism, but also by repentance, when the lusts of the flesh perish, and the Spirit grows. You see water, wood, and a dove! Do not get confused! In the water, the body is emerged to get all its sins cleansed, and all its evil buried. On the wood, the Lord has been nailed as He suffered for our sake. And in the appearance of a dove, the Holy Spirit descended, as we read in the New Testament. He who grants peace to your soul and mind and the raven is a symbol of sin that goes not to return, as righteousness is kept in you inside and outside.”

This leads to our next point.

### *The Cross*

Our whole life must be centered on the Cross. In order to be a true disciple and follower of Christ, we must take up the Cross and follow Him. As our Lord told us, “*And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*” (Luke 14:26). The life of struggle with our whole attention on the crucified Christ is a prerequisite to living a holy life.

The Ark of Noah is a symbol or a type of the Cross. The Ark was the means of salvation. Likewise, when Christ suffered on the cross, He delivered and saved us from sin and death. The Ark represents the salvation through wood, which is the Cross.

Also, when we speak of living a holy life, we must crucify the self. As Saint Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Those who live a life of self-love and self-indulgence have not yet grasped the deeper meaning of life. We must crucify the mind and submit it to God and to the seeming wisdom of the world. We must crucify the flesh and all its passions. Noah indeed was crucified to the world. He did not revel in the lusts of those around Him. He crucified his mind and did not question the building of the ark. In the end, he and his family were saved.

### *The Church*

Those who were within the Ark were saved, while those outside perished (Saint Cyprian of Carthage). Likewise, we must enter the Church and the sacramental life of the Church in order to find life - in order to be saved.

The Ark is also similar to the church in that it had many compartments and little chambers, and was made with second and third stories, filled with different beasts . . . This diversity reflects in the diversity of the members in the Church with all their gifts, yet they are united together in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

### *Saint Mary*

Noah was a type of Christ. By Noah, eight souls were saved through the Ark. By Christ, we are all saved in baptism. The ark itself symbolizes Saint Mary. The ark received Noah and became a means of saving the world. Likewise, Saint Mary received God the Word and gave Him a human body by which He died for our salvation.

Saint Mary gave birth to Christ in the body, and the body of Christ is the Church. Saint Mary and the Church are both called “mother” and “bride.”

The Church reminds us of this connection at every Divine Liturgy. Before the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, we chant the *Praxis* response which says, “Hail to you, Mary, the beautiful dove, who bore for us God the Word.” Saint Mary is a type of the stainless and pure Church who received holiness through Jesus Christ. As saint Paul said, “...*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:25 - 27).

Therefore, we when we look toward Noah’s ark, we can remember Saint Mary and her purity, and ask for her intercessions. When we surround ourselves in the atmosphere of prayer, asking for the intercessions and prayers of the saints, and read their stories; and surround ourselves with holy and good examples on earth, then we will realize we have a long way to go and can then strive toward purity of heart and live a holy life in a corrupt world.

**Glory is due to God forever. Amen.**