



March 6, 2016

An Interesting Thought Exercise - How Long Did Noah Have To Prepare The Ark? - 1

One of the interesting non-doctrinal questions that comes up is that of the length of time that God gave Noah to prepare the ark. Although this is not a doctrinal question it is a perplexing and thought provoking challenge to students of the Bible. Many believe and teach that Noah had 120 years during which he built and warned those around him of the coming cataclysm. The time is derived from a statement recorded in **Genesis 6.3**. “*And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*” I will return to a discussion of this verse later but first let us take a look at the context and set the stage if you will for the events that later transpired.

We are introduced to Noah, the son of Lamech and grandson of Methuselah, in **Genesis 5.32**. “*And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham and Japheth.*” In **Genesis 6.1-2** we have a statement of the general state of the world in which we find that men were marrying wives of all which they chose. It is at this point that God makes the statement in verse 3 cited above. **Genesis 6.5** states that the wickedness of man was great and violence filled the earth. Due to this God repented that he had made man (**Genesis 6.6**) and determined to destroy the earth. One exception in this wicked world is Noah who “found grace in the sight of the Lord” (**Genesis 6.8**). Remember these events as we shall return to them later but for now we will trace the chronology of the warning given to Noah and the preparation of the ark.

The full text of the warning from God is found in **Genesis 6.13-22**. Note that in verse 18 God stated that He would establish His covenant with Noah and his sons. Looking back at **Genesis 5.32** we find that Noah was five hundred years old when he begat his three sons. This phrase is generally used in the Old Testament to mark the births, or the beginning of childbearing. The fact that all three sons are mentioned at Noah’s age does not specify exactly when Noah’s sons were born but we know from the text that this began when he was five hundred years old. That will be used as a time marker to examine evidence later to support the conclusion that the time between God’s warning and the beginning of the flood was one hundred years or less. First let’s take a look at the information that we do have.

We know from **Genesis 7.11** that Noah was six hundred years old when the flood began. Specifically it started on the second month of Noah’s six hundredth year, the seventeenth day of the month. To make this simpler I will render the chronology in terms of Noah’s age in a format of the year, month and day. So the flood would start on **600.2.17** in relation to Noah’s age. The rain fell and the fountains of the great deep were broken up on this day. This continued for forty days. The waters prevailed upon the earth for 150 days (**Gen 7.24**). On **600.7.17** the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (**Gen 8.4**). On **600.10.1** the tops of the mountain were seen (**Gen 8.5**). On **600.10.1** plus **40 days** Noah sent out a raven, which did not return to him, and a dove (**Gen 8.6**). On **600.10.1** plus **47 days** the dove was again sent out and returned with an olive leaf (**Gen 8.10**). On **600.10.1** plus **54 days** the dove was again sent out and did not return (**Gen 8.12**). On **601.1.1** the waters were dried up and Noah removed the covering of the ark (**Gen 8.13**). On **601.2.27** the earth was dried and God spoke to Noah and told him to go forth with his family.

Chronology of the events up to this point

The passages above provide time markers from which we can construct a table of the events and what happens after the flood.

General times given:

Noah's age	Event	Reference
500	Begat Shem, Ham & Japheth	Genesis 5.32
600	God warns Noah 7 days before flood	Genesis 7.14
600	Flood begins	Genesis 7.11

Chronology of the flood in relation to Noah's age (year/month/day format):

Noah's age	Event	Reference
600.2.17	Flood begins	Genesis 7.11



March 6, 2016

An Interesting Thought Exercise - How Long Did Noah Have To Prepare The Ark? - 2

Chronology of the flood in relation to Noah's age (year/month/day format): (continued from page 1)

Noah's age	Event	Reference
600.2.17 + 40 days	Rain fell, Fountains of the deep broken up	Genesis 7.11
600.2.17 + 150 days	Waters prevailed upon the Earth	Genesis 7.24
600.7.17	Ark comes to rest on mountains of Ararat	Genesis 8.4
600.10.1	Tops of the mountains were seen	Genesis 8.5
600.10.1 + 40 days	Raven and dove sent out, raven does not return, dove does	Genesis 8.6
600.10.1 + 47 days	Dove sent out again, returns with olive leaf	Genesis 8.10
600.10.1 + 54 days	Dove sent third time - does not return	Genesis 8.12
601.1.1	Waters dried up, Noah removes covering of the ark	Genesis 8.13
601.2.27	Earth dried, God tells Noah & family to go forth from ark	Genesis 8.15

So, we still have not answered our question, but we know at this point that Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives were sent forth out of the ark. Now to answer the question of how long Noah had to prepare the ark we look forward to what happened later. A key to answering this lies in the age of Noah's son Shem as outlined in the chart below.

Chronology of Noah's son Shem

Reference	Event
Genesis 5.32	Noah begat Shem, Ham & Japheth
Genesis 11.10	Shem begat Arphaxad - 2 years after the flood Shem's age given as 100

From the chronologies given above we can begin to construct a timeline that may shed some light on the amount of time Noah had to build the ark. Consider the points below:

Shem begotten when Noah was 500 years old	Genesis 5.32
Shem begat his firstborn Arphaxad two years after the flood	Genesis 11.10
Arphaxad was born when Shem is 102 years old	Genesis 11.10

[Genesis 11.10](#) is a bit misleading in the statement about Shem and the birth of Arphaxad. In this passage it is stated that Shem was 100 years old and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood. If we subtract two years from Shem's age of 100, at which time Arphaxad was born, and this was two years after the flood, then Shem would have been 98 at the time the flood ended. That creates a problem with the age of Noah when Shem was born and the beginning of the flood. My conclusion then is that Arphaxad was born when Shem was 102 (**two years after the flood**), and the statement in [Genesis 11.10](#) does not mark the exact time at which Arphaxad was born. If we conclude that Noah's sons were born when he was 500 years old as stated, and the flood occurred in Noah's 600th year, then based on the age of Shem at the time the flood ended there would have been a maximum of 100 years between [Genesis 5.32](#) and the start of the flood. We have to read closely however and notice that when God spoke to Noah about the coming destruction his sons were married. This is based on God's statement to Noah that those who would be saved included himself, his wife, his sons and their wives ([Genesis 6.18](#)). Although the narrative repeats the birth of Noah's sons in [Genesis 6.10](#) there is an indication that some time has elapsed between the birth of Noah's sons and the Lord's warning in [Genesis 6.13-22](#).

We have no idea at what age his sons married but God's statement to Noah includes their wives as well. With that information if we conclude Shem was of an age at which he was married then that may shorten the time between God's warning and the beginning of the flood to far less than 100 years. What we do know is that Shem was born when Noah was 500 years old. The flood began when Noah was 600 years old and Shem was 100 at the end of the flood at which time Noah was 601. That will also force the conclusion that Shem had not had his one hundred and first birthday at the time the flood ended although it would have been shortly after that time. The conclusion that we can then draw that does no damage to the narrative is that Noah was warned about the flood during the lifetime of Shem which encompasses a total of 100 years. The warning from God had to have been received at a time when his sons were married which would force a conclusion that this was possibly less than 100 years. Given this perspective we must now consider the meaning of the 120 years as noted above.



March 6, 2016

An Interesting Thought Exercise - How Long Did Noah Have To Prepare The Ark? - 3

The 120 years and the progression of God' judgment against man

In other passages we find that God's judgments against evil are progressive. There are exceptions to this but a review of **Deuteronomy 28 - 32** and the prophets reinforces this conclusion. Moses warned the children of Israel of the negative consequences for departing from God. These would begin with the absence of some blessings which we find occurs later in the form of famines etc. As evil progresses we see that God sends pestilence in various forms and eventually allows the Israelites enemies to afflict them. Finally, when there was no more remedy (**2 Chron 36.16**) God allowed them to be destroyed and carried away for a period of seventy years. We also see a progressive judgment against Adam and Eve which affected their lifespan. When the couple sinned they were driven from the garden of Eden and barred from the tree of life so they could not eat of it and live forever (**Gen 3.22-24**). This appears to be similar to what happens in Genesis chapter 6.

The state of the world and development of digression from God appears to follow a pattern. First men multiply and take wives of all that they saw (**Gen 6.1-2**). This was a violation of God's model for the family of one man and one woman. Christ also brings this out speaking about divorce and marriage in Matthew 19 (**Matt 19.1-8**). It is at this point that God states that "...*his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*" (**Gen 6.3**). God states as part of this that his spirit shall not always strive with man..." (**Gen 6.3**). What does this mean?

What did God mean that his spirit would not always strive with man?

Here we have two possibilities. Did this indicate that God would not allow man to live more than 120 years, or, did he withdraw his direction from mankind due to their evil? Let's examine both of these.

We must remember that this was the Patriarchal age in which God spoke to the heads of households. The taking of wives in multiplicity and the increase in violence indicates that man no longer listened to God and so the Lord is withdrawing his blessings from them. If this is true what we have is a general refusal to be led by the spirit of God through His divine direction. This is a possibility based on statements made by Paul in his letter to the Romans.

Speaking of the digression of the ancient world from God, Paul provides us with the consequences of this mentality. Paul states, "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*" (**Rom 1.21-25**). As a result of this Paul writes, "*God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;...*" (**Rom 1.28**).

We can apply this to the evil of the world prior to the flood as we see the sin of man in an obvious departure from the Lord's will. In that case God could not maintain a relationship with beings who had turned away from Him. While this is possible it is evident that mankind had already departed from God and were not following after righteousness.

The second possibility is that God determined to limit the lifespan of mankind. The account of creation may shed some light on this. "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" (**Gen 2.7**). Life was given and sustained by the spirit that was given by the Lord. As mankind violated the natural order of marriage it is possible that the withdrawal of God's spirit was the limitation of lifespan to curb this. Such a conclusion fits the overall context of the passages and also follows the patterns of God's progressive judgment against mankind which would later culminate in the destruction of all flesh with the exception of Noah who had found grace in the sight of the Lord. If this is the case then we have to consider whether this was a warning of the coming destruction. We can answer that by turning to the scriptures once more.

Was The 120 year time limit a warning?

We can rule out the 120 years as a warning based on statements made by Christ in Matthew 24. While an-



March 6, 2016

An Interesting Thought Exercise - How Long Did Noah Have To Prepare The Ark? - 4

Answering the disciples question about Jesus statement concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and signs of his return. Answering their questions, Christ states, “*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, **until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.***” (**Matt 24.39**). Christ specifically states that no warning was given to people in the days of Noah. Was this a warning that was made known to Noah?

The 120 years appears to be a determination made by God and there is no indication that Noah was privy to this information. Only Noah knew when the flood would come and God only told him *seven days before it began* (**Gen 7.4**). This would allow Noah time to make whatever final preparations were needed and at the proper time he and his family entered into the ark. The flood then begins and the evil of man is washed away. Based on Christ’s statements and the Genesis account we can eliminate Gods statement about the 120 years as a warning of the coming flood.

Conclusions based on the passages above:

- Noah’s sons were born starting when he was 500 years old
- Noah’s sons were married when God revealed the coming destruction
- Noah was 600 years old when the flood began
- Noah was 601 years old when the flood ended and the family left the ark
- Shem was 100 years old when the flood came to an end -
- Shem’s son Arphaxad was born 2 years after the flood when Shem was 102
- No warning was given to the inhabitants of the world of the coming flood
- Noah was told about the beginning of the flood 7 days before it began

Based on the above study of the events surrounding the flood Noah had at the most 100 years to build the ark if God’s statements about his sons wives was prophetic. That amount of time would be limited if his sons were of age and married when God told him of the coming destruction. So, how long did Noah have to build the ark. The scriptures do not reveal an exact time but based on the above the time would have been 100 years or less.

The exact time however is irrelevant and the only thing we need to learn from these events is that God has established His laws and there are consequences for disobedience. Although mankind still insists on departing from the Lord and ignoring his word that will not make the judgment of God go away. We must trust that God is faithful and will indeed punish those who do evil and will save those who turn to Him.

TLC