

Prayers

To God

You understand us, Lord Jesus, whatever the circumstance, and we thank You for this grace by which you bless us. Sometimes, our hearts are so full that we pour out our deepest feelings to You in prayer almost without thought; at other times, we are so empty, our hearts can give You nothing other than the sincerity of silent worship. But You understand, Lord Jesus; You meet us on our journey, wherever we are. AMEN

For myself

Weekly theme: Pray for joy

Pray for the joy and happiness of those whose lives affect you most; for under the guidance of the Lord, their joy and happiness will lead to yours.

For others

Pray for unemployed young people in your country and in any country of the world. To be unable to work because there are no jobs available is very hard to endure.

Meditation

Getting closer.

The more someone draws near to us,
The more we feel their presence.

The more someone gives time to us,
The more we can share with them.

The more someone works with us
The more we know about them.

The more someone befriends us
The more we are at ease with them.

The more someone offers help to us,
The more we give them in return.

The more someone shows real love to us
The more we are willing to give everything.

Bible Passage

Genesis 7:1-12

¹ Then the LORD said to Noah,

"Go into the Ark, you and your entire household, for you alone are righteous in my eyes out of this whole generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, male and female; and one pair of the unclean animals, male and female; ³ and also seven pairs of the birds of the air, male and female, to keep their species alive throughout the earth. ⁴ In seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the whole earth every living thing I have made."

⁵ Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him; ⁶ he was 600 years old when the Flood of waters came over the earth.

⁷ Then Noah went into the Ark to escape the waters of the flood with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ⁸ Clean animals, unclean animals, birds, and creatures of the ground, ⁹ they all went into the Ark together with Noah, two by two, male and female, as God had commanded.

¹⁰ After seven days the waters of the Flood came over the earth. ¹¹ In the 600th year of Noah's life, in the 2nd month, on the 17th day of the month, on that day all the springs of deep water burst out, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

Review

The time had come for God's work of de-creation and recreation! The preliminaries were now over and God was ready to act. Noah had been warned, and was obedient in preparing for the coming of the Flood and its consequences (6:17), and the ark was built according to instructions. The Lord then instructed Noah to enter the ark, and made it clear that He accepted Noah as righteous in his eyes, and on this account, he and his family would be saved. Throughout the centuries, Christians have regarded the ark as a sign of God's saving work not just in the past but throughout history, and an event that indicates the nature of God's judgement and His salvation.

A number of things in this story are important, not least the salvation of Noah's family. Noah's sons were doubtless involved in the building of the Ark, but scripture is quite specific that it is Noah alone who is 'righteous' before God (7:1), and it seems that Noah's righteousness is sufficient for his family. Today, we live in a very individualistic age and Christians do not tend to think of 'salvation' as something that is covered by genetic issues. Indeed, some would feel that it was a misinterpretation of scripture to suggest that salvation could be achieved in any other way than individually. Yet it is not just here in the Old Testament that salvation is a family rather than an individual matter, for the New Testament has its texts which indicate a more complex understanding of salvation than mere individualism (e.g. see 1 Cor 7:12f.). Here in the story of the Flood, we can argue that of course the family had to be saved, because they were needed to populate the world after the Flood. Nevertheless, we should not be too pedantic in all this, otherwise we find ourselves entrapped in the same dilemmas of Genesis 4, trying to find where Cain (and soon, Noah's sons) would find wives!

One other thing stands out in the story of the Flood. This is the one event in Genesis which tells us dates and timings of things. It is not just about absolute time, measured in those days according to Noah's age and his generations (Gen 5, 7:6). The whole story of the Flood is littered with references to time periods of days and weeks elapsing between elements of the story (see 7:4,6,10,11). If you read around this subject you will discover that people disagree on exactly what the dates and times stand for, but the one who wrote down this story for us was keen to make the sequence of events as clear as he could, given that he was writing well before any modern systems of dating. Nowhere else is there such a detailed set of time references in Genesis. Although great archaeological debates still rage over the date of the Flood, scripture is adamant that it happened and it was measurable.

The big question people want to ask today is 'did the Flood actually happen?' Certainly the oldest records of over 150 of the world's greatest ancient cultures have a story of a Flood in them with remarkably similar themes. For this to have happened, either there was unparalleled co-operation between all ancient peoples to agree on a myth (highly unlikely), or a flood must have happened of amazing proportions across the whole of the known world! The best known 'other version' of the Flood is an Akkadian legend written on a tablet over 3,000 years old, found in Nineveh in 1853 and now held in the British Museum, called the 'Epic of Gilgamesh'. If you read a translation of this you would be immediately impressed at how closely it connects with our story in Genesis. The scriptural story, however, has clear differences. In the Epic, the gods are afraid of the rain when it comes; but in Genesis, God is in control of everything! In the Epic, Gilgamesh, the hero, is credited for saving the world; in Genesis, Noah is God's righteous servant and takes no credit.

These differences emphasise the uniqueness of what Genesis says about both God and people. The Bible has a completely different understanding of the creation of the world than other myths and epics of the ancient world. Perhaps the raw facts of life were indeed the same for all peoples, but within the Hebrew nation, God has given us the gift of His own understanding of these events. This is why the story of the 'Flood' still bears important messages for people today, as we will increasingly discover.

Discipleship

Application

Towards the end of our passage there are a few verses that indicate the beginning of the Flood, and also begin to talk in detail about the dates when things occurred. Contrary to what some modern scholars believe it is quite possible to add these up and make sense of them. There are more such figures in tomorrow's reading and we will look at this in more detail then.

They truth about the Flood - what happened?

It is not a merely a matter of spiritual comfort to try and discover the reality which lies behind the story of the Flood. It is a serious scientific question raised by a vast number of ancient sources, and Christians can expect to find that books by secular researchers in various fields from anthropology to geology will be written; and these may have a bearing on how we read this Bible story. We should not be afraid of what might turn up, for we believe in a world that is consistent, contains truth and is a witness to the God who made it. The exercise of reading the story we have in the Bible now is important; and as we do this, we discover what God does in this first great story of salvation. It is not a story which is superseded by the atoning work of Jesus, but it is one which points towards Jesus and what God will one day do through Him. For this reason, we should not be afraid to take what messages we find from this story and use it to help us understand how God's salvation works; even within families!

The obedience of Noah - a key aspect of faith

The story of Noah has always been a challenging one for those who seek to follow Jesus. Because it is very ancient, it describes salvation in its simplest forms and it is easy to say that this does not teach us much. However, I am of the opinion that there is not enough emphasis today on obedience, whether in terms of fulfilling obligations, or in following God's instructions to do what He says. Often, we do not fully understand what God requires us to do, but our obedience is necessary if God is to do things on a wider front which we cannot necessarily see. We want to see the reasons for anything before we will do it, but God asks us for obedience so that His will can be done far beyond our sight.

Ideas for what to do

- *In what ways are you challenged by the Lord to do things you do not understand in order to fulfil God's call on your life? Do you find this easy or difficult? Pray and ask the Lord to help you become more accepting of spiritual things you do not understand*
- *Pray for those who stand under judgement because they contribute to the sins of the world that stand condemned before God. Most of them, whether they are bankers or criminals, vicars or prostitutes reject the truth of God's Word. Pray for God's Word to be shown to be true within the world*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *The clean animals were brought on board in pairs of seven so that there were enough for sacrifices. Why should this be required?*
2. *What role do you think the 'family' plays within this story of the Ark? How does this relate to salvation as we understand it today?*
3. *Does the story of Noah need to be 'proved' archaeologically?*

Final Prayer

Lord God, You sent Your Son to live the life of a man and to take part in what happens within this world; and He lived an incredible life of integrity and love. Help us to follow His example and seek every opportunity to do what is right and good in the world, not just for ourselves and those we love, but for all people. Thank You Lord God. **AMEN**