

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord Jesus, the limitations of our humanity. We are so easily tempted to follow the example of those who speak the loudest in our world, through television or film, music or literature, instead of those who live by the power of the Spirit. Give us the grace to confess our failure to listen to Your Word, and turn us around, so that we accept Your guidance. Bless us as we seek to do what is right, we pray; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Vision

Pray that all God's people, that they might take hold of God's vision of His Kingdom, a vision that is empowering and enlightening, and leads people to find fulfilment in service.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for all those working to expose injustice in the world*
- *Pray for industries badly affected by recession*
- *Give thanks for the beauty of music and the arts*

Meditation

Face the hardest challenges of life,
whatever they may be
Christ has gone this way before us;
so we have nothing to fear
Repent before the Lord of all,
and leave behind the past.
Love the unlovely, whoever they are,
and embrace the world's rejected
Heal past hurts and present regrets,
so deny the devil his chance.
Give total respect for each other in Christ,
seek only the best for God's church.
Embrace the empowering of the Holy Spirit,
and pursue His exclusive lead.
Speak such words as are honouring to God,
and love the truth of the Word.
Exercise faith all the time, like breathing,
and enjoy who you are in Christ!

Bible Study - Genesis 8:13-22

¹³ On the first day of the first month of Noah's 601st year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah removed the covering of the ark, and observed that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ On the 27th day of the 2nd month, the earth was dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ Go out of the ark, you and your wife, together with your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ Bring out with you all the living creatures that are with you, birds and animals and all the creatures from the ground, so that they

may multiply on the earth, be fruitful and increase in number.’¹⁸ So Noah went out together with his wife, his sons and their wives.¹⁹ Every animal, every creature, every bird, and everything that moves on the earth, they all went out of the ark by families.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD inhaled the pleasant smell, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of people, for their heart is inclined to evil from youth; nor will I ever destroy every living creature again, as I have done. ²² As long as the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.’

Review

The Flood was over, the land had dried out, and the family of Noah were at last able to think about leaving the ark! Everyone could go out and get on with life again! This is the underlying theme of today’s reading, after everything all that had happened during more than a year’s worth of drama (6:11–8:12). The whole tale has been fascinating, with all kinds of interesting details including the timing of events (which carried over in into the first few verses of today’s text). However, in contrast to the rest of the story of Noah, this passage is full of deeper significance for later generations. It is a passage that was revered by the ancient Israelites and is still preached upon in Christian pulpits, because it is the first occasion in scripture where we read of someone offering a sacrifice by way of worship to God (apart from Abel’s ‘offering’, Gen 4:4).

The right moment to disembark After patiently waiting for the right time and the right moment (8:13,14) and the word of God by way of instruction (8:15), Noah first led his family and then all the living creatures that had been in the Ark with him, out into the freedom of the earth again. It is an impressive picture, and moreover, the Lord God instructs them all to fulfil again the great commission of the first chapter of Genesis; to ‘multiply ... be fruitful ... and increase in number’ (8:17). God had not done away with all His creation, but that which had been destroyed had to start again.

Noah’s worship of God To celebrate all that had happened, Noah then worshipped God, the one who had protected him throughout this extraordinary adventure, and he did so by offering a sacrifice. Those who believe that this story comes from people who ‘wrote’ Israel’s history in later times, believe that Noah’s sacrifice simply fulfils the sacrificial requirements of Leviticus (see Lev 1:4ff) on completion of a hazardous journey. However, Jewish tradition has always considered the sacrifice of Noah to be a unique act of worship copying that of Adam’s murdered yet righteous son Abel (Gen 4:4), a sacrifice that set a precedent for future generations. The principle of this sacrificial worship was that there was a deep connection between life being given up and life that could flourish; and that was what had happened in the Flood. Though many had died, life could flourish again, and the sacrifice of Noah, even though we do not appreciate the details of how it was done, worshipped God for this simple fact of life.

God receives Noah’s worship As God received the offering made to him by Noah, He considered the situation and accepted that a plan of annihilation of the earth because of the sins of humanity would not bring the complete salvation from sin and restoration with men and women that He desired. Calvin, a great Christian of the 16th century once commented that if God had chosen to continue to work by this means of salvation, then we would need daily ‘Floods’ if our daily sins were to be atoned! But however righteous Noah was, God perceived that sin still lurked within him and his family, as ultimately proved to be the case (9:20ff); ‘their heart is inclined to evil from youth’ (8:21). As a consequence, God graciously

gave the gift of time (8:22) which repeated itself in cycles of seasons; the 'seedtime' and 'harvest'. This indicated the on-going opportunities for the grace of God to work within humanity, and indeed, much time would elapse before God would be able to deal with the problem of sin in the world through Jesus Christ.

One other thing worth mentioning is this. Through the whole experience of the Flood, God stood firm, meting out justice and mercy with discernment, and as a result, Noah was changed into a man who worshipped God. Although God observed that Noah and his family were still sinful people, He accepted his worship because he was the one man now entrusted with the future of humanity. We often remember that we are all descended from Adam, and for good reason; however, there are times when we need to be reminded that we are all descended from Noah, the first man who worshipped God!

The Chart

Ref.	Scripture says	Numbers analysis	date	day
7:4	Flood in 7 days time	7 days of waiting begin	10/2/600	Sunday
7:11	Flood begins	7 days of waiting over	17/2/600	Sunday
7:12	Rains come for 40 days	40 days of Flood		
7:17	Continues up to 40 days	40 days Flood continues	(27/3/600)	Friday
7:24	Waters swelled for 150 days	Total 150 days of Flood swelling		
8:4	Ark comes to rest	From now 150 days of abating	17/7/600	Friday
8:5	Mountains re-appear		1/10/600	Wednesday
8:6	After 40 days a raven sent out	40 days waiting	(10/11/600)	Sunday
8:10	'another' 7 days a dove sent	7 days waiting	(24/11/600)	Sunday
8:12	7 days and another dove sent	7 days waiting	(1/12/600)	Sunday
8:13	Dried up – Noah looked out		1/1/601	Wednesday
8:14ff	Disembark	(40 + 2x7 days waiting)	27/2/601	Monday

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think of the story of the Flood as historically 'real', or do you think of it as a story which teaches us truth? Discuss the difference.
2. What does sacrificial worship teach us about worship today, and why do we find the idea of the sacrifice of life so difficult?
3. Look at the final speech of God again (8:21,22), and make a list of the things He says and does. Discuss what you have discovered.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Noah's sacrifice of worship to God was unprovoked, unplanned and unasked for. That is part of why it was acceptable to God. Perhaps one of the difficulties we face today is that we think of 'worship' as something which is done for us by worship leaders and preachers, with which we 'join in' in a rather timed and planned manner. Perhaps the worship that the Lord longs to receive from us is the instantaneous praise and honour of a prayer of thanks after we have come through some difficult experience, or completed a difficult journey, for example. When the natural things of life are turned towards God with praise and prayer, then worship is perhaps most genuinely given.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *How can you offer the Lord worship in a natural way during your everyday life? Think about whether it is practical to be so focussed, and what the difference is between Sunday worship and private worship.*
- *Pray for those who look after animals today, and especially those who look after endangered species. God has created all the world and he gives us responsibility for all these things, and we should not let Him down.*

Final Prayer

Great Lord and Master of all Creation, we ask You to receive from us the prayers and the praise we offer each and every day of our lives. Fill us with a heart of worship so that nothing is too large or too small for us to bring to You in thanks, and be a reason for our praise. Great and Mighty Lord; we worship You: AMEN

Along with the principle of sacrificial worship which is that 'life offered sustains life' (which I have already mentioned), much has been made of the fact that the Hebrew word for 'smell' is very similar to 'Noah', which means 'rest' or 'contentment'. There is certainly a strong connection between contentment, satisfaction and the smell of good food, even to this day! But whether this is what is intended is not really that clear in this passage. This, however, is the only place in scripture where God is personally described as 'smelling' a sacrifice; the references to 'smell' in the sacrificial laws of Leviticus are only a matter of inference from priestly practice, as a sacrifice is described as producing a 'soothing aroma', as if to pacify God (note the connection between 'smell', 'pacify' and the name of Noah!), and other scriptures talk of occasions when God refuses to 'smell' a sacrifice (1 Sam 26:19, Lev 26:31, Amos 5:21-22). In none of this is scripture very clear.

What is known is that in ancient times, it was common to sacrifice animals to the 'gods', and consumption by fire was considered to be the god's way of 'eating' the food supplied. This was not what was believed by Noah, and not what scripture is describing! For us, there is a different connection altogether. To 'smell' something has for generations been linked to 'remembering' things, and it is now known scientifically that the sense of smell is closely related to memory; it is common for the smell of something to 'take us back' to our youth in a way that nothing else can, for example. So, in our passage, as God 'smelled' the sacrifice offered, He 'remembered' Noah, and if you were able to read the last study on Genesis 8:1-12, you will recall that God's 'remembrance' of something or someone is not a reversal of having forgotten it! It is a description of the way God decides to do something which intervenes in Creation for the sake of His Covenant. This is exactly what happens

here, for as the sacrifice was offered, God proceeded to intervene in the story of Creation to modify and extend His will for its future; which is explained in the last two verses.

God 'thinks again!'(v21,22)

Now the climax of this part of the story has arrived, and God gives a blessing to Noah and the animals that have surged out of the Ark to occupy the earth again and fulfil His command to 'increase in number'.

The remarkable thing about these words of God in verse 21 and 22 is that they are presented as if we are looking into the very thoughts of God. In this speech, God balances the judgement and the grace with which he always has to deal with people and with His Creation. Firstly, He modifies the curse made on the ground because of Adam (Gen 3:17), in saying 'I will never again curse the ground because of people', the word He uses for 'curse' is different from that in Genesis 3 and less insulting than the anti-blessing sense of the original curse. Essentially, God accepts that the results of the Fall are a permanent feature of humanity, and despite His acceptance of the righteousness of Noah (6:8), the salvation and reconciliation which is His long term plan will not be achieved if the earth is 'cursed' and therefore made too hard for people to both work with and live with. After this, God blesses the earth with words which remind us of God's pre-Fall delight with His creation of both the night and day, and the seasons and their fruitfulness (Gen 1:9-19). This original delight is re-affirmed by God, and presented as a promise of fertility to humanity, despite the nature of sin that he acknowledges is now fixed within the human soul.

This is not a 'change of heart' on God's part, but His decision to act in a certain way to achieve His ultimate goal, which is the salvation of fallen humanity and the fallen world. This will form an important theological backdrop for all that happens in chapter 9!

Conclusion

This is a truly important and even beautiful moment in the history of God's dealing with men and women. Ultimately, God has not changed as a consequence of the great Flood, though we are told of His thoughts and the manner in which His great plan is extended as a consequence of all that has happened. However, what is it that has made God reveal more of Himself? It was not the Flood itself, but the worship that Noah gave to God for his deliverance from the Flood. This worship is what God longs to receive from people, and although what happens in this story is culturally far removed from worship in our present day, we can easily see the principles of what is going on. According to this story, true worship which pleases God takes place when we give sacrificially to Him so that we might live and remain in His will, and there are many ways in which we can do this today without killing animals!