

A NEW BEGINNING

Genesis 8-11

Lesson 5b

Key Verse: 8:1a

"But God remembered Noah...."

1. God remembered Noah (8:1-22)

But God remembered Noah..." God turned his attention from destruction to the work of restoring. He had poured out his wrath in the flood waters by opening the floodgates of heaven. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished. Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark, and the waters flooded the earth for 150 days. But hidden in God's judgment was a redemptive purpose. God had judged the earth so that he could salvage a spiritual remnant. Noah was that remnant, and God did not forget him.

God who judges is also God who provides a way of salvation. All the people of those times lived in sin and grieved God. But there was one man, Noah, who walked with God. For the sake of this one righteous man God had given the command and instructions concerning the ark, and Noah had obeyed. When God destroyed the world by the flood, he made a covenant with Noah and his family to preserve their lives. He made a covenant of salvation (6:18). Now, the world was covered with water and had almost returned to its pre-creation state. But Noah and his family, and the animals in the ark, a remnant of life, were floating on the surface of the deep.

God remembered Noah and sent a wind over the earth and the waters receded. This reminds us of God's beginning of creation when his Spirit hovered over the waters in chapter 1:2. Gradually, the waters receded, and the ark came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat. 40 days after the tops of the mountains became visible, Noah sent out a raven. Then, he sent out a dove. The dove could find no dry place to set its feet, so it came back. A week later, when he sent the dove out a second time, it returned with the sign of a new beginning, a sign of hope--a freshly plucked green olive leaf. How overjoyed Noah must have been to see a fresh green leaf for the first time in a year. It meant that God was restoring

the vegetation. Noah and his family could again live on the earth. In the midst of unspeakable death and destruction, God planted hope in the heart of his servant.

Noah and his family waited until God told them to come out of the ark. Then, a year and ten days after they had entered the ark, they came out on dry land. Noah's first act after coming out of the ark was to build an altar and worship God. Verse 20 says, 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. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man..." Noah offered an animal sacrifice, a blood offering, for he knew that he was a sinful man, undeserving of God's grace and salvation. God was pleased with Noah's burnt offering. God also realized that man's fundamental sin problem had not been solved by the flood. The root of sin was still in his heart. But God made a decision. "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood..." Perhaps God was looking forward to the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, whom he would send to take away the sin of the world. He continued by making a promise. "Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done..." Verse 22 continues, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." God promised to preserve the order of the seasons and days as long as the earth remains. When the final judgment comes it will not be by means of another flood; it will be by means of fire. (2Pe 3:5-7,10)

2. The new beginning (9:1-28)

God's command in 8:17 ["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 upon it."] reminds us of Genesis 1:22,28. ["God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water...'"] He commanded Noah to bring out all the living creatures so that they might multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it. This command for a new beginning is repeated in 9:1,7: "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ...As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.'" God is a God of new beginnings. Man can also pick up the pieces of a broken life, and with God's direction and help, make a new beginning.

For the sake of mankind, God established a new kind of creation order. There was no new command to "subdue and rule over the earth." Perhaps mankind was not able to do this in the chaotic jungle that the world without creation order had become. Man cannot live in chaos. But because of man's rebellion, spiritual order had been broken, and if something were not done, chaos would come. 9:2 says: "The

fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands." So God put fear and dread of mankind in all the animals. Now man must rule the earth by fear and not by love. God told man and animals to eat flesh--to cease being vegetarians and become carnivorous. Now only the strongest and most able would survive, and the peaceful earth would become a jungle. This was the price of man's sin, and it was how God made a way for mankind to survive in a hostile world.

But there was an urgent and important lesson which mankind must learn. The carnage of the flood had dulled man's respect for human life. Today, as well, many people do not know why human life is valuable, and those who attach a pragmatic value to human life easily condone abortion, euthanasia, and eventually, genocide and murder. 9:6 says: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Man must be taught and continually reminded that man's life is valuable in and of itself--because man bears the image of God. God taught the value of life in several ways. First, he prohibited the eating of meat with lifeblood in it. (4) Blood represents life. God was laying the foundation for the sacrificial system. This would teach man the nature of and value of spiritual life, for this was God's provision of a way to atone for sin. Sin demands lifeblood. Leviticus 17:11-12a says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood...'" Forgiveness is necessary for spiritual life. Second, the shedding of innocent blood by either man or animal is a capital offence, to be punished by death. Verse 5 says, "And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man." Verse 6 continues, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed;" Third, God made a covenant of life with mankind and with every living creature. He promised never again to destroy the earth by a flood, and he put his rainbow in the sky to remind himself and mankind of this promise. (15) The rainbow is a beautiful reminder of God's love for mankind, even sinful mankind. God also regards the lives of all living creatures as precious. Although God gave animals to man for food, he is displeased by the wanton killing of animals. With the rainbow, God made a commitment to make it possible for mankind, to pioneer a new world and a new life. It is important that people respect the lives of other people; it is important that each person respect his own life.

3. Spiritual order in the family and community (18-28)

These verses tell about an incident that reveals the weakness of Noah the man of faith. We are tempted to leave this story out, but the Bible writer put it in because it teaches an important truth. Man is a social being; every society must have orderly relationships in order to function properly. The family is the first social unit--the building block of society. The spiritual order which should exist in society and in the family is very precious; it is necessary to man's peaceful and fruitful life on the earth. This spiritual order was violated by Noah's youngest son, Ham, in an incident which seems ridiculous and insignificant--and seems to be Noah's fault. Noah drank too much wine and got drunk. His youngest son saw him uncovered and made fun of his father. The older 2 sons, however, covered their father, showing him great respect--even though he revealed his human weakness. When the basic lines of authority and respect among people break down, the result is moral anarchy and devastating corruption of society. So this was no small event.

Noah realized the seriousness of what his youngest son had done, and he cursed the son of Ham, Canaan. When a man shows disrespect to one whom he should respect and honor, then those who should honor him cannot be blessed. Paul tells us to show honor to those to whom honor is due and respect to those to whom respect is due. (Ro 12:7b)

The Canaanites later became the corrupt and idolatrous inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The Israelites would become God's instrument of judgment on them when they conquered the land, and the prophetic curse of Noah came true.

3. Filling the earth -- The Tower of Babel (10:1-11:32)

Chapter 10 describes the spread of the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth. They spread out into their territories by clans and nations, each according to his own language. But the incident in chapter 11 tells us why they spread. It seems that they did not want to scatter. Rather, they wanted to stick together and show God that they could get along without him. They were proud of their human ability and they thought that nothing they planned would be impossible for them to do. So, in their pride, they started building a tower that would reach to heaven. God knew that they were able--he had made them in his own image. He could have become very angry and swept them from the face of the earth--but he didn't do that. 11:6-7 say, "The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'" When people can't communicate, they can't work together. God wants people to work together to do good; not to work together to plan and do evil. God confused their languages so that they could not understand each other. Some day he would send

his Spirit to work in regenerated people to enable mankind to praise him with one voice and heart. He was already making a long range plan for the salvation of mankind. He nurtured the line of Shem, and at the right time, called one man Abraham, to become the ancestor of a new history.

Men's hearts must be changed; the root of pride and rebellion could not be removed with out great cost. God's redemptive history would be worked out through Abraham and his descendants--down to Jesus Christ, and from Jesus' cross and resurrection, through the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth.