

# Noah Builds an Altar

Devotional Reading: Psalm 77:1-2, 7-19

Background Scripture: Genesis 6:1-9:17

Today's Scripture: Genesis 8:13-22; 9:11-13

## I. Noah's Situation

### Genesis 8:13-22

<sup>13</sup> By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. <sup>14</sup> By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

<sup>15</sup> Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup> "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. <sup>17</sup> Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

<sup>18</sup> So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. <sup>19</sup> All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

<sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup> The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even

though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

<sup>22</sup> "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

13. The biblical account of the flood gives details regarding when the flood began (Genesis 7:11), the length of time the rain fell on the earth (7:12, 17), how long the floodwaters covered the earth (7:24), and the length of time it took for the flood waters to recede (8:3). The amount of time from when the flood began to when the earth was dry adds up to a little more than a year (8:14). We know that Noah was 600 years old when the flood began (7:6, 11). This verse states that one year had passed, and it was *the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year*.

14. The phrase *the twenty-seventh day of the second month* reveals that about two months had passed between the events of this verse and the previous verse. The duration of the flood was 150 days, but the process to dry out the land took about 60 days.

15-16. As *God* had commanded *Noah*

and his family to go into the ark, so God also commanded them to *come out of the ark*. One can only imagine how ready Noah and his family were to do so—they wouldn't have had to be told twice!

Scripture gives us the names of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 7:13; 9:18-19; 10:1). However, we are not told the names of Noah's wife or the wives of his sons. The New Testament informs us that a total of eight people were saved through the ark (1 Peter 3:20).

17. The four designations *living creatures* (wild animals), *birds*, *animals* (likely domesticated animals), and *all the creatures that move along the ground* are intended to convey a message of totality. We should not fail to consider the amount of labor that was necessary to care for all the animals on that ark! And imagine the smell after even a day or two of being cooped up with them in the ark.

The statement *be fruitful and increase in number on [the earth]* repeats the command given to Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 1:28). In this verse, however, the command is not issued to Noah and his family but to the creatures in the ark so that they would *multiply on the earth*.

Noah and his family would receive such a command later: "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Noah would become something like a second Adam (not to be confused, of course, with "the last Adam," who is Christ; 1 Corinthians 15:45).

18. As in Genesis 6:13-22 and 7:1-5, the verse before us shows the pattern of God's command being followed by Noah's obedience to that command. God spoke, Noah listened, Noah acted. It is a simple sequence, but it is one that God's people sometimes struggle to put into practice.

19. The animals, birds, and all creatures aboard the ark are in two categories: clean and unclean (Genesis 7:2).

20. One of the first things—if not the very first thing—that Noah did after exiting the ark was worship. That is not surprising, as Noah's character has already been testified (Genesis 6:9). Worship is a very appropriate response after one has been delivered by God.

This is the first *altar* mentioned in Scripture, but it's not the first blood sacrifice. When Noah was commanded to save pairs of animals in the ark, more clean animals were spared than unclean ones. Perhaps the act of sacrifice noted in the verse before us had been intended from the beginning, provision for it having been made by keeping more of the appropriate animals alive.

21. We should note immediately that the phrase *said in his heart* indicates private thoughts, not a response to Noah, which comes later. Thus, the writer uses figurative language to describe God's reaction to the sacrifice. Since "God is spirit" (John 4:24), we need not assume that God smells things the same way we do or has a literal, physical heart. Nevertheless, we understand such language. The same manner of figurative language is used when Scripture speaks of the "hand" and "arm" of the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; etc.). This kind of figurative language is known as anthropomorphic language. The point being made is that God accepted the offering. Moses will use the same type of language later to describe the sacrifices and burnt offerings that the new nation of Israel will be commanded to present to the Lord (see Exodus 29:18, 25, 41).

We may wonder to what end God accepted Noah's offerings. In later times, burnt offerings will atone for sin (Leviticus 1:1-9) and ordain the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 29). Some suggest that Noah's offerings are for atonement for the sins of all who perished in the flood, but that is not likely. Ordinarily, an offer-

ing of atonement is made in lieu of punishment, but those who perished because of the flood have already been punished.

More likely, the sacrifice is tied to the purification of the earth. Centuries later, Aaron and his sons offered burnt offerings to purify themselves for the new priesthood. Similarly, Noah offered sacrifices to cleanse the earth as home to new generations.

The question that arises, then, is whether the statement *Never again will I curse the ground* here in refers to the flood itself or to the original curse of Genesis 3:17. If the latter, then the prophecy of 5:29 is fulfilled—but then we have to ask why thorns and thistles still interfere (Genesis 3:18) and why agriculture still involves sweat-producing labor (3:19). If the reference is to the punishment of the flood, then the promise to not again curse the ground is another way of stating the promise never again to flood the earth.

22. The apostle Peter refers to the Noahic flood as an illustration of the fact that God can judge the world and that another destruction is coming, one by fire (2 Peter 3:6-7). But until that time of judgment, the cycles of the seasons will continue. The flood had interrupted that normal cycle, but God reaffirmed the ordering of his creation.

## II. God's Response

### Genesis 9:11-13

<sup>11</sup> **"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."**

<sup>12</sup> **And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."**

11. The word *you* indicates that God has switched from pondering thoughts privately to communicating with Noah personally. And what God communicates is the first of the five covenants mentioned in Scripture.

This *covenant* in view here fulfills God's promise in Genesis 6:18. The establishment of this covenant is one-sided: God does not ask anything of Noah and his descendants.

12. Giving a *sign* of a *covenant* is a common idea even today. We exchange wedding rings to remind us of the covenant of marriage. Circumcision was used as a sign or token of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17), and the Sabbath was also used as a sign between Israel and God (Exodus 31:16-17). In reality, these three signs of a covenant are all present in Genesis, with the Sabbath at creation (Genesis 2:4), the rainbow here in 9:12, and circumcision in Genesis 17. Signs appear at watershed moments in salvation history.

The promise that this covenant is *for all generations to come* is also reflected in Genesis 9:16, where it is deemed "everlasting." But neither the word *everlasting* nor the phrase *all generations* should be taken to mean that the covenant extends into eternity. The time limitation of Genesis 8:22 is that the covenant is in force "as long as the earth endures." This verse sheds light on the meaning and significance of words such as *perpetual*, *everlasting*, and *forever* as they occur in other contexts regarding God's covenants.

13. A form of the underlying Hebrew word translated as *rainbow* also refers to a bow as part of a bow-and-arrow combination (examples: Genesis 27:3; 48:22). Perhaps the image is one of a weapon of war becoming a symbol of peace.

# Involvement Learning

## Noah Builds an Altar

### Into the Lesson

Complete the following statements:  
*The most important promise I ever made . . .*

*The most disappointing broken promise . . .*

*The best promise I ever received . . .*

Our study today looks at Noah and his obedience that led up to God's covenant promise.

### Key Verse

"I have set my rainbow in the clouds,  
and it will be the sign of the covenant  
between me and the earth."

—Genesis 9:13

### Into the Word

Read Genesis 8:13-22. As you're reading, write down Noah's actions and God's promises under the appropriate header.

*What Noah Did*

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*What God Promised*

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What is the sign of God's promise?

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### Into Life

Consider Noah's attitude after the flood. What words would you use to categorize his heart?

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What are some ways to develop the same heart?

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How would having such a heart affect worship?

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Write a prayer of thanks to God for his covenant faithfulness in light of what has been discussed about worship and Noah's reactions to God.

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### Thought to Remember

Wait for God's command  
and then obey it!