



PART 3 – JUSTICE & GRACE

DISCUSS AND APPLY

Discuss – questions to help understanding

1. Where does our human desire for justice come from? Is it important that justice be done?

Read Genesis 6-9

2. How did the world come to be so bad that God decided to destroy it?
3. How long did the flood last for and what effect did it have on the earth?
4. Why are Noah and his family spared?
5. What is the nature of the covenant God makes in Genesis 9? Who is it with, what does He promise and what is the sign?
6. What changed for human beings (in terms of what God commands and permits) after the flood and what stayed the same as before it?
7. What does this passage teach us about God's concern for animals and their status compared with that of humankind?

Apply – questions to help personal application

- Does it seem fair to you that God should judge human beings for their sinfulness? Should anyone be spared from His judgement?
- Do you think you deserve God's judgement? Why or why not? Do you think we tend to justify our own wrong actions and deny the extent of our sinfulness?
- Why was Noah saved from the flood and what does it teach us about how we can be spared from God's judgement on our sin?
- Do the idea of God's grace and the principle of salvation on the basis of sacrifice seem odd to you? If they are true, what does it say about the value God places on you and the seriousness of your sin?
- In what ways does this section of Scripture support or challenge modern ideas about human being's relationship to the environment and to animals?

Where did Cain get his wife?

People sometimes ask how Cain (and later Seth) could have children if they were part of the only family on earth. Genesis 5:4 refers to Adam and Eve having “other sons and daughters”. Some of the daughters may have become wives for Cain and Seth. This raises another question. Is incest not wrong and dangerous? It would not have been dangerous because of the lack of genetic mutations at this early stage in human history, but does that make it acceptable? There is a basic principle in the Bible that actions are only sinful if God has forbidden them. At this point of human history God had not prohibited incest as He did later (see Leviticus 18:8-18 and 20:11-21). It may (and should) seem odd to us to think of siblings marrying, but this was not a problem at the time we are reading about.

Did people really live to such great ages?

There is no doubt that the life-spans of the people listed in Genesis 4 are extraordinarily long by modern standards, from Lamech (777) to Methuselah (969). Some people may claim these ages as evidence that the Bible is mythological and fantastical, but we must recognise that there are no other elements of fantasy in this chapter. Other than the old ages, it is remarkably ordinary. Other people suggest that the ages are not meant to be taken literally and that they might be figurative, as numbers often are in the Bible. It is not, however, so farfetched to believe these people lived so long when we consider the following:

- **The human gene pool was purer** – few disease-causing mutations would have existed in these earliest generations after God’s perfect creation, so few people would die of inherited diseases or cancers;
- **There were fewer people** – there would, therefore, have been less competition for land and resources meaning that famine and drought would not have been causes of premature deaths;
- **There were probably fewer infectious diseases** – in modern times before the 20th century the biggest cause of death was infections, but these would not have existed in such great numbers at that time because few micro-organisms would have become harmful to human beings and the lack of overcrowding would make the spread of infections less likely in any case;
- **Ageing did not yet exist** – in Genesis 6:3 God, imposes a limit of 120 years on the age of humankind, presumably by altering their genes to introduce ageing. Without a genetic programme to age we could, in theory, live until we have an accident or incurable illness.

Was the flood really worldwide?

Some people suggest that the flood through which Noah was saved was only a local event. Perhaps it affected the whole region known to the author or, at least, the region where human beings lived. That is impossible, however, when we read the account again. It is clearly stated that the highest mountains were covered over (7:19) and that all land-dwelling lifeforms other than those animals and human beings on the ark were destroyed. As indicated in the notes for this study, the flood was not simply a minor inundation of water, but a major geological event that had a lasting impact on the planet and its environment.

Some Christian geologists suggest that the evidence of the fossil record and rock formations fits very well with this account. It could certainly explain why fossils of marine lifeforms are found even high up on mountains and how fossils could have formed through sudden burial under silt accompanied by intense pressures capable of forming rock. It might also explain the phenomenon of frozen animals in the tundra, since the sudden collapse of the water canopy surrounding the earth may have caused rapid cooling. All of this is, of course, strongly disputed by other geologists, but I am convinced that the biblical account of the flood is compatible with the evidence. It also finds parallels in the myths of many other ancient civilisations.

Does God cause natural disasters?

Genesis 6 clearly describes God as the direct cause of the flood, but it would be wrong to suggest that natural disasters are always ‘acts of God’. The Bible makes no such claim and, in fact, rejects simplistic claims that bad things are always judgements from God. Natural disasters are a result of life in an imperfect world and their impact is often exacerbated by poor human judgements. God should not be blamed for them.