

## Genesis 7:6-8:22

We are continuing this morning with our study of the Book of Genesis, moving into what will be the “home stretch” for this particular series which began back in Chapter 1 and will come to a close at vs 9 of chapter 11 in about 6 weeks or so. Now at some point in the future I would like to come back to Genesis - having laid this foundation - and in that second series spend some time looking at chapters 12-20, which record the life of Abraham.

For the moment, however, once we finish with this portion of Genesis, it is my intention to resume our study of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Those of you who were with us for that series may remember that we got as far as chapter 7 before we had to put it aside to look at 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, in anticipation of our first elder elections.

So, if you’re looking for something new to study in your personal devotions, let me suggest 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians as a place you might consider going to for a while. Also, it should be said that in order to help people “catch up” on the Corinthians study we are in the process of uploading sermons from that series onto the church website which you can then access at your leisure. With that announcement/advertisement or warning, perhaps, let me pray for our time, and we’ll then turn our attention to Genesis 7:6-8:22.....

Now in this series we’ve been looking at the beginning - not just the beginning of the Bible, but the beginning of all things through the events of Genesis 1-11. We have seen in these chapters the outworking of God’s plans and purposes for the world and all its inhabitants, including and especially the people who have been given the unique privilege of bearing his image.

We have seen humanity created, commissioned and placed in a garden paradise with great freedom and only 1 restriction. We have then seen how in spite of all this, and in the face of great generosity, the man and the woman chose to challenge God’s rule and authority and rebel against His one restriction. This rebellion ushers in disastrous consequences, not only for the man and woman, but for all their descendants and, indeed, for the creation itself. Further, we see in this initial disastrous event the establishment of a conflict and a problem *which it will take the rest of human history to resolve*: the problem of how to reconcile a sinful, fallen people with a Just, Holy Creator.

As Genesis has unfolded we have seen the development of this story line in several different directions. We have seen the progression and worsening of sin and its effects in the children of Adam and Eve. We have seen the development of the pattern prophesied in Genesis 3:15: i.e., those who show themselves to be the seed of the serpent - an ungodly line, and those who show themselves to be the seed of the woman - a godly line. Alongside these developing plot lines we have seen the ongoing demonstration of God’s mercy toward an undeserving remnant of fallen humanity - toward Adam, Seth, Enoch, and now, most recently, Noah and his family. Which brings us to where we find ourselves in the narrative.

The progression of sin has now reached a crisis point. God will not allow the earth to continue any further in its current state of absolute corruption (6:5,12) but has determined to wipe, or rather *wash* the earth clean by means of a world-wrecking flood.

Now, while I have never seen the aftermath of a flood, I can remember very vividly the aftermath of some of the hurricanes that came through our area of the country, including Hurricane Camille - which was the biggest one ever. I remember after the storm passed through getting up the next day to ride with my dad to the Miss Gulf Coast, to see if we could help out in any way. The storm was so big that it created this massive wall of water that it pushed ahead of itself - a wall of water that was deadly. I can still recall seeing mile after mile of just nothing - places where there once stood huge, majestic houses and hotels and shops - now all gone, trees uprooted and washed away, sections of the highway lifted out of the ground and tossed aside like they were nothing. And the whole thing looked very much like someone had taken a giant eraser and just wiped it across the landscape, leaving nothing behind. That's what the flood was like, only far worse as God takes a giant eraser, wipes the slate clean, and starts all over again.

And so this is the account of Noah. He has been told of the coming judgment. He has been commanded to construct an enormous, floating, coffins-shaped box in which he will house his family and representatives from the entire animal kingdom. And Noah has followed God's instructions - taking 120 years to construct this "Ark" - 120 years during which he faithfully, through word and deed, warned others of the coming judgment - and all to no avail.

And so now the flood is on its way. As we focus this morning on the flood itself, we will divide our time into 3 parts - and not all of the same length. Firstly, we will look at some of the details of the event itself - things like how the flood happened, how extensive it was, etc. The sorts of things which are important, even if not earth-shatteringly so. Next, we will look at some of the significances of this story for God's people in Moses' day. Finally, we will look at some of the significances of this story for God's people in our own day. Firstly, then, let's look at some of the details regarding the flood....

Last week we finished our study at the point where Noah has just been commanded to enter the ark with his family and all the creatures, which 7:5 tells us he *did*. In vs 6-10, we then have an expanded description of what vs 5 summarizes - (read 7:6-10). This description of their entering the ark is then repeated, in vs 13-16 - (read 7:13-16). Interspersed between these repetitions of how they entered the ark are descriptions of the flooding of the earth, which we see in 7:6; 7:11-12, and 7:17-20 - (read these).

Now, in reading all this back forth storytelling and repetition, you might wonder what is going on. Are these, as some critical scholars have suggested, two different accounts of the flood that have been woven together into one story? Or is something else going on here?

Well, the short answer is, no, these are not two accounts. It is not necessary to postulate a cut and splice Bible here. Rather, what we see in these verses is simply some of Moses' own literary style as he communicates through the techniques of repetition and expansion some of the awful drama and seriousness of these events in the history of the human race.

So, as part of that style, Moses will repeat some aspects of the story and, at the same

time, he will do more than just repeat them: he will add details to them as he goes expanding on what he has already said in some way. The effect of this is something like the effect of a pounding drum which keeps sounding the same pitch and rhythm, but which gets louder and louder with each strike of the instrument. Or it is perhaps like a visual technique used in film-making where, at some crucial point, the film suddenly shifts into slow motion and you watch a scene play out for a second or two, and then it gets replayed, and then replayed again and with each passing replay some new detail or bit of information, or camera angle, is added to the shot.

This same sort of thing can happen in a literary medium where repetition and expansion of written materials takes place and this is, I would suggest, what is going on here. Indeed, have we not already seen this same sort of thing happening earlier on in Genesis with the repetition and expansion of the creation accounts in chapters 1 and 2? So, once again, the various repetitions are simply a very Hebrew way of thinking and communicating and serve to underscore the drama of this moment, *as well as* provide additional information about the event with each expansion.

So Noah, his family, and the representatives of the various animal species all enter the ark - a process which apparently takes about a week - judging from the statements in vs 10 and 13. Once that task is completed, Noah and his family load themselves on board last of all - with Moses going out of his way to point out how it was *God himself* who closed the door - which must have been massive - and shut them into the Ark. This is another indicator, among many to be found in these accounts, of God's on-going providential concern for His creation.

Once they are in, the waters begin to come - from two directions at once. From below, great underground springs of water burst forth and begin flooding the ground. From above, torrential rains begin to fall such as the world has never seen.

Now, in reading about these waters which come "from below and above" we are meant to be drawn back in our minds to the events of the initial creation found in Genesis 1:1-7, where one of the early tasks of creating the world involved God separating "the waters from the waters" as one translation puts it - the waters below from the waters above. In short, these early verses are talking about the creation of the atmosphere by separating the elements that make up the sky and sea. And so, the language in Genesis 7 regarding the beginning of the *flood* is meant to draw us back to this initial time at the very beginning of *everything*, to a time where there was only this formless and void planet, completely covered in water. In short - what we are meant to see in all of this, what Moses wants us to see, is a return to a prior stage of creation - a starting over, in some sense. And so the flood is, essentially, both an act of *un-creation* and, at the same time, sets the stage for a *re-creation*.

Well, after all this, we are then given some more detail about how long it flooded and how high the waters got, etc., and are assured that the flood accomplished its intended purpose of blotting out all creation except Noah and company.

Now, as a kind of side note, it needs to be said that, for a number of reasons, the flood

talked about here was a *world-wide* flood and not a merely *regional* flood, as some have suggested. Without going into all the reasons for saying this, let it suffice to say that to treat this event as a local flood, in my judgment, goes against both the most natural reading of the text and, more importantly, the theological implications of the text.

And, while some who are skeptical of biblical assertions of a world-wide flood will cite various geological data as rendering such a thing impossible, the reality is that their arguments are neither conclusive, nor compelling. Indeed, it can be reasonably argued that the burden of proof lies not with the Christian accounting of what has gone on but with those who deny it - especially when you take into account the astounding prevalence of what we will call "flood stories", and which seem to have found their way into the collective conscience of human civilization.

For instance, you may not be aware of these things, but there are, so far, something like 300 cultures which possess some ancient tradition regarding a disastrous, catastrophic flood that took place somewhere in the ancient history and memory of their peoples. One scholar (McDowell) reports that we have so far discovered flood accounts in places as diverse and geographically distant as PNG, North America, Central America, South America, Africa, Greenland, Hawaii, Lithuania, Wales, Greece, Egypt, India and China - and many, many others.

Notably, these accounts typically originated among peoples that have *never* had any contact with Christianity or Judaism, or at times long before the first Christian missionaries had ever set foot in their country. For example, one Chinese pictograph from about 2500 BC shows a boat with *8 people* enduring some great flood which inundates the world - *8 people, mind you*. Similarly, among the peoples of India there is also a story involving 8 people, a great flood, and a central figure who is described as "righteous among his generation" Hello? What can all this mean except that somewhere behind all these different stories is a common event that has been kept alive in the memories of the various peoples, and which can be traced back to the descendants of Noah as they spread out from Mesopotamia.

And so, again, there is a world-wide flood which accomplished its intended purpose. Once that is done the text says that God "remembered" Noah which doesn't mean he forgot about him but simply means that God picked up with and continued onward with his gracious treatment of Noah and company, specifically by turning of the faucet, so to speak, and then by using a powerful wind to begin drying things up.

This process, naturally, took some time and the text conveys that in a number of ways which are not terribly significant. Eventually, however, the drying out process has gone on long enough for Noah to begin trying to find out what the status of things is. This takes us to the familiar account of the sending out of the birds - a raven at first, followed by a series of doves. Through this process, Noah eventually works out that the earth is probably sufficiently dry to leave the ark behind *and yet* he refrains from doing so until he is explicitly commanded to by God. When he finally does get the signal to leave he does so, and as he does receives the same commission that God originally gave to the man and the woman in Genesis 1 and 2 - to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

As a first act, however, Noah pauses to worship God by means of an animal sacrifice -

about which we at least need to take note of one thing. In this event of Noah's sacrifice we now see why Moses, earlier on in the flood account, takes care to show us that while the *general* pattern for gathering animals into the ark was in pairs of male and female creatures, there was a variation in the pattern when it came to "clean" animals and "clean" birds. When it came to these creatures we are told that there were 7 pairs of these brought into the Ark. We now can see why this is the case. Without the additional pairs of these animals Noah's sacrifice would have also resulted in the extinction of those species!

So anyway, Noah worships God by means of sacrifice and this is acceptable and pleasing to God and, at the conclusion of this, we are told two promises which at the time were not uttered to anyone but were simply something which God determined to Himself. On the one hand, God promises that he will never again curse or "abuse" the ground as he has. This is not a revocation of the curse in Genesis 3:17-19, as some have suggested, but is simply an assurance by God that He is not going to flood the earth again. He might do other things - but He won't do that.

On the other hand, God not only promises something he will NOT do anymore, he promises something that he *will* do, continually - He will guarantee the on-going stability of the world, the regularity of the seasons, and the dependable coming and going of Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring.

Now the events described here are certainly significant and have implications for God's people in every age. And so, while we will not spend nearly as much time on these things as we have on the first part, still it is important to draw your attention to at least a few of these implications. For starters, we must ask how these things were significant for God's people in Moses' day....

The people of God, under Moses' leadership, on the edge of the promised land - these were the people to whom these written accounts would have first been given. As a nation they had just spent a great deal of time wandering in the wilderness. In that exercise they had seen first-hand the judgment of God as he blotted out an entire generation of them for their rebellious refusal to enter the promised land forty years earlier. So they know all about blotting out.

Now Moses is preparing these people to go and take the land before them and as part of that preparation, he is giving to them the Scriptures which we know as the Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible. And while they have heard these accounts before - in stories that have been passed down - they now, through the process of divine inspiration, have them in written form.

And so as Moses presents these things to them, they encounter again these stories about the creation and the fall and the flood. And in the midst of that they would see, again, the sinfulness of the human race and God's righteous response to it. Being reminded of these things would have prepared them for the task that lay before them - entering a foreign land and driving out the people who are there. Because, you see, *they* were now going to be God's instruments of righteous judgment against a sinful people. And as such, they needed to be assured and confirmed in the rightness of what they were about to do. They were God's people, enlisted in a holy cause, for his sovereign purposes.

They also would have been reminded, through the account of the flood, of God's unswerving intent to have what He will have - a people who are called by His name, a people who are holy and who live in a fully restored and reconciled relationship with their Creator - as it was in the garden so long ago. And they would be heartened by this reminder, knowing that they stood in the same line through which God would one day bring the One - the promised seed - who would accomplish all of God's purposes.

Even further, they would have seen, within these verses, things which undermined the religious beliefs and teachings of the pagan nations around them. This would have had the effect of hopefully minimizing the potential for their being tempted and swayed to follow these pagan beliefs and practices.

For example, there is the fact that when it came time for the flood waters to abate, the means by which the Bible explicitly says God brought this about was through a wind which He caused to blow and which no doubt accelerated the evaporative process. But notably there is no mention of the Sun in all of this and most likely this omission is intentional. Many pagan cultures worshipped the sun and considered it a powerful deity. However, in the story of the flood it plays no part at all.

Another illustration of this sort of thing can be found in 8:22, where God promises that there will be stability and regularity to the earth's seasons and climate patterns. Now, this may not seem so significant to us, but in the days of Moses one of the more popular belief systems had at its core this idea that the regularity of the seasons and the fertility of the ground were directly related to the activities of the gods and typically, the *sexual activities* of the gods. According to this belief system, there was a kind of "sympathetic" relationship between the heavens and the earth such that the gods could be influenced or coaxed into doing certain things by the activities and practices that they saw people engaging in here on earth. So, if you wanted to make the seasons "happen" you had to do things which would "get the gods moving", so to speak. And so thus rose the so-called "fertility cults" which were quite prominent in that day and which promoted things such as temple prostitution - things which eventually turned out to be a great snare for the people of God.

And so this part of the account was, among other things, an early attempt to undermine these sorts of troublesome pagan beliefs by showing that the regularity and stability of the world and its seasons was not at all dependent upon the activities of human beings or the whims of stupid gods, but was entirely and *solely* dependent upon the true God: the God of Israel who had promised that he would provide the needed stability and regularity.

And there is one further benefit that flowed from God's reassurance here of temporal and seasonal stability. As we have already seen, although Noah is described as a "righteous" man in the Genesis narrative, this did not mean he was a sinless or perfect man. And being a "righteous" man, Noah would have understood better than anyone the failings of his own heart. And so, as Pratt points out, he surely would have wondered, even as he was stepping off the ark what the future held for he and his sons. He knew that they were sinners. He knew *he* was a sinner. He knew that they too would fail, and he would fail. Would God then simply destroy them, as he

had just done? Was there any point in trying to rebuild all that had been lost?

In the face of those realities, Noah is reassured of the stability of the world and its seasons. He is assured that God will not send another flood. And so he can be confident in moving ahead with God's agenda - sinful though he is. In the same way, Moses' people could and *should* be confident that God's promise of stability and regularity still held in their own day. After all, they too would have understood their own sinfulness. They had witnessed the awesome judgment of God on several occasions now. Was there any point in *their* going ahead, in taking on this new land, this new project? Would it be worth the effort to build this new kingdom? And, of course, the answer is "Yes, it would be worth the effort." And so by these and various other means Moses would have encouraged his people with these words.

And the benefit and encouragement to be found in these words is not limited to the people of God under Moses, but is important for God's people in every age. To be sure, our situation is not the same. We are not on the edge of some promised land, about to enter in. The whole kingdom of God thing we saw in Israel - God's people in God's place under God's rule - the reality to which those things pointed in a shadowy sort of way has been fulfilled and is being fulfilled in Christ. He is our king, leading us to a new place where we will dwell with him.

And so we, like God's people before us although in a different context - but we also have the opportunity to be challenged and encouraged and motivated by these verses as well. And there are a number of things to be seen in this regard.

For example, we see in these verses something of the seriousness of sin. If you are on some main road in Baton Rouge and are suddenly passed up by 10 ambulances, with their lights and sirens flashing away, you know *something* is UP. And the logical response when you see something like this is not, "Gee, what's up with the ambulance people? What's their problem? That's not the logical question to ask. We assume that the reason there are ten of them on the way to some scene is because that is what is needed to provide adequately for the situation to which they are going - whatever that might be.

The same sort of thing is true with God. When you see that God responds to human sin with a flood - the logical response is not to say - "What's up with God?" or to conclude that there must be something wrong with *Him* or that he is over-reacting or something like that. *God is simply doing what the situation calls for.* So, the question is not, "What's up with God?", but rather "What's up with US?" Clearly we have no earthly idea what a cosmic offense our sin is to God, how messed up we really are, or what sort of chaos sin creates. Clearly, we're *clueless*. If sin is so bad that God would destroy a world over it, then we must not be taking it seriously enough. We must be trivializing it. Pray that God will help you to see the sinfulness of sin and of YOUR sin, in particular.

And building on this point, we see in the flood account how Noah was a preacher and agent of God's righteous judgment on earth. And we know that in a related manner, Moses and his people were agents of God's righteous judgment upon the Canaanite peoples. In a similar fashion, we too are agents of God's righteousness and judgment every time we share the Gospel

with another person because - if we do it right - we will carefully highlight to people that they too are sinful persons - deserving of God's wrath. We will be willing to tell them the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, but also the bad news of judgment and the wrath of God if they reject Christ. Are we being arrogant and un-caring when we say these things? No. We would be un-caring NOT to say them. Do we have the right to say these things to people? We certainly do. And not only do we have the right, we have a responsibility to say these things. So, be wise? Yes. Be loving? Yes. But *don't be silent*. Knowing what you know about sin, and about the holiness of God and the judgment of God, being silent about the Gospel is the cruelest thing you could do.

Well, our time is almost gone, so let me highlight one more way in which these verses are an encouragement for us and it is found by looking at a very curious statement that appears in verse 21. Notice what God says, "...I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth..." which, in the NIV reads perhaps a little more clearly, "...*even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood...*".

Now flip back to chapter 6, verses 5-7. In these verses you see this same idea - that God sees and knows that every inclination of the human heart is evil - which the Lord is very grieved about - and after which he declares that he is going to blot out the creation.

In other words, God is saying in chapter 8:21 that the thing that seems to have been a motivating factor in his sending the flood in the first place, is no longer going to motivate him to send another one. Which tells us what? It tells us that while the pervasive sinfulness of humankind was a motivating factor *for* the flood, it was never God's plan or intention that the flood itself was going to eliminate this problem. Floods do not eliminate human sinfulness. No amount of punishment of human beings, no matter how severe or widespread, will itself cure the human heart from the corruption that entered into the picture because of the Fall. Even a flood which reduces the world population to 8 people will not wipe out sin or its effects - *because you will still have 8 sinful people*, as we will soon see in the continuing story of Noah after the flood. Floods demonstrate the holiness and sovereign freedom of God. They demonstrate the depth and seriousness of human sin. They are an expression of the justice of God. They do all sorts of things. But floods do not do away with the problem of human sin.

And so, even though we are still very early on in the biblical story, we can look at the flood and know that if the problem of human sin and fallen-ness is ever going to be solved, it will not come through *mere human discipline or punishment or coercion*. The flood and what happens afterward proves that. If God is going to solve the problem of human sin - and still have humans left at the end of it all - then he is going to have to approach their problem in another way - from the outside, and yet at the same time from the inside. His wrath and justice against sin will have to be satisfied in a way which does deal with humanity, and yet without wiping it out in the process. It will have to happen in a vicarious, substitutionary manner.

We see this sort of vicarious, representative thing happening in the flood account, don't we? We see it in the fact that Noah is the only one who is described as being a righteous man - and yet his wife and family benefit by that - carried along, as it were, by Noah's righteousness - even if only in a limited, temporal sense.

In a similar but more ultimate sense, this is what happens with Christ and his people. We are carried along by *His* righteousness. We are carried along and delivered safely through the storm of God's judgment when Christ - who was fully human and divine - endured the wrath of God on our behalf, as our substitute. The sacrifice which Noah offered, and which was pleasing to God, was a shadow of Christ's better and perfect and all sufficient sacrifice which pleased God, not just for a season, but for all time.

Further, we are also carried along by Christ's righteousness when he, like Noah, lived a righteous life but who, unlike Noah, did it *perfectly, sinlessly*. We have then, in Jesus, one who was greater than Noah and who secures for us even greater blessings and promises and credits to us a righteous standing which He alone has merited and deserved. Just as Noah's family benefitted from his righteousness, we, as children of God, benefit from the righteousness of Christ, the head of this household to which we belong. In Him we are carried safely along, until God brings us to the place which he has prepared for us.