

The Promised One

Seeing Jesus in Genesis

(A 10-Week Bible Study)

nancy guthrie

The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis (A 10-Week Bible Study)

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Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Amy Bristow

Cover photo: Bridgeman Art Library

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2625-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2628-2

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2627-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2628-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guthrie, Nancy.

The promised one : seeing Jesus in Genesis : a 10-week Bible study / Nancy Guthrie.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-2625-1 (tp)

1. Bible O.T. Genesis—Textbooks. 2. Typology (Theology)—Textbooks. 3. Bible. N.T.—Relation to the Old Testament—Textbooks.

4. Bible. O.T. Genesis—Criticism, interpretation, etc.—Textbooks.

5. Christian women—Religious life—Textbooks. I. Title.

BS1239.G88 2011

222'.11064—dc22

2011001937

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Before We Get Started

A Note from Nancy

Welcome to *The Promised One: Seeing Jesus in Genesis*. I'm so glad you have committed to set time aside to look into God's Word along with me through this book. I'm praying that you will make fresh discoveries about God and what he is doing in the world and in your life as you work your way through this study over the weeks to come.

As we open up Genesis, we're not simply looking to increase our Bible knowledge; we want to see Jesus. We want this study to enlarge our understanding and correct our misunderstandings about who he is and what his gospel is all about. Usually we don't turn to the Old Testament to see Jesus. Instead, we turn to the Gospels in the New Testament. Yet Jesus said to the Jewish religious leaders at one point: "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!" (John 5:39). And, of course, the Scriptures he was talking about are the books of the Old Testament. Jesus himself made it clear that we can search the Old Testament Scriptures and find him there. This study is uniquely designed to help you to look into the wonder of the first book of the Old Testament—Genesis—and see how it prepares for and points to Christ.

There are three essential parts to this study. The first is the personal time you will spend reading your Bible, seeking to strengthen your grip on its truths as you work your way through the questions provided in the Personal Bible Study section of each week's lesson. This will be the easiest part to skip. But nothing is more important than reading and studying God's Word, expecting that he will meet you as you do.

As you work on the Personal Bible Study, don't become frustrated if you can't come up with an answer to every question, or if you're not sure what the question is getting at. I am hoping that the questions will get

you into the passage and get you thinking it through in a fresh way. The goal is not necessarily to record all of the “right” answers but to interact with the passage and grow in your understanding. Certainly some answers to your lingering questions will become clearer as you read the Teaching Chapter and as you discuss the passage with your group.

You will notice that several of the questions have a 🕒 beside them. If there are weeks when you feel you just cannot give enough time to the study to complete all the questions, completing the 🕒 questions will give you a foundation for understanding the Teaching Chapter and equip you to take part in the group discussion.

The second part of each lesson is the Teaching Chapter, in which I seek to explain and apply the passage we are studying. At the end of each chapter is a short piece that will turn your attention to how what we’ve just studied in Genesis gives us insight into what is still to come when Christ returns. One woman who worked through the study called this part “dessert,” and I do hope it will be a sweet reminder to you of our future hope. If you would like to listen to an audio version of the Teaching Chapters, go to <http://www.SeeingJesusInTheOldTestament.com>.

The third part of each week’s lesson is the time you spend with your group sharing your lives together and discussing what you’ve learned and what you’re still trying to understand and apply. A discussion guide is included at the end of each week’s lesson. You may want to follow it exactly, working through each question as written. Or you may just want to use the guide as an idea-starter for your discussion.

Each aspect is important—laying the foundation, building on it, and sealing it in. We all have different learning styles, so one aspect of the study will likely have more impact on you than another, but all three together will help you to truly “own” the truths in this study so that they can become a part of you as you seek to know your covenant God in deeper ways.

I’ve put the sections of this study together in a way that offers flexibility for how you can use it and flexibility in how you can schedule your time working through it. If you are going to use it for a ten-week group study, you will want to read the Teaching Chapter in week 1, “The Road to Emmaus,” before the first meeting. (There is no Personal Bible

Study section for the first week.) From then on, each week, participants will want to come to the group time having completed the Personal Bible Study section of the next week's lesson as well as having read the Teaching Chapter. You may want to put a star beside questions in the Personal Bible Study that you want to be sure to bring up in the discussion and underline key passages in the chapter that are meaningful to you. During your time together each week, you will use the Discussion Guide to discuss the big ideas of the week's lesson.

There is a great deal of material here, and you may want to take your time with it, giving more time to discuss its foundational truths, allowing it to sink in. To expand the study over twenty weeks, you would break each week into two parts, spending one week on the Personal Bible Study section, either doing it on your own and discussing your answers when you meet or actually working through the questions together when you meet. Then group members will read the chapter on their own over the next week and use the discussion guide to discuss the big ideas of the lesson the following week.

If you are leading a group study, we would like to provide you with some resources that have been developed specifically for this study. We hope that these resources will increase your confidence in leading the group. To request those helps, go to <http://www.SeeingJesusInTheOldTestament.com>

I would love to hear how your study is going, so please go to <http://www.nancyguthrie.com> sometime and send me a message. I am praying, as you see Jesus in a fresh way over the coming weeks through the book of Genesis, that your love for him will go deeper and that your longing for him to come again will grow stronger.

—Nancy Guthrie



Week 4

Noah and the Flood

Genesis 6–9


Personal Bible Study
Noah and the Flood

GENESIS 6–9


1. Skim chapter 5 of Genesis, reading verses 28–32 more carefully. What is the pattern repeated in this account of the descendants of Adam?
2. What does the name Lamech gave to his son, Noah, indicate about his hopes for this child?
3. Read Genesis 6:1–7. There are numerous speculations on what exactly the “sons of God” having children with the “daughters of man” means and who the Nephilim were, and it is difficult to determine definitively from the biblical text. But we do know that the “sons of God” are those who by faith walk with God. So why is it a problem that these “sons of God” are marrying the “daughters of man,” who do not by faith walk with God?


4. Remembering that God breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), what does he mean when he says, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever” (Gen. 6:3)?


 5. What does Genesis 6:5–6 reveal about the heart of man and the heart of God?

 6. How does the picture presented in Genesis 6:5–7 differ from or serve as a contrast to that of Genesis 1 and 2? (See especially 1:21–31.) Note the contrast in the second column of the chart below.


<p>“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Gen. 1:31)</p>	<p>Gen. 6:5</p>
<p>“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” (Gen. 1:26)</p>	<p>Gen. 6:6–7a</p>
<p>“So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.” (Gen. 1:21)</p>	<p>Gen. 6:7</p>


 7. God is so grieved by what he sees in the heart of man that he wants to *uncreate* what he created. What reason can you think of that he cannot destroy *all* of humanity?

 8. In this bleak and seemingly hopeless scene, there is still hope. How would you describe the hope found in Genesis 6:8?

 9. In Genesis 6:9, we learn that Noah was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” Which came first: the favor or grace of God, or Noah’s righteousness, and why does this matter?

10. In contrast to Noah, who was righteous, Genesis 6:11 says that all people and the whole earth were corrupt and that God had determined to destroy them. God gave Noah instructions to build an ark that would hold Noah and his family and two of every living thing. What does this signal about God’s intentions in the flood and after the flood, and what does God state about his intentions in regard to Noah?

 11. Read Genesis 6:11–8:19. What are two or three details from these verses about the flood and Noah’s experience that stand out to you as significant. Why?

 12. Recognizing that the day is coming when the world and all that are in it will once again fall under God’s judgment, what can we learn from this story about (1) the nature of that judgment; (2) who and what will be destroyed by it; (3) who will be preserved in it; and (4) what we can expect after it?

13. Using the chart below, compare and contrast God’s blessing and instructions to Noah with those God gave to Adam at creation.

"God blessed them." (Gen. 1:28)	Gen. 9:1
"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen. 1:28)	Gen. 9:1
"Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." (Gen. 1:29)	Gen. 9:3

14. Read Genesis 9:8–17. How would you summarize the covenant promise God made to Noah, and why do you think he made it?

15. Read the following verses in which God's "bow" is described:

If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;
 he has bent and readied his bow;
 he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
 making his arrows fiery shafts. (Ps. 7:12–13)

He has bent his bow like an enemy,
 with his right hand set like a foe . . .
 he has poured out his fury like fire. (Lam. 2:4)

Then the LORD will appear over them,
 and his arrow will go forth like lightning. (Zech. 9:14)

How might these verses offer insight into the imagery God used when he said to Noah, "I have set my bow in the cloud" as a sign of his covenant promise not to destroy the earth and all flesh again?



16. When Adam sinned, his shameful nakedness had to be covered in a provision from God, and Noah's shameful nakedness must also ul-

timately be covered by a provision from God. Go back to Genesis 6:8. What has God provided to cover Noah’s shameful nakedness?

17. How does Noah point to Christ? Look up the verses in the second column of the chart below and write a statement that relates to the statement about Noah in the first column.

Noah	Christ
Noah’s name means “rest.” (Gen. 5:28–29)	Isa. 11:10; Matt. 11:28 <i>Jesus is our rest. He is the one who provides rest for our souls.</i>
“Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.” (Gen. 6:8)	Matt. 3:17
“Noah was a righteous man.” (Gen. 6:9)	Luke 23:47
Noah was “blameless in his generation.” (Gen. 6:9)	Luke 1:35
Noah “walked with God.” (Gen. 6:9)	Luke 2:52; 4:4; 6:12
Noah was given work to do by God—to build an ark that will provide protection from judgment. (Gen. 6:14–21)	John 17:4
Noah’s work resulted in the “saving of his household” and “every living thing.” (Gen. 8:17; Heb. 11:7)	Rom. 8:21; Heb. 3:6

Noah did "all that God commanded him." (Gen. 6:22; 7:5)	John 15:10; Phil. 2:8
Noah brought his whole family and every living creature out of the ark with him. (Gen. 8:18-19)	Isa. 11:6-7; John 18:9

18. How does the ark point to Christ? Look up the verses in the second column of the chart below to write a statement about Christ that relates to the statement about the ark in the first column.

Ark	Christ
The ark was a divine provision of grace. (Gen. 6:13-14)	John 3:16; Rev. 13:8
The ark was a refuge from divine judgment. (Gen. 6:17-18)	Acts 4:12; Rom. 5:9-10
God invited Noah and his family to come into the ark. (Gen. 7:1)	Matt. 11:28; Acts 16:31
The ark was a place of absolute security. (Gen. 6:14; 7:16; 8:18-19)	John 10:28; 18:9; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5
The ark bore the judgment of God in the form of the flood. (Gen. 7:17-18)	John 12:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:24
All of those outside the ark perished. (Gen. 7:21-23)	Acts 13:40-41

Teaching Chapter

What Will Have the Last Word in Your Life?

As I sit here sipping my hot tea this morning, it is clear that the transformation is complete. I have become my mother.

I went for many years without the morning hot tea and afternoon iced tea ritual my mother has always enjoyed. But it must be in the genes.

My husband sees my mom in me in the way I set my fingers along the car door window when riding in the passenger seat in the car. I don't remember ever observing this in my mother and deciding I wanted to do it, yet when I see my fingers on the car door, I realize this is exactly what my mother does.

It shouldn't surprise me. All I need do is look in the mirror to see that I am a reflection of where I came from.

We are all born with traits and tendencies inherited from our mothers and fathers—some good and some bad. These things are in our hardwiring so that they just come naturally. But does where we come from and the environment we live in have the last word in who we are and who we will become? Do we have to succumb to the genetics we inherited, the culture we live in, or the choices we've made?

A long season of Natalie Grant's life was shaped by a voice from without and within that threatened to have the last word in her life. She first heard it waiting in line with her college boyfriend at the grocery store. "You always ask me if you look pretty," he said. Then, pointing to the picture of a woman on the cover of a magazine, he said, "This is what I think is beautiful."

Looking at the rail-thin model on the cover, with her perfect skin and flawless hair, Natalie knew that she could never look like that. But she could try, she thought.

After leaving the store, she and her boyfriend went out to lunch at a restaurant nearby. It was the first of innumerable times over the coming years when Natalie would lock the door of a bathroom stall, kneel down on the dirty floor, shove her finger down her throat, and expel what she had just eaten. And it felt good. She felt free of the food, in control of her life, and hopeful that by this she could gain the acceptance and approval she craved from the person whose word had so much power in her life.

Eventually Natalie dropped down to 96 pounds. Her collarbone stuck out, and she thought she was beautiful. Other people thought she was beautiful too, and told her so. But then her teeth began to turn yellow from the constant purging. Her hair began to fall out, and the boyfriend drifted away. What she initially thought had given her freedom and control had actually turned her into a slave.

But a boyfriend's unrealistic expectations and bulimia's false promises did not have the last word in Natalie's life. The day came when Natalie heard the word that had much more power than the word she had listened to from her boyfriend, from our beauty-crazed culture, and from her own self-loathing: "I've never heard God speak audibly," Natalie said, "but the Holy Spirit speaks to us on the inside, and one day, huddled down with my head over the toilet, I heard him saying, 'My grace is enough. My grace is enough' as that Scripture began to move from my head to my heart. I remember looking at that toilet and saying, 'I am kneeling to the wrong God. I'm kneeling to this god of myself because this is what I do to make myself feel better and to feel accepted, and to look a certain way. I'm kneeling to the wrong god, and this will destroy me.'"¹

Freedom came when the voice of God spoke grace into her life so powerfully that it drowned out all lesser voices. God's grace became the defining word in her life instead of bulimia.

¹Adapted from "Natalie Grant: Her Heart Revealed" (<http://www.cbn.com>) and "From Hunger to Healing," Focus on the Family radio program (September 2, 2009).

As we look at Genesis 6, we see that Noah had many voices in and around him seeking to define him. There were the voices in the culture inviting him to join in debauched living, voices suggesting he not take this ark building so seriously, voices ridiculing his lonely stand against the world, and angry rants at how his obedience to God heaped condemnation on everybody else.

Perhaps even more unavoidable was the voice inside Noah—his own voice—questioning his own ability to hear God clearly, lamenting the effect his choices were having on the rest of his family, wincing at the knowledge of his own shortcomings, wondering if one hundred years of building a boat on dry ground would only leave him looking like a fool.

But most unavoidable was the voice of God giving instructions and making promises.

So what or who will have the last word in Noah's life? Will the words of ridicule heaped upon him by his neighbors have the last word? Will his fears and failures have the last word?

This is a question we want answered because we have the same question about our own lives. Will my religious upbringing or my current doubts and questions have the last word? Will my sexual experimentation or my marital faithfulness have the last word? Will my initial spiritual fervor or my current apathy toward God have the last word? Ultimately, will my own thoughts and feelings, successes and failures, have the last word in my life?

Or will someone else, something else, get the last—the lasting and definitive—word in my life now and in my eternal future?

Noah: A Sinner Saved by Grace

Noah's life began shaped by a grand expectation. For generations, whenever a son was born, moms and dads hoped that he would be the one to be the offspring that God had promised (Gen. 3:15). They hoped he would be the one who would break the curse that had brought so much frustration and difficulty to life while working the land, as well as death when the work was done.

So when Lamech fathered a son, he “called his name Noah, saying,

‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands’” (Gen. 5:29). Perhaps Noah, whose very name meant “comfort and rest,” would be the one! But 595 years after Noah was born, it happened to Lamech too—he died. Evidently Noah was not the Promised One.

Noah was born into a world that had devolved significantly from the beauty and purity of the garden that Adam and Eve were forced to leave. By the time Noah was born, the population had grown significantly in number. But as they grew in number, they also increased in wickedness.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen. 6:5)

Humanity had become thoroughly and pervasively evil—*every* intention, *only* evil, *continually*. No goodness, no kindness, no joy—just never-ending selfishness and never-enough indulgence.

This is the world Noah was born into and the nature he was born with. Noah was a natural-born sinner like everyone around him. The same selfishness came naturally to him, and the same debauchery tempted him. But Noah was not like everyone around him. Noah’s life was not guided by what came naturally to him based on his environment and inherited tendencies. How do we know?

Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. (Gen. 6:8)

Noah found favor, or grace, with the Lord. Or perhaps it would be better to say that grace found Noah.² And when grace found Noah, grace determined to have the last word in Noah’s life. His surroundings and his sinful nature and his evil ancestry certainly spoke into his life and had their impact, but they simply did not have the final say about who Noah would be or what would happen to him.

Most of my life, I assumed that Noah found favor in God’s eyes *because of his righteousness*—that God looked at humanity and found the one person who sought to please him and therefore granted him

²Alec Moyter, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996), 43.

favor and provided salvation in the ark. But that is not the case at all. The grace came before the goodness.

It was the grace of God poured out on Noah, based not on Noah's goodness but on God's choice, that made Noah righteous. Noah did not earn this favor from God. It was a gift, pure and simple and undeserved. In fact, God's favor is never something that can be earned or purchased. It is always a gift. The grace that found Noah changed Noah. In fact, it shaped everything about his life and identity.

*My sinful nature will
not have the last word
in my life—God's
favor will save me
from myself.*

Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:9)

When we are told that Noah was a “righteous” and “blameless” man, it does not mean that Noah never sinned. Like all other sinners who find acceptance with God, Noah received this righteousness by faith. Though he was surrounded by moral evil and perversion, the grace at work in his life implanted in him the desire to keep himself pure and uncontaminated. Like his great-grandfather Enoch before him, Noah “walked with God,” meaning that Noah was a man who oriented his life away from the world and toward God. He saw himself and his sin in the light of God's holiness and God's grace, which made him want to stay close to God and walk with him throughout his life.

While Noah found and knew the grace of God, he did not see and understand it as we can, because grace has come to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). And though Noah may not have seen and understood the grace that found him, it still had the power to change him from who he was according to the nature passed along to him by his mother and father. As he responded to and was covered by this grace, he was accepted by God because of this grace.

To know the favor of God is not to be loved as you are by nature but to be loved for who you are in Christ. It is not that you have never done

wrong or naturally do right, but that God's grace gives you eyes to see your own sinfulness and a heart of repentance. God's grace in your life transforms you into a person who loves the world around you less even as you have an increasing affection for God. Most significantly, grace gives you faith to believe in the Promised One.

Noah: A Sinner Protected by Grace

While Noah had found favor in the eyes of the Lord, God looked at the rest of humanity and saw only corruption and violence. So God decided to treat humans exactly as they deserved to be treated. God determined to destroy them. But not all of them. God had every intention to fulfill his promise to send the offspring who would crush the head of Satan and break the curse on all creation. He had not forsaken his plan for the whole earth to be filled with the glory of God. He intended to preserve one righteous man and his family. With this man, Noah, God would start over.

God's wrath would fall in the form of raindrops that would wipe out every living thing. Noah would not escape the judgment that was about to fall, but he would be protected in it. He was to build an ark in which he would find protection. The storm of God's judgment would rain down its full fury on the ark, but Noah, safely inside with his family, would be preserved.

God's instructions must have made little sense to Noah. To invest one hundred years in building a huge wooden boat on dry ground when he had likely never even seen rain falling from the sky, let alone floodwaters, required a radical reliance on the word of God. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that "*by faith* Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (11:7). In other words, Noah believed what God told him about something that he had never seen and in fact had no categories for. Noah took God at his word. And sure enough, what God had warned about and prepared Noah for finally happened.

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation."
(Gen. 7:1)

The righteousness that had come to Noah by faith worked its way in and through his life and was lived out not only through his radical *belief* in God's word but through his radical *obedience* to God's word. Four times the narrative expounds on the nature of his obedience. In Genesis 6:22 we read, "Noah did this; he did *all* that God commanded him." After receiving God's instructions for going into the ark and taking his family and all the pairs of animals with him, we're told, "Noah did *all* that the LORD had commanded him" (Gen. 7:5). Two more times in this chapter we read that Noah did as God had commanded him.

What a picture of grace at work in the life of a sinner whose natural bent is to go his own way, trust in himself, and seek to gain the approval of others. Noah set himself against all of that so he could single-heartedly give himself to obeying God.

Then the day came that Noah had invested a century of sweat preparing for. He and his wife along with his sons and their wives, and two of every animal went into the ark. "And the LORD shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). The single heavy, pitched-covered door of the ark was locked tight by an act of God. Noah did not shut himself in. The world outside did not shut him in. Because it was the Lord who shut him in, he knew they would be safe. Water would not leak through the door and sink the boat. Desperate, drowning people would not break open the door and thereby overwhelm the boat.

There they were, shut inside the boat that all the people of his day must have thought would be Noah's oversized coffin. And then the rain began to fall. Water not only fell from the sky, but it also gushed from beneath the ground so that all of creation became a watery chaos.

This is not the cute little story of children's storybooks and cheery nursery decor. Just go to Babies-R-Us and see what you find. I looked. In addition to all the Noah's ark-themed toys and bedding, you'll find a Noah's ark Fun Rug, Noah's ark stepstool, potty chair, and toy chest. On each item you'll find a cheery, white-haired Noah and his wife surrounded by animals of every kind, ready to board a big wooden boat.

But this is a sanitized picture of the whole sad story. The real panorama is not one we want to plaster and paint around a child's room,

even though it is true. Noah's ark floated in the midst of a grim and gruesome scene. While Noah and his family nestled safe inside the boat with all of the animals, the wider view reveals the rest of humanity—all of those who refused Noah's warnings and rejected Noah's God, all of those who, instead of being safe inside the ark, were swept away in a tidal wave. The bigger picture around the ark was that of families on rooftops, struggling and failing to keep their heads above the water, and a sea of floating corpses. Not exactly what we want to wallpaper around the baby's bed.

This story of unbridled wickedness and condemnation, of death and destruction, serves as a warning to all those who refuse God's offer of grace. It prefigures what will happen to all who refuse to enter into the safety and protection provided in Christ. The day is coming when all those who have rejected Christ will be destroyed, although next time it won't be by flood but by fire (2 Pet. 3:7).

Many people today, as in Noah's day, refuse to believe that a time of judgment is really coming. And let's face it. It's unpleasant. It sounds old-fashioned. We'd rather not talk about it or just be vague about it. The story of Noah and the ark shouts to all those who persist in living apart from God about what is to come. It invites all to accept God's offer of protection and safety found only by being united to Christ.

In the ark we see in shadow form the salvation provided through Jesus Christ:

- ≈ Just as building the ark seemed foolish to all those who would perish in the storm, so “the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).
- ≈ Just as the ark was provided by God so that those who believed God's word would not perish in the flood, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- ≈ Just as the ark was the only refuge for those who wanted to survive the storm, so “there is salvation in no one else” but Jesus (Acts 4:12).

- ≈ Just as the ark provided absolute security for those who hid themselves inside, so is there absolute security for those whose lives are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).
- ≈ Just as all those outside the ark perished because they refused to believe the truth and be saved, so will all those outside of Christ perish “because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

There is an ark of safety—the person of Christ—and the door is open to you. Have you entered in? Have you responded to the grace that has come to you in Jesus? Or are you lingering on the outside somewhere—distracted by the world, disgruntled by what you will have to leave behind, delayed by doubts or questions?

Won't you enter in? Won't you hide yourself in Christ where there is safety and rest?

Noah had to have been happy that all of his family was inside the ark with him, safe and dry. They carried with them God's promise that while everything that lived on the earth would die, all who were safely in the ark would live. Rather than experience God's wrath, they would receive his covenant promise. Rather than die in the flood, they would emerge from the waters of death into resurrection life.

But as happy as they were to be safely together, and as noisy as all the animals and the sounds of the rushing waters must have been, surely it did not drown out the screams of those who refused to listen to the warnings Noah had given about the judgment to come. Because Noah was a righteous man who walked with God, Noah's heart must have broken as he heard the desperate cries of those who were not safely inside the ark.

And though you may find yourself safe from the storm of judgment in the ark of safety provided in Christ, if someone you love has so far refused to believe that judgment is coming and has scoffed at the suggestion of the need to enter into the safety of Christ, your heart is broken, too. Rest inside the boat does not come easily unless all those you love deeply are safe inside with you.

This cannot be skipped over lightly, but neither can it be settled simplistically. It can only be saturated in prayer. It can only be sought through diligence on our knees. The heart that is heavy with the knowl-

edge that someone we love is outside the ark is a heart that aches with the burden of Christ himself, who said with tears, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matt. 23:37).

Like Noah, we live a blameless life joyfully obeying God’s commands. Like Noah, we put our faith in a loving Father whose Son said,

*God’s wrath will not
have the last word in
my life—God’s
protection will keep
me safe.*

“It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matt. 18:14). And ultimately, we pray that it will not be our loved one’s rebellion and resistance that will have the last word in his or her life, but God’s grace and mercy.

Noah: A Sinner Preserved by Grace

While Noah and the ark is a story of judgment and death, it is also a story of grace and new life, a story of a promise kept to send a flood, and a promise made to never destroy the earth again through a flood. This is the story of how a world of evil was cleansed and given a fresh start.

When Noah finally emerged from the ark with his family and the animals, he was like a new Adam, the father of a new humanity. The world had been washed clean so that it was like a new Eden. Except this was not the pre-fall paradise. The curse was not gone. Sin was still a reality that had to be dealt with. And so before he began a new life in this new world, Noah built an altar to make a burnt offering to God. This was an offering of gratitude for salvation. But it was more than that. We know that because, as it burned, it was “a pleasing aroma” to the Lord (Gen. 8:21). This is the language used throughout the Old Testament for an atoning sacrifice offered in faith that pointed to the once-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice to come. Though Noah could not see Christ or speak of Christ, the sacrifice he offered on the altar pointed to Christ. This is precisely what made it pleasing to God.

God then made a promise that took into account his expectation that Noah and his descendants would sin:

I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. (Gen. 8:21–22)

Then we read that “God blessed Noah and his sons” (Gen. 9:1). Clearly, the story has moved from judgment to blessing. This is the first time we read of God blessing anything or anyone since he blessed Adam and Eve in the garden before they sinned (Gen. 1:28). This new beginning in many ways resembled the first beginning recorded in Genesis 1 and 2, particularly in the command to be fruitful and multiply. But there was a key difference. It now rested upon a covenant of grace based on shed blood. Though humanity had forfeited the blessing of God given to Adam and Eve in the garden and abdicated their position as ruler over creation, by his grace, God gave his blessing once again.

God also instituted some new protections, since sin still reigned in the world. To protect them from the animal kingdom, people could now eat animals, which would cause animals to fear them. To protect them from other people, people could put to death someone who murdered another person. And to protect them from another flood, God made a covenant promise that despite their sin, he would never again send a flood that would destroy the whole earth. In a sense, we could say that, in this promise, God was really protecting them from God.

He called it “my covenant” (Gen. 9:9, 11) because it did not require any assent, action, or ratification from Noah—not even acknowledgment. This was God’s self-motivated promise of mercy that would last throughout the remainder of human history. God bound himself with the promise that he will never again send a flood that will kill all living creatures and destroy the earth. Then God put forth a sign of his covenant.

I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and

you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. (Gen. 9:13–15)

What is interesting about this sign of a bow in the clouds is who the sign is for:

When the bow is in the clouds, *I* will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. (Gen. 9:16)

This sign is not so much for man but for God. This bow in the clouds will remind God of his own promise. But it also had to be a comforting sign to Noah and his family. Though their feet were again on the solid ground of earth, the sound of rushing torrents had surely left its echo in their ears. The next time they saw clouds gathering and darkness coming, their fears would surely flourish as they wondered, “Is God’s judgment about to rain down again? Is he coming again to wipe out the world?” Then they would look up and see the bow.

The bow illustrated exactly why God could make this promise of mercy. Throughout the Old Testament, the word “bow” refers to a weapon of war or a dispenser of wrath. So the bow that God placed in the sky was not merely a curve of light shining through the rain. This sign represented an archer’s bow, a weapon. The psalmist described God’s bow, saying, “If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He will prepare his deadly weapons and shoot his flaming arrows” (Ps. 7:12–13 NLT).

But this bow is not hung in the sky and strung tight with arrows at the ready, pointing toward the earth. It is loose and hanging at the warrior’s side, pointing into the heavens. The bow in the clouds is a sign that God is no longer at war with those who have found grace. By setting his bow in the heavens, God was saying that even though humanity is sinful, he will not come again in war against the earth.

God can hang up his bow for only one reason. It is not because Noah and his descendants will no longer sin, and it’s not because he will now overlook sin. He can hang up his bow because its arrows have been spent on someone else. God chose to aim the arrows of his wrath

and judgment toward an innocent Christ rather than toward guilty sinners.³

Whenever we begin to think that the grace extended to us, the grace that gets the last word in our life, is free, the bow in the clouds reminds us that the grace we enjoy has come to us at great cost.

Like the rainbow that appeared in the sky, in Christ, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11). And just as the rainbow serves as an “everlasting” sign to show his intentions of grace toward his people, we have been raised up with Christ “so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

I suppose it would be nice if this were the happy ending of Noah’s story. If it ended here, he and his little family could walk off into the sunset of a cleansed creation, with the backdrop of the burning sacrifice on the altar to signify their faith and obedience and a bow in the clouds to signify God’s eternal promise to them.

Had some human admirer chronicled the history of Noah, the last part of his story would likely be omitted. But the fact that it is recorded and that no effort is made to cover up or excuse Noah’s sin is evidence that the characters of the Bible are painted in the colors of truth and reality by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Noah’s story is the story of a man who walked with God, believed God, waited for God, and depended on God. But sadly, it is also the story of a man who, in the final chapter of his life, dishonored and failed God. Noah is just like us. He not only needed God’s saving grace; he needed God’s sustaining grace.

Genesis 9:20 tells us that “Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.” It takes years for a vineyard to produce grapes, so it must have been some time after the flood when Noah used the grapes from the vineyard to make wine. Because he was a seasoned man of the soil, he knew exactly what would happen when, as Moses

³Numerous pastors and theologians present God’s bow as picturing a warrior’s bow, including Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 96–98; Timothy J. Keller, “Lord of the Earth” sermon, December 10, 2000, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York; and Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Eternal Truth of God,” sermon, Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, 1865. But other theologians disallow this, citing inadequate support for the idea in the text, including the editors of the *ESV Study Bible*, and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 125.

tells us, “he drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent” (v. 21).

Obviously the flood had not purged the world of wickedness. If God had wanted to do that, he would have had to eradicate the entire human race. But this God would not do because he had promised that the offspring of Eve would one day crush the head of Satan.

What seems to be a sad ending to Noah’s story is redeemed only because of what we remember from the beginning of his story: “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). This favor had not come to Noah because of his good behavior, and he could not lose it through his bad behavior.

The good news of the end of Noah’s story is the good news at the end of our stories. If God’s grace has found us and is clearly at work in us, we do not have to fear that sins in our past or sins in

*My future failures will
not have the last word
in my life—God’s
promise will secure
my hope.*

our future will disqualify us from enjoying the benefits of God’s gracious covenant. God has bound himself to us, and nothing can come between us.

Your genetic predispositions, your sinful tendencies, the moral failures of your past, the culture you live in, the path you have taken so far in your life—none of these are destined to have the last word in your life. God’s grace toward you in Christ has the last, the lasting, and the determining word in your life, as it did when it found Noah:

- ≈ Grace invites you to walk with God and away from the world.
- ≈ Grace empowers you to obey over the long haul.
- ≈ Grace keeps you from having to endure the wrath of God you deserve.
- ≈ Grace promises you that the storms in your life are not punishment for your failures but preparation for your fruitfulness.
- ≈ Grace covers your sin so completely that it cannot be canceled out by your bad behavior. It is there, on the other side of your repentance, to woo you back and welcome you home.

∞ Grace binds you to Christ so that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39).

How Genesis Points to What Is Yet to Come: “As Were the Days of Noah”

The disciples asked Jesus the question, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). Jesus answered their question by referring them back to the story of Noah: “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:37). So we have to ask, in what way(s) will it be like it was in Noah’s day? Jesus said that in the days before the flood, people were absorbed in their daily activities, ignoring Noah’s warnings about the judgment to come, enjoying life. They could not imagine a devastating flood and therefore would not believe they were in any danger.

They were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:39)

Jesus was saying that is the way it will be at his second coming. Many people will be busy going about life, having persisted in denying that God will pour out his judgment on sin, and like the people in Noah’s day, they will be “swept away.” Then Jesus added to this picture two scenarios in which one person is taken and the other left:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. (Matt. 24:40–41)

Many have read this passage and imposed on it a particular view of the end times to suggest that believers will be taken to be with Christ somewhere other than on this earth, while unbelievers are left behind. But is that a correct assumption based on Jesus’s statement that it will be like it was in Noah’s day? Who were the ones taken in the day of

Noah, and who were left? Genesis 7:23 says that “only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.” Was it not those who refused to respond to the “gospel” preached to them by Noah who were taken when they were swept away in the flood? And was it not Noah and his family who were left?

Surely Jesus was saying that those who have rejected God’s offer of protection in Christ will be swept away or taken, while those who have hidden themselves in him will be left to rule and reign with him in the cleansed creation of the new earth. And if this is so, we do not sing, “The Son has come, and you’ve been left behind,” as a dirge but as a dance.

The apostle Peter also wrote about the day of the Lord, when Christ will return, and he also drew on Noah’s story to help his readers understand what that day will be like. He described a coming day of judgment when the ungodly will be destroyed—not by flood but by fire. On that day, the cursed creation will not be swept away by water but melted away by flames:

In the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, “What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained 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 out from the water and surrounded it with water. Then he used the water to destroy the ancient world with a mighty flood. And by the same word, the present heavens and earth have been stored up for fire. They are being kept for the day of judgment, when ungodly people will be destroyed. . . . On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:3–7, 12–13 NLT)

On that day, all who have hidden themselves in the ark of God—the person of Jesus Christ—will be protected from the flames, just as Noah and his family were protected from the flood. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, will deliver us safely to the new heaven and new earth he has promised.

But this time we will not begin again as sinners living in a cursed environment, like Noah and his family did. Sin and its effects on us and our environment will be gone for good. There will be no more curse. Grace will have had the last word. “‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”⁴

⁴John Newton, “Amazing Grace,” 1779.

Discussion Guide

Noah and the Flood

GENESIS 6–9

Getting the Discussion Going

1. If you had been a news photographer during the time of Noah as he prepared for and built the ark and as he gathered the animals and prepared to enter the boat and after the rain started falling, what interesting scenes might you have captured? Are there any animals you wish had missed the ship?

Getting to the Heart of It

2. In the Teaching Chapter, we saw that Noah was a sinner saved by grace, protected by grace, and preserved by grace. Let's work our way through these three. First, when we read that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord," or that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," what does that mean?

3. Has it always been your understanding that God initiated and provided Noah's righteousness, or like Nancy described as her own past understanding, have you thought that Noah was the only righteous one and, because of that, he found favor with God? What difference does it make?

4. As we see Noah and his family and the animals protected inside the ark, we discover an Old Testament picture of the saving work of Jesus Christ. All who "hide" in Christ will be protected from judgment. As you made the connections between the ark and how it pictures Christ

in the Personal Bible Study section, which aspects were most meaningful to you?

5. As Nancy described, we tend to turn this into a cute children's story, and even as adults we are pained to face up to the stark reality of the divine judgment and gruesome death in this story. Why do you think we are so uncomfortable with it, and why is it important that we not conveniently delete it from the story?

6. Though Noah was a righteous man in that he embraced God's covenant from the heart, he was still a sinner. What were the signs of that when he emerged from the ark and began to build a new life on dry land?

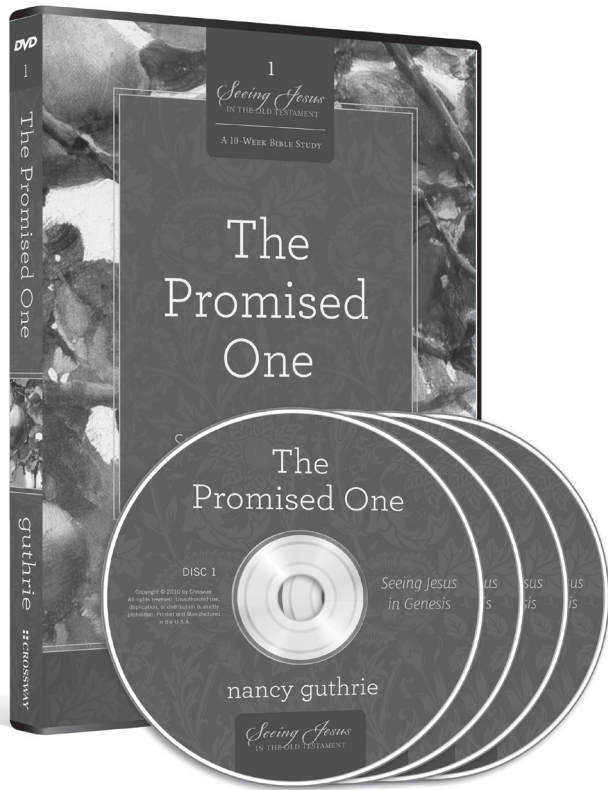
7. How was Noah *preserved* by grace, and what verses in the Bible come to mind to assure you that you are preserved by grace?

Getting Personal

8. The big question of this week was, "What will have the last word in your life?" Though Noah inherited a sin nature and was surrounded by wicked sinners, sin did not have the last word in his life. Would you be willing to share how you dealt with this question personally this week? Is there anything other than the grace provided to you in Jesus Christ that threatens to have the last word in your life?

Getting How It Fits into the Big Picture

9. Throughout this study, we're trying to grasp how some of these familiar stories fit into the bigger story of God's plan for redemption. How do you see the continuing threads of the promised offspring and the restoration of all things in Genesis 6–9?

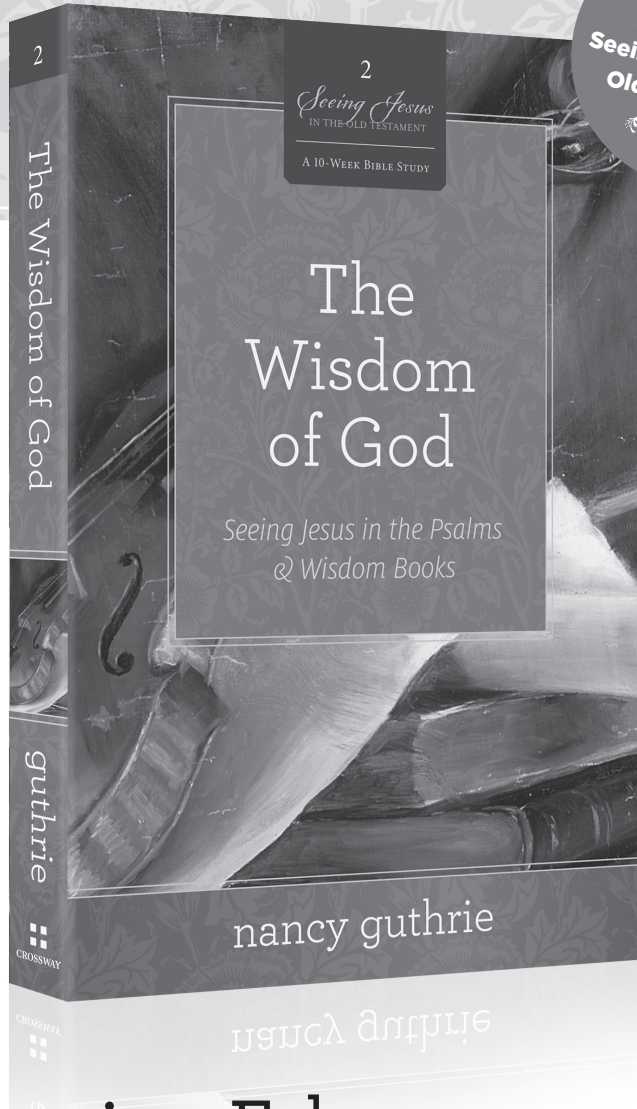


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