

## Genesis 7

The previous article set the stage for the flood that is about to be unleashed on the earth. It told us that God is both angry and sad. God is angry because humanity has become evil and has filled the world with violence. God is sad, because God loves humanity, which is God's own creation. The question is, what will God do. The answer is, God will begin again with a new humanity through Noah and Noah's family. Though Noah's story may seem a rather cruel way to create a humanity 2.0, it is only the first of many "humanity restarts" in the Bible. God restarts God's people (who are to demonstrate what humanity 2.0 ought to look like) through the wilderness wanderings, through the words of the Prophets, through the Babylonian exile and through Jesus of Nazareth. Restarts are part of the story.

In this portion of the story we encounter one of the many anomalies that remind us that the Noah story is composed of two strands of tradition. The anomaly is that at one point, Noah is instructed to take seven pairs of each kind of "clean" animal and birds, while only taking two of each other kind of animals. Yet a few verses later it is stated that only two of all "clean and unclean" animals entered the ark. The origins of the seven clean animals and birds is shrouded in mystery, but the assumption is that in a later generation in which the Temple in Jerusalem was at the center of worship, Noah would have "needed" clean animals for the appropriate sacrifices. Thus, in order to not immediately eliminate all clean animals through sacrifices, seven pairs were needed.

We see these two strands of tradition again with similar, yet slightly different, accounts of Noah and his family entering the ark. In each story we find similarities. We read that Noah was six-hundred years old when the ark was built, that Noah and his family went aboard the ark, that the animals entered the ark and that the flood waters began to come upon the earth. We also find differences. In one story we learn that the rains began immediately, while in the other the rain waited seven days to arrive. Even with their differences, these accounts show us two things. The first is that God is faithful to God's word. God promised to flood the land and begin again, while at the same time protecting Noah and his family. God does both things. The second is the faithfulness of Noah. Noah continues to be the person who does exactly what God tells him to do.

Finally, we witness creation almost returning to its primordial state. If we remember the original creation story, the waters covered the earth. There was no separation of land and waters. There was no separation of the waters above (in the sky) and below (the oceans). This is where the Noah story takes us. Once again, the mountains are covered in water as the water wells up from the deep and comes down from above, and all creatures die off. This is truly a new beginning. The only difference between this story and Genesis 1, is that Noah and his family are saved so that humanity can have another chance at life.

**Reflection:** What is interesting about the church is that when it used this story it usually focuses on Noah and the ark and ignores the death and destruction that raged around them. We create wonderful arks filled with fun loving animals and give them to our children, careful not to mention that all the other animals (and people) died. Maybe it is time then that we look at the larger picture offered by the story. First, that God desires a creation in which violence and evil are extinguished. Second, that God desires a creation in which humanity lives in peace, justice and compassion. Third, that God will do what it takes, even dying on a cross for us, to make it happen.

### **Questions:**

1. What are your takeaways from this story?
2. How has God restarted your life?
3. Where do you see God at work creating a world of peace, justice and compassion?