

Elder Vernon Johson

Numbers

Forty and the Destruction of the World

God created the world and formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostril the breath of life and he became a living soul. God gave one commandment to Adam and told him that "Of every tree of the garden, thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." When Adam broke the commandment, he plunged himself and his posterity into the pit of being dead in trespasses and sins. Man began to live out his sin-cursed nature and to commit grievous sins. This is illustrated when Cain killed Abel because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Nearly nineteen hundred years into man's history on earth, God had determined to destroy the earth with a flood. The condition of man upon earth is described thusly:

1. Gen. 6:5 "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. 7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

2. Gen. 6:11 "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. 13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth."

Yet, even in this den of iniquity, we see the grace and mercy of God: Gen. 6:8 "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

There are many ways in which God judges sin, both eternally and timely. Of course we know that in the end of time, the non-elect will be cast in the lake of fire

and be eternally judged of sins. Yet, among other ways, God judges the sins of nations and in the time of the flood, the sins of a whole world: Ps. 9:17 "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

The scriptures tell us that the Lord rules and judges the nations:

1. Rev 12:5 "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

2. Rev 19:15 "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

This execution of the wrathful judgment of God upon nations is further illustrated for us in the scriptures in the destruction of the following nations:

1. Sodom and Gomorrhea,
2. The seven nations that Israel displaced from the land of Canaan,
3. Babylon,
4. The empire of the Medes and Persians,
5. and the nation of Israel.

The one common element that all these nations had is that the iniquity had come to the point that there was no recourse but destruction: Gen. 15:16 "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

Yet, as we previously pointed out, in the midst of timely judgment, God is still gracious and merciful: Gen. 6:13 "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. 15 And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. 16 A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

17 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. 18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. 19 And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. 20 Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive."

The ark, we are informed in 1 Pet. 3:20, 21 is a figure of the death and resurrection of Christ: "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Thus, even in the midst of a timely destruction, God had placed that which was a figure of an eternal deliverance from sin.

The actual destruction of the earth was by a flood, part of which was a result of rain for forty days and nights:

1. Gen 7:4 "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth."

2. Gen 7:12 "And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights."

3. Gen 7:17 "And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth."

This was the beginning of the association between the number forty and the subject of trial and judgment.