

## General Comments on Genesis 6-9

### Flood Myths

[Flood mythology](#) is pervasive through history across [many cultures](#), the exception being those within desert regions. Owing to the recurring nature of flooding events (e.g., natural dams bursting, tsunamis, high rivers, etc.) and their being wildly destructive, they create memorable events. These events get turned into compelling stories that get retold as a warning to coming generations who are subject to these kinds of natural disasters.

For the ancient Israelites, a well-known flood myth would have been that of [Utnapishtim](#), which is part of the Mesopotamian [Epic of Gilgamesh](#) (see [this video](#) for an in-depth review of the Gilgamesh Epic, which includes Utnapishtim [The Histocrat, Gilgamesh and the Flood]). That account presents a somewhat similar story to that of Noah, but it differs on significant key [theological details](#) (Down Came the Rain: Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin on Noah and Gilgamesh). It is very likely the Noah account was written intentionally to counter the Mesopotamian version so as to draw clear contrasts between the God of Israel and their pantheon.

### Why the Deluge?

This chapter represents a completely new start for the human family. People in general have become so wicked the Lord has no choice but to select out the only righteous family and destroy the rest by a catastrophic flood. Prior to this event there apparently was no capital punishment exercised by the Lord (e.g., Cain), and after this event the Lord imposes the law of capital punishment (cf. 9:5-6) for murder. The reason why is obscure in the Genesis account (it is alluded to in the cases of Cain in Gen. 4:8, then Lamech in Gen 4:23, and then the Lord's comments in Gen. 6:5 and Gen. 9:5-6), but in the Moses 8 account it is made plain. Simply put, the people had become generally murderous (cf. Moses 8:18). Their willingness to kill and murder one another and destroy Creation had become so pervasive the Lord was left with no alternative but to hold them responsible and enforce capital punishment upon them via the Flood. The underlying doctrine is mankind can become so destructive and murderous the Lord is left with no alternative but to annihilate that society and start over again.

From this point on in history, the methods employed here are repeated in Sodom and Gomorrah, the various wars of extinction waged by the Israelites, as well as in the Book of Mormon populations of the Jaredites and Nephites. In the Book of Mormon cases, the details of those accounts are sufficient to illustrate why extinction was necessary, cf. Moroni 9:9-21. However, in each of these cases, the destruction is selective, not universal, as was the case with the Deluge. In the present account, the Lord is grieved at having to destroy mankind in such a fashion, and swears He will never do it again (cf. 8:21-9:17). Destruction is no longer universal, it is selective. This heralds and change in the way the Lord manages human affairs, paving the way for the covenant with Abraham, with a lineage-based promise.

### **A New Creation**

On the Flood, the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary on Genesis (Nahum Sarna, 1989) states:

The uncompromisingly moral tenor and didactic purpose of the Genesis Flood story have influenced its literary artistry. Because humanly wrought evil is perceived to be the undoing of God's creativity, numerous elements in the story are artful echoes of the Creation narrative. Thus the divine decision to wipe out the human race employs the same two verbs that are used in the original Creation, but transposed in order to symbolize the reversal of the process (6:7; cf. 1:26-27). The Deluge itself is brought about by the release and virtual reuniting of the two halves of the primordial waters that had been separated in the beginning (7:11; cf. 1:1, 6-7). The classification of animal life in 6:20 and 7:14 corresponds to that in 1:11-12, 21, 24-25. The provisioning of food in 6:21 depends upon 1:29-30. Noah is the first man to be born after the birth of Adam, according to the chronology of 5:28-29, and he becomes a second Adam, the second father of humanity. Both personages beget three sons, one of whom turns out to be degenerate. Noah's ark is the matrix of a new creation, and, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, he lives in harmony with the animals. The role of the wind in sweeping back the flood waters recalls the

wind from God in 1:2. The rhythm of nature established in 1:14 is suspended during the Flood and resumed thereafter, in 8:22. Finally, the wording of the divine blessing in 9:7 repeats that in 1:28, just as the genealogical lists of the Table of Nations in chapter 10 parallel those of 4:17-26 and 5:1-32 that follow the Creation story. In both cases the lineage of the human race is traced back to a common ancestry.

Mankind's horrific self-destruction is undoing the purpose of God's Creation. As such, God must retaliate.

The JPS Torah Commentary also points out the number seven figures prominently in the text, which also parallels the seven days of Creation. Time periods are measured out in sevens of days, there are seven pairs of clean animals, the verb "s-h", "to make" and "b-w-", "go into" are employed seven times each throughout the story.

### **Theological Importance**

**Individual and Corporate Justice** Gen. 4 presents a case of individual sin and divine judgement. Chapter 6 presents a case of societal sin and divine judgement. The text conveys the message that God is just and holds people accountable at both the individual and societal levels for their actions. When a society is composed of individuals that are entirely corrupt, that society has to be judged and dealt with accordingly.

**Capital Punishment** Note the Lord's change in attitude from ch. 4 to ch. 6 when it comes to capital punishment. In 4:10-15 the Lord curses Cain's existence by making him an outcast, but He does not impose the death penalty on Cain. In fact, Cain expresses fear over being killed in retribution for the murder of Abel, and the Lord imposes the mark upon him as protection. Then, four generations later, Lamech commits murder in a similar fashion (cf. 4:23), assuming the protection Cain was granted would be seven times greater for his heinous act. Society ultimately degrades to the point where the people were wicked and murderous constantly, so the Lord is left with no choice but to destroy human society and spare only Noah and his immediate family. Afterwards, the death penalty is imposed, and from that point on the Lord requires men to avenge blood for blood. The Lord initially did not impose capital punishment, but the corruption stemming from not imposing it jeopardized human

society, so the Lord imposed it as a measure of stemming corruption. The underlying doctrinal message is there are humans who will do whatever they can get away with, and without penalties being imposed upon them, society becomes unstable and eventually corrupt.

**Morality Independent of Religious Creed** Of particular note is the society judged here is not labeled as "idolatrous" or "heathen" for religious reasons. They are judged and condemned for being morally bankrupt at the societal level. This is not a matter of religious differences, it is because of complete ethical and moral breakdown among all people save a handful.

**Pivot to lineage-based covenants** The Deluge account shows the Lord is willing to change the way He deals with humanity. After these events, He announces He will never again annihilate humanity in such a fashion. This means the Lord has to do things differently. How? The covenant with Abraham.

### **Historicity of the Flood**

Attempting to read the Noah story as the equivalent of the modern history textbook is a mistake. The story is literally thousands of years old, and is clearly meant to convey theology. Did a man named Noah exist? Yes, clearly. Was there some horrific catastrophic flooding event that marked a tipping point in ancient pre-Israelite history? Yes. Is the Genesis account of the flood a historically accurate presentation (in a modern sense) of what happened to him? No. Modern history comes with it's own set of cultural contexts, rules and methods. The ancient Israelites observed none of our modern expectations and it is absurd to expect that, or even compare the two things. Rather, we should read the text from the ancient point of view and do our best to understand their cultural context so we can better understand the intended meaning.

For a good review of the interplay between religion and science through the Christian era with respect to the Noah flood account see [this lecture](#) (David Montgomery, Noah's Flood and the Development of Geology, Radcliffe Institute) by David Montgomery, a professor of geomorphology at University of Washington.

## Comments on Genesis 6

1 AND it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2 That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. 3 And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. 4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown. 5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually.

6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

v1-7 As people spread over the face of the earth (v. 1) the sons of God abandon God for worldly women (v. 2). The Lord is angered by the general apostasy of man (v. 3) and in an effort to humble them He cuts their life span down to about one tenth of what it formerly was (v. 4). Great wickedness continues to run rampant and the society has become entirely corrupted (v. 5). The corruption is so complete the Lord, terribly upset at what He sees (v. 6), has no choice but to destroy men from off the face of the earth (v. 7).

Compare the present text with that of Moses 8:13-26. The Moses account gives considerably more detail on the events described in the Genesis account.

v2-4 Verses 2 and 4 are controversial. There is an old tradition among Jewish exegetes to observe the [peshat](#), or most straightforward or literal or direct reading, of the text. For a variety of reasons discussed below, this has not been the case with these two verses. After reviewing the variety of readings on the text, I recommend the reader observe the peshat of the text, which is that the formerly godly men followed the lusts of their flesh and turned to worldly women (v. 2), fell out of God's favor (v. 4), and turned entirely to evil (v. 5).

v2 This is the "sons of God and daughters of men" passage generally interpreted by some in both Judaism and Christianity

to be a folk mythology about gods or angels copulating with mortal women. There is nothing in the Hebrew requiring such a fanciful reading, as the phrase in the Masoretic text is "benei ha elohim", translating simply to "sons of God". The problem is there is equivocation among the various related texts:

In Ps. 29:1, 89:7, the variant *benei' elim* instead of *benei ha- 'elohim* is used. This term appears in Ugar. And Phoen. sources in reference to the gods of the pantheon. In place of gods, the Israelite poetic imagination has one God surrounded by a host of courtiers. Of course, *ben*, usually "son of," has no biological implication but has the sense of "belonging to the class of" as in 1 Kings 20:35 and 2 Kings 2 passim, *benei ha-nevi'im*, "the members of the prophetic guild." That the "divine beings" were thought of as being angels can be demonstrated by Dan. 3:25, 28, where Aram. *bar' elahin* is identified as *mal'akh*, "angel." In Ps. 148:2, "angels" parallel "His hosts," *tseva'av*, which in Kings 20:19 have the same function as *benei ha- 'elohim* in Job 1:6; 2:1.

The earliest known exegesis of Gen. 6:1 took *benei ha- 'elohim* to mean angels. This is attested by the Noah fragment of 1 Enoch 6-11, which goes back to the first half of the second century B.C.E. Josephus, Ant. 1.78 (Loeb, p. 34) had the same tradition. However, about the middle of the second century C.E., R. Simeon b. Yohai strenuously objected to this interpretation and insisted on the meaning "sons of nobles" (Gen. R. 26:8). This is how the two Aram. Targums render the term, as do Sym. And Sam. Targum. Manuscripts of the LXX vary between "the sons of God" and "the angels of God." Aq. Uses the enigmatic "the sons of the gods." The striking contrast between *'adam* and *'elohim* in our passage together with the other biblical usages of *benei ha- 'elohim* leave no doubt that the latter was originally understood to refer to members of the celestial host. The later rendering, adopted generally by medieval Jewish commentators, most likely owes its origin to the need to combat sectarian misinterpretations of the entire narrative. (Nahum Sarna, 1989, JPS Torah Commentary on Genesis, page 356, note 2 on Gen. 6:2)

The entire quotation of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai referenced above says:

XXVI:V.

1. A. "the sons of God saw [that the daughters of men were fair, and they took to wife such of them as they chose]" (Gen. 6:2):
  - B. R. Simeon b. Yohai referred to them as sons of the nobility.
  - C. R. Simeon b. Yohai cursed anyone who called them "sons of God."
  - D. Said R. Simeon b. Yohai, "Any sort of public breach of morality that does not begin with the upper classes is not really a breach of morality."
  - E. R. Azariah in the name of R. Levi: "If priests steal the gods, by what will people take oaths, and to what will they sacrifice? [Freedman, p. 213, n. 3: What hope is there when the leaders and guardians transgress?]"
  
2. A. Then why does Scripture refer to them as "sons of God"?
  - B. R. Hanina and R. Simeon b. Laqish say, "Because they lived a long time without suffering and without anguish."
  - C. R. Huna in the name of R. Yose, "[Freedman:] It was in order that men might understand astronomical cycles and calculations. [Freedman: p. 213, n.5: A long life was required for making the necessary observations.]"
  - D. Rabbis say, "It was so that they should take the punishment coming both to themselves and to the generations after them [having lived a long and easy life, they would merit the punishment that was to come, so they lived like gods]." (Genesis Rabbah 26:8, see Jacob Neusner, 1985, Genesis Rabbah, The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New American Translation, Volume 1, Brown Judaic Studies, page 282).

On this subject, Fox states:

The final pre-Flood section of the text includes a theme common to other ancient tales: the biological mixing of gods and men in dim antiquity. Perhaps this fragment, which initially seems difficult to reconcile with biblical ideas about God, has been retained here to round out a picture familiar to ancient readers, and to recall the early closeness of the divine and the human which, according to many cultures, later dissolved. It is also possible that the episode serves as another example of a world that has

become disordered, thus providing further justification for a divinely ordered destruction. (Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses, 1995, Schocken Books, page 32)

And Alter says:

This whole passage is obviously archaic and mythological. The ideas of male gods coupling with mortal women whose beauty ignites their desires is a commonplace Greek myth, and E. A. Speiser [Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, "YDWN, Genesis 6:3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75.2 (June 1956): 126-129.] has proposed that both the Greek and the Semitic stories may have a common source in the Hittite traditions of Asia Minor. The entourage of celestial beings obscurely implied in God's use of the first-person plural in the Garden story (compare 3:22) here produces, however fleetingly, active agents in the narrative. As with the prospect that man and woman might eat from the tree of life, God sees this intermingling of human and divine as the crossing of a necessary line of human limitation, and He responds by setting a new retracted limit (three times the formulaic forty) to human life span. Once more human mortality is confirmed, this time in quantitative terms. (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 2004, W. W. Norton & Co., page 38)

It is clear from these sources there is no real agreement either anciently or modernly over what this verse means [[see this for a vigorous review of the different viewpoints](#)]. The result is some commentators take considerable license to come to highly speculative conclusions based on selective use of proof texts, ignoring those that are hostile (e.g., Michael Heiser, The Unseen Realm, pages 92-100).

Setting the equivocal traditional interpretations aside, a number of other Biblical passages say much the same thing, but in a much less ambiguous fashion. All of these indicate the issue at hand is religious men being tempted by worldly women and abandoning their religion to pursue lusts of the flesh, cp. Gen. 24:3, Gen. 38:2, Exod. 34:16, Deut. 7:3-4, Josh. 23:12, Judges 3:16, Hosea 4:11-14, Mal. 2:11. Despite this, the traditional interpretation remains popular.

"saw the daughters of men and they were fair", the sons of



God were degraded to the point they followed the lusts of their eyes.

v4 This obscure verse has spawned an extraordinary amount of speculative ideas about fallen angels becoming devils and mating with human females to produce demi-god-like giants.

"There were giants", a poor translation in the KJV. The Hebrew term is "nephilim" and is obscure in meaning. The root n-f-l suggests "fallen ones" which by context would be referring to the sons of God who abandoned God for the daughters of men. The Nephilim seeking Noah's life makes more sense in the light of them being deliberately rebellious.

If one reads this as though there really were "giants", following the traditional interpretation, then perhaps King Og (cf. Deut. 3:11) was typical of them and they were about 12 feet tall and 5 feet wide. Either some of these giants survived the flood or it was a matter of genetics as there were "giants" both before and after. As Og is identified as one of the last giants during Moses' time and then Goliath appears somewhat later, that suggests it was matter of genetics. However, neither King Og or Goliath are identified as "nephilim". The only other reference to "nephilim" in the Old Testament appears in the description of the people of Anak, and that account is clearly a gross exaggeration designed to incite fear, cf. Num. 13:33.

"mighty men...men of renown", an obscure passage. I take this to be a reference to the various well-known mythological stories of Israel's contemporary neighbors, such as the [Enuma Elish](#), the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#), and the various Sumerian [creation myths](#). The ancient Israelites were surely aware of these other competing creation accounts, and this would put those other stories into an Israelite context where they are pegged among the wicked men whom the Lord must wipe out in the Flood.

To the Israelite reader, this would effectively categorize all of these competing accounts as idolatrous wickedness, and tidily dispose of them without having to address them systematically in a polemical fashion. They are all simply swept into the same dustbin of antediluvian history by the all-powerful Israelite Lord to make way for Israel.

v6 "it repented the Lord", in this context "repented" is a poor translation. A better translation would be "The Lord regretted he had made man". Strong's Concordance for the Hebrew in

question follows:

05162 nacham {naw-kham' }

a primitive root; TWOT - 1344; v

AV - comfort 57, repent 41, comforter 9, ease 1; 108

1) to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted

1a) (Niphal)

1a1) to be sorry, be moved to pity, have compassion

1a2) to be sorry, rue, suffer grief, repent

1a3) to comfort oneself, be comforted

1a4) to comfort oneself, ease oneself

1b) (Piel) to comfort, console

1c) (Pual) to be comforted, be consoled

1d) (Hithpael)

1d1) to be sorry, have compassion

1d2) to rue, repent of

1d3) to comfort oneself, be comforted

1d4) to ease oneself

8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. 9 These [are] the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man [and] perfect in his generations, [and] Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. 13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

14 Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. 15 And this [is the fashion] which thou shalt make it [of]: The length of the ark [shall be] three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. 16 A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; [with] lower, second, and third [stories] shalt thou make it.

17 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein [is] the breath of life, from under heaven; [and] every thing that [is] in the earth shall die. 18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. 19 And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every [sort] shalt thou bring into

the ark, to keep [them] alive with thee; they shall be male and female. 20 Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every [sort] shall come unto thee, to keep [them] alive. 21 And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather [it] to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. 22 Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

v8-22 Noah, who was prophesied would restore peace to the earth (cf. 5:29), and his sons are righteous men (v. 8-10). The Lord speaks with Noah and tells him the corruption He has witnessed necessitates Him destroying man from the face of the earth (v. 11-13). The Lord instructs Noah to build an ark (v. 14-16) and to place himself and all his family, and pairs of all the living creatures of the earth on it along with food (v. 17-21). Noah obeys the Lord and does so (v. 22).

v9 The Genesis account indicates Noah was righteous and blameless in his generation, but doesn't indicate why. The PofGP Moses account informs us he was instructed to preach repentance and did so. The result was the blood of that generation was not on his hands, he was blameless.

v11 "violence", the Hebrew term can similarly be translated to "lawlessness", or "chaos". Here is the Strong's entry:

02555 chamac {khaw-mawce'}

from 02554; TWOT- 678a; n m

AV - violence 39, violent 7, cruelty 4, wrong 3, false 2, cruel 1, damage 1, injustice 1, oppressor + 0376 1, unrighteous 1; 60

1) violence, wrong, cruelty, injustice

That the earth was filled with violence, cruelty, and injustice shows how bad things had become. It was not a matter of isolated incidents as with Cain's murder of Abel, it had become pervasive among society.

v14-16 While the Lord tells Noah how to construct the ark, he still has to make it himself. This pattern appears again with the brother of Jared and with Nephi.

v14 "gopher wood", the exact nature of this wood is lost in antiquity. Some say it is cedar, some say it is cypress.

v16 "a window", the Hebrew word "tzohar" is a very rare Hebrew word. The word comes from the Hebrew root "tzahar" meaning "to shine."

The LDS Edition KJV has a footnote on Gen. 6:16 that indicates some Rabbinical commentators thought the "window" or "skylight" was in fact some kind of glowing gemstone. But, no references are given. Below are two Rabbinical sources verifying the statement. The first is from a compilation of rabbinical commentary. The second is by Rashi (i.e., a contraction of "Rabbi Shlomo Yitzak"), an eminent 11th century Jewish commentator.

The Midrash Rabbah explains the passage this way:

XXXI:XI

1. A. "Make a light for the ark" (Gen. 6:16):
  - B. R. Hunia and R. Phineas, T. Hanan and R. Hoshiah did not explain the matter
  - C. R. Abba bar Kahana and R. Levi explained it.
  - D. R. Abba bar Kahanna said, "It was a window."
  - E. R. Levi said, "It was a precious stone."
2. A. R. Phineas in the name of R. Levi: "During the entire twelve months in which Noah was in the ark, he had no need for the light of the sun by day nor for the light of the moon by night.
  - B. "Rather, he had a precious stone, which he suspended. When the stone dimmed, he knew that it was day, and when it glowed brightly, he knew that it was night."

(Jacob Neuser, Genesis Rabbah, The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New Translation, Vol. 1, Brown University Judaic Studies, page 104)

And Rashi writes on the word TZOHAR in Gen. 6:16:

Some say this is a window. Others say it was a precious stone that supplied them with light. (The Metsudah Chumash/Rashi: a New Interlinear Translation, 1991. Davis, Kornfeld and Walzer., KTAV Publishing House, 700 Jefferson St., Hoboken, NJ 07030. Page 69)

Thus, according to some Jewish commentators, Noah's ark was lit by a precious stone called a tzohar which shined with light, cp. Ether 3:4.

v18 The Lord's primary interest is to covenant with people so as to bring about His plan. With mankind deliberately rebelling against Him and thwarting He plan, He is forced to start over again. The Lord does so with the only righteous family left, those who will covenant with Him.

v22 In sharp contrast to those around him, Noah listens to the Lord and does what He tells him to do. The result is Noah is spared while all others perish. A simple statement indicating listening to the Lord is in our own best interest.

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