

Prayers

To God

Ask the Lord God to show you new things today, that he may open your eyes to the possibilities of grace and truth and love.

For myself

Weekly theme: Pray for joy

Sing a song to the Lord, a song that blesses your soul, and let the music fill your mind throughout the day. It will not fail to be God's means of blessing for you this day.

For others

Lord God Almighty; You are in control of all things, and You are the great peacemaker. Lead us to where people do not have to fight each other, and where all people will appreciate each other as Your creation, and where the whole of Creation lives in obedience to Your will and perfect order, we pray. We know this is Your ultimate will, Lord God, but show us this is possible, that we may reach for it: AMEN

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
For all Your good gifts are undeserved.

Bible Passage

Genesis 8:1-12

¹ But God remembered Noah and all the animals, wild and domestic, that were with him in the ark. So God sent a wind over the earth, and the waters began to subside; ² the springs in the earth and the floodgates of heaven were closed, the deluge from the heavens was held back. ³ The floodwater gradually receded from the earth, and at the end of 150 days the floods had abated.

⁴ On 17th day of the 7th month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters gradually fell until the 10th month, when on the 1st day of the 10th month, the mountain tops appeared.

⁶ After forty days, Noah opened the skylight he had made in the Ark, ⁷ and released a raven, which flew around whilst the floodwaters dried up on the earth. ⁸ Then he released a dove to see if the water had gone from the surface of the earth; ⁹ but the dove found nowhere to alight, so it returned to Noah to the ark for there was still floodwater over the earth. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it into the Ark with him.

¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he released the dove from the Ark. ¹¹ In the evening, the dove came back to him and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the floodwaters had gone from the earth. ¹² He then waited another seven days, and released the dove; but it did not come back to him any more.

Review

This passage begins with the centre piece of the whole story of the Flood; God 'remembered' Noah and the drama of the story changed around. Before, we heard news of impending doom and rising floods, but from 8:1 onwards, we hear of subsiding water and the quest for land (8:4f.). One thing becomes evident, however, and this is the emphasis placed on dates and times. We have seen a few references so far, the days of waiting (7:4,11) and the days of flood (40 days – 7:12,17). The best way to understand the sequence of events is through a chart, which I have given below.

This is a compilation of the Biblical information about timing in the story of the Flood (using Wenham's 'Word' Biblical Commentary - Nelson 1987, and Hartley's New International Commentary - Paternoster 2000). The dates given are related to Noah's 600th birthday, and the dates in brackets are estimates whereas the others are quoted directly. Also, the first month in the ancient calendar is not January. There is some dispute as to when the Jewish calendar begins, but we must assume around March / April.

Ref.	Scripture says	Numbers analysis	date	day
7:4	Flood in 7 days time	7 days of waiting begin	10/2/600	Sunday
7:11	Flood begins	7 days of waiting over	17/2/600	Sunday
7:12	Rains come for 40 days	40 days of Flood		
7:17	Continues up to 40 days	40 days Flood continues	(27/3/600)	Friday
7:24	Waters swelled for 150 days	150 days of Flood swelling		
8:4	Ark comes to rest	From now 150 days of abating	17/7/600	Friday
8:5	Mountains re-appear		1/10/600	Wednesday
8:6	After 40 days, raven sent out	40 days waiting	(10/11/600)	Sunday
8:10	'another' 7 days a dove sent	7 days waiting	(24/11/600)	Sunday
8:12	7 days and another dove sent	7 days waiting	(1/12/600)	Sunday

8:13	Dried up – Noah looked out		1/1/601	Wednesday
8:14ff	Disembark	(40 + 2x7 days waiting)	27/2/601	Monday

Several interesting things arise from this list. Firstly, notice the chiastic structure of the day numbers. This confirms the overall chiastic structure of the story as already noted (see yesterday's study). Secondly, the pattern of repeated descriptions of entry into the Ark seems similar to the repetition of Noah's sending out of birds to ascertain whether it was safe to disembark, and this fact helps us understand more about the disembarkation process. Thirdly, whilst many things happen on Sundays (naturally, because it was the 'first day of the week'), two very significant things happen on Wednesdays, which was considered a 'special' midweek day. The first was the re-appearance of mountain tops, and secondly the day Noah removed the covering of the Ark and observed that the land was dry (8:13); both these days were evidently special 'blessings' within the whole story. Charts such as this can be most helpful in getting to grips with Old Testament stories!

From today's reading onwards, everything that has happened unwinds. The floods abate, the Ark comes to rest, the mountain tops re-appear and Noah patiently waits for the right moment to allow all on board the Ark to disembark. God's remembrance (8:1) triggers this change, but why does scripture talk about 'remembering'? This sounds strange to us, for surely God is 'all-knowing', and He must know what needs to be done? The trouble is that the word 'remember' has a slightly different meaning in Hebrew to that in English. When the Bible says 'God remembered', it means that God 'called to mind' something and decided to intervene! God's remembrance here is therefore the point of his decision to intervene in saving power; and as He does so, the world responds in gradual re-creation. God brings the 150 days of 'swelling' waters to an end (7:24) and begins a 150 day period of 'subsiding' waters (8:3). If you look at the detailed dates for the Flood in Genesis 7 and 8, as laid out in the table above, then you will see that the whole flood lasted just over a year. People have argued for centuries about these dates, but the important thing is to know that this was no short event. It lasted a long time and required great patience, as shown by Noah in his handling of the birds, whilst waiting to be sure that the land was dry and able to support life again.

Other features of this part of the story include the work of the Spirit of God in controlling the 'waters' as if for a second 'creation' (8:1). This is then symbolised in the dove released by Noah to help him decide when to open the doors of the Ark that God had shut (7:16). The other great mystery is the location of 'Ararat', the mountain on which the ark came to rest, which some reckon to be the region of Ararat, the Biblical Arartu in northern Mesopotamia (see 2 Kings 19:37, Jer 51:27). This is the subject of on-going investigation, and there is still more work that can realistically be done to clarify what has been claimed as archaeological work on this issue.

The amazing fact is that God was in control of this whole operation, as the chart shows. There is no doubt that those who wrote down this story were impressed by the scale and structure of the whole story. We should not treat it therefore as some 'fairy tale'. What it tells us about God's work in this world is invaluable.

Discipleship

Application

The plan of salvation - a plan in real time

Time is important. When sin happens, there are key moments when decisions are made and things go wrong, the consequences of which do not go away. In the same way, the redemption of God stems from a decision on His part to act in order to bring salvation, but the process of its outworking in real history may take considerable time. The first Creation, unimpeded by sin, was described as taking place in six of God's 'days' (and ten of His commandments); now, in the story of the Flood, this re-ordering of creation after the Flood takes 25 times longer (150 days). Perhaps there is a hard lesson for us who live in a world of expected instant results. The redemption of God may take time. Noah was certainly cautious about letting everything out of the Ark, and we should possibly be wary in our assumptions about our abilities, when we are indeed working to God's timetable.

The Covenant

It is also a source of great joy to all who are Christians that in Christ, God has made a Covenant with His people for salvation, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the Covenant which His actions both protect and enable. Our prayer today is that God will 'remember' His Covenant and act through His people to bring salvation to an increasingly lost world. It is not that God has forgotten to act; there may be a few generations worth of judgement (swelling waters!) still to come in our torrid world before God's time is right to 'remember' us again with the revival and renewal that His people so long for. It is all a matter of God's timing, and just as we find it hard to fathom the dates in the story of the Flood, we should be wary of presuming to know too much about God's timetable for redemption now.

Ideas for what to do

- *Are you waiting for the Lord to do something in your life? You may not be aware of it, but the Lord may be waiting for you to fulfil something important so that He can work in you! Seek to find out some answers to these questions!*
- *Pray for those who find themselves caught up in events which are significant, but they are not confident of how to deal with the issues involved. This can happen at work or at church, or personally. Pray for wisdom to speak to people who are in such need.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *Check out the list of days and dates in the table to make sure that you can understand what is happening.*
2. *Which feature of Noah's handling of the birds catches your attention, and why?*
3. *Are there any other stories of scripture which show that God's redemption takes time? Share and discuss what you find with others.*

Final Prayer

Remember us O Lord, and flood our lives with the joy of Your presence! Give us patience as we wait for Your timing and the comfort of knowing that we await Your works of power and might. We praise You for the timing of all that You do, O Lord; **AMEN**