

# Genesis: Session 7, Noah and the Flood, Part 1 (Genesis 6:9–9:29)

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## Keywords

Noah, Flood, Genesis, Covenant, Ark, Mesopotamia, Gilgamesh, Creation, Canaan, Theology

## Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Kenneth Mathews explores the theological and literary significance of the Noah and the Flood narrative in Genesis 6:9-9:29, highlighting how it serves as a core example of God's blessing, judgment, and merciful preservation of humanity. The source contrasts the biblical worldview of a loving God and moral judgment with ancient Near Eastern creation and flood myths, such as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan. Additionally, the lecture examines the literary structure of the flood narrative, focusing on its themes of uncreation and recreation, along with intentional Hebrew wordplays and covenantal relationships. Ultimately, Mathews demonstrates how the flood account serves as a pivotal bridge illustrating God's sovereign plan of salvation and hope for a new creation.

## Outline

### I. Introduction to the Flood Narrative (Genesis 6:9–9:29)

#### A. Literary Prominence and Proportionality

1. The Noah and Flood narrative represents the longest single story in the primeval history (Genesis 1–11).
2. This reflects the author's strong emphasis on the theological and historical centrality of this event.

#### B. Narrative Structure and Division (Genesis 6–9)

1. Chapters 6 and 7: Preparatory events, including the commissioning of Noah, building the ark, and the onset of rain.
2. Chapter 8: Receding of floodwaters, disembarking of Noah's family, altar construction, and God's promise of preservation.
3. Chapter 9: The Noahic covenant, promises of blessing, and Noah's drunkenness/blessing-curse sequel.

#### C. Theological Framework: Universal Blessing and Human Rebellion

1. God's original purpose: Bringing blessing to humanity and enabling procreation and dominion (Genesis 1:28).
2. Rising human wickedness: Rebellion in the Garden, murder of Abel by Cain, and the escalating trajectory of perversity.
3. The Sethite Lineage: Chapter 5 genealogy preserves the line of blessing ('and then he died' refrain, with Enoch's exception of walking with God).
4. The Bridge (Genesis 6:1–8): Intermarriage between descendants of Cain (wicked) and offspring of Seth (righteous) crosses boundaries, leading to pervasive corruption.
5. God's Response: Righteous judgment mixed with merciful preservation through the offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15 promise) via Noah.

## II. Literary Structure of the Flood: Creation, Uncreation, and Recreation

### A. Reversal and Restoration

1. Uncreation: The floodwaters overwhelm the created order, reversing the separating of waters in Genesis 1.
2. Recreation: God steps in to dry the ground and restore His creation, renewing original assurances.

### B. Narrative Symmetry

1. Linear progression of rising and falling waters (ascent to Mount Ararat, and descent/drying of the ground).
2. Parallel of Noah's family and animal pairs disembarking to produce a new progeny.

### C. Ark Chronology and Architecture

1. Time Span: Exactly one year (from entry in Genesis 7:11 to exit in Genesis 8:13).
2. Physical Dimensions: A floating rectangular barge measuring 150 yards (1.5 football fields) long and 25 yards wide.
3. Internal Structure: Three stories, acting as a 'prison of freedom' that protects its inhabitants.
4. Sovereign Care: Built with no rudder, sail, or captain except for God's providential oversight.

## III. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Background and Comparative Methodology

### A. Methodological Principles: Compare and Contrast

1. Focus on similarities and dissimilarities to illuminate the biblical text.
2. Most important is the underlying worldview, not just incidental, shared cultural details.
3. Universal common memory of the flood rather than direct borrowing (the 'furniture of the culture').
4. Analogy: Understanding Darwin's theory of evolution without having read \*Origin of Species\* illustrates how ANE motifs were shared indirectly.

### B. Israel's Geographic and Socio-Political Context

1. Canaan as a Land Bridge: Syria-Palestine falling between Mesopotamian powers to the east and Egypt to the south.

2. Mesopotamia: Cradle of civilization (Tigris and Euphrates) featuring Sumerians, Akkadians, Amorites (Hammurabi, ~1800 BC), Babylonians, and Assyrians.
3. Egypt: Highly stable regime supported by the reliable, predictable agricultural resources of the Nile.

4. *Canaan: Politically fragmented city-states under local kings, exhibiting a dimorphic lifestyle.*

a. *Migrating/roving shepherding (pastoral nomadism).*

b. *Semi-urban residence in local walled cities (e.g., Abraham at Hebron).*

### **C. Defining Myth and Legend in ANE Cultures**

1. Myth is not a fictional fantasy but an ideological/theological narrative.
2. Purpose of Myth: Demonstrates how gods sustain nature and socio-political/governmental institutions.
3. Coterminous relationship: Deities are identified directly with natural elements (e.g., Egyptian sun god Re).
4. Theogony: Narratives describing the origin, birth, and genealogies of the gods themselves.

## **IV. Comparative ANE Creation Accounts**

### **A. Egyptian Creation Perspectives**

1. Atum of Heliopolis: Creator god who emerges from primeval waters as a hillock, bringing himself into existence (possesses a beginning).
2. Memphite Theology: Ptah as an intellectual principle who creates the universe by using magical speech.
3. Creation of Humans: consistently depicted as shaping clay on a potter's wheel with a goddess breathing life; minimal interest in woman's creation.

### **B. Mesopotamian Perspective (Enuma Elish)**

1. Cosmic clash between male primeval water (Apsu) and female salt water (Tiamat).
2. Victory of Marduk: Defeats Tiamat (splitting her body to form heavens and earth) and becomes king of the gods, deifying Babylonian kingship.
3. Creation of Humans: Created from clay mixed with the blood of the slain rebel god Kingu.

### **C. Canaanite Perspective**

1. Cosmic battle between chaos (represented by Yam, the waters) and cosmos.
2. El as chief god over 70 sons, with Baal as the active god of rain and fruition who secures order by defeating Yam.

### **D. Theological Contrast and Polemic of Genesis**

1. Genesis presents God as eternal and independent of creation (creation by authoritative word, not emanation).
2. Motivation: The biblical Creator acts entirely out of love and goodness (1 John 4:8–10), rather than a desire to manipulate or escape manual labor.

## **V. Comparative ANE Flood Accounts**

**A. Epic of Gilgamesh (11th Tablet)**

1. Gilgamesh seeks eternal life and meets Utnapishtim (the Mesopotamian Noah), who was granted immortality.
2. Gilgamesh obtains a youth-restoring plant from the waters, which is subsequently stolen by a serpent.

**B. Atrahasis Epic**

1. Narrates early history from creation down through the flood (parallel to Genesis 1–9).
2. Motivation for the Flood: Humans become too noisy and disturb the sleep of the gods, prompting their destruction.

**C. Key Theological Contrast**

1. ANE Flood: Driven by the gods' annoyance, convenience, and selfish interests; humanity exists merely to serve them.
2. Biblical Flood: Triggered by severe human moral degeneration; God acts righteously to judge wickedness and preserve life.

**VI. Literary and Theological Details in the Genesis Flood Narrative****A. Introduction of the Covenant**

1. First occurrence of 'covenant' in the Bible (Genesis 6:18).
2. Nature of Covenant: Represents a personal relationship of blessing and preservation, not a mere transaction.

**B. Rhetorical Repetitions and Narrative Cohesion**

1. Use of numbers (sevens, 40 days and nights, 150 days) builds narrative symmetry and cohesion.
2. Argues against the theory of disjointed, patched-together sources, showing a single, masterfully structured narrative under God's control.

**C. Intentional Wordplays in Hebrew**

1. Noah (\*Noah\*) and rest (\*nuach\*): The ark comes to rest on Ararat (Genesis 8:4), mirroring Noah's role in bringing rest to humanity.
2. Ark (\*tebah\*): Used only here and in Exodus 2:2–5 for Moses' basket; both represent vessels of salvation from watery judgment.

**D. The Ultimate Hope**

1. God shutting the door of the ark (Genesis 7:16) signifies His active, sovereign protection of Noah and the new world.
2. Noah emerges as a 'new Adam' from whom a new creation and humanity can begin.