

## **The Flood**

*Genesis 6:9-8:22*

In Genesis 6:9 a new section begins, having as heading: These are the generations (the history) of Noah. This part continues to chapter 10. In this outline we will discuss the first part of it which deals with the flood. (“Zonvloed” means: the flood that was sent.)

### **The Building of the Ark**

---

First of all Noah is indicated as a just and irreproachable man, who walked with God, as Enoch did, which is a special testimony (cf. also Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5). Next the world situation, wherein sin increased further, is again described (6:11, 12). Then follows the divine command to build an ark, because now God was going to bring a flood over the earth. This should be dated later than 6:3. How many years it took to build the ark is not mentioned. The word in the original text and translated by “ark” is of Egyptian origin and means box; it is also found in Exodus 2:3.

Noah was to build the ark of gopher wood (cypress, or perhaps some kind of pine, which types of wood in early days were used in the building of large ships). The walls were to be coated with pitch outside and in, just as wooden boats nowadays are tarred. The dimensions were to be as follows: the length 300 cubits, the breadth 50 cubits and the height 30 cubits. A cubit is approximately half a metre. Compared to present day ships, the size of the ark was about 19,000 tons. If we take into account that it was not until the end of the last century that ships of a similar size were launched, we realize that technical developments in Noah’s days have been far advanced. We may assume that Noah employed capable men for such a construction. The ark was further to contain three floors which were to be subdivided into many rooms. The roof was to be put

on in such a way that it would be 1 cubit higher than the ark itself, so that an opening would be left between the two for light and air. Therefore the roof over the total length probably rested on poles. The entrance was to be made in one of the longer sides, probably at a height of about 15 cubits, since the ark would be in the water up to a certain height.

Later we read about a window (8:6) and a covering (8:13), probably something hanging off the roof as a protection against the rain.

And finally, Noah was to gather large supplies of food for man and beast (e.g., grain, fruits).

### **The Destruction of the First World**

This is described in Genesis 7.

Seven days before the flood God gave the command to enter the ark, also all the animals, which by God's hand should come to Noah in pairs, male and female; 7 pairs of the clean cattle and birds, and one pair of the unclean animals. Clean animals were more numerous than the unclean ones in connection with the sacrifices that were to be brought and, during the stay in the ark, with a view to nourishment (milk and milk products). Noah probably needed the whole week to regulate everything and bring it to its right place. Last of all he himself entered the ark with his family, his wife, his sons and their wives, eight souls in all. The animals that were brought in on the last day together with those that had been taken into the ark before are expressly mentioned once more in verses 14-16, because not only the preservation of mankind was intended, but also the saving of the animals, for God wished to preserve the earthly life of *creation*. When everything was in the ark, God Himself shut the door with His own hand . . . and shut the ungodly world irrevocably without. The division was completed for ever, also with regard to relatives and co-workers on the ark, who also perished in their unbelief.

On that very day "all the foundations of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of heaven were opened." A pouring rain as of a cloudburst beat down for forty days, and out of cracks resulting from earth and sea quakes masses of water were pushed up from the deep. And the waters

increased up to fifteen cubits above the highest mountains and all life on land was destroyed. But the ark drifted on the waters. Even after forty days this situation continued, up to the 150th day (8:3b). The waters above and the waters below, which God had divided on the second and third days of creation, had once more poured over the earth and covered it as in the beginning of creation. It also shows the enormous masses of water which God had created, not only in the seas (which today cover two-thirds of the earth's surface) but also in the heavens above the earth, and *under* the earth's surface. Reference to the flood is also made in Isaiah 54:9; Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:5-7; also indirectly in Jude 14, and probably Job 22:15-18.

Unbelieving scholars reject all this, regarding it at the most as a memory of a local flood. In Christian circles the flood is often restricted to a limited area, where mankind of that time lived, which could be Armenia and possibly a slightly larger area. It is true that the word "earth" is mentioned, but this word is sometimes used to indicate the inhabited and therefore known earth (cf. Genesis 11:1; Daniel 2:39). The grounds for using that meaning here would be that the world had existed too briefly for mankind to spread itself over the entire world.

Against this theory we make the following remarks:

- a. It is told in 2 Peter 3:6, 7 that "the world that then existed" was destroyed and that "the heavens and earth that now exist" are being preserved unto fire. The word "world" is the translation for the word "cosmos" which is in contrast to "the heavens and earth that now exist." It is evident that the word "cosmos" should be understood here in the meaning which it frequently had in the olden times, and which is even its original meaning, namely, that of *heaven and earth together*. This is the skies (firmament with the clouds) and the whole earth. And those heavens and earth of today. In other words, *there has been a change in those heavens and on the earth*. The "world that then existed" indicates the nature and condition as they were in those days (not the extent and size of the disaster area). We do not know what the heavens and earth were like before the flood; we only know that their state was different from that of today's world. This points to the changing and destructive actions of the flood, by which the old world perished.

- b. If only Armenia (possibly with its surrounding area) had been covered with water, it is incomprehensible that even to the 150th day (8:3) it stood above the mountains and did not flow away to lower regions, since water always seeks the lowest places. It is then also inconceivable that after the downpour it still required about two and a half months (from the seventeenth of the seventh month to the first of the tenth month, 8:4, 5) to sink only so far that the tops of the lower mountains were seen; we would certainly expect it to pour out in large masses to the lower areas.
- c. One should not be deceived about the immense growth in population before the flood. It is apparent from the information of Genesis 5 and 6 that from the creation of Adam to the flood, the world had existed for 1656 years; that the existing race was extremely strong; that the average age ran to many hundreds of years which certainly does not point to many undermining diseases; moreover, every time it is said “and he begat sons and daughters,” indicating at least two of each. On the basis of a very careful estimation the population at the time of the flood has been calculated to be a least one billion, which is equal to the entire world population in the first half of the last century (in 1800 about 906 million, in 1850 approximately 1,171 million). Such a population could not possibly live in the Near East. Who can say how far they had swarmed out into all directions, whereby even seas would have proved no hindrance. Noah’s ark, which was many times larger than the ships in which Columbus crossed the ocean, proves that they were already quite competent in the field of shipbuilding.
- d. Finally we may point to the exceedingly large number of remains (fossils) of bears, hyenas, horses, mammoths, wolves, foxes, elephants; of all kinds of animals that cannot live peacefully together, but that, in mortal fear crowded together, drowned together in ravines and holes of the earth. They have been found in many places on the earth, as also human fossils in Africa, Europe, Asia, and America. Viewed by itself this does not have to be a binding proof for the flood, but when we believe that the first world was destroyed, it does give added proof.

## **The End of the Flood**

---

The great turning point came on the 150th day. God remembered Noah, and therefore His covenant (mentioned in 6:18), and this signifies the end of this wrath. The water began to recede, because God caused a wind to come over the earth. We should imagine this as follows: the underground action ceased its upward surge, the water below sank down, and withdrew into the newly established deep sea basins (the Atlantic Ocean, for example, was, according to present day scientists, originally merely a limited inland sea), and part of the water evaporated. On the seventeenth of the second month (when Noah was 600 years old) the flood began, and on the seventeenth of the seventh month the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (i.e. Armenia) due to the receding of the water. Meanwhile it was still until the first of the tenth month before the lower mountain tops were visible. Forty days after this Noah let out a raven, which did not return and apparently found sufficient food from the carcasses on the mountains. For a number of times he let out a dove every seven days; the first one returned, the second brought a plucked-off (fresh) olive leaf in its beak (olive trees bloom also under water), indicating that the tops of the trees were visible; and the third dove stayed away. It is probable that Noah waited several more days, and then he saw that the earth was drying up. It was on the first month. On the twenty-seventh of the second month the earth was completely dry, a year and ten days after the beginning of the flood.

There are certain questions here which cannot be answered. Time is reckoned in days and weeks. After 150 days the water began to decline, and after 5 months from the beginning of the flood, the ark became grounded on one of the higher peaks of the Armenian mountains. How did the writer calculate the months? As lunar months, according to Israelite reckoning, which counted alternately 29 and 30 days? Then the ark was grounded already before the water started to go down. Or according to solar months, which counted 30 or 31 days? Then the ark became grounded a few days after the water began to go down. Or did he work with round numbers: each month 30 days (which was known *also* in those days) as we ourselves sometimes do, then the ark became grounded on the same day that the water went down. We do not know on which top the ark settled. Neither do we know how high the water level

was there, since there are even higher mountains in the world; but on the other hand the water billowed back and forth because of the circling of the earth so that there was high and low tide, while also the depth of the ark in water should be kept in mind. Another unknown thing is in which season the flood began, in the spring according to one Israelite annual reckoning, or in the fall according to a different one.

Then Noah left the ark and all those who were with him and all the cattle. But not until God commanded it. God Himself had closed the door behind Noah, and He gave him the command to leave the ark and to give freedom to all the animals, so that again the earth would be teeming with creatures and would be fruitful and plentiful.

That must have been a joy unimaginable! Do not disregard the crampedness on that giant ship with its stuffy atmosphere and its smell and its rolling on the billowy waters in the midst of the most terrifying weather. What thankfulness now that the wrath of God is past and in His love a new future indicates the initial fulfilment of Lamech's prophecy of comfort.

### **Noah's Offering**

---

The first thing Noah did after leaving the ark was to build an altar (of which we read here for the first time in the Bible), a symbol of the dedication of the offering, carrying it *upward*, bringing it closer, as it were. Noah offered burnt offerings (also mentioned for the first time) of all the clean animals and birds, through which he dedicated himself to the LORD and thus, in his person, the new earth.

When the LORD smelled the sweet savour, He said to Himself (as He revealed later to Noah) that He would not again curse the earth for the sake of man, that is, send such a destroying flood, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." This seems strange and the *Kanttekening* of the *Statenvertaling* has: "although the imagination of man's heart is evil" etc. Lately the continued language study has revealed that the Hebrew word translated by "for," can indeed mean "although" (8:21). And thus, according to divine determination, the existence of the world with its variation of seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and

winter, day and night would from now on be established through the ages. (See also Genesis 9 in the next outline.)

### **Saved by Water**

---

The Scriptures do not give any other significance to the *ark* than that it was the means for Noah and his family not to perish with the godless world. It is not mentioned in the Scriptures that the ark points to Christ (ark of salvation) or to the church as a means to save.

In 1 Peter 3:19-21 the Scriptures do give a special meaning to the *water*, of which baptism is called a symbol or counter-symbol (“tegenbeeld”), that is to say that baptism had already cast its shadow as it were upon the water of the flood.

Peter reveals to us that Christ, made alive by the Spirit, has through the powerful fact of the ascension into heaven, preached His triumph to the bodiless spirits of the disobedient people of Noah’s time (taken here as an example); and then it is said that they “formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.” In *de Korte Verklaring* Prof. Dr. S. Greijdanus gives: *saved by water* (not, as the Dutch translation has it, “door het water heen!”). This shows us that the *water was the means by which they were saved*. From what were Noah and his family saved by water? From the godless world, which was a great danger to the diminished church, and which was undoubtedly a continual torment to Noah, as it is also testified of Lot (2 Peter 2:7). So God succeeded also in delivering this righteous man with his family out of temptations (cf. 2 Peter 2:9).

And as the water of the flood washed away the sinners with their sins, so baptism cleanses *us* of our sins.

It must be a baptism, however, which has the effect of an internal cleansing by the blood and Spirit of Christ. In this way God removes the evil, so that the life of communion with God may exist. One day God shall destroy all sinners and give His people an eternal, joyful communion on a recreated earth where perfect holiness shall dwell.

## Questions

---

1. What was the covenant of 6:18 about?
2. Is it possible to say that 8:21 points to the removal of the curse of 3:17?
3. What did Noah indicate when he made his offering?
4. Could we already call this offering ceremonial with an eye to Christ?
5. If the water of baptism by itself does not cleanse man of sin, is such a baptism by water then without meaning for infants?
6. When can we say that baptism saves us (as it is said in 1 Peter 3:21)? When does this apply to children? And to children who died early?
7. May we say, in view of 1 Peter 3:21, “It is *only* sprinkling with water”?
8. How should we, in relation to 1 Peter 3:21 judge the expression that we are saved “only through faith”? Does this expression occur literally in the Bible? Against what does one draw a boundary by saying it this way?