

Genesis 6

6:1 When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,
2 the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. ...**3*** ...

4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

* *(note: Verse 3 will be dealt with on the next page. Verses 1-2 and 4 have a similar theme and so are grouped together)*

“When men began to multiply on the face of the ground...” Although God had commanded the humans at their creation to be fruitful and multiply, throughout the early chapters of Genesis increasing numbers of humans seem to multiply mostly sins and problems.

“...daughters were born...” Daughters and women in general have played a very minor role in the opening chapters of Genesis. Eve was the first human to rebel against God, but the only other women mentioned by name are those in the genealogy of Cain. It does appear that the reference in these chapters to daughters or women in general is a sign of further problems. In most of the genealogy following the descendents of Seth wives are not even generically mentioned; only fathers and sons get mentioned by name. After Eve, the next time a wife is mentioned in the Seth lineage is with Noah and his sons. The next wife actually named will not occur until Sarai, wife of Abraham is mentioned at the end of Genesis 11.

“...sons of God...” It is possible that this section of the story with the references to the sons of God might actually have originated in a pagan source where avatars, “sons of Hercules, and other human offspring of the gods are common themes. Judaism developed its own language and imagery which includes the phrase “son(s) of God”. The inclusion in Genesis of verses 6:1-2 and 4 may have resulted from the Jews adapting some erstwhile pagan stories to their own use. Some interpreters have seen the “sons of god” as a reference to angels or demons intermarrying with humans and producing “divine” offspring. Such an explanation is totally inconsistent with Jewish and Biblical anthropology. First neither angels nor demons have been mentioned in the text. Second, both angels and demons are bodiless powers and would have no way to have sexual intercourse with the humans. Angels in Biblical thinking don’t become human when they sin – that would be more a Platonic or dualistic idea, not a biblical one. No matter what the origins of stories about the “sons of God”, probably the interpretation of the text which is most consistent with the witness of the rest of Genesis would be that the descendents of Seth (the sons of God) began intermarrying with the daughters of the outcast Cain, something which displeased God.

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“...they took to wife such of them as they chose...” The text indicates a disorderly world, with each person doing as they saw fit with no regard for anyone else and especially with no regard for God’s wishes. If God intended an orderly universe with each kind of animal and even each kind of human (descendants of Cain or the Sethites) maintaining separate realms, then the story is showing that the humans continue to push the world toward disorderly chaos by failing to respect the boundaries in creation established by God. The human penchant for disregarding and destroying God’s established boundaries and realms is a major theme of the early chapters of Genesis. In the Flood story God will be described as grief stricken because of this destructiveness of humans.

“...daughters of men...” The earlier genealogies rarely mention daughters (except in the lineage of Cain), here nameless daughters are mentioned, and their role is that of temptresses. Is it the women’s fault that they are good looking? It is not the women who are out of control; they simply are what they are. It is the “sons of God” who are doing whatever they want. Is the text suggesting that lust is uncontrollable in the sons of God? St. Isaac the Syrian believed that lust was the only major sin of these early citizens on earth. Such stories will contribute to the monastic ideal of chastity and celibacy as the means for humans to overcome their own sinfulness. It is desire which gives birth to so many evils, a theme common in ancient Hindu and Buddhist writings as well in which desire destroys the underlying unity of all things and causes the formation of the “self” which is in opposition to all other “selves.”

...“the daughters of men were fair...” The word “fair” in the Septuagint is the same word that is used when God in Genesis 1 saw each day that what he had made was “good.” It also is the same expression that is used when Eve is tempted by the serpent and she looks at the forbidden fruit and saw that it was “good” (Genesis 3:7). The goodness that God sees in his creation is distorted in the eyes of humans who see goodness and instead of being awed or grateful form lust for the “object.” Instead of moving from created to Creator in their thinking, fallen humans displace the Creator with the created. The created is beautiful and desirable but it no longer lifts human thought to the

Creator God who is all but forgotten. In the Septuagint we read: “If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wisdom 13:3-5). The distortion of humans to see things as that which must be possessed rather than that which is appreciated is part of the sinfulness within the human heart. The humans see nothing as God’s gift, and nothing as a sign of God’s presence and favor, but rather like Eve see creation as something to be grasped and claimed for themselves. Humans fail to see themselves as stewards of God’s creation. On the contrary, feeding their selfish sense of entitlement they believe everything is theirs for the taking. As described in the Epistle to the Romans: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of

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evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Romans 1:19-32). The result of seeing creation as an end in itself rather than seeing it as a way to know the Creator is all manner of sin.

The Nephilim so closely resemble ancient stories from Greek mythology that one has to suspect that legends of ancient giant like men were accepted by the Jews and eventually made their way into Jewish thinking and scriptures. Many efforts have been made to explain the Nephilim and the men of renown. The main point of the text is the corruption of humanity as it continues its downward slide away from God.

"The mighty men..." In 3 Maccabees 2:3 the Nephilim are referenced as part of the fallen creation. The text argues that even these giants of men were corrupted by the sin of arrogance and pride. "For you, the creator of all things and the governor of all, are a just Ruler, and you judge those who have done anything in insolence and arrogance. You destroyed those who in the past committed injustice, among whom were even giants who trusted in their strength and boldness, whom you destroyed by bringing upon them a boundless flood." Size and strength, which so impress humans, apparently do not impress God who looks for holiness not height in His people.

The inclusion of 6:1-2, 4 in Genesis is a good example of the principle which the Patristic Fathers held to - once a text is recognized as scripture it cannot be rejected, but it must be interpreted. Many people through history have tried to ignore and even eliminate difficult passages from the Bible. We have no authority to remove passages which are hard to understand. But sometimes it will leave us with the realization that there is mystery in scripture, perhaps as some Fathers speculated, put there intentionally, like the Parables of Jesus, to make us hunger for truth, even when the truth seems to escape us.

Is it possible that stories of the "sons of God" mating with human women reflect a human desire to attain immortality? Does the story reflect part of what is wrong with humanity - namely that humans want immortality but do not

want to have to be holy to attain it? They want immortality magically bestowed upon them, even if this involves immorality? Humans want an immortality that comes without requiring any self denial. They are afraid of an immortality which says to attain eternal life one must love others by emptying one's self - by taking up the cross and losing one's life. Humans want eternity but without the moral demands of the eternal God and without having to give up anything they also greedily and selfishly want. This desire for immortality without self denial is in the Scriptures part of what is wrong with humanity. Humans are not going to attain immortality through self-centeredness or through lust. Self denial is a normal part of spirituality according to the Scriptures (and according to most of the world's great religions as well).

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3 Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

"My spirit shall not abide in man forever..." In Genesis 2:7 God breathed his breath (or Spirit, the word is the same in Greek or Hebrew) into the nostrils of the man of dust and at that moment the man of dust became a living being (Greek: *psyche*, soul). "Every soul is enlivened by the Holy Spirit," is how we sing it at Matins (2nd Antiphon, 4th Tone). In Biblical anthropology, the soul is the very locus of God's Spirit animating the physical "dust" of humanity's being. The soul is where in each person the divine interfaces with the physical dust. In Genesis 6:3 God gravely pronounces His Spirit will not stay in a human forever. This is not a new revelation, for God had warned that if Adam ate the forbidden fruit he would surely die. Adam did the forbidden act, and death is now part of the human experience. According to the text not only is there death, but also longevity of life is to be restricted. God does not refuse to send His Spirit or breath to enliven humans; He only limits how long His Breath will abide in them. Maybe now God is defining of what death consists for humans. God is not refusing to bring new souls into existence, but is limiting their lifespan. He is not permanently cutting the humans off from Himself, but is certainly limiting the duration of His Spirit abiding in humans. No longer are humans made for eternity but rather have become transitory and mortal beings.

In John's Gospel we encounter the reversal of Genesis 6:3. "And John bore witness, 'I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God'" (John 1:32-34). In Christ God's Spirit once again permanently abides in humanity. In Christ the Spirit doesn't temporarily rest on him but remains in Him. The Spirit remaining on Christ does not alter the fact that Jesus as a human will die. What changes is that death is no longer a permanent state; death cannot sever the relationship between the human Christ and God His Father. Christ in fact lives forever even through death in which his body remains uncorrupt. This is the defeat of death and is the hope Christ Jesus gives to all the world. The Holy Spirit's remaining on Christ at His baptism is a sign of humanity's reconciliation with God. The feast of the Baptism of Christ is not only a theophany, but it is also a revelation of humanity

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– a humanity restored to communion with God. Theologically the Baptism of Christ is a feast of the revelation of the Trinity; personally it is for each of us also the manifestation of what it means to be human.

“...for he is flesh...” These are ominous words in the text. Humans are more than just flesh having been made in God’s image and likeness and receiving His Spirit. But, the text is plain, humans are not immortal by nature but belong to that which is “not God.” So we are not merely flesh, and yet we share with all animals that fleshly nature which means we will die and will return to the earth from which we were taken. As it says in the Septuagint’s Wisdom of Solomon: “I also am mortal, like all men, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh” (7:1). We cannot escape our flesh nor our mortality. Christ however will restore the flesh making it capable of being God-bearing. He will also transform our mortal nature. “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:52-57).

“his days shall be a hundred twenty years.” God’s decision to limit the human life span to 120 years is connected to the Fall of humankind. Humans will not live forever. The number 120 however is not meant to be read literally for it is being established as a limit for humans but not as the norm. Noah the next hero of God’s story lives to be 950 years old according to the bible, well beyond the 120 year limit just declared by God. The only person in the bible who lives to be 120 is Moses. “Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7). In the upcoming chapters of Genesis, the claimed length of lives of the people will become progressively shorter suggesting that the Fall of humankind through sin had very detrimental and cumulative effects on the lives of people.

“...a hundred twenty years...” Could the word “year” mean something other to the ancients than it does to us? While this is possible, the word “year” does seem to refer to a twelve lunar month time period so the word is referring to something close to our understanding of a “year.” Because the Bible is a revelation from God it is more likely that the literal reading obscures a deeper message which is the main point of the text. The Bible is a revelation from God and conveys to us God’s message in human terms so that we can understand it. The age of the individual characters is not quite as important as the bigger picture – our lives today are cut short by death, which is the direct consequence of human sin. Why do people die? Because people have sinned. This is both the consequence of personal sin but also the common experience of all those who share the same human nature.

Humans have been expelled from Paradise and lost God’s favor and the chance for immortality, but now God’s Spirit is to be withdrawn from them as well. The very nature of what it is to be human is at stake. What exactly constitutes being human? Can we become “inhuman” or “dehumanized”? Did the loss of God’s Spirit change humanity? Chrysostom argues that it is avoiding evil and practicing virtue which makes us human. If we practice self control over our passions we are human, if we have to be controlled by others, we have lost our humanity. Though God gave humans free will, it distresses God to see humans not only choosing to be wicked but rushing to do evil things. It brings grief to God that humans created in His image and likeness lack self control and must be controlled through vigilant police tactics and punishment. It grieves God that He must impose such things as law, punishments and hell with which to threaten His creatures because humans are often not motivated by love for God or love for their neighbor.

The text suggests there is a growing estrangement between humans and God – the effects of the Fall are both progressive and cumulative in nature; the separation between God and his favored humans is growing ever wider.

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5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

The narrator tells us that God sees, but does not tell us how a being with no eyes can see or what He sees. Nevertheless the invisible God who has no eyes has vision, unlike the idols which men make. "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat" (Psalm 115:3-7). The God who has no organs and no limbs is able to do all the things that idols cannot do. Furthermore, God's sight is not value neutral. God sees things as good (Genesis 1) and as evil (6:5). God does not merely observe, He evaluates and judges. The God who has no mouth is able to speak and to convey His judgment. We do not know how exactly the people of God "heard" the Lord speak, but for us we can hear God's voice through the revelation recorded in Scripture. St. John Chrysostom says, "The mouths of the inspired authors are the mouth of God, after all, such a mouth would say nothing idly – so let us not be idle in our listening, either." (Notice: for Chrysostom the Word of God is first listened to, it is not first and foremost a written word).

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth..." In Genesis 1, each day God saw that the creation was good, and creation with humanity was very good. In Genesis 2 God noted that man's being alone was "not good." In Genesis 6 for the first time God sees evil in His creation. Now God sees how wicked His humans can be. There exists in the Bible and in traditions based on the Bible an idea that there are beings (rebellious angels) who are endeavoring to turn God against His favored human creatures. In the book of Job, Satan as the prosecuting attorney endeavors to prove to God that the Humans He loves are in fact no good at all. God however counters Satan by showcasing His servant as proof that humans are capable of being good. In the Quran the angels at creation question God's wisdom in bestowing so much trust and power in humans when God knows these humans will commit murder and other sins. Despite God seeing our intentional wickedness, He does not completely reject His creation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the

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world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth” This section began with verse 6:1 “When men began to multiply on the face of the ground...” In the beginning of the world God did bless humanity and encourage them to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). Humans now are apparently filling the earth... with evil! God’s reaction to this development does suggest He had high hopes for his free willed humans, but those hopes have been dashed to His divine disappointment. God is portrayed as wrestling within Himself about the very meaning of creation and having creatures with free will. He is grieved by what His creatures have become. Yet knowing all of this, He doesn’t create a different set of creatures to replace or displace the fallen humans, but continues to work with those He has already made. He doesn’t choose to shelve the human project or abandon it. God’s steadfast love for His creation is unalterable despite the grief caused to Him by His creation. He endeavors to deal with, purify, or transform humans within the limits and means allotted him by physical creation. But God does not abandon hope and holds to the smallest shred of evidence that there is goodness in humanity, even if it is found in only one man.

The evil of humanity comes from the heart – it is not attributed to Satan or some outside source. The humans are not forced or predetermined toward this evil, but rather they willfully conceive it in imagination of their own hearts. As Christ taught, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man” (Mark 7:20-23). “Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:25). St. Augustine pondered how humans who were created as very good by a good God could turn out to always choose wickedness. This troubled him greatly. He concluded that there must be some external influence on the human which lures the human into evil. Augustine’s writings will contribute to an increase in blaming Satan for every wrong thing people do. Augustine

could not believe that God’s creatures on their own would choose evil, yet Jesus Himself seemed to have a clear belief as is also expressed in Genesis that wickedness resides in the imagination of the human heart.

“...every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...” While God sees the evil imagination of the human heart, He deals with it in the most unexpected way. As the Theotokos Mary sings in her post-conception Magnificat, “He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts...” Humans can continue to imagine evil, God incarnates the good.

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great ...that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...” Despite God’s observation of the tendency toward wickedness of human, Judaism did not embrace any ideas of predestination for fallen humanity. Humans do evil because they choose to not because they have no ability to resist it. Free will is strongly defended by the Eastern Patristic writers and is found in Sirach 15:14-20: “It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. ... He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given anyone permission to sin.”

Though in the text God sees the wickedness of man, the evil humans were doing is not spelled out. What exactly was the wickedness that causes God to so harshly judge the world He had made? St. Isaac the Syrian notes that at this point in the text there has not been any mention of war or greed or idolatry or sorcery. He proposes that the only sin specified in the text is that of sexual lust. In Psalm 94, there is a lament about the wicked which might give us some sense as to just what evil humanity was engaged in that caused God to be distraught and brought the judgment of God upon them: “O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? They pour out their arrogant words, they boast, all the evildoers. They crush thy people, O LORD, and afflict thy

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heritage. They slay the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive" (94:3-7)

The heart. In the text both God and humans have a heart; perhaps this is even the very manner in which humans are said to be in God's image. The heart in Genesis is not so much the physical organ for pumping blood as it is the center of intellect and emotion. Genesis says blood is the life of the animal, but the inner life, the self, is centered in the heart. The heart in this sense is being used metaphorically or figuratively more than as a body organ. God's heart (His inner self) is grieved by the evil He sees in His created humans. The grief and pain in God's heart is contrasted in the text with the wickedness which is in the heart of humans. God's heart is filled with love and thus subject to grief. The human heart is closed by the selfish wickedness in it.

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6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

7 So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

"it grieved him to his heart." He who loves much suffers much or so one adage says. God's grieving heart is being contrasted with the human heart in the previous verse, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). God's thoughts are on grief, human thoughts on how to do evil. The extent of the fall is obvious – for now in what way is the human in God's image and likeness? Certainly the human heart has become 'unlike' God's. Thus says the Lord "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

"...it grieved him to his heart..." A most profound theological thought: the sins of humans touch the very heart of God! We often excuse our sinful behavior by saying, "It's between me and God." This may be true, but the text also points out that our sins cause God pain and grief! God is not merely a transcendent being untouched by His creation. He is a very immanent and loving Creator whose inner being is touched and affected by what we, His creatures, do. The incarnation does not result from God's distance from us, but rather from His connectedness to us – from the fact that He is touched by our sin. His response to this pain is to take on Himself our sin by assuming our flesh. St. John the Baptist "saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

"So the LORD said,..." To whom is God speaking? To whom does God share His sorrow and grief? In Christianity this is another sign of the existence of the Three Persons of the Trinity. God is not a soliloquist; for after all this is all about revelation! The thoughts of God are shared by the Three Persons of the Trinity and revealed to those inspired by God to record His thoughts in the Scriptures. We do not know all that God thinks, but we do need to know all that He thinks to reveal!

What kind of God do we worship? Not only One who is creator and judge, but also the God of

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love who grieves in His heart when humans sin. He is a God of compassion and feeling. The image of the angry God who judges the ungodly which some like to preach, may misrepresent God because they ignore the foundational thoughts in God's heart: love and painful sorrow. When we fail to understand the compassionate nature of the God who is love, we reduce God in rationalistic terms to a God who is logic. Genesis reminds us that God is not just mind, He also experiences life deeply through His heart. We would do well to remember the words of God to Job's totally rational interlocutors: "After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eli'phaz the Te'manite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7-8)

God who saw the goodness in humanity and creation in the beginning, now regrets what He sees on earth. What had God intended for humans? What went wrong? Had God not foreseen this turn of events? Prior to this the only time God saw that His creation was not good was when He recognized the loneliness of the first human. But at that time God formed the plan to create another human who would be able to procreate with the first man. Now God sees way beyond the world being imperfect to recognizing the evil in humanity.

St. Augustine not willing to concede that humans were created with "a defect" (or that the perfect God would create something defective), speculated that Satan has such a powerful influence over humans that humans cannot choose the good without the help of God. He did believe humans had free will but he concluded that they were so influenced by Satan that they could only freely choose evil. Humans in his thinking no longer were capable of choosing the good without God's grace. He formulated his ideas on predestination, a speculation that actually was rejected by the Church in the Christian West in his own day. The later Medieval Roman Church will embrace his ideas despite their having been rejected by

the early Church. The radical reformers such as the 16th Century's John Calvin took these predestination ideas to the extreme and declared humans as incapable of any free choice with lives totally pre-determined by God. Such ideas of total predestination were never embraced by Biblical Judaism nor by early Christianity or even by later Orthodoxy which have always upheld human free will and responsibility.

Such pessimistic ideas about humanity certainly are challenged by many sayings in the Scriptures themselves. Such as, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7) or First Peter's more cautionary comment, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:8-9). The New Testament exhorts us to resist Satan, not fear him; and certainly the New Testament authors seem to assume we can resist the Evil One. Satan, according to our pre-baptismal exorcism does not even have power over swine. We renounce him in the exorcism and spit on him – we claim to not only resist him, but to despise him, and to trample him beneath our feet. Evil is pervasive in the fallen world, but its powers are limited. We have the full power from God to resist evil and to overcome it.

The story of the flood sets another Old Testament theme: that of a divine judgment. The forces at work in the world may appear to be capricious, meaningless and random, but the Scripture puts the otherwise irresponsible forces under the control of the Creator God who purposefully uses these forces to accomplish His judgments.

God's sorrow at having made the humans should be as shocking to us as it was to Him. But what is more amazing is God's plan for salvation requires His Son to become flesh – to become fully human. Considering God's assessment of humanity, this is a most amazing plan of all, and certainly was not expected by the people of God, though a few prophets caught a glimpse of this plan of God. Despite its wickedness humanity is not totally depraved but is totally savable. What humility and love on

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God's part to embrace such humanity - God became man, became fully human taking on a human heart (whose inclination to evil so grieved the Lord) and all the temptation to sin. In some ways more amazing than God's becoming human in the incarnation of Christ is the Virgin Mary, a woman whom God realizes is capable of conceiving divinity in her womb and of giving humanity to His Divine Son. Mary, the Theotokos, is totally of the same fallen human nature, heart and genes as the rest of humanity (whose wicked hearts so grieve God!). Yet she is not corrupted by such wickedness. She is chosen to do what angels, the cherubim and seraphim and heaven itself cannot do – unite God to humanity.

God's plan for dealing with the wickedness of humanity involves neither an eternal hell of punishment nor totally annihilation (returning the cosmos back to the nothingness out of which He created it). God deigns to drown the wicked humans along with the rest of His creation. God originally saw creation as all good (Genesis 1), but in the Genesis 2 second story of creation God noticed a flaw in His creation – the loneliness of man. And God decided it was not good for man to be alone. So He made all of the creatures of the world for the benefit of man, culminating in the creation of woman and the chance for humanity to procreate. Now, in Genesis 5 the Creator God is sorrowful as He looks at what humans have become. The Lord does not turn the clock back and try again. (Is it possible that once His creation has been called into being, once time and space exist and are blessed by God that He will not return them to nothingness?) The God of existence, the God of love, the God who is creator "cannot" undo what He is, nor is He to will creation out of existence. He who calls "not God" (= creation, that which is not God) into existence does not permit non-existence to replace His creation, for if that happened would He as Love, as Creator, as Life-giver cease to be Himself? So God deals with His creation, and He doesn't send it all to eternal punishment or banish humanity from His presence. Rather the story of the flood is going to be one of a great cleansing of creation, a washing away of the sins of the world, a death which provides for a resurrection, a flood which allows for the salvation of the faithful remnant so that life can be renewed and permitted to continue. The flood will prefigure the rescue of the Hebrew race through the Red Sea, and it will prefigure

the role of the Church which too is an ark of salvation in a world awash in sin. The story of the flood is a symbolic story of who God is – not only Creator, but Savior. God triumphs over death which merely destroys human life, and He uses death as the way to cleanse the world of sin. He shows that though He is a God of justice and judgment, His wrath is not eternal, though His love is. "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Punishment and death do not destroy the world, but they cleanse it in order to allow it to be renewed, to attain holiness. Punishment is not permanent, but a necessary temporal tool to end wickedness and to bring humans into self control by learning that there are true limits to human endeavors. Humans are not eternal, not divine, not sinless, not perfect, but they are perfectible, forgivable, deify-able. The story of the flood is a revelation about God and His dealing with fallen sinful creatures. God is love (1 John 4:8), and as such God deals with His rebellious, fallen creatures in love. His goal is not to punish them eternally, but to bring them to repentance. His goal is not to wipe them out of existence, but invite them to change in order to embrace His forgiveness.

When God looks down upon the earth again after the deluge He still sees the same wickedness and evil coming from the heart of all people (Genesis 8:21), but as He promises He will not destroy all flesh but instead will become incarnate in it.

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8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.
9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. **10** And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Noah finds favor – not because he is “manly” or macho or heroic, but because he is righteous/godly. This alone is what God values and looks for in a human. Noah is the prototype of the just man who escapes the punishment of God. Noah escapes the ruin that the wicked world must suffer because of God’s judgment. “...if (God) did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...” (2 Peter 2:5,9). We get here a sense of what Peter got out of the flood story – it is not mostly about ancient history. The lesson of the flood story is to teach us about how God acts, especially in relationship to a righteous remnant in a sinful world. The moral of the story is God knows how to rescue the godly person and knows to punish the sinner.

Noah is an example to all believers that it is possible to live a godly life even in a time when godliness is otherwise absent from the world. God is still able to see something good in His creation – and it is in a human being! Today we often look for good and beauty in nature, not in our fellow humans. God however has His eyes upon the righteous. God can be pleased with a human; He was with Noah and can be with us too!

God seems concerned to find some good in His creation and to be able to maintain some continuity with the original creation rather than to simply obliterate the old creation and begin a totally new one. It is the righteousness of but one man that stops God from annihilating the earth. In God’s eyes the worth of one righteous person is more than the all the rest of humanity which deserves obliteration. A similar idea is presented in Genesis 18 when Abraham continually pleads to God to spare the city of Sodom from destruction even for the sake of five righteous ones. God is willing to show mercy if even one righteous person is in the mix, which is why Orthodoxy so often invokes the prayers of the saints on our behalf – perhaps God will be merciful to us for the sake of His saints.

St. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-16 instruction which could easily have been based on the story of Noah, the righteous man in a perverse generation: “work out your own salvation with

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fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life..." Faithfulness to God will not be accomplished by "keeping up with the Joneses" nor by following the crowd or doing what everyone else is doing. We are however not just to stand out or stand apart to condemn the world, to the contrary we are to be a light to the world showing them the way to the Kingdom.

"Noah was a righteous man" In the desert fathers, Abba Poemen upholds Noah as a model of poverty, probably because he saw Noah willing to give up all his possessions to do the LORD's will. Noah did not try to save or preserve his wealth or belongings but rather did as the LORD commanded, leaving everything behind in order to save his family and himself.

"Noah walked with God" Like Enoch in 5:22, Noah too walks with God. These are the only 2 personages in the Bible who are credited with walking with God. However, in Genesis 18:16-33, Abraham walks with his three mysterious visitors and talks with the Lord while walking, giving us an idea about what a walk with God consists and what one converses with God about when walking with Him. The implication is clear that those who walk with God are viewed as righteous, though the text doesn't indicate whether the walk or the righteousness comes first.

"Noah walked with God" Noah is described as being righteous in his generation – there were perhaps many paths he could have walked and many companions he could have chosen. He chose to walk with God. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers" (Psalm 1:1). With whom do we prefer to travel? What path do we chose and which destination? Noah seemed willing to take any path as long as it was with God. What would it mean for us if we were to make that choice?

"Noah, as He saw your nobility, the purity of your character and perfection in all things, God manifested you openly as the founder of the

second world. You preserved for it the seed of every kind, as He Himself decreed, from the overwhelming flood." (From the Canon of the Holy Forefathers of Christ)

Noah, the man to whom God spoke, is left speechless in the story. There is no record of what if anything Noah may have said to God. There is no record of any dialogue between God and Noah – all we have is several comments from God to Noah. Is Noah's righteousness purely that he was obedient - God said it, Noah believed it, that settled it? The very first words Noah will speak, and his only words recorded in the scriptures are his curse of his grandson Canaan in Genesis 9:25.

"Noah had three sons..." He also had a wife, yet she is not even given honorable mention at this point in the story. Her name is never mentioned. These early chapters of Genesis do not place a strong emphasis on family or marital life and values in a way modern Christians might prefer. Whatever role the husband and wife have with each other or whatever role the parents are to play in the lives of their children is not discussed. Fathers and sons are listed without mentioning wives or mothers, though the existence of women is implicit in the text – it is not explicit. The focus on the father-son relationship is suggestive that a very patriarchal tradition (tradition means a handing on of values and wisdom) is the normative way for families to operate. The text offers us little insight into or from family life among these fathers of our faith.

Noah's sons are not credited with being righteous as Noah is, however they will benefit from the righteousness of their father as God will invite them to enter the ark of salvation.

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11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. **12** And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

God had commanded the humans to fill the earth, and they have filled it with violence. And God sees this and apparently cannot or will not take his sight off of what He sees. Though we often pray that God will not turn away His face from his people (Psalm 132:10), and we fear God's hiding his face from us, when it comes to sin, certainly our prayers are that God not remember them and rather that He cover them over in His mercy. But in this text in Genesis God's vision is squarely fixed on human corruption. Can He still see His creation or does He now only see corruption? Again and again in verses :11-12 the text mentions God seeing the "corruptedness" of the earth (Not unlike Americans on 9/11 watching over and over the video showing the jetliners crashing in the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon!) God sees the sin of His people but He still at times expresses the hope that "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). God's hope is that we can see our sin and turn away from it to seek the face of God. In our Genesis text the humans apparently are not as offended by their vileness and violence as is God.

"the earth was corrupt in God's sight... it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." Three times the text specifically mentions the corruption of the earth. In the Septuagint, the Greek word for corrupt is the same word that God uses in 6:13 for destroy, "I will destroy them with the earth." The implication seems to be that as God sees it the humans have destroyed (corrupted) the earth; He now is going to finish the destruction which the humans began. God is simply going to bring to completion what the humans have started – the destruction of the earth. The God, who cannot be seen, can see. God has no eyes as He is not a physical being, so we cannot know how God sees, nor exactly what He sees. We hear that God "sees" and project onto that word our ideas of what seeing means. But God does not see as we do, His vision is not limited by physical eyes and sight. How and what He sees remains a mystery to us. Can God see what we see, since He has no eyes? Again, we can only guess. In Genesis 1 God was able to see goodness when nothing but light existed. He was able to see goodness when nothing but inanimate sea and earth existed. God's vision

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enables Him to see good in inanimate objects. We are not able to see what He sees, nor do we see as He sees since our sight is limited to our eyes. Sadly there came a time when God could no longer see good on earth.

“And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt...” In the seven days of creation described poetically in Genesis 1, seven times the narration says that God saw what He had created and it was good. When God called into being that which is “not God” and fashioned humans both male and female (Genesis 1), He somehow made “not God” both in His image and in relationship to Himself who is God. But now as God looks upon His “not God” creation, He is unable to recognize His image and likeness. That which was created, the “not God” is no longer looking good to its Creator. “Not God” has become antithetical to God and is at enmity with God. God had originally seen that His “not God” was very good (1:31) but now apparently cannot see any good in it for it has all become corrupt/destroyed. However, the God who is love is not going to abandon His fallen “not God” creation. For we know that this story is part of and moving towards God becoming “not God” in order to redeem and renew and restore “not God” to its original goodness, and then to move it beyond that goodness to a totally new oneness with God. In fact, mysteriously in God’s seeing the corruption of earth and the wickedness of humans is the very cause of God’s decision to have the Word of God become flesh. The corruption of the flesh will prompt the God who is love to unite Himself to the corrupted flesh to save it rather than destroy it. “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

Noah is different from other humans: he doesn’t need threats of punishment, the flood or hell to make him obey God. Noah is motivated by love for God – and Noah is a rare human being! Apparently nothing was able to make Noah turn away from God.

Noah’s righteousness is contrasted with the wickedness of the rest of humanity. Noah wasn’t blameless in God’s eyes because he lived in a time in which it was easy to be godly. The story precisely contrasts Noah to the world around him. The story is not offering some ideal golden age in which humans knew how to

behave. Noah’s world like the modern world is corrupt and filled with violence. Yet despite what the wickedness of the world, Noah found it in himself to be godly and righteous. Noah turns out to be a model for all believers in any generation. Despite the alleged corruption of everyone else in the world, one person can still live righteously, a good lesson for us. We don’t have to just live up to the standards of everyone else, we can choose to follow God and to seek God’s favor.

Note the wickedness of humans is not attributed to Satan – he is not even mentioned in the mess. Humans are quite capable of evil and cannot blame the devil for their own wickedness.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, God imposes increasing order on the chaotic and formless cosmos. The suggestion of the text is that by the corruption on earth God’s good order is both threatened and being undone. God decides He must once again step in and deal with his rebellious humans to restore good order.

“...for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” By declaring that “all flesh” had corrupted its way, the text implies it is not only humans who are corrupt/violent, but rather that all living animals (everything that has flesh) including the humans have become corrupt. Can animals sin? Genesis is not limiting itself to looking at conscious choices of evil. What has happened is that all flesh has become “destroyed” – the original purpose of all creatures that bear flesh has become so distorted as to no longer be recognizable to God. The cause of the flood is not merely the original sin of Adam and Eve. What God sees is a corruption of the very nature of the things He has created. And this corruption/destruction is not limited to our ideas of conscious and willful sinning. The world is no longer fulfilling the original intentions of the Creator. This is a “bad to the bone” ontology. Created things do not have to willfully sin, they obviously can become corrupted, distorted, and destroyed in their very being so as to be unrecognizable to their Creator. It is no wonder that God is sick in His heart. It isn’t simply the rational human beings who are using free will for evil. All flesh has become corrupted. Genesis is presenting the starkest of images. God can see in Noah righteousness – since no other being besides

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humans have free will, no other fleshly creature has the possibility of being redeemable, or of repenting, or of asking forgiveness. The Genesis story is a story of God's recreating His world. God saves the one human in whom He still sees righteousness (goodness?). Did God imagine that perhaps Noah's heart was not tainted as is the rest of humanity's heart with evil? Perhaps God hopes Noah can somehow be the seminal human of the new creation who will pass along righteousness to his descendents and thus to the entire human race after the flood. If this was the first effort at genetically modifying humans, it will not accomplish the desired results, to God's total regret. Noah is the one being from whom God hopes to be able to recreate the world in which creatures of flesh can repent of their wickedness and try again (for the first time?) to follow God's way. The rest of the animal kingdom is not capable of repentance or of cleansing the world of the destruction that has distorted every living being. Only humans with a heart can repent of wickedness, can decide to choose something other than corruption, have the rational ability to recognize wickedness and triumph over it. The other creatures lack that dominion over the flesh, over destruction, that humans have been given. The story of the flood is not just about humans willfully sinning, it is about the corruption of the created order – the malformation, the deformity, and the disfigurement of all flesh. It is as if evil was winning in the world and completely taking over and dominating God's good creation. God steps in to put a stop to this. God may have brought order to the abyss and the waters in Genesis 1, but a malevolent force was resisting what had happened to the abyss and was now at work in all flesh (Very much like Psalm 91:5-6's the terror of the night, the pestilence that stalks in darkness, and the destruction that wastes at noonday). This evil chaos God will endeavor to destroy in the flood with the intention of restoring order to His creation. The story is highly symbolic. For Christians it speaks of the waters of baptism – no longer a cataclysmic force of destruction but now empowered by God with order and reason to drown the sin but to save the sinner. This is certainly why St. Peter saw baptism as corresponding to the flood, and why the flood is mentioned in the baptismal service. But now the waters of baptism save not just seven people in the ark while destroying thousands, but rather save thousands and bring them into

the ark – the Church. It is also why in the Divine Liturgy when the celebrant lifts up the gifts at the anaphora he proclaims, "On behalf of all (things) and for all (things)." All of creation is in need of God's transforming salvation, not just humans. All things in heaven and earth need to be restored to their original beauty undistorted by the destruction of evil forces. We need to be saved not only from bad choices but even from all irrational wickedness and evil. As salvation is defined in Colossians 1:13-14, God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Salvation is not just a matter of dealing with human sins and misdeeds; it involves God asserting Lordship over ever force and power even the malevolent ones.

"Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he sent forth his word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!" (Psalm 107:17-22)

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13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. **14** Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. **15** This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. **16** Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

The Righteous man Noah learns about God and about righteousness not by reading any book, but by listening to the voice of God (for the Scriptures had not been written in Noah's day, but are put to writing only much later – if we follow the Bible's telling, in the time of Moses). This God who speaks remains a mystery, but His Word and voice are revealed to Noah. The God who remains transcendent speaks so that the righteous man can hear His Word. This is how God first revealed Himself in Genesis 1:3 – through His voiced Word. Listening to God's Word, not reading it, was the initial and primary way to come to know God and God's will for His chosen people. St. Isaac the Syrian (d. 700) wrote: "As long as our nature possessed a pure heart, God had no need to speak to us through the composition of writings, but He spoke to us as He did to Noah, Abraham, Job and Moses without the intermediary of a book. But because our nature fell into an abyss of evils, God spoke with us through writings on tablets of stone, a sign of the hardness of our hearts." St. Isaac suggests that the reason we have Scriptures is because of sin and our hearts hardening against God. Scripture was not the way God wanted to convey His Word to us, but to what He resorted when our hearts hardened against Him. In the fullness of time God acted for our salvation - the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Word did not become a book. The book only witnesses to the Word.

In the story, God tells Noah to build an ark, which is the first time the word "ark" appears in the text. It is something of a mystery as to how Noah would have understood God if in fact God was speaking about something Noah had never encountered. In the story of Adam naming the animals (Genesis 2), we are not told how Adam created the names. How did he make up the animal's names? How many words did he even know? How would these names have formed in his mind? Did the author of the text assume that language and words are innate – from the time we are born our brains have full vocabularies and Adam just drew from this God-given inborn knowledge? Or did he assume that somehow Adam seeing things for the first time had new names pop into his brain? Genesis is giving us a glimpse into how the ancients understood the mind or conceived the formation of language. And in the story of the ark as well as in Adam's naming of the animals, the Bible presupposes that the mind has all it needs to form new words – it doesn't need the help or influence of

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ancestors, society, or even a revelation from God.

When the invisible God speaks to Noah, somehow he “hears” the voice even though there is no one there speaking to him. How does Noah conclude “this is God speaking to me?” If the “voice” simply is in his head (there is no form to see outside of himself), how does Noah determine the source of the voice? At least when St. Paul heard Christ speak to him, he asked, “who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). Noah never asks who is speaking to him, he simply obeys. This invisible God speaks to Noah about something which Noah did not know – an ark. So how did an image form in his brain? How did He know what he was to build? The mystery of the relationship of the mind to the brain is much like the mystery of the soul to the body, and of God to man.

“God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to...’” The Prophet Amos tells us, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (3:7). God reveals His intention and plan to His servant Noah. The flood is not going to come upon the entire earth unannounced. The very purpose of the flood is to reveal God and His holy will, not merely to punish or destroy. God is not capricious, but gracious. The Wisdom of Solomon declares this truth about God: “Do not invite death by the error of your life, nor bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal. But ungodly men by their words and deeds summoned death...” (Wisdom 1:12-16). Clearly in Wisdom bringing about a flood which destroys all life goes against the very nature of God and His creation. The flood story is not portraying a natural disaster but truly an unnatural act of a heartsick Creator.

God speaks to Noah, and despite Comedian Bill Cosby’s retelling of the story, Noah never speaks to God or asks a question. Noah listens and Noah obeys, but He never addresses God. In fact no word of his is recorded until after the flood. Noah is a man of few words but great action.

“...for the earth is filled with violence through them...” God commanded the humans to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1), and the humans have filled the earth with violence and destruction.

“Make yourself an ark...” God tells Noah to make himself an ark. God doesn’t offer to build the ark for Noah. This is an important spiritual lesson for all of us in the Church. God tells us make ourselves an ark of salvation – the Church – God doesn’t offer to do our work for us. He doesn’t do the work that humans can do. He expects us to do the work we are capable of doing.

“Make yourself an ark...” The story presents us with some information with significant gaps in explanations. God commands Noah to build an ark, and Bill Cosby has Noah asking, “Lord, what’s an ark?” Good question. Is Noah is to understand that this ark is to be seaworthy? He is only told that God has determined to destroy the earth, and he is commanded by God to build an ark. The word “ark” as scholars note simply means a box or coffin. But this is no simple ark, it is massive – 450 feet long, and 75 feet wide. Which raises other interesting questions – Genesis has been devoid of any mention of any tools, let alone of engineering or architecture. How would Noah know what the ark is, let alone how to build it? Was he to be the ingenious inventor of engineering and architecture and shipbuilding in addition to all the tools and simple machines needed to do the building? He is not commanded to have anyone help him build the ark, and the story presents him as doing it himself. Since not even one story buildings have been mentioned in Genesis, how was he to know how to build a three story, 45 foot tall box? He would have had to invent and design all his own tools in addition to the engineering to accomplish the task. Fortunately the story is going to give him 100 years to complete the project.

If we are to assume that Noah understood the ark to be a seafaring vessel, this would be the first mention of a boat in Genesis. Were there other seafarers? If there were, why when the flood came couldn’t they simply get into their own boats and try to weather the storm? Were there no other boats on which others could have escaped the devastation of the flood? The ark is not a ship, it has no stern and no way to steer

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it. It is a box to protect those inside it from the storm, but leaves those inside completely at the mercy of the elements, and of God.

“...gopher wood...” The details of the ark are noteworthy as they contrast with the relatively little detailed information that is generally offered in Genesis. Gopher wood is mentioned only here in the Bible and is otherwise an unknown wood.

Though Noah is made aware of God's plan, Noah does not intercede on behalf of creation to beg mercy from God. Noah is obedient to God's will but apparently does not believe his intercession would make a difference or doesn't believe his role is to intercede for creation. Noah also does not ask his fellow humans to mend their way in hope that God's judgment can be changed. He neither preaches nor prophesies. In a wicked generation Noah is a model of steadfast righteousness where righteousness means obedience. He is not, however, commanded to warn his fellow earthlings about the impending disaster nor to reveal God's displeasure. He makes no call to repentance to the rest of humankind; in fact he shows no particular concern for the fate of his fellow humans.

“...filled with violence...” The text does not list any other sins or evils of humankind. Violence seems to be the wickedness which so upsets God.

“For if God ... did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:5-10). The New Testament uses the Noah story as a prophetic warning of God's impending judgment of sinners and salvation for His saints.

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17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. **18** But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

In the ancient Mideast cultures, there were many stories of a catastrophic flood which covered the entire world. Some of these other non-biblical stories are considered by scholars to be even older than the biblical story. It appears that the biblical story may have adapted some information from these other stories. For some believers the existence of these other stories might help confirm the truthfulness of the ancient belief in such a flood – it is widely written about in the ancient world. For others, the existence of these stories might appear to challenge the notion that the Bible alone has such a revelation. But the existence of other non-biblical flood stories does not in any way disprove that the biblical authors were inspired by God to include a story of a catastrophic flood in the Scriptures of Jews and Christians. The story of a catastrophic flood is not unique to the Bible, though the telling of the story is made to conform to the singularly monotheistic theology of Judaism (which does make it different from the other ancient flood stories). One such ancient flood story which can be readily found by modern readers is in the ancient Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. There are some close parallels between the biblical story and these other stories, and because the other stories are considered older than the biblical version it is assumed by scholars today that in fact the ancient biblical writers borrowed some information from these stories and adapted them for Jewish purposes and Jewish theology.

“...a flood...” A good question is why a flood? If God was determined to wipe out human wickedness why did He choose a flood which destroys everything in its path, not just the wicked? Why didn't God send a plague or virus to wipe out humanity – a “smart” bomb as it were - or a precision killer such as the angel of death that would have spared the rest of creation? We may never know exactly why this method was chosen, but we can speculate on a few things. The ancient idea of justice requires a punishment for the offenders that matches the dignity of the offended. In as much as the universal Creator had been offended by sin, a universal punishment is needed to restore the sense of justice in the cosmos. So a destructive catastrophe that affects the entire earth would be seen as an appropriate way to re-establish harmony, order and justice in the universe. The all-powerful Creator who has established order out of the chaos of the primordial abyss and brought the earth and humans into existence

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simply stops imposing His order on the world, and destructive chaos results. It is this cosmic act by God – withdrawing His hand which was keeping the chaos at bay – which cleanses the earth, destroys the nihilistic wickedness of an out of control humanity, and makes possible peace, order and justice in the world again. The Wisdom of Solomon offers us this: “For your all-powerful hand, which created the world out of formless matter, did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude of bears, or bold lions, or newly created unknown beasts full of rage, or such as breathe out fiery breath, or belch forth a thick pall of smoke, or flash terrible sparks from their eyes; not only could their damage exterminate men, but the mere sight of them could kill by fright. Even apart from these, men could fall at a single breath when pursued by justice and scattered by the breath of your power. But you arranged all things by measure and number and weight. For it is always in your power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of your arm? Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground. But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men’s sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which you hast made, for you would not have made anything if you hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who loves the living” (Wisdom 11:17-26).

In the New Testament, St. Peter uses the story of the flood and Noah’s ark as a prototypical story proving God does separate the good from the wicked, saving the good from a world awash in sin, and punishing the wicked for the sinfulness. “For if God ... did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:4,5,9-10) . For St. Peter the story of the flood is not as important as a record of past history, its full meaning is found in God’s Judgment Day at the end of the world.

“a flood of waters upon the earth...” God does not threaten the earth and its people with total annihilation – a return to absolute nothingness – rather God threatens the world with a return to chaos, the waters returning to the cover the earth and to bring an end to the order He had willed for creation. And He promises an ark of salvation for the faithful, righteous remnant. He is destroying wickedness in order to protect and preserve His chosen ones.

The ark. In Wisdom 10:4, it is Wisdom herself who guides Noah to build the ark. “When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.” The comparison of the ark to a piece of wood will also connect it to the wood of the Lord’s Cross in Christian poetic imagery.

“...destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die.” Everything may be an exaggeration for later fish and sea animals do not seem to be included in the list of all that dies. Perhaps the ancients did not think of fish/sea creatures as having the breath of life since they lived under water. St. Basil the Great noted that “A fish does not resist God’s law, and we men cannot endure His precepts of salvation! Do not despise fish because they are dumb and quite unreasoning; rather, fear, lest, in your resistance to the disposition of the Creator, you have even less reason than they.”

The ark. St. Symeon the New Theologian interprets the ark using an **allegorical** typology, as a way for us to understand the New Testament. “Again, the ark was a type of the Theotokos and Noah of Christ and the men with Noah were a first-fruit of the portion of the Jews, of those who would believe in Christ, while the wild beasts ... constituted a type of the gentiles.” St. Symeon tempers the analogy a bit noting that the ark saved those who were in it, while Christ saved both his ark (Mary) and all the world from the flood of sin.

In the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, Noah is upheld as a man of faith – he begins building the ark one hundred years before the flood comes. But Hebrews also uses the story to contrast Noah with the wicked people who no longer believed in God. Noah alone may have kept faith in God, but by remaining faithful to the

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Lord he was also calling into judgment all who had forgotten God. There was no excuse for their forgetting God – Noah was able to remember and so should have they. “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

Covenant. This is the first time the word covenant is used in the Bible. A covenant is an agreement “legally” binding two parties together. God is promising to bind Himself to a particular people on earth - not necessarily to all people but perhaps to all people through this chosen people.

God envisions the flood waters cleansing the earth of wickedness. But the only way to cleanse His creation of evil by this method is to drown all the people and all of the animals and plants. None of this changes the human heart, where evil comes from. It only destroys those who are evil. It is God who will Himself have a change of heart by the end of this flood story and promises Himself never to destroy the world again because of human wickedness. Even if He cannot change the heart of humans, God is moved to change His own heart. (The heart in biblical imagery doesn't often refer to the physical organ used to pump blood. Rather it is the center in a being for not only emotions but also for thinking. It is the inner self of a being. God has a heart according to Genesis and because we do too, this may be one way that we are in His image and likeness). What God will do however is revealed in the Gospel. God will unite Himself to humanity in the incarnate Christ in order to heal and restore fallen humanity. He will send His Holy Spirit upon humans after the death and resurrection of His Son. God's plan for the world is not to destroy the world but to save it by transfiguring and transforming it. “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). And miraculously, God will use water to wipe away sin – the water of baptism which drowns the sin but saves the sinner unlike the flood waters of Noah's day. As the Lord phrased it, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark...” Though we think about the flood story mostly in terms of its destruction of all flesh, the story is in the eyes of St. Peter (2 Peter 2) mostly about God saving His chosen people. The story shows that God knows how to rescue the godly no matter how little good can be found in humanity. The mention of covenant at this point in the narrative also is a very strong message of hope: whatever is about to happen, whatever destruction is going to occur, God obviously intends to have an on-going and continuous relationship with humanity. There is a future, even though it is going to be at the very distant other side of after the flood. But God is telling Noah and family not to despair. God is painting a very bleak picture about the world, but in the midst of His judgment there is hope for that faithful remnant.

“...you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” The order of the list of the person to be saved by God is interesting - the sons rank ahead of their mother. The Commandment to honor one's mother and father has not yet been issued to this obviously male dominated culture. God tells Noah that his wife and his sons' wives are also to enter the ark. One wonders if God had not commanded the inclusion of the wives whether Noah would have thought about it. Noah after all in the story is noted for his righteousness not his thoughtfulness. In fact we are never told what he thought about any of the God ordained events. God established His covenant only with Noah, not with Noah's family. The invitation to the ark ride shows God's largess and graciousness. The timeless God thinks a lot more about the future than the transient Noah. Noah is totally obedient to God. We are not told who Noah might have wanted on the ark.

Noah's wife is not named in the canonical Scriptures, and nothing is said about her at all. Intriguingly, in the book of Tobit Noah is upheld as a model of morality for taking his wife from among his relatives. In Tobit already a strong “racial profiling” is occurring among the Jews and marrying outside of their “own kind” is frowned upon. Tobit assumes Noah, the father of the saved people would certainly have chosen a fellow Jew to be his wife.

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19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.

20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them."

22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Part of the story of the flood is God's own graciousness in not wanting to completely destroy His creation but rather endeavoring to preserve some of it in order to cleanse and renew it. God's goal is not just the annihilation of wickedness. He didn't need to save Noah for that. He saves Noah because His plan is ultimately about salvation not destruction. So of all animals a pair of them is to be saved in order that they may be a continued part of the renewed creation. God does not even eliminate "unclean" animals for He has created them and they too are to be saved. The renewed creation which is to appear after the flood has every kind of creeping animal (including snakes) and every kind of unclean animal which eventually will be forbidden as food to the Jews. (at this point in Genesis humans are apparently still vegetarians as permission to eat animals/flesh is given only after the flood in Genesis 9:3 where all animals are given as food and none are declared as unclean). God wants to save the animal species from complete extinction. He apparently is not intending to recreate extinct species after the flood nor is He planning to create new species, but rather will repopulate the earth from the remnant gene pool. He is not going to create vast numbers of the animals as He did at the beginning of creation; rather He is going to expect the animals to repopulate the world through procreation.

In saving each species of animal, God puts some of the work of salvation on Noah himself. God does not do all the work but expects synergy with humans in saving the world. God doesn't build the ark for Noah; Noah has to do it himself. God doesn't save Noah's family and the animals of the world from the flood; He expects Noah to do that part of the work which humans are capable of doing. God has warned Noah what is to happen – that is something only God can do. It is up to Noah to accomplish the human contribution to the salvation of the world. Why does He need Noah to preserve the animals so that they too will exist after the flood? The salvation of the world is not a spectator sport. God calls His chosen ones to actively engage in the salvation of the world. God doesn't want a people who are in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, "so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good." The ark as a prototype of salvation requires the people who are to be saved by the ark to do a tremendous amount of work for themselves and for the world. There is little reason to doubt that had God so desired He

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could have simply drowned all the animals on earth and then created in the new world new animals. The God of Genesis is the Creator who also is Savior. If everything had been wiped out by the cataclysmic destruction, the God of Genesis would be little different than the other gods of the ancient world who create and destroy capriciously and amorally. The God who is love loves His creation even when it isn't lovely or loveable. God saves His creation; He doesn't simply trash it and start totally new each time He is unhappy with the results. He intentionally created beings with free will, the humans, and accepts the consequences of their decisions – and He expects them to as well! There is a sense in which there is a permanency to God's creation, even if the creation exists in time.

Patristic writers did see the flood as a foreshadowing of baptism – for in baptism the immersed person's sins are washed away and drowned while the one being baptized is saved and brought up to heaven. The baptismal font is a watery grave where the "old man" (the fallen sinner, the person whose humanity comes from Adam) is left buried along with one's sins, while the "new man" (the person whose humanity is that of Christ's) rises to eternal life. The flood waters are being portrayed not merely or even mostly as destroying the earth, but of cleansing the earth from corruption and freeing the earth of wickedness, decay and of death.

What do we learn about our God – a God who does not return His creation to chaos or nothingness, but rather uses the creation to cleanse and purify His world become corrupt? He is not a God who simply starts over anew, or abandons what He has begun. Rather He is a God who interacts with His creation in order to save it. The created cosmos is both capable of being used by the Holy God to cleanse corruption from it, and capable of emerging from the cleansing in a renewed form. Why did He not more simply deconstruct everything and then start again? Why does He try to use the little good that He finds in the world rather than starting all over? Could not He who created the animals in the beginning, create new ones after the flood? What is His relationship to and commitment to this cosmos and world? Why does He want to save part of it rather than simply starting from scratch? The answer to these questions is revealed fully only in the time

of the New Testament with the incarnation of God the Word. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). The Lord is the God of love, the God who is love. He is not going to annihilate that which He loves; rather His plan is to save it.

"Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up" Non-edible plants apparently will not be spared in the flood. The amount of food Noah would need to harvest and store up is immense and would require massive farms and storage facilities, as he wouldn't be able to do all this work and food growing and collection and storage on one day. It would be a project worthy of modern mass farming, transportation and storage. Or perhaps Noah was expected to bring back not only animal species from across the globe, but also a sufficient amount of their native foods to last from the time he got them back to the ark until the ark departed. The storage of such plant life (keeping it edible for a sufficient time period) would have been a challenge of "Biblical" proportions.

Noah is seen in the Patristic writers as an example of perseverance, faith and patience. He does everything God commands without ever complaining, asking a question, or even uttering a word. He manages to build the biggest structure known to man, while at that time going out into all the world and corralling representatives of every species of animal. Noah is the very icon of obedience and faith.