

Lesson 7

God's Persistence: His Yearning for His People

Introduction: Through all that we have studied thus far, we continue to see God faithfully showing that He only desires what is best for man. We see this in the fact that, before creating a single thing, God first created the eternal plan of redemption. Then we saw it continue in creation and His wonderful provisions for man. We saw this in his warning to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We saw it in His immediate promise of a Deliverer. He clothed Adam and Eve. It was communicated to Adam's offspring as to what kind of a sacrifice to bring. Even though Cain brought the wrong sacrifice and killed his brother, God still pursued him, reasoning with him, desiring him to repent.

God's love and perfect desires for mankind are obvious, as we see Him pursuing man even in the face of persistent disobedience.

- **Read Genesis 5:3-5.**

This is a very different picture from Genesis 1 and 2 where there was no sin, death, sickness, or sorrow. Humanity was living in the presence and fellowship of God, in the Garden of Eden with every need met, eating from the Tree of Life. Now they are separated from God, toiling by the sweat of the brow, experiencing sin, sickness, sorrow, and death. In the

above passage, we see the third aspect of death brought about: physical death.

Through Genesis 5, we see the genealogy of Adam. Notice the emphasis that God places on the fact that each of these people died! God specifically states over and over: “and he died”!

Over and over God is proving that He is faithful and that His promises will always be carried out. He promised Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate the fruit.

“But whence came this strange and dreaded thing—death? St. Paul gives us the answer: ‘by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin’ (Romans 5:12). Here we have the origin of death. It came by sin. Sin snapped asunder the link which bound the creature to the living God, and that being done, he was handed over to the dominion of death, which dominion he had no power to shake off. And this, be it observed, is one of the many proofs of the fact of man’s total inability to meet God. There can be no fellowship between God and man, save in the power of life, but man is under the power of death; hence on natural grounds, there can be no fellowship.” C. H. Mackintosh

The result of sin led to three aspects of death: spiritual, physical, and eternal. Even with today’s advancements in medicine and machines to support life, we all know without a shadow of a doubt that physical death is absolutely unavoidable! Somehow,

we seem to think we can turn around and on OUR OWN avoid the other two aspects of death. The assuredness of our own inability to avoid physical death is a picture of the assuredness of our own inability to avoid spiritual and eternal death.

The people listed in Genesis 5 are the family line of Seth. From Adam to Noah, there were ten generations. It was the people from Seth's line who seemed to be the main ones who continued to believe and look for the coming Deliverer that God had promised back in the Garden of Eden.

One of Seth's descendants was a man named Enoch. We know that Enoch also was born a sinner. But Enoch believed God and came to Him in the way that He had instructed. Because of Enoch's belief, he was led to live his life in fellowship and communion with God.

- **Read Genesis 5:22-23 and Jude 14-15.**

From this we understand that Enoch was a messenger or prophet of God in his day. Enoch not only warned the people of a coming judgment, but it is specifically stated that he prophesied about Jesus' return after the millennium when He returns with the "saints." Again, the grace and faithfulness of God is manifested and His continual pursuit of man and desire for him to repent! But the majority rejected God's warnings through Enoch.

- **Read Genesis 5:24.**

It's interesting that in this chapter where God emphasizes the physical death of man, there is one man in the midst of it He chooses to intervene and take to heaven without experiencing physical death.

- **Read Hebrews 11:5.**

It appears that God was giving a physical picture here. In Chapter 5, for man after man it's recorded that "he died"; but one man, Enoch, God intervened and took Him.

God also made it clear that it was because of Enoch's relationship and faith in God and His promises that Enoch pleased God, and that is why God chose to intervene and take him. Just as it was only through faith that Enoch pleased God and he was allowed to escape physical death, so it is only through faith that man can escape spiritual and eternal death as well. God was providing another faithful picture and witness to the truth, for He only EVER wants what is best for man.

- **Read Genesis 6:3, 5-11.**

We see that man's heart motivation was only evil. Their hearts acted in accordance to what they were...against God. Despite the attitude of the people towards God in Noah's day, God loved them and desired that they repent and believe on Him. He did not want them to die.

- **Read Ezekiel 33:11.**

Put the fact that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked together with fact of **2 Peter 2:5**, which says that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” We can be confident that once again, God was taking the initiative and offering grace to mankind.

But according to **Genesis 6:3**, how long would God’s Spirit continue to speak through Noah to the people? One hundred twenty years. What characteristics of God would cause Him to patiently endure and continue speaking to the people for one hundred twenty years? Grace and mercy.

The same way God’s Spirit guided Noah to tell God’s message to the people in his time, so also He speaks today through those who faithfully teach the Word of God. And as God lovingly and faithfully tried to warn the people of Noah’s day, so He does the same today through the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

The same gracious, merciful, and loving God that was pursuing Cain after bringing the wrong sacrifice and killing his brother continues to pursue sinful man today.

Even though God in His grace was exceedingly merciful, truly desiring man to repent to turn back to Him, we know that they did not. Instead of listening to the Spirit of God and admitting their sin, it says that they became even more sinful and violent. The last part of Romans Chapter 1 describes the moral

condition of people who refuse to believe God. Again, this emphasizes how impossible it is for man to escape any of the three aspects of death on his own. For what was true of the heart of man in Noah's time, was true in the time of Paul, and is also true of the people today.

Often times the perspective that we have of this event is that the people in Noah's day were so wicked, and God's hatred of sin is so great, that He couldn't endure their sinfulness any longer and decided it was time to judge them. Emphasizing how much God absolutely hates sin, we can often lose sight of the way that we have seen God pursue sinful man, patiently extend grace, and promise to send a Deliverer. Yes, it was an extremely serious thing for God to come to this point. But, in coming to this point, what is God really revealing about Himself and His heart?

Discussion: Remember all that we have seen God reveal about Himself and His heart for mankind.

Was God's choice to judge the people in Noah's day about His "hatred for sin" or about His love for mankind? *It was about His love for mankind. God was making mankind's sinfulness crystal clear so that he will turn to God and be saved. Everything that God does is always about salvation and redemption.*

- **Read Genesis 6:13-17.**

Every living thing on the earth would be destroyed except those who entered the ark. Noah had to follow God's instructions and build the ark exactly as He said.

We don't know exactly what the ark looked like, but we do know its specific dimensions that God had recorded for us. From the measurements given in the Bible, it has been estimated that the ark would have been 438 feet long, 72.9 feet wide and 43.8 feet high. The dimensions given to Noah by God for the ark he was to build were proportional to the huge ocean-going carrier ships that are being built in this century.

Until the mid-1800's, there was no ship built close to the ark's size. The *SS Great Britain*, the world's first iron-hulled, steam-powered ocean liner, was the largest vessel afloat when it was launched in 1843. It was 322 feet long, 51 feet at the beam, and 32 feet high from the upper deck to the keel. The ark was bigger than this vessel. It was God who had created the laws that control flotation. He had no problem knowing the perfect design for such a huge ship. The purpose of the ark was to float and to preserve life, and the shape and size were ideal for that purpose.

Many animals needed to fit into the ark, and God took that into account when He instructed Noah how to build the ark. In his book *Noah's Ark—A Feasibility Study*, John Woodmorappe tallied up about 8,000 genera of animals that would have been aboard the ark, meaning about 16,000 individual animals. Standard recommended floor space requirements for

animals indicate that all the animals together would have needed half the available floor space of the ark's three decks.

The total capacity of the ark was approximately 1,400,000 cubic feet, which is equal to the volumetric capacity of 522 standard livestock cars such as used on modern American railroads. Woodmorappe said since it is known that about 240 sheep can be transported in one stock car, a total of over 125,000 sheep could have been carried in the ark.

The average size of land animals is less than the size of a sheep. Of all the animals aboard the ark, only about 11 percent of the animals would have been larger than a sheep, and it is probable that the largest animals were represented by younger specimens.

Bottom line, it wasn't left to Noah to come up with a blueprint for the ark. *Everything had to be done according to the plan God had given him.*

Man has accomplished one thing for himself—DEATH. And the only way that any man can escape any of the three aspects of death is through the grace and mercy of God. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised the only solution: a future Deliverer.

It was not left up to them to figure out. They tried to cover their own nakedness, and God did not accept it. He provided the clothing, and He actually clothed them! Again, it was not left up to them. He rejected Cain's attempt to earn acceptance through his own reasoning. He pursued Cain and implored him to come His way, but Cain refused God's grace and therefore never experienced deliverance.

Enoch walked with God, and God intervened and delivered him from all three aspects of death. And now it would be the same for Noah. If he and his family and the animals were going to escape death in the coming judgment, the ark would have to be built exactly how God required.

It is extremely significant that there would only be ONE ark. This signifies that there was only ONE way for the people to escape the judgment. Then that ONE ark had only ONE door to enter through. Every person and every animal that was to escape God's wrath had to enter the ark through that ONE door!

Had Noah or anyone else in his day tried to come up with their own solution (like Adam and Eve did) it would have also been rejected. Only God is the supreme, sovereign, almighty Creator, and owner of all of creation! Not only does He have the right to determine how man can escape death judgment, but He also WANTS us to believe Him and be delivered!

- **Read Genesis 6:22.**

Up until this time, it had never rained on the earth before! But even though Noah didn't understand WHAT rain was going to look like, he believed God!

- **Read Hebrews 11:7.**

Many people today refuse to believe because they haven't seen God or a place of eternal punishment. In contrast, Noah believed even though he had never

seen rain. He believed it because it was God who said so!

Not only is this done today by unbelievers, but many believers are doing the exact same thing. Many people struggle with really believing they are who God says they are. This has real ramifications in terms of living the Christian life.

- **Read Genesis 7:1-5.**

Noah believed that God was going to destroy the world just as He said He would. Noah also believed that only GOD could save him and his family.

- **Read Genesis 7:6-15.**

Noah and his family and all the animals entered into the ark through its only door. There was no other way for anyone to go into it and be saved.

- **Read Genesis 7:16.**

Notice this verse says that GOD shut them in. God shut the door. God Himself shut Noah and his family and all the animals inside this place of safety and deliverance. They were safe because it was God Who had shut them in. This is a picture of John 10 where Jesus said, “no one can pluck them out of His hand.”

Not only was Noah, his family and the animals shut IN for deliverance, but all that had refused to believe were also now shut OUT for judgment. In this one act of shutting the door, God manifested grace and mercy, and at the same time judgment and hatred for sin. Only He had the right to shut the door! Only He can extend grace and mercy, and only He can judge sin!

For one hundred twenty years, these people had rejected God's grace. Now that it was judgment time, they were left with no other way of deliverance. God had shut them out, so it would have been impossible for Noah to have opened the door and let them in. This is similar to when God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden with no other opportunity to eat from the Tree of Life.

For one hundred twenty years, God had pursued these people through Noah; now He was destroying them. I can't imagine how it must have pained Him. When God decides it is time to judge and punish those who refuse to believe, there will be no escape from His wrath.

Discussion: Because these people died in the flood, do you think it also meant that they received eternal death/separation from God?

Not necessarily. I think it's highly possible that when it started to rain and the water started to get deeper and deeper and deeper, that people thought, "Noah was right about the flood, I bet he was also right about a coming Deliverer."

From the time of the fall, all through history up to us today, the only time that mankind turns to God is when he is desperate. The deeper the waters got, I'm sure the more desperate people became.

- **Read Genesis 7:17, 21-23.**

For forty days and nights the waters rose until the tops of the trees and the highest mountains were all covered. Remember that in the beginning, the earth was covered with water. God separated the waters and placed it above the earth's atmosphere. It was this water that God caused to fall as torrential rain on the earth. Notice the last sentence in verse 23: "*Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.*" In the beginning, God promised death as the wages of sin! Again, we see the utter impossibility for man to escape any of the three aspects of death apart from the grace, mercy, and divine intervention of God!

Noah's only hope was to believe God and trust in His grace and mercy! It is exactly the same for us today; our only hope is to believe God and trust in His grace and mercy, period! This grace and mercy are continually extended towards us in spite of and in light of our utter inability to stop the consequences of the three types of death. As He did then, God continues to rescue us from impending disaster, even when we act like we want to be destroyed. Take the example of Lot.

- **Read Genesis 19:10-23.**

God saved Lot and his family because of His mercy. He didn't save them because they were good. Even though Lot did not live a wicked life like others in Sodom, he, too, was born a sinner. Even though Lot apparently believed that he was a sinner and was looking to the coming Deliverer, it's interesting to note that he didn't just up and believe the angels. For Lot to escape the judgment, the angels had to actually grab him by the hand and force him and his family to leave. WOW! Talk about a picture of the grace of God! This is the pattern that we've seen from God and His interaction with man even from the very beginning. WHY? Because man is so far "gone"—*“every thought and intent of the heart is only evil from childhood”*—that he is absolutely incapable of even remotely being able to escape God's judgment for sin.

In the same way the angels grabbed Lot by the hand and delivered him from the judgment, so that is exactly what God has done with us through Christ and His finished work. Salvation from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and from the presence of sin is all by the finished work of Christ.

A statement that I believe really discloses the heart of God and clearly pictures His grace and mercy as He divinely intervenes in our lives is the statement that the angel made to Lot in verse 22: *“Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there!”* I am not allowed to judge and destroy these tremendously wicked people until you are

safely removed. I believe this is a pattern we see all the way through the Word of God and is exactly what we will see in regard to the great tribulation that comes in the book of Revelation. Before the judgment is released, like Lot, God will safely remove all believers through the rapture.

- **Read Genesis 19:24-25.**

After Lot was safely outside of the city, God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah. This would have been a tremendously fearful demonstration of how seriously sinful our human condition really is.

Today, mankind is no different and is just as sinful as we ever were. The Bible also makes it clear that death is still the wages for sin. Sin must be judged! At the same time, God knows that every thought and intent of man's heart is only evil from childhood. Therefore, He has provided EVERYTHING and has left NOTHING up to us! Despite God's warnings, which He always carries out, man ignores Him because he loves his sin. It takes a change of being to change that, and only God can produce that change.

To go deeper into this topic, read through Lesson 13 in the full Knowing God curriculum.