

Genesis 7: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Genesis chapter 7 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth, and Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

Of clean animals and of animals that are not clean, and of birds and of everything that creeps on the ground, two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened, and rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark. They and every beast according to its kind, and all the livestock according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every winged creature.

They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh, in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him, and the Lord shut him in.

[2 : 0 0] The flood continued forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters.

And the waters prevailed so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep, and all flesh died that moved on the earth.

Birds, livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all mankind.

Everything on the dry land, in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died.

He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground. Man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.

And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days. Noah's ark, as we have seen in the previous chapter, has resemblances to the tabernacle.

[3 : 0 2] It is the place where God is present with his people, but it is also the place where he preserves his people. And its dimensions are like a bringing together of the dimensions of the tabernacle courtyard, one hundred cubits by fifty cubits, and the tabernacle itself.

Thirty cubits by ten cubits, divided into twenty cubits by ten, for the holy place, and then the most holy place, as ten by ten. The tabernacle is the only other construction described in this way, in the Pentateuch.

Rabbi David Foreman has noted the parallels between Noah's ark and the ark of the covenant. It's important to notice that these aren't the same word ark in Hebrew as they are in English, but there are parallels nonetheless.

In both cases, someone is called to construct a wooden object and to overlay it inside and out with something. Pitch in the case of the ark of Noah, and gold in the case of the ark of the covenant.

We can also see maybe parallels with the ark in which the infant Moses is placed. Again, it's daubed outside with pitch, and it is prepared in a way to preserve this young child from being drowned in the waters.

[4 : 18] Noah has originally been told to take pairs of animals into the ark, but the instructions here are fleshed out further, where he is instructed to bring seven pairs of the birds, and seven of each clean animal.

There's an anticipation on the one hand of the birds flying out over the new creation as it's been released from the deep, and then the sacrifice of the clean animals in the future.

We should notice that the story of the flood, as Gordon Wenham and others have pointed out, is a series of bookends around bookends. It has an ABCDE DCBA structure.

So it can think about the rising of the text, and then the falling of the text, like the waters themselves. This is what scholars have called a chiasm, or a polystrophy. It's a there and back again structure.

So if you look at the days that are mentioned, you see seven days of waiting for the flood, in chapter 7, verse 4. Seven days further of waiting for the flood, chapter 7, verse 10.

[5 : 19] 40 days of the flood itself. 150 days of water triumphing, in 7, verse 24. 150 days of water waning, in 8, verse 3.

And then 40 days of wait, 8, verse 6. Seven days of wait, 8, verse 10. And seven days of wait again, 8, verse 12. So you can see there's a up, and then a down.

There's a going out, and a coming back. Noah enters the ark at the age of 600. And again, we should note the significance of particular numbers, particularly round numbers, and multiples of 60. So this is 10 times 60. It's another round century, as we see in the case of the story of Adam. And we see that Noah begets his children around the age of 500.

These round numbers are important. Methuselah is born in the 65th year of Enoch's life, after which Enoch lives for 300 further years.

[6 : 24] Noah and Enoch both walk with God. They both have these round numbers as part of their ages. The ark is the seed of a new world. It's a microcosm.

And God shuts Noah in. Maybe we could think of parallels with the events of the Exodus. There's a great pilgrimage of a large number for deliverance from judgment. There's the shutting up of some within a realm of refuge, like the doors being closed around the houses of the Israelites while the Egyptians were judged.

We can think about the judgment arriving upon those outside of the doors. Deliverance and judgment through waters, as at the Red Sea, arrival at the mountain, as in the case of both Sinai and Ararat, and then the establishment of a covenant.

The covenant with Noah and the covenant with Moses and the Israelites. 40 days and 40 nights are both significant numbers associated with the rising up of Moses to God's presence and also the rising up of the ark.

There are instructions to build a construction and there's obedience to those instructions. So maybe there's something to be explored here about some parallel between these events.

[7 : 36] The event of the flood involves a decreation and a return to the chaotic state at the very beginning of the creation. Darkness over the face of the deep, the deep covering the whole earth, blanketing the creation, and a return to this state of chaos.

And this one small place within the creation that preserves order. And that's the realm of the ark. That's the seed of a new creation that will later on be spread out upon the world.

You can think about the importance of boats more generally. Boats can represent a home, a structure of order, in a realm of chaos, in a realm where everything else is outside, is disordered and dangerous.

Noah and his family enter the ark in the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the 17th day of the month. Now, it's an interestingly precise figure.

Why not just say he entered in the 600th year and came out in his 600th and first year? But it's very specific, as are a number of the other dates in the narrative.

[8 : 42] This, it might be noted, is 47 days into the year, which is 40 plus 7, which, both being numbers that we see at the beginning and the end of the event of the flood, are already known to be significant for the author.

The flood ends exactly one year and 11 days later. When we consider that the solar year is 11 days longer than the lunar year, it might seem to be intentional here.

The specificity of the dates does invite reflection, and maybe we should see some connection with feast days or something like that. I would strongly recommend that people look further into this, see

if there's anything that they dig up.

The world is drowned, but Noah and those in the ark are not just preserved through the waters, but they're lifted up by the waters. They are raised up. One final question.

Can you see any of the possible significance to the dates of the flood narrative and to the numbers of the days devoted to specific events?