

## Notes on The Flood

1. The Biblical account of the great flood has parallels in other ancient texts. This can raise questions. I find it helpful to know about how the accounts are similar and how they are different. The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic written in about 1600 BC tells of a man who is instructed by a god to build a boat to escape a flood. He brings in animals, floats around, releases a bird, lands on a mountain, offers sacrifices, is given eternal life. Whatever we make of the parallels, there are significant theological differences to note. The loving and just God of Genesis is very different than the self seeking gods described in Gilgamesh. The Biblical account identifies sin, and God's sorrow as the reason for the flood. In the Gilgamesh the gods want to stop human population growth and their noise (like the Grinch). Also- the Babylonian gods are terrified by the floodwaters they have released. They are not omnipotent. They rush to the sacrifice because they are hungry. One of the gods is surprised to discover a human survivor. The God of Genesis does not depend on sacrifice for sustenance. He discloses his goodwill and faithfulness by pledging to protect the earth and by once again charging his people to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. (9:10).
2. In Chapter 6 there is a reference to the "sons of God," taking for themselves the daughters of men. It is not entirely clear who the sons of god are. They may be beings of another order (like angels) or human royalty. The product of this union is "the Nephalim" who are called "heroes of old." But the odd thing is, despite human adulation, the Nephalim were not well regarded by God. They were perhaps violent men-envison "The Terminator" but not Godly men. These references are hard to understand. But in 6: 11-13 God's judgement is that the earth is corrupt and full of violence. It seems to imply that supernatural creatures were transgressing and interfering with humans against God's plan. This is one of those passages that remains puzzling.
3. Noah walks with God. Noah is identified as righteous. The phrase "walks with" implies intimacy and faithfulness.
4. The precise measurement of the Ark signals to the reader that this will be sacred space. We are given boundaries for the garden of Eden, and precise measurements for the tabernacle, and then the land of Israel is described with all its boundaries and finally the temple.
5. There is an interesting literary style called chiasm that frames the flood story. It's a bit like a piece of paper folded, cut in a pattern and opened. On one side are de-creation events and on the other, creation events. The ark is entered 7:1 and exited 8:16. There are seven days framing the entrance and the coming of the flood 7:10, and seven days between the land being dry and the exit 8:12. There is a similar mirror with the forty days and with the mountains being covered and the mountains being uncovered.
6. Noah is a sort of second Adam. When he sacrificed to God he secured favor not just for himself but for the whole earth.
7. For those of you who read through chapter 9 and wonder what Ham did that caused Noah to curse Ham's son, Canaan; we do not actually know. The text makes it clear that Ham has disrespected his father, and that was a very serious thing. Honor your father and mother was an OT command that directly followed all the commands about our duty to God.