

Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church
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DHW **BIBLE STUDY CLASS**

BOOK OF GENESIS

Lesson 7

Genesis 8

INTRODUCTION

Nothing is said about what Noah thought or did while he and his family, and all the living creatures were in the ark. The devastation which was taking place outside the ark, and which was unique in the history of the world, was completely beyond man's control. Noah's faith was once again being tested. Surely, he passed the test by patiently waiting upon the LORD God for His next instruction to him. In the meantime, he stayed in the ark and did not know when he could come out of the ark to dry land.

The chapter can be divided naturally into the following parts:

- 1) God remembered Noah (8:1-5);
- 2) Noah tested the waters (8:6-14);
- 3) God commanded Noah to go out of the ark (8:15-19);
- 4) Noah built an altar to worship the LORD (8:20-22).

The first part details how the flood waters abated, the dry land appeared,

and naturally the plants started to grow. The second part describes Noah's attempts to test whether the waters had completely abated. The third part relates God's commandment to Noah to go out of the ark together with all the living creatures. The fourth and last part narrates Noah's erecting an altar to worship the LORD.

This chapter projects the total dependence of man upon God. It shows clearly the sovereign will of the LORD God Almighty to purge the world of evil. God will judge and destroy the wicked and the ungodly but He will be graciously merciful to those who obey Him.

STUDY THE WORD

God Remembers Noah

The chapter opens with the statement that *God remembered Noah and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark.*¹ God's remembrance of Noah did not mean that He had forgotten (a moment of amnesia). Far from it, God's remembrance always shows that He is acting towards someone because He has previously made a commitment and that He is keeping His promise (Genesis 6:17-18): *And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the*

¹ The Hebrew word translated "remember" is *zakar*. It is often used (e.g Genesis 9:15, 16; 30:22; Exodus 2:24; 6:15; 1 Samuel 1:11), implying a remembering with kindness, granting requests, protecting, delivering, (Brown, Briggs, & Driver Hebrew Lexicon).

breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. 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. This fact that God remembered Noah gives a breath of hope and optimism when His people were in the midst of destruction. God remembered Noah not because of a memory lost of the promise He had made to him. Faithful to His word, God saved Noah, who was a *just man, and perfect in his generation, and walked with God* (6:9); but it was His will, grace and mercy that Noah and his family and all the other living things were not destroyed.

In keeping to His promise, God caused the water to recede by making a strong wind to pass over the water filled earth. He also closed the fountains of water of the earth and stopped the rain from heaven. God brought about the retreat of the water from the earth and the dry land appeared. On the 17th day of the 7th month the ark rested on *the mountains of Ararat*. Scripture does not give the exact mountain on which the ark rested, but simply states that the ark rested on the mountains in the area called Ararat.² And on the 1st day of

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, 185. Wenham comments that Ararat is the Hebrew term for Urartu, a kingdom north of Assyria. It was later called Armenia, which is now a part of eastern Turkey. The land of Ararat is mentioned in other places in the Old Testament: 2 Kings 19:37; Isaiah 37:38; Jeremiah 51:27. Observe the plural for “mountains,” an accurate translation of the Hebrew text. It implies that the ark not necessarily rested on Mt Ararat, but on one of the

the 10th month (about 75 days, counting on a thirty-day month), the waters had receded to the extent that the peaks of mountains could be seen. We see the stupendous power and work of the LORD God Almighty!

Noah Tests the Waters

Noah waited for another forty days. Then he opened the window of the ark and sent out a raven. The raven flew *to and fro* (Hebrew, *yatsa*: to go out; and *shuwv*: to return), until the earth was dried up. The raven is a scavenger bird, which feeds on carrion (decaying flesh of dead animals). Noah's reason for sending out the raven is quite apparent. He wanted to know how much the water outside the ark had receded. Then he sent out a dove. The dove is a more sensitive bird, which likes low lying grounds, which are habitable. Noah's choice of sending the raven first and then the dove is logically sensible. The raven could have picked up some dead meat from the floating corpses but the dove would not. He sent the birds in order to ascertain the conditions of the earth. This is interesting. How is it that God did not tell him of the conditions of the earth? The most plausible answer is that what Noah could do to ascertain the conditions of the earth, it

other mountains. The location where the ark rested is most central. Access to the Mesopotamian plains is easy. Asia Minor is just to the west; Syria, Arabia and Africa to the south and southwest; Asia to the north and northeast; Europe through Asia Minor in the west; India through Mesopotamia in the east. Leupold comments: “Here is the scriptural centre from which the nations went abroad over the face of the earth” (Leupold, *Genesis*, p. 312).

is not necessary for God to do so. It was the responsibility of Noah to do that which he could do. Noah used his God-given common sense and intelligence to find out what he wanted to know. There are some such examples in Scriptures. For example, Moses received direct revelation from God, but it was his father-in-law who taught him the most efficient way of administering judicial matters (Exodus 18). God promised Joshua that he would be given the land of Canaan (Joshua 1), yet he had to send spies to scout Jericho and bring back a report to him (Joshua 2).

Noah patiently waited for another seven more days after the first dove returned with nothing in its beak. He released a second dove. This dove returned in the evening, and in its beak was an olive leaf plucked off. With this small piece of evidence, Noah knew that the flood had receded from the earth. Then on 1st day of the 1st month of Noah's 601st year (almost 11 months later since he first entered the ark, Genesis 7:11), *the waters were dried up from off the earth* (8:13). Noah emerged from the upper deck of the ark, and he must have a panoramic view of the mountains of Ararat. However, it was not until 27th day of the 2nd month that the whole earth was dried up.

Interestingly, the word *dry* was used three times in verses 13 and 14. For the word *dry* in verse 13, the Hebrew word is: *charab*, which means "to be free from moisture." In verse 14 the verb is

yabash which means, "to dry up of water." It is logical that the *charab* action precedes the *yabash* action. The reverse would be unusual.³ Another feature is the different dates: in verse 13, it is the 601st year (of Noah), the 1st day of the 1st first month; and in verse 14, it is same year but the 27th day of the 2nd second month. If we compare these dates with the date the Flood began, an interesting point is observed:

The flood began on the 17th day, 2nd month, and 600th year of Noah (7:11).

The flood ended on the 27th day, 2nd month, and 601st year of Noah (8:14).

The duration of the Flood was twelve months and 11 days. This is the exact period required to equate the year of twelve lunar months, 354 days, with the solar year of 365 days. In other words, the Flood lasted one solar year!⁴

God Commands Noah to Go Out of the Ark

Noah saw that the earth was dry, but he did not leave the ark yet. God then spoke to him and directed him to take his family and every living creature to leave the ark. Noah waited for God's directive to leave the ark. Observe that God spoke to Noah personally and not to the whole family—"Go forth" (v.16), because he was the head of the family. Noah obeyed God and carried out

³ Some criticise that verses 13 & 14 as unnecessary repetition, but the different use of the word for "dry" explains otherwise.

⁴ Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, 305.

God's directive (vv.18, 19). Notice that so far Noah had not said a word. It tells us that Noah was a doer more than a talker.⁵

Noah Builds an Altar to Worship the LORD

The first thing that Noah did after he came out of the ark was to build an altar to worship the LORD. Note the Covenant-Name of God is used here: *YaHWeh* or JEHOVAH. He offered burnt offerings on the altar unto the LORD (v.20).⁶ He did not cook a meal first for himself and his family. He did not think of himself and his family first. But he worshipped God first. It was a great offering for he took from each kind of the clean animals and birds. It was a generous sacrifice. By his action he acknowledged that it was God, who delivered him and his family from destruction. He expressed his faith in God in practical ways. It was a thanksgiving offering to the LORD. Incidentally this is the first time the word *altar* (Hebrew, *mitzbeakh*) is used in the Bible. Noah's burnt offering to the LORD prefigured the offering of Christ, the Lamb of God on the cross at Calvary.

The LORD God's response was that He *smelled a sweet savour* (v.21). God saw the heart of Noah and his action pleased Him. Has God a nose like us? No, for God is a spirit. The use

⁵ Ibid., 307.

⁶ The Hebrew word for burnt offering is *olah*. It is a reference to whole burnt offerings going up in smoke to God.

of such expression is understood as "anthropomorphism"—the use of human experiences to describe God. And God declared in His heart that He would not again curse the ground or destroy it as He had done (v.21b).

Did God make a mistake in destroying the earth, hoping that man would change, but man has not? The conjunction "for" in the clause *for the imagination of man's heart is evil*, is not to be understood as causal, "for, because." If it were taken this way, then God would never again destroy or punish man, because from the start man is continually evil. Rather the conjunction must be understood as emphatic: "even though" *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*. The heart of man is evil from his childhood. Herein lays the depravity of man.⁷ God who is holy and hates sin will punish and condemn man for his sins. But in spite of man's depravity, this verse reiterates God's mercy. Thus God does not deal with man according to his iniquities. God promised not to destroy all life in the manner He had done. There will not be another global deluge like it. This at least takes away the dreaded fear of another devastating calamity of the same kind.

God then promised that as long as the physical world remains, *seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night* will also continue to be the same. Interestingly, this is the first mention of the four seasons. The

⁷ Proof of the original sin nature in man.

earth axis had been tilted when the deluge occurred bringing about the four seasons in a year. However, the phrase *while the earth remaineth* (v. 22) or as long as the earth remains, implies that the earth is not going to continue for ever. God promised here that the seasonal patterns would not be affected.

These seasonal patterns meet the needs of man completely. Leupold remarks: "The basic guarantee covers the regular alternation of *seedtime and harvest* . . . Then, are mentioned those two elements, which primarily contribute to the proper maturing of the grain, *cold and heat*. These two, by their regular alternation, delightfully relieve one another and make life more bearable. Then are mentioned those two periods in which cold and heat specifically reign, namely, *summer and winter*. Over against these seasons stand those smaller divisions of time, *day and night*, which in the very nature of man's constitution, are essential to his well-being. So then, everything between the wide limits of food and sleep and all that make both possible is fixed by unalterable divine ordinance."⁸

PRACTICAL VALUE

It is a truth *that wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Genesis 6:5). Sin must be punished. And man has not changed even after all the inhabitants had been destroyed by the

Great Deluge with the exception of Noah and his family. Down through the ages, the earth was re-populated through Noah's family. In spite of the Ten Commandments which God gave to man through the nation Israel so that man can live in harmony with Him and with his fellow men, man remains the same, and has become more and more wicked. Prior to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, man's wickedness and evil will reach its climax. God once again will mercifully intervene and destroy the earth a second time even after 1,000 years of a righteous government under the Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of that millennial reign, God will destroy the earth with fire. And He will create a new earth and new heaven for all His blood bought people. Then there will be lasting peace. In the meantime given this prophetic picture of the future, every man and woman must repent and believe in Jesus Christ and enter into His Ark of Atoning Grace to be saved from the destruction to come.

Noah's action in sending the raven and doves to find out whether the flood waters had receded teaches us a valuable lesson. Every Christian is saved by the grace of God through his faith in Christ Jesus. His salvation from eternal condemnation in hell fire is secured. However, our Christian life on earth demands that we put our able body, mind, soul and spirit to better use. Noah knew that the water had receded but he waited for God to order his release from the ark. He waited for

⁸ Leupold, Genesis, vol. 1, 324-325.

God's timing. Similarly, let us follow Noah's example. Do all we can to realize our hope, and let the LORD open the door in His time. He is never too late nor too soon.

Noah's first act after stepping out of the ark was to build an altar and worship the LORD. Believing that God was there and that He saved him and his family, his thought was to worship the LORD by offering burnt sacrifices unto Him. This teaches us to show our gratitude to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He gave His life for us, and should we not offer our life a living sacrifice to Him? For it will be sweet savour pleasing in the sight of God. In this regard, let us be generous and sincere in our thanksgiving.

GOD BLESS YOU