

## **LIMITS ARE SET, GENESIS 6-8**

This is my Father's World #6

♦**Intro:** You surely are aware of the massacre of 19 children and 2 adults in the Uvalde Elementary School in Texas, May 2022. What we mostly see in news articles as a response are things like boycotting the NRA, and a call for increasing gun laws, because it's guns that kill people, not people. Surely we are not the problem. One of the elders in First CRC of Highland, IN, my former church, went to Highland Christian School as a boy. That church began in 1908. That church built the Christian School in 1909. The Town of Highland incorporated in 1910. When this Elder was a grade schooler he and his friends all brought their shot guns and rifles to school and stood them in the corner. On the way home across the fields, which years later was to be my neighborhood, they would hunt rabbits and squirrels. Nobody ever heard of mass shootings in any of the schools back then, and everybody had guns. What has changed? May I suggest that it's not our cache of ammo, but rather our character as Americans that is the evil behind our atrocities?. And that's in only one century.

♦When you live 9 centuries you can really produce a lot of evil. One scholar has figured mathematically that the average pre-Flood person lived 900 years, and if bearing one child every 4 years, between the ages of 40-600 (2/3rds of their lifetime), there could have been 58.6 billion people by the time Adam was 760! And Adam wasn't even dead yet! Considering that verse 6:5,11-12 describe a patently

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depraved world of people, that's a high level of evil development!

♦(*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... Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and full of violence. God say how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.*)

♦Now suppose you were God the Creator, and your project (the world of men) turned out like That. And suppose you felt like God felt in v6 (*The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*) Don't you think you might like to just scrap the project? And when we read that God decided to wipe men, animals, ground creatures and birds off the earth, we might picture God being a little like us. But we would be missing something.

### **♦1. The Flood story tells me that God is a cleansing God.**

One theological term for that is "redemption". God sets a limit. He will only let the world of men go so far.

♦Flood stories are not unique to the Hebrew people. Ancient literature is also full of hundreds of flood stories, some of which closely parallel Genesis with a counterpart to Noah, a huge ship to save himself, his family, and the animals, birds to check the waters, coming to rest on a mountain and offering a sacrifices. But the differences are glaring. The Babylonian story is a fairytale

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world. The ship is a perfect cube built in 7 days (sure to be a floating nightmare). The flood lasts one week and is caused by a stupid decision of one of the gods. The Babylonian Noah parties with his soon to be dead neighbors. He's hardly a preacher of righteousness. The gods are afraid of the flood too, and not interested in the humans.

♦(aside: Some suppose that because there are other highly implausible flood stories, that the Bible's account is fictitious as well. This is hardly a necessary conclusion. There can certainly be a *true* story from which the others all derive. And while the message of Genesis is not a photograph, or a science text, it bears the marks of real history and sciences. While many cultures tell tales they acknowledge as legend or myth, the Hebrew writings never hint at this. On the other hand they are clearly seen in their own references as being historically based.)

♦What I'd like us to notice first is that in the Hebrew account of the Flood, God is starting again. God is in a sense, recreating, or redeeming. The text takes us back to Genesis 1 where the first thing present was water and chaos. So while we might jump to the conclusion that God has changed his mind, or given up, or merely decided to get people back for bothering him -we should be careful not to miss what he's really doing. Unlike the Babylonian story, God's character isn't to blame for the flood; people are to blame. And God isn't heading off in his own

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direction separate from people. He is fixing the earth and humanity. He does it by giving earth a good bath!

♦Years ago my brother Dan found a 1880 Spanish snipers rifle in the dirt under some bushes in New Jersey. It looked a mess and certainly wasn't useful. But he ran water in the bathtub and set to cleaning it up, taking it apart and starting from the beginning. Long story short, he can hunt with that rifle today. It is restored. That my friends is the flood story. While it is judgement (coming in a minute), it is the beginning of restoration. It is the curbing of sin, like Adam and Eve being kept from the tree of life and living eternally as sinners.

♦This is what God is doing with the world of mankind. God acts to redeem. He shortens live spans (v6:3). He sends the bath water. And he reestablishes his mandate to Adam, now with Noah (9:1).

♦B. What does this all mean for you? Just this: Do not despair, and beat yourself up, and fall into hopeless self-condemnation when you fail, or sin, or even surprise yourself with the fact that you too (or your children) are perfectly capable of heinous evil choices! It's all true. You and I are the problem. But, God's foremost desire is not to harm humanity, but to heal it. Not to destroy you, but to clean you. This is why he sent his holy son, Jesus; to in essence wash us clean. (Heb12:7)

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♦1 Peter 3:18-21 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

♦Step number one in getting rid of murderous human actions is to find forgiveness in God's Son. It's the hand that holds the gun, and the man who directs the hand. Only Christ can change the man. Do you want your country to be a safer place? Then get out in the public square and speak about hope in God. Vote for laws that line up with his Word. Do you want to change you? Well draw near to God every day!

### **♦2. The Flood story tells me that God is a gracious God.**

♦Know what we often do? We lie to ourselves and consider ourselves masters of our own destiny. We are so sure that we know what is best, and what will fulfill us. We are the saviors. Scripture consistently points out that it is always the grace of God that acts first in any good.

♦6:8 says that Noah found favor in God's eyes. That comes before v9 that says Noah was a righteous man, and blameless. It's God's hand alone that restrains our evil. He sets the limits. The term we render *blameless* sounds like

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*sinless, or perfected* in our culture. In the Hebrew culture it means "whole". Noah was a whole man. That is, his spirit was just as alive as his body. He paid attention to God. It doesn't mean he had no sin. Scripture everywhere teaches no man is sinless. In fact, after the flood Noah will make some series moral blunders, as we shall see... Furthermore, do you not see the sovereign grace of God in the fact that Noah's father, Lamech, predicted that Noah would be instrumental in bringing rest (noach) to humanity. That prophecy came at Noah's birth before he had done anything good or bad.

♦The fact that God predetermined to save any human at all was grace. He had no obligation to do so. The fact that God washed the world instead of imploding it was grace as well.

♦cf 8:21-22. God here chooses to limit his own righteous judgement! He is curbing the effect that sinful man has on nature and the rest of creation!

♦So give credit where credit is due. If you have made healthy and godly decisions in your life that have turned out in blessing, don't be proud of yourself. Be grateful for grace. It always comes first. God is the one who has limited your sin, and stirred up beauty in you. Has your child made a good moral choice? Praise God for grace. Many a parent has also spoken truth, and done their best but lived in pain at their child's choices, for evil lives in everyone of us. Has your loved one stumbled in sins that

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are hurting their humanity? Pray for grace! Pray for the Lord to appear to them, for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. Do not tell yourself they know good from evil, they will come around. None of us comes around without the grace of God. We are hopelessly lost aside from his pursuit of us! And yet that is who he is!

♦**3. The Flood story tells me that God is a just God.** And that means that my sin has consequences. Good and bad are not equal opposites powers (yin Yang). God's preferred future is limited to only the good. There is a lot of hope in the Flood story, but don't let it make you think it doesn't matter how you live! The Flood is clearly a judgement on human evil. It is not a challenge that the technology of man must learn to overcome and save the day. In Noah's day, the time had come for human wickedness to be severely throttled back and cut down. We need to remember that this is the end result for all evil. This is at once a comfort and a danger, isn't it? A comfort because God is going to win. He will set everything right at some point. Truth and righteousness will prevail over the dark side of the "Force" such that there will someday be no option for darkness. But it's also a danger, because the seeds of evil are a part of everyone of us, and for God to do surgery on us we will likely have to get cut. Are you willing to pray for that?

♦Jesus made it clear that all of human history is aimed at a day when judgement will finally be passed on all humanity. Let us

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stop adding to the history of evil by our own actions! Every evil act is destined to be burned. So pay attention to your own choices.

♦ "First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire. This will be their argument: "Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly the same since the world was first created." They deliberately forget that God made the heavens by the word of his command, and he brought the earth up from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the world with a mighty flood." 2 Peter 3:3-6, NLT.

♦ When we sin, it is like choosing obsolete tools, or eating spoiled food. It's doesn't work as well, and it always brings illness. And in the end it will be thrown out.

### **♦4. The Flood story tells me that God is a committed God.**

That tells me that I have a chance, because I can depend on God.

In our text God promises that never again will he allow man's sinfulness to have such a devastating effect on the globe itself.

He is limiting the effect of sin in the natural world.

♦ "Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:9, 10, NRSV.

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♦I wonder if you noticed this same kind of compassion on the part of God in our text, verse 6? There we read that the Lord God *grieved* over humanity. This is a significant term. You grieve when you lose something very dear to you. It's not minor disappointment. It's not angry violence. It's a mourning. The text says that the heart of God was filled with pain. Over people! This is not a mischievous God. This is not a hard-nosed technical God either. This is a loving Father God who sees humans as his sons and daughters. Do you realize how astonishing this is? No creature can deserve this from it's creator! Remind your self of this when you feel alone, or insignificant in the grand scheme of humanity!

♦**Conclusion:** Now, a loving father judges but he also preserves. He sent the flood, but he also provided the Ark. No wonder the ark has been long seen in Christian tradition as a picture of salvation. God is protecting humanity from *his own judgements*. And isn't that also the story of Christ? Sin must be paid for with death. So God the Father lays all the wrath of human history on the spirit of his Son, Jesus, so you and I can be his living brothers and sisters.

♦Not only that, but the inside of the Ark is a foretaste of the future Day of the Lord, when as the prophets say, the wolf will lie down with the lamb, and the lion with the calf. Nothing is going to stop the Father's plan for his kids. So the world goes to the bathtub, not the burn pile. The Creator can recreate. The storer of good can restore. As the apostle Paul said, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come.