

Week 3: The identity of God's family (Genesis 5–6)

What we've heard so far defines our identity as humans, who we are in relation to God.

In the beginning, God established heaven and earth in relationship. His proclamations transformed what was formless and empty into a living, fruitful world. The lights in the sky serve as signs that we're under heaven's reign. On the ground, humans represent the heavenly sovereign's care for the creatures that live in the boundaries God set for them. With his good world at peace, God rested (Genesis 1).

God invited us into his garden, serving him with the abundant life he provided. Only the knowledge of good and evil was reserved for the sovereign himself. God gave us meaningful relationships with him, with the creatures, and with each other (Genesis 2).

But that wasn't enough. Grasping at God's power for ourselves, we brought pain and conflict into God's good world. Life is a struggle we lose. Instead of becoming gods we became mortals (Genesis 3).

Ignoring the warnings of our true sovereign in heaven, people opened the door for the powers of sin and death to rule over us, cutting us off from each other and from the LORD. We create societies that rely on violence for justice. Everyone suffers. Yet God gives life to those who call on his name (Genesis 4).

Any thoughts or comments on the first four chapters before we proceed?

Genesis 5: The family that trusts God

Genesis 5:1-2 (NIV)

¹ This is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created **mankind**, he made them in the likeness of God.

² He created them male and female and blessed them.

And he named them "**Mankind**" when they were created.

So begins a new branch of the Genesis story. In Hebrew, verse 1 reads:

"This [is the] family record [*tô·lē·dôt*] of humanity [*ādām*]."

Tô·lē·dôt means generations, descendants, family line. In Genesis, each new family-story is introduced with this word. Previously we heard *the family-story* [*tôlēdôt*] of *the heavens and the earth* (2:4). Next will be *the family-story* [*tôlēdôt*] of *Noah* (6:9).

Ādām means humanity, and the first human was named Human (*Adam*). The same word is translated as "mankind" in the next sentence and again in verse 2.

The human family-story [*tôlēdôt ādām*] is defined by God's decree. Even after our attempt to become God (Genesis 3) and establish societies controlled by violence (Genesis 4), the good news is that God reigns and what he decreed still defines us (echoing 1:26-27). Recognizing God's **image** in humans is foundational for ethics in both the Old Testament (Genesis 9:6) and the New (James 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:8).²⁴

²⁴ For example, see Ben Witherington III. *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament* (2 volumes). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009, 2010.

The human made in God's *likeness* passes on that *likeness* to their descendants:

Genesis 5:3-5 (NIV)

³ When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. ⁴ After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.

⁵ Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

It took a long time, but the human died as surely as God had said (2:17; 3:19). This is going to be a long story, but one day the authority God gave humans in the beginning will be restored to the earth through *the Son of Man* (the descendant of humanity).²⁵ By installing him as head of the human family, God restores earth to heaven's reign:

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves ... The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [family-head] over all creation (Colossians 1:13, 15).

That's where the story is headed, but there are many steps along the way. The joy of Genesis 5 is God's providence: the birth of an heir in each generation. The tragedy of Genesis 5 is the refrain, "and then he died" (verses 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). The exception in Genesis 5 is someone who did not die *because God took him*:

Genesis 5:21-24 (NIV)

²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah.

²² After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Enoch has evoked much speculation. When the Jews came under Persian rule (539 BC), they wondered how God would free them to be his people again. They imagined Enoch returning from his journey into the heavens, revealing that God had judgement all prepared to pour out on the nations and the ungodly. In the centuries that followed, they kept developing this story, imagining a "son of man" who would receive the authority God promised in the beginning. In the end, the story identifies Enoch as this son of man (1 Enoch 71.14).

It's not clear if the "son of man" parts of Enoch were written before or after Jesus' time. What is clear is that the notion of a human descendant (*son of man*) restoring the reign of heaven to earth was already there in Daniel 7.

The other message of hope in Genesis 5 is found in Noah's name:

Genesis 5:28-29 (NIV)

²⁸ When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. ²⁹ He named him **Noah** and said, "He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed."

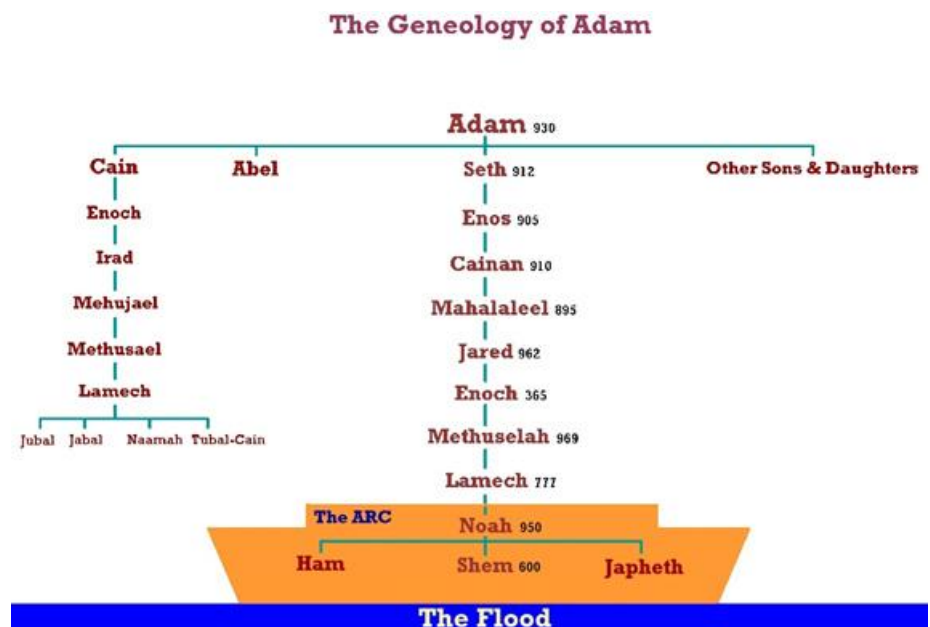
The name *Nō^ʾh* sounds like the Hebrew word *nmh*—to feel sorry or to be comforted. Noah's name bears the hope that God will comfort us, saving us from our sorry existence.

²⁵ See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2023/10/23/son-of-man-the-backstory-of-jesus-authority/> and <https://allenbrowne.blog/2017/07/17/introducing-the-son-of-man/>

Like Paul in Romans 8:20-21, Noah's father understood the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 to be a temporary arrangement, that one day earth would no longer be exiled from God's presence. The prophets often used the word *nmh* to speak of the comfort God will bring, especially in bringing them back from exile. It's the word Isaiah used to say:

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ... See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm" (Isaiah 40:1, 10).

In summary, Genesis 5 traces the family that recognizes the God who gives them life and calls on the name of the LORD in their struggles (4:25-26). The descendants in their image carry God's image (5:1-2). When the patriarch who represents God's reign dies, a new one receives that role. In the seventh generation, the patriarch doesn't die because God takes him. The family lives with anticipation of the day when God removes the struggle and restores his people.



Aside: What about the numbers in Genesis 5?

Is Genesis 5 saying that some individuals lived have for almost 1000 years? That doesn't match anything in our world today or in ancient history. Is what it sounds like to us what it meant to them? Or did it mean something to them that isn't obvious to us? Honestly, I don't know. At this point, I'm uncertain what to make of it.

Some have combined the lists from Genesis 5 and 11, assumed each name is an individual and that list covers all generations, performed math on the numbers, and concluded that the universe was created less than 2000 years before Abraham. But several things warn against copying these numbers into spreadsheets like this:

Genesis 5	Age at birth of son	Genesis 11	Age at birth of son	Total
Adam	130	Shem	100	
Seth	105	Arphaxad	35	
Enosh	90	Shelah	30	
Kenan	70	Eber	34	
Mahalalel	65	Peleg	30	
Jared	162	Reu	32	
Enoch	65	Serug	30	
Methuselah	187	Nahor	29	
Lamech	182	Terah	70	
Noah	500	Abraham		
Total:	1556		390	1946

Firstly, the assumption that these are complete genealogical lists doesn't hold water. Luke 3:36 lists another generation between Arphaxad and Shelah, a guy named Cainan.

Secondly, nothing in the history of the world supports the idea of individuals living for centuries. Do the numbers in the list represent something that would have been obvious in their culture but isn't obvious to us? Are there any similar lists from the ancient world that could help us understand what it meant to them?

The nearest analogy from the Ancient Near East is the **Sumerian King List**. The Sumerians (the region Abraham came from) compiled a list of their kings around the time of Abraham or shortly before (circa 2000 BC).

According to the mathematical system of the Sumerians (sexagesimal), each king reigned for thousands of years. But if the numbers are read as decimal (as the Hebrews did), the numbers of the Sumerian King List are intriguingly similar to Genesis 5. Evangelical scholar John Walton says:

If the notation is read with decimal values rather than sexagesimal values, the numbers are in the same range as the biblical numbers, and the totals of the lists are nearly identical.²⁶

Now, Genesis 5 is not a list of kings. In Genesis, God does not authorize human government until after the flood (Genesis 9). In the early chapters, God reigned directly. Yet, this is a list of **heirs**—a patriarchal list (always sons, never daughters) identifying the head of the family through the generations. While Cain went out from the LORD's presence to his own city (4:16-17), these generational leaders represent the authority God gave to Adam (1:26-28), the authority Adam passed on to them (5:1-2). In that sense, a kingship list of who inherited God's world is not a bad analogy.

That might help us to understand why this list is in the Bible. It's about those who inherit the promises and represent the heavenly ruler's reign in their generations. That helps us frame what the list would have meant in their world. And there's another striking similarity: the very next story in the Sumerian King List after the list of kings is the account of the flood.

But we still haven't resolved the question about what the numbers in this list represent. We don't know enough to be sure what these numbers meant to them.

Your thoughts on Genesis 5?

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²⁶ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 281.

Genesis 6: Losing our identity

Why was there a flood in Noah's day? Genesis 6 explains the reason, before we hear the details of the flood in next week's chapters (Genesis 7–8).

What do you make of this?

Genesis 6:1-2 (NIV)

¹ When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.

The sons of God

What does *sons of God* mean? In Job 1:2 and 2:1, the angelic beings who form God's heavenly court are called *sons of God*. Is this text saying that angels found the pretty girls irresistible, had sex with them, and caused the women to give birth to demons?

That strikes me as a very male (chauvinistic) interpretation. The underlying assumption is that angels are biologically male, lusting after women, capable of impregnating them and producing hybrid offspring. That's a very odd but old interpretation—one that can be traced back to the Persian period.²⁷

But *sons of God* also refers to God's people. In Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1, Israel is God's *son*. Deuteronomy 32 spells out both sides of that relationship: God is their *Father* (verse 6), and so his people are called *the sons of God* (verse 8 ESV).

So who are *the sons of God* in Genesis 6:2? Is it the angels in God's heavenly court? Or is it the family who represent on earth their Father in the heavens?

Context decides. What fits the story so far? Humans or angels?

The only reference to angels was back in 3:24 when God sent *cherubim* to guard the Garden from the humans. There's nothing about angels in Genesis 4. There's nothing in Genesis 5. There's no reason to turn the discussion into angels in Genesis 6.

What we have in the previous two chapters is two communities of humanity:

- a) One group *went out from the presence of the LORD*. They built a city to honour humanity and human creativity. They celebrated a leader with multiple women and a physique to frighten people into submission (4:16-24).
- b) The other group responded to the pain of the violent world by *calling on the name of the LORD* (4:25-26). They saw God's image in Adam (5:1-2), walked with God (5:24), and looked for the promise of God comforting his people and saving them from the curse (5:29).

This is, of course, a very Jewish way to view the world. The people of God suffer at the hands of the "city" that relies on human power instead of calling on the LORD. The whole context is these two genealogies (4:17-22, and 5:1-32). So, which group could be called *the sons of God*? (Compare Luke 3:37.)

²⁷ For arguments in favour of this view, see Michael S. Heiser. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

The trouble comes when the distinction between these two groups breaks down. They intermarry. The godly sons take partners from the community of mankind on the basis of how *good* they look, without regard for what is good in God's eyes.

Here's a very literal rendition of the Hebrew words in verses 1 and 2:

Genesis 6:1-2 (my translation)

¹ And it came to be that humankind began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them ² and the sons of God **saw** that the daughters of humankind were **good** and they **took** them for wives from all that they chose.

Are those phrases familiar? Remember what happened when Eve and Adam turned from how God defined *good and evil*, when they *took* what looked *good* to them?

Genesis 3:6 (my translation)

The woman **saw** that the tree was **good** for food and a delight to the eye and the tree was desirable to make wise, she **took** from its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her.

That didn't end well. Pain and conflict came into God's world. Violence and death came to their family. They became not gods but mortals (3:14-24).

It's like that again as *the sons of God* reject his values. God will not keep wasting his breath/Spirit on non-responsive people. He sets a deadline:

Genesis 6:3 (NIV)

³ Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years."

If the disobedient sons of God were angels, God got it wrong. God thinks the problem was with the humans. What do you think?

The next verse is crucial to the Enochian interpretation that *the sons of God* were fallen angels who produced demon-children:

Genesis 6:4 (NIV)

⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Who were the *nēpîlîm*? That's an untranslated Hebrew word. It means something like big muscly guys, people who were hard to fight (Numbers 13:33). The Septuagint (Greek translation) calls them giants. The parallel expression at the end of this verse explains who they were: *the heroes of old, men of renown*.

Big burly blokes like Goliath were feared in the ancient world where warfare relied on physical force. The boastful Lamech (4:23) fits the profile of a *nephilim ... a hero of old, a man of renown*.

The point of Chapter 6 is that the world had gone mad because God's people had lost their values. Their stories focused not on God but on human power. They were preoccupied with the human physique: how good a girl looked (verse 2), how well a guy fought (verse 4). All they thought about was imposing their own power on everyone else (verse 5). Their violence corrupted God's world (verse 11).

The Enoch literature tells a different story. It treats the *nephilim* as demons, the offspring of fallen angels and human women. According to 1 Enoch, these hybrid beings were so abominable that God sent the flood to rid the earth of them. But that didn't work: being half-spirit they survived the flood. So now these demons roam the world craving for bodies to possess because they're half-human.

Now, the point of this interpretation is to blame demons for the state of the world.

According to 1 Enoch, the demons taught war to men and seduction to women.

The reason the world is in a mess is not human sin but the invasion of evil spirits.

That's the exact opposite of what Genesis 6 says. God does not say, "My Spirit will not tolerate these hybrid demons causing all the wickedness." God is very clear who is responsible:

Overview of 1 Enoch

A collection of writings by different authors over a wide span of time.

Book I	Chapters 1-36	2nd century BC
Book II	Chapters 37-71	40BC-AD 68
Book III	Chapters 72-82	3rd century BC
Book IV	Chapters 83-90	175-171BC
Book V	Chapters 91-108	Early 2nd century BC

Source: https://images.slideplayer.com/34/10185839/slides/slide_7.jpg

Genesis 6:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

⁷ So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."

In summary, 1 Enoch is a reinterpretation of Genesis 6. Influenced by Persian dualism (the cosmic fight between good and evil), and living century after century under foreign rule, the Jewish people became acutely aware of the spiritual power of evil. They wrote creative stories where evil spirits were responsible for their plight, but this is not what Genesis 6 said in the beginning. What do you think?

The judgement

Genesis 6:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

⁹ This is the account [*tô-lē-ḡôṭ*] of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

The word *tô-lē-ḡôṭ* in verse 9 indicates we're now moving to Noah's family story. We started with the family story of *the heavens and the earth* (2:4), and then the family story of *Adam* (5:1). Noah's story runs from here to Chapter 9, and then Chapter 10 is the account of *Noah's sons*.

Noah's story raises all sorts of issues for Christian theology. How can Noah be a *righteous man*? He can't be *blameless* (i.e. without fault), because the Bible says *no one is righteous* (Psalm 143:2) and *all our righteousness is as filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6).

More problematically, what kind of God kills all those people? Why do we treat it as a children's story? It should be R-rated.

When the Assad government fell in Syria, evidence of mass graves emerged.²⁸

Tens of thousands of people had gone missing. Their bodies are now turning up. But what Bashar al-Assad did to his enemies is nothing compared to what God did in Noah's time. Why the flood? And what does this say about God?

God is repulsed by the violence:

Genesis 6:11 (NIV)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.

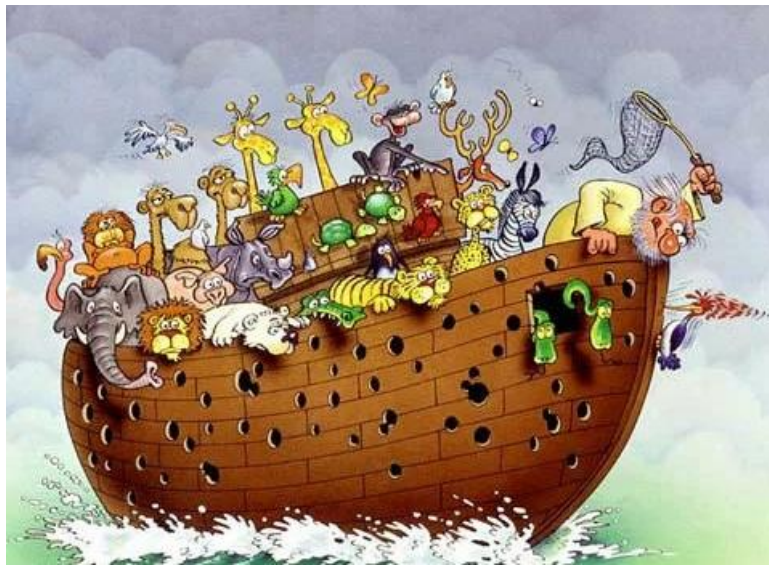
Violence comes from people forcing their will on others. It comes from rejecting God's authority to define *good and evil* (Genesis 3). When I define *good* to mean "what's good for me," I can take whatever I like from you—even your life (Genesis 4). When the godly community rejects God's values it's indistinguishable from the rest of humanity (6:1), worshipping *warriors, human legends* (6:4). Human wickedness then spreads over the earth because all we think about all the time is *evil*—how to force our will on others (6:5).

And when there's no community left to represent God's authority on earth (because we're enforcing our own), there is **no hope** for the world. Even God loses hope. God is deeply grieved, regretting his decision to entrust his world to humans (6:6-7).

The world God created had been corrupted (*šā·ḥāṭ*). To *šā·ḥāṭ* something is to ruin or destroy it. Violence has ruined/destroyed God's world.

In the beginning God spoke order to a world that was *formless and void* (1:2). He did this by separating things such as light and darkness (1:4, 14, 18). God separated the waters above from the waters below (1:6-7). *God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."* And it was so (1:9).

But it's no longer so. By rejecting God's decree, humans introduced conflict and death into what had been good (Genesis 3). That led to a world ruled by violence (Genesis 4). In their suffering, the godly sons *called on the name of the Lord* (4:26) as they waited for God to comfort them in their misery (5:29). But when they lost their values (6:2), all hope was gone. God set a deadline (6:3), but evil had taken over. The whole world was *šā·ḥāṭ*. The story cannot continue.



²⁸ Lina Sinjab, "Syria mass graves: Daunting task of searching for and naming the dead" (BBC News, 18 December 2024). <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj90wz8weymo> accessed 28 December 2024.

The Hebrew text portrays the heavenly sovereign as willing to deal with the failure of his earthly realm. God announces he will *šā·ḥāṭ*, (ruin, wreck, destroy) the world that is already *šā·ḥāṭ* (ruined, wrecked, destroyed) because of the violence of his servants:

Genesis 6:11-13, 17 (NIV)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt (*šā·ḥāṭ*) in God's sight and was full of violence.

¹² God saw how **corrupt** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) the earth had become, for all the people on earth had **corrupted** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah,

"I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to **destroy** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) both them and the earth. ... ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to **destroy** (*šā·ḥāṭ*) all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."

What are your thoughts about God *šā·ḥāṭ*-ing what is already *šā·ḥāṭ*? Does God have responsibility for what he has made? Should he wash away the wreckage of what is already wrecked? Is God doing right by putting a failed creation out of its misery?

However else you understand this event, the flood is not a paradigm for how God manages the world. It was a unique situation, requiring a unique response. God assures us repeatedly that this is something he will never do again (8:21-22; 9:11, 15).

God does judge evil in other ways, and God also saves. As the Old Testament prophets keep reminding us, God's management of the world involves both judgement and salvation.

The rescue

In a world beyond rescue, God finds a way to rescue the world:

Genesis 6:14-22 (NIV)

¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.

¹⁶ Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy (*šā·ḥāṭ*) all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸ But I will establish my

covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive.

²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

God's problem is that he has chosen to partner with humanity. All it takes to save the world is **one person in partnership with God**. That's the point of verse 22.

The kingdom of God established in Genesis 1 involves God as the sovereign over all creation, with humans exercising his authority over the animals. If that partnership is to continue then God must save the humans, and the humans under his authority must save the animals.

That's why Noah must build such a large box (*ark*)—around 135 metres x 23 metres x 14 metres. With no way to power or steer it, it's more of a preservation box than a ship.

The details of the ark prepare us for the divine rescue mission God brings to the world through Israel. The ark and the Tabernacle are the only buildings the Torah describes. The ark has the same dimensions as the Tabernacle, but is three times the size. The ark had three stories, just like the temple (1 Kings 6:6). Claus Westermann says:

The parallel between the ark and the tabernacle has a profound meaning. The people of Israel which alone has in its midst the place where God reveals his glory is part of the human race which exists now because it has been preserved by this same God.²⁹

In the end, **the corrupted creation is saved through one person who follows God's decrees**. One obedient son of God was all it took to establish a new creation after the corrupted world was dealt with.

So what?

How do you understand the character of the God who destroyed the destroyed world? Meditate on how the Bible narrative describes the way God handles his responsibly to judge and save.

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What does Genesis 5–6 teach about the mission of the church? What's our role in a world corrupted by violence? How do we ensure we're not seduced by the values of a world that worships superheroes? How do we represent God instead?

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Read Genesis 7–8 in preparation for next week.

Going further

Blog posts:

- [Who will represent the sovereign?](#) (Genesis 5)
- [Who corrupted God's world?](#) (Genesis 6:1-6)
- [Is there any justice?](#) (Genesis 6:5-22)
- [The faith of Enoch](#) (Hebrews 11:5-6)

²⁹ Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 421.