

Genesis 7 The Flood: Boarding the Ark and Innundation

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Overview

Structure so far:

- 6:9-11, Moral Context
- 6:12-11, First Execution Paragraph: God commands Noah to build the ark, and Noah responds. Command is alternated with prophecy of the flood, the prophecy coming first.

We are working toward the center of the chiasm at 8:1.

Chapter 7 is execution paragraph, much more complex. The basic idea of an execution paragraph is that an action is described, then it is executed. The exact relation between the description and the execution can vary, and we see two types in this chapter. In both cases, vv.1-4 contains the description.

- The description may be a *command* by the speaker, which is then carried out by someone else. 7:1-3 is a command to Noah, and 5-16a records the execution, which is Noah's *obedience*. This is developed chiastically.
- Or the description may be a *prediction* by the speaker of something that he himself will do. 7:4 is such a prediction. The execution in this case is the *fulfillment* in 17-24, which is also developed chiastically.

In fact, the fulfillment (the coming of the flood, though not the death of all flesh) is anticipated twice in the description of Noah's obedience. The effect is one often seen in cinematography, the rapid alternation between the hero, working feverishly to escape a coming threat, and the advance of the threat. Noah's obedience this time is described in much more detail than in 6:22, and at the end the Lord shuts the door of the ark in the nick of time to protect its occupants from the deluge.

Application: God makes know to his servants what is shortly to come to pass, Rev 1:1. We are more than servants; we are friends, because our Lord tells us what he is doing, John 15:15.

1-4, Command and Prediction

The first execution paragraph had two commands (Build the ark, and Stock it with food), and a Prediction of the flood. Now the ark is ready. It is time for Noah to get on board, and take the animals with him. Once again, we have a command motivated by a prediction, followed by a description of Noah's obedience. Again, two components to the command, each with an explanation. The final prediction of the flood motivates both commands.

1-3, Command

1, Noah.—He and his family are to come in; they are granted access because of his righteousness. Note the causal order:

- God selects Noah, 6:8.

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- Noah is distinctively righteous, 6:9-11, as a result of this selection.
- God invites Noah into the ark, 7:1, because of his righteousness.

God demands righteousness of us. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:13). Yet the best righteousness we can generate on our own is no more than filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6). Only "the righteousness which is of God by faith" can satisfy his requirements. As David observed in another context, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chr 29:14).

["Come thou": Does this mean that God is already in the ark? *bw*' sometimes has the sense of "go," Gen 45:17-18, where it is used both for motion away from and toward the speaker. (Often, *bw*' has special sense of movement *into* a domain: the tent, the ark, ...)]

2-3, Animals.—The animals and fowls are to come in, to preserve their lives. Otherwise they will not survive, and then Noah would live in a sterile world.

The distinctive feature of this part of the command is the distinction between clean and unclean, which has not previously been made explicit. It has two effects in later books:

- Only clean animals may be eaten, but man has not yet been authorized to eat meat. Gen 1:29; 2:9; 3:19 all anticipate a vegetarian diet, and only after the flood is he allowed to eat meat, 9:3.
- Only clean animals may be sacrificed. We know from 4:4 that the race already knows something about sacrifice, so it must be in this context that God has taught them the distinction between clean and unclean.

So from Noah's perspective going into the ark, the motivation for the distinction must lie in sacrifice. He is not being saved just for his own comfort. He is a worshipper of God, and is being preserved along with the resources necessary to worship God. For himself and his family alone, a much smaller boat would have sufficed, one with room for their provision, since seeds apparently survived the deluge. But, like the later worshipper taking care to have "full hands," Noah must exert himself to be able to worship.

- The installation of a priest focuses on "filling his hands" (English "ordain, consecrate, install"), providing him with a sacrifice (Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; cf. Lev 8:22, 27-28).
- Similarly, when the people come to the pilgrimage feasts, they must not appear empty: Deut 16:16-17; Exod 23:14-17; 34:17-23.
- The early believers followed this pattern when they came together to break bread, 1 Cor 14:26. So should we.

4, Prediction

Two details:

- the *coming* of the flood, with chronological details, which is echoed in following panels;
- the *effect* of the flood: end of all life on the earth. This is not picked up until 17ff.

So we are given a summary of what will be described in 17ff. The fulfillment tries to break in on us twice (6, 10-12) before it finally comes crashing down.

Note the chronological detail. God tells Noah

- how long until the flood comes, so that he can get his family and the animals on board and settled;
- how long the actual rain will fall, so that he can look forward to its end. Otherwise he might be discouraged after incessant rain, wondering whether it will ever stop. When God places us in unpleasant circumstances, he assures us that there is an outcome (1 Cor 10:13). We should never feel desolate and without hope.

5-16a, Obedience to the Command

As the table shows, this is an elegantly constructed summary with chiasitic amplification.

5-6, Summary

There are two aspects to the summary:

1. Noah's complete obedience to the Lord's instructions, amplified in 7-9 and 13-16a, in all cases concluding with a note of his obedience.
2. The beginning of the flood, with chronological information. This time, the chronological information concerns Noah's age.

7-16a, Detail

The two panels (7-9, 13-16a) correspond almost exactly with one another, focusing on Noah's obedience. In between is the unique correspondent to v.6.

Panels

Three main sections:

Noah and his family.—Four couples are preserved to repopulate the earth. Their obedience is not trivial, since they have to face a year locked up with all the animals. During this time, according to our Lord, people were “marrying and giving in marriage” (Matt 24:38). One wonders what engagements they had to cancel during the seven days before they got on board, when they knew when the flood would arrive. “I’m sorry, I won’t be able to come to your wedding in two weeks; I’m going for a cruise.”

Animals.—Several things to note:

- The same four categories are mentioned in both panels, though not in the same order: (wild) beasts, cattle, birds, and creeping things, described in the second panel as “all flesh wherein is the breath of life.” 7:8 matches the order in 1:30.
- Both mention the male-female pairing, since the point is to preserve the species.
- The verb is important, “they went in.” Suggests that the Lord brought them to Noah. It was enough for him to shepherd them through the door and into their rooms; he did not have to roam over the earth to find them.

- Note also the explosion of emphasis on “all” in the second panel. This is an excellent example of “all without distinction” rather than “all without exception.”

Obedience.—Both panels emphasize Noah’s obedience. He was willing to enter the ark, and willing to receive what might seem an obnoxious cargo.

Center

Here and throughout the story, Moses pays great attention to chronological detail. Here we bring together the chronological data both from the prophecy (v.4) and from the summary of Noah’s obedience (v. 6).

Two sources for the water:

- “fountains of the great deep”: subterranean waters flowed up
- “windows of heaven”: perhaps from a vapor canopy that had been around the earth.

16b-24, Fulfillment of the Prophecy

We have been alternating between action by God (commanding and prophesying: 6:12-21; 7:1-4) and action by Noah (obeying: 6:22; 7:5-16a). Now the action returns to God, no longer to speak, but to act.

His first action is related not to the fulfillment of the prophecy of the flood, but to Noah’s obedience. He shuts the door, sealing them safely in from the waters. Before he releases the judgment, he ensures that they are safe.

Next, we have the description of the flood. The action shifts into slow motion with lots of repetition, which is characteristic at the climax of a narrative. Note the chiasm, whose members correspond to the two parts of the prediction in v.4.

- Description of the waters, 17-20, 24
- Description of the destruction, 21-23, with the explicit exception of Noah.

17-20, 24, Ascent of the Waters

Two verbs are used, each with its own distinctive and contrastive consequences.

17-18, Increasing Waters Lift the Ark.—The main verb in 17, 18 is “increase.” The point is that they got deeper and deeper; the amount of water on the surface of the earth grew as the subterranean reservoirs and the heavenly waters poured out. The action is reversing the creative restraint of the waters in 1:9. Note the consequence, mentioned twice: the rising waters lift the ark with them, and it rides safely on the surface. For them, the waters are a means of deliverance, carrying them away from the mockery and rejection exhibited by their contemporaries.

There is an ominous transitional anticipation of the verb used in the next two verses, “prevail.”

19-20, Prevailing Waters Overflow the Mountains.—This verb (used also in v.24) is most commonly used of one person or nation defeating another in battle. The emphasis here is on how irresistible the waters were in their destructive force. Again, we have two mentions of the consequence of their action: even the high hills and the mountains are covered, leaving no place for those outside the ark to hide.

Application: The same event that brings death to the world, lifts up the ark and delivers Noah and his family. We need to learn to see God's providential blessing even in things that the world considers disasters. Cf. the murder of Christ, which brings judgment to the unbeliever but salvation to us, Acts 2:23. More generally, Rom. 8:28.

21-23, Destruction and Salvation

Three successive verses relate the completeness of the destruction, which is contrasted with Noah's survival.

21-23a, Death

- 21, "all flesh perished" (different verb than in 22)
- 22, "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life ... died"
- 23, "every living substance was destroyed," using the noun and verb (2x) that appeared in the prophecy in v.4. This is the "wipe clean" verb we saw earlier in 6:7.

vv. 21 and 23 further emphasize the completeness of the destruction by enumerating the various categories of creation from ch. 1.

Note in particular the phrase "breath of life" in 22. To what does it refer?

- Unlike the verses on either side, it does not list the various types of beings. Thus we have something of a little chiasm.
- This impression is reinforced when we notice that "man" is last in 21 and first in 23. Thus the order is "animals, man, breath-of-lifers, man, animals."
- In the creation account, man alone was said to receive the "breath of life," 2:7, and Josh 11:14 contrasts the animals, which were kept alive in the conquest of the northern cities, and those who "breathe," who are all killed. (7:15 is a different expression, "the spirit of life.")

Conclusion: v. 22 is not summarizing the death of all the living creatures, but emphasizing the death of one particular creature, that one into whom God had breathed life in the creation. Man is

- the creature to which he was most intimately created,
- the one he had made as his own image and in his own likeness,
- the one he had enlivened with a kiss.

Even this blessed, privileged creature must perish under the force of his just wrath.

Application: Unbelievers and even some who call themselves believers sometimes wave the "love of God" around as their defense against hell: "A loving God would never send anyone to hell." Moses warns us not to make this error. He singles out the uniqueness of man as the recipient of the divine kiss of life, and shows us that because of sin, he must die.

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23b, Life

Finally, at the end of v.23, we are reminded that there is one exception: Noah and his family. In the midst of this terrible judgment, he is preserved. The NT refers twice to this exception, both times for the same lesson.

Matt 24:36-42 urges us to be ready for the coming of the Lord's judgment and our deliverance in the rapture.

- v. 39 "took" = *airw*, referring to the destruction of the worldlings in the flood (see Louw and Nida for meanings "destroy, execute")
- v. 40 "took" = *paralambanw*, "receive," cf. John 14:3, used of the Lord's receiving us unto himself when he returns.

2 Pet 2:4-9, God knows his own, and will not let them fall under his judgment with the reprobate.