

## *Why Did God Flood the World?*

*The story of Noah and the flood is one that many of us grew up hearing about in Sunday school. But even those who did not have any religious education growing up have likely heard about the story of the flood. It is probably one of the best-known stories in the Bible, although not well understood. And it is also one of the more controversial.*

*Was this an actual worldwide event, a more localized event, or simply a mythic story? Answering that question is beyond the scope of this article. But I do want to look at the purpose of this flood. Why did God choose to destroy the world of Noah's day in a cataclysmic flood?*

### *The Story of the Flood*

*The story of the flood is told in Genesis chapters six through nine. This passage starts with a strange description of the sons of God and daughters of men seemingly producing the Nephilim. Mixed in with this is God's response to the wickedness of the world and his determination to destroy it all. Following this was God's instruction to Noah to build a large boat and take on board pairs of all the animals. God was going to be sending a massive flood that would destroy all terrestrial life not on board the ark.*

*So, Noah built the boat and loaded the animals that God brought to him. No sooner was this done than the rain began, and the springs erupted. It rained for 40 days, and the ground was flooded for over a year. Finally, the waters subsided enough for everyone to come out of the ark. Noah offered a sacrifice and God responded by committing himself to never again destroy the earth by flood.*

### *Ruling Out One Alternative*

*Genesis 6:6 says that "The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled." And, in response, God determined to destroy all life on the earth. It would be easy to read this and see a God who was caught off guard by how sinful humanity had become. A God who became so angry that he decided to wipe out the whole mess and start over again.*

*But it is hard to reconcile that with a God who is omniscient, who knows the future. A God who had chosen Christ as our atoning sacrifice before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). And who had chosen me in Christ at the same time (Eph. 1:4).*

*The word translated as "regretted" in Genesis 6:6 could also be translated as "be grieved." And that seems to me to better fit here.*

*This is an emotional response from the creator over what his creation has become. Even though he knew it would come to this, it was still distressing to him. God is not an impersonal force or entity with no feelings for his creation. Rather, he is intimately involved with his creation. We see him expressing delight in what he has done. And disappointed in what we have done with his creation.*

### *The Obvious Alternative*

*The most obvious answer to the question of why God flooded the world is the one given twice in the first few verses. Genesis 6:5-7 tells us that the Lord saw how wicked humanity had become, that every inclination of our hearts was to do evil. And he determined to wipe us from the face of the earth. Genesis 6:11-13 says essentially the same thing, going on to give instructions to Noah about saving a remnant of life on earth.*

*I suspect that the charge "that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" was hyperbolic. But it clearly describes a condition of extreme rebellion against God. Even as bad as we think our world is today, it does not approach the condition described here. Most people, even though in rebellion against God, are at least living decent lives.*

*So, it would seem like humanity had reached a point where, if God had not intervened, they would likely have destroyed themselves. And so God stepped in and put an end to the wickedness of those days.*

### *Noah's Ark in the storm*

#### *A Less Obvious Alternative*

*Genesis 6:1-4 is a very puzzling passage. And one that we often just scratch our heads over and go on. But I do not believe it is just an incidental story that the author of Genesis decided to include just to fill up the scroll. I do believe that it applies to what follows. And that it provides additional information concerning God's decision to destroy the world.*

*In these first 4 verses, there are three specific groups mentioned: the sons of God; the daughters of humans; and the Nephilim. Who are these three groups? One common response is to identify the sons of God as the descendants of Seth, and those who call on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). The daughters of humans would then be the descendants of Cain and the Nephilim would simply be their offspring.*

*But, I believe a more likely explanation identifies the sons of God as*

being the same group mentioned in Job 1:6 and Job 2:1. In Job, the NIV translates sons of God as angels. But it is the same expression as used in Genesis 6:1, 4. That would mean this passage then describes a sexual union between angels and humans. And their offspring were the Nephilim.

The sixth and seventh chapters of the non-canonical book of 1st Enoch describe just this scenario. A group of angels, called watchers, determined to have children by human women. These children were described as giants who preyed on humans, and the watchers taught humans things that they were not supposed to know.

It would be easy to dismiss this account as mere fantasy. Yet Jude 1:6 and 2 Peter 2:4 both seem to draw from 1st Enoch as they describe the punishment given to fallen angels. And, since Jude and Peter seemed to take this account seriously, I think we should not entirely dismiss what this account records.

This less obvious alternative to why God sent the flood is not an alternative. Rather it provides additional information leading to God's decision. At least a part of the reason for the rampant human wickedness had to do with the fall of this group of angels and their influence on humanity. God sent a flood to cleanse the physical earth. And he bound the fallen angels in chains awaiting a future judgment.

### *Serving as an Example*

One final thought as to why God flooded the earth comes from 2 Peter 2:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. These passages both look at historical events described in the Scripture. These were times when God had punished the sinful activities of humanity. And both passages describe this punishment as being an example to us. The 2 Peter reference specifically identifies the fallen angels and the flood of Noah's days as being an example of what will happen to the ungodly.

God does not immediately execute judgment and punishment on every transgression of humanity. But he has given us plenty of examples of what will happen to sinful humanity. Our punishment may be delayed, but it is just as certain as the flood.

I believe that the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 speaks to this as well. At the end of the parable, the rich man pled for Lazarus to be sent back to warn his brothers. Abraham responded by saying that they have Moses and the Prophets to warn them. Today we still have Moses and the Prophets to warn us of the consequences of our sinful actions. In addition, we now have the

*New Testament as well.*

*An example of this warning in the New Testament comes from Acts 5:1-11. Ananias and Sapphira lied to God concerning what they sold their property for, and it cost them their lives. This did not happen in the future, but immediately. This action on God's part is not repeated that we know of. Yet we have the example of Ananias and Sapphira to warn us about the seriousness of lying to the Holy Spirit.*

*Why the Flood?*

*I believe we can find two distinct reasons for the flood. The first, and most obvious reason, is the sinfulness of humanity. Sinfulness seemed to have reached an all-time peak, potentially aided by a group of fallen angels.*

*A second and more significant reason for the flood is the example that it provides for us. God takes the sinfulness of humanity seriously. Even though the flood was a one-time event, it does remind us that judgment awaits those who persist in living in rebellion against our creator.*