

Covenant

Read: Genesis 9.8-17.

The dominion of human beings over the rest of creation had been the reality of life in the ark. It is now re-affirmed with the addition that they were not restricted to a vegetarian diet. The only proviso is that “you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (v. 4). Derek Kidner comments –

[The law on *blood*] at once limited man’s rights over God’s creatures, since their *life* (4) was His. The Mosaic law reaffirmed this repeatedly (*e.g.* (Lv. 3.17; Dt. 12.15,16). It also prepared men to appreciate the use of blood in sacrifice. Belonging to God, it could be seen as His atoning gift to sinners, not theirs to Him (Lv. 17.11).

God established his covenant with Noah and his sons, “Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth” (v. 11). Peter draws attention to the Great Flood and warns that the earth will one day be destroyed, not by water, but by fire (2 Pet. 3.1-10). That will be the end of the earth. But the Lord is patient, giving people every opportunity to come to repentance (v. 9).

The sign of the covenant is the rainbow (Gen. 9.12-16). The rainbow is a natural phenomenon which occurs when there is both sunshine and rain. There had most likely been rainbows before (2.5 seems to imply that rain was needed for the plants to grow), but from this time on, they were a sign of God’s mercy and grace. Rain would come – and floods too! – but they would stop short of the ultimate catastrophe.

Reflect:

- We live after the Flood. What lessons has the “new” human race learnt? How can we live with an awareness of God as our Creator and Lord? How should we then live under “grace”?
- Consider 2 Peter 3.1-10. Note vv. 11-12 – “Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival” (*The Message*). Think of the clog – what is the model for our life?

8. Lines of Descent. Reading: Genesis 9.18-10.32.

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Studies in Genesis chapters 1-11
by Peter J Blackburn

7. A New Beginning

Reading: Genesis 8.1-9.17

We arrived in Jindabyne on 31 December 1983, and spent a week exploring Kosciusko and the Australian Alps. We went to Cooma for a day trip and on 4 January 1984 I wrote the following entry headed “Made from the Model” –

The clogs sold at the Clogs Cabin at Cooma are made in Holland and finished here. They are made of poplar wood, which is waterproof.

Using a block of local pine, Raymond de Smeth demonstrates the making of a clog a number of times a day.

The old way of making clogs began with a long blade which cut the wood to the desired outside shape – this took an hour or so. In fact, the demonstration only took a few minutes. The block was clamped in a copying machine. A guide followed a model clog and a rotating chisel blade carved the block to this shape.

We were shown the gouges used for hollowing out the inside – another half-hour’s work. But the block was transferred to another machine where a spinning gouge head followed a guide which traced the inside of a model clog. A bandsaw separated and shaped the clog.

There it was – still needing finishing, but a clog nonetheless.

How important that model must be! It would be disastrous to make each clog from the previous one. The clog-maker would need a whole series of precise, painstakingly-made originals. Otherwise his product would get further and further away from the original.

What a picture of life!

Things must have been really bad – even worse than conditions today – for God to decide to “put an end to all people” in the Great Flood. But the new beginning would still be with human beings, so there was still no guarantee that all would go to plan. “Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord”. That doesn’t mean he was perfect – he needed to live under divine grace. And what of his sons?

Reflect:

- Saved for a new beginning. Had there been a problem with the original plan? or had the plan been ignored? To start afresh with Noah and his family was a bold move. How could it have any better chance of success?

God Remembered...

Read: Genesis 8.1-5.

According to the record, Noah's family, together with the animals and birds, were in the ark just ten days over a year. Humanly speaking, anyone in their circumstances would begin to wonder whether they would ever get out of the ark again. It was the only safe place to be for the moment, but not the ideal place for any of them.

"But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark..." (v. 1a). They weren't forgotten. In the plan and timing of God, "the water started going down" (*Good News Bible*).

"Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth" (vv. 2,3a).

The Flood assumes huge amounts of water from extraordinary sources. As mentioned in the previous study, "This suggests major earthquake activity and the release of water trapped beneath the earth's crust. It appears to have been a period of major geological change". Since water runs to the lowest level anyway, the water could only "recede" if there was continued geological change. Such change would deepen the oceanic trenches and raise the land masses to the point where "the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat" and "the tops of the mountains became visible" (vv. 4,5).

The "tops of the mountains" would have been the tops of the Armenian highlands in the region known as Urartu. The location is in Turkey in an area bordering Armenia and Iraq – a politically sensitive region claimed by the Kurds as their homeland. There have been a number of expeditions and claims regarding the location of the ark. Our confidence in the trustworthiness of the scriptures isn't dependent on any of these.

Keil and Delitsch make the following comment –

The mountains of Ararat are, no doubt, the group of mountains which rise from the plain of the Araxes in two lofty peaks, the greater and lesser Ararat, the former 16,254 feet above the level of the sea, the latter about 12,000. This landing-place of the ark is extremely interesting in connection with the development of the human race as renewed after the flood. Armenia, the source of the rivers of paradise, has been called "a cool, airy, well-watered mountain-island in the midst of the old continent;" but Mount Ararat especially is situated almost in the middle, not only of the great desert route of Africa and Asia, but also of the range of inland waters from Gibraltar to the Baikal Sea—in the centre, too, of the longest line that can be drawn through the settlements of the

Caucasian race and the Indo-Germanic tribes; and, as the central point of the longest land-line of the ancient world, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Behring Straits, it was the most suitable spot in the world, for the tribes and nations that sprang from the sons of Noah to descend from its heights and spread into every land.

Reflect:

- "But God remembered Noah..." "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31.34c). "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lk. 23.42). What does it mean for the Lord to "remember"? When have we been aware that the Lord has "remembered" us?

Back on Dry Ground

Read: Genesis 8.6-22.

The raven "kept flying back and forth..." The original implies that the bird went out and returned, probably to perch on the roof of the ark. The dove was sent out three times. The first time there was nowhere for it to land. The second time it brought back in its beak "a freshly plucked olive leaf" (v. 11). The olive leaf, frequently used as a symbol of peace, is to be seen here as a sign of the new creation. The third time the dove didn't return.

After Noah "removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry", they stayed in the ark almost two more months until "the earth was completely dry" (vv. 13-14). The ground needed to be dry enough for the animals and human beings in the ark to walk on it in safety.

So the command was to "Come out of the ark... Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you..." After this length of time, some of the animals and birds may have been reluctant to do so. There is a blessing similar to that in chapter 1 – "so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it" (vv. 16-17).

This is a new beginning for animals as well as for human beings – an occasion for thanksgiving with the sacrifice of some of the clean animals and clean birds. The LORD is pleased. Although there isn't the restoration of Eden, there appears to be some mitigation of the curse on the ground and there will be no repeat of the destruction of the universal flood. Indeed, "as long as the earth endures", the seasons will continue with regularity.

Reflect:

- The LORD knows that "every inclination of [the human] heart is evil from childhood". Yet what are the signs of his grace towards sinners?