

## Final Prayer

Glorious Lord; You clothe us, You feed us, You give us energy, and You nurture us; but we are not babies! You do this for us so that we might grow into the full stature of those who live by faith. May we achieve the maturity of living by faith, trusting in You, and being confident of the glories of our eternal home in heaven! We praise You, glorious Lord! AMEN.

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty, when we are enjoying ourselves, remind us of the real world in which we live; where others are suffering, children are crying for help, people are killing each other, and nations are being ruled by tyrants. We ask You to give us the time we need for ourselves, but may we never waste the time we could use to help other people in our troubled world. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Vision

*Pray that we might all be open to receive what the Lord would say to His people today, to test it out and to act upon it with courage and conviction, together with all God's people.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the way your body works, and the gift of life
- Pray for people who are worried about their jobs at the moment
- Pray for missionaries and agencies attempting to feed the starving

## Meditation

Listen for the voice, my soul,

Which tells you how and when to do the will of God.

Seek the true 'shalom', my soul,

Which is God's gift to those who stand with Him, forever.

Turn the coming corner, my soul,

Which redirects your life towards its heavenly goal.

See the shining light, my soul,

Which shines forever brightly in this troubled world.

Speak the eternal truth, my soul,

Which is only known by revelation from the throne of grace.

Accept the love of Christ, my soul,

Which saves you from the pointless death of love of self.

Stay open to your God, my soul,

Hear and do the simple things of faith by which you truly live.

## Bible Study - Genesis 6:1-10

<sup>1</sup> When people began to be numerous across the land, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God saw that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves by choosing them freely. <sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said, 'My spirit shall not support people forever because they are flesh, and their days will number one hundred and twenty years.'

<sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and afterward as well, when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore them children. These were the heroes of old who were renowned men.

<sup>5</sup> *The LORD saw that the wickedness of people covered the whole earth, and that the thoughts and desires of their hearts was always evil.* <sup>6</sup> *The LORD regretted making people on earth and grieved bitterly.* <sup>7</sup> *So the LORD said, 'I will wipe out from the earth the people I have created; people together with animals and creatures and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'*

<sup>8</sup> *However Noah found favour in the sight of the LORD.* <sup>9</sup> *These are the descendants of Noah. He was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and he walked with God.* <sup>10</sup> *Noah had three sons; Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

## Review

This reading today begins a significant new story within scripture, the story of Noah the great Flood. This occupies four chapters of Genesis (Genesis 6-9), and together with the stories of Creation, Adam and Eve, and the Fall, (Genesis 1-4), it dominates the opening chapters of Genesis (1-11) which are commonly called the 'prologue' to the Bible. Most Christians know about the story of the Flood, which tells us that God wiped out all humanity except Noah (a descendant of Adam and Eve by Seth), and started again with his family; in the process wiping out the entire line of Cain, the errant son of Adam and Eve. The story has some surprises for us today, however, because the simple understanding provided by Sunday School teaching about the animals, the ark, and the rainbow at the end, has left many with the feeling that this is little more than another myth; indeed, many Biblical scholars are content to describe it as such. However, it is far more important to the history of God's dealing with people in the Old Testament than we imagine, as our studies in forthcoming days will show; there is much for us to explore.

**Questions** To begin with, the first part of the story in our passage today raises a number of questions. What was really happening on earth before the Flood? What made God decide to wipe out so much of what he had made? Who were the 'sons of God' (6:2) and the Nephilim (4)? Why is there a difference between the 'sons of God' (6:2) and others? Who was marrying who, and who were their children? Although the story is relatively understandable from verse 5 onwards, the first four verses are highly mysterious; what does it all mean?

**Theories** Over the years, many theories have arisen to try and explain this passage, and it remains something of a mystery whichever view you take. One theory rests on the idea that scripture uses the term 'son of God' (as in 6:2) elsewhere to describe good people who do His will, such as David (see 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7). Could it be therefore that this passage uses the term to describe the 'good' line of descent from Seth, but speaks of the sinful line of Cain merely as 'people', or 'humans'? In this case, it is possible that God was not happy with the two lines to intermarry because of the consequences of Cain's sin. Another theory suggests that the 'sons of God' were angels who lived on earth at that time, and intermarriage between humans and angels produced people of special strength called the 'Nephilim' (6:4). If you have followed these studies, you may also be tempted to wonder whether this passage somehow expresses the difference between the descendants of Adam (possibly as 'sons of God' because they are god-breathed) and the humans on earth at the time who were not god-breathed (see notes on Genesis 4:17-26).

**The simple truth; the dominance of evil** I will be frank and say that at this moment in time I am not convinced that any particular theory fits the text sufficiently well. I have read a number of works on this passage, as well as spending time on it myself, but have not yet found any presentation to be conclusive. I therefore suggest that it is better to read the text and accept it as we find it, that is, as something of a mystery, than attempt to 'explain' it further. It could be that God does not wish to reveal more of this period of time to us, and we cannot know what we are not told. Nevertheless, scripture has left us with a clear

sense of evil pervading the world and a need for God to do something about it. Earlier, He had commanded people to 'fill the earth' (1:28), but the earth had been filled with evil (6:5), and in order to preserve the integrity of His creation, drastic action was required (6:6). God decided to bring to an end the features of creation that interacted primarily with humanity, and re-create a significant proportion of His previous work (6:7).

Some find it hard to come to terms with the idea that God might do this, especially since when He made it, God was 'pleased' with His creation. However, these few verses dramatically demonstrate the serious effects of the Fall, and if God did not do something about the evil that had penetrated the whole of His creation, then it would be impossible to claim that His 'goodness' was in evidence within the world. The great truth to emerge through this strange passage of scripture, however, is that God always has a plan in hand for the salvation of humanity. Right at the end we are told simply that in the midst of the chaos, there was indeed a glimmer of hope, found in one man and his family; Noah. As we will find out, God was planning to destroy the world and allow Noah and his family to survive. Noah and his family would be the start of a new generation of humanity and a new work of God within the world.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Were you aware of the problems with this passage? Which of the theories about who the 'sons of God' were do you prefer?
2. What are the key features of wickedness and evil that cover the world today? Are they different from those of any other generation?
3. How does God destroy sin and to save people from sin, and how does the story of Noah help us understand this?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The opening verses of Genesis 6 are notoriously difficult to interpret. It is humbling to have to accept that we cannot just say this or that, and give an answer to every question there might be about a text. Scripture is sometimes like that, I would even suggest that we tend to overstate our true ability to understand God's Word. Some of the things we say with confidence may well be proved incorrect in the course of time; for example, even the Authorised Version which has proved to be so influential to the faithful lives of so many Christians, has been found to be quite incorrect in places. Yet all this does not dissuade us from believing the Bible to be the Word of God. Our mysteries are more a result of our own inability to understand than inherent 'faults' within the text. Who knows, there may well come a time when these verses will be fully and well explained because of some new approach or discovery!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Does it worry you when you are unable to find a definite answer to the problems raised by a scriptural text, or are you simply challenged to look deeper? How easy do you find it when there is no clear answer to a scriptural problem, and how far should we pursue our efforts to find an answer to everything?*
- *Pray for those who find themselves under the grip of evil today and unable to either understand it or perceive how they can be liberated. Ask the Lord to show you if there are any people you can help to overcome the evils which beset them.*