

Genesis 7

7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. **2** Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; **3** and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. **4** For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground."

Genesis does not tell us how the invisible God "speaks" nor how Noah would have known God's "voice" which would be coming from "thin air" as it were. Noah who cannot see God, has a mouth but does not speak. Noah is able to envision what God wants from him, even though He cannot see the God who is speaking to him. Noah cannot see God, but he can envision the ark and begins to work on it. Noah is able to see what God wants without seeing God. Noah shows no surprise at hearing the voice of the invisible God. God almost never dialogues with people at this point in the story. He simply speaks or commands and they either do or do not listen. Our story's narrator is obviously not God for the narrator is describing what God is doing and thinking. The narrator gives us no clue how he learned these things, he simply reports them.

In the Septuagint we read the following words using a boat on water as an image of relying on God's Wisdom to carry us safely through the tumultuous threats of a fallen world. The passage is reflecting on the lessons of Noah and the flood: "Again, one preparing to sail and about to voyage over raging waves calls upon a piece of wood more fragile than the ship which carries him. For it was desire for gain that planned that vessel, and wisdom was the craftsman who built it; but it is thy providence, O Father, that steers its course, because thou hast given it a path in the sea, and a safe way through the waves, showing that thou canst save from every danger, so that even if a man lacks skill, he may put to sea. It is thy will that works of thy wisdom should not be without effect; therefore men trust their lives even to the smallest piece of wood, and passing through the billows on a raft they come safely to land. For even in the beginning, when arrogant giants were perishing, the hope of the world took refuge on a raft, and guided by thy hand left to the world the seed of a new generation. For blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes" (Wisdom 14:1-7). The wood of the ark and that of the cross will be frequently associate metaphors in Orthodox hymns of salvation.

"seven pairs of all clean animals..." As in the early chapters of Genesis it appears that more than one tradition of the Noah/flood stories are brought together in the formation of our scriptures. Whereas earlier Noah was commanded to bring a pair of all animals into the

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ark (6:19, P-Source), here in the J-Source he is told to bring in seven pairs of all CLEAN animals. Modern scholars remind us that before these stories were written down in Scriptures, they were transmitted orally for generations. Oral Tradition doesn't have just one "author" (as we to think in modern times of an author). Rather it is held, authenticated, honored and handed on in community – by, through and in all the people. Oral communities commonly remember more than one version of a story (Think about the New Testament's four Gospel writers). It is only when the story is committed to written word that efforts are sometimes made to combine or harmonize the variations, or that the story begins to be examined for its "literal" truth. The story's discrepancies may be a clue that the story is not to be read quite so literally as we sometimes think it should be read. The text does not offer a reconciliation of the variations and doesn't command the reader to resolve the discrepancies. Source Theory offers a plausible explanation – there are two different sources at work here. The LORD (**YHWH**) commanding Noah to take 7 pairs of clean animals, while in Genesis 6 it is God (Elohim) who commands Noah to take but 2 pairs of ALL animals. The different ways of referring to God and the different commands given to Noah suggest that different traditions (sources) were blended together to form the canonical Scriptures. Since this was inspired by God, one has to think that God did not intend for the stories to be read only literally – they have deeper meaning and the variations in the story remind us of this. These God-inspired differences and inconsistencies motivate believers to dig deeper into their meanings in order to get beyond and past the literal details. Biblical literalists generally conclude that God was only further refining His thinking – 2 pairs of all animals but seven pairs of the clean ones which will be helpful at the end of the flood when Moses slaughters some of the clean animals in a sacrifice to God. The distinction between clean and unclean animals does primarily arise in the Bible in the time of Moses with the giving of the Law. Here the J-source anachronistically assumed that even in ancient days they would have known the Torah and followed it even before the Law regarding clean and unclean was given. The Torah-keeping Jews of the time period when Genesis was actually recorded as Scripture would have found the lack of distinction between clean and unclean animals

by Noah as unacceptable for a man whom God had deemed righteous.

"...in seven days..." Though in P-Source Noah has 100 years to build the ark, here in the J-Source he is suddenly given a seven day warning and in a new commandment is to gather seven pair of clean animals. The urgency in the story is now great. The reference to seven days in the story reminds us of the seven days of creation. Seven is a sacred time period. The combination of the two traditions (J-Source and P-Source) moves us back and forth from a grand picture of things to the sudden urgency of events. Jesus uses the story of Noah exactly as a warning against sudden and unprepared for death. "As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). The Final Judgment of God will come upon us just like the flood came upon the people of the world in Noah's day.

"I will send rain upon the earth..." God foretells what is going to happen. He wants Noah to understand that what is about to take place is not just an act of nature; it is the will of God. He prepares Noah for what will take place and wants Noah to understand the events happening are a fulfillment of a prophecy/promise. There is no coincidence, all that will take place is an act of God; it is what God intends to do. For his part, Noah is to remember what God told him, so that Noah upon seeing the deluge will not attribute the events to the forces of nature, to the unnamed evil, to the gods. Noah will be certain when the events transpire that the force unleashed upon the earth is the hand of the one Creator God.

"I will send rain upon the earth forty days..." One aspect of the flood story that it is easy for modern people to miss is that ancient people experienced nature and weather as an unpredictable and violent force in their lives. They lacked reliable methods to forecast the weather let alone earthquakes, volcanoes or Tsunamis. They tended to view nature as an anthropomorphic force that could suddenly and violently turn against them, or be used by God as a means of venting His anger on them. Nature was a totally unpredictable, uncontrollable and even hostile force. Though we today sometimes experience that force of nature (such as the hurricane Katrina devastating New Orleans), still we do have

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some warnings and with satellites and other scientific instrumentation we are given warnings and a little time to prepare for the force of nature. Ancients lived in a world where there was no way to predict even the smallest natural disasters and were often caught unaware. We see that dread of not only nature but also of the unexpected appearance of enemy armies in our liturgical prayer where we pray for deliverance from “Flood, fire, sword, invasion from enemies, civil war and sudden disaster.” The ancients experienced the world as much more unpredictable, chaotic, capricious and wreaking havoc without any warning. The story of the flood uses that experience of the ancient people and their fear of natural disaster to portray to its readers a warning about what can happen when humans totally disregard God and offend or anger Him.

“...seven days ... forty days...” Certain numbers repeat so often in the scriptures that they are believed to have symbolic value to them. Many scholars believe that the true significance of these numbers is in their symbolic meaning not in the actual literal numerical value. Seven is a number which symbolizes completeness in the Scriptures. God creates the world in 7 days. He warns Noah that the flood will begin in 7 days – the fullness of time is coming. Forty is symbolic of a long period of time and is often associated in critical situations with a form of consequences – 40 days of rain, 40 years wandering in the wilderness, 40 days of fasting. The idea that numbers stated in the Old Testament have a symbolic meaning to them is bolstered by the fact that in the ancient world alphabetical letters are used for numbers and so often people assume the number is a mystical spelling of a hidden word. St. Basil the Great for example wrote, “Scripture continually assigns seven as the number of the remission of sins.” He does not tell us what made him associate seven with repentance. Whole mystical movements especially in Judaism have evolved around numerology and occasional become faddishly popular. But those engaged in such deciphering of the meaning of numbers have rarely agreed with each other about the meaning of the numerals.

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5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him. **6** Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. **7** And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. **8** Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, **9** two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. **10** And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

Noah's unfailing obedience to God is noted repeatedly throughout the story. We do not know in the story if it is because he is righteous that Noah always obeys God or if he is considered righteous because he obeys God. In either case, the story is a revelation about how salvation works. God decides to save Noah from the impending judgment and deluge. He tells Noah to build an ark for himself. NOTE: God does not build the ark for Noah. Noah must be willing to do what he as a human is capable of doing for his salvation. God saving Noah does not mean God does all the work. God has already mentioned covenant to Noah – this is a mutual agreement, so Noah needs to do his part. For Christians, we have a responsibility to build the church, which is the ark of salvation. Remember the words edifice and edify have the same root. We are to build up one another – we are to edify one another so that we become the edifice which is the Church, Christ's Body. This is our responsibility and our role in salvation. When the judgment comes, if the Church, the ark of salvation, is incomplete or neglected, we all risk being lost. Building the Church, which is made of living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5) has far more to do with loving one another than it does with the detailed or obsessive keeping of rubrics. We are to love each other more than we love rules and regulations – this is precisely the lesson Christ offered the Jews, and they hated it and Him. It is through love of God and of neighbor that we build the Church. "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up (edify), just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Noah was said to be 500 years old when his sons were born (Gen 5:32), and 600 years old when he entered the ark (7:6). Thus he labored on the ark for 100 years – plenty of time for a patient man to build the ship of salvation! Of course he also had to use this time to gather all of the animal species from around the earth (To be realistic, the ancients in the day when Genesis was written wouldn't have imagined a global flood, as they had a much more limited

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view of what the entire earth meant. Many ancients actually imagined that the entire earth was limited in size and they envisioned the entire universe to be something like a big box which contained the “flat” earth. In some ways the ark – a big rectangular box – is a miniature version of how they envisioned the entire cosmos. The “temple” was also often thought of as a miniature model of the known world. And just as the ark was surrounded by the waters of chaos, so they imagined that the earth was in a similar condition. During the flood God just allowed the waters of chaos to overwhelm the earth, except for the mini-earth which was the ark floating on the waters of chaos).

“Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark...” Noah's sons are all about 100 years old when they enter the ark. For their entire lives they had watched their father laboring on this big box of his. What would have been clear to them is Noah is building something no one else had ever even conceived. Perhaps the enormity of the project made them believe the idea had to have come from the divine. In the story God speaks only to Noah. The invisible God which only Noah can hear told him to build the ark. What did his family think of their driven ‘old man’? Amazingly in the story they go into the ark, which had to have been intimidating to these good folk, trusting Noah and the invisible voice to which Noah was attuned. It is the sons' absolute trust in their father and their cooperation with him that leads to God blessing Noah's sons when they disembark at the end of the flood. They proved themselves to be men of faith. They trust the witness of their father.

It appears in this telling of the story that Noah and his family enter the ark first with the animals following Noah the ‘animalherder.’ The animals seem to voluntarily follow Noah and his family, and with dignified processional order enter into the ark. There is no rush to get in, no pushing or shoving. Rather the text portrays a beautiful procession – animals side by side, matched with their mates, patiently waiting their turn to make the grand liturgical procession into the ark. They are following the command which God had given to Noah, perhaps a Scriptural way of taking a poke at the serpent of Genesis 3 who questioned Eve about what God had commanded. Now the animals all obey, apparently recognizing Noah's dominion over

them. Indeed this is one of the few texts in Genesis where a human actually has dominion over the animals who follow him in peace. There is no stampede, no panic. And there is no rush to get on board by the animals that were not chosen to go on the ark. The animals are portrayed as knowing their place – which are to follow Noah and in which order. The peaceable kingdom is at hand, lion and lamb respectfully cooperating with the humans. This is not the domestication of all animals, but rather the animals doing by nature what is expected of them. The animals respect Noah's God-given authority. Did these non-rational beasts understand the salvation of the world and of their kind was at stake? Is the fact that God saves all of the species of animals from extinction a hint that God loves His non-rational creatures as well? Is it possibly a sign that in the end, God will ultimately save even the animals of the world? Animals were created for the benefit of humans, but in the Noah story in entering the ark they share all of the benefits of being human.

One of the lessons learned from the Noah saga is that the world is messy. Rational and scientific minds often want a totally mathematically predictable and describable world. But the reality of both love and evil argue against such a world. Beauty adds a totally different dimension to our thinking, but so does randomness. Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle tells us that we cannot know everything about our world. It is not that we lack the proper instrumentation, but rather any instrumentation we might build interacts with the things we wish to understand and changes them making measurement of every last fact impossible. All of this is true without mentioning God or Satan, or hearts which constantly imagine evil, or saints whose sacrificial love defies belief. The story of the flood reminds us that the non-rational is part of the universe we inhabit – something modern theories in relativity and quantum physics affirms.

St. Isaac the Syrian wrote that the Noah story teaches us that the time to obey God is now – the Day of Judgment or wrath is too late because once God's judgment begins it will be too late to enter the ark of salvation. We must embrace salvation before the Day of Judgment! And so though today we often feel no immanent threat of God's impending judgment, now is the

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time to follow God's commandments. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). As St. Paul warned in words that are most appropriate to the lessons surrounding the Flood, "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:11-14).

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11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. **12** And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

With almost scientific precision and disinterested objectivity we are told exactly to the day when the flood began. For the modern reader this lends historical accuracy to the story. The ancients were often interested in numerology, and the numbers may have symbolic value lost on us. But using the calendar historians believe was in effect when the story was written, the flood begins on a Thursday. It will end according to this version of the flood story on a Monday.

“..the great deep burst forth... and rain fell...”
After 100 years of building and preparing the ark according to the P-Source, the flood seems to almost suddenly and unexpectedly burst forth. Our Lord Jesus himself interprets the advent of the flood as a humanly unanticipated and completely unexpected judgment being visited upon the world: “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” ... For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day. ... As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:20-27). Christ uses the Genesis story of the flood to warn that with an equally unexpected force the Kingdom of God will suddenly appear. We won’t have to go looking in the Holy Land or Jerusalem, for the coming of the Lord will be a cosmic event; the news of it will not spread slowly but rather the world will be instantly transfigured by its happening – which is what happened to the world when the flood burst forth upon it. And in the end of the world, those chosen to be saved by God will be in the ark of salvation – the Church where they will ride out the final storm. One hundred years of warning and preparation are not enough alarm and time for the earth to be ready for God’s judgment. “When people say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3). This is the lesson we are to learn from the flood, and we are to learn it well.

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One interesting aspect of the flood is that while God certainly promises to unleash the cataclysm, His role in this chapter is mostly that of the sustainer and protector of Noah and all aboard the ark. The storm that rages is described in mostly naturalistic terms with little reference to God's own involvement – the deep bursts forth, the rain fell, the windows of heaven were opened but none of these things are directly attributed to God. The text is amazingly careful to avoid saying God did these events that brought about the destruction of the world. God promised the destruction, but then the cataclysm seems to “just happen.” God as Creator, Sustainer and Protector of life is very much emphasized in the story rather than God as destroyer. Noah and his family and the animals on the ark are central to what is happening – they are being saved by God's providential warning and grace. All that really is being destroyed is wickedness. The story carefully avoids any idea that God is a wicked, mean, petty, vengeful, capricious, cranky, purposeless or immoral destroyer. God's goal is not to destroy, but to rid the world of evil. God is not evil, He is destroyer of evil. God is not destroying life; He is preserving life on the ark and only destroying wickedness. And all of this comes out of God's heart which is full of grief and sorrow because of the wickedness of the world. The story is not emphasizing God as angry judge, but one who is brought to grief by evil, and destroys the evil to preserve and save that which is good in His creation. The flood itself is not life-giving, rather it is purifying. The flood is not enriching the soil so that it can be more productive, it is cleansing the earth of evil. The story upholds God as holy, Creator and Savior.

“all the fountains of the deep burst forth...” Not only is there a deluge of rain but all the waters beneath the earth spring forth to the surface, The abyss which God tamed and ordered in Genesis 1 to allow the dry land to emerge is permitted to reclaim the earth. On the 2nd day of creation in Genesis 1 God created a great vault to separate the waters above the heaven from the waters beneath the heaven. All of these waters of chaos were pushed back into their place and contained by God until this moment when God decided to no longer hold back the great waters of the abyss. The Psalmist says, “You did cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; at the

sound of your thunder they took to flight. The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which you did appoint for them. You did set a bound which they should not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth” (Psalm 104:6-9). The Psalmist claims God set a permanent boundary for the waters. But though he claims the waters were prevented from ever covering the earth again, in the Genesis flood this is precisely what is said to happen. The permanent boundaries of the waters above and below the earth were removed and the waters rushed in to reclaim the territory from which they had been driven by the orderly creation which God enacted. The cosmology in the Old Testament envisions the heavens as a great ceiling above which are the storehouses of God – where He keeps the waters of chaos and all the extra water, snow, etc, that He might use at some time. But these storehouses of the heavens hold other things as well - “Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; and he rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance” (Psalm 78:23-25). In Psalm 78 the heavens are also the storehouse for the manna that rained down on the Israelites in the wilderness. The cosmology certainly envisions a very physical heaven which is well stocked with all kinds of materials. The ancients did not have an idea of the outer space, or the vast reaches of a mostly empty universe. To them the sky was a solid wall holding back physical items.

God does not use some supernatural means to accomplish His will. God uses what already exists in creation – water – to accomplish His plan for the cosmos. Chaotic water upon which God imposed order in the beginning to bring forth dry land and life on earth is now to be used to cleanse the earth. Part of the revelation of the flood story is that God is Lord even over the flood waters, over the abyss, over chaos itself and over all evil. God's Lordship remains unchallenged by the forces of nature, even when these forces overwhelm the entire earth. God shows His Lordship over nature and the abyss by being able to save Noah and his family and the animals in the ark. However forceful and destructive these powers are, God is able to shield and protect his chosen ones from their might, because He is even more powerful. In the baptismal exorcism, it is claimed that Satan does not even have power over the swine. God

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in the flood story asserts His authority over human evil, over all the powers of nature and over the powers of chaos. These malevolent forces cannot do anymore to God's creatures than God allows. In Psalm 93:3-5, God's Lordship is established over all of nature, even over the most destructive floods imaginable.

St. Augustine says that like Noah we Christians are today building an ark – the Church – for the salvation of the world. Others are going about their business and ignoring us, but we should all learn from the people in Noah's day and take seriously the respite God has provided us before the awesome and terrible day on which His judgment will occur. For Augustine the Church is the ark which will carry us through God's judgment when it like the floodwaters bursts upon the world with a destructive force.

The 100 years that it takes Noah to build the ark suggests that God's decision is not passionate vengeance, but a plan. And since the plan has to do with God's revelation, Noah working at the ark for 100 years would be a way of saying that plenty of people had opportunity to ask the prophet what he was doing and why. Punishing people by drowning them would do nothing for those folk as they would be dead without having changed human behavior. As it is the wicked are given a chance by God to come to their senses and to ask God what they should do to prevent the flood. No one apparently asks.

If we follow the insight of Source Theory we realize it is in the J-Source that the rains causing the flood lasts 40 days and 40 nights. The P-Source has the flood waters rising for 150 days from the time the waters burst forth upon the earth. By separating the Genesis 6-9 into the two versions of the same story, we can make sense of the different numbers of days, 40 or 150, being used in Genesis. For our reading of the Genesis Flood account, the length of the flood is not as important as the lessons we learn from the story. It is a story with a moral after all, and it is the lesson learned, not the literal facts which are important for modern believers.

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13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, **14** they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. **15** They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. **16** And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

How did Jesus make use of the story of Noah and the ark? In the Gospels, Jesus uses the story of the flood as a prototype and warning for the sudden end of the world and the coming judgment of God. "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39; see also Luke 17:27). Jesus mentions Noah in response to the question, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:3) Basically Jesus warns that as the flood suddenly came upon the unsuspecting people, so too will be His return marking the beginning of the final Judgment Day. There will not be warning signs to be observed, it will catch everyone by surprise (Luke 17:20). He says people will be going about their daily business as they always do and always did (like in Noah's day) because they don't really believe God's Judgment will ever come nor do they believe in its finality, nor that unbelievers will be swept away in the judgment. The Lord Jesus does not use the flood story as a test case for proving the literal truth of Genesis. He uses the story as a prophetic warning about how the Judgment Day will come suddenly upon us and we won't be prepared unless we've heeded His warning. The flood story is the prototype; a foreshadowing of what God is intending to do when the final Judgment Day comes. That Day will come by total surprise just like the flood in Noah's day. "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming... Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:42,44). Jesus uses the story of Noah to teach us to be prepared, alert and vigilant for the Judgment Day. The issue is not whether Genesis records the literal facts about the flood. The moral of the story as the Lord Jesus says is that we need to be prepared and alert unlike the people of Noah's day. The story has a point and a purpose whether it is legend or history; its message is "be prepared for God's coming Judgment." Even if we don't believe in the literal details, it doesn't truly matter for the Lord Jesus Christ tells us that we have been forewarned about God's Final Judgment by the story of the flood. However we understand the story of the flood, we have no excuse for being unprepared if God

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in our lifetime suddenly ends the world for Judgment Day. We need to act like the citizens of Nineveh when warned by Jonah that disaster was impending because God had judged the city. Those citizens repented, they didn't argue over the believability of the prophecy, or whether the literal details made sense. If we use the story only to argue about the literal truth of scriptures, we lose the meaning which our Lord assigns to the story. More important than trying to convince people the story is literally true, we need to use the tools God has revealed to us in the scriptures to teach people that there is a God and that each of us is going to have give an accounting for what he or she did in and with his or her life. If we try to turn the prophetic warning of the Noah story into a science or history lesson, we risk never helping people have a relationship with God because we didn't handle the scriptures well and try to turn them into a science textbook, rather than reading them as the theological revelation which they are. What is true about the story of the flood? It is true that we need to be prepared for the Judgment Day which Christ promises is coming.

Literal reading of a text. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), and though he didn't wait around for Jesus' answer, his question is significant. In America, most commonly when someone asks, "Is the bible true?", they mean only is it literally (scientifically and historically) true. But this is a very limited way to understand that question. John 1:17 reads, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Does this mean that what Moses wrote – the Torah – is not truth? That is literally what the text says, but it is not what the text means. The Old Testament is also the scriptural record of the revelation of God. It is truth. But truth is more than just words on a page. Jesus said to the Jews, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). One of the unintentional effects of the printing press is that it makes us think of words on a page in terms of "literal truth." We have a hard time reading poetry because the words are often metaphorical, figurative, symbolic, or present truth in images not in purely factual ways. Because we have printed Bibles, we forget that in the beginning God SAID, He didn't write anything. And in John's Gospel the Word of God is identified as Jesus Christ, not as the

Bible! Printed Bibles have tended to make us think about truth as something printed in words, and have in some ways narrowed our ability to understand God's truth because we want one precise (and short!) text to quote - a sound byte. We don't want to have to consider the whole context of a passage, nor its place in the entire Bible. Printing presses have caused us to equate "the Word of God" with words on a page rather than with the Jesus who is the Word of God, the full revelation of God. This has narrowed and limited the depth of scripture and the richness of our scriptures. It has also often forced some to feel the need to defend the literalness of the Bible when reasonable questions are raised about the text and about what we know from science and laws of nature. While we do claim that the Scriptures are true and that the Scripture contains truth, our Lord says that the very purpose of the Scriptures is to bear witness to Him. Scriptures point to the truth, and point out the truth. The truth is not limited by the Scriptures. The Scriptures don't say reading them will lead to biblical literalism, rather they are supposed to lead us to Christ. Reading the Bible merely literally will often not lead to Christ but might lead us into conflict with the truth that God is revealing to us through His created world. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus claims to be truth. His claim is that truth is not a "what" but a "who". While we certainly can read Scriptures literally, and much of Scripture reads perfectly well literally, if that literal reading does not lead us to Christ, then the way we are reading the scriptures (take note: NOT the Scriptures themselves but only **the way** we are reading them) causes us to fail to achieve the very point of the Scriptures in the first place. Some fear, however, that if every word in the Bible is not literally true than the Bible is not trustworthy at all. This is a false fear and a false belief. The Bible contains parables and poems and stories whose purpose is to lead us to Truth even if they are not literally true themselves. Anyone who reads Aesop's fables knows they are fictional fables, but they teach truth. We quickly can understand the lessons they teach about greed, arrogance, selfishness. They do not need to be literally true to teach truth. The story of George Washington and the cherry tree teaches a lesson about honesty and truthfulness. Yet the story is purely fictitious. It was originally made up to teach us about honesty – the appeal to George Washington

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was because he is believed to have been an honest man. The story affirms his honesty and teaches us “not to tell a lie.” We all can understand the lesson even if we know the story is fictional (a lie that teaches the truth!). We can easily understand from such lessons that Truth is something more than words on a page. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But is this statement literally true? In what way are we all equal (weight, height, intelligence, wealth, athletic ability, education, artistic talent, health)? Self-evident to whom? Who is the “we” that Jefferson meant? Who do we count in the “we” today? Only when we qualify what we mean, and explain what we mean, and define what we mean, is the truth of Jefferson’s statement revealed. A purely literal reading of the text is possible, but it won’t reveal the fullness of the truth – what we believe today about this statement nor what he meant when he wrote it. So is the bible true? Yes, because we have the key – Jesus Christ – to unlock the deepest meanings of what it says. Origen, the greatest biblical exegete of the 3rd Century, did take note that there are in fact discrepancies and inconsistencies in the Scripture stories that cannot be explained. He concluded that because of this truth does not lie in the literal reading of the text but rather in the meaning of the text. He speculated that perhaps God Himself put such stumbling blocks in the Scriptures to make sure we realized there is a deeper meaning to the text. This he felt will get us off reading the Bible merely literally and to look for the deeper, spiritual meaning of the Scriptures.

The story of the flood waters is related to the theme of salvation and judgment. It is a theme which is repeated numerous times in the Bible. In the beginning of creation, the dry land was made to appear from the chaotic deep waters in Genesis 1. The Hebrew people will be saved from Pharaoh by passing through the threatening waters of the Red Sea which will drown their pursuing tyrant. And finally with the coming of Christ, baptism becomes the means of salvation for His chosen people. Thus we can see the theme of water being related to creation, salvation, and judgment.

One of the priest’s prayers at Vespers asks God to “Guide us to the haven of Your will.” God’s will is sometimes very demanding and difficult for us to perform, and yet it is a haven for us as well. The Noah story is precisely about totally trusting God. In the story Noah builds this huge ark – a huge box for a ship – even though no water is around him. He trusts God. He takes wild and dangerous animals into this giant box along with his family. He trusts God. He is sealed in the box for more than 11 months without being able to see the sunlight, and without fresh air. He trusts God. The ark is sent on a wild ride on a totally destructive flood over which Noah has no control. He trusts God. Noah trusts that God’s will is indeed a haven despite its most obvious dangers and uncertainties. This is certainly a main part of the message of the story.

“(The animals)... went into the ark with Noah, two and two ... male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him” As in 7:9-10, so in this version of the story, the animals follow Noah like sheep into the ark. The animals obediently do what God commanded Noah. There is a great emphasis on the fact that only in the moments before the cataclysmic flood do the animals suddenly have the relationship with the humans that God envisioned back in paradise. Somehow the animals know this time, in this moment, salvation is on the line, and they need to follow Noah as if they are obeying God Himself. The human finally has dominion over the animal kingdom!

“...the Lord shut him in...” Again in the story God acts in an anthropomorphic fashion and is able to shut the door of the ark. Is this a “pre-incarnation” of God? It is at a minimum a prefiguring of God’s intervening in human history in order to save humanity from sin. How is it possible for God to touch that which is “not God”? “Not God” is all now part of the fallen world and yet God is still able to act in the world and even touch it; unless of course the text is only figuratively speaking. But the exact role of God in saving the humans by closing the ark door suggests strongly God lovingly and incarnationally acts to save humankind. Origen in the 2nd Century felt the anthropomorphic acts of God such as shutting the door of the ark precisely show us that we need to read the text symbolically or figuratively or otherwise we

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make the Creator God nothing more than one of the minor gods of paganism. Arguing in a world awash in paganism, Origen warns Christians against too literal a read of the bible which he felt can only lead to wrong theology and to disbelief.

“and the LORD shut him in.” The anthropomorphic touches in the story give us that strong sense not just of God intervening in the world, but of the closeness of God to His humans. “For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit’ (Isaiah 57:15). If we did not have both the J-Source and the P-Source stories, our imagery concerning God would be impoverished. If the P-Source with its transcendent God had fully controlled the final editing of the Scriptures, we would have no images of the Creator God closely interacting with His creatures. So rather than fearing a scholarly insight like the notion of more than one story being woven into our biblical text, we can appreciate how biblical scholarship actually deepens our knowledge of God and appreciation of the text. The atheistic secularist, who attacks the Faith by mocking the literal reading of Genesis, might find a much more profound truth about what it means to be human when he experiences the Christian community accepting and being guided by Truth, whether biblical, historical or scientific. The test of faith is not whether we hold on to the literalness of Genesis even when it contradicts common sense or the knowledge of the world God has allowed us to discover through rational search. The test of faith is do we believe God’s promises revealed through His prophets, His people, His Scripture and ultimately through His incarnate Son? Even if we lack proof for His promises – the scientific method and historical research cannot prove whether or not God’s kingdom is real nor if God even exists – do we believe that God created the heavens and the earth and do we believe the life in the world to come? Do we live as if we believed these things or do we live only for the comforts and pleasures of this world? “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say,

“You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder” (James 2:14-19). The story of Noah and the ark teaches that no matter what happens on earth, it is all part of a much bigger plan of God for the salvation of humankind. Perhaps a literal reading of Genesis is of comfort to certain believers, but it is not the God established test for determining who is being faithful to His promises. Our true task and the true sign of faith is to love God and love neighbor – to love one another as Christ loved us - not to decide whether or not Genesis is literally true.

“...the LORD shut him in..” God does not go into the ark with Noah; rather God closes the door behind and Noah and locks him and his family into the darkness of the inner decks of the ark. God has not told Noah that He was going to sojourn with Noah. This is a journey that Noah and family and the animals are going to make on their own, as it were. God will be on the outside of the ark, not within it. He has shut them in, come what may. The journey in the ark – riding out the storm – is a journey for Noah and his family. The God who walked in the Garden (Genesis 3) will not even so much as get His feet wet in this flood. The flood is indeed dirty business, and God will maintain His holiness this time around. As we know in the Christmas story, God acts in a totally new and unexpected way. By becoming incarnate in Christ, God no longer separates Himself from sinful humanity but rather takes on sinful human flesh and the human heart which is ever inclining to wickedness. In the Nativity story, God no longer will attempt to drown sin, but rather will unite earth to heaven and transfigure and transform fallen humanity making it capable of being God-bearing again. The Theotokos, Mary the God-bearer is key to the salvation of the world.

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17 The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. **18** The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. **19** And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; **20** the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

Chrysostom, who like most Patristic writers looks at the Scripture as a witness to the goodness of God, speculates that the 40 day rain was used by God to give the people not in the ark the chance to repent as the waters slowly rose and before they drowned. God gives the people the chance to think about why the destruction is happening and to come to their senses like the Prodigal Son and to repent of their sins and seek God's forgiveness. His interpretation of this verse requires us to ignore vs. 11 where in fact a giant cataclysmic Tsunami did overwhelm the earth all at once.

"and the waters increased, and bore up the ark" One is reminded of Psalm 107:23-32 : "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded, and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders." The Psalm in turn brings Matthew 8:23-27 to mind: "And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, 'Save, Lord; we are perishing.' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?'"

"The waters prevailed and increased..." The author of the text uses the same word for increase that was used by God in Genesis 1 when He blessed the animals and told them to increase and multiply. Now the waters are multiplying in order to overwhelm the animal life. The story portrays an undoing of the order God had imposed on the world. One thing that was

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increasing is that which was wrong with the earth!

Jesus uses the story of the flood as a warning about the coming judgment of God to the people of His generation and to us. Christ's use of the Noah story is to turn it into a typology - a foreshadowing of a future event. It is not the flood itself which is important, but the role the story of the flood serves to prophetically prepare us for the coming judgment of God. "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39)

St. Peter in his Second Epistle also uses the story of the flood as a warning to all about the impending Judgment Day of God. He argues that those who scoff about Judgment Day are no different than the folk in Noah's day. Peter's reference to the flood in his verse 3:6 does seem predicated on a belief that the deluge was a historical event. "First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-7).

"...the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep." The depth of the water (22.5 feet above the tallest mountains – Everest!) would have meant most of the space which we now consider our atmosphere would be filled with flood waters. Even the North and South Pole would be under water to this huge depth. The height of the water would have meant both salt and fresh water would be intermixed changing the salinity of both. St. John Chrysostom (4th Cent AD) tries

to navigate his flock away from just thinking about the literal claims of the text. "So, sacred scripture narrates this, not simply to teach us the flood level, but that we may be able to understand along with this that there was absolutely nothing left standing – no wild beasts, no animals, no cattle; rather, everything was annihilated along with the human race." He does not question the veracity of the literal details, but tries to move believers beyond overly focusing on them to the point that it raises serious intellectual doubts. The point of the story, he says, is to say all life except that in the ark was destroyed because God wanted to give the world a fresh start and by cleansing the world of all wickedness a renewed chance to pursue goodness. He doesn't think the literal details are what is important. It is what the flood accomplished that is significant. He argues not to get bogged down in the details so much that you lose sight of the story's meaning and purpose.

Chrysostom does not say the Genesis story is mere fable or myth; however he wants to caution against an overly literal reading which would contradict reason and rational truth and thus lead to a loss of faith. He always wants his flock to know that scripture is to inspire in us a trusting faith in a loving God. He certainly tends to downplay interpretations which would make God into an angry tyrant bent on destroying an evil world. God for him is always a saving and loving God, and that in his belief is the revelation of scripture. "So, whenever God does something, dearly beloved, don't insist on inquiring with your human reasoning into whatever he has done: it surpasses our understanding, and the human mind could not succeed in measuring up to it or grasping the secret of what has been created by him. Hence, after hearing that God has so directed, we ought believe and obey what is said by him." (HOMILIES ON GENESIS 18-45, TFOTC, p 135) Chrysostom's "pray and obey" response to difficult scripture passages will obviously not satisfy some inquiring and skeptical minds. To his credit he never shies away from difficult questions raised by believers or non-believers and often in his commentary poses questions he imagines people asking when the text might cause an inquiring mind to disbelieve.

Some life in the seas, oceans and lakes would have been able to survive the flood. The text

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really doesn't concern itself with sea life being able to survive, nor how if it was destroyed it would have been "recreated" after the flood since its seed would not have been saved. The wrath of God seems focused only on land life anyway. This of course raises the question for some, why destroy all life except for that of marine life? The animals on land were not any guiltier of sin than the animals at sea. It doesn't seem fair. But then our ideas of "fairness" are shaped by modern egalitarian notions in which we want all things treated "the same." This was not an idea that was vogue in the ancient world which accepts inequalities as normative and thus had a very different sense of what is fair. In the ancient world when families or tribes or villages or clans suffered as the result of the evil of their leaders, this was considered fair as the ancient world did not really think in terms of individualism. Generally in the ancient world the smallest social unit is not the individual but a person's family or clan. In the ancient world each person is part of a greater social unit and so it would be "fair" if the head of a social unit suffered that all the members of that unit would suffer with him/her. And the ancient notion of fair included an idea that the higher up the social ladder you went the greater the suffering for wrongdoing. Thus the effect of the humans sinning was great throughout the entire creation since in the Genesis story humans had dominion over all other creatures. By our modern thinking it is not "fair" that animals suffered as a result of human wickedness. By our modern thinking it is not "fair" that marine life escapes the fate of land life. But the story of the flood is not about modern ideas of fairness. The story is about how unfair it is that humans, created in God's image and likeness (unlike all the other animals in creation – hey, that's not fair! That's not equal!), created to have dominion over all other animal life (hey, that's not fair!) respect neither God, nor each other, nor the rest of creation. The humans totally destroy the natural relationships between God and humans, humans and other humans, humans and the rest of creation. Remember when in Genesis 6:11-12 God saw the "corruption" on earth; "corruption" is the same word as "destruction" in the original text. God saw how humans had destroyed the relationship between themselves and everything else. The animal life and the abundant plant life which was created for the benefit of humans in Genesis 2 are being taken away from them in the flood story. This is part of God's punishing the humans. Noah and

company are being saved, but they also are suffering punishment for the sins of all humanity. God saw Noah as righteous, but while that spares Noah from dying in the flood, it does not spare him from suffering along with the rest of creation because of sin. There are 8 humans who will survive the flood, but just as Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, so Noah and company lose the goodness of the original earth, and are going to be plopped down into a world which is even more hostile to them. After the flood the animals will dread and fear the humans. The humans are moving ever further away from not only Paradise but the world into which Eve and Adam were sent. The humans are suffering serious loss and consequences for their continued wickedness. The rest of the creatures on earth are becoming increasingly hostile to the humans. So though the story is about a just God angered at the wickedness of His favored creatures, it is not about modern notions of fairness (which shaped our ideas of justice). In the flood story, the One who is directly offended by human sin is God, and the ancient view of "justice" (fairness) demands that the one who is offended is the one who must somehow be made "satisfied" by the action against the offender. Thus the cataclysmic flood which effects the entire world is part of the ancient sense of justice – the God of all creation was offended by human sin, and so a punishment must be meted out that restores his honor and restores order and restores justice to the universe. At least according to the story this is what the flood has to accomplish. Universal justice and order are restored by cleansing the world of all that was offensive to God. That the land animals had to suffer to restore this justice is considered by the ancients what it takes to complete the task (we might apply a modern concept – collateral damage – to this thinking of fairness. You can't bomb the enemy's industrial production into oblivion without also killing the civilians and destroying the economies and daily lives of the people). But in the end of the story, God is not going to be "satisfied" with the achievement of such justice. He is the God who is Love after all and in the end He is going to promise never again to use universal destruction as a means to re-establish universal justice and order.

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21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man;

22 everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. **23** He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. **24** And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

While the flood according to the story causes a massive extinction of all life (those in the ark being the only to survive), the purpose of the flood is to free the world from wickedness, not to destroy life. "As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11)

In Matins there is a hymn of light which extols God and includes the line addressed to Jesus: "O Lord and God, lamb of God, the Father's Son: You take away the sin of the world, O You who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" (translation from New Skete Monastery, A BOOK OF PRAYERS). Since the advent of Christ, no longer does the Lord God use the impersonal and destructive flood waters to take away the sins of the world as He did in Noah's day. Now in Christ, it is the Word of God Himself, not nature obeying God's Word, which takes away the sin of the world. And the Word of God takes away the sins of the world not by destroying the world, but by dying for it to save it. No longer by destroying humans will God save His holy remnant, but rather by the death of His Holy Son will God destroy sin and death. The force of the flood waters destroyed all in its path – animal and human regardless of sin. Christ takes away the sin of the world only by allowing Himself to be destroyed by the world. Truly the love of God surpasses our understanding. The moral of the flood story is a message to all who want evil destroyed – evil is better destroyed by God's love than by His wrath. The Genesis flood temporarily destroyed wickedness by destroying the wicked without giving them a chance to repent in order to save themselves from God's judgment. Christ on the other hand eternally destroys death and gives life everlasting to all repentant sinners. God destroys evil so that love can prevail. It is not God's wish to destroy His creation along with the evil in it but rather God desires that even the wicked be converted to goodness through His love and mercy.

"He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals..."

This would have included children, toddlers and babies, people we would normally consider to be innocent of sin and malice. However, keep in mind in the story that outside of mentioning the birth of the humans (birth of the **men/males**)

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there has been no mention in Genesis of infants, child rearing, or children. If the story is to be read only literally we have to assume either God drowned innocent children, or that since they aren't mentioned in the story, there were no children when the flood occurred. If however the story was intended to be read figuratively or symbolically (we know the New Testament reads it prophetically, metaphorically, typologically and even allegorically) the story may be suggesting what it literally deals with – the destruction of sin-prone, violent and wicked adults (and maybe specifically adult males since women are not much mentioned in the story either). So rather than portraying this angry, capricious, destructive, unpredictable, and violent God (common ideas in ancient literature about gods) who drowns the innocent along with the guilty (which one might conclude from a literal reading of the story) a more careful and thoughtful reading of the text (and one that would be more consistent with the Creator God who is love) would read the story figuratively. It is a story with a very powerful moral to it. God will not allow wickedness to triumph on His earth. God is not affected or defeated by human wickedness. God is sickened and disheartened by it and wants to preserve whatever goodness He can find in any of His human creations. God is not powerless in the face of evil. God deals with evil totally and justly and will at the time of His choosing completely wipe out evil and all powers opposed to His goodness. Moreover, by using the powers of the abyss – the cataclysmic deluge – to accomplish His will, the one God of the Bible asserts His Lordship over everything in the universe including darkness, chaos, evil, wickedness, destruction and death itself. The loving and all good God endeavors to protect and save the righteous (even if it is only one man in the whole world) from all the wickedness of the world. This thinking is in fact consistent with the portrayal of God in Genesis. “Then Abraham drew near, and said (*to God*), “Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:23-25) Genesis is very careful to portray God as Creator and as a God of justice unlike the capricious and violent gods of the pagans. God

is not a God who will destroy the innocent with the wicked.

How did the people of the world benefit from this tragedy? In Hebrews 11:39-40, we are told, “And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” The salvation of the world is done as whole for all of humanity – those people living in the past as well as those in the present and who will live in the future. All that happens benefits future generations even if in the present we do not understand the purpose of the events we live through. The suffering of past peoples may not immediately have benefited them, but it does potentially edify and benefit us. In this we can also understand how and why the literary power of the Genesis stories is not in their literal detail and reading, but rather in the lessons and morals of the stories. The stories are a prophetic witness to God's Lordship, will, plan and Kingdom. They reveal to us both the **eschaton** (what God is guiding us to) and the **teleology** by which God guides the universe. When we understand that God loves all His created people, we can understand how events of the past benefit us more than they benefited ancient people – we are the ones who learn the lessons from what they suffered. And our suffering today will benefit our fellow humans in the future. We are all part of the one human race and we all benefit and suffer when any humans anywhere are blessed or suffer. Our sense of absolute individualism causes us to fail to take into account just how connected each of us is to all other humans. We share a common humanity and a union with all other humans. We share a common human nature. St. Paul also uses the image that we are all members of one Body. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it“ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14,26-27).

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Some Patristic writers see in the story of the ark a prototype of the Church, outside of which no one is saved from the deadly flood of sin.

In St. Peter's First Epistle, Peter has Christ upon his death descending into the nether regions to preach salvation to those "... who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (3:20-21) So though they were blotted out as a result of their wickedness by the deluge, St. Peter claims Christ redeems these people once judged by God. The judgment rendered by God on the wicked in Genesis is thus not a permanent judgment. Those who died in the flood were not condemned eternally to hell, nor were their sins considered unforgivable. In the end, God's own mercy and love overcame even the wickedness of those whom God could no longer tolerate on earth!

Only land animals and birds are included in the destruction. Sea creatures are not destroyed by the flood – in any case Noah would have lacked the technology to build a sizeable aquarium which could save sea creatures and thus preserve their seed..

"And the waters prevailed upon the earth..."
When God unleashes the waters from the vaults of heaven upon the earth, He seems to be saying to the people on earth, "You didn't like the order I imposed upon the cosmos and you prefer to follow your own disorderly and destructive ways, alright then, I will let disorder and destruction reclaim the earth. You can have your way but I will no longer protect you from the chaos, from the randomness of an ungodly universe, from the entropy described by your laws of thermodynamics. You prefer disorder in the world to my divine order, now you will see what happens when I decide not to impose my order on the universe. See if you can survive when the world ignores the divine order." Or, as the Lord says in Deuteronomy 32, ""The LORD saw it, and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters. And he said, 'I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.

... For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. "And I will heap evils upon them; I will spend my arrows upon them... destroying both young man and virgin, the sucking child with the man of gray hairs" (32:19-25).