

General Comments on Genesis 7

The great Deluge occurs because of the wickedness of mankind, and destroys them from off the face of the earth. However, the Lord deliberately preserves Noah's family and animal life. The story is typically interpreted by scholars as being reactionary to the Utnapishtim subplot of the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic. In the Gilgamesh epic the gods are presented as acting in a chaotic and destructive manner with humans being subject to their caprice. The gods plot to destroy all of mankind, but the one who created mankind subverts the other gods by indirectly warning Utnapishtim, and thus human life is preserved. However, in the present account, it is humans who are chaotic and destructive, and that requires the Lord to act decisively to preserve human and animal life. The corruption of mankind necessitates a new Creation.

How literal, and therefore pervasive, the Flood was is a matter of pure speculation. A localized catastrophic flood would have been sufficient to annihilate the local corrupt human culture. But, if it were localized then why go to the efforts of building an ark with animals, as wiped out local animal populations would have naturally been repopulated from more distant ones. This suggests the catastrophe was more than just localized, especially since more than just domesticated animals are preserved on the ark. Regardless, the author's intent is to portray destruction that is effectively universal as far as humans are concerned. Thus, the Flood had to cover as far as humans had spread.

With respect to complete planetary immersion, it is a popular interpretation among the LDS to interpret this event as necessary in part because the earth had to undergo the literal ordinance of baptism because it too something akin to a living thing. This reading is highly speculative and derived from text that is blatantly metaphorical (i.e., poetical texts that anthropomorphize the earth as speaking and so forth). There is no literal Scriptural suggestion the earth is alive in any sense of the word. Even if it were, so are plants and animals as well, and they do not have to be baptized, so why would the earth need to be baptized? There isn't any reason why it should as the consequences of the Fall with respect to sinning, repentance and baptism and so forth are strictly limited to the family of Adam and not other living things. Yes, the earth and other living things were

thrust into a temporal setting with the Fall and will ultimately be redeemed from it, but there is no connection for other aspects of the Atonement that are contingent upon free agency and sin as is the case with mankind. Nothing living is baptized except humans, so there is no reason to think the earth needs to be baptized.

There are significant theological implications of the Lord sparing Noah's family and the creatures of the earth. According to the Creation account of the preceding chapter, the Lord created all life. Why then does the Lord bother to preserve life again, when He could just create it all over again? Why not destroy men entirely and make a clean start? The theological message is the Lord deliberately interacts with human society to accomplish His goals. While humans can interfere with his goals by ignoring Him and breaking His commandments, He will step in to make sure His goals are still met. While the Lord allows men their agency, so does He exercise His agency in accomplishing His goals. Mankind was placed on the earth to be fruitful and prosper, and completely annihilating them wouldn't accomplish that goal. However, destroying the murderously wicked does serve the Lord's goals as He is working to preserve human life. Thus, God interacts with humans, who have their agency, but they are held accountable when they are working contrary to God's plans.

Comments on Genesis 7

1 AND the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. 2 Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that [are] not clean by two, the male and his female. 3 Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth. 4 For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth. 5 And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

v1-5 The blessing of righteousness. The Lord acknowledges Noah's obedience in building the required ark (v. 1, 5) and gives additional details on how to preserve life (v. 2-3) before the impending flood (v. 4).

v2 The seeming discrepancy regarding seven pairs versus two pairs referred to in 6:19-10 is explained by the taking on of

additional clean, especially note that they are clean, animals for the purposes of sacrifice, cf. 8:20.

Note the categorization of "clean" and "unclean" animals preceded the Law of Moses. This may have been an anachronistic comment or there may have been either some culturally observed practice based on experience or some presently undocumented revelation concerning which animals were categorized in what fashion.

v4 "seven days...forty nights", these units of times are commonly used in the OT as not necessarily specific time lengths but of general time frames. Seven days was considered "several days", or in other words, soon but not today or this week. And forty days was longer than a lunar month of 28 days (one of the few determinate measures of time), but not an entire season (another of the few determinate measures of time). However, see v. 11.

6 And Noah [was] six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth. 7 And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean beasts, and of beasts that [are] not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, 9 There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

v6-10 Preserving Life. In the "seven days" before the Flood Noah's family and all the animals of the earth board the ark. Note the emphasis on the pairing of Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, and all the pairs of animals (v. 7-9). The preservation and continuity of life is paramount in the effort. Only after the boarding is complete does the Flood start (v. 10).

v7 Note when they enter the ark, no comment is made upon personal possessions. Rather the only thing of concern presented is getting living things in pairs onto the ark.

v9 The animals went to Noah, he did not collect them, clearly suggestive of divine influence over the animals and their behavior.

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of

heaven were opened. 12 And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

v11-12 The Storm. The heavens burst forth to unleash their torrent upon the land (v. 11), and the rain persists an unusually long time (v. 12).

v11 "six hundredth year...second month...seventeenth day", while time keeping in the OT is generally somewhat nebulous, this suggests someone was keeping very careful track of time, and argues against relativistic measurements of time in this account.

"great", in describing the "deep" out of which the floods are poured it is called "great", which in Hebrew is "rabbah". This identical term appears in 6:5 when describing the wickedness of man. This suggests the flood poured out was retributive and matched equally to what incited out. (Paraphrase of Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary [JPS TC] comment)

v12 While rain is necessary to water the earth, in this case the rain is sent to cleanse it. A normal rain storm would not last forty days, thus the length of storm indicates its divine nature. It also suggests the wickedness of man upon the land was so bad it took an extraordinary storm to wash away the filth.

13 In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; 14 They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. 15 And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein [is] the breath of life. 16 And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.

v13-16 All types of life are preserved (v. 13-15) and divinely protected (v. 16).

v13 Here we learn that Noah has one wife and three sons only, and no daughters, only three daughter-in-laws. In Moses 8:12 we are informed that Noah begat Shem and Japeth by the same woman and Ham apparently by another. Unfortunately, we are not informed as to whether Noah had two wives and one had

deceased or if he remarried after the first deceased, which will be an issue later in ch. 9.

v15 On this verse the "two and two" of all flesh is gender ambiguous and this has led some modern commentators to say that they may not necessarily have been paired males and females. This is grasping at straws, as v. 2-3 explicitly state the pairs are to be male and female.

v14-16 All living things that enter into the ark are presented as obedient to the command that God gave Noah. This implies the rather unusual circumstances of putting together such a crew of animals that under normal circumstances would be in competition or a predator-prey relationship are instead subject to the command of God. Thus, another authority statement indicating God exercises His will over all Creation in general, and the only exception is man who more often than not uses his agency to rebel, and hence the Flood.

v16 "the Lord shut him in", While Noah built the ark according to God's commands it is the Lord who seals it, suggesting an act of divine providence in making the ark fit for the upcoming task.

17 And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. 18 And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that [were] under the whole heaven, were covered. 20 Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.

v17-20 The flood commences and the entire landscape is affected.

v18 "went upon", the Hebrew here means it had no steering gear so it simply floated about until the flood subsided.
(Paraphrase of JPS TC)

v20 "fifteen cubits", with one cubit being 17-22 inches, that adds up to 21-28 feet deep. Not deep enough to submerge a "mountain" per se, but the author's intent is to present the Deluge as universal, it affected all of the land, even the highlands, not just low-lying areas and valleys.

There is nothing to suggest the depth is figurative or

symbolic. Thus, one would assume the depth of flooding was ascertained after the fact by a high water mark.

21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: 22 All in whose nostrils [was] the breath of life, of all that [was] in the dry [land], died. 23 And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained [alive], and they that [were] with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

v21-24 Everything living that was not in the ark is destroyed by the Flood (v. 21-23). The flood is so pervasive the waters do not start to recede for 150 days (v. 24).

v21-22 Obviously, marine life was exempted.

v23 The absolute destruction of all living things upon the earth indicates that man is the primary inhabitant of the planet and therefore things concerning him take precedence over other living things. It also indicates the influence man exercises over Creation around him, such that when he defiles himself he is also defiling the creation around him by twisting it to his own selfish purposes (cf. Hosea 4:1-3), thus the need to destroy that along with him.

Copyright © 2005 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurtn@cybcon.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.