Lesson Three

Noah: Finding Grace

Focal Text
Genesis 6:5-9; 7:1-6; 8:13-22

Background
Genesis 6:5—9:17

Main Idea
God acts with grace and mercy even in the midst of bringing judgment on people’s wickedness.

Question to Explore
Why do good things happen?

Quick Read
Faith and obedience position us to receive the grace God intends for all.
The way we treat others indicates our true relationship with God.

Commentary
Some children wrote questions for God, including these:

“Dear God: Instead of letting people die and making new ones, why don’t you just keep the ones you have? Johnny.”
“Dear God: I read the Bible. What does ‘beget’ mean? Nobody will tell me. Allison.”

“Dear God: Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident? Norma.”

“Dear God: Did you really mean, ‘do unto others as they do unto you’? Because if you did, then I’m going to fix my brother. Love, Darla.”

We have many questions for God. But none is more pressing than ours in this lesson: Is God fair? Why did he punish the earth’s population for the sins of the human race? What does the Flood tell us about God, ourselves, and our future?

In our study we will learn that the God who is “holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3) is also the God who “is love” (1 John 4:8). You will be privileged to extend this “grace greater than all our sins”1 to those you teach this week, wherever they need God’s grace and mercy most.

Claim God’s grace for your past (6:5-9)

Our text begins: “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). “Wickedness” translates a Hebrew word that refers to both actions and their results; “inclination” describes the process of conceiving words and actions.

Here we learn that the Lord can see the “thoughts” of our “heart.” Scripture is clear on this fact:

- “The LORD knows the thoughts of man” (Psalm 94:11).
- “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD” (Psalm 139:4).
- “God knows your hearts” (Luke 16:15).
- “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).
- “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20).

The Bible is always relevant because human nature doesn’t change. Total depravity, the doctrine that sin taints every part of us, is still a fact. God’s response to sin doesn’t change, either: “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain” (Gen. 6:6).

Scripture says of Israel, “How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland!” (Psalm 78:40), for “they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit” (Isaiah 63:10). Paul warns us, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30).
“Grieved” (Gen. 6:6) is translated in the King James Version as “repented.” The Old Testament frequently pictures God in such a posture:

- “The LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened” (Exodus 32:14).
- “I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions” (1 Samuel 15:11).
- “Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done” (Jeremiah 26:3).

The Hebrew word translated “grieved” or “repented” means to feel deep sorrow or compassion. When applied to us, it can mean to turn from evil to good. It does not carry this sense with God, of course, as “God cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13).

Nor does God change his mind in the human sense: “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind” (1 Samuel 15:29). There are times when God changes his announced actions in response to a change on our part, as when God promised not to bring judgment against his people if they would repent of their sins (Jer. 26:3).

Sin grieves our Father. We will do well to remember that fact the next time we are tempted.

Here is the response required by his holiness: “So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them’” (Gen. 6:7). “Wipe” means to “blot out or wipe away” (Numbers 5:23) or wash away sins (Psalm 51:9).

All “mankind” would be affected, for all have sinned (Romans 3:23); the consequence of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We have not all committed the same sins, or to the same degree, but any sin grieves our Father and breaks fellowship with our holy God. If we had been alive during the Flood, would you have survived?

Now we encounter the good news of God’s grace: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). “Noah” means rest or comfort, a name that was fulfilled in God’s decision to use him to save the human race. We know nothing of his early life, as he first appears in Scripture when he is 500 years old (5:32).

His grandfather, Methuselah, was the longest-living person in the Scriptures: 969 years old (5:25-27). He died in the year of the flood: he was 187 years of age when Lamech was born (5:25); Lamech was 182 years old when Noah born (5:28); Noah was 600 years
of age when the flood came (7:6); the math adds to 969 years of age. In fact, he may have died in the flood, rejecting Noah’s call to repentance and faith, as his grandson was a “preacher of righteousness” while building the ark (2 Peter 2:5).

By contrast, Noah’s great-grandfather, Enoch, was a man of notable faith. He walked with God and so escaped death for an immediate journey to heaven (Gen. 5:24). Noah is likewise described as walking with God: “This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (6:9). “Righteous” translates saddiq, meaning to conform to the standard, to be straight, honest, fair. “Blameless” means that he was complete or mature, with no essential quality missing.

Such character did not earn God’s favor, however: he “found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). “Favor” translates chen, the Hebrew word for bending or stooping. It pictures a superior bending over to help an inferior. Noah’s righteousness did not earn this favor. Rather, it positioned him to receive the grace God wanted to give to everyone: “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Noah was by no means perfect, as his drunkenness would later demonstrate (Gen. 9:21). But he responded to God’s grace with integrity and received his mercy and favor. God still desires to extend such grace to us: “Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isaiah 30:18).

Years ago I heard a parable that illustrates the relationship between character and grace as well as any I know. As the story goes, a group was touring one of the underground cavern systems in New Mexico when a sudden cave-in trapped them in darkness. Panic set in, but before long some of the stronger personalities in the group took charge. They organized one group to work on the rocks, trying to pull them away and create a path to freedom. Others were charged with digging at the sides of the cavern, looking for an escape route. Others went to work banging on the roof and sides, hoping to attract attention to their plight.

As they were all hard at work, one young girl noticed a pinprick of light far in the back of the cave. She made her way to it, and discovered that it led to a shaft large enough to enable everyone in the group to escape. But when she ran back to tell the others, none would believe her. They insisted on continuing their own efforts to win their freedom, so she was saved while the others eventually perished.

Her belief in the escape shaft she discovered did not earn her salvation—it positioned her to receive what had been provided to all. So it is with our commitment to the word and
will of God. Such obedience positions us to receive the grace he extends to all who are close enough to hear his voice and trusting enough to accept his mercy.

Our culture says that you are what you do. In the eyes of your society, mistakes and failures are permanent marks on your record, guilt that will likely plague you for the rest of your life. God’s word says that our Father forgives every sin we confess to him (1 John 1:9). Where do you need such grace and mercy for your past?

**Trust God’s provision for the present (7:1-6)**

Our story continues: “The LORD then said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation’” (Gen. 7:1). The Lord had instructed Noah in the building of the ark: it would be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high (6:15), with a roof and three decks (6:16-17). It required 100 years to build (Noah was 500 at the beginning of the work and 600 years of age at its end; Gen. 5:32; 7:11).

Engineers have calculated that Noah’s ark held a volume displacement of 14,000 tons. It could have carried 522 standard railroad cars: 188 for 45,000 animals (17,600 species), three trains of 104 cars for food, his family, and room to move about. It could easily have housed the occupants described by Genesis: “Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth” (7:2-3).

Why seven pairs of “every kind of clean animal”? It is possible that Noah and his family ate only “clean” meat while in the ark, implicitly fulfilling the later requirement of the Law:

Meat that touches anything ceremonially unclean must not be eaten; it must be burned up. As for other meat, anyone ceremonially clean may eat it. But if anyone who is unclean eats any meat of the fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people. If anyone touches something unclean—whether human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean, detestable thing—and then eats any of the meat of the fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people (Leviticus 7:19-21).

These “clean” animals would later be used in sacrifice as well: “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (Gen. 8:20).
Their obedience to God’s call to board the ark was urgent, for “seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made” (7:4). There is an interesting chiasm in the story (a symmetrical pattern, in this case A B C B A):

A: Seven days of waiting (7:4, 10)
B: Forty days of rain (7:12, 17)
C: 150 days of flood (7:24; 8:3)
B: Forty days of waiting for the rain to recede (8:6)
A: Seven days of waiting (8:10, 12)

The key to Noah’s reception of God’s grace was clear: “And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him” (7:5). If he had not, the human race would have perished with him. As it was, “Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth” (7:6). Picturing the divine-human partnership, after Noah built the ark, “the LORD shut him in” (7:16). Noah did what he could, and God did what Noah could not.

Then the rains fell. Rainfall continued for “forty days and forty nights” (7:12), covering the mountains to a depth of twenty-one feet (7:20). They flooded the earth for “one hundred and fifty days” (7:24). Five months after the flood began, the ark came to rest on “the mountains of Ararat” (8:4), a mountain range rather than a single peak. This range strides the border between Turkey, Iran, Armenia and Nakhchivan (where the traditional grave of Noah is located). Eight months after the flood began, mountain peaks became visible again (8:5). A year and ten days after the flood began, the earth was completely dry (see 7:11; 8:14).

Jesus would make this flood a metaphor for the urgency of preparation to meet God:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:37-39).

Here was a man of remarkable faith, building an ark to survive a coming Flood when it may have never rained before:

- “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Hebrews 11:7, emphasis added).
- Prior to this time, “the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams [“mists”] came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground” (Gen. 2:5-6).
• “Rain” is not found in the Genesis record until 7:4, “Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights.” This is apparently God’s first explanation to Noah as regards the actual flood itself.

As a result, Noah likely spent a century building a boat to prepare for a flood when no one on earth had ever seen rain or had any idea how such a flood could occur. And he had no idea how the animals would be brought to the ark, or the door shut after he and they entered.

Noah trusted God’s provision for the present, and it was his. As with his reception of grace for the past, again his faithfulness did not earn God’s help—it positioned Noah to receive what God intended to give.

Now God offers you and your class the same promise of his present provision:

• “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you” (Isaiah 43:2).
• “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).
• “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).
• “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

Noah couldn’t see God’s provision, but he could believe that the Lord would do all he promised to do. When Walt Disney World was completed in Orlando, Mr. Disney’s widow was present for the opening ceremonies. Someone commented that it was a shame Mr. Disney did not live to see his vision completed. “But he did,” Mrs. Disney assured him.

Where do you need God’s present provision? Know that God’s will never leads where his grace cannot sustain.

**Follow God’s plan for the future (8:13-22)**
The flood finally receded from the earth: “By the first day of the first month of Noah’s six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry” (Gen. 8:13-14).

Now the earth was ready to receive the human race as it began again: “Then God said to Noah, ‘Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives’” (8:15-16). Their acceptance of God’s grace and mercy had preserved their lives and humanity with them.
Then God began to provide for their future needs: “Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it” (8:17). As the Creator intended his creation to multiply and fill the earth (1:22, 26, 28), so God renewed his creative purpose after the flood.

In continued obedience to God’s call, “Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another” (8:18-19). Then he followed the natural human impulse to worship God and sacrifice to him: “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (8:20).

With this result: “The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: ‘Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done’” (8:21). God does not automatically accept human sacrifices: “I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings” (Leviticus 26:31); “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them” (Amos 5:22). His acceptance of Noah’s sacrifice indicates the right condition of Noah’s heart.

Then God instituted a new covenant with Noah and humanity. This was the first of seven covenants found in the Old Testament:

- Noahic (Gen. 9:8-17)
- Abrahamic (Gen. 15:9-21): the “promised land” in response to Abraham’s faith
- Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 17): to be their God, so long as they remained consecrated to him
- Sinaitic (Exodus 19—24): to protect and bless Israel, so long as she remained faithful to the Lord
- Phinehas (Numbers 25:10-13): to maintain the family of the faithful priest Phinehas
- Davidic (2 Samuel 7:5-16): to establish his throne forever
- New covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34): to forgive the sins of Israel by writing his law “on their hearts.”

God’s covenant with Noah began:

As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease (Gen. 8:22).

The Lord will one day destroy the earth with fire:

You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:3-7).

But this destruction will not come by a flood, for God promised never again to bring such a universal deluge to the world. This Noahic covenant applies to the entire human race (unlike later covenants with Abraham and Moses, intended for the Jewish people).

Noah’s terms:

- Be fruitful and increase in number, and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1).
- Use everything that lives and moves as food (9:3).
- Do not eat meat “that has its lifeblood still in it” (9:4).
- Do not shed the blood of humankind (9:5-6).

God’s promises:

- Never again will a flood destroy the earth (9:11).
- A rainbow after rain will be a sign of this promise (9:12-16).
- This covenant will be kept between God “and all life on the earth” (9:17).

The Lord would later renew this promise to his people:

“To me this is like the days of Noah,
when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth.
So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,
ever to rebuke you again.
Though the mountains be shaken
and the hills be removed,
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken
nor my covenant of peace be removed,”
says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:9-10).
What about the future most concerns you in the present? Are your fears financial? health-related? vocational? relational? Know that the God who sees tomorrow better than we can see today is ready to lead all who will follow. And remember with Paul that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Where do you need this promise today?

**Conclusion**

Noah was a man of great patience, akin to Job (James 5:11; see Ezekiel 14:14), laboring to build the ark for 100 years. He was a man of great obedience, building the ark exactly as God directed. Otherwise he and all of humanity could have been lost. He was a man of remarkable faith, building an ark to survive a coming flood when it probably had never rained before. He was a man of great perseverance, laboring for a century (apparently by himself) while preaching and warning the world without result. Only his immediately family believed his message.

Is God calling you and your class to patience in continuing to follow his will? to obedience in following his direction? to faith in his promises? to perseverance in the face of opposition?

Rejoice in the fact that God is not fair with us. In our fallen world, think about the way things would be if God were always fair. If God were fair, he would never help us with our problems, never forgive our sins, never redeem our suffering, never strengthen us as we go through pain, never intervene miraculously, never walk with us in our hardships.

If God were fair, we’d get caught every time we sin. A ticket every time we speed; jail for every law we have ever broken; public exposure for every private sinful thought; no pardon from anyone we ever hurt or wrong.

If God were fair, no one would hear the gospel twice until every person has heard it once. I heard the gospel in the seventh grade, at a Christian concert to which a friend invited me. I didn’t understand it and didn’t accept it. If God were fair, there would have been no bus ministry three years later, no knock at my door, no invitation to church, no explanation of the gospel, no salvation until everyone else on earth had heard the gospel first.

Think about the sins you’ve committed that no one else knows, that God has pardoned and forgotten. What if God were fair? Think about the mistakes you’ve made for which there has been little or no price to pay. What if God were fair?

Think about the multiple opportunities God gave you to hear his gospel. Are you better than people living in the desert of Saudi Arabia with little or no access to God’s word? Think about the prosperity you enjoy. Are you more deserving than starving souls in
Ethiopia? Think about the health your children enjoy. Are they more deserving than AIDS babies in Africa?

What if God were fair? You can bring your fears and worries to the God of grace, and know that his grace is greater than your guilt from the past, your need in the present, or your fears for the future.

Many years ago, in the pioneer days of aviation, a pilot was in the air when he heard a noise he recognized as the gnawing of a rat. For all he knew the rat could be gnawing through a vital cable or control of the plane. It was a very serious situation. At first the pilot did not know what to do. He was more than two hours from the next landing strip, and two hours gone from the field where he had taken off.

Then he remembered that a rat is a rodent and was not made for the heights; it was made to live on the ground and under the ground. And so the pilot began to climb. He went up a thousand feet, then another and another until he was more than 20,000 feet up. The gnawing ceased. The rat was dead. It could not survive the atmosphere of those heights. More than two hours later the pilot brought the plane safely to the landing field and found the dead rat.

Worry is a rodent. It cannot live in the secret place of the Most High God. It cannot breathe in the atmosphere of prayer and trust and Scripture and worship. Worry dies when we take it to the Lord.

This is the promise of God.
See [www.baptistwaypress.org](http://www.baptistwaypress.org) for additional study materials on

_The Book of Genesis: People Relating to God_

and on more than thirty-eight other Bible studies by BaptistWay Press®,

or call 1-866-249-1799
(M-Th 8:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; Fri 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. central time).

A recent book by Dr. Denison, _The Bible—You Can Believe It: Biblical Authority in the Twenty-First Century_, is also available from BAPTISTWAY PRESS®. The cost is only $4.95 each plus shipping and any applicable taxes. A _Teaching Guide_ is available for only $1.95 plus shipping and any applicable taxes.

♦

_To receive Dr. Denison’s free daily e-mail, “GodIssues: Today’s news in spiritual perspective,” see [www.InformedFaith.com](http://www.InformedFaith.com). The brief essay discusses current events and issues in light of God’s word and provides practical applications to life._

♦

1 “Grace Greater Than Our Sin,” words, Julia H. Johnston.