



Genesis - Chapter Eight

I. Genesis 1:1-11:26 - Primeval History (continues)

I.d Genesis 6:9-9:29 - Noah's Descendants and the Flood (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

This chapter tells the story of how the flood waters started to recede, where the ark came to rest in the mountains and the tests that Noah performed to ensure that the surface of the earth was habitable for them. When it was God instructed him and his family, along with all the living creatures, to disembark and once again start to populate the earth.

Noah builds an altar in praise of God's gracious saving acts, with offerings that God found pleasing. So God made a covenant with Noah never again to destroy his creation in the way that he had just had to do.

I.d.iii Genesis 8:1-19 - The Flood Subsides

After five months the waters started to abate and two months later the ark came to rest in the Ararat mountain range in Turkey. Yet it was a further three months before the tops of the mountains started to appear from beneath the flood.

Nearly six weeks later Noah sent a raven to see if the ground was dry. This was later followed by sending out doves until one failed to return for it had found somewhere to settle. God then instructed Noah and his family to take all the animals, birds and other creatures out of the ark so that they could start to populate the earth as God had always intended they would.

¹ But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ² the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the

heavens was restrained, ³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

Genesis 8:1-4

God remembered Noah. This marks the turning point in the flood story. This is an anthropomorphism, a non-literal picture of God in human terms. When the Bible says that God ‘remembers’ someone or his covenant with someone, it indicates that he is about to take action for that person’s welfare, as confirmed in Genesis 9:15, 19:29 and 30:22, Exodus 2:24 and 32:13, Psalm 25:6-7 and 74:2. All life on the land having been destroyed, God now proceeds to renew everything, echoing what he did in Genesis Chapter One.

God made a wind blow over the earth. The Hebrew word for wind, *ruakh*, is also sometimes translated Spirit, e.g. 1:2 and 6:3. While the context normally enables the reader to distinguish *ruakh* meaning wind from *ruakh* meaning Spirit, the present verse intentionally echoes Genesis 1:2.

In v.2 God puts into reverse the process started in 7:11. The waters both rose and abated during the period of one hundred and fifty days, refer to the comments made on 7:17-24.

The mountains of Ararat indicates a range of mountains in modern Turkey of which Mount Ararat is the highest. The text does not name the specific mountain on which the ark came to rest. Refer also to the comments on 6:13-17 with regard to accounts of parts of the ark being found in the region.

It is not known how high the mountains were at the time of the flood. Geologists have shown that many changes to the landscape of the earth have occurred due to the effects of ice ages and seismic activity so it may be that the landing place for the ark was not as precarious as the reader may imagine.

⁵ The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared. ⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the

dove from the ark; ¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹² Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more. ¹³ In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

Genesis 8:5-14

The slow, gradual process by which the waters receded and the land dried up is captured by the detailed account of Noah's releasing a raven and then doves. As in Chapter One, the dry land emerges from the waters.

Both ravens and doves are referred to frequently and symbolically in Scripture, e.g. <<*The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi*>> (1 Kings 17:6), <<*Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?*>> (Job 38:41), <<*Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*>> (Luke 12:24), <<*And I say, 'O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest*>> (Psalm 55:6), <<*The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land*>> (Song 2:12), and: <<*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'*>> (Mark 1:9-11).

Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made. Although the window was not mentioned in the design of the ark given to Noah by God it makes good sense to have such an opening for the ark was otherwise completely sealed. Whether it was a window to let in light to give guidance to the passage of time or simply a wooden hatch is not made clear.

It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. This phrase indicates that it took some considerable time for the raven to see that the waters were abating and dry land appearing so it should be understood that the bird would periodically return to the ark to rest and eat.

There in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf. The dove that returned with this leaf is a symbol of peace. Tradition has adopted this Scripture to use the symbol of an olive branch being a peace offering, yet a dove could not pluck off a whole branch nor could it carry one in its beak. Peace can be sincerely offered with a much smaller gesture and with less effort if the heart's motivation is right.

The olive leaf would have informed Noah that the water had subsided to no more than the height of a small tree and that some vegetation had survived or recovered following the flood. However, when a subsequent dove did not return to him he knew that it had found somewhere safe to live and did not need the ark any longer for shelter or food.

The three periods of seven days between sending out the doves has led some commentators to speculate that each one was sent out on a Sabbath day. However, this cannot be said with any certainty.

In the first month, on the first day of the month. Although this relates to the Hebrew and not the Gregorian calendar, this precise date still marks a new year, with a new beginning and fresh hope for the world God had created.

In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. Nearly two months earlier it is recorded that the earth was drying but clearly it was still too muddy to be safe for all the living creatures to leave the safety of the ark so they had to remain where they were.

God was precise in giving Noah a command to enter the ark but he never told him how long he would be in it or at what point he should come out. He needed the command to enter to avoid the deluge that would otherwise have killed him but he had also to learn patience to endure the storm of life and work out for himself when the time was right to move on.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ 'Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh – birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth – so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.'

Genesis 8:15-17

Then God said to Noah, 'Go out of the ark.' The Lord had <<*shut him in*>> (7:16b), and now it is God who provides the opportunity for Noah to leave the ark, three hundred and seventy days later. Refer to the chart in the Supplementary Material on the web site.

God's instructions to Noah are reminiscent of Chapter One, especially the statement that Noah and his family are to be fruitful and multiply on the earth, a reflection of the command given at creation in 1:28.

¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives.

¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

Genesis 8:18-19

In obedience to God, Noah went out of the ark with his family and all the creatures. That the creatures too went out by families may indicate their pairings, with either seven or seven pairs of clean creatures together or it may indicate family types.

As commented on in Chapter Seven, it should be noted that many translations record seven clean animals rather than seven pairs being taken into the ark.

I.d.iv Genesis 8:20-22 - God's Promise to Noah

In acknowledgement of God's saving act and as an offer of praise, Noah built an altar to God and makes sacrificial offerings of the clean creatures, which God found to be a pleasing odour. As a result, God made a covenant with Noah not to destroy the earth in this way again, even though the human attitude would not be changed by the experience of such devastation.

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 smelt the pleasing odour, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'

Genesis 8:20-22

Noah's first recorded act on emerging from the ark is to build an altar to the LORD. On it he presents whole-burnt-offerings, using some of the clean animals and birds. While this is undoubtedly intended to express gratitude for divine deliverance, it is also an act of atonement. This is a normal aspect of burnt

offerings, (refer to Leviticus 1:3-17, especially v.4), and is supported by the mention of the pleasing odour, as confirmed in Leviticus 1:9-17.

Noah took of every clean animal and of every clean bird. Since only either only seven or seven pairs of each of these clean animals and birds existed it might have seemed prudent to preserve them. However, they belong to God anyway and giving back to God some of what is his is a simple matter of trusting in him to supply the increase. The same principle applies to tithing. True offerings to God are intended to be sacrificial and costly, giving to him the first and best of all things.

The Hebrew term for pleasing, *nikhoakh*, conveys the idea of rest and tranquillity. It is related to the name Noah, Hebrew *noakh*, and is probably used here in order to remind the reader of Lamech's remarks in Genesis 5:29. It also has the sense of 'soothing.' The burnt-offerings soothe God's anger at human sin, so although human nature has not been changed by the flood, God's attitude has changed.

It is not so much the odour of the offering that seems to be pleasing to God but the faith and attitude of heart that is behind it that is of real importance to him: <<Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required>> (Psalm 40:6), <<For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings>> (Hosea 6:6), and: <<Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God" (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).' When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt-offerings and sin-offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he added, 'See, I have come to do your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second>> (Hebrews 10:5-9).

Notice how v.21, 'for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth' echoes very closely to the earlier statement: <<*that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually*>> (6:5). In spite of the human propensity to sin, atonement through sacrifice is possible, securing a peaceful relationship between the Lord and humanity. However, it is an activity that needs to be repeated constantly: <<*Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year*>> (Hebrews 10:1-3), unlike the sacrifice of God's Son: <<*And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*>> (Hebrews 10:10).

I will never again curse the ground. The clear force of the Hebrew text is that God will not send another flood; he is not revoking the curse pronounced in 3:17, which continues to be in place, for the words for 'curse' are different. This short comment about the effect of sacrifice underlines the importance of sacrifice in the Bible's plan of salvation.

Cold and heat, summer and winter. This speaks of the profound climatic and ecological changes in the earth since the blanket of water vapours covering the earth was emptied. Now there are seasonal and temperature variations. The result of this change is found in the rapidly decreasing life spans. There will never be 900 year old people after the flood. The mass extinction of animals revealed in the fossil record, such as dinosaurs and other such creatures, probably took place shortly after the flood, when the earth was changed so dramatically and plunged into an ice age.