

Genesis 6:9-22! God remembers and promises to keep his covenant with Noah and us!

I. The book of Genesis is one big story book! It was written by Moses in order to serve as a basis toward helping his ancient readers and modern readers alike, understand and appreciate the call of God to Israel to be His special covenant people. It is a foundational book! By calling it a foundational book, I am asserting that this seemingly benign book of “nice stories” contains key ideas regarding God, and God’s relationship to Israel as his people. This chapter is not different. It is not only conveys a wonderfully told story, but this chapter is the beginning of Noah’s story that offers key insights into who God is and how He can be counted upon to remember and keep his promises to not only Noah; but to all of God’s people who seek Him and who desire to walk with him.

This second section of chapter six amplifies several of the main ideas presented in the first eight verses of this chapter. Remember what we have already seen in the first section of chapter six. God saw the pervasive evil and wickedness of humanity. He was sorely grieved and regretted that he had created humanity. God then determined to wipe out what He had created. Now in this second section of chapter six, the writer of this story focuses our attention upon Noah, his family, and their story. This second section of chapter six begins by telling the story of how God decided to spare Noah and his family from the coming horrendous disaster-the momentous calamity -that was about to engulf everyone on the earth. Interestingly enough, four long chapters out of eleven chapters¹ of the prologue are devoted to telling the story of Noah.² Why so much attention placed on Noah and his story? What is the author’s purpose in retelling Noah’s story in such a prolonged way? What is so important to grasp about Noah and his story that would be so encouraging for the original readers whom Moses led out of Egypt on their way to possessing the land promised to Abraham? Simply that God remembers and keeps his covenant (promises) to his people! Let us take a look at his section to see if this is indeed the overall message of this story and one that we all need to know and remember too!

I. Noah’s background and how he was different from his generation. (vs. 9-14)

The first five verses introduce us the main character of the story. They provide the essential background for appreciating the unfolding drama to follow. This section is strongly linked to previous eight verses in amplifying two main points: **1) the unmistakable corruption** of the people at Noah’s time. **2) Noah** was different from the rest of his generation.

A. Background regarding Noah (vs. 9-10) “*This is the account of Noah*”³ (vs. 9a) This beginning statement of the history of Noah marks the beginning of a new section of a larger story being told in the book of Genesis⁴ which extends through Gen. 9:29. This account involving the next four chapters is the story of Noah, his family, and what happens to them. Verses 9-10 of chapter six briefly inform us that Noah was married to an unnamed wife and had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The three sons will play a role in the subsequent story. The main

¹ Roughly 1/3 or more of the prologue is devoted to retelling the story about Noah and God’s rescue of him.

² Several commentators including Gordon Wenham assert that the main story of Genesis involves the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph and the promises made to them as found in chapters 12-50.

³ So translated by NIV of Gen. 6: 9a

⁴ The statement this is the account of such and such is a recurring way that the writer organizes his overall story in the book. See Gen. 5:1, 11:10,27,25:19.

focus of the first two verses is to highlight Noah's character. In contrast to everyone else of his generation, Noah is described using the following terms. Noah was righteous. Noah was blameless. Noah walked with God. There is an implicit contrast to everyone else of Noah's generation and implicitly these three terms point to a reason for why Noah found grace or favor in the eyes of the LORD. Briefly what do these terms mean? The first term righteous is the most common expression for what God expects from all people. It basically means that Abraham was a good person in the eyes of God. He was not evil or wicked. Job was described in similar terms. (Job 1:1) A righteous person is one who seeks to obey God (Gen. 6:22). A righteous person also seeks to help and seeks to do good to their neighbors.⁵ Noah not only sought to be righteous, he was perfect or blameless, just like Job was in his generation. I would add that while in God's eyes he was deemed perfect. Nevertheless, he was not sinless.

Noah is furthermore described as someone who walked with God. This is the third term used to describe Noah. Only Enoch in Gen. 5:22 is explicitly said to have walked with God. The term according to Wenham ⁶conveys how Noah enjoyed a close intimacy with God. The term also is a metaphor for anyone living out their lives being mindful and aware of God's presence with them. Abraham was called by God to "walk before him and be blameless."⁷ To walk with God means to live a life of dependency upon Him day by day. To walk with God is to recognize and acknowledge his blessing, his providences, and his help day by day. While it is said explicitly that Noah and Enoch did, I think that the same term –walking with God can be applied to Eve, Abel, and Abraham, and even the unnamed servant⁸ of Abraham who all testify to God's help and dependence in their lives.

B. The Ruined state of the earth and God's determination to put an end to it. (v.11- 13)

Immediately following the brief description of Noah and his walk with God, the writer once again describes how in contrast to Noah, Noah's contemporaries had become so wicked and depraved! Remember the description follows the very pessimistic assessment of Noah's generation earlier who were previously described as: "*every intention (imagination) of their minds was only evil continually.*" To make his point unmistakably clear, the writer in following two verses (vs.11-12) three times declares in those verses **that the earth had become corrupt or ruined**.⁹ In this section the writer does not provide concrete details on exactly how or in what way the earth had become corrupted, except by saying twice "that the earth was filled with violence"! We can imagine vaguely some of what that statement implies: murder, abuse, exploitation of other people. It could imply inflicting pain and sorrow upon other people. Instead of providing concrete illustrations of violence and corruption upon the earth, the writer climaxes his description of what God sees by declaring God's intention to destroy the earth. "*And God said to Noah, I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold I will destroy them with the earth.*"(vs. 13) Unlike a modern writer, the author of Genesis concludes this subunit by simply but emphatically declaring God's response to what he sees happening among humans in Noah's generation.

II. God's determination to spare Noah & his family from the coming destruction. (14-17)

In these three verses God continues his conversation with Noah informing him of two key ideas that advances the story that is unfolding for us concerning Noah. The four verses disclose for the first time just how God intends to bring an end to humanity. Second, these few verses provide key details into how God

⁵ Wenham, Gordon Wenham Genesis 1-15 Word Biblical Commentary 1987 p. 169 See Ezekiel 18:5-9.

⁶ Ibid. p. 170

⁷ Gen. 17:1

⁸ Gen. 24:40 "The LORD before whom I have walked will send his angel with you."

⁹ The word *corrupt* is the Hebrew term *Shahat* meaning spoiled or ruined. Wenham cites Jerm. 13:7, 18:4 remarking that **it was good for nothing**.

plans on saving Noah and his family from the impending threat of destruction. For the first time in the unfolding of this story regarding Noah, God makes it plain to Noah what exactly Noah and his family must do in order to escape the coming calamity –the certainty of impending death and destruction that will affect everyone around them. What does God tell Noah? Get ready! Here are the instructions God gave to Noah of what he must do first!

A. Build a Box like structure. (v.14-16) God calls Noah to construct something big-very big. “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. God commands Noah to build a box not a ship in order to escape the oncoming calamity. The word translated Ark means box or chest. Wenham comments that apart from the reference to the ark or chest of reeds which Moses was placed to hide him as a baby, the term for what God was calling Noah to make is used only here in the Old Testament.¹⁰ We are not given detailed blueprints on how to construct this massive box only several key features that enable us to grasp roughly the “thing” that would protect Noah and his family from the upcoming destruction. Note the following details regarding box!

75feet wide x 45 feet high
decks

it with a cargo door on one side
(18inches) above.

-450 feet long (300 cubits)¹¹ x

-This box would contain three levels or

-covered with pitch to make it watertight. Build

- even make a roof (watertight) finishing it “to a cubit

B. God discloses to Noah the means by which He is going to destroy the earth. (vs.17) “*For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesheverything that is on the earth shall die.*” In this concluding verse to this section God redundantly tells Noah that a massive flood is coming that will bring the end to all life-everything that has the breath of life will die. This is the first indication in this story so far as to how God will bring an end to life on this earth. Point: Every living thing will die!

III. God’s additional instructions to Noah & God’s promise to Noah. (vs.18-22) God has previously announced the coming end to all that has the breath of life. This announcement includes animals as well as all humans. Noah has been instructed to build an ark. But before the massive flood happens, Noah must be prepared for the life threatening disaster by paying attention to the following instructions and keeping in mind the solemn promise given by God.

A. Take two of every kind of animal/birds- male and female into the ark. (vs.19-20) Two of every sort of animals and birds. Noah must be careful to take them with him. Why? In light of what God has said earlier that the flood of waters will destroy all life on the earth (v.17). These instructions regarding taking birds and animals is the means by which God will save them. Twice the author states the purpose this command by saying: “**to keep them alive with you**”. (vs.19, 21)

B. Take enough food and store up enough food until the disaster (flood) is over. Think about this! God gives specific instructions for Noah to take enough food for himself and his family and for the animals. Yet, please notice that the text does not indicate how long the threat of the flood will last, nor how much food is enough for Noah to store.

C. The Sure Basis of Hope given to Noah and his family. (vs. 18) . In addition to the previously mentioned instructions regarding the animals, birds, and food, these five concluding verses draw attention to something of critical importance for Noah and his family to remember. Most English versions translate this verse 18 as “*but I will establish my covenant with you (Noah & his family)....and*

¹⁰ Wenham p. 172 citing Exodus 2:3, 5. Wenham thinks that the Hebrew word for chest comes from a similar sounding Egyptian word (tbt) meaning box or chest.

¹¹ One cubit is approximately 18 inches.

you shall come into the ark....” Against this backdrop of God’s disclosure of the coming massive flood that will destroy all life on this earth, this statement by God is critical to remember if Noah and his family are to survive the coming calamity. How would this statement be so reassuring to them particularly as they were palpably facing uncertainty of the threatening flood?

a. God gives Noah a solemn promise/commitment! God does not merely say I will keep my promise(s) to you to keep you alive! Most readers including myself understand that this is the overall thrust of the statement *“but I will establish my covenant with you....”*. Instead of God promising something to Noah, God declares something even stronger to Noah by saying that ***“I will establish covenant with you.”*** So what does covenant mean here and why is perhaps an even stronger statement of reassurance to Noah than simply saying promise?

The term covenant is one of the main theological ideas presented in the book of Genesis. Israel and our relationship with God frequently is described in terms of covenant.¹² It is crucial to keep in mind that a covenant involves promises and commitments (**obligations**) between two parties that make up a covenant. Point: Sure God is promising to save Noah by this statement. But, Wenham suggests that this verse should be understood as a statement expressing God’s sense of obligation to maintain his special relationship to Noah.¹³ This then is God’s affirmation and his commitment to be with Noah and his family. Specifically, it is God’s commitment to be watching out and keeping Noah and his family safe and secure in the midst of the impending calamity of the flood. This to me God’s promise to keep his covenant to Noah is a stronger statement than God declaring to keep Noah safe!

b. God promises to keep or confirm/ratify his covenant with Noah. Wenham once again is credited with making this plain to me. Briefly, to confirm a covenant is used in the sense of accomplish or/fulfill preexisting words (D. 9:5) promises (2Sam. 7:25) or even oaths (Gen. 26:3 NEB).¹⁴ Finally, this statement by God that He will accomplish or keep what He has covenanted to Noah by solemn words of obligation¹⁵ demonstrates that “Noah is already viewed as being in and enjoying a covenant with God.”¹⁶ Noah is not only a good man. He is. Noah was a man who walked with God. Noah in the past and who according to our story about him is about to face the terrible uncertainty surrounding threat of a massive flood. How could he face this impending calamity with the hope and assurance? Noah is called to remember that the God whom he knows, trusts, and loves, will remember and keep his covenant with Noah and his family.

¹² Wenham p. 175

¹³ Ibid. p175

¹⁴ “I shall fulfill the oath that I swore to Abraham.” NEB Gen. 26:3

¹⁵ A husband and wife exchange solemn words of promises and obligations on their wedding day.

¹⁶ Wenham p.175