

Gleaners Bible Studies A 11

THE DAWN OF HISTORY

Study 1

The Growth of Evil



Genesis 6: 1-12

In the years before the Great Flood, civilisation developed rapidly. **“Men began to multiply” (verse 1)** and the increasing population occupied more and more of the known world. **Verse 2** tells us of great freedom in marriage - **“they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.”** Restraints were broken down and it is obvious from **verse 4** that these relationships were not always the right ones. Mighty men grew up among the people. These men were strong and dominant, yet wicked and violent. These verses paint a vivid picture of a rapid growth among the people, yet it is evident that it was a growth without God. Once you have this picture clearly in your mind you will see that it has much similarity with our own times. Men boast today of their power and knowledge. We see mighty men on the earth, yet so often they are godless. In Noah’s day we have a society ripe for God’s judgment. What can we say of our own society? There is every indication that our day of reckoning is near!

We have seen that as men grew more powerful they also grew more evil and it is obvious that this growth of evil was rapid. **Verse 5** sums up the whole situation. The Lord, looking down on the earth He had made, takes stock of the evil conditions. Nothing escapes His notice. Great wickedness was on the earth. Notice what it says: **“every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”**. How dark it had all become! There was **NO LIGHT** - it was as dark as sin can be. The progression through **verses 11-12** shows that the outcome of such conditions was violence and corruption. The ‘permissive society’ of Noah’s day is also a fitting description of our times. There was, and is, growth in knowledge and power, but also in godlessness and wickedness.

Let us pause here for a moment and study the development of man’s evil way. In **Genesis 3**, we saw one sin committed. Would it stop there? In **Genesis 4**, we saw another sin committed and we ask again: Will it stop there? These verses continue to show us how sin multiplies and spreads. We could say it is like a disease - a disease worse than the very worst cancer. We read in **Matthew 24: 37-39**, that the people enjoyed very pleasant lives. They ate and drank; they were marrying and living in pleasure, yet they were corrupt and violent. This was sin, and it is just the same in our world today as it was in the days of Noah. There is no doubt that men found pleasure in sin - many forms of excitement. Yet over all of this life there was a veneer of culture and refinement. How like the age in which we live! Every day there is crime and immorality. **“As the days of Noah were”** applies just as truly today. What are you thinking as you read this chapter? Are you reading it in the light of your own life? It is essential that you do.

THE LORD SAW! We may ask the question: ‘Does God know what is happening?’ In Noah’s day it is quite evident

what He saw made Him sorry that He had ever made man at all! While the people lived careless lives without any thought of Him, He was there, watching. This is an important lesson to learn. God does know what is happening in your life and mine. He may be silent and seem far removed from us, but **Psalm 139: 1-12**, makes it clear that everything we do is known to God. But if yours is a life where sin has been taken over, how good to know that through the Lord Jesus Christ your sins can be forgiven and the power of sin in your life can be broken.

It is important to remember that God was not just spying on the people in order to catch them out. He was **INTERESTED** because He was **INVOLVED**. Here is a vital lesson to learn. God marks the evil in man’s life only because His heart is touched and broken by what He sees. Note the sadness of **verse 6**. Here are words which tell us of the deep feelings in God’s heart when He saw man going so far astray. Today He is just the same. He hates sin, but loves the sinner.

THE LORD SAID! What God saw made Him speak and they were terrible words. **“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth”**. (**verse 7**) We notice in **Genesis 1: 31** that when God had finished making the world, He saw all that He had made and it was very good. **WHAT NOW?** The dark stain of sin had spread over everything. But the worst part of it all was that it was the descendants of the man and woman whom God had made: they were responsible for this. We learn in this lesson that God must definitely judge sin. However long it may be allowed to go on; however bad it becomes, God eventually speaks in judgment on this sin. Little did the men and women of Noah’s day realise what was in store for them! One day God will speak again and this world will experience His judgment, too. There is one more point to learn here:

THE LORD SELECTED someone to whom He could show His favour - **“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”**. (**verse 8**) Just one bright spot in a very dark picture. Why was this so? It seems that God was pleased to find just one man who was different. **“But”** marks this point of difference. Notice God’s basis for selection - **“Noah walked with God”**. (**verse 9**) Remember God never picks His servants at random. It is the man or woman who pleases Him that He can use. These three facts tell us much concerning the character of the man whom God marks out for His favour:- Notice Noah’s **CHARACTER** was righteous (just); his **COURSE** was blameless (perfect), and he walked in **COMPANIONSHIP** with God. In a dark, sinful world, this meant so much to God that He shared His plans with Noah and used him to do His work.

God still shows His favour today to those who please Him. Is your life pleasing to God? Can He use your life in His service? Through the Lord Jesus Christ and faith in Him, many today share this same grace that Noah found. Such people will be delivered from judgment, and of such it is said that they are **“Chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world”**. (**Ephesians 1: 4**)

It is clear from this study that the sole aim, object and ambition of the people of Noah's day was to 'have a good time', and to 'enjoy life to the full'. But how much better and more abundant is the life that is lived with the sole object of pleasing God and sharing a part, however small, in His plans and work. Will it ever be said of your life, as was said of Noah's, he or she "walks with God and finds grace in the eyes of the Lord?"

Study 2

The Flood

Genesis 6: 13 - 7: 5

We ended our last lesson by noticing that in a very wicked world there was one man who found favour with God. God was so angry with men for their sin that He vowed He would destroy them. Yet righteous Noah was marked out to find God's wonderful blessing. I often try to imagine what it must have been like to be in Noah's position. Possibly he found it difficult to live a godly life when there was so much evil around him. It is not easy to be pure and clean when the world is sinful and vile. I think he must have spent much time in prayer for God was so real to him.

But one day God spoke to him and told him that He was going to destroy the world with a flood of waters. There had never been rain on the earth before. We are told in **Genesis 2: 5-6** that moisture was provided for the ground by a mist that rose and covered the earth each day. Noah was probably surprised by God's pronouncement, although I am sure he expected God to do something about the wickedness in the earth. God then commanded Noah to build an ark and the exact details were given regarding its size and the materials to be used. If you read these details you will find that it was a very large vessel indeed. I can imagine that Noah would have employed carpenters and craftsmen to do this work for him, and they no doubt would have thought it a strange job. A dry land boat, but as Noah built he preached! In **2 Peter 2: 5** he is called "**a preacher of righteousness**". He warned his hearers of judgment to come. People heard, discussed, questioned and mocked, but Noah carried on building and preaching. Finally the work was finished and the message went out, "**After seven days and I will cause it to rain on the earth**", said the Lord. (**Genesis 7: 4**) Let us learn here some lessons:-

1. PERIL.

As the ark was being built the warning of judgment was heard. These people were in danger. God was going to fulfill His Word and destroy the earth and all with it. How would you have reacted? I am sure the people found it difficult to realise the danger they were in. After all they were comfortable, very prosperous, and seemed secure. So they ignored the warning. How sad that today so few people realise that God is going to judge the world again for its sin.

2. PROVISION.

The ark was a fine ship, built on dry land, but built to go through a flood. It was the only way of escape from judgment and death. I like this story for it is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only way of escape for us today. God was going to take Noah and his family and the animals chosen, and He was going to shut them into the ark so that the flood could not touch them. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour will never know God's judgment for their sins. They will be sheltered in Him because He died for them at Calvary. I wonder as you read this and study the story, if you are really

trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Just as the ark was the only provision for safety in Noah's day, so the Lord Jesus is God's only provision for mankind today.

3. PREACHING.

It is always interesting to me that Noah preached to those who watched him build, and I have wondered what they said. Perhaps someone would say, 'How do you know that it will rain? It has never rained before!' 'Who is this God?', someone else might mock. 'Fancy building a ship on dry land'. . . and so on. But righteous Noah went on warning the people of their peril, until the time came when there were just seven days left. Today there are those who preach the gospel and warn us of coming judgement. **Romans 10** is interesting to look at here. "**How shall they hear without a preacher**"?, **verse 14** asks. And the answer comes back in **verse 17**, "**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.**" God is warning men today of judgment to come, and it is coming soon.

4. PENALTY.

There came a day when the ark was finished. God called Noah and his family, with the animals, to come into the ark. Then the door was shut! The rains began and the waters rose, carrying the ark and those inside it in safety. But all outside perished in the Flood - they paid the penalty for their sin and unbelief. In the same way, all who refuse to accept the Lord Jesus as their shelter from sin, will pay the penalty of judgment. Those who will not accept Him now as their Saviour must soon meet Him as their Judge.

5. PROMISE.

It is good to notice that against the dark background of judgment and punishment for sin, God gave the promise of better things to come. God spoke great words to Noah, "**I will establish My covenant with you and you shall go into the ark**". (**Genesis 6: 18**) God was obviously looking on to the days beyond the Flood. It could be that there were times when, to Noah, it seemed that everything would end. No one listened to his preaching - he stood alone. Yet in **Hebrews 11: 7** we are told that it was "**by FAITH**" Noah built the ark to the saving of his house. Because he believed God, he obeyed Him. This tells us so much about Noah's relationship with God. He reckoned God would not let him down. In the face of opposition and seemingly impossible circumstances, he trusted and obeyed. We, too, need to trust and obey God's Word.

Study 3

The New Beginning

Genesis 8: 18-22; 9: 1-17

The Bible tells us that during the Flood it rained for forty days and forty nights. All the valleys and hills were covered with water and every living thing died. There is no doubt about it, God's judgment was complete and final. We read in **Genesis 7: 23** that only Noah was left along with those who were with him in the ark. God's word proved to be true. It always does! Many people today question the authenticity of the story of the Flood, saying it is merely a myth or legend. Yet, one of the strongest reasons for believing that this story is true, is the fact that the Lord Jesus Himself refers to it in **Matthew 24: 37-39**. He said that when He comes again, conditions on the earth would be the same as they were in the days of Noah. Take careful note of this and think about it.

But one day, the rain stopped and the flood began to recede. We are told that for 150 days the water prevailed over the

earth. (**Genesis 7: 24**) Inside the ark eight people waited for the judgment of God to come to an end. "**God remembered Noah.**" (**Genesis 8: 1**) - I like that very much! Perhaps the thought that God might have forgotten them had at some time come to Noah, although I like to think that Noah trusted God implicitly. Whatever the case, Noah waited and wondered. What was happening outside? Eventually the ark came safely to rest on Mount Ararat. Forty days passed and Noah sent out a raven to explore the outside world. It went out, but did not return. Then Noah sent out a dove which soon came back to him. Seven days later he sent out the dove again. This time it returned, bringing with it an olive leaf. From this, Noah could tell that the waters were abating. The third time the dove was sent out, she did not return, Then God told Noah and his family that they could move out as the land was dry once more. The Flood was over!

1. The BUILDING of an ALTAR by Noah.

It is interesting to notice that this is the first time an altar is mentioned in the Bible (although it is possibly inferred in **chapter 4**). There are many other times when altars for sacrifice are mentioned, and they all have their particular purpose. But here is an altar at the beginning of the New Order in the earth. Notice sin had been judged in a terrible way. For what could be more terrible than the Flood? Now as Noah begins his new life in a new world, he does so by offering a sacrifice. **Verse 21** tells us clearly that it was a sacrifice that pleased God. We can learn a lesson from this about the new life which begins when you become a Christian. It begins through the sacrifice which Jesus offered at Calvary's Cross. Look at **Hebrews 9: 26** and perhaps you will see how this is so. God accepted the sacrifice made by His Son on the Cross, and this is pictured in the sacrifice offered by Noah, for Noah's sacrifice marked the beginning of a new life in a new world.

As Christians, there is something further that we can learn from Noah's sacrifice. Perhaps as you read this you are entering a new phase of your life. Perhaps a new job, or maybe with a new partner as you begin married life. Make sure as you do so that you put God first in your life and He will bless you. Make sure your new life, and indeed each new day, begins with God, by speaking to Him in prayer and listening to His Voice from His Word. This is the only way to a life of blessing.

2. The BLESSING of the Lord on the NEW CREATION.

In **Chapter 9** we are told that God blessed Noah. It is good to notice in reading your Bible WHERE things are said. This blessing follows the accepted sacrifice of **Genesis 8: 21**. It was therefore on the ground of an accepted sacrifice that God gave His blessing - not only to Noah and his family, but to the restored earth. It offers to us a reminder that **SIN** can only be blotted out by **SACRIFICE** - this is what the Cross is all about. Here, in the words which God spoke to Noah, there is a feeling of wide-open possibility. The blessing included the promise of God, never again to curse the ground or to destroy every living thing. (**Genesis 8: 22**) It also included the faithfulness of God in the ordering of the seasons. (**Genesis 8: 22**) Then there comes the command to Noah and his sons to "**be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.**" (**Genesis 9: 1**) A whole new way of life was open to them as they took possession of a world that had been cleansed through the Flood. We can reflect here that for believers in the Lord Jesus, **NEW LIFE** began with His blessing and was only made possible on the ground of the cleansing power of His sacrifice at Calvary. **LIFE** and **LOVE** are here linked together.

3. The BOND between God and men.

God made a new covenant - He entered into a new relationship with Noah and the new earth that day. Often after

a storm we have looked into the clouds and have seen the rainbow. **Chapter 9: 13-17** explains God's reason for putting it there. It was a sign that He would never again destroy the earth by flooding. It is such a simple story, yet it reveals that God loves to show His kindness rather than His judgment toward men. One day the world will be judged again for its sin, this time by fire. (**See 2 Peter 3: 9-10**) But the rainbow in the clouds tells of the bond which God made that day with Noah and the new world, and we should praise God and give thanks every time we see it!

It will be good if we end our lesson by giving thanks to God for the new life He has given us through the sacrifice of His Son, the Lord Jesus. God will never break His promise. If you turn to **Revelation 4: 3** you will read that when John saw the throne of God in Heaven, he saw a rainbow round about it. This, to me, indicates that the bond with Creation made in Noah's day will be eternally remembered and upheld. Our God is a faithful God - He keeps His promises forever.

Study 4

Babel

Read Genesis 10 & 11: 1-9

In this series, "The Dawn of History", we have studied many interesting things together. The Bible does not tell us very much about what happened to shape the course of man's early days, but it does tell us sufficient for us to understand certain important facts. In this final study of the series, we are going to consider the way in which man was scattered throughout the world. It is also the Biblical description of the origin of languages among the people of the earth.

Noah's life ended very sadly. Sin triumphed once more even over this righteous man and he is pictured acting foolishly under the influence of drink. (**Genesis 9: 20-24**) Even the greatest men in Scripture failed at times. Perhaps we should pause here to reflect that the Bible always tells the truth about the people it portrays. While describing their greatness and power, it does not ignore their faults.

Life in the new world continued for a long time. Men once more multiplied on earth as families grew and the years went by. **Chapter 10** gives us the descendants of the Sons of Noah; Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Flood was left further and further behind and as always with the passing of time, its meaning was lost to the people. With increased power and culture, men once again became self-sufficient and God was forgotten. They became great builders. It is estimated that it was at about this time that the great Pyramids of Egypt were built. The cities of Babylon and Nineveh were also built, with all their beauty and power. Men and women became very proud of their civilisation and culture, and once again God was forgotten, and evil began to re-assert itself.

This is where **Genesis 11** begins. Notice **verse 1** of the chapter. According to this, there was but one language in the earth. Thus people were united together in the language they spoke. Have you ever thought how strong the world would be today if we all spoke the same language? A different language can also mean an entirely different culture, giving individuals a sense of isolation from one another. Conversely, because of their unity of language and culture, these people were strong and active to further their own ends. Maybe they did remember the Flood and sought means of making sure they would not be caught again! For, if you remember, when Noah and his family

left the Ark, God told them, **“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”**. (*Genesis 9: 1*) God wanted the people to scatter throughout the world so that the whole of the new, clean earth could be inhabited. But humans are very obstinate creatures at times, aren't they? They decided instead to all stay together and eventually settled in the fertile Plain of Shinar. *Verse 4* tells us they did this in order to **“make a name for ourselves”**, in case they were scattered throughout the earth. Clearly, they wanted to be famous.

Now it is always true that the more men think of themselves, the less they think of God. Having discovered how to bake mud bricks to use in place of natural stone, they started to build houses. Then they said, **“Let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the Heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves”**. No doubt they thought that if their tower reached Heaven, they would be like gods themselves. God, looking down, knew that although the earth had been cleansed by the Flood, man's heart was still as sinful as ever. If God did not stop him now, there would be no end to the wicked things man would do. So, *verses 7 and 8* tell us that God came down and confounded their language. **“So, the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”** (*verse 9*)

Let us look at three facts about this incident in man's early history and learn the lessons. The first thing we notice is that theirs were **ACTIONS WITHOUT GOD**. **“Let us build.”** (*verse 4*) We can perhaps imagine a committee meeting where a decision is made on what should be done. Did you notice how often they said 'us' and 'ourselves'? There was no question of seeking God's guidance in the matter. It would seem that by this time He did not figure in their reckoning at all. Certainly they took no account of Him. So they pursued their plans - they built without God.

If we go back to the first man we find that he was made to work under God's direction. When Adam was first placed in Eden he was happy to do God's will. This meant that God was glorified in what he did. What a difference here! But it never pays to build without God. Action without His authority is doomed to failure. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, **“Without Me you can do nothing.”** (*John 15: 5*) The building of the Tower of Babel was foolishly undertaken, because it was **ACTION WITHOUT GOD!**

Secondly, we notice that it was **ACTION FOR WRONG ENDS**, **“Let us make a name.”** (*Genesis 11: 4*) There was only one motive for their building this tower, and it was completely selfish. Their whole idea was to shut out God and increase their own power and influence in the world. We have already noticed that civilisation had grown and that men had advanced in their culture to a high level of ability and power. With this advance it was obvious that **PRIDE** also grew, and man became self-confident and self-sufficient. Yet we also notice that the Lord **“came down to see”** (*Genesis 11: 5*) what was happening, showing that He is still above man's puny efforts. as with Satan previously, God must act! 'Pride goeth before. . . a fall' - this was the sin leading to Satan's own destruction. A life lived for selfish ends will never succeed.

Finally, we see **ACTION ENDING IN FAILURE**. The Lord soon answered the challenge of His authority by civilisation. Men were scattered and their language 'confused' into many, so that they could not understand one another. 'Confusion' is what the name 'Babel' means, and confusion is what ensued. We can imagine the surprise of the people as God overthrows their

schemes. History has seen many such interventions by God in human affairs. It bears out the tremendous truth that those who exalt themselves will be humbled. (*Matthew 23: 12*) Yet the humility is the path to greatness - one of the paradoxes of the Christian life! But what a serious lesson Babel teaches us!

So we complete the first stage in our studies of the Biblical history of man. Man enjoyed perfection for a short while - then he fell. The world of God's making became spoilt by sin. Into such a world as this God was to send His only Son, that through His selfless love a remedy for sin would be found.

Questions

Study 1

THE GROWTH OF EVIL

1. What similarities do you see between the state of the world in Noah's day and that of the world in which we live?
2. What was God's reaction to what He saw in Noah's day, and what action will He one day take towards our world?
3. What can always be truly said about God's attitude to a) sin; and b) the sinner?
4. In what way did Noah differ from all the other men in his generation?
5. What should be the ambition of every Christian?

Study 2

THE FLOOD

1. What do we learn from *Genesis 2* that made God's pronouncement seem impossible to the people of Noah's day?
2. a) What else did Noah do as he built the ark?
b) What lesson can we learn from this?
3. In what way is the ark a picture of the Lord Jesus?
4. Examine the people's reaction to Noah's message. What similarities do you see in the reaction of people today to the gospel?
5. Give a brief description of Noah's character as you see it.

Study 3

THE NEW BEGINNING

1. How can we be sure that this account of the Flood is not merely myth or legend?
2. a) What was Noah's first action after leaving the ark?
b) Why do you think he did this?
3. It is evident from the Old Testament that sacrifices needed to be made repeatedly to God. There is, however, one sacrifice mentioned in the New Testament that only needed to be made once.
a) Which sacrifice was this?
b) Why was once sufficient?
4. What is the main spiritual lesson you have learned from this chapter?
5. Of what was the rainbow a sign or reminder?

Study 4

BABEL

1. Why did the people settle in the Plain of Shinar?
2. What was the main sin of the people at Babel?
3. a) Why did God intervene in the affairs of men at Babel?
b) How did He intervene?
4. Where in the Book of Acts do we read of an incident which could be called a reversal of this situation at Babel?
5. What is the most important lesson you have learned from these "Dawn of History" studies?